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Five Principles of rDzogs chen Transmission in the *Kun byed rgyal po*

Jim Valby

As long as practitioners meditate any buddhist or non-buddhist view, it is impossible for them to realize primordial enlightenment. Practitioners realize primordial enlightenment by totally relaxing in Natural Presence¹ beyond cause and effect. Five principles of rDzogs chen transmission — historical, root, yoga, intentional and literal — explain how to totally relax in Natural Presence. These five principles are explained in the 200 folios of the 84 chapters² of the *Kun byed rgyal po*,³ the principal tantra of *rDzogs chen sems sde*. Khenpo Zhenphen Öser⁴ explains in detail these principles in his 2400 folio commentary⁵ on the *Kun byed rgyal po* named *Ornament of the State of Samantabhadra*.

These five principles establish conceptually the meaning of unmistakable effortless, self-perfected Natural Presence. Practitioners with high capacity⁶ do not struggle on the paths of spiritual vehicles.⁷ Instead, they totally relax in Natural Presence, directly recognizing the immediacy and totality of primordial enlightenment.

Historical Principle

The *Kun byed rgyal po* says:⁸

*dang po yid ches pa yi khungs bstan phyir
lo rgyus don gyi bshad lugs bstan par bya*

¹ Natural Presence is also called pure, perfect, intrinsic, non-dual, primordial, instant *rigpa*-knowledge-awareness.

² These principles are explained explicitly in chapter 13. Chapters 21, 29 and 45 give additional explanations.

³ *Kun byed rgyal po* editions include: *sNga 'gyur bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*, folios 6-285 of volume 3935 of TBRC W25983; *mTshams brag*, folios 1-198 of volume 604 of TBRC W21521; *mKhyen brtse (gTing skyed)*, folios 1-186 of volume 1757 of TBRC W21518; *Bai ro'i rgyud 'bum*, folios 383-435 of volume 1; *sDe dge*, folios 1-170; and *sGang steng*, folios 1a-93b.

⁴ mKhan po gzhan phan 'od zer is person P2DB5991 in the TBRC digital library. His seat was Ser shul rdzong, and this commentary is his only known composition.

⁵ The commentary appears in volumes 4010 and 4011 of section W25983, available as Adobe-readable PDF files from the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center (TBRC) founded by Gene Smith.

⁶ Capacity is usually explained with five topics: confidence in the primordial enlightenment of the master, oneself and all beings; devoted interest and active participation in the master's oral and symbolic transmissions; continuous attentive presence inside time; cultivation of *prajña* presence to directly experience the emptiness of mind and phenomena; and timeless contemplation in Natural Presence beyond cause and effect.

⁷ Vehicles include non-buddhist traditions, Śravakayāna, Pratyekabuddhayāna, Bodhisattvayāna, Kriyatantra, Caryatantra, Yogatantra, Mahāyoga and Anuyoga.

⁸ Folio 61, chapter 13, *mTshams brag* edition.

First, the historical principle is explained in order to provide confidence in the source.

The historical principle⁹ is explained to disciples to produce confidence in the primordial source, which transmits its knowledge in three ways: direct transmission is the natural empowerment of primordial emptiness with infinite potential; symbolic transmission is the raw energy of each experience, which demonstrates its definitive meaning through its own nature; oral transmission is speech and elegant compositions with profound concepts and words.

Practitioners with low to medium capacity gradually develop the high capacity to completely relax in the knowledge of primordial enlightenment by working with these three aspects of the transmission of qualified rDzogs chen masters, inside a community of practitioners who help each other.¹⁰

Oral transmission involves words and concepts which masters and texts explain to help disciples develop capacity to continue in the recognition of the immediacy and totality of primordial enlightenment. The essence of the oral transmission is that everything is already the wisdom-energy of primordial enlightenment, beyond renunciation, antidotes, development, accomplishment, purification, transformation and attainment. Practitioners with high capacity do not take refuge in the words and concepts of oral transmission.

The meaning of symbolic transmission is that every experience of every being is already the pure, empty, self-perfected wisdom-energy of primordial knowledge. There is no hierarchy of wisdom-energy experiences. The raw energy of each experience demonstrates its definitive meaning through its own nature. Also, we may begin to recognize the immediacy of wisdom-energies through sacred symbols, such as a mirror, a crystal, space, a peacock's feather, mandala attributes, and so forth. Practitioners with high capacity do not take refuge in the experiences of symbolic transmission.

Direct transmission is the secret refuge¹¹ for practitioners with high capacity. Through our experiences of sensation, clarity and emptiness we find ourselves concretely in Natural Presence with our vajra master and each other. We use oral and symbolic transmission to develop our capacity to stabilize our realization of the timeless naked awareness of direct transmission, beyond cause and effect.

All teachers, teachings, disciples, times and places are already the uncorrected natural state of primordial enlightenment. Enlightenment is not newly produced by disciples who follow the teachings of teachers in particular places at specific times. Causes, conditions, effects, struggles and practices are already the self-originated wisdom of Natural Presence.

⁹ The historical principle answers questions like these: What is knowledge? From where does knowledge come? What is our situation now? From where do teachings come? What is the natural state? What is refuge? What are the three aspects of rDzogs chen transmission?

¹⁰ In addition to intellectual study, practitioners apply secret methods to produce experiences which help to develop higher capacity. Methods are more secret. Ideas are less secret.

¹¹ Outer refuge is buddha, dharma and sangha. Inner refuge is guru, deva and dakini. Secret refuge is the unchanging path of Natural Presence.

Everything of the universe of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa arises as the enlightened energy of the one self-perfected Natural Presence. But teachers still mistakenly teach that disciples should fabricate enlightenment by applying discipline, renunciation, interruption, purification and transformation.

Root Principle

The *Kun byed rgyal po* says:¹²

*chos kun rtsa ba sems su 'dus pa'i phyir
de nas rtsa ba'i don de bstan par bya*

The root principle is explained so that (one understands that) the root of all phenomena is Presence.

The root principle¹³ explains that all phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are primordially enlightened and unified in Natural Presence. Uncreated, primordial, all-pervasive and insubstantial Natural Presence is the source of all teachers, teachings, disciples, times and places. Natural Presence is not some object or experience to produce, discover or maintain. We relax with unstructured, raw, timeless awareness in the primordially empty source, which has infinite potential to manifest anything through sound, light and rays. 'Sound' means the vibration and movement of emptiness. 'Light' means that subtle energies begin to manifest through vibrating emptiness. 'Rays' means the diversification of the empty wisdom-energies of light. All phenomena of the animate and inanimate universe are already the wisdom-energies of essenceless light. All phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are direct manifestations of self-originated wisdom and are already liberated in all-pervading, uncorrected Natural Presence. No action is necessary to produce enlightenment. Primordial liberation does not depend upon behavior, ideas, meditation, words or mind.

All phenomena are already unified in primordial unique, indivisible, non-dual Natural Presence, which transcends all frames of reference and cannot be established through words. Practitioners with capacity learn how to relax naturally in authentic unfabricated equality, beyond negation, affirmation, rejection, acceptance, fear, hope, struggle or practice. There is no need to apply mudras, recite mantras, imagine visualizations, preserve samayas, meditate deities, perform sacred activities, travel on paths, purify obstacles, or search for wisdom. Natural Presence already abides in the bliss of natural contemplation and transcends the dualistic diseases of meditation practices.

¹² Folio 61, chapter 13, mTshams brag edition.

¹³ The root principle answers questions like these: What is the source? What is the main principle of rDzogs chen teaching? How does energy manifest? How are energies unified?

Yoga Principle

The *Kun byed rgyal po* says:¹⁴

*theg pa'i khyad par so sor dbye ba'i phyir
yo ga'i don gyi rtsa ba bstan par bya*

The base of the yoga principle is explained in order to differentiate the features of the vehicles.

The yoga principle¹⁵ differentiates the features of spiritual vehicles, so that serious practitioners with high capacity can completely transcend actions, efforts, acceptance, rejection, cause, effect, struggle, achievement, purification and transformation.

Because all spiritual paths lead away from the recognition of the immediacy and totality of primordial enlightenment, we must learn how to use anything from any teaching without being conditioned by it. We learn how to study, practice and live in the context of Natural Presence. It is impossible to get familiar with Natural Presence when we are taking refuge in the ideas, words and experiences of spiritual vehicles. But we can quickly develop capacity using the ideas and methods of any spiritual vehicle when we do so inside the transmission of Natural Presence.

The obstacles and deviations of spiritual vehicles include views, meditations, initiations, mandalas, samayas, behaviors, paths, levels, wisdoms, sacred activities and goals. It is impossible for practitioners to get familiar with Natural Presence while conditioned by and attached to these obstacles and deviations.

'Obstacle' means that the practitioner fails to recognize the immediacy and totality of primordial wisdom. Obstacles of action are based upon the failure to recognize effortless Natural Presence. Obstacles of knowledge are based upon the failure to recognize that everything in the universe manifests as the ornamental energy of Natural Presence. Obstacles include concepts of two truths, three purities, acceptance and rejection, the four aspects of approach and attainment, good and bad, self and other, nirvāṇa and saṃsāra, enlightenment and non-enlightenment, and so forth. Basically, obstacles are concepts that something exists which is other than the self-manifesting wisdom energy of Natural Presence.

'Deviation' means entering into action based upon an obstacle. Deviation means searching for something other than self-perfected, all-pervading primordial enlightenment. Practitioners deviate from natural primordial enlightenment by traveling paths with conceptual characteristics. Failing to recognize the immediacy and totality of primordial wisdom, practitioners deviate through their struggles to achieve something else.

Sattvayoga, Mahāyoga and Anuyoga reject, accept, struggle and achieve. Atiyoga transcends all actions, efforts, struggles, causes and effects. Al-

¹⁴ Folio 61, chapter 13, mTshams brag edition.

¹⁵ The yoga principle answers questions like these: How do practitioners use spiritual vehicles to block the possibility of realization? How do we get free from all limitations, especially those of teachings? How do practitioners transcend correction, transformation, rejection and acceptance? What are obstacles and deviations?

though Natural Presence is beyond differentiation or exclusion, Atiyoga explains how different teachings struggle with views, behaviors, *samayas*, practices, and so forth. Natural Presence is far superior to any vehicle.

Because followers of spiritual vehicles are attached to methods, such as renunciation, interruption, development, purification, transformation and accomplishment, they do not know how to relax in uncorrected Natural Presence. Followers of Śravakayāna use the four truths to reject the self-originated wisdom-energies of Natural Presence. Followers of Pratyekabuddhayāna use meditation on the twelve links of interdependent origination to block relaxation in Natural Presence. Followers of the Bodhisattva vehicle conceive relative and absolute truths and gather merits and wisdom by gradually traveling on the five paths and training on the ten levels for eons. Followers of Kriyatantra try to purify and empower all phenomena, using mantras, mudras and visualizations related to *jñānasattva* and *samayāsattva* deities. Followers of yogatantra do not understand unchanging Natural Presence, so they meditate deities, using the five factors of manifest enlightenment and the four types of miracles. They cultivate contemplation of the relative *vajradhātu maṇḍala* with characteristics and contemplation of absolute emptiness without characteristics. Followers of Mahāyoga use the three contemplations and the four aspects of approach and attainment to transform the five aggregates and five elements into the pure *maṇḍala* of enlightenment. Followers of Anuyoga do not understand how to relax in uncorrected Natural Presence, so they assign the name 'cause' to the *dharmadhātu* object, assign the name 'effect' to the self-originated wisdom subject, emanate and re-absorb light rays, and try to obtain ordinary and supreme *siddhis*. Followers of Atiyoga with high capacity realize primordial enlightenment beyond action and achievement by relaxing in uncorrected Natural Presence.

Intentional Principle

The *Kun byed rgyal po* says:¹⁶

*rtsol sgrub bya mi dgos par bstan pa'i phyir
dgos ched don gyi dgos pa de ru bstan*

The purpose of explaining the intentional principle is to reveal that it is not necessary to struggle for and achieve (enlightenment).

The intentional principle¹⁷ explains that struggle and achievement are not necessary for the realization of effortless primordial enlightenment. Practitioners with high capacity totally relax in direct, immediate, accessible pri-

¹⁶ Folio 61, chapter 13, mTshams brag edition.

¹⁷ The intentional principle answers questions like these: What is the purpose of rDzogs chen teaching? How does one realize? What is the main point of study and practice? Why are struggle and achievement not necessary for primordial enlightenment? Why is rDzogs chen teaching secret?

primordial knowledge, beyond views, meditations, *samayas*, sacred activities, paths, spiritual levels, trainings, antidotes, struggles, achievements and purifications.

The main point of rDzogs chen teaching is relaxation in Natural Presence beyond cause and effect. We do not try to set up some new, improved frame of reference in which to take refuge. We do not try to escape from the circumstances of our situation. We can take care of our responsibilities much more easily if we govern our ever-changing presence inside time with Natural Presence outside time. Right now we can understand total primordial liberation, beyond vehicles, with their views to understand, meditations to accomplish, *samayas* to preserve, sacred activities to perform, paths to travel, levels to practice, antidotes to depend upon, and purifications to apply for removing obstacles.

The intention is that each practitioner directly experiences unconditioned, primordial, Natural Presence, beyond words, ideas and actions. There is nothing to deny, establish, accept or reject based upon the dualism of relative and absolute truths. Fortunate practitioners with high capacity effortlessly self-liberate by relaxing in unfabricated primordial enlightenment beyond searching and struggling.

Natural Presence already abides as the all-pervading enlightened state of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, beyond efforts to achieve some imaginary state of enlightenment. All phenomena are the enlightened energies of unborn Natural Presence, beyond the origination and cessation of four noble truths, beyond dependent origination, beyond ritual cleanliness, and beyond the development and accomplishment stages.

Beyond struggle and practice, Natural Presence experiences diverse phenomena as one flavor, beyond good, evil, pure, impure, rejection and acceptance. Practitioners with low to medium capacity hold onto the frames of reference of the provisional teachings of the gradual paths of the vehicles of cause and effect. As long as practitioners continue to grasp suggestive teachings, they will not understand and should not be taught the effortless realization of the self-originated wisdom of Natural Presence.

Literal Principle

The *Kun byed rgyal po* says:¹⁸

*mi rtogs don de rtogs par bya ba'i phyir
tshig gi don de sgra ru brjod par bya*

The words of the literal principle are communicated in order to provide understanding of the non-conceptual meaning.

The meaning of the literal principle¹⁹ is that words are precisely communicated to provide conceptual understanding of the non-conceptual meaning

¹⁸ Folio 61, chapter 13, mTshams brag edition.

¹⁹ The literal principle answers questions like these: How do rDzogs chen practitioners understand the literal meaning? What is never the main point? How does a practitioner

of the absolute equality of Natural Presence beyond all struggle and achievement. The intellectual meaning of words and concepts is connected with non-conceptual meaning. For a practitioner with high capacity, the oral transmission is never the secret refuge. The application of the literal principle depends upon the capacities of individuals. We learn how to use words and concepts to undermine our frames of reference. We learn to connect with the intended non-conceptual meaning beyond the words and concepts.

Some practitioners almost automatically build a new 'rDzogs chen cage' in which to live. But the main point is never the words and ideas of the oral transmission. The intended meaning is always the naked Natural Presence beyond the words and ideas. We can use our human capacities to think, judge and speak to loosen up the concreteness of our temporary cages. We do not take refuge in the thinker, judger, speaker. We recognize our limitations while relaxing in the Natural Presence of the primordial source.

The proclamation in words providing intellectual understanding of the literal principle plants seeds for non-conceptual understanding. Practitioners on their own rarely get familiar with Natural Presence. When someone wants to understand Natural Presence, a teacher already familiar with knowledge explains by pointing out that Natural Presence has no essence. The real condition of Natural Presence, which cannot be expressed, is pointed out with words such as 'inexpressible'.

The sounds and words of the literal principle communicate effortless self-perfection using the ten topics: beyond views and meditations, beyond initiations, beyond *samayas*, beyond *maṇḍalas*, beyond paths, beyond levels, beyond sacred activities, beyond behaviors, beyond limited wisdom, and beyond goals. Practitioners who develop capacity may recognize and get familiar with the qualities of unborn, non-conceptual, self-perfected Natural Presence beyond arguments and logic. Practitioners who develop high capacity totally relax in the empty natural state of primordial perfection, beyond dualities such as cause and effect, affirmation and negation, relative truth and absolute truth, manifestation and emptiness, development and accomplishment, realization and non-realization, enlightenment and non-enlightenment, and so forth.

These five principles present the essence of *rDzogs chen sems sde* transmission.

