

MEDITATION IN DAILY LIFE

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Excerpts

...Maybe you meet someone and you fall in love. You think they are very nice; your friends, however, are not so sure. You tell them: *'You just don't understand. You don't know this person the way I do.'* But then after some months you think: *'Whatever did I see in this person?'* In fact we never did see the person. We used them as a hook onto which we could hang all our fantasies and longings and loneliness and so on. This is the power of the imagination: we get caught by an idea. We are taken in by it and when we are inside that bubble we experience one quality of existence. Each bubble that we get into has its own logic and everything makes sense inside that bubble and then — Pop! — it is gone. We are surprised. We did not go from reality to fantasy. We did not go anywhere else. We were here in our body and yet at the same time we were lost. We were both here and not here...

... Many religions have the idea of lostness as being displacement from the good place, from the Garden of Eden or wherever. However when we get lost we do not vanish to another place. We are lost exactly where we are. This is very important because it means that it is not about going on a spiritual journey; it's not about going somewhere else. Rather, it is about being attentive to where we are...

... Life is happening. We don't know why, we don't know what to do with it. Let's just stay with that. If we are open to the happenstance of life we will find ourselves being moved in ways we didn't expect. And then we will find ourselves becoming something we didn't expect...

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PSYCHOLOGICAL, BUDDHIST AND DZOGCHEN APPROACHES TO THE MIND

Although we all have a mind the actual nature of our mind is not very clear to us. We have many thoughts, feelings and sensations... all the experiences coming in through our senses. Also our lives are quite busy and in the many things to do we tilt ourselves towards what is outside of us, to the past and to the future. To attend to what is exactly here in the moment is more difficult. Just being with ourselves and finding out what that means requires a gentle untying of knots that bind us into unnecessary activity.

Buddhism is very big field, with many different methods. The reason there are so many methods is because people have imagination. For example, looking outside we see many different kinds of motorcars, many different shapes of buildings, many ways to dress or do our hair.

In the field of psychology and psychotherapy there are also many different models. Why? Because people imagine different things. Freud looked in one direction, Jung looked in another. It seems as if everybody looks in their own direction and then writes a little book and sets up a training. Tibetan buddhism is the same; it has many lineages of teaching and often these start with somebody having a vision or a dream and on this basis they establish something. A few people then get interested and start to maintain this as something important. In this way a new lineage comes into being.

Imagination can be said to have two functions, or two directions. One establishes all the complexity of worldly life and the other establishes the possibilities of a pure spiritual existence. Both are composed of ideas. This is important to understand. The quality of ideas may be interesting but for meditators the most important thing is the *nature* of the idea. What is an idea? Ideas catch us. We lose ourselves in them. The ideas can be linked together in chains, in narratives, like in films or novels. When you start to read a novel, if it's good, you fall into it. The more you give your attention and your emotional resonance to the characters in the book, the more the characters come alive. However even if the book is very good, when you are depressed or agitated or worried about something, you can't quite get into the book and so it doesn't come alive for us. This is something we all know.

Losing yourself in something is very interesting. Losing yourself in a film is quite safe; losing yourself in someone else, such as when you fall in love, is much more dangerous. We can lose ourselves in our work, or in various forms of identity. We might try different sorts of jobs and even think, *'Ah, now I have found what I really want to do'*, but then after some time it may not seem so interesting. In buddhism this is explored in terms of attachment and by that is meant not just attachment to a possession, to a thing which is outside ourselves, but attachment to a sense of self, to a sense of the world around us with its different people and different possibilities.

Day by day, moment by moment, we have progressed through our lives by making choices. For some reason we decided to come here, to come to Tenerife, and to understand a bit more about meditation. Many people didn't make that decision. They want to do other things, maybe to play or watch football. Football seems very shiny to them but meditation does not. Is there anything in this world that is truly shining in itself? If the quality is in the object we as subjects will all be drawn towards it. But as far as we know no such object exists. So it's quite difficult for us to identify what is valuable out there. Generally if we like *this* then we don't like *that*. That is to say, we develop as people by making choices which define our sense of self. This means that the reason I am me is because I have chosen that many possibilities are not me.

In the front of our hotel there were groups of people who had come to play golf. These people have brought a variety of sticks will use them to try to put a little ball in a hole in the ground. They will spend a lot of money going to different places to try to put this same ball into different holes in the ground. If you are very good at putting a ball in a hole you can make a lot of money. This is the nature of the imagination. That is to say, our creative potential as human beings can be poured into any kind of activity, good or bad. Some people invent new kinds of torture and other people invent new kinds of heart operations to save lives. It all is the quality of our mind, our energy, which can be directed in many different ways.

In the dzogchen tradition of buddhism we are looking to experience directly the ground or the basis from which the energy of the mind moves. Yes, there are many kinds of manifestation and yes, you can spend your life making selections among these different kinds of manifestation. In dzogchen, however, what we want to do is to look at the **ground** of the manifestation, at what it comes from. This ground is not far away. In fact, it is the basis of our existence but because it is so rich, because it is so generous in its potential, it shows many different forms and we become hypnotised by all the potential that we see. There is always something new to be excited about. If the value of the euro goes up, people get excited; when it goes down they get excited. If you get a job you get excited; if you lose your job you get excited.

MEDITATION PRACTICE: SHAMATA — CALMING THE MIND

Turbulence is everywhere, all the time. Because of this, we need the focus of meditation to open a space and see what is there. It's not that we have to create something new — there is enough stuff already. What we want to find is the space and the awareness which is foundational.

The first thing we do is focus on calming the mind. That is to say, we practice allowing things which seem very important to become unimportant.

Just as you might walk about in a big city looking in the windows of the shops and letting your attention be taken this way and that way, in the same way our mind is showing many different thoughts and memories and hopes and fears. We go this way and that, taken in the different directions. It seems a kind of freedom to follow our own thoughts, and say, *'This is what I am interested in.'* It is one way of defining ourselves but actually we don't have much choice. We tend to have habitual patterns to our thoughts, some themes that we keep getting caught up in. When we are sitting our minds run over familiar things and we might say, *'Well, I'm just sitting here, having some thoughts. I'm thinking about something.'* Actually, I am not consciously thinking. The thought arrives and I take it to be **my** thought. None of us knows what we are going to be thinking about in five minutes time. It's not like phoning for a take-away pizza to be delivered — something comes and you accept it. You are not making a choice. You are agreeing to hang out with what has already arrived. Most of the time this is invisible to us because we just keep doing it.

Once we start to meditate, we often notice that our mind seems more agitated than usual. Of course it's not that meditation agitates the mind; it's that by calming ourselves we see how agitated we normally are. This then is something we have to get through, to keep a clarity of intentional focus that will protect us from being pulled this way and that.

The initial meditation we practise is called *shamata*, in Tibetan *shiné*, which means 'staying peacefully.' Staying peacefully means not responding to the hooks and invitations that the various thoughts, feelings

and sensations provide. We do this by focussing our mind on something very simple, because when the mind is focussed it seals itself in its absorption.

If you spend time with children who are into Xboxes or computer games you will know that it is very difficult to interrupt their game. You say, *'Food is ready!'* They don't come. *'Food is on the table. Come! Eat!'* They don't even hear because the mind is already focussed. Unfortunately it is focussed on nonsense. If the same quality of attention could be given to their homework then the parents would be really happy. What is interesting in that is that fully focussed attention is a kind of protected area; nothing much else is coming in.

This focussed attention is exactly what we want to develop in our meditation practice. The quality of focus becomes in and of itself a protection against distraction. We do this by focussing on something simple. Very often it is the experience of the sensation of the breath at the end of the nostrils. The sensation is quite subtle. It only reveals itself if we focus our attention on it. It is easy to get lost and whenever we find that the mind wanders off onto something else, we gently bring it back onto that focus. Very gently, because if we blame ourselves, if we say, *'I'm stupid. I can't do this'* or *'Why did that happen?'* or *'What was I interested in?'* then any such questions will just create turbulence.

You can also focus your attention on a simple external object, perhaps a pebble from the beach or a smooth round stone. Have it about two arms' length in front of you. Just let your gaze rest on it. There is nothing you need to find out about the stone. The fact that it is boring is very helpful because you are simply resting your attention on the object. You are not thinking about it, but you are using it as a kind of anchor to let the attention settle.

This is an important distinction, because usually we give our attention to things which we like and which seem important; we take our attention away from things we don't like. In that situation it is the quality of the object which determines the quality of the attention. The position of power seems to be outside ourselves. When we do this *shamata* practice we are taking this power, this attention, as inside ourselves. *I* decide to focus my mind. And so if the object is boring — like the breath, which is not very interesting, just going in and out — this can be very helpful because it is bringing the centre of our life back into ourselves.

Now let's do this practice. We sit in a comfortable way. We want the weight to be passing down through our skeleton, through the spine, so that the bone structure is supporting the weight and the muscles can then relax. We want to be relaxed **and** focussed. We are not straining and struggling because then you get tension. You can sit with your hands in the lap or on the knees, shoulders open and dropped, the chin is slightly down, the gaze is running down the line of the nose. We are not staring at anything in particular; it's just a relaxed, open gaze. The lips are slightly open and the tongue is resting on the upper palate. Now we can maybe focus on the breath. We can make a simple intention: *'I'm going to focus my attention on the sensation of the breath going in and out of my nostrils. For the purposes of the meditation nothing else that occurs is important. I am deciding that only this is important and so I am focussing my full attention on it.'*

If you find that your mind wanders off just very gently bring it back to the focus. We will do this for about half an hour. Are there any questions before we begin? Okay, let's start.

[Meditation practice]

We will return to this practice from time to time over the weekend and build on it.

EXPERIENCING THE WORLD PRIOR TO OUR CONCEPTS ABOUT IT

The buddha's teaching is often referred to as the 'Middle Way'. That is to say, we don't merge into the object, getting lost or caught up in what is there, but at the same time we don't want to hold ourselves rigidly inside and disconnect from what is out there. So we want to be loose, relaxed and connected, so that moment by moment you balance and re-balance, balancing as if you are riding a bicycle on bumpy land. So some degree of control is required, but not too tight or too loose. So the key thing we are trying to maintain is a sense of attending to what is occurring.

In the world new arisings occur all the time. If you sit down in the restaurant, people will come in, they go out, the waiters go by and so on. You can be aware of each thing that is happening. What we don't do is apply extra mental energy, such as judgement. Judgement involves comparing and contrasting, extrapolating, taking certain features out of the lived situation and then comparing them with something else.

For example, you are eating an apple. You put it in your mouth and it reveals its quality to you. You might find it very dry, or tough. That is what you experience. It's quite difficult, however, for us to keep it at that since we may well go on to say, *'This is not a very good apple. I have tasted much better apples. In fact this is not my favourite kind of apple.'* In that way we elaborate many thoughts about the apple, and the more thoughts we have the more we abandon the apple as it is: dry, tough. It's not juicy and fresh. This is what a dry apple is like.

If we open ourselves to it we have this experience. We are here with this experience. But if we bring in a judgement, it acts as a kind of wedge which separates us from what is happening. There is the sensation in your mouth: this is actual, this is what you have. But your thoughts about it don't let you find out what it is. Our own judgements are the main cause of our alienation.

If you take the concept out of whatever is there then something is there! What is it? The only way to find out is to become empty and allow the object to show itself to you. Otherwise we take our thoughts, which are based on the past, and we push the past onto the present, so the present—even if it's coming towards us—is being framed inside our concepts of the past. This gives us a sense of mastery, of knowing what is what, but actually it makes everything stale since our knowledge has gone ahead of our experience. So, if we want the world to be fresh we have to take our assumptions, our judgements, our knowledge and let them sit on the back shelf and let the world show itself first.

Our modern world is very phallic, very thrusting, masculine. People are all very busy making their mark and pushing themselves into the world. The function of meditation is to help us to be more passive-receptive. We have these two aspects of our existence: wisdom and compassion. Wisdom is to really see things as they are, which means we have to allow everything to show itself, not tell it what it is. We also have energy which can move out into the world in terms of compassion and connectivity and relating. With wisdom and compassion, we are relating now to what is there. We are not relating to something in ourselves.

In my experience most people, when they talk, are talking to themselves. I sit in my consulting room as a psychotherapist and I'm there, but people are not talking to **me**. They are talking to some fantasy figure.

One can describe this as transference, there are many different names for it, but actually we are pre-occupied with our own story. Tumbling inside this story we don't really notice who is the other person. The therapy starts to take off when the patient sees, *'Oh, James, you are in the room with me!'* Now we can have a conversation. When the conversation begins the patient starts to learn to do something new but as long as they are trapped inside a monologue of the self, they are just filling the space with a reproduction of their own structure.

This is what we want to interrupt through meditation practice: the self-intoxication of our own discourse. Then something more fresh, more alive, more in this moment, can be present for us.

There are two main lines of thinking about where things come from. There is a horizontal line which says that according to what happened in the past, forms and manifestations are happening in the present and these will have consequences in the future.

For example, some religions say that a god made the world. There wasn't a world before and god said decided to make a world. We now find ourselves living in something which has a long history and each generation can't escape that history. Christianity developed the idea of 'original sin' and then with Jesus coming, this is washed away. You can be reborn, have a new beginning. The parallels with buddhism are interesting. we see in buddhism there are many parallels. So Jesus comes from God, god is this big, overarching, unchanging God, and we are trapped in history. Then when Jesus comes from God he cuts into this line of history and says: *'If you accept me, now, today, you are free.'* That is to say, no matter how much sin or badness or rubbish or bad habits you have, it can be washed away in one minute. Jesus is a bridge that links the purity of God with the fallen human beings. The fallen human being has come from God but because the fallen being, that is to say, us, has come from god originally, to be reconnected with God is no problem.

What we are describing here is an experience of getting lost. The old-testament story, the Jewish story, is very interesting, because Adam and Eve had everything but there was one thing they were not to have. You can go here, there, everywhere and enjoy everything you want however this one forbidden thing becomes extremely interesting. In the Bible account Eve forgets everything in order to get the one special thing. That's the beginning of the problem: abandoning everything to get the one special thing.


Why, if you have everything why would one little thing be so special? The topic is explored also in the story of Bluebeard's Castle where the young wife is told: *'My dear, everything that is mine is yours. Except this room. Don't go in the room!'* Here too the forbidden becomes more and more attractive.

The story of the forbidden object is alluding to duality. It has created a separation in the big circle, the infinite circle of everything, to set something apart. Many cultures have these creation myths which often are created around the story of the forbidden, or the trickster.

The Greek tradition has Hermes who is the bridge or the communicator between the gods and earth. He is very good at lying and cheating. He is a thief too and clever. He can even tricks the gods. Once he stole the cows from Apollo and he got the cows to walk backwards so that the gods could not work out where the cows had come from or gone to. The trickster figure in mythology points to the falsity of the division between the rational and the irrational.

CONTROLLING LESS, EXPERIENCING MORE

That is how we simplify our world. We say, *'These people are sane, normal, rational. And these other people are crazy, mad.'*

But, of course, each sane person is a bit mad and each mad person is a bit sane. In China they have the black and the white yin-yang symbol , where each has a dot of the other in the centre. Any idea one has that one can completely separate the good from the bad, the right from the wrong and so on is a fantasy of control. We think that if we can name something precisely we can then allocate it to its 'proper' category and that we will then know where we are. When things don't fit in a category we are surprised. For example, there is no essence of good or bad in a person. Each person has a big potential and due to causes and conditions this potential is activated in different directions. When things go well, people can be very sweet. When difficulties arise, people can become more selfish and unpleasant. This is a central understanding in buddhism: there is no true essence or nature or personality in any person. Due to the interaction of many different causes and conditions various things will occur.

For example, I have just heard that a university friend of mine died the other day. He had been a yoga teacher and was very, very healthy. I am not very healthy and I am still alive. We have all kinds of fantasies: if I do more yoga or go running every morning or become vegetarian or only eat fruit then I will live a long time and be happy. But nobody knows why we live or why we die. The doctor can do a post-mortem afterwards and cut open the body and say that it was the heart or the liver. However some people with a bad liver live a long, long time and others die very quickly. There are many vectors operating through our lives.

All this creates an anxiety. How can we know what to do? We do want to have a long, happy life so should we sacrifice a great bull to the gods and burn their intestines on the sacred fire? Or should we give our money to the poor? What shall we do? We don't know what to do. Many people tell us to do this or do that, or that this new diet is really good... Life is happening. We don't know why, we don't know what to do with it. Let's just stay with that. If we are open to the happenstance of life we will find ourselves being moved in ways we didn't expect. And then we will find ourselves becoming something we didn't expect.

Usually we resist this because we have some fear. *'But I am me! I couldn't do that! It's okay for **you** to do it because you are you. But I am me.'* We may get out some old photographs of ourselves as children. When you were five there were probably things you didn't like to eat and little soft toys you had to have in your bed to help you go to sleep. There were things which were necessary then and things which were impossible. Now we don't live that way. We went through a limit. When we look back in our life we have gone through limit after limit after limit; been reborn every year. Like a snake getting rid of its old skin we go into a new life, yet somehow we are still here. We have got a few scars, a few old cuts and so on, but we survive.

So maybe we can find our way. Maybe we have always been finding our way. Maybe we were never in charge. Maybe we give ourselves extra anxiety because we imagine that we should be in charge, although we have never really been in charge. What we do is respond.

In some Indian traditions the so-called teacher will never teach because 'they have nothing to teach'. But if somebody asks them a question they say something. The reason for their speaking is the other person. They don't need to speak for themselves but they respond to whatever comes.

The structure of most buddhist monastic teaching is organised and has a syllabus. If you do **this**, then **that** will happen. In Europe, in the past they said you should study hard and then go to university, get a degree and then you will get a job. Nowadays however you may not get a job but at least you know how to enjoy your unemployment status better! In Tibet, if a young lama studied hard he might become head of the monastery and then along come the Chinese—but he did have more opportunity to survive as a refugee. Even the Dalai Lama is a refugee.

We don't have the power to control and we all have this childlike fantasy that someone somewhere will rescue us. Every religion has special methods, prayers, austerities and offerings that you can do that will rescue something. When I was first learning Tibetan and went to Tibetan festivals, I would often buy books and take them back to my teacher and ask him to tell me what I had bought. Because I didn't know. I showed him one of the books and he said, *"This is very good for you because this is the book to be a successful village lama. It has special mantras for finding a lost cow."* We all want the holy person to have gained something. If they have done all this mediation for all these years what have they got? But maybe what we get is less rather than more. Less anxiety, less stress, less habitual loss in thought-formations, fewer hopes and fears...

That is a real freedom! That's the freedom that everybody can have. It is not about magical power over the world but the possibility of being present in the world as it comes. None of us knows what will happen. You can suddenly be in a car crash and be in a wheelchair. You can have a stroke and for the rest of your life someone else will be wiping your ass. You might think that would be too humiliating and you would prefer to have died but if it happens you might be glad just to be alive. We can't know how we will respond to tragedy. When the new situation comes, we may be re-configured in a different pattern. When you look through a kaleidoscope you see a pattern and if your hand doesn't shake the pattern stays stable but you turn it a little bit—the pattern is gone.

Our character is like that. Certain factors come together in particular constellations or shapings but events can easily rearrange that.

This would indicate that although we can apply all our knowledge in preparation for an imagined situation, we have no guarantee. The farmer ploughs the field and plants seeds in good faith and with hope but he does not control the rain, the storm, the diseases, the insects. Anyway, this is how we have to live. If you are a farmer, you have to plant. You have to act as if your plan will work out well, even although you know it may not. The life of the farmer is a projection through time, whilst planting the seed you are envisaging the harvest.

However through meditation we focus our attention more on the present moment. We shift the paradigm we operate in. Instead of thinking, *'If only I can improve my map, my plan, the predictive power of my computer modelling, then my life will be good'*, the issue is to be **here**: to be relaxed, open to the situation, open to one's potential, relaxing the tendency to judge, the tendency to objectify, to make things very solid, and to work with the capacity we have in the moment and the potential of the situation, the circumstances as they present themselves in the moment.

When I was in the plane, there was a little boy of three sitting behind me, and he liked talking and talking. He was driving his mother crazy. And then he started singing songs he was making up: *'I am the plane, I am the sea, look at me, I am the plane...'* It was very sweet. This little boy was becoming the king of the world in his imagination and then when the mother says, *'Shhhh'* he was completely indignant. *'Why should I not sing!'* Being with children is so very helpful because it shows us, in a natural

intoxication, how they get carried into fantasies which have no relation to the environment around them. In the same way we get locked in our fantasies, our hopes, fears, plans...

It is the activity of our own mind which hides the nature of our mind from ourselves: because we learn to tell stories. When we come here we meet some people we haven't met before and we ask them where they come from, what do they do... We encourage each other to start to tell these stories about our life. I am here and I tell you that I am from London. Saying '*I'm from London*' doesn't add anything to being here with you. You might have been in London once so when I say 'London' you imagine **your** London, the London of your experience. But that's maybe not **my** London. And so the word 'London' — '*Oh, I have been there, too!*'— doesn't bring us together, it actually puts us more in our separate worlds. Usually it is through non-verbal activity that we find each other; we look in someone's eyes or we walk with them and our step is in rhythm or we stop and look at the sunset together. You are **in** it. You are not thinking **about** it.

So the function of meditation is to help us recognise how we lose ourselves. We lose ourselves in the story about ourselves, regardless of whether we are telling the story or someone else is telling the story.

ARE THERE ANY QUESTIONS?

Question:

We project an idea about where we want to be or not want to be. We need an answer to everything we do, to keep on doing things, to keep practising. Normally we don't know how much effort we must put into it or **not** put into it. For me it's pretty difficult because I try my best but sometimes the result is not what I want. Then I do more practice and stay more calm in response to the new situation. But in my mind there resists this thing: how much force do I have to do?

James:

Buddhism has many answers for this question. For example, in the general *mahayana* tradition, which is based on compassion and the understanding of emptiness, we take the *bodhisattva* vow saying: '*From this day on, in this life and all my future lives I will work for the benefit of others.*' Having made this vow then everything you do has to be in connection with that. You clean your teeth for the sake of others. You put on your shoes for the sake of others. The overarching organising principle is to be for the other. Inside that, when you get a moment of individual ambition such as '*I really want to be able to do this well, so I am going to try hard*' then the question comes: Why do I want to do it? What is it for? If I want to help all beings, what does this one little success guarantee?

We are lucky people; sometimes we win and sometimes we lose. For example, yesterday I was in my room in the hospital for the last time. I have now retired. The room is completely empty; there is not one thing in it. When I left I took my name and my job title off the door. I had been in that hospital setting for over twenty years. I did many, many things there; I ran courses, worked in different clinics and so on. Now it's gone. There is not a trace. It has all dissolved in time.

We build things up and they go down again. All life is just children building sandcastles on the edge of the sea. What gives a deep meaning, however, is the intention: may it help all beings. When I stand in the queue in the airport to get on the plane, it's for the sake of all beings. When someone is pushing in

front of us and we think: *'Yes, may you get enlightened before me.'* — because the alternative version is: *'You fucking asshole!'*

'You fucking asshole' makes me angry and small and 'May you be enlightened before me' makes me big. Compassion dissolves everything into emptiness. If you wish good for other people there is no grasping. Then you really see that the moment is always dissolving. It's always dissolving.

In Britain we sometimes hear very sad stories on the radio. Once they interviewed the mother of British soldiers who died in Afghanistan. In Helmand, the area of Afghanistan where the Taliban and the British were fighting, the Taliban are back in control and the mother was asking: *'What did my son die for?'*

It's the same in Iraq. What did they die for? The politicians put out a big shiny idea: *'We will defeat the enemy! This will mean an end to terror. There are only two kind of people: good people and terrorists. We are going to kill all the terrorists and then all the good people will be happy.'* However when we tried to kill the terrorists, because they don't have it on their forehead, we killed other people as well.

The Greeks had a myth about this. When you cut off the head of the monster, the dragon, every drop of blood becomes another dragon, another monster. This is why the notion of victory is very dangerous to us, since it is based on splitting and separation. Asian spiritual traditions all agree that the cause of all our problem is splitting and separation. We will never solve splitting and separation by doing more and more of it. So all these thoughts that we have about good/bad, right/wrong, friends/enemies... just letting them dissolve again and again.

THE VIEW: OUR MIND EMPTY AND PURE FROM THE VERY BEGINNING

In the Tibetan buddhist system the teaching is organised in terms of four factors: the view; the meditation; the activity and the result. The view means our way of seeing the world. The Sanskrit word for it is *drishti* which also means seeing. It presents us with the question: can we trust our own eyes? We think that we see clearly but most of the time we are mixing perception and cognition together. These cognitions or thoughts are not rational and well thought out; they are often more in the form of assumptions.

Regarding the view, we look through another lens: we are used to being ourselves and in order to function in the world we have to trust that our vision is reasonable. If we start mistrusting our own sense of the world then we can become paralysed. However we know that people's sense of the world can be misplaced.

...Maybe you meet someone and you fall in love. You think they are very nice, however your friends are not so sure. You tell them: *'You don't understand. You don't know the person the way I do.'* But then after some months you think: *'Whatever did I see in this person?'* In fact we never did see the person. We used them as a hook onto which we could project all our fantasies and longings and loneliness and so on. This is the power of the imagination. We get caught by an idea. We are taken in by it and when we are inside that bubble we experience one quality of existence. Each bubble that we get into has its own logic and everything makes sense inside that bubble and then — Pop! — it is gone. We are surprised. We did not go from reality to fantasy. We did not go anywhere else. We were here in our body and yet at the same time we were lost. We were both here and not here...

Many religions have the idea of lostness as being displacement from the good place, from the Garden of Eden or wherever. However when we get lost we do not vanish to another place. We are lost exactly where we are. This is very important because it means that it is not about going on a spiritual journey, it's not about going somewhere else, rather, it is about being attentive to where we are.

The truth is not somewhere else. It is right here, but we don't see it because we are caught up in something else. And this is really what we have to explore, both 'What is this actual state that we are in?' and 'What is the process of being lost where we are?'

In the tradition the description of how things are is that from the very beginning our mind has been pure. 'Pure' here means always fresh, not growing old. And it is naked, it doesn't get covered. Clearly when we look at our own mind as we understand it, it is not very fresh and it is very covered. That is to say we are caught up in habitual thoughts, feelings, memories, hopes and so on. There is a real paradox here because these contents of our mind are what we rely on, what we build our own world out of, and yet they are transient. They are changing moment by moment.

Maybe you remember at school or university when you had an exam. You sat in a big hall at your little desk. Then the examiner said: '*You can turn the question paper over now and you have three hours.*' Then you have to try to pour the contents of your mind down through your arm onto the paper, as if you were filling up a car tank with petrol. If you do well, they say you know a lot but two months after the exam you have forgotten everything. So this is amazing.

Actually we don't have a tank of knowledge or information inside us. But under certain conditions knowledge comes together in patterns and we relate to the world in that way. Think of an old-fashioned hourglass or egg timer. Our senses and our mind are like this narrow point and all these experiences are slowly pouring through one by one by one and making a big pile. And it is only in this narrow point when we are in touch with the experience, that it is alive.

These building blocks out of which we construct our sense of self are not very substantial. We do not have agreed opinions about very much in this world. Take General Franco, people have very different opinions. You will still find people who believe he was the saviour of Spain while others believe he destroyed Spain. So what is the real truth? It depends on what you believe. Our breakfast this morning was a buffet and this world is like a buffet. According to our interests, our habits, our appetite, we select things and create patterns and believe: '*Oh, this is how the world is.*'

Does the sum of the contents constitute the mind? If you add up all the thoughts, feelings and sensations, would that create the truth of your existence? From the buddhist point of view that would be impossible and anyway it would be just another illusion. We are sitting here together now and moment by moment we are in the passage of time. When we are here, present, something is happening. Who does it happen to? It seems to happen to 'me'. Each of us can say: '*I am having my own experience. My experience is like this.*' When this experience vanishes, does the 'I' remain?

Moment by moment we can say: '*I am here, I am here, I am here.....I taste this, it looks like this... for me.*' The capacity that we have to identify with what is happening in the moment rests in the emptiness of the first person singular. For example, when I came into this dining room I was hungry. Then I started to

eat and I became less hungry. Then I was not hungry at all. So in a short period of time I was hungry and then I was not hungry. How is this possible? Because if it were true – *'I am hungry'* – why is this not an eternal truth? It is a transient situational experience and yet when you **are** hungry, you are hungry; and it fills your world. If you need to have a pee, you really need to have a pee, however somebody starts to tell you an interesting bit of gossip and your ear is getting bigger. *'Wait a minute, I have to go to the toilet.'* This is our state. We are filled by these experiences. Then you have a pee – and now you can hear the story. It is the emptiness of the self which allows the self to have everything.

If you read buddhist books they often talk about there being no self. What this means is that there is no fixed, substantial content to our self. Of course, we get used to telling a story about ourselves. We all have constructed narratives to give the sense of a coherent identity for ourselves but these stories are built out of concepts, out of abstractions, not out of experience.

I may say: *'I am Scottish. I have always been Scottish. This is a continuing feature of my identity.'* but I don't live in Scotland. I don't even want to live in Scotland. I like whisky and haggis, but that's all. So what is my Scottish-ness? *'Oh, but I am Scottish!'*

There is nothing there, but it is something which is nothing. *'Oh, I used to live in India.'* Some memories arise – it is nothing.

THE MIRROR AS AN EXAMPLE FOR EMPTINESS

Identity is shadow, echo, fantasy. What we have moment by moment is just this and the reason we get 'just this' is because we are empty. The traditional example for this is the mirror. The mirror, when you turn it around, will show reflections of everything which is in front of it. But if you look into the mirror, even if you have a magnifying glass, you will not see the mirror itself. The mirror shows reflections, reflections of something else. To express that another way: the mirror shows its capacity for reflecting its creativity, its expressive power; it doesn't show itself. It is the emptiness of the mirror which allows it to show so many images. Effortlessly filling and effortlessly emptying.

If you are driving in a car you have to check your mirror. When you go on a long journey many, many, many reflections are arising and passing in the mirror. At a certain point you have to stop and get more petrol. You fill up the petrol tank, you maybe you check the water, the tyres. To you then connect to the 'mirror machine'? To the big vacuum cleaner that sucks all the old reflections out of the mirror? No, this is not necessary because the mirror does not fill up. The mirror is always full and always empty at the same time. When the petrol tank is full, it is full. When the petrol tank is empty, it is empty. These are opposites. The mirror however is full and empty together at the same time.

One reflection goes, but another has already come. This is like our mind. Something is always happening. Sometimes we are very aware of sensation in the body, sometimes thoughts, feelings, perceptions, sounds... all kinds of different experiences happen. Coming and going, experience is always transient. So, we are in time and in fact our mind, as awareness, is time itself. We step out of time when we step into concepts.

I am sitting here – this is it, this is all there is. Life is unfolding. Each of us is right at the centre. Then a thought comes: *'Oh, tomorrow I will go on the plane back to London.'* But before I get on the plane I have already got on the thought. To get on the plane I have to go to the airport. To get on the thought of

going on the plane, I can just sit here. Now I think: *'I have to get on the plane, so I need to do my online check-in, I can do that at lunchtime...'* One thought, one thought, one thought... I haven't gone anywhere yet, but in a sense I am not really here either.

This is what we each have to explore for ourselves. What is this experience of being caught up in a thought? When we are in that bubble we are forgetful of everything else. But the bubble is not separate. When you are a child and you blow bubbles and they float in the air, the air inside the bubble and the air outside the bubble is the same, with a thin film around them. The inside of the bubble is like the mirroring surface. If we are swimming under the sea then with the angle of the light you can look up and see a mirrored surface. There is no real barrier, but you can't see through it. You are in your thought, you have gone off on a journey, but you are here. The thought took you nowhere. And yet you were not here. It is the very purity of the mind, the openness of the mind, that allows this.

BEING FRESH INSTEAD OF BEING ASLEEP IN OUR LIVES

In the dzogchen tradition they say there is one ground and two paths. The one ground is awareness or presence, our being here. We can be present in our presence or we can be absent in our presence. When we are absent to it, it is still there.

When you are a child, as you get older you get weekend homework to do. You don't do it on the Friday, because it's Friday night. Why would you do it on Saturday? Saturday is for fun. Somehow it is now Sunday night and the homework time has arrived. The homework was there the whole weekend, fully available. But only when you suddenly come in contact with it do you think: *'Oh my god, I have left it too late.'*

This is our capacity to disregard ourselves. For example, nowadays lots of people do yoga and tai chi and so on and through this they find a sense of embodiment. People do some exercises and a bit of breathing and they think: *'Wow, I am really in my body!'* They are coming to be where they always have been. They had nowhere else to go. If you lose the body, well you are no longer alive. Through the body you can explore when you forget your body. You might be caught up in watching a great movie and it is as if the body is not there. However the basis for being able to watch the movie is having a body.

That is to say, the experience, which is all that we have, can be integrated in the field, or can be operating in the field together with forgetfulness of the field.

For example, we are sitting in this room and there are many, many things here in this room. This room is the field of our communication. But when we focus in to our task, this one small part of the room becomes the focus of attention. The rest recedes yet it is still there. If it weren't there this would be very strange. We take it for granted and on the basis of that, we ignore it. We then lose the context. This is the nature of ignorance.

When I was a child, at the weekend we would sit and have a longer family meal and at the end, before we broke up, my father would often say to my brother and me: *'Do you know this woman? This is your mother. Your mother has cooked the food. She went to the shops and carried it from the shops. She peeled the potatoes, put out all the plates... While she was doing this you were playing. Now you want to go and play again. I notice that you didn't thank your mother. I notice you didn't even want to take your*

plate into the kitchen and also that you haven't offered to wash the dishes. So may I remind you – this is your mother.'

It is like that because for children the mother is like the floor and the wallpaper; just something there that does things. And the mother is our second memory: *'Mum, where are my socks, where are my shoes?'*

These kinds of lessons we get in childhood are very important because they show how we live in our bubble or in our little tunnel vision. I watched my mother cook many things. Later, when I was about eighteen, I used to say to her: *'Mum, how do you do that?'* She said: *'You've watched me a thousand times cooking!'* *'But how do you do it?'* It is so interesting: you see, but it does not register. We are there, but asleep at the same time.

This is what meditation is about, to become more awake. Not to fall asleep in our lives. Not to rest inside assumptions and imagine that what we know is what there is. Not to be an observer, since actually we are participants. The world that we get is the world we engage with.

Our attention can be very finely focussed or it can be relaxed and be panoramic. There is no essential division between these two. We can move from one to the other. The detail is there while we have the panoramic vision and the panoramic vision is still there when we have a precise focus.

That is to say, when we relax and open to the field of experience, we encounter the enormous complexity of our existence and we have two choices. We can find a way to relax and open and respond, trusting our creativity will arise in the moment. Or we can decide to simplify, to control, to manage, to shape and impose order on the situation.

This second choice buddhism calls *samsara*, where we burden ourselves with the huge responsibility of making sense of the world. New events are always occurring. What shall we do? What would be the right thing? How can I be sure I am not going to make a mistake?

There is no way to know but if you relax, if you stay open and connected, then you have the optimal receptivity of all that is here and you respond into that as part of it. You are participating in the unfolding field.

This is the meaning of non-duality. There is no real difference between subject and object, or between people. We are not homogenised into one mind, but neither are we just little isolated entities floating around, not knowing anything. For example, when trainees are learning about psychotherapy they read lots of books and have many ideas. Then they sit in the room with someone and try to work out what is going on. Then they come to supervision and often it goes:

—*What should I say?*

—*I don't know what you should say, I am not in the room.*

—*But you are the supervisor. You must know!*

—*No. You will find out what to say.*

—*But how?*

The answer is always: do not think too much; because if you sit in your own anxious thoughts they will become a barrier to the connection that allows you to speak from the heart.

It is very interesting that psychotherapists make their money by talking. Of course it is not an 'ordinary' conversation, it is a 'professional' conversation, and so you need to read many, many, many books and learn many things, and you have to write papers and present them to learned academies and so on. All of this is done simply to allow you to charge money. That is the only reason, because when someone comes into the room you don't know what to do! Knowing what to do is a kind of violence. There are many violent invasive forms of psychotherapy.

Conversation works when you trust that by not knowing something will arrive. Because we want it to be fresh. If you go to supervision you talk about previous sessions. You may get some idea about what to do in the next session. But then the patient arrives with some new experience. You can't force-feed them what you planned to say. So you let them show you the ingredients, the new events that have happened and so on, and together you find a way to cook it – not on the basis of a particular recipe, but on the basis of the ingredients.

MOVING PATTERNS OF ENERGY

In the clinic I might see someone who says.

—*I am depressed.*

—*How long have you been depressed?*

—*I have always been depressed.*

Now we have to be very careful. This means that the patient is a very experienced bullfighter. '*I am depressed*' is like the cape. The stupid therapist starts charging towards the depression. And then you get the sound of bull hitting the torero with its horns and they turn you like an ox on the spit!

'I have been coming for a year and my depression isn't any better. We need to look more into it.' It is like that. The depression is part of the picture. It is much more helpful to be interested in the patient's shoes. *'These look very comfortable, where did you get them?' 'I notice you always wear red shoes. Why is this?'* Then gradually more and more and more of the patient's world appears and magically, it seems, the depression is shrinking. These other aspects were always there, but we get hooked by the big idea, the symptom.

We are back with the same paradox: it is the very openness of our mind which allows us to be caught in many things. The lostness is not us; it is the content of our experience continuing for a while under certain conditions. The root problem, which in buddhism is described as the nature of ignorance, is our desire to have definite knowledge. We live in this ceaseless flow of experience which reveals itself when we are fully present and which we can find our way through. For example, on a day like today with some wind around we could go out windsurfing. You have the waves; waves move according to the wind and you also have the currents of the tide. And you also get the shifts of the wind blowing around that is affecting the sail. Stability is momentary. The windsurfer is moving all the time, rebalancing and rebalancing, because they are on the sea. If they were moving like this all the time on the land we might think: *'This guy is drunk.'* But we accept that when you are on the sea you have to move.

This is the central point. The world is like the sea, everything is moving. To try to stabilise it is going to cause a lot of problems. Everything in our life which appears to be fixed is dynamic.

If you don't have work you apply and apply and then suddenly you get an interview and you get a job. To **have** a job is like you **have** something. But a job is activity. You are allowed to go through the door of the

building and do many kind of activity. All day long your life is unfolding in this particular frame. It is not stable. If you are a schoolteacher the class is always moving. If you are a bus driver you have to be going on the road with the traffic. This is the actuality of our situation. But through our culture the ways in which we try to make sense of it is to cut the world up into pieces, into fixed entities, and then to try to move them around.

Awareness is appreciating the state of the mirror: the emptiness of the mirror and the movement of the reflections. Ignorance is the process of ignoring this dynamic nature and ceaselessly attempting to install fixed, stable entities.

This is my watch; it is very useful when I need to know the time. I need to know the time maybe twenty times a day. Because I am used to reading the time I only need to glance at it for one second. So it is useful for twenty seconds a day. But I need to have it. However I only actually **have** it when I look at it. So although I own it all day I **have** it twenty seconds a day. When I am not looking at it, it can have many other functions. It can be a basis for anxiety if I misplace it. It could be a head ornament. You could use it for many different things. But we say: 'This is my watch.' It is a function, which is why I have it, for its function. A function is something dynamic. We have shoes and we use the shoes for walking. They protect our feet when we place them on the rough ground. The shoe is revealed as a shoe when we hit rough ground.

THE WAY OF CONFUSION

In the tradition this natural openness of the mind, how it is, is lost sight of by what is called 'the way of confusion'.

For example, you look in the mirror and you see your face. You think: '*Oh, what is that?*' You are touching your face but you are looking at in in the mirror. '*Oh, I see what is happening.*' It appears to us: I see my face. The fact is that you will never see your own face. You see the reflection. You take the reflection to be your face. In the morning, doing your teeth and looking in the mirror, you don't think: '*That is a reflection of myself.*' We think. '*Here I am. This is me.*' We take the reflection to be us. This is alienation. Jacques Lacan wrote a lot about this. That is to say, we recognise ourselves through representation, because we don't actually re-cognise, or cognise ourselves; we **are** ourselves.

When the *chi* or the *prana* or the *libido*, when the life energy flows through us, here we are. And yet we worry about our lives. '*Am I going the right way? It doesn't feel quite good. I need something more.*' We have the sense that how this is, is not quite right. '*If only I changed the form of my life, I would have a better life.*'

On one level that makes sense. There are many people who have self-destructive behaviours. If they were to change these behaviours they would live a bit longer and probably be happier. But from the buddhist point of view even if their lives were healthy and happy and they were off playing golf every day and enjoying the beautiful view, they would still be entranced by a representation, by a reflection. And they meet a friend and the friend says: '*How are you?*' They immediately go bla bla bla... '*Ah, I had a wonderful game of golf this morning and at the sixteenth hole I got in two shots, it was fantastic.*' This is story.

Our socialising, our being together, our mutual affirmation and reassurance is a sweet toxicity; it tastes very nice. You are talking with your friends, you are smiling and it is great to be here and it is warm... and we are all asleep together in the same dream.

What is here in this dream? Space, the openness of the mind and the movement of energy, arising as all these manifest forms of each individual moment. When we attend to the detail our response becomes more and more subtle and we are returned to aesthetic appreciation, to enjoyment. For example, from where I am sitting I can look out of the window at part of the hotel. The building is cement-coloured. It is not a particularly interesting colour but because there are many different qualities of cloud today there are subtle shifts in the quality of the light touching the building; and with that the building changes. Now, if you are a western materialist you might say: *'No, the building does not change, it only looks different.* From a buddhist point of view you might say: *'The building is changing, you only imagine that it is the same.'* This is the big difference. When we assume that there is an essence – 'the building' – that seems to give us something substantial to hold on to. It is a noun and towards this noun we can apply adjectives and adverbs to show shifting qualities around the noun. So we could say sometimes the building looks light grey, sometimes it looks dark grey. There is 'the building' and these secondary qualifications may or may not apply. They are extrinsic. What is intrinsic is the facticity of the building being the building.

This is an anti-phenomenological interpretation. When we attend to the phenomena as they present themselves we see that they are inseparable from our interpretation. Many philosophers, from Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, tried to bracket off the assumptions and interpretations that we put onto objects, so that the thing itself could show but gradually they began to see that this was impossible, because everything we see or taste or touch is inseparable from our response. We do not have a neutral relationship with the world.

Western materialistic science is driven by ambition. People begin by wanting to get a BA. Then they get a PhD. Then they get a post-doctoral place in a laboratory. Then they start to publish. After that they get promotion, become a professor and maybe get a Nobel prize. This didn't fall out of the sky like rain; this is orchestrated around something very familiar: I want. I want power, status, money and so on. The various motives that academics have. This is life. This is not neutral, objective science. Human motive is inseparable. Near Geneva, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, CERN, has a huge accelerator to find subnuclear particles. When the scientists are interviewed they are always very excited. Surely science is neutral, calm, objective? No, they are emotional and excited because they are building their worlds.

Passion, the mind, life – it is not neutral. Everything that is revealed is dialogue, is mutuality. What this indicates is that we are never a neutral observer. Our participation is part of the evolving picture. Because it is evolving, we are on the cusp of time just as the surfer is moving along the edge of the evolving wave. We are working with the wave of time. And the more present we are in the moment the more we experience now... now... now... and we find a way in that.

WHAT IS MEANT BY IGNORANCE IN THE BUDDHIST TRADITION

In the buddhist tradition ignorance is to evacuate yourself from the moment, to separate the subject from the field of experience so that you have subject and object or self and other as two different worlds and then to go up in your own helicopter and look down on what is going on and use perspective to make sense of what is going on.

In the history of western art perspective is, of course, very important. It is the basis for the great transformation of art in the Renaissance. Perspective is based on the idea that it is distance and separation which allows things to be seen in their place in the world, not according to our importance, but to where they are. In the tradition of painting icons, the icon is the thing itself. When the icon painting is finished and the eyes are put in, prayers of blessing are done and the icon becomes the actual presence of the Virgin Mary or Saint Michael or whoever. That is why people want to touch or kiss the icon. They come in touch with the divine because the divine is in their world. The icon is the Epiphany.

Painting with perspective, however, everything is reduced to human size. Man becomes the measure of all things, like in Leonardo da Vinci's famous drawing. This has big implications because it means that we start with ourselves and look at how these things are in relation to me.

Next we take up our position: I like, I don't like. These choices cut the world up more and more and more. By then it has become very difficult to say that everything is wonderful, because *'I don't like that'* and *'not for me.'*

Consumer capitalism places a great power into the individual, the power of total self-delusion. *'I chose to buy this amazing T-shirt. I express my personality, my authentic being, in the purchase of this T-shirt made in Thailand. This is me, wow!'* Two million other people might be wearing the same T-shirt, but hey, never mind! This is an amazing trick, to convince people that mass-produced goods can become the sign of their own individuality. Remarkable. Gradually we become more and more separated off by our individual choices. If you go into a shop to buy a T-shirt for the summer; there are rows and rows and rows of them, thousands of T-shirts. The main thing you are saying is: *'No.'* You go along the line, just running your fingers over them: *'No... no... no.... oh, maybe.'* *'No, Not me. I could not wear that colour.'*

We are defined by rejection. This is the law of exclusion. *'I may not know who I am, but I am not like you!'* It is quite difficult to define yourself. This exclusion is like a big tear which cuts up the field of experience. We start with an assumption: *'I would not continue to be me if I did this.'* From the buddhist point of view this is because we actually **are** part of the world; we are not lonely, isolated creatures. However in imagining my isolation I now give myself this burden of responsibility to work out who I am. So many choices are open to me. What will I do? How will I live?

I am still setting out the view, so that we understand why we do the meditation practice. The meditation is designed to help us relax into participation, to let go of the individual fixation.

Let's take a break now. We will get up and walk over to the door and then we'll walk down the ramp. Each of us will have the experience of getting up, of walking and then walking slightly different down the ramp. How I will get up from this chair is determined by the height of the chair, the strength of my muscles, the amount of weight I'm carrying and so on. When we get to where the ramp starts to go down, it is quite steep, so we will be adjusting our posture to work with this angle.

You can tell that story in two ways: I am adjusting my body in order to walk down the ramp. Or, the ramp is making me adjust my body. The ramp comes first; we respond. We are working with circumstances. We are not in mastery over the world. But how we walk depends on the surface. We are in ceaseless conversation with the world because we are part of it. We are born out of our mother's body, we don't come in from a spaceship. So to see the world as something apart and scary is a complete misunderstanding.

Question:

Is it possible to put our mind naked after so many years of thinking in a particular way?

James:

Yes, I think it is possible because it is not an either/or.

In a traditional example there is the ocean and the waves. The waves are inseparable from the ocean. If you have an ocean you are going to have waves. When the wave arises it shows a form which seems to be something; it is a 'something' created out of water, which is the ocean. It is the ocean showing the form of the wave; the wave-ness of the wave is the ocean. In the same way the reflection is the clarity or the illuminating power of the mirror. The mirror shows itself as reflection; the reflection is the quality of the mirror. The wall behind us is not reflecting. Not every surface can reflect. So reflectivity is the quality of the mirror but the form of the reflection appears to be of something else. So if you look at the form of the reflection and you start thinking about whatever is behind it – when you look at a mountain or other buildings or whatever – we don't normally see that the reflection is the brilliance, or the radiant quality, of the mirror.

Likewise our many thoughts, feelings, assumptions, worries and so on. Maybe we are worried about our health, for example. We have to go to the hospital for some tests. This is not going to make us happy and we have various kind of thoughts, sensations and so on. We think: *'This might be serious.'* It creates a particular kind of mood. What is the content? It is experience arising moment by moment. It is the display of the clarity of the mind. The clarity is like the illuminating power of the mind. Worry, depression, confusion, regret – these heavy, negative experiences are also the radiance of the mind.

As far as we know, a table doesn't experience guilt or regret. Things happen to a table; when we look at the surface we can see marks made by things in the past, but these are not bringing aware response. **We** are aware of our experience. This awareness is illuminating even if what it illuminates is dull. When we look at the semantic content of the dullness or the affective power of the content, *'Oh, I am so worried about this'*, when we are in the feeling tone of that, we don't see any illumination.

TRAGEDIES AND COMEDIES IN THE THEATRE OF LIFE

In that sense, we can think of space as being like a stage. Sometimes on the stage we have a tragedy and sometimes we have a comedy. When we have a comedy, everybody is laughing and having a good time; we feel light in our spirit. Then that play closes and the tragedy is here. We might look at what is happening at the stage and think: *No. don't do it!* This play is terrible and the other one was lovely.

'I don't like tragedy. I am a nice person. I want life to be joyful. I only want comedy. Then we are all going to be very happy.'

It is tragic, deeply tragic, if a tragedy comes, because it is not just painful, but it feels 'wrong'. It should not be happening; we have a big resistance. We feel: *'I have to protect myself from this.'* However it is already happening so it *is* my life. How will I live with my life? I keep pretending it should not be happening. I am dulling, I am making myself stupid, because I am telling a lie to myself.

When someone say: 'I can't bear it!' this is always very interesting. Who is it that sets this limit? Actually, we can probably take a bit more. If it doesn't feel good, if I don't like it, then I can still work with that. However when I say: 'It should not be happening.' then there is much more resistance. How can I deal with something that should not be happening, when I retract from it?

The basis of our practice is to accept life as it is. This would indicate that our problem is narcissism. *'I refuse to accept how things are! As the king of the world it is my duty to inform you that I have been provided with a very substandard world. My secret agents at this very minute are investigating to find out who is responsible. The culprits will be brought to justice! We should not have to put up with this!'*

British television channels carry a lot of advertising from cancer charities. *'We are going to defeat cancer! We are going to destroy cancer!'*, they say however are the rates of cancer increasing. Why? We have a lot more plastic in our world. We are in touch with many more chemicals now than a hundred years ago. These substances are not neutral. Our skin and our internal digestive organs are always in relationship with what they come in contact with. Cancer is mutation and some degree of mutation is normal. We have many re-balancing systems in the body but sometimes the degree of mutations is bigger that the ratifying system can cope. This is a natural system which is out of balance, this is the body acting against itself. Many forms of arthritis have the same structure. The defence system gets a bit crazy. Countries have armies to defend themselves and destroy the enemy. Sometimes the enemy is external, sometimes internal.

This is the dialectic of dualism. Find the enemy – destroy the enemy – be happy forever. The problem has to do with our wish to be always happy. We don't like to know about old age, sickness and death. We just want to have fun. Why shouldn't we have fun? People who stop us having fun are bad. This is the kind of madness which is everywhere in youth culture. You Spanish people are visited by hordes of young British people. They go to lovely places like Ibiza in order to have 'fun'. When you see them having 'fun' it's not very pretty since they often are very drunk.

So how do we make ourselves happy? Actually there is a lot of research evidence now that says that happiness comes through altruism. When we forget ourselves and go into the service of the other this opens a world wherein we feel more content. When we are in the service of the other we often go beyond our limit.

The mother with the small baby has to get up again and again. Of course, feelings of anger and irritation will arise but if the baby is lucky, the mother is able to look at the face of the baby – this little raw, red, crying face at four in the morning – and she will feel: *'Oh, poor baby.'* No revenge, just concern. This disturbance is incorporated in the world.

It is the same with all our own thoughts, our jealousy, our pride, our insecurity. We have to put an arm around it and say: 'You are mine.' I get jealous, I get worried, I have hateful thoughts. Okay, this is how I am.

If I don't feed them they will go. Now, I can feed the thought by building it up: '*I hate everything Scottish, these awful Scottish!*' You can pump energy into that. But we also feed the thought by saying: '*I am not going to think that. That is a bad thought, I'm not going to think that!*' It is like pushing a wall; the wall exerts an equal force back otherwise it would fall over. I am actually pushing my energy into the wall.

When we resist a thought in ourselves – '*I don't want to be like this. I'm not going to be like this*' – we are taking this formation seriously. It is really dangerous or unpleasant, and therefore we are not going to reinforce its power.

So the practice is: not denying, not merging into it, but just being present with it, and it will vanish. In the tradition this is called self-liberation. That is to say, all our thoughts, feelings, sensations, are impermanent. They go by themselves. We cannot keep a thought in our head. We may repeat it again and again, but the actual form of thought is always transient. And because thoughts are transient we don't have to push them away.

This is why the view is very important. If we have a piece of paper and we draw a line on it, the paper is now marked and the potential of the paper is now reduced. When it was blank we could do anything with it. Now this mark is on it and we have to think: '*What can I do now in relation to that?*' Our ego is like paper. We take lots of marks on ourselves. We feel hurt and insulted by other people, we build up images of other people and then feel close to them or not, and in that situation we have to be careful. As the years go by we accumulate more and more marks and it is very difficult to feel fresh. Our heart gets weary, we have less hope. But if we remember the image of the mirror: the paper takes the mark on the surface. When we look at the mirror, it is as if the reflection is right inside it and yet, when we turn the mirror the reflection is gone without a trace.

So, awareness, or the true nature of the mind, or the mind itself, is like the mirror. Since we got up this morning, we have had so many different experiences. Some of them maybe have left a mark. Where is the mark? Not on the mirror but in the self-formation, the shaping of our self.

For example, when I was nineteen, I hitched down to Spain on the way to Africa. I had a little bag and would sleep under the trees. I remember one early morning I came into this town and I had a coffee and hot churros. This stayed in my mind over all these years, such a sweet moment. This morning in the restaurant here I saw this thing and I thought: '*Oh, maybe this is churros.*' Memory affection blinded me to what was there. I was not what I wanted. However, out of profound respect for the past, I ate it!

This is the ego and this is how we carry these hopes and fears. The ego is like plastic or clay, always moulding and shaping, always having a shape. We can make the shape better or not, according to what we think is better. What we can't do, however, is make it shapeless. For example there are many ascetic practices of deep renunciation which people use to try and smooth their life.

I, ME, MYSELF. 'ME' IS THE DUSTBIN OF THE 'I'

From the point of view of dzogchen this is a big mistake since shaping is part of our existence. When I am here with you I am shaping myself in different ways as I make connections with you and what we are talking about. According to the mood of the meeting and how people are, words come out of my mouth in different ways.

We have a three-stage understanding here. We have the emptiness that is the infinite potential; and moment by moment there is the entire constellation of the field as it is now; and each of us is in the field, as part of the field, with our particular shaping in this moment. 'Here we are just now' may make some people feel very relaxed and at ease whilst for other people they may feel anxious being here.

These three are niched like Russian dolls. Our self is part of the field and the field is part of space, or the showing of space. So it's not that we have to get rid of this, rather it is that we are to recognise that this formation is the energy of the field, the field which is the self-display of emptiness. If we focus on the vertical alignment – this, into the field, into the space – we find the freedom in the form. This is what it says in the Heart Sutra: *'Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.'* However, if we take our shape and make judgements about it, then not only am I separated from the field, but now I split myself into 'I' and 'me'. *'I don't like myself.'* Many people feel this but it is a crazy thing to say. Where is the separation? Who owns your passport? Is it 'I' or 'myself'?

So there are shapes which I take to be 'me' but which I don't like. Someone might think: *'My bum is too big'* or *'I talk too much'* or *'I am bored with being so shy'*. *'If only I was different.'* Of course, the 'I' is always different. The problem is 'me'. 'Me' is the dustbin of the 'I'. 'I' eats the apple and throws the core in the dustbin, because we are now in another moment and then we think: *'Why did I say that? I shouldn't have said that!'*

The judgement brings this retraction which is again the splitting. *'I thought about what I had done and I don't like it. I must remember to never do that again.'* So now I am projecting into the future what I have to do. Now I exist like a traffic policeman between stuff coming from the past going into the future. Very difficult spot to be in *'because I don't want to do these bad things again.'*

Reparation is the issue. If I say something to you that upsets you I can say: *'I'm sorry.'* I look at your face, I see you are upset, and I say sorry. Then it dissolves. But if I take it into myself I leave you with your feelings and I go off thinking: *'Oh, why did I do it, why did I do it?'* which leaves you over there in one place and me in another, sealed in my thoughts.

This is the heart of it: that compassion means relating to other people and saying whatever needs to be said in the moment. It is like a hospital. If there is an injury then you should bring the patient in very quickly. Clean the wound, stitch it up and it can start to heal. When we wander around with all these unhealed wounds it is not surprising we are very sensitive, blaming ourselves, blaming other people. What helps us is to embrace the unforgivable aspects of ourselves, to keep them on the inside. It is not that we need to actively incorporate them, since they are already incorporated. Just allow them to be. Be honest with yourself.

We will do some of the meditation now. The basic issue is to relax our fixation from our ego-shape and experience this self as part of the world, arising as the flow of experience, as the radiance or the self-display of the open, empty mind.

We will start in a simple way, just breathing out. In this practice the chin is slightly raised. We rest our gaze in the space in front of us about two arms' length away. We are not staring at a distant wall, but are just resting our gaze in the space in front and we are open to whatever comes.

When we say, *'we are open to whatever comes'*, 'we' refers to our aspect of awareness. We are offering hospitality to the room and simultaneously to this embodied existence. When I look around the room and I see different people, you are my experience. Whatever you are for **you** I will never know. I have my experience, that is what I have. What is this? [James slaps his body] This body is my experience. I experience my feet; I experience my bum on the seat and so on. I experience sensations inside my body, thoughts and feelings. Now I may say: *'I have unique experience of me and you don't have that. I have a private world inside me.'* But actually, what I am for me is experience. I experience myself and I experience the shapes and colours of you. I experience the movements of your faces and so on. Self and other are aspects of the field of experience. We divide that field by entering into our self-referential thoughts.

In this practice we breathe out, relax and then sit present with whatever is occurring, whether it seems to be subject or object. It is all the flow of experience. If you find yourself entering into judgement or you find yourself getting lost in a commentary about what is going on, then as soon as you recognise that, gently bring yourself back to being here with whatever 'here' is in the moment.

In this meditation we can't know in advance what we will be focussing on because our focus is to be present with whatever is occurring.

Any questions about that before we begin? Good. We will do this for a while.

[MEDITATION PRACTICE]

When you are on your own you can do it for five minutes, then ten minutes, and then gradually build up. We are very used to being located as the ego, and the basic position of the ego is a drowning person. We are always grabbing on to things to keep us afloat, to keep us interested. In this practice we are letting the ego just be like a cork on the water, not going to drown. It's more like a sequence of the surf, the little bubbles on the surface. We become aware of the shift of the sensations and the thoughts and we realise there is no castle of the self. It is not a territory to be secured against other factors.

'MYSELF' IS 'ME IN RELATION TO YOU'

So what will I hold onto? Nothing. If that is the case then, what will happen to me? That is the door of anxiety that we have to go through, which is why trust is very important. When we start to feel the anxiety we retract, we re-track and hold on to familiar thoughts and feelings and build up a picture.

The more we trust and relax and are open the more we see that 'I am nothing, but I am not nothing at all, I am the nothing which is everything.'

So the process is that

- we start as something, as somebody, wanting to improve ourselves, wanting to be a better class of somebody.

- then through the practice we realise this somebody is nobody. It doesn't have a fixed, enduring essence that allows us to define it consistently through time and yet, like the mirror, it is always showing something. What it is showing is part of the world. Just as the mirror shows a reflection of what is outside the mirror – *this is changing the analogy a little bit, so follow closely* – just as it shows the reflection of something else, so 'myself' is 'me in relation to you'. Myself is 'me for you'.

It's not like me sitting in my castle, wondering what to do today and deciding to ride out on my horse to say hello to my peasants. First there is you. You impact and I respond. So I am the 'me for you'. This is beautiful because it answers the big question *'What will I do with my life?'* As long as we are relating to people, life is good.

In Britain we have an increasingly elderly population more and more of whom live on their own. The men especially don't do well. A man over sixty, living on his own without much social contact, will die five years earlier than a man living with a woman. However, unfortunately for the women, a woman living with a man dies two years earlier than living on her own! Very interesting. But all you women know that we men are hard work! This speaks exactly to this: we are part of connectivity, we are interdependent.

The culture of individualisation, of individuality, is against how we actually are. It doesn't mean, of course, that you have to live with other people, but you have to have other people in your world. The word 'individual' is very interesting. Linguistically it means 'indivisible', like an entity, a fixed thing, you can't divide it. But, of course, we are divided all the time. We have so many different ways of relating to children, to older people, to students in the class, whatever there would be. We are rich in our multiplicity, which is revealed through relating.

Wisdom takes us into the openness of the mind itself, unchanging awareness, the depth of the mirror. Compassion brings us into ever-changing relatedness with the world around us. Compassion is the movement of the energy of the empty mind. The ego, this sticky formation, gets in the way of the free flow of energy.

It seems that we work best with others when we don't have too much prepared. In business meetings, when planning a new product, people do brainstorming. They throw out the ideas and write them up and gradually the group gets a feeling of growing together. Because everybody has been part of the process they can commit themselves to the outcome. But if the boss comes in and says: *'Let me tell you all what we are going to do'*, the energy in the team goes down, because now they are having to bend their shape to fit into something already decided. In working with couples it's the key factor involved. Many couples never make we-decisions. They divide up the activities. The woman decides on the summer holidays and the man goes along with it. Sometimes that works but it can also feed into a kind of isolation. Of course, it is quick. You sit down, look at some brochure and you say: *'Alright, we are going to go there.'* Then you find out the cost and it is done. If you ask: *'What do you fancy doing in the summer?'* you could be talking a long time and as you talk together you might realise that you want to do different things. So how do we live with difference, with divided up? How do we bring difference together into synergy? One person likes to lie on the beach and the other likes to go walking in the hills or go to see some archaeological remains. How shall we do this? We make some accommodation. *'Okay, this year I am willing to sacrifice my ideal holiday for you. Next year will you do what I want?'* This is so interesting, isn't it? Once you possess the territory, giving it up feels like sacrifice, like loss. So if we have

an image of ourself which is over-solid, over-stable, we can easily get into trading: *'I'll give you two units of mine if you give me three units of yours.'*

In terms of the practice, the more we can loosen up our own self-construct we see that nothing is lost by doing this, that we are not throwing anything away. It is the joined or shared emergent shape of the moment which determines which aspects of myself need to come forward. This is the great liberation – that we are potential, not fixed entities. Our lives can be much more playful then, relaxed and easy.

RELATIVE AND ABSOLUTE TRUTH

We have looked at the nature of non-duality. Non-duality doesn't mean that everything is mixed together. If an orange is not ripe, it is not good to eat, so there is a difference between 'ripe' and 'not ripe', 'hot' and 'cold' and so on.

Is an orange better when it is ripe? Better for who? When the orange is not ripe and is still on the tree, it's alive in the wind, very happy with its other orange friends... Ripe orange means moving towards death orange.

When we apply attitudes we have to think what is the basis for our interpretation. There are two things which operate, and in buddhism they are referred to as the *two truths*. There is relative truth, which is the truth of phenomena within the realm of comparing and contrasting. And there is absolute truth, or the truth that doesn't stand in relation to anything else.

IMPURE RELATIVE TRUTH: ATTRIBUTING VALUE TO OBJECTS

There are two levels for the relative truth, pure and impure relative truth. In impure relative truth you see that something exists and you enter into a relationship with it based on the five poisons, which are stupidity, aversion, desire, jealousy and pride. These emotions each generate a particular positioning.

For example, I can see a recording machine in front of me. I am confident that this is a recording machine. Something is there, an entity. On top of that some emotion arises, some direction towards the object. I may think: *'I like this. I want to have it,* and then I have desire for something. Just now I may have more desire for the recording machine than for the cup of water which is also on the table in front of me, because I think that the machine has more value. However I could live without the recording machine but if I didn't have any water then I would die.

So although I may say: *'Yes, I really want to take this recording machine'*, its importance depends on the particular context. In another context I would say: *'Listen, I will give you my recording machine and all my money and my watch too for some water, because I am very thirsty and without water I die'*.

So we see value in the object, and the value is an attribution coming from ourselves. This is the mark of impure relative truth. We see the world constituted out of many different entities, many truly existing entities each of which has an intrinsic and identifiable value. We trust our emotions that tell us what that value is: because I like it, it is valuable. That value seems to be there.

Liking is the movement of the subject towards the object. *'But I am not stupid! I would not like it unless it were wonderful!'* So we put our liking out there as a proof of the intrinsic value of the object. However the topology of the world becomes more complicated since there are some things we like, some things we don't like and some things which we neither much like nor dislike. We are now responding not just to the actual shapes of things in the world and their functions, but also in terms of the emotions which are evoked in us.

This is why it's called 'impure', because we get very confused. What is the value of confusion? Every day across the world hundreds of millions of people are masturbating to pornography on the internet. They look at their little screen and they think: *'Wow, what an arse! Come on, little friend, come, let's play.'* This is amazing! Nobody is there! You can't kiss the screen. You can't hear breathing because nobody is there. It's all projections, fantasy. But it is very powerful.

This tells us something about the nature of the mind. Once you project value out into the object, it seems to be very special. However it is by taking the emotional response back to oneself that we start to have a cleaner relationship with the world.

In England it is not uncommon to hear children say: *'Ugh, I hate that, it's horrible! I don't want to eat that.'* Then the parents say: *'Listen, look around the table, your brothers and sisters are eating it. If you don't want to eat it, that's one thing but you can't say it's horrible, because they are eating it.'*

There we see that it's very easy to make the object bad on the basis of our feeling. So once we start to take the feeling back into ourselves, it doesn't mean that the world is completely bland. We still have our feeling, but we know: *'this is my feeling.'* It doesn't tell me anything true about the object. It tells me about the subject. So my life is coming back into the palm of your hand.

Then you can make your meditation work. For as long as you see the world as being full of real objects with true value, with different values, meditation can't change anything. It may change your opinion but changing your opinion doesn't change the world. But if you realise that your opinion *is* what the object seemed to be, and that what persecuted you about the object was not the qualities of the object, but your reaction to it – what you created in yourself about the object – then you realise that if that is the case, if you can change your mental construct everything shifts. It doesn't mean you have to be the master of the world but the velcro that was binding you into strong connections, is loosened. So objects can be seen as useful or not useful according to circumstances. Their value is contextual, not intrinsic.

I brought a winter coat with me from London because it was quite cold when I left. It has no value here. Now I might decide: *'This coat has no value so I will throw it away.'* Then I get back to the airport, to the train station, to London and I'm shivering!

The value belongs on the situation; it is not belonging to the object. I find it it's very useful to review my life in those terms. I look at all the things which are powerful for me, positive or negative, and ask myself: *'Would all my friends agree with my evaluation?'* If not, this is **my** interpretation. So when I say *'this is important'*, this is just half a sentence, this is important **for me**. There is more to the sentence: This is important for me because I put my value onto the object. My shimmering life-force, which can come as hope/desire or as fear/aversion. This is **my** quality. This is the movement of my life, my energy, my potential. Now that I see this is mine, I can do something.

Very often we don't throw away old objects because they have a sentimental value. I have many books. I am now sixty-five and I am going to be dead before I can read all my books. It's a fact. I have already given away more than a thousand books because I realised that I bought a lot of therapy books that don't really interest me much at all. But I still have to decide what will I do with my time. So I start to read a book, maybe remembering when and where I bought it, then I look at the book later and think: *'Listen, you wee fucker, you are stealing my life.'* That's because I read very slowly, and I always write something when I read so then I go into a conversation with myself and I don't want to stop reading the book. I don't like to stop halfway through a book.

This is our life, this is what we have to recognise, how we give ourselves into the object as if it were really meaningful. Or not. Maybe we just get caught? Either way, we give our life, our time and time is life. We give our time and life to these objects. So our meditation is a good way to wake up, and ask: *'Oh, what am I doing?'*

PURE RELATIVE TRUTH: EACH OBJECT IS IN A CONTEXT

In the pure relative truth we see that there are many 'things' that are there and actually their nature is empty.

Emptiness is a big topic in buddhism and I'll say a little bit about it first. Emptiness means that there is no inherent or intrinsic defining self-nature or essence in any phenomena. For example, here is a table. We saw the table last evening and we are seeing it again today. Clearly it is a table. But what we actually see is a table somewhere. This table always has somewhere-ness. The table is on the floor. The floor is not an accident. If we remove the floor the table falls down until it finds some other floor. That is to say, each object is in its context. The context may change, but there is always a context. Every 'something' is a 'something' somewhere, and the somewhere-ness shifts the 'something'.

Now I am here with you, later I will be in the airport. What I can do here with you is different from what I can do in the airport. It's like that. Our behaviour is contextual. This is obvious to us all but it is also true of the table. If you look at this chair beside me and then look over by the window you can see a chair there with some sunlight on it. The piece of the chair that has the sunlight shining brightly on it appears to us as a different colour from the part in the shade. In the actuality of our direct perception it is a different colour. If we say: *'Oh, it's only because the sun is shining on it, actually it's all the same colour'*, this is a conceptual elaboration, which is the mental activity that allows us to continue the fantasy that the chair is the chair is the chair under all conditions. No, it's changing. When we start so see this then we come into pure relative truth. We start to see directly that the colour of the chair depends on the quality of the light.

The use of the table depends on the meeting that is held. When we see the table we see a potential. If we there were young children here they might play under the table. They would recognise immediately that this is what you do, because when they look around the room everything is the wrong size for them. Whereas the table is the right size for hiding underneath.

What this tells us on a deeper level is you cannot take your mind out of your experience. There is no objectively existing table that is the same under all circumstances. The potential of the table exists as a quivering half-story. And the creativity of our mind exists also as a quivering half-story. When these come together many things are possible.

We all know something of Picasso and his life, and that it was endlessly changing. You may say that Picasso was unique or a genius, but that doesn't really take us anywhere since that is to assign him an essence. Our question is: how did Picasso Picasso? By looking, by being very curious and by forgetting. When he was sixty he was still bringing fresh eyes, even when he was seventy. To be surprised by the world. And because **he** was surprised he made objects that are also surprising.

This is also the quality of the pure relative truth. Life becomes more shiny when you are not telling the world what it is and what value it has. Instead you are receiving it and responding in some way.

With the further purification on this level one sees the moment of perception as being inseparable from the flow of time. This – now, this – now. As time changes and circumstances change, there is change. It's not that **this** becomes **that**. But there is this and this and this and this. Each 'this' is unique and specific. We may also see patterns, but the pattern isn't pointing to an essence but to an illusory formation like a rainbow in the sky.

Some of you may know a novel by Oscar Wilde called *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*. It's a bit like the story of Doctor Faustus who makes a contract with the devil. Dorian Gray makes a kind of contract in which a portrait of him will age but he will stay young and beautiful. As the story unfolds he behaves worse and worse because, having been moved out of time, the consequences of his actions can't touch him. Actually our lives are the other way round. We look at photos taken earlier in our lives and we recognise ourselves: *'Oh, that is me!'* But actually that **was** me, because we are changing and moving towards death. What you can fix is a narrative or an image, but you can't fix a lived existence.

ABSOLUTE TRUTH: DIRECT PERCEPTION WITHOUT CONCEPTS

So the absolute truth is the direct perception that everything is like a dream. In a dream we experience things, places, emotions and so on and then they are gone. It's like a theatre. The play begins, we get caught up in it, then it's gone. Everything in the play was a lie and yet it rings true. Once we see that it's a lie we can see it without being caught up in it. We no longer give ourselves into our fantasies, believing that they are true.

From the western point of view at this point many people say: *'Yes, but I don't want the world to be always completely calm. I want excitement.'* The people who say this usually have a nice petty bourgeois lifestyle. If life is sweet why not have a little bit more fun? I had fun today eating my fish. The fish didn't have much fun when it was caught. I'm not a fish, so I enjoyed eating the fish. The fish didn't enjoy the prospect of sacrificing itself for me. It seems I belong to a hypocritical buddhist sect to believe in theoretical compassion and good eating!

The point here is that emptiness means the ungraspability of the world. What we grasp is a remnant, something left over. The actuality of our existence is impermanent experience. Freedom therefore is based on releasing the fantasy that you can get something. In all our life we never arrive anywhere. The course of a life is a whole series of tunnels. You go through the tunnel of school and you get some diploma. If you go on to further study you go through the college tunnel and you get a degree. It seems as if each tunnel is going somewhere, will arrive somewhere. You have the moment: *'Now I have my degree!'* The feeling maybe lasts for a few hours. Possibly they put a little cap on your head or gave you a piece of paper. That first day you phone people and say: *'Hey, I got my degree!'* The following days you phone them: *'Hey, did I tell you I got my degree?'* The value is going down very quickly. Then you

stick it in a drawer and if you apply for a job you might need to take it out, but only then. All the energy that was in that tunnel has gone by the time you come to the end, because it was a dynamic process. The end, however, is not a full stop. It's always a comma. It always goes on. Life is this endless story. So this term 'absolute truth' doesn't mean mystical or supramundane. It does point to the fact that life is rich and given to us in our full participation, but if we try to appropriate it, to grab it, we get less.

My Tibetan teacher always said: *'Do it the easy way.'* However, when I was a child nobody said that to me. Everybody said: *'Try harder.'* Why would anyone want to work so hard? It was very helpful for me, him saying that. One time I went to the hills and into retreat and I did many different things including a lot of prostrations. When I came back to my guru's house I told him what I had done.

—*Oh, so you have done your 100.000 prostrations now. And do you feel tired?*

—*Yes.*

—*Oh yes, that happens.*

—*Rinpoche, what is the purpose of doing all these prostrations?*

—*I don't know. You wanted to do them, you did them, so now you tell me.*

Inside the traditional practice everybody is supposed to do a lot of these full-length prostrations. Why? Because that is what you have to do? Why? Because you have to. Rinpoche was not very traditional. He said: *'If you want to do these things then you can do them. But I never asked you to do them.'* There are many ways to spend your time. But what shall I do? Well, everything is moving and changing, all the outer forms and the inner forms – where are you? That is the most important question. Where are you? What it is asking is: what are you resting on?

We could say that we are here in this room together but then where is 'here'? We can tell stories about it, we can give the name of the hotel, which part of the island we are on, the latitude and the longitude and so on. So we could pinpoint precisely: *'We are here.'*

But where is it? 'Here' is our mind. We are in our mind, we are in our awareness. The way a reflection is in the mirror our experience is in our mind. The reflection is not the same as the mirror, but you can't take the reflection out of the mirror. Experience is not the same as ourselves, our being, our presence, but you can't take the experience out of your presence. We are always experiencing something. When you try to say what it is – nothing! And yet it's here.

There is a famous four-line praise verse to the goddess Prajnaparamita. Prajnaparamita means 'transcendent wisdom'. She is the goddess who is the essence of all the wisdom literature of the Heart Sutra family. This verse begins: *'This transcendent wisdom, which is the nature of all beings, is beyond speech, thought and expression.'* We cannot express the immediacy of being here. We can tell stories about being here linked with memories, interpretations, evaluations, but in a very simple, direct way we are just being here. How could you say all that happens at once? There are so many things in this room to comment on. The history of modern design in Spain and so on, endless topics you could elaborate. But the immediate experience – that is not possible because it cannot be grasped.

We express what we take hold of and what we take hold of are concepts, not the actuality. This is the really basic general buddhist understanding. It is pointing out that the status of a concept is not that it is an expression of truth, but that it is an expression of connectivity. The truth cannot be spoken. What we can speak of are creations, images, and these images create patterns.

It's like that. You meet someone new in this retreat and you start to tell them about yourself. How could you give a true description of yourself? Since you got up this morning you've had thousands of experiences: cleaning you teeth, walking down the stairs, seeing the sky, talking with people and so on. Each of these moments has influenced how you have been. You were there, this happened, but you have no pockets to put it into. When you are really here you are naked.

If you have children the children go out to play, they come back two or three hours later and you say:

—*Sweetie, what were you doing?*

— *Playing.*

—*But what were you playing?*

—*Just playing.*

Maybe you can remember how playing was, playing is naked. Many things happen when you are playing, running around together, chasing. It's real, you are there, laughing, falling over, whatever, but it doesn't mean anything in a sense that children have no reason to make meaning out of it. Being there was enough, being there was the whole thing.

Do you think that is true? Do you have that memory? It's very sweet. In the summer when you are a kid you spend the whole day on the beach running around, doing all of this stuff. And it wasn't a means to an end; it was an end in itself.

If you are out for a walk with a small child of two and a half or three, it is very slow-going. They stop and they look at everything. By the time they are six years of age they are singing some songs to themselves and they are in their own little world. You might say to them: '*Look at the caterpillar!*' and they reply: '*Oh, yes...*' but they are not so interested. It's like that.

The period in our life when we are stopped in our tracks by the world is very short. However I think it is genuinely possible to continue to be amazed by everything. Knowledge is a false god. With information technology and computers people are everywhere worshipping in this Church of Information. In a few seconds you can Google and get knowledge **about** something, but this is to alienate yourself from the lived experience. Life is contact because contact is the non-duality of the field of experience.

In Tibetan there are lots of words for 'direct', 'unmediated', 'unobstructed', 'penetrating', to simply receive and respond like an easy wave. It's again on that basis, of there being nothing to grasp, that we sit in a relaxed way, enter into the practice and allow the world to be as it is. If we find that we are being caught up in chains of thought, just by being aware of that, the thought will release itself.

[MEDITATION PRACTICE]

BLOCKED BY THOUGHT

For thousands of years hindu and buddhist meditators have seen the mind as being in the heart, where it exists in the form of an eight-petalled lotus. That is to say, there are eight pulsation directions of energy. This heart *chakra* is linked with the other *chakras* along the *avadhuti*, the central channel. Each of them can blossom and become fully alive, that is to say, with full extension and communication.

The traditional yoga system describes how there are two main side channels coming from out the central channel and they have many sub-branches that go all through the body. Our vitality or energy is moving through these all the time. Due to fixation and trauma and resistance they can get blocked so that the energy becomes sluggish in some areas. That manifests in imbalances of the five elements. People with a lot of fire and wind are very light, but usually very busy. People with water and earth dominant tend to be more stable, but more sluggish and heavy. A free movement of the energy through all parts of ourselves balances the five elements, because the central channel, the *avadhuti*, is empty. It is the quality of space, the quality of emptiness. When the other channels are linked into it, they are cleaned out and so everything becomes possible.

However when we are blocked and sit in the meditation certain sensations seem to repeat themselves, in particular the sense of *'I am in here, this is me. I am meditating. I am here and this is happening to me.'* This is a thought. *'This is happening to me'* is a thought. The thought may arise on the back of a sensation, but if we merge into the thought it seems to be self-evidently true. *'This is me, I'm meditating, I'm here.'* The thought is already going. Now we have solidified it. Like a frog leaping in a pond from one lily leaf to another to another to another, we jump from *'this is me, this is me, this is me...'* I'm always here. I am kidding myself, but I do it so quickly and so beautifully. *'This is me!'* So this is what we need to watch. These are all just thoughts. The thought says: *'Trust me, believe in me.'* And then it vanishes.

This is called the 'one-night-stand', sometimes happy, sometimes sad. But the thought has gone. The thought says:

—*I am the truth! I will be with you forever.*

—*Oh, baby! I believe you. Yes, this is me.*

And then it's gone. This is the problem of not recognising the nature of thought. Thoughts cannot be stable. The very thought that says *'I am reliable, I am stable'* is itself unstable. The label doesn't tell you the real content. It's not like the Ronseal advert which tells us *that 'It does exactly what it says on the tin.'* All that arises is impermanent, but the difference between *samsara* and *nirvana* is whether or not you believe that thoughts are reliable.

Thoughts are useful, they are relational functions but they belong in the house of compassion, not in the house of wisdom. But because we have generated this fantasy of cognitive truth we think that the thought tells the truth. But the thought is vanishing, it's going. It's there and it's gone:

—like a rainbow in the sky,

—like an echo,

—like a mirage on a hot summer's road,

—like the reflection of the full moon on a pond.

So what should we do with the thought? Look again and again until we see that thoughts vanish. They are the energy of the mind, just as we see the waves on the sea moving because of the wind and the tide. You can't grasp the wave, but if you are sailing a small boat you can work with the waves because you understand what is a wave. You balance in the small dinghy so that you don't get knocked over.

Likewise, when we sit in the practice we come to a sense of *'I am here'*, and we gently bring our attention to exactly this experience of being here. Don't add any more thoughts, just observe: *'Where*

am I? Various answers will present themselves. Do any of them remain? Then you start to see the nature of the mind.

STORIES WE TELL

Inevitably our time goes by and now there is not so much time left. However I want to explain two more things and then let's see if there are any questions on what we have covered so far.

There are different systems of understanding Dzogchen and as I was suggesting earlier these systems all develop out of our imagination. This is wonderful, but it makes everything quite complicated.

For example, the story of Buddha Shakyamuni is the story of a life completely wrapped in stories because nothing was written about him in his lifetime, only much later. According to the stories we have he was born into a wealthy family, maybe even to a small king or a leader in a republic. An astrologer said to his father: *'Your son will either be a great world-conquering emperor or he will be a sage, a saint who renounces the world.'* The father thinks: *'Well, I want a big, strong manly warrior son.'* so he makes sure that his son learns about riding chariots and firing bows and arrow and so on. The boy grows up inside this world (or this bubble) of his father's beliefs and assumptions. But then, as he gets older, he rides out of the palace compound to go hunting and he has some experiences.

He sees a sick person at the side of the road. He sees a very old person walking slowly and in great pain. He sees a corpse. *'Oh, maybe this will happen to me.'* This thought had never crossed his mind before. Finally he sees a holy man, a wandering *sadhu* just with a little loincloth and long matted hair. He then decides he has to leave the palace and find out some deeper meaning of life. According to the story he leaves in the middle of the night and rides off with his charioteer, gives away his possessions and becomes a wandering *sadhu*. He trains with other yogis and they do various kinds of austerities, such as starving themselves, doing painful stretched postures and so on, learning many different philosophies and kinds of yoga. All this he practises in a hot, dry place on the banks of the Naranjana river in Bihar, but after six years he thinks: *'This is getting me nowhere.'* He has just been tormenting his body.

Then he gathers some *kusha* grass (wild grass) and makes a seat for himself under a tree. A village girl comes by and she offers him some *kihr*, a sort of rice pudding. He eats this: *'Hmmm, life is not so bad.'* Then he resolves: *'I am going to sit here and I'm not going to move until I get enlightened.'* He sits in the middle of the experience, not merging into it and not pushing it away. He touches the ground to say: *'Give me proof that I am here, that I have arrived'*, and the earth trembles three times. All the temptations, the *maras* and so on, vanish.

Afterwards he thinks: *'I'll continue to stay on here'* and he walks up and down for some days. However the gods in the heavens know that something momentous has happened and they come down and say: *'You must teach.'* but he thinks: *'If I teach, no one will understand.'* The gods keep asking him to teach: *'Please, please, big lovely Buddha, sweet Buddha.'* Finally he says: *'Okay, I'll teach.'*

He begins to teach and the teaching gets bigger and bigger as more and more people come and are asking questions. The tradition says that he taught 84000 different *dharmas*, different views and methods. This is very interesting. He experimented with very different methods. He had found freedom in just looking at his mind and from this he elaborated many, many methods. In the Tibetan buddhist tradition there are thousands and thousands of methods. So many that the Tibetans say about

themselves: 'In India people practise with one god and get enlightened whereas in Tibet we practise with a hundred gods and get nowhere.'

TRADITIONAL QUESTIONS ON HOW TO LOOK AT THE MIND

All the deity practices are practices of energies, practices of manifestation. They are ways of working with the complexity of manifestation. But all manifestation has the same ground which is emptiness. It is the open state which is called the *dharmadhatu*, the infinite dimension of space. This is our own nature. If we understand our own nature then we have access to all the forms of energy but if we go chasing all the forms of energy we may never find y

our own nature. Life is short, people die easily. We can also get strokes. We can have different kinds of conditions which make it impossible to practise.

In the dzogchen tradition the main point is to understand the nature of the mind and integrate manifestation in that nature. The nature of the mind is called *kadag* or primordial purity, which means that it is empty like the mirror. Manifestation is *lhundrub*, which means effortlessly arising or spontaneously manifesting. This is like the reflection in the mirror. If you enter the state of the mirror, the reflection comes automatically but you can look at a million reflections and never understand the mirror. To chase the reflections without the mirror is called *samsara*. To see the reflection and know it is the radiant presence of the mirror is called *nirvana*.

Don't get lost in the many different practices but to look again and again at your own mind. Now, you can look at your feet very easily but how do you look at the looker? The looker is not an object. You cannot **see** your subjectivity, but you can **be** it in the moment of its presence. Presence is the being here-ness that we have moment by moment. It is the radiant space or the illuminated stage in which all manifestation is occurring. When we look at the stage we find that there are many props from previous dramas left there. When we check out these painted backdrops and tables, chairs and so on they bring us into the realm of narrative.

That's why when we sit open in the meditation some bit of old furniture arrive. We start from 'this is me' and quickly elaborate from that. By not entering into fixation on that particular bit of furniture, it will go away until gradually you are able to see the stage as a little bit empty. However once you recognise that it is a stage you recognise the status of everything which is on it. This is the realm of illusion.

When a thought, such as 'I am sitting here', arises this is like a big bit of canvas painted with bright summer's sunshine and some flowers. 'Here I am'. 'But I can't meditate.' Now it's like a dark night with a spooky house and bats flying around. Each of these understandings that we develop sets the scene for a particular interpretation of who we are. You cannot stop thought. It would be terrible if your thoughts stopped so don't try to stop thought. The thought is not harmful if you give it space.

If you go out in the wilderness and capture a wild stallion, bring it back and put it in a small enclosure, then it would be very dangerous for you to go into the enclosure. If instead you put the horse in a big field with a strong fence then the horse has room to move around fairly freely and gradually it gets used

to being there. It is tamed by the space. It is the same with your mind. If you tightly grasp what is happening and try to control it, it will slip away like a bar of soap in the shower.

So, we relax, we open. When a conclusion arrives we don't push it away. We don't take it as the truth, we just allow it to have its space. Then we see what happens. There are five questions which we often ask. Many of you will know this already:

What shape is the mind?

Does it have a shape?

Does it have a colour?

What size is the mind? Is it big? Is it small?

Where does the mind come from?

Where does the mind stay?

Where does the mind go?

The mind is not the thought. The mind is not the sensation or the feeling. These are experiences of the mind.

The mind as the experiencer or the revealer or the show-er, as the one who reveals, does it have a shape or a colour?

You can try this with your eyes closed and with your eyes open. Many different experiences arise, each has its own colour, but the mind itself does it influence the colour of what is arising? Does it have a shape?

Ordinarily we sit and think: *'My mind is inside my body. My mind has access to the world through my sense organs. I have access to the world through the light that comes in my eyes, the sound that comes in my ear and so on.'* In this way we tell ourselves the stories we learned in school. If you did some physics in school to demonstrate that sound is vibration they put a clock inside a vacuum jar and then you can't hear it anymore. Other such experiments. We tell ourselves that we know, but it's a story. If we just sit and open our eyes all of the room is here. It is immediately available; it arrives all at once. It is not built up bit by bit by bit. We are present with the room. Whether we think that light goes out of our eyes to the room or in from the room to our eyes, the immediacy of our experience is that the room is here and that we have access to it since it is an experience arising for us.

—*But my mind is in my body.*

—*Who is saying "My mind is in here"?*

—*I am saying it!*

—*Are you inside or outside?*

'I' says there is inside and there is outside. 'I' experiences inside and outside. I can feel some sensation in my knees and look at your face at the same time. Both are experience. Experience is the revelation of the mind. In the *dzogchen* tradition this is referred to as *rang zhin*. Our face is a potential because it can show many expressions. The basic potential of the face is call *ngo wo* or the 'true nature' or the actuality of the mind. It is like the face, it can show everything. Your face shows a complexion and this shows your health. You see if someone looks healthy or not healthy. This is the *rang zhin*, the display, or the showing of the quality of energy of manifestation. And thirdly there is our energy which arises from that, called *thug je*, which is participation or movement in the world.

All of this is revealed to us in our mind. This mind is not a thing. You can't say it is inside or outside. It's everywhere, because everything is revealed to us and yet it's nowhere because you can't find it as something in particular. It is not like anything else and this is why it is outside of relative truth. It doesn't belong in terms of comparing and contrasting, 'bigger than this, smaller than that'.

So where is the mind? It is not a trick question. It is an enquiry that allows us to release ourselves from the intoxication of false beliefs. The false belief operates because we tell ourselves these stories. Human beings will believe any old shit.

I watched the television yesterday and heard that in Yemen two people had gone into different mosques with bombs strapped on themselves and had blown themselves up in the mosque during Friday prayers. Over a hundred people were killed. You have to imagine: somebody believes this is a virtuous thing to do. *'I am a good Muslim, so I am going to blow myself up and blow up other people too because they are bad Muslims. I even will do it in the mosque.'* It's a horrible event anyway and we feel very sad about it but it is also terrifying because it shows just how stupid we are, that we pour our life into any strange idea.

A hundred and fifty years ago in Britain women got very little education because people thought educated women were dangerous. Every culture has been cocooned into limiting ideas. Many cultures believe you have to beat children to bring them up properly. When people believe that, they think you have to do that. You cheat your children if you don't beat them. This shows the power of belief. We give ourselves into an idea and the idea seems to make us powerful but at the same time it is making us stupid. This is why meditation is difficult. When we sit we easily get caught in ideas. Everything about our education has told us to buy into the idea: *'Grab the fact and make use of it.'*

However, now in our meditation here we are seeing the idea as it comes, the thought, and just being with it. Let it hang in the air, let it show itself. Don't say yes, don't say no, but let's see. This is why we want the mind calm and spacious. Then it will show itself and we see: *'This is a thought.'* It's not a fact; it's a thought. And it's gone. Where is the mind? The mind is still here, the thought is gone.

Where is the mind?

I am here. I have a sensation in my hand, it comes and goes. A memory arises, comes and goes. A bit of biology I learned in school arises: *'Oh, this is the mind, it is the brain'* and so on, and the thought goes.

All of these contents are just the flow of reflections.

Where is the mirror?

How big is the mirror?

What colour is the mirror?

Where does it come from? Does it come from anywhere else?

We might think: *'My body came out of my mother's body.'*

Where does the mind go?

I will die and then they will burn my body or bury it.

But is the mind in the body or not?

This is not a science question or a philosophical question. You can find the truth of it just sitting here. You have stories about what your body is. You might know about a medical body, the body of anatomy and physiology. That's one particular kind of story. But you have here the experience of the body. Is this in your mind or not? Who is the experiencer of the body? Where is this experiencer of the body? This you have direct access to.

THE THREE A PRACTICE

We will do some meditation practice on this and in order to help us we start with the guru yoga or 'Three A practice'. The basic view we have been looking at is one of non-duality, there is no separation between subject and object, or the level of manifestation and its ground. However we will start with the sense of being ourselves. We are very used to seeing ourselves as someone apart, someone separate so we use the guru yoga to open up the space of connectivity.

We do the practice with our gaze open, imagining in front of us about two arms' length a white letter A. It can be a capital A or the Tibetan letter if you know it; it doesn't matter. A is the basic vowel or the basic sound of the universe. It's the first sort of sound that babies make and all the other sounds come out as variations on A. So it is seen as the basic point where emptiness goes into manifestation and where manifestation can go back into emptiness. It is surrounded by five-coloured light, which represent the five wisdoms, the radiance of the dharmakaya and so on.

This letter A and the light represent the mind of all the buddhas and the mind of all our different teachers. Through the various teachers we met we have become ourselves. Our so-called individual existence emerges through dialogue with the world. So here is the mind of all the buddhas and we also have the ground of enlightenment, the buddha-nature; the basis of opening is within us. This is our mind.

With this vision in front of us we make the sound of A three times, releasing all our fixations, assumptions, absorptions, so that the space of the heart and the space in front of us with the wisdom aspect of the A is inseparable. Space is linked to space.

We sit in that state and then gradually in your own time you can take up these questions:

What shape is the mind?

What colour is it?

Is it big or small?

Is it inside or outside?

Where does it come from? Where does it stay? Where does it go?

We make this inquiry very gently. Asking the question too strongly makes it very dualistic. Rather, we are inquiring into what is there. We are not like a detective, but are more like an ornithologist who knows that a new bird has arrived in the woods. It is in the bushes sitting very alert. If you move, it is going to disturb it. Calm, confident, present – and see.

Okay, we will do this practice.

[Three A practice]

AWARENESS AND CONSCIOUSNESS

We have two other aspects of our existence: our consciousness and our thoughts. This capacity of awareness is usually called *rigpa*, or *shepa*, the capacity to know. It's not so much knowing something, but just knowing, an awareness that is there. In our ordinary mental functioning we operate from consciousness, and consciousness is different from awareness. In the Tibetan language the word for

consciousness is *nam she*. *Nam* means a kind of shape or form, essentially it means knowing something. It is linked to thought, *nam tok*, a kind of shaped apprehension.

Knowing particular things is of course necessary for our life but the way in which our consciousness takes hold of the world cuts the world up into bite-sized pieces. This brings a particular quality to ourselves. According to the buddhist teaching consciousness is situational. For example, we have five consciousnesses for our five senses and the mental consciousness, which organises these. There is also emotional consciousness and a kind of cosmic memory consciousness.

If we think of sound and our relation to auditory consciousness, when there is no sound there is no auditory consciousness. When we hear something, an aeroplane for example, in response to it our auditory consciousness goes out and takes this sound to the mental consciousness which says: '*aeroplane*.' No sound, no hearing consciousness. This is why you can fall asleep at night, because when the thoughts stop coming, the mental consciousness is not there. Then some dream starts to arise and mental consciousness is again there. Consciousness is discontinuous and the discontinuous nature of our dualistic experience is organised around the narrative of continuity.

A traditional example is the beads strung on a *mala* or rosary. We have moments of experience which arise, just themselves, and the next moment they may be very different. But we thread them together on the sense of: 'This happened to me, this happened to me, this happened to me...' It gives a sense of order and continuity, which is why it is so easy for us to get trapped in narrative.

Sometimes meditators feel that if the narrative stops all the beads will roll over the floor and then who the fuck will we be? Just this chaos of different impressions and so on. But actually, it's not the narrative which is holding everything together; it's awareness. Awareness is continuous, but invisible. The more you have a sense of the difference between awareness (this open, unborn presence which shows everything without being mixed up in it) and consciousness, the more you recognise that consciousness is always involved.

We are not trying to get rid of consciousness, but to see that consciousness is a particular form of the arising of the energy of awareness. It's a capacity of our mind to create pictures and patterns and images, whose function is communication. Its function is not the establishing of truth. Nevertheless we do use concepts to try to establish truth and it is the main reason why human beings are the most dangerous creatures on the planet. We establish truth by our belief and so we have to destroy the people who don't share our beliefs. Whether these are aboriginal people, or gypsies or black people, whatever.

The more we open to awareness or presence the safer we feel in the world, because we are *in* space, *as* space, rather than trying to hold together this very fragile false ground which we create by our concepts. The main point is to relax and trust experience, to see that control is an illusion. We are neither out of control nor in control. But we are here, participating.

Q&A

Question

How do you integrate Dzogchen practice into psychotherapy?

James:

I got one very simple and useful piece of advice from a professor of psychiatry whom I worked with. He said he learned most about psychiatry when he was a student of dermatology. His teacher had told him: *'There are only two things you need to know about the skin: If it is dry, wet it. If it is wet, dry it.'*

This is the Buddha's deep teaching. First we have to have a sense of what the problem is. What is it that stops the person being here? There are many places to get lost, as we have been looking. You can get lost in the past, lost in the future and of course you can be lost in the false present. As in meditation, in therapy we try to help the person to be here with us and slowly to help them see that to live in a naked way is safer than covering oneself up.

If we see something frightening we might cover our face. *'I am safe in here.'* But of course we are not safe in here at all. We are safest when we look and see, because then we can react in some way.

One way to understanding all forms of neurosis and psychosis is that they are ways of hiding. You can hide in depression, in anxiety, in obsessive behaviour, in fantasy... The problem with all these ways of hiding is that they create a fantasy time, a time that is based on the continuity of one's own self-diagnosis. When somebody says: *'I have always been anxious'*, this is a lie. However when you become fixed on the notion of your anxiety as the most interesting thing for you, you develop a selective attention, what a psychologist calls a "status quo bias".

In English we have a saying: *'better the devil you know.'* You get used to a particular structure in your life and in a sense you become the master of depression or anxiety. If you became healthier you wouldn't know anything; you would be like a little lamb in a field. We know that if you want to learn a new language you are going to make many mistakes and you are going to feel less efficient. So when you have been in your neurotic structure for a long time, to move towards health will be less efficient in some ways. There can be a lot of resistance.

The first thing that dzogchen can do for the therapist is to make them more tolerant. It's very easy to talk about change, but it's difficult to do. Second is to keep a more neutral tone without hopes and fears. Thirdly, keep the therapeutic space as open as possible with as few assumptions, demands and intentions as possible. By being very present and open to the potential of the person we resist their seduction, which is to make us believe that they are who they say they are.

This is where therapy gets very sticky. *'Oh, I'm always socially anxious and I don't know what to do.'* The therapist says: *'Okay, let's start with that.'* From the dzogchen point of view this is a bad place to start. We might say: *'What is your favourite flower? What is the best holiday you ever had? What is your favourite flavour of ice cream?'* Then you find that their life is moving a little bit. *'So you are a good ice cream eater and a total bastard.'* If you get them to laugh a little bit then life gets easier. Seriousness is not so good. Nowadays the mood in many professions is very serious; they look for an objective truth, a research base. All research evidence is the excreta of the ego of the researcher. Eating other people's shit is not good because you then arrive in the therapy with an agenda. Of course you can know many things but are any of them necessary? First let the patient show themselves and then we attend on them.

In English, in the restaurant you have a “waiter”. Waiters don’t tell you what to eat; they wait until you show your desire. This is the same as an “attendant”. An attendant waits and does what is necessary. The word for “therapist” comes from the Greek word for an attendant in the shrine of Asklepios. Asklepios was a great healer who established healing shrines across Greece. These shrines were very beautiful places where people would go and have baths and put on clean clothes. They then would go into a cave-like structure and wait for the gods to give them a healing dream. So the therapists, or the attendants, were those who waited on those who waited on the god.

This is very important: healing comes from a kind of vibrant passivity. It's not proactive; it's not dominating. That is how dzogchen could influence the work.

Question

I find it very hard to focus on these questions about the mind in meditation. Is there something which could help?

James:

It's a bit like when you go to doctor complaining of back pain. He'll ask, *'Can you feel it just now? What is it like? Is it hot? Is it cold? Is it dull? Is it sharp?'* The patient has to listen to the pain. Maybe they have never listened to the pain before; they just **had** the pain. By calling it “a pain” they blinded themselves to the qualities of what was occurring. Adapt a passive position, allowing the mind to become more present.

Comment:

When I try to find my mind...

James:

You cannot “find” your mind as a thing. This is why these traditional buddhist texts are very tricky to translate, because they use a lot of visual imagery and a lot of cognitive imagery. That is why I called my book of dzogchen texts “Simply Being.” We experience it as being present, being open. When you are dancing you don't **know** you are dancing, you **are** dancing. It is self-validating, it doesn't need any naming or proving from the outside, no stamp of authority. It is self-true.

Tibetan texts often discuss the term “being”. Hindus are very happy with “being”. They talk about three factors: *sat* (like in *sattva*, which means “being”), *chit* and *ananda*. Buddhist say: ‘Well, maybe we don't know who we are, but we **do** know we are not Hindu, so being is very bad.’ *Vidya* is another term that means “knowledge”. Many schools in India are called “Vidya Bhavan”, house of knowledge.

But, of course, you can't know your mind because it is not an object to know. So you have to be very careful. The words send you on a wrong, wrong path. It's not “being” in the sense of being something in particular. It's being present, not present **as** something, but a kind of pure or open presence.

BEING AT HOME “JUST BEING HERE”

The space of the mind allows every experience to arise. This quality of openness is our birthright, it is always there with us, but because our attention is taken by particular manifesting objects – we like some and we don't like some – these objects are what hooks our attention.

On a relative level when we do the basic *shiné* focussing in the breath, we are here and then we are gone. We seem to have gone somewhere else, only because we 'should' be here. So we bring ourselves back to being here. This is a dualistic practice. Duality is the separation of the manifestation from its ground, or thought from the sphere of awareness. Being here is better than being there but when we focus in open space, opening to the space, we are space; we are not anywhere. *'I'm sitting here.'* I may feel a pain somewhere and the sensation then seems to invite the thought, and the thought explains to the sensation what it means. *'Now I am here.'* This is a thought telling another sensation where we are. This is the game that thoughts play. *'I am the big brother, come little sister, I show you the way home.'*

But we are already at home. This means that when the thought says it is leading us home it is taking us in a walk around the home and saying: *'Some bits of the home are not home.'* The Mahayana tradition calls *nirvana* "the *nirvana* that doesn't rest anywhere". At first we think: *'Here we are in this terrible place samsara and we want to go to a better place. We don't know much about nirvana, but we know it's not here.'* So it is elsewhere. In the Mahayana tradition, however, they say *nirvana* isn't anywhere, that is to say it can't be located in a particular place. Nothing is outside it. Everything is inside it, because it doesn't have a place.

As soon as we locate ourselves somewhere, this is the play of the energy of the mind, a fantasy construct. London, for example, is a concept. Ten million people live in London; each has their own London. Not only that. They don't have just one London. When they are in a happy mood they have one London and when they are sad it's a different London. So where is London? What is London? It's a process of interpretation, a process of thought-display. This is the movement of the mind.

That is why it is said that the mind is unborn, that you can't catch it. Like the sky. It is unceasing, experience is rolling on. What does the experience mean? It can mean whatever you want it to mean.

Recently some people blew themselves up in mosques in the Yemen, and other members of their group would said it was a wonderful act and today these men are in heaven, beloved of god. We may not think that. We may say that they have the wrong idea and they would reply that it is we who have the wrong idea.

The truth doesn't lie in ideas. And our world is composed of ideas. Things look good from one point of view, bad from another point of view. If you look at a sculpture you can never see it, because it is in three dimensions. You get one view, then you move ten centimetres and you get another view. It is undeniable that the sculpture is there, but you can't see it all. Just as with the people around us here; we have been looking at each other from different angles, but we never see the whole of the person.

Every conclusion we come to about the meaning or value of something will be superceded. In science they talk of hypotheses. Research evidence allows us to say that for the moment this is the best working hypothesis we have. Who knows what may arrive tomorrow and show that there is some deficit in our current understanding?

Such humility is helpful for meditation practice as well. Nothing can be established in a certain and stable way in our world. When we act on the basis of our current understanding we should do it very lightly.

Generally we don't have buddhist missionaries, because standing on a street corner and giving out buddhist pamphlets is not very helpful. People find their way if they are interested. Buddhism is a path of enquiry. It's about questions rather than answers. The path is about questions. Part of us does want to be sure and definite and know exactly what is happening, but this is a kind of infantile demand. When we are small we want mummy and daddy to make us safe and later we want facts to make us safe. But there are not many facts in this world, because people don't all have the same ideas.

To be looking for the mind is a particular kind of curiosity. Not in a hurry, as much as possible loosening the idea of success and failure, the thought of getting somewhere, because you can see that these kind of movements are all based on the sense of *'I am here and I want to get there.'*

In that way our examination, our enquiry, begins with an assumption. The difficult thing is how to begin without assumption. This is why we relax into the outbreath or we do this "Three A" practice to release. Nothing. As a preparatory practice for this we can explore how moment by moment we create the world out of our thoughts. Buddhism says that the mind is chief. Thoughts arise in the mind and they can be allowed to dissolve back in the mind or they can be taken out into the world. When we let them dissolve back into the mind, we are aware of their empty nature and this is wisdom. When our thoughts take us out into the world, we connect with other people and patterns in the world change; this is compassion, communication, connectivity.

RIPPLING WAVES IN THE OCEAN OF BECOMING

The meditative approach and being in the world are not two different domains. The central point is that each of us is the centre of the world. Not because we are trapped in an ego, but the revelation of experience is the mirror-like mind or awareness which each of us has, and which shows itself.

On the level of an individual self we are moving through the world and on the level of awareness the world is revealing itself to us and through us. Our body and our voice are the energy of the mind. Our thoughts and feelings are the energy of the mind. This energy of the mind is what in ordinary language we call "experience".

So whenever we can in the course of the day, we can just look out into space, relax into the outbreath and open to everything. From the point of view of duality the world is full of stuff, millions and millions of different things. From the point of view of dzogchen everything is experience, empty manifestation ceaselessly changing. When we see it as experience we relax and move easily because our body and our speech are part of the field of experience. We are not a thing apart from other things but we are rippling waves in the great ocean of becoming.

We will now do a final mediation and start with the "Three A" practice.

[MEDITATION PRACTICE]

Whatever merit arises from our practice together we offer to all sentient beings.

Imagine rays of rainbow lights spreading out from your heart to all beings in the different dimensions.

[DEDICATION OF MERIT]