

Self Liberation in Phenomenology and Dzogchen, Essays

DZOGCHEN AS PRESENCE

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The focus of Dzogchen practice is to experientially understand the nature of our awareness through awareness itself. To be nonconceptually aware of the nature of our awareness is rig pa or open presence. The root or the source of all phenomena is Presence. This word presence is often used by 14th century Longchenpa as well the contemporary Namkai Norbu and many dzogchen masters as the signifier of ground of being, the ground as presence. Contemporary Christian philosophers influenced by existential phenomenology, such as Paul Tillich and Karl Rahner, describe the ground of being and ground of presence as Divinity. In Dzogchen philosophy descriptors are added such as the divine presence, luminous presence, radiant presence, pure presence, immaculate presence.

When we were discussing self liberation as the ground, the language used was that within the nature of the primordial ground of being, there is spontaneous presence that never parts from being the nature of the ground. This spontaneous presence abides as the inner radiance of the ground of basic spaciousness and original purity. When the presence of the ground is manifesting appearances, the appearances are themselves the nature of the ground. To experientially realize that everything that appears is the nature of the spontaneous presence of the ground is self liberation. Presence is a felt sense. Everything and anything within the universe arises as the radiant energy of this natural presence, this pure awareness, this ground of being.

Natural presence is the source of the teachings and the teachers. Natural presence is self revealing. Presence reveals Presence. Natural presence is the primordial guru...self illumination. Natural presence is not some object to be discovered. Natural presence is non dual primordial awareness, pervasive presence. The experience of non dual awareness is within the embodiment of all phenomena, within all experience.

Presencing presences, as the great presocratic philosopher Parmenides once exclaimed... unceasingly presencing, relentlessly presencing. Presencing manifests worlds within worlds and manifests the infinite worlds of subjectivity, the infinite worlds of interiorities, numerous interiorities. Interiority is the inner most openings of awareness experiencing within infinite forms. Subjectivity is whoness.

What is most amazing by becoming aware of our own awareness we experience presence, the presence of experience, the presence of awareness. It is amazing that this presence, this personal presence is primordial presence itself. All experience, every experience is the manifestation of primordial presence. Primordial presence is a felt sense.

Primordial presence is manifesting itself in you as you. All of you; your body, your mind, and your whoness. Presence manifest presence in you as who. This whoness is the innermost openness of knowingness. This presence of your presence is primordial presence itself. Primordial presence is not otherness, not some otherness that happens to be in you; it is not a seed as some would have you think. Self arising presence is youness. Self arising presence is also the circumstances, the infinite circumstances, the unfolding of situations, the unfolding of events, events within events. All circumstances and situations are sources of presence, doorways of presence, openings of presence. Both you and your situation is the unfolding of presence, the unfolding of self revelation.

As you experience presence within your self you can experience the same self arising presence in others and the same self arising presence in the world. The same presence is within each singularity and is nonetheless completely universal presence. Presence is both oneness and difference. Presence is both pervasive and within singularity. Within the kiss, the meeting of lips, presence is manifesting within and between the lips. How wonderful and how amazing for everyone.

Universal presence, the ground of being is manifesting within you as your innermost presence and this direct presence is the who you are and the who in the other as they are. By my experiencing the presence within myself, or you within yourself, you and I are able to experience the presence in the other. Since the presence is the very same oneness of presence, the same presence is within animate and inanimate being.

Because of this presence being within you as you, and within others as others, you can easily experience the non duality of presence within the duality of phenomena. And you can easily experience within non duality of presence, the duality of phenomena. This experience is both completely natural and completely ordinary and is complete; this is the great perfection.

The source of this presence is within your body and most of all within your heart essence. This presence is self arising within you and you can extend your experience of this presence beyond yourself into others, into the cosmos. And the presence returns; it is mirrored back.

This presence is light and spaciousness; this presence is luminous energy. This light can be sent from one to the other. This energy can be sent from one to the other. You can experience this presence in the other as the other and experience non duality of presence within the duality of phenomena, within the me and the you. Phenomena is duality and within the nonduality of presence is the duality of phenomena. The difference of phenomena is completely within the non duality of presence.

Most amazingly, and not easily experienced, this primordial presence is unborn, uncreated, and undying. Primordial means it is pervasive and insubstantial. Insubstantial means this "no-thingness" is the source of everything and anything. Presence is "no-thingness" and yet it is not nothing like an empty house or empty box.

You can extend the light into others and into the cosmos and into others. Thus light increases within that person or that place. Just as we project the mind we can extend the space of presence. This presence is the field. This presence is the qualities of the field. Everything we say about the field can be called presence, in its vast horizons and multidimensionality.

As you experience this presence in time you are slowly but surely accessing timeless awareness. Timeless awareness is the innermost dimension of your own awareness, your depth of presence. As you experience timeless awareness you have entered Vajra kumara, the unborn and undying state of timeless awareness which has no beginning and no end. As you go through this door of timeless awareness, deathless life opens within you and the fear of death itself dissolves since the sense of death itself is dissolving and deathlessness life is self arising. This is amazing and not easy to be experienced.

At the moment of death, as the mind and body dissolves, what remains is your own awareness, this inner most presence, this whoness that is in time and yet beyond time as timeless awareness, timeless presence, divine presence. In the drama of the moment of death presence meets presence, deathless presence meets deathless presence. The nature of your own presence becomes so clear and so luminous as primordial awareness, primordial presence.

The various myths of religious judgment (whether by a diety, or just missing the light, or being frightened by the archetypical presentations of presence) are ultimately religious contrivance of the human institution of superego -- a distortion of justice, a distortion of the nature of awareness, a distortion of the great compassion.

Liberation is the experiencing of personal presence as primordial presence. This can take place right now within life as well as at the moment of death. Within ones own being we can experience the non duality of being within duality of phenomena. The seeming duality between personal presence and primordial presence dissolves into non duality of personal presence within primordial presence. This is the Indivisibility of my being with Being itself. This is the indivisibility of my presence with primordial presence itself.

Transmission is the human capacity to extend primordial presence to everyone and everything anywhere. Liberation is being free of fear of death as you have entered deathless awareness or deathless presence. Within this state of deathless presence, you experience the actuality of being beyond appearing and disappearing. You experience the no-thingness of awareness manifesting in different modes and dimensions of existingness.

Historical transmission of primordial awareness are various modes are ways of giving knowledge. Direct transmission is the natural empowerment of primordial emptiness with infinite potentiality. Symbolic transmission is the energy of the symbolic sphere which invokes the

openness of the awareness field so that the nature of luminous awareness is felt. Oral transmission is the use of language and words to invoke the phenomena of awareness of awareness, language invoking the experience of primordial presence.

Oral transmission communicates through words and letters, through voice and gesture that everything and anything is the luminous energy of primordial presence. This invocation is not information but informing of our experience as luminous vibrational presence. This understanding takes everyone beyond renunciations, antidotes, purifications, attainments, rituals. The words and letters open the field of the text through the text so that what is signified is experienced directly within the person, within your awareness and within my awareness.

The root understanding is the experience that the source of all phenomena is Presence. The base of phenomena is presence. The source is presence. All phenomena is luminous and in oneness as natural presencing. All phenomena are within non dual natural presence. Natural presence transcends all frames of reference. Natural presence abides in bliss.

The understanding of skillfulness differentiates the vehicles of transmission. As the natural immediacy and completeness of primordial luminosity of all things and beings, we actually live in natural presence. When we are in the transmission of natural presence we can utilize every method and every practice as expressions and doorways of natural presence. A person can become organized by the concreteness of religious practices and lose the focus of natural presence. The practices can become super-egotized. Natural presence is not an object and the methods and views can be objectified and reified and in so doing there is objectification of the mind of awareness. In that way awareness of naturalness can disappear.

Obstacles mean one fails to experience the immediacy and totality of primordial presence. Actions can foreclose the effortless experience of natural embodied presence and effortful actions fixate the mind and the wholeness of the experience is missed. Knowledge itself can be bondage as a person can easily become fixated on information and in so doing so lack the experience that everything and anything is the manifested energy of primordial and natural pervasive presence.

Understandings can be veils. Understandings such as the two truths (acceptance and rejection, right and wrong, enlightenment and no enlightenment, attainments and non attainments, causality and non causality, existence and non existence of phenomena, the illusion of nothingness being emptiness alone as nihilistic nothingness) can be veils of actuality. Searching for that which is already given is both hopeless and misdirected waiting and wanting. This is waiting for what already is. This is the extreme form of waiting for Godot.

Natural presence is beyond differentiation. There is no essential differentiation in natural presence. The understanding of effortlessness reveals effortlessness and deedlessness of liberation which is becoming the being that you are. There are infinite degrees of realization. Buddhahood or Siddhahood is experiencing the unbound universe as vast wholeness.

The paper was influenced by Jim Valby's most wonderful translation of the commentary on the Tantric Text The All Creating Sovereign, Kun byed rgyal po' imdo.

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