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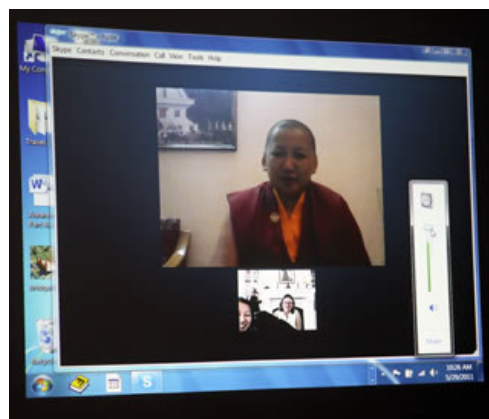
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On the View and Practice of Dzogchen

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This address was delivered by Her Eminence Jetsün Khandro Rinpoche via Skype, to practitioners at the conclusion of the Ati Zabdon Retreat at Lotus Garden, on May 29, 2011

I am sure you all had a very wonderful retreat! It is very nice to see the number of retreat programs that have happened all through last Autumn, Winter, Spring, and now into the Summer. And I am very happy that so many programs happened under the direction of Jetsunla. Whenever she is there, we can trust that things will be structured more formally and that everything will go well. But not only has Jetsunla been there; we have the lopöns and senior teachers and practitioners who have held these retreat programs, and our sangha which has been so wonderfully dedicated to retreat.



This *Ati Zabdon* retreat was something I was very happy—and also very concerned—about, because it involves a very high and advanced level of teachings. While our lopöns have taught on *Ati Zabdon* and other topics during shorter retreats, this was the first time they taught a full, extended *Ati Zabdon* retreat; and the intensity with which this retreat was supposed to happen required the teachers to be really qualified.

Of course, one must be qualified to teach any kind of teaching. But the profound vajrayana must be approached even more sensitively and with greater, deeper awareness. And when it comes to the dzogpa chenpo teachings—that's a completely different level. The dzogchen teachings involve such a profound, in-depth samaya, that to speak even a word of such teachings, the teacher must realize what you are actually handling, and the students must recognize the kind of deepened heart connection and devotion you need to have for the teacher.

My concern, or hope, was that this not be approached as a subject to study, nor that it be approached—as people now tend to do—out of curiosity or experimentation, with the different kinds of practices seen as some kind of physical and mental exercises. But with Jetsunla there, and knowing the lopöns, and hearing from Jetsunla how they've been teaching, I was very delighted and happy with the in-depth understanding of the profound meaning of the dzogchen teachings.

That is something I would expect from this sangha. I have always seen you as sangha members for whom dharma practice is not some extra thing you do in your life; rather you have dedicated your lives to practicing and understanding the truth, power, and wisdom of the teachings. Many of you have—slowly, but certainly—changed your lives in accordance with the dharma. That is very, very important.

It is in this way that you become a suitable vessel, a suitable student to receive and practice the dzogchen teachings—and the teachers teaching them will also become suitable qualified teachers, for whom their teaching and their samaya to the practices and realization of the teachings are things they cannot now be careless about. Every time the students go forward, the teachers need to go even further forward in actually realizing what you are teaching, recognizing its meaning—and then using this life for realizing the basis, the absolute nature of your own mind. This is most important.

Gaining Confidence

For some of you, I am aware that this material is very new. Jetsunla mentioned some of the questions you've been asking, and one can see that some of those questions come from practicing this for the first time. Some conceptual ideas, which we call *namtaks*, or discursive thoughts, will come up and questions may develop.

What is essential to know, in relating to dzogchen practice and the Ati Zabdon teachings, is the view you must cultivate—and the confidence that arises from the preliminary practices to the Dzogchen teachings, namely the yidam practices of the creation and completion stages.

Through having accomplished ngöndro and through the accumulation of merit and purification of karma, you should recognize and cultivate the profound view of the mahayana teachings: the indivisible nature of appearance and emptiness. Form is emptiness, emptiness is form; form is nothing *but* emptiness. Realizing the indivisible nature of appearance and emptiness is none other than establishing familiarity with the “samadhi of equanimity,” the samadhi beyond the four extremes.

Then, through accomplishing the preliminary yidam practices of the creation and completion stages, further confidence arises. We are no longer so fettered by the mundane-ness of all our habitual patterns, which continuously bring about a mundane outlook. Nevertheless...

No matter how much we try to understand the absolute truth of prajnaparamita or to rest our mind in the perfection of the samadhi of equanimity beyond the four extremes, residues of karmic patterns and imprints may remain very strong. We may still encounter the adversities of karmic patterns calling us back to cultivate or maintain the continuum of a mundane samsaric view. It is essential to develop a confidence that can withstand the constant, magnetic quality of this karmic impulse.

Pride of the Deity

When the mind begins to waver, when the forgetting or lessening of the power of the samadhi of equanimity begins to happen, that can only be counteracted by pride of the deity.

The pride of the deity, which is the essence of the creation stage, allows us to have the confidence that can withstand the magnetic pull of karmic impulse and mundane view. As that confidence—which is confidence in nothing other than the realization of the samadhi beyond the four extremes—builds, it further refines our understanding of the mahayana view of indivisible emptiness and appearance.

When appearance-emptiness is thoroughly realized, when you truly realize the meaning of mahaprajnaparamita, when your mind remains in a samadhi of equanimity beyond the four extremes—realizing and recognizing that is the trekcho perspective. And when this fully blossoms, or illuminates, that is the thogal perspective.

All these stages—from mahayoga, to Anu yoga, culminating in Ati—are the progressive support structures that sustain the mind as it becomes more and more able to shine forth luminous primordial wisdom.

How All Practices Intertwine

You have to understand that all these practices are intertwined. In the mahayana teachings, we have the introduction of shunyata and appearance, and the various practices for training the mind to acquire merit and purify negativities. We have the bodhisattva practices that nurture mind to become “familiar and supple”: familiar with remaining closer to its intrinsic nature, and supple enough to let go of the tightness of karmic patterns and dualistic tendencies of samsaric patterns. In this way, you train the mind.

Ultimately, the Mahayana principle is the understanding of the empty nature. But still we encounter the adversities of habitual patterns. And so the

vajrayana teachings help to cultivate a confidence that is more powerful than the pull of mundane-ness and samsaric patterns.

The creation stage and especially the completion stage introduce more trust—again, in the very same mahayana view. Whether you call it indivisible appearance-emptiness, or samadhi beyond the four extremes, or realization of mahaprajnaparamita, or recognition of the fundamental true nature, or tatagathagarba, or rigpa essence—it is all the same. These are not distinct. During the completion stage, especially, you are introduced to appearance-emptiness as indivisible in nature, and you really gain confidence in that.

Uprooting the Cancer of Ignorance

As human beings, we struggle with basic ignorance. If you look at it from the cittamatin perspective, the imprints of our basic ignorance are stored in the eighth consciousness, the *alayavijnana*. If you look at it from the madhyamika perspective, the causal consciousness is where our storehouse of basic ignorance remains steadfast. Whether at the level of *alayavijnana* or causal consciousness, as long as the imprint of samsara remains at the core of our mind, severing the ties and influence of duality will be very difficult.

Even having glimpsed the indivisible nature of appearance-emptiness, if the seed of karmic imprint is still held at the level of basic consciousness, there is always room for doubt. There is always room for the causal consciousness to deviate from the basic fundamental nature. With continual separation between the fundamental nature and basic ignorance, wisdom and ignorance become two different things—and so wisdom decreases, while ignorance continues to manifest. Therefore ignorance must be uprooted.

To uproot the cancer of ignorance, so to speak, from where it keeps coming back, you must not only have a glimpse of understanding of the indivisible-ness of appearance and emptiness; that view must be one-hundred percent strong. To take out all the poison, the severing of basic ignorance must be done thoroughly. Like performing surgery: to completely remove the cause of the disease, you must treat it like that.

Trekcho Practices: Rushen, HUM practices, Jungne Drosum

You can see, from the *rushen* and HUM practices you have done, that these practices are very thorough. That thoroughness is directed to the uprooting of what could be seen as small cancer cells. Such cells could multiply into bigger doubts and hesitations, thus continuously bringing us back into the mundane samsaric view, which is the view of duality. Therefore the trekcho practices must be very thorough.

When doing rushen, for example, it is not sufficient to just do what is given in the text. At some point, rushen means to do “whatever comes to your mind.” This is said to make sure the meditator does not leave any “cancer cells” behind. There must be nothing still categorized from some dualistic perspective as pure or impure: I can do this, I cannot do that; this is the proper thing to do, that is improper; I can think this, I cannot think that; this is what I like or don’t like—which are all dualistic separations.

When doing rushen, you have to be brave enough to do everything. This is by way of saying “don’t leave anything behind or undone.” There should be nothing left that could multiply and become strong—strong enough to become the basis for calling your mind back to a mundane perspective in the future. The thoroughness of rushen has to be understood in this way.

Now even though you’ve been doing the practices for many days, try to see it going over ten years, fifteen years, twenty or twenty-five years. Go through all of those things that still seem to make sense to you, things you categorize with samsaric concepts as being sensible things to do in the world. You should try them all, do them all—and get over it.

Having done it all, if there is something you’ve glossed over, some terribly unvirtuous thing you have always wanted to do, just do it. See if it makes any great change or brings anything great into your life.

Is there some role-playing that you need to do? Maybe you want to become a victorious world monarch. Try to do that. See how it feels and get over it. Then—when you go back to resting in the indivisible nature of appearance-as-emptiness and emptiness-as-appearance, and everything being a creation and projection of your own mind, and mind’s essential nature being empty—you don’t have to think, “Well, everything is empty, except that I really wanted to become a monarch and that’s still very real.”

On the other hand, this is also about your fears. These days you are all very much aware of sickness, old age, and death. So those are good things to work with. The view of dzogchen encompasses every aspect of your life. You must cultivate that. If certain things are left untouched by the view of prajnaparamita, or emptiness, you will always have the cancer cells of hope and fear. Then when you are struck by adversity, the adversity will become so big and strong, it will completely smash whatever little bit of emptiness view you may have realized.

This should not happen. Your practice should allow the view to become so true and so very much a direct experience that it can completely encompass every aspect of samsaric activities, thoughts, and concepts. We say that when

the sun rises and darkness recedes, there is no spot left untouched by the sun. The sun illuminates everything.

In the same way, when the view of dzogchen arises, it should encompass every one of your insecurities. Whatever you like or dislike the most, whatever secrets you're most afraid of, whatever your hopes or fears—all those things are part of the view. Then, as is said in the *Aspiration of Samantabhadra*, even if the three realms and 3000 worlds collapse, one's mind is not deterred by fear.

The mind that remains immovable and confident is called the "vajra mind." That, however, requires you to come up with all your gross and, most importantly, your subtle neuroses.

Counteracting Gross and Subtle Neuroses

Gross neuroses are mostly attacked or counteracted by the rushen practices. The human mind, being ignorant, believes it has many things to be doubtful about, many things to be hopeful about, and many things to fear. But when it comes to being very clear about what these things actually are—we are not very sure.

We know we are hopeful, but are not sure about what. We may say that we hope to become rich, to live long, to practice well, to have children, and so forth. But if you look very carefully, these things are not what we really hope for. These would be good things to have happen. But what are we actually hopeful about? We don't know.

In the same way, we have tremendous fear. But what are we actually afraid of? Most of us can only come up with a few of things: I'm afraid of spiders, I'm afraid of my child dying, I'm afraid of getting old, something like that. But, again, these things are *not* what we're actually afraid of. We are simply afraid. We are not afraid *of* something, we just have fear. That's it.

The ignorant mind is called "blind mind." The blind mind just projects hope and fear with no clear idea, itself, what it is hopeful or fearful about. It is the same with doubts and hesitations. The ignorant mind allows you to believe things you cannot articulate very clearly. Nevertheless the hope and fear are very strong. These gross hopes and fears are identified and cut through by rushen practices.

Subtle hope and fear is the main weapon of basic ignorance. It is hopeful and fearful but doesn't know about what, which makes it ignorant: ignorantly

hopeful, ignorantly fearful. This ignorant hope and fear that we nevertheless sustain is cut through by the HUM practices and *jungne drosum* practices.

The immediacy of *jungne drosum* works with every thought as it arises, looking at its nature. This allows us to counteract the very powerful weapon of basic ignorance—which continuously allows concepts of hope and fear to dominate our minds, and continuously breeds dualistic tendencies that don't allow the mind to establish the perfection of samadhi beyond the four extremes.

These three main practices of Trekcho—*rushen*, HUM practices, and *jungne drosum*—should be taken up with that view and understanding.

Now, you have to know that these are all methods. And you have to know the uses, the benefits, and the results of these methods. It is crucial to approach the practices in this way. This will allow the dzogchen view to truly manifest. If the view is kept constant in your mind, you will be able to actualize dzogchen throughout your life, without any separation.

Two Things to Carry into Daily Life

As you end this retreat and go back into your life, it is essential that you carry away two things. The first is to allow the dzogchen view to encompass your daily life. When your everyday thinking is not mundane or samsaric, it can embody the dzogchen confidence of seeing everything in its own true nature. Because of that, you become less and less grasping to the occurrences you meet with each day.

Taking the view into your daily life, you will know the true nature of adversities when you encounter them. Of course you will feel the challenges. But deliberately recalling the view to mind allows the destruction of solid concepts to begin. By recalling the view, the basis of whatever concept is there will be eroded. When its basis is not strong, then the deconstruction and destruction of that concept will happen more easily. So the first thing is to not bring about any disruption in the continuum of the view.

The second thing you must carry into your life is a longing for retreat. Know that the mind still needs to be sustained and protected, and the view still needs to be deepened. Therefore the mind should always recall retreat, with a longing to be in retreat. This is crucial.

All of you are very fortunate to have met with the dharma, to have a wonderful sangha that supports one another, and to have all of these wonderful teachers with you. Now is the time to practice.

Every day you make offerings for the deceased, and you are sorry for the friends who have passed away. But why do we ask you to make offerings for the deceased? It is not for the money you offer; it is for the names you hear every day. Then you begin to recognize how easy it is to die. Impermanence is very much with us. Even in our very small sangha, I don't think a day has gone by since the beginning that someone has not mentioned a person who has passed away or had a very difficult illness, and so forth. You all need to allow this to strike your mind. And whenever your mind goes into a mundane or samsaric way of looking at things, call the mind back to a more dharmic perspective.

It is very, very important to hold the dzogchen view, so that you can interpret the occurrences of each day from a much more dharmic perspective.

Departing from the Four Attachments

In conclusion, I am going to give you four lines by one of the great Sakya masters who have taught through the centuries. These four lines are said to be crucial reflections that must be cultivated by meditators, particularly those who choose to dedicate their lives to retreat and practice. These four lines are usually called "Departing from the Four Attachments."

If you are attached to this life, you are not a true spiritual practitioner.

If you are attached to samsara, you do not have renunciation.

If you are attached to your own self-interest, you have no compassion.

If there is grasping, you do not have the view.

In the first line, Sakya Kungpa is referring to cultivating the right aspiration. To contemplate this first line, examine the kind of aspiration you carry into your practice. If your aspiration is still contaminated by the eight worldly dharmas, then you can be sure you are not a spiritual practitioner. A true spiritual practitioner's aspiration is nothing but enlightenment of self and all sentient beings. So, check your aspiration carefully.

The second line says that if you are attached to samsara, you do not have renunciation. This refers mainly to reviewing your life from the day you started the practice of dharma until now. Make sure your dharma has not retained only an aspiration, but that you have truly engaged in the practices.

Now, what is "engaged dharma"? Engaged dharma is the decrease of samsara and samsaric activities, and the increase of dharma and dharma practices in your life. If twenty years ago, you were more samsaric, today you should be more dharmic. This involves postmeditation, which our western

friends are very good at; but it also involves the formal discipline of meditation.

The third line refers to a careless attitude towards bodhichitta, which is one of the biggest downfalls of your bodhisattva vows. No matter which high view or practice you are practicing, if its basis is not bodhichitta, you can never be sure your ego hasn't again tricked you into creating another neurosis. Therefore check your practice to make sure there is no self-interest in it, and that it is founded on the basis of bodhichitta.

The fourth line is indicated mainly for practitioners of mahamudra and dzogchen. It is very simple: if there is grasping, you do not have the view. Look into your mind; look into your conduct; look into your actions. Your body, speech, and mind and the way you engage in the activities of your three doors are the truest indications of whether or not you are able to rest your mind in the true view.

One may talk about Ati Zabdon, trekcho, thogal, and so forth, while still sneakily engaging in activities of attachment and aversion. This is mine, ours, me; my pain, my happiness, my security, my insecurity, my friends; the people I like or don't like—if such indications of grasping and maintaining of concepts and dualistic tendencies are there, it is clear that one is *not* able to hold the view.

Reflecting on these four lines, when a practitioner leaves a retreat such as this, you must have a genuine aspiration to attain enlightenment. You must begin to live the life of a renunciate. You must maintain bodhichitta at all times. And in your body, speech, and mind, you must exert effort to have less and less grasping. If you are able to accomplish this, the blessings of Guru Rinpoche, the blessings of all the masters, and the blessings of all the Buddha and bodhisattvas will never be separate from any one of you.

I wish you all well as you go back home. Be happy, be cheerful, and recognize how fortunate you are. Here at Mindrolling, it is a stormy night and very hot and humid. But my heart is very, very happy to see that—in this time and this age—there are still meditators who are trying to follow the examples of all the great teachers who taught and practiced these teachings. You should all be very, very happy and return again for your next retreat.

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