

~ *The Dzogchen Path* ~

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Dzogchen is called "*Ati yoga*" in Sanskrit and the "Great Perfection" in English.

The Nine yanas encompass the complete practices of all of Buddhism. Including the Dzogchen tradition, practices are categorized into nine yanas that give a complete picture of the entire buddhadharma. Within the nine yanas, the highest one is *Ati*. The way that *Ati yoga* is structured, most of the teachings are categorized as the ground, path, and fruition. These are the three categories.

The ground means the "principle" because the main focus of Dzogchen is the view. The view is the perspective or the principle, which is very important in Dzogchen. Before meditation, we have what we call "the ground." "The ground" means "who we are, who you are, who I am." The fundamental nature of all of us is explained in the ground. I will teach you about the ground aspect of Dzogchen later.

Now, I would like to focus on the Dzogchen path. In Dzogchen, normally there is not too much shamatha meditation. In Mahamudra, we have this step-by-step shamatha meditation practice. First, we look at how our minds relate to meditation and how we can free our minds. Next, experience comes, and then the next level of meditation. That is the Mahamudra style.

In Dzogchen, there is not so much of this step-by-step shamatha practice. The main teaching of Dzogchen is what we call "*trekchö*," meaning "cutting through."

In the teachings of *trekchö*, the first important thing is pointing out the nature of mind. Of course, we need to have a foundational practice before that. First, we do the foundational practice, and then sometimes there is a simple shamatha meditation, which is a kind of open awareness meditation, and next we are suddenly introduced to the nature of mind. In Mahamudra, we have what is called, "ordinary

mind," and in Dzogchen, nature of mind is called "*rigpa*" which translates as "pure awareness" or "pristine awareness."

How are we introduced to *rigpa*? There are a lot of particular practices used like "cutting through" and different practices that I will explain in more detail later.

In the first important "cutting through" practice, *trekchö*, we need to really recognize nature of mind. Of course, Mahamudra and Dzogchen are two very famous meditative lineages in all of Tibetan Buddhism. Dzogchen is the main meditation practice of Nyingma, the early translation lineage. And Mahamudra is the practice of the other three, which we call the "new translation" lineages: Kagyu, which is my lineage, Sakya, and Gelug. Those three use Mahamudra. The two great, very famous lineages are Dzogchen and Mahamudra.

And each of these are suitable for different personalities and mentalities. In the past, sometimes there were debates about which was better or higher. Some would say one was higher than the other. But sometimes, teachers would say that we just make noise, and on a deeper level, practitioners respect both traditions. A Mahamudra meditator respects Dzogchen, and a Dzogchen meditator respects Mahamudra. If you learn both, that is very good. I learned both, and it is really beneficial.

If you get too tight about practicing only Dzogchen or only Mahamudra, sometimes there is a danger. What we mean by "danger" is that if you are too tight about Mahamudra — which is a step-by-step practice with a lot of shamatha, love and compassion, and then, analytical meditation — and you do not go into nature of mind practice, then you cannot free yourself. You cannot really liberate yourself — you are stuck in shamatha. Sometimes that happens. It takes a long time, and some people are lazy and do not continue to practice and get stuck.

But with Dzogchen, sometimes the problem is that when we are suddenly introduced to the nature of mind, if we cannot recognize it, then what happens is, what we in Dzogchen call "*yi chö*" meaning "conceptual nature of mind." Actually, you are living in a fantasy, and then what you do is fabricate [Mingyur Rinpoche mimics a contrived, wide-eyed gaze and rigid posture]. "Pure awareness, openness,

vividness, non-conceptuality... Samsara and nirvana are one... Wakefulness!" You hold onto those fantasies. You are creating these mental images and feelings.

Sometimes I see people who go directly into Dzogchen, and when they meditate they almost look like this [Mingyur Rinpoche mimics a dull, upward gaze.] It is artificial — it is not natural. That is another danger.

In a way, both traditions have special, unique aspects. The uniqueness of Dzogchen is that it really cuts through concepts. If you really recognize nature of mind, then it is really beneficial. The first important thing in Dzogchen is that you have to recognize nature of mind. Sometimes we say, "You need to get inside the house." The problem in Dzogchen is that sometimes you do not know how to get inside the house. That is the problem. Once you get inside the house, there are a lot of teachings. After you recognize nature of mind, then there are a lot of teachings in Dzogchen, like how to differentiate between nature of mind and conceptual mind. There are a lot of detailed practices. And then, although they look different, they are the same. There are a lot of practices about the union of the conceptual mind and nature of mind. And then, in the end, samsara and nirvana — everything becomes a display of nature of mind. There are a lot of great teachings about these things.

Then, particularly in Dzogchen, there is what we call "tögal," meaning "shortcut." In Tibet, we have a lot of mountains, so we go up and down, up and down. Sometimes you go up, then you need to go down, and then you go uphill to a higher pass. You have to go through that pass, and then you go down again. But tögal means that you can jump from this mountain to that one. You do not need to go down. That is an example of a shortcut. In tögal, especially in Dzogchen, there is what we call the "display of nature of mind," or the "display of pristine awareness."

How can we practice with that display? Through the eyes. We need to have a special gaze and a special body posture. Then there is the pure wisdom manifestation of rigpa. We see the environment like a rainbow and within that the *bindu* — "bindu" meaning a round dot — and within the round dot, there are chains. What we see is beyond time and matter, and everybody has it. We look at that, and then there

is a special practice of nature of mind, and that also really enhances the practice. That is what we call “tögal” practice.

But tögal practice is, in a way, very difficult. Nowadays nobody has time, and we are lazy and busy. Tögal practice is quite difficult, so I will not teach it this time. This time, there is a lot of trekchö, which my teacher Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche said was the best, especially for lazy, busy people nowadays. [Mingyur Rinpoche laughs.] You will learn this in the coming courses.