

Dzogchen

by Dirk Gillabel, 2010

Introduction

Dzogchen is an ancient teaching that explains both who we are in the world as in our essence, and how we can make our essence manifest again. It has always been a secret teaching, not because there is anything to hide, but because its teaching can be easily misinterpreted by those who have not gained enough understanding in the mind and the divine essence. Then it easily can lead the practitioner astray. But times have changed. The traditional Tibetan culture has been dispersed all over the globe; and many people are now ready to receive various spiritual teachings. Several books about Dzogchen have been and are still published that explain in detail this wonderful teaching. Here you will find a summary of Dzogchen.

Dzogchen is considered to be both the final and ultimate teaching, and the heart of the teachings of all the Buddhist teachings. Dzogchen has been practiced throughout the centuries by masters of all the different schools as their innermost practice. Its origins reach back to before human history, and neither is it limited to Buddhism, nor to Tibet, nor indeed even to this world of ours, as it is recorded that it has existed in thirteen different world systems.

Dzogchen is widely translated as "Great Perfection", but this may imply a perfection that we strive to attain, and this is not the meaning of Dzogchen. Dzogchen is explained as Ground, Path and Fruition, and from the point of view of the Ground, it is the already self-perfected state of our primordial nature, which needs no 'perfecting', for it has always been perfect from the very beginning, just like the sky. It is uncreated, yet spontaneously accomplished.

The Founder of Dzogchen



Garab Dorje "was the first master of Dzogchen, who himself received transmission through direct visionary contact with the Sambhogakaya. Dzogchen teachings were taught for the first time on this planet in this time cycle by Garab Dorje, who manifested a birth in a Nirmanakaya form as a human being in the third century B.C.E., in the country of Ogyen, which was situated to the north west of India. He spent his life there teaching to both human beings and the dakinis. His final teaching before he entered the Body of Light was to summarize the teachings in Three Principles, sometimes known as "The Three Last Statements of Garab Dorje."

He left behind this testament for all the Dzogchen practitioners of the future. The Three Statements of Garab Dorje are:

"Introduce in the state directly" refers to the transmission by the master, who, in various ways, introduces and brings the disciple to understand the condition of "what is", the individual's primordial state. This is the Base.

"Do not remain in doubt" means that one must have a precise knowledge of this state, finding the state of the presence of contemplation which is one and the same in all the thousands of possible experiences. This is the Path.

"Continue in the profound knowledge of self-liberation" is the Fruit. That means, the complete and unchangeable knowledge of self-liberation is totally integrated with one's daily life and in all circumstances one continues in that state. All the hundreds and hundreds of original texts of Dzogchen can be considered to be an explanation of these three verses of Garab Dorje." (from "The Crystal and the Way of Light" and "Dzogchen, the Self-Perfected State" by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu)

Overview of Dzogchen Teachings

Our essential being, that what we were, what we are and what we always will be, is a state of awareness that is primordial pure. Our normal mind and consciousness is always obscured by impurities of emotions and thoughts.; but our essence is total purity. This is also called the Natural State of our being. This primordial purity is empty. Emptiness has no obscurations whatsoever, nor by emotions, nor by thoughts. Dzogchen uses the image of a mirror which has the capacity to reflect whatever is in front of it, but is not obscured by it. The mirror always remains the same.

We all are this primordial purity or emptiness. But our everyday consciousness is so clouded by emotions and thoughts that we are not aware of it, and thus we don't recognize it.

When our awareness is in the Natural State, then there are no restrictions or limitations to the expression of our being. The appearances we perceive are just reflections in the mirror of the mind. They are manifestations of the mind. As such they are perfect and as they should be. Manifestations come and go. They are recognized as just reflections, or 'illusions', and are enjoyed as such.

Awareness remains in its pure state.

As ordinary beings on this earth, our awareness identifies itself with the manifestations and takes them to be real. There is no awareness of the pure state. One's consciousness is clouded by the constant activity of emotions and thoughts, which also has a tendency to narrow our perception.

Most of us have never experienced their true pure essence in our lives, so how do we know what it is? In Dzogchen one first needs a direct introduction to one's Natural State, usually from someone who has directly experienced it himself. By this one knows the difference between one's Natural State and one's daily clouded consciousness. Then one has to practice to make this Natural State to happen again, even for brief periods, and then to make it more permanent. In meditation one will find that the mind continuously produces thoughts. Thus, thoughts are looked at. They are observed to arise and to flow away. By this, one discovers that thoughts actually do not exist by themselves; they are insubstantial waves that come and go and cease to exist. They are just waves or movement in the mind. It is important not to identify or to follow the thoughts, as they lead your awareness away. Thoughts can be, but do not have to be, eliminated. The point is to keep one's awareness on one's true essence, and let the thought go by. It's like watching a train go by, instead of jumping on the train and ending up elsewhere. A lot of thoughts are just ramblings, automatic programs that just keep your mind busy all day. Once these have been quieted, one is able to really think what one wants, and not allow thoughts that are not wanted. Of course, the purpose is eventually to stay aware of one's Natural State. The more the thought process slows down, the clearer consciousness becomes. Our mind becomes very clear and alert; and aware that beyond those thoughts there is an ever present state of clearness and emptiness (empty of the obscurations). One becomes more and more aware of oneself. In our everyday awareness we are not aware of ourselves, we are aware of emotions, of thoughts, of what is around us. By practicing Dzogchen we become aware of our true self, pure, clear awareness of self.

The Natural State possesses the qualities of emptiness and clarity. These are of course concepts of our mind. Anything we think of, including what the terms emptiness and clarity means, is a construct of the mind, and not the true Natural State. But in our human world we need words and concepts to communicate, and as such these terms are approximations. The natural state is just itself, beyond the mind and all its constructions. When one is in the Natural State, one just is. One cannot describe it accurately.

The Natural State is permanent, but Dzogchen does not hold the view that a separate, independent self exists on its own and is self-sufficient. No eternal, independent, separate, concrete entity or identity such as an eternal soul or self can be found. In normal life we constantly create a sense of self. This grasping at a self is done by ignorance because we lack real knowledge and awareness of our true state of being. During practice we cannot find this self. It is just not there. When we search the mind it is not there. What is this "I" that we so desperately cling to? The self is not a single unified entity or substance, but it is a process occurring in time. It is a succession of states of consciousness having varied

mental contents. It is like a river that changes from moment to moment. it is never the same.

When practicing Dzogchen one can arrive at a state of mind, where there are little or even no thoughts. One experiences profound stillness, or calmness. But this does not mean one has attained the Natural state. One can get fixated on a state with no thoughts, but this is still a state of mind, and thus a reflection or creation of the mind. One needs to look at the source of thoughts. Who is thinking, who is watching the thoughts? As we don't find either a watcher or what is being watched, both of them dissolve. Then a state of clear emptiness arises. Emptiness of thoughts, and clarity of awareness. In this state we are not thinking nor do we make an analysis, or interpretation. We find ourselves in our Natural State, beyond conception by the intellect.

In the beginning, being in this Natural State is short lived, because of our habit of residing in a consciousness that dominated by continuous thoughts and concepts. With practice we enter in this state again and again, and try to stay in it longer. Again, it does not mean that thoughts do not arise anymore. The diminishing or elimination of thoughts are just a means. The goal is to stay in the Natural State when thoughts come and go. Then one is not subject to thoughts, thoughts are subject to the state of clear awareness.

During practice, there are three obstacles which can disturb our meditation. The body easily becomes drowsy. Dullness makes us lose our clarity. Agitation happens when thoughts take us for a ride. When these happen, it is best to take a break, refresh oneself, and start over again.

The Base, the Path and the Fruit

The Dzogchen teachings are often structured threefold: the Base, the Path and the Fruit.

The Base

Usually a realized master introduces the Natural State to the student. He is able to directly transfer that state of awareness to his student. The student who now has experienced his Natural State of being, even if it is only briefly, then has to practice in order to enter the natural state again and again. This constitutes the Path. But first the student has to have had a direct experience of the Natural State.

The Base is the experience of identity with the Natural State. It is the fundamental ground of existence, both at the universal level and at the level of the individual. The base has always been there, has always been pure and perfect. It is present in every living being. It is non-dual. Once the being enters duality the experience of the Natural State is lost. This means that it is temporarily obscured by attachment and aversion arising from ignorance of dualistic vision. A normal person is ignorant and thus his Natural State is only latent; but for a realized person it is manifest. The goal of practice is to make the Natural State manifest again. From the moment we enter into dualistic vision, we leave the primordial Base, and transmigration begins. Transmigration is the continuous

movement of going from one body to the next because of karmic causes. One has become subject to cause and effect.

The primordial state is beyond space and time, beyond creation and destruction. But its nature is to manifest itself as light, as the elements, as energy and all the interactions that end up what we experience and enjoy as the cosmos. Entering into duality we become caught up with all these projections which we mistakenly take as external reality. Thus we perceive the individual as made up of Body, Voice and Mind. The Body is the entire physical manifestation of the person. Voice is the vital energy (prana) of the Body. The Mind is that what reasons.

The Natural state is permanent, all the rest is impermanent or temporal. Why is everything we experience, including ourselves impermanent and temporal? All phenomena lack inherent existence; nothing exists by itself as a permanent something. If something existed permanently, it would have its own inherent existence, and nothing else could affect or change it. It would be immutable and unchanging. There would be no causality, no cause would be able to change it into something else. Experience tells us otherwise. Everything is changing all the time, thus everything lacks inherent existence. It is our perception that makes us think that phenomena are somehow solid and permanent.

The Base, or Natural State, has a threefold condition: **Essence, Nature and Energy.**



The Essence of the Base is fundamental voidness. Voidness means that when one examines thoughts, one will find that they come and go, but do not have any real, independent existence. It is a phenomenon that only temporarily exists. Before and after a thought there is only emptiness, voidness. This emptiness is fundamentally pure and clear, and it is compared to a mirror. A mirror reflects whatever is put in front of it, but the mirror itself is never changed, nor made impure or obscured. It always remains empty and clear. Thoughts come and go, but they are just reflections, they do not change the purity and emptiness of the Natural State.

The Nature of the Base is the manifest phenomena. Although phenomena come and go, and at their essence they are void and empty, nevertheless phenomena do exist and continue to manifest. This is compared to the nature of a mirror. Although the mirror remains empty and pure, it is its nature to continuously

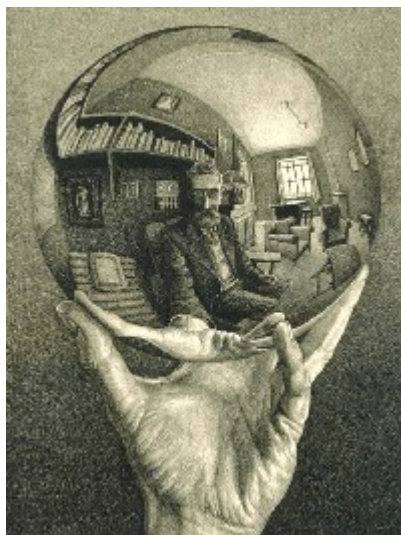
reflect what is in front of it.

The Energy of the Base is the way the Base, or the Natural State, manifests itself. This is compared to the reflections themselves in the mirror. Essence, Nature and Energy are all interdependent. One cannot exist without the other two.

The last one, Energy, manifests itself threefold: **Zal**, **Rolba** and **Dan** (untranslatable terms)



Zal (the appearance of a seemingly external world): is the energy of the individual that appears as a seemingly external world. The individual sees himself as a separate entity that lives in outer world of objects. But these outer objects/world are actually projections from his own energy. This compared to a crystal. Light (energy) enters the crystal (the individual) and projects into rays and patterns of colors which are seen as separate from the crystal, but in fact they are functions of the crystal's nature. In reality there are no external independent or separate phenomena; they are manifestations of the energy of the individual.





Dan (infinite and formless quality of the energy): the energy of an individual can take any form whatsoever. Because of the individual karmic vision, its energy will shape itself into a Body, Voice and Mind with an external environment; life after life. This is compared to a crystal ball that will take the color of whatever colored cloth it is put on.

The Path

After the student has been introduced to the Natural State of being, he need to practice the Path in order to get out of his dualistic view and condition, and to realize again his true Natural state. The Path has three aspects: **View**, **Practice** and **Attitude**.

View means that one has to observe oneself and discover what one's own condition is in regards to his body, voice and mind. In this way one will find that one is conditioned by a lot of things, and stuck in many 'programs'. The body is conditioned by its living conditions, external influences, nutrients and so on. The vital body has problems with energy being stuck, not flowing freely, causing both emotional problems and physical ailments over time. The mental body has its own imbalances, like a distorted view of the world, mental fixations, unhealthy thought processes... Here we have the image of the mirror again: the practitioner needs to look in the mirror of his own being.

Practice strictly means contemplation, that is, one strives to enter the state of non-duality, the Natural State, and tries to stay in it for longer and longer periods. Thoughts can come and go, but when properly centered in the Natural State, the practitioner will not be affected by those thoughts. The mind itself is not engaged in doing any effort or work, as it is the case in meditation. Meditation engages the mind to do something with for example visualization to bring about a state of calm that is inductive to enter contemplation. Once in contemplation one is totally present and aware, and one neither rejects nor follows any thought. Because we are all different, and our energies are all different, one has to look inside to find one's own kind of obstacles (=View), and then one has to choose and employ a meditation technique(s) that will help him to dissolve those obstacles. Meditation techniques are a help to overcome one's problems, but they should not be a goal by itself. The focus in Dzogchen is always on contemplation.

Attitude means that once the practitioner is able to stay in contemplation, in the Natural State of clear awareness, during his practice, then he needs to continue, being in this Natural State, into his daily life. Then he brings his present clear awareness into every moment of his life. He avoids all distractions that could bring him out of the Natural State. His mind doesn't wander about the past or future, but he can actively plan something for the future while remaining clear and aware of the present. For this he needs to cultivate constant clear awareness of his entire being. It is an attitude or conduct that will allow him to gain mastery over the karmic causes in his life. Karmic causes are twofold: primary and secondary. Primary causes come from the past and can be experienced as good or bad. But the primary causes need the right conditions in this life time to be able to manifest themselves, thus they need secondary karmic causes. When the practitioner has continuous clear awareness of the Natural State, he is able to recognize when the secondary karmic causes are arising and prevent the negative ones to develop, while stimulating the positive ones. Eventually he is not conditioned at all by any experience, good or bad. Thus he becomes completely liberated from conditioned existence. He is not limited by the actions of the manifested world. He can act completely free from all limitations, rules and causes/effects. Such a person may be seen acting in strange and unexpected ways. A master of himself, he is free to do what he wants, but he remains aware of the needs and limitations of other people, and he will always try to help them to observe themselves and to make their own decisions.

The Fruit

The fruit is Realization. Realization means that one has made manifest in his awareness that which he in essence always has been, that is, a state of pure, clear awareness that we call the Natural State. Through the process of ever deepening awareness of this state one self-liberates from the dualistic vision. All passions and all karmic causes that condition a person to a dualistic world have dissolved. This person has no attachments to these plays of energies. There is no separation of subject and object, which is merely a habitual vision of unrealized beings.

A practitioner who remains continuously in the Natural State does not expect any virtuous qualities to arise or fear bad consequences of wrong actions. The Natural State is beyond all karmic causality and its effects. Such a practitioner is not subject to causality or karma. Our existence as a human being is the result of our impure karmic vision brought about by causes. It is impure because it is caused by ignorance and the passions or emotional defilements.



Tibetan letter "A", the symbol of body of light.

The letter A also symbolizes symbolizing the concept of "infinite space".

Ultimately, the practitioner dissolves his personal reality into the Reality of the Natural State. This also means that the physical body dissolves because it is just one manifestation of our impure karmic vision. It returns to the primordial energetic essence of the Five Pure Lights of the Rainbow Body or Light Body. This is not a symbolic thing. There are a number of documented cases where the practitioner dissolved his physical body, leaving only hair or nails behind.



When one enters into the Natural State and continues this state for a prolonged period of time, the potentiality of the Natural State has the occasion to manifest spontaneously as vision. Thus, the ultimate result of a prolonged practice is the attainment of the Light Body or Rainbow Body (also called Sambhogakaya, a body made entirely of light). The realized Dzogchen practitioner, no longer deluded by apparent substantiality or dualisms such as mind and matter, releases the energy of the elements that compose the physical body at the time of death or even before. This is not a transformation process of an impure physical body into a pure light body. In Dzogchen there is nothing to be transformed, and nothing to be visualized. The Light Body is not the result of visualization. Visualizations are the products of the mind. But the Dzogchen practitioner is in a state beyond the mind. The vision that arises spontaneously is a manifestation of what is already primordially present in the Natural State. It simply manifests.

Because the Natural State is both emptiness, and spontaneous manifestation, when a being enters the Natural State, compassion for all sentient beings arises spontaneously. Unlike with other Buddhist practices, compassion does not have to be cultivated by the mind. In the natural State it has always been there.

The Light Body has two sides: emptiness which is permanent and wisdom which is impermanent. It is a seemingly dualistic concept, but both emptiness and wisdom (=clarity and awareness; wisdom is the understanding of the emptiness and insubstantiality of all phenomena, internal as well external) are always inseparable in the Natural State. Clarity and awareness are a manifestation side and thus impermanent because they are changing all the time, while emptiness is constant. This is very similar to the concept of Shiva and Shakti in Kashmir

Shaivism. As human beings we are both Shiva, permanent, passive consciousness and Shakti, dynamic consciousness. Shiva is the immobile center, Shakti is like a reflection of Shiva bringing forth the manifestation and creation of the cosmos. The being who has now become his Light Body or Rainbow Body can appear to sentient beings to teach them. The Rainbow Body, which is a pure light manifestation, is not material, but it can appear to be so since it can act on all the senses of a sentient being simultaneously. The Light Body can be perceived only by the Aryas (highly realized beings). Ordinary beings cannot see or hear this manifestation. Only when the Realized being manifests in a visible, physical manifestation, can he be seen by human beings.



Tapihritsa was an ordinary person from a nomadic family in the country of Zhang Zhung (The Zhang Zhung culture is an ancient culture that flourished in the western and northern parts of Tibet before the introduction of Buddhism into the country during the 7th century). The main teacher of Tapihritsa was Dawa Gyaltsen. Tapihritsa practiced for nine years before he attained illumination. The place where he practiced is a holy place outside Mount Kailash (=is a peak in the Gangdisê Mountains, which are part of the Himalayas in Tibet), a place called Senge Tap. After nine years of practice there, Tapihritsa achieved the rainbow body.



Sogyal Rinpoche (Chapter 10 of Tibetan Book of Living & Dying) wrote: "In 1952 there was a famous instance of the rainbow body in the East of Tibet, witnessed by many people. The man who attained it, Sonam Namgyal, was the father of my tutor at the beginning of this book.

He was a very simple, humble person, who made his way as an itinerant stone carver, carving mantras and sacred texts. Some say he had been a hunter in his youth, and had received a teaching from a great master. No one really knew he was a practitioner; he was truly called a "hidden yogin."

. . . he then fell ill, or seemed to, but became strangely, increasingly happy. When his illness got worse, his family called in masters and doctors. His son told him he should remember, 'Everything is illusion, but I am confident that all is well.'

Just before his death at seventy-nine, he said "All I ask is that when I die, don't move my body for a week." When he died his family wrapped his body and invited Lamas and monks to come and practice for him. They placed the body in a small room in the house, and they could not help noticing that although he had been a tall person, they had no trouble getting it in, as if he were becoming smaller. At the same time, an extraordinary display of rainbow-colored light was seen all around the house. When they looked into the room on the sixth day, they saw that the body was getting smaller and smaller. On the eighth day after his death, the morning in which the funeral had been arranged, the undertakers arrived to collect the body. When they undid its coverings, they found nothing inside but his nails and hair.



One of the most frequently painted forms of rainbow-body emanation is that of Padmasambhava (also called Guru Rinpoche), a great Buddhist teacher. When Padmasambhava is represented as manifesting on the dharmakaya (truth-body = light body), sambhogakaya (bliss- or enjoyment-body = energy body) , and nirmanakaya (activity-body = physical body) level simultaneously, then three rainbow sources emanates from his crown, forehead and heart centers, respectively. These three rainbow-streams merge together very subtly to produce a harmonious triple whirl-pool of rainbow waves.

