

“Direct Introduction of Buddhahood beyond Classification”: a terma text of Nuden Dorje Drophan Lingpa

James Low

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The focus of this weekend is to open up the view and practice of an aspect of dzogchen using a terma text by Nuden Dorje. I have translated and commented on it in Chapter 8 of Simply Being¹ so you can also look there for more information.

I will say something first of all about the general background of dzogchen, then something about Nuden Dorj, and finally we will go into the text.

¹ Simply Being: Texts in the Dzogchen Tradition. James Low. Vajra Press, 1998. ISBN : 0953284506

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Introduction to dzogchen

The focus of this weekend is to open up the view and practice of an aspect of dzogchen, through a text by Nuden Dorje. First of all I will say something about the general background of dzogchen and then something about Nuden Dorje and then we will go into the text.

Dzogchen is a teaching, which is found mainly in the nyingmapa school of Tibetan buddhism, although it is also practiced by kagyupa school and increasingly by people in the other main groups. The Dalai Lama has just published his teachings on dzogchen, so it is very popular.

The lineage starts with Kuntu Zangpo, then to Dorje Sempa, then to Garab Dorje. It continues to Sri Singha, to Manjushrimitra and Padmasambhava. That is to say, the teaching was originally a natural manifestation of reality, represented by Kuntu Zangpo. Gradually it took a more articulated form, which is Dorje Sempa, or Vajrasattva and then it came into the human dimension through Garab Dorje.

There are elements in the dzogchen practice, which are similar to taoist practice and to aspects of zen, which is a *mahayana* practice. There are also many, many other traditions that have similarities to this view. In the bön tradition of semi-shamanistic practice in Tibet there is also a tradition of dzogchen which predates buddhism.

How view meditation and result differ in each of the nine yantras

The nyingmapa tradition categorises the styles of practice into nine styles, nine vehicles, called the *nine yantras* and dzogchen is placed in the topmost one of these, the highest vehicle. So it is seen as being the best, or the most perfect way of practicing. Each of these nine yantras has its own view, meditation (a kind of prescribed activity) and result.

The nine yantras make a kind of spectrum moving across from the *hinayana* whose basic view is: this world is a dangerous place, full of problems and difficulties and we are people who easily get lost and confused.

We have the movement towards a more mahayana view, where we believe that we are connected with all beings; that we have a debt of gratitude to all beings because they have been our mothers in our past lives. Our job therefore is to gain enlightenment, liberation for all beings. The practice of mahayana is to recognise the essential emptiness of all phenomena and bring that understanding into our relations with others. Because there are many, many beings and these beings have many many obscurations and have accumulated much karma, this is going to take a very long time.

Then we come into the realm of *tantra*. (I am clearly condensing this information very much, and there are many books you can read to get the details.) There are various strands of tantra but the basic principle of tantra is that from the very beginning all things have been connected, not just all beings but the whole of existence. This connection is automatic and unchanging because the basic nature of existence is an infinite spaciousness, full of awareness. This is the *dharmadhātu*, the dimension of reality. Within this all things arise in

the manner of a dream. The practice of tantra is to realise the dynamic illusory nature of manifestation as inseparable from the ground, which is this open dimension of the dharmadhatu.

In dzogchen the view is that from the very beginning everything has been perfect, there is no mistake, there is no ignorance. The name of this founding Buddha is Kuntu Zangpo and his partner is Kuntu Zangmo, Their names mean '*always good*'. So there are real implications of the particular view that we practice from.

In the traditional language we have this idea that we are born again and again going from one realm to another. In each realm there is only suffering and this revolving, and this necessity, of repeated rebirth is called *samsara*. So from the view of hinayana, we are in *samsara* and we want to get out of *samsara* and go someplace else. That special place, where there is a release from suffering, is called *nirvana*, which means: 'no disturbance'. So we want to leave a bad place and go to a good place.

The mahayana view is different. We make a commitment to be with all sentient beings for as long as they are in *samsara*. So the practice is to learn how to live in *samsara* without being disturbed. And the person who takes up this view enters the path of the *bodhisattva*, the one who is a being turned towards *bodhi*, (*bodhi* means, 'awakening', 'enlightenment'). This is seen as a very courageous act and we say: '*I will devote all my time, all my energy in this life and all my future lives to the salvation of all beings.*'

These ideas are probably familiar to many of you here but I think that it is always useful to remind ourselves what are the differences of the views and the styles of practice particularly when we move towards dzogchen.

So in this mahayana path, we develop an understanding of emptiness, of the absence of inherent self-nature in any phenomena; the understanding that all phenomena are empty. Just as it says in the *Heart Sutra*, which is a key text of this approach: '*Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.*' This means that everything that we see, every experience that we have, is arising out of emptiness, is inseparable from emptiness. And this is very important.

Hinayana: a horizontal movement

From a hinayana point of view, let's say I get very angry with someone, we would say that this is the arising of a poison, an affliction in myself. This is anger, which is increasing this sense of subject and object. It is a very dualistic energy and it is arising out of ignorance through the path of all my accumulated bad karma. It is as if somewhere behind me there is this ignorance and in my past life I have done these bad things and this wind is blowing through me, so in an impulse I go and do something bad.

It is a very horizontal kind of movement; I am going from some place, to someplace else, it is coming through like that. My action now is determined by something behind me, pushing me along; the ground of my action is the past. Because we believe that we have been born many, many times in past lives and in each life we have done a lot of nonsense, we then

have many, many karmic winds blowing through us, so one has to try to cut these off by not being influenced by them.

On an outer level, one should avoid disturbed behaviour, become a monk or a nun, avoid erotic energy, not drink, not eat disturbing foods like garlic and lead a very simple life. In terms of the meditation one should try to calm one's mind by focusing the attention, being mindful; mindful of walking, mindful of eating, simplifying the world. One should not be distracted nor excited, but take the attention and turn it onto basic repetitive aspects of existence avoiding elaboration; everything is pared down. Through this, one is gradually able to withdraw from the world.

The basic view in the hinayana is renunciation, renunciation on an external level of sensory disturbance, and renunciation on the inner level of any intoxication with whatever is arising in the continuum of experience.

We have to remember that when Buddha Shakyamuni first started to teach the dharma, he taught it from the point of view that people have different natures, different capacities; and so different views and different methods are quite appropriate. When we study these different yanas or different methods, it is not that one is more true than another, neither is it that all are true. They are methods to realise something, to realise your own nature.

In the Tibetan tradition people would practice each of these yanas and they would practice them in quite an integrated way. For example inside puja texts like this *Big Rigdzin* which many of us do, or inside the *Dorje Drollo purbha*, you have practices of each of the nine yanas and in the course of the puja you go through these different views and positions. That is why it is very important to know what these are and how to take up that position fully as you go through the dynamic movement of the text.

It becomes almost like a sequence of yoga. By going through the different *asanas* different parts of the body get stretched and resolved and you come through a well-organised session of postures to have a total relaxation. This is the purpose of these large practices, to have a kind of massage on all aspects of the karmic body.

The more we understand about the different styles of practice, the better we can use them in relation to our own condition. For example, sometimes we may be very sleepy, other times we may be very agitated and can't seem to focus our mind. At those times it can be useful to do some simple kind of external activity, like prostrations or circumambulation. You can find a park near you and write some little mantras or make some little Buddha statues, tie them up in a tree, and then you can walk in the park and do your holy circumambulations. Think of creative ways to make your environment sacred and you can relate to it in this way. So the more methods you know, the more you can be close to your own lived condition.

From the hinayana view, using focused attention on the breath to avoid being distracted into arising thoughts is the beginning of renunciation. It is the point at which you have some choice about whether you go into something or not.

Mahayana: a recognition

The mahayana path has two key focuses. One is to understand emptiness, which is done by an analysis of the nature of phenomena – looking into seeing if you can find any inherent self nature, followed by further looking at the mind to see if you can find any solid substance, any real object as the basis of your self-identity. The second focus is to develop compassion – which is the sense that we are linked with all sentient beings, that we cannot separate ourselves from sentient beings.

Emptiness and compassion are both used to cut at the basis of self-centeredness, of selfishness; of placing ourselves in a narrow tight anxious way as the centre of the world. We need to keep these two running together because if we take this bodhisattva vow and say: *'I will save all sentient beings'* whilst still believing that sentient beings are really existing and full of karma, then we remain within the view of ordinary people; that is to say, we see objects as real and separate from ourselves. However if we understand of emptiness, and say: *'I will save all sentient beings'* then we are saying, *'in the manner of a dream from the very beginning there has been no inherent self-existence in any phenomena.'*

Looking around this room we see people, but what do we see? We see shapes and colours and then from our own mind we say: *'This is a man, this is a woman'*. From our own mental production we create the sense of the inherent self-existence of the other - this is *our* work. No doubt each of us is thinking we are real and separate and this is the production of our own thought system. So if you understand emptiness, all the sentient beings that you are going to save, including yourself, are inherently empty. And so the act of awakening is to recognise what is already there: the inherent emptiness of the situation. You don't have to go anywhere else. You don't have to leave samsara and *go* to nirvana. In the mahayana tradition the description of enlightenment is that you *attain* a nirvana, which in Tibetan they say: *mi nae pe nya ngan lae dae pa* which means, nirvana, or a state of enlightenment which doesn't rest anywhere. It is not a place - it can't be put in location to anything else because it is pervasive.

So this is the basic view of the mahayana particularly of what is called the *paramita-yana* aspect of the mahayana. The paramitas are grouped as six or ten ways of practicing which take us to the other shore. That is what paramita means: *'to go across to the other shore.'* So they are methods of enlightenment.

Tantra: a method

Tantra develops methods to help this process. Tantra is an aspect of mahayana buddhism which uses more attention to the aesthetic dimension of existence. We can use as an analogy for karma, the experience of having an operation. You enter a state of anaesthesia, where you get dulled out, losing contact with your ordinary ground which is your body. Ignorance and karma are a bit like that. Losing touch with our true ground we are a little bit stupid and don't really see what is going on. Awakening is to move from anaesthesia to aesthesia.

It is very important to understand a little bit of the history of tantra and the history of buddhism because different practices arise at different times due to different socio-political situations. In buddhism this is called dependent co-origination, or *paticcasamuppada*, which means on the basis of this, that arises; where we see that particular patterns of manifestation create an environment in which some things can develop. It is very similar to Darwin's notion of evolution, in which forms of life come into existence due to changes in the climate, or the kinds of food that are available. For example, you get the development of an ice age, the ice starts to move out, it becomes too cold for some creatures, that then die; other creatures move from one area to another area and slowly develop new capacities. So around the fourth century of the christian era you start to get the development of tantra in India, you have buddhist tantra, you have hindu tantra and you have jain tantra.

The body

In tantra you have a development of the understanding of the body as a site of the divine. In the earlier stages of buddhism, in this hinayana period, the body was seen as something bad, dangerous, dirty; something that would lead you astray. So you become essentially a mind, a pure mind, which should be separated out from the body. In the early days of tantra you have a return to the body, in which teaching is done through the body.

For example, many of you will know the stories of Tilopa teaching Naropa and of Marpa and Milarepa. This teaching was very much in the body, involving beatings, jumping off buildings, having broken bones - sort of boy's activities- it's a kind of testosterone dharma. Because Milarepa was a very healthy strong young man who had a lot of energy, he was running all over the place and Marpa was like a kind of probation officer, a social worker for delinquent youth. And he got him to build all these towers and take them down again. And then gradually through this activity he came to realize something; he shifted his relation between his incredible energetic impulse that was taking him out of himself and he was returned to himself but through the activity of the body.

Another example is Saraha and one of his songs is in this 'Yogis handbag'² book. Saraha was from a brahmin family, high status, doing meditation but in a very, very pure way and then one day he meets a woman from a low caste, a caste which makes arrows, very low, dirty kind of people to an Indian way of thinking. She, with her insight, intrigues him and manages really to plant an arrow of wisdom right in his heart and he awakens to something.

We have a similar story with Naropa, who was a professor in a big monastic university, spending all his life surrounded by books. With a great deal of clarity he understood the natural position of everything but then one day an old women comes to see him and asks him just some very basic questions: 'What's all this buddhism about?' And he says, 'Oh you wouldn't understand' and she asks, 'Well who are you?' And she keeps pressing him and he gets very confused and upset because she is not coming through this proper hierarchical, patriarchal monastic system; she is coming in from another angle. She shows him that

² Simply Being (Wisdom, 1998, ISBN 978-0953284504) has been translated into German and called Aus dem Handgepäck eines tibetischen Yogis. Grundlegende Texte der Dzogchen- Tradition (Theseus, 1996. ISBN 978-3896200891)

although when he faced to the front everything is power and clarity, if you go round the back he had many, many confusions in himself. She exposed these and then told him, *'Oh you should go and see my brother, Tilopa'* and so Naropa went off to see Saraha...

This shows us the movement of the feminine into these patriarchal structures. This is the way that the *dakini* principle started to operate; very much as something deconstructive, from the left hand, something alternative opening up a bit of space inside institutional forms, which were always sealing themselves over and trying to have no cracks - to have all the answers.

A return to experience

So, tantra is a return to experience. In tantra, experience is placed at the centre and of course all our experience begins with the body. We have our sense organs, we have our impulses, our desires, our fears and so on and these become the path to enlightenment. I think it is important to get this idea clear. That from this view of the mahayana, the idea that everything is empty, means there is no inherent self-substance, so it makes the world performative, it is not essentialised; the world is a domain of display and that display brings reactions and the reactions become intensified if we feel that the performance is something solid.

Generate an ecstatic energy out of breached boundaries

So, just to go back a little, in the hinayana tradition we are trying to discriminate between what is good and what is bad; what is pure and what is impure. And this creates clarity but also intensifies a sense of duality. In the path of tantra we say everything is devoid of an inherent reality, so then what is the difference between good and bad? What is the difference between beautiful and ugly? What is the difference between sacred and profane?

There is no essential difference, but there is a performative difference. This is why in tantra, or say for example in hindu tantra, they developed the notion of doing what is forbidden, a kind of anti-deconstructive move. A bit like the work of Georges Bataille in modern French philosophy, where you have the idea that you go into the very place that is forbidden and through that there is a liberation. Or like Herbert Marcuse's notion that the revolution can only arise from the dispossessed, from those who have no investment in the maintenance of the system. Therefore you would have practices like eating human flesh, having sex in a temple in front of the gods; doing things which according to the regulations of the institutions which are separating good and bad, would be an anathema, would be something terrible, would be shocking. And through the quality of using that shock, there is a kind of liberation; a bit like punk.

So the most important thing is to understand the principle, which was to bring in contact things, which seemed to be opposites and to use the energy of that *'rapprochement'* to transform - so it was to generate an ecstatic energy out of breached boundaries.

But for Western people having sex in front of a statue of the Buddha doesn't really bother us, we may have our shrine room in our bedroom, so these things would not be very shocking.

I remember when I was in one of my psychotherapy trainings, we each had to do something that was a bit difficult for us. The task that the group gave to me was to wear a tie. So I had to go out and buy a tie and put it on and then I felt that I was becoming my father. That would be an example of tantra. When you look into these large puja texts – which are a presentation of the practice of the integration of tantra – there are many things in them, which are not particularly shocking to Western people, but inside the frame of the Tibetan buddhist practice they are very shocking. So we can miss some of the point. Imagine you go to see an Iranian film and suddenly the veil falls from the woman's face. If this was shown in Tehran everyone would gasp but we don't think of it in that way.

So it is very important to understand that if you are practicing these things, you yourself will need to make experiments to see what is rigid and fixed in your own character, what are the contradictions of that. Explore being with that contradiction.

For example, one of the things that some people do in India is drink their own urine. Many people would find that disgusting. But just the experience can give rise to feelings of repulsion and then you can think: *'Well what is this repulsion?'* What is this? What is the point at which I say: *'No... not I...go away...bad.'*

Because tantra itself means, connection, like when you have a *mala*, a rosary; you have a thread and all the beads are on the thread. And the meaning of this for the term tantra is that every moment of experience is threaded on emptiness. So if we say nice things are empty and unpleasant things are very, very real, then we have broken the mala. It is something about, can we be with the emptiness of every experience – so the things that frighten us and horrify us are the things we need to go into?

Researching what is the limit of your existence and using the practice to include that, is at the heart of tantra. Nothing is to be excluded. One can stay in a state of the recognition of the emptiness of all manifestation.

That is why when we do the dissolving practice in tantra we come out with the awareness, that all sounds are mantra, all forms are the god's form, all thoughts and sensations that arise are the pure play of the dharmakaya. This is really the essence and then we need to take this practice not just in our familiar life but go out into these liminal, these border experiences and see what is this- otherwise we are always being frightened

Transformation of the world

The function of tantra is the transformation of the world. It is a symbolic system in which we make use of the deities and the mandalas and the mudras and so on to take this world, our ordinary world of experience, and to see it differently; to turn it into a magical realm, a divine realm. It is to make the profane, sacred so that the whole of existence becomes sacred. Now in order to do that, in the pujas for example, you have practices of killing,

where it describes taking a big knife or a *purbha* and killing the demon. And it has aspects of sex; sex and killing are very basic for human beings.

Our brain is very concerned with sex, with murder and death, with annihilating people; we want to get the things we like, we want to push away and destroy the things that we don't like. These are the two basic moves. Out of stupidity comes desire, attachment and aversion, anger and hatred.

The key thing for practicing tantra is to know that you are a nasty bastard! If you don't know you are a really shitty fucker, that you could kill people, that you are full of outrageous sexual desire, that you want everything in the world and you don't give a fuck about anyone else; unless you know you are a monster, it is very difficult to practice tantra because otherwise you do the puja and it is something abstract out there. We might be doing this kind of refined, distilled puja, which has something to do these emotions, these five poisons - but who has these five poisons? We have the five poisons. We are very unpleasant people. Really look in yourself and understand this, and don't edit yourself. Know that you have a lot of prejudice.

Whatever makes you very narrow and nasty, you have to know that and go into it and not say: '*Ah! I shouldn't feel this*' then sit on it and try to cut it off. Tantra is not about cutting and splitting things away from yourself. It is about looking right into the heart of the nastiness and transforming it so that everything can be integrated.

You can't try to wash things away, and integrate them at the same time; it doesn't work. You have to stay with all the limitations, all the unpleasant parts of yourself. That is very, very important. They always say if you want to get the five wisdoms you have to start with the five poisons. The five poisons are the basic fuel: stupidity, anger, desire, pride and envy or jealousy and these spread out to all their sub-family members, but these five especially, when they are cooking in you, there is a lot of power; that is where our energy is. If you hate someone, you get a lot of energy.

So it is very important to recognise that we are dealing with the raw embodied emotions in these practices and not just reciting some funny words.

[Break]

Cultural context within which teachings arise

Our study and practice always exist in a particular context. Some people don't think it is necessary to look at these cultural issues. They think: '*Oh you should just have faith in the teacher and do the practice.*' But the practice is inseparable from the field in which it arises and so it is necessary to know something about it, so that you can understand what is a reliable object of faith and what is a socio-cultural formation. The latter is not an object of faith; it is an object of understanding.

For example, from a Western point of view, there is no historical evidence at all that Buddha Shakyamuni taught tantra. There are no references to such text in other texts of the time,

there are no commentaries, there are no inscriptions; there is absolutely no evidence at all that he taught tantra. But in the Tibetan tradition they say very clearly: Buddha Shakyamuni went to south India, to this sacred Mount Malaya and there he transformed himself and taught tantra. Tibetans believe that, but the fact that they believe that doesn't make it true. I'm sure if you read a German history of the First World War and an English history of the First World War they would say slightly different things.

The difference between a critique and a criticism

So it is very important if you want to study dharma to understand the difference between a critique and a criticism. With a critique one is taking a point of view of clarity and trying to understand what the structure of the situation is. It is a search for what is the actual phenomenology of the situation; how has this come about? What were the factors involved? A criticism, on the other hand, is a value judgement, which says, *'I like it, or I don't like it.'*

So if you take a historical view and look at the sources, you can see the gradual evolution of these different schools of buddhism, arising usually out of a dialectical tension. Positions were established which were in conflict and then the resolution was a development of a yet another school. But in the Tibetan tradition as in many Asian cultures, because they are so exquisitely hierarchical, the validation of any proposition comes about by it being shown to be in alignment with the supreme signifier, which in the case of buddhism is the Buddha. So if you want to know that a position is true, you have to show that the Buddha taught it, because in that way it will be true since the big boy at the very top said it and so it must be true. You have a circular solipsistic justification.

So it is important to understand that this is how these traditional systems created a sense of truth. Now there is clearly a logic to it and there are certain principles. To see these is not to say that it is wrong, because every system will try to establish truth in some way; but what is very important to know is that this is a construct. As the Buddha said: *'All things arise from causes'*, [*cho nam tam che gyu lae jung.*] All dharmas, all phenomena arise from causes. They are not self existing. In this world of illusion truth is elusive. *Ma sam jo me she rab pa rol chin.* The real nature of wisdom is beyond speech, thought and expression. What you say in words has always got a little bit of a spin on it because it is always serving some kind of purpose.

So it is very important to understand this, because a lot of dharma is story; and story has a function, narrative has a function. All human cultures have many, many stories and we use stories to bring meaning and order, value and ethics into our life. But stories are not of themselves true, they are methods. The danger is when you start to believe that your story is the real truth.

For example, we have two Karmapas and we have two different stories about these Karmapas. You cannot believe both stories at the same time; so you then have a problem. You have to have faith but whom will you have faith in? Well that is your luck – or your bad luck. It is very, very important to know what is reality and what is a story. Stories can help

us get close to reality, or stories can cover up reality but if you have no way of distinguishing in your own mind what is reality and what is a story then you have a big confusion.

Faith is very, very important inside the meditation practice but outside the meditation practice it is very important to investigate. If you don't investigate, if you have no freedom to investigate, then it is very difficult.

I have often asked Tibetan lamas questions and they say: *'Oh you have no faith'*. I learned after a while, that simply means you are asking a difficult question. And I understand now, very painfully through my life experience, that when people get anxious they become attacking. It took me a long time to realize that because I was raised in a Scottish protestant family with a lot of guilt, if somebody said: *'You're a bad boy'* I would think: *'Oh, I'm a bad boy, it is my fault.'* Now I realize when people say: *'You are a bad boy'* they are usually frightened or something. It has taken me many, many years of suffering before I realized that; that people will defensively attack when something is difficult to be investigated because it is not quite true.

If you brought together all the versions from the traditional Tibetan texts about the history of the dharma, everything would be criss-crossing and contradicting; that is the reality.

So, I would say this is the basis of the practice of dzogchen because dzogchen requires a very, very honest examination of reality. So if it becomes impossible to investigate because something has to be put up on an altar, held very safe and is full of idealisation, it will be very difficult.

Tantra uses idealisation as a method for transforming the world but idealisation is a method, it is a story, it is not a sign of the truth. The fact that you believe something doesn't make it true. The fact that your teacher believes something doesn't make it true. Truth reveals itself through direct encounter, not by narrative, not by story; stories are stories are stories...

However when you are in the practice, then you should have faith and criticising something once you are inside it, having lots of negative judgments about something once you are in, is not very helpful.

I work a lot with couples and very often the two people, they come and they sit in front of me and then they start to fight. They blame each other for everything they do and I always try to say, *'Well if you are not going to separate, why don't you try to be nice to each other?'* and they say, *'Oh because, because, because...'* 'OK, there is a lot of justification for why you think this man is a total shit, so either you should leave him or you should transform your vision because if you are going to live with him, what is the point of seeing him as a shit all the time otherwise you are just living in shit'. And it is like that. If you are in a system there may be problems but focusing on the problems is not helpful.

That is why we say faith is very important because criticism affectively, emotionally-driven, position-taking, is a sign of the five poisons. Critique and clarity however, illuminate how illusory forms manifest in the world and have a function, whilst actually devoid of inherent reality. And it is very important to be able to distinguish these points, otherwise everything

comes just '*Lama la kyab su chi*' and inside that cut out your eyes, fill up your ears and walk over the precipice.

So tantra is an approach, which uses ecstasy; the return to the body and the transformation through the use of the deity. This becomes essentialised in the form of the guru, who is seen as the living embodiment of this realisation and who one then prays to in the hope of getting blessings, which will transform one's own nature.

Function of the teacher in dzogchen

The practice in the view in dzogchen is different. Dzogchen starts with the assumption: from the very beginning your own nature is completely pure, you don't need the blessings of anyone else to purify it and your nature is not and has never been either superior to anyone else's nature, nor inferior to anyone else's nature.

The main function of a teacher in dzogchen is to help you to return to yourself; the teacher should be somewhat invisible. What is important is yourself. You can know the whole history of Tibetan buddhism, you can know lots of stories about Padmasambhava but if you don't know who you are, how will it help? When you die all the information that you have will vanish. All the knowledge of dharma on the level of conceptual knowledge will just vanish away. What remains is whether you are present in the continuing of your own existence.

The fact that one is related to someone else doesn't give one their qualities. Being British I have a queen, my queen is one of the wealthiest women in the world – yet I have no entitlement to her money. You may say: '*My guru is enlightened*' but how can you write a cheque on your guru's enlightenment account? You can only write a check on your own account.

Observing yourself is the beginning and end of dzogchen

So from the point of view of dzogchen, the key focus is on observing yourself, this is the beginning and end of dzogchen – to observe yourself. To observe yourself doesn't mean to be like a police officer. You are not trying to find out about yourself but it is to observe yourself very close to yourself, through being present with yourself in the moment-by-moment emergence of your existence. Everything about yourself is important. By observing, its meaning and value will reveal itself.

For example: you are sitting and you are not comfortable, so being uncomfortable means something. Now from the point of view of hinayana, if your knees are sore then you should just sit and observe the pain that is arising in your knees. From the point of view of dzogchen, if your knees are sore then move your legs. Because your body is a feedback system, it is providing a lot of information all the time; and if you don't listen to your own experience but you listen instead to something from outside yourself – *I should sit this way, I should practice this way, the tradition has said that I should be this way* – then you use this against yourself and push yourself to fit in with the tradition. How then will you find yourself,

since you have already so pushed yourself out of your natural state? What will you find but this distortion?

The Terma text

Nuden Dorje Drophan Lingpa

This text was revealed by Nuden Dorje Drophan Lingpa, who was the first lama in the line of Chhimed Rigdzin. He was living in east Tibet in the middle of the last century and he discovered many important meditation texts and puja texts. This way of discovering text is called: *'revealing a terma'* or *'revealing a treasure'*. In the nyingmapa tradition they believe that when Padmasambhava, the great yogi from Uddiyana, came to Tibet, he hid many texts for the future throughout Tibet. He hid them in caves, he hid them in rocks, he hid them in the water, in the sky and in the mind. At that time he had twenty-five close disciples and he gave specific instructions mainly to these twenty-five: that they would be reborn at different times in the future and they would then come to remember the teaching that he had given them directly and be able to reveal that teaching in terms of these hidden treasures.

Therefore people should have faith that these treasure texts, which are revealed, are the authentic teachings of Padmasambhava. Of course, over the years in Tibet there were many false treasures which were revealed, but the principle is that they are the true teachings of Padmasambhava. Now this is clearly a story of faith. And faith is very important when you come to do practice, so we must believe this is the real teaching of Padmasambhava.

Sem de; Long de; Man ngag de

The teachings of dzogchen are presented in three different classes or families: *sem de*; *long de*; and *man ngag de*. *De* means like a division, or a class. The *sem de* teachings are teachings about the nature of the mind, how the mind functions and how to recognise it in its various modes. Some of these texts have been translated into English, for example there is a recent translation of a text: *Dorje Sempa nam ka che* translated as: 'The Supreme Source' by Namkhai Norbu and Adriano Clemente. This is a very useful text for explaining the structure of the mind.

The *long de* texts deal with the function of energy; they deal with postures, with gazes, with breathing. They are dealing more with the ways in which one can shift one's practice in order to overcome difficulties.

The third grouping, the *man ngag de*, is the teaching – often a spontaneous teaching – of somebody who has been practicing for a time. This text here is in the structure of a *me ngag de*. In Sanskrit, one would say, *upadesha*, which means that it is a direct instruction from someone out of their own practice.

Garab Dorje's Three Statements

Patrul Rinpoche's teachings on "The Three Points" is included in the 'Yogis' Hand Bag' book and in it he gives a commentary on core dzogchen teaching of Garab Dorje. When Garab

Dorje was going to leave this world, they say he rose up into the sky and out of a cloud of rainbow light he gave this teaching and in it he said three things:-

Firstly you need a direct recognition of your own nature, a direct introduction to your mind, not an introduction by somebody else, but you need to recognise your mind.

Secondly, you have to be able to stay with that experience, not to vanish into doubt, not to get lost.

And thirdly you have to be able to really continue through time, with stamina, integrating all experiences into that understanding.

All dzogchen teachings can be structured around these three statements. *Sem de* relates to the first statement; *Long de* to the second and *Man ngag de* to the third. So this kind of teaching is about to how to both enter the state of awareness and how to maintain it. It is giving some direct instruction and some flexibility as well. The style of this text is a mixture of dzogchen and tantra.

Commentary on the text

Salutation to my own awareness, the supreme ruler.

So the text begins by saying: '*Salutation to my own awareness, the supreme ruler.*' It is normal to begin with a salutation and evocation, usually of a deity, to ask for a kind of blessing, a kind of introductory prayer. Here this is towards one's own self. So the homage, the salutation is not to something outside, not to Padmasambhava, not to anybody else but to one's own real nature: the supreme ruler.

There is nothing that occurs in your existence but you are in charge of it. This is a very strange thing to say. Say for example, you are driving home and someone drives into you from behind and you have a crash. How are you in charge of that situation? Well, what has happened to you? What is the situation? You have an experience, where are you in that experience? If you make sense of the experience by saying: '*He did that to me, why did he do that? This is very terrible, this has happened to me*', then you enter your experience mediated through a story which gives all the power to someone else.

But if you stay present in your experience with the sensation, maybe having cuts on your face or whatever, this is what is going on, you stay centred in yourself, you are present – you are the 'ruler'. We always have choices about what sort of stories we tell ourselves. We have to tell stories; this is one of the domains of our existence.

In these three *kayas*, storytelling is part of the *nirmanakaya*. We come into language, we always give an account. This is what we do as human beings born in this dimension. We are going to say something, so we can be aware how we say it, how we centre it, where we put ourselves and also how much truth we put into the narrative; it is like a gesture in a dream. So in this way being centred in oneself, one is the '*supreme ruler*'.

A key *sem de* text is, *Kunjed Gyalpo* [Kun Byed rGyal Po] which means 'The king who does everything'. In this text our own mind is presented as the king who does everything. Now how do kings do everything? They sit on a throne and do nothing. You might read a story of how this king rebuilt the city of London. Actually, he sat in a room with some nice wine and somebody showed him some plans and then he said: '*Oh yes*'.

Last night, for those of you who were here, we were talking about how this basic openness gives rise effortlessly, spontaneously, without any kind of intention, or moulding, to an infinite set of possibilities, which come into the world according to causes and conditions. This is the nature of existence. In the dzogchen tradition, when we talk about the mind, we are talking about existence. The mind is not apart from existence; our mind is not something we have inside us like this mushy thing in our skull - our brain. This is not the mind; the mind is the whole of existence, everything which occurs.

These three modalities, of openness, radiance and precise manifestation occur all together; this is the supreme ruler, the king who does everything. When the king arrives everything happens; when presence arises in openness, thoughts, feelings, activities manifest spontaneously in the world.

For example, I am quite a busy sort of person, I do many things and one of the things I do is I work in a big teaching hospital, where I have a position as a consultant. I like to see many patients; or rather I spend all my time seeing patients. But one of my colleagues said to me, '*Your job is consultant, your job is to be available. You should spend some time everyday talking to the secretaries, telling some jokes, drinking tea and just looking very relaxed and peaceful.*' Then I started to do that and I found that this was very, very helpful because people then thought: '*Oh this man who is sort of responsible and in charge of everybody, he looks as if he has no problems, therefore we can believe that everything is wonderful here.*' So in that way one creates the illusion that even in the collapsing health system of England all is OK.

The paradox of this, as it relates to this text, is that the less I do, the more that other people do. And it is like that. If we have some calm place in ourselves, some calm place in a system, somehow more happens. But when we are running and we are burdened by our activity, we become overwhelmed.

So part of the real shift in dzogchen is trusting that everything is OK. This is the meaning of Kuntu Zangpo: everything is OK. When these two towers got blown up in America, Americans became very anxious and they felt something had to be done. Clearly it didn't matter so much what they were going to do, but something had to be done. So they mobilised a huge amount of energy, a huge amount of money and created a lot of disturbance. If there was some time for reflection, probably much better strategies could have happened.

We also do that, because we feel on the front line. We feel alienated from our own space, our own deep relaxation. We are out there where it is all in our face, very intense and we always have many things to do.

So this is how the text begins. Salutation is just a reminder: it is OK. Kuntu Zangpo. Everything is OK. Relax and the gestures will arise. You don't need to do worried, anxiously planning; reality will present itself as it presents itself. No matter how hard you try you cannot change it. But if you are relaxed and present, then you are in the field of existence, then you can dance, then you can move with reality as it is.

This is the meaning here: *'the supreme ruler'*.

Tantra is concerned with power: dzogchen is concerned with awareness

This is different from tantra. Tantra is a system based on power, and these pujas use the power of mantras, the power of mudras, and the power of meditation, to control the world. You get people who can start the rain, who can stop the rain and can make crops grow and can make cows give more milk and so on. The lama in the Tibetan tradition is seen as a very powerful person.

Dzogchen is not really concerned with power; it is concerned with awareness and responsiveness. It is not about winning. Tantra is about winning. It is about putting the demon under your feet, these big gods are dancing and a demon is underneath them.

In dzogchen it is about how to stay in the dance. The music of life keeps changing and changing but you have to stay there in the dance floor. Just keep moving around, and with that presence you maintain the continuity of your own existence. Not by dominating the world, not by running from the world, but being present in your existence as it occurs.

After lunch we will start to go more into the text and do more mediation practice together.

[Break for lunch]

It is important to gain a proper instruction from a teacher in order to enter the practice properly

The text goes on to say: *'It is important to gain a proper instruction from a teacher in order to enter the practice properly.'* Now there are various reasons for this. Last night there was an interesting question: *"Don't moments of opening occur through our life?"* And clearly it is not that we don't have any experiences of our own nature, without instruction. But usually these experiences are quite short lived. They arise because some gap occurs but when they have gone we are left with a kind of passing sadness, or maybe a sense of: *'Oh, there is some other possibility, but what to do?'*

So the reason for having a transmission for the teaching is to learn methods of not just entering the state but also being able to manage the various factors, which can interrupt the continuity of that state which has been realised.

But more profoundly it has to do with the nature of non-duality. Because if we are attempting to realise our own nature, there is a question, if our own nature is ours. So that: *'I must have a real nature somewhere, I don't know where it is, but somewhere, I must have it, so if I keep looking and opening all my pockets all of the time, eventually I may find it'*. But

that is to put the one who is looking into a very dualistic (almost subject onto object) relationship with one's own nature. It is almost as if one's real nature was a hidden object which I/my ego/my self is going to find.

This is very bad understanding, a wrong understanding. It is not that the teacher is going to give you your real nature but that this real nature has, as one of its aspects, an infinite ground, which is not marked or conditioned, or contained in anything which arises on it. When we are together, or when we do practice together, we are in the same situation and each person participates as they can. The experience arises in the relationship. It is not something, which is in us, but it is in our interrelationship. Our real nature is the movement of the arising of ourselves in the situation in which we find ourselves. It is not something that is inside, which is personal and private, but it is in fact something which is exquisitely public. What is most intimate about us is actually most public and available because it is our connection with the world, or rather the connectivity of all that arises on the ground of being.

So the purpose of the transmission is to allow a re-tuning, an attunement not into 'our selves', but into our nature, which is not personal. It is impersonal and personal at the same time.

And this attunement takes two forms: one is on the side of calming disturbance and the other is on the side of disturbing assumptions. These two are pulsing through all the styles of dharma practice.

So in doing practice together as the basis of transmission, it is a bit like dancing with someone. You are not doing a formal dance like a waltz or a salsa but you are just doing a modern kind of free moving about - you are in yourself and you are connected with them. You have your movements and they have their movements and there is an interchange of movement and gestures in which sometimes you copy each other and sometimes you do things differently. We can't connect with others if we operate from a rule book. We have to trust that relaxed openness will allow our response to arise in a way that is fitting. So the transmission is about trusting the integrated effect of the simple spontaneous response. It is very important to understand this.

In tantra you have initiation. In Tibetan the word for initiation is *wang kur* [dbang bskur]. *Wang* means power and *kurwa* is to bestow, to give. So you get an empowerment from somebody who has power. The attitude for receiving initiation is to be very humble, very open as if you are an empty pot and something is going to be poured in and fill you up.

But in dzogchen you don't have initiation, you have a transmission, which means you have to be in your 'adult self', not small and anxious but with the sense: '*I have this Buddha nature, this is my own nature, my own potential and I am coming back into it.*' So you are using the energy of the situation just to recognise oneself.

In the practice of the hinayana one is leaning back, one is trying to renounce and stay a little bit away from things. In this mahayana practice one is leaning forward, wanting to offer

something. In tantra you are leaning forward trying to receive something and in dzogchen we are just in yourself, finely tuning yourself.

If you want to do this practice, you should leave your ordinary life

So then the text carries on by saying that: *'If you want to do this practice, you should leave your ordinary life'*. Tibetan culture is very social, if you are living close to people, you have all sorts of responsibilities to respond to. You can't turn your back on someone. It is completely forbidden to say: *'Please go away. I am busy!'* In order to get a bit of space you have to really run far away. But for many Western people living in the city they already feel really quite lonely; they may be living in a flat on their own, not really talking to people very much. So for us we do not have to run away from society, we can be by ourselves more easily. Just switch off the television!

Put your body in this position, the seven-fold position of Vairocana.

Then it says: *'Put your body in this position, the seven-fold position of Vairocana.'* The key thing about this position is that it is said to be the position in which you can sit the longest, without getting a strain on your back and without it being too difficult.

Most Western people have grown up sitting in chairs, not sitting cross legged, so the key principle is – you can follow this seven fold position if your body allows you— to keep the back straight. Move your back around and feel if you are properly aligned, so that your spine and through to your shoulder blades, your shoulders, are carrying your weight and the weight of your head is passing down your spine. When you sit in the meditation you want to avoid the tension of being out of alignment, where your muscles are holding you in place; if your muscles are doing the work they will get sore after a while. Let your skeleton do the work.

You want to have your chest open and breath from the belly. So watch if you are doing upper chest breathing. If it gets shallow, always take it back into your belly so that you can feel your stomach going in and out as the diaphragm rises and falls.

Take the tip of the tongue and put it on the hard palette behind your upper teeth. There is supposed to be a point there which, touching it with your tongue, helps some control of energy. But it also helps prevent your mouth filling up with saliva. So we are sitting in this position.

Without speaking or entering into conversation.

Then it says: *'without speaking or entering into conversation.'* One very important thing is to observe yourself in the course of the day as you speak to different kinds of people and observe the impact of communication. The thoughts that we have which are connected with speaking have a major impact on our body. The importance of silence is that it allows some of the tensions, which build up through speaking, to relax. It's not that silence is more important than speaking but it just gives us a chance to detoxify some of the tension that builds up through speech. Especially when we speak without awareness, we are often in our

speech expressing the five poisons and these always carry some kind of friction, or tension, which builds up a charge inside ourselves, some kind of anxieties, some kind of muscular rigidity.

The key thing is don't believe me, and don't believe the text, but investigate for yourself. Look at what happens to your existence when you engage in different kinds of activity. That is the only way to know whether an activity is helpful or not. And sometimes we have to do things which put pressure on us. Then we need to do something about them afterwards to reduce the tension we are carrying. So it is all about being more subtle, more sensitive to one's own situation and observing how to re-balance ourselves whenever a tension has occurred.

Expel the air from your body and remain relaxed in your own place

The text continues by saying: *'expel the air from your body and remain relaxed in your own place.'* This again is something that you can observe for yourself. According to the tradition, when you are breathing in there is an increase in mental functioning, more thoughts are arising and moving through the mind. And when we breathe out there is a diminution of mental activity. You can observe this for yourself.

So it says: *'expel the air from your body'*. Let's just try that, making a few deep out-breaths. So breathing in fully and then breathing out, right from the diaphragm, slowly and deeply, just express the air and see what happens.

The belief from the tradition is that as we breathe out and relax we are returned to ourselves. At the point where the out-breath ends and before the in-breath begins, there is a point of change where the energetic veil lifts a bit. If you stay attentive and aware in that moment then you can recognise yourself. That is why it says: *'relax in your own place.'* Your own place is exactly, fully where you are, not following thoughts about the future, not following thoughts about the past, not following sensations, not following sounds, just - here. And then from that there is a movement, which is the return of this whirling wheel of these three modes.

Stay present without doubt and uncertainty

So then it says: *'stay present without doubt and uncertainty'*. Doubt and uncertainty mean thought production. If you focus on the thought you will not see what is the basis, or the ground of the thought. So if thoughts and doubts arise, just let them arise and pass but keep your own relaxed awareness in this state of openness.

Don't think about anything, don't develop anything, just abide spontaneously, in the state of non- distraction

'Don't think about anything, don't develop anything, just abide spontaneously, in the state of non- distraction.' Usually when we do our meditation practice, we have something to focus on. We focus on our breath, or some external object, or we focus on a visualisation of Arya Tara, or Padmasambhava, or we are reading some instructions, or we are visualising lights coming in and out of our body and so on. But in this practice there is no object to

focus on. The practice is simply to relax, and if any object arises stay relaxed and open and the object will pass. This is the heart of the deep practice of impermanence. We read about impermanence again and again in buddhism, but if we really relax and stay open, every experience which arises, will pass.

You don't have to push bad experiences away, nor is there any point in clinging onto good experiences and pulling them towards you because they both will pass. So by staying relaxed and open, all arisings will pass and you will have more and more sense that this openness is there, inseparable from these waves of creative energy, which are the manifestation of thoughts and feelings.

Practice of Aa

We can support this practice by doing the out-breath linked with the sound *Aa*. *Aa* is a very central point, as some of you know, in many of the Tibetan traditions. Because the letter *Aa* represents the most basic sound, a sound which has the widest potential to become other sounds, all sounds are seen as a variation on the *Aa*. Therefore when we say *Aa*, it is the sound which allows all other sounds, and the thoughts associated with them, to relax down into it. When we say: '*Aa Aa ah*' it is a relaxing and opening in which manifestation goes down into emptiness.

So when we do this practice we have our chin slightly raised, our eyes are open and we rest our gaze in the space in front of us. We are not staring into the space but allowing the presence of the space in front of us to integrate with our own inner space. We are using this space as a means of alignment. So when we do this we can also see the other people in the room, maybe they move around, maybe they cough... This is helpful, not harmful for meditation because experience is always dynamic and changing. The level of manifestation is not still; it is dynamic. What is still, is the level of openness.

So when we do this *Aa* three times together and relax into this space, we just stay relaxed and allow whatever comes to come, without trying to edit or to shape what is occurring. What is arising in front of you is not something other than you because your experience is part of you. So if I look at *you*, you are *me*. This is not some kind of great fusion where we are all one. Non-duality is not the same as homogenisation. My experience is not something inside me through which I am looking out, like a sort of periscope, at things outside. Rather, my experience is the complete expanse of my being that I am aware of. Sometimes that is infinite and at other times it comes down to a tiny, tiny point.

Pang lang me pa

So the absolute key principle that you will see again and again in dzogchen texts is: 'don't push away and don't pull towards yourself'. *Pang lang me pa* means don't enter into discrimination that something is good and something is bad. This is the living practice of Kuntu Zangpo in which one offers a generous open welcome to whatever is arising.

Now of course if somebody is moving a lot, irritation may arise. So you have movement and irritation. This is, within the same field of arising two things are happening. It is not that I

am having the irritation, and you are doing the moving. It is not that you should stop moving so that I won't feel irritated. Both are my experience and they arise together and move together. So by giving space to the movement of the other and giving space to the irritation arising in oneself, they will pass by. If you over identify with your experience and you dis-identify with what is going on outside and say: *'that is you, this is me'* then you have no integration and then you, yourself being an autonomous self, become like a puppet, where any crazy person can pull the string. When you walk in the streets there are plenty of crazy people to wind you up.

This is the essential paradox: the more you try to control your situation, the less you will be in control, because reality cannot be controlled. We can see the history of our civilisation as attempts to control people. The christians have to control the jews and the arabs; the catholics have to control the protestants and control all the other heretics; the jesuits don't like the benedictines and everybody is trying to control someone else. So we can do these little 'insider, outsider' games in our own head and we can know in advance, they will lead nowhere.

So together we will now practice: back straight, chin up, eyes open, gaze relaxed and then sound the three *Aa* 's. And then we just sit allowing space to whatever arises. Not resting in your body on your sense of self; letting that go into the flux as well. Through the *Aa* you open the space beyond your body, so whatever you experience as your body, the basis of your existence - allow it just to come and go in the dynamic flux of manifestation.

Don't try to push yourself. With all these practices, nothing is gained by trying hard. Much more is gained by relaxation because the one who tries hard is part of the problem - this is the heart of it. So it is about just relaxing again and again and if you find that many thoughts come, focus briefly on the out-breath and use that out-breath just to create a bit more space. OK, so we can try that again.

Stillness and movement are inseparable. Whenever there is stillness, there is movement there; whenever there is movement there is stillness. Because we have been tilted towards movement for a very long time, we often crave the antidote of stillness. But stillness is difficult to achieve in its own state. If you try to cool the mind down to make it very calm it will often become dull and empty and lack clarity.

Rather we can relax and observe and recognise ourselves in the openness that is present in all movement. Emptiness is ungraspable so please don't waste precious time in trying to pin it down. By relaxing, the intensity of identification with movement will decline and gaps of spaciousness will present themselves.

Then with the various things that arise in our experience, the centre of the practice shifts from recognising this gap into openness, to being able to maintain the awareness of the openness. This text contains some instructions on how to do that.

But sometimes this very direct way of relaxing into one's own nature, seems a bit too difficult, it is a bit too subtle. You do this breathing but still you seem very caught up in the thoughts and there is no gap at all and it is just a muddle. If one follows the path of

dzogchen, all that one would do then is maybe get up, walk around a little bit, maybe have a shower and then come back and do the practice again. Just sit and do this three *Aa*'s very gently and peacefully and after sometime one's situation will change.

Meditate on the form of the deity without taking the appearance to be strongly real

But we can also do as it says in the next section of the text: *'to meditate on the form of the deity'*. And in particular it says: *'without taking the appearance to be strongly real'*. So the practice is always imagining instantly in front of oneself a clear blue sky. The clear blue sky is the visual equivalent of saying *Aa* - it just means very open and relaxed. And then in the midst of that the deity arises, the god hasn't come from somewhere else into the sky; the god has come out of the sky. That means that if this sky is open and empty and the god comes out of it, then the god is also open and empty. So the god is form and emptiness and then we pray to this god. We can say any kind of prayers, any kind of mantras - you can do a full puja if you like, to make a very strong connection. The purpose of this is to use the energy of the recitation as a way of pulling together all the energy that would usually be dispersed in various kinds of distraction, bringing it to focus on the deity.

When you have this one pointed attention with the deity you start the process of dissolving; the deity coming to the top of your head and dissolving down into your heart and then your body which is a body of light also, dissolves into that ball of light, which then becomes smaller and smaller and smaller and smaller until it vanishes - and you are just in the open dimension.

If one is practicing in the tantra style then the nature of the deity is very important. For example, if you are wanting to transform your anger then you meditate on a very dangerous frightening god, who has flames all around and big teeth with blood dripping off them; somebody who looks as if he will be eating ten Taliban every second. Sometimes you identify with the god and you think: *'Yeah, I can kick ass!'* Then if the main preoccupation is with desire you visualise somebody who is very sweet, maybe Padmasambhava, sixteen years old, lots of testosterone, sweet charming soft skin. Then you use the beauty to evoke desire in yourself and again you can do it from your side, full of desire; or also through the identification with the deity, having confidence in your own expansive seductive power. Both polarities dissolve back into emptiness. So in tantra there are many, many different forms, which elaborate the transformation of these energetic distortions of the five poisons.

But from the point of view of dzogchen we are using the god as a door into our self. We are not concerned to transform our energetic qualities but to recognise our own real nature, so that we can then integrate all the forms of energy in the moment as they arise. We are using the god as a kind of clutch to help us change gear. You can do this practice with the deity you usually use but the simplest form is just to imagine the clear blue sky and out of it arises a ball. You can imagine it as either a white light, or a five coloured light: blue, red, white, yellow and green. And this light is shimmering on the surface, a transparent ball of light and this is the essence of the five wisdoms, this is the essence of the body, speech and mind of all the Buddhas.

Tigle

This kind of ball is called a tige, an essential drop, like a bindu, which is in both hindu and buddhist tantra. It is the first point of manifestation out of emptiness.

In dzogchen we use these balls of light a great deal because they are a more unelaborated stage than the full form of the god; every god has in their heart one ball of light with their mantra inside - so this is the less elaborated form of the deity. Because it is out of these balls of light that all the various deities arise and all the various forms of manifestation in our world. Everything that we see is an expression of the five elements: space, wind, fire, water and earth and these elements correlate to these five colours.

So this is the level of radiance that we are working with here and in correspondence with that, the basic mantra we recite is: Om Ah Hung. Because Om represents the buddha's body, Ah the buddha's speech, Hung the buddha's mind and this is the essence of all mantras. When we say 'Om, Ah, Hung' it can stand in the place of any mantra. So for example, if you have a lot of pujas to do with recitations to maintain for many deities, and you don't have enough time, you can simply say: 'Om A Hung' instead. It is a very nice short cheating system.

Once again it is very important to recognise that this system of working with the energy of deities is very different from christianity. When christians pray to god, they never know if god will give them what they want. When buddhists pray to the deity, they always get what they want. This is a very big difference. There is no anxiety; god is not some dangerous bad father who is maybe having a bad mood and doesn't want to speak to you and won't go and play football with you. The deity here is the manifestation of your own buddha nature and your own buddha nature will never abandon you, it will never betray you. So every time you pray, this power is absolutely there – immediately - there is no doubt or hesitancy. And that is why you can have a very adult to adult relationship; it is not like a small child: *'Please give me something, please, please, please.'*

From the very beginning this is your entitlement and the deity is the method of re-wiring you to this basic entitlement. So that's why the mood can be a bit more playful and also automatic. It is something, which has an effect; it is a method, a method of practice. So we of course use faith and devotion but also because these are methods; we use faith because faith works. It is efficient.

It is not that if you don't do it somebody will punish you. Unfortunately there is nobody out there to punish; the world is full of shit, the world is full of the most evil bastards, doing terrible things and there is no big garuda flying down from the sky to peck them out. What is possible is to transform yourself by relating to your own nature.

[Tea Break]

Refuge using three *Aa* 's

It is usual with buddhist practice to begin with the *refuge* and *bodhicitta*. When we take refuge we say: *'I am inside this buddhist system and I rely on the Buddha'* and when we do the bodhisattva vow we say: *'I will dedicate my energies in this and all my future lives to helping all sentient beings.'* In dzogchen as well you can do a kind of refuge and bodhicitta through the use of the three *Aa* 's.

When you do the three *Aa* 's you visualise in the space in front of you one letter *Aa* (Tibetan form, or a capital 'A') and experience this as the essence of all the lineage, all the gurus, all the buddhas. When we do the three *Aa* 's we integrate into that state. So we take the refuge directly, not as an aspiration but as an integration.

The bodhicitta arises through the practice itself. Because refuge is an intention and bodhicitta is an intention they come into fruition through the practice. So if you don't have so much time and you want to cut directly into it, you can do it without formally saying the refuge and bodhicitta because they are in the practice itself. You wouldn't be doing the practice if you didn't believe in it, so it is already the refuge.

And when we do this practice with our eyes open, there is the presence of the room and through that the presence of the whole universe, because our meditation is not just stopping at the walls - it includes the whole of the city, the country... Outside, we hear a car going by or an aeroplane overhead; all of this is held in the space of the meditation. So in that sense, the inclusion towards all beings is there present in the practice itself. It is not that we are doing something incorrect or improper by not reciting verses, but we take on the same position through the practice itself.

Om Ah Hung visualisation

With this kind of visualisation – usually we don't do it with our eyes open as in the three *Aa* 's practice – we have our head more tilted down and our eyes slightly open. It is an act of imagination - we are imagining this happening. So we imagine the clear blue sky in front of us, this ball of light arises and then we recite together: *Om Ah Hung, Om Ah Hung* and as we do that we imagine rays of light coming out from this ball into our body, filling up our body.

White light into the forehead, red light into the throat, blue light into the heart, purifying all sins and obscurations, opening up the pathways to the realisation of the three kayas until our whole body is full of light: white, red and blue light moving together.

Then when we stop the recitation the ball comes to the top of our head, it gets a bit smaller and passes down into our heart; so we have a ball of light in our body of light. Our body of light then collapses slowly down into the ball that is in our heart, so we now merge into the god, or the essence of enlightenment, which is inside us. And this condensed essence of subject and object now shrinks smaller and smaller and smaller until it just vanishes.

And you keep your attention focused one-pointedly on this ball as it gets smaller and smaller, so that when it vanishes there is none of you left over, you are not going here, there

and everywhere; you are completely focused in. This is said also to be a very good preparation for death, to keep doing this kind of practice.

Now this is a tantric method but we are doing it in the style of dzogchen. We don't need to do the mantra a lot. You can do the whole practice in five minutes. It is just to give you the focused attention into yourself. So we are doing this to take all of our attention out, all our distractions, all our energy is going out into this form, being purified and focused and concentrated and then the ball is in and we are down - and then out. This is the function. And so this is a way of recognising your own nature and then when the point dissolves, you stay relaxed and open; at that time you have no body, you have no history, you have no identity, whatever arises, doesn't belong to you.

A thought arises: *'Oh, I didn't buy any bread'*, who is going to eat the bread? So in that way it is very, very important because usually when we relax and we do the meditation, thoughts arise which have hooks on them because they seem to be referring to us. They seem to be saying something personally to us and so we lock into them. But when we do this dissolving one pointedly: *'I am just light'*. You don't have to say it in words but it is just that total identification: *'this is me now, I have nothing else, I am just light, just light - space'*. Then fully relaxed, open, in and as that space, you are offering no hooks for any of the things that go by; they can't catch you. They can be as hooked as they like but they will just float through the space - that is the theory.

So now we can try this practice together.

Student: I experience irritation doing this practice with the open eyes, with the light coming and things like this.

James: The muscles of the eye are not used to this kind of open gaze and especially in a room like this when some bits are a bit bright and others are darker. I think if you do it for a short period of time in a room where you are not looking directly at bright light, gradually it will become easier. And if water comes out of your eyes it is not a problem. Although this meditation with the eyes open is difficult at first for some people, the advantage is that after you have done the focusing and the relaxation, the movement of integration of the state of the meditation with your experience in the world is easier, because you are already connected. If you do this dissolving, it's a kind of inward movement and then you have to come out again. Very often in that transition out, you have the sense: *'I am now returning to the world'* which increases the sense of duality; whereas if you do it with the eyes open, it can be easier.

Commentary on the text (Cont'd)

You can also focus your attention on a statue, a letter, a symbolic implement or a pebble, whatever feels appropriate

OK, so we continue with the text. This next paragraph, it is actually quite difficult to do. Because he is saying: *'you can also focus your attention on a statue, a letter, a symbolic implement or a pebble, or whatever feels appropriate.'* So this is like a form of ordinary

calming meditation, using an external support, a statue of the Buddha, a pebble or so on. In Tibetan they would say 'hinayana shi ne'. Now usually when you do this you keep your attention focused. When thoughts and feelings come and you become distracted, you bring your attention back to the pebble. But here he is saying we are using it just as a little beginning-support. So you use this to calm and focus your mind.

Stay present without being distracted into the thoughts

Whatever thoughts are coming, he is saying: '*Stay present without being distracted into the thoughts.*' Here the focus of attention is not any longer on the external pebble but it is on being in the state of presence yourself. So this is a little more difficult to do because if you do not recognise presence, it is a bit subtle.

Don't think about anything with your mind, do not meditate

But after the first sentence the instruction is very, very helpful: '*Don't think about anything with your mind, do not meditate.*' This means once you have just centred yourself using this external object, once you have used it just as a momentary hook for calming, like for example saying the three Aa 's: you do the three Aa 's and then you stop - here you use the external object, you just centre on it and then into presence. At that time you have no object of meditation - keeping the mind relaxed, spacious, whatever comes, comes, it doesn't matter, good thoughts come, bad thoughts come, don't try to block them.

At that time, do not block the process with thoughts of hoping to remain in that state for a moment, or wondering how long it will continue

As it says very nicely: '*At that time, do not block the process with thoughts of hoping to remain in that state for a moment, or wondering how long it will continue.*' Everything is impermanent; the experience of this basic state of openness is also impermanent. But that doesn't mean that openness is impermanent. For example, I suddenly became aware I am sitting on my bum. Before I was looking out at you and then I became aware I was sitting on my bum. When I am looking at you it doesn't mean I don't have a bum; when I became aware of my bum it doesn't mean you have vanished. The whole is there even when our attention is on the part; knowing that the whole is there we can return to it. For example, you are watching television and you are in there, then you turn it off and you get out; you get up in your body, your body has been there all the time, but when you were watching the television you had lost your body; it is as if you had lost it though it was always there.

It is the same with the openness of mind, it is always there, never lost – so relax. Don't worry if moments of openness are very brief, they will come back. If you try to chase the moment of openness you will just be following attachment. So you have to stay with whatever comes and trust that these clouds will vanish and again there will be some openness; and that the clouds themselves are inseparable from the openness. But if you think: '*Oh the clouds have stolen the openness. I don't like this bit, I wish I had another bit*' then you will be caught up in thought production and that will cause a lot of trouble.

For whatever sudden thoughts appear, recognise them immediately and continue without distraction in this state

As it says in the last line of this paragraph: *'for whatever sudden thoughts appear, recognise them immediately and continue without distraction in this state.'* This is very important – the notion of recognition. Because usually when a thought arises we go into it; our sense of self and the thought merge together so that awareness merges into what is arising and becomes a kind of enmeshed consciousness. So as a thought is arising, if we just recognise it, then it means we know it is a thought, we know this is arising and will pass. This is a form of radiance; all thoughts, feelings and sensations are the clarity of the mind.

When you read dzogchen texts and also higher tantra texts, you will often see the term, *od sal* used. It can be translated as: 'the natural light of the mind' or 'the clarity of the mind'. But the clarity of the mind can arise thinking: *'How much longer is James going to talk for, I need to have a pee.'* It can arise like that. The thought: *'I need to have a pee'*, is also the natural clarity of your mind. If you think the natural clarity of your mind is some kind of light that is going to radiate out of your head and that when you come up from the meditation and walk down the street, people will be bowing, and then you might have to buy a special hat to keep it down ... it is not like that at all!

Each thought in itself is the radiance of the mind, whether the thought seems bright or not bright, sad or happy. Recognising this is itself a radiant illumination. This is the meaning of *od sal*, that it is this moving liquid, always-changing vibratory power of the mind. Therefore recognising *this*, you can be in a state of admiration, of enjoyment of this delicious quality of the mind without trying to turn it into something to sit on. Because the more open we are, the less weight we have and we have less need to sit on the arising; we are less in need of support.

The more conditioned we are by experience, the more we are attached to the impact of past experience, the more substantial we become, the more we want to find things to support us. But the things we use to support us in fact condition us more; so this how samsara tumbles on. So it is very important: recognising... and enjoying. Recognise and enjoy. Even if it is a sad thought, watch it passing; it is very beautiful, just moving, moving. Just as you can see in the autumn these changing clouds blowing across the sky, sometimes big black clouds full of rain and then the wind blows them and they pass by. The same inside your own mind, all kind of strange clouds are moving and if you sit behind your double-glazing with this calm unruffled awareness you can enjoy them going by.

If the mind remains tight, then relax and if the mind is too loose then tighten it up

So then the next two paragraphs are quite straightforward. They say basically: *'if the mind remains tight, then relax and if the mind is too loose then tighten it up.'* Buddha Shakyamuni said that the middle way is like tuning a guitar, or a sitar: if the string is too loose it will be off, if it is too tight it will be off. The same way observing our own state.

So say for example something has happened and you are very upset, somebody has died or you get some very bad news. Much better than doing meditation is to cry. If you are upset

cry, or drink a little whisky - just a little. But if you are in a state of agitation allow the agitation to be there, then you can always put on some music and dance, or you can phone up a friend and talk. And then when you have some release from that, then you can go into the meditation. But if your whole energy is into manifestation, if you don't know how to recognise your own nature in the moment of manifestation, which is quite difficult, it is better to just do some simple ethical behaviour and then when you are ready go back to the recognition.

Very often people think in tantra: dharmakaya is very high next comes sambhogakaya but then nirmanakaya is a bit ordinary. In dzogchen it is the other way round. First, if you like, we start with dharmakaya, then sambhogakaya and then nirmanakaya - nirmanakaya is the most difficult. To be in presence in the turbulence of ordinary life, that's very hard. To be in presence in the meditation, when it's unconstrained and infinite, that's much easier. So if you have external turbulence, you can have a bath, a nice warm bath, put on some music; that is useful. So in that way you can use external supports to change your mood and then you come into the level where your capacity, your ability to do the practice and the practice come together. But if you try to work beyond your capacity, how will it help you? Sometimes people think that the meditation itself is so powerful that it will help you whatever you do.

So for example, in the tantra text it says: *'No matter what happens, good times, or bad times, never to forget to pray to Padmasambhava'* but from the point of view of dzogchen, the practice is sometimes just to do something simple. You know when you are hungry, so eat; if you are tired, sleep. If you have had a long day and you are tired and you think: *'Oh, I have to do my meditation practice, I have to do my meditation practice'* the quality of the meditation practice is not so good. Better to go to bed early, have a good sleep and wake up in the morning and do some practice. The key thing is you have to put yourself at the centre, not the practice, not the teacher, not the Buddha, but yourself! And through the examination of your own state, use the meditation practices that you know, to help you maintain realisation. So that is really what these paragraphs are talking about.

You can practice by merging attention with the object of the six senses

So then it says: *'you can practice by merging attention with the object of the six senses.'* This is a practice from the twenty-one *sem dzin*, which are practices for developing a focus of attention and recognising the nature of the mind. So for example, it means you can practice by going to a place where there is a sound, for example in your house you can put on a record or a CD. And you take your full attention on to the sound, not listening to the sound 'out there' as if it was coming from a machine, but experiencing the sound exactly at your ear, so that the sound is an aspect directly of your experience. So it's not that you are thinking: 'I am listening to a sound.' Experience sound directly as it arrives and integrate your awareness into the manifestation of the sound.

You can do the same thing with your visual perception. You can sit and look at a flower, anything you like, a painting, a photo, a person and keep your attention on the experience of the other. It is not as if you are looking out to what is 'out there' but you are aware of how this experience is impacting you, so that you are staying in the presence in your sense

organs. When you eat something or drink something bring the focus of your awareness into your mouth, not just to increase the sensation of eating but to keep non-dual presence in the moment of the arising and passing of the sensation. The same with touch, you can do it yourself, you can just sit and gently caress your arm and as you are doing that you can feel the movement of sensation. Keep your awareness in your arm, feeling that arising and passing - the arising and passing.

And as you do that you will go from being a subject having experiences, to being an awareness which is inseparably integrated into the experience itself; not merged into the experience, not collapsed into it in an unconscious way but just co-emergent with the experience, so that presence and experience are inseparable. You can do that with all the senses.

In particular people are often very interested in how to bring sex into meditation. This is the very useful way. Sexual activity is sensation. Sensation is unfortunately impermanent but fortunately it means we have to do it again and again. So when you are in a situation, when you are close to someone, maybe touching them, or they are touching you, or you are kissing them, you can do this practice. Just very gently on the out-breath, relaxing, being present, then taking that presence into the arising of sensation. One is not grasping, not hanging onto experience. One is not stepping back somehow examining it, but just being with it but with an increased sense of presence. Allow sensation to arise and pass, not blocking it, not channelling it, not focusing it, but just being present with the movement of sensation. And in that way you experience sensation as self-liberating, that the experience arises and passes. Therefore the desire for hanging on for more, the hunger relaxes as one experiences the waves of sensation passing through. That is one of the best, easiest ways of integrating sexual activity.

And the closer we stay to experience the less space there is for secondary commentaries to go on in our mind and the over-layering of experience with assumptions and prejudices and so on. So this practice of staying, of keeping presence close to the moment of arising-experience on the point of the five senses is very, very important indeed. And it is something you can practice all the time. If you are sitting in a café waiting for a friend, if you have a coffee you can be with the smell of the coffee, just bring that smell close in your nose – completely there. So all the time there are opportunities to enjoy and be in the world.

Breath

Then finally I will say something on the breath and then we will do the three *Aa*'s and finish for today. The next thing it says is about, the practice of inhalation and holding; holding and exhalation. Always we are breathing in and out and in and out. Breath is very useful for balancing energetic disturbance and you can train the breath, and use it to train the mind. For example, it is very common to breath in with *Om*, hold with *A* and breathe out on *Hung*. And you can do this in terms of natural breathing but also in terms of more developed breathing when you count. So you can do yogic breathing where you breathe in for six, hold

for eight and breathe out for four and there are many mathematical methods for building up and developing this breath.³

But in terms of dzogchen we use the breath as a means of maintaining our presence. Sometimes we just focus on the breath — which is similar to the hinayana practice of mindfulness of breathing — but here we try to be present with and as the pulse of the breath. We have this sense of expansion, maintenance and collapse, expansion, maintenance and collapse. By staying present just with that, the whole world becomes a wave-like motion and you can see the pulsing and turning of the waves in the ocean, the clouds in the sky, the planets moving through space; the rhythmic activity of the universe.

This is a very helpful practice for gaining a sense of balance. Having focused on that, you then extend presence to more aspects of your existence.

But if you have never done any kind of yoga or breathing practices, it is very, very useful to learn just some basic control of the breath. If you are breathing badly from your upper chest with very shallow breathing, you will have a tendency to breathe more and more quickly, under pressure. This will affect the balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide, which will disturb the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous system; you will start to pump a lot of adrenalin and everything starts to get a bit tight. This is very common for stressed out people. You can see from the way their face goes a bit white, that the adrenaline is working in that way.

So very, very important to practice breathing from the diaphragm, so that whenever you find yourself a little disturbed, the first thing you check is your breathing and if you can correct it with breathing it works very quickly. Trying to work out why I am disturbed, what they did to me, what kind of practice I should do, takes a lot of effort. The first base is go to the breath, stabilise the breath and maybe the whole disturbance will pass quickly.

Question: Can doing some prostrations also help?

James: If you like. The thing about prostrations is first of all to get your breathing clear, and then do the prostrations along with the breath. The problem is that in many prostration systems the verse you have to recite is so very, very long, that you cannot coordinate the verse with the breath and with the prostration. It can become very bad for the health because the whole thing is not integrated. So from the point of view of dzogchen put your body first. Having a rhythmic movement through your body, where the breath and what you are reciting and the visualisation are all coming together, then your practice is benefiting you. But if you are trying to visualise something too complicated, trying to say something too long and you are not very fit, then it is not so good.

Going through a text and giving a commentary on it takes a lot of words, that's one realisation of today! What I would suggest is that we repeat some of today's practices this

³ See www.simplybeing.co.uk for James' talk on Purification in Hinayana Mahayana Tantra and Dzogchen where these exercises are described

evening or early in the morning and if you have any questions about them, bring them tomorrow.

OK so now we will do this three *Aa* practice for a little while and then we end for today. And it is normal with this buddhist practice to do a dedication of merit. Here we can do that directly through the practice, so when we do this three *Aa* we are very open to this universe, so whatever merit or value is generated from our work here today is automatically integrated into all beings. We don't need to say a special prayer to do that.

Day 2

Mirror

Experiences arise like reflections in a mirror

Letting go of striving and relaxing into just being simply present allows us to separate off from the enmeshment with whatever is occurring. It is said that when we relax and open in this way the mind is like a mirror and then whatever we experience is arising like reflections in the mirror. Due to the power of attachment we identify with the reflection that is arising in the mirror and take that to be something substantially real.

This is usually what happens in the meditation. For example, an experience arises in which you feel: 'this is *my* body, or this is *me*' and then you sit in that experience and that attachment causes the continuity of the arising of the experience. And through that settling into the experience as if it were self, the state of the mirror is lost and one is fully identified as a reflection, taking this reflection as real and taking other reflections as real. If you are serious about this practice it is very important to keep doing it again and again until you can relax and really observe the arising of experience without attachment. In that way we see that the whole world is truly impermanent; that impermanence is not some external fact of: now autumn is coming, the leaves fall off the trees and there is frost in the morning. It is not that external changing of seasons, but moment-by-moment and the subtlest part of the moment, the whole universe is changing. This is how our own experience arises.

We can also start to experience that attachment itself is a dynamic process; we can observe the arising and passing of attachment. So that, with the arising of an experience, say for example a sensation, you then have the arising of the thought: 'This is my shoulder' and then you have further thoughts about that. All of this is the nature of experience.

Rang dang: the mirror's capacity is to reveal many possibilities

In Tibetan it is called *rang dang*; it refers to the way in which one's own experience arises out of the ground of emptiness. It is important to understand this mirror-like quality of the mind. The mirror itself has no content; the mirror's capacity is to reveal many different possibilities, which arise due to causes and circumstances. So if you have a mirror and you put your hand in front of it, it will show your hand; if you put a book in front of it, it will show a book.

Due to causes and conditions many images arise. They arise because the mirror is empty; if the mirror became filled up with images it would not be able to reflect the next image. An image arises in the mirror, is there and then is gone leaving no trace. This mirror is the basic state of awareness, which is an innate quality that we all have. In Tibetan it is called *rigpa*. In Tibetan the word that we translate as ignorance is *ma rigpa*. *Ma* means not, so the state of *not* being in *rigpa* is what ignorance is. So the whole of samsara arises when our attention slips from this state of *rigpa* (this open awareness, the quality of the mirror), to falling into attachment, as a reflection arising inside the mirror. When we identify with the reflection we lose the sense of the mirror and the reflection then seems, through our attachment, to be something substantial, something real, something we can be in control of, shape and develop and so on.

Then between these reflections arising in the mirror, some take on the identity as self, some take on the identity as other. We can see that this happens very easily. For example, I think I am self and I think you are all other, but each of you thinks you are self and everyone else is other. So we split this all the time - we just chop it up. And then we in our sense of a separate self, we look out at other people, out through our sense organs and we observe them, we observe each other, but as if the other was something truly other.

So if you go to a cinema and you're watching a film and there are two characters having a conversation, you can see how each of them seems to be quite real and they are talking to the other person, who also is being impacted by what they say and is then talking back. But actually all this is just light on the screen. There is nobody talking at all because this is being projected from somewhere else.

And this is exactly our situation: we think that we are talking and having real relationships but we are an illusory manifestation which is arising out of the ground; we are projections from this infinity of the dharmadhatu. There is nothing wrong with having the conversation but unless we recognise what is the ground of this experience, that it is arising moment-by-moment in this infinite awareness; the mirror-like nature of the mind, then we take the arising as real, as separate and we completely misunderstand what is going on. This is the meaning of ignorance; this is *ma rigpa*.

When we recognise the ground then we see that what we call 'self' and what we call 'other' arise together and that the arising is in a non-dual integration with the other dimensions. So we have the openness, the energetic radiance, and the precise manifestation of being here in a room on a Sunday morning with the light like this. This is what is happening now and it is not arising in this way because 'I am me'. It is arising because this is the way the energy of the ground manifests at this moment. This is the understanding of the non-duality of the ground and the manifestation; of the stillness and the movement. This is the unchanging nature of all change.

Relax into this state of the mirror

When it says in dzogchen that the key thing is to observe yourself, you have to really make sure you understand what this means because if you try to observe yourself by looking at yourself as if you were an object, you will never have any success. We are so used to looking

as if through a telescope, trying to see something outside ourselves. It is very deep in all of us, but if you bring this way of looking into the practice of the meditation, you will only see reflections - because that way of viewing is the way to view reflections. Reflections look at reflections in terms of separation and separate reality.

When it says 'observe yourself' it means relax into this state of the mirror. The mirror sees everything and shows everything but is not affected by anything. This is how to observe yourself. Observing oneself means to be present with experience, in experience, as experience but without being experience. So it is very subtle, it is exactly the practice of non-duality.

So, experience arises, I am not apart from it looking at it. I am not merged right into it, being it. I'm not identified with it, but I am so close to it that I am just about merged into it. So it is a bit like if you were dancing and you were aware of dancing - being your body. So you are your body, your body is moving, you are not directing your body, you are not thinking: 'What do I do now? I should do this.' The body is moving and you are completely there in your body. It is exactly this experience that we try to bring to everything which is arising. Now we are more used to doing this just in terms of our own body, our own experience but it is also what we can experience when we are with other people. The more we can relax and open and let other people into our world, the more we will have the full experience of being with them, almost in fact of being as them, without any resistance. This is because we are not identified with the continuity of what we normally call: 'I myself'. 'I myself' is one pattern arising and 'who you are' is another pattern arising and both can arise and have equal value.

So to observe oneself, is to de-centre the observer from resting on the matrix of the ordinary ego sense of self, which is to say, an attachment to an identification with the five skandhas, the five poisons, one's karma, one personal history, ignorance and so forth. So it is very, very important if you recognise this, then you start to be able to see the mind in operation and that who you are is both who you always thought you were, and completely not who you thought you were.

That is the main understanding of dzogchen. If you understand that and you can live that, then you will get something of value. But of course that is quite difficult so we have to support the meditation practice by investigation.

Commentary on the text (Cont'd)

The outer objects that we believe in, all the experientable phenomena have been from the very beginning like the sky

So the text then continues: *'that the outer objects that we believe in, all the experientable phenomena have been from the very beginning like the sky.'* This is taking this mahayana view of form and emptiness; everything has been completely open. What we take to be the nature of something is arising there due to causes and circumstances but when these causes and circumstances change, this shape, this manifestation changes and these changes when you see them happening through time, leave no trace at all.

So we have to investigate impermanence. Here in Berlin is a very good place to investigate impermanence because you can see signs of various stages of the history of this city everywhere. They are written in the architecture, in the way the streets are laid out and so forth. Some trace is left but we can ask: *'Well, where is that trace left? Is it in the bricks? Or is it left in our head?'* Because if you don't know anything about the history you just walk about and think: *'Oh they have different types of buildings here.'* But if you learn about the history then you can say: *'Oh that belongs there, that belongs there.'* So what often appears to be outside and external, inherent in objects is, when you look at it, largely projection from your own knowledge base; from your own data bank, the continuum of all that you have built up.

Husserl and semiotics

Part of the practice then is to develop a phenomenological attention in which one brackets off assumptions. Taking the line from Edmund Husserl: *'What is required is to see things as they are'*. The more one practices trying to do that, the more you see how much you layer onto the world out of yourself. We are full of thoughts and experiences and associations which give us power because they allow us to put significations on manifest experience; and through that potentiation we give ourselves leverage in a world which operates on the basis of signs; a *semiotic* world - a world of significances which are transferred.

Once we start to interrupt that process of the projection of meaning, the world becomes very different. The world becomes much more fresh, because the problem of knowledge is that while it give you power, it takes away directness. When our world is mediated through a semiotic experience, through the layering of signs, through the reading of the world, this reading is itself a veil. We imagine that the reading is taking us closer but it is creating something.

When I was coming from the plane from London, there were two people sitting near me and they had a guidebook for Berlin and they were going through the pages, thinking about where they would go and what they would see. They had clearly never been to Berlin before but they already had a 'big big Berlin' in their head. And they were going to run around to make sure that the Berlin outside fitted the Berlin inside their head.

This is the nature of karma. We build up many impulses, many understandings, which we then seek to find in the world. For example, it is well known that people very often go into relationships with people who in some way hold a representation of their father or mother. We seek to repeat experiences we had in earlier in our childhood, what Freud calls 'repetition compulsion'. Karma is very large-scale 'repetition compulsion', in which we repeat again and again patterns we have been involved in before.

The phenomenological method requires us to bracket things off. However of course, Husserl failed in his project and Merleau-Ponty, his great student, failed as well, because it is almost impossible from the standpoint of being a reflection in the great mirror, to bracket anything off, because you don't have a boundary between yourself and the world.

Husserl's problem was that he thought you could step apart from the world and change it - but we cannot take ourselves out. This self is always implicated in the world of becoming; we are always influencing the world in which we live. You cannot perceive the world in a naked way because to perceive it, is to have a take on it.

All the phenomena of samsara and nirvana are like the sky, from the very beginning they are un-born, not one thing has ever come into true existence.

This is why in buddhism we have this idea of these nine yantras, each of which has its own view and the view is different and no one view gives you reality. Reality on the level of manifestation is always a construction, in which one is implicated. However this complex co-emergent experience, in which we exist, is nakedly arising from the ground, which itself is never constrained nor contaminated by any of the processes of co-emergent construction.

This is why in traditional buddhist language we say: all the constructs of the world, all the compounded things, (In Tibetan they say: *du che [dus byed]*) all of these things are actually, '*du ma che*' [dus ma byed]: un-compounded. So that is why it says here in the text: '*all the phenomena of samsara and nirvana are like the sky, from the very beginning they are un-born, not one thing has ever come into true existence.*'

All meditations, dualistic ideas, are merely names devoid of even an atom's worth of reality

Then the text continues by saying: '*all meditations, dualistic ideas are merely names devoid of even an atom's worth of reality.*' Again this returns us to the relationship we have with language. A great deal of buddhism functions as a critique on how we use language. Language when it developed in terms of our western notion of evolution clearly brought about a huge change in how we behaved. We could communicate very easily and quickly, we could start to refine and define what was going on for ourselves and for others and it allowed the development of abstract thought; so ideas became more and more enriched in levels of meaning, due to language.

Some of us may have some memory of what, as a very small child, it was like to move into language and particularly to move into its social dimension; which is to say, not just our own capacity to speak language but other people's expectation that we understand language. So that when your mother says to you: '*Listen, I am talking to you. I want you to do this. Do you understand? You have to clean your teeth. You have to do this ...*' at that moment you can't pretend that you don't speak and listen. You are trapped into a world of expectations and demands. The more you come into language the more you both have an expansive freedom (especially the freedom to tell lies!). but you are also imprisoned. You are imprisoned by the fact that language goes right in through your body to every part of your existence and starts to take over the spaces of spontaneity. Since everything can now be thought about, everything becomes layered in thought.

The illusion of self-existence is held in language

So what the text is suggesting here is that everything that we see – all separate phenomena, ourselves, our hands, our legs, our eyes, the walls, the doors, everything we see when we examine it – has no inherent self-existence but the illusion of that self-existence is held in language. It is by naming that we recreate moment-for-moment to ourselves the sense that the world exists as a succession of constructions of real separate entities. This is very, very important.

Now the answer to this is not to stop talking, language is part of our dimension. We don't survive very well if we cannot speak. What we have to do is understand the nature of language. Language clearly is an act, it is an activity, it arises and it passes, it impacts, it both links people and makes impact from one to another. But it is impermanent, it is devoid of inherent self-nature, it is like a game.

So when we speak, part of the understanding is to hear sound in a light way, to hear our own words in a light way and to hear other people's words in a light way. If we allow the words to be too solid then we become solid with them.

For example, in cognitive psychology and cognitive psychotherapy they spend a lot of time looking at the core beliefs that people have. Very often when people suffering from despair and depression start to monitor their thoughts, they find that there are phrases which they repeat to themselves. Things like: 'I am unlovable' or 'I knew people would let me down.' These thoughts run again and again and again. These *words* are empty, they just arise. They are just bubbles of experience passing - quite impermanent. It doesn't leave any mark on this basic mirror of awareness. But within the framing of identification as a reflection, these words help to shape and constrain the energetic quality of the reflection. Then we enter the world limited by this and of course it leads to the repetition of the kind of experiences which have given us this core belief.

Derrida and deconstructing language

So it is very important to deconstruct language. This is not at all different really in the buddhist tradition from what was developed by Jacques Derrida about twenty-five years ago in France. Derrida's notion is that everything that we experience in the world, all our culture, our language, our attitudes and so forth is a construction; just like in buddhist thinking. And he said, *'the main thing is don't try to destroy the construction. You can't break things down. You can't break free of things.'* We have been through the sixties and all its radical politics with people really pushing to try to make something new, and in the end we do the same nonsense as everyone else. If you have ever lived in a commune then you know that people are selfish and stupid and all the rest of it; just as bad as the people who run the big capitalist companies.

But deconstruction means: in the moment of the arising, to recognise its context. In buddhist language we would say: this is to keep an awareness of dependent co-origination, so that as something forms, one is always aware of the matrix in which it forms itself on the relative level. So you can see the historical, political, social, antecedence of any position that

somebody takes up. And at the same time and more importantly from our point of view, from the more infinite point of view, when we recognise that each reflection is held in the mirror and has no existence outside the mirror, then it deconstructs by itself.

Rang drol

In dzogchen this is called self-liberation: *rang drol*. This is very, very important. You don't need to push things away or destroy them. If you stay calm, relaxed and open, everything will resolve itself. Everything passes but usually we don't believe that, or we are in a big hurry to change things and get them the way we want.

Now, in some ways that would be fine if we really knew what we wanted, but we are very fickle, that is to say, we are very uncertain, unstable kind of people, so what we want on Monday, we don't want on Tuesday. We want things before we get them and once we get them we don't want them. So to put one's own desire at the centre is probably going to be too many problems.

Once again the integration of the mirror and the reflection is the key. You can't get rid of reflections, you can't get rid of language, but by integrating it into the open ground then there is the natural spontaneous liberation. In that way we have the experience which is fresh and is not conditioned by the previous moment of experience. Of course conditioning always occurs. If somebody shouts at you, you get upset. If you stay present in the moment of being upset, it is likely to free itself more quickly but you will also need to do something. Reflections are influenced, it is not like trying to become like a stone and say: '*My nature is empty, nothing can touch me - I am Dorje Purbha*'.

To have this *vajra* nature doesn't mean that nothing gets to you. If you have ever encountered any Tibetan lamas, you can see almost everything gets to them; they might be very touchy about what they can eat and what kind of bed they can sleep on and so on. So the *vajra* nature doesn't mean to be like a stone, it means that what is indestructible is the mirror, what is indestructible is the sky and what is moving and changing in that, is unborn.

That is why we say the nature of reality is unborn and unceasing - the mirror is unborn - it never comes into existence - you can't find it as a substance and the thought and feelings which arise and move through this mirror are always changing, they are unceasing. You cannot control the mind, things will always happen and therefore to be responsive, to be engaged in the dance of the world is absolutely part of it; this is what it means by compassion.

In the dzogchen tradition compassion is not trying to do something for someone else. It is to relax into taking one's place in this cosmic movement and through the relaxed attunement to the situation not causing trouble for other people, and being able to make gestures which fit moment-by-moment.

OK so we will take a break now, but in this break what might also be helpful is to observe how you use language and how you identify with things that you encounter. Look at the

relation between the direct experience of the senses and the narrative that is developed through language.

[Break]

Dzogchen

When something confronts us, which appears to be solid and real, we often lose our power. For example: there was a story in the British newspapers about a month ago about a couple who were aged about sixty-five. The man had retired a few years before and they were trying to have just a peaceful life. Both of them had been working hard in their lives and they had a little house but outside in the street was a place where the children played and the children were very rough, always yelling and screaming. This couple had gone out to try to speak to the children, who being 'well educated' modern British children told them to, 'Fuck off!' So the couple killed themselves and they left a little note saying: 'We cannot continue to live with this noise and disturbance. We don't know what to do. We had hoped to have a quite retirement.' That was very sad. A great deal of time in life we encounter things which are too much for us. We don't have the stomach for them; we cannot swallow them and digest them.

The practice of dzogchen is designed to give you a very big stomach (in relation to his stomach James indicates that: 'I have some signs of success' [*laughter*]). Because what is important is to be able to be open to every experience which comes and to find a way of digesting it or integrating it. Whenever we encounter something which functions as a limit, without pushing that away, without running away from it, without trying to seek power over it, without going underneath it, just stay with what is arising.

This is the essential teaching of dzogchen and it is also something which is very common in psychotherapy. Somebody comes with a problem which is limiting their existence and one tries to create a situation in which the patient can just be there with the trouble and gradually find that the problem gets smaller and they get a bit bigger; then they have more confidence.

Now in dzogchen we are not doing this by strengthening the ego but by integrating these three dimensions of existence. So on the manifest level we will hit limits, things will happen to us which we don't like. We maybe go to the doctor for something and they do a few tests and then they say: '*Oh you have cancer, you are going to die*' or '*We have to cut a bit of your body off.*' These things happen to people every day. If something is going to be cut off my body, I have to change my sense of my body because if I continue to have the notion of my body as it was before my operation, then how will I integrate this new experience?

The essence is always to be present in the moment as it comes. As it says again and again in these texts – and you find this everywhere in Tibetan buddhism — '*Don't go after past thoughts, don't go chasing future thoughts.*' Don't get stuck in memories about how things used to be; don't get stuck in dreams about how you want things to be, because these are fantasy realms. The past is a fantasy, it has gone. There is no way to go back into the past.

What happens though is that the past comes into the present and conditions our existence - this is the meaning of karma. So if we can be present and fresh in this moment, karmic impulses will self-liberate and will not condition this moment. And because we are relaxed and centred, we are not leaning forward into the future, anxiously planning. Then spacious and relaxed we respond to the world as it is. As it is, is not always how we want it to be.

When we say everything is Kuntu Zangpo, good, always good, pure from the very beginning, that doesn't mean that it is going to be just perfect as judged by ordinary standards of good versus bad. Rather it points to the fact that for each experience, its ground is pure, its ground is empty and things are good according to where they have come from. This is an old-fashioned idea.

People don't believe it any more but people used to have an idea that if children came from a good family, then they would be good. Like it says in *The Heart Sutra*, when the Buddha is teaching to monks nuns and to the bodhisattva sangha, the question comes from Shariputra: *'If the sons of a noble family, of a good family wanted to practice in this way, what should they do?'* Because the idea is that if you are from a good family, you have been well brought up, you have a good character and so you are an ideal candidate to practice. The idea there is: the origin leads to the fruit. If you plant some barley seeds you won't expect weed to come up. If you plant bad actions the karma that results from that will be difficult and painful. If you plant good actions the karma that results from that will be good and make you happy.

So there is a relationship between the origin and the result. Now in this case, the origin of everything is emptiness. Because emptiness is without defilement it is like the clear open blue sky, there is no fault, limitation or mark inherent in it. And so in our moment-by-moment experience everything is pure and good, in the sense of emptiness. On to that we then bring our various judgments: clearly we like some foods and not others, we taste something and we think: *'This is not very well cooked'* or *'This is not very ripe.'* If I have a cup of tea in Berlin, it tastes different than it does in London. So it is just like that, things are different.

We have discrimination and discrimination is a quality of intelligence; it is a natural intelligence, it is part of our wisdom to know how things are. What we need to do is keep this clean because the next step is usually that we put a judgment on top of it: we think, *'This is different; it is not good. I don't like it this way'* and instead of just being open to the infinite variety of situations and thinking: *'Oh, this is how this is'* how you work with it, something comes from the past in which you want to appropriate the present moment into your existing set of interpretations and then the judgement comes. With the judgement you are immediately distorted and off-balance. Then that off-balance movement means in the next moment you again push into things and you never quite become settled in yourself. So it is very, very important, to investigate your own tendencies. We will all have tendencies.

In the yoga systems of Tibetan buddhism we have the idea that there is a central channel and beside it this solar and lunar channel and spreading out from these many other channels. The basic principle is simply: that as energy moves out of its centred base it becomes charged up with various forces, usually of desire, attachment, interest and

aversion, anger and repulsion. So we go close to some things and away from others; this is the basic discriminatory function that we have. Now, these movements can come back to centre – it is as if you were practicing martial arts – you would be standing with legs apart, knees bent, relaxed, energy in the belly and then you make a move and then you come back to centre. So every time you make a move you come back to the centre.

Balance

There was an interview recently in England with Georgie Best, who used to be the best footballer in the world. He was saying the key thing that makes someone a really good footballer is balance. He says when a good footballer is jumping, if you watch it, it is just like ballet. You can see that they never are off-balance. Even if they are making an incredible turn they are always in balance and have the power coming through their bodies so they can head the ball. Other people leap but they have gone off-balance so they can't then hit the ball. And that is exactly the same principle - never lose your balance.

Whatever occurs is quite specific and then it is gone. The one who seems to experience this is another precise moment of occurrence, and then is gone. The one who experiences all of this is the unborn awareness, unsexuded and unconditioned by any and all arisings.

Balance in dzogchen means always staying integrated in the mirror. This is at the heart of dzogchen practice because this is the way to be fully in an ordinary life, just having all the difficulties and the hopes and fears and allowing yourself to speak about them, to say: 'Oh no! I don't know what I have just done, I have really messed up!' and to hear yourself saying that and to be able to integrate that.

It is not about holding yourself in a correct position because every position is a correct position. Every position is correct. So if you really feel fucked off with something that is also Kuntu Zangpo. The thing is to allow yourself to be fucked off when you are fucked off. If you pretend to be nicer than you are, you will be cooking, you will be adding, you will be editing and that in itself is an action of representation covering representation which takes you very far away from integrating with the state of the mirror.

What is proper behaviour?

Again, it is not to say that judgement is bad. Even if someone is full of judgements and very prejudiced, if they are present in their judgement and prejudiced this would be the proper practice of dzogchen. So there is clearly an ethical issue here: what would be the proper behaviour of someone practicing dzogchen? If you are present in your behaviour this means you are also present in the context. It doesn't mean to be inside yourself looking out - it means to be present in the context. So the existence of the others with whom one is relating, is an equal part of the process.

If the centre of balance shifts out of being 'inside me', into the space in-between (which is what we try to do with this *Aa* practice), the focus of attention is in the middle. The environment is here and we are here as part of the environment. Then how I speak, how I respond, is going to be influenced by the other person. So prejudice and judgement, if one is

present in it, will have to have a function suitable to the context. For example, you might have a prejudice, that children should be in bed by nine o'clock - that is a prejudice – in some families children stay up until midnight. That is your judgment, your style and you might even say: *'It is my house, and in my house you will do what I say.'* So the small person is likely to resist this and ask, *'Why?'* The reason you might give is *'I am bigger than you and you have to go to bed - I am the limit of your world.'* So if in the moment of that you can be present in that, then you are performing a judgemental limiting act on the life of another, integrated into the understanding that this is a drama between two images in the mirror.

Judgement is part of life - you cannot get out of it; because our world is not structured on truth; nobody speaks the truth, truth is an illusion. What we do have is relationship, contact, communication, compassion – but nobody has the book of reality which can be read out to instruct us what to do. The christian bible is full of contradictions; it is used to justify soldiers going and killing people or it can be used to justify disarmament and turning the swords into plough-shears and so on. The same with the koran; the same with buddhist teachings. In the end we have to live in judgement.

The basis of ethics is connection. The basis of ethics is the face to face; where you open yourself to be in relation to someone's face and there they are and they have a living presence. So you are present in the presence of another, which means that some things won't arise – there are some things you just can't do when you are looking at someone else. This is so important. This is why so many prisoners get shot in the back of the head; it is an efficient way to put a bullet in the brain but it also means that you don't have to look in someone's face when you shoot them; it is more easy because you are not shooting 'someone'. It is the same when you are very angry with someone and you are having a go at them: usually you don't see the person, you are caught up in your own angry disturbance and they have just become an object. So ethics here is not written from a book of rules but arises in interpersonal dynamics.

OK so we will do the three *Aa* practice again. And this time after we are relaxed, just from this state of relaxation and openness, observe without examining - but just observe how thoughts arise and pass, where they come from, where they stay and where they go.

[Practice of three *Aa* 's]

Discussion

Perhaps now would be a good idea to get into small groups and try to describe your experience of the arising and passing of thoughts.

James: any thoughts or reflections on that?

Student: In our group we had difficulty in trying to pinpoint the moment where a thought actually really arises, what is actually the starting point. We had the feeling that we were just not clear in our heads and one of us had the idea of doing some prostrations beforehand to clear out the head.

James: Maybe - if you like prostrations. But the key thing, when the mind is a bit foggy or thoughts are coming fast, just to remain very relaxed. You can shift your state by doing something else like prostrations or having a cold shower, to get a bit more focused - but essentially thoughts are coming all the time. We become close to them because of our attachment and that is what makes it very difficult to observe.

From the point of view of dzogchen, do the three *Aa*'s again and again. Relax into the out-breath and just observe - but do the observation for a short period of time. At first don't do it for more than about five minutes because you become very tired - it is a very strange thing to be doing. It is much better to do it clearly for five minutes and then have a break, do something else and then come back rather than to try to extend it for a long period of time.

Student: We actually found that meditating with open eyes brings some kind of phenomenon with it - sometimes our eyes would kind of like fool you. I kind of had a white fog coming up, actually devouring everything, so that everything vanished in that. I found that so interesting I was completely distracted by that.

James: Many of these kinds of experiences happen in meditation. People see all sorts of things, or hear different things; sometimes people hear music, you can get visions, you can get vision of Zangdopalri as well - you can get visions of anything. The key thing is to just stay with that experience and it will pass and to observe how you become interested in it - because that fascination is the basis of attachment. So it is a very good point to examine attachment in motion.

In school physics we learned that if you push something like a wall, the wall will be exerting an equal and opposite pressure - otherwise it would fall over. So there is a resistance; in fact when we push a wall, we put the energy of our body into the wall. And it is the same when a thought arises in the mind and we give it attention, we make the thought stronger. So then you have the sense that the thought or the sensation, or the image is continuing through time - but we are actually doing that, like blowing up a balloon - we are pumping energy into it. If we sit more calmly without this tilt towards it, the thought or the experience, or the image stays quite small and seems to vanish more quickly. So the more we look, the more real the thing seems to be - so then we look even more. But what we don't realise is that it is we who are making the thing real. So we project our energy into the object and then it seems to be very alive.

Student: But James if it is nice music and if it is nice visions, why should we stop it?

James: Well it depends on what you are trying to do. If your television has broken, why not enjoy the music? But if you are trying to look at where thoughts come from and where they end, then it is not so useful. Why? Because the quality of the pleasure and enjoyment will very often lead into an attachment onto the object - so the mind is now resting on something rather than being present with it. As soon as we rest on it, we reaffirm the sense that our mind needs something to rest on, which reaffirms I am heavy and I need supports.

James: When I was in Shantiniketan in India with C R Lama, there was a man there at the time who used to like reading the books of Charles Luk. In one of these books there was a

picture of an old Chinese master. The man had the experience that if he looked at this picture, later he'd be reading another book and would see this picture. We asked Rinpoche: 'What does this mean?' and Rinpoche would say: 'It means nothing at all'. The teaching from Patrul Rinpoche in his *Tsik sum nae deg* ('Essential teaching in three words') is that the yogi develops his meditation by destroying his meditation. So if you get visions the best thing to do is ...Cut!

Student: We had an interesting discussion, on the idea of this practice because I felt a bit confused about the actual exercise. The question, 'Where do my thoughts come from?' is still a thought, so I had the feeling that this method would drive me crazy if I continued with it. If I have the concept not to be attached to my visions, then this is also a concept. You said there is no truth - that truth is an illusion and any concept you make belongs to phenomena and becomes a phenomenon in itself. The dharma is also a concept. Then the fish are better off than us because they have no concepts.

James: That may well be true. It says in many dzogchen texts that really there is only *Aa*. The whole universe is just *Aa* and that all these constructions and things that we have, which we think that are important or not important, they just vanish. If you go to Iraq you see the ruins of Babylon or you go to Iran and you can see huge stone carvings, or in Egypt the pyramids and you think, human beings have made all these things. Day by day we also build pyramids in our head, which rapidly become ruined fragments.

So thought construction is both necessary and useless. It is useless in the sense that it never creates anything permanent, but it is necessary because it is the natural creativity of our mind. The specific thing about the method is that from the relaxed space (say, when doing the three *Aa*'s), we observe the thoughts coming and going, but we are not moving, we are still. Like someone sitting resting on a park bench watching people coming and going. The stillness of the mind, which is radiant, which is shining, which illuminates what is going on, is like the surface of the mirror, an infinite mirror without top or bottom, front or back. This mirror is the inseparability of openness, space and awareness. All that we usually take ourselves to be is the ceaseless movement of reflections. This level of manifestation cannot work out the nature of its own ground, or even its own nature. For if a reflection tries to observe where another reflection is coming from, it turns around and around and vanishes up its own arse.

[Break for lunch]

Resume of key points

So I will just run over the key principles that we have done so far. The main point in beginning dzogchen is to recognise one's own nature. This nature is something, which is already there. We don't have to make it or get it from someplace else. However our relationship with that nature is not clear. We have become attached to the lack of clarity, to the confusion and created out of it our separate sense of self. There are many things in the practice which can help us here. Firstly is observing one's own external existence: are you kind to yourself? Do you eat properly? Do you get enough sleep? Do you wear reasonable clothes? Do you have social support? Do you have a place in the world? These are all

things, which influence our state. Many people who come into buddhism have led somewhat disorganised lives and have been a bit on the margins of society. That has advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is that you get many different kinds of experience but along with that there may also come a particular anxiety. Having a more secure social situation can be quite useful for practising dharma. It is one thing if you really want to be a yogi and renounce ordinary life and live under a tree, but most people don't want to do that.

On a daily level, look at how you spend your time: Do you get caught up in activities you don't want to do? That is probably not very helpful. Later when you have more capacity you can integrate more disturbance but at first it helps to make life a little bit simple - as much as you can. You may decide to stop reading a newspaper for example, or stop listening to the news, or not watch so much television, or not drink so much, or not fight with your partner so much. Many simple decisions can be made which can clear a bit of space.

And again the central point in dzogchen is ourselves. So there are many dharma activities, which are 'good' things to do, but they may not be good for you. So the first thing is to see what is your condition and then you think whether participating in dharma activities is good or not. Only you can decide that. Now clearly we all have ignorance and confusion and the five poisons, so the decisions that we make will be influenced by this. But somebody else's decision about what you should do is also influenced by something, so maybe it is better to make your own decision because you will have to live with the consequences of your decision. If somebody says you should give up your job and go and live in India that is fine but will they feed you when you are in India? And if you have to come back to Germany will they give you a deposit for a flat? If not, then you have to think what you are doing. You have the consequence of your action.

Then the next thing is to study dharma text. Studying dharma texts also can create confusion: there are many different ways of translating technical terms, there are many different viewpoints... You can have discussions with other people and try to find some basic understanding. Sometimes you will get more confused but basically I think if you rub your mind together with other people's minds, people who are also trying hard to understand something, you can get some clarity. And then we use the dharma concepts to start to investigate our own situation: looking externally at impermanence in the world, looking at impermanence in our own body, looking then more subtly at impermanence in our thoughts and feelings - this is all very important. Happiness will become sadness; sadness will become happiness. So the more we see that – when we go from happiness to sadness – we don't need to be so alarmed. And when we go from sadness to happiness we don't need to be so excited. It just will turn. This is how we start to get more balance in our life.

When we feel anxious it is important to be kind to ourselves, relax, be calm, speak nice words and do practice. Do things which bring us back to our centre. Big puja practices are not wrong or bad but for many people when they do these practices, they lose themselves. They learn these eight forms of Padmasambhava, and they learn all the different kinds of *phurba* and they learn all about these mandalas of peaceful and wrathful deities and then they learn many Sanskrit words and then they learn many Tibetan words and then they have all of this. But who are you? Who is doing all of this and why are you doing it? The same

way as ego and narcissism can develop through studying worldly things, they can also be developed through studying the dharma. So it is very important to focus on recognising your own nature. Do the three Aa 's, relax and when you find that you are having difficulty relaxing - then review your life.

It is amazing that we can't relax; this is quite, quite tragic. Whatever disturbs us, we have to try to understand its nature. Part of that is to examine it in terms of impermanence and emptiness. If you don't know what impermanence is then the books can give you some good ideas. And if you don't understand the term emptiness, many texts can give you understanding and there are many lamas around who can explain the madhyamika view of emptiness.

You can also do it by one very simple exercise: take a plastic pen and unscrew it. You have the top part and the bottom part and a little spring and a little tube of ink and you put these four things out. Then you have something there. And then you put them back in together again and you make the pen. And then you unscrew it and you put it out. And then you put it together again. And you keep looking how when there are four parts, there is not a pen and when the four parts are put together, there is a pen. So what is the pen-ness of the pen? Where does that fifth element: the pen, the gestalt, the fixed clear, seemingly self-existing form come together? Keep looking and looking and looking until you see as this text says: *'it is just a name put by mind.'* We have parts functioning together and out of that we create the sense of a fifth element, an extra element. I

It is the same with the analysis of the body: in the traditional schema we have five skandhas. When these five skandhas, these five aspects of our being come together, we become ourselves; but this sense of being *me* is added on top of these five skandhas. If we start to take the parts of ourselves out and lay them, we don't have that 'self'. So 'self' is a kind of mystery or illusion an over-invested signifier, which stitches compounds together, and gives them the sense that they are innate organic entities. This is very, very important to investigate. And you can do this all the time.

If you are waiting at the bus stop, then you can look at a parked car and you can see how it has wheels and it has a top. And you can imagine the factory where they make the car and how all the pieces were put together and at the end it became a car. And if you took all the pieces out and laid them on the ground, there wouldn't be a car. You can do that again and again. You can watch where they are building houses and you see how a house is constructed; you see the steps of it with the scaffolding and then after some months you see it is all brightly painted and people are moving in. They are moving into an empty space and after a week they say: *'Oh this is my home, welcome to my home'*.

If you keep observing that whole construction you start to see this illusory game in which we add the missing element and this missing element can be both a joyous game because it is the wonderful richness of creativity to be able to invent the world; but when we grasp at it and see it as self-existing, then it steals our awareness because we start to rest on entities which do not exist in reality.

So this is the basis of the general buddhist view and we use this to support the relaxation through the three *Aa* 's. Into that you can add all the other ideas from the rest of this text. Where do thoughts come from? Where do they rest? Where do they go? Then look at the mind itself. Where does your mind come from? Where does your mind rest? Where does it go? Particularly what does your mind rest on?

So you do the three *Aa* practice and then you sit and you look for your mind. And whenever you come to a solution, examine that solution or write it down on a piece of paper. Return to it again and again. See if you can actually find something your mind is resting on. For example, you might think my mind is a production of my brain. I have read about this, I have seen these beautiful photographs of all this electrical activity in my brain. Scientists are showing that the brain is very wonderful, so I have a brain and my brain produces thoughts and these thoughts produce the sense that I exist. So I am created out of electrical activity in my brain. Who is thinking that? That is a whole series of thoughts, who is the thinker of that thought? Is your brain thinking that thought? You have to investigate this because you have to be able to get to the point where the thoughts, the stories, the possibilities stop. Get to the point where you see directly- you experience directly.

This is the beginning of dzogchen practice; nobody can do it for you. We could bring Karmapa here in a helicopter and he could have a golden throne descending from a helicopter. He could fly over this town of Berlin with a big loudspeaker: 'This is the nature of your mind, people of Berlin!' But only you can discover your nature. It is *your* nature, nobody can give it to you and nobody can take it from you. So we all need to get some help in teaching and instruction but the main work is for you.

Introduction of practice of 'Phat!'

The practices we have been doing until now are about subtle attunement but sometimes we don't feel so subtle. So there is another practice which is used in many ways, but it is using this syllable of 'Phat!' to create a disturbance or a disjunction within the flow of continuity of thoughts.

This is not a good practice to do if you are feeling a bit mentally disturbed. If you feel agitated and mentally disturbed unless you are strong in your meditation at the same time, it is always better to do calming sweet practices. But if you're basically not feeling too upset and you don't have a tendency towards psychotic illness, then this practice is very simple.

You can start directly, or start with the three *Aa* 's. When you are sitting and find many thoughts arising and taking you over and you can't stop yourself from somehow being caught up in them, you just release from the belly, as if it is coming up right up through your body and out through the top of your head, this sound 'Phat!'. One is using it to disrupt, to break the connection between subject and object, between the one who is having the thought and the thought. So you should feel disturbed when you do it. You should get shocked. Patrul Rinpoche, in his text on Garab Dorje's *Three Statements* uses the word *hedewa* to describe it. *Hedewa* means confused, disorientated; losing the sense of who you are. In that moment of losing that sense of who you are, the self-referential continuity of your own identity, you can recognise your own nature.

So first of all we just try making the noise all together.

Practice of sound Phat!

Watch that you don't make the sound from your upper chest. This is bad for the throat and will interrupt the breathing. You want to just be very relaxed, with the belly relaxed and then let the full force of the breath come up. When you do that you should feel the tension in the diaphragm and then it becomes empty. So it should be: muscles all very relaxed and then coming straight out.

OK so we start with the three *Aa* and in your own time, you go into that. Sometimes when people do this in a group they get a little nervous and they laugh. So if you get distracted, stay completely in the practice and just keep doing this 'Phat!' strong and deep again and again and again and you will calm. Don't get carried away - you must learn to control the energy of your own existence.

[Practice of 'Phat!']

You may have seen a picture of the famous statue of Padma Sambhava of which he said, '*It looks like me*'. He is depicted with energised vibrant expression as if energy is pouring out of him. That is the kind of feeling you should have when you do this 'Phat!' Because the sound, the energy should come out through the top of your head and you should feel just completely open – a presence devoid of content.

When we can integrate thoughts they reveal themselves as this blissful energetic wave arising without cease from the dharmadatu. But when we cannot integrate our thoughts, they are our enemy and they will capture us and keep us revolving in samsara for a very long time. So until you are able to integrate your thoughts you should be very careful of them and 'Phat!' is a way of cutting being captured by the thought.

If you want to be arrested, do this at any time and in any place. However generally speaking you should do it in a place where it is reasonable behaviour. You don't necessarily have to go outside. You can just imagine situations that bring terror to you. In Tibet people would go into cemeteries but you can buy a terrifying video and put it on, or you can watch the news. Watch the face of Mr Bush our world president – if you reflect on his intelligence and his compassion and then you do some 'Phat!'

OK, so take a few minutes now and just reflect particularly on the practices that we have done in the last two days and see that you are very clear about how we are doing them. Also why we are doing them, but particularly how we are doing them. Then we will see if there are particular precise questions to clarify that before we move to the end.

Questions about the practices

Student: About the three modes - you have the openness on one hand, the moment of precise manifestation on the other hand— but what does this factor or mode of radiation actually stand for? Where is it actually seated, between the two or in the two?

James: OK. If you like, it is like the voice. The mind is like the openness, the voice is like the radiance and the body is like the precise manifestation. So radiance is the creative potentiality, which has many, many possibilities before it comes into the moment. Moment-by-moment the world is forming but it could take many different paths. For example, if you go in the morning to look at what clothes you will wear, you will maybe not just have one jacket, but maybe you will have three jackets. So there is a potential, and then we choose one. So when we sit in the meditation, all the thoughts and feelings and sensations which arise, we say is the level of clarity, or the level of radiance. What is a thought is actually the energetic uprising of this ground openness of the mind. When we see it as a thought it appears to be a particular thing: *'I have this thought'* but when we really observe it, we feel this radiant emergent, energetic quality of it and that is the domain of radiance.

Student: Before the break you were talking about anger, anger coming up and that it is a different situation if you actually see someone face to face or not. If you would not see somebody face to face, that this anger would simply subside by itself. But what can I do if I feel very exhausted? I feel some feelings like hatred and anger come up even though a certain person may not be there. Maybe for instance when I am driving my car, what can I do to transform this to clear my mind again of this anger and not be attached to it, or caught by it?

James: There are various methods but the essential one in dzogchen is if the anger arises as you, that is to say if *'I am angry'*, that is very different from knowing that I am angry and it is also very different from being present with the anger.

So the key practice that we have to do, and we can use the three *Aa* for this, is whenever we get caught up in a thought, to relax from it but relax close to it. We are not frightened and pulling away, not trying to get rid of it, not being merged in it but just being close to it. It is easier to do that at first with simple sensations but gradually you can build that up with anger, so you can be angry but not be disturbed by it.

In Tibetan they use the example of making butter in a churn. Very often a hair would fall into the butter and then you have to pull the hair out of the butter. You have to be very careful because if you pull too hard the hair breaks. If you try too softly, then your fingers get covered in butter and they just slip along the hair. So you have to get just the right pressure and just the right tension. This is the key thing.

Similarly you can't push the thought away but just step back out of it. You can practice this. For example, put a video you like on the television and watch it and then every now and then just remember on the out-breath to bring some space into this video. When you are caught up in the video, you breathe out and you bring a little space - you are still with the story but not in it so much. Just by practicing that you come to see how, without turning away, you can find this space close to experience. Televisions are very useful for this.

It is attachment to situations which generates anger. The root of all the five poisons is attachment to the notions of separate entities and the best way to deal with this is to integrate whatever arises into a state of openness. And I have already described many ways for entering into this state of openness.

OK, so we have just about come to the end of our time here. Dharma is like an ocean, there are always many, many more things to explore but human life is short so hopefully something useful has been explored here.

We can end by doing again this three *Aa* practice. As we did yesterday just let your awareness expand, to increase, to include the whole of Berlin, Germany, Europe and the whole universe.

Three Aa practice

[End]