

Solitude and how to make use of it

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Part 1

So good morning everyone. We have some time today to do some study and practice together. I want to have quite a lot of time for practice. The basic theme today is solitude and how to make use of it. Because we find ourselves in this enforced isolation, and this has many advantages for spiritual practice and many disadvantages for the ego. So, hopefully, we are more concerned with our spiritual life.

So, maybe we begin with a little quiet sitting. Sit in a comfortable way. Always with your spine supporting your weight, and just being present. You can track your breath or you can just sit in an open way. The key thing is to gradually release yourself from interest in, and involvement with, whatever thoughts, feelings, colours, smells, tastes are arriving. We're just quietly here, no need to get involved. (Three minute meditation).

The four thoughts that turn the mind to dharma.

1. Precious human birth

Ok. So the basic view we will look at in detail later is, of course, dzogchen. But at first it's perhaps useful to look at the basic four thoughts which turn the mind from samsara which we find used in all the buddhist traditions. The first is when we reflect on having a precious human birth. We have a reasonably healthy body, we're able to study and learn. We have enough leisure time to do practice, and we're born at a time that the buddha has taught the dharma. That dharma is still transmitted, and that dharma is made available to us. So from the outside we have the possibility of learning about how to open ourselves more. How to become more available through wisdom and compassion. And on our side we have the potential of a body which is alive, and which has a bit of time available to us. Each day we have some hours when we are awake, and when we reflect on the precious human body we reflect on: how do we use our time? Many people now are in isolation. They're watching a lot of TV, big box sets of Netflix and so on. They're talking with their friends on their mobile phones, sending messages here, there and everywhere. Reading lots of novels. They're passing their time. This often feels like an imposition. People want to go outside, the weather is better. I want to go to the beach, I want to have a barbecue. But this is forbidden. So, the normal ways in which people

affirm their identities, by doing their usual activities. By doing this I confirm to me that I am me. There is a block on that. So many people seem to spend, certainly in London, a lot of time going round and round doing the same activity. But a precious human birth means now your life truly has meaning. You have a path in front of you. You have the possibility of understanding something new, of opening new doors. Of becoming more available to yourself and to other people.

So, this is a really important thing to reflect on. How do I use my time? The time that we waste today will be gone, it will never come back. When we talk of wasting time it doesn't mean that you have to be sitting and doing formal dharma practice or reciting mantras. You can be looking out the window watching the birds but you can do that with awareness or without awareness. The key point is always awareness which is the basic clarity of the mind which is not under the control of the ego. Hopefully this will become clearer to you as we proceed. The deeper your dharma practice everything becomes dharma. If we only have a very shallow dharma practice then it becomes the formalised rituals that we repeat and then we have a difference between dharma and non-dharma.

2. Impermanence and death

The second aspect is to reflect on impermanence and death. Clearly this has become very pressing for us. The lives we had before this virus arrived seem to have faded away now. It's almost a mythical time when we could get up and continue our daily life. People are cut off from family, friends, places of work, means of earning money. There's anxiety. If you run a cafe, maybe you'll never manage to open it again. There's a lot of anxiety developed through impermanence. What seemed to be the case, what seemed to be reliable is gone. And, of course, when people get the virus they don't know the trajectory of it, they don't know if they'll recover or not. Death is always close to us. Our body is full of these vital organs, the movement of blood, and air. We are a dynamic system interacting with the world. There is no wall around us keeping us safe. We have to breathe in, and it's possible we breathe in some air with the virus in it. If we stop breathing we're dead. If we keep breathing we're vulnerable. This is the situation, in a human body, in samsara.

So we have some time. How shall we use it? How will we be kind to ourselves? So reflecting on impermanence is not a way of scaring yourself, it's a way of reminding yourself that each moment is precious. It's like there's a big road in front of you a dharma road, but every half kilometre there's a sign saying holiday time or rest a little bit or daydream time, and you can go off on these side roads and pass half an hour, an hour and then you try to get back on the main road again. But when distraction has become a way of life, and because of impermanence new distractions are always arising. There's always some new thing to be fascinated by. Many people are now preoccupied by conspiracy theories. Where has this virus come from? Some dark machinations lie behind it. You can think about these things endlessly. You can go on the internet. More and more people's mental fabrications about causes and possibilities of the virus. If you're a meditator you think; thinking about the virus is a waste of time. I'm thinking about something that I hear, somebody says something, and what I'm doing is I'm feeding the turning wheel of thought. A wheel which turns towards samsara. This is the vehicle by which I move around in different situations. So this is not helpful.

Impermanence means: stay fresh, to be alive here and now means what I hear, what I see, what I taste in my mouth. The pressure of my body in my seat. There is sensation coming through all the five senses. Thoughts and feelings are arising now. So, instead of going away on journeys, carried away by speculation, by imagination. We always try to return to what is here, what is simple, what is actual. That's where the freshness lies. That's where the possibility of profound change arises. Chasing thoughts looks like, looks open, looks like a marvellous door, but actually you get wrapped in more thoughts, more feelings. Then there's no end to thinking and feeling.

So, it's important to reflect for yourself on this. How are you spending your time? Essentially, in the great question of C. R Lama, how do you cheat yourself? There are things you decide to do but then you don't do them. Why don't you do them? Who's stopping you? Another thought. Another tendency. So you can feel split inside between, as it were, your good self who wants to do some practice and your lazy self or bad self that avoids it and does other things. This way of thinking is not so useful. All of this is you. You need to welcome all the aspects of yourself and see; what is a tendency of avoidance? What are the objects that seem to provoke distraction from dharma? We should always turn towards the difficulty.

Learn from the difficulty. Nothing is gained by hiding from difficulties. All of us have limitations, limitations of the amount of focussed attention we can give, limitations of the stability of our body, limitations through the health of our body. We have to work with our limitations. So the closer we can be to our embodied existence, without comparing and contrasting with anyone else, we just say oh, this is my situation, and this situation arises from the third factor which is karma.

3. Karma

Karma is activity. Activity generates patterns. Our body changes it's postures, gestures as we engage with different activities. The mobilisation for these activities arises from desire to have things that please us, and aversion to things that displease us. We're constantly making choices. The room feels hot, we open the window. Now it feels cold, we close the window. Always trying to adjust the outer factors of the world to maintain our situation. So karma is a kind of conversation between subject and object, between self and environment in which self acts on environment, environment acts on self. And each movement creates new patterning, new tendencies, new hopes, new fears. And so we find ourselves in situations, and we're not sure why.

When I look back at my own life I'm always very surprised how I ended up like this. I'm living in London. I never thought I would live in London. It was never my desire to live in London but I've been here a long time. Somehow it just happened. Of course that's not true. I made small decision, and small decision, and small decision and that fed into a pattern whereby I needed to study, and then I needed to get a job, and then I had family responsibilities and so on. And each of these micro decisions put my life in a particular pattern, a particular trajectory. So you can reflect on that for yourself. How have I come to be the person I am now? Certain little stream-lets, certain little tendencies like puffs of wind blow into our lives and we turn this way and that. We are at the mercy of these tendencies unless we turn and recognise them. If we look at the face of a tendency we can say yes or no. Whether it's eating too much or drinking too much or gossiping too much. When you realise oh this is maybe too much, it's not helping me. Then we can stop, and we can do something different.

So, karma means, from not understanding who we are, we take ourselves to be our ego self, in our particular embodied situation, in our culture, with our language and so on. And we formulate plans. We have an intention. We enact our intention. We have a consequence to that intention, and when we align with it that becomes another affirmation that this is who I am. And we stay inside that for a while but because it's a construct, because it's a gathering together of different factors eventually it starts to fall apart. So it's always helpful. Reflect on your life. Reflect on how your time is structured. What you give your attention to. Is it truly meaningful? It means something to you. It's personally meaningful as the person who you take yourself to be. But if we remember the second reflection: impermanence and death. We're going to die. This body. This en-cultured, socialised formation, is a movement of many factors. At a certain point the five elements start to separate. They don't collaborate so well, and the life energy can no longer hold them in it's patterns and we start to move into death.

So what seems important in this life may not have any deep or profound or infinite significance. It's just the patterns of socialisation, and the factors that were around in the culture when we were young that we've continued with. So, again and again you have to think; oh, who am I? What is the basis out of which I make this choice or that choice. Our aim is always to leave the surface waves the turbulence, interaction of subject and object, and go deeper into an awareness which reveals a broader picture. Awareness itself is neutral. In the example that many of you know it's like a mirror. It just shows what's there. But our ego self is not neutral. We are biased. We have our tendencies, our habits, and that takes us towards developing a particular experience of the world. So this is the meaning of karma, is to see how we can be pulled into finite shapings which will not last but which, from the inside, through our attachment and commitment appear to be of profound eternal significance. That's how we cheat ourselves.

4. The six realms

And the fourth reflection is on the six realms. That, at this moment, according to the tradition we think we are human beings. This is what we experience. We confirm to each other, oh you're a human being. You're a male being or a female being. You're not a dog, you're not a cat, you're not a bird. We look at the birds, we think I can't fly. We look at a cat, and think I'd better not jump out of a tree. We see other beings able to do things that

we can't do, and we can do things they don't do. So it's as if, cats and birds and human beings are three completely different kinds of beings. What unites them is that they are sentient. They are able to feel and to think. They are alive. So with all living forms which have mind although the outer form, the shape, seems very different basically they are having their experiences because they have mind. The mind is the commonality. That's why when we die we can go into these different realms because these are mind experiences. All you have ever had in your life is an experience. Maybe you had kind parents, maybe not so kind parents, good teachers, bad school. That was your experience. You experience it. You're sitting in the classroom next to someone, they have a different experience of the teacher from you. If you have siblings, brothers and sisters, they probably experience your parents in a different way.

There is no fixed object. The object arises in relation to our subjectivity, our interpretation. So we can be reborn in different ways. You see, when you look outside and you see the small birds jumping around in the trees, flying, trying to find something. Oh! That makes sense to them, clearly. They're able to do things we could not do, we're able to do things they can't do. This body will die. Their bodies will die. Each of these is like a dream like formation. The essence of ourselves is empty awareness. Everything else is contingent. That is to say, it arises from causes, circumstances. It lasts for a while and then it vanishes. There is no essence of James. There is no essence of me as a man or being Scottish or anything. These are just factors dynamically operating for a while.

So we can be born up in the highest heavens, down in the lowest hells. There are many places to be born with different kinds of experience. At this moment we have human body which for dharma practice is the best situation. It's the best situation because we have the opportunity to have some good experiences and some bad experiences, and we can reflect on them. And we also have some capacity for choice making. So we can turn our mind towards some deeper exploration or we can fritter our life away in the outer movement of events. This is our choice. This is our freedom. So thinking about the six realms is very important. When we human beings disregard animals of various kinds and treat them badly this is parallel with our disregard for the natural world, for the climate, and so we provoke the environment around us. If you see the world as dead, if you see other living creatures as meaningless you can act on them. You can turn them into a

mere object. You lose your sense of intersubjectivity. But from the buddhist point of view, we, in our individuality, in our aliveness, we share the world with other living beings and we need to collaborate with them. Share the space. We want to have fish in the river. If you pollute the river you don't have any fish. Then it's tragic. You have this smelly, swampy, dark flow through your city. When the factories stop dumping all their crap then the river gets clean and the fish come back. When the fish are there then different animals and insects come and you have a whole new ecosystem which is beautiful and lively and sustaining of forms of life.

So the key point at our time when we see international interdependence of the economic field, people travelling across the different continents. If we are truly linked on an external, material level maybe we have to think about what it means to be interconnected on a living biological level. Rather than being a separate monad, an individual that goes from here to there, we are always travelling with other people. On the bus, on the underground, on the train, in the plane, we are with others. Walking on the street we're sharing the environment. We are with others. So maintaining these kinds of reflections is always about opening your attention out into the world. How does it function? What are my assumptions? And are my assumptions in the service of wisdom and compassion or are they in the service of ego comforting delusion?

Taking refuge

So normally we begin our practice by thinking about refuge. We can take refuge in the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha. But we also have a particular opportunity at this moment because in isolation you're cut off from many of the people and activities and commodities that you might normally make use of. So I would suggest that we take a little quiet time to sit and reflect: through this experience of social isolation have I learned anything about what I actually take refuge in? It's all very well to say I take refuge in Buddha, Dharma, Sangha but maybe I take refuge in the park, in my favourite trees, in watching the flowers in the forest, in chatting with a neighbour, in visiting my friend, in going to a bar. What do you miss at this moment? What are the factors of attachment in your life? Because these factors of attachment pull us into identification. I need this in order to be me. By repeating that activity I confirm to myself that I am still me. So this is a wonderful opportunity for us to think: in being cut off from these familiar

factors do I continue to be me? Your mood might change, your thoughts, feelings, hopes and fears, different vehicles are arising in the mind but there some continuity to you. What is that? What is your mind? Because in Dzogchen the ultimate object of refuge, not really object, but the ultimate place of refuge, is your mind itself. We take refuge in the unborn mind. In awareness which is inseparable from emptiness. So let's just sit quietly and reflect for a while on what we take refuge in, and how refuge in ordinary worldly people and events distracts us from taking refuge in both the outer symbolic forms of refuge and in awareness itself.

Three minute meditation.

The ego self

Ok. Our ego self, although it would like to be autonomous and independent, is very far from being that. We actually live in dialogue, we live in dialogue with internal factors so that when we're hungry we want to eat, when we're thirsty we want to drink, and so on. And external factors; we're affected by the time of day, the climate, the way other people behave towards us. We are constantly in formation with what is in formation around us. Forming and forming and forming. The ever shifting patterns of the object world, and the ever shifting patterns of our embodied world have an interface and we become like this, and like this and like this. This goes on and on and on. There is no way to avoid this. It's not a mistake or a problem but it's how we are.

So, I. When I say 'I' it seems to be referring to some precise thing in me but, as many of us have reflected many, many times, when we look for this 'I' we can't find it. So it's a kind of screen or a mask behind which the ever changing dynamic formation of our lived experience, moment by moment, is moving. But the mask seems to somehow stay in place. I am influenced by others. They get to me, they touch me, they move me. This is the possibility of connectivity, of compassion, of kindness, of empathic attunement with others. But it's also, of course, the potential for vulnerability, for being hurt, for feeling exploited, for being unloved, rejected, abused, not seen. Many painful experiences arise because we would like a particular bandwidth of connectivity between ourselves and the world. We like to have a kind of attunement with situations, and events and people which confirm our value. But that is often missing.

Inner and outer refuge

So when we take refuge in the Buddha we're saying I need you. We also need, maybe, coffee and bread. We need many things but the transient formation of temporal phenomena vanishes. They're just always evanescent, they're like morning mist vanishing in the sunshine. When we take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, we believe that there is something reliable and enduring. This is the outer formation. The inner formation is our mind. And as we know our mind has these two aspects. It has the content, which is our experience, what is arising both seemingly outside the body, and inside the body. This is the flow of experience. We think oh, I think it's a beautiful day. That seems to be my mind, my mind tells me it's a beautiful day. Actually the perception through the eyes feeds into mental consciousness which formulates an understanding: it's beautiful day. It's a beautiful day for me because I'm a human being in a temperate climate and I'm happy that it's over 20 degrees in London. So the notion of a beautiful day is dependent on how I'm located. When we take refuge in something more abstract, we have the continuity of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha which is not contingent in that way. But even so I take refuge in the Buddha, this takes, what three seconds to say? I take refuge in the Dharma, three seconds. It's gone. It's always vanishing. Whatever you do in Dharma which is performative it's simply part of the flow of emergent and dissolving experience. This is why from the point of view of dzogchen the formal practices of Buddhism are not so important because they are in the liquid flow of experience. They don't create something you can really hang on to because you say I take refuge in the buddha, even you do a hundred thousand prostrations reciting this, afterwards you start thinking about something else. It was a period in your life when you were able to do a lot of dharma practice intensively, and after a couple of years ah! That was the past. Now you're here with Oh, now I have some kids, I have to earn money, I have to do this, I have to do that. You have a new formation of your life. So the refuge that you had becomes less available. Your life energy gets pulled towards engagement with other things. So, learning what is experience is very important. This moment is vanishing. This moment is vanishing. Always going. Always vanishing, going away, unavailable.

What will I rely on? How do you know this moment is vanishing? I feel it. How do you feel it? Something registers. What is this modality of registering? We have two aspects here. One is cognitive, that is to say; oh, I

am aware that early in the morning I had a cup of tea, I don't have a cup of tea now. So that's a thought. I have a thought about a thought. The thought that I'm thinking about we can also describe as a memory. There is a memory with some taste in my mouth. Oh yes I had a cup of tea. And now I'm thinking about that experience which is gone. But by thinking about it it's as if I pull it here, into the here and now, but both are vanishing. The flow of experience is unreliable. It's like the reflection in the mirror it's changing according to circumstances whereas the mirror itself doesn't change.

The true refuge

The true refuge is to relax into the mirror like quality of awareness which is always there. This doesn't change but it shows change. So the mirror is a very important symbol in dzogchen because it's the place where stillness and movement collaborate. You put. You have to look at the mirror on the wall, and you wave at it, as your hand is going from one side to the other the reflection is moving. The mirror doesn't move. The mirror doesn't fall off the wall. The mirror stays there. Everything is moving as reflection, and the mirror stays. This is like our mind. But we, in our egoic merging into the structures of conceptual identity. I am James, born in Scotland, I like this, I do that. Once we're in this kind of packaging, which is a deceptive, delusional packaging because it's based on the false assumption that there is a continuing James-ness to James. Some essential James-ness. When we do that then we look to the environment for things to reassure us about who we are, to confirm our patterns, to avoid the difficulties that we don't want to be encountering. This is a lot of work. On, and on and on, adjusting, shaping, improving. It's a lot of work. And it doesn't end. You cannot arrive at a safe place inside the stream of concepts, sensations, feelings, memories, plans. They move.

So it's vital to be clear that stillness and movement are not the same and yet they are not separate. They are non-dual. The mirror doesn't stand apart from the reflection in it. The reflections are in the mirror but the reflections move and the mirror doesn't. So this is the profound understanding of the Mahayana: that form is empty you can't find anything, truly, in the form of a cup or a human body or a dog. You look inside and you find all these different aspects collaborating together, and they themselves have no individual essence. And yet there is a form. The form is the showing of emptiness. For us, as meditators we see that every moment of our life,

whether we're sleepy or energised, whether we're in pain or relaxed, whether we feel lonely or we feel loved however it is, this is dynamic. It's arising and passing. Who is it happening to? So from our ego position it's happening to me. This seems so obvious, so straightforward. This is why refuge is very important because on an outer level if I am trapped in reactivity, in this surface turbulence in which something is always happening. It's like getting cream and putting it in a bowl and whipping it around with a little metal whisk to put air into the cream and it becomes lighter and you can use it on top of a cake. You are putting air, air is increasing the volume. There is nothing, you haven't added anything substantial at all. We put our life energy. We put our belief, our hope, our trust into mental formations, and it is as if they are real, true, reliable.

A crossroads: which road to take

So meditators require the courage to look and to see. We always come to the crossroads, there are two roads: one is: I can believe the stories I tell myself, which are stories other people have told me, about who I am and how I am, and what I'm like and what I like and so on. Endless numbers of stories. Or I can see; oh this story, that I'm telling myself, is passing through. What is it passing through? What is the illuminator, or the illuminating factor that allows the revelation of this story that I tell myself. Oh! This is awareness. Awareness is like a clear light. It doesn't bring any colouration onto anything. If you're in the theatre you have spotlights with red beam and green and so on that can be mixed and put on to illuminate aspects of the stage. But we don't want to have any colouration. The colouration is in the movement. It is something which is done to the clear light of illumination. When the clear light of awareness is mediated through our assumptions, our beliefs, our habit formations, it takes on a precise colouration. Red or green or whatever. Intense, not intense. And as we know when light falls on a surface some of the bandwidth that is the potential of clear light is absorbed and some is rejected. That's how we get colours. The formations of the world are just like that for us; the light of our illuminating awareness gets pulled into some factors and rejected from others. So you go shopping and you see apples, pears and bananas. For some reason you buy pears. Today they are shining for you, and the others they're not shining for you. So the light of the mind is either rejected or absorbed by the phenomena around us. And this is what gives the

particular valency, the particular charge, the particular kind of, value or importance to all phenomena moment by moment for us.

This is us. This value has not been established from the outside. It doesn't lie in the object it lies in how the mind is either clear, just showing or mediated, and in that way veiling, in the very process of this adapted illumination, this contrived illumination. So it's either direct or indirect. And when we look in the dzogchen texts they're always saying this is a direct path. It's unbounded, unmediated, uninterrupted. Whereas in our ego self we think about things. We try to make sense of things. We run the facts through ourselves, and they take on the colouration of our habits, our desires, the events of our childhood, the karmic dispositions from previous lives, and so on. Mediated experience means that we participate as part of the flow of experience while imagining that we are separate from the experience. This is happening to me. I'm here and this event is coming towards me and touching me and Ahh! I don't like it. But this me is part of the flow of experience because I experience myself in different ways in different circumstances. I believe I am a fixed reference point. I have always been me. Since I was little, little child I've just been me. I can go through the years, I can tell you about my life. Me, me, me. I have always been me. But this me has always been in dialogue, in co-emergence. In dependent origination with the factors around it. This me is a lie, it's a deceit, it's a fraud, it's an illusion. Not totally, it's not that it doesn't exist at all but it doesn't exist as what it says it is. It is the interpretation of the self which makes the self a problem. To be a self is simply, could be simply, describing a body shape which is moving in an environment, my body is not separate from the environment I'm in. I'm always someplace. I don't exist apart from the world. Not for one second. I am an aspect of the world. But when I start from the assumption; no but I'm me, and I don't like that and I don't want that but I do want that. This accepting and rejecting confirms the seeming autonomy of this particular position. This is ignorance as we live it day by day, moment by moment. And when you're caught up in this interactive flow all the time, so much going on. All of which could be quite important because of winning and losing.

[Eight worldly concerns](#)

We have these eight worldly dharmas or concerns, gain and loss, winning and losing, fame or good reputation, other people not liking us, being

included socially, being excluded. These are very important for the ego because the ego is dialogic. The ego is not autonomous. We may, on a bad day, get into a monologue, a depressive monologue or an anxious monologue, we don't really want other people to interrupt us. But essentially even such a neurotic monologue is dialogic because there is a speaker and a listener even if it's internal to the person. I am talking about me. I am telling you about my experience. The ego is part of the world, it is part of the play of the world, it doesn't exist apart from the world, and yet it would like to. We'll come back to look at the nature of ignorance a bit later.

So refuge is so very, very important. Not only are you, maybe, dependent on smoking cigarettes, or drinking some wine or kissing a particular person because if you don't do these things you don't feel like you. But, we're more profoundly, we are addicted to our thoughts. We're addicted to our memories. We believe in them. We believe that our memories tell us the truth about who we are. In the field of psychotherapy this is absolutely continuous. People come and they tell you what happened in this week or last year or when they were children or with their previous partner. It's always stories about something. It's concepts about concepts. And the reason we do this is because the ego talks itself into existence as a quasi, a pseudo, autonomous entity. But it doesn't exist by itself. This is how illusion moves into delusion. It is an illusion to think that we are separate. And when we strongly believe that we are separate and independent we are deluded, and we misinterpret what's going on. So taking refuge is also deep in terms of our meditation practice, which we'll go into a bit later today.

When thoughts and feelings are arising, and we get caught up in them, this is the ego striving to maintain its identity through fusion with what is arising. I become me through being able to think about myself or being able to think about that. Thinking is the fuel for the maintenance of the delusion of the true, deep, isolation or separation of the ego self. So in meditation we're just trying to keep an eye on this. Hey, what's going on here? How come I'm so busy following this idea and that idea. These ideas are crazy. What the fuck? What am I doing? Oh! I'm making me. It doesn't matter what the thought really is I just need it to be me because without that situation it's difficult. If you're a kid and you've got a ball you want to bounce it. You bounce it on the ground you bounce it on a wall. You need to keep the ball moving otherwise it's really boring holding a ball in your hand up and down, this is terrible but now you have a wall. Now you can run around and

catch the ball. Much more exciting. So this is what we're doing with our thoughts: we're maintaining the different modalities of our interaction.

Developing bodhicitta

Along with refuge we develop bodhicitta or develop an altruistic attitude; an openness to the potential for enlightenment in all beings. So the birds, the fish, beings in different realms, they have a potential for awakening because they have a mind. It doesn't matter if they're a bird. Being a bird doesn't stop them from having the potential for awakening. Being a bird reduces the possibility of them understanding that they have, behind their excitement at seeing a worm or the fear at seeing a hawk, behind that is an awareness which is illuminating their experience. It's very difficult for birds to see that or for cows in a field or horses. We can see that just with the animals that we see. If you go out in the fields and you see the little baby calves, and they look at you with their big eyes, and they come up and they want something, and you say sweetheart what can I do for you? The cow, the little calf just wants comfort. The mum's taken away. Now mum's just being milked very day and the little baby's outside. Moo, and the little bullocks, they run around in the field. They're looking for something but they can't conceptualise it. They have a potential. This is a potential to awaken, but the circumstances around it are very restrictive. So when we develop bodhicitta we see this sadness arising in ourselves. All these beings who have minds who could awaken to how the mind is, and then from that, to see that everything is the radiance of the mind. They are trapped in the dullness of being constricted in the limitations of the patterning of their embodiment. And so that's their world. A very small world.

It's not a mandala. The Tibetan word for mandala, one of them is *shal-ye kang* it's like an infinite house, a vast arena. We as human beings we can do that now. We walk around we see the hills, the rivers, the valleys. We're not in a field with an electric wire around it, like the little cows. We have freedom to move, we have access to so much. The big question there is: well who is the one who is experiencing this big much? The mind. The content of the mind can be very small and very tight. It is still illuminated by awareness. The content of the mind can be broad, and rich and deep. You can know a lot about western culture, art, opera, and so on. A rich cultural literary life. It's illuminated by awareness. Whether you're a cow or an

intellectual you can still be lost because you are moving within the parameter that the content of the mind is the mind. This is the primary delusion.

So when we say may all beings have happiness and the root of happiness and then we think; I will work for the happiness of all beings. I want to enter enlightenment with all sentient beings or lead them into liberation. Because these beings have the potential for relaxation, for openness and freedom. They can awaken, that's the meaning of Buddha, boddhi to awaken. To pop out of this dream, of this delusion. In Tibetan they translate it as *sangye*, *sang* means to clean and *gye* means to increase. You clear away the limitations and simultaneously you have the release of all the qualities, which are the potential of the ground of your being. Your ego is small but your awareness has vast potential. So that's our Bodhicitta, is to, when we look at beings to see them in relation to the ground. The source of all beings is awareness, is the mind. That's where they come from. They are the showing of the potential of the mind. This is our infinite vision. If we close that infinite vision down, and we make the point of interpretation reference to me, then we look at people in terms of I like you, I don't like you. I want to eat you or I don't want to eat you. We have all kinds of self referential interpretations whereby we allocate value to sentient beings in terms of where we stand with them and they stand with us. So this is something really worth reflecting on.

Just take a little minute now, we'll sit quietly, think about people you know. Think about, if maybe you have a pet, a dog or a cat. The neighbours or people you work with and so on. These are potential buddha's. These are beings with Buddha nature. But when you think of your boss at work do you think potential buddha? Or do you think bastard? So this is what you have to think: what is the basis of how you reveal the potential of the situation to yourself? What do you bring? What colouration do you bring to your interpretation of the value of beings? If all beings have Buddha nature and Buddha nature is the most profound truth of every living being. Maybe we have to think: how come I don't have any sense of that? Instead I have a sense of: I don't like this person, this person's not nice or this person's amazing, they're so special. So my prejudice screens from me the infinite open potential of all sentient beings. So that's the basis for awakening in bodhicitta. So let's just sit with that for a little.

Three minute meditation.

Ok. So, if you have a cat you have to know that not everybody likes cats. How is this possible? You like cats. You think cats are wonderful. You could spend a lot of hours every day just being with your cat. But some people don't like cats. The value of the cat is in your mind it's not in the cat, it's not in the object. When we start to see this then we see the people I don't like, I don't like because I don't like. This is my mental formation, my attitude imbued with my emotional reaction. The people I do like and value, that's my construct. I value them because they have qualities that I like. So I say this person is more interesting or better or more charming than that person. This is my mental experience. I am the one who is creating the barrier between me and the world. I am mediating everything I encounter through my assumptions, my likes and dislikes.

So if we want to have real bodhicitta we have to start seeing people clearly. How are they? What do we see? We see movement. What is that movement? Shape and colour. People are light, people are sound which is always dissolving. They are gestures which are always changing. I dull the world. If my dullness goes down. All beings have Buddha nature and indeed all beings are part of the Buddha mind and indeed all beings are Buddha. I also am Buddha. What hides my Buddha nature from me is me. What hides your Buddha nature from me is me, is this complex, this collection of attitudes, judgements, beliefs which I cling to as so valid, so important, because they make me feel like me. I blind myself. I screen myself. I veil myself. Now on one level this is pretty shitty. This is pretty horrible. On the other hand: if I'm doing it it's in the palm of my hand. It's in the palm of MY hand. It's not, I'm not, at the mercy of what other people are like and what they do and how they behave. They are interpreted by me. I need to look at my mind because the interpretations through which I say: wonderful person, horrible person, this is experience arising and passing in my mind. This is reflections in the mirror. As long as I'm so mesmerised, so caught up and intrigued, and merged into these reflections I have no space to relax into the mirror itself.

So here we see; wisdom and compassion are born together. If we awaken to the mind itself as it is we then release our fixation on, dependance on, identification with all these transient patterns of feelings and memories. And then we also see everyone more clearly. We see them as they truly are. Of course they don't even see them as they truly are. It's not like, oh I've been projecting onto this person because they seemed like my mum, and

now I recognise this through therapy I'm not going to do that so I have a better relation with that person. I'm not talking on that level of dualistic interaction. I'm talking of the fact that my whole sense of how they are and who they are is my experience and if I see that experience is empty of the capacity to establish truth, it's just a play of potential and I release that and release it. Then I start to have unmediated direct presence with others which is the basis of true compassion.

Part 2

So I think we also have to recognise that this experience is somewhat strange. It's different from the times when I've had a chance to be together with other people. Then we meet in the breaks and chat and then we come and we sit together and we see each other directly in our embodied presence and now we have images on a screen. So the manifest quality of the unique specificity of each person as they come into the world and show themselves is a little bit flattened. We become images. However, the question would be then; where do we meet? What are we meeting in? What is the basis of this? Each of us is sitting someplace in a room looking at a screen. Where is the mind? We meet in the openness of the mind. If we go into thoughts and opinions, and judgements and values, that creates a kind of barrier because then we compare this with how it was when we met face to face and so on. But if we simply relax and open, we are here, this is arising and then distance and space has no meaning because we always meet in space. Space is the mother. Space is the, if you like, the shining face of emptiness. It's just open and in that openness each of us is here in our own particular way. We don't encounter that directly but in as much as we don't fixate on the specificity of ourselves as the starting point but we relax and open, then we're here together.

Meditation instruction

So, generally speaking if we're doing meditation, particularly in a retreat, we cut a boundary. We say I'm not going out. I'm going to stay inside and there are ritual ways of making this inside and outside different. We cut off from the stimuli, the provocations of many different events which can occur. That is to say we're limiting the field of experience so that we can see more. Just

as if you were in a research laboratory there would be certain rules for maintaining the purity of the environment so you didn't get contamination of what you are investigating. So that's what we do. So the first thing we want to do is to isolate the body. That is to say to gather ourselves back through our senses into being present in our body. Sitting comfortably. Feeling the exact presence of the body but keeping it in a posture which doesn't move too much. That's not looking around hungrily for new experiences. But it's just here because this just here-ness is a kind of basis for being able to see what moves. The mind moves and the mind never moves. This is the paradox that we live with. The mind itself as mirror never moves, the end itself, showing as experience, is always moving and these two things are inseparable.

So, we sit now, in a calm way in our body. Everything around the body, for our purposes, not as truth, but for our purposes, as practice, we're not concerned with. Just this body. Keeping the body calm. Then we have our voice, the capacity for speech. We become silent. Silence means that the potential for seeking connectivity, which, as we looked before the break, is usually mediated through our ego concerns: am I happy, sad and so on? This vehicle of self affirmation is dispensed with. We're just quiet. Nothing to express. No need to relieve ourselves of any experience inside by talking about it. This means that the breath is allowed to flow freely in and out, in and out, without being given the additional vibration of speech. That's all that our speech is. We breathe in, we breathe out, and as the air is going through the voice box it's given a particular quaver and it comes out as sound which we then understand. It is air in vibration. So, if we don't add that vibration we have the simplicity of breath. So, relaxing the diaphragm, breathing in. So very simply we can do just now. Breathe in for four, hold for two and breathe out for a count of four. Just in, hold, and release. In, hold, and release. And this four-two-four is quite easy to access and stabilising. So let's do that for a little.

Two minute meditation.

So, we're simply sitting, simply breathing, and then with the mind, is simply open. As we're sitting many things arise, external noises, maybe some noise from the street, someone moving in the room. Whatever is arising externally or internally, let it move. There is no need to interrupt the flow. To add

something to it or subtract. So it's a bit like breathing without speaking. You're not adding any content. You're not doing any artificial breathing exercises. Once you get a calm steady rhythm. Same with the mind. Sitting relaxed and open. Many experiences arise. You don't need them. You don't need anything from them, There's nothing for you to do to them. You're simply present. Of course, we have a long habit of involvement; of adjusting or prejudice or selection. When you become aware that you're in that tendency then just relax you attention back on the breath for a little. Calm, simple, flowing, and then open to whatever is occurring with the same approach, calm, open welcoming, not interfering. Ok, let's try this for a little while.

Five minute meditation.

Ok. So, when we are relaxed in that we are simply an organism in a world of organisms. We don't need to add any special value. Of course, our ego self wants to establish value. And because of that it becomes active in pursuit of things it likes and avoidance of things it doesn't like. And these two forces, they're like the mouse in an exercise wheel going round and round. The mouse is running but it's not getting anywhere. Similarly in samsara we're busy, busy, busy but nothing much is achieved because the past is always vanishing.

Ignorance

So maybe helpful to look a little bit now at the nature of ignorance and how we come to be in this situation. As many of you know the teachings are organised in terms of the view, the meditation, the activity and the result. And the view comes first. It's not a philosophy, it's not a theory. It's a way of organising our attention so that something is revealed. So, for example if you are out walking in the countryside if you're standing up as you walk you're seeing things in a particular way, but if you lie down on the grass and you look very closely at what's coming out of the earth you get a completely different world revealed to you. That world was always there but it's a bit hidden when you're standing up and looking down on the grass. So the view is always linked with the revelation, and the way we view reveals the world in particular forms.

The view of Dzogchen

So I'm going to describe this from the point of view of Dzogchen and the higher tantra of Anuyoga. This is linked with these three aspects of the ground, the path and the result. The ground is the basis, the source, the source of everything. Where does everything come from? From this source. So, if we see the source then we have clarity. If we don't see the source we don't have clarity. The path is to see the source, and the result is that you never stray from the source. So, you abide or you rest in the intrinsic integrity of the ground and its manifestation of stillness and movement. So the ground, which is the basis of everything, is uncompounded. It's not a thing. Everything we know about is compounded: houses, motor cars, bodies, cakes. Everything is brought about by bringing different ingredients, different components, putting them in patterns, processing them. Then you have your product. They are products of particular patterns of engagement. The rocks, the mountains they have a similar thing. We have all our human sciences, geology, oceanography, and so on, revealing more and more information about cause and effect and the mutual influencing of factors. But the source, the ground, is free of all of that. It is untouched by anything. It is not a creation. It is just there. This is the second quality of *rang-jung* or self-existing, self-arising or, in ordinary language, it's just there. It just is. It's not produced by anyone, it's not made by any god. It didn't have a beginning, it is infinite. No limit. No limit in the past, no limit in the future. Everything is within it. And that infinity, its vastness, it has both depth and expansion. Which ever direction you go in this is the ground. So the ground is not in a place, it's not like the earth that we walk on which is there, and then you dig a foundation and you can build a house on top of it, where the house, as you build it up storey by storey is getting further away from its source. This source, because it doesn't have location, and it doesn't have duration, it's not graspable by any of our concepts. It's not a thing in relation to other things. It's just open. It's just open. It is a vast openness which is not dead but has potential. And with this quality it's inexpressible, it's not like anything else.

Everything we know, whether it's milk, you know, comes from the cow, the cow eats the grass, and so on and so forth. We know cheese, cheese comes from the milk, made by the specialists in making cheese, you get different cheeses in different places, you get sheep cheese, goat cheese, cow

cheese. So many incredible compounds, elaborated commodities, of our modern capitalist economy which have been generated. And they have names, they have qualities, they usually have a market value and a price. A wholesale price, a retail price and so on. But the ground is not like that. It's not included in any of the ways in which we would express things. It's beyond concept. It's beyond language. And yet it is the basis of our existence.

Two possibilities

And fifth general quality is that it cannot be placed inside the formations of samsara or nirvana. It's neither limited nor free. It just is. This ground has these two possibilities: one is that there is awareness of it, secondly, there is not awareness of it. If there is awareness of it then it's like the mirror. The mirror is aware, and the mirror is open and undefended. And arising as the potential of the ground comes many different formations which are revealed in the mirror as reflections. So this is how we experience the potential of the ground as these transient movements arising as the quality of our experience. And the wider our view the more variety of experiences arise.

So, if you have a, kind of, ordinary job, I don't know, a school teacher or a bus driver, you have your body and you're concerned with ordinary things. But, say for example, you work in a hospital laboratory, you spend some of the time you're looking at blood samples, some of time you're looking at bits of organs from biopsies, some of the time you're looking at examples of faeces or the shit that somebody has taken from their body. Normally you don't want to look in someone's shit at all. You might look at your own but you don't want to look at someone else's shit. But in the laboratory that's what they look at.

So in our world the visions that we see of what's important and unimportant are very relative depending on our social role, our professional trainings, our age, capacities and so on. That is to say; this world is like an unbelievably complicated sculpture, and each of us has access only to some little area of it, and we take that to be the whole of it. This is my life, this is what I get. Tibetans call this your *che*, your slice, your share. So we

each get our particular vision and we think this is the whole. This is the outer formation but the ground itself is not like that, it's not limited by the quality of the perceiver. Awareness is not a perceiver. It's not someone looking at something. There is no someone in awareness. When you're peaceful and calm you're just aware. You might be aware of a memory, and that memory's got a little, kind of, friendly vibration, and you think oh yes, I was on holiday there, that was lovely, we had paella, whatever. So there's a familiarity in the memory, and in that moment the openness of awareness becomes fixated potentially into that. So we have these two possibilities: stay open with relaxed awareness or get pulled into identification with the image.

The open ground

So, with the open ground, which has no agenda, it's neutral. It's not like some visions in a theistic system where there is a god and people want to believe that god is good. The ground is equal, indifferent, it doesn't care. It's just showing this. If you don't see it, see that it is open and ungraspable, grasping arises. If you ignore the openness, as the openness displays a ceaseless flow of images, smells, scents, whatever is arising according to your particular formation, you take that as real, as something. Something graspable.

The beginning of samsara

So this is the beginning of samsara. There is a something: object side, and a someone: subject side. Something is happening. Happening to me, for me, maybe as me. Subject and object arise when awareness is not aware of the ground. When you have unawareness of the ground the object side shows itself, the object side is how the ground appears in it's showing of it's potential, and the subject side is how awareness is when we're not aware that we're aware. The is to say, the content of experience, like corks floating on the ever-moving waves of the ocean, are bobbing, and different patterns are arising. But the depth of the ocean is hidden. Without the depth of the ocean you wouldn't have the waves. So this is not theory. We can experience this for ourselves. That when we sit and relax, and we're not

doing anything, experiences come and go. They are self-arising and self-liberating. Self-liberation is a big focus in Dzogchen. Because when you really sit with whatever is arising for you, happy or sad, you see that it goes. The content of the mind is movement. You cannot own it, you cannot seal it, you cannot grab it, you cannot hold onto it. It's here and then it's vanishing. Always vanishing.

So when we really see this, what is this grasper? What are you trying to get? It's like trying to catch the wind. What you catch is your concept of the object. The object is always dissolving, the concept about the object is always dissolving. But if you keep running it round, and round and round it is as if there is a subject and a stable object. So you need to observe this for yourself. Ignorance is simply the absence of the experience, the subtle experience, that allows the first flavour of awareness. At the moment we're a bit foggy, we're so used to conceptualising everything, to looking through the lens of concept. As we do that less we start to have an experience. It's not awareness itself but it's close to it. We have the sense of being open. There's still a self-referential sense: I am the one who is opening. But still there is more movement, and as we stay with that we see both the dissolving of the object and the dissolving of the subject. But who am I? Just this. Just this: inexpressible, openness, presence, radiant, shining, peaceful, contented, naked, it's not covered by anything, always fresh. Just here. And then you find yourself wrapped again in immersion. You've gone into the arising. And the more there is a focus on the object, not only does the object take on a density and an impact, but the subject arises as well. This is the co-emergence of the subject and the object.

So in some systems of meditation we try to limit the arising of the object so there is nothing for the subject to do and it thins out. In Dzogchen we tend to focus on the subject and not feed it so that it doesn't get hungry for the object. The subject is hungry because it's alienated from its own ground. If we are in touch with the ground, with the source; everything is there. Everything is arising, everything is available. Everything can be engaged with as required. But when we're cut off. When we think well I'm just me I've got to take care of my life, I've got to do all of these things. When you're stuck in that kind of situation there's a lot of work to be done, and there's always a need to be busy. And that busyness itself generates the screen by which you cannot see who you are and how you are. This is tragic. No-one is

suffering. The one who suffers, and who is hungry, and sometimes happy and fulfilled, the sentient being is the expression of the mind. It's a display of the mind which is blind to the mind itself.

A traditional example

So, it's like, a traditional example is that we're like the farmer who's out on the hill looking for his cow when the cow is safe in the byre in the cow house, next to the farm. We don't look in the right place. We imagine that there is enlightenment over the hill in the next valley, and in order to get there we have to go on a journey and we have to do so many things. And that we look at ourselves and we think I'm not ready, I'm this kind of a person, I make so many mistakes, and I've got an unhappy social life, and so on. That is to say I fixate on this image of myself which has arisen due to causes and conditions, and on the basis of that I imagine buddha-hood is very far away. So if you start in the concept, truly, the journey is far. But the concept is in your mind. The concept comes from your mind. It has no other source. The ground is the source. There's no two factories. There's only one factory. Only one production point. It is the empty open arena, the Dharmadhatu, the space within which all dharma's, all phenomena, whether subject or object are arising together.

So, the practice is always to relax out of fixation on identification with the transient content of the mind. So we can do this a little just now. We sit in a comfortable position. Usually we do this with eyes open, resting in the space in front. If that's not easy you can simply look down the line of your nose. But don't focus in on a point as you might do in a calming practice. This is a practice of openness so you're just settled. Then allow yourself to be present with whatever arises. And the key thing is; we're not starting with the sense of I, James, am in my body, doing meditation. If we do that we've already, we've already changed the thing. If you were going to cook a meal, maybe some vegetable stir fry, and the first thing you did was you chopped up ten hot chillies and put them in the pan, you've directed what kind of dish this is going to be. 'Cos it's gonna be hot! So, if you start from: I am meditating. You have already set up a frame of reference. We don't want to do that. Sit and experience. Don't assume this is my body. I live in this body. My mind is my brain. All these various things that we may have heard. There

you're starting with beliefs, and assumptions and concepts. Here we start simply: relax. Oh! Then experience arises. Various kind of experiences. They arise and pass. Arise and pass. Some of these experiences we might call body experience, or experience showing as body. Experience showing as a motorcar passing on the street outside. Experience showing as children playing in another room.

Whatever's in your life situation all kinds of things are arising. Let the arisings come and go, come and go, and whenever you find yourself fixating on a point of reference which could be a sensation in the body, it could be some kind of pain, some feeling in your mouth. The mind can lock onto anything. We are used to believing that illusions are real. So it's exactly like that in the meditation. Our tendency, our habit, to hold onto something and say this is me, there's proof it's me, I experience it, it must be true. Don't try and change that in any way. Just sit. It's gone. The great understanding, this profound insight, has vanished. Now it's just something else, something else, something else. Without beginning, without end. Unborn and unceasing. So whenever you come to a conclusion and you seem to have definite knowledge, and you seem to have something that you can build up a picture, don't criticise it, don't step back and judge it, don't observe it, just be with it. This is here, now it feels like me, and it's gone. So it's very subtle. It's not rough, it's not crude. We're not managing our existence, we're not making ourselves. We're just trying to sit quietly and see what's going on.

If you imagine that you're a child, small child, maybe you're six, and you wake up in the night and hear the big people talking so you go down the stairs or you go out of your room and you listen outside the door. Oh, big people are talking but you don't want them to see you so you sit on the carpet and you listen. Like that. It's not your world, nothing to do with you. If you make a noise your mum will come out and send you to bed or maybe take you in the room. Oh. You're there, close but not involved. Neither merging in nor stepping back. Ok. So we do this for awhile and if you find yourself getting lost you can just relax in the out breath, and here you are and the flow of experience goes on.

Three minute meditation.

Ok. So, sitting in this way can often seem a little bit strange because it's not our usual way of proceeding. The key thing though is not to see the movement as the enemy. It's not that the movement is stealing your peace or your stillness, or your settledness. The movement is inseparable from the stillness. The movement doesn't destroy the stillness. The movement is the showing of the stillness, or the breath of the stillness. As if your mind goes like the sky and a little soft, spring wind was blowing through it, and as the wind blows it moves the grass and stirs the blossom in the trees. So we're not trying to stop the movement of the mind. There are many kinds of meditation which attempt to do this. But since the very nature of the mind is movement and stillness you would then be entering a prejudice of stillness is good and movement is bad. The problem is not either stillness or movement but the uncoupling of stillness and movement.

The ego is the state of isolation from it's own ground. The ego is our alienation from the ground of our own being. The pretence at autonomy and separation. So when the mind is moving and there are thoughts and feelings, however they are, they are the movement of the mind. When you fall into your conceptual interpretation of the meaning or value of what's arising in your mind, and you start to attribute value. You say this is good, this is bad. I like. I don't like. Then all you've got is movement. Because you've got your egoic movements and the movement of the arising of the field of experience. Very difficult to settle into stillness with that. So we want to always follow the middle way, without bias to one side or the other. We're just sitting. Experience is arising, movement, whatever we call it, something is happening, and then it vanishes. Where is this happening? Here. How do I know it's here? Because I am here. What am I here as? Open awareness. As soon as I'm here as James I become a participant in the movement.

Three aspects of Dzogchen

So in Dzogchen we have these three aspects which are inseparable and yet different. We have what's called *ngo-wo* or the essence of ourselves, who we are, which is emptiness. It's the un-graspability of the truth of the basis of our mind. It's not really different from the ground or the source. This empty essence shows itself as qualities. These qualities arise as the whole field of experience. Everything outer, everything inner, and it comes all at

once. And then inside this we have the specific movement of what we take to be ourselves. We are a movement of the field, in the field. Just as if you went out, if you were able to, go out into the country and you see a field where there are spring wild flowers growing, and a breeze moves across the field and you see some of the flowers are catching the breeze and they start to vibrate. So this is our individual participation. We are flowers in the field, and the field is inseparable from the ground. We don't come out of the field.

This is where you can directly taste the true meaning of what is called ignorance in Buddhism. That we are ignoring the fact that we are enworlded. We were born out of our mothers body, and our mother was, when we were born, probably lying in a bed and the bed was in a room, and the room was in a house or a hospital. Like Russian dolls there was niche, after niche, after niche, and so as your body came out of your mothers body, and the umbilical cord is cut it is as if you become separated. But you're immediately connected with breathing because if you don't breathe you die. So instead of getting your nutrition through the umbilical cord as you float in the amniotic fluid which is a state of communication or dialogue or connectivity. In coming out of your mothers body you are now in communication with the world. And you get placed on your mothers belly which helps the placenta to come out, and gradually you move and you start to suck some milk from her nipples, and you're breathing in and out and there you are. This is your participation in the field. Your parents give you a name. People talk of you as someone separate. Photographs are taken and sent to relatives. This little girl has been born, she is called this, she is so much like her grandmother. When we start to tell these stories we are extracting the baby from the world. Because the baby is there with the mum because the baby is not going to survive if the mum gets sick and dies. The baby has to be somewhere. Even if there's a problem at birth the baby's in an incubator. We are always somewhere and this is not an accident. We are somewhere because we are part of the field of disclosure. We are interdependent. We are not independent. Nor are we passively dependent but it's always a dialogue. It is movement. It is pulsation. Subject and object arise together. The flowers arise from the field. The field arises from the ground.

Sitting practice

While we're sitting in the practice we're not concerned with our manifestation into the world. We're concerned with the field of what is arising and keeping that field non-dual with, or inseparable from, the open ground. So when experiences arise we don't interfere we let them arise and pass. If you grasp at the experience, if you name it and call it something and try to make use of it you're separating it out. If you have some flowers growing in your garden and you pull them out to put them in a vase you're killing them in order to get their beauty. Now the flowers are in a vase and they're so nice for one or two days and then they're gone. If you'd left them growing in the garden you probably would have had them longer. So this is the same thing that when you grasp at something because you think it's important you kill it. You kill it because the root of whatever is arising is in the Dharmadhatu. It's in the infinite spaciousness of the ground of all the buddhas. The buddha is the presence of the ground. The buddha is this radiant, smiling presence and the quality of the buddha emerges from the ground. It's not some private property that a buddha has. Everyone has buddha nature which is to say their inseparability from the ground.

So in the meditation our main instruction is always: don't push things away as if there was something wrong with them, don't hang onto momentary experience as if it was especially precious or important. Because both of these interpretations are the movement of your own mind. These are your conceptual constructions allocating value and significance to transient arisings. For our purposes what we want to see is the inseparability of the emergent experience and its ground. That this is the unfolding of emptiness. Just as if you went to the sea you would see waves moving on the ocean. The waves look different from the ocean. They are formations of water into particular shapes but they are simply water. The fact that the ocean shows a wave doesn't mean that the wave is other than the ocean. But in all our languages we have vocabularies for waves. There are, in English we say, this, white horses, this white that rides along the top of some of the waves. And we have spume, little droplets of water that come shooting off especially if there is a wind. So we have ways of thinking about the wave as a wave, and when we apprehend a wave in that way it is as if we have found something separate from the ocean. But that separation is created by our thinking.

In the same way if you look at a cloud in the sky. The cloud is in the sky. We say oh that cloud is very white or that looks like a rain cloud, and we take it as something pulled out of the sky. Or we look at a reflection in a mirror and we say oh how beautiful. This reflection is the shining manifestation of the potential of the empty mirror. That's what it is. If there were no brilliant, shining display quality in the mirror there wouldn't be a mirror. You look at the wall. Doesn't show you your face. It doesn't show you anything shiny. It shows itself because the wall is full of wall. But the mirror is empty and because the mirror is empty it can show all these diverse reflections. And they are the showing of the emptiness of the mirror.

So, the wave, the cloud, the reflection, these are all traditional examples to help us to see that when we're sitting, and experience is arising, just leave it. Don't do anything with it, don't cook it, don't add spices, don't chop it up. Don't do anything at all. Leave it raw, naked, as it is. The more we do this we are using less and less effort, so the mind becomes relaxed. This is called resting in the original situation. This is how the mind is, just at rest. When the mind is at rest movement is flowing through it all the time. This movement is a potential so that when we get up from the meditation and we go into interactions with the environment, with other people, one of the forms of the energy of the ground manifests as myself. Here I am. Talking, walking, making a cup of tea, whatever I am doing, where am I doing it? Within the field of experience.

So, say I decide I'll make a sandwich for lunch I have bread, I cut up the bread, I get out some cheese or whatever, and I put it with the bread. Now I have a sandwich. The sandwich is the mind. There's the quality of the cheese, maybe it's a crumbly cheese, maybe it's a smooth cheese, the quality of the bread, this is display, this is experience, this is your mind. If you think of it, oh this is very good bread, or this is terrible bread I'm not going to buy it again. This is your mind. You're giving a commentary. If you just stay with what is there, as you cut into the bread, you find no resistance, or strong resistance depending on the ingredients of the bread. Stay with the phenomena. Stay close to how life is emerging and relax your relentless need to make a commentary, to interpret, to give your opinion about everything. Oh! Now you become more full of the world. Now you feel part of the world. Because as long as you're giving your commentary you're separated from the world, and you're, as if you're in charge of the world,

and it's a big burden. It's a big burden to have to work it out and decide what's right. But the paradox is; the less interpretation you do, the brighter your mind will be.

Clarity in Dzogchen

Clarity, as described in dzogchen, is non-conceptual clarity. This is not something we learn in school. Education is entirely about conceptual development, conceptual elaboration. But stay with the practice, just relax, whatever you do. We're going have a break now for lunch for an hour. Whatever activity you're doing, relax in the out breath and feel your body moving in the environment. That how your body moves and the environment is like a joint movement. You're co-emergent with the environment. Because if you walk and turn your head a different aspect of the room is revealed to you. So the potential of the room and the angle of your head arise together. And then you bend down to tie your shoelaces and a whole other vista is appearing. If you conceptualise it, oh these are my shoes, then you step out of time. There's past, present and future, I bought these shoes two years ago, blah di blah blah, big story, but if you're just bending and you're tying your shoelaces and you feel your wrist moving as you tie the knot. You're present with the moment of this emergence of this unique situation. So this is the practice that we do after our meditation.

Well now we have a break, It seems very odd to say goodbye when I haven't really met you but that's our situation at the moment. So we meet together again in a short one hour period. I wish you a good lunch and then we'll continue with more practice and Dzogchen. Bye for now.

Part 3

Ok. Let's start. So we begin with just a little quiet sitting. In a relaxed way, get your spine to carry your weight, and without any particular agenda remain open to whatever arises.

Ten minute meditation.

Ok. So, the basis of the practice, as we looked before, is to not enter into involvement. Because if you get involved you're likely to get enmeshed. You can get pulled in like a bird being caught in a net. Because you may think that you are the one doing the thinking but the thought will catch the thought of you. You will have nowhere to hide you'll just get turned around and around.

Ignorance

So, if we return to the qualities of ignoring or unawareness, that we looked at in the morning. The separation from the source. The beginning of samsara is like a magical illusion. It's like something happening in a dream. It doesn't actually happen, but it is as if it happens, if you believe in it. That is to say it is a mental event rather than an ontological event or an existential event. Like seeing a mirage on a hot summer's road, you see something but there is no water there. You see it but it's not there. You are deluded. Or the familiar example of mistaking a rope for a snake. In the evening when the light's not clear, and you're maybe a bit anxious going along a little path in a hot country you see a snake. It's not a snake but you see it as a snake because you believe it, and that highlights the nature of our perception. According to the general Buddhist understanding: through our five senses, information is coming from the object whether it's sound or taste or whatever, it's coming in through the sense organs and it's formulated by a consciousness belonging to that object. This first level of information is then fed into mental consciousness; *yid kyi nampar shepa* which is said to reside with all the consciousnesses in the heart and on an eight petaled lotus. And mental consciousness is then close to the consciousness of the five poisons: of mental dullness, desire, aversion, jealousy and pride, and from that all the other kind of emotional pulses of reactivity. As well as all the potential of all the accumulations of possibilities of dualistic experience which is called the consciousness of the ground of all. This ground of all is not the ground of all in terms of bright awareness, it's slightly dull because of reification, because of taking what arises as being something. So when we look through our eyes and we see something and we think oh, I perceive a tree, I perceive a car, the car is white in colour. It appears to us that I see what is there. It's just there. I look out of my window just now, I see there's a white car parked in the road. From the buddhist point of view 'white car' is a construct in my consciousness, it is an interpretation. So my ordinary, in the world,

perception is deluded. I think I'm seeing an object which is self existing but actually I am co-creating the car with the potential of what is there, colour, shape, so on and all that I know about cars, and the fact that they get parked on the road and so on.

So in the moment that I perceive a car, I conceive the car. It is a conception as well as a perception, and the conception also indicates a coming into birth. I'm birthing the motor car with how I think about it. So this is a movement of mental activity and this is what ignorance is because as soon as the source is not seen, this is where it comes from, this is where it comes from, now there's just stuff. There's oh! All of this. What is it? So now I have to make sense of it and I do that according to my culture, my education, what I think is important, what I ignore and so on. Each of us has our own particular frames of reference. For some people cars are not important for others they're very important. Some people know a lot about it, some a little about it. That's the content of their mind it's not what's parked on the street.

Awareness or unawareness

So mental activity is the activity of the ground, mistaken or twisted or spun a little bit so that it seems to be a thinker, thinking about someone. That the one who sees the car is me, and what I see is the car. But, as we looked this morning, I am also something I experience. I experience myself experiencing the car, but because I take myself for granted I don't look at that I just think; I see a car, I'm not stupid, you know! I see a car. So in that way I hide from myself my own participation in the arising of the experience. When subject and object move together that's a play of co-emergence. It's a quality of non-duality but when I think I am looking at a white car then there is subject, me (in my flat) and the car (on the road). Subject and object are completely different. So, although subject and object are movements of the mind the more solidification, the more density my sense of self takes on, the more I seem to be stabilised as the inhabitant of this body, the owner of this body. Everything which is not me is just other, and I can select from it the aspects which seem to affirm me. So this is how ignoring works. It is a process of ceaseless interpretation of the unborn potential of the ground as it shows itself. You look in a mirror, you see a reflection. But you don't. You see your face. You look in a mirror you see your face. I'm in the mirror. You're not in the mirror. But I am in the mirror, look, that's me!. So in that way the nature of the reflection is hidden

because when you look in the mirror you see yourself. No you don't. And you don't even see; oh this is what a reflection is. So the relationship between the mirror and the reflection is not apparent to you because you're simply using the mirror as a means of confirming: oh that's me, that's how I look. So it's so close because the reflection is in the mirror and yet it's so far because I'm looking at me. So simultaneously you have the possibility of open awareness or unawareness.

So, in the tradition, once you have the initial grasping at something you have this co-emergent ignorance which is the possibility of seeing there's nothing there, it's the movement of the mind, or to see things. And once you start seeing things there is a subject that see the things and from that you get all the elaborations that you get in different cultures, different periods of history and so on. Leading to the formation of myself in a particular environment, leading to my behaviours, good or bad, selfish or generous, whatever.

So it's so important to see that the first stage of ignorance is one of separation. So when you look at a mirage in the summer time you've got a shimmering movement of the air, and the way this light comes into this shimmering creates for us the illusion of water. We see something which is not there but we see it. So this is really what ignorance is. It is to be convinced of the existence of something which doesn't exist. There is something there, there is light, there is movement, this is the potential. But when the potential is grasped at as being something then the second move is when that something is incorporated into our familiar frames of reference. "Oh, it's water, water on the road." I can imagine there's water on the road, sometimes there is. Oh yes, that's what it is, but it's not. But as long as you feel that's what it is and you act on that basis then you go towards it. And when people are out in the desert these kinds of mirages can take them off the path that they should be following and they can get into big trouble.

The flow of experience

So that's why the texts often say samsara is like a dream. It doesn't mean that it is nothing at all but it is an illusion which, when you believe it to be true, deludes you. It is your own belief, your own longing for something that makes you stupid, and the reason we want something to be out there is

because we want someone to be in here because we are convinced that we exist. We are. We are a showing but we're not something which exists. We don't exist apart from it. We are the flow of experience. So this is enormously important because if when I am sitting and just, some thoughts come in my mind, if I take that mental activity as an aspect of myself then it is as if I am the thinker and then our familiar story continues. But rather what we're wanting to see in the meditation is that what I take to be myself is an aspect of mental activity. Maybe I think myself in to existence, into a pseudo existence, an ersatz existence, something which appears to be the case but actually is make believe, pretend, produced by mental activity. And what is mental activity? The energy of the ground arising and passing, arising and passing. And as I said, the ground, according to the tradition, is completely neutral. It doesn't care, it's just a potential.

So as subject and object get involved together we become entangled, we take our life seriously, we believe in the importance of maintaining our structures. Life becomes quite thick. Of course, if you have family you have to feed your kids and have to get them to school and so on. It's not that you should walk away and leave the world behind but it is more to see that the world is flowing. Moment by moment. If you've got kids they're always moving, they're always doing something. They throwing around, this, that, thoughts, happy, sad, falling over, crying... When we have the idea that this is my child and that I want them to behave in a particular way, we you solidify the situation. If you can flow with the flow life gets much easier. In family therapy you see again and again the families that function well, they are very fluid. And the families that don't function so well are either very sticky or enmeshed or very distant. Too hot, too cold. But there's very little flow. So the flow of experience is how it is. We don't need to invent it, we don't make it. We find ourselves moment by moment in this flow, But if you miss the pulse, if you miss the beat you become a bit staccato, you become out of rhythm with things and this creates friction, and either aversion or desire and the usual kind of chaos we're familiar with.

Shinè

So in order to separate. So separation was the cause of the problem in the first place because we separated the arising appearance from it's own ground, and the interpretation of that arising experience from its own ground. But now because subject and object seem to be separate we need

to separate from them in order to have more space to see clearly. Which is why we have the general stages of practice. First of all we do shinè, or staying peacefully, staying calmly so that the minute the power of habitual involvement, of reactivity, the felt sense of the necessity of doing something. So how do we do that? Well, on the outer level, we do it simply by focussing our attention on the nostrils. Most of you are probably very familiar with this, and it may seem like a beginners practice but in the tradition in Dzogchen we keep doing this from time to time because it's a way of, in a sense, a way of seeing whether the brakes are working on the car. Once you get into life and the car's moving if you haven't checked the brakes you can have problem. So when we do shinè we sit in a calm way. We bring our attention to sensation of the breath at the nostrils and that's what we focus on, and this acts as a brake for our movement to the left, movement to the right, following thoughts that have gone in the past, waiting expectantly for future thoughts. We just focus. So it's a restrictive focussing device that allows us to be more aware of our habits of distraction because if you're always distracted and distraction seems like a kind of friendly social thing as you enter into conversations and be part of what's going on. Distraction seems quite fine but when you try to slow down then you see oh actually this is a habit, I'm not a friendly social person. I'm pulled into these social situations because I can't sit still. I can't just listen I have to participate. So in order to give ourselves more perspective we just practise sitting a little bit. So we do some basic shinè now, just for a short time but just to settle into that space. So sitting with the spine. For this kind of practice the gaze is going down the line of the nose. We're not looking out. We're not concerned with the environment. We're wanting to make our world very, very small. The only thing that matters is the sensation at the nostrils. And if we wander off, going here and there, as soon as we notice that we just gently bring ourselves back.

Ten minute meditation.

Ok, so that's a very good practice to do A, because it calms you down and makes it easier to have more sense of spaciousness but it also helps us to notice when we seem to go under the power of thoughts, memories, sensations in the body... It is as if these arising phenomena have the power to pull us, to pull us in. This is where we cheat ourselves. These ideas do not have that power. For example if you like alcohol then you think the alcohol's

very good, you want to have some alcohol every day but you notice that not everybody does this. How very strange. Alcohol is available why would you not drink it. Some people say I don't like it, I don't want it. What's wrong with these people? Alcohol is good. So if you're a drinker you see the quality as being intrinsic to the alcohol. But if the quality was intrinsic to the alcohol everybody would be caught by the power of the alcohol and we would all be drinking. The same with cigarettes, the same with pornography, the same with many of the things that take people over, where they feel: I have to, it's necessary, it's important. Projecting meaning and value into the object is the way that you allow yourself to be a slave. The mind is free from the very beginning. No object in the world has power to control you. People who get cancer respond to it very differently. People who have amputations respond very differently. People who've been tortured respond very differently. There is no fixed correlation between a particular kind of object or situation and a subjective response. So when you see this, when you really see directly: oh, I give myself to the thought, to the memory. I am sacrificing my freedom in order to be involved. That involvement is more important than freedom. Then you start to see the choice point or the crossroads between the openness of awareness which is not involved, and the ego which is always involved. When you get distracted in meditation this is because you have not released yourself from the nexus of your egoic identification, your sense of being your familiar self. And so on that basis the link between habitual objective forms and habitual subjective responses, lock together very easily. But this is from your side. The object's not doing it to you. We are drawn towards the object out of a sense of lack. The ego is marked by a sense of lack, it needs more and it wants more. And that lack can be met, if possible, by positive situations but it can also, as we know, be met by negative action.

People who have been abused will often, as adults, put themselves back into abusive relationships because they've become used to a pattern in which they are put down, denigrated, physically attacked, sexually attacked and so on. It's habitual to them and habitual means there it confirms my sense that I'm worth less, I'm unlovable, I'm stupid, I'm rubbish. So once you have an identification like that it provides a kind of lock on. So in meditation this is a place where we can choose freedom. We can allow these strands of habitual involvement to untie and relax. That's why the simplicity of

focussing on the breath is so helpful. Just breathing in and out, I'm not having to do anything, just breathing in and out.

Vipassana

So, we can, usually from that we go on to do vipassana practice which links, and it's a very important investigation to do for the practice of dzogchen because it's a way of really becoming clear that impermanence is all there is. So, in the practice of vipassana, this is general Buddhist vipassana. After sitting for some time we take the focussed attention we've had at the nostrils, we take it up to the top of the head and then scan down through the body to the soles of our feet and back up again. Down and up, up and down. Slowly. Just being aware with what is there. That is to say we go down as an awareness, not an investigative consciousness but a simple attention which is open like awareness. It's still an attention but it's not looking for anything in particular, and it displays whatever it encounters. So there's an itch or a burn or a pain or a happy feeling. What ever it is, and you pass through. And you just note as you go up and down, the changing movement of these experiences. So we try that for a little bit. Just very gently, move in your own time. It's a way of getting close to the lived actuality of embodiment. This is what embodiment is, how it presents itself. It's not a medical body or a theoretical body, an anatomical body, it's the body of life as it shows itself moment by moment. Scanning down, scanning up.

Five minute meditation.

Ok. So this is a very simple practice it's very easy to do you just keep scanning up, scanning down. Not stopping, not thinking about what's occurring. Just allowing it to register. Don't tell yourself what is occurring. Something hot arises if you say it's a pain, you have told the event what it is. But if you just stay with it, the event has a chance to show itself to you. And so the phenomena have space to be as they are without being cooked through your assumptions, your beliefs, your ideas. This is the very heart of dzogchen practice because if you don't understand this then you keep the internal commentary running and you become the mistress of everything that's occurring. You never find freedom. We're moving from engaged, enmeshed participant to an observer, neutral, and then we're going to become more spacious and receive whatever is arising without letting it

mark us. And then on the basis of that you can be participating in the world but always with the freshness of the emergence from the ground. So when we do this practice, if you keep doing it, you start to experience; oh, this body is a process. This body is a revelation, an unfolding, a showing. So this body is like a potential. So it's like a flow of water and you can pour it into a round jug, or a square jug, and the water will take that shape, for a while. So I am fluid, I am flow.

So you can see if you then go to do a tantric practice where, say, your name is Anne. Anne is now sitting and visualising or imagining that she is Tara. But Anne has started by being Anne, how can Anne become Tara? If Anne is very strongly enmeshed in the idea: I am Anne then you have to de-Anne Anne. You have to take the Anne out of Anne in order that she becomes Tara, and that's quite difficult if you just spend all your time being Anne, and being Anne, and being Anne. But when you do this vipassana oh, I'm flowing in this particular way. This is a flow like the water. So I flow into Anne, and I flow into Tara then I flow into Padmasambhava. So you might have thought; my name is Anne I'm a woman, yes I could be Tara, but Padmasambhava this a man. I don't know that as a woman can I become a man? You see ahh! I am stuck in my assumptions. The flow of my experience is not male or female. It's the potential, and then you can be the 21 Taras, the eight forms of Padmasambhava because you can move in any direction with whatever is occurring. Water flows. Egoic stability and stuckness and fixity can't flow. It has to defend itself. It's greedy and defensive. This is not much fun. The vipassana is a very simple practice but it goes very deep and it allows us to go more easily into the practices.

Two practices

So, we're using these two practices, the calm sitting and the vipassana, means to see clearly, to have direct insight, we're using these two to free ourselves from our history of reification, the solidification of ourself and the other. So we want to sit, uninvolved, but present. So when you solidify yourself you put yourself apart from the flow. So in these practices, like with the scanning, like a melting block of ice, you go from solidity into flow. And we stay with the flow because dzogchen is entirely about the flow, the flow of light, of sound, of the movement of experience. So we're not involved but not in a defensive way but simply as the mirror is present with the reflection but not involved in it. The basic quality of the ground, of

awareness itself is called *kadak*, primordial purity, never been stained or marked or touched by anything which has occurred. It's vajra, it's indestructible. Nothing can distort it or break it or harm it. No reflection alters the mirror itself. The mirror itself is very, very close to the reflection but it's not transformed by it. That indicates the quality that we want to open to in the awareness. We're not trying to make it happen. We're not inventing something or developing a new form of ourselves. Rather this is the quality of the source itself which is obscured by our own constructive energy and the ways that we operate.

Guru Yoga

So we want to relax and open, and the main way that we do this in dzogchen is through Guru yoga. Guru yoga is a very, very ancient practice. Over the years, over the centuries many additional practices have been added to Dzogchen. These are, kind of, secondary practices which are useful for working with energy. That is to say, with working with the patterning of what arises, working with movement. But Guru yoga allows you to open to the ground itself, and through finding yourself in the presence of the ground, which is your own ground, then movement ceases to be a problem at all. So Guru yoga is very simple and very, very profound. The reason it's simple is because it takes you to what is intrinsic, what is already there. You're not having to make it happen. It is. All you're doing is allowing yourself to unfold from the burden. Say you've been walking in the hills, and you have a big rucksack and a jacket, and you walk and walk and you sit down and you ease the sack off your shoulders. Take off your jacket. Ahh. Your body suddenly feels lighter, your spine gets longer. Now you're here, and before you were looking at the ground that you were walking on. So this is the function of the Guru yoga: to lay down the burden of the conceptual notion of self you have been carrying for so long. It's false. It's a fabrication and actually it's not very heavy. In fact it has no substance to it at all other than your own belief in it.

So when we do the Guru yoga we sit in this usual position. Everything resting through the spine our gaze is open into the space in front of us and we imagine a white letter "A", could be it a Tibetan ༄ or a western capital "A". The point is that "A" symbolises unimpeded flow. Unimpeded flow and potential. So if you take your breath, breathing in and out, quietly, silently,

and you start to allow some sound. Hah, hah, ahh, ahh, mama, papa. So this empty silence starts to go into its basic form of "A", and on the basis of "A" you get the development of all words. So the entire conceptual field. The entire play of the creation of particular patternings is the, kind of, surface shimmer of the sound of "A". "A" indicates emptiness, not as something dead but something empty and full at the same time. Just as the sound "A" is nothing at all but it's the basis for mama, papa, everything. Empty and full, empty and full. This non-duality is what the "A" represents. This is Dzogpachenpo the great completion. It's complete in its emptiness.

So we imagine, maybe about an arm length and a half in front of us, about the size of your fist to your thumb, like this, a white letter "A", and around it we have these colours spreading out. This white, red, blue, yellow and green, and they represent the five elements, the five wisdoms, the five poisons. All the potential of samsara and nirvana which is inseparable from the open, empty ground. Arising and passing. Arising and passing. Energy flows out into the space of "A". So it's not that the energy is around "A" and going out somewhere else. "A" is the infinity of space within which these five colours are moving, forming all the potential patterns. And relaxed and open with this as our focus of attention we make the sound of "A" three times, relaxing into the sound, releasing into the sound. Allowing all our constrictions, and tensions and constructs just to dissolve into the sound because all the them are just elaborations of the basic energy of emptiness. Opening out. When we come to the end of the sound of the third "A", the "A" in front of us dissolves then we're just sitting. The open sky in front of us. The open sky within us. Sky and sky. No barrier. No limit. No border. And within that, experience arises. Sometimes it looks outside, sometimes it looks inside. However it appears, don't interfere, don't make a commentary, just allow it to be. So you're very relaxed, nothing to be done. Stay as you are, just peaceful. So we'll do that practice, then we'll have a break. Ahh, ahh, ahh.

Five minute meditation.

Ok. So many kinds of experiences arise when we're sitting. Let them come and go. Self arising, self vanishing or self liberating. There's nothing for us to do with them. But as soon as we become caught up with one thought the next thought seems to double up on top of it, and double up and then next

and more and more and more. Like a traffic jam on a motorway; one car breaks down and now there's five thousand cars unable to move. So you get a compacting or a densification. Each of these cars, if it's functioning well, it's just moving along the road there's no problem. Thoughts arise and they pass through. But it is as if one thought sits on another, and another. The bottom one has already vanished, but it's as if they generate an increasing opacity. You can't see through them they become like a kind of veil. Just as when you have clear light and on a summers day you hold up a crystal the light goes into it and the colours come out. You see, oh these colours are the potential of the clear light. Just as we had with the white "A", like the clear light and the colours radiating out. But when these colours are, say, on the wall of a room, or you have some bookshelves or bedspreads or whatever you have in the room, different colours. One is red, one is green, and so on. And these colours are there because of this ability or non-ability to absorb colour. So the colour that you see is the colour that is not absorbed by that material. It seems to linger on the surface. So we see the blueness there and we don't see that this blueness has a relationship to the capacity of the surface of that material to absorb the full spectrum of the clear light or not. It is a selection, and that then gives a density to the colour. If it was clear light it is just transparent, you just move through clear light but if it's solid blue or solid red, we say solid, it seems to be something there. So this is what you can see in your own mind: the light of your mind which is open and fresh, this free flow, suddenly seems to condense, thicken, coagulate like blood, and it becomes sticky. Then you build up something. Then you build up something. Nothing was built. Uncompounded, but it looks as if something was built.

So nobody can do this for you. Each of us has to look and get to know our own mind. Nothing is hidden. This is not esoteric, it's not a great secret, but it helps if somebody sets out oh this is how it is because that gives us the courage to keep looking. But if you do keep looking you will find because this is how it is. It's not that some people have more of it and some people have less. Some people have more tendency to distraction. Some people fall asleep very easily. These can be managed a little bit by extra, secondary practices. But the main thing is, not to block it, however it is, don't edit it, stay fresh with it.

Part 4

I hope that you can now appreciate that all the different aspects of Dharma fit together very well. Sometimes Dzogchen is presented as a completely separate tradition, but in the Nyingma tradition its part and parcel of the full flavour of dharma. And all the schools of buddhism point to the absence of inherent self nature in beings. That is to say that we don't exist as a separate entity. If you take the depth of this understanding it leads you directly to Dzogchen. So it's very important to, when you do practice, to see how the different aspects of dharma that you become familiar with can be very helpful. So, for example you can pray. You can pray to Padmasambhava for help. That looks like a very dualistic thing, subject and object, but who is the one who is praying? This is an aspect of the ground. Who is being prayed to? This is an aspect of the ground. What you're doing is you're connecting the energy of the ground as it vibrates according your habitual karmic structure, you're opening it out by bringing it into a kind of harmony or syncopation with the energy of Padmasambhava.

This whole world is nothing but vibration, it's nothing but energy. We see peoples different personalities, some people are very angry. Some people are very playful. We have many different personality types, body types. All of that is simply vibration. Different kinds of trees, plants, fruits, all of them are just kind of, formations of energy. So, if you feel sad and lonely and desperate you can pray to Padmasambhava for help but you can integrate that with your Dzogchen understanding. You do the guru yoga of the three "A", and then you pray from that state of openness. So that the movement of the energy which is unimpeded frees you from locking into the little prison of yourself. This is so very, very important. Don't think of some things as not being Dzogchen, some things being special Dzogchen. There are no high teachings and low teachings there are only teachings which you use and if you use them in the right way they are all deeply meaningful and helpful. So this is something we want to stay with. Because the key thing is isolation.

So when we looked at these three aspects before; there's the openness of the mind, the display which arises as the open field that we are part of, the subject field of how the world appears to us, trees, buildings, people and so on. And the third aspect is our participation in that and the texts say our participation is all pervading. So how can that be? I feel like an individual

person, I think I'm here but my energy is not different from the field, it's part of the field and it's part of the ground. So the infinity of emptiness, the infinity of the Dharmadhatu, the infinity of the dharmakaya, which is not located anywhere, is inseparable from this arising moment and inseparable from your breathing in and out, from your talking with someone. So each small thing is not small, it's a shining moment of connectivity; of this point and that point, and that point and that point. So it's very, very important for us, whatever we do if you allow your movement, the movement of your body, your speech and your mind to arise in space, moving in space, manifesting and dissolving, manifesting and dissolving. There's no limit to that. You're not a small person. People now with fear, with this virus are very, very small. They're fearful: I will die! Of course you're going to die.

Of course we're going to die!

Of course you're going to die, dying is dying. It's not a big surprise. How will I die? When will I die? We don't know. But how I will die, I don't know in terms of: will it be a car crash, will it be a disease, will somebody shoot me? We don't know. But what we do know is that we will die by the easing out of our preoccupation. That is to say, when we die the five elements start to separate. Earth into water, water into fire, fire into wind and then into space. And the consciousness which rides on wind into space vanishes, and you find yourself into the movement of the bardo. That's how we die. Just as when you're born the red substance of the mother and the white essence of the father come together and the subtle consciousness goes into that and these three together start to evolve as a foetus inside the mothers body.

So you have coming together, merging, ever increasing complexity manifesting, coming out of the mothers body, and then gradually the body loses it's energetic integrity, the five elements go their separate ways, and the body is a piece of meat which gradually will rot and smell bad. So this is all it is. This (body) is not who we are. This is not the truth of us. The truth of us is infinite awareness which is never limited, always open. Always experiencing self and other arising inseparably. And then moment by moment we're like this and we're like that. One of the great aims of buddhist practice is to overcome the fear of death.

If you were gambling and you put all your money and all your possessions on the table you're probably going to feel quite anxious when the roulette

wheel is turning because you can lose everything. But if you understand that this body is part of who you are, not the ground of who you are, not the secure basis of who you are, but just a moment of showing, it's like an apparition, a ghostly form, a magical form, then you don't over invest in it. The body changes, then we die. But the continuity lies in awareness and emptiness. Awareness and emptiness never changes it's always present. Consciousness changes. So it's very important at a time when people become very, very frightened, just to say, yes, I will die. We should know about death. I will die. And what is death? So when you fall asleep at night it's kind of rehearsal for death. It's the falling away of the energised functioning that brings you together. You start to dissolve. You dissolve into sleep, you let go, you release yourself into sleep, and in the morning you collect yourself into the formation of the morning. Is the person who fell asleep at night the same as the person who wakes up in the morning? Maybe, maybe not. You have to look for yourself.

The three statements of Garab Dorje

So the key teachings of Dzogchen come from Garab Dorje. And he's famous for his three statements so we maybe look at these a little bit, because it shows us, always, the central point.

So the first one is that you have to open to what is already here. Open to the intrinsic purity out of which you are arising at the moment. So, sometimes it's called being introduced to your true nature. That is the outer form, somebody says; your mind is like the sky, or like the ocean, or they maybe show you a crystal with the light going through it. You get some ideas. But what you got was ideas. What we need is the direct experience and you get that when you sit in your own practice. You're sitting, relax into the out breath and you're sitting. Thoughts, feelings, sensations are moving. So if you want to open to the ground of your, experience the ground of your being, and this flow of thoughts seems to be covering that ground of being. It's obvious. Don't merge with the flow of thoughts. They take you here, they take you there. They take you in all directions. Just stay, without merging and without separating. In the Tibetan text they have it again and again. *Pang-lang mepa*. Don't push things away, don't absorb or identify with what's arising. So this is our most basic meditation instruction. And you have to do it, again and again, by yourself. You're sitting and you find yourself, maybe, very dull, heavy, there's no clarity in your mind, you feel as

if you're sinking, and you might think: oh this is a waste of time, what am I doing? The instruction is always don't try to change anything, you can just increase the depth of your breathing if it helps to give you a bit more support. But stay present with how it is. Because, I hope what you get a sense of today is how it is is always movement. It's not stuck. When we feel stuck that's because we're holding on, we are grasping, we are identifying. But thoughts come and go, feelings come and go, sensations come and go. So, if the mind is dull and heavy, if you feel burdened, if you feel hopeless, if you think, I've been practising for forty years I never understand anything, that's a thought. Every thought arises, stay with the vanishing of the thought. Don't go onto the thought, don't merge into it otherwise you go away with the thought and you think: what am I doing, maybe I should do something different. Thought follows thought. Stay present with however it is, and it will change. It will always change because change is what happens to the energetic forms of emergence. This is absolutely central and vital to our understanding. If the mind doesn't move then you see that movement moves.

Stillness and movement

Now, the mind is both stillness and movement, so this is very subtle, this differentiation. You could easily tip into the movement, like the reflection is in the mirror. It's not something crude, you can't take a hammer and a chisel and cut into it and keep things separate. It's very, very subtle. It's like a ballet dancer having a sense of how they are balanced at every moment as the body is moving. Balance is dynamic. And the movement of the mind is always inseparable from the stillness of the mind. They are not two things. If you put them back to back and say either I'm still or I'm moving, then you get very, very confused because you think then I have to stop having thoughts. Thoughts are not the enemy. Thoughts become like the enemy if you merge into the thought because then the ego self and the thoughts that are arising have to work out do we like each other or not? The ego likes some thoughts and not others. So then you're back with accepting and rejecting, sorting out, composing yourself, compounding yourself, according to how you feel.

So when we go back and look at the nature of the ground it is uncompounded. So if you compound anything you're in the realm of ego. You can utilise the movement of energy but not build on it. You pulse with

it. It flows through you. You have an intuitive adaptation. You find yourself harmonising with the situation. But you don't do it. The one who is doing it, the maker, the doer, this is the root nexus of the ego. And it's overburdened. We take responsibility. That's why, in the general teachings in buddhism, you have a lot of attention to purification practice, and to detailed teachings about karma because you need to let go of all the bad things that you have done. Why? Because you think you've done a lot of bad things. You look at your life and you regret having done that. Why was I so unkind to my dad? Why did I not offer him the kind of friendship he wanted to offer me? Why? Oh, because I'm a bad person. Only bad people would do something like that. That's an explanation. If you just think, this arose in my mind, the potential of the ego pushed aside the potential of awareness, you leapt into this arising thought about your dad, I don't like him, I've never got on with him. And because of that, this formation arose, I don't want to hang out with my dad. It was dynamic. No-one did it. No-one did it. If someone really had done it, and they were a really bad person no amount of Dorje Sempa or purification would remove it. If you have a piece of coal and you wash it every day for a year it won't become chalk, it won't become gold. It's coal. So if your heart is black it's not going to become white. Your heart only becomes white because it's always been white but its been covered with black. The black is contingent, situational. And it's dynamic. So that understanding, you take it into the dzogchen practice, you see oh, the problem is not self, it's not the other, it's this glue. The glue of attachment. Ok. So what I need to do is dissolve the glue of attachment.

Meditation instruction

Ok. So now to the meditation practice. You're sitting and the thoughts arise and you feel this immediate impulse to get rid of it. No. You don't merge. How do I not do it? You stay very close, but you don't merge. Open. Intimate. But not merged. You don't want to pull back, you don't want to fall in. You're just staying present and open. Like the mirror. How will I do that? By getting a sore bum! By sitting for a very long time in meditation. Because you don't know how to do it. It's not going to fall out of the sky. Because you're learning how to release habits which are not you. The habits create the illusion that this is you. So every time you merge into the thought which you think is important, this is a movement of the mind striking another movement of the mind which is your habit of identification, and these two

movements move together in the devil's *pas de deux*. Now you're dancing this interminable dance, not getting anywhere with this. This is shit. And you just go round and round and round. How can I not get involved? You have to relax. Don't try hard. Don't do anything. Be useless. Take retirement. Stop trying. Then you have to trust. This is what is the meaning of faith. I trust that from the very beginning my nature has been pure. This is the first instruction of Garab Dorje. Open and seeing that your mind is pure. That all difficulties are contingent, they've fallen like dirty rain from the sky but the mind itself is pure. So if you see that, whatever is occurring is not me. This is the beginning of freedom. If I don't fuse because I have to fuse. I now have a choice. I can fuse or not. That freedom is important when you stop your sitting meditation. First of all you have to learn not to get involved. Not to get involved. That is to say to do less, and not to do more. Once you can do less and you don't have to, it doesn't feel like a necessity, then, when you get up from the practice, and you enter into a situation with someone you receive them and you respond towards them. You're not responding from your repertoire, from your portfolio of your personality. You're responding from the ground towards the situation. And in that way both sitting practice, and interactive practice, dissolve the habitual identification with certain patterns of movement as being who I am. Then we have access to all movement.

Five questions

But first of all we have to see: I am empty. There's nothing in me. So we have these famous five questions some of us have looked at many times: does the mind have colour and a shape? Does it have a size? Is it small? Is it inside the body? Outside the body? Does it come from somewhere? Does it stay somewhere? And does it go somewhere? We use these questions as a means of observing how the mind is. They're not questions like exam questions. They're more like an encouragement to attend to the details of what is happening so that we see, oh my mind sometimes seems to be inside me, sometimes seems to be outside me. Oh. Maybe it's not fixed. You look again, and again and again, until you see, oh yes, it's like this. It's like this. Then you have a confidence that the mind cannot be caught. Movement catches movement. Thought catches thought. Emotion catches thought. Thoughts and emotions catch sensation and vice versa. These patternings of movement are interactive and they build patterns. But

awareness itself is not involved. So this is the central way that we find our mind. Mind is the illuminating capacity which is not fixed anywhere. Which is not catchable. Awareness is not an object of mind. Your feet are an object of mind. Your memories are an object of mind. What's in your fridge is an object of mind. You can think about these phenomena. But awareness is not a thing.

So all the tools and the skills that you have, that you learned in school, that you developed through your life, that allow you to take hold of situations, to make sense of them. They are useless in the meditation. Because you can cheat yourself by imagining that you've got hold of your mind. Most of us do that a lot while we're doing the practice. We come up with a conclusion, we think: oh yes this is my mind. And then it's not. We were so sure, this is me, this is it. And then it's gone. Ahh. Because we associate knowledge, clarity, with catching. When you're in primary school and the teacher asks a question; what is three times five? You put your hand up. Please miss, I know, I know. It's very exciting. I know something, ho, ho, look at me. So when you have this attitude that you want to get hold of something, that there is some benefit to knowing, to being important, to having power, to having control. This takes you very far away from Dzogchen. Dzogchen is about availability. Relax, open, receive. The ego is the recipient of the gift, or the blessing of the ground. The ego is a gift of the ground. It's not the master. It's a flowering, a showing, a display. But it's not the boss. It receives the energy of the ground and displays the energy of the ground in particular formations. So that's why the more we relax and open. Open and empty. Full and radiant. And this specific movement. Then we see these three are never separated. They flow together. It's not one, two, three. It's actually an integrity which we only number as one, two, three in order to get a sense of it. When we live it it's not one, two, three at all. There's no difference. So that's the first point of Garab Dorje.

The second point of Garab Dorje

The second point is: not to remain in doubt. That is to say; not to think about it. This goes back to what I was just saying, that we use thinking as a way of proving something. So, when you're in school and the teachers asks you about what's your sense of this poem, and you say something and she says what thought's led you to give that opinion? How did you arrive at that opinion about the poem? And you start to speak, and you join more

thoughts together, and you come up with a picture. This is what we do. We're narrative producers. We're creating storylines about something. We're always talking at one remove. So this is very tempting. But if you do that you will lose the very thing that you want to relax into. So, not entering into doubt means that you see, clarity is intrinsic to the ground. Clarity is the showing of the ground. Clarity is not arrived by having more thoughts, If you have something in samsara, I don't know, say you have to do your income tax return, and it's quite complicated. You have to think a little bit about how you phrase that. Or you have to write a letter, a formal letter, you have to be coherent and put your thoughts in a sequential order. That's a conceptual clarity. But the clarity which sees awareness, which is awareness, is an immediate clarity. Immediate means not mediated. It's not mediated through thoughts or memories or big ideas, it's just direct.

So, if you have bit of a garden or even if you're trapped in a flat, you can look out of the window you see the houses, maybe trees. All of this is there immediately. What you see is immediately there. Then try to describe to yourself what you see. I see five cars. One is like this, one is like that. Then you say and now I see this block of flats in front of me, made of bricks. I take my binoculars and I'm counting the bricks. One, two, three thousand four hundred and forty, forty three thousand and eighty four. Fucking hell! There's a lot of stuff out there. And the more you get into the detail the more you give yourself a headache. That's not how we do it. That's to apply a conceptual clarity. You draw the curtain. You look out the window. Ah! It's all there. It's all there. What is it? It's this! Yes, but what is it? So this question is so important. What is it? This. It's self explanatory. It's this. But why is it? Then you go into the conceptual interpretation, the analysis, the definition, the liking, the not liking. The first form of clarity. Immediate. Unconstructed clarity is the natural gift of the mind. It's called *lhundrup* in Tibetan, it's the immediate, all at once-ness, which is this. But when you try to work it out, when you try to give an account. You pull it into a story, you add lots of meaning. That is to say you poison the freshness of the world by smearing on top of it these old ideas and associations. Which means that this beautiful freshness offered to you, moment by moment in your life, in every situation, is not allowed to touch you because you make the fresh stale, and old and mouldy so quickly by wrapping it in your habitual interpretation.

So when he says: don't remain in doubt, means when you find yourself wanting to think about it more, wanting to go back and read a book to

check out whether it's just right, then you're going in the wrong direction. You stay with your mind. You open to your mind. You rest in your mind. And whatever happens you return to that. That is the place where the gold is. If you go into conceptual interpretation you get lead. Lead and gold are not the same. The shining moment is the shining mind which is clear immediately. And the more you stay with the brightness of the mind you'll be more intelligent, more quick, more intuitive, more responsive, just like that. And the more you struggle to think and to make sense of things, you will become burdened by the weight of your own thoughts. Although these thoughts don't weigh anything, when you stack them up it's quite a burden you're carrying.

The third point of Garab Dorje

And then the third aspect of Garab Dorje is to simply continue in this way. That means don't look for anything better. One of the key points of awareness is that it is satisfied. The mirror hangs on the wall. If the lights are off and there's no reflection, that's fine. If something very ugly is put in front of the mirror it shows that. No problem. If something very beautiful appears in front of the mirror. No problem. It's neutral. It has equanimity, evenness. But we tend to establish value by comparing and contrasting; is this better than that, is this bigger than that, can this do more than that? And so once you take this, this against that attitude, and you bring it onto your own practice, you deviate off into exploring other things. Oh I'm doing my practice every day but maybe I should read more Madhyamaka. Maybe you should. It might be nice. It's a good hobby, it won't cause any harm. But if you're thinking I need Madhyamaka in order to understand my mind, what are you saying? I need to learn ideas from Madhyamaka, wonderful, beautiful, deep ideas, from Nagarjuna and so on. And with this battery of ideas, with this toolkit of ideas, I will apply them to my mind. There's a problem here. If the flavour of the mind is naked, fresh, open. The image of it is Padmasambhava when he's born, he's like a beautiful eight year old boy with little beads of sweat on his forehead, he's so fresh. Whah! Now, you want to understand this. You want to understand it. Actually what you want to do is to stand it under your mind, you want to layer your interpretation on top of this. So this is where you go wrong. That's why we say if you're doing the practice don't talk about what happens in practice. You can, of course, ask a teacher or some experienced meditator if you have some real

question, but to talk about meditation is generally unhelpful. Because it takes the fresh, and winds it into the field of the already established. And you have to remember the past is gone. The past is gone.

So the key thing is stay with your mind. And just stay with it, and don't think about it, just stay with it. Let your mind show you itself, you don't have to show your mind to yourself, that would be too complicated and stupid. Your mind is already there otherwise you wouldn't have any awareness. Your mind is displaying everything which is going on. It's like the mirror, it's the field of disclosure. So your feelings in your body, smells coming from the kitchen, whatever it is, this is moving through the space of awareness. Movement through the space. Stay with that, while you're sitting, while you're walking, while you're talking, whatever you're doing. Experience, or appearance is moving in the space of the mind. If you stay on the point you won't be able to think about it. This is a beautiful thing. Because if you think about something, ok I think about my lunch or I think about what I'll do in the evening. I'm thinking about the past, I'm thinking about the present. So I might think, well how am I feeling now? Ok James, how am I feeling? So now I'm looking at myself as an object. I'm coming up with a picture of myself. Ah ha, ok. Who is this one that I am thinking about? This is an image, something imagined. It's not the revelation of how I am but something I'm fixing like a moth or a frog in a horrible old school. You take the frog and you pin it onto a board and take a scalpel and while it's still alive you cut into it to see what's moving. This is not going to work You can't pin the mind and have the mind in it's natural mode. It moves where it moves. It's like the wind.

So needing to have mastery over the mind, to really know what is happening, it's a false paradigm. You're entering the game in the wrong way. If the game is football then you don't pick up the ball. If the game is rugby you can pick up the ball. Every game has it's own rule. And the rule in Dzogchen is relax from mental activity. Stay relaxed, open, and present with what's occurring. It may sound very passive. It may sound as if it would be impossible then, to work out the problems of your life, you have to go to work, you have to earn money. When you get to work there are things you have to do. Certainly, in my experience, by not thinking about things, they happen. They happen. We have all accumulated a lot, a lot, of life experiences. These are there like resources all around us. And when we relax we have access to the widest range of our own resources. But when

we get worried, when we think we have to plan, when we try to prepare we tend to focus in on a narrow arena of the resources that have that we think will be important for this. So we've already closed ourselves down before we've begun.

So, not planning but staying with the spontaneity. In the, particularly in Mahamudra they use this term Sahaj. Sahaj means like, simultaneous, that as the situation arises, you arise. If you're with the situation you're co-emergent. There isn't a gap in which you have to work out what shall I do? What shall I say? How shall I behave. Because if you receive the situation. If you let the other persons face come right in through your eyes, if the tone of their voice comes in through your ears, you respond. You can see what has to be done. If a child comes home from school and they're looking a bit sad, if you're the parent you look at the child and in an instant you have to think do I leave them alone? Maybe they need just to settle. Or do I say, hey sweetie, what's the matter? You know with children you have to have that sensitivity. If you ask them, and they need to hide, that's not good. And if they need to be asked, and you let them alone, that's not good either. So you have to find a way to allow the intuitive connectivity to guide what goes on. Of course mums learn this with very small babies. So it's not mystical function. It's just that over thinking dulls the world. Too much thinking makes everything thick. So in terms of the five poisons, the first is called mental dullness. And it's dull because it's over thought. It's over filled with concepts.

So that's a lot of words just now. So let's do a little more sitting. Let's do the Guru yoga of the white "A" again.

Ahh, Ahh, Ahh.

Seven minute meditation

So with this practice we don't do it for a very long time, may be five minutes, ten minutes then take break. Do it again. If you have plenty of time you can do it again and again. But you want to begin in a fresh, open, relaxed way. If you try to do it from a position of effort or struggle you won't make any progress. And in fact it will make things much worse for you.

Solitude

So we began today thinking a bit about solitude. Now awareness is solitary. It abides in solitude. But it's not isolated. Just as the mirror is solitary. It's singular. It's not mixed with anything, and yet it is the host or hostess of all the display, of all the reflections which arise. Now the ego is different. The ego is isolated. The ego feels cut off, wants to join in, but on it's own terms. The ego is not solitary. The quality of solitariness is contentment. It's just itself, alone, infinite, settled, peaceful. When we're not in touch with that, when we're separated from that in the delusion of an isolated, individual, ego formation, then we have no solitude. Because solitude becomes persecutory. We become bored, we want something to happen, because excitement, and something new and different, is the food that feeds into the ego's sense of itself. So you can use this as a kind of litmus test to review how you're getting on in the practice. If you can sit very peacefully, and you don't need anything to happen, and you're not trying to make anything to happen. And at the same time your mind is bright and fresh, then that's a quality of awareness. But if you find that you're caught up in stories about what's going on, and you become very curious about lots of things. Your mind is jumping around fascinated by facts and information. Then you can observe for yourself how long you've been doing this, and has it ever brought you any real satisfaction? There is no end to learning. There is no end to thinking. There's no end to worrying, there's no end to problem solving. But there is an end to samsara which is to relax into open awareness which has been unchanging from the very beginning.

So this is what my own teacher tried to show me again and again, and it's quite a difficult thing to become accustomed to. To really trust that buddha nature exists from the very beginning as the ground of our being. In Tibetan they say *ye sangye* primordial buddha. This is the quality of our own mind. So, if you already have buddha-hood why would you try to improve it? If something is already perfect, and you try to improve it, it's obvious that you're likely to spoil it. I don't know, if you're cooking some spinach you don't want to cook it too long. You know, if you have a hot pan you can cook it in two minutes. And then it cooks through but it's still very fresh. So you have to know. If you're painting or writing or speaking, you have to know when to stop. That's enough. Same with the mind. If the mind is already perfect. Dzogpachenpo. What do you think your marvellous thoughts are going to add to it. What's the purpose of your thoughts? It's to

keep you in employment. The ego wants to exist. The ego doesn't exist but neither does it not exist. It is the middle way. It is appearance and emptiness. Ego and emptiness. Self and emptiness. James and emptiness. Whatever form is arising, however you take yourself to be, these formations are always vanishing. They are not final, they are simply of the moment. So don't try hard. In meditation it's very important not to try hard. But then I'll fall asleep. Why? This is subtle. We have to become used to the subtlety. If your mind is crude. If you've had, if say for example, you've grown up as a member of a gang and you've stabbed many people and you've robbed shops and you've made many people afraid. And there's a certain crudeness in your mental structure. The you may need to soften that. That's all. You just soften that. It doesn't mean you're a bad person. But if you're used to taking out a knife and wanting to stab someone, you have to think well that's a very strong reaction. The person called you an asshole, then let's observe you. You are an asshole. So why are you angry to be called an asshole? You are an asshole. That person's telling the truth. You don't want the truth. So what do you want with dharma? You want dharma, get the truth. You're an asshole. Stop stabbing people. Not very complicated. Relax. Relax, whatever you pretend to be, and you may think that's doing you some favours, is just hiding you from yourself. The truth of ourselves, that we're lazy, we're dull, we get angry, we're jealous, we're selfish. This is well known. It's in all the buddhist books. The five poisons and so on. This is us. The description was there before we were born. This is how we are, we're in samsara. So we shouldn't be shocked.

The question is how do you live with the patterns of your energy, small, twirling, corrupt, unpleasant as they may be, without merging into them, and without trying to get rid of them? Normally we say you should get rid of them, don't merge but definitely get rid of them. But here we say stay with is. If you are selfish be aware of selfishness arising. And the more you allow the selfishness to arise, the thinner it will get. If you're not aware when you're being selfish, if you want to be selfish, then the selfishness will increase. Awareness is the great thinner. It just thins things, thins, and thins and thins. The ego is the thickener. And awareness is the thinner. They go in opposite directions.

Now I heard that some of you would like to ask some questions but I think it's going to be, kind of, difficult. We never really have enough time like this.

So I would suggest we just do a little bit more practice before we come to the end.

And practice, meditation practice is quite a lonely thing to do. You have to make friends with yourself as you are. You have to find the way, this very subtle path in which you keep your balance. Some of you may have been out in the Himalayas, walking in the hills and you come to these areas where the path is very, very thin. It's half a metre wide, and you're against a rock face and you have to walk very, very carefully. Well, this is exactly the same. We have merging into what's arising, we have stepping away from what's arising. The middle way is very, very narrow. And so you have to be balanced. And in order to be balanced you have to be able to feel your body, you have to feel your muscles, you have to know your spine. Your spine is so wonderful it bends, it moves. The best support for balance is flexibility. Because you can make all sorts of subtle movements, you don't have to be gross. And it's these subtle adjustments that you can make in the meditation which allow you to stay with the stream of the arising of experience. If you take a strong antidote, like suddenly reciting mantras or getting up and doing prostrations, it's too crude. You cut across what's happening. So we want to stay very close even to experiences which you feel are horrible. Because, of course, what arises in your mind is, in Sanskrit it's called Santana, it's your mind stream and in this stream there are tendencies from previous lives. You may have been trying in this life to be a good person, but you might find, that for a while, all kinds of strange thoughts come into you. Cruel thoughts, vicious thoughts. What am I getting this? Because when you meditate you loosen up the blinkers that keep you in the frame of yourself, and there's more scope for these old karmic traits to manifest. So, always we say: welcome, welcome. There is space enough. Awareness is space. It's like the sky, there is space. The ego cannot say this welcome. If the ego says it it's a mark of hubris, of inflation, of pride and it's going to get crushed. But relaxed awareness can let everything come through because it doesn't identify with the patterns of the movement as being the truth of itself. The mirror is not defined by the reflection. And you are not defined by what arises in your mind stream. Functionally your energy of participation is conditioned by that patterning of emergence but your potential is not defined by it because your potential is buddha potential. You are the mind of the buddha.

So, we're almost at the end so let's do another sitting. We can just go directly into it.

Five minute meditation.

Ok. So we come towards the end of our short period today. But, of course, we are the very fortunate ones, we have some connection with dharma. We have some access to the practice. We have some support from sangha members, and around us are people who have no such support. So we offer all the merit arising from this towards all sentient beings. May they be freed from fear, from anxiety, from sickness, and may they come to awaken to their own buddha nature.

I'd like to thank Milton and João for organising the day and keeping everything running smoothly. And I'll be doing a few more of these days and also some things in the evening from time to time in the next few months. So, it's a pleasure to spend some time with you and I wish you good success in your meditation practice. Have a peaceful weekend.

Bye.