

# Complete Fulfillment (Dzogchen)

*There is no need to reject or appropriate anything, or to refute or establish any position, because reality is unbiased. This is Complete Fulfillment - the optimum peak of all spiritual perspectives.*

**Longchenpa**

In different ways we all seek an experience of deep and lasting fulfillment. We yearn for a way of being that will give us the confidence in knowing that we have gained a quality of living that can never again be degraded by the suffering and confusion that pervade so much of our everyday existence. In many spiritual traditions this state of existence is envisaged as escaping from the limitations of our physical existence and achieving union with a more fundamental reality. In other traditions, fulfillment is sought through accepting the primary conditions of our embodiment and trying to minimize our suffering by embracing the seemingly inescapable facts, that we are separate and cut off from the world in which we live, that we don't control our destiny, and that one day we will cease to exist at all. However, while such approaches hold out hope for a future state of freedom, they compel us to make more effort as we try to escape from, or come to terms with, our present existence. The most they can offer us right now, is fuel for our fantasies about the future, or consolation that the blunt realities of human embodiment are essentially unavoidable.

The Complete Fulfillment (or Dzogchen) is a Tibetan spiritual tradition that avoids the traps of fueling our fantasies, or feeding our fears. Of course, if this sounds attractive then we have already been hooked by our hope for a better, or more advanced spiritual approach than those we presently know. So beware. If we read into this tradition yet another promise of liberation, we are missing the point.

The Complete Fulfillment tradition informs many aspects of the practical work we offer through the Center for Timeless Wisdom. In this article we would like to share the important features of this tradition with you, so you can better appreciate the continuity and intersections between this tradition and our work.

Whilst there is currently a great deal of interest in the Complete Fulfillment tradition amongst Westerners, it was little known in the West even ten years ago. At least in part, this present interest is an expression of our consumer culture, which daily conditions us to want "the latest, the fastest, the most elegant, and most refined." Because this tradition embodies the consummate insights of the most evolved Asian masters, it fulfills our Western need to have the very best that is on offer.

Paradoxically, this Complete Fulfillment tradition is one of the most profound, yet least distinctive of the world's spiritual traditions, since it cannot be located by pointing to any text, belief, teacher, ritual, or institution. The reasons for its obscurity are its deeply experiential nature and the fact that it is invisible to those who view spiritual practice as a "means" for their personal liberation. Whilst it is true that masters of this tradition produced a rich body of literature, at essence, Complete Fulfillment is experiencing the fundamental nature of being itself (dharmata).

## **A TIMELESS SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE**

In contrast to goal-oriented approaches to spirituality, the Complete Fulfillment is a spiritual perspective that has been tapped into from beginningless time by sage-philosophers as they transcend the need to escape from, or indulge their experience, by constructing that it is either deficient, or complete. This tradition sources its origins to the timeless experience of rare individuals in all cultures who have the courage to see beyond the limited and seductive interpretations of human existence offered by different religious and philosophical systems. Through a vision that spontaneously deconstructs all structures that separate reality into experiences of the sublime and mundane, pleasure and pain, the veridical and illusory, such people achieve a radically natural and uncontrived way of being in the world, without subsequently constructing this as any sort of spiritual achievement. They realized a contentless wisdom, completely unstained by the fear of suffering, or hope of liberation. In the Complete Fulfillment tradition, this is spoken about as the uncontrived realization of things-as-they-are (dharmata).

As an historical phenomenon the Complete Fulfillment tradition emerged in the spiritual crucible of North Western India and Tibet in the eighth century. It was transmitted through a lineage of Indian masters who included Vajraprahe, Manjushrimitra, Vairochana, Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra, Shrisimha and Jnanasutra. In Tibet it was transmitted through a lineage that includes such illustrious masters as Yeshe Tsogyal, Longchenpa, Jigme Lingpa, Patrul Rinpoche, and Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche.

These and other famous masters emerged on the historical landscape with such power and timeliness that they permanently transformed the shape of esoteric spirituality in India, China and Tibet. Through a process of natural maturation, they expanded their capacity to be fully and simply present to life, to the point where no conceivable event could shake their serenity, or disturb the clarity of their awareness. Any possible reactive response to experiences of loss and gain, praise and blame, pleasure and pain, was displaced by the sheer breadth and impartiality of their awareness. By connecting with pure, immutable awareness, they gained the ultimate freedom to be exactly who they were, with no need to consolidate, or avoid, their personalities. They gained the capacity to live in the world without any contrivance or self-gratifying agenda. No matter what their external circumstances were, they experienced a natural, effortless and imperturbable freedom. Even their own death was entered with such heightened awareness and capacity to accommodate the unknown, that it became completely uneventful.

## **A LOW PROFILE TRADITION**

In contrast to the quite widespread dissemination of this tradition that is beginning to occur in the West, Indian and Tibetan masters only communicated this perspective to a small number of students who they considered were able to implement and embody this system without distortion. Indeed, the idea of trying to "attract students" by preaching the promise of liberation is antithetical to the Complete Fulfillment perspective which doesn't engage with our need for freedom, and fear of future suffering. The act of drawing attention to itself would stimulate the very expectations that hinder entry into this perspective. As such, whatever we could "hope" to achieve by engaging with

this tradition, it can't be the culmination of Complete Fulfillment. As the great Indian Complete Fulfillment master Manjushrimitra says: "The state of pure and total presence of the Joyful One does not exist. It is a magical apparition of that state that appears to those who are deluded."

## **CLOSE LINKS WITH BUDDHISM**

Even though the Complete Fulfillment tradition transcends cultural determination, it blossomed with a special vigor in the deeply contemplative cultures of India, Tibet and China. Buddhism in particular provided a very fertile and conducive foundation for this tradition. Of all the world's religious traditions, Buddhism has been particularly capable of integrating the Complete Fulfillment perspective due to its own emphasis on the primacy of experience, and rejection of faith and dogmatism. Buddhism's uniqueness on the world stage lies in its capacity to deconstruct itself-leaving the practitioner with nothing to stand on but the transparent structures of a linguistically created universe. In the same way that other movements within Buddhism, such as the Middle Way school (Madhyamaka) and Zen, have dismantled the entire edifice of Buddhist concepts and practices, so the Complete Fulfillment tradition is respected as an authentic and powerful expression of the wisdom that the Perfect Wisdom tradition (Prajnaparamita) knows as "no wisdom".

Even though the Complete Fulfillment tradition has very close historical links with Buddhism, it has also existed outside of Buddhism. In Tibet, for example, the Complete Fulfillment was cultivated within the indigenous, pre-Buddhist religion called Bön. It also shares historical and philosophical affinities with Chinese Ch'an Buddhism and the Hindu Shaivite tradition.

This capacity to be aligned with other non-dualistic traditions, and even to exist quite independently of any system or institution, derives from the fact that awareness as such cannot be destroyed or perpetuated. While our "understanding" of awareness can be threatened or supported by alternative interpretations of the "phenomenon", awareness as such has nothing to do with what we think about it. In fact, from the Complete Fulfillment perspective there is no such thing as a competing system or orientation since there is no "thing" for other systems to compete against. Similarly, there is nothing to promote, or protect.

Perhaps more than any other tradition, the Complete Fulfillment cut across religious, economic, and gender divisions due to its emphasis on integrating a state of realization into everyday living. It also naturally steered away from the standardized practices that define any institutional culture. In traditional patrilineal cultures it catered for women largely because it was non-monastic and communal.

## **A NON-CONTRIVED APPROACH**

The Complete Fulfillment tradition differs from other spiritual approaches because it doesn't provide a path. We don't traverse any territory with this approach. Nor do we arrive at some spiritual destination. In this tradition there is nothing to gain or lose, because the experience transcends the need to avoid suffering, or achieve liberation. Nothing contradicts or threatens this experience, since every thing that we have ever thought, done, or experienced is an expression of a state of complete fulfillment.

In the Complete Fulfillment tradition reactive emotions and burdensome thoughts release themselves. In contrast to most other spiritual approaches, "we do not contrive or condition (our mind) by suppressing (experiences), or applying remedies, but rather let (the mind) rest naturally in whatever (condition we find it)." The contemporary Complete Fulfillment master, Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche, explains this process more fully. He writes:

When we speak of the path of self-liberation, there is neither a concept of renunciation, because if it is always my energy manifesting, then it can manifest in many different ways: nor is there a concept of transformation, because the principle here is that I find myself in a state of pure presence, of contemplation. If I find myself for an instant in a state of contemplation, then from that point of view, wrath and compassion are one and the same. Good and evil are one and same. In that condition there is nothing to do; one liberates oneself, because one finds oneself in one's own dimension of energy without escaping and without renouncing anything. This is the principle of self-liberation.

Self-liberation, or the spontaneous release of reactive emotions, occurs as a natural consequence of identifying with awareness-as-such. When our awareness ceases to be conditioned by the act of compulsively or intentionally engaging and disengaging with different sensations, then thoughts and feelings float through our awareness like clouds in the sky. Emotions dissolve like snow falling on the warm water of our panoramic awareness.

## **SPONTANEOUSLY LIBERATING OUR SUFFERING**

The ability to spontaneously liberate constricting emotions and compulsive thoughts occurs because we neither grasp onto, nor suppress any arising thought, feeling, or perception. As Longchenpa writes, "We don't discard (some experiences) and cultivate (others). (Whether our experiences) are dynamic or stable we should let them go wherever they want to go." "When the mind is in a diffusing or dynamic state we aren't discouraged, and when it is calm and stable we desist from wanting (it to continue in that state)."

Consequently, we don't judge some experiences to be sublime and others profane. We don't make more out of our experience than what is immediately given. We don't enhance or accentuate our experience, but nor do we trivialize it, or devalue it. Basically, we don't intervene, or meddle in our experience, in any way at all. Our experience is natural, unaffected, unmanipulated, and free from contrivance. This practice is called "leaving what appears just as it is."

## **DISCERNING NON-APPRAISAL**

In the Complete Fulfillment there is no deliberate attentiveness because this conditions our experience. Nor is there a need to refute, or establish any truths or theses, because the experience isn't influenced by our beliefs. In this way we remain in a free state of discerning non-appraisal. In this tradition it isn't necessary to remove thoughts or emotions in order to achieve freedom. What is required is that we are no longer conditioned by thoughts and emotions. As Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche writes:

One's passions only grow powerful because one is ignorant of the state of pure presence, and so consequently one follows after one's passions. But when one finds oneself in the state of the pure presence of the passions, one is not dominated by them nor does one have to suppress them because they are like the ornaments of one's primordial state. Thus one's passions are self-liberated into their own condition whenever they arise.

When bare awareness has been activated, thoughts and emotions are no longer a conditioning agent. Even though we may engage in thinking and be subject to emotional responses, thoughts and emotions no longer cause or condition our present and future mental states. Thoughts and feelings arise, but are freed in the sense that they are merely a presence or happening occurring within the real dimension of our being (dharmata).

In this tradition the only discipline is to stay in a natural and unfabricated state of bare awareness. The single commitment on this path is to be aware, knowing both that we cannot do this, and that awareness itself is not an existing thing. Even so, the earlier paths come into play because the cultivation and maintenance of this awareness is achieved by avoiding the opposing states of drowsiness and elation. Behaviorally this means that practitioners avoid actions and environments which stimulate depression, boredom, lethargy, excitement, agitation, etc. However, once we are in that state there is nothing that we can do to enhance it, or destroy it. Furthermore, we see that all the effort we have applied to gain this experience has neither contributed to, nor detracted from, its occurrence, since it is the primordial and unconditioned nature of being as such.

*If you are interested in the **Radiant Mind Course**, a **Free Audio CD** interview is available of Peter being asked about the Course, what the unconditioned mind is and how people can tell if they are experiencing nondual awareness.*

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