

An Introduction to Dzogchen

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Good evening, everyone. So, we have a short time this evening, to look at some of the general principles of this path called Dzogchen and then, do a little bit of practice at the end. Dzogchen means the great completion or the great inclusion. When the word great is used in this context, it means empty or open; it means that it's not about some special entity - some God or divine being or fundamental reality. It's pointing to the mysterious process by which we manifest moment by moment out of an ungraspable openness. And, this state, which is our own state, is complete in as much as all the experiences that we have, arising and passing, arising and passing, are immediately present and then gone. So we live on the cusp of this wave which never breaks; we're just on this opening, and opening and opening.

I will say something about this in terms of the traditional categories of view, meditation, conduct and result.

View

The view is that, from the very beginning our own mind as it is, has been pure; pure here means uncontaminated by anything. So, we're used to having thoughts, feelings, sensations, hopes and fears, our moods expand and contract. There are all kinds of movements, which we take to be ourselves. We maintain the sense of self-identity through our selective attention and our editing. We highlight the features which seem to confirm our sense of who we are and diminish the impact or intensity of the factors which don't confirm our sense of who we are. When we become aware of that we start to see, that we are in a process of constant construction. It is rather like being a child on the edge of the sea where the sand is very soft and wet and you have your little bucket and you fill it with sand, you turn it upside down, and it just slowly dissolves onto the rest of the sand. So everything we construct in life gradually fades away whether it's work situations, relationship situations or whatever. The shifting patterns of what we experience cannot be frozen, no matter how hard we try. So the purity of the mind is the fact that these pulsations or moments of experience are present without leaving a trace.

The traditional example for this is, the mirror. A mirror on the wing of a car will show hundreds of thousands of reflections and images over the course of one journey, and yet, it will still be fresh at the end of the journey; everything else in the car will be tired, including the driver, but the mirror stays fresh and open for the next thing that arises. Usually, we get layered with the stresses of the day, with remnants of conversations we've had with people, with plans and so on. We get full of stuff.

So, the view is, that the person who feels that they are full of stuff is a false identity or a delusion, which is generated by a lack of clarity as to our own ground — that our base is space, our base is ungraspable openness. But when we are not attentive to that, when we don't relax and open into that, we tend to fixate on stuff. We then select the stuff and build up pictures of who we are, how we think we should be, other people's expectations of who we should be, and that keeps us very very busy. Not only, is there the busyness of the moment, but as we find ourselves repeating

patterns, developing habit formations, we find that there is an intensification of our investment in our projects. This investment is what is meant by *karma*.

Karma is the belief that things are real that they are important and that, 'I have to do them'. And this means that when you finish something, because you have been so invested in it, there's like a kind of wobble. You've added too much energy into it and so, there's a kind of judder and, that reverberation continues through time. So even if you stop doing something, a habit like smoking cigarettes, if you get a bit drunk at a party you might find yourself trying to borrow a cigarette off someone else. That pattern has remained dormant inside you; you haven't smoked for 10 years but still, you could, because the pathway hasn't entirely vanished.

The view is that in order to free ourselves from this endless reverberation we don't have to try hard. This is a fundamental understanding of Dzogchen — because the mind is pure and has never ever been marked, conditioned or limited by any pattern we have. We may feel that I'm like this or like that, that I know myself, and that my people who know me, they'd know I'm like this; therefore this pattern is me.....for a while. You weren't like that when you were born, nor when you were five years of age nor when you were 15. Our egoic formation is always deceiving us about our changes, because the ego is our sense that I am a consistent point of reference, that I exist as me and I have always been me. Things may have happened, I have met people, been closed, broken up and so on — all kind of stories — but fundamentally, I am myself. But this is an obscuration or a false belief which we are held enthralled by, were under the power of.

How did it come about? The traditional teaching say, it just occurred. It's like a magical formation, it has no meaning, it just happened. On the basis of it happening, one first thought, the thought of substance i.e. something. From something we have subject and object, an experiencer of the something and something which is experienced. Subject and objects start to vibrate together like a *damaru*, like a two-sided drum, and this sends off all kinds of patterns of interest and evolution, and we end up experiencing our complex world.

The fundamental basis of it is reification, that we experience entities. We look around our world and we see the walls in the room we're in, decorations, carpets, cups, and so on, each of these we perceive as something. I see what is there, I know

who I am, I know where I live and I know what I have in my house, my possessions etc. I am a knower of things.

There's a certain power to that, but of course there are many many things we don't know. So we're like a little glowworm with a small arena of illumination surrounded by a vast darkness. But this light, the light of knowledge, is like one of these self-charging torches that you have to keep squeezing in order to keep the light on. You have to work at it all the time. That's why, at night when you fall asleep you go unconscious and it's as if there's nothing at all, unless you wake up with some dreams in the middle of the night.

So the view is to give us the sense that our mind is like the sky, infinite open and bright; the sun rises in the sky, the rays of the sun spread out and we have this infinite illumination. Inside that we have a bubble of self-identification and this bubble keeps turning and that's our life, our individual existence. What's inside the bubble of our self is space, because when we have a thought, it arises in the space of the mind. When we have a sensation, it arises in the space of the body. There are many many different spaces and they're all like theatre stages. They are arenas on which experience arises.

All experiences arise and pass almost instantaneously. Nobody's causing them to arise, nobody's removing them, there is no creator God, and there is no final purpose that we have to strive for. When we have a sense of purpose, it means subject focused on object — *I will go to the shops before they close, I will make sure to set my alarm clock for the morning* — there is an aim and an achiever of the aim; the ego self is an agent.

Meditation

Now the meditation that we do is very very simple, it's simply to sit. You just sit in a very open way and whatever comes comes, whatever goes goes. When we experience thoughts and feelings arising, they seem to be arising in our territory, so we claim them to be our thoughts. That feeling that this is arising in my mind somehow brings a proprietorial sense that I must be the owner of this thought. And if I'm the owner I should make sure I have quite nice thoughts! So there comes a tendency to tidy them up, to edit them to direct them in some way.

However the view of the open unborn sky-like mind is a pure awareness which is not resting on anything, and which is free of any inherent need to have an intention. It is not a doer, it's not about something, it's pure illumination. There is this and this and this and this. When we think *'this is happening to me'* or *'I need to do that'* then you have subject and object, running round and round and round, like, two baby squirrels chasing each other. This goes on and on and on.

So in the practice you want to relax and allow whatever is arising to come. Usually for this kind of practice, we have our eyes open, we rest our gaze in space — whether it's a huge space outside in nature, or it's a small space indoors, space is space — letting the gaze rest in space and then doing nothing. The one who does, is a form of the energy of the mind. The energy of the mind is like the wind blowing through the sky. The wind also is ungraspable; you don't see it directly, but indirectly when it moves the clouds or ruffles the leaves in the tree.

So from the sky you have the wind, and then the wind leads to fire, to water, and then to earth. Most of the time, we conceptualise our experience in terms of earth — *'this happens, I want this, I don't want that'* — and this and that carry a density which is not actually inherent to them. It is projected from our longings, our beliefs, our values. When we have a project at work it becomes important for us; we put a lot of time and energy into it. If you were to take it into a shop and ask, *'How much money will you give me for my report?'* people would say, *'Why would we give you any money for nothing. What is it? It's rubbish.'* For you it's very precious, for them it's just pieces of paper with writing on it.

When we see this again and again, we realise that the brightness of the world, the shining quality of the world, is our own projection, but because we have selective attention, because we have bias, because we don't go to the world in a fresh open way, the patterning of our ignoring or attending brings a topology to the world, peaks and valleys, some bright patches and some areas that are seemingly forever in the dark. We lack panoramic vision.

When we sit in meditation we experience that some thoughts and feelings, some sensations really seem to grasp us, and others we don't really care about. Why is this? Because of how we have become conditioned to allocate value, we don't see the intrinsic value, we see the pattern of our own artificial contrived constructive value.

This creates a kind of echo chamber in which our thoughts are returned to us as if they were valid. We of course are human beings, certainly in this life, and we talk to each other. In language we generate this web of confirmation of the truth of how we are.

So the difficulty of meditation is to allow ourselves to do nothing, to become irrelevant, to become redundant. This may bring up a kind of basic anxiety that we will vanish into some great space of nowhere-ness so I've got to hang on to my existence. This fear arises because the ego-self holds itself apart from the field of experience. Although we breathe in moment by moment, we need to eat and drink. We are participating through our belonging organically to this environment; it is our conceptualisation sets us as something apart from it.

So if you dissolve the ego, you're still here in the world, but you start to see that your belonging in the world is not 'me' and 'the world', but 'me world' arising together in non-duality. Non-duality means not one and not two; it's both and there is a togetherness which is not a homogenisation. The more we feel at home in the world, the more tolerant we are of how things are because it's just this appearance, and just this appearance, and just this appearance... We have hopes and fears and thoughts and worries, they come and they go, and when we see there is actually no individual self that they're refer to, then the impact of good days and bad days thins, and thins, and thins and so, we become more spacious, more at ease in ourselves.

This experience is known as clarity. It indicates that nothing has changed; the world functions, you get up you clean your teeth and so on. Who is the one who is cleaning their teeth? That's not a question to be solved by some kind of cognition. When you're cleaning your teeth, teeth and cleaning are arising together; when you put your shoes on, your hands, your body, your spine, arches to put the shoes on, and you find that each moment has an internal coherence as things arrive in the right place at the right time. This is the spontaneous completion, the intuitive completion of ourselves. Instead of having to work hard to make things happen, we find that because we are not so preoccupied, we have more attention on phenomena, and so we can work with circumstances, with what's arising. If you have less of a menu in your mind, if you've got less of an agenda and fewer fixed ways of doing things, then the freshness of the moment is the potential of all that can be utilised to bring forward and manifest, bring forward and manifest, whatever that would be.

So in that way, thoughts, sensations and feelings become in the service of illumination; they are the blossoming or the rays of energy arising out of the infinite spaciousness of the mind. We start to see, *'my mind is like the mirror, empty of self content and yet always showing radiant display.'* The mirror keeps showing and showing all kinds of different patterns. In the mirror of awareness, self and other arise together. What I call 'I, me, myself', what I take my seemingly separate self to be, is one reflection in the mirror arising together with other reflections. Whether I'm sitting or cooking or walking or talking it's never just me. It's always me and... because the environment and the individual arise and have the same nature. They are the revelation of the potential of the mind which arises with particular patterns.

For us as human beings, the world patterns in a particular way, when we look outside and we see the birds in the garden, the world is patterning for them in a completely different way, many of the things which are figural for a robin are not figural for a pigeon, the pigeon has a big heavy stupid body and the robin has a very light friendly little body, so what they see, what they can find is very different. In my back garden here, there is a little birdfeeder with some seeds in it, and the robin arrives and it eats seeds, and the big fat pigeon sits underneath the feeder, like a beggar waiting for some drops to fall from the table. It might look like the pigeon is the fat king of the world but they can't get into the seeds. So when you see the world, you see everything is just exactly as it is, not fixed, but in display. Patterns of luminous display, arising from causes and conditions, each of which is arising from causes and conditions, and all of them are this ceaseless unfolding of the potential of the ground.

Conduct

The open empty mind shows itself in infinite ways. Our conduct in the world, how we proceed, is through conversation, through communication, through allowing ourselves to be touched and moved by the events of the world. It's not about isolating ourselves. If you watch the news and you see the state of Palestinian children or children in Yemen or in many African countries you weep, it's so sad. When you see the protesters in Myanmar being shot, you weep, it's sad, it's awful. And then something else comes and something else, and something else, ... If you're fully present in the awful moment, you have full compassion and you can respond.

The key point is that something else happens, and something else happens, if you are going to be open and fresh to the moment; the enemy is preoccupation, if you hang on to something and brood about it, and go over it again and again, you're living in a mental tunnel. You are neither deeply relaxed in yourself, nor are you freely participating in the world. You are trapped in this labyrinth of recollection and plans and hopes and fears. So, our conduct is to release ourselves from that and to be present, moment by moment, in the fresh co-emergence of our body, moving with that of other people, doing whatever we do.

There is no fixed agenda. We are already here in life as it is. The openness of the mind, the bright shining clarity of the mind, and the unique moment by moment participation that we embody, these three are inseparable. However your body emerges is the display of the open ground. Trying to correct ourselves in order to become a better kind of person is a kind of strange notion since I am the builder of myself and, as we know, all constructions have a limited endurance. They fall apart again, so self-construction is a way of hiding ourselves from ourselves. The very desire to better ourselves, to better the world, becomes a way of not seeing the actuality of how experience emerges from the ground.

So the path is luminosity, the path is to stay close to the light of the ground as it presents with all the phenomena that are revealed to us. Our eyes can only see light, the eye cannot see motor cars and trees; the mind *interprets* light as things. Our ears can only hear sound but we *interpret* the sound as music or people having a fight or whatever. So when we start to see that the 'naked fresh potential of the world' is being cooked according to the recipe book of my cultural neurotic and egoic fixations, we can put down the cookbook for a while and just stay present with the revelation, with what is received.

I don't have to be so busy, life will continue without me, and I don't have to wait till I'm dead to find that out. The less I do, the more I receive and when we receive more, we find that we are energised and resourced by each moment. So this is the basic orientation of Dzogchen: that what we need is already here, through our open fresh participation.

Result

The result of that is, that we stop driving ourselves, it doesn't mean that you can't work hard or fulfil your projects; you can do them, but in the manner of a dream.

What is effort? Effort is a mobilization of energy, but it doesn't have to be serious. Seriousness is a kind of overburdened heaviness, in which, true value and true meaning has been put into something which actually will fade. Seriousness, as we see in the world politics all the time, makes for an over-investment in limited projects, which leads to the identification of those who don't agree with my project as being my enemy, and that then quickly leads to war. There are so many sites of violence in the world today. Very few people live in a world they can share. Most start with number one, 'I, me, myself', and then in series of expanding circles, my lovers, my family and so on, until they reach those they don't know and those they don't want to know, and would be quite happy even if they were dead.

Dzogpa Chenpo, the great inclusion, brings everything into one great circle, one great bubble of light, and then we see all these divisions that we make — friend, enemy, desirable, undesirable — are just rippling moments of the energy of the mind, here and then gone. What I love in one moment is not so interesting in the next moment. I am fickle, so if I am fickle I should not pretend to be serious. Actually, being fickle can be helpful because then you are labile; you are moving and moving and moving. Ever since you were born you were moving; when you were in your mother's womb you were moving. We are movement and movement is not solid. It's not serious either. This is the basis of our Dzogchen practice.

Sitting Meditation: Instructions

We sit in a very simple way, but not as an intention, not as a direction, but as a kind of mood. Have the sense of space, be open to space; space is our home. Space is the spaciousness of potential, from which we each emerge in different ways. When we woke in the morning none of us could say how our day would turn out to be. If we had been walking, who we would have met on the street, who we would have been talking to, what we would have been talking about. We don't know, our life is revealed to us. So we participate in a shared field of revelation, rather than being an individual agent who has to push out their elbow to secure our little space in the sun. Space is the

mother, space is our basis, we have space. It's just that we're not so sure how to recognise space, how to awaken to space, how to be part of the space.

In fact we are the blossoming of space moment by moment so when we do the practice, we relax open and allow whatever comes to come.

The senses are not blocked. We're not wanting to make a big barrier between inside and outside. We see that outside and inside are simply patterning in the field of revelation. There is a circle of revelation which is always there whether we turn to the right or the left or up or down. There is just this and just this, and this includes me; we are always within.

So maybe we can just do a little sitting just now. There are lots of extra bits you can learn about the practice, but the most important thing is to release that energy which vibrates as impulse and the need to do something. Whenever you find yourself being busy in the practice, release yourself in a long slow out breath. And there you are. What you take yourself to be, will show itself as unreliable, as ever-changing. Our formation is momentary. This is the middle way. It's not that we don't have formation, — it's not just nothing at all — but the formation, or the pattern which arises, is just here for an instant. We are always moving in this wonderful limpid sea of disclosure and disclosure, self-arising and self-liberating.

That's what we sit with. Let's sit a little bit just now.

[10 minutes meditation]

Transition between meditation and post-meditation

So one of the things we attend to, is to the transition between sitting practice, and getting up, and moving around, and being with other people. Have that transition as simple as possible. We sit in open clarity and we move in open clarity. Then when we find ourselves re-centering into our body as 'I am this person', just be aware that: 'I am falling under the power of a thought. I am identifying myself on the basis of a linked series of concepts. I exist. I have a body. I am not you.'

When we hold on to these concepts they generate a little cocoon around us which gradually separates us from what's around.

So simply seeing that the thought which defines me has already gone, the feeling which defines me has already gone. We don't need to block what is arising, but just to avoid grasping, building, and constructing so that whatever occurs is self-arising and self-liberating. We will then have the seamless movement of sitting, and moving, and talking, and life moves on within this luminous sea of light.

So that's all I have to say today. I wish you well with your practice. I understand that you have been meeting together as a group for quite a long time now so I hope you keep enjoying it and getting some benefit, to make your lives more easy. Now I say goodbye!