

SAMADHI OR TINNGEDZIN AND DHYANA OR SAMTEN

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In my opinion, students of Level Zero of the *Santi Maha Sangha* Training should be on the alert in regard to the distinction between *dhyana* or samten and *samadhi* or tinggedzin, and to the relation between these concepts and those of absolute *Prajña* and Contemplation.

In the *Yogasutras* of Patanjali, the sequence of the three final states of yoga is *dharana* >—> *dhyana* >—> *samadhi*. *Dharana* is the uninterrupted concentration of the stream of thought on an object of consciousness; *dhyana* is the subsequent stage, in which «absolute consciousness» is freed from all superimpositions, and that is both the condition for attaining *samadhi* and the very way to *samadhi*— which in turn is regarded as the absolute state of attainment, as the very Fruit of the Path.

The above is perfectly correct from the standpoint of the *Yoga dharshana*, which is associated to the *Samkhya dharshana*, according to which consciousness is Purusha, and as such is inherently separate from the physical world or Prakrit. Unable to surpass its own dualistic separation in regard to Prakrit and its play, the best human consciousness can do is to attain a perfect aloofness in regard to the play of Prakrit. And this perfect aloofness is precisely the state of *samadhi*.

Buddhism does not posit an unsurpassable, inherently existing, substantial duality between consciousness and matter, the mental and the physical, a *res cogitans* and a *res extensa*. Therefore, it could not conceive the Supreme Attainment, the very Fruit of the Path, as a mere aloofness of consciousness in regard to the play of appearances.

This explains why, in Buddhism in general, *samadhi* pertains to *samsara*, rather than amounting to liberation or Enlightenment. In the Mahayana, in particular, Enlightenment is neither a direct result of the gradual development of *dhyana*, nor a development of *samadhi*. Enlightenment depends on the arising of absolute *Prajña*—i.e., not on the manifestation of *prajña* as the mental event (*chaitta* or *semjung*) posited by the Abhidharma and its Commentaries, but on the absolute *Prajña* posited by the *Prajñaparamita Sutras*. As emphasized by Ch'an Buddhism, *Prajña* arises abruptly or suddenly, rather than developing gradually, as is the case with *dhyana*—although the latter is intimately associated to *Prajña*, and its practice may be to a great extent a precondition for the arising of *Prajña*.

Moreover, in Indian Buddhism in general, *samadhi* is not achieved after and by means of *dhyana*, as it is in the *Yogasutras* of Patanjali. Although the *Diccionario Budista* by H. V. Morel and J. D. Moral claims that in Buddhism in general *dhyana* leads to *samadhi*, the *Lexikon der östlichen Weisheitslehren. Budismus, Hinduismus, Taoismus, Zen* edited by Stephan Schuhmacher and Gert Woerner, points out that *samadhi* is concentration and *dhyana* is *any state achieved by means of concentration* (and, in particular, the four degrees of progress in the *Rupadhatu* or *Rupa Loka*). It is the *Lexikon* that expresses the correct view according to Indian Mahayana: *samadhi* is the way to *dhyana*, which in turn is the culmination of *samadhi*.

In Chinese Buddhism, the content of the concept of *dhyana* is wider than in the Indian texts and schools, for it includes all the exercises applied in the practice of

meditation. Therefore, what Morel and Moral have stated in regard to the sequence *dhyana* >—> *samadhi* might be correctly applied to the Chinese Buddhist usage of the terms: *dhyana* refers to all the exercises applied in order to achieve *samadhi* or concentration. In this light, we can understand why, from the standpoint of Zen Buddhism, D. T. Suzuki pointed out that *samadhi* may be regarded as the content of the states of *dhyana*.

In Tibetan Buddhism in general, the term *samadhi* or *tinggedzin* is used to refer to all practices of concentration. In the Semde series of the Dzogchen teachings, in particular, the practitioner must go through four different stages of *samadhi* or *tingngedzin*, which are: (1) *nepe tinggedzin*; (2) *migyowe tinggedzin*; (3) *nyamnyee* or *nepe-migyowe tinggedzin*, and (4) *tinggedzin* of *lhundrub*. The last stage is the very state of realization, and thus we must assume that it is not a mere *samadhi* or *tinggedzin* in the general Buddhist sense of «conditioned state of concentration».

According to *The Crystal and the Way of Light*, in particular:

«...that which one practises initially in the (Dzogchen) Semde—i.e., when one begins to practise shine, which is the concentration of attention in order to attain a state of calm, or *lhagtong*, which enables one to get rid of the mental activity aimed at maintaining the calm state and thus be capable of working with the arising thoughts—is meditation rather than Contemplation...»

As stated above, in Buddhism in general, *samadhi* is **neither** the absolute attainment that constitutes the fruit of the Path, **nor** the state of Contemplation that constitutes the realization of absolute condition while on the Path. If we were to explain Dzogchen terminology in Mahayana terms, we would have to say that Contemplation, understood as the manifestation of the absolute condition while on the Path (and, in particular, as «resting in the Vision or *tawa*»), is the non-dual state in which absolute *Prajñā* is fully manifest and thus the true nature of reality becomes fully patent.

In his various teachings in South America (cf. the recordings and/or transcriptions of the South American retreats, and/or the book edited by Gina Pierini, *The Song of the Vajra*), Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche has repeatedly stated that, once each of the *samadhi* or *tingngedzin* of the Semde is achieved, the practitioner has to look toward the mental subject who is experiencing the *samadhi* in order to create the conditions that may allow for a spontaneous transition from «the state of the one reflected» or (deluded, dualistic) mind, to the «State of the Mirror», «State of Knowledge», «State of Enlightened Awareness» or «State of Contemplation». When this happens, the *samadhi* will have turned into Contemplation.

The fact that, in the Semde series of the Dzogchen teachings, one has to do something specific after each and every *samadhi* or *tingngedzin* is achieved, so that the state in question may be turned into Contemplation, shows that, in the series in question, the state indicated by the term *samadhi* or *tingngedzin* is **not** Contemplation. The same applies to what is said, from a more general standpoint that is not limited to the Semde or even to Dzogchen, about *samadhi* or *tingngedzin* in the section of *The Precious Vase* (the longer text on level 0 of the SMS training) dealing with «the results of the maturation of virtuous karmas», and specifically with «the result that corresponds to merit» (answer to question No. 58). In the section in question, we read:

«By applying the *samadhi*, the calm state of meditation, one may obtain a rebirth as a divinity of the highest sphere, known as Formless.»

If *samadhi* leads to rebirth as a divinity of the Formless (*Arupa*) sphere, which is one of the three main regions of *samsara*, then certainly *samadhi* is not Contemplation but a conditioned state.

However, it seems as though this were not the case in the Longde series of Dzogchen teachings—at least, judging by the use of the term in Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche's *The Cycle of Day and Night*. In fact, in the text in question, it seems as though *samadhi*/tinnge dzin were repeatedly being used to indicate states of Contemplation.

Does this mean that, in general, the term *samadhi*/tinnge dzin indicates conditioned states of concentration, but *in some special contexts* it is used to refer to the state of Contemplation? I don't know, really, but this is what seems to follow from all that has been considered until this point.

If so, what about the meaning of the term *dhyana* or *samten*? We have seen that, in general, *dhyana* or *samten* is also used to refer to conditioned states—no matter whether, as in Indian Buddhism, it is used to indicate the result of *samadhi* or tinnge dzin, or, as in Chinese Buddhism, it is used to indicate the practices conducive to *samadhi* or tinnge dzin. In Tibetan Buddhism, in particular, and specifically in the teachings on the six bardos which were revealed by Karma Lingpa (and which then spread, through the Karma Kagyu and Nyingma Traditions, into all Schools of Tibetan Buddhism), the bardo of concentration is called «*samten (dhyana) bardo*». This shows that, also in Tibetan Buddhism, and in particular in the Dzogchen teachings, the term *dhyana* or *samten* indicates a manifestation of relative conditioned experience that must be liberated by means of practice. In fact, by definition, a bardo is a mode of conditioned experience to be liberated by means of one or another type of practice.

However, both in *The Wish-fulfilling Vase* (the shorter text on level 0 of the SMS training) and in *The Precious Vase* (the longer text on level 0 of the SMS training) there are statements that suggest that the term *dhyana* or *samten* may indicate a state of Contemplation. As part of the answer to question No. 124, *The Wish-fulfilling Vase* reads:

«The «meditative concentration that is virtue of the *Tathagatas*» is a state of Contemplation (incorrectly translated in the text as «meditation») in which even the concept of voidness as an antidote has been overcome and one finds oneself in the condition free from delusory conceptualization [which unveils] the ultimate nature of phenomena.»

In regard to the same question, *The Precious Vase* tells us that:

«When one overcomes the concept of antidotes such as *shunyata*, etc., and remains in the state of *dhyana* of the *dharmata* which is not disturbed by thoughts, this is called the *dhyana* of the virtuous *Tathagatas*.»

In the Mahayana, the term *dharmata* indicates the absolute condition, whose name may be translated as [single] «nature (*ta*) of [all] phenomena (*dharma*)». Thus explained, the term refers to the absolute condition as the Base; however, when the term *dharmata* is combined with the term *dhyana* in the expression «*dhyana* of the *dharmata*», reference is no doubt being made to the state of Contemplation, which makes patent the *dharmata* while on the Path (the definitive establishment of this realization is the Fruit, but then there could be no talk of Contemplation, for at that point there is nothing that is not Contemplation and thus the term has become meaningless and may no longer be applied). Therefore, in this case the word *dhyana* is no longer referring to conditioned states, but to the state of Contemplation.

From the above it follows that, what was said about the meaning of the term *samadhi*/tinngedzin, may be extended to the meaning of *dhyana*/samten: although normally the term indicates conditioned states within *samsara*, it seems that, in some special contexts, it is used to refer to the state of Contemplation. Again, I don't really know whether this is so, but it seems to be the logical conclusion of all that has been considered.

The final conclusion I draw from all the above, is that Rinpoche is the Master who, according to Ch'an classic *The Blue Cliff Record*, sits on the top of Mount Sumeru, and that the questions and answers of the SMS training are the bait he lets down in the four seas «just to fish out terrible dragons»:

«Sitting on the top of Mount Sumeru
letting down his hook in the four seas
just to fish out terrible dragons.»¹

And also:

«Letting down the hook in the four seas
just to fish out terrible dragons;
the mysterious device outside conventions
is for seeking out those who know the self.»²

¹*The Blue Cliff Record*. Translated into English by Thomas and J. C. Cleary. Boulder and London, Shambhala Publications, 1977.

²*The Blue Cliff Record*, Vol. I, p. 84. Translated into English by Thomas and J. C. Cleary. Boulder and London, Shambhala Publications, 1977.