

# Dogzen

## Cultivating Naked Awareness



A Short Course In Naked Awareness  
by Edrid

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Revised Edition

*Dogzen – Cultivating Naked Awareness, 5th Edition*

*By Edrid*

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*©2006-2016 Ed Riddle (Edrid)*

*Email: [edrid@sandoth.com](mailto:edrid@sandoth.com)*

*Website: [www.sandoth.com](http://www.sandoth.com)*

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# Preface

In early 1999, I was co-leading a 6-day Enlightenment Intensive at Nechung Dorje Drayang Ling, a Tibetan Buddhist temple on the Big Island in Hawaii with a long-time associate, Osha Reader. It so happened that my birthday was on the 5th day of the Intensive. When Osha found out, she enthusiastically said, “Edrid, I want to buy you a present! Go into the Temple Store and pick out something.” There was a little shop attached to the temple where you could buy Tibetan crafts, gongs, books, incense, and so forth.

During a break, I went in and looked around. Frankly, I didn’t really need anything, but Osha encouraged me, and suggested a book, *The Golden Letters*, a translation of Tshig gsum gnad du brdeg-pa, or *The Three Statements That Strike The Essential Points* by Garab Dorje. I did not know it at the time, but this book presents the essence of the Dzogchen teachings, said to be the highest (9th) vehicle of Vajrayana Buddhism. The book also includes commentaries by H. H. Dudjom Rinpoche and Patrul Rinpoche, as well as excellent commentary by the translator, John Myrdhin Reynolds (Vajranatha).

I was in a very opened-up state because it was the 5th day of an Enlightenment Intensive. I don’t know if you’ve heard of the Enlightenment Intensive (EI), but it is a very potent practice that leads to deep spiritual experiences. From being in contemplation for five days, I was in a very clear, aware, present, and luminous state at the time.

During a break later that day, I retired to my quarters and thumbed through the new book. As I read Garab Dorje’s three essential points, the short commentary by Dudjom Rinpoche, and the more detailed description by Patrul Rinpoche, I became more and more excited and amazed. The teachings in the book were perfect. They matched my understanding exactly. I can’t tell you how wonderful it is to be in union with such great masters. It was all perfect! It was like finding dear old friends and recollecting our great times we had together. No, it was better than that. I can’t explain it. During that epiphany, it felt like I knew Garab Dorje like one would know an old and trusted friend.

Over the next year, I became absorbed in the Dzogchen teachings. They were clear articulation of what I knew to be true of the self, of life, and of awareness. They validated and made accessible what I knew from the deepest spiritual experiences I had at Enlightenment Intensives.

Sometime later, in 2002, a Tibetan Bön master, Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, began coming to Northern California to teach the Bön view of Dzogchen as presented in the secret teachings of the zhang zhung nyan gyud. I attended these teachings, which stretched out over a 2 1/2 year period. During that time I did practices and read just about everything I could get my hands on about both Bön and Buddhist Dzogchen.

I wanted to share my newfound vision with my friends, so I began to hold evening practices and short workshops. Although I was not officially empowered to teach Dzogchen, since I wasn’t

formally trained and wasn't a part of any particular lineage, I knew in my heart that I understood the teachings and felt I could easily communicate at least something about them to others. The classes were informal and I explored the various ways to help the participants directly experience the Dzogchen view. During this time, I was surprised to realize that these truths I had taken to so quickly weren't all that accessible to others. I began to innovate simple practices and invent various lecture themes, borrowing liberally from the Dzogchen teachings, to see if I could get the material across to my friends who attended the practice sessions.

At one session, a dear friend of many years jokingly called what we were doing "Dogzen," a play on the Dzogchen name. As soon as I heard it, I realized it was going to stick, and sure enough, we were doing Dogzen from that point on.

I wrote a series of newsletters to share the Dogzen unfoldment with people I've known that attended EIs. I have been an EI master for over 30 years and have accumulated an email list of a few hundred names. I would put out a newsletter every month or so, though that would vary as I would back off from time to time to go through successive levels of integration of the Dzogchen teachings. People responded to the newsletters and pretty soon we had a nice dialog going with a number of people. Several people did "get it" during this time, which was very satisfying to me and gave me great impetus to continue.

All along, my wife, Anatta, shared Dogzen with me. We would go on long walks and discuss it. We'd "go to the base" together and walk along silently, experiencing naked awareness. She reviewed and edited the Dogzen newsletters and contributed greatly to their clarity.

After the initial set of newsletters, which were sort of like an historical record of an energetic opening for me, I began to seriously formulate what I wanted to share with others, trying to put it in some sensible order so it would be easy to understand and practice (while also trying to allow for some humor and a lightness of being). After some more incubation, I started a second series of email newsletters. In these newsletters I attempted to write as if I were writing a sutra or essential text. I wanted to write it down as simply as I could and to put the material in order so anyone could just read through it and get it without being stopped by missing pieces. I know I didn't actually achieve that goal, but what we have now is worth reading in my estimation. The newsletters from this second series are the sources for the lessons in this booklet.

From the Bön Dzogchen teachings and other sources, I cobbled together a simple guided meditation. One can do it at the beginning of a practice session to help get into a state of contemplation or naked awareness. I've found that it helps people contemplate, reducing the number of stories and mental digressions that often prevent them from going deep with their meditations.

I recommend that you practice the Preparation for Contemplation twice a day, for example, once in the morning and once in the evening, for a few weeks, and see if it helps you gain access to a state of naked awareness. Perhaps not everyone will get it in such a short time, of course, but I believe some will. It only takes about twenty minutes to do, and it leaves you in a great place.



# Introduction To Dogzen

The purpose of Dogzen is to make the enlightened state more available in our daily lives. What this means for each individual can vary. It could support a more grounded sense of yourself, or an emptied-out ego, free of encrusted binding elements that limit your options. It could help to dissolve away your sense of separation and duality, or help to create a fresh, open awareness, like Zen “new mind.” It could diminish the fear you have, and help to open your heart towards others. It could help to free you from your reactivity and being at the effect of situations. It could help you have a vivid connection to the truth, to ultimate reality, to the absolute, or to God. It could take you out of your false identifications. It could blow your mind with joy, rapture, and enthralling beauty. It will certainly eliminate some unnecessary suffering. It could give you a clear, open connection to your creative abilities if that is where you are headed. It can wake you up from your waking dream and can help you to live in the present, vividly aware in the moment.

These are some of the benefits that Dogzen could provide. What you get out of it depends on a lot of factors that you carry into it. Although our essence is the same, each of us is in a unique condition. We will each get out of it what is right for us. Through it all, Dogzen has an element of experimentation. We engage in the practices and see where they take us.

Where to start? There is an entry point that is the same for all of us. The entry point and the core activity of Dogzen is becoming directly aware of awareness. By doing this, we develop access to the very essence of our conscious experience, to life’s events and meanings. We cultivate naked awareness so that pure, here-and-now awareness becomes a familiar and accessible part of our daily life.

Dogzen is inspired by Dzogchen, a deep enlightenment tradition within Tibetan Buddhism and Bön. However, the Dogzen practice has an extra element of experimentation and grassroots discovery. It doesn’t necessarily look like traditional Dzogchen, or any other school of Buddhism for that matter. We are exploring naked awareness freshly and seeing what unfolds.

## *Entry Into the View*

As we all know, we can be in many different states. With Dogzen, there isn’t any particular state that we need to be in before we begin. We simply become directly aware of awareness as it is right now and increase that direct experience.

We make a distinction between what we are aware of at this moment and the nature of awareness itself. It is easy to understand that no matter what you are aware of and, no matter what state you are in, the common denominator of all experience is awareness itself. Traditional Dzogchen literature sometimes calls this “intrinsic awareness” because awareness is intrinsic to all experience.

One of our practices is “detaching awareness from what it is aware of and directly know awareness itself.” People generally need a little support to get this started, so we use meditation techniques, including solitary meditation, guided group meditation, and a powerful two-person contemplative art called the Dyad.

Dogzen practices all have a single focus: to continually deepen awareness of awareness. The consciousness that evolves from this becomes a touchstone or base from which you experience your daily life. From being in touch with the base, you can begin to perceive the events and meanings of daily life from pure, naked awareness.

Viewing the world from a base of naked awareness strikes directly at the tendency to become sucked into illusions and to lose yourself in reactivity. As we become more and more familiar with the way objects and meanings arise within the field of awareness, many sufferings and upsets are revealed to be unnecessary, and they dissolve without you having to do anything about them. You don't have to believe in anything or use force of will for this to take place. It is simply the consequence of being grounded in the base. In addition, insights into the nature of illusion and reactivity help you to understand how and why others are acting the way they do. From these insights, you can become more open, tolerant, and helpful. It uncovers your natural compassion.

## *Practice Sessions*

At first, it is helpful to do the Dogzen practices in a group setting, either with or without a leader. After some practice, you find you can access the base in your daily life, at nearly any time you want. The goal is to steadily increase your familiarity with naked awareness until, eventually, you can access it effortlessly in any life situation, or even become established in it permanently, freeing you from your illusions and reactivity.

More formal Dogzen evening practice sessions typically meet for a couple of hours every week or two. There is a short subsidence-type meditation that quiets the nervous system and helps you “go to the base.” Then there is a short talk or discussion by the host about awareness and about the techniques or practices the group will be doing.

Following the meditation and talk/discussion, there is usually a Dyad that lasts forty minutes. A Dyad is a two-person meditation technique that combines contemplation with communication. In the Dyad, one person is active, the other receptive. These roles are reversed every five minutes, signaled by a bell or gong. The active partner contemplates a particular aspect of awareness and then communicates what comes up to the receptive partner. The receptive partner listens and understands, keeping open attention on the active partner. The receptive partner does not judge or evaluate what the active partner says, or give any feedback. We have found that this combination of contemplation, communication, and open listening is very effective in cultivating naked awareness and other refined states.

From time to time, you can hold a one-day practice. This is a day devoted to cultivating naked awareness. It typically starts at around 8:00 AM and goes to about 5:00 PM. It is nice to share a festive potluck lunch, with breaks for snacks and conversation. However, most of the day



is spent doing the Preparation for Contemplation meditation, Dyads, and discussing the Dogzen principles.

We try to set it up so you don't need to charge any money for practice sessions. It doesn't cost any more to get together for an evening to do the practices than it does to sit at home and watch TV, so it is best not to charge anything. The one-day practices are potluck and people bring all the food, snacks, and drinks needed, so they don't cost anything either. I suppose at some point there will be a situation where one would have to charge something. That would be OK, I suppose. It isn't primarily a moneymaking activity, though.

Everyone is welcome to try the Dogzen approach. There isn't any commitment and it isn't about beliefs. You don't have to stop any other spiritual or personal growth activities to benefit from Dogzen. It is such a basic process, it can improve the effectiveness of any other spiritual practice.

# A Short Course In Naked Awareness

This is a brief, 10-lesson course intended to help you cultivate naked awareness. Naked awareness is pure awareness, uncluttered by extraneous thoughts, feelings, opinions, memories, and other mental chaff. It's just pure, open, here-and-now presence, being-in-the-moment consciousness. As you go through the course, the exact meaning and significance of naked awareness will be made clear.

This course is supposed to be a "slow read." We encourage you to take your time with each lesson.

Each lesson is mercifully short and to the point. Often there are short practices that you can do to develop a skill or achieve an insight or realization. At the end of each lesson there is a brief summary of what is in the lesson.

Do the lessons in order. Each one builds on the previous one. Try not to leap ahead to the next lesson out of curiosity. Chew on each lesson until you are satisfied that you have experienced what is discussed, even if only a little bit.

Try not to just read through the lessons and then think about them with your intellect. The lessons are meant to support your having direct spiritual experiences. We know it is a lot easier to just intellectualize, but to really do Dogzen you have to sit down and contemplate until you directly know the inner experience the lesson is teaching. Go slow and go deep.

You can do the practices alone, solo, by yourself, or you can do them in a Dyad (see Appendix B for more about the Dyad). The problem with the Dyad is that you need to have someone else there with you who also wants to do the practice and do it with you. Fortunately, it's actually not all that hard to find someone with whom to do Dyads. In fact, you can develop a group and get together regularly. This provides all sorts of added benefits, like friendship, caring, love, adventure, shared food and so forth. You can do Dyads over the phone too, or using video conferencing like Skype or FaceTime. It works really well, but it's better to be in the same room.

## *Lesson 1*

# Awareness

The first thing about Dogzen is "awareness of awareness." The first thing you do is become a little more aware of your own awareness.

A lot of people I've talked to don't quite get what it means to be aware, at least at first. When I asked them, "Are you aware?" some were not sure of what I was asking, so we need to be very clear about this.

First of all, I don't mean some high super-cosmic state or anything like that. I mean your ordinary awareness that you have right now and use every day while doing regular things.

We are aware when we are awake, aware when we are daydreaming, and also aware when we are asleep and dreaming. When we are awake, we are aware of the information from our senses. We are also aware internally of our thoughts and feelings. When we are daydreaming, we are aware of pictures in our minds (and aren't very aware of the world around us). When we are asleep, we are often aware of dreams, as if we are in a different world.

If you are in what some people call the 4th stage of sleep (called "oblivion"), then maybe you aren't aware. Also, if you are really zonked-out with an anesthetic during an operation and you have no sense of what is happening around you and retain no memory of what happened while you were out, then that is generally thought of as "not being aware." When you again become aware, it's like a piece of the movie was cut out and the ends spliced together. There's a gap in which you were not aware.

If you sit with your eyes closed and think about what you had for dinner, you are being aware of a memory stored in your mind. When you are watching TV, you are being aware of the images being presented on the screen. If your eyes are closed and you just see black, you are still aware. You are aware of a black field. If there was no awareness, you wouldn't have an experience of an ongoing blackness. There would just be absolutely nothing, a gap in time.

If you sit there and decide that you are not aware and you know you thought that thought, then you really are aware and so your thought is just wrong.

Some people think that if you aren't in touch with important things, then you aren't aware. For example, if you aren't concerned about ecology or poverty or feel compassion for someone in trouble, then you are unaware. Or maybe you think that if you aren't in some high, cosmic consciousness state, you aren't aware. But what that says is that you aren't being aware of something in particular. That doesn't mean you aren't aware. Being aware of junk is still being aware.

In Dogzen, awareness is not defined by what you are aware of, but by the nature of awareness itself. This is a key distinction. You should reflect on this until it is very clear.

The common denominator of all your experience is awareness. It is that basic faculty that illuminates sensory information and inner states.

So now, do you know what I mean by awareness or being aware? If you read this, and know you read this, that is you being aware.

So the next big question is, "How do you know you are aware?" If someone asked you, "Are you aware?" you could notice your awareness and answer, "Yes." You can tell by just noticing. We could say it is self-evident. Noticing your own awareness is called "awareness of awareness."

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## *A Practice*

Consider the question, "How do you know you are aware?" See if you can dig into that. It is not so important that you get an answer, but that you observe the process of becoming more aware of your awareness.

Sit in meditation and see what comes up for you as you inquire into this question: "What happens at the instant that I become aware that I am aware?"

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That is the starting point of Dogzen. You just become more aware of your own awareness. You do this by directly knowing it.

Now I expect that a certain number of you are very clear about awareness already and are quite aware of your own awareness. Maybe you think that this is all very elementary and simple minded or something like that. But just wait. We'll get into some things that are really interesting pretty soon. However, we have to start somewhere, and Dogzen starts with identifying what we mean by awareness and becoming directly aware of awareness.

Awareness of awareness is like a muscle, in that you can exercise it and it gets bigger or stronger. If you become aware of your awareness a little bit now and then every day for a while, it becomes more apparent. It's like it gets bigger, or thicker, or more solid, or more noticeable. Instead of being just a fleeting wisp of an experience or an inkling, it gets "more there." These descriptions aren't literal, but are trying to point out that some change does occur in your ability to be aware of your own awareness and that something builds up with practice. Dogzeners work on building this up.

So, to recapitulate:

- You are aware.
- You can be aware of your own awareness.
- The more you practice being aware of your own awareness, the stronger the experience becomes.

Practice being aware of your awareness and see for yourself the nature of awareness. Hopefully, these lessons will bring more enlightenment into your life. To see if this is true, continue with the next lesson.

## *Dedication to all Beings*

Traditionally, when you finish a meditation practice or if you have studied a basic truth of life, you are encouraged to dedicate any improvement or benefit you may have gotten from it to everyone, to all sentient beings. This opens your heart and prevents you from becoming too self-centered or smug. Also, it helps you realize that when you become clearer, others will actually benefit from that because they will find you more accessible and easier to relate to. You won't be as big a problem to them.

If you wish, take a moment now to dedicate any improvement or benefit you got from this lesson to all beings. Do this with an open heart.

## *Lesson 2*

# More About Awareness

This second lesson goes into awareness a little deeper. Before you read this, though, be sure to read the first one. Read it in a way that gives you an *experience* of your own awareness rather than intellectual ideas about awareness. This is important, because if you aren't experiencing what is presented here, this material just goes into your intellectual mind and loads it up with more things to think about. This isn't what we are trying to accomplish.

What is the experience we are trying to get from the first lesson? It is simply your own experience of awareness itself.

### *A Key Distinction*

With Dogzen, awareness is not defined by what you are aware of. That is to say, no matter what you are aware of, awareness itself is the same. The ability is the same, but the content may be different. This is an important distinction.

We are still aware when we aren't in a special state. Dogzen points out that awareness is the thing that supports all experiences.

### *Pure Awareness*

At this moment, see if you can grasp the essence of awareness that is independent of what you are currently aware of. This is a core practice of Dogzen. We detach awareness from what it is aware of and become aware of awareness itself.

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### *A Practice*

Go where you go to meditate (or right where you are sitting right now). Put your attention on something, like a small physical object. Keep your attention steadily on the object for a minute or two, then detach your attention from the physical object and see if you can put it on the awareness itself.

Don't analyze the object, or try to notice its attributes. Go for being directly aware of awareness itself.

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When you do the awareness practices by yourself, begin with short, relaxed contemplations. Just pick an object, focus on it, and then see if you can isolate the awareness from what it is aware of. You can try to do it for just a minute or two at a time, or you can become absorbed in the

process and do it longer. However, in the beginning, it is more important to be able to become aware of your awareness quickly and easily than to try to go really deep (whatever that means).

Awareness that is just aware of itself is "pure awareness" since it isn't about anything or of anything. It is empty of content. At the instant awareness is aware only of itself, there is no awareness of the world, or of mental thoughts or pictures, or anything else. We also call it "naked awareness" since it isn't wearing any concepts or other coverings. It is like empty space. It is clear. It is luminous. It is free. It is filled with presence and a primordial knowing. We practice being aware of awareness until we can touch the nature of awareness directly. (You shouldn't just take my word for what naked awareness is like! Dogzen isn't a belief system. Do the practice and you will see for yourself.)

In Dogzen, we don't have to maintain a state of pure awareness for long periods of time, but to have knowledge of it and to have easy, ready access to that emptiness. To develop this, it is sufficient to just have brief experiences over and over. I think being able to be pretty stable with it for a minute or two at a time is all we need to do, at least at first. Over time, it grows naturally into a "base" from which one can experience all events and meanings.

I want to repeat that because it is so important: Over time, it grows naturally into a "base" from which one can experience all events and meanings.

Some people may want to go very deep with pure awareness of awareness. This would mean going into a pure state in which there is no consciousness of the world or anything else at all, just awareness directly knowing itself, and maintaining that for long periods of time. In Yoga, this is called samadhi. You will know if that aspiration calls to you. However, at this point, just having easy access to that awareness is enough.

## *Practicing Using the Dyad*

You can do the Dogzen practices in a Dyad. A Dyad is a two-person meditation technique that combines contemplation and communication. To do a Dyad, you'll need a partner. At any one time, one person is active, the other receptive. These roles reverse every five minutes, signaled by a bell or gong. The active partner does the practice and communicates what comes up for him when he does it. The receptive partner listens and understands, keeping open attention on the active partner. The receptive partner never judges or evaluates what the active partner says, or gives any feedback. We have found that this combination of contemplation, communication, and open listening is very powerful.

In the Dyad, we use an instruction instead of a question. For example, for the question "How do I know that I am aware?" the listener gives the instruction in the form of a request, "Tell me how you know you are aware." Another excellent instruction is, simply, "Detach awareness from what it is aware of and be aware of awareness itself." For this instruction, you begin by focusing on a physical object. Later you can use a mental picture, a sound, or another individual (anything you can put your attention on). In Dogzen evening practices, we normally do one or two

standard 40-minute Dyads, using 5-minute bells. That's for active turns and four receptive turns for each person, then a break.

The Dyad is particularly helpful because having a listening partner keeps you focused, and it gives you the opportunity to communicate your experiences. Communicating clears the ideas from the mind that naturally arise when you introspect, allowing you to go deeper. The Dyad is also enjoyable because of the deep contact you can make with your partner.

For additional information about Dogzen Dyads, see Appendix B.

## *Attributes of Awareness*

You can use your ability of discrimination to see the difference between awareness itself and anything that you are currently aware of. To do this, you have to let go of the connection with what you are being aware of and reflect on the faculty of awareness itself. It will eventually become obvious that awareness itself is empty, clear, vast, spacious, luminous, present, and knowing. When pure enough, no self or personality marks it. (We'll describe how to get these experiences in subsequent lessons.)

Awareness is what gets filled with experiences. When awareness is filled with experiences, the experiences usually obscure the underlying pure field of awareness. This awareness is what makes experience possible but isn't the experience. Because we are ignorant of this clear base, we are likely to become totally wrapped up in experiences. We get so wrapped up and identified with these conditions, that we have no inkling of the awesome miracle of awareness itself. Dogzen works to re-connect us with the essence of awareness. In so doing, it helps us to be liberated from the binding nature of phenomena.

Remember, though, that Dogzen is not really about these ideas about awareness, but about the direct experience within consciousness of how awareness operates. That is, it does us little good to just think thoughts about this. We need to catch awareness itself in the act of being aware in our everyday life.

So, in summary:

- Discriminate between awareness and what you are aware of.
- You can develop the ability to experience pure awareness.
- Over time, pure awareness can become your base for experiencing.

This completes the second lesson. We'll keep going, getting this thing clearer and clearer and clearer.

## *Dedication to All Beings*

If you wish, take a moment now to dedicate any improvement or benefit you got from this lesson to all beings. Do this with an open heart.



## *Lesson 3*

# Pure Awareness

Awareness itself is void-like. It isn't any of the stuff that appears in it. It is the faculty by which one has experience, but it is, itself, blank. Think of awareness as the screen on which the movie plays, or the mirror that reflects images but is not those images.

Even though awareness is empty, we can assign a few attributes to it:

It is "space-like." It is the space in which experiences occur. Sometimes the Bönpo (practitioners of Tibetan Bön Dzogchen) go up on a hillside or out in the open to stare into the clear blue sky. This is a meditation that gives them an impression of the nature of mind—clear and empty space. Sometimes awareness is called "the field of awareness" to emphasize its space-like nature.

It is "luminous." Awareness is a space with inner light. This is the same light that illuminates the objects in your dreams. When you are asleep, your body is lying there in the dark with its eyes closed, but you see a lit-up stage on which your dream unfolds. It can be fully convincing light, even though you are in a pitch-black room. After some reflection, you can realize that you only see inner light, whether in the waking state or asleep. The "luminousness" of physical light (from the sun, lamps, and so forth) is created only within the field of awareness, though few people realize this. Any light you see right now is inner light. The light "out there" doesn't shine except by virtue of your awareness.

When I was first introduced to introspection, I was told that memories are like inner pictures that I could see. Amazingly, I had never noticed this. In fact I was dubious and thought it was some weird belief or a metaphor. Then, in a contemplative practice, I was asked to close my eyes and report what I saw. At first it was just black, but then it was little sparks and faint glows. Then, abruptly, I saw a picture of a scene and realized it was something I imagined when I was reading a novel earlier. I realized that I, indeed, was seeing inner pictures. After a little practice it was easy to see mental pictures.

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### *A Practice*

Visualize something in your mind, a simple object like a chair or a cup. When you can see it in your mind's eye, study the light that illuminates the object. Realize that this is the light that is created within your own mind, within the field of awareness. This is the "inner light" we're talking about.

Spend some time doing this meditation until you realize that all brightness or luminosity, inner and outer, occurs by virtue of your own awareness.

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Another attribute of awareness is "knowing presence." You could think of "knowing" and "presence" as separate attributes, but, actually, they are always together, like two sides of the same coin. Knowing and witnessing are right there together.

This knowing isn't the knowing of familiar conversation. It isn't intellectual knowing. It's not about knowing the names of the state capitals or the amount of wheat grown in Kansas. It isn't about knowing where you left your keys. It is direct knowing. It's the basic knowing that you have when you are aware of having any experience within the subjective field without any context except your being aware of it. You just know when you are aware of something. (It could be called "gnowing, from "gnosis", to differentiate it from "knowing". I won't push the odd spelling, but in these lessons watch for the distinction between what you know (information) and what you "gnow" (directly experience).

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## *A Practice*

Just gaze at an object for a while and see if you can sense your knowing that object. You might not know anything about it, but you know it. Don't mentally take it apart, analyze it, or compare it to anything, and don't engage in having any particular thought, idea, or story about it. Just cleanly know it.

Notice that you are present with the object. You are right there knowing it. Sense your own presence. Some people characterize this as being in "union" with the object.

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Presence is usually associated with an individual (for example, "I am present!"), but this is not always the case. Awareness can be present without the mind forming a separated individuality, though this is pretty rare for most of us. The mind normally formulates a sense of self, the "ego", and associates it with experiences, thinking, feeling, the body, relationships, and so forth.

One day, in (about) 1972, I was sitting quietly on a sunny deck where I was living in the Santa Cruz Mountains of Northern California. I had just spent about two hours in a sensory deprivation tank (an environment made to limit sensory information coming into the body). My mind was very quiet and awareness just naturally happened to focus on itself. At that moment, how it was making a "me" became obvious. Little by little, "I" let "me" go. Soon there was just pure presence with no mental artifact of a separate individual. That state lasted on and off for a half-hour or so, after which a "me" became stabilized again. (There is certainly a very strong tendency to be an ego-self!) However, once this ego-self had been evaporated, my belief in it as being an absolute true me diminished. Without a me, I still went on.

[Aside: The subject of the self goes much deeper than what I experienced on that sunny deck. What I experienced is the dissolving of the self that is manufactured by the mind. The issue of the real nature of the self is much more profound. That subject is a bit beyond the scope of this little booklet, however.]

There is one other attribute of awareness, a very important one. This is that all experiences arise within the field of awareness. All experiences that you, the conscious being, have ever had are experiences that arose within your individual field of awareness. Awareness is the ground or base of all experience. I encourage you to chew on this until it is perfectly clear and obvious to you.

When something arises in the field of awareness, awareness itself does not change. It's the underlying ability or faculty that makes experiences possible. Your awareness has not changed from any experience you have had in this (or any other) lifetime. Even if you get compulsively focused on a memory or feeling, awareness is still nothing but the capacity to experience. It can't be altered or damaged. I'm not kidding.

Not too long ago I was having a medical problem with a heart arrhythmia and I went to the hospital because I thought it might be life-threatening. The ER doctor said, "To get your heart back in rhythm, I want to give you an injection that will stop your heart briefly." I asked, "Are you sure it will restart?" He said he was sure, so I gave permission. The drug went in to my vein and within seconds my heart stopped completely. That's like being dead, by the way. I watched as my conscious field began to shrink. It got smaller and smaller until I shrank down into pretty much nothing. The subjective field collapsed, so to speak. After about half a minute, the drug was metabolized and consciousness flared again. What was so remarkable was that this basic awareness never changed a bit. What I was aware of changed a lot, but that basic primordial awareness remained, largely naked of any experience except it's self knowing.

Experiences arise within the field of awareness and then they complete or just disappear, making room for the next experiences. The experiences you had in the past did this. They came, occupied your subjective field, and then went on their way, back to the void from which they came (or stored in your subconscious). They are fundamentally "impermanent." All of them, except for the one you are having at this very instant, are actually gone or will be at some point. Records of some of them are stored in your brain so you can experience a memory of them, but the originals went somewhere and are now -- where? Just a part of the energy-warmth of the world.

To summarize:

- Awareness is inherently empty, space-like, and luminous.
- Awareness is filled with knowing presence.
- The attribute of an observable individualized self within the field of awareness is a mental "add-on."
- The nature of awareness does not change with experiences.
- All experiences come and go within the field of awareness.

Was that fun for you? It was fun for me.

## *Dedication to All Beings*

If you wish, take a moment now to dedicate any improvement or benefit you got from this lesson to all beings. Do this with an open heart.

## *Lesson 4*

# Naked Awareness

What exactly is this "naked awareness" and how do you develop it? One way to get at it is to talk about what makes awareness not naked.

Let's start with the five senses and their effect on awareness.

[Aside: some people define more than the familiar five senses. Some people have accounts of over 20. In any case, we can stick with the basic five for our purposes here.]

Your eyes produce what the Buddhists call "eye consciousness" (vision). Your ears produce what they call ear consciousness (sounds). The others are tongue consciousness, nose consciousness, and touch consciousness. Each one affects awareness in its own way, but in one sense, they are the same: they all give rise to experiences in the field of awareness.

Let's stick with one channel, eye consciousness, and follow it through. It's more or less the same for any of the five consciousnesses.

Your eye consciousness contains the raw, immediate impression from your eyes. By raw, I mean that you're getting pure information, raw data, just what is coming in through your nervous system.

[Another aside: the image of the "open-faced sandwich" One day I was having lunch with a dear friend. On the menu was an "open-faced sandwich." I looked up with a totally open face (use your imagination) and said, "an open-faced sandwich!" He got it, and looked back with an equally open face. Over the years, we'd do this from time to time for a laugh (we're easy to amuse, I guess). In the exercise for experiencing raw eye consciousness, maybe try doing it with an "open face" at first, just to get it started.]

Eye consciousness is "mute." Words, concepts, attitudes, etc., don't come in from your eyes. There are no labels identifying what you see coming in from there, no meaning, no opinion about it, no desire, no associations with previous experiences, and no "me" coming into your brain with the image. There's just the raw TV picture. See if you can experience this for yourself.

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### *A Practice*

OK! Right now stop reading this and see if you can look at something and tune in to the raw experience of eye consciousness. Just sit still and stare at something until you get it. It's not that hard, really.

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A pure sense consciousness, such as eye consciousness, is figuratively described as someone who can see (hear, feel, etc.) but can't talk. The eye consciousness presents an image to awareness

but makes no comment about it. There is just the immediate and direct sense-experience itself. We have the ability to attend to the pure sensory information, leaving out all the other stuff. No labels or judgment need to be attached.

All of the five sense consciousnesses are like this. They do not have any mind elements such as ideas, words, judgments, preferences, evaluations, or anything like that. They are just pure sensory things.

Then there is mind consciousness. Mind consciousness has been called the "sixth consciousness" by Buddhists and others. The sixth consciousness is not in direct contact with the outside world like the five sense consciousnesses. It gets its information from the images or impressions triggered by the sense data, along with contributions from the inner conditions of your mind. Therefore, its experience is inherently indirect. It adds interpretations to what you experience, and, in so doing, adds all the captions or stories to the sensory displays that arise in the field of consciousness. The captions and stories, and all their associations, are what make awareness not "naked."

One good way to cultivate naked awareness is to take a moment from time to time to be just in your senses, without mixing the experience with any of those mind things from the sixth consciousness. Just get the raw feed. You have to actually try this (and have at least a little success) for it to be real to you and know its value. You will notice that if you do it for a little while, the sixth consciousness (mind consciousness) gets left behind. If you do it a lot, it begins to get really left behind. There will be periods of time where it sort of dissolves away. It pacifies the field.

In summary:

- The five senses give us the five sense consciousnesses.
- The sixth consciousness is mind consciousness.
- The sixth consciousness "puts the captions on the pictures."
- You can directly perceive without mind consciousness.
- Practicing pure sense consciousness makes the sixth consciousness fade back.

There is more to understand about the six consciousnesses. Stay tuned and something really wonderful will unfold in your life.

### *Dedication to All Beings*

If you wish, take a moment now to dedicate any improvement or benefit you got from this lesson to all beings. Do this with an open heart.

## *Lesson 5*

# Overlays

[A reminder: these lessons are meant to be slow reads. You want to experience the things talked about, not just store neat new ideas in the mind.]

In the last lesson, we focused on the awareness through the senses, mainly eye consciousness. This lesson suggests you, again, try to "just see" without engaging the sixth consciousness (the part that thinks, evaluates, judges, complains, labels, remembers, tells stories and so forth). Practice this a bit until you are personally satisfied that you can see without automatically adding material from the sixth consciousness, or at least be able to tell when the sixth consciousness adds something.

One way to do this is to just sit and stare at something until you get it. It's not all that hard or particularly exotic, though you may look funny to others if you do it in a public place.

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### *A Practice*

For most people, practicing with ear consciousness is more difficult than eye consciousness. It's worth a try, though.

One way to start is to repeat the same word over and over again until it loses its meaning. For example, just say the word "book" until it is just a sound. Try "I got a good idea" over and over until it is just "igotagoodidea". Silly sound, the tongue just bouncing up and down.

Next, just listen to the world around you. Observe the sounds that originate out of the underlying silence.

---

We almost always experience a combination of the pure sense consciousness and material added by the sixth consciousness. The sixth sense overlays the pure sense consciousness with its own creations. Furthermore, the overlay is mixed with the object of our perception so that we think the overlay is actually a quality of the thing we perceive.

Very important and needs repeating: the overlay is mixed with the object of our perception so that we think the overlay is actually a quality of the thing we perceive.

An overlay isn't just an opinion or a label. It can also be a feeling. You can, for example, look at something and feel a pleasant feeling. This makes you think that the thing itself is pleasant or good. On the other hand, you might look at something and feel revulsion and think that the "revoltingness" is within the thing you see. If you project the feeling onto the thing itself, you introduce a basic error about what that thing actually is.

An important consequence of not seeing your role in creating your universe is that you believe you are separate from it, that it has these attributes separate from you, which is not the case.

You can also overlay things with labels. The downside of labels is that concepts usually connect with other concepts (by virtue of their similarities or connected story line). This can add even more layers of overlay because these connections can pull in lots of material from the storehouse in the sixth consciousness.

Some people think that you need labels to know something. However, when you directly know things, you perceive them without any concepts. For instance, you can put on your hat in the morning without thinking any word-thoughts about it. If you are present and attentive to what you are doing with no story attached, you will quite often be in a naked awareness state. You just silently know what you are doing.

I think you get the point: we experience a combination of the pure sense consciousness and the output of the sixth consciousness. When the sixth consciousness overlays our experience, it can distort perception by combining with it. When the sixth consciousness overlays are really thick, we can be “lost in illusion.”

I should point out that the sixth consciousness is not bad. Some of the great experiences in life are offered by cognitive delights, realizations and rich inner feelings. It is just that we need to be able to spend a some time free from these overlays to realize how they operate in life.

People flawlessly act in accord with what overlays are operating. Here's an extreme example (one that I actually witnessed) that illustrates the point: a person was waving his arms, trying to brush away birds flying too close to his head, but no one else could see the birds. His actions are exactly appropriate for his experience because he perceives the birds. They are real to him, but to no one else. The images generated by the sixth consciousness overwhelmed all other inputs, including visual perception. We should all realize that we all do that to some degree, but most of the time the distortions aren't as extreme.

For most people, overlays are added automatically and unconsciously. We don't realize that it is happening, and so we are at the effect of them. With knowledge of overlays, we can practice naked awareness and notice how that improves our connection with reality. There is great relief when you wake up from a dense matrix of overlays.

Our overlays play an important role in our relationships with others. When we have overlays in common, we feel more connected. The negative is also true. When our overlays conflict, we feel like we are in separate realities. Shared opinions make a shared reality. The shared reality is a powerful component of our sense of belonging or being a part of a group.

When you start to let go of overlays, you might feel conflicted because it seems as if you are dropping out of the reality that binds you to others. These reactions can be a barrier to becoming nakedly aware. Be careful not to get caught by them.



Synopsis:

- Experiencing life from pure sense perception is a form of naked awareness.
- Pure perception is often obscured by creations from the sixth consciousness.
- We usually don't notice when the sixth consciousness overlays perceptions.
- Not seeing your role in creating your universe, you believe you are separate from it, which is not the case.
- People often feel connected with others when they share the same overlays, or separate when their overlays don't match.
- People are often reluctant to drop their overlays because it can make them feel separate from others.

There is still more to understand about the six consciousnesses, overlays, and naked awareness. Carry on!

### *Dedication to All Beings*

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## *Lesson 6*

# Some Practical Things About Dogzen

Let's step back for a moment and look at how we can practice Dogzen.

With Dogzen, there isn't a big focus on scheduled daily practices. That doesn't mean that you won't profit with a certain amount of personal discipline, or that you shouldn't continue to do your daily meditations. You know when your other practices help you, and, if they do, by all means continue. However, the practice of Dogzen doesn't have to take place in a special set-aside time or place. It is best if it occurs in the broadest context of your daily life.

The things we do at our evening and one-day practices are just launching points. It's important to not only wake up (be aware you are aware) when you are in a formal meditation, but to wake up spontaneously throughout the day. By increasingly becoming familiar with pure awareness and the base, it becomes easier and easier to make that step any time and in any situation. Over time, it will just blend in with the way you are and you won't even have to think about it. It becomes your natural state. That's what we are going for.

Dogzen starts with the easy things first. You try to become familiar with the nature of awareness in small incremental steps. There isn't any expectation, at least in the beginning, of having pure awareness immediately available to you when you are in a big crisis. That will come with time, but we work on these understandings in the small motions, small thoughts, and small events first. Over time, the benefits of pure awareness will be a resource to you during more significant events in your life.

With Dogzen, you do small, subtle things to handle the grossest aspect of any problematic conditions that you face. You don't start out by trying to create a big effect, but by creating a small effect. You just taste the essence of pure awareness a little bit. You just touch the base momentarily to refresh your realization of its true nature. You don't try to get a big, deep, Oscar-winning spiritual experience right away. For example, in our Preparation For Contemplation meditation (presented in Appendix A and available as an audio file), you set out to get just a little taste of the pure states of stillness, silence, and non-conceptual mind. If you can't get the actual things, you can just imagine getting them. Over time, it will get easier. You relax into emptiness, not struggle for it.

Dogzen stays focused on the direct experience of the essence of mind. We keep doing more or less the same thing, going for awareness of awareness and the base. We learn as much as we can about that core topic, becoming more and more familiar with it. We don't chase after things that come up in the mind as a result of these efforts. We don't chase after memories. We don't get into all of the philosophical or speculative issues that it can bring up. We don't try to ferret out mental hang-ups or past upsets and try to resolve them. You can still do that, many people should do that, but that's a different practice. The practice of Dogzen is just a one-pointed exploration

of the deep essence of being sentient, what is called in the literature "primordial awareness." We steadily keep that focus.

Becoming familiar with pure awareness and the base is best accomplished by relaxing rather than willfully trying to achieve something. That is why there is a general recommendation to avoid "chasing after" experiences. In the Bön tradition, one reads that Bönpos take a vow to give up moving, speaking, and thinking. This doesn't mean that you sit like a stone, silently, with a blank look on your face! It means that when you try to directly experience pure awareness you do not chase after the experiences of the body, speech, or mind that can arise. You let all of that go.

To summarize:

- Dogzen is practiced many times throughout the day, not just at special times.
- Do the easy steps first; do little things to deepen awareness.
- Develop pure awareness through relaxation and letting go.
- To experience pure awareness, don't chase after thoughts.

By now you should know if you are getting anything from these lessons. I hope you are, but, if not, that's OK too.

The next lesson takes you, again, to the source of creation.

### *Dedication to All Beings*

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## *Lesson 7*

# On Emptiness From the Start

Let's look again at the inherent emptiness of awareness (as developed in Lesson 3).

First, remember that the idea of emptiness and the actual experience of emptiness are different. Having an idea of emptiness doesn't create an experience of emptiness. It fills awareness with the idea of emptiness. Any idea is a "something" that can fill awareness. To experience emptiness itself, you must take a moment to relax, suspend overlays, let go of the sixth consciousness, and just rest in awareness itself. If you do this, awareness is in its base state, which is empty. At the base, awareness is just aware. We call this pure awareness or naked awareness.

Awareness is empty from the start. It begins empty. In other words, that is its native state. Before you think, feel, or otherwise experience anything, there is awareness, but it has nothing in it. It is naturally empty of any views, memories, decisions, preferences and so forth. Even the world. As you begin to perceive, think and feel, awareness fills and attention goes on those things that fill it. Emptiness is always the starting point. It's the base of experience.

By "beginning", I don't necessarily mean to strongly imply a beginning in time, like the emptiness comes first and then a thing appears next. By beginning I mean something appearing out of nothing. Like an invisible seed that sprouts a tree. Like something emanating from the void. Maybe like space becoming something.

Thoughts that arise from this emptiness don't really have the role of compelling the next thought. That is, there is no actual demand for one thought to follow another. Even when there is a flow of connected thoughts, and one thought seems to have causative power over other thoughts, this is just an illusion. The implication here is that there is really nothing to stop you from leaving them behind at any point. The benefit of knowing this is that you can at any time drop a train of unproductive thought and be at original emptiness again. It is a choice we always have but rarely exercise. In fact, our assumption that we don't have such a choice becomes self-fulfilling, like innocently going into a trance of our own making.

Our thoughts (and feelings) **ARE** the reality we live in. We often fail to notice that we are experiencing internal representations, and we completely believe these to be inherent qualities of an external reality. This makes the experiences quite compelling!

Having a view, opinion, attitude, or decision about anything (including emptiness) isn't what we are after. Emptiness is a primordial, original source state. You don't have to create anything to experience this emptiness because it is already there from the start. In fact, if you think any thoughts or create anything in your mind to understand this, you move away from the empty state. The thoughts just fill the emptiness with mind stuff and that is where your attention goes, so this is not our intent.

Note that the primordial emptiness is not changed or harmed by what fills it (perceptions, thoughts, and feelings). It is completely untouched because awareness is just the potential for new experiences and that is beyond the experience itself. The emptiness is always allowing for continuous new experience. However, for most of us, awareness just stays filled up with stuff so we don't experience it in its native state very often.

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## *A Practice*

Ponder "emptiness from the start" and see if you can catch the primordial emptiness that lies at the origin of all experience. See for yourself what that is like.

Next, be internally quiet and see if you can catch something "becoming from emptiness." Don't get discouraged. It may be a while before this becomes vividly evident to you. Try it when you are lying in bed at night as you wait to go to sleep. Close your eyes, get empty, and then observe when something becomes from who-knows-where.

---

To know from your own experience the emptiness at the beginning you don't have to force your mind to be blank or anything like that. (That's really hard to do!) By being directly aware of awareness, you can be aware of the emptiness that is always there. You will see through the stuff in your mind that overlays the underlying emptiness. Then you will be able to notice how all experience originates from (or, perhaps, relies upon) that emptiness.

Bonus: every event or meaning that is becoming in this moment appears fresh with novelty when experienced from the clear and empty place we call the base. In our Dogzen groups and in the writings, we've called this "ingression of novelty<sup>1</sup>." It is an experience that you can get when awareness rests in the base and then you perceive something. The vivid novelty of the moment derives from this emptiness at the start, as things freshly "become" from emptiness. Freshness of the now is one of the rewards for experiencing from this base of emptiness.

To summarize:

- The idea of emptiness and the experience of emptiness are different.
- Attention usually goes to what arises in awareness, thus obscuring the emptiness.
- All perceptions, thoughts, and feelings begin from emptiness.
- Emptiness is not changed by what arises within it.
- Experiences are fresh with novelty when experienced from emptiness.

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<sup>1</sup> A term coined by the late Terrence McKenna.

## *Dedication to All Beings*

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## *Lesson 8*

# Going To The Base

We Dogzenners are moved to directly realize the pure base of experience so that it is available to us always. As I've said perhaps too many times already, this base is almost always clouded over with content in the form of thoughts, emotions, events, meanings, visual objects, sounds, and so forth, so directly experiencing the formless base can seem like a daunting task. It's not only clouded over, but awareness fully joins the flow of conscious ideas and experiences to the extent that we often live completely ignorant of how what we are experiencing is a dream illusion arising within us. This personal identification with the flow of inner experiences is done innocently and automatically, but so thoroughly that we might know nothing at all about any alternative views of reality.

Furthermore, we all want good life experiences, so there is little attraction to an empty state. Not long term, anyway. There are exceptions, of course, such as when we seek relief during a crisis. Yet living from the base is, in fact, capable of giving us the life we truly desire. That is because realizing that it is our mind that creates our experience of reality, there are more options than we ever believe are possible. By cultivating naked awareness we intuitively realize that there is more to life than the temporary experiences we are getting, no matter how fine they might be. We can go deeper.

What does "deeper" mean? What defines depth of life experience? We use the idea of the base to help us get at this. The base is "below" the transitory experiences of daily life. The base, being nothing but pure awareness, is the point from which we become able to gain insight into the nature of all experience. Pure awareness is the fundamental faculty that brings all experiences to light. It's the mother of the field of realization that makes insight into the nature of experience possible.

Directly knowing the base makes it possible to know all events and meanings for what they really are, because to know the base is to know what all experience is made of. In particular, access to the base positions us to understand the illusions that occur in our lives. Knowing that something is an illusion, we are less inclined to go off the deep end about it. The reactivity is quenched, pacified by our being rooted "in" the base and experiencing life from it.

What exactly do you have to do to get these benefits? The answer lies at the point at which you make a transition, going from the (unrealized) illusion to the base. You are experiencing something and then you detach awareness from it and become directly aware of awareness itself. At that moment, when you make that shift, you are positioned deeper than the illusion and can realize its nature.

For me, there is sometimes a unique and intense change that occurs right at the point of transitioning to the base. Everything that attaches me to an illusion rises up at that instant as if to

convince me that the illusion is reality and I am making some kind of mistake or there is risk in letting it go. You may or may not experience it this way. The most prominent one is you forget or don't realize that it can be done at all in the situation you are in. It could also be that you experience a fright, like a demon rearing its ugly head to frighten you back into submission to the illusion. Or, perhaps you might forget how to get to the base. Sometimes feelings are so strong, they dominate your nervous system and you can't seem to extricate yourself. Sometimes going to the base is like giving up your very being (called "death of the ego"). At other times, it might seem as if going to the base separates you from others, so you don't want to do it. Of course, you may not experience it like any of these. You will probably have your own unique version of being entangled in illusion.

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## *A Practice*

At various times, think the thought, "go to the base" and then do that by detaching from what you are currently aware of and being aware of the emptiness at the base of awareness. See how quickly you can land in the base. See for yourself what that is like.

---

To transition to the base, it is best if you are not bound too tightly to your assumptions about reality. You need to be open to something new. If you believe your current experience too deeply, you won't even try to go to the base ("Why should I deny reality?"). If you can open to the possibility that your current experience is mind (in the sense that mind displays images that are just a vapor made of forms and lights), you can at least try.

Note that you really shouldn't try to deny the truth. We are not going for denying the current reality for the sake of blotting it out. You seek more connection to truth, not the avoidance of it. That would just become a hangup. Set out to realize the actual nature of what you are experiencing (the empty, pure, present, knowing of sentient experience) and the clinging to the current state of mind and emotions dissipates with no effort on your part. All the components of your current condition are still there, but your relationship to them changes.

Again, it is much less effective to try to release a mind-bind using judgmental thought. Just see deeply into the nature of mind. Detach awareness from what it is aware of and be directly aware of awareness itself. As they say, the truth sets you free. You can do that if you have cultivated naked awareness.

Of course, if you are sitting peacefully in your garden, the transition to the base is easier because there are no compelling, demanding events or meanings holding your attention. When you are at peace and resting, the mind is already pretty quiet and empty, so the base is right there. It is helpful to cultivate a lifestyle that gives you some peaceful moments so you can practice sinking into the base.

When you are in an upset or crisis, the path to the base is trickier. You can cultivate having access to the base even at those times if you keep your wits about you. As the Dogzen practice



increases your ability, you will find it easier and easier to live through these things with some amount of equanimity.

Synopsis:

- You find out how illusion works by going to the base (detaching in the process)
- When you go to the base, you may face a barrier
- It helps to be open to the possibility that there is some illusion in your experience
- If you are peaceful and undistracted, the base is more accessible
- With practice, you will not be so easily tricked by intense experiences

I hope that took you to an interesting place. If it did not, maybe read it one more time, slowly.

### *Dedication to All Beings*

If you wish, take a moment now to dedicate any improvement or benefit you got from this lesson to all beings. Do this with an open heart.

## *Lesson 9*

# Standing Outside of the Realm of Description

Standing outside of the realm of description is a good practice to help you find your roots in pure awareness.

"Standing outside of the realm of description" means simply that you stay present but don't describe what you are aware of. You don't describe whatever you are aware of with words in your mind (or out loud, for that matter). You are aware of what you are aware of without inventing any dialog, stories, labels, or captions to go with it. To stand outside the realm of description you won't evaluate, judge, form opinions, or rehearse what you might say about what you are aware of. You are just nakedly aware.

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### *A Practice*

Put your attention on an object and experience it outside of the realm of description. Just be nakedly aware of it. Ignore the mental descriptions that pop up.

Another practice: close your eyes and remember a recent event. Mentally experience the memory of the event as a pure image, with no description.

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You actually are always outside the realm of description, so you can approach this practice that way, recognizing the wordlessness of your nature. Often we are not conscious of this, but it is always true anyway.

In Lesson 4, you learned about the sixth consciousness. With this practice, you are de-identifying with the actions of the sixth consciousness. You step outside the domain of the sixth consciousness, and let the cloud of descriptions in your mind dissipate, leaving an open place for naked awareness. This gives you the opportunity to directly experience an aspect of the natural emptiness of awareness.

People vary a lot about how much they internally describe what they are aware of. I talked to a person a while back who said he could not even imagine not describing what he was aware of. He didn't know even how to start to do that. I think there are many people who aren't too familiar with being aware while empty of thought. This practice is especially beneficial to them.

This isn't something you do, it is something you stop doing. You just let go of the automatic internal description of what you are aware of. For example, often people judge themselves,

especially after they did something that they imagine is wrong or stupid (which we all do at one time or another). To do this practice, you would simply take a moment to consciously not judge.

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## *A Practice*

Recall a time when you did something wrong or stupid, something that has some “charge” on it. While recalling it, let go of all sixth consciousness overlays so you are standing outside of the realm of description in relation to that memory. If you can do this, you will notice that the “charge” on the event is gone.

Next, recall a current problem and do the same thing. Notice that if you view it from outside the realm of description, it disappears and you are left nakedly aware in the present moment.

---

Suppose you always name things. You might be someone who needs to name everything. It is as if you feel you aren't aware of something unless you can name it. This isn't true. You can be aware of something without naming it. In fact, you can know it more intimately if you don't name it because you don't overlay it with concepts and words and all the associations those words connect to. The thing just stands on its own legs within the field of awareness.

[Aside: this article is a description. This is just a description of standing outside of description!]

Standing outside of the realm of description is a part of being in contemplation. You can't really be in contemplation if you are mentally describing things (or at least, it is difficult). Mentally describing things brings in all sorts of mental and verbal associations, previous experiences, and the like, that make it hard to just directly get the suchness or simple actuality of the thing you are aware of at this moment as it enters awareness. Standing outside of the realm of description immediately clears the mind of this material and what remains is a simple state of naked awareness, uncluttered by verbal mind. It takes a little practice, that's all.

Your words don't make things what they are. Descriptions aren't even true knowledge of what things are. Descriptions and other overlays do have their place, but it is also good to be able to stand outside of the entire realm of descriptions so that you just nakedly experience what you are experiencing. As you get used to doing this, your describing mind quiets down a bit and there are moments of emptiness, which are refreshing and help you to re-sync to the base. Your descriptions that arise from a clear state can be clearer and more attuned to the present.

We here in Buddha land want to be grounded in a state outside of the process of describing things, at least part of the time. This state should be easily accessible in any situation or circumstance. When something "strong" comes along, we'd like to be sort of transparent to it, letting the energy flow through without getting stuck and causing distress. Not automatically labeling goes a long way towards not getting stuck in things.

"But what about Dyads?" you might ask. When you do a Dyad, you're asked to describe what comes up in your mind. In the Dyad, the first part is contemplation, so this is where you stand outside the realm of description and just be open to experiencing the truth directly. During that time, you do not chase after thoughts about what is real and what isn't, or about what is the true self and what isn't, or about what has occurred that is you or not you. You stand outside of the whole realm of description and just experience directly, without seeking the concept or words that describe what you are experiencing.

Oftentimes you have to intentionally hold off thinking for a little while or you can't get into contemplation. Some meditation techniques even recommend that you tense up your body and kind of force your thoughts to shut up. I've done this in contemplation retreats and it works pretty well, at least in the beginning. You can alternate this with being very relaxed and just resting in emptiness a bit, allowing yourself to not get caught in any thought stream. That way, you don't get too rigid or get blinded by the forcing.

After a few minutes of the contemplative state, in which you stand empty of descriptions, you then let the impression generate a concept. You try to capture what it is you are experiencing by formulating how you would describe this to your partner.

During the contemplation part, you don't enter the realm of description, but then, during the communication part, you do. You try to keep these separate. You want to avoid just thinking thousands of thoughts without ever being silent enough to catch pure awareness just being aware without a fog of mind-stuff obscuring it. You can more easily experience awareness of self (or whatever your contemplative focus is) without concepts getting in the way because the direct awareness of self is not just having a clear idea or concept of self. It is the fundamentally empty self-nature reflecting itself into consciousness.

Once you have practiced this for a while, you will find that you can remain in contemplation even while thoughts think themselves nearby, and you don't automatically lose contemplation while communicating.

Summary:

- Cultivate the pure contemplative state that is not all about describing, but is, instead, all about pure awareness open to being directly aware of truth.
- Incessant internal verbalizing and conceptualizing tend to block the development of pure awareness states, especially contemplation.
- If you are doing a Dyad, keep the contemplating and communicating separate so your communication doesn't obscure your contemplation.

Like all these Dogzen things, it gets easier with practice. Do the practice! Spend some time outside of the realm of description, just being nakedly aware.

## *Dedication to All Beings*

If you wish, take a moment now to dedicate any improvement or benefit you got from this lesson to all beings. Do this with an open heart.

## *Lesson 10*

# Figmentalization of the Dynamic

## Cosmic Energy

You've probably heard the phrase, "It's just a figment of your imagination." What's a figment, you might ask?

fig ment (noun). Something invented, made up, or fabricated.

That's what we do all the time. We figmentalize - invent, make up, and fabricate. We do this with every perception, every feeling, every attitude, every analysis, and every opinion. Our lives are filled with figmentalization. This happens spontaneously. We don't even notice it most of the time.

We take the basic substance of experience and overlay it with figments. Everything gets the gloss. Only at rare moments do we see things without the figments obscuring the underlying reality. When this does occur, when the figments are cast aside and we merge with truth itself, we call it directly knowing.

The underlying dynamic cosmic energy is decorated with figments of our imagination, and this is what we go by; this is what makes up our day-to-day reality. The field of cosmic energy is constantly boiling up things that flash into existence within the field of awareness. Then the decorations start, and what we see, what we know, and what we react to is this odd combination of the cosmic energy and figments of our imagination. Living within this world of figments is called "living in samsara."

This, of course, is fine. No problemo. We are (mostly) here for that. We love to be alive, and much of what being alive is is figmentalizing the underlying dynamic cosmic energy within the space of our awareness and dancing our dance with each other. But our hearts also yearn for direct knowing. We want to get grounded in Truth. We want to merge awareness with the Divine base, to become one with God.

(This becoming one with God can be said in many ways, many of which, in fact, don't mention God but, instead, point to absolute existence, love, being, suchness, and so forth. As the Amitabha Sutra says, "In his own country, each [enlightened being] brings forth the appearance of a vast and long tongue, everywhere covering the three-thousand, great-thousand worlds.")

Our wanting, at least for a moment, to cast off the layers of figmentalization and just directly experience truth takes us to spiritual practices such as Dogzen. Here we clearly identify how the mind is overlaying the moment with mental stuff, and we detach awareness from what it is aware of and experience pure awareness directly knowing itself. We realize for ourselves the nature of

awareness (essence of mind, the Divine) by clearly and directly experiencing awareness within a moment of pure contemplation, a moment when there is no figmentalizing going on. From that experience there emerges an understanding of our nature and the nature of life, which gives us clues about what we really want to do with our precious time here.

It isn't all that easy, actually, because everything is defined by the figments. Figments reinforce other figments. We fill our relationships with our figments. We live and die for our figments. We get afraid when we lose our figments.

To cease figmentalizing, one has to pull away from all figments and experience essence of mind with essence of mind. No figments. No thoughts. No concepts. No beliefs. We need to have this present awareness, which is that intimate central source, directly know itself, purely, in this moment, without any expectations of a really good figment resulting from doing it. When the figments that create a separate self dissolve, the separate self dissolves, and the space of pure luminous knowing truth abides.

This whole lesson is a figment of my imagination. It is also a figment of your imagination. Letting it dissolve from the mind, there is just you. And there is just me. And there is our opportunity for contact.

Summary:

- We overlay the basic dynamic cosmic energy with figments of our imagination.
- We react to these overlays as if they are real.
- We sometimes long for the simple, direct experience of Truth, unobscured by the overlays.
- When awareness becomes aware just of itself, the figments dissolve.

### *That's About It*

This marks the end of the 10th and final lesson of this short course. I don't think anyone, when they get to this point, would feel that they have gotten all that it has to offer. There will always be more to realize, more to directly experience, since the subjects covered here can go very deep.

This course is just a little survey of ideas and experiences around the act of seeing with naked awareness and developing access to the base. You can always deepen your experiences and understanding of these things. If you find you are able to take advantage of the states introduced in this course, you might want to wait a little while and then go back through the lessons to see if you can get each experience more deeply. It's entirely up to you, though.

### *Dedication to All Beings*

If you wish, take a moment now to dedicate any improvement or benefit you got from this lesson to all beings. Do this with an open heart.

## *Appendix A*

# The Preparation for Contemplation

This is a text version of the material that is included on the Preparation for Contemplation audio file (MP3). I've included it here in case you want to lead others in the meditations. You can use some of it like a script.

### *Introduction*

The Preparation for Contemplation (PFC) is a subsidence type of meditation. Subsidence practices calm the nervous system so that the mind and emotions settle down. This promotes an empty state that is good for contemplation.

This meditation also instructs us about the nature of the base. You are at the base when you are present and the field of awareness is empty. “Returning to the base” is a key practice of Dogzen.

As with most guided meditations, the first time you try it might seem awkward, but after you do it a few times, you will get the knack of it and it will usually be quite enjoyable and leave you in a wonderful state. I recommend you do the meditation twice a day, morning and evening, for a week or two, so you can experience for yourself where it can take you.

We do four short meditation practices in the PFC:

- Nekashum, a breathing exercise, followed by meditations on
- Stillness,
- Silence, and
- Non-conceptual mind

Each practice follows immediately after the previous one. You stay in the meditation as you move from one practice to the next.

We usually do these practices with our eyes closed, but it is not a rule. “Whatever works for you” is the rule.

The spirit of this practice is very permissive. We try not to get into the bad habit of trying too hard or forcing the mind to obey our will. We allow our skills to grow at their own pace so we can approach each practice in a relaxed frame of mind without stressing about how well we do.

We don't do each section very long. Two to three minutes for each one is enough. The whole meditation lasts about eighteen minutes, but you should allow a few extra minutes for integration after it is over.



Sit in a comfortable meditation position, one that will keep your body from being a distraction. It is best if you sit up, with your back straight, and with your head balanced above your spine. Stay relaxed and attentive.

## *Nekashum*

The first practice is called Nekashum (nee-kah-shoom). It is a simple breathing exercise that helps you detach awareness from its involvement in the external world and settle in the central channel of the body.

On the in-breath, let your awareness ride the flow of breath into the central channel of the body. For our purposes, the central channel is anything that, to you, seems like the central channel. It is generally described as an energy channel that runs inside the body, parallel to the spine.

On the out-breath, rest in the central channel. Remain within. Let the breath go out without your awareness going out with it.

Breathe slowly and naturally. Just go in on the in-breath and rest, within, during the out-breath.

Do this at your own pace for a few minutes. Just go in and in and in.

## *Stillness*

The next meditation is Stillness.

Now look around in your field of awareness and find something that to you is stillness. Don't try to get a strong experience of stillness, or a perfect experience. Just get a little.

If you can't find any stillness, just imagine some stillness and use that. That works just as well.

If you are distracted by any movement, just understand that stillness is at the base and is sometimes obscured or covered over by movement. Just reconnect with the stillness. Treat stillness as the base of your awareness.

Next, we will challenge your connection with the stillness a little. Hold your hands out in front of your body, elbows bent, palms up. While staying in touch with the stillness, slowly raise your hands over your head until the palms touch.

Keeping the palms touching, slowly lower your hands to about where your heart is and let them rest there.

During this whole movement, stay in touch with the stillness, even in the face of the motion of your hands. Try not to let the movement obscure the underlying stillness.

As your hands come to rest in front of your heart, you can have the stillness of your hands strengthen your sense of stillness.

If you lose touch with the stillness, stop and reconnect with it, then continue.

[At the end] Finish the movement you are on and then just stay with the stillness.

## *Silence*

The next meditation is silence.

Look around in your field of awareness and find something that to you is silence. Don't try to get a strong experience of silence, or a perfect experience of silence. Just get a little.

If you can't find any silence, just imagine some silence and use that. That works just as well.

Gently work with this for a few minutes. Become familiar with the silence that lies at the base of awareness.

If you are distracted by any sounds, just understand that silence is at the base and is sometimes obscured or covered-over by sounds. Just reconnect with the silence. Treat silence as the underlying base of awareness.

If you find yourself struggling to make the silence stronger, just give that up for now.

Now let's challenge your connection with the silence a little. We will say the syllable "Ah" while staying in touch with the silence. "Ah" is one of the simplest and gentlest sounds, so it is a good one for this practice.

When the bell rings, take a breath and say "Ahhhhhhhhhh" while staying connected with the silence. Understand that silence is at the base and that sounds can sometimes obscure the base, hiding it from awareness.

If you lose touch with the silence while chanting, stop and reconnect with it, then continue.

Chant "Ahs" with me for a few minutes.

## *Non-Conceptual Mind*

The next meditation is non-conceptual mind.

Look around in your field of awareness and find something that to you is non-conceptual mind. This is how the mind is when it is not conceiving of something or thinking about something. Find something that to you is non-conceptual mind.

Gently work with this for a few minutes. Become familiar with not conceiving of anything - just being present.

If you are distracted by any thoughts or concepts, just understand that non-conceptual mind is at the base and is sometimes obscured or covered over by thoughts. Just reconnect with non-conceptual mind. Treat this as the natural base of your awareness.

## *Ending*

Thank you. That completes the meditation. You can open your eyes now. However, open them slowly and see the room with fresh awareness. Notice if your state has changed and, if so, how it has changed. Don't be too hasty to re-engage with movement, sounds, and concepts. Take a minute or two to be nakedly aware, until the state loses its freshness naturally.

## *Dedication to all Beings*

Traditionally, when you finish a meditation, you dedicate any improvement or benefit you got to everyone, to all sentient beings. This prevents you from becoming too self-centered. Also, it helps you realize that when you become clearer, others will benefit from that because they will find you easier to relate to. You won't be as big a problem to them.

If you wish, take a moment now to dedicate any improvement or benefit you got from this practice to all beings. Do this with an open heart.

## *Appendix B*

# Dogzen Dyads

This is a brief outline of the Dogzen Dyads. It describes the basic rules of the Dyad and gives a few examples of Dyad instructions you can use to increase awareness of awareness.

### *The Set Up*

Since this is a two-person meditation technique, first find a partner to work with. Sit down with the partner at a comfortable distance apart, facing each other. You can sit on chairs or sit on cushions on the floor. The partners should be at the same height, though. Sit with your back straight and with your head balanced above your spine. Keep your body relaxed and your breathing free and easy.

At any point in time, one person is the active partner and the other is the receptive partner. Arbitrarily choose who will be active first. It changes every five minutes, so it really doesn't matter who starts.

Dyads are usually 40 minutes long, consisting of eight 5-minute periods. At the end of each 5-minute period, a bell rings and the partners change receptive and active roles. Each person, therefore, gets four active periods and four receptive periods.

### *The Social Covenants of the Dyad*

The partners make certain agreements to prevent relationship issues from interfering with the flow of the Dyad.

Both partners are open to real interpersonal contact and to the truth. Both approach the Dyad with the intent to be present for each other, to allow the other the freedom to experience whatever comes up for them, and to be open to any communications about what comes up. The receptive partner does not have to agree with what the active partner says, but should listen and try to understand.

They also agree to keep what is said during the Dyad in confidence and not gossip about it to others. In addition, they agree not to comment about what the other says, not during the Dyad or even afterwards. If something about their partner or what their partner said comes up while they are in the Dyad, they just let it go and focus on their own process.

### *The Receptive Partner*

The receptive partner has two roles: as the one who starts and stops the practice interval, and as the receiver of the active partner's communications.

Start/Stop: to start a 5-minute practice period, the receptive partner gives the active partner his instruction. When the bell rings ending the period, he says, “Thank you” to acknowledge the work done by the active partner and to indicate that the period is complete.

Receive: As the active partner works on his instruction, the receptive partner just listens and tries to understand whatever the active partner says, keeping attention fully on the active partner for the whole five minutes. He endeavors to be an empty listener, and doesn’t mentally judge or evaluate (good/bad, right/wrong) what the active partner says. He doesn’t try to lead or teach the active partner, nor does he try to sooth or take care of the active partner. He also avoids drawing attention to himself. He just receives from a state of emptiness and with an open heart.

### *The Active Partner*

The active partner receives the instruction from the receptive partner and then sets out to comply with the instruction. He either contemplates or attempts to perform some action, depending on what the instruction requires. He then communicates to the receptive partner what came up from his doing the practice. On average, the active partner should spend about half the time doing the practice and half the time communicating what comes up.

When the active partner communicates, he does his best to get the receptive partner to understand what he is saying. He watches to see if the receptive partner is getting it, and does his best to make the message clear. He does not comment in any way on what his partner said during his turn as the active partner.

The active partner works on the same instruction (or set of instructions) for the entire 40-minute Dyad.

### *Giving the Instructions*

When the receptive partner gives the instruction, he should use the same exact wording each time. Try not to add extra words like “please” or “OK, so tell me...” or anything like that. Keep the wording clean.

The receptive partner should “mean it” when he gives the instruction to his partner. He gives the instruction as a request, for example, “Tell me what awareness is.” He is requesting that they really do this and then he listens to what they say in response.

Both partners should know what the instruction is trying to accomplish. If they don’t, they should discuss it with the instructor or with each other and get it clear before the Dyad starts.

Some practices have multiple instructions. You do each one in order, and then repeat. To move to the next instruction, the active partner indicates with a nod or “OK” when he has completed the one he is on. The receptive partner then acknowledges with a “thank you” and gives the next instruction. At the start of the next 5-minute period, you always begin with the first instruction again.

## *Some Useful Instructions*

The following are some of the instructions we have used during our Dogzen practices. They are especially helpful for increasing awareness of awareness. People usually have some preferences for one instruction or another. It is usually best to work on an instruction that you like and are motivated to work on.

Instruction: “Tell me how you know you are aware.”

This is a good first question to work on when you first begin your work with Dogzen. We’re not necessarily looking for a “right answer.” The instruction directs the active partner to be aware of his awareness and to be open to what that is like. The goals are to become more aware of awareness and to experience what occurs in consciousness when you set out to become aware of awareness.

Instruction: “Tell me how you know I’m aware.”

This encourages the active partner to put his attention on the receptive partner and discover the other’s awareness as an experience. Doubts about knowing another’s awareness can come up. The active partner works through this.

Instruction: “Tell me what awareness is.”

This has the same objectives as the previous instruction. It should not be done as an intellectual exercise. You’re not trying to define awareness, but trying to become directly aware of awareness and to articulate what you discover when you do that.

You can also use “Tell me what awareness is” alternated with “Tell me what awareness isn’t.” This is good for clearing up confusions.

Instruction: This practice has three instructions:

- a. “Put your attention on the [object].”
- b. “Detach awareness from the [object] and be aware of awareness itself.”
- c. “Tell me your comments about that.”

Before the Dyad starts, the active partner chooses an object he wants to put his attention on and tells the receptive partner.

The active partner holds his gaze on the object until his mind is steady. He doesn’t try to analyze the object or figure out anything about it. He just steadies his gaze on it.

For the second instruction, the active partner loosens or detaches his gaze from the object and shifts his attention to the awareness itself. He tries to become directly aware of his awareness, letting go of the object he is aware of.

The third instruction gives the active partner a chance to communicate what came up when he did the practice.

Instruction: “Get your awareness across to me.”

For this instruction to be effective, the active partner needs to already have a clear experience of awareness itself. This practice emphasizes getting the actuality of awareness across to another. How do you do that? That's what this is about. You find out how to get awareness across to another by doing the practice. The word "your" is optional. Some people object to it because they are working on a "no self" model.

Instruction: This practice has two instructions:

- a. "Tell me how to be aware of my awareness."
- b. "Tell me how to be aware of your awareness."

For these instructions to be effective, the active partner needs to already have a clear experience of awareness itself.

With the first instruction, the receptive partner is inviting the active partner to tell him how to be aware of his own awareness. It's like saying, "Teach me about me." The active partner attempts to describe to the receptive partner how to be aware of awareness. In so doing, he inevitably reflects on his own experience of awareness so he can get it across to the receptive partner.

The second instruction is also a "teach me" instruction. The active partner is to tell the receptive partner how the receptive partner can become aware of the active partner's awareness.

Instruction: This practice has two instructions:

- a. "Be aware of the awareness of another."
- b. "Tell me your comments about that."

The active partner sets out to be aware of the awareness of another, typically their partner. This doesn't mean that they try to assume the exact same viewpoint as the other, but just that they become conscious that the other is aware in the same way that they are.

The active partner notices how his own awareness shifts when he does this. In other words, what is it like to be aware of the awareness of another?

The third instruction gives the active partner a chance to communicate what came up when he did the practice.

There are many more instructions you can use to increase awareness of awareness. The ones listed here are just a few that have been tested, so we know that they are pretty good.

It is important, when making up a Dyad instruction, that you do not just have a person focus on some mental idea or look for or chase after some memory of a prior event. All the instructions listed here focus awareness on itself in the here-and-now. They don't direct you to your intellectual mind or memories.

