

Finding
the
Face

by

WIM VAN DEN DUNGEN

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to what just exists

'Luminous, bhikkhus, is this mind, but it is defiled by adventitious defilements. Luminous, bhikkhus, is this mind, and it is freed from adventitious defilements. Luminous, bhikkhus, is this mind, but it is defiled by adventitious defilements. The uninstructed worldling does not understand this as it really is ; therefore I say that for the uninstructed worldling there is no development of the mind. Luminous, bhikkhus, is this mind, and it is freed from adventitious defilements. The instructed noble disciple understands this as it really is ; therefore I say that for the instructed noble disciple there is development of the mind.'

Aṅguttara Nikāya, Ekakanipāta, 49 – 52.

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Samantabhadra with Samantabhadrī
the Ādi-Buddha

Preface

This book is about *recognizing the nature of the mind*, metaphorically called ‘the Face.’ Referring to a state of *total presence*, it is undefinable by any term but inherently *radiant* and *wakeful*. Figuratively explained as a mirror, its nature is *brilliant clarity* and an *unobstructed* medium for whatever appears. The method leading to it is called ‘supreme yoga’ (*atiyoga, mahāsandhi*), known in Tibet as Dzogchen, said to have been first taught by the semi-historical Garab Dorje, initiated by Buddha Vajrasattva himself. In his *Three Incisive Precepts* (Tib. *Tsiksum Nedek*), he summarized to his heart student the 6.4 million verses explaining these teachings as follows : ‘A *direct introduction* into the nature of mind is the first imperative. *Absolute conviction* in practice is the second imperative. Gain *confidence* in release is the third imperative.’

The first historical figure and heart student of Garab Dorje was Mañjuśrīmitra, working in the 8th century and the son of an upper-class Brahmin from a village near Bodh Gaya (this situates Garab Dorje in the 7th century). At first, schooled at home, he lived at Nālandā as a Yogācāra scholar and practitioner. He divided the teachings into three ‘series’ : *cittavarga* or ‘mind-series’ (Tib. *semdé*), focusing on this very subtle mind, *abhyantaravarga* or ‘space-series’ (Tib. *longdé*), emphasizing the spaciousness of this natural state and *upadēśavarga*, or the ‘instruction-series’ (Tib. *menngagde*), relating to the somewhat esoteric initiatory practices of *Cutting-Through* (Tib. *trekchö*) and *Direct-Crossing* or *Leaping-Over* (Tib. *tögal*), methods enabling direct access to this mind.

‘The mind is not engaged in seeking nor is it directed toward anything. One is free from knowing and not knowing. There is neither picking out nor attending to (aids to meditation). Delight in acceptance and rejection are alike in not existing. Not objectifying (anything) and remaining with the (understanding of) this likeness, there is no creation of duality ; one is beyond the realm of speech ; there is neither activity nor inactivity ; there is no accumulation (of merit) or diminution (of faults), etc.’ – Mañjuśrīmitra, *Gold Refined from Ore*, verses 117-119.

Śrī Siṃha, the principal disciple and Dharma heir of Mañjuśrīmitra re-edited the *Menngagde*. In this form, it was passed down to Guru Rinpoche and Vimalamitra (8th century). Via the latter, it reached Tibet. Another lineage began in Tibet with Padmasaṃbhāva, who is also said to have received Dzogchen directly from ‘sky travelers’ (*ḍākinīs* and *ḍākas*). This lineage started during the first dissemination of the Buddhadharma in Tibet. This so-called ‘Old Translation School’ (Nyingma) still exists today. For Nyingmapas, ‘*atiyoga*’ or ‘*dzogchen*’ is supreme and considered the Buddha’s definitive and most secret teaching. In Tibetan, *dzogpa* means (a) something completed, finished, exhausted, and (b) what is full, perfect, and complete. Supreme yoga is ‘great’ (Tib. *chen*) because there is nothing higher or more sublime, and ‘perfect’ or ‘complete’ because no other methods or means to attain awakening are necessary. Translated as ‘*Great Completion*,’ this yoga points to the all-encompassing, absolute ground spread *throughout all that exists*, be it nirvāṇic or defined by the limitations of the cyclic pain scale (*saṃsāra*). In the 14th century, Dzogchen was unified as a system by Longchenpa and then later condensed by Jigme Lingpa (1729 – 1798).

Some Dzogchenpas claim *Great Completion* is not a tradition, lineage, or teaching at all but refers to a *state of consciousness* called ‘Great Completion.’ Insofar as this innermost awareness (Tib. *rigpa*) can be attained by all sentient beings at any moment of their existence, *atiyoga* is not bound to nationality, social class, race, sexual preference, culture, or any other *mode of differentiation* between sentient beings. To frame supreme yoga as teaching would be reducing it to a mental category or a mere designation. At the same time, it is the ever-present, enduring, and inseparable *actual* union between the primordial base (which is self-empty) and this natural, original mind (which is luminous). Pointed to it, everyone can directly recognize this *in the moment at hand*.

Common to the three series is the view the original mind at the root of consciousness is by nature *pure* (i.e., empty, an ongoing process, not a fixed substance), *undefiled* (never depending on sorrow), and *self-liberated*, meaning that all manifestations of mind, all volitions, feelings, thoughts, and reflective states of consciousness, arise, abide and cease *by themselves*. Nothing needs to be done to change this display or ‘sport,’ no *purification* (Lesser Vehicle), no *renunciation* (Great Perfection Vehicle), nor *transformation* (Diamond Vehicle). Because this innermost awareness cognizing the Inner Buddha (*tathāgatagarbha* or Buddha-nature) was, is, and always will be inseparable from the primordial base of all that exists, the only thing to do is to *recognize* this empty and luminous nature of mind. Its two aspects are *primordial purity* (continuously and uninterruptedly lacking self-existence since beginningless time) and *spontaneous presence*. Like water and wetness or fire and heat, the primordial base, this state of total primordial, empty

purity is inseparable from underlying non-intentional awareness. Whatever appears, one looks at the *surface* of the mirror of the mind, not at the objects taking shape. Recognition is by *pointing out* and so does not depend on a gradual, goal-oriented way. For such linear, fabricated efforts strengthen the duality of consciousness. One needs to move *beyond* conceptual activity. Being introduced to the Face is a *sudden revelation* and *unveiling* of the root-mind, spontaneous and selfless. Recognizing *that what just exists* (*yathābūtham*) initiates a practice of no-practice, a meditation of no-meditation, an effortless resting opening up to the Face.

A few years after I took refuge in the *Three Jewels* (2006), I came across this extraordinary approach. As my mind had been accustomed to a panoply of practices of various traditions (non-Buddhist and then exclusively Buddhist), it seemed outlandish to accept that to awaken, nothing more is needed than to recognize the Face of the mind. Can the same not be said that, at the base of each mindstream, a fully enlightened Inner Buddha is present, so that all that is needed is to *remove* the adventitious material concealing this completely awake, uninterrupted existence ? For some, partial to piling complexity upon complexity, this borders to heresy.

Daily training in the three precepts, I no longer seek the elephant once it has been found and stick to (re)introducing the nature of mind, trusting in the spontaneous self-release present when always turning to the Face. I do this so that all sentient beings may benefit.