

Dang-wa, Rol-pa and Tsal

Three modes of energy

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Extracted from the end of the Eiffel Retreat, October 2001

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Dzogchen speaks of three three modes of energy, three ways of appreciating energy, *dang-wa*, *rol-pa* and *tsal*. Many texts have described these functions and in slightly different ways. What follows is a way of understanding them, as described by C R Lama.

Dang-wa is the capacity of the mind to allow whatever occurs to occur. The traditional example for this is the crystal ball. The crystal ball will take on the colouration of whatever is placed next to it. The crystal ball is transparent and translucent with no inner content of its own and thus is open, welcoming or receiving whatever arises. This is the quality, the energetic flavour, of the dharmakaya, our presence, our ever-open nature. Dharmakaya, having no content of its own, is completely open to being integrated into any situation. It has no boundaries, no inside or outside, no bias or favouritism, and has nothing to protect and nothing to gain. The crystal ball will allow any colour to pervade it, and similarly our dharmakaya nature offers space to any arising without fear or risk of being damaged.

The various colours arising in the crystal ball do not harm or improve it and likewise a bad thought arising in your mind doesn't harm the actual nature of your mind. It may harm your sense of yourself but your sense of yourself is just another thought pattern arising in your mind itself. That is to say, manifestations impact manifestations but they don't impact the space of open awareness. The dharmakaya has nothing to be hurt or affected; it receives and gives everything in its infinite generosity. This is the vajra quality, the indestructible nature of enlightenment. Nothing can destroy it and so it doesn't have to defend itself. This is a wonderful quality to open to. Being infinitely open we find we are infinitely available. Nothing will harm our true nature and it will never be depleted.

When you sit in meditation and start to judge what is happening you may get worried because your mind is not clear, or you feel you are having too many of one kind of thought and not enough of another. If this occurs simply remember this image of the crystal ball and relax. Nothing that occurs can harm your true nature. You don't have to improve your meditation; you don't have to work at making it clearer or sharper or better. Such effort may 'improve' the content of your mind but it cannot influence the mind itself. So simply allow the mind to be as it is and rest in open presence with whatever happens. In this way you will find yourself as the dharmakaya. Longchenpa, Jigme Lingpa, Dudjom Rinpoche... every great lama who writes on this topic says exactly the same thing.

The second mode of energy is called *rol-pa*. This indicates unfolding, displaying and is a quality linked to the sambhogakaya, the enlightened aspect of enjoying the richness of radiant expression. The image used to illustrate this is a mirror and its reflections. The mirror has the capacity to show what is placed in front of it – that is the potential of the mirror. It is not that the mirror contains within it, hidden like seeds in a pod, all the images that it will show. The mirror is empty through and through yet it has the potential, the capacity, to show exactly what is placed in front of it. Just as a reflection arises from and appears within the empty mirror, so, like the sun rising in the empty sky, the radiance of the

mind illuminates what is there. This is our mind's potential to reveal all the rich variety of experiences that occur including the experience of ourselves.

This display is playful and always moving. The word *rol-pa* also indicates play and dance and evokes a sense of fluidity and change. The mirror is both stable and moving. The surface of the mirror, as these images come and go, appears to be very dynamic and yet the space within which they move, the mirror itself, is completely still. *Rol-pa* indicates the flow of new forms arising, changing and passing away, a natural dynamism that is not generated by our individual will and intention.

For example, if you practice a tantric sadhana and visualise yourself as Padmasambhava, this is the form arising from the vows taken at initiation, the *damtsigpa*. When the natural form or *yeshepa* merges into it this is a quality of *rol-pa*, for the mind which is naturally empty is now revealing, out of its potential, yourself in this form. Through the practice you come to see that when you become Padmasambhava, and after the practice when you become James, both are arising out of emptiness. So one's ordinary self is also the quality of *rol-pa* – a natural display. Your ordinary self is now experienced as dynamic flowing presentation. Rather than being a fixed self that you have come back to at the end of the practice, this ordinary self is revealed as just another appearance of the display of our empty nature, very playful and energetic. This is actually how we are, always moving and always changing. This movement and energy is the display quality of the dharmakaya as it reveals itself as sambhogakaya.

The third quality or mode of energy is called *tsal*. *Tsal* carries the notion of vibration or wave, effective and impactful, influencing the field in which it moves. The image used to illustrate this is a natural crystal, which of course always has flaws inside it. When the sun shines into a crystal you see little rainbows as the light is refracted by the cracks as well as by the refractive index of the crystal itself. In the same way on the level of the nirmanakaya, the creativity and the potential, which exists in its latent form as the white light, comes into a

precise manifestation according to the circumstances that are there. The differentiated refracted light shining from the crystal depends on the cracks within it. Just as each crystal will have different cracks, so we each have our own structure, our own conditions. The particular lives we live have their own structure and conditions and so we become 'ourselves'. As the 'light' of an event strikes us we refract it through our patterning and this manifests as 'our' response. This is the quality of 'us' having our energy in 'our' lives, eating the amount of food we eat, the kinds of food we eat, wearing the kind of clothes we do, having the kinds of conversations we have. This particular identity feels like our qualities yet it manifests as interaction and has no essence that can be grasped.

Each moment, each gesture, is unique and precise but is also the energetic manifestation of the underlying quality of the dharmakaya. So instead of saying, "How I am now is the result of how I was in my past lives," we come to see that all the particularities of our lives are not the result of some negative chain of events but are exactly in this moment, directly radiating out from the ground emptiness. Thus, *tsal* is the quality that we have in being in the world.

However, when the spiraling energy of ignorance and attachment fill the space of experience this *tsal* energy is not recognised. All three modes of energy are inseparable from space, as are all the forms of energy that give rise to the experiences of samsara. But due to ignoring the space, we focus on the interaction, the movement, and being unable to integrate, we are swept along by the flow of events.

Each of these three modes of energy is very important in meditation for recognising what is happening. Begin by relaxing with the ever-present spaciousness of being. It is as if you are in the middle of a huge crystal ball within which is arising this room, these people around you and yourself. Without effort everything is here and yet without substance, without internal defining essence. Our mind is the arena of emptiness. Everything can be accepted here because it has no inherent self-nature, and so is not going to make any mark on the fundamental situation of openness.

Ignorance brings fear and anxiety, in particular the fear of the destruction of ourselves. By entering the meditation we can see that there is no self. There is infinite emptiness. The mind is open, empty, clear and radiant. Anything can arise; this is the translucent generosity of *dang-wa*. Integrating with this you just stay relaxed and present as these images pass by.

Focussing on movement reveals the potential that is *rol-pa*, and focussing on space reveals the hospitality of *dang-wa*. *Tsal* is revealed in the precision of each unrepeatable moment appearing as the manifestation of the non-duality of awareness and emptiness.

When you hold a crystal and turn it around in the light, different colours stream out. Similarly we react to things very easily, we are impacted and respond. *Tsal* is a gesture appropriate to the situation. It is fresh and empty and leaves no trace. It is the immediacy of each moment, the gift of a giver who only gives if there is a context.

Participant: Are we in charge of our actions or do they just come? With awareness do I have the possibility to make decisions, or is there is no 'I' that makes a decision?

James: I remember when I was about twelve, going out in the countryside with my parents. I went up to the top of a big hill and then starting to run down it. After a while I was running so fast that I couldn't stop. At first the ground was very smooth and then it started to get very rough, and that was the first time in my life I really realised, "Ah! I am not at all in charge of this", yet somehow my feet were in the right place. Have you ever had that experience? It is really quite amazing. The only way to survive in that situation is just to trust, trust the direct immediacy of the energy of non-duality.

This is an example of the *tsal* aspect, precise activity without a controlling reflective agent. When the lamp shines on the crystal light comes out, the body running down the hill is co-emergent with the hill, a seamless arising of boulder and step. The movement is not being processed; there is no machine inside the crystal. The sun just hits the crack and light

radiates. This is very quick, an action arising in the situation rather than being applied to the situation.

The more we trust the precision of immediacy the less we have to think. Most of us spend quite a lot of time in anxious thinking and worry. But what we call thinking is not really thinking, it is a turning over of old patterns of thought. The more we trust in relaxed openness the more we find what we need. It is not that thoughts are the enemy; it's just that we dull ourselves with badly applied thoughts, inefficient thinking, defensive thinking.

On an ordinary level you can get a sense of *dang-wa* when you read a novel and you are entranced within it. It is as if you are in the book, and the book is in you. You have become completely empty and you are filled by the book. Then you close the book and you go off and do something else. Even if it's a very interesting book, you can just go off, and then you come back to the book and go right back in. The same occurs when watching a film or at the theatre. We enter each situation and it enters us for a moment – and then something new occurs. When we are not open it is a different story. We start to carry the traces of experiences and so enter into judgement and manifest an individual agency in order to get more of what we like and less of what we don't like.

Participant: How does this relate to distraction?

James: We can be distracted, taken away from the immediate presence of our hospitable translucency, our infinite potential, and our diverse engagements. Pre-occupation covers the easy relaxed openness of awareness and when thought chases thought the three modes of energy, although present, are hidden from us. They are related to the fresh, naked ground and when we open to that basis of our experience, then the three modes are revealed. The openness of *dang-wa* does not judge or discriminate; it accepts all that occurs. The richness of potential in *rol-pa* is not habitual or intentional or partial but displays according

to circumstances. The precision and impact of *tsal* is fresh, direct, and co-emergent and so is free of the duality of actor and action.