INTRODUCTION TO THE INTERVIEWS

There has been, over the last four decades, an immense amount of interest in demonstrating that Buddhist thought is, in some sense, scientific. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama, himself, says in the coming interview, “Some scholars say that Buddhism is a science of the mind.”

Over these last several decades, three different approaches have been taken to establishing the scientific merit of Buddhist thought. The first approach was that of recognizing that there are significant similarities between the worldviews of modern science and Buddhism. This approach was both popularized and epitomized by Fritjof Capra’s book The Tao of Physics, which took a look at several parallels between the worldview of modern physics and the worldviews of several schools of Asian mysticism.

Capra pointed out, for example, that Buddhism and modern science both take the position that (1) there is no such thing as absolute space and time; (2) there is a unity and interdependence of all things in the universe; and (3) all phenomena are temporary manifestations of an underlying reality.

The second basic approach to lending scientific authenticity to the findings of Buddhist psychology has been that of using the methods of neurobiology and cognitive science to investigate the effects and efficacy of Buddhist meditation. One excellent example of this work is the work of Richard Davidson on the role of the prefrontal cortex in regulating emotions.

The research being presented in The Healthy Mind: Mindfulness, True Self, and the Stream of Consciousness takes yet a third type of approach to investigating the empirical validity of the mind science of Buddhism.

The Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition contains and is predicated upon a descriptive and theoretical proto-science of the phenomena that appear in the stream of consciousness. Many of the philosophical and psychological theories
of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism have been derived from its observations of these phenomena.

The research that is being presented here in *The Healthy Mind* is an attempt to empirically evaluate, replicate and expand upon the ancient mind science of Tibetan Buddhism, and we are attempting to do so by studying the very same phenomena that Buddhist practitioners and scholars have been studying for centuries—the dual, nondual and predual phenomena that appear in and as the stream of consciousness.

In taking this approach, we are consciously taking the position that the lamas being interviewed are scientists of the mind—which is exactly what they are, even though they do not wear white lab coats or have a training in modern science. These lamas are scientists in the sense that they are part of a centuries-old tradition that has made systematic scientific observations of the stream of consciousness. More than that, they have derived, from their observations, theories of both the healthy and unhealthy mind.

As such, each lama is a vital repository of observations of the phenomena of the stream of consciousness—both their own observations and the accumulated observations of the Buddhist tradition.

I have interviewed the lamas to elicit and record their observations of both the egoless stream of consciousness and the egocentric stream of consciousness. It has been a profound experience, and a great deal of fun as well.

Almost all of the lamas that I have interviewed have been practitioners and teachers of the DzogChen tradition. DzogChen is a unique school of philosophy and meditation practice that is found within both the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism and the Bön religion, which is the indigenous religion of the Tibetan plateau.

Both the Nyingma and Bön traditions regard DzogChen as being the ultimate vehicle for both understanding and cultivating an enlightened, or completely egoless, mind.

For our purposes, one of the virtues of the DzogChen is that its exposition of the mind is a stunningly empirical one. It contains crystal clear descriptions of the experience of the egoless state of mind, and how that state of mind is different than the egocentric mind. This is one of the principal reasons that I have focused on studying and working with DzogChen lamas. Given their training, it is an easy matter for them to render empirical descriptions of the stream of consciousness and the egoless mind.

I have interviewed a large and varied spectrum of DzogChen lamas. At one end of the spectrum stands the Dalai Lama, who is perhaps one of the best known human beings on the planet today. On the other end of the spectrum are virtually unknown lamas who are living in remote mountainous locations.

In general, I sought to interview lamas who were not celebrity lamas if you will, although I did make exceptions when I thought the celebrity would not present insurmountable logistical problems or distort the substance of our discussions.
The appendices presented here are collections of interviews with four different lamas:

1. His Holiness the Dalai Lama
2. Lopon Tegchoke of the Deorali Dodrupchen Monastery in Sikkim and of Bhutan
3. Khenpo Tsewang Gyatso of Namdroling Monastery in Bylekupe, India

These interviews have been excerpted from a series of volumes published by Vajra Publications of Kathmandu that collect and annotate my research interviews, and I have left them in the original form in which they were published.
The Healthy Mind Interviews

The Dalai Lama Interview

*HMV:* Your Holiness, I have been interviewing lamas for a while now for the purpose of developing a mind science that is a science of the phenomena that appear in the stream of consciousness. It is a science that is grounded in observations of the stream of consciousness that one can make in meditation. As you probably know, as of yet, there is no descriptive science of the mind in Western science. We have said that it is not possible to scientifically study the stream of consciousness.

*HHDL:* We cannot take measurement.

*HMV:* Yes. That is a part of the perceived problem. My feeling, though, is that this position is a mistake, a misunderstanding of the nature of science. And I wonder if you, too, think that this might be a mistake in the sense that it actually is possible to scientifically study the stream of consciousness. Science is not just a matter of taking measurements. Science is defined as, and always begins with, the process of making observations of phenomena.

*HHDL:* That's right. My observation is that up until now science has developed on the basis of observing external things. Something you can see, you can touch, you can feel. Within that context, mind seems to be something outside science. But that does not mean that mind is something outside science. I think a new science can develop. Some scholars say that Buddhism is a science of the mind.

1. This interview took place in Dharmasala, India, on October 17, 1994.
That would be my position, too. I think that it is definitely possible to develop a valid descriptive science of the mind that is grounded in observations of the stream of consciousness that a person can make in meditation. If you look at the Buddhist literature, it becomes evident that this kind of mind science has existed in Buddhism for centuries. It is a literature that is full of observations of the phenomena that appear in the stream of consciousness.

That’s right.

I have been interviewing lamas at length about the experiences they have when they meditate, and I have been doing so as part of a scientific research process. I see lamas as people, scientists if you will, who have had extensive experience observing and describing the phenomena that appear within the mind, and I have been interviewing lamas as the scientists they are. It is part of a process in which we are gathering data to develop a descriptive science of the mind, and I would like to interview you in this same way if that would be OK with you.

Yes.

One thing that we have been trying to do is identify the different types of phenomena that appear in the stream of consciousness. I would like to present to you some of the phenomena that we have identified and see if you have experienced them as well.

Yes.

Take, for example, the phenomenon of the involuntary stream of consciousness. The involuntary stream of consciousness is the constant stream of thoughts and emotions that are constantly going through a person’s mind.

The cessation of the involuntary stream of consciousness is another phenomenon.

What do you mean by cessation?

The stopping of the flow of thoughts and emotions.

Temporary?

Yes, temporary.

Not permanent cessation.

No, not permanent cessation. As far as you know, does anyone ever attain permanent cessation?

Should be.

It is possible.

That is the goal. Amongst practitioners, that is the goal. [Laughter]

Have you experienced that?

No.

Thank you for allowing me to ask you this question.
**Annotation:** There are many texts and teachers in the Buddhist tradition that take the position that it is desirable to cultivate the permanent and complete cessation of one’s thoughts. For example, the nine dhyana formulation of the stages of samatha meditation is grounded in the notion that cultivating the cessation of all inner appearances is a desirable thing to do. Moreover, many lamas and texts define nondual awareness as the complete cessation of all thoughts.

There are also traditions and teachers that teach that this is not the case. The DzogChen Rinpoche once said to me, “You have to have thoughts.” Longchenpa felt that it was important to not confuse the meditative experience of clarity with the experience of the dharmakaya, or rigpa. He made this distinction by saying that, “A meditative experience of clarity is a clear state of mind at rest, but the dharmakaya is the unity of lucidity and awareness, free of any sense of being at rest.” Lopon Tenzin Namdak, one of the current head lamas of the Bön tradition, says that, “Having no thoughts is not the essential practice of DzogChen. There is nothing wrong with having thoughts.”

Here in this interview, His Holiness is saying that he, himself, has not achieved the complete cessation of thoughts. It is tempting to conclude from this one single fact alone that the complete cessation of thoughts is not necessarily a desirable end to achieve.

But if this is true, then why do we have, in the history of Buddhism, this definite strand of thought and practice that holds that it is desirable to cultivate the complete cessation of all thoughts? Perhaps what is really being said is that it is important to cultivate the complete cessation of dual, as opposed to nondual, thoughts.

Or it just might be that long-standing philosophical commitments make it imperative to define the egoless mind as a mind in which inner appearances simply do not arise.

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2. The nine dhyanas are a description of the nine different states of mind through which a person progresses on the way to developing samatha—a calm mind. See, for example, B. Alan Wallace and Gen Lamrimpa. (1992). *Calming the Mind.* Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications.


4. Meditative experience of clarity is a translation of Sal-wa’i nyams. DzogChen mind science recognizes the existence of three nyams, or moments of nondual experience. DzogChen is very careful to point out that nyams are not an experience of the nature of mind, but that it is a sign that a practitioner is progressing.


7. The term inner appearances, here, is a translation of the Tibetan term nang gyi nangwa, and it is used to refer to both dual and nondual phenomena that appear within the mind.
Here, then, is another interesting empirical question: Is the egoless mind a mind in which there has been a complete cessation of the appearance of thoughts? Is it, or is it not, desirable to cultivate a complete cessation of one’s thoughts? His Holiness will touch upon these questions in a later portion of this interview, and he will do so in the process of describing the nature of the nondual mind.

**HHDL:** Then there is the Third Noble Truth. The important thing there is that the procedure for stopping rebirth is to first bring about the cessation of certain negative emotions. Usually, it is said that there is no beginning with negative emotions, but that there is an end. With the positive emotions, there can be a beginning, but there is no end. There is neither a beginning nor end of the seeds of positive mind or emotion.

**HMV:** So there can be a cessation of negative emotions.

**HHDL:** There is the belief, the conviction, that this is the case.⁸

**HMV:** Thank you. Now I would like to ask you some questions about dual awareness. Does the English term dual awareness have any meaning for you?

**HHDL:** Nondualistic and dualistic. I don’t know.

**HMV:** I am referring to subject-object duality here.

**HHDL:** The term dualistic has many levels of meaning in the context of Buddhism. It has many, many different levels of meaning.

**HMV:** The type of duality that I am referring to here is one that is commonly experienced in meditation. Sometimes, in meditation, when your stream of consciousness appears, it seems as though there is a separation of subject and object. It seems as though there is a subject, the watcher, that is watching the stream of thoughts, or objects, go by.

**HHDL:** Yes.

**HMV:** This is the experience of duality that I am referring to here. Sometimes that duality collapses and there is only awareness present, and then that would be what is meant by nondual awareness.

**HHDL:** Yes. What do you say during deep sleep? Certainly, there is some kind of consciousness still there.

**HMV:** For sure.

**HHDL:** Do you think there is the conceptual awareness of subject and object?

**HMV:** Well I think that perhaps we will disagree here. I would say that dreaming is a dual experience.

**HHDL:** No. Not dreaming. Deep sleep.

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⁸ His Holiness seems to be saying here that even if it is not possible to attain the permanent cessation of thoughts, that there is another type of cessation—the cessation of negative emotions—that might actually be attainable.
HMV: Oh. Deep sleep. I really haven’t thought about it, Your Holiness. What do you think?

HHDL: No. It is not nondual.

HMV: Why not?

HHDL: Because it has the appearance of conventional reality, conventional truth.

HMV: What is appearing in deep sleep? When I think of deep sleep, I think of sleep without any dreams.

HHDL: Yes. Without dreams. Without feelings. The crucial point here is that even though in the deep sleep state things may not appear, it is like the consciousness of a fainted person. It is not the kind of nondual state attained through practice. So therefore it is difficult to call the state of deep sleep a nondual state. There is a distinction to be made between the mere absence of thoughts and the attainment of nondual awareness through practice.

HMV: When a single thought arises and dissolves in front of your mind’s eye, is that nondual awareness? If a single thought or feeling arises and dissolves in front of a mental consciousness, would that be a moment of nondual awareness?

HHDL: No.

HMV: Why not?

HHDL: Well from a certain level perhaps I think yes, but certainly it is not the meaning that is being given in Buddhist texts about the meaning of the nondual state of mind. Because at that time still there is the appearance of the conventional phenomena.

HMV: How about after the conventional phenomena disappear and there is just awareness left?

HHDL: This dissolving of one thought is a continuing process. One comes and it dissolves and another comes and it dissolves. The genuine nondual experience in a Buddhist context is that through training you deliberately stop all of your thoughts, and you remain absorbed in your ultimate nature, ultimate reality. As long as you are doing that meditation, the process of thought cannot function. That is nondual.

HMV: So that, then, is a genuine nondual experience. Once thought disappears and you remain absorbed in that emptiness, which is the lack of

9. By ultimate nature, His Holiness means, here, the ultimate nature of the mind. The “nature of the mind” is a technical term in Buddhist psychology, and it refers to a specific type of awareness that is the natural state of the mind. In the context of DzogChen mind science, the natural state of the mind is an awareness that is empty, nondual, joyous and like space. It is also the awareness that realizes the emptiness of the mind itself.
appearance of conventional phenomena, and this is the experience of nondual mind.

**HHDL:** That’s right. That’s right.

**Annotation:** His Holiness is presenting here an empirical, or descriptive, definition of the experience of nondual, or empty, mind. It is the first of two different empirical definitions of nondual awareness that His Holiness will be giving us in this interview. This first definition, to reiterate, is that the nondual mind is a mind in which you deliberately stop all of your thoughts and “remain absorbed in your ultimate nature, ultimate reality.”

**HMV:** And in a moment when a single thought dissolves and disappears, could that be looked upon as a simpler, or less profound, moment of nondual awareness?

**HHDL:** Again, this is not a process that has taken place through a certain practice. Such a process of change occurs because of being impermanent.

**HMV:** Thank you. Now it seems like there are two different things can happen after a thought or emotion arises. One is that it can dissolve naturally, and after that nothing else will appear for a short moment. The other possibility is that the mind will hold on to that thought and it won’t dissolve.

**HHDL:** Yes.

**HMV:** It also seems there are two ways the mind can hold on to, or grasp, a thought or emotion. One way is by trying to push it away from awareness, and the other way is by trying to hold on to it, which happens because the mind likes that thought. Whenever the mind holds on to a thought, then the same thought and related thoughts will keep appearing over and over again within the mind.

**HHDL:** That’s true. Even when you hold on to yourself, momentary change is still taking place, and in that momentary change, holding on to the object also takes place.

**HMV:** So sometimes the mind holds on to an object and sometimes it doesn’t. Sometimes the mind holds on to a thought and sometimes the mind does not hold on to a thought. Does that seem correct to you?

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10. The term “conventional phenomena” here refers to the appearance of any and all inner appearances.

11. Actually there are three fundamental ways in which the egocentric mind grasps, or holds on to, a thought—rejection, accepting, following. For some reason, at this point in this interview I decided to mention only two of them.
HHDL: You mean the mind holding on to the mind?
HMV: Exactly. Suppose a thought arose in my mind and I liked that thought. It was a thought that said, “Gee, I am being a smart man today.” And if I hold on to that thought when it first arises, the same kind of thoughts will come back over and over again. And then it would become like a recurring film telling me that I am a smart man. Perhaps a film in which I am talking to the Dalai Lama and thinking I was saying something smart. Or a film with a completely different kind of theme might also arise. It seems to me that this is what happens when a person holds on to a thought. On the other hand, if you just let your thoughts take their natural course, they will dissolve and not keep coming back at you over and over again.

HHDL: It depends upon being able to hold the continuity or not. The continuity of the mind.
HMV: I am not sure I understand what you mean by that, Your Holiness. What do you mean by hold the continuity?
HHDL: In the case of the mind in which you have some interesting thing, then you deliberately prolong the continuity of the thoughts.
HMV: Is that the same thing as the process I just described of holding on to a thought?
HHDL: Yes.
HMV: Is that an experience that you have?
HHDL: That is one type of meditation. You just let out whatever thoughts come and go. Whatever comes, let it come and let it go. Never make an attempt to hold on to them. Through that practice, thought automatically becomes weaker, weaker, weaker. Then eventually, there is some kind of cessation of thought. That means the thoughtless state of mind.
HMV: Right. Now in DzogChen that meditation practice is called trekcho. Is that correct?
HHDL: Yes. Yes. But trekcho is not only that.
HMV: OK.
HHDL: The thoughtless state is something like the goal of trekcho.
HMV: OK.
HHDL: We have to go through that door. The actual experience of trekcho is much more than that.
HMV: When you go through that door what happens?

12. Trekcho is a type of meditation technique that is one of two techniques that is unique to the DzogChen tradition.
HHDL: I have no experience. The actual realization of rigpa\textsuperscript{13} is not the mere thoughtless state of mind. It is not just the awareness of the nature of mind. No. Rigpa means that there is a special kind of experience in which the mind is very clear. Very sharp. At the same time it is an awareness that remains completely neutral. All the thoughts come and go. Come and go. But your main mind remains completely neutral, and it is never influenced by your thoughts. Your main mind is very clear. It is very sharp and very aware. Not only of the process of your thoughts, but of external things as well. The example that is usually used is that of the hawk. You see, the hawk comes out from its nest. That means it is very active. Very clever. Very aware. Usually in the mere thoughtless state of mind, there is some kind of darkness. Some kind of simpleness. So that is not rigpa.

HMV: So in rigpa, then, would it be fair to say that thoughts still appear.

HHDL: Oh yes.

HMV: But you don’t accept them. You don’t hold on to them.

HHDL: Yes.

HMV: You don’t reject them, or push them away.

HHDL: Yes. That’s right.

HMV: You don’t believe them. You just allow them to pass. You don’t care about them.

HHDL: Yes. That’s right. [Very emphatic]

HMV: And as a result of that process they become clearer and everything else becomes clearer as well.

HHDL: Yes. And one way is dual and the other way is nondual.

HMV: And is nondual mind, Your Holiness, that natural state of mind in which you don’t accept, don’t reject and don’t believe?

HHDL: This is the pure or clear awareness. That is rigpa. Not grasping. From that angle, nondualistic.

HMV: Right. And because you are not grasping, you are not attributing any concepts to the appearance.

HHDL: But at the same time, the appearance is there. So it is dualistic.

HMV: So it is both dualistic and nondualistic simultaneously.

HHDL: Oh yes.

HMV: Thank you very much.

13. The Tibetan term rigpa means different things in different contexts. His Holiness is using the word rigpa here as it is used in a DzogChen setting. The DzogChen tradition is reluctant to describe the nondual experiences of rigpa. Nonetheless, it is willing to point to the term and say that rigpa is a blissful space-like awareness that is the nondual self-awareness that is the awareness of the egoless mind.
**Annotation:** Here, then, is His Holiness’ second empirical definition of nondual awareness. In his first definition, His Holiness took the position that a nondual mind is a mind in which all thoughts have completely ceased to appear. In this passage, His Holiness describes a nondual mind as being a mind in which thoughts do appear, but in which the mind’s awareness does not grasp those thoughts.

Given that His Holiness has now put forth two different descriptions of nondual awareness, it should also be said that His Holiness is not alone in thinking that there are two different ways to understand the nature of the nondual mind. In the course of doing these interviews, it has been my consistent experience that lamas describe nondual awareness in two different ways: they describe the experience of nondual awareness in precisely the same two ways in which the Dalai Lama has just described the experience of nondual mind.

Many lamas take the position that a nondual mind is a mind in which there has been a complete cessation of all inner appearances. Many lamas also take the second position that nondual awareness is a state of mind in which inner appearances continue to arise. Once again, in this definition, nondual mind is an awareness that does not grasp the inner appearances that appear to it. As a result, it realizes the emptiness of those appearances of which it is aware.

The import of nondual awareness is that when the mind has nondual awareness of a meaning, or inner appearance, it knows the content of that meaning exactly as it is; which is the same as saying that it knows that meaning without projecting any concepts, or constructs, onto it. When the mind has nondual awareness of itself, it knows itself as it is.

In contrast, when the mind has dual awareness of an individual meaning, it does project additional constructs onto the meanings it creates, and as a result, it does not know itself as it is. For example, when the watcher has dual awareness of a single thought, it will know that thought as a mixture of thought and projected construct. By way of illustration, when the watcher has dual awareness of a thought, it might experience that thought in tandem with an emotion; or in tandem with an ego narrative that is an habitual or recurring pattern of ego thought.

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14. The term “inner appearance” is used here to refer to both the dual and nondual phenomena that appear within the mind. Dual appearances would include thoughts, emotions and recurring patterns of ego thought. Nondual appearances would include primordial meanings and moments of timeless wisdom. Please see Volume III of *The Healthy Mind Interviews* for a more thorough empirical discussion of the nature of the nondual inner appearances.

15. “Habitual pattern of ego thought” is a translation of the Tibetan term “bagchags.” Please see Volume II of *The Healthy Mind Interviews* for both an empirical and theoretical discussion of the place of the bagchags in Buddhist psychology and its relationship to Western psychology.
The import of how you define nondual mind is that it will determine what state of mind you cultivate in your attempts to develop an egoless mind. If you ascribe to the first definition of nondual mind, you will pursue a state of mind in which there is a complete cessation of inner appearances. If you ascribe to the second definition, you will leave your mind in its natural state.

Perhaps the resolution of this apparent contradiction lies in the understanding that there is a sense in which both positions are correct. Perhaps a nondual mind is a mind in which (1) there is a cessation of dual thoughts, but in which (2) awareness does not grasp the nondual and predual thoughts that continue to appear to it. Whatever the answer might be, once again, I would like to think that this apparent contradiction can be resolved empirically.

**HHDL:** As time goes on, that experience, will become more stable. More sound. More forceful. Then the thoughts will automatically become weaker, weaker, and weaker. Then eventually, without having to make some kind of special effort, you will develop the conviction that all phenomena, including one's own thoughts or mind, all are some kind of reflection of awareness. Then eventually, somehow all of the reflections will disappear. They dissolve into the main awareness. That automatically leads you to the awareness of sunya, or emptiness.

**HMV:** Thank you.

**HHDL:** Then it really becomes nondual.

**HMV:** Your holiness, do you ever experience this state of mind where all of your thoughts just spontaneously dissolve into your awareness?

**HHDL:** I don’t know. Sometimes in dream-time. Quite rarely, occasionally, sometimes I experience this. And then later I would ask my DzogChen lama, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. I would describe my experiences to him, and he would make very favorable responses. But I don’t know.

**HMV:** Do you think it would be correct to say that an egocentric mind, a mind with an ego, is a mind that accepts, rejects and believes its thoughts and emotions, in the way that we have just described it. And that an egoless mind is a mind that allows its stream of consciousness to remain in its natural state? It does not accept. It does not reject. It does not believe its thoughts. Do you think that this is a correct distinction?

**HHDL:** Those practitioners of DzogChen who have correct experiences, those experiences automatically increase their compassion. That is the right sign. If certain extraordinary experiences take place, but that person does not find a positive effect on compassion then that experience of awareness is not correct.
Are you saying that even if a person is not accepting, not rejecting, not believing, if they don’t have that increased compassion it is not egoless?

Yes. And ego has many meanings. Many definitions. One ego is, “I can do. I will serve humanity. I will serve until all sentient beings reach nirvana.” That kind of determination is based on ego.

But that kind of ego we need. That kind of ego is constructive. Without that, how can we develop self-confidence?

So we need will power. Will power needs some basis: ego. But another type of ego—a strong sense of self that rejects others’ rights or has no hesitation to exploit others or disregard others’ rights—that ego is a negative ego.

And would that be what you are trying to transcend on the Buddhist path?

You try to remove it. When you have the experience of trekcho, you develop a deep awareness of the fundamental nature of all phenomena. And then you also see that other sentient beings are grasping those phenomena in a mistaken way. Because you have this awareness, it naturally brings concern for those other sentient being. The person who has developed the trekcho experience sees that all phenomena are a mere reflection of that nature, of that ultimate reality. So on the ultimate reality level, there is no positive, no negative.

So samsara and nirvana become, in fact, the same thing. 16

That’s right. So because of your deep awareness, you develop some kind of concern, compassion. Now you see that there is an alternative. And you see how suffering comes. Because of true experience, you develop an awareness of all these things, and it automatically brings compassion. That’s the way. During meditation, you are not moved to generate compassion because compassion is a kind of thought. Your mind is clear.

One more question Your Holiness. It seems to me that as people become more egoless . . .

Egoless means the negative ego.

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16. The formulation that samsara and nirvana are the same is an oft heard statement in Mahayana Buddhism. It has many different levels of meaning. Here the intended meaning is that ontologically, samsaric and egoless mind are the same are ontologically the same, but epistemologically, they are different. They are the same phenomena looked at in different ways. Ultimately, samsara is the dual awareness of phenomena, and nirvana, or egoless mind, is the nondual awareness of phenomena.
HMV: Yes. And that as people become more egoless in that sense, they are less likely to fight other people, less likely to destroy the environment, and they are less likely to be unhappy.

HHDL: That’s right.

HMV: Do you think that egolessness, or emptiness, could be the basis of a psychology of peace?

HHDL: Oh yes.

HMV: How do you know that this is true? Why do you think that is the case?

HHDL: My little experience is that the sense of egolessness comes through training in compassion, of love and compassion. Now here compassion means unbiased compassion. Usually what we describe as compassion is biased. Actually, you see, it is attachment. So first we have to make a distinction. Genuine compassion is unbiased. It includes you and me. That compassion reduces negative ego feeling. The work goes like this. First you develop a sense of concern for others. It doesn’t come through emotion. It comes through analytical meditation. You see that your self and others are the same sentient being. I have the right to be a happy person. They also have the right. They are numberless. I am just one. They are much more. Then you develop some sort of genuine conviction that you must have some kind of genuine compassion towards them.

Usually what happens is that when something negative happens to you, you think only of yourself. As a result, a really strong emotion develops that destroys your peace of mind. When you develop concern for others, and others means limitless numbers of people, huge, then when something happens to you, oh, then you have no bother. This is so tiny. When we think only of ourselves, then the whole world is wrong. If you think only of yourself, then when small things happen, oh, you cannot bear them. Compassion brings a sense of respect. A sense of concern.

HMV: Does compassion give a sense of strength as well?

HHDL: Oh yes.

HMV: How does it give you a sense of strength?

HHDL: Once you develop a sense of concern for others, it automatically brings some kind of desire to do something. That increases your inner strength. Previously, one thinks only of one’s self. Then after training in compassion, you think of others. Automatically, your mental attitude is much changed. Your ego is much increased now. Previously, you carried on your shoulders only your own responsibility. Very small. But deep inside there is fear, there is doubt, there is sense of insecurity. When you take responsibility for all sentient beings, then ego becomes a big ego. A positive ego.

HMV: So you have to have an ego to be egoless.
HHDL: [Laughter]
HMV: Thank you very much.
HHDL: Thank you.

Annotation: At the time of this interview, His Holiness was concerned about the possibility that there were Western students of Buddhism who might be misunderstanding the nature of the egoless mind. He said as much both before and during the interview. His concern was that some people might be adhering to the mistaken notion that an egoless person is a person who has no identity, no goals and thus no sense of purpose.

His Holiness’ view of the nature of the egoless mind seems to be quite different than this. He has said here that the process of developing an egoless mind is one in which a person actually cultivates a “positive ego” and abandons a “negative ego.” This was one of the major themes of this interview, and it came up over and again in a couple of different contexts.

In taking this position, His Holiness is simultaneously making two related empirical assertions about the nature of the egoless mind. His Holiness is saying that:

1. An egoless mind is a mind that has an ego, which can be thought of as a positive identity, and
2. The positive attributes of the egoless mind, for example wisdom and compassion, are attributes that have to be actively created and cultivated through the practice of meditation.

If His Holiness’ view is empirically correct, and the egoless mind does have either an ego, or identity, what then is the difference between the...

17. The Tibetan term that is translated as the English word “ego” is “dag-dzin.” The term reveals the two components of the Tibetan conception of ego. “Dag” means identity, or self-concept. “Dzin” means grasping. An egocentric mind is a mind that both has an identity and grasps that identity. In other words, ego and identity, in a Tibetan context, are not equivalent terms. “Identity” refers to a self-concept that a mind attributes to itself, and “ego” refers to a mind that grasps its identity.

18. There is, in Tibetan Buddhism, a second type of approach to developing the positive attributes of the egoless mind. This second path works on the premise that given that the positive qualities of the egoless mind are already present within the nature of the mind, it is not necessary to actually create those positive qualities. Given that these qualities are already present within you, the only thing you have to do is realize and abide in the nature of the mind. In the words of the late Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, “The infinite inexpressible qualities of primordial awareness are inherent in Mind. It is therefore not necessary to try to create them or attempt to manufacture something.” Lopon Tenzin Namdak takes the same position in saying, “You don’t need to try to be a Bodhisattva. Just keep to the nature. Bodhisattva, bodhicitta are there. The best way to practice with Bodhicitta is keep to the natural state.”
egoless and egocentric mind? Ultimately His Holiness is saying here that an egoless mind is a mind that has two fundamental traits: (1) it is a mind that has a positive identity grounded in compassion and (2) it is a mind that leaves its stream of consciousness in its natural state because it does not grasp its thoughts and emotions.

References

In DzogChen, when you see the emptiness of an appearance, it is absolute truth.

—Lopon Tegchoke

The Function of the Mind

HMV: What is the function of the mind?

LTC: The function of the mind is to know and grasp objects.

HMV: It sounds as though you are talking about the function of the dual mind. Is it the dual mind knows its objects by grasping them, is it not?

LTC: Yes.

HMV: Does the dual mind ever become the nondual awareness that is rigpa?

LTC: Yes, but dual mind itself is not converted into rigpa. If dual mind ceases, if the ego ceases, then rigpa, or nondual awareness, appears.\(^1\)

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\(^1\) For the last twenty years I have been interviewing Tibetan lamas about their experiences of their own mind in meditation for the purpose of developing an empirically valid theory of the nature of the healthy human mind. Vajra Books of Kathmandu is publishing a series of twelve volumes that collect and annotate these interviews. Each volume contains interviews that were done with one lama. This is the third volume, and it contains interviews with a most excellent lama named Lopon Tegchoke. Lopon Tegchoke is the head teacher at Dodrupchen Rinpoche’s monastery in Gangtok, Sikkim. He also teaches at his own retreat center at Thimphu in his native Bhutan.

The Tibetan term “rigpa” is a pivotal and oft used term in the DzogChen literature. Empirically, rigpa is the awareness that is nondual, or egoless, mind. Rigpa is and has nondual awareness of all phenomena. In this book, the term rigpa will appear in two different ways. Sometimes it will appear as the unchanged Tibetan term “rigpa,” and at other times, depending upon context, it will be translated into English as “nondual awareness.” Please
HMV: How are dual mind and rigpa different?

LTC: There are vast differences between dual mind and rigpa. In DzogChen we say that when dual mind is exhausted, then rigpa can appear.

HMV: Does that mean that rigpa, or egoless awareness, is always present within us? That it is the sun that is always there behind the clouds; even on a cloudy day.

LTC: Yes.

HMV: Are the clouds that keep us from knowing and being rigpa the thoughts and emotions created by the dual mind?

LTC: Oh yes.

HMV: And when those clouds disappear, then the rigpa that is always there appears.

LTC: Yes.

Annotation: One of the most basic tenets, if not the most basic tenet, of Buddhism is that the human mind exists in two fundamentally different states. The mind can be either egocentric or it can be egoless. These two states of mind are known by many different names in the Buddhist literature, and two of them are samsara and nirvana, respectively.

As socialized beings, most of us have an ego. Buddhism says, of course, that a person’s attachment to their sense of identity, or ego, is the cause of all psychological suffering. It also says that the mind without an ego is a mind that does not suffer. It is a happy, healthy and compassionate mind. In keeping with this fundamental analysis, the goal/nongoal of Buddhist practice is to cultivate an egoless mind.

The empirical study of the stream of consciousness suggests that the defining difference between these two types of mind is that each of them has a different mode of self-awareness. The egocentric, or dual, mind is a mind that has dual awareness of itself, and the egoless mind is a mind that has nondual awareness of itself.²

Lopon is saying here, that rigpa, the nondual awareness that is and knows the egoless mind, is always present within us, but that our ability to know rigpa and be egoless is blocked and obscured by the thoughts and emotions created by the ego.

This Monarch, naturally manifest (nondual) awareness, is present in everyone, but no one realizes it.

(Naturally Arising Awareness)³

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see Volume II of The Healthy Mind Series for several discussions of the nature of rigpa (Vyner, 2004).

2. Please see the section titled “The Two Modes of ‘Self Awareness’” in the second volume of the Healthy Mind Series for a systematic sketch of the differences between the egoless and egocentric modes of self-awareness.

3. Naturally Arising Awareness is a seminal DzogChen text. It is one of the seventeen root tantras, or texts, of the Mengagde category of DzogChen texts. As quoted in R. Barron. (2001).

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It should be mentioned at least once that even though samsaric mind and nirvana are very different, they are also one and the same.  

**HMV:** I’d like to take a moment now to compare the functions of rigpa and dual mind. You have said that the dual mind grasps phenomena, and that it does so for the purpose of knowing and understanding them.

**LTC:** Yes.

**HMV:** Given that the dual mind is a mind with an ego, does the dual mind serve any useful purpose?

**LTC:** Yes. When you have an ego, it has many good functions.

**HMV:** Does the dual mind help a person function in the world?

**LTC:** Oh yes!

**HMV:** Does it help a person know and understand things?

**LTC:** Yes.

**HMV:** Now does rigpa serve a similar kind of function? Does rigpa help a person know the world?

**LTC:** Yes. It knows the world.

**HMV:** How does rigpa know the world?

**LTC:** Like a mirror. Rigpa is like a clear mirror, and in that clear mirror reflections can come.

**HMV:** In the West, we say that one of the primary functions of the mind is to give meaning to a person’s sensory experience. Here’s an example of what I mean by that: suppose I am crossing a street and all of a sudden I look up and see that a truck is speeding towards me out of control. My mind might create a thought that says, “That truck is going to hit me. Get out of the way.” That thought is a meaning. It gives meaning to the sensory experience of seeing the truck.

Another example of a meaning would be this: right now, as I sit here listening to you talk, single thoughts are appearing in my mind, from time to time, that tell me what I want to say in response to the things you are saying. These thoughts are created by my mind to give meaning to my experience of listening to you.

Do you see the mind in the same way? Does DzogChen hold that one function of the mind is that it gives meaning to a person’s experience?

**LTC:** Yes. It’s very much the same.

**HMV:** Thank you. And in your theory of the mind, do meanings created by the dual mind appear in the stream of consciousness as thoughts?

**LTC:** Oh yes.

**HMV:** And is that the function of a thought?

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4. Samsara and nirvana share a common ontology, but they are epistemologically different.
LTC: Yes.
HMV: Thank you. Now does rigpa, or nondual awareness, also give meaning to experience?
LTC: Rigpa can have the same function, and in a moment (he claps his hands) everything can be understood. In the dual mind of ego, it comes in pieces. In rigpa, you see the whole thing.
HMV: Ah. So rigpa can and does give meaning to events that happen in the outer world.
LTC: Oh yes. And it gives more meaning to experience than dual mind.
HMV: It sounds as though you are saying that the meanings that rigpa gives to its experiences are larger than the meanings created by the dual mind. Almost like the whole universe.
LTC: Yes.
HMV: Like a mandala.\(^5\)
LTC: Yes.
HMV: In what form do these meanings appear?
LTC: They appear as rigpa itself.
HMV: When rigpa appears to itself, does it appear as a gzhi-nang,\(^6\) or predual appearance?
LTC: Yes.
HMV: Can a predual appearance create meaning?
LTC: Yes. They will do more work than a computer.
HMV: Can a predual appearance create intention?
LTC: Yes.
HMV: Thank you very much.

**Annotation:** The human mind is a system that has four essential functions: (1) the construction of sensory experience; (2) the creation of constructs that give meaning to that sensory experience; (3) the expression of those meanings as behavior; and (4) the regulation of how those meanings are expressed.

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5. In Tucci’s words, a mandala “is, above all, a map of the cosmos” (Tucci, 1961, p. 23). A mandala is a sacred image that is thought of as being a visual depiction of the universe. In the religions of South and Central Asia, mandalas are used in both the practice of meditation and the performance of liturgy. The mandala can also be seen as a structure, if you will, within the mind, and this theoretical aspect of the mandala will be explored in the second section of this book—the section that carries the title “Mandala.”

6. “Gzhi-nang” is a technical term in DzogChen mind science. It is usually translated into English as “appearance of the ground” or “appearance of the base.” In this volume, gzhi-nang will be rendered into English in two different non-literal ways: “predual appearance” and “primordial meaning.” Please see the annotation that starts at the bottom of page 8 for a discussion of the nature of a gzhi-nang.
In this passage, Lopon agrees with the notion that the mind does, in fact, give meaning to its experience. He says that it is not only the dual mind that gives meaning to experience, and that the nondual mind does as well. The dual mind does so by fashioning dual meanings, and the nondual mind does so by creating nondual meanings.

Finally, Lopon says that these dual and nondual meanings both appear in the stream of consciousness, but that they do so as different kinds of phenomena. The dual meanings are familiar to us, and they appear as thoughts, emotions and the recurring patterns of ego thought.7

Nondual meanings appear in a number of less familiar forms. In this passage Lopon mentions a first type of meaning that is not dual: the gzhi-nang, or preduel appearance. This entire volume is going to be an exploration of the different types of nondual meaning that appear in the egoless mind.

### Knowing the Emptiness of Thoughts8

The wind blows through the sky and flies over continents without settling anywhere. It traverses space and leaves no trace. Thus should thoughts pass through our mind.

—Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche9

**HMV:** I’d like to circle back for a moment and talk about dual mind once again. I think we’ve agreed that the dual mind creates meanings, and that those meanings appear as thoughts in the stream of consciousness.

**LTC:** Oh yes.

**HMV:** When thoughts appear, would it be fair to say that there is, in the dual mind, a watcher? That in the dual mind there is both a stream of thoughts and a watcher, or awareness, that knows and is aware of those thoughts?

**LTC:** Oh yes! The watcher is the subject and the thoughts are the objects.

**HMV:** Now when the watcher is watching thoughts go by, does the watcher ever act upon the thoughts that it sees? For example, does it ever grasp thoughts?

7. “Recurring patterns of ego thought” is a non-literal translation of the Tibetan term “bak-chaks.”
8. This is just a quick footnote about emptiness for those of you who are entirely new to Buddhist thought. Emptiness is the central idea of Buddhism. In a sense, the goal/non-goal of the Buddhist path is to realize the emptiness of your own mind, and, as a result, the emptiness of all phenomena. At its simplest, to know the emptiness of your mind is to know yourself as you really are.
10. By definition, grasping is any response that the watcher makes to an inner appearance that attributes a concept of self to that appearance. There are three elemental forms of
LTC: Yes.
HMV: Does the watcher ever accept, reject and/or follow thoughts?
LTC: Yes.
HMV: When the mind grasps a thought, what happens to that thought?
LTC: Many more thoughts will come as a result.
HMV: If the watcher doesn’t grasp a thought, what happens to that thought?
LTC: It will dissolve and disappear.
HMV: Is there any other set of events that will make a thought dissolve?
LTC: Oh yes. There is a second way. A thought will dissolve when you realize its emptiness, which is the nature of mind. When you realize the emptiness of a thought, then all of your thoughts will cease from the root, or bak-chaks.\(^{11}\)
HMV: Are you saying that the mind can realize the emptiness of its thoughts? Is it possible to realize the emptiness of thoughts as they appear?
LTC: Oh yes. And when you do, your thoughts will stop appearing. It is also possible to stop your thoughts without understanding their emptiness, but then the thoughts will come back. If you don’t realize the emptiness of a thought, then its root will remain in the storehouse consciousness of your mind,\(^ {12}\) and at any time the thoughts can arise again.
HMV: It sounds as though you are saying that when awareness realizes the emptiness of a thought it causes two things to happen: (1) it allows the thoughts to dissolve and cease appearing and (2) it causes the root that is the source of those thoughts to dissolve and cease functioning.
LTC: Emptiness is the antidote of the thought. If one realizes the emptiness of a thought, the bak-chaks will be removed.
HMV: And when awareness realizes the emptiness of a thought, does that thought self-liberate?
LTC: There are two ways that self-liberation\(^ {13}\) occurs. One way is that when one fully understands emptiness, egolessness, then one can say that the thought is really self-liberated.

grasping: accepting, rejecting and/or following. Whenever you grasp an inner appearance, as Lopon Tegchöke will be saying later on, you create and become attached to a concept of yourself.

11. “Root” is a non-literal rendering of the term “subtle bak-chaks,” and it is the term that Lopon, himself, used here. Please see the following annotation for an explanation of the term bak-chaks.

12. “Storehouse consciousness of your mind” is a non-literal translation of the Tibetan term “kungzhi.” The Tibetan term kungzhi, in my experience, is used in two different ways. It can be used to refer to either a structure in the mind, if you will, or to a specific state of mind. Here, Lopon is using the term kungzhi to refer to a structure. There are six systematic theories of the mind in the history of Buddhism. One of them is the Yogacara model. Yogacara theory posits that the mind is composed of eight different kinds of consciousness: visual, auditory, etc. The Tibetan term for the eighth type of consciousness in this model is “kungzhi.” Kungzhi is said to be, in Yogacara theory, the structure within which the subtle bak-chaks are stored; thus the translation as storehouse consciousness.

13. “Self liberation” is a technical term in DzogChen, and it is a method by which egocentric mind spontaneously transforms itself into egoless mind.
HMV: When rigpa liberates a thought, by allowing it to dissolve into rigpa, is rigpa having nondual awareness of that thought?

LTC: Oh yes. Then the five wisdoms will appear.

HMV: Thank you. And is the same true for the nondual awareness of emotions? Will the five wisdoms appear?

LTC: Oh yes.

Annotation: Lopon is saying unequivocally, here, that it is possible to realize the emptiness of thoughts and, in so doing, allow them to transform themselves into the five primordial wisdoms of the egoless mind. In the process of making this point, Lopon goes on to say that realizing the emptiness of thoughts is the definitive method for bringing about the cessation of the habitual patterns of ego thought, or bak-chaks. What are bak-chaks?

Most of us have noisy minds in the sense that a rush of thoughts and emotions is almost constantly coming and going within our minds. Buddhist and DzogChen mind science have long recognized the existence of these thoughts, and it sees them as being recurring, or habitual, patterns of ego thought, or “bak-chaks,” in Tibetan. The function of these recurring cycles of thought is to create stories that help the ego believe that it has the identity it thinks it has.

The egocentric mind lives in the narratives created by the bak-chaks, and it is in this sense that the phenomena of the world and mind are one and the same. The problem with living inside these ego narratives is that they make you unhappy. They block a person’s ability to know and be their self, and they create existential ruts in a person’s life.

Buddhist and DzogChen mind science both take the theoretical position that each of these patterns of recurring thought is caused by a structural root, if you will, that is stored in the unconscious mind. In Tibetan mind science, these roots, or unconscious fixed ideas, are called subtle bak-chaks, and the thoughts, themselves, are called gross bak-chaks. 14

Lopon Tegchoke is saying here that there are two ways to abandon, or stop living in, a recurring pattern of ego thought, or gross bak-chaks. One way is to simply stop following, or believing, the stories they tell. This is actually a profound thing to do, but Lopon says here that this is only a temporary solution. The thoughts will return.

14. The notion of the unconscious mind is, of course, a Western idea, and the term does not appear, per se, in the Buddhist tradition. There are, however, phenomena that have been recognized by Buddhist mind science that appear, for all intents and purposes, to be unconscious phenomena. The subtle and gross bak-chaks are two of them.
The second approach is to dig a bak-chaks out by its roots. Lopon says that this is done by realizing the emptiness of the appearing thoughts. This causes both the dissolution of the subtle bak-chaks and the cessation of the thoughts themselves. Abandoning habitual patterns of ego thought is an essential aspect of the process of developing an egoless, or nondual, mind.15

**Predual Meanings: Gzhi-Nang**

**HMV:** I would like to go back, for a moment, to the idea that both dual mind and rigpa give meaning to experience. We’ve already established that meanings created by the dual mind can appear to the watcher as thoughts. When rigpa creates a meaning, when rigpa gives meaning to an experience of the external world, in what form does that meaning appear within the mind?

**LTC:** It is very much the same, but we can only express the clarity of rigpa with analogies. We cannot express it in words. It is like a mirror looking at space. And the space itself is emptiness. This is the way in which rigpa enters into clarity. That clarity is emptiness too. Then we can’t use words. When rigpa knows rigpa, it is just like the experience of space.

**HMV:** Is rigpa an awareness that is like space in the sense that it is an awareness that does not grasp, accept, reject or follow thoughts?

**LTC:** Oh yes. In the state of rigpa, when rigpa knows rigpa, you know and understand the attributes of rigpa.

**HMV:** What are the attributes of rigpa?

**LTC:** The attributes of rang-dang, or self-illumination.

**HMV:** What is rang-dang?

**LTC:** Rang-dang is an appearance that illuminates one’s self.

**HMV:** Thank you. When you see a moment of self-illumination as an inner appearance, does it actually look like light rays?

**LTC:** Yes.

**HMV:** Can the appearance of self-illumination create intention or meaning?

**LTC:** Yes. It can provide both meaning and intention.

**HMV:** Does self-illumination always appear as rays of light, or can it appear in some other way as well?

**LTC:** Only as rays.

**HMV:** Sometimes when a thought dissolves, I see light. Would that be self-illumination?

**LTC:** If it shines like rays, then it is rays.

**HMV:** Then it would be self-illumination.

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LTC: Yes.
HMV: Thank you. Once again, then, what does it mean to “know the attributes of self-illumination?”
LTC: It means understanding the exact meaning of the illumination in a moment. [Lopon claps his hands]
HMV: Does self-illumination give nondual meaning to experience? Are they nondual appearances that give meaning to a person’s experience in the same way that thoughts are dual appearances that give dual meaning to experience?
LTC: When self-illumination appears to rigpa, it is like a reflection appearing in a mirror. It is like this.
HMV: Are the images that appear in the mirror inner appearances, external appearances or both?
LTC: They are gzhi-nang, or predual appearances.
HMV: Ahh. And once again, does a predual appearance give meaning to a person’s experience?
LTC: Oh yes.
HMV: Thank you very much.

Annotation: Empirically, there are three different categories of meaning that appear within the mind. There are dual, predual and nondual meanings. The status of a given meaning is determined by the kind of awareness that the mind has of that meaning.

For example, a dual meaning is a meaning of which the mind has dual, or conceptual, awareness. A thought is an oft cited example of a dual meaning.

A nondual meaning is a meaning of which the mind has nondual awareness. It is a meaning that the mind knows exactly as it is. As we will be seeing, the primordial wisdom that knows the suchness of phenomena, or day-khona-nyid togpai yeshe, is an example of a nondual meaning.

In addition, there are also meanings that are neither dual nor nondual. In an interview that will be published as part of a second volume of interviews with Lopon Tegchoke, Lopon takes the position that a gzhi-nang is a primordial predual appearance. Here is an excerpt from that interview:

HMV: When we talked about meanings before, you said that there are both dual meanings and nondual meanings.
LTC: Yes.
HMV: Thoughts, for example, are dual meanings.
LTC: Ah yes.
HMV: As are the habitual patterns of ego thought.
LTC: Oh yes.
HMV: And emotions.
LTC: Yes.
HMV: You have also said that there are nondual meanings.
LTC: When you understand that a meaning is nondual, then it is nondual. But both are thoughts. When there is dual grasping, that thought will not dissolve. When you have nondual awareness of the thought, then it dissolves.
HMV: It sounds like you are saying that one given meaning can end up being either dual or nondual.
LTC: Yes.
HMV: And that whether or not a meaning is dual or nondual depends upon whether or not awareness grasps that meaning. If the watcher grasps the meaning it becomes a dual meaning.
LTC: Yes.
HMV: And if path rigpa\(^\text{16}\) has nondual awareness of that meaning, then it becomes a nondual meaning and dissolves.
LTC: Oh yes. [Laughter] It’s like muddy water. The mud disappears by itself.
HMV: Now where does that original meaning, the meaning that can either be grasped by the watcher or realized as nondual by path rigpa, come from? What kind of meaning is that original meaning?
LTC: In the first instant, there is a dual meaning, and it arises from there.
HMV: It sounded to me like you were saying something different a few moments ago. It seemed as though you were saying that the original meaning is not dual in the first place, but that it becomes dual because it is grasped by the watcher. If this is true, how can it be dual before it is grasped?
LTC: Before grasping a dual meaning, a nondual meaning will not be there.
HMV: OK. So at first, it is neither a dual nor nondual appearance, but there is a meaning.
LTC: Yes.
HMV: What is it then?
LTC: At that time, both dual and nondual are not there.
HMV: I understand, but there is an appearance.
LTC: Yes.
HMV: What type of appearance is it?
LTC: Dual, nondual; both are not there.

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16. A distinction is made, in DzogChen, between “path rigpa” and “fruition rigpa.” Path rigpa is temporary nondual awareness that comes and goes on the path, and fruition rigpa is permanent nondual awareness, or enlightened mind.
That’s true. I understand. [Laughter all around] If I might venture a guess, it looks to me like this appearance that is neither dual nor nondual is a gzhi-nang, or predual appearance.

Yes. [Laughter] You are truly in Longchenpa’s lineage.17

**Annotation:** Lopon is agreeing, here, with the notion that there are appearances, or meanings, within the mind that are neither dual nor nondual. He is saying here that DzogChen mind science has recognized the existence of these predual appearances, and that it refers to them as “gzhi-nang.” A predual appearance is neither dual—in that it has not yet been conceptually grasped by awareness, nor nondual—in that it has not yet dissolved into rigpa.

The Great Primordial Basis is the state which previously has neither become enlightened through realization of its self essence, nor strayed into mind by not realizing it.

—Pema Ledrel Tsal18

A predual appearance is primordial in the sense that it is the first meaning that the mind attributes to a given experience, and for that reason the term gzhi-nang will be rendered in two different ways in this book: as both “predual appearance” and “primordial meaning.” The import of realizing that there are predual appearances, and of recognizing them as they arise, is that it reinforces the notion of leaving the mind in its natural state. If you leave a gzhi-nang, or for that matter any meaning, in its natural state, it will be spontaneously transformed into nondual mind.

**Inner Appearances**19

I’d like to make a list, now, of the different types of inner appearances. May I give you a list of phenomena that I think are inner appearances and see if you agree?

OK.

17. Lopon is saying here that this is a correct understanding of Longchenpa’s definitive writings on the nature of the gzhi-nang. Longchenpa was a fourteenth-century practitioner and scholar of DzogChen and is regarded by all as a seminal figure in the history of DzogChen. He wrote at length about the pivotal nature of the predual appearance, or gzhi-nang. See, for example, pp. 293–294 of Tulku Thondup Rinpoche’s book *Buddha Mind* (Tulku Thondup, 1989).

18. Ibid., p. 58.

19. Once again, the term inner appearance is being used throughout this volume to refer to all of the different types of phenomena—dual, nondual and predual—that appear within the stream of consciousness. Some terms, for example the word emotion, refer to only dual appearances. Other terms refer to only nondual appearances. But the term inner appearances, which is a translation of the Tibetan term nang gyi nangwa, is used here to refer to both dual and nondual appearances, and to predual appearances as well.
HMV: Is a thought an inner appearance?
LTC: Yes.
HMV: Thank you. Is a thought a dual inner appearance?
LTC: Yes.
HMV: Does that mean that the content of a thought is an illusion?
LTC: Oh yes.
HMV: Thank you. Is an emotion a dual inner appearance?
LTC: Yes.
HMV: Once again, does that mean that the content of an emotion is an illusion?
LTC: Oh yes, and the emotions are spread by thoughts.
HMV: What does it mean to say that emotions are spread by thoughts?
LTC: When you grasp a predual appearance as an “other”—as something that is separate from you, you create a duality—the duality of self and other. Now the act of grasping is actually a thought. The thought appears, it creates a self, and once a self has been created, you become attached to that self. That attachment is desire. Then anger towards the “other” begins.

Annotation: In this last passage, Lopon Tegchoke is presenting the very heart of the DzogChen theory of the gzhi-nang, or predual appearance. This theory says, in essence, that two very different possible fates await each and every predual appearance that appears within the mind. Awareness can and does respond to a predual appearance in two different ways, and the type of response that it makes will determine an appearance’s fate. If awareness responds to a predual appearance by attributing a concept of self to it, that appearance will become dual mind. If, on the other hand, awareness does not attribute a concept of self to a predual appearance, that appearance will become nondual primordial wisdom. Once again, the message is clear. Leave your mind in its natural state.

HMV: And that, in turn, creates the emotions.
LTC: Yes. Now the defining attribute of the emotions is that they make you unhappy. They create problems. In the end, thoughts and emotions will both give rise to suffering and problems. If you think too much, you will get tired. If you refrain from thinking too much, you will be happy and contented.
HMV: In the West we think of thoughts and emotions as being two different things. We think of them as being different in the sense that they have
very different ways of appearing in the mind. We see a thought, as we have already discussed, as being an appearance of either words or images in the mind.

LTC: Yes.

HMV: And we think of an emotion as being a feeling that you feel in both your body and your mind.

LTC: Yes. It's the same for us.

HMV: It is also true that thoughts and emotions often appear in tandem. For example, in a recurring pattern of ego thoughts, thoughts and emotions appear in tandem, and they appear over and over again.

LTC: Oh yes.

HMV: These thoughts and emotions are the bricks and mortar of which a recurring pattern of ego thought is made.

LTC: Oh yes. [Shared laughter]

HMV: Now would it be correct to say that a recurring pattern of ego thought, or gross bag-chags, is a dual inner appearance?

LTC: Yes.

HMV: Does that mean that the content of a recurring pattern of ego thought is also an illusion?

LTC: Oh yes. The habitual patterns of ego thought are like the mantra used by a magician to do a magical trick.

HMV: They do cast a spell over you. My understanding, Lopon, is that there are two aspects to a recurring pattern of ego thinking. There is a subtle pattern and a gross pattern.

LTC: True. The root of all thoughts is a subtle pattern.

HMV: What would you call the recurring thoughts that run over and over again?

LTC: You can call them either a coarse recurring pattern of ego thoughts or a stream of thoughts.

HMV: Thank you. Is a coarse habitual pattern of ego thoughts a dual inner appearance?

LTC: Yes. I'd like to give you an example of a habitual pattern.

HMV: Of a subtle pattern or a gross pattern?

LTC: Both. If a scent, let's say saffron, were to be poured inside this cup, there would be a duality. Once the scent has been poured into the cup, it will remain attached to the cup. That's a recurring pattern of ego thinking.

HMV: Is the scent a subtle pattern? Or is it a gross pattern?

LTC: It is both; because the scent will keep coming and coming.

HMV: If you realize the emptiness of that scent, will the scent disappear?

LTC: If you realize the emptiness of the scent, the scent will still be there.

HMV: Thank you. Now I'd like to ask you about one more type of inner appearance—the momentary experiences of egoless mind, or nyams.
Is a momentary experience of the egoless mind a dual or nondual inner appearance?²⁰

**LTC:** Both.

**HMV:** Very interesting. How can it be both?

**LTC:** The momentary experiences of egoless mind can arise either with or without an understanding of the dharma.

**HMV:** Are you saying that the three classic nyams of DzogChen—the momentary experiences of clarity, joy and the cessation of thoughts—can be either dual or nondual?²¹

**LTC:** Yes. If one does not understand the dharma, then they are dual. If one truly understands the dharma, the true nature, then the experiences of egoless mind can be nondual. If you truly understand the dharma, at the moment that you first experience egoless mind, you understand that it is just an appearance; that it has no true existence at all. Then there is no possibility of subject and object.

**HMV:** On the other hand, if you see an egoless experience as being real, it becomes dual.

**LTC:** Yes.

**HMV:** Is seeing an egoless experience as real the same thing as attributing a concept of self to that experience?

**LTC:** Yes. On the other hand, if you see an egoless experience as being a delusion, then you will have nondual awareness of that experience.²²

**HMV:** If you see an egoless experience as a delusion, is that the same thing as not attributing a concept of self to that experience?

**LTC:** If one fully understands that an egoless experience is like an illusion, then it is assured that the experience has no concept of self.

**HMV:** Let’s take an example. Suppose I’m in the midst of a joyous experience of the egoless mind, and that in the midst of that joy, I begin to think, “Oh what a good practitioner I am. This is an advanced experience.” Would that be an example of thinking that a nyams is real?

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²⁰The Tibetan term “nyams” is another technical term in DzogChen mind science. Empirically, a nyams is a momentary experience of the egoless mind, and there are three different types of nyams. They will be discussed at length in the passages and annotation that follow. Please also see Khenpo Nyima Wangyal’s somewhat different approach to understanding the nyams in Volume I of The Healthy Mind Interviews.

²¹In DzogChen, it is classically said that there are three types of nyams: there is a nyams in which there is a cessation of thoughts, a nyams that is an experience of joy and a nyams that is an experience of clarity. These terms are empirical terms in the sense that they actually describe the three different momentary experiences of the egoless mind.

²²This is an example of the paradoxical quality of delusion. The basic idea of the paradox is this: if you see an appearance as real, it becomes a delusion, but if you see an appearance as a delusion, it becomes real. This paradox comes up over and over again in Lopon Tegchoke’s thought, and he will be discussing it at length in the second Healthy Mind Series volume of his interviews.
LTC: Yes.

If there is a good and bad, it is nyams and not realization.
—Longchenpa

HMV: At that moment, am I having dual awareness of that egoless experience?
LTC: Yes; and then the joy will go away. If you grasp an experience of egoless mind, the experience will be lost.
HMV: And that, in turn, would also create a habitual pattern of ego thoughts, or bak-chaks, would it not?
LTC: Yes. Yes. [Emphatic]
HMV: Suppose I have an egoless experience of joy, and I don’t grasp it; I don’t think, “Oh this means I’m great.” Would the joy dissolve?
LTC: It will not dissolve. It will actually flourish.
HMV: What do you mean by flourish? Do you mean that the sense of joy will grow and become more stable?
LTC: Yes. The three egoless experiences are an important part of the path. If you don’t experience them, then you won’t reach full fruition.
HMV: What is the difference between a nondual nyams and a realization?
LTC: There is no difference. (Shared laughter)
HMV: Thank you very much.

Annotation: When I took up this line of questioning with Lopon Tegechoke, I was entirely expecting him to say that every nyams is a moment of nondual experience. However, it turns out that Lopon brings additional distinctions to his use of the term.

Nyams is a technical term in DzogChen mind science, and it is usually translated into English as “experience.” The term “experience” does not quite rise, however, to the task of expressing the significance of a nyams. For one, the three nyams are temporary experiences of the egoless mind, and as such they are thought of as being advanced meditative experiences. In keeping with this point of view, Lopon Tegechoke says that having these experiences is actually essential to the development of an egoless mind.

However, in addition to being seen as an element of progress, the momentary experiences of the egoless mind are also seen as being a potential snare. Precisely because the nyams are positive experiences, meditators

24. Paradoxically enough, even though a nyams is a sign of progress in meditation, it is also true that a nyams can be experienced outside of meditation and even by people who do not meditate.
are apt to hold on to them and turn them into a form of ego. It is this
danger that leads Lopon Tegchoke to make the distinction between dual
and nondual experiences of the egoless mind.

A dual nyams is an experience of egoless mind that is turned into ego
when it is seen as an accomplishment. A nondual nyams is an egoless
experience that remains egoless because it is seen as a delusion and left
in its nondual, or natural, state. As Lopon says above, a nondual nyams
is the same thing as a realization.

**Definition of Nondual Appearances**

**HMV:** Given that it is possible to have nondual awareness of an inner appearance,

is it also possible to have nondual awareness of an outer appearance?

**LTC:** When you say nondual, what do you mean?

**HMV:** Well, let’s talk about that.

**LTC:** OK.

**HMV:** What I talk about nondual appearances, what interests me most, are the

nondual inner appearances. And for me, Lopon, a nondual appearance is,

for one, an appearance that has not been grasped. It is an appearance that

has not been accepted, rejected or followed.

**LTC:** OK.

**HMV:** Two, it is an appearance that has dissolved.

**LTC:** Oh yes.

**HMV:** And three, as a result of its dissolution, you either have a moment of egoless

experience or a moment of primordial wisdom. This is what I mean by

nondual awareness of an inner appearance.

**LTC:** Yes. That’s acceptable.

**HMV:** Thank you. That’s very helpful. But I find it difficult to apply these same

criteria of nonduality to an outer appearance. The flowers sitting right

here on your table will not dissolve.

**LTC:** Hm.

**HMV:** So in a sense I am asking if it is actually possible to have nondual awareness

of an outer appearance.

**LTC:** It has to come.

**HMV:** How does it come?

**LTC:** There are two ways of thinking about this. First of all, in nondual aware-

ness, an outer appearance will have no attributes, or characteristics. When

that attribute is not there, that flower will not arise in your mind.

**HMV:** Do you mean that the concept of flower will not arise in my mind? Or that

the outer appearance of the flower will not arise?

**LTC:** The concept of flower will not arise. The appearance will be there.

**HMV:** Is that non-conceptual awareness of the flower the same thing as having

nondual awareness of the flower?
When you say nondual, it means that there is a flower, but there is no holding on to it as a flower.

In other words, no grasping.

Yes.

Rigpa and Yeshe

I’d like to turn now to yeshe, or timeless awareness. Is timeless awareness a nondual inner appearance?

Yes.

Thank you. Is timeless awareness the same thing as an empty appearance, or chos-nyid?

Timeless awareness is the awareness that actually knows the empty appearances; the nature. When timeless awareness realizes the emptiness of an appearance, then it dissolves into and becomes rigpa.

What is the difference, then, between rigpa and timeless awareness?

There are two kinds of yeshe, or timeless awareness. There is one kind of yeshe that is primordially there. It is always present. Then there is another kind of yeshe that appears when you see an object without any delusion. That is also yeshe.

What is the term for the primordial yeshe?

The primordial yeshe is called rangjung yeshe, or naturally occurring timeless awareness. In DzogChen, naturally occurring timeless awareness is the same as primordial rigpa.

Ahh. And then what is the Tibetan term for the yeshe that knows an object the way it is?

Day-khona-nyid togpai yeshe, or suchness yeshe. Suchness yeshe is the wisdom that knows a phenomenon as it is.

Annotation: A literal translation of “day-khona-nyid togpai yeshe” would be “the primordial wisdom that knows the suchness of phenomena.” It is a moment of nondual awareness that knows the suchness of one specific

25. “Yeshe,” or timeless awareness, is one of many Tibetan synonyms for enlightened mind. Yeshe is most often translated into English as “primordial wisdom.” Richard Barron renders yeshe as “timeless awareness,” and I will be following this usage as I find it empirical. Please keep in mind, however, that there are several different kinds of yeshe, and that each of them has a different name.

26. A “chosnyid” is an empty appearance, and it is, as such, a nondual appearance; an appearance onto which egocentric concepts have not been projected. As an inner appearance, it is also a species of nondual meaning. Lopon Tegchoka will be discussing chos-nyid at more length in his second volume of interviews.

27. To know the suchness of a phenomenon is to know that phenomenon as it is; to know it without projecting any constructs onto it. Nondual awareness knows the suchness, or emptiness, of a phenomenon. Dual awareness does not.
phenomenon. To know the suchness of a phenomenon is to know that phenomenon as it is; to know it without projecting any dual constructs onto it.

In this volume, “day-khona-nyid togpai yeshe” will be translated into English as the less cumbersome “primordial wisdom.” It is wisdom in the sense that it is a cognition that has timeless and truthful content. It is primordial in the sense that it is knowledge that has always been, and will always be, present within you. It is knowledge, as we will be seeing, that is part of the mandala that is the ground of a human being’s existence and mind.

HMV: Thank you. Does this mean that primordial wisdom knows the emptiness of a phenomenon?

LTC: Oh yes. Knowing suchness is the same as knowing the emptiness of a phenomenon.

HMV: Before a moment of primordial wisdom realizes the emptiness of a phenomenon, what kind of phenomenon was it?

LTC: It would be a deluded mind.

HMV: Could that be, for example, a thought or an emotion?

LTC: Yes. Those are deluded minds.

HMV: What type of awareness actually knows the thought and allows it to transform itself into an empty appearance?

LTC: The awareness that recognizes that a thought is a thought, is egoless, or nondual, awareness.

HMV: Thank you.

LTC: But remember that this is ordinary rigpa. It’s the rigpa that you experience on the path.

HMV: Does this ordinary rigpa have nondual awareness of the thought?

LTC: Yes.

HMV: And as a result, does a moment of primordial wisdom appear?

LTC: Yes. That’s true.

28. Occasionally, depending upon context, “day-khona-nyid togpai yeshe” will also appear as “togpai yeshe”—which is the term that Lopon Tegchoke actually used whenever we discussed this phenomenon. More often than not, however, it will be translated into English as “primordial wisdom.”

29. The next two lines of this passage were deleted as they contain a plethora of technical terms, but for those of you who know these terms, the remainder of this passage has been included here:

HMV: Would that be shesrab that is recognizing the thought? Or would it be rigpa?

LTC: They’re the same. They are two different names that mean the same thing. Togpai yeshe. Dag-may-gyi sans. Shesrab. Rigpa.
HMV: Now finally, when rigpa recognizes a primordial meaning, or gzhi-nang, as a self-appearance, and as a result yeshe appears, is that yeshe the same type of yeshe as togpai yeshe?

LTC: Yes.

HMV: Thank you.30

There is naturally occurring timeless awareness that . . . is in essence naturally abiding and spontaneously present, and that does not take sense objects as its reference point.

There is timeless awareness that is dynamic energy functioning as cognition, which arises in the immediacy of sense objects and takes those objects as its reference point.

—Longchenpa31

Nondual Meanings: Primordial Wisdom

HMV: There are times when countless thoughts are running through my mind. At other times, there are long interludes in which there are but a few thoughts coming and going. During these periods of relative quiet, I become increasingly aware of the appearance of single thoughts in my mind that appear and then instantly dissolve and disappear just like that. [I snap my fingers]

LTC: At that time, you are on the path.

HMV: It has been my experience, that four different kinds of transformation can and consistently do occur immediately after a single thought dissolves like that. Sometimes, for example, a feeling of joy will arise after the thought dissolves. Sometimes the feeling of compassion will appear. Sometimes there will be a temporary cessation of all inner appearances; a single thought will dissolve and then nothing new will arise for a period of time.

LTC: Yes.

30. Another line was left out here as well. For those of you who are familiar with the technical language of DzogChen, the next thing Lopon said was this:

“When thugje is aware of rang-zhin, this is the same thing.”

By way of explanation, thugje and rang-zhin are the names of two of the three defining aspects of gzhi. Gzhi is an idea that is unique in Buddhism to DzogChen, and it is usually translated into English as “ground” or “basis.” In Janet Gyatso’s words, gzhi “is a ground that underlies and unites all phenomena.” But the term has many other shades of meaning, as well. Gyatso goes on to say, for example, that “the ground is aware.” “It is a naked ‘consciousness of the present.’” It is “self aware” (Gyatso, 2002, p. 200).

HMV: The fourth thing that can and does happen after a single thought dissolves, is that a large insight of one kind or another will immediately arise in my mind. It might be an understanding of the nature of mind, or perhaps an understanding of rigpa. It could be any number of things.

LTC: That insight is primordial wisdom, or togpai yeshe. It is enlightened mind.

HMV: Do you mean that it would be enlightened mind if those insights were present all of the time, as opposed to coming and going for moments at a time?

LTC: Yes. The enlightened mind is a permanent chain of nondual moments. If you are in dharmakaya, there are no thoughts. It is like the permanent nature of the sky. There is a permanent stream of nondual moments.

HMV: Would that be the same thing as saying that enlightenment is a permanent stream of nondual moments of primordial wisdom?

LTC: Yes.

HMV: Thank you. That’s very helpful. Given that these temporary moments of insight are not enlightened mind, what would you call them? Are they simply moments of primordial wisdom?

LTC: Yes. Initially, primordial wisdom lasts for a very short while. Gradually, as you go on practicing, the primordial wisdom, the gap, increases. At the same time, the deluded minds will decrease. When you reach Buddhahood, then the deluded appearances will cease altogether.

HMV: Then only the kayas and timeless awareness will appear.

LTC: Yes. [Emphatic] When the recurring patterns of ego thought are no longer being created, then the delusions of the samsaric mind will, over time, gradually subside. And then the primordial wisdom will increase.

Annotation: Lopon has already said that the mind creates predual meanings, or gzhi-nangs. Here he goes on to say that: (1) the mind also creates nondual meanings and (2) that the phenomenon of primordial wisdom, which was briefly touched upon earlier, is one specific type of nondual meaning. He describes the experience of primordial wisdom as being an experience in which a moment of insight arises immediately after the spontaneous dissolution of a single thought.

32. Lopon is using the Sanskrit term “dharmakaya” empirically, here, to refer to a specific state of mind. Empirically, the dharmakaya is one of the three aspects of nondual egoless awareness. Doctrinally, the dharmakaya is one of the three bodies, or personalities, of the Buddha.

33. As the term is being used here, the kayas are three different aspects of rigpa, or nondual awareness.

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Lopon then goes on to say three very interesting and empirical things about the completely egoless, or enlightened, mind. One, the egoless mind is a permanent stream of nondual moments of primordial wisdom. Two, dual meanings cease to appear in the egoless mind. Three, only the kayas and primordial wisdoms appear in the fully realized egoless mind.

**HMV:** Would it be correct to say, Lopon, when a person is in the process of developing an egoless mind, that thoughts and emotions continue to appear in between the moments of primordial wisdom?

**LTC:** Yes.

**HMV:** Is it also true that once primordial wisdom becomes permanent, that thoughts and emotions no longer appear in the mind?

**LTC:** Yes. That’s correct. You have thought it out very well.

**HMV:** One more question in this vein. When a person is experiencing moments of primordial wisdom, what is it that holds them back from having a permanent stream of nondual primordial wisdom?

**LTC:** That is prevented by the delusions created by the recurring patterns of ego thought. The power of these recurring patterns is very strong, and they prevent you from staying in a longer stream of primordial wisdom.

**HMV:** Are you saying that by following your habitual patterns of ego thought you keep your self from remaining in a permanent stream of nondual yeshe?

**LTC:** Yes.

**HMV:** Thank you very much. Finally, for now, does primordial wisdom always appear as a large insight? Or can it appear in some other way as well?

**LTC:** Primordial wisdom is always an insight like that. While you are on the path, primordial wisdom has to be continuously appearing. They are essential.

**HMV:** Why?

**LTC:** To attain enlightenment. That is the path.

**HMV:** Is it true, then, that one progresses along the path to enlightenment by having increasingly frequent moments of primordial wisdom?

**LTC:** Yes.

**HMV:** How does the realization of these moments of primordial wisdom by path rigpa help a person realize fruition rigpa?

**LTC:** On the path, you have yet to see the essence of nondual awareness, or rigpa, face to face. You still believe you have a self. The sole

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34. “Following” is one of the three elemental forms of grasping. To “follow” a recurring stream of ego thoughts is to believe the content of those thoughts; to live in the content of the story that those thoughts are creating.

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responsibility of primordial wisdom is to destroy that ignorance of having a self-conception.  

HMV: Ahh.

LTC: Rigpa and primordial wisdom clean off the dirt of self-conception.

HMV: How does primordial wisdom cleanse the mind of the ignorance of self-conception?

LTC: Primordial wisdom is actually rigpa. When rigpa appears, ignorance decreases; it gradually dissolves and disappears.

HMV: Let’s try an example. I think of myself as having many different identities, or self-concepts, to which I am attached. For example, I see myself as a doctor. I see myself as a mountaineer. I see myself as a person that has a big heart. And so forth. Now when you say that the ignorance of self-conception decreases with the realization of primordial wisdom, are you saying that in a moment of primordial wisdom that a person abandons one of their identities?

LTC: Oh yes. [Emphatic]

HMV: So let’s say, for the sake of discussion, that I carry around a hundred different identities. Are you saying that as a result of having an experience of primordial wisdom, that I will let one of those identities go; that in my heart, I will really let one of my identities go.

LTC: Oh yes.

HMV: And then there are ninety-nine more to go.

LTC: Oh yes. It’s like this. When you go into the mountains, when you are at the base camp, at that time you are a doctor. Now when you climb the first step, you abandon the doctor at the base. When you climb another step, you get farther away from being that doctor. As you go higher and higher up the mountain, the doctor you abandoned at the base camp is left farther and farther behind. As primordial wisdom increases, your conceptions of self are left behind.

HMV: Thank you very much.

The Five Primordial Wisdoms

Primordial wisdom is the complete knowledge of every aspect of phenomena (both ultimate and relative).

In fact, when the ultimate truth is apprehended in one taste with the relative, and when at the same time dual appearance subsides, no division can be made between the ultimate and the relative; they are of one taste.

—Mipham The Word of Chandra

35. “Ignorance of having a self-conception” is a non-literal translation of the Tibetan term “marigpa.” Marigpa is usually translated as simply “ignorance.”

HMV: Is the primordial wisdom of togpai yeshe the same wisdom that appears as the five wisdoms?  

LTC: Yes. If you analyze it, primordial wisdom is the same thing as the five wisdoms.

HMV: Does that mean that there are five different kinds of insight?

LTC: Primordial wisdom is the same thing as egoless mind; it is a moment of egoless insight.

HMV: What is the difference between the five different wisdoms?

LTC: I’ll describe them. When you attain egoless suchness, your stream of thoughts ceases to appear. That is called the wisdom of total openness.

HMV: So this first type of primordial wisdom, the wisdom of total openness, is experienced as the cessation of thoughts.

LTC: Yes. Thoughts are like wearing a shirt. When you take off the thoughts, you are leaving behind a naked appearance.

HMV: Like KuntuZangpo.

LTC: Yes. The second type of primordial wisdom is mirror like wisdom. When an object appears within your mind, and there is no grasping, that is mirror like wisdom. The appearance is there, but awareness does not grasp it. There is no grasping.

HMV: So there definitely are inner appearances in the nondual mind.

LTC: Oh yes. When you know the egoless suchness of those appearances, there is no difference between them. There is no duality between heaven and hell. There is no difference between purity and impurity. This realization of the sameness of all phenomena is the third kind of primordial wisdom. It is called equanimity wisdom.

HMV: What does it mean to say that all appearances are the same?

LTC: All the appearances are the same in the sense that they do not make any difference.

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37. Traditionally, it is said that there are five different primordial wisdoms. These five primordial wisdoms are thought of as being five distinct attributes of the Buddha’s mind; five different characteristics of the egoless mind. Here, I am asking Lopon if these five yeshe are the same as the insights of togpai yeshe, the primordial wisdom of which we have been talking.

38. “Wisdom of total openness” is a non-literal translation of “chö ying yeshe.”

39. There are many different Buddhas in the Buddhist tradition. Kuntu Zangpo is the primordial Buddha of the DzogChen tradition, and as such, he is the source of the DzogChen teachings. As a blue and naked Buddha, Kuntu Zangpo is a symbol of naked egoless awareness. He is a symbol of the DzogChen belief that the enlightened, or egoless, mind is the source of its teachings.
Within the scope of awareness—awakened mind—everything is equal in being unborn, unceasing, and not abiding in any finite way.
—Longchenpa

HMV: Thank you.
LTC: The fourth primordial wisdom is seeing a material object just as it is. Whatever material object appears—cup, tape recorder, laptop—if you see it just as it is, that is called discriminating wisdom.
HMV: And the fifth wisdom?
LTC: The fifth primordial wisdom is, like all of the other wisdoms, an egoless mind that realizes suchness. It is the wisdom that is able to accomplish the dharma-kaya for yourself and to accomplish the desires of other beings as well.
HMV: What do you mean when you say that it can “accomplish the desires of other beings?”
LTC: It gives you the ability to liberate all beings and lead them to Buddhahood.
HMV: Are you saying that the fifth primordial wisdom enables a person to help others reach realization.
LTC: Yes. That is why it’s called all accomplishing wisdom.
HMV: Thank you.

Nondual Wisdom Creates Meaning and Intention

HMV: Does primordial wisdom give meaning to events in the external world?
LTC: Yes, it does give meaning.
HMV: Does primordial wisdom tell you how you really see things; how you really feel about things?
LTC: Yes. The second one is called mirror like wisdom.
HMV: OK.
LTC: And the first one is called discriminating wisdom. That tells you what you see without grasping it.
HMV: Can primordial wisdom create intention? Can it tell you what you want to do in response to things that happen in the world?
LTC: Yes. It will create intention. That is called all accomplishing wisdom. That is what gives intention.
HMV: In his text “A Treasure Trove of Scriptural Transmission,” Longchenpa says that yeshe is the same as “gongpa,” which Richard Barron translates into English as “enlightened intention.”
LTC: Yes. They are different names for the same thing.

41. Ibid.
HMV: Ahh. Is gongpa an intention in the sense that an intention moves a person to do something?
LTC: Yes. Yes. It is intention.
HMV: Thank you. It seems to me that we can now say that there are two fundamental kinds of meanings that appear in the mind. There are egocentric, or dual, meanings, and there are egoless, or nondual, meanings.²²
LTC: Yes.
HMV: The egocentric meanings are thoughts, emotions and the recurring patterns of ego thought.
LTC: Yes. Yes.
HMV: And at this point, we have established that there is at least one type of egoless meaning: primordial wisdom.
LTC: Oh yes.
HMV: Would it be correct to say that the insights that arise as primordial wisdom are nondual meanings?
LTC: Yes.
HMV: Thank you very much.

The Functions of Rigpa

HMV: A few moments ago, you said that primordial wisdom appears when rigpa recognizes a predual appearance, or gzhi-nang, as a self-appearance.
LTC: A predual appearance has two aspects.⁴³ One is awareness and the other is the appearance, itself. When the awareness grasps the appearance as an “other,” duality is created. Then the thoughts come. When the awareness recognizes the appearance as a self-appearance, then there is no duality. Then the appearance dissolves.
HMV: Ah, then there is self-liberation.
LTC: Yes.

Annotation: Buddhism has, over the course of its history, developed four different elemental techniques for transforming egocentric mind into egoless mind. Each of the fundamental vehicles of Buddhism—Hinayana, Mahayana, Vajrayana and DzogChen—centers its practice around a characteristic transformative technique that defines that vehicle.⁴⁴

²². Predual meanings were not mentioned in this passage because this particular conversation took place before Lopon and I had managed to have a talk that established the existence of the predual meanings.
³³. A predual appearance, or gzhi-nang, is usually said to have three aspects. When I brought this to Lopon’s attention, he said that he sees a gzhi-nang as having just these two aspects.
⁴⁴. Even though it is true that each vehicle is defined by a core meditative technique, it is not at all unusual for practitioners in one vehicle to use techniques from other vehicles as well. See, for example, Jigme Lingpa’s description of the daily routine he followed in his first three year
The defining transformative technique of DzogChen is self-liberation. From the perspective of DzogChen, the techniques of the first three vehicles define an egoless state of mind, and then use meditation to attempt to cultivate that state of mind.

DzogChen meditations, in contrast, do not attempt to cultivate a predefined state of egoless mind. They operate on the premise that if you leave the mind in its natural state, it will spontaneously transform itself into egoless mind—like a snake spontaneously slipping out of its own knots. This is self-liberation.

Not fettered by any fruition, the natural mind is free.
—Longchenpa⁴⁵

Self liberation is the spontaneous and effortless transformation of the egocentric mind into egoless mind. It is not something that you can make happen through effort. Self-liberation will only occur of its own volition when awareness is truly like a space that allows the mind to remain in its natural state.

HMV: And then it becomes primordial wisdom.

LTC: Oh yes, and then there is one more step. The primordial wisdom dissolves within itself, and then primordial rigpa, or rangjung yeshe, appears. The primordial wisdom dissolves into rigpa and rigpa appears.

HMV: Given that thoughts dissolve into primordial wisdom when rigpa is aware of them, and that the resulting primordial wisdom dissolves, in turn, into rigpa . . .

LTC: That is all correct.

HMV: Would it also be correct to say that the function of rigpa is to transform the thoughts and emotions of dual mind into the nondual mind they have always been?

LTC: Yes. If primordial wisdom is not born, then emotions and thoughts will be born. In the minute in which primordial wisdom is born, then enlightenment comes. That is the function of rigpa.

HMV: Thank you. It seems, then, that you are saying that rigpa actually has two functions. One of its functions is to allow thoughts and emotions to self-liberate and become nondual mind—primordial wisdom and rigpa.

LTC: Oh yes.

HMV: Is this the main function of rigpa?

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LTC: Yes. That is its main function.

HMV: Would it be correct to say that rigpa has a second function: the prevention of the formation of ego? It seems to me that by allowing thoughts and emotions to become primordial wisdom, rigpa performs a second function: it prevents the formation of ego.

LTC: Oh yes. It is like the sky. No matter how much you say that there is some substance in a space, in actual fact it does not exist.

HMV: So rigpa is an awareness that is like space, and when thoughts and emotions appear in the space that is rigpa, they dissolve into the nondual mind that they have always been.

LTC: Yes, that is true. Whatever appears to rigpa, rigpa is aware of it as a self-appearance.

HMV: There seems to be one important difference, though, between recognizing a flower as a self-appearance and recognizing a thought as a self-appearance. The difference being that when I see a thought as a self-appearance it dissolves. But when I see a flower as a self-appearance, it doesn’t dissolve.

LTC: Yes.

The Experience of the Kayas

Annotation: The kaya doctrine is a key doctrine in the history of Buddhist ideas. In its essence, the kaya doctrine says that a Buddha has more than one aspect, and each of those aspects is called, in Sanskrit, a kaya. In English translation, this is usually taken to mean that a Buddha has more than one body, or personality.

There have been, in the history of Buddhist thought, many different formulations of the kaya doctrine. Different schools of Buddhist thought defined and numbered the kayas in different ways. Originally there were two kayas, then there were three kayas and there is also a doctrine of five kayas.

In the coming chapter, Lopon Tegchoke, like the DzogChen tradition itself, defines the kayas empirically. He defines them as being the three different aspects of rigpa, or egoless awareness.

HMV: I’d like to return, now, to the other transformations that occur with the dissolution of single thought.

LTC: OK.

HMV: My experience, once again, is that in addition to the appearance of primordial wisdom, there are three other transformations that can and do occur after the dissolution on a single thought. Cessation is one of them, and it is the transformation in which thoughts cease to appear for a while. A single thought will dissolve, and then there will be, for a period of time, a cessation of all inner appearances.
LTC: When thoughts cease to appear, that is either the dharmakaya or kungzhi.46

HMV: How do you differentiate between these two different states of mind?

LTC: It depends on whether or not primordial wisdom arises. If primordial wisdom appears, then it is dharmakaya. If there is no primordial wisdom, if there is simply nothing after the thought dissolves, then it is kungzhi.

HMV: Thank you. Now in your experience, can bliss or joy also arise after the dissolving of a single thought?

LTC: When all of the thoughts dissolve, then compassion comes. The bliss comes in the same way. If the bliss is permanent, it is the sambhogakaya.47 But when it comes and goes, it is a momentary experience of the egoless mind, or nyams.

HMV: Would the same be true for that state of mind in which there is a cessation of thoughts? If the state of no thoughts is permanent, then it is the dharmakaya, but if it is not, then it is a momentary experience of egolessness.

LTC: Oh yes. [Emphatic]

HMV: Finally, if we have already talked about insight, bliss and the cessation of thoughts, when compassion arises after the dissolution of a single thought, is that the nirmanakaya?48

LTC: Yes, at the time of full fruition, but while you are on the path, this is, once again, a temporary experience of egolessness.

HMV: When the compassion is a momentary egoless experience, which type of egoless experience is that?

LTC: Clarity nyams.

HMV: Thank you. As I listen to you describe the experiences that are the three kayas, it seems to me that they are actually three different aspects of rigpa.

LTC: Yes.

HMV: Would it be correct to say that each of the three kayas is one specific aspect, or quality, of nondual awareness, as opposed to being a type of appearance?

LTC: Yes.

HMV: Thank you. Now I’d like to ask you about one more kind of experience. Sometimes, my thoughts slow down and almost cease to be a presence in my mind for extended periods of time, and when that happens, a feeling of joy arises within me that can remain present for a good long time.

46. Once again, the term “kungzhi” is used in two different ways. It can be used to refer to either a structure in the mind, or to a specific state of mind. Here, Lopon is using the term to refer to a state of mind. He says that the dharmakaya and kungzhi are two different states of mind in which thoughts have ceased to appear. It is important to be able to distinguish between them, and in the passage that follows, Lopon describes how that can be done.

47. “Sambhogakaya” is the Sanskrit term for one of the three kayas, or bodies, of the Buddha. If I were translating it into English, I would render it as “the bliss of the Buddha’s Mind.”

48. “Nirmanakaya” is the Sanskrit term for another one of the three kayas, or bodies, of the Buddha. If I were translating it into English, I would do so as “the compassion of the Buddha’s Mind.”
LTC: Yes. That can happen.

HMV: The experience I have is that the joy actually becomes me.

LTC: Yes.

HMV: It becomes me in the sense that it becomes the awareness that knows my world.

LTC: Hm. That is clarity nyams.

HMV: Thank you. When it seems like that joy is my awareness, is it really my awareness?

LTC: In the context of relative truth, it is yours. But in the context of absolute truth, it is not. In the terms of absolute truth it is nothing. (Laughter)

Mandala

Rigpa’s manifestations are the actuality, or appearances, of the mandala.

—Longchenpa

Abandoning and Not Abandoning Thoughts

Those who meditate on voidness are casting stones in the dark.

—Patrul Rinpoche

LTC: There are two different types of thoughts. There are negative thoughts and there are perfect thoughts. Perfect thoughts lead you to enlightenment.49

HMV: By perfect thought, do you mean a nondual thought?

LTC: Yes.

HMV: Is a perfect thought the same thing as primordial wisdom, or togpai yeshe?

LTC: Yes. They are the same.

HMV: Would it be correct to say that a negative thought is a dual thought?

LTC: Yes. Given that there are these two types of thought, when thoughts appear, it is very important to understand what kind of thought it is. You have to decide whether that thought is a negative thought or a perfect thought. Given that some thoughts are perfect, you don’t abandon all of your thoughts. You hold on to the perfect thoughts. However, when negative thoughts appear, you have to abandon everything.

HMV: You totally abandon the habitual patterns of ego thought.

LTC: Yes. Yes. [Emphatic] When the recurring thoughts of ego are abandoned, then the delusions of the samsaric mind will gradually subside. And then primordial wisdom will increase.

49. Throughout this entire passage, Lopon will be using the term rnam-tog, or thought, to refer to both dual and nondual inner appearances. Usually, the term rnam-tog is used to refer to just dual inner appearances.
HMV: And at the same time, it sounds like you are saying that one should actually hold on to the perfect thoughts, the primordial wisdom.

LTC: Oh yes. That is very important. The ultimate, in DzogChen, is to abandon all thoughts—negative and perfect. Abandoning all of your thoughts is the ultimate goal. It is the ultimate intention of the Buddha. As a result, some people think that the thoughtless state is the ultimate state. These people look sane, but if you look carefully, they are not sane.

Alas! The animal like contemplators stop the perceptions and remain without any thoughts. They call this the absolute nature and become proud. By gaining experience in that state of concentration they will be born in the animal realm.

—Longchenpa

When we stay without thoughts, it’s like living with your eyes closed. On the path, primordial wisdom is very important. If you have primordial wisdom, that will lead you to the enlightened state. However, when you reach enlightenment, there is no need to abandon primordial wisdom. It will go away all by itself. It’s easy. This is very important. So when it is said that the Buddha has no thoughts and that we should be like him, some people take that to mean that we should stop thinking. But when you stay without any thoughts, it is like being drunk or anesthetized.

HMV: Buddhism is not an anesthetic.

LTC: It is not that. [Shared laughter]

Annotation: Sometimes it seems as though there is a contradiction in the Buddhist tradition about the desirability of cultivating a state of mind in which there are no thoughts. On the one hand, the Buddhist literature is full of passages that seem to value and encourage the cultivation of a state of mind in which thoughts cease to appear.

And yet, here we have Mipham, Longchenpa and Lopon Tegchoke, amongst others, actually dismissing the practice of cultivating a state of mind in which there is a complete cessation of thoughts.

Lopon Tegchoke disentangles this seeming contradiction by making two points here. First, he seems to be saying that there is a distinction to be made between: (1) abandoning thoughts and (2) cultivating the cessation of thoughts. They are two entirely different things.

To abandon your thoughts is to cease believing in the self-sustaining narratives of your ego. To actively pursue the cultivation of a thoughtless state of mind is to create another form of ego.

Second, Lopon says that it is, in fact, necessary to completely abandon the dual thoughts of the ego on the path to developing an egoless mind. But he also says that it is not necessary to abandon the nondual thoughts that are primordial wisdom. He says that while you in the process of developing an egoless mind, it is actually helpful to hold on to nondual primordial wisdom. At the same time, he says that once the mind is completely egoless, or enlightened, that it is not at all necessary to make an active effort to abandon nondual thoughts. This, he says, will happen naturally by itself.

Abandon the malady of striving.
—The Cuckoo of Awareness

**Primordial Wisdom and the Mandala of Rigpa**

**HMV:** Now when you say that it is important to hold on to primordial wisdom, what do you mean? What exactly does a person do to hold on to primordial wisdom?

**LTC:** You have to think deeply.

**HMV:** Think deeply about what? The insights?

**LTC:** You think deeply by doing analytical, or vipassana, meditation.

**HMV:** There are different levels of vipassana meditation, and is it not true that you analyze different things on the different levels?

**LTC:** Yes. In DzogChen one analyzes the mind: Where does the mind arise? Where does it reside? Where does it go? Analyzing the mind brings you to the realization of rigpa.

**HMV:** And in general, the analyses of vipassana meditation are done for the purpose of rationally understanding emptiness.

**LTC:** Oh yes.

**HMV:** Thank you. Now I’d like to pursue this notion of holding on to primordial wisdom a bit further by discussing a portion of my own experience. I recently did a long meditation retreat in Ladakh, and during that retreat I began to have lots of small and medium sized insights, or moments of primordial wisdom. As time passed, it became evident that these insights were pieces of a much larger picture.

**LTC:** Yes. Yes. [Emphatic]

**HMV:** The small and medium sized insights began to fit together and form a larger picture. And the larger picture felt like it was a portrayal of how the egoless mind would see both itself and the world. I’m just guessing, but it seemed to me that maybe I saw perhaps twenty percent of that larger

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picture. When you talk about holding on to primordial wisdom, would that be the same thing as holding on to this larger picture created by the insights of primordial wisdom?

LTC: Yes. Yes. That larger picture, itself, is primordial wisdom, and as you have more and more moments of insight, the primordial wisdom becomes larger and larger.

HMV: Is holding on to and living in that larger picture a useful thing to do on the path?

LTC: Oh yes. It’s like walking towards the state of enlightenment. A small dose of medicine is able to control a disease that attacks you. The momentary arising of primordial wisdom is able to stop suffering and the habitual patterns of ego thought; and as you have more primordial wisdom, you move you gradually closer and closer towards the state of enlightenment. A small lamp is able to illuminate a large space. Likewise, a small moment of yeshe will dissolve a lot of delusion. This is the truth of moving towards enlightenment.

HMV: Suppose a person realized a hundred percent of that larger picture? Would that one hundred percent be the mandala of rigpa? Would that whole larger picture of how life looks to an egoless mind be the mandala of rigpa?

LTC: They are the same. There is no need to question the realization of that larger picture. When a slight moment of primordial wisdom is born within you, within your mind stream, then your entire body is a mandala.

HMV: What do you mean by that? I think of a mandala as being a picture of nondual reality.

LTC: Yes.

HMV: But the body is a body; as opposed to being a picture. I don’t quite see the connection between the two. Could you explain?

LTC: You have said that you see the larger picture created by the smaller togpae yeshe as being a mandala.

HMV: Yes.

LTC: What do you mean by saying that the larger picture is a mandala?

HMV: The first and most honest thing to say is that I have a theory about mandala that is just a personal theory. My small experiences with primordial wisdom have led me to the conclusion that every person has inside of them a big picture, a mandala if you will, that is a description of their mind and the universe in which they live. My experience has been that nondual awareness, or rigpa, has access to this larger picture, but that the dual awareness of ego does not have access to that picture. That’s what I mean by mandala.

LTC: Yes. That’s the mandala of rigpa.

HMV: Thank you.

LTC: Now, when you are abiding in rigpa, do not separate your body from that mandala. When you abandon ego, don’t put your body in another bag. Your body is the main mandala.
HMV: What does it mean to say that the body is the main mandala?
LTC: Ask yourself this: When you think of egoless mind, who thinks that?
HMV: Thank you very much.

**Annotation:** Lopon is saying here that the momentary insights of primordial wisdom are pieces of a larger picture of the universe that resides within the mind; that they are pieces of the mandala that is known by rigpa.

## Mandala

**HMV:** I’d like to try and understand, now, the relationship of mandala to both rigpa and primordial wisdom. I’d like to begin by reading you a series of three quotations about mandala and then ask you some questions about them. The first two quotations come from Longchenpa and the third one comes from you:

> Rigpa’s manifestations are the actuality, or appearances, of the mandala.
> —Longchenpa

> Chos-ying abides timelessly as the source of a mandala that is a wish fulfilling treasure.
> —Longchenpa

**LTC:** Yes. [Emphatic]

**HMV:** This third quotation, once again, comes from you:

> Rigpa gives meanings that are large like a mandala.
> —Lopon Tegchoke

**HMV:** Once again, I am trying to understand the relationship between rigpa, primordial wisdom and mandala. When a person has a moment of insight, a moment of primordial wisdom, is that insight a portion of a mandala?

**LTC:** Whatever rigpa knows, that is mandala.

**HMV:** Oh. What does rigpa know?

**LTC:** The kayas and primordial wisdom.

**HMV:** Ahh. And the kayas and primordial wisdom are mandala.

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53. Ibid.
54. Interview with Lopon Tegchoke in Gangtok, Sikkim; February, 1998.

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LTC: Yes. That is mandala.
HMV: Thank you.
HMV: Would it be correct, then, to say that if enlightenment is a stream of nondual moments, that in every nondual moment the egoless mind realizes a moment of primordial wisdom or kaya that has, as its source, a mandala?
LTC: Yes. [Emphatic and with joy]
HMV: Is that the same thing as saying that what rigpa knows, or has access to, is a picture of the universe?
LTC: Yes.
HMV: So the mandala is what rigpa actually knows.
LTC: Oh yes. But that is an ordinary mandala. In DzogChen, the explanation is slightly different.
HMV: And what is the difference?
LTC: They are the same mandala, but the explanation is different, more profound.
HMV: What is the DzogChen explanation of the mandala?
LTC: The qualities of the dharmakaya, sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya, are accomplished by, are expressions of, Buddha Nature. All of these qualities are present within rigpa. That is the mandala. That is the mandala at the ground, or gzhi. It is the foundation mandala.
HMV: Does that mean that the ground and the DzogChen mandala are one and the same?
LTC: Yes. The ground, or gzhi, is the foundation mandala.

Annotation: Lopon says a number of interesting things about mandala in this passage. He starts off by saying that the fully realized egoless mind is aware of at least two kinds of nondual inner appearances: the kayas and primordial wisdom. Then, he goes on to say that the source of these nondual appearances is always a mandala—a picture of the universe. Finally, it appears that he is taking the position that there is, in the human mind, a mandala that is the foundation, or source, from which the appearances of the nondual mind arise.55

Given that awareness is pure by nature,
Its essence as emptiness is dharmakaya,
Its nature as lucidity is sambhogakaya,
And the way in which its innate responsiveness

55. Two more points here: Lopon Tegchoke’s second volume in The Healthy Mind Series will have much more to say about the place of the mandala in the human mind. Second, the mandala is also regarded as being the source of the dual mind. For example, “Ordinary consciousness and the vast range of non-conceptual timeless awareness arise naturally as nothing more than the display of the supreme mandala of the enlightened mind” (R. Barron. (2001). A Treasure Trove of Scriptural Transmission. Junction City, CA: Padma Publishing, p. 16).
arises is nirmanakaya.
This great, undiminishing treasure
Is the utterly lucid mandala
That abides as the ground of being.
—Longchenpa

The Kayas and Yeshe Are Not Delusions

HMV: Given that the thoughts and emotions of dual mind are delusions, do the kayas and primordial wisdom really exist?
LTC: Yes.
HMV: So they are not delusions.
LTC: No.
HMV: Are they nondual appearances?
LTC: They are nondual appearances if you leave them as they are.
HMV: Thank you. What type of awareness is primordial wisdom?
LTC: Primordial wisdom is aware that the self does not exist; it is egoless. It is, for example, aware that this flower here does not really exist. Imagine, for a moment, that you are sitting before a realized lama, and the lama says that the reason you are in samsara is because of your thoughts. Then you begin to think about your thoughts, and you begin to wonder what makes thoughts appear in your stream of consciousness.

You ask the lama, “How do I recognize thoughts?” The lama says that holding on to the constituents of your body as permanent, is one kind of thought. Seeing the impure body as pure is another kind of thought. Seeing your body as a body of bliss, even though it is a source of suffering, is another kind of thought. Even though the body you have is not you, you think that it is you. This is another kind of thought.

When you sit down by yourself and analyze what the lama has said, you come to the conclusion that your body is actually impermanent. That even though you have been thinking all along that it is permanent, it is not permanent. You realize that you have been mistaken.

After analyzing further, you also realize that your body is impure. All along, you have been thinking that your body is pure, but now you realize that you have been mistaken. After analyzing further, you also realize that your body does not provide you bliss. It is impermanent, and since it is impermanent, it is the cause of suffering. Because it is impermanent, it is definite that it will suffer. It is the source of suffering, yet you have

56. Ibid., p. 13.
57. My understanding of Lopon here is that he is saying that the pleasures of the body are not bliss in the sense that they are not the nondual joy that is the natural state of the mind.
been thinking all along that it is the source of bliss. But now you realize, once again, that you have been mistaken.

All along, you have been thinking of your body as an “I.” When you say “I,” it means that you are holding on to it as your own. Once you think that way, you have an ego. When you think about it carefully, you realize that you really do not have authority over your body. Every day, moment by moment, it changes. If it is mine, or if it is I, then this change will not take place.

When I fall sick, then I suffer. When I face the heat, then I suffer. There is no difference between my body and your body. I can say my body is mine, but actually, I have no control over it. So when you ask the meaning of a thought, you are holding on to an idea that does not really exist in reality. Even though you have been holding on to your body as permanent, now you come to the conclusion that this is only a mere thought.

There is no purity within the body, but you have been thinking it is a pure, and this is also a thought. There is no bliss within the body, yet you have been thinking your body is a source of bliss. That is also a thought. Within the body there is no “I.” All along, you have been thinking it is an “I,” but that is also a thought.

Then after thinking about all of this over and over, it occurs to you that maybe you’ve been mad. What is primordial wisdom? When you say impermanent you understand as impermanent. Impurity you understand as impurity. Suffering you understand as suffering. Nonexistence of “I” you understand as nonexistence of “I.” That is called togpai yeshe. That is called primordial wisdom.

References


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The Egocentric Mind Is Not a Healthy Mind

HMV: In the Western world and in many other of the world’s societies as well, people believe that a healthy mind is a mind with a strong ego. Do you think that a healthy mind is a mind with a strong ego?

KTG: No.

HMV: Why not?

KTG: Because the ego\(^1\) pollutes the mind. It is actually the cause of problems, as opposed to being healthy. Because of the ego, all sorts of problems arise—attachment, aversion, negativity, anger, pride and all of the afflicted, or painful, minds.

HMV: OK.

KTG: As Chandrakirti, Santideva\(^2\) and many other teachers have said, all suffering and faults arise from the attachment to self or ego. And because we see things in this way, all practitioners—all of the yogis and yognis—try to get rid of the ego. When there is no ego, when one is pure in one’s nature, one can realize independence and freedom. And at the same time, one can still do anything that one wants to do in the real world.

HMV: It sounds like you are saying, Khenpo, that ego is actually the main cause of psychological suffering.

KTG: Yes, that’s true.

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1. The Tibetan term that we were using for ego here was dag-dzin. Several aspects of the meaning of this term will be explored and explained as the interview progresses.
2. Chandrakirti and Santideva were both seminal Buddhist philosophers who lived in India in the second half of the first millennium AD.
HMV: And it sounds like one of the things you mean by suffering is that the ego causes painful emotions to arise.

KTG: Yes. Sure.

HMV: Is the arising of painful emotions the only form of suffering that ego causes? Or does it cause other forms of suffering as well?

KTG: Yes, there are other forms too. All forms of suffering are caused by the ego. The complete cause of getting rebirth in cyclic existence\(^3\) is the result of being attached to or holding on to the ego. Dag-dzin. The grasping of “I.” When you are born into samsara, or cyclic existence, the ego and its pride makes us want to gain fame, wealth, prosperity; and when there is any kind of obstacle or obstruction, it gives rise to all sorts of emotions, depression and suffering.

HMV: It sounds like you are saying that ego is the cause of all psychological suffering.

KTG: Yes. Yes. [Emphatically]

HMV: It also sounds like you are saying that the mind with an ego is not a happy or healthy mind at all.

KTG: The mind with an ego is not a happy mind; nor a healthy mind. That’s true in two ways: relatively and absolutely. Normally, in the relative world, people think, “Oh I’m good. I’m rich. I’m healthy. I’m fine.” Then people think, “Oh I have a healthy mind; a healthy body. Because of that I’m happy, wealthy and good.” Relatively, it seems like this, but at the same time there are so many problems. To really experience ultimate happiness, or just even peace, to really have that healthy or happy mind, that can only happen when one gets rid of the ego.

HMV: Yes, and I’d like to come back to the egoless mind in a moment, but first I’d like to pursue this notion of the ego a little bit further with you. It’s true. A lot of people would say, “Look, if I have a lot of money and I’m famous, then I’m happy.” But it sounds like you are saying no; that’s not necessarily the case. That if a person has fame and fortune, that actually they won’t be happy. Is this what you are saying?

KTG: Yes. They won’t necessarily be happy.

HMV: Why is that?

KTG: Because of the ego, there is still no satisfaction. The whole complete point about the ego is that it is never satisfied. The ego never feels it has enough money, enough wealth or enough happiness. One never really gets satisfied. Still you want more and more. In that way, one never really gets satisfied. And then you live in fear of losing what you have. And you also suffer because you have enemies. Once ego loses fame or wealth, then there is

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\(^3\) The essence of samsara is suffering. In Buddhism, the term samsara, or cyclic existence, has both cosmological and psychological meaning. It can be either a literal place in the mythological universe of Buddhism where beings lead lives of suffering, for example the animal realm, or it can be an egocentric state of mind in which people lead lives of suffering.
double suffering. Ego increases the suffering because you have an unsatisfied mind. It is not a healthy mind.

**HMV:** If the pursuits of the ego do not provide happiness, would it be fair to say that real happiness, real satisfaction, is actually the joy that is the nature of the mind.\(^4\)

**KTN:** Yes.

**HMV:** And that when you have ambition, the kind of ambition that comes with ego, that you don’t get to experience that joy and peace that is the nature, or natural state, of the mind.

**KTN:** Yes. [Emphatic]

**Annotation:** In this last series of questions, Khenpo Tsewang is saying that genuine and lasting happiness is not achieved by the pursuits of the ego. Genuine happiness is attained by realizing the natural state of the mind, the nature of mind. One of the central tenets of DzogChen mind science is that the mind has a natural state. This natural state of the mind is the state that arises when the mind is not being altered by the ego.

In contrast, the egocentric, or socialized, mind is a mind that is forever and always trying to change itself. It changes itself as a means of controlling itself. To live in society, it’s necessary for a person to control both their mind and, as a result, their behavior.

The egocentric mind controls itself by changing itself. It changes its thoughts, feelings and emotions so that they match its sense of identity. In using this approach to control itself, the ego mind removes itself from its natural condition.

The egoless mind, in contrast, controls itself by leaving itself in its natural state. The mind that is left in its natural state has a number of healthy characteristics. One characteristic of the natural mind is that it abides in a state of joy. This joy spontaneously appears when the mind leaves itself in its natural state.

The analogy of the sun and clouds is often used to explain this idea. The sun is always present in our sky and solar system. It is, of course, there even when we can’t see it because it has been covered over by clouds. In much the same way, the natural joy of the mind is always present within the mind, but sometimes it appears as though it is not there because it is covered over by the thoughts and emotions created by the ego.

Khenpo Tsewang will be returning to this issue of the nature of the mind in two of the sections that follow: “The Cause and Nature of Suffering” and “Experiencing the Nature of Mind.”

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\(^4\) The “nature of the mind” is another name for the egoless, or natural, mind. We will be discussing the nature of mind at length throughout the entire book.

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Definition of Ego

**HMV:** For the sake of clarity, let’s develop a definition of the ego, and let’s start by taking a look at the Tibetan term for ego—“dag dzin.” What does the word “dag” mean? And what does the word “dzin” mean?

**KTN:** Dag is the existence of phenomena.

**HMV:** Is it the belief that all phenomena have a self?

**KTN:** There are two types of dag-dzin. There is the grasping of one’s own person, and then there is the grasping of all other phenomena. These are the two main categories of ego. The deluded mind, the mind that has an ego, thinks that its own person, or personality, has a self that has a true existence.

**HMV:** Does this mean that the mind with an ego thinks that it has a permanent identity of some sort?

**KTN:** Yes. A person is actually just the five aggregates, which are the basis of the self. It is onto these aggregates that one imputes the self.

**HMV:** So a human being is actually composed of many different physical and mental elements, and if you think you have a permanent self, or dag, what you are actually doing is attributing a concept of self to the elements of your mind and body.

**KTN:** Yes.

**HMV:** So philosophically, this is what the word “dag” means.

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5. Here the Khenpo is taking the classic Mahayana Buddhist position that there are, in the universe, two different kinds of ego, or self. Ultimately, in Buddhist philosophy, the self is a just a concept that the mind with an ego attributes to (1) a person—by attributing a personality to a person and (2) all of the other phenomena that exist in the universe.

It’s worth taking a moment to mention here that the translation of the Tibetan term “dag,” and its Sanskrit equivalent “atman,” has been fraught with some confusion. Both terms have been translated by Western scholars into English as both “self” and “ego.” As a result, these English terms are often used interchangeably, as Khenpo and I will be doing throughout the interview.

The confusion comes from the fact that in Western thought, the terms “ego” and “self” are not at all equivalent. They have very different meanings. Consider, for example the different meanings of these terms in Jung’s work, or their many different uses in the history of psychoanalytic thought. It’s important that we eventually get clear about the translation of these terms. To my way of thinking, the Tibetan term “dag” means exactly what Khenpo has said here. A dag is a concept of permanent identity that is attributed to a person or a phenomenon. I personally like the word “identity” for “dag,” but using that term at the present time would only confuse matters more.

6. The term “aggregates,” as Khenpo Tsewang is using it here, is a translation of the Sanskrit term skandha. In the history of Buddhist ideas, a number of different approaches have been used to make the case that a person does not have a self, or permanent identity. The very first approach that was ever taken was the position that a human being is actually a stream of constantly changing elements, and that as such, a person does not have a permanent self. These elements were called the skandhas. Here the Khenpo is saying that the self is just a concept of identity that the egocentric mind erroneously attributes to the basic elements of which a person is composed.
**KTG:** Yes. Dag is the inherent existence of a self. [It] is a strong concept, a grasping, that makes us think that we have a self, a truly existing self.

**HMV:** Let’s try to bring that to life a bit. Would that be the same as me saying “I am a doctor; and that I’m always a doctor no matter what the circumstances. Even when I’m at home, or when I’m in Tibet. More than that, I’m a good doctor; always a good doctor.” Is that what you mean by dag? Is it some kind of concept of one’s self like that?

**KTG:** Yes. Normally you just think I’m Doctor Hank. I am. When someone says Doctor Hank, you automatically have the response, “This is me.” This is the self. When we say, “I am going. I am good. I am talking to you. I want to do this. Today I feel sick. We are using that same I.” These are all communications of the relative life in which we use that “I.” Ego is that sense of “I” plus pride, which is a type of grasping by the ego. There is a Santideva text in which he says that ego also includes thinking I am better than other people.

**HMV:** That’s part of the “I” too.

**KTG:** Yes. And there is also a feeling of inferiority that is part of ego, as well. Compared to this other person, I am inferior. That is also part of the ego, or self.

**HMV:** So the first element of ego is some kind of “I am”; some kind of concept of who you are.

**KTG:** Yes.

**HMV:** The second element is comparing your self and thinking you are better than other people.

**KTG:** Yes.

**HMV:** The third element is thinking you are not as good as other people.

**KTG:** Yes. One sort of humiliates one self. One just sort of thinks, “Oh compared to this other person I’m just not so good.”

**HMV:** So those are the three main elements of “dag.”

**KTG:** Yes.

**HMV:** Now what about the word “dzin”? What is the grasping aspect of ego all about?

**KTG:** “Dzin” means grasping. To grasp something is to attribute a concept to it. In the case of a person, it’s the concept with which you impute an “I” or an ego to the five skandhas. Of course in reality, not just in absolute reality, even in the relative sense, if you really investigate what this “I” is, it does not really exist at all. So we end up grasping, or clinging to, this concept of “I” that we create. Even in our dreams, when you have a nightmare, you just think “Oh I’m being chased by something.” You get scared. That is grasping, clinging, to the self you have imputed to the five skandhas. So that grasping is actually ignorance.

**HMV:** Who is grasping? And what is being grasped?

**KTG:** What is being grasped is the “I,” your concept of yourself, and it is one’s self who is doing the grasping. It is based mainly within one’s mind.
HMV: In other words, it happens in the mind.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Now I’m going to jump a little bit. Could you say that the self is created (and grasping of the self actually occurs) when one moment of mental consciousness grasps another moment of mental consciousness? That the self is created when one moment of mental consciousness grasps another moment of mental consciousness?

KTG: Yes, of course, grasping is the action of a mental moment of consciousness. 7

HMV: Let’s see if we can talk about this in terms of the actual experience of the mind.

KTG: OK.

HMV: My experience when I meditate, and I think it’s the same for most people, is that in the dual experience of mind, not the nondual experience of mind, just the dual experience . . .

KTG: Yes.

HMV: It seems like there is a watcher, an awareness, that is watching the stream of consciousness.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: It’s just like standing on the side of a river and watching the river flow by.

KTG: Yes. [Emphatic]

HMV: Except in this case, there is an awareness, which we are calling the watcher, that is watching the stream of consciousness go by.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: It seems to me that the essence of ego is just this: the ego is actually the watcher in those moments when it grasps moments of consciousness—the thoughts and emotions—that appear in its stream of consciousness.

KTG: OK.

HMV: That the yul-chen, the egocentric watcher, grasps thoughts. For example, it can grasp thoughts by rejecting them. 8

KTG: OK.

HMV: It can grasp thoughts by accepting them. 9

7. There are several different Buddhist theories of the mind. In almost all of them, the mind is depicted as being a constantly changing stream of individual moments of consciousness (MoCs). In this analysis there are six different types of MoCs. Visual MoCs are aware of visual objects, auditory MoCs are aware of auditory objects and so forth.

In Western thought, we accept the existence of five senses, but Buddhist psychology posits the existence of six. The sixth sense is the mental sense—which is a moment of mental consciousness that takes as its object another moment of consciousness. Khenpo is agreeing here with the idea that the mind creates the belief it has a self when one moment of mental consciousness attributes a concept of self to another moment of consciousness.

8. Door-wa is the Tibetan word for reject, and rejection is a form of grasping. It means rejecting, or repressing, the thoughts and emotions that appear in your stream of consciousness.

9. Long-wa is the Tibetan word for accept, and accepting is another form of grasping. It means identifying with and holding onto the thoughts and emotions that appear in your stream of consciousness.
KTG: OK.
HMV: It can grasp thoughts and emotions by following, jay-soo-drong.\(^{10}\)
KTG: Yes. [Emphatically]
HMV: And that these different forms of grasping are the essence of ego. Would you agree with that? Or would you disagree with that?
KTG: That is OK in a way. But when you accept, reject or follow, that is also a thought.

**Annotation:** In these last passages, we have been considering two different but related definitions of ego. Khenpo Tsewang gave us a philosophical definition of ego. He said, in his discussion of the five skandhas, that a person has an ego when his or her mind grasps, or attributes a concept of identity to, the elements of which their mind and body are composed.

I then asked Khenpo to consider an empirical, or psychological, version of his definition. I suggested that the ego is created when the mind grasps, or attributes a concept of identity to, itself. To be more specific, the ego is created and recreated in every moment in which the mind's awareness, or watcher, attributes a concept of identity to its thoughts and emotions. In other words, the ego is, and can be defined as, a specific mode of self-awareness. It is a form of self-awareness in which the mind has more than one mode of self-awareness.

HMV: Of course.
KTG: That is also a thought. That thought is not separate from your watcher, your mind.
HMV: So the watcher is actually the awareness that is watching the stream of consciousness.
KTG: Yes.
HMV: And it sounds like you are saying that when the watcher grasps something, that's just one thought grasping another thought.
KTG: Yes. Grasping is an action of the mind that arises as a thought. It is like the waves and the ocean. The watcher, or yul-chen, is the subject and the thoughts are the object, or yul, that are being grasped.
HMV: Right.
KTG: The stream of consciousness carries on all sorts of thoughts and holds all sorts of habitual tendencies.

\(^{10}\) Jay-soo-drong is the Tibetan word for following, and following is yet another form of grasping. It means believing and living in the stories that are created by the recurring streams of thought that appear in your mind.
HMV: By habitual tendencies, do you mean the bak-chaks?  
KTG: Yes. bak-chaks. All sorts of actions.
HMV: And just to be clear, are you saying that the bak-chaks actually appear in the stream of consciousness?
KTG: Yes.
HMV: Do individual thoughts appear in the stream of consciousness?
KTG: Yes.
HMV: Do emotions appear in the stream of consciousness?
KTG: Yes.
HMV: Could we take a moment and say exactly what bak-chaks are and how they appear in the stream of consciousness? Are bak-chaks recurring patterns of thought that appear over and over again in the stream of consciousness?
KTG: Yes. This is true, but we should also mention that there are both gross and subtle levels of bak-chaks.
HMV: What is the difference between gross and subtle bak-chaks?
KTG: Subtle bak-chaks are a potential in the mind stream that gives rise to the habitual tendencies. The gross thoughts, or bak-chaks, are what you really do. They are the actions that appear in the stream of consciousness.
KTG: Yes. This is true, but we should also mention that there are both gross and subtle levels of bak-chaks.
HMV: When I look at my own bak-chaks, the recurring patterns of thoughts that appear in my own mind, it looks to me like they are telling stories.
KTG: Yes.
HMV: It also seems to me that they are telling the same stories over and over again. Would it be correct to say that, in general, the bak-chaks are stories that the mind tells itself over and over again?
KTG: Yes.
HMV: Secondly, when I look at the content of these recurring stories, it looks to me like they are just ego. They are ego in the sense that they are stories created to support my dag—my concept of my self. Would you agree?
KTG: Oh yes.
HMV: Is that their purpose? To delude a person into thinking that their ego is real?
KTG: Yes. That is also bak-chaks.
HMV: Is that their purpose?
KTG: Relatively, they have that purpose. But if we are thinking of liberation, looking for peace and happiness, then there is no purpose. They just create more problems.
HMV: Thank you very much.

11. Bak-chaks is usually translated into English as “habitual patterns of thought.” Its empirical meaning will be discussed in the passages that follow.
Annotation: Bak-chaks are one of the central ideas of both theoretical and applied Buddhist psychology. They are central in the sense that it's very important to both recognize the recurring thought patterns of your mind and to not believe, or get caught up in, the stories they tell.

In essence, a bak-chaks is a recurring thought pattern that appears in your mind as a repetitive stream of thoughts. When you meditate, it is only too easy to see these recurring thoughts. They appear as cycles of thoughts that tell the same story over and over again. This is what Khenpo Tsewang is calling gross bak-chaks.

The egocentric mind believes and lives in the narratives created by the gross bak-chaks. The egoless mind, in contrast, does not believe and live in these ego narratives. It allows the gross bak-chaks to remain in their natural state, and as a result, they dissolve into and become the nondual nature of mind that they have always been.

Gross bak-chaks are empirical, or observable, phenomena. Subtle bak-chaks, in contrast, are a theoretical entity. In Buddhist psychology, the existence of subtle bak-chaks has been inferred from the observation of the gross bak-chaks—the habitual patterns of thought. The subtle bak-chaks is thought of as a structural deposit in a person’s stream of consciousness that is the source of a habitual pattern of thought—a gross bak-chaks.

To my eye, the “subtle bag-chag” of Buddhist psychology is very similar to the “fixed unconscious idea” (idée fixe) of Western psychology.  

Ego Is the Watcher That Grasps

HMV: Now let’s go back for a moment. I was saying before that the essence of ego is the actions of the watcher. By actions, I mean the actions by which the watcher holds on to its concept of self by accepting, rejecting and following the thoughts and emotions that appear in its stream of consciousness. Do you think that this is the essence of ego? Or do you think it’s something else?

KTG: When you say “watcher,” watcher is only a word that you apply to somebody. But who is that watcher? Can you really point out the watcher?

HMV: Again, I’d like to see if we could talk about this in terms of the actual experience of the mind.

KTG: OK.

HMV: Once again, the mind’s dual experience of itself in meditation is one in which it seems like there is a watcher, an awareness, that is watching the stream of consciousness.

12. A systematic and interesting discussion of the place of the unconscious fixed idea in the history of Western psychology can be found in Ellenberger (1971).
Yes.

In my experience, the watcher, awareness, has two different ways of knowing and responding to the stream of consciousness. It can be either egoless or egocentric. The egocentric state of awareness is called the watcher in Tibetan, and the egoless state is called rigpa.

The watcher tries to change the stream of consciousness. Awareness is the watcher in those moments when it accepts and rejects thoughts and emotions; and when it believes and lives in the habitual patterns of thought that it creates. It seems to me that these are the defining actions of ego, and the means by which the watcher aligns the stream of consciousness with its concept of self. The watcher is called yulchen in Tibetan, and in fact the word yulchen is translated into English as “the watcher.”

Yes.

On the other hand, the mind’s awareness is egoless when that awareness is rigpa. Rigpa, unlike the watcher, leaves the mind in its natural state. It doesn’t accept or reject thoughts and emotions. It doesn’t create or follow the habitual patterns of thought.

The Dharmakaya is “a state of meditation that is like the continuous flowing of a river, (a state in which one) remains, at all times, without attempting to create or stop anything or trying to develop thoughts or calm them down” (Patrul Rinpoche).

It seems to me that this difference between yulchen and rigpa is a fundamental difference; it is the fundamental difference between the egocentric and egoless mind. The egoless mind does not accept, reject or follow, but in contrast, the egocentric mind does.

In addition, this is a way of empirically describing this fundamental difference between the ego and egoless mind; it is a way of describing this difference that is based on and derived from observations the mind.

Yes.

Science is about deriving theory from experience. I’m wondering if it would be OK with you to talk about these issues in terms of our actual experience of the mind. In terms of the watcher and the stream of consciousness, and what awareness sees as it watches the mind stream go by. Would that be OK with you?

13. The term rigpa is a pivotal and oft used word in the DzogChen literature. It is usually translated into English as the word “awareness,” although it has received a number of other translations. Empirically, rigpa is the awareness that knows and is the egoless, or nondual, mind.

KTN: Yes. But in one way it seems like that when you say “watch your mind.” Then there is an object—your mind, and then you are the watcher. So when you say you, the watcher, still it is your mind.\textsuperscript{15}

HMV: The mind watching the mind.

KTN: Yes. The mind watching the mind.

HMV: Yes. In the dual experience of mind, the mind does not recognize that an appearance, a gzhi-nang\textsuperscript{16} if you will, is the same as the awareness that knows it. In dual mind, the watcher thinks that the appearances are different than it. Is this what you are saying?

KTN: Yes. This is dualistic mind. There is a subject and an object. And wherever there is subject and object, there is self. All of the phenomena grasped by the dualistic mind can be understood as having a self.

HMV: All the grasping is self.

KTN: The (grasped) phenomena are dag. That is dag.

HMV: Suppose the watcher grasps a single thought. Does it believe that it is the concept that it attributes to that thought? For example, suppose the watcher decides that a specific thought is a smart thought, and as a result decides that he or she is a smart person. Is that dag-dzin?

KTN: Yes. [Emphatic]

\textbf{Annotation}: Please forgive the inclusion of this section. It is, essentially, a presentation by myself of an empirical theory of the difference between the ego and egoless mind. I left it in because it’s a set of ideas that the two of us came back to over and again in the ensuing discussions.

The Cause and Nature of Suffering

HMV: How does the ego cause suffering?

KTN: By creating ignorance. It is always ignorance that causes suffering.

\textsuperscript{15} In rereading this passage after the fact of the interview, I wish I had said to Khenpo, at this point, that for the purpose of science, dualistic observations are not only acceptable, but necessary. I think that what Khenpo was beginning to say here was that given that science makes dualistic observations of the mind, how useful could it possibly be? After all, from his (soteriological) perspective as a Buddhist teacher, dualistic observations of the mind are useless. Science, however, which seeks only relative truth, can and does make much good use of dualistic observations.

\textsuperscript{16} A gzhi-nang is a technical term, in DzogChen mind science, for a type of meaning that appears in the stream of consciousness. Three different types of meaning can and do appear in the stream of consciousness. This would include (1) dual meanings—thoughts, (2) predual meanings—the gzhi-nang, and (3) nondual meanings—primordial nondual wisdom (yeshe) and emotions realizations. A gzhi-nang is a meaning that is both dual and nondual. It is dual in the sense that it is an appearance that appears to be separate from the watcher. It is nondual in the sense that it has not been grasped by the watcher. Once it appears, the mind can have either dual or nondual awareness of a gzhi-nang. If the mind has nondual awareness of a gzhi-nang, a nondual, or egoless, meaning is created.
HMV: Why?
KTG: Because it always creates mistakes; some kind of wrong action.
HMV: What do you mean by wrong action?
KTG: It has a fault in relation to the true nature.
HMV: What do you mean by fault?
KTG: A fault, for example, is grasping this table here as a table. This is a mistake; in reality the table does not really exist. It does not have a true existence. Similarly, the grasping of one’s own self is a fault; a mistake. Even in the relative sense, if we really investigate or analyze, the self does not exist. So when you see yourself as having a self, it is a hallucinating consciousness and a hallucinated object. Both are just completely fault.
HMV: A fault, then, is a mistaken way of seeing something.
KTG: Yes.
HMV: It sounds like you are also saying Khenpo, that when the ego grasps itself and thinks that it really exists—I am a doctor, I am a Khenpo, whatever—that it is this grasping that is the cause of suffering. That it is the grasping that creates the self, one’s own self, that causes suffering. Is this a fair way to put it?
KTG: Yes.
HMV: Why does the creation and grasping of one’s self cause suffering?
KTG: Because when you grasp yourself, whether you think you are a Khenpo or a doctor or even if you are just thinking that you are an “I,” then based on that, there is attachment; attachment to that concept of self. And then based on that attachment, there arises all of the concepts that want to reject all of the things that are bad for one’s self and grab all the things that are good for one’s self. And by putting so much effort into this process, and by doing lots of wrong actions as a result, then suffering arises. It is based on these causes and conditions.
HMV: In other words, the ego mind is forever and always stuck with the full time task of accepting and rejecting its experiences on the basis of whether or not they are good or bad for its self-concept (dag).
KTG: Yes. [Emphatic]

**Annotation:** Khenpo is saying here that when you think you have a self, it causes you to suffer because it causes attachment to the concept of self you create. When you become attached to a concept of your self, you are automatically imposing upon your mind the full time task of judging all of your experiences and all of the meanings\(^{17}\) that appear in your

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\(^{17}\) I am using the term “meaning” here to refer to any construct that the mind creates to give meaning to its sensory experience of the world. That would include thoughts, feelings, emotions, gzhi-nang, yeshe and realizations. To my eye, the structure of the mind’s basic experience of itself is one in which there is (1) a stream of consciousness in which different kinds of meanings appear and flow by and (2) an awareness that knows and responds to those meanings.
stream of consciousness. In the Khenpo’s words, you judge them towards the end of rejecting and accepting them on the basis of whether or not they support, or are good for, your concept of self.

**HMV:** Thank you. Now let’s say, for example, that I have a concept of my self as a happy person. Now let’s suppose that I get angry; that the emotion of anger arises. To preserve my sense of self, my watcher might grasp and judge that emotion, and decide that the anger is bad. As a result, I then feel like I’m a bad person. Both the emotion of anger and the feeling that I am bad will then stay in my mind because the watcher has grasped them. Is that what you mean by accepting and rejecting experiences on the basis of your dag?

**KTG:** When you think of yourself as a doctor, and somebody says “Oh you are not a good doctor,” then instantly it does not really affect you, it affects your ego. The concept is you think “I am a good doctor.” When you hear the words “not a good doctor,” you get affected by them.

**HMV:** My ego gets affected by just hearing those words “not a good doctor.”

**KTG:** Yes. It gets affected, and then an emotion will arise with that feeling.

**HMV:** Perhaps the emotion of anger will arise.

**KTG:** The emotion of anger could arise, or perhaps hatred. Afflicted minds of some kind will definitely arise, and with the afflicted minds, everything we do is the cause of suffering.

**HMV:** Is the emotion of anger or hatred itself the suffering?

**KTG:** Yes. It gets affected, and then an emotion will arise with that feeling.

**HMV:** Is it painful?

**KTG:** Negative. The negative thoughts cause negative actions. The negative thoughts and the negative actions are the cause of suffering. They are always the cause of suffering. When you are angry, for example, you really don’t feel happy or comfortable. We can prove that it is negative because, one feels guilty in response. Why does one feel guilty if it is not bad?

**HMV:** Are you saying that if I act out of anger, that the anger will make me feel guilty, and that the feeling of guilt is the suffering?

**KTG:** No. The feeling of guilt itself can be either positive or negative. Sometimes, when you do the wrong thing, you feel guilty. You feel sorry for what you did. That is can be good. It is the emotion that is negative. When one feels angry, one does not have joy.

**HMV:** Ah. You are saying that the anger causes suffering because it blocks out the nature of the mind.

**KTG:** Yes.

**HMV:** And that this is why the egocentric mind is not happy.

**KTG:** Yes. Yes.

**HMV:** Because it blocks out the joy that is the natural state of the mind.

**KTG:** Yes. [Emphatic]
HMV: So it’s like the sun and the clouds.

KTG: Yes. Yes. These are the obscurations.

HMV: In other words, when the thoughts and emotions of the egocentric mind arise, that they are like the clouds that block our ability to know the joyful spacious nondual awareness that is the sun of rigpa and the egoless mind. They block our ability to know this sun that is always there. Is that a fair way to put it?

KTG: Yes. Yes.

HMV: Thank you very much.

Annotation: The Khenpo has returned, here, to the question of the natural state of the mind. He is saying, once again, that the natural state of the mind is happiness and joy. In addition, he is now saying that human beings suffer because the emotions and thoughts created by the ego block our ability to know and be this natural joy of the mind. The natural joy of the mind is, like the sun in the sky, always present within the mind. Sometimes, though, it appears as though it is not there because it has been covered over by the thoughts and emotions created by ego.

The Healthy Mind Is the Egoless Mind

HMV: Now let’s switch and go over to the healthy side of things. Would you say that the egoless mind is a healthy mind?

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Why do you say that Khenpo?

KTG: Because it is a free mind.

HMV: Free. Does that mean the mind with an ego is not free?

KTG: Not free.

HMV: Why is the mind with an ego not free?

KTG: Because it is dependent on many different causes and conditions. It does not have complete freedom.

HMV: It is not the natural mind.

KTG: Of course it is not the natural mind. It is dependent on causes and conditions. Something that is dependent is like a prison.

HMV: What are the causes and conditions upon which the ego depends?

KTG: Your personal karma; all of your habitual tendencies. The ego is something that is not independent.

HMV: Do you mean to say that the egocentric mind is not free from the thoughts and emotions and the stories of the mind. That its feeling of well-being is dependent upon them.18

18. For a more thorough discussion of this idea, please see the first book in this series: The Healthy Mind Interviews: Khenpo Nyima Wangyal.
KTG: Yes. [Emphatic]
HMV: And that as a result, it is not free of them.
KTG: Yes. [Emphatic]
HMV: As you said earlier, the watcher with an ego is also stuck with the unremitting task of trying to control its stream of consciousness. This seems to be another way in which the mind with an ego is not free. Instead of having the freedom of simply allowing its stream of consciousness to run free and dissolve and self-liberate,¹⁹ it must constantly do the work of monitoring its stream of consciousness.
KTG: Yes. Yes. That’s true.
HMV: Now you were saying before that the egoless mind is a healthy mind because it is free.
KTG: Yes. It is free. Completely independent and free. It does not have any delusions. No emotions. And it is free of all of the concepts that are created by the ego. It is only the perfected and pure and accomplished with the pure qualities.²⁰
HMV: Does the egoless mind suffer?
KTG: No. [Emphatic]
HMV: Why not?
KTG: Because there is no cause of suffering.
HMV: And by cause of suffering do you mean karma and the habitual patterns of thought?
KTG: And the ego itself. [Lots of shared laughter]

The Nature of Rigpa/Egoless Awareness

HMV: Now in the same way that we were saying before that the ego is a specific form of self-awareness—a specific kind of relationship between the watcher and the stream of consciousness, I wonder if we can talk about the egoless mind in the same way? Can we say that the egoless mind is rang-rig yeshe²¹—a nondual form of self-awareness in which the watcher relates to the stream of consciousness in an entirely different way?

KTG: OK.

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¹⁹.  Self-liberation is another technical term in DzogChen mind science. It refers to a specific phenomenon. Self-liberation occurs when the mind has nondual awareness of a meaning that appears in the stream of consciousness. When the mind has nondual awareness of a meaning, that meaning dissolves and becomes a moment of nondual, or egoless, mind. This is self-liberation.

²⁰.  Khenpo is using the term “pure” here to say that only “nondual, or non-conceptual, appearance” arise in the egoless mind.

²¹.  Rang-rig yeshe is a Tibetan term that translates literally as “the self-awareness that is primordial wisdom.” Empirically, it is nondual self-awareness.
Annotation: We have already defined ego as a specific mode of self-awareness in which the watcher has dual awareness of the thoughts and emotions that appear in its stream of consciousness because it accepts, rejects, and follows those thoughts and emotions. Now I am asking Khenpo if we can define the egoless mind as being a different mode of self-awareness; as a different type of relationship between awareness and the stream of consciousness.

**HMV:** Can we say that egoless awareness is rigpa?

**KTG:** Yes.

**HMV:** Can we say that rigpa, unlike yulchen—the watcher of the egocentric mind, is an awareness that does not grasp inner appearances?\(^22\)

**KTG:** Right.

**HMV:** And as a result, everything is different.

**KTG:** Yes.

**HMV:** In the mind with an ego, it is the watcher that knows and responds to thoughts, emotions and the habitual thoughts. Is rigpa the awareness of the egoless mind?

**KTG:** Yes.

**HMV:** What kind of inner appearances is rigpa aware of?

**KTG:** In relation to awareness, rigpa?

**HMV:** Yes. What kind of inner appearances appear to rigpa when it knows itself?

**KTG:** In the field of rigpa there is no subject and object.

**HMV:** OK.

**KTG:** Whatever appears is rigpa itself.

**HMV:** Right.

**KTG:** It’s just rigpa’s display.

**HMV:** Is that rigpa tsal?\(^23\)

**KTG:** Yes. Rigpa tsal. At the same time, rigpa realizes its true nature. Rigpa never conceptualizes or grasps or clings to itself, and as a result, it never has

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\(^22\) The term “inner appearances” is a translation of the Tibetan term “nang-gyi nangwa.” I use the term to refer to all of three categories of meaning that can and do appear in the stream of consciousness. This would include (1) dual meanings—thoughts and emotions, (2) predual meanings—the gzhi-nang and (3) nondual meanings—yeshe and realizations.

\(^23\) Rigpa tsal is a technical term in DzogChen theory that has both metaphysical and psychological meaning. The DzogChen metaphysic takes the position that all of the phenomena we know and perceive are created by rigpa tsal. Rigpa tsal is seen as an energy that is both an expression of rigpa and the source of all phenomena in the universe. In Longchenpa’s words:

Mind itself is a vast expanse, the realm of unchanging space . . .
Everything is the adornment of basic space and nothing else.
Outwardly and inwardly, things proliferating and resolving are the dynamic energy of awakened mind.

(Barron, 2001)
dualistic experience of itself. So whatever appears to rigpa is a pure appearance.\(^{24}\) At the same time, everything is liberated in its nature. There is no source for the ego. It is completely egoless. Rigpa is always in that moment where there are no conceptual thoughts. It is pure and perfected.

Relatively, we say that the experience of rigpa is pure and perfected, but still the actual experience of rigpa cannot be expressed in words. Awareness and the actual realization of the true nature of mind are inconceivable by our present mind. There is no language that we can use to express that experience.

Realization of the absolute nature is like the dream of a mute.

—Padampa Sangye\(^{25}\)

There is, to be sure, some kind of result or fruition that one can and does experience in realization, but there is no language or example that we can use to put that experience into relative communication that another person could understand; although it can be said that rigpa is pure or perfect, without concepts. It is just completely free, completely liberated, omniscient mind.

\(^{24}\) Khenpo is using the term “pure appearance” here to mean “nondual, or non-conceptual, appearances.”

\(^{25}\) Padampa Sangye and Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche (2003), pp. 16–23.
HMV: That it has no boundaries . . .

KTG: Yes. [Emphatic]

HMV: That it is joyous. Blissful.

KTG: Um hm.

HMV: And has nondual awareness of all phenomena.

KTG: Yes. [Emphatic]

HMV: Is this non-conceptual mind the same thing as rigpa?

KTG: The same.

HMV: OK. So it is possible, then, to describe the qualities of rigpa in this way. We can say this much about rigpa.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: But we can’t actually describe the experience that rigpa is having. Is that a fair distinction?

KTG: Yes.

**Annotation:** We have made a distinction here. Earlier, Khenpo said that it is not possible to describe the content of nondual, or egoless, experiences. Here he is saying that despite the fact that it is not possible to depict these experiences, it *is* possible describe the qualities of the awareness that is having those experiences. It can be said, for example, that rigpa is like space, that it has no boundaries, is joyous, is non-conceptual and has nondual awareness of all phenomena.

It should not be forgotten, however, that even though it is possible to articulate the qualities of rigpa, it would be a definite mistake to set those qualities up as goals to be attained in meditation:

> With natural abiding, there is nothing for anyone to contrive. To abide in what simply is, without its being sought, means that nothing need be done—this is revealed to be the most sublime activity.

—The All Creating Monarch

HMV: Fair enough. Now can we also say, thank you, that rigpa is aware of inner appearances?

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Can rigpa be aware of yeshe, nondual primordial wisdom, as an inner appearance? Is that possible?

KTG: Yes. Sure. Relatively we can say that.

HMV: In relative language. We’re not describing the experience itself.

KTG: Yes.


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HMV: Can rigpa be aware of a predual inner appearance, or gzhi-nang?  
KTG: Yes.
HMV: Thank you. Can rigpa be aware of the three different types of nyams?  
KTG: Yes.
HMV: Can rigpa ever be aware of a realization, or nyams dang togs-pa?  
KTG: Once again, in a relative way of understanding, we can say that. Yes.
HMV: But ultimately we could not say that.
KTG: Yes. We could not say it exactly like that because the realization is not separate from rigpa.

The Two Modes of Self-Awareness

HMV: Thank you very much. Now, I’d like to take a look at the differences between the watcher and rigpa. For one, it seems that the egocentric watcher grasps thoughts, emotions and bak-chaks, whereas rigpa, egoless awareness, does not grasp any of the appearances that arise before it.

KTG: No. Not at all.
HMV: And it seems to me that this is a primary difference between the watcher and rigpa. Would you agree?
KTG: Yes. It’s a big difference.
HMV: Why is that a big difference?
KTG: Because they are two completely different natures. One is the relative nature, and one is the absolute nature.
HMV: And one causes suffering and the other doesn’t.
KTG: Oh yes. In rigpa, which is the absolute truth, sems . . .
HMV: Dual mind . . .
KTG: Yes. Sems, the dual mind, does not appear, or exist, at all. Dual mind is just exactly like a hallucination and a hallucinated object. Dual mind is not perceived by a Buddha, and dual mind does not have true nature. So in the ultimate sense, it does not even exist; the ego and the dual mind and all the deluded minds do not really exist.
HMV: Not only do they not exist; they do not even appear.
KTG: Yes.
HMV: Do bak-chaks ever appear to rigpa?
KTG: No.
HMV: Do thoughts ever appear to rigpa?
KTG: No.
HMV: Do emotions ever appear to rigpa?
KTG: No. It’s not possible.

27. Here I am asking Khenpo if nondual self-awareness can ever be ever aware of the predual meanings that are known as gzhi-nang in DzogChen mind science. See footnote # 15.
28. The Tibetan term “nyams” is usually translated into English as the term “experience” or “meditative experience.”
**HMV:** And why isn’t it possible?
**KTG:** Again, because they are a different nature.
**HMV:** Is it because there is no grasping?
**KTG:** Yes. There’s no grasping.
**HMV:** Because there’s no grasping, thoughts don’t arise.
**KTG:** Yes.
**HMV:** Because there’s no grasping, emotions don’t arise.
**KTG:** Yes.
**HMV:** And because there’s no grasping the bak-chaks don’t arise.
**KTG:** Yes. We can say it in that way.

**Annotation:** In this last series of questions, Khenpo Tsewang takes the definite position that thoughts and emotions never appear to rigpa—nondual egoless awareness. I have heard many other lamas take this exact same position as well. I have also heard many lamas take the opposite position—that thoughts and emotions do appear to and are known by rigpa. Khenpo Tsewang, himself, takes this position at a later point in this book.

This is an important issue. Why? Because it presents us with two very different pictures of the healthy mind; two very different pictures of egoless awareness, or rigpa.

If, on the one hand, the egoless mind is a mind that never experiences thoughts and emotions, then this would seem to mean that the goal of healthy psychological development is to suppress thoughts and emotions. The healthy mind would be defined as a mind in which thoughts and emotions do not appear.

If, on the other hand, rigpa, the egoless mind, is a mind where thoughts and emotions do appear, then this would present us with a very different picture of the healthy mind. This type of egoless mind would not suppress thoughts and emotions. It would, in contrast, be a mind that is totally open to the appearance of thoughts and emotions; a mind that would allow thoughts and emotions to remain in their natural state and dissolve into the nondual mind they have always been.

Here’s one opinion on the matter as stated in “The Six Expanses,” a text cited by Longchenpa in his “Treasure Trove of Scriptural Transmission.”

The passage describes “mind itself”—another name for nondual mind:

> Within mind itself, there are conceptual frameworks:
> Myriad appearances arise naturally,
> And so, with their individual names and colors,
> They are perfect in the dualistic way they manifest as forms.

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Within mind itself, there is what can be transformed:  
Afflictive emotions arise naturally,  
And so, like poison being transformed into medicine  
They are perfect as the epitome of the kayas and timeless awareness.

Within mind itself, there is what can be freed:  
Sense objects manifest as they do,  
And so, being like a knot in a snake that releases itself,  
They are free and perfect in their own place.

Longchenpa summarizes this passage by saying that awareness is “far from . . . being simply nonexistent, like some kind of void, it is called ‘great perfection,’ because both the true nature of phenomena and phenomena themselves are perfect as the essence of both the two levels of truth and the three aspects of purity.”

Ultimately, I would like to think that this is an empirical issue. It seems entirely possible that a group of people who have experienced the egoless mind could sit down together and compare their observations of that experience. They could do so in much the same way that physicists compare their observations of galaxies and elementary particles. Once this has been done, it should then be possible to determine which of these two hypotheses is correct. My own opinion is that once this discussion has been held, we will find that there is a sense in which both of these hypotheses are correct.

**HMV:** A quick aside now. Who is it, in the mind, that thinks it has an identity? In other words, in the mind with an ego, who is it that is actually thinking that it has a self-concept? Take me for example, Hank. If I think I have an identity, who is it that is thinking that? Is it the watcher?

**KTN:** Of course, relatively speaking it is the watcher.

**HMV:** It is the watcher then, my watcher, that thinks it has a self.

**KTN:** Yes. [Emphatic]

**HMV:** And then as a result, it behaves as though it has a self to protect. It accepts, rejects, and follows.

**KTN:** Yes.

**HMV:** Now does rigpa think it has a self?

**KTN:** No. [Emphatic]

**HMV:** Is this another important difference between the watcher and rigpa?

**KTN:** Yes.

**HMV:** Between egocentric mind and egoless mind.

**KTN:** Yes.
HMV: Does rigpa behave differently than the watcher because it doesn’t think it has a self?

KTG: Yes. [Emphatic] Completely different.

HMV: I’d like to summarize. I think that we have mapped out some of the defining differences between rigpa and the watcher. We’ve established that rigpa is egoless awareness, the watcher is egocentric awareness, and they are very different.

KTG: Yes. Very different.

HMV: And I think we have described the essential differences between the two. The watcher believes it has an identity.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: And as a result, it accepts, rejects and follows its thoughts and emotions, and it suffers.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: And rigpa, or egoless awareness, doesn’t believe it has an identity.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: And that as a result, it does not grasp in any way the inner appearances that it knows.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: And that as a result, they remain pure appearances in the sense that they do not change into conceptual, or dual, appearances.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: And that as a result, rigpa does not suffer.

KTG: Yes.

Annotation: Here, then, is the essential and defining difference between the ego and the egoless mind. They are two different forms of self-awareness. They are, respectively, dual self-awareness and nondual self-awareness:

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

HMV: These, then, are the basic differences between egocentric and egoless awareness.

30. Ibid., p. 86.
KTG: Yes. But at the same time, rigpa and the ultimate nature are always there without it being decreased or increased.

HMV: It’s always there.

KTG: Yes. It’s always there. Right now and always. It doesn’t change.

HMV: That’s the beauty of it. Because all you have to do is stop grasping your own mind.

KTG: Yes. Just recognize the rigpa. Right now. All of this ego grasping is mistaken and confused. All of the concepts and phenomena are confused.

HMV: You can just stop believing in all of that stuff in an instant, can’t you?

KTG: Yes. The moment we recognize the true nature of our mind, all this confusion just disappears by itself.

Realizing the True Nature of Thoughts

HMV: When you say recognize the true nature of your mind, do you mean recognize the true nature of your thoughts? Recognize the true nature of rigpa? Or both?

KTG: Actually, I mean recognize rigpa. But in the Dzog-Chen practice, there is a practice in which you can realize the true nature of thoughts.

HMV: What practice is that?

KTG: DzogChen meditation.

HMV: Do you mean trekcho?\footnote{There are two meditation techniques that are unique to DzogChen. One of them is called trekcho—which is usually translated into English as “cutting through,” as in cutting through solid states of mind.}

KTG: Yes. Trekcho.

HMV: What does it mean to recognize the true nature of thoughts?

KTG: Recognize that the thought is a thought, and then don’t pursue that thought.

HMV: I see. Not following the thoughts.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Does that mean that if you are not following your thoughts, that you are recognizing their nature?

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Is that the same thing as recognizing the emptiness of your thoughts?

KTG: Yes. You can say it like that.

HMV: How do you know inside yourself that you are actually not pursuing your thoughts? That you are not following your thoughts?

KTG: If one’s own mind is not obscured to one’s self, then you are not following your thoughts.

HMV: Ahh. Do you mean that the thoughts of my dual mind are not obscured to my watcher?
HMV: If you are having clear awareness of your thoughts, then you know you are not following them.

HTG: Yes. Then you know that you are recognizing the thoughts and you are not following the thoughts.

HMV: What’s the Tibetan word for thought that you are using here?

HTG: Thought is rnam-tog.

HMV: OK. We’re talking about ordinary dualistic thoughts.

HTG: Yes.

HMV: OK. So it is possible to recognize the nature of your thoughts if you don’t follow them.

HTG: Yes.

HMV: On another occasion you said that if you recognize the nature of your thoughts, they self-liberate into wisdom.

HTG: Yes.

HMV: When a thought self-liberates into wisdom, does it dissolve?

HTG: Yes.

HMV: Is that a moment of nondual awareness?

HTG: Yes.

HMV: Thank you. Now suppose an angry thought arises, the mind recognizes its nature and the anger dissolves and becomes mirror like wisdom. Would that be an example of the self-liberation of a thought?

HTG: Yes. There is a prayer that says that whatever appearances arise, just leave them there. Don’t grasp them with a self-concept. Don’t conceptualize them. Then there will be no afflictions. Just leave them there.

HMV: So it is best to leave thoughts in their natural state.

HTG: Yes. [Emphatic] Then the subject and object by their nature are just as pure as the deities.

HMV: You know, it’s really true. It’s really very true that if you believe your mind is OK, then all of a sudden, everything that appears in your mind really is OK.

HTG: Yes. Then it is OK. There is no problem.

HMV: But if you react as if your mind is not OK—by accepting, rejecting, judging and following—that makes it seem as though it is not OK.

HTG: Yes.

HMV: As soon as we stop all of that, then lo and behold, it’s all OK.

HTG: Yes. It’s OK.

HMV: It’s a kind of a miracle.

How the Watcher Becomes Rigpa

HMV: Now once again, in the mind’s dual experience of itself, it seems as though there is both a stream of consciousness and an awareness that is watching the stream of consciousness. Would you agree with that?
KTG: That’s possible. At a subtle level. Yes.
HMV: Why is that subtle?
KTG: Because normally we don’t experience our mind in that way.
HMV: How do we experience our mind normally?
KTG: Normally, we don’t experience all of our thoughts. Sometimes thoughts arise, and you don’t notice them. The thoughts just happen. But when you concentrate in meditation, you become more aware of your thoughts.
HMV: And this, then, is the experience that we all have in meditation where you experience yourself as having a stream of consciousness and being a watcher that is watching the stream of consciousness.
KTG: Yes.
HMV: It sounds like you are saying that this is a skill that has to be developed; that seeing your mind as having an awareness that is separate from your stream of consciousness is a developed skill.
KTG: Yes. It develops as a result of looking into the mind based on these practices, and it is good to develop this kind of awareness.
HMV: Would it be fair to say that this is a first or second step towards the development of egoless mind? Is that what you are saying?
KTG: Yes.
HMV: Because, after all, this is still dual awareness.
KTG: Yes.
HMV: If we went walking outside right now and if we stopped the first person we saw and asked that person if they have, in their mind, a watcher watching their stream of consciousness, do you think they would say yes or no?
KTG: They would say no.
HMV: [Laughter] OK. So that really is what you mean. The experience of having a watcher is something that is created by the practice of meditation.
KTG: Yes.
HMV: Thank you.
KTG: Those who are trained to watch their mind, they have this kind of experience. Normal people don’t.
HMV: Is it helpful to develop this kind of experience?
KTG: Yes.
HMV: Why?
KTG: Because this experience is a step towards realizing the nature of mind.
HMV: Are you saying that it is the watcher that realizes the nature of mind?
KTG: Yes. [Emphatic]
HMV: How does the watcher realize the nature of mind?
KTG: It happens if the watcher knows what the mind looks like, its actual characteristics, and where the thoughts arise from, and how they come. That way you can go much deeper and deeper into it, and then you can get into the nakedness of the nature of mind.
When abandoning the watcher in awareness itself, there is utter emptiness free from color and shape.

—Chokgyur Lingpa

**HMV:** Would it be fair then to say that meditation creates the watcher?

**KTG:** Yes.

**HMV:** Would it also be fair to say that meditation creates the watcher so that eventually the watcher can realize the nature of the mind?

**KTG:** Yes.

**HMV:** So that eventually the watcher can realize the emptiness of the mind?

**KTG:** Yes.

**HMV:** Does this mean that eventually the egocentric watcher is transformed into egoless awareness, or rigpa?

**KTG:** Yes.

**HMV:** How does the watcher become egoless awareness?

**KTG:** At the moment that it recognizes the true nature of mind.

**HMV:** When the watcher recognizes the true nature of mind, then it becomes rigpa.

**KTG:** Yes.

**HMV:** Thank you very much.

**KTG:** Then it realizes that there is no mind and there is no watcher, and then it is realizing the truth.

**HMV:** When you say the watcher realizes there is no mind and there is no watcher, what exactly do you mean?

**KTG:** Normally we think that there is a mind and we think there is a second mind that is watching it; and when we think in this way, it seems like there is a duality of subject and object. But in reality this duality does not really exist in this way. So then at some point it dissolves. The subjective and objective aspect of that mind becomes nondual.

**HMV:** Ahh. The watcher becomes rigpa when it realizes nondual mind.

**KTG:** Yes.

**HMV:** And is that also what you mean by realizing the truth?

**KTG:** Yes. There is no subject or object existing any more.

**HMV:** In other words, when the mind realizes rang-rig yeshe, nondual self-awareness, it is realizing the truth. This is the truth.

**KTG:** Yes.

**Annotation:** The watcher of the ego mind becomes the egoless watcher, rigpa, when it realizes nondual mind. The healthy, or egoless, mind is the mind that has nondual awareness of itself—rang-rig yeshe.

HMV: And this is the same as the watcher having nondual awareness of itself; the same as rigpa having nondual awareness of itself.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Would it be correct to say that when the watcher realizes the emptiness of the stream of consciousness, that it is having nondual awareness of the stream of consciousness.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: And is this the same thing as realizing the truth?

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Thank you very much.

Experiencing the Nature of Mind

HMV: At this point, I’d like to play back to you a tiny portion of an interview that we did before and ask you some questions about that.

KTG: OK.

HMV: Can a tog-may, or non-conceptual thought, appear in an egoless mind?

KTG: A tog-may is a direct perception. The direct perception itself is a kind of awareness. That kind of awareness itself is the nature of mind. And that itself is the wisdom.

HMV: The wisdom is the awareness itself.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Not the appearances?

KTG: Not the appearances.

HMV: Just the awareness.

KTG: Yes. The awareness itself is the wisdom. And the wisdom itself is clarity. And clarity itself is there from the beginning. It never dissolves. It never develops and it never decreases.

HMV: If you are asleep is that clarity present?

KTG: Yes.

HMV: If you are knocked unconscious, is that same wisdom present?

KTG: The wisdom is there.

HMV: Can you describe what that awareness is like? Is there any way you can describe the experience of that awareness?

KTG: It’s like space. It does not have an end. It does not have a beginning. It does not have borders.

HMV: Does that space-like awareness have a blissful quality to it?

KTG: Yes. Definitely.

HMV: Does it have any other qualities?

KTG: Clarity.

HMV: By which you mean that there are no thoughts.
KTG: Yes. No thoughts.

HMV: Is that spacious, blissful and clear wisdom awareness aware of inner appearances?

KTG: It is aware of all phenomena, but it is never gasping or clinging or involved in them.

HMV: That’s very clear. [Laughter] Now a few questions about this passage. And thank you.

KTG: OK.

HMV: When the mind is abiding in this spacious blissful awareness, do all of the inner appearances that arise in the mind dissolve?

KTG: Inner appearances? You mean like thoughts and feelings?

HMV: Yes.

KTG: If one has the actual meditation practice, then they all dissolve.

HMV: In my own experience, it feels like the bliss is actually dissolving the thoughts or inner appearances. It just seems like the bliss is melting them away as they arise, like a flame would melt butter.

KTG: Hm.

HMV: Is that your experience as well? Does the bliss actually work to dissolve the thoughts?

KTG: The actual antidote that dissolves the thoughts is the nature of mind itself—which is actually a combination of emptiness, clarity and the great compassion. When one has a strong experience of bliss, one cannot experience any of the minor thoughts. So that is why it appears like the bliss is dissolving the thoughts.

HMV: Are you saying that when that when the bliss that is the nature of the mind is present, that thoughts can’t appear in the mind?

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Why can’t thoughts appear when that bliss is evident in the mind?

KTG: Because the thoughts arise in the form of bliss. We know the thoughts, but we do not identify with them.

Worldly thoughts are realized as Dharmakaya. So the natural great bliss arises within. There is no need of acceptance and rejection since all phenomena arise as the lama.

—Longchenpa

HMV: No identifying. No grasping. No accepting, no rejecting.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: And that’s why they dissolve.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: When that bliss is there as awareness, the mind doesn’t grasp, accept, or reject. It just allows everything to remain in its natural state.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Is that actually your experience?

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Thank you. It also seems like that bliss just emerges or arises as the thoughts disappear. In other words, you don’t have to make it come. In fact, you can’t make it come. It comes naturally on its own as the thoughts slow down and dissolve.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Is that your experience?

KTG: Oh yes. The fountain rises.

HMV: But you can’t make the fountain rise, can you; even if you tried all day or all of your life. It has to come naturally.

KTG: That’s right.

When from out of the primordially pure Dharmadhatu, suddenly Rigpa arises, and with it there is an instantaneous recognition. It is like finding a precious jewel in the depths of the ocean. No one is responsible for this—it is just the Dharmakaya.

—Garab Dorje

HMV: Why does the bliss arise naturally when the thoughts disappear?

KTG: Because it is the quality of the nature of mind.

HMV: That’s what I thought you’d say; just wanted to make sure. [Laughter] So the nature of mind is a kind of blissful space-like awareness that directly perceives all phenomena without grasping them.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Thank you. Would it be correct to say that the nature of mind is a space-like awareness in the sense that it allows all inner appearances to remain in their natural state?

KTG: Natural state?

HMV: I mean that it is an awareness that does not change inner appearances in any way; there is no grasping, accepting or rejecting.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Can this space-like wisdom awareness be aware of inner appearances and thoughts?

KTG: Yes. It can be aware of inner thoughts if there is a thought.

HMV: And when thoughts appear they will immediately dissolve.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Because they hasn’t been grasped.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Could this wisdom awareness also be called gzhi?35

KTG: Yes. According to DzogChen.

HMV: Thank you. Can it be called chos-ku?36

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Thank you. Is the purpose of meditation to develop this space-like blissful awareness?

KTG: The purpose of meditation is to just to recognize the nature of mind, and to maintain it.

HMV: And it sounds like you are saying that the nature of mind is this blissful space-like awareness.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Would it be fair to say, then, that what meditation does is train the mind to stop grasping, rejecting, accepting, following; and that as a result of this training the mind realizes the nature of mind which is a blissful and clear space-like awareness?

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Thank you very much.

Ah! In supreme bliss—just as it is, effortless—
Do not make any effort with body, speech or mind.
Do not contrive or create constructs.
Do not conceptualize.
Do not be influenced by the characteristics of things.
Rest in the ultimate experience of bliss, naturally occurring timeless awareness.
—The All Creating Monarch37

35. Gzhi is another name for egoless awareness. It is the empty awareness that is the ground of all existence.

36. Chosku is yet another name for egoless awareness. It is the Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit term dharmakaya. One of the traditional ways of describing the mind of the Buddha is to describe it as having three aspects: dharmakaya, sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya. In DzogChen, the dharmakaya is the blissful space-like awareness that realizes the emptiness of all phenomena. In this series of questions, after establishing that blissful space-like nondual self-awareness is the natural state of the mind, I am asking the Khenpo if dharmakaya is another name for this awareness.

Conceptual and Nonconceptual Joy

HMV: Just a few more questions now. My experience is that when I stop grasping—when I stop accepting, rejecting, judging and following my thoughts—that my thoughts slow down. The waves of the ocean start to disappear. The thoughts slow down more and more, and as they continue to slow down, a feeling of joy arises within me, and then as that feeling grows, it becomes more and more stable and then it becomes me.

KTG: Aha!

HMV: You know what I mean.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: It becomes me in the sense that it becomes my awareness—the awareness that knows my inner and outer world. Sometimes it comes. Sometimes it goes. When it’s present, all of the inner appearances that arise in the face of that joy dissolve and disappear. Do you know this experience? Is this an experience that occurs on the path?

KTG: It can happen. But there can be conceptual joy and non-conceptual joy.

HMV: What is the difference between conceptual joy and non-conceptual joy?

KTG: Conceptual joy is experiencing the joy and then having the concept that this is joy: “Oh this is so good.” This is conceptual joy.

HMV: In other words, you become aware that you are in a good state of mind, and you label it as such.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Which would make you want to hold on to this joyous awareness, and as a result it would become, in turn, a form of ego.

KTG: Yes. Yes.

HMV: Then what is non-conceptual joy?

KTG: Non-conceptual joy is the opposite of that. You have the joy, but you have no concept of it at all.

HMV: You don’t step back from it and go “Aha, this is good.”

KTG: Yes.

HMV: You just are the nondual joy.

KTG: Yes. The joy and one’s self are not separate. It is like the first moment of the tongue tasting chocolate. When the sweetness of the chocolate and the subject meet, there is a sense of knowing the taste without any concepts.

When awareness is a space that leaves the stream of consciousness in its natural state,
When awareness ceases to believe and live in the ego narratives created by the stream of consciousness, this allows the thoughts and emotions of the mind to dissolve and become joy.
The joy that is space-like nondual self-awareness.
The joy that is the natural state of your mind.
APPENDIX

Self-Liberation

HMV: On another occasion you once said that if you recognize the nature of thoughts in DzogChen, they self-liberate into wisdom.

KTG: OK.

HMV: When a thought self-liberates into wisdom, does it dissolve?

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Is that a moment of nondual awareness?

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Thank you. Now suppose an angry thought arises, the mind recognizes its nature, the anger dissolves and mirror-like wisdom appears. Would that be an example of the self-liberation of a thought?

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Suppose a hundred thoughts dissolve. Will each of those thoughts turn into a nondual wisdom, or just some of them?

KTG: In general there are many subthoughts and not each of the subthoughts will necessarily change into wisdom.

HMV: You mean that it’s not the case that each and every sems-byung\textsuperscript{38} turns into wisdom.

KTG: Yes. What happens is that all the thoughts disappear and then there is one wisdom.

HMV: Ahh.

KTG: And that wisdom has one nature and different features. Yes. There is one wisdom, but that wisdom can appear as mirror-like wisdom or sameness wisdom. Like that. One nature. Five aspects.

HMV: OK. Those are the five wisdoms.\textsuperscript{39}

KTG: Yes.

HMV: I’d like to make sure that I’ve understood you. It sounds like you are saying that one transformation that can happen to a stream of thoughts when many, many thoughts are going through your mind . . .

KTG: Yes.

HMV: . . . is that all of a sudden that stream of thoughts will dissolve and one wisdom will appear in their place.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Does that wisdom appear for a short period of time or a long period of time?

\textsuperscript{38} There are six systematic psychologies in the history of Buddhist ideas. The first systematic psychology was the Abhidharma. In the Abhidharmic analysis, there are primary thoughts (sems) and subthoughts (sems-byung).

\textsuperscript{39} It is traditionally said in Tibetan Buddhism that there are five different primordial wisdoms, each of which corresponds to, and is a nondual transformation of, one of the five basic emotions.
KTG: That depends on the practitioner. Actually it is always there in the ordinary mind, but it is just not recognized.

HMV: OK.

KTG: But once practice is stabilized, it appears for a longer time.

HMV: OK. Does that wisdom appear as a single appearance, or phenomenon, in the stream of consciousness, or does it appear as a specific type of awareness?

KTG: As a type of awareness.

The Egoless Ego of the Bodhisattva

HMV: I’d like to turn to another issue. In doing these lama interviews, and in particular with you, I think I’ve come to an understanding that I wanted to run by you and see if you think it is correct. When we were talking about accepting and rejecting thoughts earlier on, you said that you would reject the thought of stealing. Or accept the thought of compassion.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: That this is actually part of your path.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: That made me think that perhaps you have what I would call a Bodhisattva ego. What I mean by a Bodhisattva ego is this: In our earlier conversations I think we agreed that an ego has two aspects: one, an image or concept of who you are and two, the illusions that the mind creates—by grasping, accepting, rejecting, and living in its thoughts—to maintain the belief that it has the self-image or self-concept that it thinks it has.

KTG: OK.

HMV: It has begun to dawn on me that what you, and many of the other lamas that I’ve talked to, are doing in their practice, is developing a Bodhisattva ego. That rather than wanting to be rich and famous or whatever, that your practice is one of trying to be a person who helps all sentient beings become happy and self-realized.

KTG: Um hm.

HMV: And that the path of the Bodhisattva is one of adhering to the six paramitas or ten paramitas and the precepts and whatnot.

KTG: OK.

HMV: And that as a result, you actually still accept and reject thoughts. You accept and reject thoughts in a way that will allow you to maintain your ability to be a Bodhisattva; to maintain your Bodhisattva notion of ego. Does this sound right to you?

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Is that true? Do you have a positive ego on the basis of which you accept and reject thoughts?

KTG: Yes. This is based on the Bodhisattva practice. It is the path, and it is true.
HMV: It is true, then, that you would accept and reject thoughts, feelings or emotions on the basis of whether or not they enable you to conform to what the ideal of a Bodhisattva.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: The Dalai Lama said a similar thing to me in a slightly different way. He said that you have to have a positive ego to be egoless. Many Western practitioners have had the impression that being egoless means that you don’t have any sense of identity at all. But I don’t think that this is what the Buddhist tradition says. You advocate a positive ego, which is the Bodhisattva ego, and that is the path.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: Now my next question is this: this approach of accepting and rejecting thoughts on the basis of a positive ego seems different than the DzogChen path as I understand it. I can see that you understand where I’m going with this. The later portion of the DzogChen path is one in which you don’t accept, reject, follow. You just allow all of your thoughts and emotions to remain in their natural state and self-liberate.

KTG: Yes.

HMV: On the surface those two paths seem contradictory. Do they go together? Are they two different paths? Or are they two different stages of the same path?

KTG: Different stages. And also it has been said different paths.

HMV: OK. Could you explain what you mean by both of those statements?

KTG: They are different paths in the sense that the Bodhisattva path is practiced according to the Sutrayana. And the DzogChen path is one on which you don’t accept, reject, follow and so forth. But for one particular person, these two different paths become stages. First you do the Hinayana way of practice, then the Bodhisattva way of practice. Then it goes higher and higher and then comes the DzogChen practice.

HMV: Does the Bodhisattva practice of accepting and rejecting thoughts interfere with the DzogChen practice of not accepting? I can see that you know what I am going to ask and that your answer is going to be no.

KTG: That’s right. Someone who is practicing DzogChen is also on the Bodhisattva path.

HMV: At the same time.

KTG: Yes. It is not separate from the DzogChen path. If the DzogChen path is totally separate from the Bodhisattva path then that is not the actual DzogChen.

HMV: So I’m still wondering how they go together, since they seem to involve different ways of relating to one’s own mind. In thinking about this issue, here is what occurs to me. I’d like to find out if you think it’s right or wrong. I think that at first, a DzogChen practitioner would try to be a Bodhisattva and reject and accept thoughts on that basis. At some point,
though, you would stop rejecting, accepting, following thoughts as you transcend the Bodhisattva ego. So you are still trying to be a Bodhisattva, but you are also allowing your thoughts to remain in their natural state. Is that how it works?

*KTG*: Yes. The actual meditation practice for one’s self is to apply the DzogChen path, which is, as you know, the fastest path in meditation. That whatever thought arises just recognize it and let it go. Then on the Bodhisattva path, there are positive thoughts and negative thoughts. To reject negative thoughts and accept positive thought is more for relating to sentient beings. It’s the external practice.

*HMV*: Oh. So you divide it up. On the inside with your mind you do DzogChen.

*KTG*: Yes; in your meditation practice.

*HMV*: But in your day to day life, you continue to try and be a Bodhisattva and accept and reject.

*KTG*: Yes.

*HMV*: Very interesting. [Lots of laughter]

*KTG*: For example, suppose a thought of desire comes. According to DzogChen, there is nothing to accept or reject. But it is also a danger to the practitioner who does not understand nothing to accept, nothing to reject. So they start doing things thinking that a bad thought is nothing to reject. Then there is the possibility of creating negative karma. So on the Bodhisattva path one must reject a thought that is the cause of negative karma.

*HMV*: So are you saying that on the DzogChen path you would reject the thought of desire for another human being?

*KTG*: No. On the DzogChen path you don’t reject thoughts. When a thought arises, you just recognize it and let it dissolve.

**References**


Trekcho Interview

This is the wisdom of self-awareness; it is beyond speech and not an object of conceptual mind. Therefore, I, Tilopa have nothing whatsoever to show you. Know by yourself your own supreme self-awareness.

Tilopa

HMV: Usually when I ask questions about trekcho I end up feeling that there is nothing to learn. That it is somehow irrelevant to try and learn anything about the method of Trekcho—if there is such a thing. Is there anything to learn about doing the practice of trekcho?

LTN: Oh yes. Very much.

HMV: What kinds of things?

LTN: You must practice guru yoga. If you practice guru yoga it makes you part of the connection to the lineage. You must also learn to allow all of the creations of the mind to go back to the natural state. You must learn how to find the natural state; when you think back to the source of the mind, you can’t find anything.

HMV: But you do see thoughts, emotions, feelings.

LTN: Yes. Everything. That’s the nature of change, and they all return to the nature of the mind. If you are trying to find where they are coming from,

you won’t find anything. Watcher and watched, both of them disappear at the same time.

If what appears as perceived does not exist,
Then what appears as perceiver does not exist;
Duality’s not existing at all is what really exists.
—Maitreya²

HMV: It seems though, like there is always an awareness present.
LTN: No. There is nothing there, but it is not the same condition as deep sleep or being unconsciousness. At that moment, your awareness is very bright and clear, but what is there you can’t speak of it.
HMV: What do you mean when you say it is really bright?
LTN: Well it is clear . . . very bright and very clear.
HMV: What do you actually experience in that state of mind?
LTN: Well nothing.
HMV: Nothing. No thoughts.
LTN: No.
HMV: No emotions.
LTN: No. Nothing.
HMV: Awareness? Are you aware that you are aware?
LTN: Yes. Just aware, but what you are aware of is unspeakable.
HMV: Are you saying that there is nothing there to be aware of?
LTN: Awareness is there. That means you can’t find anything. It itself is aware.
HMV: Is it just space?
LTN: Space and awareness. Awareness is also space.
HMV: Awareness is space.
LTN: Yes.
HMV: So there is nothing there.
LTN: Nothing there.
HMV: Nothing material is there, and there are no phenomena of any kind. That is what you mean by nondual awareness.
LTN: Surely. That is the nature of mind. When you are in this position, soon after, when the thoughts start to arise without expectation, they go back to their source. The source is the same as your nature.
HMV: How do you stay in the nature if the thoughts arise?
LTN: Well that depends. If you are familiar with the thoughts, then they will not take you . . . lead you.
HMV: In other words, you don’t believe your thoughts.
LTN: Yes.

**HMV:** You just let them go.

**LTN:** Yes.

**HMV:** You don’t care about them.

**LTN:** Don’t care. Whatever comes.

**HMV:** In other words, just let them go. Don’t believe them.

**LTN:** Nothing.

**HMV:** Don’t believe in anything.

**LTN:** Nothing.

*Annotation:* Here Lopon is saying that thoughts can and do appear to nondual awareness, or rigpa. He also says that one of the defining characteristics of nondual awareness is that it does not follow the thoughts that appear to it. Nondual awareness does not follow thoughts. Rigpa does not care about the thoughts created by the dual mind. Nor does rigpa believe the content of the stories they create and narrate. This is the state of mind that trekcho cultivates.

The dharmakaya is “a state of meditation that is like the continuous flowing of a river, and (in which one) remains, at all times, without attempting to create or stop anything or trying to develop thoughts or calm them down.”

In contrast, the watcher, the subject of the egocentric mind, does follow and believe the stories that are created by its thoughts, and in so doing, it causes itself to suffer.

**HMV:** It sounds like this state of mind would sort of be like watching a movie go by and realizing it is just a movie and not real life.

**LTN:** Yes. You don’t need to care. If you think something, thought side, then you are already too distracted.

**HMV:** OK. So the important thing to do is to neither believe the thoughts nor think about them.

**LTN:** Not at all.

**HMV:** And then if you don’t care about them, they will just disappear.

**LTN:** Yes, and when they disappear it is just the same as you keeping into the nature.

**HMV:** They come from emptiness and return to emptiness.

**LTN:** Yes.

**HMV:** How do you concentrate into the natural state? What do you focus your awareness on?

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LTN: There is nothing to do. Just leave it to itself. If you do something, if you try to do anything, then you are not into the natural state.

HMV: So there is no method.

LTN: No. Just keep the natural state continuously.

If one rests in the natural state without seeking anything,
Without any specific method concerning how or when to rest,
that is meditation.
—The All Creating Monarch 4

HMV: How do you stabilize the natural state?

LTN: Just do nothing.

HMV: Just sit there with my eyes open?

LTN: No. That doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter whether your eyes are open or closed or whether you lie down in your bed.

HMV: But even when I do nothing, I do something.

Annotation: There is a distinction to be made between trying to do nothing and just simply doing nothing. When you try to do nothing, then you are doing something. Lopon is saying here that in trekcho you cultivate a state of mind in which you just simply do nothing and, in so doing, allow your mind to remain in its natural state.

There is also a larger distinction to be made between allowing your mind to remain in its natural state and the act of trying to cultivate a predefined state of mind. The nature state of the mind is egoless. In contrast, whenever you try to cultivate a specific state of mind, you are creating a form of ego, and what is more, the defining essence of the egocentric mind is that it is a mind that tries to maintain a predefined state.

The predefined state that is customarily maintained by the ego of the socialized mind is one’s concept of self, or identity. But you are also creating a form of ego whenever you try and cultivate a state of mind that is blissful, or a state of mind in which no thoughts appear, or a state of mind in which you do absolutely nothing.

LTN: That depends. If you are familiar with keeping the natural state, if you are quite advanced with this practice, then you can talk, or you can do everything without disturbing it.

HMV: You mean that you could do those things without getting distracted into following your thoughts.

LTN: Well no. You just keep in the natural state while you are doing something. That takes a long time.

HMV: So when you say you just don’t do anything, would that be the same as saying that you don’t reject your thoughts.

LTN: Yes.

HMV: You don’t accept your thoughts.

LTN: Yes.

HMV: You don’t follow your thoughts.

LTN: Yes.

HMV: That’s the same thing.

LTN: That’s the same thing.

HMV: It’s easy to stop following thoughts . . .

LTN: If you try to stop your thoughts . . .

HMV: Then you make another thought.

LTN: Yes. Then you are making more thoughts. Don’t do anything. Just try to keep in the natural state.

HMV: If you told me to pick up my helmet, I’d say OK, there’s my helmet over there and I’ll go to go pick it up. If you told me to go start my motorcycle, I’d walk down the hill, put the key in my bike, turn the key on and kick it over. There would be a discernible method to starting the motorcycle; a technique.

LTN: Yes.

HMV: If you told me to keep my mind in the natural state, what would the technique be for doing that?

LTN: That I told you. Just watch. Once your thoughts come, just for a moment turn back to the thoughts. Where do they come from? How do they look like?

HMV: I guess that’s what I’m asking Lopon. Can you describe that process? What is that process like of turning back to the source?

LTN: Well that is the method. But there is no real method to use because it is unspeakable. If you follow what I am saying, words, then you won’t find the natural state at all. You are listening to the outside, and you are catching my words.

Annotation: This is really the crux of what Lopon is trying to say here about the technique of trekcho. Lopon’s point is that you simply cannot give another human being instructions on how to cultivate the natural state of their mind. For one, there are no instructions because there is nothing to do.

But more importantly, if you try to follow a set of instructions when you are meditating, then you are no longer allowing your mind to rest in its natural state. If you follow a set of instructions, then you will be making your mind do something different than whatever it would have
been doing naturally. If you try to follow a given technique, then you are not allowing the natural process of your mind to unfold as it is.

All you can do is remain in the natural state. Do not change the dynamics of your mind in any way, unless, of course, it changes itself naturally on its own.

The natural state of the mind has an effortless quality to it. It is a state in which you feel as though there is no need to respond to or change the phenomena that appear within your mind. Everything is already perfect.

The import of leaving your mind in its natural state is that it allows the thoughts and emotions of the dual mind to self-liberate, or spontaneously transform themselves, into nondual egoless mind.

The nature of mind does not change: were the nature of mind to seek to realize itself it could not succeed.

—Supreme Source

Suppose anger comes. You just watch, for that moment, the angry thoughts. You can’t see anything. The anger itself is disappearing if you don’t follow the angry thoughts.

HMV: Suppose the anger doesn’t disappear.

LTN: Well it does. If you have anger for a long time, that means that you are following it. Supporting it. If you don’t support it, surely it will disappear.

HMV: So if I stay angry at someone for six hours, that means that I am still following the angry thoughts and emotions.

LTN: Oh surely, Yes. Yes. Look how many people fight wars. So you just look back to the thoughts. See where their source is and where they are coming from. What do they look like? Then you can’t find anything. When you don’t find anything, then you have already found the nature. This is the nature.

HMV: If I don’t find anything, that is trekcho.

LTN: This is the trekcho. There is nothing else to do. Trekcho means that you are not following any of your thoughts. You are not following. Everything dissolves and goes back to the source. If something comes, you don’t follow it.

Annotation: If you allow your mind to remain in its natural state, it will spontaneously show you the source, the empty awareness, from which your thoughts come and to which they return.

HMV: Well then, let’s go back to the original question: Is there anything to learn about the trekcho?

LTN: Yes.
HMV: What do you have to learn?
LTN: Well . . . that depends. If you are advanced, and if you are practicing continuously without any disturbance, then you have to learn the phenomena.
HMV: What phenomena do you have to learn? The phenomena of my mind?
LTN: The phenomena of your mind. All the visible things. The worldly life. Everything.
HMV: What do you mean by learn the phenomena of your mind?
LTN: Well learning the phenomena means, for example, take one person. His wife thinks, “He is my husband.” His mother thinks, “This is my son.” This is one person. Other people think this is my friend, or my enemy or something.
HMV: They all have different concepts of who that person is.
LTN: Yes. On his side, what exists in reality is nothing. Everything is created by your thoughts. So everything is the same situation. All the good things. All the bad things. Even the universe. All of the universe comes from the thoughts. The creator is the thoughts. Once you realize that the thoughts are the creator, then all of the created universe goes completely into being illusion. It is only made by thoughts, but on their own side, nothing exists, like that man. You have to learn that.
HMV: That the delusions are delusions.
LTN: Yes. The delusions are presented by your own thoughts.
HMV: Are you saying then, that to experience the nature of mind, that you have to really genuinely believe that all of your thoughts are illusions?
LTN: Do not try to believe anything. You just have to become familiar with the natural state. If you are familiar with the natural state, then you are absolutely into the natural state.
HMV: And to be familiar with the natural state, does that mean that you just naturally stop following your thoughts? That you train yourself, you allow yourself, to stop following them?
LTN: Yes. Surely.
HMV: And that is the practice.
LTN: Yes. Surely. Then you will realize that everything is projected and illusion. That teaches you very much. Much more than science ever will. The scientist always has to face to the outside.

Annotation: Lopon is saying here that all of your dual, or grasping, thoughts are illusions; they create the illusion that all of the things in the universe really exist and have a self. He is also saying that there is no need, when you meditate, to try and look at your thoughts as though they are illusions. To do so, would be a departure from the natural state and it would create, once again, a form of ego. If you simply stop following your thoughts, the realization that they are all illusory will arise spontaneously.
The virtue and import of realizing that all of the thoughts that appear as your habitual patterns of ego thought are illusory is that: (1) you will stop living in the stories they create; (2) you will stop trying to change them by responding to and grasping them; and as a result (3) they will dissolve into and become nondual awareness.

**HMV:** But is it not true that the talk we’re having right now is science.

**LTN:** Oh yes. Surely.

**HMV:** We are talking about observable things.

**LTN:** But as much as you follow your thoughts, you won’t find anything; always more and more coming.

**HMV:** When you follow them, the same thoughts keep arising.

**LTN:** Surely. Always rising; one after the other.

**HMV:** Why does following your thoughts make more of them arise?

**LTN:** There is no limit. The human mind has no root. It is rootless. Everything in this world is destroyed by the elements. Fire or wind or water, but mind never disappears. And science is completely following the thoughts. If you don’t go back to the source, then the thoughts won’t be limited at all.

**HMV:** How do you go back to the source?

**LTN:** Just watch the thoughts.

**HMV:** Just let them go.

**LTN:** Yes. That is the key. If you try to do something, then you will never achieve the natural state at all.

**HMV:** Why does it seem like there must be something more to learn than this?

**LTN:** Well that depends how long you have spent with the natural state. You have to practice. Then you are getting more and more into the natural state. If you don’t practice it, it’s all theory. Talking. And then you will never achieve it. You can talk and get some idea of what it looks like, but the complete explanation will never come to you.

**HMV:** Thank you. What is the difference between Vipassana and Trekcho?

**LTN:** Well there is very much difference.

**HMV:** What is the difference?

**LTN:** In Vipassana, you have to focus in a particular way. In Trekcho, there is no focus at all.

**HMV:** Whatever happens, happens.

**LTN:** Yes. I told you. Awareness is empty. Empty awareness. But in Vipassana you must have some target or focus.

**HMV:** How do you know when you are in the natural state?

**LTN:** Well that depends on my thoughts, how I control them, and whether or not I follow them. When the thoughts come, I know whether or not I am following them.

**HMV:** How do know that you are not following your thoughts?

**LTN:** Well that is by yourself; your empty awareness.
HMV: When there are no thoughts or emotions?
LTN: No. If you are dependent upon emotions or thoughts, then you are not in the natural state.
HMV: What do you mean by “dependent on thoughts or emotions”?
LTN: Well, follow or believe them.
HMV: In trekcho, do you focus on the gaps—the gaps that appear in the stream of consciousness?
LTN: No. Not at all.
HMV: So you don’t focus on anything.
LTN: Nothing. Just completely leave it.
HMV: I’d like to present to you a conclusion that I’ve reached as a result of my own experience, and I’d like to know what you think about it.
LTN: OK.
HMV: The conclusion is this: the way in which your mind responds to its own thoughts and emotions will determine whether or not you realize nondual awareness. You have just now said, for example, that you should just let your thoughts go. Don’t care about them. This is one specific way of responding to, or relating to, your own mind. It is one particular way of relating to your own thoughts.
LTN: Oh yes.
HMV: It sounds like you are saying that the way the mind relates to its thoughts will determine whether or not you realize nondual mind.
LTN: Oh yes. Surely.
HMV: That’s true?
LTN: Yes. The thoughts are very much for the temporary. Like clouds. So they are coming and going. We don’t need to follow or care about them. If you let them come, they will stay awhile and disappear. But if you follow them, then more and more will come. If you don’t follow them, then they themselves disappear.

The wind blows through the sky and flies over continents without settling anywhere. It traverses space and leaves no trace. Thus should thoughts pass through our mind.

—Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche

The thoughts themselves are very much temporary. Nothing to do with the nature. The natural state means that it is the nature of all existence, not only the mind. One thought can show you the real nature, but that nature, that emptiness, is the same quality of the whole universe. Not only for one thought. You don’t need to do anything with those thoughts.

HMV: Just allow them to remain in their natural state.

LTN: Everything is in there. You don’t need to follow your good thoughts. You don’t need to follow or even watch them. Or the bad thoughts. They are all the same thought. The same quality. The same nature. This is the complete truth.

HMV: So if you follow your thoughts, they will keep coming, and your mind will remain dual.

LTN: Oh surely.

HMV: If on the other hand, you don’t follow your thoughts, then they will disappear, and you will realize nondual mind.

LTN: Yes.

Annotation: Unbeknownst to himself, Lopon is being a scientist here. He is saying that in his experience, it is empirically correct to say that when awareness does not follow the thoughts that appear before it, it causes two things to happen: (1) those thoughts will dissolve and disappear and (2) nondual awareness, the nature of the mind, will arise. “One thought can show you the real nature, but that nature, that emptiness, is the same quality of the whole universe.”

Lopon is also saying here that in contrast, it has been his observation that if the watcher does follow its thoughts, that it causes two different things to happen: (1) more thoughts will appear and (2) the watcher will have dual awareness of those thoughts.

In making these observations, Lopon is affirming three fundamental principles of human self-awareness: (1) the watcher can and does respond to the thoughts and emotions that appear in its stream of consciousness; (2) the watcher responds to those meanings in a number of different ways; and (3) the different responses will determine what kind of awareness the mind will have of the meanings that appear in its stream of consciousness.⁷

In addition, meditation is, ultimately, a means of changing the way the mind knows and relates to itself. The human mind has two fundamental modes of self-awareness: egocentric self-awareness and egoless self-awareness. In the egocentric mode of self-awareness, the watcher is forever and always trying to change its experience of its stream of consciousness so as to maintain its sense of identity. The egocentric watcher alters its stream of consciousness by repressing or holding on to thoughts and emotions, by attributing concepts of self to those thoughts and emotions

⁷. Concurring and related observations can be found throughout all three of the first three volumes of The Healthy Mind Interviews.
and by creating and living in emotional thought narratives that support its sense of identity.

Meditation, in contrast, dismantles the machinations of ego. It cultivates a state of mind in which awareness does absolutely nothing and is, thus, like space. Egoless self-awareness does not accept, reject or follow its thoughts and feelings. This second mode of self-awareness is the joyous nondual awareness that is spontaneously cultivated by the practice of trekcho.

**HMV:** Thank you. Now, would it be correct to say that there is more than one way of following your thoughts? It seems like so far we have said that following your thoughts is the same as believing them.

**LTN:** Yes.

**HMV:** If you follow, or believe, your thoughts, that this will cause more thoughts to arise.

**LTN:** Oh surely.

**HMV:** Now sometimes the mind will spontaneously try to reject a thought.

**LTN:** Yes. Sometimes.

**HMV:** Will that make more thoughts appear?

**LTN:** Yes. Surely.

**HMV:** If you accept and hold on to a thought, will that cause more thoughts to appear?

**LTN:** Yes. Surely.

**HMV:** What kind of response will stop the thoughts from coming?

**LTN:** Doing nothing. Just keeping in the natural state. Then the thoughts themselves will stop. If you try to do something, then you will not be in the natural state.

**HMV:** I guess one of the hardest things to do in the world of the mind is to do nothing.

**LTN:** It is not easy.

**Lopon Tenzin Namdak Rigpa Interview**

With the perception of the true nature of phenomena within basic space, wisdom arises continuously as the adornment of that space.

—Longchenpa

Whatever thought or emotion arises, in itself it is none other than the wisdom of dharma-kaya.

The true nature of these thoughts and emotions is the actual clear light of the ground of dharmakaya.

—Patrul Rinpoche

HMV: When you meditate, does a stream of thoughts ever appear in your mind?

LTN: Yes.

HMV: How do these thoughts appear in the stream of consciousness?

LTN: They just appear spontaneously. This is the normal way. And if you don’t touch anything, if you don’t follow anything, right after they appear, the thoughts are liberated. You don’t need to do anything more. If you do something, than more and more thoughts will develop. Continuously.

HMV: When you say “do something,” what do you mean?

LTN: Well that is the normal way things happen. You do something. However, if you don’t care about the thoughts, when the thoughts come, they will disappear by themselves. There’s no trace. But if you do something, then everything is created. This is the simple way. If you are a national leader, and you give somebody an order, first of all you have very simple thoughts coming up, and you immediately take action. You say something. You give an order to the next person, and they do something more and more and then you have created the Second World War.

HMV: [Laughter] Does it work the same way in the mind?

LTN: Sure!

HMV: When the thoughts appear to the mind, how do they appear? As images? As words?

LTN: They come like waves.

HMV: They come spontaneously.

LTN: For sure.

HMV: And do you actually experience them?

LTN: Sure.

HMV: How do you experience them? Are they pictures in the mind?

LTN: No. This is mind. It comes from the nature. And they spontaneously appear.

HMV: When I look at my glasses, I see the glasses there. When you look at a thought, what do you see?

LTN: It depends on the thought. It depends on what you are following.


10. When Lopon says here that, “You do something,” he means that awareness does something in the sense that it makes one of the three egocentric responses of accepting, rejecting or following the thoughts and emotions that appear in its stream of consciousness.
HMV: Different thoughts appear in different ways.

LTN: Yes. And you can observe whatever comes up. If you seriously want to control them, then you need to not care about anything. Good things are coming up. Bad things are coming up. But if you don’t follow them, then soon after they appear, they, themselves, will all be liberated into the nature. Which is also where they are coming from.

HMV: Are you saying that there is a causal relationship between the actions of the watcher and the thoughts. For example, here it seems as though you are saying that if the mind does not follow its thoughts, that it will cause, or allow, the thoughts to dissolve and disappear.

LTN: Yes. And then they go back to where they came from. There is no separation.

HMV: What do you mean there is no separation?

LTN: Well that means that the thoughts are not coming from beyond the nature. They are coming up from the nature, arising into nature and disappearing into nature. That means that the thoughts and the nature are not at all separate. The thoughts themselves are nature; the empty nature. If you think that something is there, concretely or materially, then more and more thoughts will develop.

Annotation: The nature of mind is an important technical term in both Buddhist and DzogChen mind science. In its simplest sense, to know the nature of the mind is to know the mind the way it really is; to know the mind in its natural, or unaltered, state. In the context of DzogChen mind science, the natural state of the mind is an awareness that is empty, nondual, joyous and like space.

The natural mind is also a mind in which all inner appearances—dual, nondual and predual—are allowed to pursue their own natural trajectory. When the inner appearances are left in their natural state, they spontaneously dissolve and self-liberate. They spontaneously transform themselves into nondual egoless mind.

HMV: Are these thoughts dual appearances? Is there a subject and object?

LTN: Yes, obviously. Any kind of consciousness is dual consciousness.

HMV: Are they dualistic in the sense that there is a subject and object present?

LTN: Yes.

11. Lopon uses the English word “consciousness,” which is a translation of the Tibetan term “rnam par shes pa,” as a synonym for dual mind. Many lamas do. This is a consequence of the history of the translation of Tibetan term “shes pa” into English. “Shespa” is a technical term in Buddhist psychology, and refers to specific kinds of dual moments of consciousness that appear in the stream of consciousness. (The English term “consciousness,” however, does not necessarily denote dual, as opposed to nondual, awareness.)
HMV: Are they dualistic in the sense that there is a watcher, or awareness, watching a stream of thoughts?
LTN: Yes.
HMV: How do you know that a thought is a dualistic appearance?
LTN: That becomes clear from having experience of the nature. When you experience the nature, then you can see clearly without subject and object. They are coming up spontaneously without subject and object. Then they are liberated into the nature from which they came.
HMV: It sounds like you are saying that the mind can have both dual and nondual awareness of itself, and that once you have experienced the nature of mind, you can tell the difference between them.
LTN: According to the DzogChen view, any kind of consciousness is a dual consciousness. Subject and object are always there, because all consciousnesses are grasping at something. There is conception.
HMV: Is it the grasping, then, the attributing of a concept of self to a phenomenon, that defines and creates dual consciousness?
LTN: Yes.
HMV: So mind, or sams, means dual mind.
LTN: Yes completely.
HMV: And the nature of mind means nondual mind.
LTN: Yes completely. There is not any consciousness at all. Only empty nature.
HMV: Is there awareness?
LTN: Yes. There is awareness. It’s empty. There is no separation of awareness and nature. We talk about them as being different things to help understand it, but it only like water and wet.

Annotation: Lopon is saying here that the “nature of mind” is the same as rigpa—awareness that is nondual and empty; the awareness that realizes the mind’s own emptiness.

HMV: My experience has been that when a person first starts meditating, that many thoughts, a stream of thoughts, will appear in a person’s mind. Is that correct?
LTN: Sure. This is the nature.

12. Two quick points here. Once again, Lopon is using the term “consciousness” as a synonym for dual awareness. Second, the term grasp is a translation of the Tibetan term “dzinpa.” In its essence, the watcher grasps a phenomenon whenever it responds to an inner appearance by attributing a concept of self to that appearance. That would include the responses of repressing, attaching, and following.
13. This is both a linguistic and empirical assertion. Either way, Lopon is asserting that dual moments of consciousness, for example thoughts or emotions, do not appear in the natural, or nondual, mind.
HMV: And then after a person has been meditating for a while, the thoughts begin to slow down.

LTN: Yes.

HMV: And sometimes they even disappear. Is that correct?

LTN: Yes.

HMV: Eventually, it seems that gaps will begin to appear in the stream of thoughts. Periods of time occur when there are no thoughts appearing. And sometimes those gaps will last for a very long time. In your experience, can that happen?

LTN: Yes. What do you mean by gap?

HMV: By gap I mean a period of time in which there are no inner appearances. Nothing appears.

LTN: Then what is there?

HMV: Nothing.

LTN: Nothing?

HMV: Well there is an awareness present.

LTN: What is awareness?

HMV: It’s just awareness.

LTN: What’s it aware of? To be aware means seeing or knowing something. Otherwise there is no awareness.

HMV: It is aware of space.

LTN: Space. OK. Who at that time is knowing that empty space?

HMV: Nondual awareness. Rigpa. 14

LTN: Oh yes. This is the point you see. Is this rigpa consciousness? 15

HMV: No. It is not consciousness.

LTN: OK. Then what is rigpa?

HMV: It is just the awareness of empty space.

LTN: Just space.

HMV: Just space. 16

LTN: Nothing else?

HMV: Nothing else.

LTN: OK. Only space. Why do you call this awareness? Space itself cannot see anything or know anything. It is empty. Then what is aware?

14. Rigpa is usually translated as either “awareness” or “pristine awareness.” In truth, the word has many different meanings in both colloquial and philosophical Tibetan. Different schools of thought give different meanings to the word rigpa. In the DzogChen setting, rigpa refers, empirically, to nondual awareness.

15. Once again, Lopon uses the term “consciousness” in a very specific way. Here Lopon is using the term to ask if there are any dual moments of consciousness, which would include thoughts, emotions and the habitual patterns of ego thought, present in rigpa.

16. Empirically, the term “space” is being used here to refer to awareness that is like space. It is an awareness that is like space in the sense that it responds to the meanings that appear in its stream of consciousness without rejecting, accepting or following them (lahng-door maypa and jay-soodrong maypa).
HMV: The awareness itself. It is aware of the space and itself.
LTN: OK. Just aware. Then how do you control it at that moment? How do you stay in that state?
HMV: Well actually I don’t try and control it.
LTN: You don’t do anything?
HMV: Nothing.
LTN: OK. Completely empty space.
HMV: Completely empty.
LTN: OK. There is no awareness. Nothing to see. Nothing to know. Only space exists.
HMV: There is only space, but it also definitely feels like there is an awareness present within the space. My experience has been that within this space, inner appearances can continue to appear.
LTN: Yes.
HMV: The inner appearances continue, but they dissolve as soon as they appear.
LTN: Yes they continue, but is something changing, or does the space go on?
HMV: The way it seems to me is that the space goes on.
LTN: Never changing.
HMV: Never changing.
LTN: OK.
HMV: It never changes, but again, individual inner appearances will sometimes come into the space.\textsuperscript{17}
LTN: Yes.
HMV: But as soon as they come into this space, they dissolve.
LTN: OK.
HMV: And then they’re not there anymore.
LTN: Yes.
HMV: And then there is space again. Maybe for a long time.
LTN: OK.
HMV: And then another single inner appearance will come and then just dissolve. And then it’s gone.
LTN: OK. Who sees?
HMV: Just the awareness.
LTN: You say this is awareness, but it is only space. Nothing else.
HMV: My experience is that when these single inner appearances arise, they come into the space and then immediately disappear.
LTN: Yes.
HMV: In addition, my experience has been that when these single appearances dissolve, different things can then happen. For example, sometimes

\textsuperscript{17} By individual inner appearances, I am referring to predual moments of consciousness that dissolve as soon as they appear. They are neither dual nor nondual. Please see the annotation on pp. 73–83 of Volume III of \textit{The Healthy Mind Interviews} for a thorough discussion of the nature of predual inner appearances.
when a single inner appearance arises and disappears, light will come. Light appears.

LTN: What is light?

HMV: My eyes are closed. And inside, a field of light appears. The space is now filled with light. In your experience, can that happen?

LTN: [Long pause] Yes. The conditions for the thought come up. Or as you say light. Where does the light come from?

HMV: Nowhere. From the nature.

LTN: From the nature. So nature has some power.

HMV: Oh yes.

LTN: So if you have experienced this much, this space itself, if you don’t touch anything, this space is not normal space. It has special qualities.

HMV: What do you mean by special qualities?

LTN: I’m going to tell you now. This is not normal space. Normal space is only space. It is a space because material things are not present in that space. Nothing is there. This other space is special because it liberates thoughts. It liberates consciousness. It looks like space. You have to use words. But it is not real space. This condition has this special power. Everything, nirvana, samsara, happiness, sadness can spontaneously appear.

HMV: Are you saying that everything takes its origin from this space?

LTN: This special space has power. We call it lhondhup. There is nothing to point out in the space. But this nature is also completely and originally pure. You cannot take any negative actions in this space. Therefore this space is also called pure or kadag.

Everything is supreme bliss, equal to space itself—
the expanse of dharmakaya.
There is nothing that is not free within
the expanse of dharmakaya.

—Longchenpa

18. “Lhundup” is a technical term in DzogChen mind science that is usually translated into English as “spontaneous.” Tulku Thondup Rinpoche says that the term refers to the “spontaneous perfection of appearances” (Masters of Mediation and Miracles. Shambhala South Asia Edition, p. 33). Lhundrup is the spontaneous transformation of thoughts, emotions and predual inner appearances (gzhi nang) into nondual egoless mind.

19. “Kadag” is another technical term in DzogChen mind science. It is usually translated into English as “primordial purity.” His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said that kadag “corresponds to . . . emptiness,” and that it is “the main subject matter of the second turning” of the wheel of dharma. It refers to the emptiness of phenomena, although in some contexts it used to refer to the emptiness of rigpa. (His Holiness the Dalai Lama. (2000). DzogChen: The Heart Essence of the Great Perfection. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, pp. 87 and 165).

And kadag and lhundup spontaneously exist within this space. But if you
don’t care about staying in this condition, you don’t need to check any-
thing. There is no one to check. But it is there. You don’t need to check
that which is pure or that which spontaneously exists. They are there.

HMV: Everything that appears in that space is pure.

LTN: Yes. Whatever appears, you don’t have to do anything. Good things can
come. Bad things can come. Sometimes very bad emotions can come up,
and sometimes good things come up.

HMV: Do negative emotions change when they come into that space?

LTN: If you are able to keep still without being disturbed, if whatever comes up
you don’t care, if you are keeping into the space without disturbances, then
you are OK. If you do this, it depends if you are seriously and continuously
practicing, gradually all the negative actions and emotions, all the negative
things become weaker and weaker. Finally they disappear.

HMV: OK.

LTN: The next thing to come is this: pure and impure, samsara and nirvana can
both come from this basic nature. So then spontaneously, pure things like
light or energies or bodhicitta, the ten paramitas, good things will start
coming without you expecting them, before the emotions come. But
still you are continuously practicing without being disturbed by visions.
Eventually all the visions can be stopped. There are no visions at the end.
So that means that our life is normally vision. And you have to realize that
these visions, everything, are from the same source: the nature. And also
that they are empty form. They are liberated into empty form. And then
everything is liberated into the nature. That is the final practice.

Annotation: You know that your thoughts and emotions are empty
forms because they are liberated into empty form.

Then what happens is that in our normal life the visions are all there, but
on your side, the nature side, there is no grasping. The visions that you
have are recognized as empty form. It is similar to the thodgal vision.

21. Here Lopon is saying that within the totally open, space like awareness that is the nature of the
mind, all inner appearances will be spontaneously transformed into pure, or egoless, phenomena.
He then goes on to name some of the different types of pure phenomena that do arise as a
result of self-liberation: light, energies, bodhicitta and the ten paramitas. Finally, he says that
there is a stage in one’s development where the “good things” will appear even before the
emotions of which they are a transformation appear.

22. There are, according to Lopon, three different kinds of visions: karmic, or dual, visions; Zhitro
visions of deities; and nondual, or thodgal, visions. Here Lopon is referring to karmic visions.

23. There are two types of meditation practice that are unique to DzogChen practice. Thodgal is
one of them. Thodgal is a meditation in which one learns to cultivate the spontaneous perfec-
tion of (inner) appearances.
If you don’t have experience with the thodgal visions, then you will always have to be thinking that the normal life visions, that everything is empty. Then you still have not completed the DzogChen view. If you do integrate with these visions, then they come from the empty nature, they themselves are empty form, and they are liberated into the emptiness that they came from. Then finally everything is completely empty form and disappearing. All the visions are finished. This is the fourth vision according to thodgal.

As for resting imperturbably in awareness, in thödgal this consists of resting in the continuum that is the radiance of awareness.

—Longchenpa^24

References


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