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## THE STORY OF TIBETAN BUDDHISM



*To abandon what is harmful,  
To adopt what is wholesome,  
To purify the heart and mind:  
This is the teaching of the Buddha.*

—GAUTAMA BUDDHA

**B**uddhism originated with Gautama Buddha (563–483 BCE), a historical figure who was born a prince of Lumbini in northern India—which is now Nepal—and lived for eighty years. He sat and was enlightened beneath the bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya on the banks of the Neranjara River in the wilderness of northern India, 2,500 years ago. But enlightenment and Buddhist wisdom and teachings are not just things from the remote past, when one enlightened buddha walked this earth. Buddhism teaches that we can all become as enlightened, free, compassionate, loving, wise, selfless, and peaceful as the enlightened Buddha himself, and that we can contribute these sublime qualities to the world. In fact, the living flame of enlightenment in Buddhism has many extant or contemporary living masters,

and I myself have observed how my masters lived and how they practiced what they preached.

Buddha considered himself a teacher—not a god descended from above or an avatar emanated from another dimension—who found a way to enlightenment or discovered enlightenment in this world and pointed out the way to others. He said, “I, the teacher, am like a doctor. My teachings of Dharma practice and path are like medicine, and the followers are like a community of patients. It is up to the patients whether they follow the doctor’s instructions or not, and whether or not they take the medicine regularly. If the doctor could heal the patients he would, but without the patient’s participation through continuing to take the medicine, it is very difficult if not impossible.” So Buddhism is not about beliefs and creeds and dogmas; it is about practice, how we live and act, and what we do day to day, moment to moment. Buddhism is not a set of beliefs to subscribe to but a way of life—the way of sane, harmonious, and balanced enlightened living.

Buddhism was established in Tibet during the seventh century CE by the enlightened Indian Tantric sage Padmasambhava, the Lotus-Born Guru, renowned as Guru Rinpoche, or the Most Precious Master. The Tibetan King Trisong Detsen and his young wife, Queen Yeshe Tsogyal, became the Lotus Guru’s main disciples and Dharma heirs (spiritual successors). Buddhism became Tibet’s state religion during their reign (742–797 CE), committing the country and its inhabitants to the principles of nonviolence, peace, enlightenment, sacred education in the inner/spiritual sciences, interconnectedness, and respect for the environment. With their help, and that of the Indian Dzogchen master

Vimalamitra, the Buddha's teachings spread quickly among the mostly nomadic Tibetans.

The ensuing centuries saw Tibetan Buddhism develop several metaphysical schools, monastic and yogic orders, and Tantric-practice lineages. At one time, there were as many as eight different branches of Tibetan Buddhism, of which four main schools remain today: Geluk (Virtuous Ones), Sakya (Gray Earth), Kagyu (Whispered Lineage), and Nyingma (Ancient Ones). The theory and practice of each school have been passed down in an unbroken lineage so that their essence remains authentic and dynamic to this day. Of the grand old lamas trained in Tibet, few are still living—but a younger generation of able teachers has arisen from the ranks of their students as well as of their own reincarnations (*tulkus*).

Although Buddhism in Tibet has been almost reduced to a tourist attraction by the Chinese Communist government (see the Afterword, “Tibet, the Land of Snows,” page 77), its teachings today are taking root all over the world. Since the early 1960s, many Asian Buddhist masters have taken up residence in the West, establishing teaching centers and empowering their students to continue spreading the Buddhadharma—Buddhist wisdom and practice.

### TIBETAN BUDDHIST MEDITATION

Buddhism has many *upaya* (skillful means): methods to awaken sentient beings from the sleep of illusion, delusion, and suffering. Three “enlightenment trainings”—ethics, meditation, and wisdom/love—are included in the teaching of the Noble Eightfold Path, originating with the Buddha 2,500 years ago and commonly found in all Buddhist schools today. Beyond the scope of this program, you can read

more about the Noble Eightfold Path in my book *Awakening the Buddha Within* or in several of the other books listed in the Additional Resources section (page 95).

Dzogchen meditation is one of many methods of Buddhist meditation. Each of the schools and lineages of Buddhism emphasizes certain aspects of spiritual practice in differing proportions. All of these *yanas* (vehicles or paths), if intelligently utilized, deliver us to nirvana.

In Tibetan Buddhism, the main types of essential meditation are Dzogchen and *mahamudra* (the Ultimate Perspective). These are fundamentally awareness practices. These meditation techniques are often supported by other varieties of practice, using different levels of form, symbolism, and energy. Some of these are devotional practices such as guru yoga (merging hearts and minds with the enlightened master or Buddha); visualization meditations (involving meditation deities or spiritual archetypes through a contemplative process of creative imagination); compassion and loving-kindness meditations; *bodhichitta* (the unselfish, compassionate, awakened mind); *tonglen* (exchanging oneself for others); *phowa* (consciousness transference); healing meditations and longevity practices; chanting meditations (using mantras and ritual instruments); breathing and energy meditations, and related Tantric practices; physical yogic meditations; dream yoga (lucid dreaming); bardo yoga (death preparation); clear light meditation; inner heat yoga; spiritual fasting; contemplative prayer; sacred dance and ritual practice; and epistemological debate as mind training to bring about attitude transformation.

Of these many practices, many Tibetan lamas have said that Dzogchen is the ultimate form of meditation, and that—due to its profound simplicity and its radical approach to directly

accessing the buddha within—it is especially suited for our turbulent, difficult times. There are practitioners of Dzogchen, the Dalai Lama included, among all four schools of Tibetan Buddhism. It is renowned as “the view from above” because of its vast scope and profound depth. Dzogchen is also known as the “Luminous Heart of the Dharma,” the “Radiant Great Perfection,” and the “Natural Innate Completeness.”

As a practice that traditionally has been taught through oral transmission from a teacher who has received oral transmission from an established lineage holder of the tradition, these practices are also especially suited for a program such as this one, which incorporates not only written information about the practices involved, but also the direct energy and sound vibrations of the teacher’s voice on a CD giving personal guided practices, passed on by a living lama who received these instructions through the ancient, tried-and-true initiatory process of oral transmission.



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### THE FOUNDATION OF DZOGCHEN The Innate Great Perfection



*My own mind is Buddha, but I never realize this.  
Discursive thoughts are Dharmakaya [ultimate reality],  
but I don't realize this.*

*This is the unfabricated, innate natural state, but I cannot keep to this.  
Naturalness is things as they really are, but I have no conviction in this.  
Guru, think of me; gaze quickly upon me with compassion.*

—JAMGON KONGTRUL I (NINETEENTH CENTURY, TIBET)

In Dzogchen it is taught that we are all buddhas by nature, and we only need to awaken to this fact to realize who and what we truly are. Momentary delusions and confusions obscure our true nature, including our luminous heart, the bodhichitta, the awakened heart-mind-body consciousness that is within us all. It is taught that our sole spiritual task is to directly experience this awakening to our true nature, which is known as enlightenment. This is the essence of self-realization and spiritual illumination, and also the meaning of *satori* (breakthrough), as they call it in Japanese Zen. What we need to awaken to and recognize is that what we truly are is our infinitely open and insubstantial luminous true buddha mind, and that the nature of our heart and mind is empty open-awareness and innate

wakefulness—whether we know it or not. Dzogchen teaches that this realization cannot be understood intellectually or studied mentally, but it can be transmitted and realized from teacher to student through oral transmission. It cannot be taught, exactly, but as I like to say, although it cannot be taught, it can be caught. Contact with a genuine teacher can facilitate this awakening.

Dzogchen teaches that if we practice today, we will awaken today, and if we practice tonight, we will awaken tonight. But, as contradictory as it may seem, Dzogchen also teaches that we need to apply total dedication and assiduous practice to our highest capacities and sharpest faculties. In other words, although we are complete and perfect as we are, most of us will need to practice over a period of time to completely realize our innate perfection and the inherent freedom and inner peace of natural being.

Since the beginningless beginning, these teachings have been passed on from master to disciple via the renowned spiritual shock tactic called “direct introduction to the nature of mind.” This is an initiatory teaching or profound provocation whereby someone introduces us to the truth that we are not just who we think we are and helps us to awaken to all that we are and can be. In this practice, we actualize Buddha’s promise that we can all be as enlightened, awakened, wise, loving, and selfless as the Buddha became if we undertake and accomplish the same spiritual journey.

Dzogchen Buddhism is very scientific in a funny way. It teaches that if we can replicate the experiment we can reproduce the results, regardless of whether we are old or young, literate or illiterate, male or female, white, black, yellow, red, multicolored, blind, deaf, or dumb. It teaches that any of us can become enlightened and awakened—not

by just believing it is so, but by practicing and realizing the truth for ourselves. Millions have done so over the centuries. These practices are the tried-and-true tools that we can carry with us to awaken ourselves and the world: an inner science of transformation, a spiritual technology for transforming ourselves and transforming the world, for healing ourselves and healing the world.

In order for this liberating realization to become an unshakeable experiential knowing of this sublime inner realization, Dzogchen teachings and practices included in this program provide direct access to this inner treasure. Whether we seek enlightenment or merely hope to spread peace and sanity in the world, Dzogchen can help us bring timeless wisdom to bear on the practical problems of daily life. Best of all, it is a practice anyone can learn and apply right now.

### VIEW, MEDITATION, AND ACTION

The great completeness of Dzogchen is always taught as consisting of three parts—view (outlook), meditation (practice), and action or conduct (embodiment in life). The first of these—the Dzogchen view, or sacred perspective—is a clear-sighted, no-holds-barred vision of things unfolding exactly as they are, in which nothing is missing and nothing is added or removed. Everything is seen to be as infinite as boundless space: radiant, immaculate, and stainless from the beginningless beginning. The second part—Dzogchen meditation—is the practice of deepening the view that we have glimpsed. Dzogchen meditation is one of inseparable awareness and emptiness: a naked, luminous, innate wakefulness and openness that is imperturbable, like a mountain. And the third aspect—or action—is of enlightened, beneficial buddha activity that is naturally arising,

spontaneous, proactive, compassionate, and appropriate to the conditions and circumstances of everyday life. These three elements represent the fundamental ground of Dzogchen. From this ground springs the path—an ancient, profound, and powerful process of spiritual transformation and awakening—and the fruition of this path is enlightenment in this very lifetime. I myself have seen it.

Traditionally, it is taught in Dzogchen that the view is like the sky, that meditation is like a mountain, and that the spontaneously arising actions and conduct are the Buddha's offspring—innumerable and inexhaustible, like the ocean's waves.

The Dzogchen view is like the sky in that it is infinite, vast, open, and without corners or center. It is a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.

Dzogchen meditation is seen as mountainlike in that as we get used to seeing things as they truly are—and leaving them as they are and resting in the natural flow of the Great Perfection—our innate wakefulness becomes imperturbable and unshakeable, unaffected by whatever happens. Through meditation, we get used to resting in the view and abiding in the view; we begin to rely on the view and at the same time see if there is anything deeper or higher or truer than this view; and, if there is, we are naturally drawn to that instead. Thus we ascertain deepening certainty in the view, of things just as they are.

From the combination of the view of the great completeness with the meditation practice of resting in and seeing things as they truly are, spontaneous buddha activity of the Great Perfection naturally arises. And by learning how to sustain this awareness—strengthened in meditation—we are naturally led to inexhaustible, selfless, loving, beneficial buddha activity completely in accord with our present

conditions, never getting lost in the action itself or forgetting who and what we truly are, even in the process of doing—just as the ocean never leaves its bed, regardless of whether there are waves or not. This Dzogchen action is not contrived, premeditated, reactive activity, driven by karma, but the proactive, unconditional, liberating buddha activity of the Great Perfection, beyond notions of doer and deed.

The natural result of this threefold path is perfect realization and the complete actualization of the Great Perfection, Dzogchen, in the form of spontaneous and inexhaustible buddha-activity, beneficial to all. Emaho!

### THE RAINBOW BODY OF PERFECT ENLIGHTENMENT

In Tibetan, this realization of the true nature of our heart-mind is called *tukarpo*, or the universal panacea, which brings about what is known as the rainbow body of perfect enlightenment. Tibetan Buddhism and Dzogchen masters often describe this rainbow body of perfect enlightenment as the full realization of all possible wisdoms and dimensions of reality at the heart of all manifestation. This rainbow body of perfect enlightenment is not a matter of feeling better, of living forever, or even of overcoming our dissatisfaction and anxiety and suffering, but the genuine realization of the timeless, ageless dimension of totality's pure radiance. It is through this realization that we can become a liberating force, a beacon of light, and a guide to all of those in need.

This rainbow body of perfect enlightenment is not an illusion or fantasy but a mystical experience of the totality of existence—including ourselves—as pure and perfect rainbow light from the beginningless beginning, far beyond the dualities of self and other, form and emptiness, delusion and enlightenment, samsara and