

GROUND, PATH AND RESULT IN DZOGCHEN

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

October 8, 2020 Lecture 1/1	3
THE GROUND	3
False ground: the ground of I, me, myself	4
The ground as described in the Evocation of Samantabhadra	5
All appearances have the same ground	5
Awareness and unawareness arise like a magical display	6
'Dharmadhatu' is the space within which are all dharmas	7
The ground is uncompounded	9
The ground is self-occurring	10
The ground is infinite	10
The ground is inexpressible	12
The ground is beyond being labeled	13
Seeing the immediacy of 'how it is', is itself Buddha	15
The difference between consciousness (nam-par she-pa) and awareness (rig-pa)	16
May everyone be aware of inside the truth of the ineffable base	19
Alternative descriptions of the ground	19
Nature of dzogchen transmission	20
From Lama Chetsangpa: the way of clarity and the way of bewilderment	22
Practice: stay with what you see	23
The difference between awareness and consciousness (Cont'd)	24

In dzogchen, we are primarily concerned with ‘simplicity and clarity’ versus ‘the power of deluded imagination’. We usually translate ‘Deluded imagination’ as ignorance. Ignorance has two aspects: 1) not being attentive to how it is, and 2) imagining that it is other than what it is. So ignorance is simultaneously both ‘a turning away’ and ‘a turning towards’.

I will now try to make this clear. When I use buddhist technical terms I will try to explain them clearly so that we all have some shared understanding.

So — the ground, the path and the result.

THE GROUND

The ground is the ground of everything or the source of everything or the base. It’s translated in different ways, the word in Tibetan is ‘zhi’ (Tib. gZhi) which means a foundation, or can refer to the earth — ‘sa zhi’ (Tib. Sa gZhi) — the foundation that we are standing on. That might indicate that *zhi* is a metaphor suggesting to build something. When you build a house, for example, you have the foundation and then you construct on top. But we will come to see that it’s not that kind of foundation.

The base in the dzogchen sense refers to ‘the intrinsic’, that which is there by itself, that which is inherent just as it is. Nobody has made it, it’s not created by anyone, it has no beginning or middle or end. Moreover, it doesn’t create anything. It is not like the idea of a creator God, as we have in christianity, which says, *God creates the world, he makes these things*.

As we study buddhism we learn about emptiness and that emptiness is not created. Everything has a quality of emptiness, and therefore nothing is created. And yet we have appearance! So emptiness is the ground of everything possible. It’s the ground of anything that you could imagine, whether it is considered existing or non-existing. Without the ground, there would be nothing and the ground itself is nothing.

What does nothing gives rise to? It gives rise to everything. Again we have a paradox. How come everything that we see– we look around, we see what’s in our room, we look outside, we see cars and so on– how come all of this something-ness has the ground of nothing? Dzogchen is a way of coming to understand this very precisely.

In this regard, dzogchen is no different from mainstream buddhism. The notion of emptiness is pervasive. Emptiness means ungraspability. When something is ungraspable, it doesn’t mean that it’s not there at all, that it’s nothing at all. Ungraspable just means that that you can't get hold of it. Like the reflection of the moon in a pond, like a mirage on a hot summer’s road, like a rainbow in the sky, you can't grasp any of these things yet it’s undeniable that they are there.

False ground: the ground of I, me, myself

I will now describe this ground in some detail. But first let’s take a little detour, and explore how we are used to a ground which is a false ground. This is a ground of I, me, myself: that I exist, that this is my body, that these are my possessions, that this is my life, and that this is how I live etc. Then there are the inner experiences such as memories, plans, hopes and fears. With outer experiences in the world, we make choices about where we want to go, what we want to eat and so on. The basis of all this activity is this seemingly irreducible, seemingly just there–ness of me: *I am here, just here.*

From the point of view of dzogchen all this is a false ground. This is where we get lost. Although dzogchen gives a very clear explanation of how this lostness occurs, it is not a dogma to memorise, since it is not something that we have to believe. Rather, the explanation is designed to be like a slight tilting of the head, a readjustment, so that you see more clearly. And then you see for yourself, oh! this is how it happens.

The key thing to be clear about is not to take dzogchen teaching as a belief system. The trouble with belief systems is that we then project and impose them on our world. The world is already full of beliefs and ideas, religious ideas, scientific ideas, political, economic, and so on. We know what it’s like to be wrapped inside a belief. It may be a belief about something you are fond of, for

example some particular artist or a musician or some aspect of national identity or a football team or your favourite flower. You may tell people that, *I believe that this is the most beautiful rose*. When you believe in something and give yourself to it, it shines more. This is a quality of how belief gathers energy which creates a particular kind of illustration, or illumination, to phenomenon. This is our own mind.

The ground as described in the Evocation of Samantabhadra

All appearances have the same ground

I will now introduce the ground as it's described in this very famous evocation of Samantabhadra, the 'Kunzang Mönlam'. In the first few lines Samantabhadra, the primordial buddha, sets out very clearly that this is our situation.

All the possible appearances and existences of samsara and nirvana have the same source, yet two paths and two results arise as the magical display of awareness and unawareness.

Samantabhadra is saying that all the possible appearances of samsara and nirvana — it means absolutely everything, whatever you have ever learnt and forgotten or what might be there in other countries, or if you imagine there are people living on Mars, or the coronavirus, or anything at all — all of this has the same ground as all the buddhas. All of these appearances have one ground, or the same ground, and from this ground or source or base, there are two paths and two results.

We can't say that the ground is just one thing, because it's neither one nor many. As soon as you say that it's one or many, you are implying that you are able to apprehend it, to take hold of it. But this ground is very slippery and so we have to be very clear from the beginning.

Although I am going to talk a lot and try to clarify all these things, the truth of this can't be said. So, the purpose of talking is like a massage; it's just to give you more looseness and freedom so that you don't take yourself too seriously, don't take buddhism too seriously and allow the flavour of the dharma to flow through. This is the most important thing. So, it is the same source for everything but two paths arise.

Awareness and unawareness arise like a magical display

In the third line, he says that awareness and unawareness arise like a magical display. A magical display could be like a rainbow in the sky, something you see but it's not there. It's magic because you can't see a particular cause for it. If you want to make a coffee, you go to the kitchen, you get water, the cup, the coffee, however you'd like to prepare it, in a percolator, and you have a chain of cause and effect. For example, if you don't pay the gas bill, your stove is not going to work. So there are many many factors that go into making a cup of coffee. There are many chains of cause and effect.

A magical display is referred to here as a 'cho-trul', (Tib. Chos sPrul) like a magician who could cause you to believe that something is there, when actually nothing is there. So we are already into appearance and emptiness. Illusion. Illusion means we experience something; there is experience (sound of clap) but nothing really arises, nothing substantial arises. It's appearance without substance. So whether you are aware of the ground or not aware of the ground, NEITHER is true. This is very important that NEITHER is valid. From the point of view of ethics, this is important.

In christian theology, if God is good and God created everything, then how come there is a lot of shit around. Who made all the bad things happen? Then you have to bring the devil in through the back door, some fallen angel like Lucifer because God is good but bad things happen. Oh! oh! you can't square a circle, this is a big problem.

Samantabhadra is not saying that this source or ground or base is good; it just is. In that sense, it is neutral. We have to remember in buddhism that neutrality or evenness or equanimity is always very important, no bias. Good and bad are two polarities but from the dharma point of view, evenness is more important because evenness allows a panoramic vision.

On an outer level when we say, *may all beings be happy*. This means that may even cruel/ unkind people be happy, may selfish people be happy, may lazy stupid people be happy. Whether they are hard working or meditating or looking at pornography, may they all be happy. That is to say that my wish for your happiness is not dependent on your qualities – it's not the result, you haven't

earned it, it's not a reward. We need to keep that sense in our mind because it means that enlightenment is not a reward for activity.

This is where the view of dzogchen is very different from many other approaches that you find in big family of buddhism. According to others, if you want to gain enlightenment, you have to have the accumulation of merits, accumulation of wisdom, you have to spend many lifetimes in practice and helping other people. When you take the bodhisattva vows, you say, *in all my future lifetimes*, you think of many many lifetimes. So there is a big intention because there is something to arrive at, because bad is bad and good is good, samsara is samsara and nirvana is nirvana. *So I want to go out of the bad place and go to the good place. I am going from one place to another.* Kalu Rinpoche, for example, used to say that if you want to practise tantra, it's like going on an aeroplane; it will cost you more than going by train. So you have to have more merits and more wisdom and you spend your accumulation to practise tantra. There is a sense of cause and effect.

However here Samantabhadra is not saying that. The source, the ground, the base has no intention. This is quite a difficult idea for us because we believe in intention. We believe that the Dalai Lama has good intentions for all beings, that he is patient and kind and tolerant. We go to a doctor because we believe that they have an intention to help us. We go to dentist with the hope that the dentist will solve problems with our teeth. So we believe in intentionality.

The ground has no intention, it's not like a God. As we will see, this relates to two things: one is stillness and other is movement. Intention belongs to the direction of movement. Stillness has no movement. The mind in its purity is not going anywhere, and nor is it doing anything. This is the quality of awareness or 'rigpa'.

'Dharmadhatu' is the space within which are all dharmas

By this evocation of Samantabhadra may all beings awaken to full enlightenment in the security of infinite hospitality.

Then he says that by the evocation of this prayer may all beings awaken to full enlightenment. The 'dharmadhatu' is the space or the openness or the unborn quality within which are all dharmas.

For example, when you look at the sky, you see a cloud, the cloud is in the sky. You don't find clouds outside of the sky, there has to be some kind of space or openness for cloud to be there, even the steam from your kettle has to go in space. The cloud is inseparable from space. Appearances are inseparable from emptiness or the unborn nature of the mind. These are all technical terms, we shouldn't grasp at them as saying they mean something definite; they are always about nudging us to think, *Oh! Ah ha! Oh!*

The path of dzogchen is about ease, relaxation, trust, it's not about striving. If you have done 100,000 prostrations, you will know a lot about striving. You will know a lot about pushing through when your body is tired. There are many many kinds of striving involved in different schools of dharma, but here we are concerned with the intrinsic, with that which is already there. So this is very important to see from the beginning otherwise confusion can arise.

According to the systems used in Nyingmapa and Kargyupa schools in particular there are nine yanas or main vehicles of dharma, each with many subsections. There is a plurality of possibilities each of which opens the view.

For example, an art gallery may display a sculpture and you can walk all around it. You look from this point of view, that point of view, another point of view; you can take a 100 different views of the sculpture. Each view is valid but none of them catches it because the sculpture is uncatchable for us who have only two eyes in this embodiment. Having that sense, then the thing to do is: looking from this way, this is what I see. Walking a little bit round and, *oh! This is what I see.* Likewise, if we are reciting a sutra to be born in Dewachen with Buddha Amitabha, *Please take me to this wonderful place where everything is perfect*, then that's a particular view. If we do a mandala meditation with a lot of visualisations, mantra and offerings, that's another view. If you are doing shamatha and vipassana, that's another view. So it's very important to be clear that there are many approaches. And not to mix up the different approaches.

Going back to the view from dzogchen that everything possible — all dharmas, everything in samsara and nirvana — is already within the infinite space of completion, then through recognising that we pray that all beings may awaken to full enlightenment. This is very important.

The way you awaken is by seeing 'how it is'. The way you get lost by imagining 'how it is'.

There is difference between seeing and believing. For example, the Sanskrit term for vipassana in Tibetan 'lhak-thong' is translated using the word for looking: it means the best way of looking. So when you do a vipassana body scan, you're going up and down, checking out what's arising and passing in the body. You begin by looking, how is this. You don't begin by assuming, *this is my body, I know what's in my body, I have pain in my shoulder*, you leave all of that on one side. And you just look, you scan up and you scan down, merely looking. Looking is very important in buddhism, Looking brings clarity, it brings closeness to how it is. By imagining, assuming and believing, this is how we construct the barriers that cut us off.

The ground is uncompounded

The source of all is uncompounded, self-arisen, infinite, inexpressible and impossible to label as 'samsara' or 'nirvana'.

Now he describes more precisely how the ground is. And he is talking about it as the 'kun-zhi', or the 'ālaya', a term that is used in different schools. Here it means the source or the basis of everything. The first point that Samantabhadra makes is that this ground is uncompounded. It hasn't been put together.

My shirt has been put together. There was cloth and in a factory, it was cut and then the sewing machine stitched it; the arms were stitched on. The colour on the shirt is a compound. My watch is compounded, it's made of little pieces. It has a transparent back and I can see the pieces moving around. Everything you see is compounded: the building you live in, cars on the road, food that you eat, everything is brought together. Even if you have a carrot, you might think, *oh, I went to a good shop and I got an organic carrot, it's completely organic* however it has water and without water the seed wouldn't have been able to sprout. The water is water from the soil which brings some minerals and chemicals into the carrot. The carrot is compounded. Everything we see is compounded but this ground is uncompounded.

If you have been studying general buddhism you will have learned about the five skandhas (aggregates or heaps). The fourth of these is called 'the compounded'

or brought together or gathered. Our sense of being a human being comes together, because we make a composite; we gather different elements, we bring them into a situation, and then it seems to be there. Sometimes these are just things placed together. For example, when you are making a salad, you might have some tomatoes, some lettuce, some parmesan cheese, and so on. You put them all together, add some dressing and toss it a little bit. Each thing is still separate and you can see that. Or you might take some of these ingredients and put them into a pan and cook them together, then they dissolve and they merge. Either way, there is a sense of compounded. Even though you can see the separate ingredients of salad, you bring it together by bringing the word 'salad' into your mind. *Oh! this is a Caesar salad*, so it will have one kind of dressing on it. Or it's a Greek salad or a caprese salad and will have a different dressing. So now there are many many kinds of salad and they are all compositions, bringing together! Our own body is like that, except that ours is a little bit more cooked.

The ground, however, is not made, is uncompounded.

The ground is self-occurring

The second term used is 'rang jung'. 'Rang' means self or intrinsic or effortless and 'jung' means to arise, to appear, to be. So 'rang jung' means self-occurring. Nobody has done it. It isn't made by anyone and it doesn't make anything. Although, it is the ground or source or basis of anything in samsara and nirvana, it's not a big mega factory. It's not making samsara and it's not making nirvana. Both of these are intrinsically illusory, they are like magical formations. So, self-occurring means that it's just there.

The ground is infinite

Thirdly, the ground is 'long-yang', [Tib. kLong Yangs] a vast expanse, infinite. We know about finite. Our body is finite, its size and weight and also duration. All of us have been born and we're heading towards death and we don't know when the death will come. The amount of money we will make in life is finite. Even if you are very wealthy, the number of possessions you have are finite. That is to say that we can draw up an account of our existence. You might have 10 books in your house or 10000 books, depending on whether you are into literature. You

might have 10 pairs of shoes or 100 pairs of shoes if you really like shoes. You might have three perfumes or just one favourite perfume or you might have 10 different perfumes. We can see that our life is finite. Everything has a shape, a beginning, a middle and an end.

'Long-yang' means without any measurement. It's vast, it's immeasurable, it's beyond comprehension. The mind cannot grasp hold at it. It slips out of any category.

When I was younger, I worked on a fishing boat in the North Sea. The boat went right out near Iceland where the waves were very high, huge and terrifying. The waves go right over the deck and you are tied on with chains so that you don't get washed away. All you see is this rolling sea and rolling sea. You don't see anything else, you don't know what east, west, south, north is, it's just water and water. That's it. It gives you a flavour of infinity. You don't have your bearings. If you swim out in the sea and you turn around you can see the beach with everyone playing on it. You can get your bearings and keep swimming out if you want to. You might say, *oh! I am heading for infinity but I want to know where the finite beach is, because I don't want to get drowned and get washed away.*

By 'infinite' Samantabhadra is indicating that there is no limit, no edge. Our body is always with some kind of edge. We are either standing or sitting or lying in bed or in the bath or in shower, our feet are resting on something, our bum is resting on something, or our back is resting on something. We stand in relation.

Whether it's our shoes, or our chair, or a car seat, this contact with the other confirms that this is 'my' body. The chair is not me, but because I am linking with the chair, my body goes in a particular posture. I am finite.

But what Samantabhadra is showing us is the basis of our own mind. When he is talking about the ground, this is not some sort of cosmological theory. This is *our* ground, this is the source of each one of us. Each person has the same source which is infinity. This is not some long long ago historical source; it is the actual source which is here moment by moment. Everything that we say, that we do, where we go, where we walk is always movement within the sphere of infinity. So the source is infinite.

As we get more into the teaching, we will start to see what this means in terms of the meditation practice and daily life.

The ground is inexpressible

The fourth quality of the ground is 'jo-du-me' [Tib. brJod Du Med] which means inexpressible. Another paradox. You may think, *James said that it is inexpressible but he keeps talking and talking. How is this possible?* Well, although it is inexpressible, we use communication— because we are in a human body— to get some proximity, some closeness, to this. The words are like an adjusting massage. The ground cannot be expressed directly but we are using the description, not as a map about something else, but as a way of bringing ourselves into connection.

It's inexpressible. Look around your room. Is there anything in your house which is inexpressible? Maybe you have a flower, maybe an orchid, you know the name 'orchid' but if you really look at the orchid, it's kind of... so beautiful but so strange, your mind kind of collapses when you look at the flower. The more you receive the flower, the more ungraspable it appears. Because the presence of the shape, the colour, perhaps the scent— it's excessive, it's beyond whatever words we put onto it.

Think of your parents. Even if they are dead now, you can say something about your mum or your dad. If you are in therapy you can talk about your mother for 20 years. You may go there three times a week and there is still something more to say about your mother. You never get to the end of your mother, there is always more. How is this? Because you can't catch your mother, you can't catch you father, your brother, your sister, you can't catch yourself. We are used to thinking that things are catchable, that shoes are definable, that motorcars are definable, that we can always say something about something. We need to understand this clearly.

You can tell the orchid what it is, where it come from and who first discovered it. If you simply look at the orchid, without saying anything or thinking anything, simply receiving the orchid then you will experience that the more you receive it, the less you can say. If you tell the orchid what it is, you won't see it but if you really see the orchid, it's full, and it doesn't need your words. IT IS. People always

want to say something when they look at a baby's face but if you really look at a baby's face, you go silent; there is nothing to say. It's amazing. And that's same looking at children, or middle-age people, or old people; it's the same for all people. If you really look, if you really receive, if you stay in contact, then the vitality of the content brings the silence to the mind. This is the heart of meditation. So 'inexpressible' is indicating a quality of intimate connectivity. It's essentially the quality of non-duality.

Many of you will know the Heart Sutra which says that form is emptiness, and emptiness is form. For example, I have a teacup here, the teacup is something in my hand, it has got some tea in it, it's made up of rough clay, so it's quite heavy in itself. So I can say a lot about this, I can tell you from where I bought it, how long I have had it and so on. But if we just look at it... the way the paint has been applied in quite a quick carefree way/ generous way... the more we look... the colour... you get into the colour and you're receiving... and as you're receiving you become quiet. If you are not receiving the cup, if you are telling the cup, if you are projecting onto the cup, then the mind can be quite busy. So this is a very important movement to become aware of.

When the mind is moving, everything is graspable and everything becomes finite. When the mind is not moving, when it is in open receptivity, then everything becomes infinite.

In our time together here we are going to spiral around these ways of understanding and wisdom from different point of views so that it becomes hopefully more vital and immediate for you.

The ground is beyond being labeled

Then the fifth quality of the ground that Samantabhadra says is that it's beyond being labeled as either samsara or nirvana, or both, or neither. No name can be pinned on to it. Whatever you say about it, that tells you something about *you* and not about it.

If somebody says, *I don't like cabbage, cabbage is horrible*. Cabbage is horrible means you don't like cabbage. It doesn't tell you about cabbage, it tells you about you. If someone says, *this is the best chocolate*. That tells you about the person

speaking, it doesn't tell you about the chocolate. It means that this is the best chocolate in this world for this person. So this is very important to see — when we name things, when we seem to be describing an objective situation such as *I've got this nail down, I am speaking very precisely about this. This is how it is* — then this is me talking about me. I am showing you some patterning of my thoughts, my interpretations, my emotions, my likes, and dislikes.

The object doesn't exist. The object is a game that the subject plays. And the subject doesn't exist either. The subject is a game that the ground plays. So whatever opinions you may have — about President Trump, about politics, about Brexit, whatever — these are opinions. What are opinions? These are movements of the mind, a patterning of thought.

In Europe, there are many many big questions at the moment about climate change and responsibility and so on. Also we again have a conflict where Armenians are being killed. This is a hot topic, this is a difficult topic. Who wants to say to Turkey, *Stop supplying weapons to kill the Armenians! You have already killed millions of Armenians, leave these people alone.* Do we hear this? Is this ringing out loudly from every nation? NO! And they are not very far away. *We are democratic people, we are good people with a good heart but we also make weapons which we sell to other countries. But we believe in peace, we want to export democracy to the world and sell guns as well.* This is hypocritical paradoxical complex. This is so important to see. We wanted to be simple but we are not simple. We are on crossroad of many contradictory ideas.

So when the text says that you can't label the ground in terms of samsara and nirvana this is also an invitation to look at the labels you apply to yourself. If you had to give story of your life, how you have lived, what you believe in, you see that there are many aspects and they don't quite fit together. *I have divided myself, I live in contradiction. Oh oh! So maybe I shouldn't be so confident that I know how it is.* When we study text like this, we are also studying ourselves.

Be careful with language, the text is saying. Don't think that you can take big terms like buddha or dharmakaya and throw them about and that you know what you are talking about! The danger is always that we create a fantasy object,

a creation of your mind. What we have to do is to observe the process of speaking.

Tantra describes all sound as mantra. You do the mantra recitation, the visualisation; you dissolve the visualisation, you do the offering and so on, and then you have to see that everything is illusion — everything is the body of the deity. All sound is mantra. Everything that arises in your mind is the movement of Tara's mind or Chenrezi's mind or whoever's mind. In other words, don't solidify. Don't objectify. Keep it loose. Keep your hands open and loose. When your fingers are loose you can do so many different things. When you apprehend something, when you take hold of it, your hand is now the slave of what you have caught. It is the same with the mind. When the mind catches hold of a dogma – be it republican, democratic, whichever political or economic theory, christian sect, buddhist grouping – you become a prisoner, you become finite.

The mind is fluid and open, easy, relating and able to move. The body should be soft and pliable. This is the source, the text is saying. The source is not something fixed, it's not dead, it's not an object, it is an ungraspable presence.

Seeing the immediacy of 'how it is', is itself Buddha

Then he says awareness as this 'such-ness' is buddhahood. It means that if you see the 'such-ness' or the 'this-ness', the immediacy of how it is, it itself is Buddha. If you see ground, this is Buddha. However if you are 'ma-rig' [Tib. Ma Rig] (ignorant) , if you are 'avidya', if you are not aware of how this is, then you are a sentient being wandering in samsara.

All sentient beings imagine that their ground or their base or their source is themselves. We may say, *I came out of God, I came out of my mother's body, I've come from my DNA and RNA or I am just myself.* These are all false grounds, these are theories of interpretations of a source for who I am. You might think, *I am a creature of my culture or my education or my gender.* Or you might think, *I am a woman, I am a man, this is what I am, this is who I am...* for a while. Next life you can be a duck or a snail or a snake, you don't know. And if you are doing 'tong-len' and you are taking all the suffering of all sentient being, then you are also transforming yourself into different kinds of experience.

This line is saying that the source of sentient beings is not to see the source. The source of all buddhas is to see the source. So the source is vital. The ground is vital and this ground is our own mind. The ground or the source is not different from the awareness that sees it.

For example, I am putting my hands up and I am looking my hands and my fingers. I, the subject am looking at my hand, the object. Now you could say, the mind of James and the hand of James, are both in one James. So James is looking at his own hand, at himself. But when I look at my hand, I am seeing it as both subject and object. As subject because I can feel the sensation inside the hand as mine, I recognise that it is indicating my hand. Simultaneously I think, *ooh! gosh! that's hand, look how it is, I don't often look at my hand.* Now this is object. So subject and object pulsing across. Both of these are false identities. They are based on a capacity to conceptualise, they are not naked. They are not the simple actual. They are not uncontrived because they are interpretations which I make and which I have learnt to make in the course of my life.

Fish don't make interpretations like that. They are still in samsara. This is why we as human beings are very privileged, because how we are in samsara, is not like a cow or a goat or a cat. We are able to have experience and to review our experience. We are able to be mindful in a way that a cat can't be. The cat can be mindful waiting for the bird and ready to move if the bird is catchable. So in that way it is mindful of an object. But we can be mindful of our process of our own becoming. Because that kind of mindfulness is bringing you closer to what is meant by awareness.

The difference between consciousness (nam-par she-pa) and awareness (rig-pa)

This term 'rig-pa' in Tibetan or 'vidya' in Sanskrit is important to be clear about. In dzogchen, it has a very specific meaning. The word 'rig-pa' can have many meanings in Tibetan language, it can mean one of the five sciences for example, architecture or medicine, it can mean knowing. In dzogchen, it always means 'non-dual awareness' that is to say 'not subject-object awareness'.

When you go to school, you have to pay attention to the teacher and learn something. You have to take what they are saying in through you ears and allow

it to sync in to memory so that you also can speak it back to the teacher. The teacher asks, *who knows what we have been looking at today?* And the child says, *Oh! me! I know!* A child feels very happy, *Now I've internalised this information and I now have this knowledge, I am a subject. At first the knowledge was like the object coming towards me, but I internalised it and now I'm a subject able to use information and knowledge. So I am becoming a bigger person.* At each stage, as you become more skilled in internalising and re-patterning information, you get more power in the world. You can take on different tasks, you have more confidence. You become rounded as a person. All of this is what we call consciousness, the 'vijñāna' or 'nam-par she-pa' [Tib. rNam Par Shes Pa]

Consciousness means I know something. It could be that I know when the post office closes. Or that I know there is not much food in the fridge and so I need to go to the shops. It could be that I know the dates of my children's birthdays. It could mean all kind of things but it always has the sense that there is a subject and an object and a verb linking them together. So it's talking about about-ness. I know about flowers or I know about bicycles, and how to repair a burst tyre. I know about cooking different kind of vegetables. Probably it's better to steam broccoli. If you boil broccoli, it gets a bit soggy whereas if you steam it then you get a nice crunchiness; it's gorgeous. I know how to cook broccoli. In that sense there is a subject (I) and an object (broccoli) and a verb which is the active knowledge of the cooking. This is consciousness. A subject that knows something about an object. I know what do with the object, how to relate to the object. Consciousness (nam-par she-pa) is different from awareness (rig-pa).

Awareness is a capacity of illumination of what is occurring. It is like a light going on, it's often compared to the sun in the sky. The sun shines, the rays of light shine out and they illuminate everything. Without light we will be in the dark, we wouldn't see anything. In the morning when the sun is coming up, we get the first light of the dawn and then the sun comes up over the houses or mountains, and then you have a direct illumination and brightness.

Before you tell the world what it is, the world is illuminated. Most of us are so intelligent that we are really stupid, that is to say our intelligence rushes forward and says, *oh, that's the church, this the house where the old lady lives, that's the car*

that was stolen last year. So as soon as something is appearing we rush in, putting our labels, stamping in with we know.

Some of you will know this word, 'mahamudra'. Mahamudra means the great seal; it means don't seal the world with the names of objects. The great seal, in fact, is not sealing anything. The great seal is revealing everything by not sealing it inside. It's a car, it's red car, it's friend's car – as soon as you put this onto the object, you become in prison. You feel big as ego self — that I know this — but you become very small because now you are just sitting inside the place of what you know and it's not much. But if you see and receive the revelation of everything which is present, that's very different experience.

So awareness is free of subject and object. It's a co-emergence of revelation and illumination. When the sun comes up, the mountain is illuminated and revealed at the same time. As soon as there is illumination, there is revelation. Illumination and revelation comes together. I hope that make sense.

So revelation and awareness together, illumination and revelation — this is the meaning of 'rig-pa'. It doesn't mean solving a problem. It's not a cognitive activity. It's pre-conceptual clarity. It's a clarity that comes before you start thinking about things.

It doesn't mean that you shouldn't think about things. You have to know when the post office closes if you need to send a letter. Chogyam Trungpa said that if the mind of buddha is just open like space, then every hospital would need to have a Buddha Ward because if you were enlightened like that then you would be incapable of leading your life and you would be lying in bed all day with an oxygen tube.

So you have to be able to function in the world. The difference is that the buddha is able to see that the movement is the movement of the ground. Every movement is the movement of ground. As we will come to see, it is the radiance of the ground, like the radiance of awareness. We think, *I am going to the post office, so I better hurry up now otherwise it may close*; we have an internal dialogue shaping and directing what we do and how we are. That is why it is very important to be clear that this is consciousness and this is what it does. It is not bad, but it has a limited capacity.

Awareness is very different. We're going to be talking a lot about awareness. For example, maybe you are on holiday in a nice place, a little Greek island perhaps, and you are just going for a little walk. You are not in a hurry to go anywhere and you walk a bit and every so often you stop and look around; you just look. You don't know the names of the plants or anything; there is the sea, some boats on the sea, some clouds on the edge of the sky, some smell in the air... everything is coming to you. This gives you a little flavour of what is awareness. You are not working it out, you're not turning situation into a problem. You are just, *oh! wow!* It empties your mind out but you still see. You have the revelation but you're not doing anything with it. So I hope that gives you some indication of awareness.

May everyone be aware of inside the truth of the ineffable base

May all beings in the three realms be aware of the truth of the ineffable base!

The base, the source, can't be expressed, but may everyone be aware INSIDE the truth, not aware OF it. What is the difference? Because as soon as I want to be aware of my buddha nature, I want to be aware of my mind and by introducing this idea I have introduced the paradigm of subject and object. This is why this text say again and again, *Shhhh*. You can't speak it, you can't say it.

As soon as you start to conceptualise it, you tear the world into subject and object, inside and outside, good and bad, right and wrong, liking and not liking. The polarities start mushrooming out. That's why I translated it as 'be aware IN the truth'. You are awakened INTO the truth; you are not aware OF it as something out there, but the truth comes to you. For example, if you have a bath and you put the water in a bath, you might test the temperature with your hand but then you get in. The skin on the other parts of your body has a different sensitivity to your hand, so you have the truth of the temperature of the water on your body... *ooh! It's a bit hot!* It's direct and immediate and you got it. This is the sense of the non-dual. I am not thinking about it, it COMES. It's like instant intuitive presence. We will look at this more.

Alternative descriptions of the ground

So now we will look at ground from a different description. There are thousands of Tibetan texts describing the ground and each author brings out slightly

different flavours. Why? Because you can't describe it. Each author is doing their best to present a little bit of how it is.

A Tibetan example is somebody who has lived in a country where they don't have anything sweet. He asks someone who comes from a country, like India, where they have all kinds of sweets and fruits, *What is sweet?* He is told, *it's in your tongue, it's in your mouth when you eat something sweet.* He says, *I don't understand!* So you can explain and explain but he still doesn't understand. Then you take a little piece of sugar and you put it on the person's tongue. *Oh! that's sweet.* You say, *Okay, now you know what is sweet, so you explain to me what it is?* And he says, *I don't know how to!* This is the meaning of direct experience: you have the taste but you can't say what it is. What does a lemon taste like? How do you know that this coffee is better than that coffee? *Well, it just tastes great!* What do you mean by 'it tastes great'? Whoa! you can't say anything! This is why you get many different descriptions: because everybody is trying to say the unsayable.

Nature of dzogchen transmission

This is important for us because, as many of you are aware, the first transmission of dzogchen teachings in this world was from the mind of Samantabhadra, the primordial buddha.

Samantabhadra is just sitting, completely open and relax. Also present is Vajrasattva. Vajrasattva means 'vajra being', completely indestructible, like the sky. He is completely pure and open like the sky. So too is Samantabhadra; there is no real difference between them so their minds have no barrier. There is no one finite buddha here and another finite buddha there. They are instantly immediately connected. This is the first transmission and it is called the transmission of buddha's mind. Mind to mind transmission.

Then from this, you have the so-called symbolic transmission in which there is gesture (mudra). Buddha Samantabhadra is usually depicted naked with his hands in his lap, relaxed; he is not doing anything with them. Vajrasattva is holding a vajra and a bell. He is holding a bell on his left thigh and the vajra in front of his heart. This is a gesture which symbolises something. So if you see that image, or if you were to meet Samantabhadra and he made this gesture

(mudra) which is the root of all the mudras, you get something. This is the symbolic transmission. It's a non-conceptual transmission of how it is and you wake up on seeing that.

Garab Dorje, who did understand the symbolic transmission, manifested into this world out of compassion but he realised that people don't directly get how they are because we are locked inside our concepts. So he gave the transmission which is described as 'coming through the ear hole'. It's an oral transmission, using words. Because we are used to words, we receive a transmission but unfortunately words are linked to concepts and concepts are always interpreted. So although Garab Dorje speaks very clearly when we hear the words, the transmission gets a little bit bent by our understanding.

If you study dharma you will learn about the three pot faults. We learn that we shouldn't be like upturned pot which can't allow anything inside. We shouldn't be like a pot with a hole in it, so that what we hear just doesn't drain out of us. And we shouldn't be like a pot with dirty old food in it because if old food is mixed with new fresh food, then we get something not very nourishing. This third pot fault is a difficult one. How do we clean our pot so that our own memories and understandings and opinions don't get mixed in with dharma! This is almost impossible. If we have a lot of education then that may be useful but it may also be a problem.

Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche said that teaching dharma in the west is very different from teaching it in Tibet because western people have a lot of education, a lot of experience of life in different ways. Our mind is quick and can link across many things which can be an advantage but it can also be a problem, because thinking is linking and so we build our patterns. Do our patterns have a true and authentic dharma vibration? Possibly not, which is why in this third transmission, when the dharma is taught in language, we try to receive it, if possible, without thinking.

He would also say not to take any notes when he was teaching. Anyway the teaching was recorded, so you could hear it again, but that wasn't the main point. The main point is, as soon as you take notes, you are in selectivity. You say, *oh!*

this is important, I need to write it down in case I forget. So instead of being there in the flow, you are picking and mixing and making your own pattern.

The flow is important because, as Samantabhadra says, everything arises from the same source. Awareness and unawareness have the same source.

Fundamentally, unawareness is not bad and awareness is not good. There is no difference between them. If you see that, your mind will collapse. Salt and sugar, are they same? *No!* Yes! Taste! What is sweet, what is salty? Same! Ahh!

So this is the key point. Don't discriminate. Don't enter into judgement. Don't allocate value, since value will always be according to some pattern you have established, be it your family culture, your national culture, your educational culture, your work culture, your sexual orientation culture or your gender culture. We have so many biases. We say, *From my point of view, this is important. As a heterosexual white middle class man, I want to say this...* But it doesn't mean very much, it is just one opinion amongst many.

In dharma transmission, we try to go beyond opinions and go into the flow of sound and emptiness. Sound and emptiness. That's the nature of transmission and that's why we have many different text which indicate this truth in different ways.

From Lama Chetsangpa: the way of clarity and the way of bewilderment

This is from a lama called Chetsangpa. There is a difficult term, it's called 'ne-lug' [Tib. gNas Lugs]. 'Ne' means to abide or to settle and 'lug' means the style or the fashion; it means: like how it is, how it is in itself. And when you don't get it, don't get 'how it is', then you have the way of bewilderment.

So this is the way of clarity, this is how it is when you see 'how it is'. This is the source he is talking about: this means your own mind is sitting here. Wherever you are sitting, whatever you see around you, however you feel in your body, whatever you think of yourself as a good person or a bad person, whatever – it is your own mind. The mind itself is not the busy functioning of your consciousness; it is this intrinsic awareness, this brilliance of your mind and this is primordial. It's there from the very beginning. Just there. It's uncontrived. It's not created.

Each of us has a personality and that personality develops as we grow older. It is contrived; personality is contrived. You come into your shape. If you grew up with brothers and sisters, how come you are not like them? *How is this possible that we are so different.* It's because you are contrived. You adapted through the positioning of different aspects of your experience.

Awareness is effortlessly arising, 'lhun-drub' [Tib. Lhun Grub], sometimes referred to as instant presence or instant manifestation. This is our mind, it's pure. This is primordial purity. It's never contaminated, never mixed with anything, just here open, fresh and it's effortlessly arising, everything coming at once. What you see around you, what you hear, what you taste, the taste in your mouth, the pain in your back, how your feet are, *I need to take my shoes off*— whatever is arising for you, it's just here. You turn your head, it's just here. Everything is instant. It's all-at-once-ness, IMMEDIACY. Your mind from the very beginning is instantly filled. When you look for your mind, you can't catch it, it's empty. But it's full. EMPTY and FULL.

Primordial purity and instant (effortless) presence — these two are not two different ideas, they are inseparable. So this is something we can be aware of.

Practice: stay with what you see

This Zoom talk will be finishing soon and then you will get up and do something; maybe you will eat, or talk to someone or go to toilet... whatever you are doing every movement of your body is a new revelation. You open the door, you go out into the passageway, IT'S THERE! From ordinary material point of view, you may think, *I am here and it's my flat, so I know which room is where; I know the layout and I know...* Now you are in your mental construction. But just relax a little bit and allow the co-emergence of experience. Don't split it into 'I', the subject, see this, the object. Relax from that. *Oh! Moving! Revealing! The pulsations!* As the body is moving, what it sees arises in front of us.

If you look for yourself, you see that you live in a world of revelation. Moment by moment everything is revealing itself. Later you will go out of your flat and start to walk in street; you can't know what's going to be there. You might know what's in your flat but once you are out in the street— cars are parked in new places, someone is out taking their dog for a late night walk... There are people

in the street; look at how they walk— all this is showing to you. Everything is showing. Showing means light. Light is shining, your inner world of light. What you see is light. What you BELIEVE you see is interpretation. Stay with what you see; that is immediate, that is primordial. That is first.

Our interpretation comes after the fact but because we are so skilled in interpretation, we merge interpretation onto perception and the two seem to be completely fixed together. So it's very difficult to focus, and to pull our thinking back. But we have to do that! The visual appearances are arising, the conceptual appearances are arising, and these are movements together. Their interplay is our conceptual understanding of what is happening.

So the more we relax and the more we allow them to move, they just very gently show that this is an interplay. The thought is not first, the perception is slightly ahead of the interpretation because we have to interpret 'something'. When we relax the mind and are being at ease, then we see, *Oh! this and this and this...* The concepts are also there but 'this' came first.

That's very important. For example, when you look in a mirror and see your face, you see a reflection. The reflection is in the mirror. You interpret the patterning of the reflection as your face. What you see is illumination inside this frame of the mirror; you see shape and colour, you see pattern of colour. That's what you actually see. And you interpret it as 'my face'.

The difference between awareness and consciousness (Cont'd)

I, Samantabhadra, affirm the truth of the source free of causes and conditions. Awareness is self-arisen on the source itself, untouched by the faults of separating outer and inner, of employing biased judgements, and untainted by the darkness of the loss of recollection and so what occurs is free of faults. Intrinsic awareness is fresh and unchanging. It is free of fear and panic even if the three worlds are destroyed. With the non-duality of appearance and mind, there is no attachment to the pleasures of the five senses. Self-arising awareness is free of concepts and so is free of material form and the five poisons.

Buddhism in general refers to eight consciousnesses. Each of the five senses has its own consciousness and the sixth consciousness, mental consciousness, takes the raw information from the senses, cooks it a bit, and comes to a conclusion. The seventh consciousness is the consciousness of the afflictions—the mixed

emotions, the mental dullness, aversion, desire, jealousy pride and so on— the many different flavourings that comes into your perception. The eighth consciousness is called 'alaya vijñāna', the ground of all consciousness.

The ground of this consciousness, however, is not the same as this ground that we are talking about in dzogchen. It's more like a kind of receptacle that holds all the possibilities. It is the consciousness which is the ground of all dualistic perception. It is within the field of dualism.

Since these eight consciousnesses operate very quickly they give you the sense that 'I am seeing something'. However when you look in the mirror, you don't actually see anything since a reflection is not 'a thing'. The reflection is very precisely appearance and emptiness. It's illusion. It's just colour in a mirror. *But I know this is my face. Oh! I am seeing my face.* What I am seeing is an image of my face; I can never see my own face directly. I have to look in a photograph or a painting or a mirror to see something that I identify as 'my face'.

The object confirms the subject. This is how our life in samsara is. *The reflection is the truth about me.* I feel from inside something about my face but now when I look in the mirror, *Oh my God, oh, I look so tired, how come it's possible!* It's something quite amazing to say that 'that' (the reflection) is 'me'. 'That' is not you. But 'that' is me in the sense 'I, me, myself'. 'Me', if you like, is the object vibration and 'I' is the subject vibration.

He said, *that to me.* 'I' received his comment. 'I' was the object that 'he' was speaking about. He said, *James why did you do that, I don't like it when you do that, oh my God!* He was speaking to me. 'I' was the object addressed by 'he' who was the subject in the moment. I didn't like what he said to me. 'I', the subject didn't like to be the object onto which 'he' is sticking these negative remarks. This is very important.

The inner duality is between 'I' and 'me', between 'self as subject' and 'self as object'. When you see yourself as object, you can tell a story about yourself. Where are you from, your favourite food, the best holiday you have ever had, all kind of things— there is always a lot to say from the point of view of 'me'. We talk in terms of 'I'— *when I was there on my holiday, I had a really good time.* Who was the 'I'? The 'I' that I describe being on the holiday is not the 'I' who is speaking

now. This 'I' is filling with the expression of the pattern of concepts which would indicate a memory of where I was. 'I' is always empty. 'I' fills with 'ME'. 'ME' is the filling of 'I'.

'I, 'I am', 'I am hungry'. I am tired, I am happy, I am playful, I am bored- 'I' will fill with anything. Because 'I' is empty. The emptiness of the self is present in every moment of our speaking, in every moment of our thinking.

So this 'I' is where you feel *rigpa* illuminating the present moment because if 'I' had a fixed content, it could never be fresh. The real quality of 'I' is that it is fresh and 'ME' is stale. 'ME' is like an old bread. In Germany, it's a tradition to make dumplings with old bread. This is quite nice, winter is coming, it's getting cold and damp, some big bowl with hot dumplings inside is very good. But fresh bread is different, the smell is so nice that you wouldn't want to make a dumpling. 'I' is fresh.

When you're looking for this ground, for this primordial openness, the freshness of the mind is revealed to you. You can try that for yourself. We're going to finish very soon and so when you get up, you can say, *I am going to make a cup of tea, or I am going to lie down, I am going to read something, I am going talk with someone, I... Now I am talking. Now I am walking. Now I am cooking. Now I am reading.* Filling and emptying. 'I' fills and empties. If you really catch the flavour of 'I', it's truly like the mirror.

The mirror has no fixed content. The mirror takes a content, such as 'I am tired', and 'I' fills and empties. Fills and empties. 'ME' is like the ocean-bed, it takes the accretion of whatever is sinking to the bottom. Like the layers of sludge, the plastic refuge of western culture is sinking down. This is 'ME' layered with my history, 'my pain', 'my suffering'. It's not great.

However 'I' is fresh. This is what you can examine for yourself. Then the meaning of awareness becomes clear. The naked 'I' is awareness. The heavy, dense, predictive 'ME' is consciousness. In your own experience, you can start to see the difference between these two. Stay with the light of the fresh, the immediate. And watch how you can settle into the density of assumptions.

So now we will end for this evening and for those of us who meet again tomorrow we will progress through looking at the ground, the path and the result as well as the view, the meditation, the activity and the result. And now I say, *Good night!*

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