

INTRINSIC FREEDOM

Freedom is intrinsic to awareness. It does not have to be gained and it cannot be lost. However due to the power of ignorance this ever-present freedom is disregarded as the energy of the mind becomes focused on generating the experiences of the six realms of samsara.

How strange and sad that sentient beings, although inseparable from the unchanging freedom of the ever-open ground, find themselves addicted to the dualistic limitations conjured up by their own imagination.

The ground of freedom is uncompounded, spontaneously arisen, infinite, inexpressible and beyond the reach of the terms 'samsara' and 'nirvana'. This is the base or source or true sphere of all sentient beings. This ground, the ground of everything, has two paths, the awake path and the dream path. Although all beings have the same ground what arises for and as them depends on which path is followed.

With the path of awareness of the ground there is the inseparability of openness, clarity and empathic co-emergence. This ripens as the three modes of the buddha: dharmakaya, the sky-like mind of the buddha with the freedom of contentment; sambhogakaya, the speech of the buddha with the freedom to enjoy the unceasing non-dual display; and the nirmanakaya, the body of the buddha with the freedom to respond without limitation according to need.

However with the path of non-awareness or ignorance there is forgetfulness of the ever-open ground even though the open ground is the actual ground of forgetfulness. Unfortunately, when this mis-taking, this unaware dullness, this dark oblivion, arises there is no recognition of error and so no return to the openness which is always already present.

Instead the creative potential of the ground, the openness of emptiness, flows ceaselessly and is apprehended by the delusion of duality arising within it. The unborn openness appears as self and other, me and you. I am me: you are you. The other is all that is not me, and I am all that is not other than me.

These categories of self and other are artificial; they are constructed compounds which are clearly false when we examine them. "I am an autonomous individual. I am my own person. I decide how I will live." These familiar statements seem convincing until we see the basic fact of our embodiment. We are inseparable from the environment, in fact we are part of it. We are enworlded and are not isolated observers who can decide whether to engage or not. I breathe in the air which is other. Other become self. I breathe out and the air that was self becomes other. I eat and defecate. I drink and urinate. We 'exist' as part of the interactive play which is the actuality of life.

The other and the self are conventional signs that we rely on to make sense of the world. They function for us because they are polarities and we identify ourselves as one pole and exclude the other. Yet there is no clear boundary between these poles except the shifting definitions of our own ideas about them. We imagine duality. Or rather, with the manifesting of duality as an organising principle all the differentiations which generate our experience of the six realms arise. I, the 'I' that feels like me, is an idea, a concept. It is not the word made flesh but the word generating the illusion of flesh, of inside and outside.

All this flow of evermore complex experience arises like a dream from the open ground. It is an illusion, like a mirage or a rainbow. When we do not identify illusion as illusion it manifests as delusion, as an encapsulating hallucination within which we take self and other to be real, substantial, and essentially different. This is how ignoring the ground and the consequent dualistic attachment to illusion as reality generates the suffering of the six realms.

Within these six realms of hells, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, demigods, and gods there can be moments of happiness, moments in which we feel free. But such moments are transient and arise due to causes and conditions. When the power of the causal activity is exhausted the moment of seeming freedom comes to an end. In the drawings of the wheel of life depicting the realms of samsara we revolve through, we see that the buddha looks on from the outside with compassion and points to an empty sphere. This is the empty open mind, the inseparability of awareness and dharmadhatu.

In terms of practice we seek freedom from suffering, from attachment, from the five poisons, and from all the other limitations. In order to achieve this we take refuge and practice mind-training and shamatha.

We also seek freedom to benefit all beings, to transcend our limits and to become truly useful. In order to achieve this we take the bodhisattva vow and include the well-being of others in everything we do.

We also seek freedom as form and emptiness, clarity and emptiness, awareness and emptiness. In order to achieve this we practise tantra and emerge as a translucent divine form in a mandala inseparable from space.

We also seek freedom with whatever occurs, enjoying the inseparability of primordial purity and instant presence. In order to do this we release the habit of adopting and rejecting, and rest in the unimpeded integrity of ground and manifestation.

If we want to find true unchanging freedom it helps if we look where freedom is to be found. Freedom lies in our non-dual awareness and not in the efforts we make to improve our dualistic consciousness. Consciousness (*Tib.: rNam-Par Shes-Pa*) cannot access our own open ground which has never been constrained. The obscurations which seem to hide our ground, our open potential, are themselves the play of the ground. Seeing this we can relax and release our reliance on the illusions that have bound us. All phenomena are impermanent. All that arises for awareness is self-liberating. Doing less we find that we are infinite. Doing more, struggling and yearning, we generate more limitations. Our freedom, our unchanging freedom, is the freedom of the ground we have never left.

James Low, November 2017