

The Path of Non-Distraction - Adriano Clemente

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An excerpt from the spring retreat, “The Principle of Presence” according to Chögyal Namkhai Norbu’s book “The Mirror, Advice on Presence and Awareness” with Adriano Clemente. Dzamling Gar, May 14, 2022.

Yesterday we started the first topic [of the book], how we can have real understanding that all phenomena or samsara or nirvana are rooted in our minds. When we have that understanding we no longer have any doubt about it. Then what is the main point that we should apply? To continue that state of presence without distraction. Here the book gives an example. It says, if we need to cut or block the flow of water from a source or spring of water, then we have to go to its source. If we try to block it some other place, we will not succeed. In the same way, if we want to block the root of samsara, we should go to the root of our mind, otherwise there is no way that we can stop this flow or manifestation of samsara.

In the same way when we speak about negative karma and suffering, if we want to stop this we also have to stop the root of our mind. If we don't go to the root that is our mind, then even if we try to accumulate merits, doing good actions and engaging in virtuous practices, we can have some temporary benefit but the root of all this suffering and obstacles will never be cut. Then again we can accumulate negative karma and so on.

Another example the text gives is a tree. If we want to definitively cut that tree, we need to take out the roots. If we just cut some branches here and there, it will only make it stronger and the tree will continue to grow and never dry up.

the all-creating king or *kyunje gyalpo* – but when we say “creating” it does not mean that it is actively creating like we do with our mind. In this case “creating” means that just like a mirror it has the potentiality to allow any reflections to appear inside it. In the same way this mind essence or primordial state has this potentiality and so all phenomena of samsara and nirvana are just like reflections in the mirror. This potentiality of the mirror is what we call the all-creating king.

So our mind – mostly we have knowledge of what we call the ordinary mind – that mind, too, is like a reflection in the mirror. But how can we have knowledge or recognition of the mirror? Only through reflections, because a mirror does not exist without reflections. A mirror means the capacity to reflect something, then all reflections become a method or means or symbols to discover that potentiality. In the same way, if we are practitioners applying the real sense of Dzogchen, all phenomena of samsara become a means for discovering that state.

In Tibetan we say *nalma* which means original or fresh condition, which has never been touched. The Tibetan word for yoga, *nal jyor*, is usually translated as union although this is more the sense of the Sanskrit word. *Jyor* means union, more or less, and *nal* means original condition, our state fresh as it is, never been changed. So here it says that if our mind is not in its original fresh state, as it is, even if we use many methods like *kyerim* (the development stage), or *dzogrim* (the completion stage), they don't become a complete path for liberation. The reason is because when we do the *kyerim* stage, we begin mostly working with our mind, with our visualization, and we try to transform our impure physical manifestation into a form of the deity and the mandala and so on, so we start from the level of the body. The body also means the manifestation of form.

Then going deeper, after that we have the *dzogrim* stage, when we work with the level of energy, channels, prana, thigle or essences, all these manifestations of the wisdoms of the deities, trying to integrate all aspects of the development stage at the level of energy. Then the finality of *dzogrim* is real knowledge, to be in the real condition of original mind. Here it says if this finality of being in the natural state of the mind is not applied or reached, then all methods of *kyerim* and *dzogrim* are not the path of complete liberation. It does not say that they are useless. They are very important methods, but in Dzogpa Chenpo they are not indispensable because we go directly to the level of mind essence.

Another example given here is that if we want to conquer a foreign country, first of all we have to capture the leader or chief of that nation. If we just capture other people we cannot achieve our aim. In the same way, if we do not deal with our mind, there is no way to go to the root of all the problems of samsara, suffering, and dualism. If we are not able to continue that presence without distraction, either we don't know how to do that because we have never received instructions on how to do it, or we don't have the capacity, in which case we are just slaves of our distraction and delusion. If we continue that way there will never come a time when we will be free from transmigration in infinite samsara. But if we do not lose ourselves in distraction and forgetfulness, if we are able to control or govern ourselves, if we do not forget, and we have that presence continuously, in that way we can continue or sustain that nature of mind. If we succeed in doing that, it is the essence of all dharmas, and the root of all paths.

All dualistic phenomena, like suffering and pleasure, good and bad, whatever we can imagine or experience, arises from our mind. We have no doubt about that. For this reason, to continue that recognition of mind essence without distraction is the most profound point of practice. If we ask

how all the Buddhas and Tathagatas of the past obtained enlightenment, [they did it] by following this path of non-distraction. Even in the future, all those who will attain Buddhahood will do so through the path of non-distraction. And even now, all those who are attaining enlightenment, that is the result of applying the path without distraction.

Without the path of non-distraction, it is impossible to attain the state of enlightenment. Therefore the first thing we should do is to have recognition of our nature of mind or mind essence. In Dzogchen we talk about the three statements of Guru Garab Dorje. The first statement is directly discovering our mind essence. There are different ways we can have that recognition. Sometimes it happens working with the direct transmission of a teacher, but it doesn't mean that it must always depend on that circumstance, such as direct introduction. In the Dzogchen Community at the moment there is this famous separation between people who received direct introduction and those who didn't. However, direct introduction means that we must have recognized our mind essence in order to have received direct introduction. Otherwise even if we have received direct introduction from the teacher twenty or thirty times, it just remains like a blessing. Therefore we need to work with methods.



Participants with Adriano at the spring retreat, "The Principle of Presence", Dzamling Gar, May 14, 2022

For example, sometimes Rinpoche gave the *yeshe sangthal* direct introduction related to the experience of emptiness. Why the experience of emptiness? Because it is easier. What is easy? To allow that state of instant presence to be recognized, because the experience of emptiness becomes like a magnifying glass. This state of instant presence is not that now it is present and after it is not. It is what we call *changchub sem*, bodhicitta, the primordial state, but we do not

recognize it because we are too conditioned and follow thoughts and distractions continuously. Then through methods like the experience of emptiness there is a kind of blockage of all our thoughts and we can have that experience that is sometimes called *heddewa*, which means that we don't have a precise idea or we cannot identify the situation we are in at that moment. For instance, if we have a shock, like a very strong noise or a bomb, first of all we have that shock, then we can have the feeling of fear, but before fear there is this gap. That gap means that our mind is blocked. If our mind is blocked but we have not fainted, how is our consciousness? How do we identify it? There is no way, but at the same time there is clarity. When we have that experience then we can recognize instant presence.

This is the first point for a Dzogchen practitioner. If this point is missing then all methods do not really go to the real sense of the teaching. Speaking about the aspect of integration, we use many methods for integration in the Dzogchen Community such as Vajra Dance and now Khaita Joyful Dances and so on. However, if we are just fixated on the Vajra Dance, on Khaita Dances but we are missing the main point, it is like saying in the previous example that we are trying to cut the branches of a tree. Of course it is very good, like planting seeds of virtue to have a connection with the Dzogchen Teaching for the future, but it is not sufficient as a main practice. This is the main point that is explained here.

Once we have that recognition it is very important to continue it with presence. At that point it becomes the essence of all paths and the root of all meditations, the final point of all practices, the real juice of all upadeshas, and the secret point of all methods, and for these reasons we really have to put effort into continuing this flow of undistracted presence.

This was the second subject [of the book] which is how we should have real understanding beyond all doubts that the main practice or root of meditation is undistracted presence.

Up to here the text gives the *tawa* or view. First it explains what samsara and nirvana is, and that whatever concepts we have of the existence of the universe, everything is based in our mind. What is the essence or nature of our mind? We should discover that. Once we have that recognition, it is the finality of the view; it is the real view. The path has three aspects: the view, meditation, and conduct or action. The view means that we have that recognition of our primordial state. Meditation means that now we cultivate that state, that recognition, in order to become familiar with it. Conduct or behaviour means that we try to bring into daily life the same experience that we have during the sitting session. It is not that we are dealing with different separate subjects; it is always the same point about how the three stages develop. So we have to start with the view. Once we have established the view then to develop we need meditation or cultivation of the path. Then we can integrate that in daily life. If the first point is missing then the second doesn't have any base. If the second is missing there is nothing to integrate with daily life. That is specific to Dzogchen Teaching.

