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# *KEEP IT SIMPLE: DZOGCHEN IN DAILY LIFE*

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## *Extracts*

*Because our life is nothing but moments, events, arising and passing, arising and passing. All that we've ever done is gone. Our childhood is gone. We can remember it, we can tell stories about it, but it's gone. Even our breakfast is gone. Everything is gone. If we really see that, then when we tell people about ourselves, about our past, we're just inviting them to fall asleep with us. We're saying, 'I had a lovely dream, let me share it with you. You can fall asleep in my dream for a while and then, because I believe in reciprocity, I'll fall asleep in yours.'*

*Life is not fair, it's not rational, it's not based on arithmetic. It is very complex and very confusing. And so the ego's desire to control, to plan, to predict, to know what's what in advance, is always going to be stymied because it's operating from the wrong position: that information will show you what to do. Information doesn't show you what to do; it is participation, actually being part of things, that allows us to know what to do.*

*To try and fill yourself with an ideal object is the basis of samara. You try this object, and it doesn't work out but you think, 'Well, I was just a bit unlucky this time, I see now how I could improve the fit...' and like an engineer you try to change yourself a bit, you try to change the object a bit, always hoping that one day the ideal configuration is going to arise. From life to life to life we revolve in samsara on the basis of this.*

*If you stay spacious you start to realize everything is just going by itself and because it's going you don't have to push it away; and because it's going you can't hang onto it anyway - so you don't need to do anything.*

*To see that the world is not our world, it's not world on our terms, the world is as it is, and we are as we are. But we don't quite like how we are and we want to change ourselves into something else, and we don't quite like how the world is, and we want to change it into something else. Then before we even engage with things as they are we've already started to cook them into something else, to fit our master plan.*

## Contents

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INTRODUCTION.....	2
Heart of the view of dzogchen is - what is the basis of our identity? .....	3
The function of Dharma.....	4
Fantasy of omnipotence .....	5
Stable phenomena exist only on the level of abstraction .....	6
Identity .....	8
VIEW .....	10
1. First is a primordial openness.....	10
2. Second aspect is the richness.....	11
3. Activity is the quality of this third domain.....	12
PART 2 .....	14
Primordial purity .....	14
Mindfulness practice is grounded in duality.....	15
If you were just one thing.....	17
The energy that Karma is created from.....	18
QUESTIONS.....	20
Q1: Eyes.....	21
Q2: Mindfulness and sense of separate self.....	22
PART 3 .....	23
Root of <i>samsara</i> and <i>nirvana</i> are not two different places .....	23
Refuge .....	26
Not a sign that something has gone wrong.....	27
We're in zombie territory.....	30
All objects come from the mind & looking at the root .....	30
PART 4 .....	32
Dzogchen transmission absolute confidence in the primordial purity of our nature.....	32
Purification is very important especially if you understand that there is nothing to purify .....	34
QUESTIONS.....	36
Q1: The three As .....	36
Q2: When you say everything is perfect is that dualistic?.....	36
Q3: Transmission, Intoxication, Cause & Effect .....	37
Q4: Shining beings .....	39
Q5: Pitfalls .....	40

## INTRODUCTION

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Some of the time I'll be speaking and you'll be listening. And listening to anything, including dharma, can be a way of becoming more stupid. It can be a way of affirming the fact that you are the one who knows something, and solidifying a basis which is actually unreliable.

So, what is sound? Clearly there is vibration in the air. When that vibration comes to you, you understand it, because I'm speaking in a language which you know. If I was to speak in a language you didn't know you would get the noise vibration, but you wouldn't have any semantic hook yourself to make sense of what's there.

So a key thing in listening is to be aware of your active participation in the construction of meaning. And as you listen to observe how you, yourself, are making what I say. So it's not as if I'm sort of cooking something and it goes into your mouth and you get what I cooked - we always turn things into our own frame of reference. And so one of the values of listening is that it can perhaps bring to mind, highlight, make more aware for us the kinds of frames of reference that we have. And through that we can see how actively, moment by moment, we are construing or constructing frames of reference. Perhaps we can never step out of these frames of reference, but we can start to see them as being gestures into the flow of participation with others; that we ourselves have our own styles. Just as we have our own ways of walking and our own ways of talking - the tonal qualities of our voice and so on - we also have our own ways of listening. Some people listen in a very believing way, other people in a very suspicious way.

So having a sense of how you relate to something which is operating in the world around you is very important. Part of the possibility in all schools of buddhism is a sense of awakening, which would indicate that somehow we are asleep. And we can be asleep in many different ways. The most common way is to be asleep in assumptions. And languages are families of assumptions. It's very cozy, it's very comforting to understand a language. You feel at home. You start to read a nice novel and it takes you over and you're in it; and it's really reaffirming your values, and you feel extended by this enriching experience. That's a particular kind of sleep.

It's a beautiful dream, it's a valuable dream, it may be a very ethical dream. But it's a dream, and a form of sleep because the one who is experiencing it has fallen into the experience, is intoxicated with the experience, and therefore is not being refreshed by the experience - may feel excited, may feel energized, but is not fundamentally refreshed because there is a kind of leaning forward, learning onto and into the experience as it comes.

### [Heart of the view of dzogchen is - what is the basis of our identity?](#)

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So at the heart of the view of dzogchen is - what is the basis of our identity? Who are we? Without having some clarity about that it's very difficult to know how to proceed. Even before we were born, people had all sorts of stories about who we would be. Mothers, other people talk to the baby in the womb. All sorts of ideas are around - hopes and fears and so on. As soon as the baby comes out of the mother's body, many, many stories are being told to the baby and about the baby. And we find ourselves as we develop taking our place in this incredible weaving of stories. People say we look in a particular way, people say we resemble some aunt or uncle, people say we're good at something or bad at something. And there are all sorts of suggestions, all sort of mirrorings - as we are led to believe - honest mirrorings of who we are. But these are ways in which we're encouraged to develop a sense of who we are. So when we meet people we usually introduce ourselves by telling them stories about ourselves. What had we done in the past, the kind of food we like to eat, the kind of work we do, whether we have children or not. These define who we are.

Of course, there is a lot of truth in that. We have our passport. We can't really swap our passport for someone else's. We have formal identities, formal capacities, and skills and qualities which we'd developed in the course of our lives. Other potentials which we haven't developed. And as the years go by, it's often more difficult to unfold new potentials because the power of repetition is very strong.

So all that we know about ourselves which provides a kind of basis, a kind of sense of who we are is both very useful, but from a traditional buddhist point of view, very deluding. Because it's a kind of smoke screen, it's a kind of illusion which stops us seeing the actual basis from that we operate from moment by moment. And the function of study and practice is simply to get back to the root, or the ground or the source of our experience, so that the various moves that we make can be seen in relation to their actual source.

In the media there's a lot of reporting about the dangers of fundamentalism. Fundamentalism is related to the fundament, to the base, the thing that things settle on. People also have a fear of radical politics. Radical is linked to 'root', and the 'root' is that which is in the ground. dzogchen is both radical and fundamental. But not fundamental in the way religions of the Middle East are fundamental. Its fundament is not a dogma. We say 'In the beginning was the word'. From the point of view of Buddhism that would be completely untrue. In the beginning is the silence. In the beginning is the spaciousness. In the beginning is the openness. A silence, a spaciousness, an openness which has never been lost, which is never obscured. But within which, in its infinite generosity, sounds, speeches, forms and so on are occurring ceaselessly. So it's the false fundament, the false foundation which is the source of ignorance. And we are all fundamentalist in that way, because we believe that we are who we are.

I'm James, I'm born in Scotland, I'm this, I'm that, and that. It's like compacting something. Like in Tibet, when it was dry, they would take earth and stack up some wooden blocks and keep stamping on the earth until it solidified. And that's what we are. We are compacted or compounded out of our experience and that appears to be a real and substantial basis for our existence. But in fact it's just a cloud of dust. Because our life is nothing but moments, events, arising and passing, arising and passing. All that we've ever done is gone. Our childhood is gone. We can remember it, we can tell stories about it, but it's gone. Even our breakfast is gone. Everything is gone. If we really see that, then when we tell people about ourselves, about our past, we're just inviting them to fall asleep with us. We're saying, 'I had a lovely dream, let me share it with you. You can fall asleep in my dream for a while and then, because I believe in reciprocity, I'll fall asleep in yours.'

## The function of Dharma

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But the function of dharma is not that. The function of dharma is an attempt to let go of these false ground of these believe systems, of these identifications which seem so determining about who we are, in order to see what they actually are. It's not like you're trying to clear it away and say, 'Oh, I took the wrong path for such a long time, but now I've stopped doing that, I've cleared all that away, and now I have clear blue sky.' We're not some kind of born again Tory Party. What we are trying to do is to be able to see that everything that there has ever been has always been pure, that is to say it's empty. It's not separate from its own ground. But the ground that we thought it was, was an illusory ground. The ground based on reification, that is to say, on turning ephemeral moments, on turning concepts and ideas into things. Creating the sense that there are real entities, and that of course, number one, firstly, that we are a real entity: 'I am me. I exist as a solid person. I have some possibilities and some restrictions, and so I want to develop myself.' And that's a very good thing to do.

So, there's 'me' and 'my potential' and the gap between me and my potential is the possibly of development. Sounds good. Lots of people do that. They go to courses. They go on the alpha course, they go on all sorts of courses to develop themselves. From the point of view of buddhism, also they say it's a very good idea: 'First start with yourself. When you find yourself then you should start to develop yourself. If you haven't found yourself, what are you going to develop?' But of course, in buddhist meditation, we discover that when you try to find yourself – you don't find anyone. Because from the very beginning there has been no substantial, enduring individual personal self. So, what would you develop?

## Fantasy of omnipotence

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The fantasy in this kind of view is one of omnipotence: 'I am in charge of my life. I have to take responsibility for my life. It's all up to me, and if I don't do it, that would be very sad. It behooves me as a good, kind, thoughtful person to develop myself in order to enrich myself and help other people. Sounds very nice. It's another kind a dream. Who is this one who is going to be developed? - Me. This is the false foundation. Who is this 'me'? Well, let's not bother about that because then it gets all metaphysical and complicated. Let's just assume as we all can that we all exist and that we are going to develop ourselves. Start with an assumption and proceed in ignorance with a smile.

This is why dzogchen, as a view, is very radical. Because it puts into question where you start from. If you start without really examining the root of your own existence, and see how deep that root goes. And that it's in fact, inseparable from the ground openness, dharmadhatu, so many names given to this. If we don't have that as a living experience in ourselves then we are basically building castles in the air. We're bringing experiences, our own life experience, which are usually a conglomerate of absolute freshness which we all experience, with the immediate mixing with habits and patterns of interpretation. So we take things that are fresh and alive and mix them with what is known in order to give a sense of meaning and direction. Does this seem to speak to your own existence? That for the sake of power and clarity, as we understand it, we adopt a view of selective attention. We keep following the things that we know about, and that we are familiar with, and we don't look at the other things so much. But to be awake is to take in everything.

To see that the world is not our world, it's not world on our terms, the world is as it is, and we are as we are. But we don't quite like how we are and we want to change ourselves into something else, and we don't quite like how the world is, and we want to change it into something else. Then before we even engage with things as they are we've already started to cook them into something else, to fit our master plan. But if we believe the basic assumption in Buddhism that we suffer from ignorance and attachment, and that that creates a kind of confusion in us - then to have confused, ignorant people in charge of this major project is may be not very wise.

When we gaze on our glorious political leaders, do we find their radiant shining intelligence a source of inspiration? So, when we gaze at ourselves and we see how confused and lost we can

be, perhaps we also should stop omnipotence. Perhaps we should stop invading other countries; having very good advice so give our friends and neighbours about how they should live their lives; knowing how to sort out things.

In the beginning is: who is the one who is speaking, who is the one who is present? Without really listening deeply into ourselves and finding out who we are, all we have are stories. And these stories, the words that we have become like stepping stones across a river. If you try to go across a traditional pathway it's always a bit wobbly, you're never quite settled. This is often how our lives are, that we go from one thing which is a little bit unstable to another thing which is a little bit unstable, always in the hope of finding stability. But how could we have stability? The Buddha's first teaching is all compounded things are impermanent. I think that's revealed to us again and again and again. Everything is changing. This is not, I think, a dogmatic belief. You don't have to believe it. You can just look. It's in your own experience. It's in breathing in and out. It's in looking at the weather as it changes. It's seeing how your interests in different kinds of people, in different kinds of food, in different kinds of clothing are changing.

It's in the immediacy of your perception through your senses. Objects don't stay the same. Even if you take an object which seems to be very fixed – piece of sculpture, pebble on the beach – if you just let you gaze rest with it you'll find that it's changing. It's changing because of external factors like the light. Maybe a cloud suddenly comes and the lighting is different so the colouration in the stone changes. But it's also because internal factors are changing. And so, your relation with what you're seeing is changing.

### Stable phenomena exist only on the level of abstraction

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Stable phenomena exist only on the level of abstraction. That's bizarre isn't it? That is to say that this room that we are in exists as an abstract idea. Each of us can look around and see the room. Clearly we are in some place. I can believe I have been here before. But where have I been? I've been in this room. Well, I haven't really examined this room. In fact it's on the basis of not examining this room that I can be very confident that I've been here before. Because the map, or the image of this room that I have in my mind can be fitted with how things are here. But in fact the layout is probably a little bit changed. Certainly the people in the room are a bit changed. The coats hanging on the wall are a little bit changed. The light coming through the roof is a bit changed. The actual phenomenological immediacy of this room is different. But it fits with my concept of the room sufficient for me to say with full confidence, 'I'm in the same room.'

So what is stable? The actuality of the room or the concept of the room? That's very scary. Because it means then, if this is true, that we're kind of zombies walking around inside our assumptions, which are habitual, stabilizing a world which is vital, and fresh and changing. Hm. Imagine if we were to live in a more fresh, vital way. Holding back on these assumptions, and through that allowing more of the world in and more of our responses out. We might be touched and moved more. We might be less afraid of what's going on. And might find ourselves more part of existence. That would be the understanding of dzogchen.

So part of it is to observe ourselves. How do we use concepts? Can we trust and believe in what we use on a daily basis? That is to say, can we trust ourselves? If somebody asks, 'Do you know the way to Bodhi Garden?' you say 'Yeah, you just go down this path.' You tell someone on the basis of your understanding of the geography of Brighton. Now, that is not inaccurate. The person has learned how to take instructions: 'You take the second turning on the right.' That's very abstract isn't it? What the person is walking along is a street. The street is full of leaves. And the wind is suddenly burling and picking up paper bags, and the rain lashes into their face so they get a bit confused and then they're looking again. That's what they're having. They're having a complex, unrepeatable, evanescent experience while looking out for the second turning on the right. These are two different orders of experience, aren't they? And I would suggest to you, a lot of the time we're in the second one. That we're addicted to abstraction. And the abstractions in their clarity create confusion and obscuration.

And this is part of the difficulty with the modern scientific development. That we have more machines, more technical basis for developing abstracted clarity. But that abstracted clarity can make people very present in themselves in a way that is cut off from the world. It's extremely normal, I don't know about Brighton but in London to see people walking down the street doing something on their phone. Everyone else has to look out for where they are going, because they are not looking out for themselves. So they feel very present, very in their lives, but in a completely decontextualised way. The actuality of the lived-shared moment with other people is cut off, as they attend to abstraction - that is to say, abstract letters appearing on the screen - and going into a vital communication with somebody who's not there, and simultaneously ignoring people who are there. This is quite alarming really. Because it means the immediacy of the face of the other - other people's eyes; the fact that they have to get out of the way; the fact that our existence is based on mutuality and saying thank you, and recognizing when other people do indeed get out of the way for us - all of that is blanked off. So one lives in this world of monologic, single person discourse with a sense of mastery.

The view of dzogchen, which I will set out shortly is very, very different from that. We would see that the sense of controlling phenomena will always be an illusion. Because in order to control something you have to stand apart from it. So for example, I have a bit of a cold. It's been quite bad. I've been coughing up lots of yellow guck, and so I could say, 'I have a cold'. There was me before I had a cold, and I hope the cold will go away and then I will be back to myself. That's a normal way of speaking. So in that way it appears that the cold is an interruption to me, myself. It is an undermining of my health. It is a diminishing of me. But its 'me'! This is how I am when I have a cold. Little bit more self-pity. Little bit of poor me, which is always quite nice. So what is that? Should I not have that? Should I be very heroic and brave? Should I collapse into it? What has been stolen from me by having a cold? My health. When I get back to my health, my cold will go away.

But what does it mean to have a cold? Every now and then I get some wheezy rattling and I have to spit this stuff out. I don't sleep so well. I feel a bit fuzzy in my head. This is my experience. From what point of view is it bad? From the point of view of knowing what is health. This is like being back in primary school; writing an essay on compare and contrast. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a cold? Well, if you're at school, you might get off going to school, so that would be a very great advantage and you might get to eat special things. The disadvantage is you can't go out and play football. So, who is it who has the cold? Is there a

James, a noun which endures through time, and is susceptible to certain factors around like adverbs and adjectives that are modifying and qualifying this James. There is James with cold and James without cold. James without cold is the real James, but sometimes James gets a cold and then he's not really James, he's just a sub form of James. This is often how we experience our lives. This is the notion of an enduring constant self. A self which 'I' should be in charge of. 'I' should be able to determine how this self is going to be. But of course our body is pray to all sorts of things.

To travel for me in London, I have to get on the underground. In the underground people are in very close proximity and coughing and all sorts of things. We give and receive bacteria all the time. The body is impacted by the environment. Why? Because the body is part of the environment. We are not apart from the world. We are of the world, in the world. And therefore we partake of what is the world. So it is not in the least surprising that we get colds. Because that's part of being here. Sickness is part of life. Suffering is part of life. Depression is part of life. Hopelessness is part of life.

One of the things that ails us most is wishing to have another life. As the buddha said, 'Suffering is getting what you don't want, and not getting what you do want'. So, what is the cause of suffering? It is the wanting. That is to say, the abstract notion as to how we should be. So instead of focusing on, 'How can I live with my life as it arrives for me', we are concerned with, 'how can I develop plans, and manage myself to order to fit my plan?' This is underpinning the rise of cognitive behavioural therapy, which becomes pervasive in more and more aspect of life - in management of companies etc. Because it's about how to make yourself conform to an image of yourself which is acceptable to other people.

## Identity

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That is to say, it's saying something very useful – identity is social. But it's saying, 'don't worry about yourself in terms of authenticity, the main thing is social conformity.' And if you conform enough you'll feel better. Why does it have to be a trade off? Then, the CBT critique of psychoanalysis would be, 'oh, you can be so finely attuned to yourself that you can't participate in the world. All this insight wouldn't change anything and you continue to have a difficult life'. So then you have to choose authenticity or fitting in. But maybe we can have authentic participation. Which is about being grounded in the infinity of our being, and moving from that with others with the sensitivity of how they actually are. There's no game plan you can do for that.

You can't plan on a Sunday what you're going to do in work on a Monday morning. 'Oh, when I arrive I'm going to say this and this.' When you arrive the person you were going to speak to looks very sad. Someone in their family looks very sick. Now you're going to confront them? Probably not. Unless you're very stupid. Or maybe you go on an assertiveness course, and you feel entitled to confront them. But it wouldn't be any good because the person you want to confront isn't there. The person who gave you a hard time is now suffering. So where are they? 'But why should they get away with it?' Well, who's getting away with it? Were always getting away with it. Because were always getting away from it. We're usually in the past or in the future. In the moment all you've got is what's in the moment. When we build up notions about how

people are, who they are what they should do, what they shouldn't do, what we're happy with what we're not happy with, we create control structures or command structures which give a certain sense of power and authority. But they blind us to freshness.

So part of the practice to be in daily life as it is, is to find a way to be fresh and flexible and attuned at the same time. If you're not fresh you'll be importing stuff. If you're not flexible, you're going to feel as you move to accommodate other people, you're going to feel oppressed. The worst thing for us is to have a meter running, to know how much good we do. To know how kind we are. To know what sacrifices we make to other people. But why is it that I always have to pay more? Yeah, every time we go out, I pay more- how come? What's the benefit of that meter?

People do that in all sorts of subtle ways, we have a sense of who does this and who does that. Now if you can hold that very lightly, that could be helpful in terms of participation because you'd have a sense of how the other person was. But if you hold it in an arithmetical way, if you add up the world, if you come to conclusions about how things are, it feeds into the reified stasis, that is to say the solidified sense of 'I know who people are', 'I've got their number', 'I know what they're up to'.

But that's a kind of death isn't it? Because people do change and in fact one of the things that stops people changing is our fixed beliefs about them. Because we ceaselessly cue each other into these fixed, choreographed moves of how we're going to be. It is why it's often refreshing if you know someone well and you see them by chance with other people and you notice that they're behaving towards these other people in a way that they never behaved towards you- how can that be? Because you're part of how they are.

I show myself in different ways at different times. I don't have reliable ways of being. I have certain patterns which come up according to circumstances. The more patterns we can develop, the more richness we can have of response, the more we'll find ourselves subtly finding ways of attuning and fitting into different circumstances. That has to do not with mastery but with resourcing.

Rather than being in control of the situation, it's about feeling the situation, feeling the world in a subtle way and allowing ourselves the possibility of meeting it. Which means, essentially, not knowing who one is. Because if you know who you are, you've then got a sort of template, you've then got a nailed down patterning of who you are which stands in relation to what you might do in this moment and then you feel yourself moving out.

People talk of moving out of their comfort zone. But comfort is an abominable concept. What has comfort to do with wisdom, or compassion or love? If you have to look after small babies, comfort is the last thing you ever get. Small babies need to be comfortable. Mothers, in particular, are never comfortable. They carry these babies as they get heavier, they get sore backs, they're tired and so on. Love and comfort don't really go together. Comfort is very much based on the idea of a return to the status quo. It's a kind of self soothing which says 'if I return to the kind of vibration frequency that I'm familiar with, if I can surpass or cut off the impinging factors of the world that call me out in different ways, haaaaah, then I can relax'.

You come home to your flat, you close the door, you can put on music you like, make yourself the kind of drink you like, lie on the sofa. Haaaah, that's better. That's better because I'm now not in relation to the other, because the other is a demand. This is one of the things we can look at a little bit today, about is there a way of freeing ourselves from that. Because in a sense, that's the secret little counter that's running all the time. Why are other people draining? Can we find a way into a source that allows ourselves just to have energy and freshness whatever the circumstances. Because if the source is me, if I know who I am and I know my capacity, then clearly I can exhaust myself by running over my capacity.

And we do have a capacity, we can get burned out. But we also have a basis or a source or an openness, which is different from our capacity. I don't know if this language means too much, hopefully it will as we progress. And by staying more with your source, your capacity can be replenished. And very often people find that through love. Especially mums looking after small babies. That they find a way to give more when they're at the end, they find a way to give more. Because of self forgetfulness. Because of the other taking one out of ones-self, in that magical moment, one is replenished.

It's an amazing phenomena. People do that in all sorts of ways. Fire-fighters do it, soldiers do it, people working in A&E departments do it, they're at the end and then suddenly somebody's rushed in and people find themselves transcending. So that transcending is a way of moving out of the frame of reference that tells me 'I can't do it anymore, I've had enough'. You could do that running on adrenaline which is popular but not very helpful or you can do it in that moment by going deeper into the source.

## VIEW

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So dzogchen as a tradition is grounded in an understanding of a particular view of our nature, of how we are. It's always important to hold this in mind as it brings a kind of clarity so I'll just very briefly set out how this is so. Here we are in this room. We're aware of being in this room. Even if we don't have particular thoughts or if we do have particular thoughts, we're just here. The basic quality of being here, if we stay present with it, reveals itself as a presence which isn't an absence. That is to say, to be here is to be vitally connected with whatever is going on. This quality in dzogchen is seen as having three aspects.

### 1. First is a primordial openness

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The first is a primordial openness. That is to say that our awareness, our presence, has no limit to it. It didn't start when we were born, it won't end when we die. It is an ever present, infinite freshness which welcomes all phenomena. So when we do the meditation as we'll do in a bit, we simply relax into this infinite openness.

Because it's open, it doesn't have any content, it's not constructed out of anything, it's not made of sensations or emotions, any kind of feeling, it's not made out of thoughts or memories, but it is infinitely hospitable to these phenomena. All colours, all shapes, everything can be welcomed within this spaciousness and the spaciousness itself is never lost by whatever complexity is present in it. In the tradition, this is called 'primordial purity'. It means it's a purity which cannot be contaminated by any phenomena. So, whatever has happened to you in your life, good things or bad things, maybe terrible things, things about which you may feel guilt or shame, from the very beginning your own nature is pure of these things. It is beyond contamination. It is said to be like the sky.

All sorts of things happen in the sky- nuclear explosions, meteors, clouds, sunshine and they pass through. Huge fires erupt, napalm in Vietnam, big black billowing clouds and then, after a while, it's gone. In the same way, this aspect of our being is never contaminated. What gets contaminated is the constructions we create for ourselves. We think 'oh God I'm such a bad person, why did I do that? I didn't mean to do it'. You know, 'I did this'. Somebody seems to be there and it's that person that did the bad thing and it's that person that carries the responsibility and the guilt.

But on the level of the openness, there is no person, it is impersonal and yet it is you. It has nothing of your personal details about you in it, that is to say it's not formed out of these, and yet nothing is closer to you than just the fact of your mere presence because your presence is there whether you're happy or sad. You're present in your sadness, you're present in your happiness, you're present in going to sleep, you're present in waking up, you're present in being angry with someone, you're present in kissing someone. There are obscurations that can arise in this but this basic quality of presence goes through all experiences. On this level it's often compared to a crystal ball.

A crystal ball that will take on the colouration of whatever materials it's placed on. If it's put on red cloth it will be red, if it's put on blue cloth it will be blue, it has no colour itself and yet it shows every colour. So our openness, unborn as it is, beyond any contamination, is constantly filled with everything. And yet it's in the very nature of everything to be impermanent. Everything is changing, but this spaciousness never changes. So it's enormously important in the practice to relax into this state because if you can really directly taste the state and trust it as yourself, then the fear of death is greatly diminished. Because then rather than having an idea about what might happen when you die or reading the Tibetan book of the dead, all these kind of constructions, you know directly 'I am indestructible'.

Simultaneous with that, thoughts and feelings are arising which are highly destructible, they're auto-destructible, they're, in the language of dzogchen, 'self-liberating'. All that you are, all that you have been as you, will vanish. Your gender, your age, your health, your sickness, your intelligence, your knowledge, your diplomas, your unhappiness- all of that, it's changing all the time isn't it?

## 2. Second aspect is the richness

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The second aspect is the richness, or the immediacy, of this open state. It's compared to the way in which a mirror is instantly filled whenever something is held in front of it. The mirror doesn't have to plan or create to build something up like pieces of Lego, it's immediately there. In the same way, when you come down the passage into this room, the whole room is here. If you turn your head and you look around at the people, they're immediately here. We're not constructing images of others, there is a 'given-ness' to whatever is there. That given-ness means there are many, many possibilities, there is a huge potential because everything we experience is ourselves, it's our world.

Now we may feel not entitled, in our modern culture we often don't feel entitled to smile at people in the street. These are the co-inhabitants of your world, but this social miasma, this dream that we live in, says you should leave other people alone. Autonomy, the right to personal privacy is more important than anything else. And in that way, we can feel that our world stops with our skin. So I live in my world and then I meet you who is living in your world. This is not true - because you are my world. When I see you I feel something. That feeling is my feeling and it's arising in relation to you. My feelings arise in relation to music I hear, listening to the seagulls, feeling the wind in my face, that is me and it's me as part of the world. It's not that there's some postbox on the front of my nose where I open things up and have a choice, it arrives before there's choice, it's immediately there.

That is what this immediacy is, that we make sense of the world after the fact. The fact is, it's already happened, it's always happening and the only way to be with it is to be immediately present in it and not think about it. Thinking about it creates another realm, the actual given-ness is just that. So there you've got the nakedness, the openness and the immediacy.

### 3. Activity is the quality of this third domain

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And as we come towards the richness and complexity of this world that we encounter, all we have is our moment by moment behaviour. Moment by moment we are in movement. Activity is the quality of this third domain because we participate in the world with others through our body, voice and mind.

Our body is always gesturing: gesturing away from the other, gesturing towards the other. Our voice is communicating in the same way, it's saying 'no', it's saying 'yes'. Our thoughts and feelings are expanding and contracting. This is going on all the time. Is it going on in relation to what is actually there or in relation to fantasies? We go back to what I was opening up a little earlier, the relation to maps and the territory to the abstract concepts that we have.

So, say for example, at work you might have a colleague that you feel you don't get on very well with. Someone who you can't really think of what to say to. So, because you know that, when you start to see them you get a slightly sinking feeling, if you've got to have a meeting and you find yourself sitting next to them you say 'hmmm, it'd be much easier if I was sitting with someone else'. That's an indication of how our energetic resonance, our strong definition of who we are compromises our capacity to respond to somebody who's there. Because the person who's there has a lot of potential, we all have a lot of potential, but they're trapped in a limitation

and now we have gone into our limited parallel, into their limitation. Because they're trapped, I'll be trapped too. That's nice isn't it- it's only fair. And the more I'm trapped, the more they're trapped. So both of you are trapped and then you sit there hoping for the moment to be over so you can do something more interesting.

In that way you've just burnt up your life. And not only has time gone, but what has been affirmed is 'I get trapped, I can't move, things are strongly real, I don't like unpleasant things and I do want pleasant things', all of which make sense but all of which is the bars of the prison, 'I have not been able to find a way of moving myself with all my potential towards just a little gesture of human kindness towards this person'. And even if they are very angry and self-absorbed, I can still, in my silence in this state of the crystal ball, just open and welcome them. The devices that start to feel that they're contaminating or restrictive of my freedom to be myself - I want to hold them at bay. And of course the more I hold them at bay and have this pressure, I'm restricting myself. So they become strongly real and I become strongly real and the basis for suffering is installed.

So this third level is the level of momentary participation where each time we meet someone, it's a new beginning, it's always a new beginning. What we know about people is not really a very accurate indicator of how they are now. That's why when we meet, people say 'how are you?'. And if we're really interested in them, that's incredibly helpful. Because the invitation for the other to reveal themselves gives us information about how to be with them.

But very often 'how are you' is simply a social empty signifier. We don't really care. We're saying 'I assume you are who I take you to be and I'm going to proceed on that basis and please try and conform to my expectations'. And that of course then means 'I want to be comfortable in knowing who you are' rather than 'I want to be fresh in becoming alive in this moment'. That's very sad isn't it? That's a really shitty kind of compromise to make, that being asleep and cosy is better than being awake. But of course if we're awake we don't know what to do, we don't know in advance.

So, how to be relaxed in a situation that might otherwise make anxiety, because often we want to know things as a way of managing the anxiety about 'how will I be'? Don't think, it's never helpful to worry about how you're going to be because you can't know. You don't make your own being. This is the control fantasy of the ego. 'I am me and I'm in charge of my life and I have to determine how I present myself to other people'.

Well of course on some level that's true, it's helpful if people have a shower every now and then so they don't stink, so some thoughtfulness about the body is very useful. But, how we are with other people will be determined by the other people unless we are going to annihilate them. Therefore to be too controlling of how you are going to be means that you are arming yourself against the other. Like the Maginot line that was build to defend against future invasions, but of course the German tanks just went around the edges of it. Whenever you build a defensive wall, it will never stretch far enough because we are infinite. There will always be cracks in our façade.

The world is too complex, there are too many vectors, there are too many strands and tendrils of shared complex karma coming into existence for us ever to know what's what. There's poor Gordon Brown, he waits a long, long time to get the job that he always knew was his. And as

soon as he gets it, it's spoiled. That's terrible, very sad for him, he's a good boy. Tony Blair wasn't such a good boy. Apparently Tony Blair didn't try very hard, he didn't study all night but Gordon would be up till 2-3 in the morning reading, memorising, knowing everything and it's all gone wrong for Gordon. That's life isn't it? That's really how life is.

I remember in my primary school, every week there was a class monitor appointed and you could wear a little badge that said monitor. In the whole of my primary school I only ever won this badge once and in the week that I was to get this badge, the boy who had had the badge the previous week was off sick so, for the whole of my week for wearing the badge, he was off sick. And when he came back the badge went to the next person. Awwwww, a lot of poor me. And life is like that, it really is, I mean that is what life is. Life is not fair, it's not rational, it's not based on arithmetic. It is very complex and very confusing. And so the ego's desire to control, to plan, to predict, to know what's what in advance, is always going to be stymied because it's operating from the wrong position: that information will show you what to do. Information doesn't do that, it is participation, actually being part of things that allows us to know what to do.

You can see that with football teams or rugby teams. The teams that are actually functioning as teams, people know what to do because they feel the presence of the other player and they send the ball to them. The ones where it goes wrong is where somebody gets absorbed in what they themselves can do and doesn't operate as a team, you get that in work teams as well and you get it in families.

That synergy, that joint productive energy of groups which transcends itself, where there's an extra dimension that comes in requires each person to be as aware of the others as of themselves. So that each person's centre is outside themselves. And that's really what teaching on emptiness is about, that rather than the core of my being, being something deep inside me, the core of my being is in this space. That I, in my embodiment, and being able to speak and move, am an aspect of space, energy moving in space, moving with you. And that for each of us, where we begin is the space in front of us. We meet everything in the space in front of us, we move into the space in front of us and that's where other people come to us in. So this is always the centre of our world. Not inside ourselves.

When you do meditation on chakras and so on, that's a method for bringing your awareness into the vitality of the body. But if we centre ourselves in ourselves, I would suggest this can often bring an implicit violence towards the environment. Because now I'm me and I know who I am. Hm. But what will I be? That would depend on you so in order to have a life I have to let the other in. And in letting the other in I have to let the self out. It's the flexibility, the dynamic movement of self and other that bring about a real freshness for us.

## PART 2

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### Primordial purity

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So the main practice connected with this is very, very simple. In its form it's rather difficult to do, mainly because we don't have much trust. Mainly we trust in our problems, we trust in our

limitations, we trust in our faults, we trust in a sense of all the things that we have to do to become better and these beliefs set out a huge agenda of things that can be done before we arrive somewhere good. The view of dzogchen is very different. When it says 'from the very beginning, everything has been perfect'. It means each of us have this perfect nature. It means there is nothing to be done.

Now clearly if you look around the world, we could, as a group, come up with a hundred and one things that have to be done - it's not talking on that level. On the level of your own primordial purity, you and the buddha are absolutely the same, infinitely the same, there is not the least difference. Which means that you don't have to improve yourself, you don't have to add anything to yourself, you don't have to get rid of anything. All you have to do is be with yourself as you are yourself which involves this state of openness.

The main problem in meditation is fixation onto temporary arisings as if the temporary arising was going to provide us with the answer. Thoughts are not the solution. We have thoughts, thoughts can be very useful for many different things. If you're trying to solve a practical problem, thinking about it can be useful because there is a practical problem which exists in the world in a particular way and you can mobilise your resources towards it in a particular way. So, your problem might be 'where can I park my car in Brighton?' and if you have a large database in your head of possible places to park a car then that's very helpful and then you can try that problem solving on these various places, drive around in circles for a while.

That's because you have one object, a car, in search of another illusive object, a parking space, and so these two things can be brought into an alignment. A subject is seeking to find the right object. When we're looking for ourselves, we're not an object so the kind of perception, the kind of enquiry that we are habitualised to make won't work because we're looking for a different kind of thing. You have to forget the arousal patterns, the mobilisation patterns that you would normally have as you move towards an object.

So, a lot of the time what brings us pleasure in life is contact. Being mindfully contactful with someone and that involves mobilising our resources towards the particular object we want to make contact with, not being distracted in various ways and finding a fulfilment through that because then you get the full 'whack' of whatever the object is. So, if you drink a cup of coffee mindfully, you get the full flavour of the coffee and then it will be gone, and then something else will arise and so you can be mindful and you'll find that that enriches the quality of life.

### Mindfulness practice is grounded in duality

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But mindfulness practice is grounded in duality. You are always mindful of something, the basis of mindfulness practice is the development of a refined consciousness which takes a particular object and doesn't let go of it. That is to say it's concerned with attention- 'I am going to attend to this'. I have to know, in that moment, what the 'I' is that's doing the attending. It is simply this quality of attention, and what is the object? It's a cup of coffee, it's a statue of the Buddha, it's a mantra, whatever it is.

Awareness and consciousness are not the same. Awareness has no objects, it has no need of objects. Subject and object arise with duality. Duality is the beginning of samsara because now there is a limited self and a myriad of objects, but, this limited self is of course fragmenting into myriad aspects. So complex subjects, complex subject and there's endless work for the two to do, we're always caught up in something. This is the nature of a subject which is trying to fill itself through the object.

All of us experience, in some way, a lack, an emptiness, a 'less than' in ourselves... 'something's missing, I want more, I don't feel right'. That lack can lead in two directions. If you move towards the object and you think that somewhere in the world there is an ideal lover, an ideal job, a perfect restaurant, the best pair of shoes, some object that, when you get it, it will solve your problems. You will always be frustrated because objects are always changing. You find a nice restaurant and the chef leaves and some arsehole arrives, the restaurant's got the same name, they charge the same amount of money but the food's now crap - how could that be? Very easily, very easily because everything is based on dependent co-origination. Many, many complex sequences of events bring anything into fulfilment and then it's gone.

So, if you look to fill yourself with an ideal object, that is the basis of Samara because you try this object, and it doesn't work out but you think 'I was just a bit unlucky, I see how I could improve the fit' and like an engineer you try to change yourself a bit, you try to change the object a bit, always hoping that one day the ideal configuration is going to arise. From life to life to life we revolve in samsara on the basis of this.

The other pathway is to go into the lack and to understand what the lack is. On its outer form it is a lack of something, on its inner form it is the presence of an absence. The absence of substance, that is to say, there is the taste of an emptiness, something is not there. If something is not there, then maybe nothing is there, what is this nothing?

From the side of samsara, the nothing that's not there is simply the sign 'I need something, I need something to take away the nothing'. From the point of view of mahayana philosophy, and from the point of view of practice in particular, nothing is the road to freedom because when you start to experience yourself as nothing, in particular as 'no-thing', as not an entity, as not something substantial, as something which can never be secured, then the weights and the mobilisation towards the object, the weight and burden of yourself and its desire for a particular kind of antidote starts to relax. 'I'm nothing, I have nothing because everything that I have is not here'. You may well have a flat in Brighton, but it's not much use because you're not in it. At the moment, wherever it is it's just an abstract concept. What you've got here is stuck on a Sunday morning in this damp room. That's all we've got.

So, all the things that we reassure ourselves with, tend to have nothing more substantial to them than ideas. They're like the stories of Scheherazade. They're things that we use to keep death at bay, to steal time, to borrow the illusion that life is safe, they mesmerize us. If we stay with emptiness, something is missing. What's missing is the acceptance that nothing is more powerful and more basic to us than something.

Every something is an aspect of nothing. That's why every something that we ever get is ephemeral, it's just like writing on water, it's just like clouds in the sky, it doesn't mean it's

nothing at all because then we would be on the error of nihilism. But it doesn't mean that it lasts either. So something is there which we can engage with but we can never own or possess.

That is to say our existence is in play, we ourselves are constantly in play with other beings moving and turning according to all sorts of complex fields, factors, but we cannot secure it because it is grounded in nothing. The foundation of our existence is nothing at all. That nothing is not a big black empty hole, it is awareness itself.

Awareness and emptiness is linked with clarity and emptiness, pleasure and emptiness, appearance and emptiness, everything is inseparable from emptiness. So rather than turning towards the object to find a solution, we turn into this feeling of 'ungroundedness' which is often coming like a hungry maw, some devouring presence in ourselves.

Some of you will know these vajra or Tibetan kind of bell, on the side of it, it has little flying buttresses coming up and these are in the form of a *makara* which is a deep sea creature like a Leviathan and it arises out and devours everything in the world. So this is seen as the form of emptiness, emptiness dissolves everything. Now we say time eats everything too, the Greek traditions of Chronos and so on, time devours its own children. Everything is eaten up, all your hopes will go, your fears will go, your doubts will go. It's not that emptiness is other than them and going to eat them from the outside, it has already eaten them. Everything is inseparable from emptiness, that is to say, form and emptiness, emptiness is not different from form. Sound and emptiness, all the skandhas, all the aspects of our existence and simply empty, everything is an illusion. It doesn't mean it's an illusion and so there is nothing, there is everything but everything is an illusion. That means everything is a form of emptiness. I also am empty, I am empty, you are empty. If you look for yourself you won't find any substance but that non-substance is itself the source of everything that you are.

### If you were just one thing

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If you were just one thing, you wouldn't be able to do many different things would you? If you are simply a worker in the People's Republic of China all you need is one blue suit of clothes because what are you? You're a worker. Most of us have more kinds of clothes because sometimes we go to parties and sometimes we go on the beach and sometimes we go to work and sometimes you do some DIY and so you've different kinds of clothes to show the different kinds of thing you do. And you can do that because you're not just one thing. This is wonderful, the very fact of being nothing allows you to be everything. How wonderful, how nice! But, if you become something, then you forget that you're nothing and you forget that you're everything.

Nothing means whatever definition you have of yourself and sometimes these can be a terrifying definitions. You might feel despairing, suicidal, hopeless, you might feel that you've wasted your life, you might feel you're caught up in alcohol, that you can't get relationships to work out, you might feel lonely & despairing. Each of these things, if you really feel it, and allow yourself to stay fully resonantly present with it, will reveal its true nature by vanishing. The more you can inhabit your despair, the more your despair will start to clear and something else will

arise. You are depressed, anxious... don't be ashamed, don't try to be anything else, these things arise and pass.

Having faith in emptiness is very important, because then you can start to attend to the emptiness of things and realise nothing that you experience is a substantial basis for an enduring identity, and yet, momentarily gives you everything you need. If you didn't get depressed, what would you do with your box of Kleenex? You'd have to wait until you get a cold. But if you can have a cry from time to time, that's also very nice. You can feel very despairing. That's also nice because then, in that moment, you can link with the despair of all sentient beings. When you feel happy, you can link with the happiness of all beings. When you feel jealous and envious you can link with these feelings and you think 'oh, when I read this in Shakespeare, Shakespeare's talking about me'. All the characters in Shakespeare are us - we're the tragic heroes and heroines, we're the ones who destroy our lives, we're the ones who don't hear the warning signs in front of our nose. So most of use can say 'I really fucked up, I blew it, I wish I hadn't but I blew it'. Stay with that and then it's gone.

There you experience two things, one is the fullness of the immediate lived moment, and the emptiness of it because it's gone. And the more we practice we can start to experience the emptiness of the fullness so that you have more freedom inside the emptiness. You can fully be whatever the situation is requiring. So, emptiness is my mind, my own self, who I really am. Lots of thoughts arise and they're gone and they're gone. If I was really one of these thoughts, when the thought ended I would cease to exist. 'how do you feel?'... 'I feel really tired'. Then you have a rest, 'how do you feel now?'... 'I don't feel so tired'. 'But you told me you were really tired- you're a liar'... 'I was really tired'. 'Well, you told me you were really tired! You really had to sleep, and now you're not! You cheater, how could you tell me that? You betrayed me'. We're always telling lies, we're always telling the truth. I really need to have a cup of tea, I really need a pee. As soon as you've had your cup of tea you don't need a cup of tea. But in the moment of needing the cup of tea, you really need it. This is form and emptiness. The fully inhabited moment is the vitality of existence, if you can't allow yourself to really feel what it's like to be just dying for a cup of tea, and then it's gone.

### The energy that Karma is created from

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So how to bring the emptiness or the openness into that moment, because if you're very attached to it, it takes on an extra energetic force which is the energy that Karma is created from. There's too much input, too much libidinal cathexis... you're 'umph-ing' into it. But to feel it as light and radiant and with its proper intensity, to enjoy some lovely cheese, to have a nice glass of wine and really appreciate all of that in its emptiness, that it's just movement through time - you will never be able to hold it or grasp it. And sequentially, because you have these ceaseless myriad moments, the one who is experiencing these cannot themselves have any fixed content. I have all of these contents because I don't have any content. This is like the crystal ball- the crystal ball has no colour itself and because of that, it is translucent and so the colours can move through it and it shows these different forms. So moment by moment, we demonstrate, we manifest this infinite variety of possibilities but none of them define who we are.

That's the big difference between samsara and nirvana. In samsara, because we're linked to this sense of lack, because we're looking for an answer to the question of who we are in terms of the object, we over-cling onto momentary arisings as if they had the solution as to who we really are. When we relax and move in the other direction towards nirvana, and they have the same ground, then we experience all the same things, you don't need to change your external behaviour at all, but you can see this beautiful exquisite momentary evanescence - the lightness of our being. Nothing needs to change, you can continue to be anxious and depressed, but now, instead of having a kind of mental construction about your anxiety and seeing it as a problem to be removed, you can feel what is anxiety in the body. You can see it as it comes in your throat when you go to speak and you can feel 'oh- anxiety punctuates the flow of my existence in being in the world with others'. It's a particular temporary kind of punctuation, and then I'm less anxious and I'm in a different way - my body's in a different way, my speech is in a different way, my thought are in a different way. Anxiety is a temporary colouration but it doesn't define who I am.

So I can say 'I am anxious but that's not branded on my forehead, it's not inscribed on my heart, it's just the truth of the moment which is absolutely true for that moment, but not true for the preceding moment or the following moment'. Is there anything which endures? The openness, which is the host who offers infinite hospitality to all these moments. So when we do the meditation practice we relax and open into welcoming whatever is coming. We do the practice with our eyes open, gazing gently into the space in front of us, usually about two arm's length ahead of us. We're also able to see shapes of people's head, bits of the wall and so on, we're not staring at any of these, we're not trying to make them our clearly, but we're integrating the space in our heart, the openness of our own being with the space in the environment around us, and then experiencing the world as it manifests in that space.

The ground of spaciousness is never separated from manifestation. People can spend a lot of time in meditation trying to still their thoughts, to make nothing happen. In the Tibetan tradition this is regarded as very unhelpful. Kalu Rinpoche, whom I studied with in India with for a while, he used to tell a story about a monk who went into retreat and he was doing a lot of shamatha practice, calming his mind, not having any thoughts, one pointed focused attention. And at the end of the month retreat he didn't come out and other monks waited a couple of days. Then they said to the teacher 'oh, he hasn't come out' and teacher just said 'oh, wow... we should take him out'. So they opened the door and he was sitting there in his meditation but a rat had eaten the back of his skull off.

Now that may be just a gothic tale, but it indicates the possibility. If you desensitise yourself, if you stop reacting, you get a problem. One of my good friends in London who has done zen practice for a long time, he was describing very precisely, years ago he was meditating with his zen teacher and he felt this pain in his knee, and he kept sitting and he suddenly felt this very strong pain and he's a doctor so he knew 'Oh, I've just fucked my knee'. And it's true, he has a very bad knee ever since because he didn't listen to his body.

He listened to the abstract rule and put that abstraction above this beautiful, embodied, sensitive, wonderful thing he inhabits. To believe that fascistic practices are a way of awakening and enlightenment is rather silly. But we human beings are prone to believe very silly things. Kindness, tenderness, close attention to detail, these are the most precious things, being a friend

to yourself, being an ally to yourself, not harming your body, not driving your body. If you're meditating and a pain arises in your knee, if you move your knee why is your mind moving? You're moving your knee.

Now we have a dog and the dog has a tail, is the knee the dog and the mind the tail? No, the mind is the dog and the knee is the tail. So, the dog is standing still and moves its knee - move your tail. Always do that. You do not need to interrupt the clarity of your meditation if you move your body because awareness, which is the basis of clarity, is not tied together with the object. Meditational practice based on duality, on subject and object, are always going to be fearful of the body getting out of control. But the body is always out of control. If you sit and meditate for a long time, water will come out of your eyes, snot will dribble out your nose, it's always like that... and you're sitting and your mouth fills up with saliva dribbling down. That's what happens, that's what bodies do. Mine does anyway.

So don't worry. It's very important, this is why we study the view a lot, the view is saying 'from the very beginning, the mind is relaxed, open, unborn'. Unborn means it has never come into existence as an object, you will never find it as a thing and yet it is always present with you. So, when we relax, we just sit in that presence. It will never become clear to you in the way that your hand becomes clear to you. It will never become clear to you in the way that arithmetic is clear to you. It will never become clear in the way that distinguishing a banana from an orange is clear for you. It's not that kind of clarity. These are the clarities of comparing and contrasting and focusing on objects.

The clarity of the mind is like the radiance of the sun. You experience it just in this immediacy of presence which doesn't cease and which is always showing something different. If you look in a mirror you'll see yourself, you won't see the mirror. When you sit in this openness, your mind will show you what's arising in the mind. You won't find the mind itself. But the fact that you can see all that's arising in your mind, is a sign that the mind is there. The mind shows itself through its productivity. It is the creativity, the images, the reflections, the manifestation that shows the mind itself. If you do certain kinds of meditation you can get an instant of just spaciousness and nothing at all but it's just an instance because manifestation is always occurring. So don't try to separate form and emptiness, don't try to push away arisings as if they were an obstacle to meditation. Whatever arises is itself empty, this is non-duality.

Ok, so we try some of this meditation and see how we get on. So, sit in a relaxed way, try to allow your spine to take your weight. As they say, chin is slightly raised, gaze is into the space in front of you and then we recite the sound 'Ahh' three times. 'Ahh' as a sound represents emptiness. Use it just to release all the tensions in the body, the fixations on memories and future planning, hopes and fears, all the internal movements of the mind, just releasing it into that spaciousness. And then settle in that state, just being present with whatever occurs, don't try to run after thoughts that please you, don't try to push away thoughts that don't please you. It's as if your mind is now so completely open, it's like a vast desert, it doesn't belong to anyone. Anything can come there, it's not yours anymore, it's just the mind.

## QUESTIONS

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So usually we do that kind of practice for quite a short period of time at first until you get more used to it. Are there any thoughts or questions you have?

## Q1: Eyes

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*If you have contacts (contact lenses) in that kind of gaze, it's more like the eyes don't tear so much to keep them wet, and if you focus it seems to lubricate itself, so do you do it without contact lenses?*

Well you could try that or every now and then just stop and focus in on something, and then go back into the practice. The main thing is not to hold things too tightly, just make some experiments and see what works.

*Why do you do it with the eyes open? Is it to use all the senses?*

That's one part of it. If you meditate by going into yourself, the focus is on depth- 'There is some truth hidden deep inside me and I'm going to contact it and then come out'. Whereas here, we're working with the non-duality of all things so, this basis here that I take to be me, is an experience that I have. That is to say, I experience myself but I am looking at you and I also experience you. So, you are part of my experience and I am part of my experience.

Now normally I think 'Well, I'm me and I'm experiencing you', so, in that way I am the basis of my experience and you're an object in my experience. But this is being shifted now, I experience you and I experience me and I experience the connection all at the same time. So, the awareness is not something operating from inside me looking out through my senses, but everything of the senses is present immediately in the experience. So, when we hear the rain suddenly hammering on the roof, we hear it there. We don't hear it here and it's presence and our presence experiencing it arise at the same time. This is called co-emergence.

So, subject and object arise together simultaneously. It's not that one is there before the other, and they arise into the field which is already open and empty. Just as if you imagined a stage and two dancers came on, one from each side, and they started to move together, then they're arising together into the space. The moves that they make are determined by each others movement but also the nature of the space. The bigger the stage they're on, the more freedom they have to accelerate and extend and [make] gestures and movements. And that would be the same, that the more spacious and relaxed we are, the more we can experience directly what's happening for us.

But of course at first we start thinking 'Well, what am I doing here? I'm just sitting here with my eyes open' and you're checking it out... 'oh yeah, I'm still here'. There what you're doing is you're mediating your experience in terms of your thought. You're saying 'I need to explain the world to myself'. So what I actually want is explanation and not experience. The more we can relax and just be there, then we enter the territory which is truly raw, naked, it's not cooked, we don't know what it is, it's just... And then into that, you gesture in your ordinary way and then you come back into that and you start to have the pulsation of these three aspects, the open, the immediate and the precise participation in the moment as just this.

I mean that's the danger of doing retreat isn't it? That you can establish a state where you don't have complex interactions and then you come back into the world and you suddenly feel disturbed. So actually from the practice of dzogchen, we do shorter periods of practice and come back in and keep the pulsation moving because the goal is integration, the integration of these three aspects so that, as you're talking with someone, the spaciousness should be there... so that the words are arising from the space and I'm aware of my body as it moves. I'm not making my body move, if I'm looking at you and talking to you, my body will start to do things. I don't know why it does it but it does it so, that's what happens and that's always happening all the time. And it's trusting that, as it were, no-one in charge. That is to say, everything's ok. It'll be ok.

Any other thoughts or questions?

## Q2: Mindfulness and sense of separate self

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*From the perspective of what you're talking about, it feels like mindfulness type meditation. It can feel a bit like it increases that sense of a separate kind of self watching something, a sort of vigilant separate self. Is there still a place for that kind of meditation or is that just actually enhancing a sense of a separate self?*

Well, there's a place for everything. I mean the buddha, they say, thought 84,000 different methods. Each method is useful for some purpose. I have in a drawer, at home, a hammer and a screwdriver. I'm not very interested in DIY and I try and avoid it so that's what's I have. But then when I have to do something, I don't do it very well because I've only got a hammer and a screwdriver. Somebody who is a professional person will have big boxes of stuff, they cart it all around. So, the more tools you have, the more beautifully you can attend to the environment.

That's why, if possible, if we have the time and the energy and the interest, learning all the different dharma methods is wonderful because then the world we inhabit is so multi-textured, so nuanced that the different tools can be very useful. So if we're learning a tool like mindfulness, we have to learn what's it for.

Mindfulness is exactly to make us mindful. That is to say, attentive to a process... 'I am going to attend to this process and I'm going to avoid being distracted by other things'. That's just the basis. Now, that is artificial. That is artificial. You will not become natural by doing artificial things. All artificial things are contained within the state of nature because they're just manifestations but, the problem with mindfulness is, if you think it's the royal road to something it probably isn't.

You become very held, there's a kind of seriousness, everything's very important, going slowly. Somebody sitting eating their bloody porridge mindfully- I can't bear it because it's too precious. You know, you can be aware and slovenly: if you eat a Big Mac and lots of greasy chips, it won't disturb your buddha nature. And so mindfulness is saying, we can draw a line that separates the disturbing factors from the calming factors and that's true. But, if you separate these two, you can hold that for a while but it's like someone using an old fashioned chest expander. There's a tension in it because, actually, the world isn't like that. The world is messy,

always. So mess will always return. So if you've tried to make little boundaries and hold things in a firm way, it can mess things up. It's the same with therapy.

Therapy is an artificial space. Particular kinds of conversation take place in therapy that don't take place anywhere else and you get a quality of attention you don't get and that's why therapy can be very bad for relationships because people start to think that their lover should give them the same quality of attention as their therapist. But their not going to do that because the lover is thinking 'What about me?'. Therapists think 'What about me?' but then they remember 'Oh, the dosh [money]'... the lovers not getting the dosh. And so artifice can easily set a particular register which makes participation in the actual world of live shared events very difficult because you have to be tolerant of other people's messiness.

*When you started you had us notice our breath for a while and that kind of mindfulness presumably would be useful if you're very distracted just to come down to earth.*

Absolutely, that's what it is. It's a method for calming yourself. Focusing on the breath or an external object in Tibetan is called shine which just means 'remaining calm', 'remaining peaceful'. So, if you want to be able to integrate complexity on a relative level, first of all you have to be able to resist the natural move of being absorbed in the moment because, if you thought of a circle that was not quite completed, there are two things which look very close. One is...

## PART 3

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### Root of *samsara* and *nirvana* are not two different places

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Start with some practices as before, using the space in front of you. Relax your gaze into the space and we recite the 'AH' together. When you're just sitting in that state, try to keep a subtle sense of who is the one who is here? That is to say this mind, this presence, this awareness which is having this experience what is it resting on? What is it connected to? The solution to that if you think if there is some definite positioning, just stay with that and see what happens.

And we can come back into doing this practice several times. In the dzogchen teachings we often say 'there is one ground and two paths' as we were looking on before, that the root of *samsara* and *nirvana* are not two different places; they have the same root or the same ground. And when we do this practice of meditation we can start to experience these two aspects or these two pathways directly. Because when we relax and open and then you find yourself caught up in a stream of thought or feeling and you're just in it, then you experience directly the pathway of closure in which there's a kind of intoxication - an investment - and you become what you're dreaming of, what you're thinking of; and then sometimes you manage just to stay more relaxed and thoughts and feelings just pass away. These are the two different paths, this is not something abstract and philosophical; it's directly present to us.

If you stay spacious you start to realize everything is just going by itself and because it's going you don't have to push it away; and because it's going you can't hang onto it anyway - so you don't need to do anything. The more you experience this you get a virtuous circle in which is

happening by itself so there is nothing for me to do and you relax more; and because you relax more, it's happening more by itself so there's nothing for you to do.

When it goes in the other direction though and you find yourself being involved then you find that you got lost, you feel disappointed in yourself, it's very easy at that point to think 'I must try harder'. You tighten up, the more you tighten up the more easier it is to get lost because you're on the job and it's exactly the one who's on the job that is looking for a precise limited solution. So although we're just sitting going 'AAHH' something very open is there, everything is there, the beginning of the universe is there. It's not long, long ago it's moment by moment there are these possibilities and the reason it's important to do the practice is that here we are bringing together these two aspects: the crystal ball of just allowing these two aspects to arise and then go and the mirror in which we see the immediacy of everything - its fullness again - without our having to do anything.

The thing about the ego self is that it claims a false mastery, it claims kinship when it's only the servant, it claims to be the mother when it's actually the child. Children find it very hard to be so impotent. The ego aspect of ourselves is the child of our awareness, that is to say all that we are is a particular naming or appropriation of elements in the flow. Other things we have other people have as well. There is actually nothing so very special about us. We speak language, we've got two eyes, two ears, wander about, we eat food and so on. We do what everyone else does, but we somehow think it's unique and special. Well it is but it's also vanishing. Who is the one who does this unique specialness? No-one. There is no God creator somewhere else and there's also no person creator on the inside because God and the ego self are born together because they are two sides of the same drum. Relaxing and opening here we are, everything is here. Then moment by moment we come into relating with others.

Now if the immediacy and givenness of everything including ourselves is integrated with the emptiness and openness, then when there are gestures of movement occurring inside that they don't become anything. So you've got the stage, you've got the dancers and the dancers are moving and each move they make is part of the dance which is what is occurring on the stage. The gestures don't come out of the dance. When we speak or we do something like making a cup of tea or we walk to work whatever we do is inside the mirror it doesn't come into existence anywhere else. It's part of the shared illusion. When you come out of your house, you come onto the street. Did you make the street? Do other people use the street? It's shared. Did you make your own house? Even if you managed to make you own house, did you make all the bits and pieces your house is made of? Did yourself grow the tree? No.

The world is always there before us. The world is always there after this individual thing, the world is also changing. So what we do is we gesture in the flow but if we look at it more clearly we don't do that. After the fact we recognize ourselves as the one who was the gesture in the flow. Gestures occur as they are evoked in this movement of being with others. Because I'm here in this place for this kind of event I'm saying these kind of things to you. That's why I'm saying this, I wouldn't be saying it if I was sitting on the train. There would be no reason to do that. That is to say I'm speaking because you're here there would be no other reason for speaking.

So my words are co-created by you. That is to say my words are created with you. So I don't have them inside me, I'm not squeezing them out like toothpaste from a tube. I don't have them

before they arise, I don't have them as they arise because I am surprised by what I'm saying as well as you are and then once they're gone they're gone for me and for you because after they're gone I don't remember what I said. It's like that, because then something else will be happening. I'll be sitting on the train going back to Three Bridges. I'll be listening to the shaking of the train and then I'll get off; then I'll go into the underground, and in each of these situations something will be happening which will be co-arising with that environment; and when I walk along and come to the top of the stairs my body shifts to go down the stairs. We go downstairs with different movements from walking along the ground. That is to say what my body does depends on the surface.

When we go out into the alley it's a little bit slippery because of the rain so as soon as we see that our bodies are a little bit more tentative. This is our existence it's not that we decide to do that. If we're just there it's happening. We co-emerge: we come into being as part of what is going on. We don't have personal individual existence apart from that. We call it me doing that but the one doing it is not somebody you can find as an individual private self. So in that we have the integration of these three spheres or domains that we were talking about earlier. Which means in everyday life keeping some sense of our own capacity as many environments as we can encounter will be helpful for us because the more we experience becoming other than you think you are, the more you will start to relax into being who you are and you don't need to solve this problem by yourself, in many ways the solution is provided by other people. Other people will ask you to step out of who you already are in a very ordinary way. They'll make suggestions; it might be a beggar in a street, it might be someone in a shop.

People will say 'meet me, meet me' and then if you meet them you're not who you were immediately before and having moved out to meet them what will you return to? The road back is closed. This is like one of these adventure movies for kids you know when there's a big bridge over a chasm and there's running across it crumbling behind their heels and they have to run faster. This is what our life is. You can't turn around and go back, it's gone. It's always already gone. So who you were in the morning is no longer available to you all you've got is where you are now which is why it's helpful to be where you are, otherwise, where are you? The orientation is in the moment. There is no stable place to return to. There is no home which is why being at home in the world is so important. The only choice we have, the only chance we have is to be at home with everything. How to do that? Partly, a great part is to drop the fantasy that you can be at home somewhere, somewhere special. Because if you have that in the back of your mind it's like a planet with a gravitational pull, it takes your attention away from where you are immediately. Because this is what we have because we have no idea what tomorrow will bring, none at all. Just have no idea. And since the past is gone it doesn't really help us it doesn't really provide us with advice on how to behave. So if I can't ground myself in the past or the future and the present is also slipping through my fingers like sand, what is the ground of my being? That has to be simply what it is which is the openness. So openness although it's ungraspable is more reliable and more secure than any of the constructions you can imagine about who you are.

People can over-identify with their job but jobs are very impermanent and when they're gone, they're gone. They're just gone and it doesn't mean anything. All the work that you did doesn't mean anything. My father had to retire a bit prematurely from a job in a bank and he had put many, many years into that bank; and afterwards sometimes he had been a bit sick, and afterwards when his health was a bit better he would go into the bank to speak to his old

colleagues, but of course they were still at work and very busy. And he would say 'why don't we go out for lunch?' but they had business lunches to go to. So he would come home and be very, very sad because that had been his world and it wasn't his world anymore - and so there is something there about the tilt.

If you lose your own grounding, your deep centering in this infinity of openness and you put the weight - the burden of yourself - onto an object it will become compressed. It will become too dense and you will feel more heavy, and you'll be seeking for it to support you but it will always go. Whether it's a relationship, or children growing up, or jobs or even having a garden. Planning permission can vanish. New buildings can come in that can destroy the beautiful view from your flat. Things change all the time. So again as we looked in the morning - objects are not a reliable refuge.

## Refuge

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The practice of buddhism in all the paths must begin with refuge, meaning: what you are relying at the moment is not very reliable. Not only external phenomena, your possessions, the people you know but especially your internal possessions - the thoughts and feelings and so on you construct your sense of self out of. These are very unreliable. What is reliable? We say we take refuge in the buddha, the dharma and the sangha. Who is the buddha? We are the buddha? How do you take refuge in yourself - by not straying. How do you not stray from being a buddha? By not being caught up in all the business of the mind. If you settle into yourself you find the buddha.

What is the dharma? The dharma is all phenomena. Taking refuge in the dharma means allowing all phenomena to be present just as they are without trying to change them. What is the sangha? The sangha is the ceaseless movement of thoughts and feelings and sensations which create the world as it appears. Now, other people are our sensations. We look out of ourselves, as it were, and we see their shape, their colours, we hear their voices. This is all sensations, something coming through the senses. Our own body is also coming through the senses including subtle proprioception of these internal feelings. This is the sangha - the linked unity of all of existence. You are never without sangha. Sangha means a circle, a meeting together of people, an association. What is associated? Everything is associated. So taking refuge in the sangha is to accept that you belong in this world with everything else. Then you don't need to find subtle allies: everyone is your ally if you allow them to be part of your world. Some allies will help you by insulting you, some allies will help you by being kind to you. How will they help you? Because they will tell you to keep moving, keep moving, don't settle. You're tired but if you fall asleep you'll die - hypothermia. Don't freeze.

Life is a flow. The people who say 'take a rest, I'm here, I'm with you', they're very dangerous. The world is freezing very quickly isn't it? Ice is always forming. We become solid that's all that the ego is. Ice forming in the flow of life. Little icebergs trickling along and we sit in these formations for a while then they start to melt. It's not just global warming, it's ego warming. All your possessions, all your dreams will dissolve just back into the flow of life. So what is this weight, this burden of who I am that I want to put somewhere? Why do I need props? That's a really, really important thing. What is this density of the self? I think the more we stay present

with ourselves and feel the dynamic movement of it, we see that the heaviness of the self is based on accumulation, on layering of one thing on top of another. Who is doing that? One thought seems to eddy on top of another on top of another. Like ice-packs when the winter's coming in the northern and southern poles. Thin layers of ice meet then others slip under and you get pack ice and it all goes very dense. This is what our sense of self is.

Traditionally it's described as like the work of the potter's wheel. The potter is taking this raw clay and working with it and you can work from the wheel building up but you can also work with small pieces and pack them together and build up something. That's more how we do it. We build ourselves up on our history, on our development of likes and dislikes. We become a person. We become a person in our own right and that carries a solidity with it. Because by defining ourselves we're also expelling all the things that we're not. That is to say to the basis of all self-definition is mutual exclusion. I am a man because I'm not a woman. I'm getting old because I'm not young. I'm sick because I'm not so healthy. Whatever we say about ourselves always stands in relation to its opposite. It's a law of exclusion. It's a dialectical exclusion of that which would contradict whatever it is that's being proposed, but you need them both because actually these binary structures require their opposite.

You want to be a good person, why? Because you don't want to be a bad person. If it was impossible to be a bad person you wouldn't have to worry about being a good person. Everything that we aim for is grounded in all the things that we're trying to avoid. All the things that we're trying to avoid are grounded in the things we're trying to aim for. That is to say nothing is self-existing. So when we experience ourselves as arising with others: how other people are - if we open to them - can take us out of, again, this box of self-definition. Other people break the ice of existence. That's why they are so helpful. That's why the politicians we don't like are so helpful to us. People who frighten us are very helpful because they make us see that we are afraid. People who inspire us are helpful because they see that we have a lack. Everybody is showing us something about this self and through that we can see, 'Oh because I'm arising in relation to the other and as soon as I arise in that way it's gone, and I now arise in another way, there's actually no essence to this self-substance.'

### Not a sign that something has gone wrong

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Now how can something which has no essence or internal depth to it have such a heavy gravity. Why is it that we feel so burdened by ourselves when in fact we're an illusion? Maybe because that's because being anxious, being depressed are part of the illusion. They are not a sign that something has gone wrong; they are just a sign in a world of signs. Something's got to happen so some of the time it's shit. It's just like that. Why are you depressed? Does that matter? Much more interesting is how are you depressed? How do you do your depression? How do you do your depression? Do you do your depression with interest? Do you do it with forbearance? Do you do it with collapse? What sort of welcome can you give yourself? If you welcome yourself, you will become lighter even when you're very heavy. It's the not welcoming that makes for the density.

So again we're going around the same territory in various different ways. The central thing is relaxing and opening which allows the manifestation of the many possibilities and within that

there's always one thing going on. Each moment there's just this, then just that, then just that. The trouble begins when we start to feel we should be in charge: 'It's not what I want. It's not what I ordered.' But it's what it is. So what shall I go with? The actuality which has arrived or what I have ordered? That's the essential point where we can decide to move towards the world and become part of the world as it is and leave the constructions of our hopes and dreams and fantasies somewhere else. The world will never be the way we want and part of that will involve frustration and limitation.

As I get older I see more and more, many of the things that I would like to do I will never do. I had developed in my life, I think, many useful skills which could be more helpful to people, and it will never happen. It's just like that. Many doors that could open, don't open, especially in the National Health Service. Many projects that could be incredibly useful will never happen. And that's also incredibly helpful for practice. To see that it's not a new age fantasy of onward ever upward. It's not like that. Everybody gets their slice of shit cake. Everybody gets that. Some things don't work out. Frustrations, loneliness, being thwarted and having to sit with sadness of things shrinking which could of expanded. Now, is that a sign of a mistake, an error, must try harder, should do it differently, if only I had a second chance? Or just, 'this is this how it is'? This is how it is.

This taste, the taste of sadness is just as valid as the taste of chocolate. It's just a taste. It doesn't mean there is anything wrong from the very beginning sadness has been perfect. Sadness is completely pure. 'I'm just sad'. I'm sad about lots of things. I'm sad about the things that happen in politics and economics. We read about these things or we might see something on television and we feel gutted, we feel miserable, we think 'oh no, why?' and that's real and then it's gone. If we couldn't feel sadness it would be terrible.

One of the most persecutory at the moment is the cult of happiness. There are endless numbers of books about happiness and Buddhism especially is being completely robbed by many people who want to see it as some machine to make people cheerful: but there are so many reasons why one shouldn't be cheerful. There are many reasons to be miserable in a state of profound grief of sadness and loneliness. What's wrong with that? It's an authentic response to a situation. It is also empty. It's not that bright summer days dancing around in the pastures, pick flowers and put them in our hair. That's all very light and fluffy and in the grey dark skies come and we all become very heavy, it's not like that. Sadness is no heavier than happiness. It doesn't feel that way, but from the beginning both had been empty.

I mean it's an amazing thing to see emptiness if you really see it because then you can sit being free in your grief, not the sort of cathartic explosion that seems to clear you out, but just maybe in a stuck grief. Sadness - maybe someone in your family's slowly dying and in pain, there's nothing you can do. Powerlessness in that situation well what could you do? Why shouldn't they die. All things that are born die. Why should they die in happiness? Many creatures die in sorrow, in abattoirs and so on. So this is it, this is the slice of the cake. It's just like when Jesus says, 'take this cup from me, I don't want it, I don't want to be here, choose someone else, I never asked to be your son. Adult adoption - choose him. Barabbas, he's a nice guy, nail him. It's me. Why is it me?'

It's always going to be us some of the time. The fantasy that we should be able to get away

with it and have an easy life and not have trouble is one of the big things that blocks us from getting on with our lives. Trouble is inevitable. Difficulty is inevitable. You open these dharma magazines and it's page after page after page of smiling lamas. Why are they smiling? It's crazy. They have a lot to be crying about. They have a lot to weep about. Haha and hoohoo are not our best friends!

- What ?
- Haha and Hoohoo. You know them?

Cooking things up is not helpful. How is the situation? I'm sad and then it's gone. What we're talking about is occupying, or inhabiting, or welcoming our situation as it is. Now you cannot do that if you feel you're going to be destroyed. Clearly many people experience horrible situations that do indeed destroy them. I've worked with people who have been tortured in the Middle East and when certain kinds of physical violations reach a level of intensity it is as if the person has ceased to exist, and that is the case. However, that person was never who they thought they were. In some ways what they lack is an understanding of dharma. Dharma is helpful in pain. All of us will experience physical pain at some time in our lives. And when it occurs there is something about who is the one who is determined or conditioned by the pain? Pain scratches. It cuts into the smoothness of our sense of who we are, but who is the one who has that smooth surface? The one who is living in complacency and assumption. This is not to insult the people who are tortured and hurt. It's to say that being born in *samsara* based on ignorance. Everyone is born in *samsara*, everyone is born in ignorance and because of that we are ill-prepared to encounter the difficult things that arise for us.

If we see the world as it is we'll have no expectation that life will be easy. Remember prince Siddhartha. He's living in his palace, everything he's got there is very easy but he sees these signs - sickness, old age and death - and he wakes up to the fact something's going on in the world that doesn't seem to exist in the palace. 'I want to see what that is', and when he comes to see that he himself will grow old and die that shifts his relation. He moves beyond comfort and he starts to be able to tolerate the world as it is. He doesn't then react to things. So then in the Tibetan paintings of the Buddha at the point of his enlightenment, it's usually painted that he's being attacked by various kinds of malicious demons who are firing arrows at him and trying to stab him and these are transformed into flowers. And various other people are trying to seduce him through various erotic means and he just remains very calm in relation to that. It's a way of indicating that if you open to what other people are doing, if you see the moves other people make, you don't have to be caught by them. But why do we get caught by the moves other people make is because we get caught by the moves we make.

We each have probably a rather limited repertoire of moves. We do the same sort of things. We have the same sort of emotions on a regular basis. We become a person and that familiarity makes us a bit blind to the possibilities that life is much more open textured. Life is not a boiled egg, it's more like a plate of spaghetti, there's lots of little tendrils everywhere. When you eat spaghetti, I certainly always get splattered with it. It's difficult to engage in life without getting in a mess, and other people are messy. To start with an assumption that people will be kind to you, good to you, straightforward with you, not betray you is ridiculous. People have the five poisons: stupidity, anger, desire, jealousy and pride. Why wouldn't they give you a hard time? Why wouldn't they? They're just doing what they do. They give you a bad deal. That's what they do. So

to expect something else is to think you're living in a place you're not living in. This is called *samsara*. An entry ticket to having a human body is a mixture of stupidity and desire, according to the tradition.

### We're in zombie territory

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And are we surprised then that consumerist capitalism has taken over because that exactly fits our situation? Add in a bit of pride, add in a bit of anger. Me firstism. The whole thing comes together. That's why we behave in the way we do. So inside that, how stupid to fall asleep. When Jesus said 'Forgive them father they do not know what they do,' that's very helpful but I think he's also saying, 'Keep me awake father for they do not know what they do'. 'I can't afford to fall asleep because they're out to lunch. They're out to lunch'. So if I get sad and lonely and say take me in, be kind to me, befriend me, that would be very foolish because these guys they're not good. We're in zombie territory. It's like an old B movie. You see people walking down the street, they're half zombie. They're half android. Electronic things plugged in their ears, going along talking to themselves, looking out into space walking along talking to someone's who's not there. That's what androids do. I've seen Arnie Schwarzenegger do it. I know. That's real. These people are not going to get off to pavement for you. They don't give a toss about you. You have to be aware and you take the bodhisattva vow. So you want to save people who don't give a toss about you.

That's going to take a long time. You need a lot of patience for that one. So how do you do that? Just by accepting ok. I have just ordered an extra slice of shit cake. That's what you do isn't it? You say I'm going to save all of them. Saving ourselves is pretty hard. Doing your daily practice is very hard. Keeping your mind fresh in meditation is very hard but you transcend all limits and say 'while I'm at it just feed them as well'. That's an amazing thing to do isn't it. So on that basis, we shouldn't be surprised if we get lots of problems we ordered them, you asked for it, now eat what's on your plate! Did your mother ever say that? That's it. We asked for it. How do we eat it? By knowing it's empty. If you stay on the ordinarily level of dualistic perception the grand gestures of bodhisattva vows, and so on, will simply become a way into prison because you bite off more than you can chew. Everything's an illusion.

### All objects come from the mind & looking at the root

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In the dzogchen teachings it says again and again 'If you go up to heaven, go to heaven. If you go down to hell, go to hell.' Once you launch yourself into the flow of life you'll be taken in all sorts of places things won't work out the way you intended they never do anyway but at least now you're saying 'ok I'm up for this.' So how do you stay present under all circumstances? You have to know all objects come from the mind. This is no factory anywhere else creating what we call reality. In fact there is no reality. Reality is linked to the Latin word which means 'thing' or 'entity'. There are no things. There is illusion. There is appearance and emptiness. What is the source of this appearance? It's our own mind. We each of us individually are the root of the whole universe. This is amazing, this is unbelievable. This is why you don't have to believe in it. You just have to do the practice and then you'll see it's true.

When we recognize that we are at the heart of everything and everything is just this amazing phenomena of energetic movement around us. The root of our being is the open naked emptiness, our potential is ceaselessly arising as the infinite matrix of all phenomena and moment by moment we are interacting. These interactions generate pleasure and pain, happiness and sadness. These are all the fruits of this open dimension of dharmadhatu. This is the realm of all the buddhas. Everything is delicious but I don't like something. That's also delicious. Your own smallness, self-pity, self-concern, self-protectiveness, your selfishness this is also delicious. I don't want to help anyone. I wish they would all just fuck off and leave me alone. Exquisite. This is also the quality of the buddha nature. I've had enough I don't care. Where did that come from? Emptiness. Where does it go? Emptiness. As you were saying it with full vehemence was it anything other than emptiness? 'I don't care!' What was that? It's just like children playing games. Are we so bad? How much we have hated ourselves because we say things like that. Because we think we should be good people. What is a good person? A person that does the right thing. In war time it's the right thing to pick up a gun and shoot someone. In peacetime it's a very bad thing. How shall we live like that?

How do you know if something is good or bad? According to the tradition you look at its root. In the old days people used to think of stock. If somebody was from good stock from a noble family. If you read traditional buddhist sutras it says 'oh son of a noble family' because people from a good family were seen to have a good tradition. In Tibet as well that continued very much. What is our stock? What is our family? We are the buddha family. From the very beginning your nature has been pure - and you don't want to help anyone. How come? Does it matter? Of course it matters, it would be terrible not to care for other people. Why? Who are these other people? They're empty.

The big difference between buddhism and most other religions, apart from some other aspects of kashmiri shaivism and so on is that, it is absolutely radical in the understanding of emptiness. Emptiness is more important than being nice. Nice is not so good. Nice will get you rewarded in the Church of England. If you want to be an Anglican, you can be nice but nice is not what is concerned here. Recognizing the root of all phenomena is the most important thing which is your own nature. Does that mean you will become a bad person? No, because the main place to recognize everything is on the meditation mat. That's where you have everything. When you come into the world with other people, it's always this or that. And if this is that is created with the other person, why would it be wrong? You look in someone's face are you going to hurt them? No. You look in someone's eyes how are you going to harm them? If you are connected with other people ethics will arise effortlessly but on the level of sitting in the meditation practice. If you cannot tolerate your own faults and limitations how will you be able to open to other people and work with them because if you're prejudicial towards yourself. If you have a very narrow gate towards yourself and you hate yourself because you don't have enough love or compassion, then you think hatred is the way to keep us on track. As soon as you do that and enter into the world you start to make trouble because now I know what's right and wrong, therefore the best thing to do is to get rid of the bad guys. A few rotten apples whether it's Al Qaeda, or black people, or Jews, or Scottish or gay people. Somebody's got to die. And it's not going to be me. There's always going to be someone else.

That's why openness to complete immediate acceptance of everything; sitting with that allows us then to move into gestures of beautiful exquisite precise connection with others

without any agenda because if you move towards people wanting to improve them, then you're starting with an assumption they need to be improved. They need to be awakened perhaps but everyone will awaken in their own time, but they don't need to be improved because from the very beginning everything has been perfect. That is what is very, very different about this way of being in the world. It's not saying there is any dogma which everybody could align themselves to. It's saying only by awakening and exquisitely turning your awareness towards yourself, unconditionally accepting yourself and through that unconditionally accepting everything, do you become into precise clear activity in the world with others. There is no way to make yourself a better person. All you can do is to stop what you do at the moment that gets in the way of all that beauty shining through. The infinite unborn openness and a precise behaviour will arise effortlessly together. Shall we do a little bit more practice?

Take that sense of letting go of activity. Just accept that everything is fine, everything's ok.

AAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH  
 AAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH  
 AAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH

## PART 4

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### Dzogchen transmission absolute confidence in the primordial purity of our nature

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Why...excellent, we probably wiped everything else. So there are many, many different decisions that have to be made... but we hope we've arrived with a good conclusion with the machine. Of all the decisions that we ever make I think that the most fundamental one is, 'am I ok, or not? Am I fundamentally good or not?' As long as you are not convinced of your basic fundamental goodness you are condemned either to hopeless sinking despair or to ever striving diligence in improving yourself. The most fundamental part of the dzogchen transmission is the absolute confidence in the primordial purity of our nature. From the very beginning our nature is pure. This means that there are no limitations. There is no defilement; there is no contamination of who you are. So that at the moment of death - as we move into that process - all that we've done in this world falls away very gently and we just merge into the great openness and then arise back out of that. The ground nature is not created by anything else and it's not contaminated by anything. It doesn't stand in relation. Our nature is infinite. Whatever is finite will have a limit. Whatever has a limit can be juxtaposed to something else: I stand in relation to other people, to other things. And that's true on the level of how we manifest into the world with others. But our own ground nature, the ground of our own moment by moment manifestation - that has no limitation. If we can deeply see that and recognize it and bring it into the practice so that it comes alive in us, everything is transformed. Of course in live on an ordinary level we make lots of mistakes. We get things wrong, we say the wrong thing to people, we upset them, we've got complex motivation. These are just moments. Moments have consequences. We have to face the consequences. We have to face the consequences of our actions - that's true. But we are not defiled or defined by them.

People are not fundamentally bad, cod are not fundamentally bad, herring are not fundamentally bad, neither are seagulls, neither are lobsters. Nothing which has the potential of buddha nature, nothing that has a basic awareness is wrong or bad. Obscuration are always on the outside. They are not on the inside. It's not that you stick a sponge in muddy water and as the muddy water comes into the sponge it goes into all the tiny spores of the sponge so that when you squeeze that out some debris, some residue is left. We don't get contaminated.

Remember this image of the crystal ball. When the crystal ball which being placed on something ghastly is removed it carries not trace with it. Mirrors also carry no trace of the ghastly images they've been placed in front of. As soon as the mirror's turned the image is gone. So we are not built out of our fault. We are not built out of our life experience. The patterns of our personality are created through interactions. If you have a very difficult childhood, that will create certain tensions in your body, certain kinds of energetic arousal and so on - but that's not your fundamental nature. And whenever you relax you can experience all these aspects of your personality coming and going. They are life trapped moths in a room, flitting around desperately trying to get somewhere. The more spacious you can be with yourself – they fly free. You can release all the tensions of you existence. So that whatever happens you don't need to be so affected by them. But it is a fundamental decision and a decision that we have to make I think on our own, deeply in our hearts: 'Am I ok'? And then you look all the other possibilities that you could be; things that you might be ashamed of or afraid of; the propositions that you limit yourself with, by believing in it.

Then you start to examine these. What is so delicious about these things? What is so seductive about them that I would want to adhere to them? These beliefs are not static they are driving forces. They are predetermining forces. Selecting forces in our existence. And they are all transient.

Certainly in the field of psychotherapy people are tormented and tortured by the negative beliefs they hold about themselves. And by the fact, that very often, they don't encounter people that don't believe in them. Psychiatric service is based on diagnoses. On the split between the healthy professional and the sick patient. These are pervasive and these will continue to be pervasive. Except that nowadays patients will be cajoled into believing that they are healthy when they're not; but this is a different level from the one we're talking about.

We're talking here about a basic health, an indestructible health. Which is never contaminated by anything that has happened. As it says in famous prayer by one of the great Tibetan masters Rigzin Godem: 'the mind is not created by good deeds, and it's not spoiled by bad deeds.' That's the most important thing. It is primordially present. There from the very beginning, was there before you were born in this life, it will be there with you all the way through your life, when you die and forever.

You are indestructible. This is the meaning of *vajra*. This indestructible quality of ourselves is ungraspable. You can't find it, it has no shape, no colour, it's not a possession – it is who you are. If it was a possession you could sell it. You could polish it. You could do anything you want to it but you can't do that with your mind. The mind is always pure. The function of the meditation practice is to integrate with that again and again.

I think it completely supported, the practice really needs I think for us living in western countries, needs to be supported with a strong cognitive sense – I am OK. Because a lot of the time we live in the realms of conditionally. People don't like us because of certain aspects in our personality. They want to change us, 'we can't accept you as you are, you have to become somebody else.' And we hear that because, in fact, it's said to the deepest level of ourselves. People say, afterwards they pretend they're talking just to our behaviour, but they mean it deep inside, 'Unless you're one of us, we don't trust you'.

This cloning, this putting everyone in the mincer, so that there is no real difference is so poisonous to us because we are all very, very different. That I think is the most wonderful thing. We all have exactly the same real nature - which is perfect. And we all manifest in the most incredibly variegated ways. And we are not one person, we are so many different people. This infinite richness in which we'll never be like anyone else, and we'll never again be like we are today is linked together in a state where everything is exactly the same.

That has nothing to do with standardised treatment interventions. It has nothing to do with the national curriculum in schools. It has nothing to do with alignment. Now they want to bring in tests for three year olds to get them reading and writing. The murderous abuse of peoples' freedom in the name of somehow improving them is monstrous. This is the return of George Orwell. This is really scandalous.

So it so important that we allow ourselves just to stay with this reflection: 'I'm OK. There is nothing wrong with me. All my faults have been movements or gestures.'

Everything which goes wrong can be corrected. Every mistake can be retaken. We can always apologise.

### Purification is very important especially if you understand that there is nothing to purify

In buddhism there are many, many practices of purification. Purification is very important especially if you understand that there is nothing to purify. You have to do both. From the very beginning you have been completely pure and you have a lot of work to do. If you believe, 'I have a lot of work to do', you never ever get there, because purity is not a product. But the very work of purification is about sensitivity. Calling to mind times when you've hurt people. Then you start to see more precisely how you lose it. These two pathways we talked of. The pathway into samsara is when we become solid, strongly real, we develop an agenda and then we act towards others from that agenda. And in that we don't see the other person as they are. We act from our work role, our family role or particular intoxication. And we're blind to how other people are. That's the cause of all the misery in the world, that people don't see each other. The most healing thing is to be seen and to be welcomed.

So the first thing is, we have to welcome ourselves. And the only part of you that can really welcome you is you primordial purity. When you really understand and see directly that you are pure, you can welcome all your impurities. They are there but they are not defining the situation. They are not defiling the situation. This is not some kind of manic intoxication that we're all perfect and we are all wonderful. This purity is about an absolute openness to everything, and within that a very precise discrimination, so you can see the details of situations very finely. And

then within that respond to people precisely in the moment. So that is the radical work. That is the deepest practice, is to just sit quietly with yourself and listen deeply, deeply, deeply into your heart. And whenever voices tell you of your limitations and the things you've done wrong or your faults, keep listening, let them speak and they'll become silent. And keep listening, and keep listening. And then start to listen to the one who is listening. Be present as the one who is listening. You've listened to everything and you're still listening. That's pretty open. And you keep in that listening, and listening and listening. 'I hear all of myself, I accept all of myself.' You just take that more and more into the meditation. You can support it by the 'three A' practice. Relaxing into a deep exhalation. Just sitting. Let everything come, whatever arises let it come. It will go. Let it come let it go. Then you stop interfering and then you start so see how good it is.

Then we really start to see, 'oh, I should have retired a long time ago. I thought I was very useful but I was just meddling. I thought I understood what was going on, but I hadn't a clue. I was unnecessary. I'm just a child I should go and play. I don't have to be so serious, because I personally didn't put the sun in the sky I didn't put the waves on the ocean. I didn't put the tarmac on the road. I don't manage to do very much. The world is here. All I have to do is walk down a street, go into the shop and say good morning.'

It's quite straight forward. Most of our lives are really quite straight forward. Accepting our place in the world very easily. Not talking on too many responsibilities. It's not up to us to sort things out. If we're not sorted out in ourselves we will never have to clarity, or the power or the openness to deal with other complex situations.

I remember when I was in university. In late nineteen sixties we occupied the university. It was in Edinburgh university. And we went into all the administrative offices. We were going into all the files searching for damning evidence of this and that, and mainly getting very stoned. And then we heard that in the big main hall the vice chancellor of the university was addressing the students. So we thought we have to go and confront him. I was there with some friends and I thought yes we're going to do this! So we ran into the hall and he was on the stage, and I ran onto the stage with him. And then I didn't know what to say. It seemed a good idea at the time. And of course it was ridiculous, because he was a very eloquent man who knew everything and we were just crazy students who didn't know anything. It wasn't very wise. It was passionate. It was meaningful but it wasn't finding a place to make things move it was just banging our heads on the wall.

And that's one of the painful lessons of life, is that we have to work with things as they are. Often we think that a simple insight will set things free and that there's no reason why it shouldn't, but of course there are many invisible reason why it doesn't happen. That doesn't mean that we have to become fatalistic. It's not about giving in and collapsing. But rather it's to learn to look very carefully so that we you move you make some difference - difference that makes a difference. So that work is effective.

But that perception comes from being relaxed and not so involved. That's not the same as being dissociated or detached. It's not a trauma reaction. It's not a kind of hopeless giving in. It's just maintaining an aware clarity: 'What is the actual structure of this situation?' Being careful is very important. Because if you do things in the wrong way at the wrong time what tends to

happen is you get wound up into a situation and the passion of the moment takes you over and then what can you do? You're lost. You're in it. You're not present with it.

So see if there are any thoughts or questions that you have.

## QUESTIONS

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### Q1: The three As

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I'm finding the three As very powerful actually. And I've been thinking about, because usually I take three breaths, and this seems very different, and I know that we're here and it's a different energy and we're a big group, and I'm just wandering what is there in that apart from actually verbalizing the noise that's different to just everything else?

James: Hmm, well that's one thing you could investigate for yourself. Try saying it very loudly, very softly, at different times of the day and so on. 'A' is seen in the Tibetan tradition as representing emptiness, it's the symbol of emptiness but it's also the route of all other sounds all the consonants take 'A'. They don't have variable vowels the way they do in the English alphabet. So everything begins with 'A' and then you get changes on the voice. You get 'kaka', 'mama', 'papa' and so on. And then all speech comes in. So when you take sound back into 'A' it's the sound that's just next to emptiness and silence. And it's also the most free flowing sound. And it's also the sound that's most often associated with death. People breath their last. And it's also a sound that people make if their having sex. And it's also a sound that's associated with child birth, 'Ahh!', making that sound. So it's a sound that's in very powerful moments throughout people's lives. It's a root sound, and a very unprotected sound, and so, you can release yourself into it.

Because most of the time like now when I'm speaking, the sound quality, the energy of the sound itself is being mixed together with the semantic content. And so we tend to, although we are impacted by the tone of the speakers voice, the rhythms and so on, we tend to be attending consciously to the meaning. Whereas here we're releasing the meaning and just being in the openness.

### Q2: When you say everything is perfect is that dualistic?

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You were saying that everything is perfect. I was listening to somebody else saying, 'I don't understand why people say everything is perfect'. Everything IS. It's not perfect and it's not imperfect. And I kind of wandered if that's a semantic. Or are you saying effectively 'everything is', and in saying everything is perfect, that means there is no point in changing?

- That's right.
- Is there anything any different from saying 'everything is'?

- No, no there's no difference
- So it's just a semantic. That's a relief.

### Q3: Transmission, Intoxication, Cause & Effect

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I've got a couple of questions. First, the idea of transmission. It would be interesting to know what that means from the dzogchen view. And another one is the idea of intoxication. I suppose it's not only drugs and drink and things like that, but I suppose you can be intoxicated with someone, or attached or addicted to somebody. From the dzogchen point of view are there certain states where you simply.. I mean.. would you want to be practising dzogchen and getting drunk or getting high? Are they compatible? Or do they isolate you in a bubble you can't break out of? And the final thing is the cause and effect idea: if we are in the moment right now there is no cause or effect, but we are relating to each other in a special way, and that way is special to buddhism and dzogchen – it's very kind and compassionate. And so if we stopped relating to each other there will be a cause and effect chain, but it's not necessarily in time, it's in the present. What is the relationship of dzogchen to cause and effect?

James: OK, if we start going back the way. Cause and effect here presumably means karma. So if you do an action it will have an immediate consequence, and then there will be a result that comes much later. The question is: 'What is your state when you perform the action?' If the action is maintained in the state of relaxation and openness, the one who is performing the action, the object of the action and the relation between them are all very lightly held. This completely minimises the impact of having a karmic result afterwards. Because, if you think of somebody, say, doing the long jump and they run, run, run, run and they leap in the air and they hit the ground. Now they hit the ground with some momentum. So they have a big tendency to shoot forward but they are supposed to have a clean landing. If you don't have a clean landing – that's karma. So mostly in life when we arrive in something we hit the ground with too much energy. So we do the deed, but there's an extra boomph that takes you on. Does that make sense? So that's what the impact is for the future. It's that you have built up in yourself a tendency. And a tendency is a movement or an urge or an impulse toward something, so it's no longer neutral.

So for example with a drinker, if someone offers them a drink their impulse is to say immediately yes. They're not thinking: 'do I really want a drink? Is this a good time to have a drink?' If they're offered a drink they say yes. Now that's the quality of the impulse that has been built up in the past. So generally, in any situation in life, when we've got a head of steam from the past we come into the situation with a tendency. Many people have a placatory tendency. They want to please other people. They don't want to let other people down. So somebody says; 'Could you help me do this? - Of course!' Afterwards they think: 'Why did I agree to do that? I don't have any time. I don't even want to do it.' That's a tendency.

- Inertia
- hm?
- Can't help but do that thing...
- That's right the impulse takes its voice through you without you having a chance to think about it.

So, if you're present you're less likely to do that. You're able to be still. So somebody asks you and you can take a moment and pause. And then you have a sense of the situation, including

yourself. You're not over privileged to the other. You're not over defended of yourself. You're with them. And then you can speak into the moment. And in that way you don't get the kind of karmic rush.

In the buddhist tradition the basis of karma is the belief or the perception of truly existing objects because then subject in real and object is real and these two strong polarities will create a shimmering energy between them which is the force which exceeds itself and leads into these future repetitions.

So the second issue about intoxication. We're intoxicated by language. Many people like to read novels. We want to watch movies and in that you get draw into the story. And if you believe the story you can't quite see what's going on. We get mesmerized, enchanted, bedazzled, bewitched. There are many, many words for that kind of enchantment. So, that can happen with anything. It can happen with work, it can happen with hobbies, it can happen with drugs and so on. The real test is: 'what is the pull of this object? If I don't have this object will I have a deficit? What will that deficit be? If I never go to this place, if I never read this book, if I never kiss this person what will the deficit in my life be?' Who is the owner of that deficit? Is it the ego or is it my deepest nature?

The ego will always have deficits. Because part of the function of the ego is to say: 'I need more. I need that.'

- What's deficit?

- A 'deficit' means a 'lack'. Something which is a deficiency, something you don't quite have.

So, on the level of awareness you don't need that. I mean one of the things that people often experience in the practice of meditation: you sit and then a thought arises in your mind, 'I need a pee', or 'I need a cup of tea', or 'I should stop now', or 'my knees are sore', and then you just keep sitting and the thought just goes away. So the thought was telling you there is a need, there is a lack. If you had followed it you would have got up and gone to the toilet or gone to the kitchen. If you sit in the practice, it goes by. And the more you do that the more you can start to stay with you impulses and watch them passing away.

There is no additional value to take drugs or alcohol if you're meditating. It wouldn't improve the mediation. I may be a productive obstacle to meditation if you are very good at meditating. If you are not very good at meditating it would be a hindrance. But there are not many people who are very good at meditating.

So generally speaking it would be a hindrance, if you don't know what to do. Alcohol is used in the Tibetan liturgy system to loosen people up a bit for certain kinds of practice. So for some practices being dis inhibited is very helpful. If you were going to do mindfulness practice, especially if you were going to do it say, at Chithurst, drinking half a bottle of whisky first would not be a good idea. The monks would take that to be an insult and think that you were not serious in the practice. So it has to be harmonious with the kind of practice you're doing. If you're doing a practice in the cemetery and you're doing some dancing and so on then drinking something first might be very helpful.

The first issue about transmission. Whenever we do practice together there is the possibility of a transmission. We're all transmitting all the time. We're all little radio station pumping out the whole news, you know. Blogging is not new. Everybody's been doing this for a long time: sending out messages on all sorts of level to the world around. The idea of transmission is that if you practice together with people who are perhaps more experienced in their quality of practice will open some door potentially. In the dzogchen tradition it can be done in a formal way. What I was doing earlier today in describing the nature of the mind. For Tibetan people to do that, why would that in a slightly more formal way. They wouldn't say anything different. In fact it would be exactly the same.

But, this is the most important thing: The meaning of communication is what is received, not what is sent. Many people go to lamas and get all kind of initiation. It is without a doubt that the lama was giving the initiation. There is a very big doubt whether you go the initiation - that's at the heart of it. Did you get it? If you didn't get it there was no transmission. Both things have to be active - the sending and the receiving. Then one can think what is it that gets in the way of not getting it? If you can really believe and through that start to feel, and through that start to experience - 'my nature is good' - then you get some transmission. Then when you go out and you walk down the street, and everyone you see you think, 'Oh, shining being, shining being, radiant beings everywhere', because you start to see the world in a different way.

Also every time you do this 3 'A' practice that's a kind of transmission as well. You can visualise it more clearly. You can imagine in front of you white letter 'A', either just a capital roman 'A' or the Tibetan letter 'A' surrounded by a ball of rainbow coloured light and as you say the 3 'A' you can imagine light coming from that 'A' into your heart. And the white letter 'A' represents the presence of - there's my learned colleague holding up just such an item - you can imagine that the blessing of all the teachers of the lineage are flowing into you. In the end the transmission is an orientation in ourselves, because what is being transmitted is what you already have. The teacher is always just giving you what you already have. So the transmission is for the person to stop believing that they don't have what they already have.

#### Q4: Shining beings

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- Just coming back to what you were saying about 'shining beings'. You were originally saying that everyone has buddha nature, so in some sense we're all the same; and also before you mentioned walking down the street. That's when it first, sort of, made any sense to me. Walking down the street and thinking rather than, 'all these people are different', rather than seeing them in terms of all the contingencies of their life histories and their tendencies to behave in certain ways, just thinking: 'everybody else is looking out in the same way that I am, and differs in the contingent but not in the..'

- That's it.

- And it's quite beautiful or compassionate. Makes a difference, these are people. They have to get round this person on a pavement.

- We never know who we meet in the street. Therefore we should always take them at their highest level. You should always start at the top and fall down if necessary, rather than start at the bottom and work your way up.

## Q5: Pitfalls

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- You said something about the pitfalls of this kind of practice, especially may be regarding the idea in western therapy of needing a self – no self, no beginning.

The main pitfall is complacency, is to substitute an idea or words for experience. Experience will always be naked. In one of the texts it says, 'the yogi develops his meditation by destroying it.' Which means whenever you get good meditation experiences you shouldn't become attached to them but can destroy them. Destroy means to use a strong meditation saying, 'Phat!!!' And in that way you blow all thoughts out of your head so instead of trying to stabilise and hang onto something you have a disruption and then it's fresh. Fresh is more important than anything else. But our temptation is to write down the outcome, 'I had a good dream' or 'I had a good meditation.' and to build it up in a composite way. 'I need to make sure not to forget this.' But in fact we need to forget it because there wouldn't be any space for the next thing. We doubt the generosity of our own nature. We will always be giving wonderful things to ourselves. The world will always be full of shining things. Moment by moment, new insights, new awareness's, birds singing snow falling and so on. So we don't actually have to hang on to very much.

But the danger were you can get lost in this, is to hold the dogma, imagine that you're clear when you're not clear and then to proceed on that basis.

- I've seen a lot of people who are supposedly psychotic who would talk about similar things to you but they don't seem as insightful.

- Well insights come to people in all sorts of states. Certainly in major mental illnesses people can get really.. lots of things fall away, and they see things, but they don't have an energetic stability to carry it through. It's more like if you take something like LSD you can have lots of insights, but usually afterwards they are not integrated into the being. You write something on a bit of paper and afterwards it doesn't make any sense.

- That's a sort of lack of grounding.

- Ok, shall we do a last meditation as we come to an end?

- Aaa...

And we can dedicate the merit arising from our study and work together for the benefit of all beings.