

Beyond Recognition

Four Phases of Freedom



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Gratitude

I want to thank my first teacher, my amazing mother.

Always in gratitude to the three kāyas as Drolkar, inner teacher Sangyé Menla, and outer teacher Guru Padmasambhava.

I have been very humbled to have had truly realized teachers along my path and would like to mention a few. HH Dalai Lama, HE Garchen Rinpoche, HH Mingyur Rinpoche, who gave me very precious empowerments and teachings. HH Penor Rinpoche, who gave me my first empowerments and connection with Dharma. His students and realized Dzogchenpas were my teachers for many years, so I want to say thank you to HH Karma Kuchen, Khenchen Tsewang Gyatso, Gyatrul Rinpoche, His Eminence Khentul Gyangkhang Rinpoche, Tulku Dawa Gyalpo, Khenpo Tenzin Norgay, and the Palyul lamas. Deep appreciation goes to Venerable Lama Karma Dorje, who gave blessing and inspired me to teach the highest yāna.

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Foreword

This text is mainly created to accompany practitioners of the Meditation Online style of Dzogchen but can be used by all kinds of practitioners.

At Meditation Online we have daily live sessions that facilitate the four phases with short sessions, inquiry discussions, and text/media explorations. These correspond with secret, inner, and outer aspects of the view.

Much of this text is meant to be accompanied by a teacher, teachings, and group of practitioners. The style deals with recognition of the nature of mind, post-recognition, and release into complete freedom. The three kāyas as essence, nature, and energy become revealed using practices passed through timeless traditions.

This text is part of an unbroken lineage of awareness-realizers. The approach of “four phases” spontaneously came together from two years of group practice. Everything here is based on real accounts from practitioners, actual introspection, peer reviewed and verified for authenticity in an honest, open, and safe environment.

Our approach has fused with much of traditional Buddhadharma, utilizing foundational aspects like the eight consciousness model, five wisdoms, and much more.

Inspired to help practitioners all over the world, a very simple truth is outlined here for direct access.

May all beings benefit!

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1. Revealing the Nature of Mind

The nature of mind is your own awareness. So simple, like space, we reside within it yet don't realize awareness as the basis for all experiences.

The very mind which is reading this text right now is the enlightened mind. Like a moth distracted by light, beings tend to attract into the movement of experience. No matter which type of emotion, thought pattern, or bodily sensation oscillates through awareness, it remains like space, unchanging and purely present.

The recognition of this aspect of your mind can be familiar, since it has been like this since beginningless time. A warm embrace that goes by ancient names like tathāgatagarbha (Buddha-nature), svabhāva, sahaja, mahāsaṅdhi, dzogchen, and many more.

If you take the example of a cup of coffee: then it's like we've spent countless years thinking we are the coffee instead of the water. During recognition we have an instance of seeing pure water, but our association with the coffee soon returns. What remains is the recognition of water as the basis, and now that the practitioner has caught a glimpse, it doesn't go away. Metaphorically speaking, we reorientate from the coffee into the water, allowing the coffee to naturally disappear on its own as self-liberation. Coffee is a metaphor for karma, or conditioned mind. If we reside in the karma then we're creating more cycling, stirring, conditioning while contracting into movement. We build worlds within the turbulence of stirring mind only to have impermanence show us the inherent futility of doing so. Pointing out the nature of mind finally reveals an alternative.

Usually a practitioner initially accesses pointing out from an authentic lineage of awareness-realizers, whether face-to-face or indirectly from dharma books and other published materials. Many teachers are constantly broadcasting this simple truth. We can find it laced throughout sādhanās (practices), mantras, and iconography like thangkas. Liberation upon seeing, like in the case of Ḍākinī script, but also liberation upon

hearing, reading, and, perhaps the most direct: a silent mind-to-mind reminder from a realized Yogi. Inquiry discussions can be used to deepen pointing out and verify. Reading scriptures or other related material can also serve to remind the practitioner, strengthening recognition of the nature of mind.

Shantideva said, “Unless you know the secret key point, whatever you do will miss the mark.” The secret key point of mind is that its nature is a self-existing, original wakefulness. To identify the key point we need to receive the pointing-out instruction.

— Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche [1]

1.1. Key Point

If pointing out to awareness “as the nature of mind” is successful then there will be an “Ah-ha” moment, even if it’s very subtle. Like noticing something that has always been there, we can discern an acknowledgment. The recognition could also settle in like an emotional “Ah-ha” or “ahh,” but it’s undeniable when one has recognized naked awareness.

There are many indicators we may use for evidence to verify recognition. There can be changes in one’s appearance, speech, and thinking in general. Recognition can be decoded by acknowledging a subtle awareness now present, even if in the background. Typically, beings immediately apprehend this recognition. Without proper guidance, that apprehension may significantly delay familiarization. “Apprehend” means we’re not leaving it alone as naked awareness, but that we form concepts, tell stories about awareness, and lay claim to awareness as our typical patterned tendencies get mingled in. This is why we have a second phase, which is to familiarize with the recognition.

The *tögal* aspect involves introduction to clear light but also to light rays, bindus, and vajra chains, which are mind-light phenomena seen by conditioned mind, thereby bridging the conditioned mind with pure luminosity.

This first phase corresponds to the first of Garab Dorje’s three statements: “Introducing directly the face of rigpa itself.” The practitioner has seen clear light awareness: even if a reference emerges, this is the basis for the path.

If the practitioner notices bindus (small light spheres within rays) with tōgal introduction, then it corresponds with the first tōgal vision. This serves as pointing out the nature within phenomena. Now one has been introduced to two aspects of reality, which are one and the same: the nature of subjective cognition and the nature of the sense world. This is the precedent for both spectrums to release from conditioning. Natural patterns of labeling and apprehending will emerge, but ultimately we can adjust to leaving these two aspects alone after recognition.

In phase one we are introduced to the fruit as the path. This very simple clear light awareness becomes the foundation for one’s own refuge and serves as the ultimate teacher. Dzogchen Guru Yoga means adopting awareness as the Buddha, a pure aspect of mind which can be leaned on for direct insight.

The essential point of the Great Perfection is this clear, naked awareness—our mind, right now, unaltered, relaxed, and without even the slightest change. And that’s it.

— Jigme Lingpa [2]

Here we have many ways to verify if this simple awareness has been recognized as the nature of mind. In the Meditation Online method we don’t require explicit preliminary practices under the assumption that finding and meaningfully connecting with the group is itself evidence of suitability. Previous practice and even life events can thereby serve as the preliminaries.

After introduction is verified, we can familiarize with pure consciousness, embracing the ineffability of our recognition and allowing freedom to unfold.

So, in this present case the view is where you are introduced directly to rigpa, and you practice by maintaining that recognition. If you have already gained direct introduction to rigpa, you do not necessarily have to go through the preliminary of examining the arising, remaining, and ceasing of thoughts to reveal “the mind’s hidden flaw,” and so arrive at a decisive conclusion about it. In the Madhyamaka approach of the sūtra tradition, however, all of these steps are necessary.

— His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama [3]

1.1.1. Pointing-Out Methods

1.1.1.1. Mind-to-Mind Reminder

The most direct method is a silent mind-to-mind reminder from an authentic awareness-realizer.

1.1.1.2. Looking into the Nature of Thought

When a thought arises, or when thoughts are proliferating, use awareness to look into it. When a thought disappears, before the next thought arises, rest in that presence. This is like water being poured into water, since awareness itself is cognition looking into cognition.

1.1.1.3. Looking at the Watcher

Just like looking at a thought, there is a feeling of a watcher, an observer, which can also be looked at with awareness. This corresponds to the seventh aspect of consciousness in the Abhidhamma, known as mānas-vijñāna. When this aspect of consciousness settles in its own place, it’s like water being poured into water, since awareness is cognition looking at cognition. When the watcher itself has exhausted, simply settle into presence without effort as the way of abiding.

There are a vast number of different viewpoints,
But in the present wakefulness, self-existing wisdom,
There is no duality between the viewer and that which is viewed.
So, do not watch the view, but look to the watcher.

[...]

This view without anything to be viewed,
Which has not strayed into a complete void and blank nothingness,
Is the present wakefulness, vivid and unfabricated.
This is precisely the view of the Great Perfection.

— *The Flight of the Garuda*, Song 19 [4]

And when you look into yourself in this way nakedly (without any discursive thoughts), since there is only this pure observing, there will be found a lucid clarity without anyone being there who is the observer; only a naked manifest awareness is present.

— Padmasambhava [5]

1.1.1.4. Being Aware of Awareness

This is the very simple act of noticing or recognizing ever-present awareness. One can be seeing and be aware of awareness. Just like that, one can be thinking, feeling, smelling, touching, etc. and be aware of awareness in the midst of these experiences.

1.1.1.5. The Top and Bottom of the Breath

With a relaxed posture, breathing mindfully, pause at the top of the breath after inhalation, then exhale, pausing at the bottom of the breath after every last bit of air has been released.

Rest in the presence at the bottom of the breath.

Bring that presence with you on your next inhalation.

This is the pure presence of mind.

1.1.1.6. The Space Between Thoughts

When doing a thought experiment, like thought isolation, where we isolate a single thought within awareness, we can notice a thought coming and going.

Notice the space in which it comes.

Notice the space where thoughts are abiding.

Notice the space after it's gone.

Settle into natural luminosity.

The great Deshek of Kham said in his Mahāmudrā pointing-out instruction:

Taking Mahāmudrā as something to be cultivated in meditation is mental fabrication. So how should you meditate? By settling in natural luminosity with no thoughts or habitual tendencies arising, and without contriving. This is how you will see your own nature.

— Pema Karpo [6]

1.1.1.7. Thinking As Many Thoughts As Possible

While in a relaxed posture, begin thinking as many thoughts as possible in rapid succession, to the point of exhaustion.

Here the conceptual mind gets crowded out to the point of silence as pure presence.

When people of lesser capacity cannot remain in the natural state, they should push thoughts to their breaking point, generating desirable or undesirable thoughts, in various ways, one after another, until their minds have become exhausted. Finally, not desiring to continue this further, they should rest loosely.

— *The Flight of the Garuda*, Song 21 [4]

1.1.1.8. The Space Which Holds Stillness and Movement

Known in Dzogchen and Mahāmudrā as a technique for recognizing the nature of mind, your Buddha-nature, the very space which holds the movement and stillness of mind is the very basis for all experiences.

When you're having thoughts, awareness can be recognized. When thoughts cease, awareness can also be recognized. Therefore, it holds as the basis for stillness and movement.

Rest your mind loosely in naturalness and

See how the mind is when calm.

Observed, it rests calmly in the continuity of awareness.

Calm and yet empty, thus is the state of awareness.

Fortunate heart-children, you must understand this.
This is how calm resting is the mind's ornament.

Give rise to a thought and observe how it arises.
Since it does not depart even in the slightest
From the state of empty and luminous awareness,
Arising and yet being empty is thus the state of awareness itself.
Fortunate heart-children, you must understand this.
This is how arising is the play of the mind.

To illustrate this, no matter how many waves may rise,
They never depart from the ocean even in the slightest.
Similarly, whether still or in movement,
The mind never departs from awareness and emptiness even in the
slightest.
So rest, since whatever rests calmly is the state of awareness.
Rest, since whatever arises is the manifestation of awareness.

— *The Flight of the Garuda*, Song 15 [4]

1.1.1.9. Phet

Shouting *PHET!*, a fierce exclamation of the seed syllable, immediately stops the flow of thoughts, stops emotional activity, and brings the practitioner directly into the pure presence of their enlightened mind.

Let the mind become distracted and then shout a forceful *phet*, at which time cognition will become lucid and nonconceptual.

— Longchenpa [7]

When you are alone you can shout the PHET syllable, as taught by the great master Patrul Rinpoche in his famous Dzogchen teaching, *The Wise and Glorious King*. Shouting PHET instantly puts you in the natural state. It also wonderfully clarifies a dull and tired mind.

— Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche [8]

1.2. Discerning the Implications

You have seen the unconditioned clarity aspect of mind (Tib: *rang zhin*, Skt: *svabhāva*). According to many masters, the Dharmakāya emptiness

aspect is present in recognition, but the cognitive Sambhogakāya aspect is what usually remains noticeable. Seeing this aspect of mind enables one to take pure awareness as the path.

The implications of this pointing out are that you now have a foundation for self-liberation. The recognition included “empty cognizance,” but the emptiness aspect did not last very long due to the immediate apprehension. Stories, labels, and other inferences are mixed in shortly after initial recognition. Even still, you have loosened from karmic practices and the conceptual mind, seeing awareness as the path. Although analysis and speculation may continue, they are seen as inferior to this recognition. The conceptual mind itself concedes to the logic of its own limitations, acknowledging language constraints and the ever-changing aspect of conceptual existentialism.

Conceptualization is the ultimate nonrecognition of awareness.

It causes one to fall into the ocean of saṃsāra.

— Dignāga [9]

Once seen and confirmed, there is a very special connection which is undeniable. It becomes difficult for anyone to fall back from this recognition as it conventionally serves as the ripening of all good deeds, all compassion and honesty. The feeling can be like that of seeing one’s home after a long time. Purely present awareness is then planted into the ground of mind as an unforgettable signpost.

The Compendium states:

However many beings there are, whether inferior, middling, or superior, the Sugata has stated that they all come from the non-recognition of awareness.

— Longchenpa [9]

One can easily discern the difference between abiding in a constant train of thought or emotion versus spacious clear cognition. Until recognition, a being is confined to smaller dimensions of consciousness (thoughts, emotions, body, sense interactions). Yet within every thought is aware-

ness, within every sound, emotion, and within every sense interaction, there is the same clear knowingness. Once recognized, it opens the mind to a dimension free of confinement. The mind, once confused as if heavily intoxicated, is now introduced to a refreshing sobriety free from the intoxication of afflictions (kleshas). One is finally introduced to an alternative to cyclic existence. Like drinking water for the first time after a long thirst, it can be very refreshing, and the practitioner often bursts into laughter.

The world of myriad ways in which beings perceive—and even the kāyas and timeless awareness of pure buddhahood—all that permeates the realm of basic space as a continuous display arises due to dynamic energy, either in light of realization or in its absence.

There is simply realization or its lack within the realm of the basic space of phenomena. For those with realization, who have reached a state of bliss, there is pure perception. For those without it, there is nonrecognition of awareness and the habitual patterns of dualistic perception, from which sensory appearances manifest in all their variety, though none of this strays from basic space.

— Longchenpa, *The Basic Space of Phenomena* [10]

1.3. Embracing the Larger Scope

In the Meditation Online approach, this recognition sets the precedent and premise for all further engagement, including effortlessness and familiarization with your whole mind as the heart essence.

Here we are introduced to ultimate wisdom and compassion, bodhicitta, which in turn blossoms with familiarization, while karmic conditioning liberates.

Even if the practitioner only has a slight glimpse, they are introduced to their enlightened mind and to the four great Dzogchen samayas. They have fully recognized empty cognizance.

Although true recognition has been ensured, in many cases the view will be apprehended by conditioned mind. The larger scope includes being

diligent and repeatedly returning to this recognition. At this point, the practitioner has made a profound lineage and mandala connection.

1.4. Coming to the Decisive Conclusion

You have broken the link that previously chained you to conditioned reality. You are comfortable enough in your recognition to begin familiarizing with the nature of mind.

Since recognition has occurred, cognitive diffusion, or the unbinding of mind, can take place. Self-liberation has a foundation in awareness.

Further immersion into this approach can be found with short sats repeated often, inquiry discussions, and text explorations. Integration of the view with one's day and night is the highest benefit to oneself and others.

With respect to the very essence of timeless awareness, free of elaboration, as things arise due to its dynamic energy it is possible to identify awareness in all its pristine nakedness, without the reifying effect of concepts—without investigating anything outwardly, examining anything inwardly, or deliberately settling in between these alternatives. This awareness is realized to be nothing other than that very essence, free of elaboration, experienced in all its nakedness. Thus, it is nondual, naturally occurring timeless awareness.

— Longchenpa [9]

2. Familiarizing with the View and Effortlessness

It's most important to remember the recognition you had before. If the recognition was vivid enough, then the practitioner can hinge on that recognition, taking the fruit as the path, so as to integrate all experiences.

Preliminary dispositions will affect the strength of recognition. If someone has done years of meditation, ngöndro practices, or even has had life-changing experiences, it could determine the depth of recognition and familiarization. Here the practitioner is advised not to add more practices, vows, or anything else, but to simply add awareness to your current disposition. Within a month of short sessions repeated often, there will be stability (Dzogchen samatha). Ultimately, there are no requirements for integrating awareness into one's life. We want our current conditioning (karma) to breathe out rather than creating new conditioning. This doesn't imply that we become a zombie. In the face of self-liberation we still have amazement, magical expression and mystery, safety, wisdom, naturalness, and sheer inexpressibility.

This is the reason why you must meditate, continuously preserving the state of awareness you have been introduced to. The omniscient Longchenpa has said, "You may recognize your own nature, but if you do not meditate and get used to it, you will be like a baby left on a battlefield: you'll be carried off by the enemy, the hostile army of your own thoughts!"

In general terms, meditation means *becoming familiar* with the state of resting in the primordial uncontrived nature, through being spontaneously, naturally, constantly mindful. It means getting used to leaving the state of awareness alone, divested of all distraction and clinging.

— Dudjom Rinpoche, *Heart Jewel of the Fortunate* [11]

2.1. Key Point

The key point is integration of the four foundations of mindfulness, internal and external reality, into recognition via effortless abiding, gaining confidence in self-liberation. What appears to be liberating? The eight aspects of consciousness, five afflictions, five elements, three poisons, self, and other.

There are several provisional methods we can use to familiarize with the view, but effortless abiding is the key point of self-liberation.

Thus, not meditating with the conceptual mind
is how everyone should meditate.

— *The Two Segments (Hevajra Tantra)* [6]

One can use the method of looking into the nature of a thought, including emotions and states of consciousness. When we're having invasive thoughts, for example, we can turn awareness to the thinking and the thought will typically vanish, leaving naked cognizance. This is the same as seeing the space in which thoughts come, abide, and cease. Awareness holds a vast spectrum of activity, from thought movement to emotional upheaval.

One of the first “barriers” is the coarse linguistic mind with its electromagnetic psychic constraint. When we're in thought proliferation it binds us to a smaller dimension of cognition. Here, linguistic mind is defined as the inner narrator, storytelling, imaginations, and ruminations of various types, corresponding with the sixth aspect of the eight aspects of consciousness. This could have a somatic location in the brain, indicating itself with a feeling of noticeable contraction in the soft tissue of the brain and along the neck. Facial indications can also be visible during the psychic contraction of coarse linguistic proliferation.

So, whether the mind is still, active, or whatever, it is not a question of overcoming each individual negative emotion and thought with its own separate remedy. Instead, the sole remedy for whatever thought or emotion may occur, the one remedy for all, is the

recognition of that view which was introduced previously, and that alone. So: “Recognize that dharmakāya you recognized before.”

— Patrul Rinpoche [3]

When the mind is busy on these coarse levels, there’s no need to try to stop thoughts or analyze content. Familiarizing with effortless abiding, the coarse thoughts will subside and more subtle aspects of mind will become exposed within volumetric, ever-present awareness. At this point, awareness can be nascent, seemingly in the background. These coarse narratives have heavier, more noticeable weight, so alleviation is somewhat easy to discern. We can feel it when thinking slows down, but also our investment into the thinking can be noticed.

Remain in uncontrived naturalness for short moments, repeated many times. You *can* become accustomed to this. The short moment *can* grow longer.

— Tulku Urygen Rinpoche [1]

Emotions (also corresponding with the sixth aspect of consciousness) are another kind of thought that the mind is having, but with more body weight than coarse surface thinking. In this approach, there’s nothing to do with emotions either: they are left in awareness during short sessions and also during the normal cycle of day and night. They can be left as pure energy in awareness as labeling and analysis subside. When, through effortlessness, emotions become lighter and coarse thinking has ceased fusing the mind, there are more aspects of experience being exposed. Particularly the subjective sense of “the one who is thinking,” which is like an emotion yet even more subtle. This is what’s considered the seventh egoic consciousness, or conditioned self, the watcher, the witness, and goes by many other names.

In this way, always remind yourself of the view, which is the clear light recognized in you as your true nature, and rest in that state. Apart from that, the crucial point is neither to suppress nor indulge, neither accept nor reject, in any way, the thoughts or emotions

which are the energy of rigpa: “Rest in the aspect of awareness, beyond all description.”

— Patrul Rinpoche [3]

Within awareness are the three spheres of conceptual consciousness: subject, action, and object, which correspond with the five senses. For example, eyes-seeing-birds, ears-hearing-bells. The thinking/feeling is based on these interactions, and a sense of self apprehends the thinking/feeling: for example, “I like seeing birds.” If the mind highly favors a particular visual sight, there will be more psychic weight than if no grasping were involved, so this weight is naturally discernible within effortlessness (see shifting practice, for example).

Aversion as an inversion will also be discernible within non-referential empty cognition. Within awareness we can notice ourselves holding visual objects, sounds, tastes, thoughts, emotions, etc., but also the one who’s seeing, hearing, tasting, etc. becomes exposed as the taproot of duality and confusion. When all three spheres are left be, then all four foundations of mindfulness are naturally within space-like awareness, being allowed to settle in their own place and revealing ineffable ultimate truth transcending concepts.

If, through the key point of effortlessness, there is familiarity with the very essence of enlightenment—the spontaneous presence of phenomena—although buddhahood is timeless, there is awakening to buddhahood anew.

— Longchenpa, *The Basic Space of Phenomena* [10]

2.2. Discerning the Implications

The implications are that we are becoming familiar with the view and effortless abiding, which facilitates self-liberation.

Things are starting to liberate in their own place, and this serves as evidence for self-liberation, unveiling confidence in the practitioner.

Deliberate action misleads—look at the confusing appearances of saṃsāra.

Effort corrupts—think about the machinations of suffering.
With virtue and harm, there is an uninterrupted flow of happiness
and suffering.

Karma is reinforced, causing one to wander high and low through
saṃsāra.

There is no opportunity to escape the ocean of conditioned
existence.

— Longchenpa, *The Way of Abiding* [12]

Conditioned mind can resolve itself. Doing nothing about our experiences isn't easy at first: many people will slowly step into effortlessness through validation. Within a month of consistent practice, one can verify that, when left alone, there is natural resolution to affliction and confusion. The plasticity of karmic conditioning exhausts itself within awareness.

Referencing the three modes of liberation, we know when we're seeing an old habit, greeting them like an old friend. We may even be stuck in a mood we've had many times, like another old friend. Invasive thoughts, bodily aches, and stories can all be considered like that from the point of view of awareness. When we're in a mood, holding a perspective, feeling the somatic contractions, this can be relieved by just letting be within awareness, so it's like a snake uncoiling itself, the second mode of liberation. The conditioned self can be like this as well. The third mode of liberation is when thoughts flow naturally as expressions of timeless awareness without grasping, fabricating, or elaboration: like a thief entering an empty house, nothing is lost and evenness prevails. No matter how relief is appearing, spaciousness, increased visibility, and other indicators like clear light, dream yoga, natural compassion, and bliss will all serve as evidence for this self-harmonization of mind.

Understand that ordinary confused mind—which is rooted in the nonrecognition of awareness, reifies sense objects as having identity, and is unable to “stay in one place” without being caught up in sense objects—is a confined space. And so forge the path with

unobstructed, nonconceptual timeless awareness, free of ordinary consciousness that engages in thinking in terms of identity.

— Longchenpa [9]

This then corresponds with the second part of Garab Dorje's three statements: the practitioner is gaining confidence in self-liberation to the point of complete release. Emptiness/insubstantiality is beginning to naturally blossom as the revelation of luminous oneness: wisdom and compassion effortlessly revealed non-dualistically. Warmly embracing all beings and the world, dynamic expressions of awareness, as timeless co-emergence.

In atiyoga, great perfection,
there is no view, meditation, or conduct.
I have revealed this thoroughly, so keep it in mind.
With nothing needing to be done—nothing to achieve, no concerted effort or speculation—
the ultimate meaning of suchness itself has always been spontaneous perfection.
How could there be anything to do or any doing?

— *Naturally Arising Awareness* [9]

2.3. Embracing the Larger Scope

As coarse and conditioned mind clears up, the lucid aspect of mind begins showing. This can be strengthened by dream experiences/insights as well as tōgal light practices. Enlightened mind will begin to expose itself within non-referential space, in inexpressible ways. Normalizing the extraordinary is recommended as the practitioner allows the view to saturate conditioned reality.

The practitioner adopts effortlessness as the primary remedy. Mental and emotional conditioning is allowed to self-liberate within its own place. This includes the conditioned self, which is the primary anchor for cyclic existence.

Discerning self-liberation enhances natural confidence, leading into pure effortless abiding, to include all four postures, day, and night.

Learn to make this distinction between awareness and mind or thought; rely on the stability of the former and purify the latter.

The essence of the techniques of taking illness, destructive emotion, the intermediate state, and confusion to enhance the path is simply to rest in the natural state.

— Khenpo Gangshar [13]

Awareness is now naturally discerning and self-resolving conditioned consciousness (sem, marigpa, avidyā) from spacious pure cognition (semnyi, rigpa, vidyā). Spontaneous presence as empty lucidity or empty cognition begins unveiling ultimate truth, mind free from division (bodhicitta). In the beginning, mind is orientated and divided into subject and object, conditioned by programming, or karmic patterns. Like throwing a rock in the air, these patterns have momentum and will oscillate throughout sky-like awareness, eventually losing strength in the face of effortlessness. When these patterns exhaust, there is freedom in oneness.

When I watch the thoughts as they arise,

The watcher vanishes.

I search for it but nowhere is it found.

Neither is the searcher seen—

There is just a freedom from conceptual elaboration.

There's no agent; there's no object of its action.

— Longchenpa, *Finding Rest in the Nature of the Mind* [14]

The watcher, or conditioned self, is also known as the seventh aspect of consciousness. This is a “thought” in the sense of being a programmed tendency for apprehension. For example: “I like ice cream,” “My name is John,” “My favorite color is red.” When this reference point is left alone within awareness, there can be equality and evenness of the mind, now abiding as awareness in a kind of psychic inversion. This is sometimes compared to water being poured into water, or like the space inside a vase meeting the space outside the vase when it cracks open.

When settling naturally and without contrivance, realization dawns. When maintaining that state, like the flow of a river, it dawns in full. Completely relinquish all forms of conceptual focus and grasping, and constantly settle in equanimity, O yogi!

— Pema Karpo [6]

True effortlessness can be approached responsibly. When we begin seeing our emotions within awareness, they become nourished and finally cared for. It's not easy to leave a thought-pattern, habitual tendency, or heavy emotion alone to bathe within pure present knowingness, but as we adjust, as we reorientate into a larger scope of mind, these things become like ocean waves arising and naturally subsiding while awareness remains firm like a mountain. As we go about day and night, all actions, all realizations, can be left alone to flourish without conditioning (the four chokshyaks).

The nature of the variety of phenomena is non-dual,
Yet each phenomenon is beyond the limits of the mind.
The authentic condition as it is does not become a concept,
Yet it manifests totally in form, always good.
All being already perfect, overcome the sickness of effort
And remain naturally in self-perfection: this is Meditation.

— *The Cuckoo of Awareness* [15]

2.4. Coming to the Decisive Conclusion

Confidence in self-liberation begins to come to fruition, embracing ineffability and revelation. Enough so that the practitioner can now stabilize fully into awareness, integrating all experiences, day and night.

Rest nonconceptually in equipoise, without thinking about anything.

— *Kunjed Gyalpo* [12]

This is Dzogchen samatha stabilization, inseparable from vipassanā insight, which takes place when coarse distracting habits are relieved and distraction from space-like awareness is minimized. We can then

allow our habit of distraction to resolve itself naturally. As stabilization (samatha) blossoms, insight (vipassanā) will naturally arise (direct seeing) in the face of non-distraction. With further stabilization, the dimensions of visibility increase and the spectrum of cognition becomes limitless: this is the union of samatha and vipassanā.

Your recognition of awareness is challenged when you perceive objects manifesting to your five senses or when denial or affirmation, ingrained fixations, or strong afflictive emotions occur in your mind.

These can be eliminated by distilling the limpid lucidity of awareness and eliciting its unobstructed essence in all its nakedness.

— Longchenpa [9]

When completely embraced from start to finish, these cycles lose their power. There can be insight when triggers begin as subtle thoughts, leading into a contraction of consciousness as a kind of pre-production. At times, we may get led into an old cycle, the production, which captivates the mind, but awareness will still be present as the basis. In post-production, we may have shame and regret, but these energies are also left alone, so the entire cycle may exhaust (nirvāṇa).

When appearances manifest, when thoughts arise, or at any other time, you recognize bare awareness in all its nakedness, and so you need not rely on any other factor whatsoever. In that context, the bare state of awareness in all its nakedness (which cuts through mental ties to the three times) is spontaneously present as a supreme state of equalness that is utterly lucid, for it arises naturally as the enlightened intent of naturally settled dharmakāya. No matter what arises in this state, do not reflect back on what has passed, do not think ahead about what is yet to come, and do not analyze the present moment in between. Rather, ensure that you do not stray from the recognition of bare awareness in all its nakedness.

— Longchenpa [9]

Practitioners usually need to get adjusted to pure effortlessness. To allow vivid, heavy emotional waves within awareness can be difficult. We habitually dive into analysis, worry about the emotions, self-judge, and take part in many other distractions from purely present awareness. Yet in the very face of that heavy experience, the most vivid recognition of awareness can occur. We begin to truly realize the pure basis of all experience. One seemingly reorientates into pure consciousness: empty cognizance as the fourth time.

When something such as an afflictive emotion arises vividly, in letting it arise you recognize awareness, elicited in all its nakedness. As you rest without contrivance and do not stray from that recognition, thus cutting through the continuity of the three times, enlightened intent arises naturally as meditative stability that does not stray from the true nature of phenomena.

— Longchenpa [9]

Allowing internal and external realities to be one within space-like awareness is a radical practice. We are habitually inclined to “fix” ourselves and pilot reality from the conceptual mind. With every ineffable realization comes the conditioned mind trying to squeeze it into an explanation or dualistic apprehension. When realization first occurs, the habit of apprehension claims the realization, so continued familiarization is important.

Let whatever happens happen and whatever manifests manifest.

Let whatever occurs occur and whatever is be.

Let whatever is anything at all be nothing at all.

— Longchenpa, *The Basic Space of Phenomena* [10]

We have many ways to observe the weight of our subscriptions into sense objects. The subject/action/object spheres are discernible within subtle knowingness, and this trichotomy begins softening. When the mind no longer pulls toward or “grabs” objects, when the magnetism of subjectivity has softened, there is great evenness.

Even though these appearances that you perceive do arise,
if you do not grasp at them, then that is Buddhahood.

— Padmasambhava [5]

Since introduction to light rays and bindus has taken place, we can begin allowing the appearance of internal/external worlds to self-liberate on its own. We enter into a path of revelation rather than imputation, of insight rather than inference. Just like clear light awareness, we can leave phenomena alone to display the fabric of reality as luminosity. Visions begin dawning without interference or analysis, normalizing the extraordinary.

In reliance upon genuine bindus, the empty nature of the dharma-kāya will be realized. Train in the dynamic strength of awareness by stimulating the luminosity of the empty bindus. When familiarity occurs throughout the day and night, visions will effortlessly appear as the extent of accomplishment.

— *Reverberation of Sound* [7]

3. Pure Effortlessness

Like knowing you have always been at the top of a mountain, there is a release into what has always been here: purely present awareness. Like letting a fire die out by itself, we can now allow mental/emotional conditioned patterns, including the root pattern of egoic apprehension, to exhaust. Previously, we were orientated into the fire, but now we are like space itself in which the fire is burning. Pure effortless abiding is accompanied by constant self-liberation or self-harmonization. Now the very mind which was seeking is allowed to invert as awareness, non-dual mind.

In regards to the elements and reality itself, now the four tōgal visions have reversed and awareness is beginning to saturate body, speech, mind, and conditioned reality. Tōgal visions four, three, and two are in this phase. This phase may also correspond with bhūmis 2-10 and the jhānas, unfolding non-linearly and asymmetrically.

3.1. Key Point

The key point here is that insubstantiality/emptiness is revealed, conditioned self with all its patterns is liberated in its own place, like a piece of ice melting back into a lake. The eight consciousnesses and five elements turn to five non-referential aspects of pure mind, known as the five wisdoms.

In atiyoga, great perfection,
it is said that there is no fruition to achieve.

The fruition is not created, but occurs naturally.

— *Naturally Arising Awareness* [9]

Referentiality is being allowed to subside as the way of abiding, free of karmic conditioning. Here the discernment between purity and conditioning is a stark contrast, like knowing whether the hand is making a fist or not. Liberation is allowed to naturally take place in the face of

non-doing. Like a flower slowly being illuminated by the sunrise, the practitioner is taken into complete freedom as awareness fully dawns.

Listen: this is how to apply the teaching.

Do not go against what you do,

Because doing and not doing are unborn.

By knowing this, whatever you do is the unborn reality.

— Longchenpa, *The Jewel Ship* [16]

The key point in phase three is pure effortless abiding as self-liberation. The practitioner has familiarized with effortless abiding without the need for any other practices. With this comes self-liberation of conditioning and the revelation of enlightenment.

Whatever appears and whatever arises, all things that proliferate and abide as dynamic expressions of awareness—such as the five emotional poisons—no matter how they arise, even as they do so there is recognition, perfection of their dynamic energy, and their natural fading, leaving no trace.

— Longchenpa, *The Way of Abiding* [12]

3.2. Discerning the Implications

Now we're in the context of total luminosity being exposed as enlightenment. The implications are that conditioning is allowed to be freed in its own place. Due to a lack of effort, there is a lack of karma. The ultimate implication is that one becomes free of karma altogether, unbinding from conditioned existence. This can also be termed “cognitive diffusion” and serves as the basis for freedom.

I relaxed momentarily

within great, empty awareness free from limitations,

the space of purity and evenness.

And like a dream,

that confused appearance faded into basic space.

— Sera Khandro [17]

Part of natural confidence within awareness is that ineffability is embraced without a need for holding a view. There's no meditation reference to hold or maintain and conduct is ensured naturally. This is right view in the pure sense of the eightfold path, which is then accompanied by effortless intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration. As the basis for confusion, conditioned agency is relieved and liberated within its own place.

Rigpa has always been free from conceptual elaboration.
Conventions such as 'view', 'meditation' or 'conduct' and
Any clinging to them is cleared, without basis or origin.
Good thoughts, bad thoughts, and those in between,
Without slipping into any such categorization,
Are freed upon arising, without any agent to make distinctions.
As long as awareness does not lose its own ground,
There is no need for anything more than this.

— Jigme Lingpa [18]

3.3. Embracing the Larger Scope

As karmic cycles are liberated, enlightened mind is revealed. This includes the four samayas and the five wisdoms in their full fruition. There can be a shift here, abandoning the identity we once knew for a known spaciousness presenting itself as much more authentic and secure than we could have previously imagined. The great triad of kāyas are unionizing as pure presence. Meaning, the energy of reality, including our own bodies, is realized as *nirmāṇakāya*. The non-referential cognition is known as *sambhogakāya* residing in the great spaciousness of *dharmakāya*. Just like we can witness in dreams, there is a co-emergence of cognition and appearances within space.

Remaining genuinely is the *dharmakāya*,
Accompanying awareness is the *sambhogakāya*,
And the non-duality of stillness and movement is the *nirmāṇakāya*.
This is what we call the “three-kāya rigpa”.

— Jigme Lingpa [18]

Commenting on the above lines by Jigme Lingpa:

The first line refers to remaining genuinely in the uncontrived wisdom mind of primordial purity, in which phenomena dissolve, the natural state of the ground, beyond confinement and liberation. When this ‘ordinary’ state of awareness is recognized just as it is, without ‘changing its fur’ or ‘altering its color’, then, as it is untainted by apparent objects externally and unspoiled by the clinging mind within, that is direct realization of the wisdom of dharmakāya, rigpa-emptiness. The fact that the spontaneous radiance, which is unceasing and the ground out of which saṃsāra and nirvāṇa unfold, is not blocked, but arises, while we are aware of it, is what we call the sambhogakāya. Even though the expressive power (*rtsal*) of compassionate energy arises as objects, if thoughts vanish without trace, so that there is no opportunity for habitual tendencies to form, and arising and liberation occur simultaneously, then we come to master the great wisdom in which there is no division between stillness and movement. The ceaseless arising of the display from the king-like dharmakāya beyond transference is said to be the nirmāṇakāya. The “three-kāya rigpa” is what we call the inseparability of these qualities.

— Yukhok Chatralwa Chöying Rangdrol [19]

3.4. Coming to the Decisive Conclusion

Effortlessness is the ultimate remedy. One has full confidence in self-liberation within the context of day and night. Like a screen which can display the full cycle of day and night but also a full range of experiences, mind is untouched by its own expression.

The evidence for a wider scope of being has presented itself in the lack of conditioning. One continues to release and trust until the appearance of an inversion occurs. The very mind abiding in awareness is seen as awareness. What was once self-liberating is now seen as pure luminosity.

This is pure Dzogchen, non-meditation.

I have revealed that there is no view to cultivate in meditation.
I have revealed that there is no samaya to uphold.
I have revealed that there is no enlightened activity involving effort.
I have revealed that there are no paths to traverse.
I have revealed that there are no levels of realization to determine.
Timeless awareness does not entail concepts and involves no specific conduct.
The true nature of phenomena, just as it is, cannot be contrived.

— *Kunjed Gyalpo* [9]

4. Complete Liberation

4.1. Key Point

Enlightenment in its full fruition. The taproot of conditioned existence, which is the conditioned self, has been uprooted. Appearances involving identity are liberated as luminosity unconfined by reification. The ignorance/confusion that initiates cyclic existence and the twelve links of dependent origination has been totally exhausted. One's mind is no longer fabricating mind-luminosity into the reifications of the elements. One is embraced within tathāgatagarbha, the womb and absolute basis, which completely exposes itself as a pure consciousness dimension (pure land). This is traditionally known as the heart essence because non-referential compassion naturally unveils itself. Wisdom and compassion have come to their full fruition.

The first vision is realized as true emptiness/freedom from the conditioned self (eleventh bhūmi) and is synonymous with samyak-saṃbuddha, full enlightenment. More specifically, this phase describes complete freedom of the seventh egoic consciousness (mānas-vijñāna)/the conditioned pattern of apprehending and dividing.

When realizing by way of freedom from thoughts
This is conventionally labeled “seeing emptiness”.
“Not seeing—that is seeing indeed”
So say the extremely profound sūtras.
Here, there is no seeing and no one that sees.
There's no beginning or end. It is peace.
Entities and non-entities are relinquished,
It is thought-free, without focus.
There is no abiding and no abode,
Neither coming nor going, and without analogy.
Inexpressible and imperceptible,
It is unchanging, unconditioned.
When practitioners realize this,
They eradicate afflictive and cognitive obscurations.

4.2. Discerning the Implications

The five wisdoms are now in full fruition, which includes the non-referential wisdom of equality, discernment, all-accomplishing, mirror-like, and dharmadhatu as a counterpart to the five poisons, five elements, and the reifications of conditioned mind in ten directions.

Time and space have lost their identity as pure presence, infinitely open, is allowed to flourish as all-encompassing (fruition of the four Dzogchen samayas). Wisdom, or super-cognition, shines in a volumetric way which ensures the first wisdom of equality, meaning awareness is omni-present in and as people, as objects both animate and inanimate. Wisdom of discernment without effort is ensured even in the appearance of conventional effort like eating food. A harmony and co-emergent flow is ensured as all-accomplishing wisdom in action, speech, and mind. Within the non-dual mind, mirror-like expressions are limitless while never departing from awakened cognition, a supreme basis. All phenomena are seen as empty appearances without a seer, within non-referential knowingness: this is the wisdom of dharmadhatu. Like a dreamer who can see themselves acting in a dream and interacting with dream objects, the entire appearance is within the scope of one cognition, a single sphere of pure consciousness.

The lucid, intuitive mind is no longer nascent. Wholeness of mind is now in the forefront, fully actualized as the basis for dynamic expressions: thoughts, speech, and action. Pure view encompasses karmic view, so one can understand both naturally. What was once distorted (*dukkha*) is now in harmony (*sukha*).

Here there is no separation at all between the object of awareness and the knower who is aware; they are inseparable. Moreover, the observing awareness (*rig pa*) has no identifiable essence whatsoever. And that is why this is classified as the unity of awareness and emptiness.

— Pema Karpo [6]

Impossible to fathom with concepts, there is cognition without apprehension. The eggshells of conceptual mind and identity have fallen away, leaving an unknowable sky-like presence beyond existential notions of singularity or multiplicity. Thoughts can no longer captivate the mind, leading it astray. Like sparks of the fire cannot hurt the sky, thoughts are simply expressions of mind, co-emergent ornaments leaving no trace, like writing on water.

The true, and best, mode of liberation is where thoughts are liberated without benefit or harm, and this is compared to a thief breaking into an empty house. There is nothing for the thief to steal, nothing for an empty house to lose. Even though thought arises, it does so within the expanse of rigpa, and owing to the energy of rigpa. When it ceases, it ceases in and of itself.

— His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama [3]

4.3. Embracing the Larger Scope

Here there is a divine union so familiar that it's like being in the presence of a loving parent. The heart is infinite in seeing, empathy is beyond comprehension. There is complete freedom to feel, there is pliancy to live as beingness. Cyclic existence has ended. Internal, external, day, and night are pure liberation. There is complete freedom from the cycle of re-becoming, which includes birth, sickness, injury, and death. One is no longer bound to conditioned existence, traditionally called saṃsāra (cyclic existence). Due to the heart essence, benefit for beings still ensnared within illusory existence is ensured.

Yogins who have realized the ultimate meaning of this great perfection in all its nakedness experience awareness, pure and simple, in all its nakedness. And so, while sense objects manifest in light of awareness, that awareness is not lost outwardly in response to those objects. Thus, dualistic perception, the root of saṃsāra, is rendered null and void. As an indication that awareness, pure and simple, pristine in all its nakedness, is not lost in response to sense objects, there are no attachments to or fixations on sensory appearances, or

attempts to suppress or indulge in them. Since saṃsāra is as free as nirvāṇa, we refer to “dharmakāya arising unobstructedly.”

— Longchenpa [9]

4.4. Coming to the Decisive Conclusion

The decisive conclusion is complete freedom. The mind is no longer bound by cognitive and emotional obscurations or sense appearances. The very last cognitive obscurations have exhausted, including the apprehension of emptiness. Within a full release into ineffability, without grasping views, and free from fixation and desire, awareness has exposed even the most subtle cognitive apprehension.

The awareness that is the seed of existence,
Has objects as its sphere of activity,
When selflessness is seen in objects,
The seed of existence is destroyed.

— Āryadeva’s *Four Hundred Verses on the Middle Way* [3]

At this point the practitioner is free from cyclic conditioned existence. Conventionally speaking, a pure expression of mind is ensured in a mandala of radiance. Super-cognition, with multi-dimensionality, can freely shine, while the infinite is readily available in terms of creativity.

This is the place we have always been, home.

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