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# DZOGCHEN IN ORDINARY LIFE

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Formal practice .....	2
Historical context of dzogchen .....	2
Our narratives: a lasagna of meaning .....	3
The Buddha .....	4
Our existential predicament: awakening to the challenge of the world .....	5
Experiences are the filters through which we experience the world .....	6
Don't worry .....	8
Relaxation and Dzogchen: ngo wo, rang bzhin and thugs rje .....	9
Ngo wo .....	10
Rang bzhin .....	10
Going shopping with my mother .....	12
Thugs rje .....	13
The one who experiences is itself arising and passing .....	14

Hello, welcome. Tonight we don't have a translator so I will speak in a simple way and hopefully we will be able to understand each other. If that doesn't seem clear, then we'll try something else.

The main focus I'll be talking about tonight will be the basic principles of dzogchen, which is one strand of Tibetan buddhist practice, and how this can be interwoven into ordinary life. There are many kinds of meditation practice, as I am sure you all know. Some of these practices are very formal.

#### FORMAL PRACTICE

Formal practices require particular ways of setting things up, maybe with an altar, making offerings, and so on. This involves a kind of interruption into the flow of ordinary life. They take a kind of loop, so that you go from your ordinary life into something rather artificial, something rather intentional, and then—hopefully—you come back into your ordinary life with more sense of presence and awareness.

In dzogchen we make this loop very short because we want to try to experience how all the phenomena of our life are inseparable from what we might call the open dimension of being, or our ground potentiality. That is to say, all the restrictions that we have in our life, the places where we feel limited, saddened, anxious, depressed and so on, when we look into the quality and the nature of that limit, we find that it is in fact not something which stands apart from us but is indeed our own expression. And then, when we look directly, experientially, into 'who is the one who is having the experience?' we start to see that our own nature reveals itself in different ways. Later on I'll explain a little about that.

#### HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF DZOGCHEN

First of all, some words on the historical context of dzogchen. It started a long, long time ago in India and in China. Various strands of understanding, which go back a very long time in human life, came together and the teachings were first formulated around the second century of the christian era.

Buddhism generally is concerned with how we can free ourselves from suffering. The Buddha's basic teaching is that suffering is grounded in ignorance and attachment. Ignorance means not knowing our own nature, not understanding the nature and the structure of the world we live in. Attachment is the dependency which develops for us in relationship to the phenomena which we experience, in the 'light' of ignorance.

Of course, one of the main phenomena we experience is ourselves. We exist for ourselves as an experience. When you wake up in the morning, you experience yourself coming out of a state of sleep into a state of waking, where everything that you do, you know that you do because you experience it. If you didn't have a capacity to experience it you wouldn't have that experience.

If you are cleaning your teeth, you look in the mirror and you see someone looking at you and you clean your teeth at them and they clean their teeth back

at you. This is an experience that we all have. You can tell yourself, “I am looking at myself in the mirror, cleaning my teeth. I know who I am. I know how to clean my teeth. When I was a little person, my mama taught me how to clean my teeth. Being a good person, I clean my teeth every day.”

So, we have a story, or an understanding, which gives us a sense of the continuity of who we are. Woven into the story are different aspects; some aspects are happy, some aspects are sad. Some people have very difficult childhoods; some people have very easy childhoods. Some people have an easy childhood and then life gets worse. Some people have a shitty childhood and then life gets better. Anyway, we all have some strands of good, bad, hopes, fears, expansive moments, contracting moments, anxieties, depressions and so on. These ephemeral moments—ephemeral meaning just something which is transient, which don't last long, just like rain falling on water—these moments of happiness and sadness, they are there, they are absolutely there, and yet you can't grasp them, there's nothing to hang onto. What we do hang on to are stories.

#### ○ OUR NARRATIVES: A LASAGNA OF MEANING

We build up, layer by layer, a great lasagna of meaning, and as you know, lasagna is very heavy. And that's what we do with our life. The stories of our existence wrap around us like an umbilical cord wrapping round a baby in the womb so we can hardly breathe. In this way a great deal of our suffering is because our experience of ourselves, and the environment we live in, is mediated, is moved through, transformed by, habitual stories which have a tilt, which have a bias, a direction to them, which block many of the other possibilities that we might encounter.

The purpose of meditation is to put into question the true status of these narratives. Sometimes, when you read books about buddhism, it will say that the cause of suffering is attachment to 'the self' or to 'oneself'. I think this is a bad kind of translation because our 'self' is not something you can be attached to. You can't grab yourself because we keep changing. We are all very unreliable. Our moods change, somebody tells us a nice story and we start to laugh, somebody tells us a sad story and water comes out of our eyes. We have no wall around ourselves. It's very difficult for us to keep a sense of continuity of measured sameness moment-by-moment through time. This would indicate that when we grasp at the self we are grasping at the story about the self, the construction of the self. To be not-attached is to be more present in life because you are not hanging on to these outer garments, these clothes, the opinions, the judgements that you've wrapped yourself in.

Meditation is designed to do two things. One is to look very clearly into the naked state of our existence, taking off the coverings, so that we experience ourselves in the direct moment of how we encounter the world. And the second function is to analyse the clothes that we wear. What is their origin?

Working in a big public hospital as a psychotherapist, every day I see many very disturbed people, and it's very clear to me that the great thing that they suffer from is not being in touch with their being as it manifests. They are locked into beliefs, habits and interpretations. They see the world according to prejudice, judgements that have been installed in the past, very often manifesting in early childhood. People have told them, "I hate you, I wish you had never been born," or "You are stupid," or "When you grow up you'll have to work very hard, otherwise you will be a useless person." And these beliefs about self and about the nature of the world get massaged day-by-day into the texture of this small person as they are growing, so that they start to feel that the belief and the assumption is who they really are.

So there is this double move. The very process of socialisation, the very process of becoming human, tends to alienate us from the actual, natural potential that we have. This is because to become human is always to become a specific human being, in a specific family, going to a specific school, in a specific social setting with its own beliefs, religious beliefs, political beliefs, economic beliefs and so on. As we grow up and take a place in the world we have a brief window of opportunity to understand something. And if, in that window of opportunity, that space of possibility, we remain clouded because we believe we are the stories we developed in our childhood, then there's a great sadness.

## THE BUDDHA

The Buddha, in his awakening, was awakening from the dream that he was whom he had been led to believe he was. The historical Buddha was born as a prince, in north India, brought up to believe that he would be a great person. He was surrounded by many people's expectations of him and he struggled to fulfil these expectations. But then, at a critical moment in his life when he was a young man, married with a child, he started to look around the world. He encountered old age. He saw an old person walking down the road, and he thought for the first time, "Oh! They're old. They have a human body. I have a human body. I will also come old. Although I'm very young and healthy now, this body that I have, my young, healthy body, is not a permanent thing. I also will be old." Then he saw someone who was sick, and again, he thought, "They're human, they are sick. I'm human. Why will I not become sick?" The wall separating him as a privileged person, a prince, somebody powerful who would always be handsome, always be rich, always be healthy, this wall started to fall down.

He started to realise, "Oh, what happens to other people can happen to me, and even if it doesn't happen to me, if my eyes are open and my ears are open, and especially if my heart is open, I'm going to be touched, I'm going to be impacted by other people's existence. And if I find that too painful, I will be sealing myself in a bubble which will cut me off from life."

## OUR EXISTENTIAL PREDICAMENT: AWAKENING TO THE CHALLENGE OF THE WORLD

So Buddha awoke to the challenge: if I open to the world I will be upset, and if I don't open to the world, I won't be alive. Not much of a choice! But this is the existential predicament that we all face.

From that experience the Buddha moved out to try to resource himself, to try to find answers. "How can I develop the courage and the clarity to face the fact that who I think I am is not who I really am? This house, this identity given to me by circumstances, is unreliable. Old age, sickness and death will come. I am not who I think I am."

He pursued many kinds of instruction in meditation and practised it for a long time and eventually he came to a point where he thought, "I have been trying to exchange an ordinary story for a holy story. I have tried to become a holy man. I have tried to become somebody special, somebody sacred; but it doesn't really work. Just as the self that I had before—my ordinary self as a privileged young man was artificial, was created by many factors coming together, so my identity as a holy person—somebody who is fasting all the time, somebody who is doing extreme forms of yoga, who is not sleeping at night, who is sitting in cold rivers doing many kinds of ascetic practice—this also is an artificial construct. I have learnt how to be a yogi, but I still don't know who I am! I have just exchanged one kind of clothes for another kind of clothes."

He decided that he would really have to look into himself: who is the one who is sitting here? He made a mat of some grass, and sat under a tree, the famous bodhi tree in India, near Gaya, and he made a vow to himself that he would stay there until he had understood who is the one who supports, or who is attached to, all these conditioned, artificial, constructed interpretations of identity.

Buddhists believe that the Buddha was able to do this. This was his awakening. That's the meaning of 'buddha'—it is somebody who has awakened from the sleep, from the dream of identification with the storylines which are generated out of experiences and which, although momentary, endure through our re-visiting of them. That is to say, he realised that his sense of self was old food. It was: pop it in the microwave, eat a bit, put it in the freezer, take it out of the freezer, pop it in the microwave, eat a bit, put it in the freezer, in the microwave. Old food, nothing fresh about it.

Following this awakening he started to explain the relationship between wisdom and compassion. Wisdom is when we understand and directly experience, not as a concept but as a lived experience, that in the centre of our being there is nothing at all. We, ourselves, when we look into it, can't really find anything which is enduring and substantial. We are basic spaciousness. It's not a dull emptiness. It's a radiant spaciousness because moment-by-moment creativity—the movement of the body, sensation and feeling—is arising. If you try to find this core as a substance, you won't find anything at all. But if you say, "Oh, it's nothing at all!" that wouldn't be true either because it keeps manifesting; we keep

revealing ourselves in a dynamic, creative way. So, wisdom is the understanding that the root of our being is nothing you can grasp.

We are not sealed off from the world, we are not living in a skin bag as a separated autonomous being but rather, from this open spaciousness, which we can directly experience in meditation, we move out in gestures of communication towards all beings, moment-by-moment. And this is compassion.

When you meet a friend for a coffee and you chatter about work and you say how terrible your boss is, this is also compassion because this is the interlinking of energy in the world. But of course, we don't see it as compassion. We experience it as attachment, as re-affirmation of a fixed and limited sense of self because we operate thinking, "I am talking to you; you are over there; you are separate from me; you have a different history to me. Truly, you are different." So, I am me, all alone. And each one here feels: 'I am me and all alone', and we speak out to other people and hope to get some kind of connection. This is life as we live it, wrapped inside the bubble of 'I am a separate person'.

Through meditation, we can just relax a bit and when we relax we experience that this self is arising always with other people. Even when you fall asleep and your head is on the pillow and you start to vanish, even if you are lying wrapped around someone else, it's as if you come back into yourself. Even in your dreams, other people are usually there.

Our existence is always relational. Who we are is always connected with other people. Although on one level we are born alone and we die alone, everything about us is relational. The clothes we wear are made by other people; the food we eat is made by other people, by farmers and so on; it's brought to the city by drivers; the trucks are made by engineers. We are always not just dependent on other people but we are inseparable from them because our very way of being is part and parcel, is intimately linked, with other people. This is the nature of compassion.

It's about how to feel free to be connected with others, to learn to enjoy the energetic quality of being connected with others, with all its ups and downs. This is not a kind of New Age fantasy where you smile forever. Life is full of problems.

EXPERIENCES ARE THE FILTERS THROUGH WHICH WE EXPERIENCE THE WORLD.

Life has depression, anxiety and confusion. What we try to understand is: 'What is the nature of depression?' If you think, "My depression torments me. I want to get rid of it", you will dig yourself more into your depression. If you become curious, if you say, "Oh, yes, today I feel suicidal. Today, I feel like death. What is this? What is the quality of this feeling which seems to take me over? It seems to fill every atom of my body; it seems to fill the whole room. Food doesn't taste the same. My mind is heavy." If we can just stay with that experience, very close to it but not collapsed into it, if you just stay with it, it starts to move. It starts to change, and then you see that the depression has many colours. Most of them are grey and brown and dark blue and deep purple. They are not bright spring-

time colours, but they have many different shades inside them, so the more you look, the more you see: “Oh, these are the subtle textures of changing experience.”

So rather than it being something big and heavy that’s covering me over so that I’m cut off from the world, see that it is the current tint or colouration of the open space of my being. It’s like in the theatre when they have spotlights with a red filter and a blue filter and a green filter. These experiences are the filters through which we experience the world. The filter is not wrong, it’s just that this is the shade, this is the colour of this moment, and it will change. Through this, rather than fighting our experience, struggling to have control over our experience, we learn to welcome and be at home in our experience.

So much psychological distress arises because the person feels themselves to be a thing, something, someone, an entity, separated off from the environment and this thin little skin of the ego finds it very difficult to hold itself together. This, according to the buddhist view, is a great way to suffer because it’s a false reading, it’s a mis-take, we have taken reality the wrong way. We’ve thought, “I need to find a position in the world, I need to take up a place against the world and through that, through mobilising my energy, through learning how to read the moves of the world, to see the structures of the world, I can be more powerful, more competent, more efficient at getting things done the proper way. Then my life will be easy.”

We want to become an expert, with power and control, as a means of establishing some security of identity. Some of the time this works but situations change. Powerful economies become weak, healthy people get sick. People die very young, people die in car crashes, people's bodies become maimed. What we had taken to be a steady, stable, reliable situation was always—always—a very fragile manifestation, held together by many factors which were invisible to us. All the times, when we’ve maybe ridden a bicycle through the traffic and didn’t get hit, these are the strands of our health. All the time when we were in a car and someone was driving in a crazy way towards us and we didn’t crash, these are invisible forces that keep our lives going. It’s like that. Other people, they have these sorts of accidents; our accidents may not have manifested yet. So, we don’t know the many, many forces, the many lines of energy which keep us in place.

What buddhism suggests is that we start to move from thinking of separated entities, of things, which can be reinforced, or strengthened, or defended, and relax into the felt experience of being part of the world with others. Other people are not our enemies. Other people are not beings to be devoured in a predatory way. Other people are not beings to be controlled in order to keep ourselves safe. Beings manifest as the quality or energy of existence. Sometimes it’s clear, sometimes it’s not clear. If you’re walking down a city street you might think “All these people have got stress up to here, so I’m going to keep my eyes open.” Of course, that’s half-way to the solution. Keeping your eyes open is very good, but you can lower the aggression, you can lower the stress, and you can just walk down the street in a dance, like a fish swimming through seaweed, neither

expecting others to take care of us nor putting ourselves in the way where others might harm us. Awareness, presence, allows us to work with the situation as it arises. It's good for us because it keeps us fresh. It's also good for our relations with others because it reduces the amount of fear or expectation that we have.

In order to be like that that, there are these two main factors. Firstly, we have to experience directly the open dimension of being, the natural openness of our mind, which gets covered over by thoughts and feelings and beliefs. In parallel with that, we have to understand what is the nature of a belief, what is the nature of a thought?

In my clinical practice, I see many people who worry a lot. Most people who worry a lot—that is to say, who have repetitive, anxious thoughts, who chew on an event like a dog with a bone—most of the time people whose thoughts are like that believe, at least while they are caught up in them, that worrying is going to provide a good solution. They feel it's necessary, even helpful, to do that thing. Later when I do a review with them, "How long have you been worrying about these things?" they say, "Oh, ten years, fifteen years." I say, "Did you come to any conclusion?" "No, each time it feels different". Each time it may feel different, but it's always the same! You take it out the freezer, you pop it in the microwave, "Mmmm! Oh, I've had enough, I'll put it back." It's re-heated, re-heated nonsense which goes nowhere. So much of people's lives is spent in this.

## DON'T WORRY

Walking down the road in the evening, the birds are singing; little window-boxes have little flowers coming out of them; the children may be playing out in the street. There are so many delightful and wonderful things but when we are pre-occupied we see very little. Most of our life is spent asleep because we are doing the very important work of anaesthetising ourselves. This is what worry is: addiction to thought, to repetitive thought, it is a way of making yourself stupid. Half an hour of worry is the same as hitting yourself with a hammer! If somebody said, "Okay, I'll save you time, let me hit you with a hammer," you'd say, "No! No! I prefer to do it myself!"

It's a very subtle hammer, but it's exactly that, it eats up your life, and of course, when we worry, our energetic system becomes very knotted. We don't breathe properly, we have increased muscle tension, and we have these chemical washes running through our body. The whole endocrine system gets disturbed. Hormone imbalances lead to sleep problems. Sleep problems then usually get linked with eating problems because you eat in a particular way to try to control the impact of the chemicals running through your body. Because of that you feel depleted, and you get a bit hyper, you get a bit up. You speak to other people in a mis-attuned way because you're speaking out of your state, of your state, about your state. Instead of speaking to the person, with some sense of actually being connected with them, with some sense of "How can I adapt myself to find a way that makes sense to you?" we're just whacking them with all the shit that's bubbling about inside us.



We do so much work to attach ourselves to our addiction to language and to giving thoughts a meaning-value. Some thought arises in our head and we try to make sense of it, to try to work it out, “What is this about?” In that moment we ignore the energetic quality of the thought; ignore the fact that a thought is a pulsation which arises and passes, arises and passes. In grasping at it and trying to squeeze some meaning out of it, we are taking it too seriously, going towards it from the sense of being needy. “I need something to fill me up.” Maybe I’m intellectual, and so I need to read lots of books to stimulate my mind and keep me excited. Maybe I’m a dreamy kind of person and I like to have fantasy thoughts about a nice holiday or a new love story, something like that, and off we drift.

By drifting off into the thought we are not here, we are not present. We are not relaxed, open and connected. Rather, we are buzzing a little bit inside. From that, we want something either to calm us down, or to fill us up. If we are buzzy we are looking for something which will be exciting and sustain us on the same level, or calm us down. If we feel empty and depleted, we think, “Give me something! Make me feel better!”

In that way we go towards the world seeking all the time to adjust the balance, both in the outer world and in the inner world of our thoughts and feelings. In buddhist language, this is the nature of samsara or on-going existence, where we go from one life, to another life, to another life. The movement behind that, the energetic pulse of it, is “I am dissatisfied, I am in need of something, I cannot just be still”, and so I’m always tilted, tilted forwards. If I’m tilted forwards at a certain point I am going to fall over, so to stop falling over I adjust myself and move. It’s just like that. This is what our mind is doing. Our mind is off-balance and so, in order to balance, it moves. When you get into your thoughts and identify with the busyness of yourself, you get the sense that you are vertical and grounded. Actually, you are off-balance. So you have got to keep adjusting yourself.

Nowadays with technology and mobile phones, people can stimulate themselves all the time. I walk home from work and see people chatting away on their mobiles. All day long, they’ve maybe been busy inside on a computer, and they come outside where the air is fresh and the sky is blue—maybe it’s just been raining, it’s very beautiful—but they’re talking: “Hi, I’m on my way home, yeah, I’ll be there soon. What are we going to do?” It’s a kind of madness.

People were mad two thousand five hundred years ago as well, when the Buddha was there. It’s not that modern technology is causing the trouble. It’s the relationship that we have to ourselves, of not knowing who we are, of not knowing how to relax, not knowing how to settle into ourselves.

## RELAXATION AND DZOGCHEN: NGO WO, RANG BZHIN AND THUGS RJE

In dzogchen teachings there are many kinds of meditation and many ways of understanding more precisely how to do this, but the basic principle is about relaxation. Through relaxation we start to separate out the various aspects of the

mind. They are not different things. Our mind is not like a piece of bread that you can cut up into slices. Rather, there are inter-related aspects.

The traditional Tibetan way is to describe it as having three aspects, in Tibetan, 'ngo wo', 'rang bzhin' and 'thugs rje'.

## NGO WO

The first aspect has the quality of spaciousness, or un-graspability. When we sit, you can sit very simply, you can just sit quietly with your eyes just a little bit open, just relax and breathe out, and then as you release the breath from your body, just sit and be with what is there, and just observe it. If you are quiet, you can see that even if you are looking at the room around you, different things reveal themselves. And you start to see that experientially, the room is different from the room, conceptually. As a concept, we know that this room is roughly square, that it's this height, or it's this or that, so if I look this way, I can remember what is there. But that is a thought. The memory is using concepts to create an image in my mind of what is there. What I actually get is very different. What we actually get are moments of experience, pulsations. We then go on to form this together into a composite form, into a gestalt, but that is always artificial. It is always added on from the outside.

When we allow experience to reveal itself, we see it coming and going, coming and going, so then we start to look: "Who is the one who is having this experience?" and very, very gently, not examining like a detective, but very, very gently, we attend to ourselves in the process of being ourselves, and we become present in that and we start to experience this ungraspable, unspeakable but very real, very present, quality of ourselves, just an openness, a generosity of being. This is 'ngo wo', the first aspect.

## RANG BZHIN

The second aspect, 'rang bzhin', is that this openness is full of many possibilities: thoughts, feelings, sensations, dreams, and so on, everything that we could ever want is there. It comes to hand, just as we need it. There is a richness of possibilities.

There is always more potential than there is manifestation. This is incredibly important because we live in a world where people are defined, where we get summed-up. For example our parents had a view about us, or we developed a view about ourselves. We might think, "I'm too small; I'm too fat; my bum's too big; my tits are too small; I'm going bald!" We have all sorts of definitions of ourselves and we live inside these, imprisoned by them. We have summed ourselves up, added up the facts of our existence, like an accountant, and then we say, "Now I know who I am!"

This is to say, we take the manifestation as defining an essence. We operate as if we can know who people are. We then go on to make prejudicial judgements. If this is expressed, for example against a group such as black people, or homosexuals, or any minority group, then we may get the feedback "Oy! That's

not a good way to be! You should be more tolerant, more open.” But when we observe our mind we can see that we do this sort of thing all the time.

This is one of the very normal mental processes that we have, and we do it because it gives us a sense of control. We can see it with small children. As they build up their database of knowledge about the world, they get a kind of confidence. They are building up their world on knowledge, but of course, knowledge always over-defines a situation.

So in this second aspect of potentiality we experience so much radiance in ourselves as we start to allow ourselves to enjoy all the strange thoughts, the snippets of day dreams, the sort of stuff that Freud talks of, slips of the tongues, funny jokes, the way we get things wrong. We start to see this is not an error, this is not a tension. This is just the creativity of the mind.

The mind is not an orderly construct. It's not a Bauhaus design. It's more like an alpine field of wild flowers, and of course, as the crows walk across the field, and the cows and the goats, they chew up the plants, and then when you find a plant, it's usually got bits torn off or is crushed. You could see that as imperfection if you have a template of what a proper flower should be like, but that would be a bit silly. We just say, “Oh, this is nature.”

In the same way, we can develop that tolerance towards ourselves, rather than saying, “Uh-oh, there's something wrong with me. I don't quite fit in... I'm the wrong shape... I should be a kinder person.... I should take out these bad thoughts and put in better thoughts...” We can start to see that all these things that we call imperfections are part of the infinite rich variety of possibility. When we appreciate, when we attend to something, it reveals itself. But if, before we encounter something, we ‘know’ what it is, we'll never see it. What we will see is something reflecting back our own prejudice.

And that's one of the functions of meditation, that it helps us to realise how narrow, how ungenerous, how inhospitable, we are to ourselves. That when we sit in meditation and we experience these strange movements of our mind, we think: “There's something wrong with me, my mind is out of control.” This is because we start from an assumption: “I should be in control of my mind.” But who is this ‘I’ who should be in control of the mind? This ‘I’ is itself a thought arising in the mind. The self is nothing other than a manifestation. There is no substance to it.

So the first aspect: the openness never changes, but inseparable from that openness is this infinite variety of possibility. The more we just relax and enjoy it, we start to see so many variations, so many different possibilities that when we move towards the third aspect, ‘thugs rje’, which is the precise experience of being, moment-by-moment, we are able to be fully in the moment, however it is. We realise that however I am, this is part of the richness of potential.

## GOING SHOPPING WITH MY MOTHER

When I was a small child I would go to the shops with my mother. We lived in a small outer part of a big town but it was like a little village, and my mother knew everyone, so it was impossible to walk more than fifty metres without her talking. So I would be getting very bored because at the shops there was a sweet shop and I was going only for getting sweets, but my mother was going shopping in order to talk to people, so we had completely different worlds that we were living in, with completely different values. When she would stop and talk to someone I used to get so bored and be pulling on her dress, "Mum! Mum! Mum! I want to go!" And she'd say, "Sshh! I'm talking. It's nice to talk." But I didn't want to talk. I want to go to the shops and buy sweets. I wasn't getting what I wanted, which is a fairly normal experience for children. As we get older we get better at disguising it, but a lot of our life, things are happening that we don't want. We feel bored, irritated, and frustrated because we think, "My life should be different. I should have a different job. I should have a different partner. I should have different children. How come I have children like these? Other people, they have nice children. These children of mine, they only cause me trouble!"

We have a sense that life has been coming at us, life has impacted us, and given us things we don't want. The more we are able to integrate this open spaciousness with the richness of potentiality, the more we see that moment-by-moment, things are changing; we start to experience that what traps us is the story we tell ourselves, because if we come out of the story into our direct sensory presence, the story has gone. Moment-by-moment, it's gone.

Of course in life we have to make compromises. We find ourselves having to put up with situations we don't like. We have to listen to things we don't agree with, participate in events that constrain us. How to inhabit that space? Very easy. Breathe out, and then you look, and hear sound coming out as the person is talking; you observe how the skin is moving around. There's always something very interesting, and you realise that infinite, infinite worlds are happening, intersecting, at the same time. What is this speech anyway? It's blah-blah-blah-blah, just as my speech now is blah-blah-blah. It's just sound coming out.

What is sound anyway? It's variations of energy which we either relate to, or not. The fact that we have a capacity, that we know a language, gives us access to one reading of language, which is a semantic construal; we build up these images in our head, "He is talking about this," but we can listen to it in a very different way. And if we do that, we start to see how people embody themselves in the world and that people's existences are very, very different. Instead of saying, "Oh, he's a professor, therefore he knows this and this and this." we can look at the face, around the eyes, and we see how sad the person is, although his words are wonderful. We are touched and moved rather than trapped by the situation.

## THUGS RJE

This is the level of real compassion, of 'thugs rje'. Compassion isn't: "There, there, let me take care of you." How will we take care of other people? Me, I'm paid to take care of people, but I never know how to take care of them. I sit in the room, and people come in and they tell me their story, and then I talk to them a bit and they talk to me, and sometimes it gets better and sometimes it doesn't. But I don't know how to do it. I spent many years training to be a psychotherapist. I had long analysis myself. I was in many groups. The more I do it and the more people I see, the less I know why I do what I do. But somehow, it gets a bit easier, so even if I'm with people who are very upset, somehow something happens and we get into something.

Part of that I think is because I'm not so defended. I don't feel I have to be able to organise what is going on because I trust somehow I will survive. Somehow, something will be there. Like how I'm talking to you just now. Somehow, something will come out. I'll find myself saying something. Hopefully it will be useful. I could come here with a prepared speech and read that out. What would be the point of that?

So once we start to be present in the moment-by-moment situation, many of the neurotic anxieties of 'How will I fit in? How will I placate the big judge who's always hovering over my head?' start to fall away, and you start to trust. And of course, the more you trust, the more you relax, and the more you relax, the more you can be in touch with the open ground of being, and so these three aspects feed into each other.

The more open I am, and the more I trust that openness, I can prepare less. If I don't need to prepare, then there is no need to put on the blinkers when I can see what's actually around me. I can respond into my lived embodied situation. Mental illness, both neurosis and psychosis, can be looked at in this way. The more we think about events—actions, thoughts, feelings, sensations—the more we tend to elaborate stories which become a screen between ourselves and what is actually occurring here and now. The more disturbed we are, the more committed we become to maintaining our story in the face of evidence that an allegiance to it is cutting us adrift from the world that we share with others.

So dzogchen, in relation to ordinary life, is about being in the ordinary, in the everyday. Every day, fresh. Not having to know. Not being closed to the lived quality of life. Not being an expert. Not building walls and barriers between ourselves and other people. Not thinking in terms of hierarchy of dominance and control. Rather, we can have an intimate and tender relationship with the world, so that we are part of the world and are friendly towards the world.

My experience is that when people do that, they start to feel the world is quite friendly towards them. If you take a sort of neurotic, anxious or disturbed position towards the world, you will find the world is quite hostile. If you provoke the world it will attack you but if you tune in to what is there you will find you can collaborate, you can work with situations, and in that working with them, you work with one situation in this way and with another situation in that way and the more

you work with different situations, the less you know who you are because all you can say is, “Well, sometimes I’m like this, sometimes I’m like that, and who knows how I will be tomorrow?” That’s quite nice.

At first it can seem very scary because it’s very, very naked but it’s very fresh, and when things are naked and fresh, they are also very connected. The problem with trying to be safe in this world is that it involves diminishing the range of experience, diminishing the range of contact and building little walled ghettos, little enclosures. If we want to be at home in the world, we have to take down the barriers, take down the walls.

If we take down the wall, anxiety will arise, so we need a meditation practice to look into ‘Who is the one who is anxious? What is the nature of anxiety?’ Anxiety is energy which spirals around itself, knots itself, but it’s always moving. Anxiety, or a panic attack, is very dynamic. States of anxiety are very, very dynamic, there’s nothing you can hold on to, they are ways of revealing oneself. And who is the one who feels anxious? If you look—really look—you won’t find anyone there, and when you look half the way there, you think, “Well, I’m anxious, I’m anxious, but each time I’m anxious the colouration of the ‘I’ is different because I can be anxious and sad, I can be anxious and angry, I can be anxious and frustrated.”

So, the self, as a point of manifestation, has many, many colours and textures and tones. The self, as the ground of being, is ungraspable. When you bring these two together then you can enjoy the fact of being so many different things. Being plural, being multiple, we can tell many different stories, and through that we escape entrapment, which is a fundamental release from the fear of death. Because, who is going to die? If you get to state where, in a very relaxed, open way you can say, “I don’t know who I am,” because who I am is not something that can be known, then who is going to die?

#### THE ONE WHO EXPERIENCES IS ITSELF ARISING AND PASSING

The one who experiences is itself arising and passing. This is the most fundamental point of buddhism. If you really get it experientially, life slips open in a nice way. If you don’t get it, you just get whacked all the time, and we all know what it’s like to be whacked a lot, to be disappointed, to be frustrated, to feel doors closing on us.

That’s the basics. It is possible to learn the meditations that go with that, and if you are interested I would encourage you to do that. I teach them from time to time in this part of Germany, and other people do as well.

Meditation—just as a final thing—meditation is not something artificial. Meditation is a way of realigning yourself, of relaxing back into yourself. We suffer from alienation, we are strangers to ourselves. We are wandering, wandering in samsara, wandering here, there and everywhere, looking for the answer, looking for things outside of ourselves, but this central problem is that we are not at home in ourselves.

As it asks in the Bible, “What does it benefit a man if he gains the whole world but he loses his own soul?”, his own self? Buddhism would say exactly the same: that this is what life is. We are very materialistic. We hope to get the good things from the world to make us safe, but this is crazy because the demon is already inside. The demon that torments us is not knowing who we are. And having a nice house and a nice car and so on will not get rid of that demon.

Only when we look inside we realise the demon is just a puff of smoke. But till we see that—quite dangerous!