
The Nature of Self in Tibetan Buddhism

James Low

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Transcribed by John Imes

Edited by Barbara Terris

We have a little time this evening to look at the Buddhist understanding of the self. We will look at it in relation to identity, personality, character and so on.

Religious and non-religious views of self

In European culture, we take it for granted that some kind of self exists. That is to say, we exist. We exist as something. That's the kind of baseline. What we exist *as* can be described in lots of different ways.

If we are not religious there may be the sense that when we die, existence moves into nonexistence; there will be nothing to continue. Religious people believe *something*, which they might call the soul, continues. Is the soul the same as the self? Some forms of theology say that the soul belongs to God and so the God part of us goes back to heaven with the Father. If, however the soul has got too contaminated, too mixed up with things of this world, it sinks down into the lower realms.

For most people nowadays it's not quite clear what a soul would be, something a bit nebulous that you can't quite grasp, an invisible thing. The more that religious culture differs from the general present-day worldview, the more it is experienced as a kind of haunting.

Question: Haunting? Meaning what?

James: Haunting, like a ghost, inducing residual forms of guilt, with a trace of paranoia: 'If I'm bad something bad will happen to me.'

That's the kind of general framework we're familiar with.

The materialistic view

In modern materialistic individualism, we start with the notion that this is *my* life and I want to get the most out of it. This means that I have to find a way to relate to the world in order to get what I need for my projects, so that I can feel safe and successful, and maintain whatever I have developed for as long as I can.

Our life, therefore, is grounded in a struggle. We're no longer fighting the devil—we're fighting time. Time is going to steal what we have. When we live in time, things fall away. Our youth falls away; we start to get a bit

old. Our health falls away. Friends fall away. The certainty we had when we were younger starts to fall away. Because all constructs are impermanent whatever we build up will start to crumble.

We are familiar with such notions as ‘midlife crisis’, the structure of which is that there must be more to life than this. We become hungry to get more, and in the process of getting it we can easily lose what we already have. Then there is question of, ‘*Can I be satisfied with what I’ve got?*’ Is contentment enough, or is contentment an avoidance of life’s challenge?

Fewer and fewer people have a calling to a Christian religious life. To live a life of prayer in a monastery or a nunnery no longer seems attractive. What would be the point, after all? Every day would just be the same. So boring! What would be the benefit of such seclusion when you can get a cheap flight and enjoy a summer holiday by the beach? If you can easily have fun and excitement and new experiences, experiences which feed you and give you more, why would you choose renunciation?

That dialectic is working with the basic duality between the world and the spiritual domain. Heaven is floating away, and we’re left just with the earth. But in our materialist society the earth is not so bad! People have enough to eat, clothes to wear and so on. Life is good. Yes, there are wars not so far away, but they are not yet on our street. There are lots of invaders coming into Europe, but they have not yet arrived in *our* town. That is to say, we are lulled into the sleep of complacency due to the fruits of consumerist capitalism. We may hear that in Syria, or in the next valley, all kind of bad things are happening, but here we can sit the nice evening and have an ice cream in a cafe. This is our experience. Our experience is *ours*; it seems very direct and immediate and what we hear about other people’s experience is just like a story.

The Buddhist view

The Buddhist view of these matters is very different. From the general Buddhist point of view, the sense of being an individual, of the sense of having a self which distinguishes us from other people, is grounded in ignorance. Ignorance here refers more to a practice than a state; it is a practice of ignoring.

Our lives are like the waves in the ocean. The ocean shows itself through its waves. The waves arise... and go back into the ocean... and arise... and go back into the ocean. When the wave arises from the ocean, it looks as if something has been born, as if something has come into existence. Its existence is very dynamic and moving—and then it’s gone. It hasn’t gone anywhere else. It shows that it is, in fact, the ocean. The individuality, the unique existence of the wave, was an illusion, because in the beginning, in the middle and in the end, the wave was inseparable from the ocean.

But this flow of this experience — this inseparability of depth and manifestation in which manifestation is a *showing* of, but not the creation of substantial apartness, of substantial entities— gets a wobble inside it, a kind of momentary self-consciousness, a sense of, ‘*What’s happening to me?*’ Being a dynamic movement, what’s happening to me is movement.

Now, when we are in movement and have lost our balance, we try to cling to something. If we slip on the pavement and start to fall over, we reach out to try to catch something. If we were swimming in the sea and got a cramp and started to feel we were drowning, we would hold on to anything that was floating by.

In other words, grasping is an attempt to stabilise a situation which feels out of control. The desire is to find something to hang onto. *Someone* — me — is hanging on to *something*. And the relation between the two is anxious appropriation. This becomes a self-perpetuating motion.

With the sense that *I* exist, I want to stabilise my existence. But my existence is made out of moving particles. The phenomenology of our existence is movement. We are part of movement. We are not really separated from the flow of the world. However, in feeling that we exist inside ourselves, there is an orientation

towards finding something that will be stable and enduring. We want to settle down, to have a safe place to stay, to maintain the rituals of our daily life which confirm the continuity of who we are.

Our sense of self is built on abstraction. The self is an imputation. That is to say, we interpret the flow of sensation, thought and feeling which arise as being signs that there is something truly existing. I drink some water because I am thirsty. *I* am the agent who goes to drink the water. *I* am the subject who experiences the thirst. I exist as somebody who can feel thirst and act to deal with the thirst. Feeling thirsty is not a continuous quality of my existence. The action of drinking water is not a continuous activity I engage in. When I am thirsty, I drink. But being thirsty is not the limit of my existence. I am many different things, many different activities, many different thoughts, memories, sensations and so on. In the moment that each of these is arising, they feel to be truly who I am: *'This is how I feel, this is how I am.'*

Making and believing stories about ourself

The proof of its meaning and value is that I have a belief that this is important, that this is true. Many of the things which we believe are actually not true at all. For example, children often develop fantasy identities for themselves, in which they link themselves with particular fantasy figures, like Batman, Superman and so on. In the same way, we construct a belief about who we are. Other people may well see different qualities in us. Our definition of ourselves, our belief that *this* is the truth of who we are, may not be the whole story or may not even be true at all!

In my work in therapy, I often encounter people who feel that they have ruined their lives. They have done something, and they can't forgive themselves. In a particular moment, at a specific time and place, they engaged in some activity which they have now taken to be an eternal definition of who they are. Because I have *done* this, I *am* this; and because I *am* this, my future is empty.

From the Buddhist point of view, this is a very understandable example of grasping. If I want something reliable to cling to and my thoughts, feelings, sensations, posture, gesture, tone of voice and so on are all changing, I am going to have to find something that I can hold onto. So I may formulate a belief that I am unlovable or that I am special.

These formulations become the basis of a belief structure. And because they are extrapolated from particular moments which have already passed, they are abstractions from the flow of life. They seem to hover *above* our lives, out of time and place, and thereby applicable in *every* time and place. *'I am unlovable; I have always been unlovable. That's why bad things always happened to me when I was a child. And because I am unlovable now, I always will be. This is an eternal truth about me.'* So this is what the self grasps at—something which has no essence to it at all, a mere construct, a gathering together of elements. You could say it's a bit like a construct with Lego but the pieces of Lego appear to have definite shapes which continue through time, whereas the constituents of our sense of self are all transient.

Despite all our ideas, self is empty of essence

The continuity of the self is an epiphenomenon—something generated out of the engagement of our belief and the momentary configuration of the situation. That is to say, our sense of self, or identity, is very strongly connected with selective attention. If we open our attention to the widest field of experience, we will encounter factors which contradict the beliefs which we have about ourselves. So we better not do that, since we want to hang onto our sense of self! And yet we *are* doing that because the basic belief is, *'I exist as something.'*

We look around at other people. They all have a definite shape. They all seem to exist. We usually imagine that they're doing okay in their lives. We don't see whatever is moving inside their mind so our usual fantasy is,

'Well, you guys are all sorted. I'm the one who's not clear. Being me is difficult, but it's obvious to me that being you is simple because you're just sitting there. You just are. I however am having to work at making myself moment by moment. So now I have to catch up with you. You've already arrived in the happy land. But I must try harder.'

So we use a misinterpretation of the dynamic nature of everyone's experience to project a false stasis into them. *'The reason that you are who you are is because you have essence of you inside of you. I hope I've got some essence of me inside of me too, but when I try to define it, it appears to be multifarious and to have many different forms. I do so want to find out who I really am, to find out what is the real truth of me being me.'*

From the Buddhist point of view, there *is* no truth. Or rather, the truth is that we are empty of essence. There is no enduring, substantial basis to who we are. We unfold as patternings, as many many patterns, some with quite high degrees of regularity and repetition. For example, our gait, the particular rhythm we have in our walking that makes us recognizable to other people even at a distance, our tone of voice and so on. We have certain dominant moods but they are not always the case.

The paradox is that our self is empty, and because it's empty it can be full of many different things. In order to accept that, we have to open to the dynamic nature of our existence but this deep core anxiety of the feeling of being off-balance, has us reaching out to hold onto something reliable.

I am movement

As we sit here now it is evening. We can hear the birds engaging in their evening song. The sun is gradually going down, and the light in the sky is getting softer. This is the movement of our life. As our planet goes around the sun, we experience the sun rising and setting. The morning goes into the afternoon and then the evening. We are time itself. We are not a thing which can be separated from time. Time is neither something acting on us, nor is time is something that we have. If you engage in music and dance, you may experience yourself as *being* time, that is to say the rhythm of the body is the unfolding of time. Our breathing, our swaying, our stamping, all the movements which occur when our bodies are moving to music are just movement itself. When we refer to the movements that 'our' body makes, this would imply that there is our body and that there is the movement. But movement is not something additional to the body; the body *is* movement.

The body can be still also, but it's healthier for our body to be moving. Many difficulties arise for people who sit in front of a computer for hours every day. Our wonderful joints require easy movement. Our hearts, our lungs, our endocrine systems, everything is rhythm and movement. 'The body' is the name we give to the pattern of movements. If we get sick, we go to the doctor, and the doctor is interested in movements. What has shifted? Has our sleep changed? Our breathing? They take a blood test. Blood needs to keep moving in the body. They take the blood out, it goes into a little bottle, and it has to get to the laboratory quite quickly. It's not good for the blood to be outside of the body. It will transform. Blood belongs inside you.

So, I am movement. That is to say, the movement is primary, and the 'I am' is a sealant, something which is established on top of the movement and which appears to somehow assert and establish the centrality of 'I am'. But from the point of view of impermanence, the 'I am' is coming after the fact. That is, when we say, "I am tired", the tiredness has already arrived. The 'I am' is a commentary about what has already occurred. 'I am hungry' is a description of what is happening to me, for me, as me.

Do you see now how our sense of self is largely commentarial? It tells a story about what is going on, and what is going on is *going on*—the unfolding, the unfurling, the revealing of experience, moment by moment.

Buddhism talks of the self as being empty, that there is no self-essence in the self. This doesn't mean that there is no performative self. That is to say, the showing, the self-ing of our selves, is ongoing and continuous,

but there is no fixed content. Our self is both an emptiness, a non-definable terrain, and it is also a great potential in that we can be many, many different things. We can say so many different things about ourselves and yet it is also the concrete specificity of how we are in this moment.

Of these aspects, the only reliable one is the emptiness, the ungraspability of the openness of our being, which is present however we are, which is to say, however we *show*. This being is our presence.

We are here, we are here now. What is happening for us, as us, here and now, is changing. That is to say, what I take to be 'my self' is actually the *content* of my experience, but the *experiencer* of my experience has no content. 'My self', as the one who is experiencing me being me, is sitting here.

Nevertheless something is indeed going on. Some of it feels like what I would call 'my body'. I hear sounds from outside. I see colors and shapes. I can designate some experiences as 'me' and other experiences as 'not-me'. So if I look at you, I experience you, and I know it's you, because I know that you are not me. Which is good. Something to hang onto. Because if I think I'm you, then I am psychotic and might end up in a hospital! So although I'm sure you're very nice, I don't want to be you; I want to be me.

You are my experience

You, however, are what *I* get. Because I'm sitting here, I see you. I can't see me. I can see my knees, but that's not much, whereas I can see your face. I can't see my own face. You are my experience.

Because of how you are, I also can be. That is to say, my being me is co-emergent with you being you. If you all look completely bored, my mood is going to change. This is normal. How I am is you. It's not like I am here in my little egg, and you send me a message which I have to decode. I look in your face and immediately something is happening. That is to say, we live in an unmediated connectivity, which we interpret after the fact.

In Buddhist language, we say that self and other are existing in nonduality. There is no radical boundary between myself and the other because I'm not existing in myself as a particular thing. I don't have a shell around me, separating me from the world. Nor do I have an essence inside me, defining how I am—because if you look bored, my mood changes. It doesn't need any essence to do that, it's just [snaps his fingers] *"Ah! Oh my God, what am I saying?"*

Self and other are co-emergent. We are arising according to circumstances. Today the weather is hot and so people are wearing summertime clothes. You wouldn't be dressed this way in January. What we eat, how we walk, what we wear is affected by the weather. And this *happens*; it happens because we find ourselves being changed by circumstance.

So in this way we can see—as in the image of the waves in the ocean with which we started—that there is an arising and a passing of moments of experience. These moments of experience are concrete in the sense of being just precisely what they are. Due to the wind and the tides and the impact of other waves, each wave that arises in the ocean is its own unique shape. It is what it is. And yet it's not, because the wave is the ocean. So the wave is the wave, and the wave is the ocean; both are truth.

The integration of these two aspects is what allows one the freedom to be fully oneself, to be in the moment, without the fear that a particular formation of ourselves could define ourselves. Because there *is* nothing that we truly are, which is to say, *"We truly are nothing."* This nothing, however, is not nothing at all, because, on the basis of the openness of emptiness of ourselves, we have the potential of experiencing so many different forms. All these forms are situationally evolved and valid in that context, but they do not speak to any truth that you can take out of that situation.

Pinning people down

For example, if you are in a relation with someone who often acts quite angry, we might ask them,

—*Why are you always angry?*

And of course, the person will reply,

—*I'm not always angry.*

—*Yes you are.*

—*Well, I'm getting pretty angry now. Why are you on my case all the time? No wonder I'm angry!*

Yes, they may have a tendency towards anger, but if someone tells them, '*You are an angry person,*' what does that mean? '*You have a tendency to be angry. You are often angry. I know something definite about you. You are definable. You are knowable. I know what you're up to.*' Mmm? Most of us would be quite angry if someone spoke like this to us. This is something we all have to work with: the contradiction, or the tension, between the open showing of ourselves, and the survival of the many narratives which can be applied to ourselves by ourselves and by others.

Actually this is what happens a lot to children, parents telling the child what it is. One of the functions of play for small children is to let them explore the full range of the possibilities of expressing themselves. However as they grow up the education systems train them into being somebody that can be known and evaluated, measured and described. We come to know that, '*I'm quite good at maths but I'm terrible at French*' and in that way, we take on a kind of profile, a particular shaping: '*This is how I am. Knowing this about me, there are some things I can do and some things I can't.*'

In psychotherapy people often discover that the beliefs they have developed about themselves are quite false. The person who is not good at French might be able to learn it if they went to live in France for a bit. They may still find learning the abstract rules of grammar rather difficult, but in a different situation, where the warmth of their personality can relate to other people, French comes alive in them. And so a knowledge that had been developed under certain circumstances—'*I'm terrible at French. I failed all the exams*'—becomes an enduring definition and an organising function in terms of the choices that the person makes. To say, '*I'm terrible at French,*' is a linguistic structure, with a semantic content. The structure of the grammar gives it an apparent solidity, as if a truth were being established, and the meaning of the words gives us the subtle shaping of what this truth is. It is, however, only a situational definition. Due to causes and circumstances, in different situations different definitions can arise.

Meditation helps

One of the functions of meditation is to allow ourselves to see that many of the thoughts that arise inside us and which appear to be true—because we have the habit of believing them—are actually just thoughts. The seeming truth of the thought is, in fact, just our merging. When a child says, '*I am Batman*' that's a belief. The belief allows them to run around and do different kinds of things and wear a Batman costume. It's the belief that makes it true, and it is true inside the belief. It's not true outside the belief.

In meditation, we come to see, '*Oh! I am very often wrapped up inside my beliefs.*' The belief has become the organising function which shapes our life. In fact the belief has no intrinsic truth. **We** make the belief true by believing it. How do we do that? We put our life energy into it, our libido, our prana, our chi. It's a kind of confidence. Even if the belief is what we might call a negative one—'*I believe that I'm stupid*'—it is true because I'm giving myself to it.

Now, [takes the water glass in his hands] I can pour water into the glass, and then when we look at it we can say there is water in the glass. The water is not the same as the glass. We can throw the water out and pour in orange juice instead. But when the water is in the glass, it's a glass of water.

'I am stupid.' Where is this being held? 'I know I'm stupid. I'm telling you about me.' It is as if the one who is telling this is like the glass and showing the contents, 'I am stupid. I look inside me, I remember school, difficulties in my life, losing my job; I know I'm stupid.' There is a complete fusion. All that I am, energetically, is fused into this belief. There's no observer. I'm not catching myself saying it and thinking, 'Is that really true?' It's being presented as a self-evident truth: 'This is what I am.'

The truth about us changes, moment by moment

'Now I'd really fancy a nice cup of tea.' The profound truth about myself is now displaced by the desire for a cup of tea! In the moment that it was arising, in the moment that there was a merging with it, its truth seemed total and eternal.

This is why in Buddhist practice, we look again and again at the impermanence of phenomena—the outer changing of the seasons and so on; changes in politics, economics; changes in our body and particular changes in our mind. Then I start to notice that I can make a whole series of defining statements about myself. And some of the things that I say with total conviction are contradictory to each other. How is this possible?

Because the self is empty and can be so filled with its content that nothing else can exist. And in that moment, there *is* nothing else. Just as if a child gets into a temper tantrum, it can't escape from the tantrum by itself. Sometimes we are merged in a situation but the light is still slightly on and so even in the moment when we are being very annoying to someone we love, we've got some sense that what we're up to is not so good, and so we can apologise. That is to say, our consciousness, or our conscious sense of self was not totally encapsulated inside the feeling tone which was allowing us to give our partner a bad time.

Having that gap where we can see what we're up to is the basis of ethics. That is to say, if we can see the context *while* we're experiencing an intense emotion, this felt sense of the context around us acts as a brake that stops us from getting fully lost in the emotion.

No barrier between self and other

The more awareness, the more attention we have to the environment, the more our behaviour can be in the service of the environment. The environment is where we live and so having good relations with the environment is very important. If you live in the city, this may not be so obvious but in the old days, if you lived in a village, you had to get on with everyone. If you wanted to build a barn, or gather in the harvest you needed the other villagers to help you. People helped each other, and therefore being available for the other is part of sociability and belonging. *'Fine, but what about me?' The welfare of all includes me. If we're all happy, I'll be happy, because I am part of the all. It's that simple.*

In Buddhism this is called the unification of wisdom and compassion. Wisdom is recognising the emptiness of the self, so that there's no barrier between the self and the other. And because of that, being for the other is not different from being for yourself because we experience other people, and how they are impacts us. If we alienate other people, we diminish ourselves. When we support other people, our own life is enriched. Nonduality is not an abstract, interpretive theory, but it describes the actuality of the co-emergence of self and other.

Our mind, as an aware presence, has no fixed or continuous content, and yet it's always here. So our mind is the presence of nothing. And this nothing is a plenum void; it's a full emptiness which is the showing of the richness of the environment, including ourselves. And within this fullness, this richness, moment by moment, we are the lived particularities of our manifesting—thousands and millions of unique moments of expression, none of which can define who we are.

Everything exists as the experience of the mind

In Buddhist theory, the openness of the mind is grounded in the infinite openness of what's called the dharmadhatu. Dharmadhatu means the domain or the space of all phenomena.

Everything is the experience of the mind. This doesn't mean that there are no things out there in the world; it means that we can never know whether there are things out in the world. In whatever direction you go towards the world, all you ever get is your experience. Your experience includes you. We don't have access to abstract phenomena. Even if someone were to say that a mathematical formula is true in itself, that might be fine for the twenty great mathematicians in the world who can understand it but for me, when I look at it, it's just marks on paper. That is my experience. The formula is not self-existently true, otherwise its truth would sing. In order to be able to access it, we have to have knowledge of many kinds of mathematical procedures. That is to say, what the mathematician may believe to be a fully established, proven truth, true in itself, exists in its fullness in the moment of its being accessed. And it's accessed on the basis of whether you have the intelligence and the training to access it. That is to say, it exists *as an experience*.

We don't meet objects; nor do we really meet subjects either. When you sit in deep meditation and you look for your own mind, you can't find anything reliable, because the mind keeps filling and emptying. But then when you look away from the subject towards the object and try to establish what the object really is, you find that every object has your mind connected to it! The world is the world as revealed to us. This depends on our nose, our eyes, our ears and so on. We know that dogs have a different sense of smell from us. We know that eagles have amazing vision. It's difficult for us even to imagine what it would be like to just fly in the sky. Maybe we sometimes have dreams like that, but actually we plod along on the earth. *[Laughter.]*

The world is experience, experience revealed through the particularities of our embodiment. That is to say, our sense of self is the middle territory, the middle way. The object as object, we never reach. The subject as subject, we can never find. But here we are, alive, breathing in and out. It's not so bad. Something's happening. Just this. We'll shortly come to an end. Then we go out into the evening. Lots of things are happening, the shadow of the light through the trees and so on. All of this. All of this. All of this. Delivered to us without effort. We *are* the revealing, or the unveiling of the world. *[Sound of birds cawing.]* We hear the birds outside. They're not in our world. They're in a world of flies and worms, a world of nests, a world of protecting their eggs against magpies and so on. Their concerns are not ours. It's another world for them. We have our world, they have theirs. Everything is changing. There is no stability.

We find ourselves at home in the flow

So, going back to the beginning of our reflections here, the anxiety arises,
 —where am I?
 —who am I?
 —what's happening?
 —what's the meaning of life?

We seek then to cling onto the familiar elements of the construction of our narrative of existence. This works for a bit; but it works because it *is* work; we have to keep constructing.

Meditation opens another possibility—that we come to relax and to trust, and that when we stop our clinging, when we stop our efforts to construct something stable, we find ourselves at home in the flow.

Through that we come to understand the five elements. It is not the earth element which is the base on which we stand and on which we build whatever we build in our life. No, the basis of our life is space—the ungraspable, indefinable and yet manifesting, spaciousness of our mind. This mind manifests as its potential, which is the energy of water, fire and wind; the richness of the many permutations which are possible. And each moment, is just *this*; the absolute precision of this moment: the fact that it cannot be anything else. This

is the earth element; it is form, it is shape, but devoid of any essential substance and therefore, it also offers nothing to hold onto.

Through the practice, we awaken to being grounded in space, to being at home in the ever-changing rhythms of water, fire and wind. The moment is not something to be held onto; there's no need for holding. The wave arises from the ocean; it has its shape, and it's gone! And this is our life, moment by moment by moment. It cannot be stabilised. We don't know what Mr. Putin is going to do. We don't know what European countries will do if many hundreds of thousands of immigrants set off in boats from Africa. We don't know what's going to happen with Greece. Mrs. Merkel seems determined to win. But what is winning?

The otherness of the other is the doorway to the potential of our selves

This is our world. It's very unstable. How would we make it stable? There is no way. That's not so terrible; it's just a fact. The question is about learning to swim, learning to move in the rhythms of life. Nothing is safe and secure. But if we want to be close to other people, we have to find ways of syncopating our rhythms, which means we have to be able to dance to other people's tunes. The otherness of the other is the doorway to the potential of our selves. If we choose never to connect with other people, we can spend our whole life just dancing to our own little tune. *'What else could I do? I'm just me being me.'* Then, after a while, we get sick, and we die. The life has been spent inside a cocoon.

We awaken to our spaciousness through meditation. We awaken to the richness of the world and our part in it through relaxation. We awaken into the fullness of the moment by being the field. Instead of imagining that I'm living in this skin bag, looking out at something else, trying to get from the world the things I want and keep away the things I don't want—relaxing as the field, the experience of what is around me and the experience of me as me have equal status, because they are experience. I look at you, I experience you. I experience my feet, the sensation. These are arising and passing experiences. That is to say, nondual compassion.

The easiest way to find attunement with other people, is to begin the wave of emergence in the unsplit, unseparated ocean, so that we experience co-emergence. As you are, I can become. As I am, you can become. We're both really in the moment. That is emerging together.

Because there's no power differential establishing this, there is an absence of violence. Violence is grounded in the individual, in the one who is apart, and who takes himself to be truly individual, indivisible: *'I have to protect the integrity of myself and therefore the fact that you can impact me is dangerous. So my agenda is to look after myself, and so I'm going to have to control what you do.'* This is the basis of violence—the separation of the individual, the monad, the atom, when in fact, it's a rippling together of wave patterns.

We must lose ourselves to find ourselves

This was a brief introduction to how the nature of the self is seen from the point of view of buddhism, in particular dzogchen. It's not that there is no self at all. Rather, there is no substantial, enduring self-content or self-definition. The self is the site of the showing of the energy of the dharmakaya, of the Buddha's mind.

The emptiness of the self is what allows it to be the expression of compassion. We probably know from our own experience that when we get into a situation where we become tight and self-defensive and separative in our notion of who we are, the less we are available for other people, the less we are interested in them as they are.

The teachings and practice show us how we have to lose ourselves to find ourselves. We lose ourselves as the anxious individual, a terrain which always needs protection, and we find ourselves as a moment of

participation, inseparable from the general field of experience. This brings the ending of grasping, the dissolving of fear, and the trust that, however the situation is, because we are part of it, we will find a way of inhabiting it.

Meditation is very useful for turning this into lived experience.

This is the end of my talk. Thank you very much.