

## EDITORIAL

# JES BERTELSEN AND VAEKSTCENTERET

Jes Bertelsen, Ph.D., has been head of Vaekstcenteret in Noerre Snede, Denmark, for 24 years. Originally Associate Professor in philosophy at the University of Aarhus, Jes Bertelsen specialized in Soren Kierkegaard and C.G. Jung. He is the author of 19 books on Jungian psychology, Christian mysticism, personal growth, meditation, spiritual practice, and Dzogchen. A number of these books have been translated into Dutch and German.

In 1982 Jes Bertelsen founded Vaekstcenteret with a group of students and co-workers as an attempt to create a spiritual community that provides teaching and workshops focused on mind training and spiritual living. The community rapidly increased in size to become the home of some 60 people, and that is still the number of residents. The residents are engaged in integrating spiritual practice with an active social and creative life.

From its start in 1982 to approximately 1992 training at the Centre focused on the "perspective of the Self". In 1989 Jes Bertelsen's meeting with the Tibetan spiritual teacher Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche signalled the beginning of an intensive process of transferring the essential parts of Dzogchen ("The Great Perfection"), one of the most profound practices of Tibetan Buddhism, to Western reality.

Rinpoche empowered and authorized Jes Bertelsen to teach all the stages of the practice of Dzogchen, and to do so in a way suitable for the Western mind. As it turned out, Jes Bertelsen's early focus on psychotherapy

proved to be an important prerequisite to the spiritual training of the mind and heart - as did the involvement with various tantric practices, the training of the body-mind, energy balancing, and the effort to integrate this into ordinary working and family life. All these activities have become the pedagogical foundation for the endeavours to uncover our inherent spiritual intelligence.

During all these years Jes Bertelsen has focused his efforts on describing this process and on supervising a large group of students. The five texts in this publication are examples of his work. The first, "Awareness", is an introductory text for meditation practitioners. The following texts, "Open Heart, Open Mind", "What is Dzogchen?", and a chapter from "The Practice of Dzogchen", Jes Bertelsen's latest book, are attempts to make the subject accessible to Western spiritual seekers. Finally, the teaching "Tradition and Modernity" from October 2005 deals with issues that Jes Bertelsen sees as essential in the process of transferring Eastern spiritual wisdom to a European cultural context.

We hope that these texts - published in English for the first time - will provide an opportunity to perceive and appreciate the unique gift that Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche gave to Jes Bertelsen, a gift which might stimulate spiritual practice in our part of the world.

**JENS-ERIK RISOM** editor

# AWARENESS

Awareness  
has two  
directions  
it is  
an openness  
that goes two ways

one direction  
is outwards  
towards something  
out towards  
the object of  
attention

you are  
attentive to something  
your attention  
rests on  
a red poppy

the curious characteristic  
of  
attention  
is  
that it  
almost  
always  
rests  
on something

attentiveness  
is a  
watchful relationship  
with an  
object  
actually  
attention  
is lost  
in its content

when I watch  
an orange  
it fills  
my senses  
and mind  
attention  
is not just  
filled  
by its  
object  
it  
identifies  
with its  
object

the great joyful  
potential  
of mind  
is  
that it is able to  
recognize  
that the other direction of  
awareness  
is inwards  
towards itself

it is wakefulness  
turned in on  
itself  
without an object

awareness  
as such  
is not  
an object

it is pure  
unlimited  
openness

mind  
itself  
or  
awareness itself  
can never  
be  
or become  
an object

When I see  
a lemon-coloured butterfly  
my attention  
is filled to the brim  
with  
the fluttering  
yellow wings

this is  
what is meant  
by  
the outward direction of  
awareness  
towards the object

usually  
attention  
is  
tied in with  
judgement

as  
I experience  
beechwood  
bursting into  
light-green leaf  
I feel  
pleasure  
it is beautiful  
and refreshing

awareness  
however  
is  
not  
in itself  
judgemental

it is a purely  
reflective  
mode

Awareness itself  
says  
neither yes nor no  
to its content  
It is a  
neutral reflection  
like a mirror  
that neither  
extends its frame  
to hold on  
to the picture of  
a beautiful woman  
nor rejects  
or suppresses  
what is ugly

awareness  
is  
basically  
a reflective  
mode

when  
non-judgemental  
awareness  
focuses  
on  
the world  
outside

or  
on  
the soul inside  
it is  
an  
objective  
unbiased  
scientific awareness

when pure awareness  
is turned upon  
itself  
in openness  
without objects  
awareness is  
meditation

science is based  
on  
a non-judgemental  
neutral  
preferably  
objective awareness

mysticism is based  
on  
a non-judgemental  
neutral  
awareness  
that turns  
the subject  
inwards  
to  
its  
pure  
unlimited  
openness

I see the blue sky  
the objective

questions  
and answers  
concerning  
why  
the sky is blue  
and  
what  
the blue  
consists of  
are scientific  
questions  
and answers  
this is  
the objective-directed  
awareness

whether you  
like  
the blue sky  
or not  
has nothing to do with  
awareness  
itself  
but is  
determined by  
esthetic  
or  
psychological  
values

if  
simultaneously  
awareness  
mirrors  
the blue sky  
and is open  
inwards  
to its own  
subjectivity  
then this is

the other  
mystical-meditative  
direction of  
awareness

when awareness  
is expressed in language  
it is directed  
outwards  
towards the world  
and towards  
its contents  
(a purple pond of water-lilies  
a pain in the body  
a violet dream)

when awareness  
turns  
in on  
itself  
towards its own  
inner openness  
then  
awareness is  
non-verbal

non-verbal  
can be  
two things  
it can be pre-verbal  
as in a new-born baby  
that has not yet learned  
to speak  
or it can be trans-verbal  
that is  
beyond  
language

the innermost essence  
and nature  
of awareness

is trans-verbal  
ineffable openness  
without object

verbal consciousness  
is always  
directed towards objects  
and accordingly  
it is dual  
divided between  
subject and object  
awareness  
and its contents  
that which sees  
and  
the rainbow that is seen

awareness  
itself  
the awakened state  
the conscious mind  
is trans-verbal  
luminous clarity  
free of contents  
a divine  
transparency

just as the sun  
is the prerequisite  
for life and light in the outer world

so  
the source of awareness  
is the prerequisite  
for realization  
and meaning  
in inner life

openness  
in bipolar  
awareness

is the path to  
the heaven of now

awareness  
stripped of content  
unveiled and naked  
awareness pure and simple  
uncovered  
naked  
is the  
enlightened mind:  
the innermost  
compassionate awareness



The path along the stone wall,  
Vækstcenteret summer 2006

# OPEN HEART OPEN MIND

A TALK ON SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE, MAY 2005

Spiritual intelligence is the potential for realizing our own innermost nature. The innermost nature is hidden and out of reach of the ego. We will never find ultimate satisfaction if we are solely concerned with our ego, our personality, our experiences and whatever else life offers us. This is not the way to find our innermost nature, so most people never find it.

What I call spiritual intelligence is the ability to recognize the light of the innermost heart, the innermost mind. Behind the personality and ego that is blocking the light. The body blocks the light. Every thought, every feeling, every sensation blocks the light. Everything we will ever be able to experience as content of consciousness will block the light of the innermost nature. So the question is: how do we find it?

There are two main paths to follow. Two paths that all the great spiritual traditions on the planet have been engaged in. And we have to use both

simultaneously. One path is the path of the heart. The other is the path of the waking state. To be awake, aware. If we use both paths correctly and simultaneously, we will embark on a journey that might lead us to find that which is deep inside.

The heart has two basic modes. It is able to focus on being met and loved and accepted by other human beings. A natural and necessary mode. However, in my experience we will never find true meaning by focusing on the love that flows towards us from others - no matter how deeply we are being loved by any number of people - no matter how sincerely we are being admired. This path will never make us realize what life is really about.

This is a dilemma. We spend all this time and energy in order to be accepted and affirmed. And this is the wrong way to go. Wrong compared to where ultimate fulfilment is to be found. So we spend our time and energy on getting

sidetracked from the ultimate objective: genuine happiness.

Fortunately, the heart has other potentials that do not conflict with the longing for the ultimate meaning of life. Compassion is the path through the heart to the innermost meaning. The problem is that our human nature seduces us into attaching great importance to the need to be appropriately respected and properly loved. This manoeuvre closes the door to the meaning that is found through compassion towards other human beings. This is the dilemma, this is the problem. Basically we are using the wrong strategies to find what we are looking for. Unnecessary resources are being wasted on whether or not we are being loved. And not enough energy is being used on the potential for compassion towards our fellow beings. Not only towards parents, brothers and sisters, friends and lovers, but towards people in general. Our potential for compassion keeps us from seeing others as merely

strangers, enemies, unimportant and irrelevant. Other people become present and important to us. This potential for compassion is one of the main entrances to the core of human spirituality.

You have to learn how to distinguish between the need to be loved and the ability to love others. This is a way to reorient the mode of operating from the heart. This will let us open the door in another direction.

Once I talked to a woman, who told me a very interesting story. When she was 6 or 7 years old she had a complicated relationship with her mother, who one day had promised her that they would spend an evening together. She was obviously the kind of mother who was not able to keep her promises to her daughter. For the little girl the most important thing in the world was that her mother keep her promise, but of course her mother did not. And then she told me that something strange happened. At first, of course, she was angry and sad. Her mother had failed for the umpteenth time. But then it felt as if everything changed. She realized that she cared for her mother anyway. This sentiment changed her life and she began to get a sense of what spirituality is. She avoided the trauma of abandonment. She found a secret, namely to attach greater importance to the love you feel for other people than to the love you receive. This is

a way to train the heart. It is a strategy to refine the empathic feelings of the heart: love, gratitude, compassion, confidence. In time, the refinement of these feelings can lead to something behind the ego, the body, the mind, and the identity. It can lead to a place where meaning and fulfilment and a completely different view of existence begin to evolve. A place that allows a different and far more intense contact with other people. A different quality of awareness and presence.

The other path is the waking state as such. It is a fact that we are awake and aware, at this very moment. This is a statement of immense depth. But usually we only scratch the surface of things and prefer to think that this is all there is. Right now in this room, the sun is shining through the windows, the floor is chequered, the ceiling made of wood, and people are having thoughts and feelings and pains and aches. However, this is only a tiny part of what is hidden behind the fact that we are awake at this very moment. It has a much deeper meaning. And this is what we try to explore through meditation and spiritual practice. The leading principle of all spiritual practice is to deal with exactly that which presents itself in this very moment. Right now. Not to focus on the past or the future. Not to focus on ideas, hopes or longings, nor on past traumas or biography. The idea is not to look for what we do not have, but for something that is already there.

Always. We deal with the quality of awareness in the present moment. That is what it means to be aware and awake right now. To be in the space of pristine awareness.

Basically our mind has two ways of functioning. One is to be filled with content: thoughts, feelings, sensations and judgements. This tendency to be filled with content is the first way of the mind. The second is to direct awareness to the waking state itself. To allow awareness to watch itself momentarily and beyond language.

So, there are two basic principles in spiritual training. The first is that of the heart, which has two paths: love towards oneself and love towards others. Emphasize the love extended towards others and train it in life - and learn to refine your feelings. The second is that of the mind, which also has two paths: it can deal with contents as it does all the time. Or it can focus on itself, it can be pure and open. This is the path of spiritual practice. These two aspects, compassion and open awareness, have to be combined in order to find our true nature. We cannot find it by training the heart exclusively, or the mind exclusively. We have to synchronize and balance heart and mind. This is the path of enlightenment. It is about creating coherence between the brain and the heart.

# WHAT IS DZOGCHEN ?

## A TALK ON THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION, JULY 2003

Our lives have various dimensions, and three, in particular, are the focus of the teachings at Vaekstcenteret.

One dimension is the unfolding of the ego - the fact that we develop an ego, an identity, and a personality, and try to succeed in the world by getting an education, a job, a family, and a social life. And this is usually enough. Most people are primarily settled in that dimension of life.

Another possible dimension that most of us are in touch with has to do with personal growth. In this dimension we begin to use specific strategies and practices in order to unfold our potentials as human beings. We may do this through therapy, yoga, or other kinds of strategies for personal growth. This dimension is associated with degrees of social luxury. In many places on earth this dimension is simply not an issue as it is in the wealthy countries. In order to indulge in this, we have to be free of the constant concern about procuring the basic necessities of life.

The last dimension is the one we call the spiritual dimension. In principle it is available to all human beings. However, on a global scale not many people spend time on this dimension. Spirituality is not primarily about the ego or the self, it is, in a manner of speaking, about being sober. The idea is that ordinary life with its focus on developing the ego and the self is a kind of intoxication, which is extremely exciting and fascinating. But it is possible to sober up.

Another way to describe it is that it has to do with an openness in the heart and in the mind that is different from the one we normally experience, when we are tied up with our ego or engaged in the development of self. And it is this openness that many people long for. It is a deeper and more general kind of love or understanding, a kind of answer to the question of the meaning of life. This spiritual dimension, then, has to do with being centred in openness rather than in one's ego, and it tends to manifest itself as a natural kindness to other people. This is rather unusual because we are so engaged in ourselves and in succeeding in our lives.

Objectively, not many people on this earth are interested in the spiritual dimension. Many people talk about it, and there is a lot of longing, but only a small number of people actually spend time practicing it to the degree where they begin to change their behaviour, their ethics, and their consciousness. We are talking about less than 5% of the population of the earth. That is not a lot.

We must have a solid base in our egos and in our selves to develop this spiritual dimension of life. We cannot skip a beat. That means that we must proceed very slowly. We have to work our way around a functional ego that is free to develop itself and free to enter into constructive social relationships. In addition we need a deeper sense of how we are determined by structures in our culture, by our parents, our childhood. And knowing that, we need to know how to pry our-

selves loose from this. That is why we use strategies from personal growth and therapy - to create a greater insight into the self, and a greater freedom. It is therefore essential to unfold the second dimension of personal growth if we want to embark upon a spiritual practice. So, it is not the easiest path to take - and it is a slow path.

But let us turn to the spiritual dimension, which is the issue at stake here.

Think of a baby. New-born babies have two characteristics that most people are able to experience. The first has to do with openness. Look into new-born babies' eyes when they are awake and have had their basic needs satisfied, and you will see something in the eyes which you will not see if you look into the eyes of a grown up. It is as if we see an extremely expansive openness or space. Many people have described it as a cosmic openness. It is quite fascinating, and all infants have it. This is a good spiritual exercise, because we get an impression of one of the ingredients of real spirituality, and we will find it in all infants for the first three weeks of their lives. They are awake, there is no ego as of yet, and there is no language. This is a very fine quality that all people have had and still have. In time we cover it with our egos and our language. We wrap our personalities around us. We can see it in each other's eyes. We teach children to eat with knives and forks, and say yes and no and Mum and Dad, and in time they are positioned in their egos and personalities. And this has to be so, or they are



lost. We tend to forget, however, that we have all been through this phase right at the start of our lives.

Another quality of the infant has to do with the heart. Babies are so vulnerable that for the sake of their own survival they have to be open. If we consider new-born babies right after they are born, we know that they will recognize their mothers. Many experiments have been made to affirm this. But babies are totally prepared to open their hearts fully to any other person that takes primary care of them, or they will die. They are unconditional in their hearts. We know that if the mother dies, and the baby is moved to another person, who attaches him- or herself to the baby, and opens his or her heart to it, the baby will open its heart in the same way that it does toward its mother. This means that babies are able to rely on their hearts in ways that adults no longer can. Very few of us have this ability to be unconditional in our hearts. We are so selective. We like this person and that one and that one, but all the others, which means to say, quite a lot of people, we keep at arm's length.

So, new-born babies have two abilities. One is their openness, free of the veils that develop with their personalities and their ability to use language. The other is their ability to reach out with their hearts, unconditionally. The heart is open. And if you want to experience those two qualities just spend some time with an infant.

On the other hand, there is something that new-borns do not have and that we adults have. And that is the ability to know. Infants do not know that they have that openness in their eyes, in their hearts. They *are* openness, but they do not realize this. We, on the other hand, know who we are and where we are. We can all say our names and we can all describe how and where we are at the moment. We all know it, unless we are ex-

tremely disoriented. So we know, and strangely, we know in two ways. We can tell ourselves: I am Peter and I am sitting in such and such a place. We know in language. But we also know beyond language. We are able to know without using language to explain, without commenting as if we were sports commentators. Infants do not have this ability.

In other words, infants are capable of something that we have been capable of too. They are capable of being completely open in their gaze, their consciousness, their attentiveness. Completely open, because they are awake, they are happy; they have no linguistic veils, and no identity. They do not know their own names. No name, no form, complete openness and an open heart. That is what infants are capable of. And we are not. What we have that infants do not have is the ability to know who we are and where we are without using language. This is a very basic ability.

If these two abilities come together we have an enlightened human being. An enlightened person is as open in his consciousness and as unconditional in his heart as an infant, and he knows. When these two abilities come together, we have a person who is fully awake. And that is what we understand by a spiritual human being.

We have the ingredients. But we have distanced ourselves from them, cut ourselves off, so to speak, so that we are no longer able to find them. We have distanced ourselves from openness in the heart because we have been hurt too much. We have discovered that we are not liked by everybody, some people hurt us and we do not always get what we want. Therefore we grow anxious, the heart contracts, and we close down. We no longer know the ingredients, so if I tell you to find openness, you will not be able to. We have grown so used to being persons of

language, full of identity and feelings, constantly interacting with other people and with the world. As a result we have distanced ourselves from the level of complete openness that was our natural condition the first few weeks after we were born.

Instead we possess the ability to know beyond language, that is to know who we are without language, without comment, but we do not use that ability very often. And we do not couple it together with fundamental openness, because we cannot find fundamental openness.

So what is spirituality?

If human beings begin to gain a little more control over the ability to know beyond language, we may witness what is going on without interfering – linguistically or in any other way. If we train and find the ability to glimpse the wide open expanse of the mind and heart, and succeed in combining the two – knowing and openness – something may begin to happen. And it happens quickly.

In a way it is simple. And it is available to all human beings. But people are only vaguely interested. Seriously, few people are interested in this training. Because we have become so fascinated by what we can do with our egos and our language, and how we can interact with other people and with society. We spend all our energy developing an ego and interacting and unfolding our lives in work, love, and other kinds of social relationships. And we do that until we die. Perhaps there are the occasional glimpses of something else that makes us go to church, to the temple, read Lao Tzu or whatever. We suddenly remember: isn't there something else? And there is! We had it as children, as new-born babies. But we did not know about it then, so that did not help much. Now we are able to know but no longer have the openness. So we do not get the chance to

couple the talent that we have developed alongside the ego, that of knowing, with the talent for openness.

If those two talents combine in a person, he or she will wake up. A fundamental change will take place in the working of the heart and the mind. To know beyond language the unbounded space of the heart and the mind – that is Dzogchen. Unadorned by gods and altars. Dzogchen means the Great Perfection. And this is how it is experienced. The moment the two come together, one understands that ego is meaningless, that life is meaningless, and that it is ok because there is something else: there is non-verbal knowing of the endless space of the heart and the mind, the heart-mind. And that is what it is all about.

One has to train on three levels. One is to start training the ability to know, without interfering and beyond words. You must understand that we all have this ability. It is one of the benefits of having developed an ego, a language, a clear and subtle adaptability to our bodies, our minds, our environment, people, parents, children, lovers, people we meet in the shopping centres, etc. Throughout this process a fruit has developed in our minds. A precious fruit that the infant does not possess. And the fruit is knowing or being aware, right now, this very moment, without interfering or using language, just being aware. This is a formidable ability, a very fine quality of the mind that has developed unawares through our ego and the use of language. Thus we have been given a gift that has never been explicitly laid out to us by our teachers, nor by our mothers and fathers: to know how to be aware of oneself without interference, to know unimpeded wakefulness – to know everything about the present moment: the sky, the light, the room we are in,

the people around us, ourselves. And we do not comment, we do not attempt to change things. We just leave everything to itself, ourselves included.

Try it now.

You do not need to sit in a particular position. You may stand on your head or lie down, you may hang from your feet. Whatever position you are in, you are able to do it. It is a question of stopping the wandering of your mind for a moment, just stopping and taking everything in through all your senses, through your eyes, your ears, your nose, taste, body, everything – everything that is. Inside the mind and outside. Everything is ok as it is. Just feel it. Do not comment. Try NOW!

Usually we cannot hold this awareness for very long – a few seconds. Then we begin to think and associate. It is not an effort, it is not something that some of us can do and others cannot. We all can. If I can explain it right, you will understand what it is, and you will understand that we can all do it.

Try something else.

Look at your right hand. Move it up to the right, describe an arch, and down again. You can do that – but lo and behold – were you aware, non-verbally, of doing it?

Now, do it again, this time commenting on your movements: now I am moving my right hand up describing an arch and down again. This is not how to do it either.

Now, try to move your hand a third time, being aware but not commenting. Did you manage?

You have now tried it in three different ways.

The first one was completely unawares. Without any conscious awareness of doing it just as we do 99% of all movements – walking, riding our bikes, standing, getting up, brushing our teeth – we just do it. We do not comment, we do not speak, but neither do we act with awareness. One might say that it happens in a kind of intoxicated, somnambulist dream state.

The second way is to comment on our movements as we do them: now I am lifting my arm, etc.

The third way is to be conscious of the movement while doing it – but with an awareness beyond language. It is possible to expand this awareness to encompass not just a movement but everything inside and around us. And anything you experience is ok.

You may sit exactly as you please, but do sit as comfortably as you can. And then try to be open to everything that is, open to all your senses, take in everything around you, the light, the people, everything. And now try to be aware and know everything that is without commenting. Do that NOW!

This exercise is basic to Dzogchen. You may practice wherever you are, not just in sitting meditation. And what you train is an ability that you possess already to be fully aware of everything inside and outside of yourself – without the use of language. Do it for a short while and then relax. You are using ordinary mind for this.

Do not accept this as a matter of faith. Examine it and keep working at completely understanding the difference between doing something unawares, commenting on it, and being fully present

without words. And when you have got it, you will know without a doubt. It is called Vipassana or witness meditation and many other names.

There are two other aspects to train in Dzogchen. One is to find the door to unconfined openness. The openness that infants have, and that we can see in their eyes. We need to discover it – we already have it, but we have camouflaged it. It sounds easy, but it is not. We have hidden it so well, and we have committed ourselves so intensely to our identity and to our language; we have turned so decisively away from it that it is hard for us to find it again. Therefore one of the main concerns in Dzogchen is to give people strategies and teach them to start the process of discovering the unbounded spaciousness of the mind that is unconditional and beyond language.

This is not easy. Spiritual traditions have tried all kinds of strategies to help people discover it. But it remains difficult. Many people lose faith after some years of searching - "I won't find it, it's a lie, it's not true" – and then give up. But some people are adamant about the search. They do not give up. They keep on searching. Some of them end up discovering it, and some do not, even though they search for the rest of their lives. And do not forget: you are looking for something you already have! It is like searching for my left thumb and not finding it, though I keep trying.

The problem is that what we are looking for is constantly moving about. It keeps shifting because we keep shifting. Our minds are constantly on the move, now full of one thing, now another. I look this way and see someone who is looking at me, and I look that way and see a magnificent view, I look at the floor, I have an itch. We are forever on the move. And the door to un-

bounded spaciousness has become a blind spot. Dzogchen is about discovering that door. The fun part about it is that when we have found it, we discover that it was there all the time! So the second part of the training is by far the most difficult one, namely to discover the unconditional openness of the mind.

The last part of the training is to train the openness of the heart. This is not something that we can discover, because we have closed our hearts. We cannot just force our way through the shield that protects the heart and find what is inside: vulnerability and the ability to love. Do you see the difference? With the mind, once we find its openness, it is fully there, but with the heart it is a slow road. If we wish to practice Dzogchen, we need to deal with the blocks and wounds and shields that we have put into our lives and into our hearts. We have to go back and rediscover how unhappy we were when lover number four left us, or how sad we were about the abortion we had even though it was the sensible thing to do. We will discover how long it keeps disturbing the heart. And if we have not cried enough or dealt with it properly in therapy, it stays put. Or we may discover that our mother left us, or our father did not take proper care of us, or that our brothers and sisters teased us, or that we were not treated well at school. We all have a long list of wounded feelings, of rejections and experiences of not being seen or understood, which has contributed to our anxious hearts. Our very, very cautious hearts that we only open a little to very few people. That is the general picture although there are, of course, exceptions. So, if we wish to retrieve the original openness of our hearts, we need to prepare for a long process of going back and working at it, crying, separating the anger from the feeling of love and knowing

all the different sensations in the heart. It is a long process.

So, Dzogchen is the combination of three abilities: the unbounded spaciousness of the mind, the unconditional openness of the heart, and the ability to know beyond language.

# THE FOUR BASIC ASPECTS OF PRACTICE

A CHAPTER FROM THE BOOK 'DZOGCHENPRAKSIS SOM BEVIDSTHEDSVIDDE'  
(THE PRACTICE OF DZOGCHEN), COPENHAGEN 2003

The four basic aspects of practice are relaxation, equanimity, loving-kindness and apperception.

In the beginning each of these aspects could be conceived as fields of practice that can be practised separately and consecutively.

*Relaxation* consists of both physical relaxation and a relaxed mind. The point is to keep your body completely relaxed and at the same time keep it erect, aligned and alert. This practice is about refining the perception of unnecessary tension and subsequently allowing it to relax. The mind will progressively experience more subtle patterns of tension and be able to let them go while remaining completely awake and pristine.

A relaxed mind is open and present, but lacks unnecessary ambition and is without superfluous projects. The relaxation rests in the present moment without any plans of changing it. The more the mind is relaxed, the deeper the presence.

*Equanimity* is an attitude usually called neutrality. Awareness watches the mind: imprints from

senses, thoughts, feelings, sensations, and fantasies. The attitude is not to evaluate the mind stream, not to harbour intentions; to let the mind settle and become clear. Like agitated, turbid water left alone, it settles and becomes transparent. No acceptance. No rejection. No tracing the past. No planning the future. Look at the mind. Look at the now. Nonverbal dual attention. Awareness attends to all phenomena with equanimity.

In this practice, *Loving-Kindness* - to notice the heart - is mainly a question of trust, of allowing the feeling of confidence to appear; of abandoning yourself into confidence.

When you start feeling confident in your heart, in your practice, in the path, an opening to the other crucial elements of the heart is facilitated: gratitude, compassion, devotion, love, kindness, vulnerability. Successful practice will cause these spontaneous feelings of the heart to occur more frequently. The spontaneous emergence and flow of these feelings is the conclusive sign that the intention of the practice has become an existential reality.

*Apperception* means that wakeful presence is momentarily and nonverbally aware of itself. Nonverbally means beyond language, an instance of clarity, wide awake. Nonverbal in this context does not mean a preverbal, low-energy state of consciousness bordering on sleepiness or pleasant dullness. Nonverbal refers to a pristine lucidity of mind transcending language. Transverbal silence. Silence after language.

For beginners it is only possible to be wide awake in the present moment for an instant and at the same time know it. This is called the moment of practice. Immediately afterwards the awareness will identify with the mind and will thus identify with or project itself into the contents of the mind.

So, practice consists of allowing these moments of apperception, again and again, at a leisurely and steady pace.

**TULKU URGYEN RINPOCHE** 1920 - 1996



"In the West we have an extremely simplistic view of spiritual growth and spirituality. Seen from the East, to borrow Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche's perspective, we are like a kindergarten while he is in the forefront of academic research". - JES BERTELSEN

**JES BERTELSEN** at Vaekstcenteret, 2006





# TRADITION<sub>AND</sub>MODERNITY

## A TALK ON THE MEETING WITH DZOGCHEN, OCTOBER 2005

This talk is about my meeting with Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche. The meeting took place in a kind of timeless dimension, and that means that when I talk about it I am not talking about it as a memory of an event in 1989, but as something that is as vividly present today as it was then. I want to talk about it in order to tell you what it looks like right now. Naturally at one level it has changed a lot since 1989, but at another level the essence is the same.

The meeting was not just a personal event. It was much more of a collective event. It was a genuine meeting between modern Western culture and the ancient, spiritual culture of Tibet. A luminous bridge was lit between the two dimensions: the modern Western way of thought and life and ancient, Eastern wisdom. An image comes to mind: in my physics class at school we experimented with something called carbon arc light. We had two carbon rods, one with positive electric current and the other with negative current. When they were brought sufficiently close together, an electric arc between them generated a very bright light. In the same way my meeting with Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche brought together a Western way - with its search for the meaning of

life and with its attempt to realize deeper levels of love and awareness - and a kind of Eastern expert dimension.

To integrate these two dimensions it is necessary to extract the essence of Eastern wisdom from Eastern cultural background. To find what is valid, regardless of race, colour, or culture. Buddhism has more than two thousand years of experience with successfully transferring a living esoteric tradition to foreign cultures.

It was clear that what I received from Rinpoche was embedded in a certain culture and tradition, namely Tibetan Buddhism and Dzogchen. It has taken many years to distinguish the cultural trappings from the essence of Rinpoche's transmissions. It sounds easy to make this distinction, but in fact it is not. As we all know, many people around the world - including leading figures in Tibetan Buddhism - are part of this process of using scientific principles to distil the essential principles and dynamics of Buddhism and integrate them with Western tradition. Because of its strong emphasis on empiricism and logic, the teaching tradition of Tibetan Buddhism is highly compatible with such an approach.

In the West we have an extremely simplistic view of spiritual growth and spirituality. Seen from the East, to borrow Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche's perspective, we are like a kindergarten while he is in the forefront of academic research. The difference between the two cultures is extreme: the layers, rhythms and structures of spiritual practice and the perspective of time involved are literally worlds apart. To the modern and secularized West spirituality must be fast and available to everybody. We should be able to gain enlightenment in the course of a few workshops, or we should at least be able to use our Western technology to find some 'quick fix' techniques that could improve the slow and tedious techniques of the East and bring enlightenment to people by the thousands. This is a gentle caricature of the naïve Western ideas of spiritual progression. In our context with its approximately 1000 people, we need to change that idea. We have to get used to how delicate, slow, and complicated this process is. What we are searching for is something we all have, and the West goes for it with an eagerness both Christian and democratic. But we are no faster than the East. And that means that we are moving at a very slow pace like a snail, and by the time the snail has crawled across

the computer; the model has changed. We are talking about uniting two very different systems.

From my point of view the task has several parts. First, we Westerners need to get into spiritual secondary school or perhaps even high school, so that we achieve a more subtle perspective. Next, we need to discern the cultural aspects of the Eastern traditions, and to respect them but not adopt them. And finally we need to be clear about the Western principles and concepts that define our finest qualities, and build on them in our meeting with the Eastern esoteric dimensions.

I have simplified matters, but the point is that discerning the cultural trappings and refining our view of spirituality makes the process of productive integration rather slow and difficult.

A lot has happened, I think. Vaekstcenteret has absorbed the first stage really well, and around 1000 people have become more subtle in their approach to spirituality and in their understanding of the particular practice of Dzogchen. To be honest, as a group we have not progressed very much. But we have progressed somewhat. And

on the other hand, we have managed to incorporate a lot of the heavy and difficult material of our lives.

There are four basic Western concepts that we Westerners need to hold on to in our meeting with Dzogchen:

### **Science**

We need the scientific approach to the world. We cannot let go of that. I understand scholarship or the scientific approach as a process of achieving understanding, without arriving at the ultimate truth, but constantly trying to be more and more precise within a field of research. This, I think, is important. Science has come up with many fine realizations that are still being refined: think of the long history of our understanding of our place in the cosmos. 500 years ago Western culture believed in a flat earth with us as the centre of creation – today we know ourselves to be a tiny life-form on a speck of dust circling a small star far out in one spiral arm of one galaxy of an enormous universe. During those 500 years, the West has refined methods to investigate and deal with the outer world. Tibet spent that time

refining methods to investigate and deal with the inner world.

Also, in the West we have a well documented and highly developed theory of evolution, both in biology and physics. This theory of evolution puts us in the position to be able to see the evolutionary state of cosmos at the moment. And looking back from historical, mythological, and archaeological perspectives, we also seem to be able to observe within man an evolution of consciousness. Such a concept is not common in the East. I believe that this is a very advantageous concept that we need to hang on to for a while.

In biology we may find another example of the importance of science. Buddhist thought has it that we are not to kill any sentient beings. Many kinds of strategies exist to avoid this. Rather be a vegetarian than kill animals, and insects and microbes are to be considered animals rather than vegetables. However, modern Western biology shows that no human being can exist without killing microbes. Our digestive systems necessitate that we kill thousands of sentient beings in order to survive. This is a scientific fact that we have to integrate with a kind of sensible, Bud-

dhist ethic of limited killing! Modified by science, our understanding moves from a kind of ultimate truth to a far more relativistic world.

### **Democracy**

The second concept that comes out of current Western experience is the appropriateness of democracy when dealing with a lot of people, large groups and probably mankind as such. Winston Churchill called democracy the worst form of government except for all the others that have been tried. We need to hang on to the appropriateness of democratic thought. But this must be combined with a hierarchical model that to some extent seems to be necessary in a spiritual process - as indeed in any special training. A hierarchical structure according to talent, skill, and effort seems to emerge. We cannot all play soccer like Ronaldinho, however much we enjoy playing with a ball. Ronaldinho is high up in the hierarchy and John Doe is low down, even though they are both democrats. We have to somehow find a balance between hierarchical structure and a form of democracy. And this is particularly difficult in a spiritual context. We have not solved this problem in our community, but we are trying to create democratic processes that we then try to balance with hierarchical ones. I do not think that we have the solution yet, but we have established the groundwork to be elaborated on.

### **The Feminine and the Masculine**

The balance between the masculine and the feminine is the third concept. In all the ancient, spiritual traditions, including Tibetan Buddhism, men and women were distinctly unequal in their access to spiritual training, to the extent that one has to search high and low to find detailed descriptions of the spiritual process from a feminine point of view. Fortunately, both texts and

practices by women do exist, but they are few and far between. Many of us find this inequality unacceptable. Many leaders and teachers in Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism today are making special efforts to improve conditions for women with a spiritual practice. We cannot imagine a spiritual progression in the West or a more exact scientific educational program that is not based on complete equality between men and women. Furthermore, we need to carefully describe specific feminine traits, because they exist at least on some levels of spiritual training, just as specific masculine traits exist. This, of course, has to be done by women and not by men. We need women to begin to describe their genuine experiences on the spiritual path. This process has begun, not just in our community but elsewhere in the West as well.

### **The Christian Archetypes**

The last concept has to do with the fact that we live in a Christian culture no matter how secularized it is, and no matter how fragile the Christian element. Jung would say that these elements have become archetypes. They are so embedded in the Western psyche that we all carry them. We need to find a kind of balance or integration between the Eastern concepts that we have started working with and some of our basic Christian structures.

We know that whenever Buddhism has successfully spread to a new part of the world, its essence has been maintained, while many traditions and rituals have changed. In our own Scandinavian history we have seen signs of the opposite; that the deepest esoteric practices of Christianity failed to take root and seek nourishment in the northern pre-Christian shamanic culture, while at the same time Christian ritual

replaced the old forms of worship. It seems that authentic spiritual practice must embed itself in the soil of local culture to flourish.

We must be aware of these issues as we approach the practice of Dzogchen. This is in fact a rather complicated affair. We need to remember that we have Danish soil under our feet.