Dzogchen

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Summary and Keywords

Dzogchen, often translated as “the great perfection,” is a tradition of meditation practice and poetic literary expression in Tibetan Buddhism. Though its origins lie in Indic Buddhism, Dzogchen developed a distinct form of practice and literary expression only in Tibet. In general, Dzogchen texts evoke and discuss a state of awareness present in all living beings that transcends dualities and conceptual elaboration.

Common terms for this state of awareness are “mind itself” (sems nyid) and “awareness” (rig pa). Dzogchen literature often states that in the presence of this awareness, religious practice oriented toward enlightenment is dualistic and, therefore, not only unnecessary, but also obstructive. Nevertheless, Dzogchen is usually integrated with other forms of Buddhist practice.

The Dzogchen tradition encompasses a variety of literature and practice; the most common way of categorizing this is a division into three classes, the mind series, the space series, and the instruction series. The mind series contains most of the early Dzogchen literature, and more recent material in the same style. The space series enjoyed only limited popularity, and little is known of it today. The instruction series, by contrast, increased in popularity from its appearance in the 11th century and in time supplanted the mind series and the space series, ultimately becoming the predominant form of Dzogchen.

The practice of Dzogchen requires an authorized teacher and the ritual transmission of key texts, as well as an “introduction” to the nature of the mind given by the teacher to the student. The main scriptural sources of Dzogchen practice are texts held to be translations collected in semicanonical compendia, treatises by Tibetan scholars, and revealed texts known as terma, usually said to have been concealed in the 8th century by the tantric master Padmasambhava.

Dzogchen is a living tradition, taught within all of the main Tibetan Buddhist schools, though it remains closely associated with the Nyingma school. Within the latter, Dzogchen is considered to be the most advanced of Buddhist meditation practices, placed at the top of a ninefold categorization of Buddhist practice, the “nine vehicles.” Known in this context as atiyoga, “the utmost yoga,” it is the highest of the three “inner yogas,” the other two being mahāyoga and anuyoga. Dzogchen is also at the pinnacle of the teachings of Tibet’s Bonpo religion, which shares much of its doctrine with the Nyingma school and has in recent years been formally identified as one of the Buddhist schools of Tibet.

Keywords: Dzogchen, rDzogs chen, Tibet, Tibetan Buddhism, Nyingma, meditation, tantric, mind, Buddhism
Dzogchen, or "Great Perfection", is a central teaching of the Nyingma school, that is also practised by adherents of other Tibetan Buddhist sects. According to... This article is about the primordial state in Tibetan Buddhism and Bön. For the monastery, see Dzogchen Monastery. Dzogchen. Tibetan name. Tibetan