

The presence of this empty room with its view

Tentative reflections on

Dzogchen's vision of the essential nature of mind

*(the unformed unity of being empty and luminously cognizant that
continuously mirrors its own discrete expressions)*

and the mind of nature

*(in light of non-reductionist currents and traditions in the humanities and sciences
that aim to learn about and engage with our shared reality)*



Part 1: The nature of mind

A radical view
of our essential nature
based on directly knowing
and effortlessly continuing in
reality as it is

Some sources

- Introductory texts on Dzogchen
 - Dalai Lama, Chogyal Namkhai Norbu, Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, Ponlop Rinpoche, Tarchang Rinpoche, Gen Lamrimpa
 - Dudjom Lineage
 - Dudjom Lingpa, Dudjom Rinpoche
 - Alan Wallace
 - Santa Barbara Institute for Consciousness Studies ([santabarbarainstitute.org](http://www.santabarbarainstitute.org))
 - Ian Baker (books and online courses/seminars)
 - Malcolm Smith (translations, introductions, lectures/interviews)
 - Bon, Mahamudra, Dohās (experiential songs, mahāsiddhas)
 - Translations by Jean-Luc Achard, Daniel P Broderick, John Dowman, Karl Brunnhölzl, Christopher Wilkinson

wisdomexperience.org comparative-consciousness.net



History & Dzogchen in Buddhism

- Nyingma tradition
 - Pre-Tibet: Samantabadra, Garab Dorje, Vimalamitra, Padmasambhava
 - Tibet: 3 series, Longchempa (systematization), Partial Integration?
 - Modes of transmission
- Early Dzogchen texts
- Indian mahasiddhas (Saraha)
- Bon
- Direct/Indirect interactions with Christian Gnosticism, Sufism, Chan Buddhism, Taoism, Advaita Vedanta?

The Three Turnings of the Wheel

Lesser and Greater vehicles

Causal and Resultant vehicles

1. Hinayana
 - Renunciation
 - Voidness of ego
2. Mahayana (path of the Bodhisattva)
 - Voidness of subject & object
 - Middle Way
 - Two wings of Buddhism
 - Rangtong vs Shentong
 - Analytical or Direct knowing
3. Tantrayana (Vajrayana)
 - Mahayoga
 - Anuyoga
 - Atiyoga (Dzogchen) – takes rigpa as the path

Dzogchen: The Great Perfection

From the beginning, awareness has neither existed as a substantial entity [nor had] elaborated characteristics: its nature is primordially pure, void, vast, and all pervasive. As the radiance of voidness is unobstructed, the ocean of phenomena of Samsara and Nirvana appears spontaneously, like the sun and its rays; neither is awareness a blank nothingness, totally void, for its natural expression is primordial wisdom, the qualities of which are vast and spontaneously accomplished

Dudjom Rinpoche, Extracting the Quintessence of Accomplishment

The inseparability of emptiness and vision, and the presence of the state and emptiness are all experienced together. Then everything can be said to be 'of one single taste', which is the emptiness of both subject and object. Dualism is completely overcome. Although there is... still the manifestation of the play of energy... because of the uninterrupted presence of contemplation we no longer experience the illusion of a dualism between the one and the other.

Chogyal Namkhai Norbu; The Crystal And The Way Of Light: Sutra, Tantra And Dzogchen

"First nonexistence is taught," which means the empty essence is being explained. "Next existence is taught," which means the cognizant nature is being explained. Finally, the unity of existence and nonexistence is taught." This means that the essence and nature, the primordial purity and spontaneous presence, are a unity within awareness. Therefore, it is said that samsaric phenomena appear while being nonexistent. In regard to their essence, they don't exist; in regard to their nature, they are manifest, appearing while not existing.

Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche. Vajra Heart Revisited

NATURAL LIBERATION

Padmasambhava's Teachings on the Six Bardos

A Companion to the Tibetan Book of the Dead

Oh, once you have calmed the compulsive thoughts in your mind right where they are, and the mind is unmodified, isn't there a motionless stability? Oh, this is called "quiescence," but it is not the nature of the mind.

Now, steadily observe the very nature of your own mind that is being still. Is there a resplendent emptiness that is nothing, that is ungrounded in the nature of any substance, shape, or color? That is called the "empty essence." Isn't there a luster of that emptiness that is unceasing, clear, immaculate, soothing, and luminous, as it were? That is called the "luminous nature."

Its essential nature is the indivisibility of sheer emptiness, not established as anything, and in its unceasing, vivid luster such awareness is resplendent and brilliant as it were... It is just this clear, steady consciousness that is ordinarily, naturally present right now...

Primordially and originally, the natural character of the mind itself exists just like that; but previously it has been obscured by inborn ignorance, so you do not recognize or ascertain it, you are not satisfied, and you do not believe... Know your own nature. Know your own flaws. That is called "identifying the mind."

Commentary by Gyatrul Rinpoche
Padmasambhava (late 8th C), Natural Liberation (revealed to Karma Lingpa 14th C)
Translated by B. Alan Wallace



Preliminaries, Guru Yoga & the View

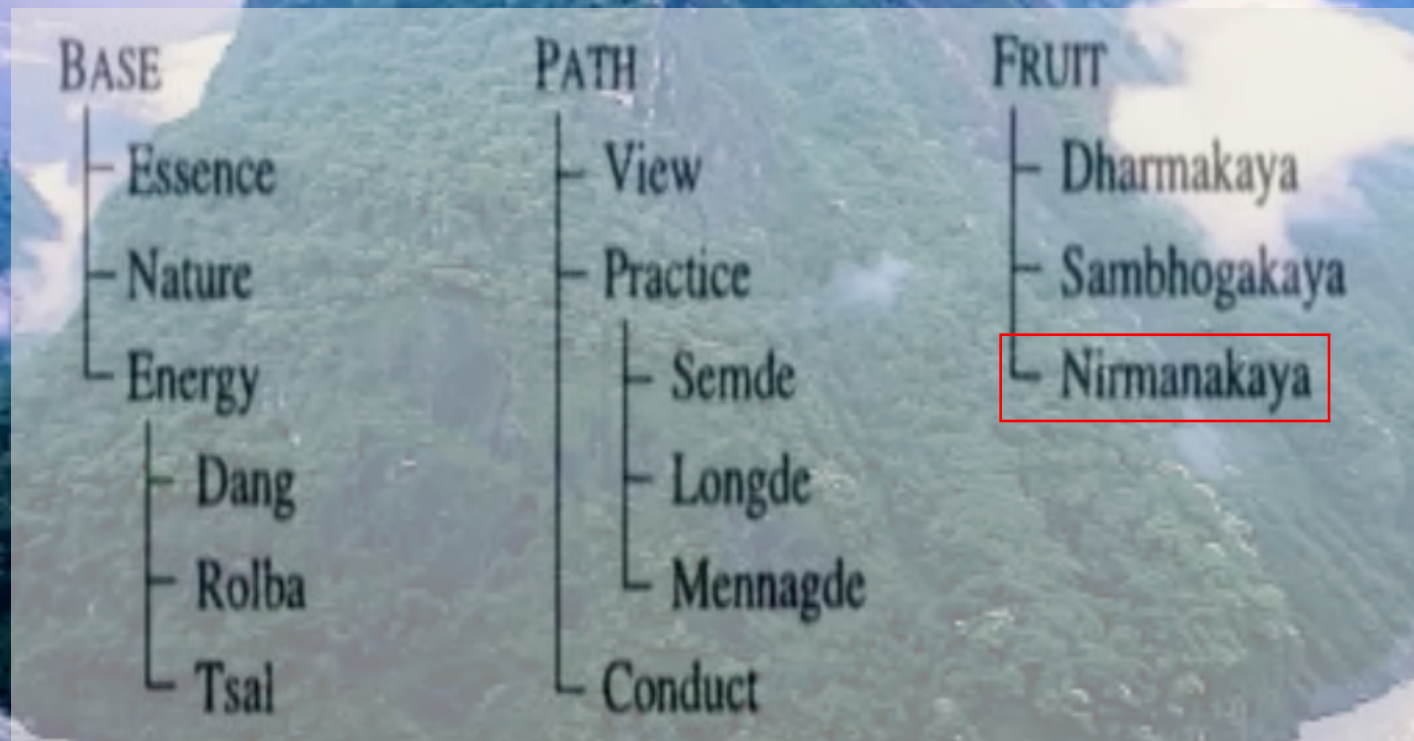
- Swift & effortless path: but there are preliminaries!
- Connection with the Guru
- View arises from meditation (rather than meditating on the view)
 - Crucial distinction: mind and rigpa

“**The mind refers to something projected by rigpa.** The night does not occur during the daytime, and the day does not occur during the nighttime. Space does not turn into either one. Distinguish between the mind and rigpa in this way.” Dudjom Lingpa
 - Heart Essence
 - Analogies: sky, sea, mirror

“The voidness which allows the mirror to ‘fill itself’ with any content illustrates the Essence; the mirror's capacity to reflect represents the Nature, and the particular appearances that are reflected in the mirror symbolize the Energy.” Chogyal Namkhai Norbu



The Ground, Path and Fruit



Two practices to identify the doorway to the path

- **Śamatha**

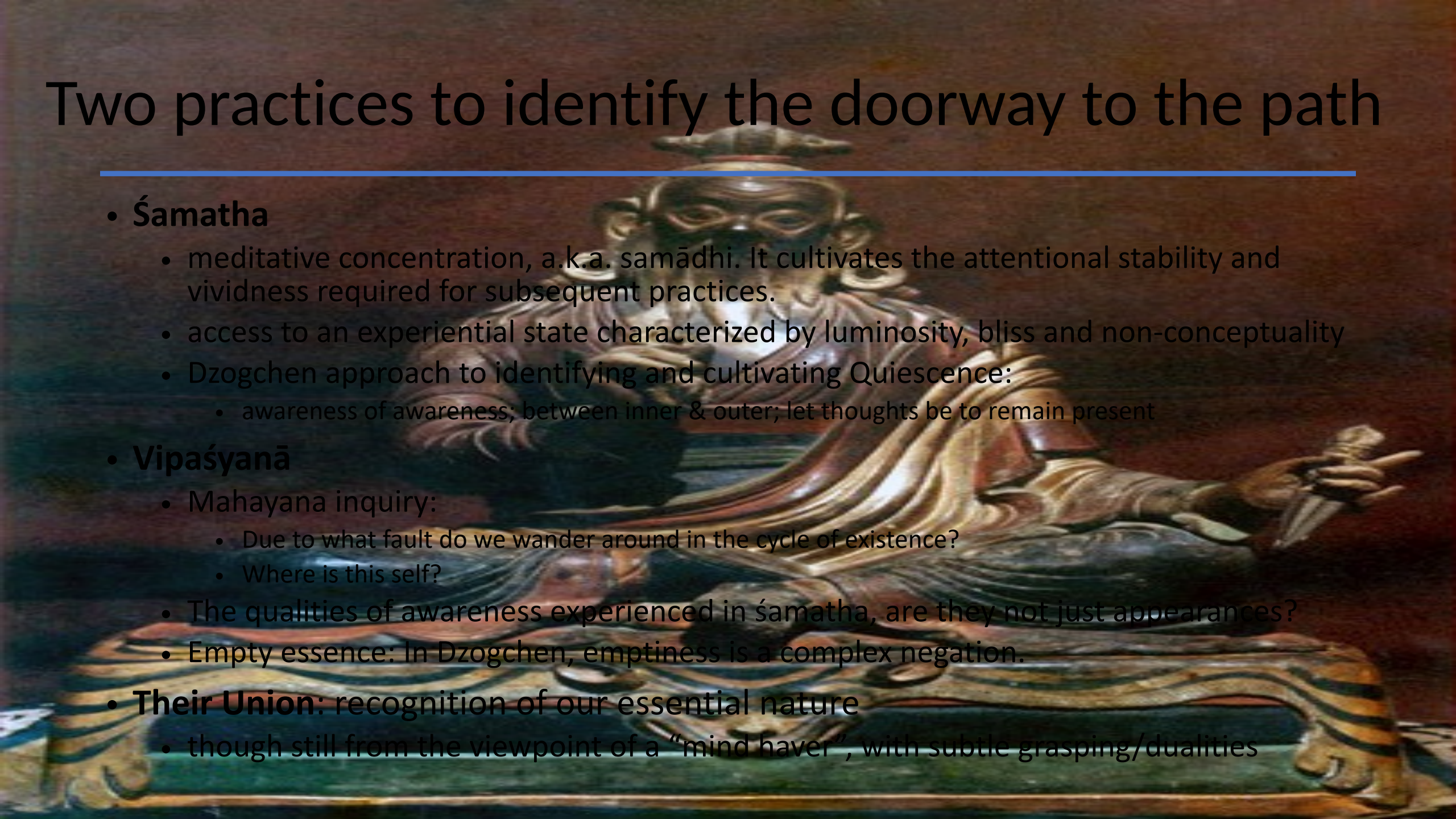
- meditative concentration, a.k.a. samādhi. It cultivates the attentional stability and vividness required for subsequent practices.
- access to an experiential state characterized by luminosity, bliss and non-conceptuality
- Dzogchen approach to identifying and cultivating Quiescence:
 - awareness of awareness; between inner & outer; let thoughts be to remain present

- **Vipaśyanā**

- Mahayana inquiry:
 - Due to what fault do we wander around in the cycle of existence?
 - Where is this self?
- The qualities of awareness experienced in śamatha, are they not just appearances?
- Empty essence: In Dzogchen, emptiness is a complex negation.

- **Their Union:** recognition of our essential nature

- though still from the viewpoint of a “mind haver”, with subtle grasping/dualities



The two core “practices” of the path

- **Trekchö:** based upon the primordial purity of mind (kadak)
 - “cutting through”
 - change of view that is described not as a transition from one region of awareness to another, but as a dream dissolving into the space of awareness: arising of rigpa
 - Realize and dwell in the essential nature of the mind (on & off the cushion)
 - Dudjom Rinpoche: “absorption without wavering from the disposition of the primordially pure view”
- **Tögal:** based upon its spontaneous presence (lhundrub)
 - “direct crossing over to spontaneous actualisation”, or “all-surpassing realization”
 - Four progressive visions (not visualisations)
 - Chogyal Namkhai Norbu
 - The Visions ... of the practice of Tögal (are) the final and most secret teaching of Dzogchen allowing the practitioner to rapidly undo the knots of conditioned existence and attain the most absolute and total type of realization, which culminates in the complete dissolution of the physical body in the essence of its elements, which is light.
- **Their unformed unity:**
 - Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche: “In short, Dzogchen is the unity of kadak and lhundrub”
 - Patrul Rinpoche: “The way things arise may be the same as before, the difference lies in the way they are liberated: that’s the key.”

Appearances/facets of our essential nature

AWARENESS

pristine

luminous

clear

still

PRESENCE

empty

open

blissful

spontaneous

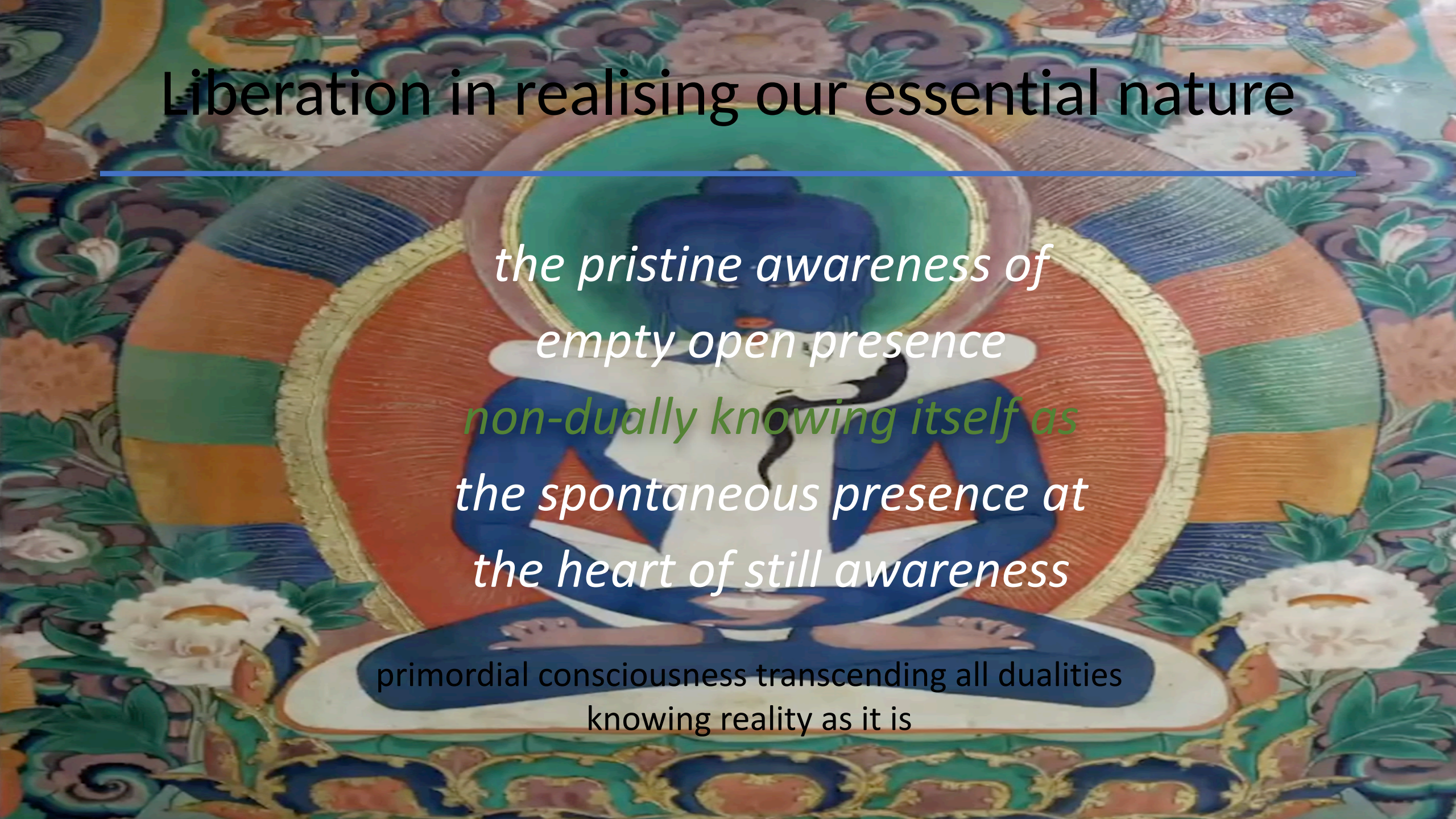
KNOWING

direct effortless creative self-arising

If awareness is not aroused by presence, in fact, it cannot function.

Chogyal Namkhai Norbu, Advice on Presence and Awareness

Liberation in realising our essential nature



*the pristine awareness of
empty open presence
non-dually knowing itself as
the spontaneous presence at
the heart of still awareness*

primordial consciousness transcending all dualities
knowing reality as it is

The background of the slide is a reproduction of the painting 'The Starry Night' by J.M.W. Turner. It features a turbulent, swirling blue sky filled with numerous bright, glowing yellow and orange stars and a large, luminous crescent moon in the upper right. Below the sky, dark, swirling waves of the sea are visible, and in the foreground, a dark, silhouetted church spire rises from a small, dark town. The overall texture is highly visible, with thick, expressive brushstrokes.

Part 2: The mind of nature

Can we discern an *essential nature* in:

- the patterns, games and dances that comprise our shared reality;
- the symbols & languages that codify our shared knowledge of this reality; and
- the way we discover, create, combine, *transform and relate* these luminous and empty symbols?

The Concept & Reality of Existence

- Toshihiko Izutsu (70s & 80s): Sufism, Taosim, Zen
 - Value of philosophy in this context
 - Map is not the territory, but travellers still need maps - including the empty spaces!
 - On Mulla Sadra (16-7C) and the Hikmat philosophy
 - Direct knowledge of 'existence' is obtainable by 'illuminative presence' and an 'immediate witnessing'
 - 'existence' and 'quiddity' are in concreto completely unified with one another
 - On Chuang-Tzu & the Cosmic Wind
- Herbert Guenther on Dzogchen
 - Gnostics, Luminous Language of Being, Heidegger
 - Buddhist Thought and Western "Daseinsanalyse":
 - "appreciated world"
 - "How does Being occur without necessitating a reference to thing occurring"
- Greg Emery, "Heidegger, Lao Tzu and the Pre-Socratics: Thinking Being"

On the seashore of endless worlds, children play

• D.W. Winnicott, *Playing & Reality* (1971)

- Where does playing occur?
 - Development to “the location of cultural experience” and creative life.
 - Navigating the two extremes of only looking out and only looking in
- Transitional objects
 - Are transitional objects created, or do they exist independently waiting to be discovered? Where does this object exist? Or, better, where does the use of this object take place?
 - Inherent paradox (positive contradiction) that must be accepted
- First playground. Joins (shapes?) inner and outer worlds
- Christopher Bollas
 - Shadow of the object, The mystery of things

Abandoned room full of dream and emptiness

- Roberto Calasso's *Abandoned Room*: an essay on Mallarmé's *Sonnet en yx*
 - “A sonnet allegorical of itself”
 - Vision of the nothingness that is not a void by taking us into the abandoned room of the sonnet
 - What is this room that coincides the very space of the poem? ... What is left is the world (the night sensed without), an empty room (hollow shell, as it were, of the vanished author), and the reflection of the seven stars in a mirror; thus the mind manifested itself, nor will its wakefulness ever be more sharply distinguishable
 - “There is in us something occult in the ground of everyone; I firmly believe in something hidden, unexpressed, that is the stuff that inhibits the ordinary”

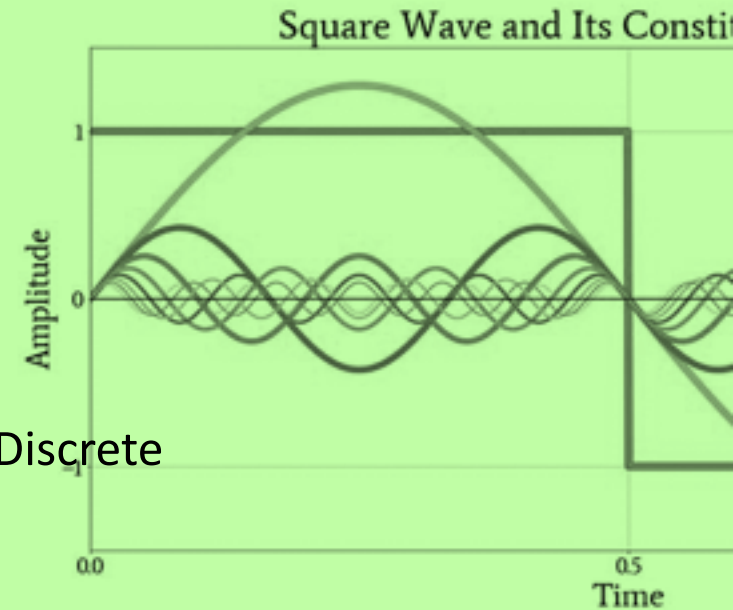
• Mallarmé's *Le Poète* in French

Where do calculations take place?

- We've forgotten how much mathematics encodes about the essential nature of the mind of nature.
- Rote vs meaningful calculations:
 - discovery, perceiving the general in the particular and vice-versa
- Every non-trivial equality is not an actual equality!
 - In mathematics, "is" is a transformation
- Algebra (al-jabr)
- What kind of thing is Differential & Integral Calculus?
- What is mathematics about?
 - Dialectic between Space (empty) & Quantity (luminous), Continuous & Discrete
 - 20C evolution of conception of space: remember the projection/action!
- Conceptual proofs: Direct vs indirect knowledge
- Conceptual mathematics: Towards a calculus of Being?

$$\frac{d}{dx} \int_a^x f(x) dx$$

$$\int_a^b f(x) dx$$



Dialectical tradition

Being

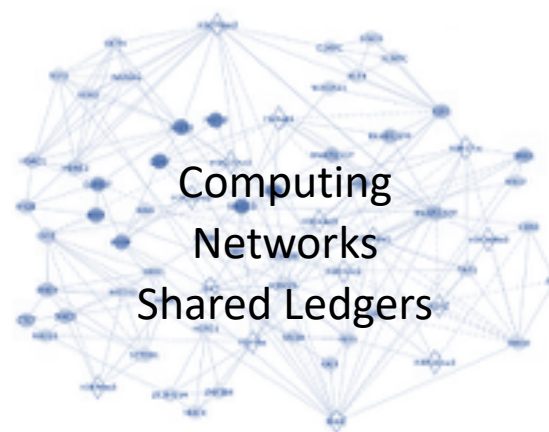
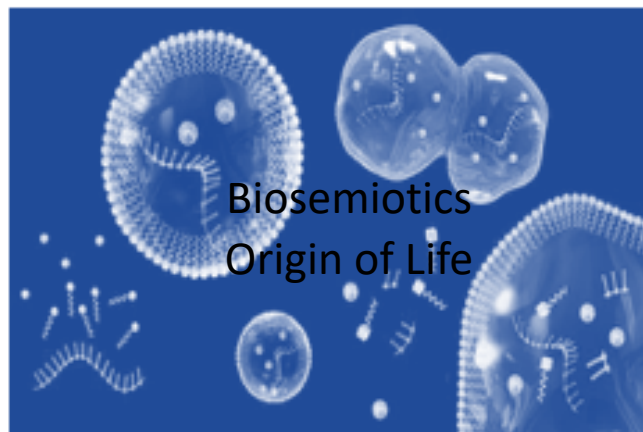
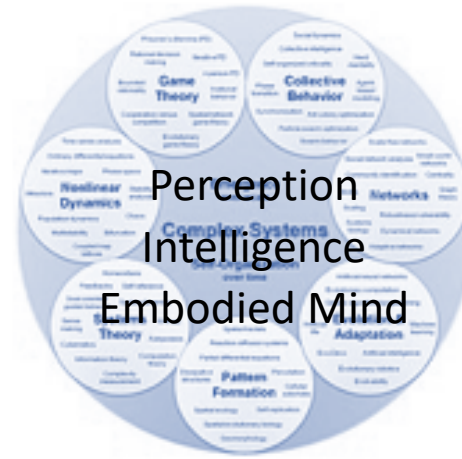
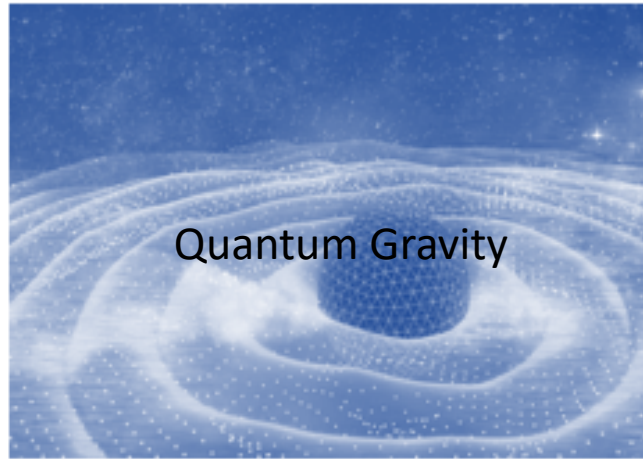
- Hegel's Science of Logic as a View rather than a System (theoretical model)
 - A Dzogchen reading of Hegel's Logic?
- Objective Logic = DAGR (Decisive Abstract General Relations); Subjective Logic = Rules of inference that play out within the calculus of a DAGR
 - *A calculus may encode "positive contradictions" that embody the manifestations and interactions of dualities;*
 - *but the rules of inference (for any calculus) should not permit contradictions*
- A calculus (i.e. Objective Logic) specifically for the general dialectic Objective Logic \Leftrightarrow Subjective Logic to guide thinking about the world?

Thinking

Objective

Subjective

New calculi for foundational theoretical problems?



Exploring the how the
empty nature of mind
and our shared reality
manifests

what occurs in thinking (formal)

what is sensed (real)

Particular theoretical models of
general (classes of) commonly
observable phenomena,
based on thinking about ...

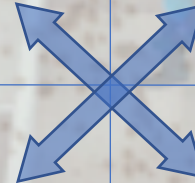
Mathematics
E.g. Conceptual mathematics

Theoretical sciences
E.g. Quantum Gravity

General unified view of the
particular phenomenon mind,
based on direct knowing ...

Dialectics
E.g. Hegel's Science of Logic

Gnostic contemplative traditions
E.g. Dzogchen



Purpose

• Dialectical Materialism (DM) vs Dzogchen?

- Conceptually understand (things vs the way things are, relate, and change) to guide how to change our shared reality
- Don't know oneself (mind vs essential nature of mind) In order to be (not what to do, but how to be)

• Hamlet's condition: *To be or ...*

• Dialectical Materialism's answer:

- Realise becoming is the natural state (of a physical, psychological, social, political being), rather than oscillating between melancholia and play-acting, engage in the world: cooperate to struggle, transform and overcome

• Winnicott's extra answer in *Playing & Reality*:

- Hamlet didn't know *how* to be
- Unable to find an answer, he was trapped in the fictional duality of being vs not being
- Root cause: ignorance of his dissociation of male (awareness) from female (presence)
- Solution: It is the play *Hamlet* that could have shown him the essential nature of his dilemma. Not the play within the play which was a self-reinforcing creation of his condition (further fueling his own cruel play-acting)

• Is it possible to directly see our lives, individually & collectively, to be in reality nothing but empty and luminous plays? And still expect to fully, compassionately and meaningfully participate in them?