

# *Staying open in a shut down world*

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James Low gave this Zoom talk since he had to cancel a planned teaching retreat in Seville due to COVID-19.

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## Being Buddhist, being Buddha

We have some time to look at the question of how we can use the time of this lockdown in a useful way. Generally speaking, Buddhist paths, which are many, many in number, can be organised according to whether they are direct or indirect. The direct one is to start from where we actually are. And the indirect paths start from where we think we are. Each of us has been born into a particular culture with language, economic situation, political and so on. Many beliefs and assumptions have become normal for us and we find our potency as people operating in the world by being able to act according to these beliefs.

In Buddhism we can also find many things to believe in. The structure of a belief is that there is a subject and an object joined by a verb which is 'believing'. You might believe that Tara will help you. You have an image of Tara, white or green or whatever; you get some teaching or initiation and then you do the practice and you believe you will get some help. This can be reassuring to your sense of self. You don't feel so alone, but you are still within this structure of duality, the separation of subject and object. So our ordinary position is: I am a sentient being, I have a mind, I have experiences and I have to work out how I should live and what I should do.

When we come into Buddhism and study, we learn that we are not just living in Brazil or Spain or Germany or England, but we are in one of the six realms of samsara. We learn that when we die, we will find ourselves in some other environment. This could be a relief or it could be somewhat terrifying. So we start to build up the idea of how to be a Buddhist. This gives a new kind of identity. But as the Buddha pointed out, all compounded things are impermanent. Functionally there's not all that much advantage in being Buddhist. There is – we can trust, I think – a lot of advantage in being Buddha.

Our time is short. When this lockdown eases, we go back into busy lives. There are many demands on our bodily activity, our speech and our thoughts, for preparing and responding to emails and so on and we get pulled into the eight worldly concerns: gain or loss, pleasure or pain, praise or blame, fame or defamation/notoriety. That is to say, we are social beings and we don't just live inside our personal identity, but our identity stands in relation to other people. We want to be liked; we don't want to have people look down on us or being disappointed in us. And this desire of the ego to be accepted and validated and indeed honoured pulls us into many external or superficial activities. And then life goes by.

## The truth of suffering

### Three categories of suffering

The Buddha's teaching began with the Four Noble Truths: that there is suffering. This means that something is not quite right. Some suffering seems to be contingent, it just arises according to circumstances. And some is structural. When we can understand suffering, that it has a cause, that it can have an end and that there is a way to free ourselves from it, then we have a profound liberation. Suffering is often organised into three categories:

**The suffering of suffering.** This is like having physical pain, emotional pain, interpersonal pain, relationship issues and so on. This is pain which impinges on us.

**The suffering of change,** whereby the structures which we establish in order to reassure ourselves of the continuity of our existence, the stability of the factors which confirm that we are who we are, are put in question.

We all know what this is like. Sometimes good situations become bad, and it's obvious that this is not very nice. But even when bad situations become good, that also brings difficulties. The more freedom and opportunity you have, the more you need to make choices. And given that the factors of the world around us are changing, often we decide on something and then the environment shifts and what was good is not so good.

Both of these kinds of suffering are, we could say, contingent or situational. They are linked to the patternings of movement which in fact constitute our existence. All the outer factors of our world are liable to change: the seasons, the time of day, the climate and so on. And we have our internal feelings, the sudden arising of a desire or a wish, which disturbs the peace we had before. Because these situations are dynamic and unpredictable, even if we try very hard it's difficult to secure an ongoing peace in your life. The opposite of samsara is often described as being peace. We don't find much peace in a moving world. As long as these changes are exciting and interesting we might be stimulated by them, but they easily can become overwhelming and we find ourselves like a kind of puppet of events.

The basis of these two forms of suffering is the third which is called **the all-pervading suffering** of conditionality. When we look around our environment, we look in the room that we're sitting in, we see the furniture, paintings, books and so on; all of these have a beginning, a middle and an end. They have come into existence due to the meeting together of the factors of production and distribution and they have impermanence built into them.

We also have death already with us; we are going to die. We don't know when. A few months ago, we hadn't heard of this virus. Now every day we can read of the number of people who are dying. Some tiny, tiny, tiny virus is able to kill people. It comes into the body and acts against the balance operation of the major organs and so on. That is to say, our body is compounded, it's put together, it's a collaborative system. It's a presentation of pulsations, of patterns, of energy, and these are easily disturbed.

This level of suffering is structural. It arises due to the misapprehension of the world that allows us to perceive ourselves and others as things. When there is a thing-apprehension, when you see "Oh, this is John, this is someone I know", the object of your attention seems to be something which is there. John is John. We can identify him, we know what he's like. And the continuity of the John-ness of John seems to be held in place by some essence of John inside. But this is the mental opacity, the veil, or the confusion of disregarding the dynamic nature of John. If John stops breathing – no more John. That is to say, if the lungs of John are not expanding and contracting, his life ends. But usually we take the lungs for granted. The heart, the liver, the kidneys – all of these dynamic movements of energy-exchange are ignored and instead of which we have: John is John. That is to say, we have a misapprehension, a mistaking way of perceiving, which establishes the flow of experience, the unfolding of the movement which we call 'John' as being a sign of a truly existing John.

### Selection and interpretation are sources of suffering

This is why generally in Buddhism we spend a lot of time becoming familiar with the impermanence of all phenomena. The more we have a bright, mindful attention to the fact of impermanence, it helps us to deconstruct our deluded fantasy of the permanence of appearances. Impermanence is not a kind of nihilistic obsession with the fact that everything is going to come to an end. Rather it's an invitation to observe the actual dynamic or moving presentation of phenomena moment by moment. The more we attend to what happens in the moment, the less likely we are to be seduced into our fantasies about the past and the future. The past is gone. Each moment of our life is vast. Through the phenomena it's incredibly rich in variety, diversity; but when we think about the past we are thinking about a construct, an interpretation.

If we read the history of our country, we read it in one book; then you read another book and the history looks a bit different. It's an interpretation. It depends on the political orientation of the person writing the book, on the kind of economic theory they are interested in. That is to say, we compose our narrative of interpretation through selecting from the rich variety of phenomena. We select particular patterns and, of course, constructs like that can never please everyone. We become partisan, we take up a position and so we like some interpretations of what happened in the civil war or what happened in the changes in government. Or we don't like.

You can get a big history book that has many pages of notes at the end of it. It looks like it's telling the truth, it's full of facts. But these facts are all interpretations, because when we are present in this moment, so much is occurring. How would you organise it? You have to select in order to organise.

So, in order to make meaning that is fitting for me as I take myself to be, I take certain features of what is occurring and make them important. And other features don't register with me at all. This is the meaning of 'compounding': I live in the world that I construct according to my situation.

When you look at the birds which are flying around so much at this time of the year, you see how each one has its particular kind of interests. Some have very strong beaks and so they can crack open nuts, some have longer beaks for poking into the ground to get worms. And as they fly around you can see that they are somehow caught up in some specific reading of their world. When you see the seagulls, they enjoy the wind so much, they float and they soar. This is a pleasure impossible for the fat pigeon. So, each creature is engaging with the world as revealed to it through its particular embodiment, sense organ function and so on. We are creating the structures of significance.

From the Buddhist point of view this is a source of suffering. Why? Because it focuses on the part as if it was the whole.

I'm a human being. I walk about. I can't fly like a bird. What is revealed to the bird is invisible for me. When we start to value the existence of other kinds of humans and other animal species, insects and so on, it de-centers us from our being at the heart of the world. To see

that the more I know and the more secure I am in my interpretation of 'this is how my life is', the less curious I can be about the existence of others. Of course, you can learn many facts about an elephant, that's not very disturbing. But if you get down on the ground and you wave one of your arms as if it was the trunk of an elephant, then you start to feel a different world. You start to get a little of the sensation of what it might be not to have hands, that you live in a world that is 'nose first'. That world is always available, but we don't open to it, because we live in this kind of a body.

So compoundedness is linked with relative truth, that is to say, the truth that I experience, the things which I take to be true, are relative to my particular embodiment. When we reflect in this way and we really look, it's like using an oil to thin an oil paint, like linseed oil. As you take the oil paint colour and add this thinning oil to it, the paint becomes more translucent, it has more bright shine to it.

When we see that our experience is relative to the mode of our embodiment this is helping to thin the opacity of our belief in our own fixed existence. Due to causes and conditions these ways of thinking make sense to me. It's likely that you see the world in a way somewhat different from your parents. And if you have children, you see, year by year, they develop their own ideas of what life is about and it's different from yours. So as particular shapes are highlighted by the culture at a time when we're in our formation as teenagers and so on, we develop particular attitudes and interests.

#### [Trying to maintain stability generates suffering](#)

When we examine in this way we can start to see: Oh, everything I engage with has a function, it's a way of moving with other phenomena which are arising. There are no fixed things. We don't find a truth to ourselves nor to anyone else. Our conversations with each other are the unfolding of possibilities and if we are attuned to the other person, we notice changes in their tone of voice, their eye contact, their breathing, posture and so on. And this influences both what we can say and how we can say it. I am arising in relation. I am a patterning of relations altering as it encounters other patterns of relating.

I start to see I am a potential rather than a thing. I am evoked by the situation. I don't exist as a fixed, decided shape prior to a new situation. The new situation calls me forth to manifest, consciously or unconsciously, in patterns which are in dialogue with what is around me.

This is the meaning of 'relative'. There is no fixed essence, no inherent existence in any phenomena, including ourselves. When we start to see this moment by moment in every experience we have, we find that we are movements of energy in a field of energy. And then it becomes more clear that these three forms of suffering arise because we live in a denial of the actual dynamic nature of our existence. Because I want to exist as someone, I edit out the things which disturb my own instability and unreliability. In trying to maintain stability I generate suffering.

However, if everything is just movement, I'm going to be in turbulence all the time, blown hither and thither by events and this will feel very unstable. But if stability is unavailable on

the level of manifestation, of what we experience through our senses in this world as it unfolds for us, that doesn't mean that it's completely unavailable. It is there, it's always available. But it's available in the place we never look. As long as our attention is out into the comings and goings of the world, in our pattern-making capacity, we are not attending to the ground or the basis from which these experiences arise. And then we find ourselves trying hard.

Here we have all the Buddhist teachings which require our effort - our effort to become more aware of the content of our mind, to develop what we take to be good thoughts rather than bad thoughts, to develop the transcendent qualities, the paramitas of generosity, patience and so on, which are a means of taking us beyond the restricted focus of our own ego-concerns.

There are many things we can do. But when we observe them, we see: Oh, this is also movement. And this movement is structured according to duality. I am doing my hundred thousand prostrations. I am offering many mandalas. I am doing a meditation practice every day, visualising deities and so on. These are activities. Who is the one doing the activities? If our answer is "I am doing it", and I can write in my little book that I have completed my prostrations, now I feel I am making some progress. It could be spiritual progress or it could be simply progress towards death, because all these activities eat time. And time is our most precious possession. Each moment is now. Are we here now? Or are we ahead somewhere? Or behind somewhere? Or even here, but here mediated through our interpretation of here.

This is why although all these dharma practices are useful, they exist inside relative truth. They develop some merit and some wisdom, but they are fragile, because our interests change through time. You might have a relative who becomes sick and you have to look after them and it takes a lot of time and energy. Or you yourself become sick. All kind of things can get in the way of dharma practice, which is why in the tradition of dzogchen we focus on firstly awakening to the stability of presence, of awareness, and then look at movement, rather than starting with movement and working towards presence.

## Meditation practice

Maybe we do a little sitting just now. Sit in a comfortable, relaxed way with your spine supporting the weight of your body. With this practice, generally we do it with our eyes open into the space in front of us. You can also do it looking down the line of your nose. And you can even do it with your eyes closed. It's not that there is a right or a wrong way, but we are wanting to come closer to ourselves. So you can explore what it's like when you sit in a particular way. If you close your eyes you might feel a little bit more able to go deep, but it's also a bit cut off from what's around.

This is one of the key aspects as we move into dzogchen practice. It's not about the triumph of technique. When you have a technique like the correct way of offering a mandala or do prostrations, if you follow the technique, it's good; it stops you having injuries and so on. There is a right way and a wrong way and that can be established according to how close or how far you are from the traditional way of doing it. But we are concerned to get to know

the mind. Our mind is both the same as the mind of all the buddhas in its base or foundation, but as it manifests in terms of our experience of thoughts, memories, emotions, this is very specific to us.

Rather than trying to conform to some abstract system, the heart of our practice is to sit and allow how it is to reveal itself for us in this moment. If you come into judging good/bad, right/wrong, you will be filling the space of your attention with commentary. We simply allow experience to be as it is. Phenomena arise and pass. Some give the sense of being subject or being me, others seem to be object, some noise outside. These are interpretations. Stay with the raw immediacy of what arises. Don't interfere with it. Just sit and be present with whatever is coming, neither blocking nor chasing after.

[Sitting practice]

Shortly we will take a break for half an hour. This is an opportunity for you to observe the compounded nature of your world. If in your flat you have familiar objects which you had for some time, they are just there. It seems they have always been there. But they had a beginning, they were bought in a shop or someone gave it to you. Before that it was made in a factory or a workshop with ingredients coming from different places. What you see is a moment in a process. And this familiar object also shifts in its importance for you according to your mood. So if you go into the kitchen to make some tea, you might have a cup or a mug that you like. Maybe it has got a little chip in it, but you like it. Maybe I should get something new or use another one? This one doesn't look so good, but I like it.

You see your ambivalence, how you are not just one fixed person with one fixed object, but many pulsations of interpretation and mood and feeling arise with all the things which you encounter. It's not that we want to be observing ourselves from a big distance. Nor do we want to be just falling into our usual pattern, but to stay close to the unfolding of our existence, to be present with the manifestation of experience.

[break]

## Transmission: Being introduced to your own face

Because we are in this situation called 'samsara', which means revolving or turning or one thing after another, we are preoccupied with the flow of events. It's very difficult for us to find our way out of samsara, because the methods that we use are also the methods which arise within samsara.

Because of that we need to have a transmission. Our transmission comes from the primordial Buddha Samantabhadra to Vajrasattva and then to Garab Dorje and into our human domain. The importance of this is that the teaching is not some construct of our intellectual activity. It's not that there is something fundamentally wrong with intelligence and knowledge and conceptual capacity. Clearly we are able to create and to imagine many different things out of which we have all the forms of culture.

The issue is that we attribute these capacities to some self-essence. We might say Picasso was a great artist. Well, Picasso found himself manifesting these particular qualities. If he

had been painting that way 200 years before, he would probably not be so popular. So, what we call 'Picasso' is the meeting together of his capacity and the nature of the environment. We can say 'his capacity': He did it, he picked up the pencil, he could draw a perfect circle, he could make many things. We imagine then that Picasso is a person who is the doer of the deed. Some people are good at singing, some at dancing, some at engineering, and therefore we see that there is something in that specific person, which is able to manifest these wonderful accomplishments, that these qualities belong to them.

This is the view of duality. Each of us feels in our life "I am the doer of the deed. I am me being me." This is the view from the starting point of the ego. But the lineage in dzogchen is a revelation that the ground, the basis of everything, is not some personal essence inside us. That is to say that I am not an essence, but I am a manifestation.

The lineage comes down from the eternal Buddha or the original Buddha Samantabhadra, which means 'always good'. And as we gain access to this lineage due to the great kindness of the many, many teachers who maintained these teachings in Tibet, in Central Asia and so on, we are helped to open to that which has been there from the very beginning. This is not our personality, not our ego. It is the basis through which we are aware of these patterns which we can refer to as our personality or ego.

In dzogchen we begin with what is called *ngo tro*, or introduction, showing the face. We have a face which we can't see directly. We need to be introduced to our face. If possible, we can have this directly in the meditation together.

Otherwise it's revealed symbolically when some particular patterning of events gives us the sense of relaxation and we can see something with fresh eyes. This could be done by presenting a crystal or a peacock feather or a mirror, but it also occurs in situations where you are shifted from your ordinary positioning. It could be in a thunderstorm in the mountains. It could be a sudden arising of fear in a near accident driving a car. In the shock the movement of thinking and interpreting stops and if you are present with that, then the spacious ground of the mind is you. It can also happen with pleasure, for example in orgasm. The intensity releases and there is openness. No one is doing it, it's just there. These experiences are very important. Before the break we were looking at compounded-ness or created-ness or made-ness. But what is revealed with a shock is something which is just there, it's as if the clouds suddenly lift and you see the open blue sky.

And the third way is through words where you get a description. So I give some description just now. And the key thing is: Try not to hear this as if I'm talking about 'something'. It's talking about you! But it's not talking about you like you mom saying: "Oh, your hair looks really nice today!" It's not talking about qualities of a personality or the shape or whatever. What is being opened up is the revealer. We ourselves, through our meditation practice, become the revealer. The ego is the concealer. The ego, in its desire to consolidate experience, to create something stable and reliable and enduring, thickens the flow of experience and it takes on a solidity, a gravity. "I exist. I want you to take me seriously." This is the voice of the ego. Your attention confirms my existence and my validity.

We don't want to listen with these ego ears. We want to be just very relaxed and open and have the words offering some gesture towards: What is this openness or how is this openness?

Language is tricky. It seems to simplify, but it draws in extra meanings very easily. That's why for most of us we start with the words, but then we need to get into some silent practice, so that silence and non-elaboration become the main allies for allowing the revelation of how it is.

### The ground

The first aspect is to introduce the ground. The ground is the basis for everything. It is the plenum void, the emptiness which is always full. This ground or basis or source has always been present. It can be described with the five aspects:

It is **uncompounded**, that is to say, it's not like anything in your flat, it's not like your body, it's not like your motorcar, not like rocks or trees or the ocean. It's not like anything else and therefore it cannot be captured by the conceptual tools that we use to identify the phenomena of the world. Many of you probably have quite active, intelligent, busy minds and it is as if that capacity to interpret and formulate is the mind itself. Unfortunately, actually this capacity is obscuration appearing as clarity, because we are filling the space of experience with our own mental activity. What we want is to ease ourselves into a more relaxed, open awareness. This awareness is present, it's here, and is not connected with activity. Activity goes on, but it's not the doer of the activity. Thoughts, feelings, memories arise and pass - this is revealed through the uncompounded openness of the ground. It's not a 'thing' making other 'things'.

The second aspect is that it is **self-arising** or arising without cause. In the general Buddhist teachings we spend a lot of time trying to understand karma and the nature of cause and effect. If you act in an unvirtuous way, you get a negative consequence some time later and if you act in a virtuous way, you get a positive consequence some time later. Actions which are causes having a result – this is karma. Therefore, I need to be conscious of what I do. But the ground itself is not made by someone. It's not a consequence of some prior activity. It just is. It is the stillness which is inseparable from movement, but which is not the same as movement.

The third aspect is that it is **infinite**. Infinite means, it has no boundary, nothing outside of it. It's not a thing which is then acted on by something else. There is no 'anything else', it is the whole. This is the true meaning of *dzogpa chenpo*: that which is whole from the very beginning. Not made, not created, not born, but always just open.

In itself this is so far away from everything we know that it is **inexpressible**. I say these words and there is hopefully some feeling tone for you in what they might be, like a caress. But they cannot define what is there. So, you might be thinking: "Well, come on, if the description doesn't fit what we are considering, how will I be able to get hold of it? How will I be able to reflect on it?" If you find your sense of what's going on going in this direction,

you have to see: I am trying to pull the ground into my familiar territory. I want to make sense of it on my terms using the concepts I am familiar with. This is not going to work.

So, it goes back to this sense of having multiple kinds of intelligence. We have intelligence resting on concepts fed by knowledge. But we have also an aesthetic intelligence, the intelligence when you go for a walk and see a wild flower and you receive the flower, you let its colour come in through your eyes, you might sniff it and be able to smell the scent. What is this flower? It is this. If you know its name in Portuguese or in Latin, does that add anything of value? These concepts are like the conquistador, they go into the wild, raw nature and they take hold as a colonialist. Because I can put this name onto the flower, I somehow have the essence of it. This is our dull intelligence, our opaque intelligence.

In dzogchen we are concerned with the intelligence of receptivity, a non-phallic intelligence, which is not concerned with domination and control and ownership but with enjoyment. When you see the flower, the simple beauty stops your thoughts. Why would you think about the flower? The flower is offering herself to you. This is clarity. This is the intelligence of allowing, allowing the revelation of what is there. In Tibetan, the word often used for phenomena means also 'light'. The flower is a pattern of light and the vibratory quality of these shades of yellow and red or whatever, they touch you. They affect the energy system that we are, our *chakras* and so on. By receiving something opens in us. But by knowing and claiming and structuring we maintain our familiar shape.

This is the key issue for meditation practice. If you project what you know onto what is arising, you will incorporate it into the familiar and then there is no end to the patternings of what we call samsara. But allowing ourselves to open to what is beyond language, to see that the simplicity of what is doesn't need our commentary. My commentary hides the world from me.

So, uncompounded, uncreated, self-occurring, infinite and not coerced into the categories of language – this is beyond the names or categories of samsara and nirvana. That is to say, I am not the boss. I like this/ I don't like this/ The things I like are good/ The things I don't like are bad... this is the ego as dictator. What I feel tells me the truth of how things are. But the mind itself, the basic clarity which is inseparable from the ground, is not like this. The habits of interpretation which we have built up for many, many lives, are powerfully tempting. The idea arises and it seems to be redolent with meaning and value and truth. But it's tricky, I have to be careful.

This is why when we sit, we allow whatever occurs to occur. The idea which seems so important is now vanishing. The thought comes and really you feel you have to get involved. If we attend to the vanishing of phenomena, we directly see the illusion that they were strong and true and eternally meaningful.

We can do a little more sitting now. Sit in a comfortable position, you don't need to establish anything in an artificial way. Whatever arises, let it arise. Whatever goes, let it go. When you find yourself caught up in your habitual selection and editing and judging, as soon as you become aware of this, just be present with it. Don't try to push it away or to try better. If you try to improve the situation, you are pulled into the subject-object-duality. The thought will go. The feeling will go. You don't have to make it go. So, our meditation practice is simply

learning to be present with how the ground is, the openness, and how the manifestation of the ground is ceaseless movement.

[meditation practice]

### The ground and its manifestations

It's a little bit strange: many things are occurring and we just let them occur. So who am I in the middle of this? This is a very good question. If we try to take up this question in a delicate way, then we get the sense: I am here, but I'm not here as my familiar 'me', because the aspects of my familiar 'me' or the ingredients of my familiar 'me' are vanishing. I, James, am a flow of sensation, memory, idea, plan, judgement and so on. These potentials or aspects arise in patterns in relation to what I experience through my senses. Just as we know that light is an energy which is always moving, as is sound, we start to see: Oh, thoughts are like that too. Beliefs are like that, hope, doubts, fears. They arise and pass and when I'm sitting, I don't need to do anything with them.

So, who is the one who is not doing anything with them? Well, it's me. How do I know it's me? This is a 'me' as a subtle quality of just-here-ness, a 'me' which is freed from its heavy winter coat of narrative and history and story. I'm just here, present, not present as someone, as some identity, but present as the revealer of all the patterns of identity. When we are in the practice and we find ourselves fusing into one of the patterning of transient phenomena – memories, hopes etc. – we become finite, we seem to take on a particular shape. This is something I can identify with, this is something I can be. This is me, this is how I am. I'm happy, sad, tired, enthusiastic... You don't have to block this, just stay present with it. You come to a conclusion: "Oh, this is interesting!" – And that thought, with some associated emotion, vanishes. Vanishing is the quality of experience, but the revealer of the experience, which we can call awareness or presence, doesn't vanish.

This is the vital point of our meditation practice, that this basic revealing capacity, which is often compared to a mirror, is just there by itself. It doesn't reveal itself as a thing, it reveals itself as its revelation. The mirror shows itself as the reflections. The mirror and the reflection are inseparable or non-dual, not two. But they are not one, that is to say, they are not the same thing, because the reflections shift and change and move and the mirror itself doesn't shift. The thoughts and feelings and sensations which arise in your mind are a non-dual aspect of the open ground, of emptiness inseparable from awareness.

This is how we have such amazing lives. In one day we can have many different moods and feelings, sensations, memories, plans... Each of these, in its moment, in its manifesting, is us and then, in its vanishing, it is not us. So we don't need to be not like that because we are not truly, forever, really like that; and yet we are like that. Sometimes we are courageous, sometimes we are frightened. Sometimes we are sad, sometimes we are warm and loving. These are qualities which arise and fill the space of disclosure.

This is the non-duality of the ground and what manifests. The basic quality of the ground is, in another language, emptiness, *shunyata*. *Shunyata* means ungraspable. There is nothing

there to get, but that doesn't mean that there's nothing there to appreciate. The colours and shapes and qualities which are ceaselessly arising give themselves in their showing.

If you are a botanist and you go out in the field and you see this wonderful wild flower, it brings you into activity. All of these activities are impermanent. You could photograph it, you could dig it up to bring it back to the laboratory, you could press it so that you can dry it, you could do many different things with this wild flower. Of course, you can see that it's beautiful, but you also know that it is some-thing. And the some-thing-ness, the workability of it – "I can do something with this" – that feeling becomes more important than the simple beauty. The flower moves from being an end in itself – just this – to becoming a means to an end, a vehicle whereby my knowledge and capacity can manifest. This is a big difference.

So, when we are meditating, we want to appreciate everything as an end in itself. It's just this. There is a simplicity and a clarity in the immediate opening to this transient moment. But you might think: "Listen, this sounds crazy, James, because if I don't know what it is, how am I going to talk about it? How am I going to do anything with it?" Then we have to go back to this wonderful description coming from the primordial Buddha Samantabhadra when he says that the ground is inexpressible. It's not a thing you can get. The attitude of getting will hide it, and yet it is ceaselessly showing and displaying which is freely available. But there's nothing to be done with it.

At the crossroads: objectification or self-liberation

Then we come to another crossroads. I can go down the road of my ego self: I need to interpret, I need to edit, I need to judge. Or I go down the other road and I am just open to what occurs.

- What does it mean?
- It doesn't mean anything.
- What have you learned?
- I didn't learn anything.
- So you sit in meditation and come out of it and it's gone. What's the point of that? You're not getting any profit.
- I don't want any profit. Listen, if I'm hanging on to the past because the past was beautiful and meaningful and I have all this knowledge which I have accumulated, my hands are pretty much full. So, what about the next moment?

It's a bit like being in an Indian railway station and if you're not quick, you won't get on the train at all. So, some new moment is arising, do I want it or not? There's almost no space left, so I'm pulled into judgement, evaluation. Does this experience fit my world? Which is wonderful, it confirms me. Unfortunately, I'm going to die and this fabulous garden of myself will dissolve. It's a construct. And in that way, when these two roads open in our meditation practice, we have the chance to do nothing. The ego is the doer, the maker, the thinker, the reference point which claims ownership and agency. But awareness is like the mirror. The mirror shows without doing.

Farmers use fertilizer because when they grow a crop, as the plant is growing it's taking some of the nutrition, the minerals and so on, out of the ground. The plant is depleting the ground. But the mirror is not like that. The mirror shows reflection after reflection after reflection and it doesn't get tired. We get tired, because we are so busy building up vanishing patterns.

So, the basic orientation in dzogchen is self-liberation, when you see that each moment of experience will vanish by itself. The movement of experience, which is the movement of the mind, because there is no experience without the mind, this movement is always vanishing. The movement is unborn. In itself it has not entered into being an object. It is a wonder. When you see the wild flower, it's a wonder, it's not a thing. It becomes a thing by your conceptualisation. Your own mind is the bringer of thingness, of objectification, of density, a solid world made of concepts.

This is very strange, but this is the truth that you can see for yourself directly in the meditation practice. We imagine the density of the world and project onto the world. So, in our sitting practice we breathe out, we relax, we are just here. Who is just here? A thought arises: "I am just here." Don't do anything. Watch the thought. It's gone. "I am here" seems to be establishing something, consolidating something. "I'm here!" – Gone. Amazing! We are mesmerizing ourselves, doing a kind of autohypnosis. However I am, is always vanishing.

According to the texts we are unborn and unceasing. Unborn means you have never become *something*, *someone* fixed and because of that you are unceasing. If you were born as a definite thing, if you were like a stone or a lump of iron, then it might appear: "Oh, here is something that doesn't seem to change very much." Not all that much to so with it, it's just a stone. But a person or a dog or a cow, this is very different.

The mind is a space of revelation. The mind is empty, which makes it a space, unborn, nothing has come in to fill this space and block other things coming in, and the mind is unceasing. This follows this follows this follows this...

Sometimes when we're sitting the body reveals itself a lot, there's a lot of sensation, other times not. Sometimes maybe memories arise, other times not. We are discontinuous and yet continuous. We are discontinuous as substance because our formations are dissolving and resolving. And yet we are continuous as a space of revelation because something is always occurring.

In order to become more familiar with this, in the afternoon we will do more meditation practice together and go deeper into the dzogchen understanding. Now we have a break for lunch and the chance to get some fresh air or to move around. Something is happening. It's not a thing, because it's vanishing. It's an appearance: sensations appear, thoughts appear, emotions appear. Maybe you go to make yourself a sandwich. We look in the fridge and some idea arises in your mind: "Oh, that looks good!" Maybe this cheese has been in the fridge for some weeks, but today it looks good. How is this? This is our life! Stay with the presence of the unfolding of the revelation in which subject and object are moving together. And if you find yourself thinking: "I don't know what James is talking about, it's too heavy and too much and I don't know", just pause for five seconds – what has happened to this

serious judgement and conclusion? Wow, it has vanished as well! Don't block the flow. Don't stop the dance.

[break]

The finite is within the infinite

Due to the virus we have these lockdown conditions. But before the virus arrived, we were already in lockdown conditions. We are locked inside samsara, wandering in the six realms and locked inside the bubble of ourselves. But awareness itself is always open, which brings us again to this central point that if you start in your ego identification and that it's your job to get enlightened, to remove your obscurations, to develop your good qualities, then you are starting with a proposition that says the finite can become infinite. And this is a false understanding. The basis of the finite is the infinite. The ground of the ego, of the individual sense of self, of the personality and so on, is infinite awareness. So, the task is not to strive to become a better person or even to become a Buddha, but first of all to recognise the ground of how you are, the source out of which you manifest moment by moment. It has never vanished, it's always here.

When Garab Dorje was first giving the dzogchen teachings he set it out as three statements and the first is to awaken to how you are. Whatever I can say is a kind of indication, a kind of pointing. The key thing is to look for yourself. Don't follow the thought. Stay present with the one who is aware of the thought. Thought patterns vanish, awareness remains. This is why they say that you can become enlightened in one lifetime with dzogchen, because we are not setting out on a spiritual journey. We're not going from *here* to *there*, but we are simply being here.

So, when we sit in order to be here it is as if you are standing on top of a high mountain. Rising up from the valley there are many strong gusts of wind. You get blown by thoughts, blown by memories, blown by emotions. Now, if you are a person on top of the mountain, you are in danger, because you can get blown over and fall down. So we have to remember the mind is like space. The wind blows through space. When the wind blows through space, the space doesn't move. Space is stable and the wind is moving. So when we sit in the practice, we're not doing anything. We use the energy of the thought to dissolve the thought. By not interfering, by not fighting or holding on to what is arising, we let the self-liberating energy of the phenomena go free.

There are these basic principles we have to hold very gently in our awareness. The mind is not a thing. Nothing which arises can touch it or modify it. It is naked, it's not covered in any kind of construction or proposition or possession. And it's fresh because each thought and feeling which is arising, in its movement of passing through refreshes the openness of the mind. Because 'here' is nowhere. We are always 'here', wherever we are. There is no better 'here' to get to than where we are now. But when you fall under the power of the thought, then the thought tells you: "There are better places to be. I've seen the pictures of the Buddha. They look so calm, so nice. I've seen the pictures of the Dakinis. But now I'm middle-aged, I put quite a bit of weight, I can't go dancing like a Dakini. I need to become somebody else before I can become the true *me*." This is the practice of Tantra. You become

Tara or Vajrayogini or Padmasambhava and through that you start to find out who you are. But dzogchen has a particular approach. Here we are not becoming anyone else and we are not becoming ourselves. The self is not something to become, it's a momentary showing, a display which occurs with circumstances. There is no self to hang on to. The self is a situationally emergent patterning.

So when we sit in the practice, the sense of self emerges in a particular formation and then is gone. The thing about the self is that it is always fragmenting. This is how we have a commentary about ourselves. We like what we do or we don't like what we do. There is the flow of direct experience and then the flow of our interpretations and judgements and opinions. Both are impermanent. Both are lacking in true substance. But when these hang like fine silk scarves one after the other, maybe you see through the first one, but by silk scarf number three it's opaque, it's blocked to you. This is our condition: We try to see through our thoughts, but the thought is thick. Instead we want to see the thought, see the memory, just being present with it and it's illuminated by awareness itself.

Now, our mind is open, naked, fresh. This is the primordial purity or the fact that awareness is never touched by anything. And within this infinite openness ceaseless experience arises effortlessly. This arising is not different from the mind – it's not two different 'things' – whether the mind is still or moving, there is no substance, there is not entity, nothing to grasp. This is our freedom. Because the mind gives rise to everything all at once we start to see that subject and object are the play of the mind. Just as if you were playing football or basketball, you are in a team. You have to learn to think as a team member. If you're always trying to selfishly get the ball, it's not very helpful. The victory of one person scoring a goal is the victory of the team because they have always been playing together.

We start so see that subject and object, self and environment, are moving together. This is one whole formation like a dance troop. If you live your life as an isolated individual, you find a threshold between you and the world. Then you have to decide how to enter the world. How should I behave towards this person? What is the right thing to do? Then you have many, many thoughts arising and with that you have a hesitancy. When you see: I am actually not an isolated individual, that I arise with the field, that I stretch up to get a cup from the shelf, that I bend down to put on my shoes, I am part of the world, moving with the shapes of the world, then the centre is not in me and the centre is not outside. The centre is shifting moment by moment. The centre can emerge in any way at any point. Just as if in a football team in the middle of the game each player can be the most important one at certain moments. In that way, instead of being pulled into yourself and your own fixity and importance you find yourself more like the wind blowing and shaping and responding with the conditions. This is co-emergence.

## The four aspects of 'how it is' by Padmasambhava

### Non-duality

Padmasambhava has described four aspects to this non-duality of primordial purity and effortless emergence of experience. The first is **non-duality**. For example, we look around

and we see walls, furniture and so on. If there is a chair you can say: “Well, I am not that chair.” But when you see the chair, the experience of seeing the chair is how you are in the moment. You are not fused into the chair as the chair, nor are you entirely separate from the chair, but whatever you encounter is arising with you as the completion of the experience of that moment. And then the experience vanishes. This is the non-duality or the inseparability of appearance and emptiness.

Because of the virus I can't fly around and so on a sunny, bright Saturday afternoon in London I'm sitting looking at an electronic machine and what do I see but my own face in front of me. This is not the highest pleasure of my existence. This is some kind of new insanity. I'm looking at a picture of myself. I can see the picture of me in front of me. I, the one who is looking, cannot see my own face. But I can see this image of representation of my face. Both are illusion. I am not more real than the image on the screen. I don't really exist, but here I am. And I am here unfolding with the machine. The machine effects my mood. I am not a machine. I have emotions and feeling tones which respond to this electronic world. Manifestation is co-emergent. So, non-duality means that wherever we see a polarised, oppositional pairing – self and other, good and bad and so on – we need to see who is separating these two? You could not have *high* without *low*. You couldn't have *self* without *other*. If there was only *me* and no *other*, there would be no *me*, because what I call 'I/me/myself' is a site of communication into the field of communication.

There are not entities. None of us exists as a thing, we are the display of the bright clarity of the mind. All phenomena arise in the mind. There is no other source for phenomena. Everything you see is your experience. You may think you have access to the object, the thing in itself, but as we touched on earlier your access is mediated by the kind of body that you have. If you have a human body, you don't see what birds see. Even if you have a human body it depends on the health of your sense organs and so on. This indicates that our experience is always relational. Nothing is self-existing. Without the mind there is no experience. We never see an object as object, we see object mediated through the subject.

So, subject and object are not dual, they are not two different things, and nor are they separate from awareness. It is as if awareness is a stage and the movement of subject and object is a dance on the stage. You are both the stage and both performers. It's not that you are them as if they were your true identity. We don't have an identity other than as something formal and conventional. You have an identity card or a passport, that guarantees who you are, but it's not who you are. Our identity is not something ontological, it's not something connected with the alive moment of our being present, rather it's an abstraction which we use like a map to orientate ourselves in terms of what is significant and what is not.

It is as if in your manifestation you are an actor. Mainly you are acting in plays with other actors. You have a role and a script. The script is mediated by the culture you live in, your socio-economic class and so on. Gender, race or age determine what seems reasonable to say and what's not reasonable to say. That is to say, the performance of the potential which we are is mediated through many different factors operating together.

This kind of reflection is helpful to massage the rigidities of your sense of self so that you feel yourself more fluid. And that fluidity is not a sign of weakness or vulnerability but a sign of being able to respond freely.

When you have dictators like Pinochet, they need to have a lot of medals pinned on their chest to show that they are very important. And this is completely appropriate because their identity is formalised, imposed. All dictatorships have this structure. And, of course, dictators don't like free people. They try to constrain the freedom of people who say: "I have a mind of my own."

This is like the relationship between your identity as an identifiable person, somebody who can be known by other people, and your spontaneity. If you go dancing and you experience your body in a free, easy movement with the music and then you go into work and you have to perform certain ritualised functions, acting according to other people's expectations directed by a hierarchy of entitlement, you see a big difference between these two possibilities for yourself. Neither is your authentic truth. But we might think: "But I feel really like myself when I'm dancing! This is the true *me*." This is delusion. There is no true *me*. You don't exist. Whether you are dancing or having to please your boss - both of these are movements of energy in space. There is no basis for one being more authentic than the other. Maybe the ego doesn't like to have a boss, so dancing feels better, but we are concerned with awareness. Moving in this world according to conditions, according to circumstances, we manifest as is required. There is a time to be casual with other people and the time to be more formal. This is just theatre. The role, the script... it is the display of energy interacting with other displays of energy.

Whenever we find ourselves thinking "If only my life was different! If only I could do that! If only I was with these people!", this is a persecutory thought. With that kind of thought you abandon yourself. But we want to find out how we are. So instead of entering into judgement about how we seem to be according to our template, we stay with how it is. I am not caught by this shape. We show this shape according to the rules or the structure of a situation. When you pour water into a jug and then you pour it from that jug into a round jug, then a square jug and so on, it's the same water. We feel: "I don't want to be this shape." We say this because we don't understand. You are this shape and simultaneously you are not this shape. None of the shapes you can have in life, whether it's being a father or a lover or a business man or a beggar sleeping in the street, none of these shapes is existentially definitive. They are communicative, relational positionings, allowing you to talk with people in particular ways or not, but it's not who we are.

What I have been saying for the last half hour relates to the second statement of Garab Dorje which is not to remain in doubt, not to have fear, not to enter into judgement. We become limited and small, not in the actuality of our performativity but in our conclusion about this performance. The conclusion is: "This is not right. It would be better if it was different." That is a set of ideas. It's like this. It's like this for a while. It's like this due to circumstances. This is how we attribute inherent existence to what arises without recognising what we are doing. Life is like a dream, it is appearance which is empty. It's not reality. There is no reality. On the other hand it's not nothing at all.

So if we stay open to the ground, the ungraspable ground, and we stay open to it so that we find that indeed we are that ground, we are not other than it, then from this ground appearance, manifestation, how I find myself being, is always in an interchange. This is the co-emergence or the dialogic nature of subject and object.

So, when we step outside and we look as if we were the audience and we make some criticism, we've entered into a dead space. The life is on the stage, the life is moment by moment by moment. We are not the boss and we are not the servant, we are participants and we need to find the right time to move. But the most important point is to find the way to relax into the unborn openness which is always there.

We'll do a little more sitting now. It's not a very complicated thing that we do, but what makes it difficult are our own tendencies, our desire that it would be different. When we enter into the ego positioning the feeling is: "I should be the star! I'm the king, I'm the queen! It's all about me!" So then when you sit in the meditation and a thought arises: 'Oh, maybe it's about me! Maybe I need this. Maybe I don't need this', it's as if you go outside in the morning and you wait for the postman at the beginning of the road and you give him a hundred Euros and say: "Hey, give me all the letters for the street, they are all mine." Everything is important for me. When we are sitting in the practice, we are nobody. We don't have a letterbox. Thoughts, feelings, whatever is coming now is going. We don't need to open the envelope. It couldn't have our name on the outside, we don't have a name. Please deliver to 'open awareness'. Throw it anywhere you like. So, we sit relaxed and open for ten minutes and then we have a break.

[sitting practice]

[break]

#### Life is revealed in participation

Now we'll focus a little bit more on the mind. Generally, in Buddhism they talk about body, speech and mind. But actually, of course, what we call the mind, the process of thinking and feeling and so on, that is within this mind of awareness. And our speech is also within this mind. And our body is within the mind. For some people this is quite difficult to see or believe or understand. Or you start from the idea: "My mind is linked to my brain and my brain is inside my skull and that's my body", then it looks like the body comes first. But for us, for people who are interested to meditate and to be directly present with our mind, we don't want to start with some knowledge or bit of information that somebody has told us but rather to stay with experience.

What is your body? You've got your body with you just now. You can identify bits of it, fingers, hands, ears and so on. That is to say, because of how our sense organs are some of your body you can see from the outside – you can look at your feet – and some of it you can only experience, as it were, from the inside out by proprioception, for example your own sense of your back. Then your body is revealed, as it were, as an object in the world and also as a flow of experience. When you see it as something in the world and then you look at your hand, you can look away and then look back and think: "It's the same hand. I know it's

my hand, that's where it is, it has always been there." But this hand, when you feel it from the inside, when you feel the flow of sensations through it, you find it is something changing. So, experience is like a flow, a stream, whereas conclusions are like a freezing of the flow. But, of course, the flow keeps flowing. So, where is my hand when I am thinking about my hand? My hand is there, but my attention is now focused on my idea about my hand and not on the immediacy of the hand itself.

Maybe we spent a lot of time in our life thinking about thoughts, thinking about images, ideas, concepts, memories. What we are thinking about are flow-elements, but our way of thinking about them seems to freeze them, seems to fix them. That is to say, we are grasping at the idea of something. When we think: "My mind is in my brain which is in my body", this is a sequence of ideas, each of which is arising and vanishing.

The focus of our practice is to stay with the actual. The actual is the enacted, the action. The action is always moving in time, it's ungraspable, because as soon as we start to speak about something, even if it's in front of us, it is changed by the speaking.

If you have a nice piece of cake, you sit in the café and they bring you the cake. You look at the cake: it looks good. It's revealing something. But now you take your fork and you put some of the cake in your mouth, textures and flavours reveal themselves and you think: this is good! What is good? You are chewing the cake in your mouth - delicious. Now, if you were to stop and take up a new plate and squeeze the content of your mouth onto the plate, maybe it doesn't look so nice. Would you like to eat this? No, it looks like dog's vomit. But when it was in your mouth it was tasting good.

Life is like that. As soon as we engage with things they are transformed. There is no essence to the cake. The cake is destroyed by enjoying it. If you keep the cake it gets mouldy. If you eat it, it becomes chewed-up mush and then eventually it turns into shit. Maintaining the object is a kind of prison. Life is revealed in participation, and in that participation it moves from self-arising to self-vanishing or self-dissolving. I give myself to the cake, the cake gives itself to me, we create a dance of death (hopefully it's the cake that dies and not me), and the cake is gone. The lingering flavour goes from my mouth and now I tell you about the cake. What am I talking about? A memory. Where is the memory? It's in my mind. What is it referring to? To the idea of cake. It can't refer to the cake, the cake is gone. But the idea of the cake can be talked about again and again and again.

We are addicted to ideas. Experience vanishes quickly. Ideas can continue in time, they can be turned over, they can be thinned or thickened. When we are remembering something or thinking about it, this is a thought chasing a thought. It's gone.

So when we come into the meditation and we are just sitting, we decide to relax and open. The mind is open, I don't have to make it open, but somehow I choose closure. I shut down, I settle into the idea of something. The ego is hungry, it's looking for something. Awareness is not looking for anything. This is a very practical point of identification. If you are sitting in the practice and you keep getting distracted, don't try harder. Get up, look out of the window, maybe have a shower, play some music and dance and then sit down again. The big thing not to do is to make effort. The one who makes effort is the ego.

### Effortlessly arising

After talking about non-duality, Padmasambhava describes *lhundrub*, which is **effortlessly arising** or instant presence. It means that experience is suddenly, instantly here by itself. That is to say, not only is the ground-open spaciousness of the mind uncompounded and uncreated, but everything which arises is also uncompounded and uncreated if you stay with it as it is, if you allow it to reveal itself.

You go to the kitchen and open a cabinet and take out the jar of coffee. You went to that cabinet because you knew that's where you keep your coffee. You're saying: "Oi, James is wrong, because the coffee is there, I always keep the coffee there. This is not uncreated spontaneity." You might even send me an email of the address of the supermarket where you bought the coffee. Cause and effect. "I went there, I gave my money, I got the coffee, I came home, I have the coffee." But that is a stream of experience. "Listen, I went to the supermarket, I went in the door, saw the coffee, I did this!" But what is being described actually is a series of activities. There is walking, turning corners, looking at the shelves of coffee, paying... each of these involves gestures of the body. Who is doing this? You in relation to the person at the checkout. They say: "This is 3 Euros." The sound comes into you, you take out the coins and you pay. This is a series of linked, interactive movements. "I did it, I did the paying for the coffee." According to what the person told me. I did what they told me. They told me because when they scanned the coffee jar, the price 3 Euros came on the screen.

What I am highlighting here is that it's very helpful to move away from the interpretation of our action as being based on my mastery, my being the doer of the deed, to see that every interaction on the way to the shop, buying the item, bringing it home, preparing it... this is all interactive with the number of steps up to your flat, the shape of your kitchen and so on.

Before we looked at this term *non-dual*. Non-dual means each moment that you are putting on your shoes and going out the door you are part of the immediate emergence of subject and object. When you put yourself in ego-lockdown and you seal yourself into being this separate entity, then you can interpret everything that arises as you doing something to the object or the other doing something to you. And this, of course, is embedded in language. You need to have a subject, a verb and an object. Different languages put them in different order, but basically that's the structure you need.

And that relates to causation, to karma. Karma means I exist, then secondly I intend, thirdly I act and fourthly I conclude, I see the outcome of my action. I am the agent. If you don't have these four factors you don't have the full force of karma. When there is no doer, there is no karma. You might think: "I do a lot of things. This is crazy, you know, there are so many things I have to do. I clean my teeth, I clean the kitchen, I clean the shower. If I don't do them, who is going to do them?" You do them because of an idea: I have to do them. "Because I don't want to live in a dirty flat." That's an idea. The idea came into your mind. When you identify with the idea it mobilises the energy of your embodiment and you clean the shower. Who is cleaning the shower? "I am." How do you do this? "I take the cleaning spray, I spray it down, I scrape the water, I scrub it so the black mould doesn't come in the

crack between the tiles.” So, when I say “I clean the shower”, this is an imperfect or unconcluded sentence. I clean the shower according to the materials I have, the time I have, whether I can bend easily or not.

You may think I’m just saying the same thing again and again. And I am, because of an important point: The cleaning of the shower is done by the shower and you. If the shower doesn’t need cleaning you may still want to clean it, you may be quite obsessive, but then you still need a shower to clean. I’m cleaning a clean shower. It’s always two together. This is the non-dual. And this non-dual arises spontaneously together moment by moment. If you think about your life, it will cover up this non-dual freshness. But if you just relax into the outbreath and maybe go to the kitchen and get a glass of water, when you look at the line of glasses you have, you find a conversation between the thirst and the size of the glass. You choose the glass that fits how you are. Then you turn the tap according to the nature of the tap. It is conversation.

### Primordial purity

And this is moving within this third factor Padmasambhava writes about, which is **primordial purity**. The basis of every experience is an emptiness which cannot be touched by anything. Everything is pure from the very beginning. There are no obscurations, there are no limitations. You might feel quite obscured and limited. What is your obscuration? “I can’t find my mind.” If the Buddha could hear you saying that, he would say “Bravo! The mind cannot be found.” “But I want to find my mind! I need to find my mind! I need to find out who I am!” Why? “It’s important. Everyone knows.” Why? This is an idea, it’s a set of Buddhist ideas. Now you’re infected with Buddhism. If I am Buddhist, I have to know my mind. But you can’t know your mind, because the mind is not a thing that can be known. You can know thoughts, feelings, sensations, memories, because they manifest. They come in. Whatever manifests takes on a kind of shaping for a period of time. But the mind itself is not a thing.

Pure from the very beginning means, even when you look again and again and again, you can’t find anything. The reason you don’t find something is not because you are not good at looking, but because you are trying to find your mind in the same manner as you find your car keys. Of course the mind must be present. We are not dead. We are aware of being present here just now looking at a screen or hearing at voices coming in different languages and so on. Something is happening, I have a mind. And if I can’t find my mind, I need to look harder, because if I can’t find my car keys, I have to keep going round, looking under the sofa and everywhere. Eventually I find my car keys. But the mind is not a thing. If you look for it in the manner of a thing, you’ll never find it. The mind is not object, neither is it subject. It is the revealer of both subject and object. The revealer is never revealed although it shows. It shows itself as that which is it and isn’t it just as the mirror shows the reflection which is in the mirror, as the mirror, but it’s not the mirror.

So, it’s not that we have to get rid of our thoughts and feelings when we meditate. They are not the enemy. The problem is not in the object (the thought) or in the subject (the one who seems to be the thinker), but in the apprehension, in how we take hold of what is occurring.

The thought has arisen and then it's passing. It is showing me its impermanence and the brightness of its showing and then vanishing. That is how it is. But I want more, so I interpret the meaning that the thought is conveying. I take the movement of the thought to be irrelevant except in its function of supporting the cognitive content, the semantic content, the conceptual content. The thought is a movement. When you try to extract this semantic value, you're looking for a substance. You never quite get to the true meaning of the thought because one thought leads to another and you build up pictures of meaning. And what is hidden in this is that thought is movement, sensation is movement, emotion is movement. For we who want to meditate the movement is the most important part. When you start to experience what arises in the mind as a turning display like a wave arising and falling back into the sea, you see this is an appearance which is inseparable from its ground. The wave was never separate from the ocean.

### Primordial buddhahood

And this brings us to the fourth quality described by Padmasambhava, which is **primordial buddhahood**.

From the very beginning your own mind has been inseparable from Buddha. Within this mind many deluded thoughts arise. If you focus on the arising and passing of the deluded thought, you will not be deluded. But if a deluded thought arises like "I am a limited sentient being. I have many faults. I have regrets, I wish I had done better in my life", this is a story, this is a script. This is your script in the theatre of samsara. You are thinking and talking yourself into existence, or rather a pseudo-existence, a false existence, because you are not really like that. You only believe that you are like that, because you believe the semantic content of something which is already vanished. The self-liberating thought, the thought that goes free by itself, is the very thing which keeps you in prison.

So when we meditate we are staying present moment by moment, not going after past thoughts, not waiting expectantly for future thoughts, but just being present. In this point, this infinite point of presence, everything is revealed and vanishes.

This is the great completion of dzogchen. There is no past to go to and there is not future that is yet to come. These are just deluding phantasms cooked up in our mind. All we actually have access to is this very moment. And this moment is the smile of the Buddha. The sky-like openness of the Buddha's dharmakaya mind displays itself as the richness of the field of experience and within that each moment arises fully formed and easily vanishing. This infinite open flow, which is always complete, is unavailed of or ignored by the ego which is trapped in its own lockdown.

This fourth point of primordial buddhahood indicates that there is nothing to be done. If you were not already present as Buddha, how could you become Buddha? If you had to create your own enlightenment, it would be a construct, and all constructs are impermanent. It would fade away and it would be no true liberation.

The mind itself is free from the very beginning. This is hidden from us by our own speculative creativity. We imagine rather than seeing. To imagine means to link the energy potential of

the mind with the content of thoughts, memories and so on. And we imagine things we would like and want to have more of, and we imagine things we don't like and want to have less of. And so we are always busy, always doing and making and improving, but there's always more that could be done. The ego is a work in progress, there is no end to it. That's why there is no end to samsara – for the ego. But your own primordial buddhahood has never been in samsara. It's immediately available if you go to it. How do you go to it? By not going anywhere, because it is here.

That's why we just sit. We don't need to do any mudras or mantras or prayers. These are ways of working with energy, of making new kinds of patterns. But the mind itself is not a pattern, just as the mirror has no pattern of its own although it's full of pattern. The mind is full of pattern, that's just how it is, we know this. We are always thinking something. But we have to see the emptiness which is the site of the display of the content of the mind. The radiance of the primordial Buddha is everything we encounter.

You may think: "Hey, I live in a city and the city is not so nice. You want to tell me that everything in the city is the Buddha? This is the radiance of the Buddha? Well, I want to tell the Buddha: You should try harder! This is not as wonderful as I hoped it would be! If London is the mandala of all the Buddhas, then life is hard!" According to me, my frame of reference. I think this is good, I think this is bad.

This is where we can see how we make huge difficulties for ourselves. I am the measure of all things. I am the judge. I decide the value of things. This is crazy. We are like a flower. The flower is in the field and the field is growing from the ground. The flower is beautiful, but it's not the master of the ground or the field. That's why again and again in the meditation we simply relax and sit and allow the movement of all these constructive potentials to move through without being activated. The ego is the builder, the doer, the maker, but actually everything is self-arising, the spontaneous interplay of all the factors of the field. Therefore we relax and we allow movement to move. We don't need to decide what to do because we will experience that emergence, how we come into the formative potential of our body, will arise with the situation.

When you walk along the beach, how you walk depends on whether the sand is hard or soft and when you turn and you go into the sea, your body is doing different things from walking. You are working with the water, you are collaborating with the water. If, when you come out of the water, you make the same gestures with your body as when you were swimming, you won't get very far on the sand. In Buddhism we always try to use very simple examples because we make ourselves stupid by our own intelligence. We are experts at over-complicating situations.

So, the mind is inseparable or non-dual from everything that occurs. In this inseparability patterns arise moment by moment effortlessly. None of these patterns, however they are, leaves any mark on the basic openness of the ground. This inseparability of stillness and movement is the primordial Buddha who is present with us at this very moment. This is not a dogma for you to believe, it's a kind of pointing or indication of how you might get closer to the beautiful actuality of how you are. This is flowing all the time. You can't catch it and yet you are it. And although you are it, however it shows doesn't define who you are, because

how you are is this unchanging trinity: **open**, which means empty, vast like the sky, **clear**, unobstructed revelation, and **precise**, the absolute, unique specificity of how you are moment by moment in the ever-changing patterning of body, speech and mind.

Actually there is nothing much to be said. Many, many things have been said and there are many things on Buddhism. And on our *Simply Being* website<sup>1</sup> you can find many, many words. But the function of the words is to bring you to silence, because silence can integrate sound. But sound tends to expel silence. So, when the mind is silent, like a night sky with bright stars and no moon, we get this infinite expansion. When we rest in this, there is nothing to be done. Then our work is over. The ego vanishes. It's not killed off, it's not destroyed, it never existed. It's like a dream or a mirage or a rainbow, it's an entrancing appearance. And following this fata morgana, following this magical shape that arises, we go wandering here, wandering there. But when we are silent and still, the energy which is hijacked into the construction of the ego self, releases and relaxes and dissolves. And from this we see everything is the radiance of the Buddha mind. I am the radiance of the Buddha mind. You can relate to the people who you know, you can go to work when that's possible and so on. But that is like a dance of clouds in the sky or a dance of gusts of wind. Nothing is established; it's self-liberating. And then you stay with the Buddha-mind whatever you are doing, walking or talking, sleeping, eating...

So, we'll do a final sitting and come to the end for today.

[sitting practice]

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<sup>1</sup> [www.simplybeing.co.uk](http://www.simplybeing.co.uk)