

Berlin Dzogchen Retreat II

Compassion, with reference to The Three Statements of Garab Dorjé.

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Unedited

Extract

My own teacher said to me again and again, "Nothing is special. It's all just the same." And if one gets the point of this, one actually realizes it as a living practice and then compassion towards all sentient beings is maintained by exactly not acting in a way that pays attention to what they identify as the specific causes of their problems, because that is not the real cause of the problem.

I want to say a little bit , about the view of Dzogchen in relationship to compassion.

One of the simplest and most precise descriptions of the , view of Dzogchen, is expressed in the three statements of Garab Dorje. These are firstly direct recognition of one's own nature, secondly not allowing oneself to be distracted, and thirdly having confidence and continuing in that manner.

Now the first one, recognizing one's own nature, means very much a continuation of what we were doing just before the lunch break. Through this kind of dissolving meditation in which by subject and object coming through into one point, and there is this experience of openness, whatever arises is seen as the manifestation of that open dimension of awareness. Direct recognition of one's own nature means being able to go into that moment, into that point, what I was describing as going through the front door and allowing oneself to be received back into this womb of open awareness.

Ordinarily in our subject/object-interaction all the time consciousness is appropriating patterns of arising as if they were self. By that I mean that when something arises one either works out whether it is self or not self. For example, say you're sitting in meditation, and a sensation arises that you start to identify as being, "There's a pain in my knee." You can take up this idea "there's a pain in my knee", and you can develop it. "This pain in my knee is terrible. This pain in my knee is getting worse. If I don't move, the top of my knee is going

to jump off." Or one can take the pain that one experiences and just watch it. By opening up this gap in which one is able to watch the arising of the pain, it starts to shift and change. What is often the case is, because we don't really believe in this idea of impermanence, we imagine that if we don't move the pain will remain forever. But if we can develop faith and confidence in impermanence then we know that whatever is arising will pass away. Therefore, if we just relax and stay open, we can be sure that the pain will vanish. I'm sure you've lots of experiences like this. So there's a point at which an arising can be self or it can be other. And how we label and name these arisings is extremely important. But no matter how skillful we are at labeling and naming, on that level one is only manipulating the nature of manifestation while being caught up in this integrated interactive procedure that's taking arisings as real.

So in this statement of Garab Dorje, when he says, being able to recognize one's own nature, recognize on the point of manifestation of one's own nature, what he means is moving out of the ordinary self-referencing function of self-identification through language. Recognizing one's own nature is recognizing a nature which can never be appropriated as oneself. That's why this moment is so radical, so subversive, because it moves perception into a dimension which is totally unfamiliar. However there is inherent in this moment of perception a new structuring, a new order in which meaning is generated or rather displayed, a meaning that's inherent in the nature of reality itself.

So recognizing one's own nature is to find a place in the whole movement of awareness which pervades all phenomena. One becomes truly enworlded. That is to say one is not taking up a place against the world or across the world or through the world, but within the world. There's an enormous sense of reassurance in that. Because there's no longer a burden of a separated self, but there is a sense of true belonging. Wherever one goes, one is never lonely because one is always a part of whatever is occurring. So this is the point of recognition of one's own nature.

However phenomena keep manifesting, thoughts, feelings, sensations, if we think about it, usually there is a subject and an object and the relationship in between them. And the relationship in between them is filtered through and flavoured by the five poisons: stupidity, aversion, attraction, pride and jealousy.

And these flavours and other associated flavours put a particular tension on the relationship between the perceiving subject and the object as perceived. And as we're very used to seeing specific causes for specific consequences or manifestations, if something is arising that's causing some degree of discordance, we often try to work out what's the reason for this discordance and then shift it around so that it's removed and it's more harmonious.

When one dissolves through this gap into the open expanse of awareness, of rigpa, there's this point of merging at which subject and object come together, and the relationship between them is radically transformed. However the old tendencies to take up particular attitudes towards patterns of arising have not ended. And the keypoint at this stage in the meditation is to recognize that when particular attitudes arise, these attitudes are arising as the self-display of open awareness itself. So that whatever arises, one knows that it absolutely has only one ground.

This is the point, certainly in the Nyingmapa-analysis of the Madhyamika where the point of

arising is seen as this ground of all - *Kun gZhi*. And this *kun gZhi* is exactly on the point between samsara, between the realm of dualistic subject/object-perception, and nirvana, the open spaciousness of integrated awareness. By recognizing that everything that arises has just one ground, there is never a real point of difference to open up the tension of subject and object. It's a bit like if you're learning something like *T'ai-Chi*. Often when people begin with this practice their energy is all over the place. If you push them they fall over, or they move about. But gradually through practice the energy sinks down until it's in the belly. They are more centred, and they are flexible, but they are not off balance. So if there's some pressure coming towards them, they can respond to that without getting out of balance.

As long as one is involved in subject/object-perception one doesn't have a center except this moving moment of the self-referencing function - "this is me, this is me, this is me".

But when we practise more and more this dissolving meditation that we did before lunch, and move through into a total acceptance of it, going through the gap between the arising of thoughts into spaciousness, it's as if the center of our gravity sinks, and we become embedded in the place of our identity in this open dimension which cannot be turned into something specific. And so keeping this new center of gravity when anything arises, whether it's a particular perception or a thought or a feeling or an opinion, one knows that it is arising from within the same territory, and one's not knocked off balance. This is the second of Garab Dorje's statements, of not being knocked off balance, of not being distracted, not losing focus.

So if you like the first point is about absolute clarity about the nature of the one who is knowing as an open awareness, not a specific subject.

And then in the second movement one's got more of a focus on the nature of arisings, so that whatever arises is liberated in the moment of arising without becoming something specific, and so there's no tension to pull awareness into precise subjectivity.

And then the third statement from Garab Dorje about continuing in this way, is to maintain the integration of open awareness and manifestation.

One way of looking at this is that the first point of Garab Dorje deals with *mnyam bzhag* or profound meditation. The second point deals with *rjes thob* or the experience that follows on from profound meditation; that is to say, how one deals with the complexity of arisings. And the third point deals with the integration of these two, *mnyam bzhag* and *rjes thob* (nach der Meditation) *dbyer med* - that means, the inseparability of profound meditation and arising.

So instead of first there being you alone, and then you have the other, the two are completely fused all the time. Now practicing in this way, what it means is that one never allows any arising to throw one off balance. That is to say one has a resolute resistance to taking any person or any animal or any being that you meet as inherently real. So that whoever one meets at any time in any place is always recognized as being the manifestation of the open dimension.

On this level there are no sentient beings to be saved. That is to say the kind of compassion that thinks, "I am a good person who'll try to save beings, there are suffering beings who need to be saved, we have a deal, we got a contract worked out here. I get to be a Buddha, and they get to be saved." We're not looking from that view at all. This is more the situation

that whatever arises is absolutely pure because of its nature. Now the the Buddha who represents this basic ground in the Nyingma-tradition is called *Kuntuzangpo* or *Samanthabadra*. *Kuntu* means "always", and *zangpo* means "good". And it represents that all that is occurring is good. So if everything is good, what's the point of making any discrimination?

The problem with sentient beings is that they *don't* recognize that everything is good, and so they are always making discriminations. And we also learned very perversely that if we complain and moan about things we'll get attention. So suffering becomes a kind of currency. We can blackmail other people into giving us what we need because of it. But if everything is good, then what's the basis for suffering? The only basis for suffering is not recognizing that everything is good. So from this point of view when people complain about specific sufferings arising from specific causes, what you know is, this is bullshit.

And again, this is not a dogmatic point of view, this is not a partyline, this is not what Nyingmas believe. This is the experience that arises out of meditating and recognizing the nature of one's mind in a very precise way. And because of this absolute clarity regarding the nature of one's own mind as open, free of attachment, free of aversion and spontaneously manifesting whatever is required, one has a particular protection against the seductions of those who plead a special case. "My suffering is particularly important. My problem is particularly interesting." My own teacher said to me again and again, "Nothing is special. It's all just the same." And if one gets the point of this, one actually realizes it as a living practice and then compassion towards all sentient beings is maintained by exactly *not* acting in a way that pays attention to what they identify as the specific causes of their problems, because that is not the real cause of the problem.

In all the traditions of Buddhism, the cause of suffering is ignorance. Ignorance means not knowing your own nature. The real compassion that we need to feel for people is that they don't know their own nature. That is the real cause of all the suffering that occurs. Recognizing the nature of your own mind, and never allowing yourself to be distracted from that means that you maintain a state of openness which offers the possibility of open recognition by others. Therefore this third statement of Garab Dorje, continuing in the same way, means, to remain absolutely identified with *kuntuzangpo*, in the state in which the ground is perfect, all arisings are perfect, perfection is without beginning and end. So the greatest compassion in this particular view is spaciousness.

So maybe we could see if there are any questions or thoughts or reflections on that.

Is there a place in that view for something that happened to you and that surprised you? I've got the impression that if you have this kind of view there can be nothing that surprises you.

In a commentary on the nature of Tantra, called the *gSang-sNgags Lam-Rim* (chapter 9 of the book) Padmasambhava gives an explanation of the way ignorance manifests in the world, and it's an explanation that you find in many other Nyingmapa texts (see also chapter

5). And the first stage of ignorance - there is a three stage development of ignorance - the first stage is called "spontaneous ignorance" or "co-emergent ignorance" (*Lhan-Chig Skyes-Pa'i Ma-Rig-Pa*). And this is described as somebody walking along in the dark night who falls down a flight of stairs. And at the bottom of the stairs - "hah! what happened?" So there's a moment in which what was happening before is forgotten, and then as soon as the question arises, "what has happened, oh, who am I?" an answer jumps in. And that answer is "I" - "Oh, something's happened to me. What was it that happened to me?" There's immediately a movement into subject and object.

And this very subtle vibration increases in intensity and manifests as the second stage of ignorance (*Kun-Tu bTag-Pa'i Ma-Rig-Pa*), which is called a sort of "total identification ignorance". And this total identification in Tibetan is *Kuntu bTagpa*. *bTagpa* means to name or to label or to identify, and *kuntu* means always or precisely. So it means putting precise names and identifications on phenomena. It means, becoming an expert. So one then has a territory in which there is a subject who is experiencing things that it knows a great deal about.

Then this gives rise to the third stage in which one is acting inside this realm of discrete phenomena that one takes to be real and knows a lot about. And one imagines that the account that one has of them is truly the case. And because of this one is acting without any understanding of the real consequence of one's actions. So this third stage is called the "ignorance of not understanding the nature of karma" (*La-rMyong-Pa'i Ma-Rig-Pa*). And that's what we get caught up in all the time in which we act as if the world was real and develop more and more causes for further interactions with complex phenomena.

Now when one has done a fair degree of meditation one starts to feel a bit more stable and relaxed, and phenomena are not so problematic in the way they arise. But then some shock or trauma may occur that stirs up thinking and stirs up deep rooted karmic patterns which one can't quite handle at that moment. It's a bit like with patients who've been in therapy for a long time, and they seem to have an understanding of what's going on, and then maybe a parent dies, or they fall in love, or they get pregnant, and all sorts of new concerns come to the surface, and they feel disempowered.

However in terms of this level of Dzogchen I've just been describing one of the common practices to enter into the state of recognition is exactly to try to shock oneself. Because when this first state of ignorance arose it was as if there was a state of clarity before that, certainly there was the shock, and it was lost. And one not only lost it, but one forgot the fact that one had forgotten it. And it's very similar to the Freudian idea of repression, that you put out of your mind something that you don't want to remember, and then you put out of your mind the fact that you put it out of your mind.

So in a very common practice, one that's described in many texts, but say you might know it from the text of Patrul Rinpoche, it is *Tsig gSum gNed-brDeg* or "hitting the essence through these three particular points", he describes how one, in order to disrupt the flow of thoughts that reaffirm each other and construct the sense of security and predictability of samsara, one means is to interrupt them by shouting the word "*phat*" very loudly. By shouting "*phat*" in this manner one shocks a gap between the thoughts, and the way in which we would link up meaning and stitch together the sense of the significance of things, that is disrupted. And in that gap that's opened up by the shock, there's the moment of the

possibility of recognition of one's own nature.

This shock he calls *he-de-wa*. And it's a shock because it's a conscious intentionally created shock, but it's actually parallel to the original shock that we had when we entered into this first stage of ignorance. But it's a shock that penetrates through the horizontal level into which subject and object is interwoven like this. It goes into a different set of alignment.

And so having made this disruption one has entered into a state of awareness which is no longer that of a consciousness perceiving particular objects, but is an open awareness through which and of which and as which manifestation is occurring. And it's because of this new alignment that nothing should shock one.

So if you've really understood that state, no arising could shock you, because you know the nature of every arising as it comes. It's as if, you know, if you're walking home at night, and you're sort of dreaming of something else, and someone suddenly comes out of a doorway, and you get shocked like that. There is the thought of expectation of the continuity of one's mood, and the perception of the street as quiet and empty, and certainly something enters into it which disrupts the pattern of prediction. However in the state of open awareness there's no prediction as to what the future will be. Because there's no particular resting in any point as my identity in the moment.