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# *Garab Dorje's Three Points*

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## Excerpts

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*Clothes show themselves when you put them on. If some dress is just folded in a drawer, you don't know what it's like, you have to hold it up, and even then you don't know what it's like because you still have to put it on. It's only when you put on the clothing that it reveals itself. In the same way subject and object are revealed through the body of the mind. This body of the mind is the dharmadhatu – infinite awareness.*



*I was watching a little video for children about an elephant who wanted to fly. The elephant couldn't fly, but some friends managed to get him up a tree, and then a friendly cloud came and floated underneath. The elephant jumped from the tree onto the cloud and he fell right through it! In the same way, emptiness is like a cloud and we are like elephants. Until we become very light, we will keep falling through. We won't be able to stay in emptiness because we are too solid.*



*Finding your mind is not an intellectual enquiry but is a case of actually looking, as if you were a bird watcher who had heard that there was some rare bird in the forest. He would go into the forest, find the likely place and just wait. He has an idea that the bird is there but he can't run around with crumbs in his hand saying, 'Come on, birdie, birdie...' In the same way you cannot find your mind by very actively looking. You have to wait for the mind to show itself. Whenever some answer arises to the question, 'Where is my mind?' stay with that answer. Let the answer be there, and see what happens.*



*This tumbling experience of being ourselves, arises in relation to the environment. The more we open in a fresh way with the environment, the less stable we will become. This is at the heart of the dzogchen teaching: you cannot control your self-identity. Because our self is part of the world, it will change as the world changes.*



*If you go to the barber, the barber will hold a mirror behind your head. When you look in the mirror in front of you, you see your reflection in the mirror behind you and in that way you see what they have done to the back of your hair. Without the mirror you wouldn't see; a mirror helps you to see things you couldn't otherwise. The teacher in the state of the transmission is like a mirror and by looking into it hopefully we can see something more of ourselves. It's not that the teacher is teaching you about yourself, but it's about trying to recognise yourself.*



*Dust will form on a mirror. The mirror is only a metaphor; it is just an image. The space-like unborn nature of the mind offers no basis for dust to adhere to. This means, especially when you sit in meditation and a thought seems to stick to you – what is it sticking to?*



*If you believe samsara and nirvana are different – if you believe that in samsara things are very bad and in nirvana things are very good – then you have two factories. One that makes samsara and one that makes nirvana, and the things in nirvana are all very nice and shiny. This is not the case from the point of view of dzogchen, where they say there is one ground – one factory – and it makes both samsara and nirvana.*



*Rather than changing the object, whether it's good or bad, what we're doing is loosening the bond of identification and attachment*

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## Staying close to the flow of experience

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We have some time now to look at the principles of dzogchen and learn practices to help us realise this in our own lives. The key thing is that we are supportive and friendly to ourselves in the process of doing this. It's not about formality; it's about being able to attend to the process of your own existence. The basic principle is to collaborate with yourself, that is to say, each of us experiences ourselves in at least two ways: one as a quality of awareness; the other as the things which **are** happening for us, as us.

For example, you might be a bit tired, be a bit shy, have a headache or feel hungry... These experiences as they arise, constitute – make up – the momentary form of yourself. We are always in the process of becoming the various things which we are, how we manifest in the world. Our openness or our awareness and the **content** of our experience are two aspects which we can't really separate. So, rather than trying to protect the openness or clarity by controlling the flow of experience, we want to really stay close to the flow of experience without judging it and just allowing ourselves to experience it.

If we're tired we can just be tired, but that involves not collapsing into tiredness, but staying present with tiredness so that you come to recognise what it is. In the same way you might be anxious, you might be depressed, you might be happy. However your body is, however your feelings are, whatever thoughts arise – don't stop them or try to correct them, just stay very close. Being aware of the process that something arises, you come into an identification with it, and in that identification it is as if you **are** what is arising: I **am** tired. In that moment you are just tired, you don't really have any room to manoeuvre. You can force yourself to not be tired, to try to push the tiredness away, but that doesn't really take you very far. Rather, we can just be tired but be present with the tiredness and see what it is.

If we do that, we start to realise that what appears to be a fixed state, is a process. This is the central teaching of the Buddha: there is no inherent self-nature, there is no fixed identity in anything that we experience. Everything is impermanent – arising and passing. Every aspect of our own experience is arising and passing, and when we stay close to that – that which is arising and passing, and that which is **not** changing – then these two aspects become supportive of each other.

The more you attend to the movement, the more you find you are still. The more you are still, the more you can attend to the movement. This is the real collaboration that we seek because due to ignorance and forgetfulness, our relationship with our own true nature, our own stillness, has been forgotten. We tend to be very turned towards movement; turned towards identification with whatever is arising.

When we do meditation and we try to focus our mind in a calm way, we find ourselves becoming distracted. We find ourselves fusing into – becoming one with – the momentary experience because we have nowhere else to be: ...because if I'm not this, then I'm not that.... If I'm not happy, then I'm sad.... If I'm not fresh, then I'm tired.... If I'm not hungry, then I'm full.... We just go from one fused state to another fused state, to another, to another. This is the flow of identity as experienced in samsara.

In all the buddhist traditions, but particularly in dzogchen, we are trying to recognise the ground **from** which and **within** which these moments of experience are manifesting and displaying

themselves. When we can do this more clearly then we have a lot of freedom because when we are attached to or caught up in particular states of experience, it's very difficult to feel comfortable.

From our childhood and because of the dimension we live in – samsara—we have ideas about how we should be. How we are and how we think we should be, are often not the same at all. We think we should be doing better, we should be trying harder, we should have more energy, we should have more clarity... We think when we sit to meditate our mind should not move, but our mind **is** moving, so there must be something wrong with us! When something is wrong you try to fix it; you try to make it better. So then I want to act on myself to make me the kind of person I 'should' be. That's very difficult, because even if you are a 'good' person, you will be a 'good' person for a while but then some shit will arise. You'll be jealous, or angry, or bored or something will happen, and you'll think, *'Oh no, I've lost myself again,'* because the one who I 'should' be is very nice, very proper, very reliable, but actually none of us are like that.

This tumbling experience of being ourselves arises in relation to the environment. The more we open in a fresh way with the environment, the less stable we will become. This is at the heart of the dzogchen teaching: you cannot control your self-identity.

Because our self is part of the world, it will change as the world changes. You might be feeling in quite a good mood in the morning. In order to get here you might have driven your car, and experienced that some of the other car drivers are not very good at driving cars, and you find yourself in an agitated state. You feel unsafe in the world; you'd like your world to be different. That's a big problem. Or is it a problem? Maybe it's just a fact that because we are in the world, how we manifest as ourselves is necessarily going to shift with the world around us. If we have tried to stabilise our sense of self – keep it good, keep it wholesome and keep it safe – we will not be able to do that.

Thinking, *'I can control myself'* is a sort of primordial fault of samsara, yet there are many systems of meditation which **do** focus on self-control because if you want to live in the world with other people, how they are will influence you, unless you completely dissociate from them or ignore how they are. To open yourself, to connect with someone else, means they will impact and shift you. We are not in control of ourselves. That doesn't mean that we are out of control. *It means that the centre or the ground of our existence, is something which can't be held in place but has to find itself, moment by moment, through the quality of awareness or presence that we have within the shifting flow of experience.*

All of this we'll explore in some detail looking at the principles set out by the great teacher of dzogchen, Garab Dorje.

### Pure from the very beginning

Dzogchen stands in a particular relationship to general buddhist practice, because it is particularly highlighting the fact that if our nature was not pure from the very beginning, it wouldn't be possible to purify it. Things which are impure are very difficult to purify, because the very process of purification will change the structure of what you are trying to purify.

For example, say you buy a nice new silk shirt, which looks very nice on you so you wear it to a big party. Then someone spills wine on it so now you have to take this stain out of the silk. By this time

the cloth is not as fresh. It looks clean, but the texture of the cloth has been altered by the method that you use to purify it. This is what happens in life.

When you act on yourself you have the intention, *'I have to be other than I am.'* This is an attitude of mastery. This is an attitude where I have some expertise, a privileged knowledge. Maybe I have been studying some buddhist books, so now I think I know what's what. Maybe I think what I have to do now is 'to realise my Buddha nature' which is a very good thing somewhere inside me but covered over by bad things. So I now have to discriminate. I have to take the 'bad' thing off the 'good' thing so that once the 'good' thing is free I will be happy. I do this, I take the 'bad' thing off and I look for a dustbin. Where will I put this 'bad' thing? I will put it somewhere outside, so now it is out in the world, but I am now a pure person who is living in a shitty world. This is why, in the logic of the theravadin system, when the Buddha got enlightened, he vanished; he went somewhere else.

The problem with this is that when you try to separate the good from the bad, you make your world small. You constantly have to keep pushing the bad things away, because the 'good' is quite fragile, and that very process brings with it an anxiety and tension.

It is natural to feel anxious in the face of things we may not want, or be happy with. We are not feeling the way we would like to feel. I can try to change the object, and say, *'What is arising in my mind is disturbing me. If I change the content of my mind, I will be happy.'* Let's say I have some new shoes and they are hurting my feet. I can take these shoes off and put on my old comfortable shoes. Now it feels better and I can walk more easily. This is what we normally do—we try to change the object. But from the point of view of dzogchen this is a way to simply enjoy a 'superior' samsara – a more 'refined' samsara, an 'aristocratic' samsara.

Instead, what we have to understand is who is the one who experiences the persecution of bad thoughts, and the elation of good thoughts? Experiences have an experiencer: who is that experiencer? Who is the one who, moment by moment, is being present as the one impacted? This is easy to talk about but very difficult to do.

The experiencer has two aspects: he has the aspect of being formed, of being turned towards the object. For example, if we go to a café for a cup of tea, nowadays they offer many different kinds of tea. The subject will look at the list and think, *'Oh I want this one.'* That subject is already formed; our identity as a subject self is not fresh, is not open; it is already wedded to assumptions, habits, particular patterns of sensation, and so we find ourselves making choices. How then can I free myself from myself? What has to happen? Again, we might think, *'Oh I have to stop having any kind of judgement at all; I can't have any assumption.'* But then life would be impossible.

The problem is the mis-recognition of the status of the self. The question of the self is a central one for buddhism. Who I am is multi-layered and has many different aspects. The quality of habit—of assumption and of karma, of patterns coming from previous lifetimes, of psychological patterns developed in childhood—all of these come together as a composite which I fuse with and identify with. We say, *'I like this kind of tea best.'* and in the moment we say that it feels completely real and true: *'I know myself, I know what I like and I know what I don't like.'*

So without destroying this self, we need to know that it is no more real than the tea bag. We put the tea bag in the water, we leave it there for some time then we take it out and we throw it away. We don't take the tea bag, dry it out and make a little necklace. We might do that if we were three years old, but not at our age. We say that the moment for the use of the tea bag is over.

Every aspect of your self also has a moment: the moment of wanting a cup of tea arises when you're thirsty. When you're no longer thirsty, your self is no longer turning around the question of which kind of tea will I have?

This is the other aspect, the aspect of the 'self' as content: 'self' as the experience of something which appears to be me, is both very close to us and always falling away from us. In this very moment I am like this, and one moment later I am somebody else. I am breathing in. If you really attend to breathing in, it has a particular quality, but you can't do that for ever, you have to breathe out. When you breathe out, if you are present in your breath, it's a completely different experience. The 'me' who is breathing in, and the 'me' who is breathing out are very different.

It is because we don't live in our existence—we live in narratives, in stories, in abstracted fantasies about who we are, telling ourselves who we are rather than observing ourselves – that we are able to maintain a fixed notion that we are one thing. The heart of the meditation which we will be doing, is observing how we construct the illusion of stability out of factors which are always changing. Relying on this illusion of stability, we attend to the world to seek evidence, to seek confirmation, that this story we have constructed is indeed actually the case.

In this way, we lie to ourselves and we cheat ourselves because the story is a cover up. When we attend to what is actually there it's something much more marvellous, something fresh and open and much more available to be in contact with other people, since there is no fixed position to protect or defend. Therefore other people are not the enemy, other people are aspects of our experience, just as we are aspects of our experience.

### How we are depends on the context

When I'm in London, travelling to work on the underground, I don't go up to fellow passengers and talk like this. I don't say, *'Friends, let me bring you the good news of the buddha dharma!'* Why? Because there is no context to do that. Here we meet together with the purpose of understanding something and so I talk in this way; in another time I talk in another way. That is to say, how we are, how we come together, how the various aspects of our lives reveal themselves depends on the context. We are contextual; we manifest in situations.

In traditional buddhism this is called dependent co-origination: we arise in conjunction, in relationship with many factors in the field. When we realise this, what we call 'ourselves' clearly cannot be something deep inside us – it cannot be some source out of which somehow everything flows – because the other people also co-create us. *How you are, will influence how I am.* The centre of my existence is not private, it is not personal, it is not a possession. The centre of my existence is in the field of how I am with other people.

The phone rings, you pick it up and it's a friend and you find yourself laughing. You're laughing because of what they told you; you didn't have an intention to laugh before the phone rang. The phone rings again and this time it is somebody you don't like so much so you're probably not going to be laughing. You might want to laugh; you might still be in contact with the happiness of the conversation with the first person but immediately you hear the second person's voice you become somebody else. You have been determined by the other. So who are you? Somebody very weak and fragile? Somebody who needs to develop a little bit more will power? Somebody who needs to study Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, to find some strength and deep courage? Somebody who listens to

In dzogchen we seek to directly experience the quality of awareness. This allows us to relax our identification with particular patterns of manifestation, that is to say, to relax the judgment that says, *'I want to be like this, I don't want to be like that'*. We become more tolerant to ourselves – more inclusive and welcoming to ourselves—and therefore more inclusive and welcoming to other people. When we realise how intense emotions arise in ourselves and then pass, we start to see that they arise and pass in other people too. The focus of a lot of the meditation is to move from judgment to interest, to openness, to curiosity; to be willing to keep looking at something you don't like.

Usually the feeling tone that we have in relation to an experience becomes the doorkeeper as to whether we allow the experience in or not. If it's a good experience, if it makes us happy, we say, *'Welcome, stay with me forever.'* If it's not a nice experience, we say, *'Out! Go away! I don't want this.'* This means that a prejudice – a judgement in advance: *'I know what I like, I know what I can cope with, I know what I can tolerate.'*—becomes a 'seeming' defender. It seems to be protecting me from things which are unpleasant but actually it is the prison keeper. It is the jailer of our own existence. Every time we act to protect what we know about ourselves, we keep ourselves as ourselves, but of course we can't do that in the long run.

If we are lucky enough to live for a long time, we may experience dementia. Our bodies will certainly start to fall apart, our hearing and our eyesight will go. This is what happens when you get old; the power of youth starts to vanish. Who you thought you were when you were young and healthy will not be something that you can find. You can go into a box and take out the old photographs and say, *'Ah, yes, when I was twenty, I used to do this and that,'* but you won't jump out of the photo. The photo refers to somebody who is dead; you are still alive but you are not alive as the one who was twenty.

### We believe the story rather than attending to the reality

Nobody can stabilise themselves; this is the ultimate illusion. This is why the basic teaching of buddhism in all the different schools is impermanence. Impermanence is the great gateway to understanding. When we experience the impermanence of our own mind—that moment by moment experience is arising and passing ... arising and passing ...—then the stories that we tell ourselves about who we are, are understood as just another thing which arises and passes. We might think that we are healthy and then we get sick. We might think, *'Yes, but generally I'm healthy, I just happen to be sick at the moment.'* In that moment we say that my story about myself is actually more important than my actual lived experience, because I am trying to **maintain** some story which is, who I really am. But where does this story exist? In the moment when you are sick, your belief that you are basically healthy doesn't do you any good because you are **actually** sick, that is to say, as enacted, as manifesting in the world. Time and again we believe the story about our life rather than attending to the reality.

In my work as a therapist, I am often confronted with patients who believe strong fixed things about themselves. They may believe they are unlovable, or they might believe that they are very brilliant and very talented. They may believe that they have some special mission in life, or that they have no place in the world. When we talk about how they **actually** are, and the fact that even though they may hate themselves, they have some friends and the friends seem to like them, they will say:

*Yes, but I know who I am. If these people really knew who I am, they wouldn't like me.*

*Oh I see, so your friends are stupid people?*

Yes.

They have to believe that in order to maintain the belief: *'I know I'm shit, don't you try and tell me I'm different.'*

This neurotic structure is not different from the basic structure of samsara, which is that we hold a belief: 'I' exist. I, me, myself, I James, whoever we are. 'I' am this person, I know who 'I' am. I know what 'I' have to do. This is who 'I' am. This is a belief. When we actually attend to the nature and process of our existence it's very different. Do we want to live in existence as a story? Or do we want to live in an existence which is fresh experience?

One advantage living as a story is that you can tell the same story again and again. As you tell it, it may get further and further from the truth but still feel very comfortable. If you stay with experience – because experience is fresh and changing all the time – it will not be so comforting, but it will be alive.

This is the basic choice between samsara and nirvana. 'Buddha' has the notion of awakening. Bodhi is the idea of enlightenment; it means light coming in. Light comes in, in the morning. You waken up when there is more light and you see things, and then when it gets dark you fall asleep. We fall asleep into our assumptions. When the light goes on and we see how things are, we don't have assumptions to rest on; what we have is this incredibly vibrant, interesting, fascinating but changing experience.

The key issue here is, can I stay open and fresh with the freshness of experience? One of the main blocks to that is the energetic feeling of heaviness. We often experience ourselves as a bit dull, a bit solid, and from that situation which can often also feel empty, we feel needy, we want something. We want something to fill us up, or something to take away the pain. Essentially, we are looking for comfort. This is again one of the great doorkeepers of samsara because as long as we looking for comfort we will go to something familiar. What is familiar? *Stories are familiar. Experience is fresh.*

When a thought arises in our mind we can rest on that thought; the thought is maybe quite interesting, telling us something about our life. We have some plans to prepare, or we go over some event that has just happened; we start to move around inside it. We know how to do that, we've been doing it for a very long time. If we stop relying on the thought, what will we rely on? Anyway, why do we need to rely on something? Because we feel heavy and we feel a need.

This is why in buddhism we usually begin our practice with refuge, because refuge is there to give us something to rely on which is different from relying on our attachment to habitual thoughts. When you rely on a thought, it gives you the sense that it is supporting you while at the same moment it's also giving you the sense that if you didn't have it you would fall down and you would feel needy: *'Oh, give me something to rest on; I need something to be busy with.'*

Many, many people are busy all the time, they can't sit still. They say, *'Oh, I'll just make a cup of coffee. Do you want some? I'll do that for you.'* This is because they need very quick little things to rest on and when they are not resting on anything they feel very disturbed and upset. Many people are like that, nowadays many children are like. They have this attention deficit disorder, this hyperactivity disorder, where the child is constantly needing some stimulus. Of course many adults are also like that. Mobile phones make people terribly urgent; they need to text someone, they need to get a response very quickly.

In the meditation thoughts arise and they are very tempting, they are like a comfortable chair. If you 'sit' in that thought it gives you a little comfort and takes you on a nice journey and then you 'get off' that thought. It's very nice here, it's a very efficient bus service, so you sit on that thought and it takes you on another little journey. You spend all day travelling around and you think this is wonderful meditation: I haven't thought about these things for a long time.... If we don't get on the bus, then where are we?

This is why it is important for us to attend to ourselves as an energy system, because the arousal of the body with the disturbances of the breath, lead us to be impulsive towards the object. It is not just that there is mind and the object; there is mind, energy and object. The energy is the connecting function and if our energy is disturbed, it's difficult to just relax. If you see a small child and it's very upset it has to have its teddy or suck its thumb because it needs that one thing which will stabilise it; it's an absolute 'lock-on' to the object. This is the quality of disturbed energy.

Generally, dzogchen is a system taught by buddhas as a way of helping us to be at home in our own nature and awaken from the dreams of illusions about who we are. It's about relaxing into that which has always been there and coming to recognise that what we feel as stable and easy, is actually a huge amount of work to maintain. Our ordinary sense of self – our ordinary existence – is very, very busy, and our minds are full of all sorts of stuff. If we let go of that, we will not go mad; we will not become lazy, dull or stupid, rather we will become very fresh.

In fact you don't need much thought to be fully present and attuned in the world, because subject and object arise together. If you trust your spontaneity, things will work out well. When we feel we are separate from the world – when we feel it's all up to us—then we take a whole burden on ourselves and that very burden makes us tired, anxious, and eventually very disturbed.

Hopefully the ground of dzogchen: the view, the basic understanding is something which should make us feel relaxed, hopeful and joyful, and the practice of it also should be something which you feel at ease with.

It's very important when we are here together to not be too formal, and to follow your body and relax in whatever way you need to. If you want to talk you can talk, if you don't want to talk you don't have to talk. This is a place where hopefully you can explore the space, find out how you want to be, and attend to yourself as you are.

OK, shall we take a little break here?

## **The Function of taking refuge**

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A lot of one's life is just a case of passing time; we do things because somehow we have to do them. We have to go to work maybe, or look after children, or study. We do them because they fit into some kind of 'life plan.' We need to earn enough money; we want to get a job or a sense of direction. These things are of course very necessary but often they don't have very much meaning. They are meaningful in the short time and necessary to do. They feel meaningful because of our emotional connection with them, but afterwards we might think, *'What was that all about?'*

If you have children, you will know that when they are small they need a lot of attention and then they grow up and they go off in their own lives. You might think, *'Oh, all these years and now it's gone. What was that all about?'* The meaning doesn't exist after the children have gone; it's only a

memory. I did this and that for them but they are not thinking about that; they have their new lives, they are going on somewhere else. All that you did as mother or father to create a good environment was necessary and meaningful, but it was contextual; it was only for the situation. You can't distil something from it and take it with you. That is often what we find in life; we put our heart into things. We might put our heart into a relationship, or a course of study, or a project of some kind and then it comes to an end. Of course we learn some things and we grow through them but there is not very much we can take away, because that experience and that pattern of behaviour is locked into space and time and can't be taken.

Whereas when we take refuge in the Buddha, in the dharma and in the sangha, and the other refuges that we have in tantric buddhism, the idea is that we now have a sense of direction that goes through time, beyond death, into future lives and right to the goal of enlightenment. We take refuge in the Buddha until we gain enlightenment. It means that we're trying to establish for ourselves a sense of purpose which will act like a kind of compass and keep us on the right track, even if we are born in unpropitious circumstances.

This is why a sense of refuge is very important—especially when life becomes hard—because if we only want to practice dharma when we are happy, it won't help. But if we only practice dharma when we're sad, that also doesn't help either. It has to be there right through every situation. If we forget the root direction or the key meaning of our life, then we don't have any protection against our tendency to merge with – to be caught up in the intensity of fusion with—particular situations.

Some people get more easily lost with happiness; some people get more easily lost with sadness. For some people when bad things happen, they wake up and they become very fresh. Other people collapse when bad things happen. Some people relax when good times come, they feel open and they think, *'Oh, this is how to proceed.'* Other people, when they become happy they just become spaced out; they don't recognise anything.

Part of refuge is not just the intention, but attention to how we lose the intention. How do I get lost? How do I forget my focus of interest? Why is it that doing these other things seems so much more important than doing the practice or the study which I had decided I wanted to be the kind of 'heart line' of my existence?

To take refuge means to accept that one is vulnerable and this vulnerability is deep and structural; it's not just a passing emotional state. That is to say, our ignorance and our lostness is there whether we are happy or we are sad. You don't come out of samsara when you're happy, you're still ignorant and you're still under the power of karma and illusion. Very often when we feel happy we think, *'Oh this is fine, I'm OK now.'* as if I have arrived somewhere nice, but it doesn't last. It can't last; nobody is happy all the time, this is not possible.

You think that maybe the buddhas are happy all the time, but they are affected by people. You can see these videos of the Dalai Lama, somebody who is happy seemingly most of the time, and then when he meets these refugees who've come freshly from Tibet, and they tell their stories, his face looks terrible. He looks very upset and sad because he is connected with these people. If he was just to be in himself, in his own meditation, maybe he could be happy all the time. That would be to be over-identified with the side of wisdom. As soon as compassion becomes part of our repertoire, as soon as our refuge is linked into the mahayana path of bodhicitta, we are going to be upset, not because of what is happening to us but because of what is happening to other people.

Therefore we cannot take refuge in happiness; happiness is very unreliable. Even the happiness generated by meditation is unreliable because if you seal yourself in it you won't be able to be compassionate. To be compassionate means to be touched by other people's existence. They impinge on you, they get to you, they impact your life, and if they get to you, they get to you. It's not an abstract theory. Somebody tells you a story and you're upset; your pulse changes; your breathing changes; your skin tension changes; your thoughts change; everything shifts; your whole hormonal system changes.

### Mahayana, tantra and dzogchen views of refuge

From the mahayana point of view we want to find a refuge which doesn't cut us off from other people. We want to find a refuge which provides a basis for being open to other people. In order to be open to other people with real compassion, we have to have enough clarity to distinguish between a gesture which has a good intention running through it, and something which is merely an impulse.

Taking refuge in the Buddha means on an outer level reading about the Buddha's life, studying the words of the Buddha, and being aware that the Buddha offered a particular reading or understanding of the world that we inhabit. To take refuge in the Buddha is to try to see the world through the Buddha's eyes. When he teaches that the nature of all things is suffering, we try to see that.

Our retreat is being held near a nice little village; you walk down the streets and you see these nice houses that look as if people living in them have a little bit of money. Good roast dinners ... a nice walk in the woods ... some money in the bank for old age ... some bottles of wine in the cellar ... what could be better than this? But inside these families there will be illnesses; there will be accidents; there will be unhappy marriages; there will be children who take heroin; there will be all kinds of things which you don't see from the shiny paint on the outside. Everybody's life has shadows of some kind falling across it. When we start to look with the Buddha's eyes, we see the nature of suffering. Suffering can happen for reasons which perhaps don't seem very valid to us, but suffering is determined by the experience of the other person.

Many farming people living here will be worried that the EU subsidy is going to be radically cut and this will affect how much money they get. The fact that their children probably don't want to be farmers may also be a problem. Maybe some of the farms here have been with one family for five or six generations. *'What will I do with farm? I am getting old. No-one in my family wants to take it, so we will have to sell it. But how can we sell it? This is our family home. If we sell just the fields then when I am old I will sit in the family home looking out the window at another farmer ploughing my fields. That's not going to make me very happy.'*

Suffering comes to us according to the pattern of our heart. Everybody gets cut in one way, because the hopes that we've had – the fantasies that we've had about how our life will be – is suddenly cut or suddenly broken by events. Once again, we are not in control of our existence. Even people who seem to be very fortunate can often have deep misery and suffering in their life; a deep sadness can be there. The more we look at that, the more we realise how people try their best. As the Buddha said, *'When you look everyone is seeking happiness; everybody is hoping for happiness but they are employing methods which bring them only suffering.'*

It's not that people are bad or have an evil intention, it's just they're not very skilful because they imagine that **objects** will bring happiness. The pleasure generated by an object can only be short

term. Real happiness, contentment, being at peace with oneself is not generated by an object. When we take refuge in the Buddha—although we could say that the Buddha is, at it were, an object to us in that it is something we stand in relationship with—the function of taking refuge is to free us from reliance on objects. When our mind is under the power of ignorance we start to feel as a small, separate subject: *'I need these things to make me happy.'* Of course things will make us happy, but if we know that the happiness generated by the object is impermanent, we can enjoy the happiness for what it is worth and not expect more than it can give. Houses, work, academic success, children, relationships, money; all of these can bring some degree of pleasure but they cannot repair the wounds of the heart. Because we are lost, we don't know who we are, so adding more things on to us will not give us a direct relationship with ourselves.

The function of taking refuge is to give a sense of direction and purpose that will allow us not to be distracted. We start to see that the things we have been relying on, although they give some relief, are actually poisonous. In this way we start to understand what attachment is: attachment is this force, this yearning inside me, 'I must have that'.

From the point of view of tantra it's not that you have to refuse yourself the object, but you have to know that the object is simply a particular kind of momentary experience. Whether it's eating nice food, drinking wine, kissing someone sweet, whatever it is, is there for a moment and then is gone. It cannot be a refuge; it is merely a distraction.

From the point of view of dzogchen it needn't be a distraction, you can integrate every experience into a state of awareness. But until we have achieved that state, over-privileging objects – imagining that a new car will make you happy – is an illusion. A new car will make you happy until somebody scratches it or until somebody reverses into it, then it will make you very unhappy! It's quite simple, isn't it?

Every object that you become attached to, because it exists outside you, makes you more vulnerable. If you own a house somebody can break into it and destroy it. If you are just renting the house, you think, *'Bye, I'm gone.'* But if it's **your** house then the salt water will flow out of your eyes because you will feel very upset: *'It's my house!'* People do that with their children as well; they think that if their children behave properly then they'll be happy. This is the most stupid thing to do; children do whatever they do. Let them get on with it, it's their luck. This is the great blessing of buddhism for parents. Children are born according to their own volition with their own karma, it's their responsibility. Take all your books on developmental psychology and burn them! It's not **your** responsibility, children make **themselves**. Then you feel immediately happier! *[Laughter]*

Taking refuge in the dharma is also the Buddha's teaching, but it also means how things are. It's the Buddha's teachings about how to find yourself, integrated back into how things are; it's a way of resourcing yourself. In English, resourcing is '**re**-sourcing': bringing yourself back to the source. The source is what is actually there. Of course all our lives we need to be resourced, we are resourced by our friends; we can be resourced by our books; we can be resourced by clothes when it's cold; by medicines and so on. But again, all these outer resources are impermanent and will fall away.

The dharma resource is something which if you keep massaging it into your heart will give you a warmth and security which will be present day-by-day; it will be enduring, in any situation you will know. You will find yourself making mistakes, or you will find yourself being very angry and you will think, *'Oh yes, Buddha taught about anger. Anger is one of the five poisons. Anger arises from attachment – it's aversion; it is wanting to get rid of things I don't like. The reason I feel angry is because I am identified with this small sense of myself.'* Then you don't need to feel bad that you

have anger. You can just start to examine that this anger is very useful; this anger is showing me the structure of myself. The anger is like an x-ray: it reveals that which is hidden. The same with envy, the same with depression and sadness.

This is because of intentionality. Intentionality means that I am attending to bring my attention, my consciousness, my focussed awareness into the situation to understand it; I am not just going to sink into it. If I feel sad, just being sad won't really change anything. What I have to do is to understand why I am sad? That means looking at what are the causes of sadness, not just the external event that made me sad.

My partner no longer likes me, that's a very common cause for feeling sad. Why would that make me sad? If they like me what will that add to my life? It will add some moments of happiness. Will these moments last? No. The most they can offer me is a slight remoulding of the contours of my experience. I make myself feel profoundly sad because of feeling an infinite loss from something which is quite finite. Who has turned this other person into an infinite, wonderful person? *"If only they still loved me, I would be so happy."* Who is doing that? We, ourselves, are doing that. If you meet the person again and you get back with them, within in a few months you're thinking, *'Oh my goodness, what have I gone and done?'* Because they are finite, they are limited. They have some good qualities and some bad qualities. People are only perfect in our mind, in our dreams and fantasies. In their day-to-day reality they are always slightly problematic.

### To use dharma means to work hard

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Taking refuge in the dharma means taking these buddhist ideas and having them as extensions to our fingers, to our eyes, to our ears. We hear better, we hear from a dharma point of view. We see better, we see from a dharma point of view. We engage with the world from a dharma point of view. We are actively bringing dharma understanding into every experience we have; everything is meaningful. If we do that, we will never be bored. We will be able to make sense of every difficult situation, and through that we have a grounding and a completion which no object can give to us. Of course, our karmic impulse would prefer to have a good, bright, shiny object to give us what we want because it's quicker.

To use dharma means to struggle; it means to work hard. In the history of Tibetan buddhism, and of Indian, Japanese and Chinese buddhism, the stories of their great sages and yogis are stories of endless struggle. Working, and working, and working; relating dharma to life and finding life impinging on dharma. Collapsing into ordinary life and then struggling to re-understand from a dharma point of view. This is what's involved, it's about struggle; it's not going to be immediately easy.

The easy path will always be the path of stupidity; it will be the path of habit. Habits are things we have developed, that we know how to do, a kind of automatic pilot. When you take them up and you operate from them there's a kind of ease, but it's a stupid ease. It's an ease that only takes you back yet again to the same place. If somebody is a drinker and they stop drinking, then they start drinking again, they are back to where they were, because drinking is drinking. If you use drugs and you stop, then you start using drugs again, you are back in the same place. The problems are always the same. They are not very interesting problems, but they are reassuring because they are always the same.

Neurosis is ritualistic. Depression, anxiety, worry, is always the same, but for the people who are in it it's always interesting. How will I destroy my body? Where will I cut myself today? How little fruit can

I eat today? That's really interesting. I am going to make sure that I don't eat more than ten grams of food today. This is a lifetime perfect career for an anorexic. Nothing is more interesting than restricting the amount of food that comes into them. Not work, not pleasure, not relationship, not happiness – no, my sole intention is to restrict my intake of food. If an anorexic was to take that energy and apply it to the dharma, they would be like Milarepa!

In this way, people in samsara have wonderful qualities. They have courage, they have endurance, they have a huge amount of willpower, dedication and mobilisation but they are turned towards nonsense. They are turned towards things that will always cheat them, that are going nowhere. It looks like it's going somewhere but it's just a boomerang – it comes back – it doesn't escape the gravitational pull of the ego self. This is why a refuge is very important, because it's an insistence.

How I am and what I normally believe in, is now recognised as poisonous and dangerous. Generally speaking from the Tibetan point of view, refuge is linked with the hinayana or the theravadin path; it's linked with the idea of renunciation of samsara. When we say, *'This world and the way I am in this world is so enmeshed, so linked in, so sticky, so automatic, that I have to 'cut'. I have to say, "No, I want to get out of here. I don't want this stuff anymore."* Of course that's not the whole story, but it's a move – it's a gesture – that brings about a bit of space. It's very important to be able to practice very powerfully and very dedicatedly in this way, and with it to renounce some things; to give up some of the things which bind us.

### Giving up the indulgence of internal tendencies

The things that bind us are both external and internal. Sometimes giving up external things is useful but, in particular, giving up the indulgence of internal tendencies is very important. There is no higher renunciation than letting your thoughts go free. In dzogchen it's called, *rang drol*, self liberation. Let your thoughts go – don't hang on to your thoughts – there is no better renunciation than that. This is very difficult to achieve, so on an ordinary level we have to start with external things, because when you start to renounce your familiar life structures you will increase your anxiety.

Most of us are quite obsessional, we do particular kinds of behaviours in order to feel safe. If we stop these familiar patterns, the anxiety which was being contained by the ritual behaviour will start to manifest. Anxiety is very important because anxiety is the vibration of duality, of subject and object. Yes/No. Good/bad. Shall I?/Shan't I? I want to/I don't want to... This is the nature of anxiety, not being able to relax and be fully open into a situation.

As long as our lives are comfortable in a sort of bourgeois sense, we won't experience that kind of anxiety. If we always have food to eat, if we always have a comfortable bed to sleep in, we don't face anxiety. That's why it's quite good to travel to other places and sleep in strange beds. You may not sleep so well as at home, and in the middle of the night all kinds of strange thoughts might come into your head so that you don't feel so at ease. You may think this is simply caused by the fact you are away from home and that when you get home you get home you won't feel this way anymore. You can say, *'Ah, when I am at home, everything is just the way I like it.'* So that home is like a kind of steel safe that keeps anxiety on the outside. Actually, coming to another place reveals the anxiety which is always there. That's a very central point for us to investigate. Do we think that anxiety is some external impingement? Something external that impacts us and disturbs us, and if only we had more power and more control, we could stop it? Or do we understand that anxiety is part of who we are and that control is just not going to work because control will always fail?

At the moment, quite a few of my friends have very old parents – parents in their eighties and so on. What seems very clear is that the pattern of personality that the person has had in their lifetime is intensified as they get older. People who have been anxious become more anxious as they get older and the body gets weaker so that they are more dependent on other people. The way they tend to deal with it, is to be controlling. But they don't have any power – they don't have any force – this is tragic. They haven't recognised how to let the energy sink into the central channel. How to just sit in a chair and think, *'Oh I'll get my tea when I get my tea.'* Instead, they shout, *'Hello! Have you made my tea yet? Hello! Hello!'* Who wants to hear this a hundred times? *'But I'm just trying to be helpful ...'* It's very sad and when you are very old like that, it's very difficult to learn anything new.

An example like this shows us that these problems don't resolve themselves. We might have had a fantasy when we were younger that as we got older somehow life would get easier, we would understand what to do and everything would make sense, but of course that's not the case. As we get older we feel we have less time ahead of us, so we can have less hope. We have to face the fact that I am me and this is how it is for me. It may not be like this for other people, but I can only live my life. I have to make friends with myself; I have to know how I am and find a way of being at peace with myself. That's very difficult if you don't have a refuge, if you don't have any spiritual belief of any kind, if you don't have a breathing practice, or if in the past you haven't allowed people to take you out of yourself.

Part of refuge is to say that real meaning and value is centred in awakening – in enlightenment – rather than in worldly success. I am going to shift the centre of my identity from pride and confidence in my learning, my health, my house, my money, my family, my attractiveness, whatever qualities one would have. I recognise all of these arise from causes and conditions and will not endure for very long through time. I am going to re-centre myself, out of myself, and into myself.

As it says in the Bible, you have to lose yourself to find yourself. This is not so much renunciation of external things by pushing them away and becoming a wandering yogi, or a monk or a nun. It's a renunciation though recognising that we are attached to the object: the object has become a ground that we are standing on. *'I feel I have been a good mother because my children have grown up and done well. They are the living proof that my life has not been in vain.'* Maybe, but lots of people have children who get completely lost and they have also done their best to be parents.

We have to investigate what little stories we tell ourselves to give ourselves a sense of importance. If you were able to be a good parent, or if you have been successful in your career, when you look back you will see that that arose due to causes and circumstances. Somebody was lucky enough to be born intelligent; was lucky enough to go to a school that developed them; was lucky enough to find a place in a university; was lucky enough to start their career at a time when things opened... I realise that due to many circumstances, my life came out in this way. It doesn't tell me anything about *who* I really am, it tells me about the pattern of circumstances of my existence; that's what it tells me.

When I was younger and I was in India, I met many great lamas and they were very friendly to me. That was a time when they were refugees and these lamas were not so busy; they didn't know western people so much, so it was easy for me to get close to them. That's not some sign that there is some big 'something' inside me, it's just due to causes and circumstances these things happened; that is what it means. If we understand that, we see these patterns, they show themselves for a moment and then they vanish.

What we have got, what we have achieved, is not ours. Other people may tell us, *'Oh, you are like this. You're very good at this.'* I think I am probably quite good as a therapist, but I am good at this because I did many trainings and I had a lot of luck. If I hadn't been able to do these trainings and I had less luck, I wouldn't be able to be such a good therapist. It's not innate – it's not inside – it is relational, and because it's relational it's not mine: it is a performativity. If I am good at my job, that's an activity I carry out with people who can relate to me. 'It takes two to tango.' A therapist is as good as their patient. I'm quite good at getting rid of patients I don't want to work with.

It's really important that we see this because attachment to the concept of self means that it's very easy for us to tell the story of our lives in terms of 'my glorious journey.' How 'I' became the one who I am, and how 'I' did it! It's really not like that. It's due to cause and conditions – to all kind of acts of luck and all kinds of acts of kindness that other people have offered to us. We are moving in this great ocean of moments of experience and for a while a wave picks us up and everything seems fine, and then the wave tumbles us down again.

That doesn't mean that we can't be present in our lives as they are, it simply means the centre is not what we thought it was. The centre of 'me' being me, is not me, so who is the centre of me? This 'me' from the *theravadin* point of view is constructed out of the five *skandhas*, that is to say, it is a composite, a construct. When these five skandhas loosen their patterning we are no longer ourselves. We know this as our bodies age; we are not the people we were when we were ten years of age. The name is the same but the actual manifestation is different.

### I am a follower, centred inside something much bigger than myself

Taking refuge means de-centring yourself from yourself. Instead of, *'I am the agent of my life, I need to make things happen the way I want them to happen,'* rather I become a follower of the Buddha; that's who I am. I am not very important in the world, there are millions of followers of the Buddha. That is who I am: I am a follower of the dharma path. In that way I am centred inside something much bigger than myself. It is an antidote to hubris – to narcissistic inflation—and it's also a support for me to find a way to change myself.

It can be very difficult for important people to change. Now that Gerhard Schröder is no longer German chancellor, what is he going to do? [*Comment that he may cry, or write a book*] He may cry and he may also make money. It may be very difficult for him to come into meditation, because he has spent a lot of time building up an identity as an important person. In Britain there were celebrations recently for the eightieth birthday of Margaret Thatcher, and the Queen of England came to her birthday party. Margaret Thatcher is still for herself the greatest prime minister; that's who she is. She can't be an old woman who's worried about death. I saw her on television arriving for her party and she was as well made up and as well as dressed as when she was Prime Minister. Actually she is a tired old woman who suffers from dementia, but she can't *be* a tired old woman because she is Margaret Thatcher.

These people are so kind to us because they show the madness of samsara. They show how idiotic it is to be like that. A public figure may find it difficult to prepare for death because they are still alive in an image which is already dead. These are terrible things, people locked in the prison of representation unable to flee.

We are very lucky because we are ordinary people and we can change our lives. That means being suspicious of the story that we tell us about ourselves, but also the stories that other people tell us. Our friends can be our worst enemies, because our friends reassure us that we are OK the way we

are. As soon as you take refuge in the dharma, you have to be very suspicious of that. We are not OK as we are, otherwise why would we take refuge? We have lots of problems. We might be generous, or kind, or useful – have all sorts of good qualities – but these in themselves are not enough because we start to recognise that there is something missing inside.

Refuge is to find a line which will open up a new sense of continuity: the continuity of 'me' being me, where the 'me' is not simply the accumulation of all that I have done. That is to say, 'me' as an experience, 'me' as a noetic capacity. The traditional image is 'me' as a mirror: me as a capacity to show and reveal many things, rather than 'me' as the content of the mirror – the accumulation of reflections. This is the essential function of refuge. The form of our attachment of samsara is addiction to improving the quality of reflection. In samsara we try to create patterns of manifestation that we can be proud of and that we can be confident with; we want to have self esteem and feel good about ourselves.

From a buddhist point of view it's a very bad thing to feel good about yourself – you should feel very troubled by yourself, certainly in the early stages.

### Metaphor of escaping a car that isn't going to stop

The first enquiry has to be, what is there so good about being confident about myself when I am going to die? This car is going crash into a wall. If I am sitting in the car thinking, *'This car has leather seats and a stereo; it is a pretty nice car...'* then I have a problem. Actually, I have to think, *'This car is terrible! It's going very fast and I don't want to jump out – I'll get hurt if I jump out—but it's going to crash anyway, so what am I going to do?'* I need to get out of the car but it doesn't stop running; this is the problem of taking refuge.

In our lives, our friends and our work colleagues keep reassuring us that we should keep on trucking; remain in the same thing that we're already in. But if we do that we are going to have a big bang, so how do you get out of the car, while staying in the car? You can't jump out, because if you have responsibilities at work or family, you can't just leave. Staying in the car, but not *being* in the car, means understanding that I am not the identifications, the narratives, the impermanent arisings which constitute my ordinary sense of self. I am them, but I am not fully them.

We develop a kind of rocking position, or fulcrum, where we experience tilting towards the world and being part of the world and then rocking back, identifying with spaciousness. The more we can do that, the more we can see that stillness and movement, silence and sound, open mind and thoughts/feelings are inseparable. One aspect is impermanent and yet the other aspect is permanent. Therefore, by being centred with the spaciousness, we don't need to change the outer manifestations – the thoughts and feelings that arise – but we are not fully identified with them; it's not all that's there.

In that way, without changing the external form, we recognise the spaciousness and we integrate the movement and the stillness. We can then find peace without having to do external renunciation. We have an absolute refuge which is not the refuge of total identification in the ego self. This is a function of dzogchen meditation.

In order to meditate, we have to be able to relax. To be relaxed means to be able to allow impulses and tensions to arise, without reacting to them. You may think that relaxation is the absolute absence of tension, but that's very rare. Most peoples' bodies have quite a lot of tension. Even

people who spend all their life doing relaxation practices will find that tension flows back into the body; tension is just part of the body arousal.

Relaxation, from the dzogchen point of view, is the relaxation which *integrates* anxiety, which *integrates* arousal, which gives space to the build-up of charge that arises. Without pushing it away, without identifying with it, there is a relaxation present at the same time as the anxiety. This is why they say in the dzogchen tradition, that when you look at people you can never know whether they are enlightened or stupid. Enlightened people don't stand as if they were Alexander Technique teachers!

## Human bodies and vajra bodies

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When we look at photos of old lamas, their spines are all bent and they are leaning over. They are not rigid; they are a bit slumped, old and tired. Do we say, *'They're not enlightened anymore because they are old and tired.'*? It's not like that, it's not that sickness or anxiety is the problem. If we are sick then we are sick; sickness doesn't mean anything except something is arising and passing.

What makes it a problem is if you identify with the sickness because then you have self-pity, and you think, *'Oh, it's so terrible I am sick...'* When you are sick you have a particular quality of energy. Maybe you *will* die from that sickness in which case, the manifestation of the body will shift and change; that's all. If you have stillness, the sickness doesn't matter; all that you are experiencing is a different kind of manifestation. An unhealthy body is not less enlightened than a healthy body. This is a particular understanding of dzogchen – very, very important.

People talk about the vajra body – an indestructible body – but an indestructible body also gets sick. Lots of lamas die from cancers and get serious illnesses; they don't have an indestructible body in the sense of a body that doesn't fall prey to all sorts of viruses and bacteria. An indestructible body is the understanding that the body is itself impermanent and always changing.

What is this manifestation? It is the display of the emptiness of the ground nature. Because it is empty it is unborn, and because it is unborn it can't be destroyed; it has never really existed, it is illusion. That's why it's an indestructible body; it doesn't mean that you never get sick, which would be crazy. People fantasise that that's the case, but this is some illusion that certain people get into. It's very important to give up fantasies of power and magic.

Old age, sickness and death – everybody gets sick and dies – we don't know anybody who doesn't do that. There is no lama who lives forever; lamas get old. Now we've got a new Karmapa. Why have we got a new Karmapa? There was nothing wrong with the old Karmapa, he was a very nice Karmapa. Why did he go? Because it was his time to go; that's what happens.

## Resting in the nature of the mind

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Sickness is not the issue, aging is not the issue; the issue is how we relate to the arising and passing of experience. If there is no stillness, all we have is the flow of manifestation. We need to rest somewhere, the mind seeks a place to rest; it wants to rest on something. If the only thing that appears for your mind is manifestation, you will rest on that manifestation, and when you rest on that manifestation hopes and fears will arise all the time. If you rest in the *nature* of the mind—which is empty—your mind will become very light. This light, spacious openness is resting in itself. It

is not resting on something; it is just resting. That's the difference between samsara and nirvana. In samara you are always resting on something. In nirvana it is just resting – at rest – not moving, not heavy, just integrated.

In the meditation practice, we are both relaxing and opening, being present with the flow of experience, observing how again and again we fuse into experience. With practice we get used to just observing that and that it goes – observing it and it goes. The more you see that it goes, as it comes it won't frighten you. You don't have to defend yourself against what is happening, you just have to let it go. You don't have to block arising, you simply have to stay present with it and it will go.

Some of my patients have had very difficult things happen to them and in the therapy they may say the experiences are unbearable. They may even leave the room saying *'I can't bear it! I can't bear it!'* What does it mean for something to be unbearable? To bear something is to hold it. In India the coolies, the people who carry stuff on their back, are called 'bearers' because they bear things. We bear burdens. This is the meaning of attachment. Things are unbearable when we are attached to things which are too painful for us. The Buddha said, *'Don't bear things. Don't be attached to it.'* It is not the *nature* of the experience which is unbearable; it is *your relationship to* the experience that is unbearable.

We can probably all remember events in our life where we did something and were ashamed. That shame was just so overwhelming we couldn't bear it; we thought we were going to die. After a while you might look back and think, *'God, that was terrible,'* but you are more relaxed about it and you think, *'Yes, I did have some really bad times.'* Now there is some space around it, so when the memory comes up you don't get fused in it; you don't get merged in it. The event is still shitty, it's still horrible, but you are not in it. So what makes things unbearable is attachment, not the quality of the event itself.

We see this with children who get ill and have to lie in hospital beds for a long time. Some of them become very upset; others develop these angelic smiles and they just say, *'Oh I am sick.'* It's amazing, because they have not attached their identity into that sickness. They are not conditioned or identified in the sickness; they just have a sickness and they are also themselves.

Other people *become* the sickness and their life collapses. We know this with some adult patients who get cancers. The ones who really 'get' cancer, they get the cancer and the cancer gets them. It's more difficult for them to survive. The ones who say, *'I am still me and I have this,'* go into a relationship with it and have more capacity to survive. Ordinary life and dharma are not very different; this is the nature of attachment.

Rather than changing the object, whether it's good or bad, what we're doing is loosening the bond of identification and attachment.

We'll take a ten minute break to stretch and get some fresh air, and then we'll come back and do some meditation.

[Break]

Stillness, movement and the space element

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This central image that we work with, stillness and movement, can be linked with the idea of space and the four other elements. Earth, water, fire and wind occupy space – move in space – but space itself doesn't move.

When we come to do the meditation, we work with space as the dimension or the arena in which movement occurs. Sometimes the movement in our mind is quite earth dominated, so we might have a feeling which is quite solid and seems to endure through time. Sometimes our experience is quite kind of watery; we seem to be just sort of flowing; caught up in something. Sometimes it's quite fiery and very hot, and sometimes it's like wind with rapid fluctuations.

All of these elements are contained in space. Our problem is that when we forget space, in order to contain the main three moving aspects of water, fire and wind, we tend to rely on earth. This links with what we were looking at earlier about how control is the way that we tend to deal with our anxiety. The ego self in feeling that it is itself an entity, seeks to reinforce its earth structure to maintain its identity, which is where we use language as a strong self-narrative.

In this practice we are seeking to re-centre ourselves out of earth and into space, experiencing that we are not a construct, we're not a unification of impermanent moments, but we are the ground within which these impermanent moments reveal themselves.

In order to do this, we simply sit in a relaxed way letting our skeleton carry our weight. We have our eyes open with the chin slightly raised, not looking up but just slightly raised, we allow our gaze to rest in the space in front of us. We are not looking into the far distance but just into space itself. Of course in front of us there are different kinds space; there is space which is seemingly empty, but there is also space that has stuff in it. The more you experience space as the ground of everything, it doesn't make much difference whether there is stuff in the space or not, because space is hospitable to manifestation. Space is not displaced by manifestation; it is the ground and the host of manifestation. This is very important.

For example, outside in the garden we can see that people here are building a stupa; they are getting towards the top and they are going to add some further bits on. When they add these bits on, is space being displaced? We remember the story of Archimedes and his eureka moment: when he gets in the bath the water flows out of the bath and he recognises that matter displaces its volume of water. Does matter displace the volume of space? No, space is always there. Matter is in space and if that matter is taken out of space, space is not influenced. This is very, very important because if space is not destroyed by matter, then space doesn't need to protect itself against matter.

In the same way if our mind is truly spacious, when thoughts and feelings arise it won't be destroyed by them. It won't be contaminated by what we take to be bad thoughts or unpleasant thoughts; it won't be improved or given added value by what we take to be positive thoughts. These thoughts will arise in space and vanish back into space...arising and passing...arising and passing...The space itself doesn't change.

When we practice, this is what we open to, sitting with our gaze open in the space in front of us, we make the sound of *Aa* three times. We allow this sound *Aa* to rise up through us, easing and emptying out all our clinging and attachment to all kinds of heaviness.

*Aa* is the sound of emptiness and emptiness is the quality of space; space has no substance, it's not a thing. Emptiness is the quality that there is nothing substantial there – there is nothing you can grasp. Once we relax into the sound of *Aa*, we then sit with whatever is occurring and just allow it to

come and go. You can see that from time to time you will start to interfere; you will start to move things or change them because you don't like them or because you want more of them. When you do that, you lose your sense of space and you become one substance acting on other substance. *'I need to remain awake. I need to get more of that.'* This 'I' is no longer spacious but has all the shaping and echoing of your habits and karma.

When that occurs just relax back into the space. Be generous and give an open welcome to whatever comes and you will see that if you don't interfere, it goes by itself. This is the heart of dzogchen meditation. So we will practice this together now. If it's new to you and you find it a little bit strange, don't push it; it is not something that you have to struggle with or try hard with. It's just a way of being open.

Together we recite this sound of *Aa* three times, with our gaze just relaxed in the space in front of us, and then sit.

### [Three Aa practice]

At first it is good not to do it for a long period of time because you don't want to struggle with the practice, it's just about opening and being with what's there. What is there is quite raw. In many ways it is not so very interesting. If you get into thoughts and link them together and cook them up they become much more interesting. The mind in its raw state is just stuff coming and going and so it takes a while to get used to just being with things coming and vanishing.

Of course we have rational, objectified view that here we are sitting in a room together; the walls are made of concrete and they are strong and solidly real. And yet when we sit with the practice they may sometimes come and be very strong, so that we are very aware of the colour and shapes... then we are not very aware of the colours and shapes... We might drift off or we might just be in the space.

We could ask anyone from outside to come into this room and they would agree that the room exists and that it is furnished in a certain way, with pictures, chairs, cushions and so on. But when we do the practice we move from that way of thinking and open just to experience as it reveals itself, not as it's cooked, not as it's edited, not as it is projected, but just as it reveals itself.

That is a huge shift, because in the realm of experience the deciding factor is whether we are present or not. In the realm of so-called objective facts, our attention is irrelevant. If you look in one direction and then you look back the things are still there. They exist without you. You are irrelevant but these things – 'the rock of ages' – they really exist.

However from the point of view of meditation this is not how it is. When you look one way in the room and you turn around and you look back, you may say to yourself, *'It's the same; it hasn't changed.'* The chair doesn't have a voice; the chair, as far as we know, doesn't have a mind. The table doesn't have a mind or a voice, so it's not going to say, *'I'm still here. Yes, you are quite correct, you have identified the fact that I am an enduring object.'* **We** say to the table, *'Ah, you are the same table.'* **We** say to the chair, *'You are the same chair.'* Who does that? We do that. We tell ourselves that things are objectively real; we do that. It is the mind that creates all things.

You can study physics and read mathematical accounts that will 'prove' the actual, objective reality of things. Where will that proof be? It will be written in symbols invented by human beings, written

by human beings for human beings, that is to say, human minds communicating with other human minds inviting them to enjoy this particular story. These are the stories we tell ourselves.

In the practice we are trying not to mediate our experience through received ideas, but just to stay with what's there. That is difficult because our automatic tendency – our long, long habit – is to see through the lense and veils of habit and assumption.

When we do this *Three Aa* practice, without making sense of what is going on, allow it to be there as the experience arises. Whatever it is don't edit, don't correct, just be with it.

OK let's try it again.

### The whole world is an aspect of ourself

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This morning we will look at our own nature and how to be at home in this nature. It's a very strange thing that that which is most fully and truly ourselves, is something that we don't find unless somebody helps us to find it. That which is not truly ourselves we find very easily. We believe all sorts of things about ourselves; things which are fabrications; things which are illusions. We might believe very negative things about ourselves or very positive things about ourselves.

We might think I am tired, or I am happy, or I am sick; these things are a description of a state which exists for a short period of time. That state exists not because of some inherent or profound quality in oneself, but because of environmental factors. So the things that we normally identify with feel real, feel true, but are not who we really are. In the lineage of dzogchen, there is the idea that without transmission, without an understanding coming from outside, we will not recognise ourselves.

This is necessary for two reasons: one is that the one who we think we are, is not who we are and, secondly, because of the nature of non-duality. Non-duality means that fundamentally there is no difference between subject and object. Of course my name is not Eva or John, so if somebody here is called Eva or John, I would have to say I am not you—you are not me. On that level of course there is a difference between subject and object, but what it means is that the ground of subject and object, the basis of their seeming identity and separation, is the same.

Because of this, if we imagine because I am me, the truth about me has to come from me, we are already sealed in an illusion of separation. If you have to receive something of yourself from another person, this doesn't mean that you are stupid, this simply means that the other person is an aspect of yourself. This whole world is an aspect of ourselves.

### All that you are is from others

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We live in a time when gratitude and humility are not very popular, but these traditional values help us to lower the threshold between ourselves and others. When we can thank our parents for having given us life, for having clothed us and fed us, then we stay connected with a situation which was real.

When we build up some list of crimes committed by our parents – we become angry because they didn't give us enough love, or didn't give us a bicycle, or were never really interested in us—we

make an absolute separation. We say, *'I am me, you should have seen me, you should have known that I am entitled to all these things. You failed to serve me.'*

When we judge other people in this way, we further separate ourselves from the fact that without their kindness we wouldn't be here. It's a fundamental fact that without our parents having sex we wouldn't be in this existence. Without our mother having carried us inside her belly with all the difficulties that that brings, we wouldn't be here. Without her going through the pain of birth, we wouldn't be here. This is the biological lineage that due to the kindness of others we come into existence. We can't separate ourselves from our parents.

In our modern culture, the teenage period is very much one of saying, *'I don't belong in this family. I am just me myself. I can live my life on my terms.'* This is a very terrible illusion because we cannot live on our terms. Otherwise we would need to say to every sixteen year old, *'OK. You want to live on your terms. You want to use the house as a hotel. You just want to eat whatever you want from the fridge and live in your dirty bedroom and not speak to us, your kind parents. Well, now we are going to extract from your brain all the knowledge that we have given you – then see how you survive!'*

Everything that you have, you got from others. The German language was in existence before you were born. When you speak German it feels like you are speaking your own language but of course it's not your language, it's your mother's tongue, that is to say it is what you learned from your mother. All that you are, is from others. When we realise that, then we can start to feel that the world supports us, the world is not full of enemies who are trying to take things from us but the world is full of wonderful people who keep giving things to us. This is on a very ordinary, relative level.

On a particular level in terms of transmission, we need to encounter people who can help us to recognise who we are. Traditionally, this is seen in the image of the mirror. If you go to the barber, the barber or the hairdresser will hold a mirror behind your head. When you look in the mirror in front of you, you see the reflection of the mirror behind you and in that way you can see what they have done to the back of your hair. Without the mirror you couldn't see; a mirror helps you to see things you can't see.

The teaching and the teacher in the state of the transmission is like a mirror and by looking into that we can hopefully see something more of ourselves. It's not that the teacher is teaching you about yourself, because having intellectual ideas is not necessarily very useful. It's about trying to **recognise** yourself.

### **Garab Dorje's first point: Ngo rang thog tu tro pa**

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When Garab Dorje, who was a great, naturally existing, self enlightened Buddha, taught dzogchen, his most essential teaching was in terms of three statements or points.

*Direct introduction on one's real nature is the first essential point. Ngo rang thog tu tro pa* [Tib. Ngo Rang Thog Tu sProd Pa]. *Ngo* means your own face or your own nature, *rang* means self or itself, *togtu* means on, and *tro pa* means to be introduced. But if you are introduced to something you don't necessarily really get it, you can be introduced to someone but because of what you know about them you might not be able to see them.

If we imagine two people, here we have George Bush and here we have Osama Bin Laden. '*George, this is Osama.*' '*Osama, this is George.*' We could imagine that it would not be a very open meeting because they each know a lot about each other. Because they already know many things how can they meet? How can they see? Contact begins when we are fresh to a situation; when it's not filled with too many ideas.

Sometimes this stage is described as 'pointing-out instructions'. This does not mean 'pointing out' like a car park attendant directing you to a parking place, '*Your parking place is over there*'. Your nature is not something elsewhere; it's not being pointed out and in a sense it is not really being introduced. It is about how to settle into what is already the case, by **dis**-identifying with what you are already identified with.

So 'to recognise yourself' means not putting the teaching in relation to all the other things you know about yourself. Who then are we? What is the nature of our existence? This nature is described in terms of the mind, but the mind that includes everything. Mind here is the state of awareness in which everything is revealed. Our voice is revealed in this state of awareness, our body is revealed in this state of awareness... We say this nature is naked. Naked means it is not covered.

When we say the mind is naked it means every thought, every sensation, every feeling, every perception is there, but is not obscuring the nature of the mind. The mind doesn't need to be wrapped in these thoughts and feelings; it is not improved by these thoughts and feelings. When we look at our bodies we see that we wrap ourselves with clothes and adornments. We are human beings, we are not dogs or cats, we wear clothes. In the same way the mind has clothes. Underneath our clothes we are always naked; our mind is always naked in the midst of the thoughts, feelings and sensations. When you put your clothes on in the morning, you don't get rid of your nakedness but your nakedness becomes something you can't see.

You are still naked but your nakedness is existing at a level that is not directly available to you; this is just how it is for the mind. These thoughts, feelings and sensations are coverings coming and going, coming and going. You don't have to remove them to see the nakedness of the mind. The nakedness of the mind is not lost by the thoughts and feelings, but the nakedness of the mind as an **experience** is lost when you imagine, '*I am my clothes.*' This is very, very important.

So without getting rid of these ways in which we manifest in the world, without trying to change our clothes, we recognise we are naked, with clothes. Your nakedness will not be improved or made more accessible if you wear something by Versace. You can spend twenty thousand euros on a dress but it won't make you more naked. The reality is that the quality of the clothes doesn't affect the nakedness.

### 'Everything is good' is not a kind of homogenisation

If your mind is very dull and very stupid, if you are very anxious, if you are very hopeless and despairing you don't have to change that into happiness. You don't have to become light and friendly. You can be sour and enlightened—also possible, because this sourness is a manifestation of the ground nature.

In dzogchen, the Buddha, our primordial Buddha, is *Kuntuzangpo*, which means 'always good'; it means everything is good. Everything is good because it has the same ground. It doesn't mean that there is no difference. An orange and a lemon are not the same. Most people could drink a glass of

orange juice but would have difficulty drinking a glass of lemon juice; both have the nature of primordial purity; both are empty from the very beginning. They have no inherent self nature but on the level of manifestation they have very different qualities.

To say 'everything is good' is not a kind of homogenisation; it's not like when they collect the milk from a hundred different farms and mix it all together to make standard supermarket quality. We are not put through a blender. Each thing as it is, is empty. This is its actual nature. In the terms of its manifestations it maintains the same qualities. If you are a sour kind of person, if you are very grumpy and unhappy, probably you won't have many friends. If you are warm and friendly you will probably have more friends. Do friends make you enlightened? Maybe not. Does being sad and lonely make you not enlightened? Not necessarily. Enlightenment is not a question of the qualities of manifestation, it's a question of the relationship between manifestation and its ground—the relationship between movement and stillness.

This is very important because buddhism, like every other religion, has a lot to say about development. We say you should try to be honest, you should try to be kind, you should be reliable, and you should be thoughtful about others. There are many good qualities and many bad qualities.

But if you have a very peaceful life you won't necessarily **recognise** your nakedness, and if you have a very disturbed life you won't necessarily **fail to recognise** your nakedness. We have to remember that the ego, in its anxiety, in its uncertainty about who it is, likes to be in control. And one way of being in control is to set up rules, so that we end up with a little rulebook '*Oh yes – good people do this and this... bad people do that and that...*' Then holding up our little book, we look around the world and say, '*Ah - you are a good person and you are a bad person!*' Then we feel very confident: '*I know how to live in this world.*' Our rule books help us to work out how we are in the world, that's what they help us to do. How we are in the world, **not** how the world **is**, because the world is ungraspable. Is George Bush good? How would you know? Is Osama bin Laden bad? How would you know? It would depend on your prejudice, your *pre-judice*, the idea you have already developed. How does it fit into your rule book?

If you are a muslim fundamentalist, you might think that Osama bin Laden is a very good guy because he is standing up for traditional religious principles and after all, how can you trust a man who shaves every day? But then George Bush might be asking himself, '*How can you trust a man who never shaves?*'

These things are very important; we have to recognise that this is the level of manifestation. When we live in this world we will always have prejudice, so no matter what you do, it will create some kind of value or not.

It is very important to recognise that whatever you believe in, is **your** belief. If you believe that buddhism is a good thing, then that's your belief. Muslims don't believe that buddhism is a good thing. The Pope doesn't believe that buddhism is a good thing. A traditionalist European might like Europe to be entirely christian. He feels like that because that's **his** belief system. It's very important to realise that you can move all these stories around. You can say, '*The Buddha is good or the Buddha is bad; Germany is good or Germany is bad; Scotland is good or Scotland is bad.*' You can say anything you like; it's just an idea. It's just some clothing and the clothing fits the situation. In the summer we wear different clothes from the winter. According to the place we are born, we learn many views and prejudices. You can spend a lot of time trying to improve your clothes, to change the ideas and values you have; to change your behaviour. Of course on the level of being with other people it's very helpful if you have a kind, loving heart. You will feel better in yourself and other

people will respond to you more easily. But being good, kind and helpful doesn't bring enlightenment.

This is the point where buddhism is radically different from dogmatic religions because dogmatic religions are about alignment. There are certain beliefs or ideas or, as I am calling them, certain 'wardrobes of clothes' that you should put on. In buddhism you have that as well: we take refuge. It is the 'taking of refuge' that separates insiders of buddhism from non-buddhists. Our goal, however, is not simply to be good buddhists; our goal is to be enlightened. In order to be enlightened you have to recognise that what you learn as a buddhist is also just '*blah blah blah*' – is also just empty words. Everything is empty. It's not empty and therefore 'nothing at all', but it is empty as in 'not being established as a truth'.

In this understanding our own nature, our nakedness is very important. Again and again, when we do the meditation practice observe attachment; observe the conditioning of your thoughts and feelings. If you observe from this perspective you will see that the thoughts and feelings come and then they go; they cannot be your permanent and real nature. However when you become attached to them, when you believe in them, when you identify with them, then it's as if they are truly who you are.

### One ground and two paths

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In dzogchen we say there is one ground and two paths. This one ground is the open dimension of the mind – our real nature which is like the sky, free of any content—is not something you can grasp. You can grasp a bottle, you can grasp a wall, you can grasp someone's hand but you can't grasp the air, you can't grasp the sky, it just goes right through your fingers as there is nothing to grasp. That doesn't mean that space is not around us, for without space we would die, but space is different from other phenomena. It is ungraspable and always present. The nature of the mind is similarly ungraspable and always present.

Another quality of our nature is that it is fresh. Moment by moment we are here. What happened in the previous moment has already gone. When we are attached to the previous moment – when we are caught up in some event and cooking it in our mind – our experience is not fresh. At the end of the day you can sniff your clothes and realise that they were fresher in the morning. This is what happens when you hang out with things; they don't stay so fresh!

In the dzogchen tradition the mind is described as *kadag*. *Ka* means the beginning or the original and *dag* means pure. Our nature is pure from the beginning which means that nothing can stick to it. There is always dust coming in the air, dust will lie on anything but dust cannot fill something which has no basis for holding it. When we see that our mind is essentially empty, what then is going to hold the dust? If you know the ***Platform Sutra*** of the Sixth Patriarch of Zen, that is exactly his teaching. The mind, he says, is not like a mirror, meaning a substantial, ordinary mirror. If you have a mirror, dust will form on a mirror. Mirror is only a metaphor. The space-like, unborn nature of the mind offers no basis for dust to adhere to. This leads us to ask—for example when you sit in meditation and a thought seems to stick to you – what is it sticking to?

### Jagged surfaces rub together: buddha nature has no corners or edges

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When I get stuck I am not myself. Clothes get dirty because clothes are in the world rubbing on things. If we have constructed the notion of ourselves as (wanting to be) a good person but

experience that some people don't like us, then we feel unhappy and wonder *'Why don't you like me? What's wrong with me?'* Who is this 'me'? This 'me' is a construction. This 'me' is something I have built up for myself. I am sure all of us know that sometimes we are nice and sometimes we are not so nice. I am sure we all have some little secret about how nasty or selfish we are. Knowing this about ourselves, why would we expect other people to like us?

If we have some understanding of karma, we know that we are not simple and round like a ball but we are very jagged, and that other people are also not round like balls. They are jagged as well with their own habits and interests. When these two jagged surfaces come together, then of course they rub.

When we look at these painted images of the Buddha, he has a nice, big ball around him. This big, bubble of rainbow light indicates that there are no corners, no edges. This is the nature of the Buddha's true existence. This is the dharmakaya. The dharmakaya is like a ball, a *tigle*, but our ego is not like that. Our ego is like a broken mirror of sharp glass – very dangerous, so of course we bump into people. You don't have to stop this happening. In fact you can't stop this happening.

I have spent quite a lot of my time with various lamas who are famous as being very good lamas but they also look annoyed sometimes. Why do they get annoyed if they are enlightened? They are enlightened enough not to worry about getting annoyed! Because non-duality means not separating things, but integrating them. To be in the world is always to be positioned. You cannot **not** be positioned because if you are a human being you will like some things and you will not like others. You will like some food and you won't like other food. Nobody likes everything. It is not possible. You can know every food is good on the level 'everything is empty' but you wouldn't necessarily want to eat everything. I can say that from the very beginning haggis has been pure but you still might not want to eat it. If you lived in Scotland you might think haggis was wonderful. This is really, really important.

We are in samsara because we take the level of the ego to be the limit of existence, but this is not true. The mind—the mind that reveals all the qualities of the ego—is not **like** the ego. It is not separate from the ego, but it's not the same as the ego.

The traditional example is that the ego is a reflection arising in the mirror; it's something which is revealed – something which shows itself. The mirror never shows itself. When you look in the mirror you always see something else. You don't see the mirror, you can't see the mirror. You know it's a mirror but you see **yourself!** In the same way the mind shows itself through something else; it shows its reflection. It shows thoughts, feelings and sensations but the mind itself is not something that you can grasp.

If you really understand this it means that if it appears, then it's not the nature of my mind. And that is very nice because it's a very good little touchstone, or litmus paper. If I am getting affected by something the 'I' who is getting affected is a manifestation – a construct. At that moment, without pushing away, just relax. Allow the manifestation to be there and it will vanish. Everything which manifests is impermanent. Without doing anything at all liberation will occur. This is the dzogchen teaching of self-liberation.

Every form of manifestation has no inherent self-nature and is empty and changing like the reflection in the mirror. So don't make effort, don't worry, just allow things to come and go as they please. Purity lies in the ground nature of the open, unborn dimension of mind. And this purity,

because it is the **ground** of all that manifests, means that all manifestation is pure in terms of its emptiness, but with the particular flavour of its arising.

### How can you recognise your face if you are wearing a mask?

So for example, here we are together – some people know each other and some people don't know each other. Hopefully we will all get on OK and be reasonably friendly but you will immediately know that there are some people you can be closer to than others. It's easier to sit and talk with some people than with others. You might sit down to have a cup of tea with someone and then not really know what to say; after a few sentences there's silence. Then you go and sit beside someone else and talking, talking, talking, you feel very at home and it's very easy. Does this mean you should try harder to talk with the first person? Why? It's just our luck. This world is not flat.

Dzogchen is very closely linked to experience, so it is not saying you should be **kind** to everyone. It's saying you should be **present** with everyone, and be there with how you respond. This is not a blank cheque, or an excuse to be cruel and unkind. It is not to say you should kill the people you don't like. What it does say is that if you take up an artificial position—if you construct a way of being because you think it is 'good' and you impose it in your relation with other people—you will be wearing a mask.

This first stage of the teaching is called, *ngo tro* or **recognising your face**. How can you recognise your face if you are wearing a mask? If you pretend to be better than you are, what will you learn? We are trying to observe how manifestation arises from the ground—how, out of emptiness, forms arise. Some of these forms we say are good and some of these forms we say are bad. If we say, '*I don't want to have bad forms, I only want to have good forms,*' we become the creators of our existence; the manager of our existence. We are the expert who is in control, and we have to then create ourselves in this image which we have of ourselves. This is the belief structure of theravadin buddhism which is about renouncing bad activity and doing good activity.

'Buddhism' is a western word. In Asian countries they don't have any 'buddhism'; they have '*chos*' or '*dharma*'. And there are many kinds of dharma. We should remember dharma is a hindu word and the concept was hindu before it was buddhist. So even what buddhists would take to be the essence of buddhism is shared by jains and ajivikas and many other branches of eastern religion. Even Inside buddhism there are many different views.

Dzogchen and theravadin buddhism are not the same. Many vipassanna teachers who studied with Burmese and Thai teachers now want to learn dzogchen and incorporate it in their teaching. This is very wrong because you can't teach theravadin vipassanna from the view of dzogchen – this is nonsense. But, they might ask, 'Dzogchen is very shiny, very nice and very special, so why should I not add it?'

What I am trying to say is that although the general mahayana point of view is that you should develop your good qualities such as being kind, helpful and available, from the point of view of dzogchen, what you do is observe yourself in relationship to others and use the close experience of being with the other – the energetic quality—to respond. What is the purpose of interaction? It doesn't have any purpose. Out of emptiness many things manifest and what is important is the relationship between the manifestation and the emptiness. If I am nice to someone that makes them happy. If I am not nice to someone that makes them sad. Of course making them happy is better than making them sad but what does it help? If the purpose of life is to awaken, then the way to be with others is to try to create a mood of lightness, and of questioning.

In the tradition of higher tantra in dzogchen, there are many yogis who lead unconventional lives. People would often ask, *'Why do they do that?'* It's because that is what they do. *'Ah, but how could they be a proper lama and behave that way?'* My teacher used to demand of me, *'Who has appointed you, James, as the judge to the Buddha?'* Of course if you are a democrat and you believe all beings are basically equal, then you are quite entitled to make your judgement. There is an English expression, *'A cat may look at a king.'* A cat may well look at a king but it can't speak. Stupid people can make all sorts of judgements in the world but it doesn't mean they can do any better themselves. It's very easy for me to criticise someone like George Bush, but I couldn't be president of America. It would be really difficult job and it would be very frightening to feel so powerful. So you can see it is easy to criticise people, but could we do any better?

### Who is the 'I' that is present?

The question here is, as I meet someone else, who is meeting who? If we are present in this naked, open awareness, pure from the very beginning, who is present in that? We can say I am present, but the quality of that 'I' is not something you can name.

I can't say I, 'James Low', am doing this because 'James Low' is something which manifests – 'James Low' is always changing. The one who is aware is not 'James Low'. The one who is aware is aware **of** 'James Low', but not vice versa. 'James Low' cannot recognise his own nature. The nature is recognised by the one who **is** the nature. The nature recognises itself, but it doesn't recognise itself in the same way I recognise my watch. It recognises **it** by being **it** – being present.

In presence, we are fully here, but we don't know who we are. Even the Buddhas of the three times, if they gathered here together, couldn't say what it's like. They only make little gestures. They might have clapped their hands, or held up a crystal or a mirror, or talked for a long time. These things help some people, but they don't help other people. They will try many different things according to their nature, according to their sense of the possibility, but they wouldn't say *'Today's example will be...'* because the transmission has to come out of being present with others. It is not something artificial to be inserted. The dzogchen tradition has three main families of teaching; some of them are formal, but others, particularly *Man-Ngag-sDe*, are not. They are a connection between people's understanding; a connection through understanding is fresh.

So, just to clarify these issues again. ***Our mind from the very beginning is not a thing. It is not an object which can be found anywhere. If you try to grasp it you can't find it and yet it is always there. It reveals itself in a naked presence, as an alive quality, moment by moment. It cannot be grasped and yet is the basis for all that we experience.***

When we sit in meditation, we do the *Three Aa* practice and there is a lot of stuff. At first we might be trying to get rid of the stuff, we might think this is not a good meditation. It doesn't matter what arises for you, maybe it's clear and shining; maybe it's dull and stupid; maybe you are angry; maybe you are bored; maybe you are thinking, *'Why have I come here, this is all nonsense.'* Whatever is arising in your mind, just remain present with it. This 'remaining present' doesn't mean James is staying present with the content of his mind – James **is** the content of his mind. Being present with what is arising is being present with subject and object. I am not my subject. My subject arises in the field of awareness. This is very important.

In this skin bag, there is the felt sense of me looking out at you – this is the dimension of the ego – I am separate from you. I can see you and I can think about you. From the point of view of presence,

my skin bag and your skin bags are all arising together; arising and changing. I see your bodies moving and I see your faces changing but also my body is moving and my face is changing.

This is manifestation. Manifestation is the non-duality of subject and object. The ground nature is the openness in which movement occurs. This is the essence of the dzogchen view and we will revisit this, particularly in terms of problems of meditation from time to time.

[Break]

## Attachment and its nature

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It would be helpful to think a little bit now about attachment and the nature of attachment. Attachment is the quality of the identification with what arises and this identification comes from looking for a site or a location of the self. We are clearly aware of this on an external level.

For example, you might have in your wardrobe some clothes which you have had for a long time, then you look at them and think, *'Oh I don't need to keep these clothes anymore, I can let go of them.'* You used to wear them and they were OK, but now they've gone. Other clothes you might have are maybe very old but they have some emotional significance for you; you might have worn them in a special relationship or at a particular time in your life. The cloth, although it's old, is filled, is redolent and rich with emotional associations and therefore it is much more difficult to throw away. That is to say the object becomes invested with something of ourselves. We project our emotional energy and our sense of who we are onto the object, and then we feel that that object is helping us to be who we are. We do this all the way through our lives – small children do it a lot and we as adults also do it. So, what is the nature of this projection?

In buddhism, we have this idea of the basic poisons or afflictions, sometimes three, sometimes five. The basic three are stupidity, desire/attachment and anger/aversion. The first of these in Tibetan is *timuk* or in Sanskrit *moha* which means kind of dull and stupid. 'Dull' in the sense of not seeing the thing for what is.

When we look at anything, what is occurring is an experience. We can look around the room and we just turn and look in some direction and we can see something. For example, if we look around this room we can see a cabinet with statues and various bits and pieces. There is 'stuff' – and that stuff registers at first in terms of colour and shape. Then we can add something to that, we can say, *'Oh these are statues of the Karmapa'* and then we can have views about the Karmapa. So if we are in the lineage of the Karmapa this is very important. If we are not in the lineage of the Karmapa it is less important. If we are connected with some other groups we might even say this is very bad.

The value of what we see stands in relation to how we see it. We don't see the thing out there. We see a mixture of what is there **and** our projection, but we take that mix as being the true form of what is out there. This is the nature of stupidity. Stupidity covers up what is actually experienced by certain assumptions which are brought to bear. The most basic of these is: *'I am here. The object is there. The object is like that and I am like this, so I am separate from the object.'* In the nature of the two truths—which are discussed a lot in mahayana buddhism—this is the quality of relative truth and more particularly, of defiled relative truth: *I see an object. I see it as separate from me. I see it as truly existing and I see it as having these qualities.*

For example in Iran they will see Britain as the devil. Britain is a trouble-making nation so Britain is not like Iran – it is separate. Britain really exists. We know what 'Britain' is and it is existing as something and then we can define all the qualities of Britain. When you have a situation like that you have the full power of stupidity; you are paralysed. You can't negotiate and you have boxed yourself into a very fixed position.

On the basis of that, desire or aversions are going to arise because if we know the qualities of Britain we either like it or we don't like it. If we like it we might want to go to Britain, and if we don't like them we might want to destroy Britain. This is happening all the time in the world where we take people, things, jobs, occupations, foods and so on as being truly real. They stand in a relationship to us which is either going to add something to us – be useful for us – in which case we have desire, or going to be attacking us or stealing something from us, in which case we have anger or aversion.

These three poisons are very important. These are the three basic moves that we have in the world. We have to remember that they come about because we assume that the object is really existing. Now normally we would take that for granted and we might think, *'OK – let's try and be scientific. We are going to try and bracket off or remove our prejudices about the thing that we are going to understand.'* In buddhism, we would say that this 'thing' that we are going to try and understand is not a 'thing.' What we have to bracket off is the assumption that there is a thingness to the 'thing' that we are going to examine, because that is already a projection.

In the western materialistic view, we would say that that is **not** a projection – that's actually an alignment with how things are. From the buddhist point of view, it **is** a projection – it's an assumption that there are truly, self existing things. We hold this prejudice even when we see that there's a lot of evidence against it.

We may have somebody whom we like but other people don't like them. We may have somebody whom we don't like and other people like them. How can that be? Well they must be stupid too! You can easily make another judgement, and in order to hold your judgement in place, you have to use another judgement. But if we held the question, *'Oh I think this is good, but other people don't like it,'* then what does that mean?

Their view is grounded in their experience. And maybe the basis of them having **that** experience, is not so different from the basis of my having **this** experience. That means that they have an opinion and I have an opinion and an opinion is just a gesture, a tilt, a move towards the object – it doesn't have any particular truth to it – it's like a belief.

So if that is the case, then I can see that onto this 'thing' – whatever it is – I put my opinion. And having put my opinion, I then experience it in terms of my opinion. I am having a relationship with myself on the basis of my fantasy about this 'thing.' I am actually talking to myself. I am not talking to the 'thing' itself. You can see that very easily.

I don't know if they allow it in Germany, but in England, in sweet shops, we have these boxes and boxes of completely artificial, chemical, brightly coloured nonsense for children. The sweets are shaped like fried eggs and so on...and you see the children getting really, really excited and you think, *'Oh God, how disgusting!'* So how is it wonderful for them? We know, scientifically, that at a young age their tongue is more attuned to sweet things than to salty things and that that will shift with time. But basically in a child's world things take on a particular *cachet*; they have a particular kind of significance. They are relating to their own desire, dream, fantasy and hope. The object that

they see is not the object that **we** see. That is really important. So their attachment to that object is not an attachment to the **object**; it's an attachment to a fantasy placed on the object.

Again, you see that particularly with small children, who may have a comforting cloth that they maybe suck and rub on their face. This cloth is often something quite dirty and not very nice to an objective or a different gaze, but to the infant who is very attached and invested in it, it's very important. If they are crying and you give them their little cloth, they immediately become calm. How can this disgusting piece of cloth have that power? You, yourself, wouldn't want to put it in your mouth if you were upset because it wouldn't have that power. The power is in the mind of the child, put onto the object and perceiving the value in the object. This is buddhist attachment – this is what it means – it is an unconscious, projective incorporation of the object into the fantasy. That is to say, it is a blindness of the object as it exists in itself.

The whole of samsara is nothing but fantasy. That's why in the traditional language they say that we are in a dream, because in a dream things appear in a different way from in waking life. We take the thing in the dream to be real and afterwards, when we wake up, we think, *'God, that was really strange. I saw this...and yet it doesn't exist. If I saw that in everyday life, I wouldn't believe it.'* You get caught up in the dream, and the dream shows us in some ways how we create this world in our own image.

In traditional buddhist language we say this whole world is our karma. This is what karma means. Karma is projection. Karma is unconscious fantasy. Karma is the mental set of associations which are created in one situation and then re-experienced in another situation where you are not aware of the direct causal link. In that sense, it is very similar to a traditional Freudian notion of transference.

### Attachment catches me with its hook

Cutting attachment is very difficult because it's not that I am attached to this and I know what I am doing. I am attached before I know I'm attached! Attachment catches me – it's not something that I do – it's not something that our conscious self does.

Of course on one level we know that and we can say, *'Oh, I am very attached to these things.'* In which case we are giving a little discourse about our attachment and then somebody might say, *'Well, if you know you are so attached to them and you are a buddhist, why don't you give them away?' 'Ah, but actually...err...I don't want it to go...' 'So why not?' 'Because if I just threw that away, I would be throwing myself away.'* You feel it from your belly; it's not coming out of your head.

A long time ago now, maybe twenty years ago, I did many paintings and I still have these paintings. Sometimes I look at them and I think I should throw them away, as they are very big and they take up a lot of space. I am not going to do anything with them but when I want to throw them away I look at them and they are calling to me. So something of me is in these paintings. What is that?

This is the same thing that parents can feel towards their children. The parent imagines that somehow the child is part of them but the child is saying, *'I am me,'* and the child is also saying *'You are part of me, and you have to do what I want.'* So on a good day both parties are incorporating the other inside of themselves and then it all goes very well, but if one party is trying to separate and the other party is still trying to incorporate, that is very difficult. In the teenage period that is often very hard, because the teenager wants to separate and then they get anxious and they want to fuse – they are doing this all the time.

It's really important for us to understand the strength of this kind of attachment—see that it is not something you can easily consciously stop, and that it is part of the human communication of this dimension. All human relatedness is based on projection.

### Tantra makes use of projection

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The tantric tradition in particular speaks a lot about the guru. In the general mahayana, paramita mahayana and the theravadin traditions, the teacher is a kind of spiritual friend – somebody who gives advice – somebody who is useful and helpful in various ways but who is a separate person. In the tradition of tantra the teacher becomes somebody who is invested with emotional significance. This investment is seen as a helpful method, because that investment and incorporation is the intense form of our ordinary form of communication. This is how we go about connecting with everyone, but if we do it in an intense form, just as if we fall in love with someone, we have an intense projection onto them – they seem to be very special. When you introduce your special friend to your friends, they say, *'Mm...may be not so special.'* [laughter]. That's why it's always very useful to introduce special friends to our friends, because they help us to see that we are a little bit intoxicated and carried away.

In the tantric tradition they make use of that projection, just as in classical psychoanalysis the projection onto the therapist—the transference, the idealisation of the therapist as the one who knows something—is an important part of the treatment. If the patient stops imagining that the therapist knows something, the analysis comes to an end.

This is the special point made by Jacques Lacan: when the patient comes along to their analyst and thinks, *'Why am I sitting here and paying money to this stupid person!? They don't know anything,'* they have freed themselves from the transference. Maybe that has more echoes in their life when they start to realise, *'This is what I do. I keep imagining that things are more shiny and better than they are. This shininess is the shininess of my heart; it is my heart. The sun that shines out of my existence makes the whole world shine.'*

This is the point where we illuminate the world but because we do it inside the family of ignorance, in terms of separation and solidity, we can't recognise that it is the radiance of our own mind that makes everything shine. Just observe how it is the energy of our own mind that is polishing the world.

### Three poisons

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Now why is it that we polish some things in the world, and we don't polish others? This is because we are in these three poisons. We have a prejudice, so we do more of what we like and less of what we don't like. When you are three years of age many things are possible. By the time you are seven, it's getting a bit less, and by the time you are twelve, it's much less. And by the time you are twenty-one, your world is very small. You've stopped studying many of the things at school and you start to know who you are – you start to know what you like and what you don't like.

And then you feel 'I am me', I now exist as a person and I am not going to do the things I don't like. I am happy to abandon all these possibilities just in order to be me. This is what individuation is – it's the closure down into being oneself – everything else one could become is closed down. Of course this is a necessary process. The difference between the awakened position to that, and the closed position to that, is that we often add anger onto it by saying, *'I don't like that.'*

Necessarily we must make choices. If I look here – I am not looking there. It's not possible for me to look here and there at the same time. So however you position yourself moment by moment, you will not be positioning yourself in other ways. This is just the nature of embodiment. It doesn't mean I only want to look here and because I am looking here, I don't want to look there. But why am I looking here? *'I don't know.'* The uncertainty about our life is made much easier if we can hate the things we are not doing. If you feel content for what you have abandoned, you will feel more confident. If you have a love story with someone and you break up often it's much easier to say, *'Oh they were terrible – horrible...'* because if you think *'Well, actually maybe they were quite nice...'* then you get more turbulent than if you say, *'Oh they were terrible, the next person will be much better.'* Then you feel much more happy. Ambivalence is very painful and one of the things about these three poisons is they attack ambivalence, they bring a particular kind of certainty: I like this and I don't like that.

When our projection onto the world is mediated through these three poisons it gives a kind of certainty; a certainty which seems to exist **before** the fact, so we **know** before we experience. In dzogchen we try to reverse this, we **experience** before we know and, in fact, we experience **without** knowing, because knowing is not very important. When you go for a walk in the woods, does it matter if you know the names of the trees? If you are looking at the trees and the shape of the leaves and the colour, you can get everything. If you know the Latin name will that improve your experience? Maybe not. Knowledge is over-privileged, because knowledge is easily availed between the subject and object.

In terms of meditation practice, when we do the *Three Aa* practice and we relax, experience is continuing, something is happening. What is happening? We are very, very experienced at knowing what is happening – at applying names, titles and conclusions to all of these things. What we want to do is to relax and just be with what is there. If we do that, the object will liberate itself much more easily. If you have already invested into the object, it's more difficult.

That's why, traditionally in the nyingmapa system, we try to practice all the different levels of buddhism at the same time. So, we use the hinayana way of renunciation as a way of trying to separate our projection, trying to pull the energy of projection back into ourselves. From the mahayana point of view—remembering that all beings have been our mother in previous lives, remembering our debt of gratitude to them—we try to develop an equal, open relationship with all beings in order to stop the discriminatory projections of friend and enemy. All of these practices are very useful. They help us to experience the world as more neutral and as less personal. The ego likes personal gratification. The ego wants things to be personally meaningful but from the point of view of awareness; it's impersonal. I am not my 'self' – my 'self' is an aspect of experience. Sometimes the self is dominant – sometimes the other is dominant.

We know this if you have a conversation with a friend. When they're talking, some of the time you are just listening. It's as if you have become completely empty and their story is filling you up and in that moment you hardly exist; you are just receiving them. Other times you're talking and other people are receiving you and in that way, we know that how we position ourselves has a huge impact.

By letting go of personal fullness, we see how we construct a personal sense of self out of the pattern of our attachment. So in the meditation, if you find yourself being caught in the stickiness of highly invested thoughts which take the form of: *'I don't want this experience.'* *'I feel overwhelmed by this experience – I don't like it.'* *'I love this – I want more.'* *'What was that thought I had? I must*

*write it down – this is a very special thought.* We can have all sorts of experiences. The key thing is just relax and let it go.

On the level of the self, we need the prejudices in order to maintain our self distinction. On the level of awareness, we don't need any of that, and if we want to use the meditation as a means of just tilting ourselves from self identification to relaxing back into the natural condition of awareness – we have to let go. Which means, stop investing the heart energy in different objects. It is your energy which makes things sticky, they are not sticky in themselves. You make samsara for yourself. This is your ignorance; this is your attachment.

This is the teaching of the Buddha in the very first teaching on suffering and the causes of suffering. What is the cause of suffering? Attachment. Attachment means, I take this to be important and good and I take that to be important and bad. 'I' take it – it is not in itself. There is nothing which is good or bad but the mind makes it so. In the *Dhammapada* the Buddha says, '*Mind, the maker of all things...*' Our own mind creates heaven and hell. Our mind is the seat of samsara or nirvana.

Samsara arises when we invest and attach to objects as if they were separate and real. Nirvana arises when we recognise that the open dimension which is unborn, and the ceaseless flow of movement are inseparable, and all that we take ourselves to be is an aspect of movement. So without changing it or destroying it, integrating it into the ground nature allows instant liberation.

This is the view in relation to meditation practice.

So let's do some of the *Three Aa* practice.

[Practice]

### We arise due to causes and conditions

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We want the buddhas to be kind and helpful and make people feel happy. How do you make people feel happy? We make people really happy by linking them back to their ground nature. The *yidam* arises out of emptiness. All the actions are performed in emptiness. This is the purity of the *yidam*; this is why we have belief in that. Outside of that, in terms of ordinary construction – '*This is real.*' '*That is real.*' '*I like you.*' '*I don't like you.*' – this is all ignorance. Whatever is done inside ignorance will simply manufacture karma.

The relation between visualising oneself as a deity and the practice of dzogchen, is that when we see that everything becomes the mandala of the deity, we see the purity of the world through the transformation into the divine palace of the deity. When we see the purity of the world through the practice of dzogchen, we see it directly manifesting moment by moment in the open dimension of being.

In order to do the second practice, the path of dzogchen, one has to be present. If you are not present, if you are distracted or attached, then it is much better to transform your attachment through identification with the *yidam* than to stay in your ordinary self. This is why in the nyingmapa tradition we learn all the different practices. There are many, many teachers teaching *lam rim*, teaching different ways of worshiping deities; different kinds of offerings, and these are very good to learn. It's very good to see many different teachers and learn many different things because life offers many different circumstances.

It's not a good idea to kill someone; it's not a good thing to do but we have to ask why do people kill? They kill because they get lost. Why do people drive cars badly? Because they are drunk or angry or disturbed by something. That is to say, this world is very unsafe. To stay in your ordinary self makes you very close to the basis of your impulses.

Who we think we are will not last forever. It's very easy to get a blood clot, and a blood clot can make psychotic behaviour happen. Degenerative diseases of the brain, like Alzheimer's, are very common now. People who were peaceful during their life can become quite violent.

We arise due to causes and conditions. From the point of view of the ego, from the experience inside samsara – I am 'me' living my life. I am the actor; I am the agent and the one who makes things happen. From the point of view of tantra, I arise in the manner of a dream in the form of Tara for example, and in the mandala of Tara, activity occurs according to the needs of all beings. That is completely different. Why does this activity arise? Because of the needs of beings. Where does it arise from? Emptiness. This is the unification of wisdom and compassion. If you have wisdom, you recognise moment by moment, my arising as Tara is the radiance of emptiness. Why am I doing what I am doing? This is the movement of Tara into the world, everything becomes the compassion of Tara. So tantra is a very useful, middle connection point between ordinary activity and the path of dzogchen.

However you can also do tantric practice without much awareness because there are many rules and regulations. There are many mantras to do. Maybe you have to do ten million mantras – ten million mantras take a long time! You see people going very, very quickly because they want to get through the ten million mantras. They're going someplace and maybe the teacher says:

*I will only teach you dzogchen if you complete your yidam practice.*

*Oh - then I have to finish my yidam...*

*You can only have your pudding, if you eat up all your cabbage.*

*Oh then I'll eat my cabbage – I hate cabbage – but I want my pudding!*

This is to practice from the position of the ego. This is not having faith in the deity because if you have faith in the deity you say, *'One glimpse of your face is enough, I ask for nothing more.'*

### The essence of tantric practice is bhakti

The essence of tantric practice is *bhakti*<sup>1</sup>. The *bhakti* practices of hinduism that arose with Mahaprabhu Chaitanya and so on, were arising around the same time as the traditions of tantra: the deity has the power; the deity will give me the blessing – *'I need you.'*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhakti>

There are many different ways of practicing with a deity. In the traditional Indian understanding you can practice as a child calling to the mother, you can practice as a prince speaking to a king and you can practice as a wife speaking to a husband.

The relation you take up to the deity depends on many things. It can depend on the style of practice established in the tradition, but also it depends on your own nature. Some people are very devotional and other people are not. So one has to ask, *'Why am I doing this practice? What do I seek to gain from this practice? Can I fully establish myself in this practice?'*

Because it's a double move. On the one hand the practice is a means to an end; it is a method, a vehicle. But in order for it to be a method, you have to be fully in it, and because you're fully in it, it's no longer a method. Because if you are really praying from your heart you're not going anywhere, you are just saying, *'Padmasambhava – I love you.'* You don't want anything. Padmasambhava could be in front of you and you say, *'I just want you! I don't want anything. You're all I need.'*

If you become too instrumental in the practice what you will do, is you will bring the ego self – its desire for mastery and power – into the practice. At the heart of tantra is humility, which is why when you have this notion of pride in the deity *lhai nga rgyal* meaning 'full confidence' that I am Padmasambhava, you are also not Padmasambhava. In many of the practices, for example, in this *Big Rigdzin* practice that students of C R Lama do, you move from being Padmasambhava to not being Padmasambhava, and back again. You tumble through these different levels so that there is the space for devotion. If you have enough time, learning about buddhism is a very good idea. It's a very wonderful system full of incredible ideas, full of fantastically interesting ways of thinking about the world. The more you understand, the more it all fits into place and you see that it is all going in the same direction.

OK, I would suggest before lunch you do something outside because it's very nice. You can focus on what we were looking at this morning. If you go out into the garden and you walk around just pay attention to what you see, whether it's the grass, apples, flowers, people or buildings. Be aware of your immediate response to what you see: I like, I don't like, some heat, some enthusiasm, some coldness, some reservation. And then just stay with that and keep observing the object.

Say for example you find a flower that looks very beautiful. Where is the quality of that flower? Is the quality in the flower, or is the quality in my mind? Then you maybe see something that doesn't look so nice. Where is that? Or you walk among the cars and you see some car that you like and you think, *'Oh I would like to have a car like that,'* and you see some other car and you think, *'Oh that's very ugly and very old.'* Is the quality in the object, or are you doing it? From the point of view of dzogchen, everything we see is only a name put by mind. It is our mind that says, *'This is this and that is that.'* Our tendency is to experience it out there in itself.

You can just walk in the sunshine and keep examining what you see. Is it self-existing or is it created by my mind? Because if it is self-existing, it's very difficult to transform samsara into nirvana. You would have to go around each individual thing and paint it a new colour. If it's created by your own mind you can cut the root of that fantasy production, and that's a useful thing to do. Shall we do that?

We have lunch at one and then we meet together in the afternoon.

[Break]

We will begin again with the refuge and bodhicitta. As you recite this, because we recite this slowly, you can be aware of the movement between the breath coming in; the breath going out with the sound; the silence; the arising of the sound as vibration in the body and the sense of the meaning of the words.

Although when you say it in Tibetan, you've not that much sense of the meaning of the words this can be quite nice. Just hearing how the movement of energy from inside the body is a connection with the energy which is in the field, and that these things are impacting us all the time. A lot of the time we don't recognise how much of an impact the environment has on us; how we become influenced by sounds around us. So when we make sound ourselves it's helpful to have more sense of where the sound arises from, and to experience when our making of sound is an attack on ourselves, or when it's a liberation.

If you speak from very tightly in your throat you constrain your body's capacity to move. You become tight and your lungs are not properly used and that creates problems. Freeing ourselves to make sound – to make a big sound – is very important. And we also have to be aware of how our many internalised prohibitions can block that: *'I shouldn't be too loud. I shouldn't take up too much space. I shouldn't impinge on other people.'* These internalised messages interrupt the arising of sound because when sound arises through us, it's not we who are making the sound. That is just one story line; the sound is just coming. We get used to making this sound and it becomes just a flow of energy through you. It is very nice just to relax into the practice and let the sound flow.

Aa

SAN GYE CHOE DANG TSOG KYI CHOG NAM LA

JANG CHUB BAR DU DAG NI KYAB SU CHI

DAG GI JIN SOG GYI PAI SO NAM KYI

DRO LA PHEN CHIR SANG GYAE DRUB PAR SHOG

*To the Buddha, Dharma and the best assembly, I go for refuge until enlightenment is gained. By the merit arising from my generosity and other virtues may I attain buddhahood in order to benefit all sentient beings.*

## Garab Dorje's second point: Thag chik thog tu che pa

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This morning we were looking at the first statement of Garab Dorje. In the second statement he says: *To decide clearly on this one thing is the second essential point. Thag chik thog tu che pa* [Tib. Thag gCig Thog Tu bCad pa]. This means to decide on the thing which has been established; on what you have understood. You need to cut off everything else—or you need to firmly decide, because we live in a world of many different interpretations, many different ways of thinking about our practice—but when you have some taste of the fact that all phenomena are an illusion, then through doing the practice again and again, you want to make a fundamental decision: this is how things truly are.

When we have for example, difficult circumstances and we feel hurt and upset; these circumstances are empty in themselves. Now we could say because the circumstances are empty it's ridiculous to feel upset, therefore you should control your experience on the basis of this understanding. Dzogchen doesn't say that, it says, *'If you are upset, you can be upset but you are upset in emptiness,'* which means you can cry, you can feel very sad, you can feel lonely. These are qualities of manifestation; you don't need to change them.

If you have established a judgement such as, *'I know what the Buddha is like. I know that Buddhas are always happy, therefore, if I am not happy that's a sign my practice isn't going well,'* you will not be able to practice dzogchen. When we observe our mind many things arise and these things are always empty. That is to say they have no truth in them – they are not inherently true. Their truth arises in juxtaposition, in the connection between one idea and another idea. We have many chains of ideas which operate together building up a whole picture.

We may think, *'Oh why did I do that? I was a fool to do that.'* We are aware of a causal circumstance, we are aware of a consequent result, and we draw a conclusion from that of *'I was a fool.'* Each of these stages is empty. What you did was empty. How you think about what you did is empty and the conclusion that you come to that you are a fool; that also is empty. If you understand that then you don't need to change anything. You can be quite as foolish as you want to be – it's very difficult not to be foolish in this world.

This is the meaning of the second statement of Garab Dorje: to not enter into building up solid judgements about anything. Whenever something arises, observe it as the dynamic play of emptiness, so if you are healthy, observe that as the dynamic play of emptiness. If you are sick, observe that as the dynamic play of emptiness. If good things happen or if bad things happen, under all circumstances see that this is a just a wave of manifestation, it won't last for long.

This doesn't mean that you are not indifferent to suffering. If somebody is suffering, you can feel for them, you can help them, you can weep for them. Weep with them, but all within the understanding of emptiness. When somebody tells you that their friend is dying and they are heartbroken, **who** is dying? An illusory form devoid of inherent self nature is dying. Your friend is upset because of the emotion that they feel about their friend, they think, *'Oh when my friend dies, I will be all alone.'* That is a sign they have no refuge; that's a sign they have built their house on sand and that they will face the bitter taste of thinking that something which was impermanent is permanent. We can understand that, without becoming indifferent to their suffering and without believing what they believe.

This is the Buddha's middle way. *'I am sorry that you're suffering, and I know that your suffering is an illusion.'* If we take the first half, *'I am sorry that you're suffering'* and we rest in that, then we'll say, *'It's terrible, what is happening is horrible – it's ghastly.'* Then we also become very upset.

If we only take the second part *'... and I know it's illusion,'* then we say, *'It's an illusion, haven't you understood that yet? You are not very developed in the path of your spiritual life.'* Either extreme is unhelpful because emptiness is not standing in opposition to form; emptiness and form are there together. Everything can be felt and everything can be responded to but in the manner of a dream, and the more we do that, in the midst of the feeling there is space.

Often if you are with someone who is suffering, there is a tendency to make very heavy statements such as, *'It's terrible.'* Well it's not necessarily terrible – it's shit – but it's not necessarily terrible. It's bad and it's horrible in the sense of a feeling tone, but it's not 'terrible' as in some disaster that has

definitely happened. Sometimes if I have a difficult day in the hospital I say to a friend, '*Oh, today was really horrible,*' and they say, '*Yeah - what you told me ...that's really bad...people shouldn't do that!*' Then I have the whole weight of their judgements coming in on me. Actually, it's not so bad, I'm still here – I'm alive. The feeling tone is negative but when we stay inside it, it's moving and changing.

How we hear other people is really important because if we reflect back to them a more solid version of their suffering than they already have, then that is not helpful.

### Don't let thought be your master

In order to practice this we have to be able to observe how our mind ties us back into solid forms of thinking, and in order to do that we have to shift our relationship with thought. For many of us 'thought' has become the master. The thought grabs us and directs our existence. A thought arises, we come into the thought, and then we act from that fusion with the thought. What we have to do is to be aware of the thought and see that the thought is moving. If the thought grabs you; you are imprisoned. How to shift the power relationship with the thought?

The first thing is not to take it very seriously. Whatever happens is there just for a moment and it will be gone – it really will be gone.

This building here was once a catholic monastery for training missionaries; it's long gone. It's just not there anymore. Many things which have been the case are now no longer the case. If we look at history, if we look at impermanence, we can see that whatever we take to be real – really is an illusion. The euro is a wonderful illusion; all the things that were promised from it. And now the European Union may have Turkey inside it. This is a new kind of Europe. What will Europe be if it's got Turkey inside it? Then it will have Syria inside it and...these things are very important because the mind may well be primordially open, but it is also resting on conceptual categories. If you shift the conceptual categories without having openness; you will have tension.

It's very important to recognise what is your own capacity. What can I do? As long as we are fused and identified with thoughts and feelings our capacity is going to be limited. We have to cut the line of attachment into thoughts and feelings. In order to do that we have to enter the realm of meaninglessness.

Between samsara and nirvana is a big, empty valley; it's the valley where nothing is real. Because everything is solidly real, everything is like an illusion. Between these two, you have to let go of one before you get into the other. You can't have both.

In order to do that we have to cut through our fantasies. Generally speaking, we do this in dharma by renouncing things, by giving up the objects of our attachment on an outer level. Then we have to bring our mind to doing meditation practice, even when we don't want to do it. This requires a displacing of the object of our desire. What we want to do is relax, take life easy, not work hard. We have to replace that with discipline, with focussed endeavour, in which the commitment to **do** something comes stronger than the impulse not to do it.

This is what underpins the tantric notion of *samaya*, which says, '*I have promised and so I must do this, whether I like to or not.*' My ego sense of self – the feeling tone quality of me being me is unreliable as a basis for decision making, which is grounded in the sense:

'I can't trust myself. I trust the tradition. I trust the practice more than I trust myself. If I promise to do the puja six times a day, if I promise to do six million mantras; I will do that. Even though if in the middle of it I think this is a waste of time; that it's all nonsense and I don't know why I agreed to do all this. I will continue to do it because when I look at my life and I think many, many times I have trusted my feelings and where have they taken me? Where have all these wonderful impulses and certainties taken me?'

Probably into a lot of trouble. Maybe I should think, *'I don't know who I am, I don't know what I'm doing, so I will cleave to this.'*

That's what we can do in the path of tantra and that's why the *yidam* is very important. If you hold onto the *yidam* – the *yidam* will be the path to liberation. My life as the *yidam* is clearer and stronger than my life as myself because I can't trust being myself. My self is constructed out of karma, it is fundamentally delusional, it is fundamentally false. This is very, very radical to say, *'I am so mad I should trust some symbolic form rather than myself. Who I am is lost.'*

This is the beginning of really understanding the nature of suffering in samsara. It's very terrifying because most of the time we want to be confident, we want to be clear, we want to feel that we are in charge of our lives and that we are making decisions. But according to the Buddha's teachings, how we have acted in the past, the basis for our actions, has been an illusion. The things we have believed to be true and real are not true and real; they are without inherent self nature. All these important decisions that we made have created so little.

Again the Buddha said very clearly human beings want to be happy – they try to be happy – but the activity they engage in doesn't make them happy. We see this everywhere in terms of politics and economics and so on, so something must happen that makes good-hearted people using lots of energy, create horrible circumstances.

The people that are called 'terrorists' are doing something because they believe in it. Inside their frame of reference what they are doing seems very useful, very valuable. They are no more mad than business people. They are no more mad than the soldiers who are out trying to stop people being terrorists; both have a belief. How can we free ourselves from heavily believing in anything?

### In order to see the emptiness of things, we have to allow them to pass

In buddhism we do this by believing in emptiness. Everything is empty. This is a completely crazy kind of idea. People believe in houses, in motor cars, in friendship, in love, in families, but ordinary healthy people don't believe in emptiness.

*What are you doing for the weekend?*

*I am studying emptiness.*

*That sounds very lonely. Why don't we have dinner together?*

*No, I really want to understand emptiness.*

*Why would you want to do that? I think there is something good on television tonight. We could have a bottle of wine and laugh a little bit, then you won't feel so empty...*

*No but I want to feel empty.*

It's very strange. We have to really understand emptiness. Half of emptiness is just a problem; real emptiness is freedom. In order to see the emptiness of things, we have to allow them to pass, because impermanence and emptiness are very closely connected. If things were truly real they would endure, it is because they have no inherent self nature that they keep changing.

In order to maintain, under all circumstances, the awareness that movement and stillness is all there is, we need to cut the reliance on the conceptualisation of events. As we were looking this morning, it's not the events that arise in our mind, it's not the thought in itself as something which is happening which is dangerous; it is our attachment to it, the way we become involved in it and cling to it. It is our identification which is the problem. This is called grasping or thirst or desire – there are many, many words used to describe this in all the forms of buddhism. Essentially it means, subject falling onto object – subject fusing with object.

### Using *Phat!* to cut the link with arising thought

In Patrul Rinpoche's commentary on these statements of Garab Dorje, he recommends the use of the syllable *Phat!* to cut through the link between the arising thought and the desire to fuse on it. When we say *Phat!*, we are not just cutting on the object, that is to say the thought that's arising, but we are also cutting on the subject. We are trying to silence, to cut off the energy, which feels the need to fuse with the object.

The use of *Phat!* is found in many different practices. It involves relaxing, having your spine straight and using your breath from deep inside to make a sound rising straight up through your body and out the top of your head. By releasing this powerfully and clearly, you free yourself briefly from any kind of experience at all. It's very radical and it's very powerful. If you are not very secure and stable in yourself, then you could try it a little, and if it's not making you feel very good then you stop.

Generally speaking, if you have been doing some meditation practice and you have some solidity, it's a very good practice to do because it helps to clarify the view we were looking at this morning. This is why in dzogchen, understanding 'the view' is very important. It's not like in tantra where you can have an initiation and then do a practice and just do a lot of the practice without understanding about it.

The view is saying very clearly that when all the things that you think you are removed; something is still there. Therefore, when you radically remove all the things that you are, you'll find something. This is the function of *Phat!*, to keep destroying or disrupting the identification, the sealing into, the fusion with the familiar hooks or identification points of our identity.

We can use *Phat!* to cut away our name, our history, our gender identity, our language. Everything about us we can remove and something is still there. Of course all our thoughts and feelings come back again, but when we recognise if we take off all our clothes, if we are completely naked, we still exist. Then when the clothes go on the memory of the nakedness remains through the clothes as we were looking this morning. This is the function of *Phat!* and it's very, very profound.

Later, you can go out into the countryside and walk in the fields and sit by yourself and make this sound, it's very, very helpful. Many yogis have done it for many, many hundreds of years. It's at the

heart of the *chöd* practice – *chöd* means 'to cut' and cutting is very important. If you understand the view it can give you more courage to do the practice.

From the very beginning we have all had buddha nature; our true nature is this buddha nature. You don't have to buy it from anywhere. You don't have to create it from anything; it is just there. Therefore there is nothing to develop. *'OK – so I have a buddha nature. How come I am not in touch with it?'*

I am not in touch with it because it's layered over by a mis-identification – an ignorance which occurs again and again in my mind. Instead of being present in the integration of the three dimensions of existence: our openness, our clarity and the flow of manifestation. We have forgotten the openness, we have a dull clarity and we are fused with manifestation. We are fused with the world of appearances; we think this is all there is.

If you 'cut' the appearance what else is there – is there. You see it because you have been looking this way. It's as if you wake up in the morning and you have a pain in your neck, so all day long you look like this – this is what you see – [*James mimicking*] this is still there. But when you go to the osteopath then suddenly this bit of the world is coming back again! [*laughter*] This was there in the morning as well. So the buddha as the healer is just opening up this spine and you can look around and think, *'Oh my goodness me! I thought there was only this.'*

Very straightforward but very difficult, because you have been looking this way for a long time. You know all about that – you don't know anything about this. That looks familiar even if there are a lot of problems in it – this is very unfamiliar. This is palpable, this is manifestation; it has colours, shades, direction. This is openness; it has no form, no colour, it's not warm, it's not reassuring, it's just open. There's nobody there, but you are there not as anyone.

This is pure awareness without any content. Very difficult to grasp because if you look and you see something – maybe you see this lamp; it's tall, it has a golden colour and your mind can immediately hold on to something and you can have an opinion about that. When you look this other way you don't know what to do, there is nothing to say. All the buddhas...nothing to say.

To enter that state can be quite shocking. This is why Patrul Rinpoche highlights this word *hedewa* which means: **to be shocked** – shocked out of your head – not to know what is going on. That is the state that we want to experience, just to be without thought, without sensation, without any reliance on anything. So we are not sitting on the floor, we are not anywhere, there is just, *'Argh...!'* and when things come back we want to integrate the state of 'open shock' with the manifestation.

Then we forget the openness and we are back in the manifestation so again and again we say *Phat!*. Each time we do that, as we turn to the other side – the missing side – we keep the quality of that as we turn back. And then we are moving between the two and they become fully integrated.

OK, so now we will try this sound. First of all we try just to make it as a sound. All sounds have different qualities and the sound of *Phat!* is very sharp and cutting. You want to relax your throat, keep it open here so you are not shouting from here, [*James demonstrating*] because the voice when it is projected from here is going out, but we are not doing this to try and annoy the neighbours. We are not shouting at someone out there. We want this noise to come up right through us as a way of cleaning us right out, like a volcano rising up through us... [*James makes the sound of Phat!*]

As we feel this, we feel some tension in our belly and we feel our shoulders opening and the top of our head. You might see little balls of coloured light. You might feel a bit strange and wobbled. You just stay with that and again all sorts of experiences arise, and again you say *Phat!*

At first try it as just making a noise, but try to feel it coming right up from deep inside you.

### [Trial *Phat!* practice]

OK – try not to lean forward slightly looking down, you want to keep your spine as straight as possible and imagine the sound coming right out of the very top of your head. Sometimes when people do this as a group they start to giggle a lot, this is because most of us keep a lot of energy trapped inside the body. We are not free, we are not very spontaneous and when you start to release this it becomes slightly hysterical. Don't worry about that just keep going – cut through the hysteria.

One of the basic marks of dzogchen is there is no limit, if everything is open there are no walls. When a thought arises or a sensation and you stop in front of it and you feel you can't go on; this is the limit of your existence. *'Oh I couldn't do that. I can't make a loud noise. What will other people think of me? I can't do this properly.'* You can spend your time whirling around in that and you will never get anywhere. If you feel like that you will just have to cut right through it – cut, cut, cut, cut – till there is nothing left. When there is no limit; then it's open.

The books on dzogchen are full of terms for unobstructed, unimpeded, direct. It means the mind is so big everything is included: happiness, sadness, foolishness, wisdom. 'I am stupid. I'm an idiot. Nobody likes me. I'm wonderful. I'm the king of the world.'

Anything can be there because you can cut it away. When you cut it away it comes back but it comes back like a bubble; it's just a passing bubble. Life is then just flicking these bubbles of thoughts around. This is this miraculous world of *tigles*: light shining balls which are moving everywhere. That's all there is – the movement of light and sound in space.

## Cutting through inhibition, shame and fear

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This is our existence but we make it something very solid, very heavy, in which we are inhibited. This is a practice for cutting through inhibition; cutting through shame; cutting through fear. Whenever you feel a restriction, do more and more. We start with the *Three Aa* practice and then in that state of being relaxed, when you experience something that you are identifying with, whether it feels good or bad, release this sound. When you release this sound you stay inside the *Phat!* – you are just the *Phat!* coming up and because it's sound, it's gone. Your little bubble has gone – so just open.

### [*Phat!* Practice]

In many ways it is easier to do this practice if you are on your own because you don't have such an impact from other people. I'll say a little bit more about it and then we can do some movement and then go and do some more of it outside.

If you start to feel strange doing this; if you feel ungrounded, stop making the sound *Phat!*. You can do this *Phat!* with your eyes open or closed so explore that for yourself. If you start to feel very

ungrounded just bring your attention back to the objects in front of you. Squeeze your hands together, relax into the out breath and come back into your body.

It's not about getting 'spaced out' – it's about getting 'into space.' You shouldn't be feeling lost in the sense of dissociated, or not knowing where you are in a dull way. It's about openness and emptiness and clarity together, so although you are not wrapped in thoughts, there is a clarity or a freshness of presence. When you make this sound you feel very alive. You may feel a tingling sensation; you may see colours more brightly. This open dimension is filled with movement. This movement is who we are; whoever we see is a movement. The problem is not to change the kind of movements we experience, but to see that there is no solid thing. I am not a thing – you are not a thing. Because you are not a thing you are indestructible. The shapes of the patterns that we embody will change. We get sick or we get happy, rich or poor. Eventually we die but the ground of this manifestation, this is undying; this is the indestructible *vajra* nature. It's the integration of awareness and space: *rig tong*.

When we experience this by cutting and cutting with the identification, with the arising, then we have the possibility of being very fresh with everything because there are no things. Why would we not be fresh? We don't have to protect ourselves.

Are there any questions about the practice or the underlying view before we continue?

### Comments regarding *Phat!* practice

**Comment:** I don't like to do this practice because every moment cuts itself naturally but when I do it, I don't like it.

**James:** Then it's a very good thing not to do it. I think the most important thing is that we observe our own condition, our own situation, and when you know this about yourself that is very good. These are practices and methods. They are not true or false, they're more or less useful according to your own situation.

**Response:** It is a dzogchen practice but it is also dualistic.

**James:** Yes. It's to take off the covering.

**Comment:** Afterwards you have more freshness and energy and you are more there in the moment. That is what I experienced.

**James:** Absolutely, because it's designed to free us especially from too much of the earth element. We are too solid, too reified, too heavy. Then everything starts to move.

**Response:** It is more linked with the air element.

**James:** Yes, which is why we want it to arise forcefully from this air centre just below the navel.

What I would suggest is we do some movement now and then we have a quick cup of tea. Then for about half-an-hour we go into the country and sit quietly and do this *Phat!* practice. Start with the *Three Aa* practice and then get into doing the *Phat!* practice.

We meet back here at just after six.

## Exploring the concept of emptiness

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Let's use the example of a cup to explore what is meant by the concept of emptiness. Although it seems to be a simple object, it contains a huge amount of thinking; the development of science and technology as well as the pathways of modern distribution and modern design. We can say that this cup is full of many invisible things but is empty of what it seems to be full of. We see it being full of itself; this is a cup. When we look at it, it appears to be something self-existing. We take it that there is a 'cupness' to the cup.

Actually there is no 'cupness' to the cup. We say 'cup'; we ascribe the identity cup to the phenomena, but without the concept of cup we wouldn't be able to use this. Again, it is our **perception** of what appears to be there, confused with our **conception** about what the thing is, which creates the immediate sense of the 'givenness' of the cup. Without understanding what a cup is, you wouldn't know what to do with it. If you give a cup to a small child, maybe eighteen months of age, it will bang it on the table because everything is a hammer when you are that age!

Its meaning is dependent on the concept. The 'cupness' is not in the cup – the 'cupness' is in **us**. We are used to projecting or adding the name – the concept of cup – to the phenomena, and we are so used to doing that, that every time we see this, we add that. If you have come here for the first time and you go into the kitchen you may see someone drinking, and ask them, *'Where are the cups kept?'* Then you turn and look and see a shelf of things and you take a cup; you know what it is and you know what it's for. The cup doesn't have to have an explanation written on the side 'How to use me'. We know this. We subsume, we bring the object that we see into the familiar pattern of mental representation and with that we have the confidence 'I know what this is'. What appears to be there is actually lacking.

The cup is full of the history of technology. The cup is full of experiences of many people throughout hundreds of years which have come together. This means that these many factors, by operating together, create what we take to be the simple object of the cup. So where is the 'cupness' of the cup? The cup is empty of 'cupness'. That is to say, something is there which we are used to making use of, and that we have the habit of seeing in a particular way, and so we take it as a given, when actually it is a construct.

## All manifested things are constructs

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In terms of the analysis of phenomena, emptiness is revealed by seeing that we are asleep in a dream where we imagine things to be fully formed and given as they are. We forget the process by which they have come into being. All manifested things, all the things that we see and encounter, are constructs: our clothes; our language; our occupations; the houses we live in; the food we eat. All of this is the bringing together of many, many different factors. The product of these factors exists for a while, and then they don't exist. Even if you try to make something from very strong substances, it won't necessarily exist for very long because things can change; battles can occur.

They are building a cement stupa in the garden here. Cement and concrete are very strong but if you have a war some non-buddhists may come in the night and blow it up! It doesn't matter that it's made of concrete. These things happen in other countries, why wouldn't they happen here? No matter how strongly you make something it doesn't mean that it can resist time, but it also doesn't resist the fact that it is a construct. The Buddha said very clearly: "All things that have a beginning, have an end." When you put things together you create the illusion of a form which is self-existing,

but this phenomena that you're experiencing is still connected by strands of meaning to the ideas which have brought it into being. When these ideas shift and change, people no longer find meaning in it.

For example, if you go to a car boot sale or a second-hand shop, you can probably find old-fashioned radios or old-fashioned bits of technology. At one time, maybe in the 1930s, everybody would have a very big radio with big units inside. After the invention of transistors, people didn't want these radios and now a few people who like old things collect these, but generally speaking, they are not popular. They still function and you can still use them, but fashions change, so the meaning and value of the object depend on the cultural projections, not just on individual personal ones.

What the thing appears to be is not inside it; it's always in relationship. All the phenomena that we experience are created out of relationship. And in fact, they are not created by a relationship which when you've finished relating to it is now somehow enough. If you stop relating to it, it won't have any meaning; it is the mind that gives the meaning to the phenomena.

When the mind is not clear, when the mind is full of ignorance and attachment, the meaning that it gives to the object it sees is a solid meaning. When the mind is relaxed and open, the meaning that it gives is a relaxed and open meaning. That is to say, there is an appreciation of the manifestation, there is an enjoyment of it, and a response to it, without turning it into a fixed object. Things come into existence and then dissolve.

You can see that in, for example, the Tibetan tradition of making mandalas out of sand. You take quite a big frame, almost two metres square, and create a pattern in coloured sand. It takes a long time. It's done very, very carefully. You use it for a brief period of time and then it's disposed of and put into a river. It's very helpful when people do that, because they are showing that you can put exquisite energy into something which is then gone.

We experience this in art. Dancers, singers, actors meet together to practise and rehearse, then they give a performance for a while and then the performance is over. If you were not there, you don't have it. You can maybe listen to a recording later, but it's very different if you are in the situation, seeing the faces of the people, or watching something on television. It's very different because the real meaning is conveyed through the commitment, the energy and the relatedness of the people on the stage and with the people in the audience. That is something which you can't grasp.

### Our attention determines our relationship with objects

Perhaps you have some possession in your house that you like very much, maybe a necklace from your mother, or a vase, and every time you look at it you think, 'how lovely' but you don't look at it twenty four hours a day. When you are not looking at it, you are looking at something else; you're thinking of something else. Its meaning and value arise when you see it; its meaning is revealed to you through the immediacy of connecting with this.

This is the way in which we can understand the object 'sings' with awareness. Without awareness – without attending to it – it will be dead. Things come into existence with attention; if you don't attend to them they will go away. This is very important.

Nowadays, people don't believe in local gods and they don't believe in fairies. Do you see fairies? No. Maybe two hundred years ago, your great, great grandmother could see fairies. Maybe they

would put a little milk outside, or on certain nights of the year they would do some special cooking and that would be a way of maintaining this connection that there are local gods. Tibetans very much believe in these things, but in the west we don't believe in them – it's as if they have vanished.

Things exist through attention; this is the most important thing. If your attention is heavy; if your attention is full of grasping; if your attention is objectifying; what you will experience are things which seem to exist in themselves. If your attention is relaxed and appreciative, what you will experience is the radiance of the moment of engagement, without judging, without assuming, without fixing the property of manifestation as being something.

### We are not things; we are a process of being

This is the way in which we can analyse and understand emptiness. It's very helpful to look at the phenomena you encounter, for example, a carpet or your clothes, and see how they are created and have come into being. Nowadays it's possible to see these fantastic films about the development of the foetus; you can see these first cells joining together and then the whole development of the foetus – it's absolutely incredible! We have developed in this way. We are a process of being; there is nothing in the body which is fixed and stable. Moment by moment, the blood is pulsing; the breath is moving; the hormonal system is dynamic and changing; the brain is functioning and communicating with all the parts of the body; the intestines are carrying out huge amounts of communication. This body is alive and moving – it is not a 'thing.'

Often when we look at other people we see them as a 'thing' and we say, *'Oh, this is this person'*, and *'That is that person'* as if there was some stable and enduring essence to them. Analysis is very important, because it helps us to see how quick and easy it is to assume that things have a fixed essence and it can be helpful for us to see this essence, since it gives us a sense of power and control.

When you have to attend to the **process** of how things are, you have a problem, because everything is impermanent, and so how it is and how it changes means that how somebody was yesterday, is not how they are today. If you want to know how they are, you have to be with them. You cannot assume anything about other people if you want to really know how they are. Which means you have to be alive; you have to be available and you have to have some space in yourself as you go towards the world. If you are preoccupied and full of your own stuff, it's much quicker then to think, *'Oh this is this person and that's that person – I know what they're like,'* and act on the basis of the knowledge you have about them, rather than attending to them.

The movement towards living with awareness means that you have to stop being lazy; you have to stop being stupid. Laziness and stupidity is the habit of taking things for granted, for thinking, *'I know what this is, I know how this works.'* When we do that we don't look, but when we look we always see something fresh. If you take something for granted you are not fresh in relation to 'it,' so why would you expect 'it' to be fresh in relation to you?

This was one of the wonderful things that happened to many people in the 1960s when people started to take LSD. They started to see the world in a way that was different. They started to see in a fresh way, and they thought this was the power of the drug, but it's not really the power of the drug; it's the power of our existence. If you stop being dead, the world will become alive. Why do we deaden ourselves? Because it's quick and easy. The path of awareness requires a lot of resourcing and willingness to attend to complex experience. Emptiness is very wonderful; emptiness means there is nothing in any situation that can give you a

stable belief that how it was yesterday is how it is today. If you want to know what something is, give it your attention.

If you want to **not** understand emptiness and you want to know what something is, give it your opinion; give it your idea; give it your concept; give it your knowledge. It's very quick; you already know so many things why would you need to learn anything else? You can just sit in your chair and know the top and the bottom of the whole world. It's very easy to have an opinion about everything, you just switch on the television and you say, *'Rubbish! Nonsense! These stupid people! If the world was run by me it would be a much better place.'* One of the great pleasures of life!

## Questions

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**Question:** On a very crude level, how often do I have to try sheep's eyes to know I don't like them?

**James:** Well, if you approach from that point of view, then you have already built up something in your mind which says, *'I know I don't like sheep's eyes, but I will pretend that I could like them, just to try to make something different. But really I know I don't like them.'* Until you can cut that idea, you have to do the *Phat!* practice very strongly. I think these things are very interesting because it's like stirring the bottom of the pond. When we bring ourselves towards something that we don't like then, we really see what our resistance is. When life is easy we can feel very relaxed and open. It's when life gets more difficult – when we have some heartbreak or financial troubles, work or health problems – then we realise that we get angry and fearful, and we don't sleep well at night or whatever. Then we have to accept that things get to me. Why do they get to me? They get to me because I don't want to accept that this is how it is.

Say you have a problem at work with your boss, that's not very nice but it's just how it is. A new boss comes into the company and they have some funny ideas and they are going to change things for you. But if you think, *'This is not fair, this shouldn't happen, I don't agree with this.'* you then stick yourself on to this, again and again, and it becomes more real and powerful.

It's not that if we relax everything becomes wonderful; there are still many things that are not our first choice, like sheep's eyes. The question is whether we build up a negative story, so that instead of being open to it and dealing with the problem as it is, we now add on to the situation a whole wall of resistance. We might think, *'When I was a child my mother always forced me to eat these eyes, so now I am not going to eat them ever again.'* But the person inviting you to eat some sheep's eyeballs is your good friend who has come from the Middle East and is offering you a delicacy; they are not your mother...

We approach the situation from this fixed world and then project that on.

**Response:** So all I know is past knowledge – it's never new – it's never fresh.

**James:** That's right. But of course some of the knowledge we have is very helpful. If at this time you go out in the forest to pick mushrooms, it really is helpful if you know your mushrooms! You can die from eating certain mushrooms. It's not that knowledge is wrong. If you are driving a car you have to know the acceleration of the car, because if you are on a motorway and you try to overtake another car and your car can't go fast enough, that's a good way to have an accident. It's not that

knowledge is bad and you have to be in this kind of spaced out view; it's to be very precisely in the world as it is, without adding the extra layers on.

For example, everything we see in this room is a construct; whether it's the electric lights, the paintings, the statues, the floors, the carpets, our clothes. Everything is made out of other things. Everything is in relationship with and in communication with many other phenomena.

Where does one thing begin and another end? It begins and ends with our concept. Our mind is like a pair of scissors, it cuts into the world and says, *'Well, this is the painting and the painting stops here.'* Why do we say that? Because we have an idea of 'painting' but if you are looking at the wall you can see many paintings, as well as a white wall and different shapes. The whole thing is one sensory impression.

When you look, your perception is bringing you all these different colours and shapes all at the same time. Your mind is sorting it out: this is the wall and that is the painting, you are doing that. If you don't do that, what you will experience is colour.

This is very important for us to practice and this is where the *Phat!* practice we were doing earlier on today is helpful. When you say *Phat!* you cut off the level of conceptualisation: the mental categories and linked aspects of meaning through which you construct things. When you do that a lot the world is just very fresh and something unspeakable – just colours and shapes. Nothing has changed, you've not gone mad and you're not hallucinating. Everything is just as it is – very vibrant – but it's not put into its categories. When we put things into categories they tend to become seemingly self-existing. Examining things very closely, looking at something and observing how concepts come into your mind and just easing the concepts off...

### No one view is correct

Here is another cup, you could say it is white, but if you were looking at it very closely you would see because of the shaping of it that the light is reflecting in many different ways. On a formal level we can say that the cup is white, but because I am sitting close to it, my actual experience is that it is white, gray and brown because of the colours reflected off the wall.

The more we do this the more we see that we live in multiple worlds. We have one world which is constructed out of abstract knowledge and in this abstract world, everything remains pretty much the same; hence we see the cup as 'white'.

In the world of experience, the cup is how it appears to be in the moment according to the light and the other colours around. If you keep examining phenomena in that way you start to realise that abstraction has some useful functions, but it is just a way of seeing; it's a way of viewing, it is not the true view of life.

Here I am speaking in English yet very few people here are native speakers of English. We can assume that you grew up speaking German and then you learnt English. Now when you learn another language, you are confronted with the fact that the relationship between the name and the phenomena, which seems completely natural, is an artificial construct. We have a word for bread in English, and you have a different word in German, so you have the same substance with different names. But when you are learning it for the first time – when you hear your mother saying it to you – the name and the object appear to be the same: *'This is a piece of bread. This is what it is.'*

If we live in a small world and we don't have many different experiences, we can naively assume that what we were told as children is the case. This is one of the reasons why it says in many buddhist books, that if you want to practice the dharma you should leave your country or village. This is not just because it is helpful to break family ties and obligations so you can be free to do meditation, but it is that when you travel that you encounter different customs. And then you see that people perceive objects in the world in a way that's different from how I do.

Maybe you go to Spain, Italy or Greece and you see that somebody is preparing a food that you have always seen cooked in one way in your country, and they are cooking it in a completely different way. How could they do that? They can do it because they don't live in your mind! Then you start to see that what you believed to be true is just a set of ideas. There is no inherent truth or value in these things; they are conventional, all that we think is true is just a convention.

This is an amazing thing and it's very terrifying, because when I rest on any belief I am resting on an illusion – a temporary structure. This is very strange. There are very few things which seem to continue through time with any sort of consistency; not political ideas, economic forms, forms of music and so on. When I go to art galleries and look at modern art now, I think, *'What is this?'* I prefer to see a painting by Constable or Gainsborough; something which has some technique, beauty and depth. I go and see this other weird shit and in my prejudiced way I think, *'What is this!?'* It's called art, but for me it is not art.

So I am old-fashioned, that is to say, the views that I have were once popular, and are now less popular as new generations of people come in with completely different ideas. I look at young people and I think, *'How can they do that? How can they listen to rap music? How is it possible for intelligent human beings to make this noise?'* But of course it's very possible, it just that I wouldn't want to that and I don't want to listen to it. In that way I am confronted with the fact that what I have taken to be the case is not the case; it's just my case, my truth, my opinion.

This is how we can see impermanence all the time. Impermanence shows us the emptiness of phenomena. And if we don't let go of things, if we have a very strong view, then anger is evoked and we think this is terrible; the barbarians are destroying my world. They are not trying to destroy my world, they are just inventing their own world. We live in a multiplicity of worlds, and pluralism means no one vision is correct.

America wants to bring democracy to every country in the world, but some countries don't want to have democracy. But from an American point of view, everything which is not democracy is bad, is wrong. We can see how problematic this is in our world, because this is the discourse of anger and it's likely to lead to a lot of warfare.

### In the absence of emptiness, impulse anger and attachment take over

Emptiness means seeing that what you lean on – what you rely on – is an illusion. But it's not just about the object; it's about the subject. Who is the one who feels heavy and needs to lean on things? Why do I need these objects of attachment? What is this hunger inside of me, or this aversion which seems so undeniable and powerful? We have to observe ourselves in the process of the arising of a phenomena and the identification with the phenomena, so that we become the phenomena.

If somebody says something you don't like, you feel irritated. You **are** irritated and in that moment you have no other position with regard to that person but irritation. Before they said what they said, you were not irritated. They say something and suddenly you are only irritated, and you think, *'I don't want to listen to you any more, I have had enough!'*

You have become sealed into a position and in that position your body changes; your breathing changes; your use of language changes; your capacity to see the other person or to look at their face changes. You say, *'I don't want to speak to you. I am leaving. I don't want to see your face again!'* People often do that when they fight.

It's very important to observe ourselves in these moments, and we can see that something which is a passing phenomena has been invested with true meaning. It appears to be so powerful that you might end a relationship, or you might punch the person, or try to destroy their life. We see this all over the world. When people kill each other, it's not that a person 'kills' another person; it's that an impulse catches a person, and the person under the power of the impulse kills the other person.

**We** don't have impulses; impulses have **us**. It's not that we can say in a generalised way, *'I feel angry with you.'* If we are angry with someone in that way, we are not really angry. If we are really angry with someone, you're just angry. Your anger, which is not yours, has just caught you and now you are just angry. But you are not 'just angry,' you are many different things. What has happened to all the other things that you are?

This is where we see the absence of emptiness. The other person is now very solid and very real, and we feel very solid, very real and the mood is hostility. It's very helpful to observe yourself when you move into negativity, whether it's pride or jealousy or desire. Without changing the form, by observing it, you can see this is attachment and when I get attached things seem very real. I am real and the object is real. When I am not so attached, I'm more loose and the object is more easy.

### The best way to deal with anger

Emptiness is a key which can help us to keep loosening phenomena as they stick together and become locked. If we don't have a key like that it's very hard. If you try to do it on a cognitive level, if you try to have an internal dialogue and say, *'James, calm down, you shouldn't get so angry!'* It's very difficult because 'you' are not being angry – the impulse of anger has taken you over. This is like a demon taking you over and in that sense you are not responsible.

This is why in the tantric practice we have the visualisation of wrathful deities. These wrathful deities, like Dorje Drollo and so on, arise from emptiness. In an instant, out of emptiness, comes Dorje Drollo – very dangerous looking, very murderous, very happy to chew up people. When you become angry, if you understand the practice of Dorje Drollo, as you soon as you start to feel angry you become Dorje Drollo. Dorje Drollo is empty, so your anger is empty. By being empty in your anger the impulses dissolve from the inside and you are less likely to attack the person or to feel attacked by the person, so the anger becomes something dynamic and moveable. That's the best way to deal with the anger.

From the dzogchen point of view, if you remain spacious, anger will come and go, but you have to be able to integrate the anger and the spaciousness. That's very hard, because the impulse will 'steal yourself' and if you are only lost in yourself, you will have no awareness to step apart. Whereas if you have a visualisation of Dorje Drollo, you go from yourself to Dorje Drollo, and from Dorje Drollo

you have some space to deal with the manifestation. That's the real benefit of these *yidams* in dealing with difficult situations.

The Buddha said in many, many different texts that from the very beginning everything has had the nature of emptiness. That is to say, there are no truly existing phenomena in this world: everything is a construct.

When we come into a situation and we say, *'This is intolerable. I will not put up with this...'* we are showing our limitation. We say, *'I cannot bear this, it is completely improper for you to behave like this.'* If we just listen to this type of language, it's very judgmental, fixed and definitive. But if there is no inherent self nature in anything, actually the situation is workable. We find something unworkable because we don't have the capacity to work it; we are under-resourced. That is why the Buddha taught eighty four thousand different dharma teachings, so that ideally, in any situation, you can resource yourself with something.

For this reason actually doing the practice is very important since a buddhist book will not resource you if it is sitting on your bookshelf. A buddhist meditation will not resource you if you never do it; only the things that you do will resource you. If you resource yourself, then in the moment where you think, *'I cannot deal with this. I just don't know what to do,'* and you remember to say the refuge, or pray to Padmasambhava, or become Tara, when you do that, you will have some space and having moved around the problem, something will arise.

### Attachment is the energetic quality of ignorance

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Problems become fixed, definite and unbearable when we are fixed and locked into a position with regard to them. The key thing is to keep moving, and to keep moving is not so difficult. The Buddha said again and again and again, that everything is impermanent. If everything is impermanent, this means it's moving. If it's moving – why then are you so stuck? It's ridiculous. Actually, the situation is not stuck; you are stuck because you have locked on to a particular reading of the situation.

It's very important not to take a position. The wrathful deities are described as having nine dances, that is to say nine different ways of gesturing and being. This is very important because when you become angry, you become more fixed and solid. If you can have nine dances when you're angry, that's quite helpful, you can move around a little bit.

So when you feel stuck in a situation or mood, do some moving, some stretching, some breathing, have a shower... Do something which is likely to change your mind and not intensify your mind. If you feel angry with someone, drinking half a bottle of whiskey is not going to help, because the whiskey will simply heat your body up, heat up the liver, and close you down. You should do something which is likely to shift your mood.

What we really see here is the link between impermanence, emptiness and attachment.

**Question:** I know that what you said last night has gone because it's impermanent; yesterday has gone. I know that what you said is just empty – sound and emptiness like a mantra – but I am attached to it and I don't want to let go of it.

**James:** Even though we have an understanding of emptiness and impermanence, if attachment is still very strong it won't help us. What we have to be able to recognise, is the emptiness of

attachment in the moment when we become attached. What is this force coming from us, which says, *'I won't let go, this is too real'*? A kind of lock-on. That energy is very tempting, very powerful and seductive.

The Buddha says in many teachings that attachment is the most dangerous thing. Attachment is the energetic quality of ignorance because attachment is not an abstract idea; my energy is now turning and swithering around this object. I may feel that this situation cannot be resolved until I get you to do what I want you to do. Or, that until you apologise to me, I am not going to let this drop. This is because I feel some change on the level of manifestation is required to repair the hurt that I have felt; there is an injustice, and only if I get justice can I let it drop.

This is a big mistake. If the Tibetan people are going to wait for justice from China before they get on with their lives, it will be a very long sad wait. China has stolen Tibet and is not going to give it back. Moreover it is completely destroying Tibet; this is a fact. But Tibetan buddhism goes on, life goes on, and people find a way of saying, *'Oh, yes that happened and now what shall we do?'*

This is very wise, and should give us some confidence that the Tibetan people are amazing in the way in which they have been able to get on with stuff. If you look at this war between India and Pakistan over Kashmir; they can't let go, both sides say Kashmir is theirs. Many people are killed and there is much unhappiness because they cannot let go. Israelis and Palestinians; Kurds and Turks; China and Taiwan; catholics and protestants in Ireland... all over the world people are locked into situations they can't let go of. But if you let go of it and you accept that this is samsara—that it's not fair, there isn't justice, and karma manifests many times with a very bitter taste in our life. You may think, *'Ugh! I don't want this to happen.'* But tough luck – it has already happened so what are you going to do? Cry? Start a world war? This is what people do because they feel insulted.

Maybe some of you have done a lot of study in your life. You look back and you find a box with your old diplomas or degrees. What do they mean? It's just bits of paper. Our lives are full of things which have gone.

I was in Austria recently for the launch of the German edition of ***Being Right Here***. They are launching this book but in my mind it has already gone, so I'm sitting there thinking, *'What is this?'* I am now caught up in my mind with other things; so although it is real, I am not in it. This is what life is. What could I do? Take the book cover and make a little hat from it and walk down the street advertising it? Life goes by. If we see that good things go by, bad things also go by.

Attachment is always empty but it doesn't appear empty. Attachment is really like the devil in the old christian notion of the devil, where that the devil takes on sweet forms in order to catch people. It looks like one thing but really it's another. When you are in your attachment it gives you the sense, *'I have to do this – this is really meaningful – I must do it.'* But actually you didn't have to do it at all, it was just an illusion.

Two hundred years ago in Germany<sup>2</sup>, if young men felt insulted they might have to fight a duel. Why? Because their honour was at stake. Nowadays within the muslim community mostly, we have young women killed in 'honour killings', as they have come to be known – killed by one or more male members of the family to 'protect the family honour'. This is attachment.

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<sup>2</sup> Ed. This teaching was given in Germany.

OK, shall we stop now and meet again tomorrow?

[Break]

## The mind and the content of the mind

The first key thing is to have a clear experience of the infinite nature of your own mind. This means that the mind is not something which has any beginning or end, boundary or limit. If the mind had a limit, then it would be something which was stopped by something else. If there is something outside your mind, then your mind becomes one thing in a world of other things. This is how we usually experience ourselves and our conscious, intellectual mind. I know things about London that you don't know because I live there. You know things about Germany that I don't know because you live here. When we meet other people we find we can increase our knowledge by learning from them, so we gradually extend our sense of who we are and our capacities and possibilities. We see this very clearly in how children develop.

When we talk about our real nature or the nature of the mind in dzogchen, we are talking about something completely different. The mind is our basic capacity to know and to be aware; it is that which illuminates what is going on, and it can only illuminate what is going on by being in touch with, or present with, that which is going on.

How do we find out what our mind is? We are very used to having a sense of our personal limitation. Some people think they can't sing; some people think they can't dance; some people think they can't cook; some people think they are not very good at learning languages. Everybody has some idea about themselves that says, *'I can expand this far; I can do this kind of thing, but I can't do these other things – it's not possible for me.'* In this way, we feel that we have a restricted shape and a restricted access into the infinite potentiality or possibility of existence. This again is our personal, constructed, self-relational notion of who we are, built up from experience grounded in some stories we tell ourselves about who we are.

When we do the meditation, we want to look very directly at what is the basis for making a boundary in our mind, and the way we do this, is to do the *Three Aa* practice. We very gently take up such questions as:

*Where is my mind?*

*Where is my mind now?*

*Is it resting on anything?*

*Where is it located?*

*Where does it stand in relation to my body?*

*Does it stand in relation to my past?*

*Does it stand in relation to the future?*

## Metaphor of watching like a bird-watcher

Finding your mind is not an intellectual enquiry but a case of actually looking, as if you were a bird watcher who had heard that there was some rare bird in the forest. He would go into the forest, find the likely place and just wait. He has an idea that the bird is there but he can't run around with some bread in his hand saying, '*Come on, birdie, birdie...*' In the same way you cannot find your mind by very actively looking. You have to wait for the mind to show itself. Whenever some answer arises to the question, '*Where is my mind?*' stay with that answer. Let the answer be there, and see what happens.

For example, you might feel your mind is in the back of your head, so you sit with that and then it's gone; that thought has gone, that answer has gone, you're still here and you are not aware of the back of your head anymore. So this was a false solution to the problem. You keep looking again and again and you become aware that there are many solutions that you put forward.

### Metaphor of 'join the dots' puzzle

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Ordinarily, you could link these solutions together and create a sense of shape and continuity like the kind of puzzles that children do, with little numbered dots on a page which they join together with a pencil until they suddenly see a shape emerge. This is how we create our sense of self. We link together many different moments of something and create an image; but this is a construct. Who is the one who has agreed this construct?

We do this for some time and then you open it up to these other essential questions.

*What shape has the mind?*

*What colour does it have?*

*Where does it come from?*

*Where does it go to?*

These are very, very important questions. You will find them referred to in many different texts, because our tendency is always to look for cause and effect. We live in the domain of samsara, which is a domain created by karma which means cause and effect. Actions lead to causes, everything in our world arises from causes, and this is what we looked at yesterday. Cups, buildings and so on arise due to forces. The question is: *Is the mind a phenomenon in samsara, or is the mind something different?* If it arises from causes then it is just like everything else. If it's not arising from causes then maybe it is something different.

Everything goes somewhere, maybe to the scrap yard, maybe to a hole in the ground; everything comes and goes. Does the mind go? If the mind goes, where does it go? You have to look again and again, and what you are really examining is the relationship between the mind as an awareness, and the content of the mind, the thought and the feeling.

We are very used to experiencing our mind through the thought. A thought arises in our mind and we think, '*Oh I am thinking this, my mind has this idea.*' I think "*This where I am the one who can know things.*" In that moment, 'I' claims an ownership over the thought but the thought is also defining the 'I'. It's a kind of symbiotic fusion. Then that thought vanishes and some other thought arises which again we identify with.

Is there a mind which is separate from thought? Remembering that what we take to be the thinker is itself, usually a thought. The mind *itself* is not something we are familiar with; we are familiar with consciousness, and consciousness is a form of subjectivity which arises in the mind and passes.

For example, if you are walking outside and the sun is suddenly shining you become conscious that it is bright and you might put on sunglasses. Before the sun was shining, you didn't have a consciousness of the intensity of the light; the consciousness of the light arose with the sunshine. Consciousness arises with objects; consciousness is not self existing. Our understanding of our mind is almost entirely related to consciousness. Because consciousness is impermanent and is fused with thought, it's very normal for us to think that our mind is this series of phenomena which is arising. This is understanding *inside* the realm of samsara: this is the understanding of ignorance.

What we are trying to understand is what was described yesterday in the view: **the naked quality of mind**. When the mind wears the cloth of consciousness and the object of consciousness, then subject and object become like some wrapping around this mind. It is the light of the mind which reveals the nature of the cloth.

Clothes show themselves when you put them on. If some dress is just folded in a drawer, you don't know what it's like, you have to hold it up, and even then you don't know what it's like because you still have to put it on. It's only when you put on the clothing that it reveals itself. In the same way subject and object are revealed through the body of the mind. This body of the mind is the dharmadhatu – infinite awareness.

Now, let's do the *Three Aa* practice and very gently we allow this question just to hover there, not as an investigation but just very gently to ask, "Where is my mind?" As different answers come just let them be there, see if they ring true and let them go. "What shape is my mind?" "Is it square?" "Is it a bowl?" "Is it very heavy?" "Is it very big?" Stay with this and see what happens.

[Three Aa practice]

**Comment:** I can see that there is always a kind of commentary about what's happening.

**James:** Who is doing that?

**Comment:** I get this feeling that it's me, and I am just standing outside looking at what's happening; sometimes it dives into it but then it comes again. Then there's a new layer and so it goes on...

**James:** So in that way, you can see how the sense of self is maintained through a dialogue—*'Something is happening, it's happening to me, this is what I feel about it, this is how I'm reacting to it.'*—moving between being an observer and being a participant. But the content of that is changing; where you are located, what you see, what you hear, and how you respond, all of that is changing, all of that is unreliable and yet somehow there is a sense that something is happening. So who is the one that has a sense that something is happening? Is that the same as the thought, or different from the thought?

**Response:** Different.

**James:** Yes, then you have to explore, who is that 'one'? What is its nature? Does it have a shape or colour? It helps very much if you can sit very still, and try to keep your eyes open because,

otherwise, if we close our eyes we are more likely to go into the realm of the thoughts and follow them around, when what we are trying to do is to have a perspective.

We sit here, there is an experience and this room is our experience. If we remember our practice from yesterday, we have more sense that everything in this room is just a name put on to it by our own mind. When we believe the name, we think the room is strongly real, when we know it's just a name, the room is not so strongly real. We become more aware of the vibrant, fresh presence in which there is an experience.

What is it an experience of, who knows? If you want to know you give it a name, you say it's a room. If you don't give it a name, what is it? Anyway something is happening – who is it happening for? In that moment you can see subject and object arising together. When the subject arises the object becomes named and more precise and an emotional reaction is evoked. When the subject relaxes into its ground nature of open awareness, there is just a presence, and in this presence subject and object move.

What we have to do here, is to move from the observer—which is our self-conscious awareness, our 'executive' self, whereby we manage ourselves in the world and which is a slightly 'displaced' notion since we are keeping an eye on ourselves, and is a point of reference. We are moving from that rational, observing self to a presence which is not apart from what is arising, but is this luminous field *within which* things are arising. We just have to try that again and again. The main thing is to be very clear of the difference.

**Comment:** But this is by thinking...

**James:** No. It's by being still and seeing what comes. You have to think in advance and you have to have a clarity about what is thought, what is consciousness and what is an emotion. And then when they come and you start to become involved in them, be aware that this is an energetic movement.

The mind has these three modes: open, spacious or empty. That is the first aspect. The second aspect is that it has clarity, or the potentiality of showing many different things. And the third aspect is that it has the energy of manifestation; we are always caught up in energy of manifestation, that is to say, we are always thinking. Part of the energy of manifestation is the idea: '*I exist, I do this, my hand is going like this, I am doing this...*' This is the quality of how we come into the world, with a sense of 'I am "doing" my existence'.

From the point of view of the openness, when you really see that the mind is open, you see that it is unborn, that it doesn't exist as a thing and yet from it everything arises. Who is the 'I' who is 'doing' this? We can't find it. Empty activity performed by no-one, nowhere.

**Response:** But this makes me panic – I have the feeling the mind is everywhere and everywhere is the mind and I am part of the mind, then I started to panic and sweat, so I thought, I better come back!

**James:** It's a very scary thing to do – you are leaving home! It's one thing when you are sixteen to say, '*I hate living in this house, I'm going to leave home.*' You fill your little bag and you walk down the street and it starts to rain and you think, '*Maybe I want to go home again.*' Leaving home is very hard because you can't leave home until you have resources, which is why studying and understanding the view is very important.

This anxiety that we feel on one level of course keeps us safe. If we think something is dangerous then we protect and comfort ourselves in some ways, but anxiety can also be a limit about moving out into something different. In life some people take too many risks and some people don't take enough risks; finding the right balance between risk and comfort is very difficult. It's the same in the meditation.

If you have civil war in your country or economic privation, it makes sense to try to come into another country as a refugee. If you are going to leave one country and go to another, you should know what is the advantage. This is why studying the dharma is very important, because then we have a sense of, *'Oh yeah, the mind is empty, but I don't really think I am empty. Anyway do I want to be empty? No, I want to be 'me'. Why shouldn't I just be 'me'?' Well, there is a big wall called death, and if I am 'me' I am going to bang into that wall.*

It's not that we **want** to get enlightened; the idea is that getting enlightened is a good way to stop suffering. That was the Buddha's first teaching. He didn't say that what you find in samsara – nice Swiss chocolate and so on – is something horrible. It's that if we build up our life on comfort and nice things, sooner or later that structure will vanish.

In Europe we have had peace and money for a long time, but the history of Europe is war, famine and suffering, and we have no reason to believe it won't come back again. And when it comes back people will be very upset, they will not know how it has happened; it happens because of the five poisons. All over the world people's health and happiness is destroyed because of stupidity. In America, they built a city under the water level with weak surrounding walls and people lost their houses, their possessions – everything. This is stupidity. People want things done quickly and cheaply, like building nuclear reactors in Chernobyl without checking the quality standards.

We have to recognise that samsara is very familiar for us; it's very easy once we've grown up and found our way of being in the world. Leaving it will not be without anxiety, especially because we are leaving into a realm we don't know and which is not tangible; you can't grasp onto it.

There is a double move. As we go into the practice, and we maybe find this kind of anxiety, we have to think, *'Oh maybe I am too heavy.'* It's like in winter when the pond near you freezes over, and you go out skating then suddenly you hear the ice cracking. You think, *'I have to get away from this bit, this is thin ice and I'm too heavy.'* This is what happens in the meditation: *'I am too heavy, I have too much attachment, too many thoughts and feelings.'* If I take 'myself' identified with this into the area of emptiness, the anxiety arises because emptiness won't support me.

### Metaphor of an elephant falling through a cloud

I was looking at a little video for children, and it was about an elephant who wanted to fly. The elephant couldn't fly, but some friends managed to get him up a tree, and a friendly cloud came and floated underneath. The elephant jumped from the tree onto the cloud, and he fell right through it! In the same way, emptiness is like a cloud and we are like elephants. *[laughter]* Until we become very light, we will keep falling through; we won't be able to stay in emptiness because we are too solid.

This is why we take refuge; maybe doing prostrations, *ngöndro* and *yidam* practices and so on to make us more light. Of course if you really understand dzogchen, you can loosen yourself up quite quickly, but it does take time. The key thing is to be aware that this anxiety arises because of these

circumstances; therefore, it's a reasonable anxiety. If I make it a limit, I am going to pull back and then the anxiety will become like a wall I can't go through. But if I think that this is the anxiety that comes as I re-identify myself, then maybe I can live with that anxiety. After all, what is the nature of the anxiety? It's empty, but of course when it comes it's very strong, very real.

Some people are frightened of going to the dentist. The dentist is not the sweetest place on earth but generally speaking, dentists are not torturers. How can you sit in the chair with somebody who is going to cause you pain, and not feel very frightened? You have to know that you are here because you have a pain in your tooth, or you want your tooth to be repaired, and so when the pain arises I have to be in relation to the pain. If I'm just in the pain and I say, *'Hey, leave me alone! Don't hurt me!'* then the dentist will say, *'OK, leave.'* I still have the pain in my tooth so I have to let the dentist deal with the pain. I feel the pain but I have to be able to see that the pain is a means to an end.

If you are in the process of the meditation and anxiety arises, it is very helpful to relax into the out breath, just releasing the tension from the body and staying. If it becomes too much you can just swivel around a bit on your hips loosening up this central area; look around the room a little bit, and then come back into the breath.

Anything else?

### Manifestation comes from emptiness

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**Question:** When I asked myself, where is the mind? I kept getting conceptual answers that I know already. Awareness would return and I'd say, *'Is this the mind?'* Then a thought came and I thought, *'OK, this is the mind.'* I was constantly doing this and I found it's all concepts as well as experience. I thought everything is the mind. Why am I doing all this?

**James:** If I have understood you correctly, what you are describing is that the mind as a subject when it looks for itself, seeks to find an object. The objects which are most to hand – most accessible – are thoughts, feelings and sensations. When one of these arises, we think, *'Oh maybe you'll do.'* We rest on this for a while but then it goes away, and then we think that that didn't work.

**Response:** But why not? The thought is also the mind, no?

**James:** No – no. The thought is a manifestation of the mind, but it is not the mind itself. If we remember the traditional example; the mind is like a mirror. What arises in the mind is like the reflection in the mirror. You can't take a reflection out of a mirror, but the reflection is not the same as the mirror.

When you look at the mirror, all you can ever see is reflection; you cannot see the mirror itself, but clearly the mirror has a capacity to show the reflection. The mind is like the mirror, it means that when we are looking for our mind, what we keep doing is identifying with reflections, and the reflections keep changing. But in that very moment when you think the reflection is my mind – your mind as the mirror is there as the space in which the reflection is revealed.

It's not that you get it wrong, it's like a balance: the reflection and the mirror. Every time you see a reflection, the mirror is there, but because you see the reflection you don't see the mirror.

**Response:** And if I go back to the awareness, am I more the mirror?

**James:** Of course. The awareness *is* the mirror. The problem is that the mirror is not an object for the mirror; awareness is not an object for itself. The thought is an object for the awareness, but the thought cannot catch the mirror. No thought will catch your mind, but your mind is always showing thoughts.

### X marks the spot. Searching for treasure

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Therefore, what we have to do is to learn to shift our focus so we are not looking for the mind the way you might look for some hidden treasure. When you read some of these children's books, there is map of an island and a cross on the island, which marks the spot where you will find a big tin box full of treasure.

Many sufi, christian and buddhist books talk about the 'golden key' to the secret treasure of this, that or the other. But the mind itself is not a treasure you can find: the mind itself is the one who *looks* for treasure. That's why it is said that you don't have to look for your mind, you don't have to buy your mind, you don't have to find your mind; your mind is already there as the one who is looking for the mind. Like the person who puts their glasses on the top of the top of their head, and then looks around saying, *'Where are my glasses?'*

**Response:** But it still feels like a subject: the looking and the awareness.

**James:** Yes. It's your awareness, but it is not your 'self' in the ordinary sense. My 'self' is my memories, my hopes, my fears and the stories I have and so on; it's the content of my mind, so on that level it is like a reflection in a mirror.

This is open, shining but ungraspable. How can I be open, shining and ungraspable? By letting go of the things I put on as my clothes. Every time we find a solution to: who am I, and what is my mind? We put on some clothing and this dulls us. To be 'naked', you can't say anything about it, everything is dropped for one tiny moment and there is nothing at all. In that 'nothing at all' you are there, but you are not there as you, as your history, as your gender, as your culture, as your language; you are not there as any of that. You are just there with the absolute simplicity of being: not being this, not being that, not being big, not being small, not being male, and not being female. Just being – a pure being – which then *reveals* itself as being this and that.

The being 'this and that' is the energy of the manifestation of the ground which is always open. But because these two are so close together, it's very difficult; we always mix them up. C R Lama always said to me, *'Don't mix your food with your shit.'* It's exactly that. Food goes in one hole and shit comes out another hole. If you are a good farmer you can take your shit and put it in the field to make more food to go around, but you don't want to mix it directly.

The manifestation is a product; something which arises and passes. Where does it come from? It comes from emptiness. This is a really important thing we are looking at just now, because if the mind is a thing, if it has a limit, it will stand in relation to other things. It is because it is infinite that it is the ground of everything. The ground of everything can't have any limit because it's not just the ground of my body, it's also the ground of the room, of this village, of this country, of this planet, of the universe. Everything you know and feel arises in the mind; the mind is not some little tiny place.

We are very used to thinking I am 'me,' and especially I am 'me' living in this skin bag; this is the level of manifestation. I **am** living in this skin bag, but the one living in this skin bag is a mind which has no

limit. The infinite and the finite come together. We need to look again and again to understand the nature of the infinite because we are so used to the finite. We keep calling the infinite finite, and we make ourselves confused.

This is primordial ignorance, which separates the open dimension into subject and object. This subject and object, in the first moment of ignorance, are not truly separate. This is why the first level of ignorance is called *lhen chig kye pai ma rig pa* [Tib. lhan cig skyes pa'i ma rig pa], the ignorance of the co-arising of the ground, and the forgetfulness of the ground.

**Question:** Then if I feel like I am in the awareness with my connection to the ground, I can say, '*Oh that's fine now,*' until a thought comes?

**James:** So where does the thought come from?

**Question:** From the manifestation of the mind. Is this the clarity aspect?

**James:** Exactly, to bring the presence of the awareness moment by moment as thoughts arise. Rather than thinking, 'there is all this stuff and I need to move it around'.

If I am very obsessive, I want to have everything equally spaced. This is what obsessive people do, they keep trying to rearrange their life to get things right. They re-do their house and re-paint things and re-plan their garden and so on.

We want to think, as long as I am trying to move this material around, I forget what it is: it is the light, the energy, the potentiality of the open ground. Therefore I can move with it; I can dance with it rather than control it. Because who I am in the moment that I am controlling it, is just a gesture of this open dimension. Subject and object arise together in that way.

**Response:** But then it doesn't matter if I am in the thought or in the awareness.

**James:** Well, if you are collapsed in the thought and you forget the awareness, then you are in samsara. If you are only in the awareness, then you are Shiva stuck on top of a mountain with nothing happening, and that awareness will become very dull!

The nature of the mind is that manifestation always occurs; you don't have to do it. Our problem is we keep thinking we have to **do** the meditation. The meditation begins when you forget that you have to do anything.

It's like if you go to the seaside on a nice day and you're just splashing about in the water. Somehow you are in the waves, and when you have that kind of experience you can be in the water for hours. You see that with children, when first of all they say, '*Oh I don't like it, the water is too cold!*' After a short time they forget that, and they are just splashing around, so when you say, '*Hey, we have to go home now*' '*No, no I want to stay!*'

To be present in a situation is very easy. You don't get tired because you're not having to do it. You're not having to resist anything and you're not having to encourage anything.

[Different views reveal different things. Metaphor of French butchering](#)

If you go to France and you go the butcher's, you can get meat cut in a very different way from in England. In France you get these very nice cuts of meat, like l'onglet and bavette, which are very delicious if you like meat! I love meat so I find this wonderful, and when I go to France, I'm always asking the butcher *'Can I have some l'onglet?'* He might reply, *'No we don't have this – but wait a minute...'* He goes to the back of the shop and comes out and cuts it, and I think, *'Ah, very nice'*. In the British butcher's school they have a big map of the cow, and they cut it in to pieces like rump and top side. The butcher in France has a different map of the cow so you get a different cut; it depends on the view. This is really important, because the view lets the butcher cut in a particular way; when you cut, you reveal things in a different way.

From the viewpoint of samsara what we see is, this is mine – this is not mine; I want this – I don't want that. This is what we see all the time; this is our view. Our view is 'I a} a limited person who needs to survive'. I need to get certain things, and I don't want other people to control me. We have all these positions all the time.

The view from dzogchen is very different. From the very beginning the mind is open. The clarity of the mind is revealed as the potential of the many possibilities of meditation, which include visions, lights, colours and so on. From that moving domain of potentiality, moment by moment, gestures of manifestation occur. And this is what we are; we are gestures of manifestation linked to clarity and openness.

Who is doing this? Nobody is doing it. On a conventional level, we say, *'James is doing this,'* but if you integrate, there is nobody doing it. Of course if you have a child to look after, you are going to remember to do things, but even in the moment of thinking, *'What does my child need when they go to school tomorrow? What do I need to put in their bag? ... who is having that thought?'*

One ground, two paths. One path says, *'I am thinking about this: it's very difficult being a mother, there is always so much to remember...'* The other path is relaxing and opening just by being present in the situation – Monday morning – child – school, these activities arise. Because I am open to the situation everything comes together, so in that sense, I reveal myself as a flow of energy. The anxious conceptualisation 'I have to make sense of my life, I have to be in control of my life', drops.

This is called 'ease of being', this is *chatral* [Tib. Bya-bral], this is being free of activity. Because activity is arising, you don't have to worry so much. This is a sign of success in the dharma; even when external circumstances are difficult you don't get so upset. It's just coming and going and you accept it; you're not struggling with life.

You still have these three factors: openness, clarity and precise manifestation, and they have to operate together; they have to be integrated. This is not the same as mixed, it means they are collaborating and they don't conflict with each other. To collaborate means, everybody does their work. If you have a couple of friends and you are going to do some cooking together, if you notice after a while that you are doing all the hard things and someone else is not doing anything, you say, *'Hey, what is this? If we are going to collaborate we should share the work.'* In the same way, the openness, the clarity and the manifestation, they all have something to do. And when we are balanced through these three, you get an ease of being.

## Questions and responses

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**Question:** In the meditation itself, is it then useful to make mingle it a little bit?

**James:** What you are trying to do is think, is this my mind? The more you ask that question and you have these answers, you can see somebody is asking this question. Who is the one who is asking the question? Where is that person? The question arises, so where does it come from? Me. So who am I? Why me? Then you can vanish into a knot but you just stay with the knot. Who is the one who is now trapped? Who is the one who feels dull and stupid? Who is the one who feels confused? Who is the one who feels anxious?

Don't collapse into the knot otherwise you'll become stuck. Don't try to avoid it by thinking of something else. Just stay present with the one who hasn't a clue what they're doing, who doesn't understand meditation. If you stay present with that, that one will vanish, and then you start to see directly: *'I thought I was that and I'm not, so who am I?'* Another candidate comes and another one...

Nowadays we have this thing called speed dating, when maybe a hundred people come together, and you get five minutes sitting in pairs to meet people and introduce yourself. This kind of meditation is a sort of speed dating. You want to find your one true love, and now you want to find your one true nature, so you interview all these candidates and you find they're all useless!*[laughter]*

**Question:** I am wondering how to tackle boredom, which has been coming up for me in the last few days? Do I just sit through it?

**James:** It's just the same. Don't sit through it – don't endure it – just be present with it and it will vanish.

**Question:** Do we have to make the space between the thoughts brighter?

**James:** You can, if you find that space, you can sit in there, but mainly we have a lot of thoughts.

**Question:** Is it useful to make the space brighter, or is it useless?

**James:** Only you can answer that, because it's your mind. The problem is if you say, *'Is it useful to make it brighter?'* Then you have a notion of agency: *'I am doing this.'* The whole function of this kind of practice is to enter into the practice without feeling you have to do it. This is why we have established practices; we don't have to invent them for ourselves.

We're just dharma followers following dharma; that's all. We don't need to be special or to have a particular task. So when you sit in the practice, you may think, *'What is the shape of my mind?'* or *'My mind is revealed through the gap between the thoughts,'* but your mind is also the thought. My mind is space as in the gap between thoughts, **and** my mind is the thought, in terms of the manifestation. It is both; one is not better than the other.

For our purposes, because we know the manifestation very well but we don't know the space, we have to tilt a bit more towards the space. We have to separate, for the purposes of recognition, something which is never separated.

*[church bell ringing]* Tea time!

[Break]

## Ego is redundant

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As we looked yesterday, since the mind has been pure from the very beginning, you don't have to make it pure. So what are you busy doing? If you are acting in order to make things better and things are already good, maybe this is not helpful. But if you don't do something, who will you be? A great deal of identity is located in 'I can do this,' especially 'I can do this for other people', 'Other people need me'. Many people have created their whole identity on the basis of being useful, but here in the practice we become useless.

That is to say, the ego self is redundant for the task of realising your own nature. The ego self is very useful for getting to the shops on time—if you don't get to the shops on time, you don't get food and if you don't eat food, you die and if you die like that it doesn't help your practice. This is not to say that the ego self is some inferior form; it is to say that it has a function. If you imagine that something has a greater function than it really has, then it will be ridiculous.

In the same way, very often parents, when their children have grown up, find it difficult to accept that on an everyday level the children don't need them. The parents still want to be important. In some families parents get upset if the children don't want to come and have Sunday lunch. They see it as a kind of betrayal of the family. Why do they want the children to come for Sunday lunch? So that the parent has something to do; the parent can feel important. Of course they won't have that as their conscious notion; they'd be thinking, *'I want us to be all together, I want to find out what is going on...'* but really it's because their job as parent is finished; the factory is closed; you are not needed. This can be very difficult. It is the same if you lose your job, the same with many, many things, but it is especially true with understanding meditation.

The ego has been used to being the central point: *'I am the centre of my life and I have to be responsible for everything. I have to remember to pay the electricity, the gas, the local taxes. I have to do the garden, I have to get the plumber in, I have to remember to get the cleaner for the toilet and I have to plan for Christmas.'* People's lives are full of many things to do and in many cases, if you don't do them, you get extra difficulties.

The world is telling you: be efficient, stay in charge and life will be better. Meditation is very, very different. What helps you in terms of survival in samsara, doesn't help you in terms of realisation of your true nature. It doesn't mean that these tools of samsara are wrong or bad since, from the point of view of dzogchen, samsara and nirvana are inseparable. It just means that if you want a job well done, you need to use the right tool.

If you are cooking a cake and the recipe says that you have to put in two hundred grams of sugar, and you discover you only have one hundred grams of sugar, so you decide to put in a hundred grams of salt instead – salt and sugar may look the same – but you will have a very funny cake! In terms of cooking you would be very precise in what you use. Why would you not be precise in meditation? You sit to do the mediation and you are applying the wrong tool, but you apply this tool because you know how to use it.

OK, so I have to put a screw in the wall, I don't have a screwdriver, so I'll use a hammer. It's a well known technique and it's not very good! We have to learn something new, but we already know how to do something, so it's always going to be easier to do what we already know rather than to really learn this new thing. Every kind of new learning involves a de-skilling.

As fluent German speakers, if you start to learn Italian, you are going to be stumbling. You go to your evening class and you learn a few words and you get the pronunciation and the grammar wrong. You come outside and talk to your friend – the German is just flowing again because it's always easier to do what you know.

## Becoming de-skilled

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We come to accept that in doing meditation we will feel de-skilled. This de-skilling means we don't know what to do; we can't get it together; it doesn't work out the way we want it to... We might even suffer anxiety and feel bodily sensations. We might feel we are going unconscious or we might get funny dreams. You can get all sorts of side effects. These are often anxiety reactions to being in a situation where you don't know what you're doing. For example, if you have a child and your child has to go to hospital, it's very normal for the parents not to be able to sleep, not be able to eat, have anxious nightmares and so on. Why would you not have something similar when you realise that all the things that you have learned – all the things that seemed very useful – are actually obstacles to getting what you really want?

This is something terrible; it's as if you have made a big mistake. According to the Buddha's teaching, you **have** made a big mistake: it's called ignorance. Ignorance has been there for a long time, and due to ignorance we are studying the wrong things. Now we have to study the right things, which means really accepting that we don't know.

If we don't know, it's always better to go slower. If you don't know, why would you accelerate? You are driving in the country and you're lost, so you think, *'Oh well, I'll go faster.'* Maybe not so good; maybe go slower, maybe even stop and have a look around and try to find out where you are on the map. In the same way, observe yourself. Look and see what is there. Don't assume. Assumption – which is habitual knowledge, that is to say, knowledge that you have gathered in another place, for another purpose – is very quick, because you know what to do with it. But if you use that knowledge, it would be very difficult to proceed.

## Feeling at home in not knowing

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A necessary function of meditation is to feel stupid. When you feel stupid it is often not comfortable. In the language of therapy we can say this is a narcissistic wound, because we believe that we are good at things and now we are faced with something that we are not very good at. This is one of the main reasons why people don't do meditation – because it doesn't make them feel very happy. Some meditation can make you feel very happy, but that's often a meditation where you pray to a deity and you feel rays of light and it's all very empowering. But if you are looking to find your real nature and you can't find it, then that can feel uncomfortable, scary even.

In order to learn we have to stop, to not know. In the same way, when we look for the nature of the mind, don't be too quick. You do know how to look for some things, but you don't know how to look for this. You probably know how to go to the supermarket and fill your basket very quickly, because you know roughly what you want and where to find it. But looking for the nature of the mind is different. You go very slowly and maybe you feel frustrated, maybe you feel confused, maybe you feel it's a waste of time; you just have to have patience.

The basic mahayana teachings on the paramitas<sup>3</sup> are very important here. Generosity includes giving ourselves time; patience is sitting with things even when they are not clear; endurance means having the courage to keep going even when you feel stupid.

Dzogchen may be a quick path in relation to some other paths, but it's very slow when it is not going well. The reason it's not going well is because *you're* not going well. We have to accept that, *'I don't have as much clarity as I would like. I'm not as intelligent as I would like. I'm not as calm as I would like. I am what I am.'* If we can accept that and start from where we are, then we start to see something. But if we are always trying to put ourselves in a better place than the place where we actually are, we have nowhere to start from, because we are actually beginning with a fantasy.

Don't cheat yourself by pretending to be better at things than you are: just know, *'I'm not good at meditation.'* That's a very nice place to begin. Why am I not good at meditation? Because I get very sleepy. So what can I do when I'm sleepy? You immediately have some precise questions. You can take them to the text; you can ask people like me, there are many ways of dealing with all of these situations. We will only know what the real meditation problems are, when we have **real** meditation problems, that is to say, when we can allow ourselves to be at home in not knowing.

Everything has problems. If you are an artist, learning to draw has its problems. People who play tennis or golf or football or any other sport have problems. When you look at what people are willing to do and sacrifice for worldly things that doesn't last, why would we not be willing to make this kind of effort for ourselves?

OK, so let's do this practice again. We will start with the *Three Aas*. Do the *Three Aas* and then relax. You are sitting comfortably in the audience, and your mind is going to put on a little performance for you. You just sit and watch: act one, scene one. You observe and the show and it will change; you don't have to do anything, you just look. You are a spectator, you are there to look. You are not an actor; you don't have to join in.

**Question:** Do we still have to ask all those questions?

**James:** Well, it's a very soft question. Maybe we can try it from the side of the object first – maybe this is a little bit easier. When a thought arises, you can think, *'Where does the thought come from? Where does the thought stay? Where does the thought go?'* Then you can be more peaceful as the audience; you observe these things arising and passing. When a thought is there, when you experience it, where is it staying? Is it staying inside you or outside of you? Is it on top of you or underneath you? You can just observe.

When the thought goes, where does it go to? If you have nothing else to do but look, you don't have to be an active participant. You just have to look and see how that goes.

**Question:** So the thoughts and the questions are specific ways of looking into it?

**James:** Looking to see what is there. When thoughts arise they seem to just be there, and they often seem to be very powerful and very true. If they are very powerful and true they seem to have

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<sup>3</sup> There are different listings of the paramitas and they all include the perfection of generosity, of patience and of endurance.

an energy of their own, and that energy seems to catch us. Again it goes back to what we have been looked at: what is this stickiness? Why does subject fall on to object? But now, if we are in the audience, we are not a participating subject in the ordinary sense.

### Mind like the sun: not mind like a searchlight

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In the traditional example it is often said that the mind, especially the awareness of the mind, is like the sun. Early in the morning, as the sun starts to come into relationship with the world, we have the stages of the dawn. In the first stage, before you can see anything of the sun, a soft light starts to spread through the sky. It is a very diffused light and gradually dark objects, maybe trees or buildings, start to reveal themselves.

This is the quality of attention we want to bring to the meditation practice. We are not looking with a searchlight, we're not looking with a torch, and we're not trying to pick out particular things. Rather we want to sit with this calm, open illumination, in which things are revealed as they come into manifestation and as they pass out of manifestation.

When we start to look in a more pointed way – looking for this or that – there is already a kind of constriction in our sense of self, and also a corresponding over-attention to certain objects. By focusing on some things we bring them into being in a very particular way; something becomes the main figure and the rest recedes into the background.

What we are trying to do now is just to keep an open attention to everything. In that open attention, things reveal themselves in all sorts of ways; sometimes the mind is calm; sometimes it's not calm; sometimes it's dull; sometimes it's clear. Without changing the form in which things are manifesting, just be present with them.

### Duality is the main problem

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The many books that are now appearing on dzogchen are all saying exactly the same thing: that duality is the main problem. Duality is where we separate subject and object, and we create for ourselves the experience that we are looking at a world which already exists. Since this world seems full of real things, I feel the need to find a way to survive in this cluttered world. Once you have that structure installed, every relationship that you have is full of emotions, hopes and fears; winning and losing; being successful; not being successful; being well known and liked; not being liked; being rejected and so on. It's a very emotionally charged way of experiencing the world.

Non-duality means that what appears to be subject and what appears to be object arise together; they have the same ground, they move together. They cannot be separated as two different things. Nor can they be compressed into just one thing. Subject and object are there but they are not entities; they are just gestures of emergence. They are revelations of the nature of manifestation and this is our original nature. This world is not what we think it is; it is something very different.

As we become more present we see everything as energy, meaning here the movement of experience. Everything is energy. Everything is dynamic and moving. Energy simply means that what had appeared to be a stable entity is actually revealing itself as something dynamic.

Of course, things still show stability otherwise we would get lost in our life. You have to know where the Post Office is. It's very important that there is a stability of the structures of manifestation, but

every time you go to the Post Office, it's a new Post Office. The name is the same, maybe the people who work in the Post Office are the same, but today is a different day. If you are fresh in that experience, you enter into something which is familiar and yet completely fresh. If you over-privilege the familiar, you lose the freshness. If you over-privilege the freshness, you won't know where you are.

### Attending: finding ourselves by being with ourselves

On this essential point of recognising our real nature, or our true nature – there is nothing to recognise; it's not a cognition. It's being at home in something which is familiar, because it has always been there and yet it is strange, because we are not used to it. To be at home in oneself, means recognising how false you have become due to circumstances.

When babies are born they have whatever they bring into the world with them. They have their own luck and their own tendencies but they have to adapt to the family they are born into. Their adaption will help them to survive but at the cost of becoming estranged from their own natural way of being.

This is exactly the same as our relationship with samsara. We find ourselves born into situations which we adapt to. The reason we get born into them is because of the karma we have developed before, so we have many tendencies, but these tendencies are already adaptations. Our real nature is very calm, very open, very relaxed, very confident, but we find ourselves being anxious, confused, hesitant, self hating and very insecure in how to be in the world. We then look out into the world for answers: how shall I be? And of course the world is full of people telling us how we should be; there are many solutions on offer. Because we already have a long history of adapting to what other people have told us – in our family, at school and so on – it's very easy to adapt into another system: a political system, a sports system, a religious system, where people tell you how to be.

From the point of view of dzogchen, it's not about finding ourselves by artificially being in a particular way, even if we get a lot of approval. Rather we find ourselves by being with ourselves. You have to attend to yourself, in order to find yourself.

The word therapy is linked to the Greek word 'therapeia' meaning *attending, being with, waiting upon*. In the same way dharma is a kind of self-therapy, because we are there with ourselves, we attend to ourselves. The attendant doesn't lead – doesn't direct – the attendant is not the doctor. The attendant is the one who follows just behind, who follows closely with.

In the same way, when we observe ourselves, we need to be with ourselves. Not judging, not trying to change ourselves but just with warmth, love, tolerance and acceptance; be with us as we are. Through this we start to reveal ourselves to ourselves.

For example, if we experience ourselves as being depressed or dull, we might encounter that with a feeling of judgement and mobilise some position like: *'I must try harder, I must change. Tomorrow I'm going to really do things differently.'* If you mobilise all these kind of things, you will give yourself something to do, but you will not be able to see who you are. Whereas by accepting who you are, you will start to see who you are. You have to accept the shit before you get the food. If you can't accept the shit, you'll never get the food. This can be very difficult to do.

We have to accept that we are lost, stupid and confused and yet not change any of these things. As it says in the meditation texts, some meditators think that they can't meditate and then they weep salt tears. This is the fault of not understanding meditation. When you sit in meditation and your mind is dull and stupid, don't try to change your mind, just sit patiently with your mind and your mind will change, that is to say, the content of your mind will change. Observe who is the one who sees the change; this is your mind itself. The content of the mind does not change, nor alter nor defile the mind itself.

### Metaphor; contrasting a mirror and a photograph

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Let's go back to the image of the mirror and the reflection. An ugly reflection will not make a mirror defiled; it doesn't fix itself. In the past, if you took a photograph of something then, in the original method, the impression coming from outside was fixed onto the photographic plate in its inverted form. We often experience our ego self in this way; something happens to us and we feel marked forever. The ego self takes impressions; it has a plasticity and becomes moulded by events. We are strongly influenced by our situation.

In my work in the hospital, many patients I see have been sexually abused in childhood. There is a very strong correlation between personality disorder in later life and childhood sexual abuse. It is a very terrible thing when adults make sexual use of very small people who don't have any choice or freedom. The intensity of the experience moulds that small person as they are developing towards the world and finding themselves, and they take on a particular kind of adaptation, which is likely to continue in their life in various ways. It requires a lot of hard work to change this. In that way, the self is like the photographic negative. Once you take on certain images, it's very difficult to get them off, because the negative and the image have become of the same substance.

From the point of view of the mind itself, this is not the case. The mind is like a mirror; it has no inherent content. The reflection comes into the mirror, onto the mirror, but it doesn't leave any trace. No experience, however bad, defiles the mirror of the mind. No experience, however good, improves the mirror of the mind. This is the difference between the mind and the ego self.

Even if you do a lot of meditation and your mind is very open, the limitations of your ego self will still be there. You will like some foods more than others, and you will be more confident doing some things than doing others. This is clear. When you look at the big, enlightened lamas, they always have preferences. To imagine that you can be on the level of manifestation without prejudice is ridiculous, otherwise, you could never make a decision. A decision means you choose something, and if you choose something, that means you say *Yes* to something. You can't say *Yes* to one thing without saying *No* to everything else; it's not possible. How will you say *Yes*? You say *Yes*, by saying *No*. Why will you say *No* to this and not to that? Because you have a tendency. Tendency is part of existence, but that tendency is not a limiting factor if the tendency is understood as the energy arising from the open dimension of being.

Tendencies are not a defining of who I am; it's just that each of us manifests into the world according to our luck. Some people like to dance, some people like to sing, some people like to sit a lot, some people read a lot of books and some people don't read books. In the history of buddhism, there are many great yogis who never read any books. There are other great yogis who read and wrote many books. Is one better than another?

How we come into the world is our luck. What is the ground of coming into the world? This is the openness of the dharmakaya. If you understand that, then however your behaviour is in the world,

you can integrate it into openness. But if you think, '*I come into the world out of myself. What I am able to do defines who I am, and who I am defines what I'm able to do.*' then this dialectical movement will create a very restricted sense of self.

This is why, again and again, we have to look: Who is the one who is aware? What is the nature of awareness? Is our awareness a possession that we have?

### Some remarks on Refuge (going) and Dzogchen (being)

Just before we do some more practice, I will say a little thing on the relation of refuge and bodhicitta, and the practice of dzogchen.

In this refuge prayer we say: **I take refuge until enlightenment is gained.** This is clearly setting out that the practice is a method to help us gain something – to help us go somewhere. Many buddhist paths are like that, full of many different methods – methods of going from here to there. This is why, a great deal of the time, we have the language of paths and also the language of vehicles. In the nyingmapa system we have nine different vehicles, and a vehicle is something that takes you from one place to another place.

From the point of view of dzogchen, the place we are trying to go to is already the place where we are. We are not trying to travel anywhere, so in that sense the method is not a method to make something happen, but rather a method to help us be where we are and to strengthen our experience of being where we are. This is a very important difference.

It's not that we have to do a lot of practice because we are not very good at it, since it is not a case of trying to develop something. It's rather that we do the practice again and again, in order to strengthen the connection between our practice and our experience. It might not seem like a very important difference but I think it is, because all of our lives are focused on going from here to there.

The ordinary Tibetan word for a person is *drowa*. It means somebody who is going, who is moving from one place to another. In dzogchen, the first thing we are seeking to awaken to and integrate is a direct sense of stillness, which is what we have been focusing on up until now.

When we do the *Three Aa* practice we are seeking to relax into, to open into the stillness which is the unchanging nature of our own existence. We are not going anywhere else. We are just, as it were, tuning in, more settling back into that which we were in.

For example, if a child is having a nightmare in the middle of the night and the mother hears the child making a noise she will go in to their room. She can see from the twitching of the child's body, or the odd look on their face, that the child is frightened. So very gently, the mother tries to waken the child up. The child is being returned to the place where they are. Their body has always been in the bed and when they fell asleep, they were with their own little head on their own little pillow. In the nightmare it is as if they have gone somewhere else, but really they haven't gone anywhere. The mother with care and attention helps the child come back to where they are, and as soon as they are where they are, they feel safe.

In the same way, we have always been our original nature. It is not possible to lose this original nature but we have been caught in this dream – this nightmare of samsara. When we wake up we wake up **on** the reality, just as you wake up **on** the experience of being in your bed. You wake up in

your bed but you wake up **on** the fact that you recognise, '*Oh here I am.*' In the same way, the covering, as it falls apart, shows what is there. So this is the function of our practice.

What it means is don't push too hard, don't turn it into a method to achieve something, because if you do that, the extra energy you put into it will mean that you have gone too far. It's about effort and balance. If there is too much effort you will lose your balance, and if there is too much balance you will stay where you are.

OK, now we'll do the *Three Aa* practice.

[Practice]

### Garab Dorje's third statement: Deng drol thog tu che pa

Now we come to the third of these three statements of Garab Dorje, and this one is *Deng drol thogtu che pa* [Tib. gDeng Grol Thog Tu bCa']. *Deng* means confidence, *drol* means liberation, *togtu* means on, and *cha* means to keep. It means: *Remain with the confidence of liberation.*

What we've been looking at so far has been mainly the aspect of stillness and the various ways in which we can increase the experience of stillness: the open, calm, unchanging, natural state of the mind. We've also been looking at how we can use that openness to welcome thoughts and feelings so that we aren't so disturbed by them.

Now we look more at movement, Movement means moving in the world of appearances, activity is occurring.

Let's say there is a big mirror here behind me, and you are looking sideways so that your face is not directly reflected in the mirror. You may think, *This mirror is showing a reflection of what is.* You see the reflection but your interest in the reflection is simply as an example of how reflections occur. This is the aspect of stillness because nothing is moving. Although there are many different reflections you can see in the mirror, as far as you are concerned, they are all just reflections.

If you now shift your attention to the content of the reflections, immediately you see different things being reflected and they impact you in different ways. Feelings arise, because you like some of the things you see reflected and you don't like other things. These feelings also arise on your body. You have bodily sensations in the skin, the muscles, the breathe... You are called into movement by your attention to the quality of what is manifesting, hence both aspects of manifestation are there: the manifestation as field, and the manifestation as response to the field.

### Movement: allowing whatever comes to come

This is the difficult aspect of dzogchen. The first aspect – the stillness – can feel quite difficult because it is not so common for us, and we might think movement will be easier because we are always involved in movement. In fact it's the other way round, because as soon as we are in movement it gets much more complicated.

If we are trying to practice stillness then we have to find a reasonably quiet place to practice, at least as beginners. We do our opening and then we sit with what is going on; thoughts and feeling are coming, but it's not too much.

Imagine you are walking down the street in your hometown and you go into a café. You have to think about where you are going to sit, who's there already, what kind of coffee you want. .. Maybe somebody next to you starts talking loudly. Should you move? Should you stay? This is the turbulence of ordinary life; hopes/fears, yes/no moving around like that. Who is moving me? All of this stuff is moving me. I cannot control all the things which move me.

This is the level of movement, in which the openness gives you no protection against the impinging of movement. You can't stop the movement out there and anyway the basic proposition in dzogchen is that whatever comes, comes and whatever goes, goes. We don't block experience. When we have lots of things happening our tendency is to resist this, to edit it, to shape it in some way. How can we bring the relaxation of the open quality **into** the engagement with the thought?

In the aspect of stillness, I'm experiencing the thought as something that is in a sense irrelevant to me. A thought may arise and I just think, *'Oh, this is a thought'*. I observe it coming and going and it doesn't disturb me. But when I go to the café, when I enter into movement, I can't do that. I have decisions to make.

You cannot speak without entering into a thought. You find yourself saying something, and in order to do that you have come into the thought, but as soon as you come into the thought you can be caught by the thought and the following thought can whack you. This is the issue of movement. Movement involves commitment. You cannot act in the world without making choices, without making commitments.

On the most simple level, it's like Husserlian phenomenology: at the basis of everything is intentionality. If I turn one way, what is revealed is what is here. Wherever I turn I have an intention and my intention leads my action. My experience also develops my intention, and these keep spiralling around all the time.

We get drawn into situations. In any situation there are always more things happening than you can respond to, so choice is always there and the choice is determined by your intention. If your intention is grounded in openness, and you recognise that whatever is arising is the flow, the fluidity, the flower, the gesture, the garland, the ornament of emptiness, then the intention is not taking you away from what you are grounded in.

But if you are seeking relief from something then your intention is towards distraction, or is covered with desire or anger. When the three poisons come into your intention you are in the realm of karma, because what you are trying to do is to make things better for yourself. What we have to do is just to trust that every aspect of the situation is open and viable, and that however things come it will be OK.

This is completely opposite from the notion of the ego's choice, because the ego is very clear that there are many things that are not OK. We often hear people say, *'We can't be friends if you behave in that way. There is a limit to what I will put up with.'* As we've looked in many ways this is the discourse of the ego. If we are seeking to integrate movement with the ground of movement which is emptiness, we have to allow what comes to come. This looks very nice when you read it in a book, but in reality it can be very unpleasant.

The texts say if you go up to heaven – go to heaven – if you go to hell – go to hell. In particular, this means you shouldn't protect yourself from difficult situations. This part of the practice is very difficult and you shouldn't do it until you have stabilised your situation. Many of the people who

really do this practice put their lives into very difficult circumstances in order to have a lot of hassle, because ease and comfort are false friends. Your difficulties are your friends when you want to practice, and this is why it says in many of these prayers *'May obstacles become the path'*.

In the history of dzogchen many yogis created bad situations for themselves, because they wanted the world to kick them. The kick was helpful because it brought them to their limit or what they could integrate into emptiness. I am not suggesting you do this at all since it is very difficult. Start with the troubles you already have and try to integrate these.

These practices are described as a kind of hard practice and this is what is meant by yogis' courage. It means something in which the yogi doesn't take care, because we are usually very careful. Careful means we take our map, our agenda, into the situation because we know in advance what we can cope with. On the level of the self this is correct, but the purpose of the practice is to go out of the level of the self and to integrate experiences which would cause the self to collapse, so that there is no collapse. In this way, samsara and nirvana are integrated. This is the meaning of this kind of practice.

### Movement from 'I like...' (subject side) to 'it is good' (object side)

If we take it back to our level, when we engage in behaviour in the world, what is our reference point going to be? At the moment our litmus test is our felt sense of self. We know what we like according to how it makes us feel. What we want to do is to shift this. How will we know what something is? Not by its impact on us but by its ground, by where it comes from.

In the practice of stillness we explored how the mind has no top, no bottom, no sides, no shape, no colour. When we look for our mind, we can't find it. It is open – it's not even 'our' openness – and as soon as we try to label or shape it in any way we lose it. If we stay open, it's something unspeakable yet inside this unspeakable infinity everything is present without changing. Because it's infinite, where else can things come from? There is no other source for anything. Whatever we see, hear or touch, everything we encounter is the energy of the mind. This is fundamental.

This means that whenever we look around the room, everything here is our own mind. When we look at each other, everything is our own mind. This doesn't mean that everybody is me, but that everything is included in my own mind.

Since it's all in my own mind, I can have discrimination. One person wears yellow while another wears red; some people sit on chairs and other people sit on cushions. We can see different things but how will we give value to them? How will we say this is better than that? We can't do that since everything has the same nature. However, when we interact with people we notice that it is easier for us to speak to some people than to others. This is just a fact of the energy of karma. The fact that someone is easier to speak to doesn't make them a better person; it doesn't add any value.

The big problem with the ego's orientation is that it is very easy to turn *'I like this,'* into *'This is good.'* Why is it good? Because I like it. We move from a personal, subjective response to an objectifying statement about something. This is one of the sealing, limiting qualities of samsara.

The dzogchen view removes *'This is good,'* but you can still say *'I like this'*. We like some things and we don't like others, that is just how it is. However the fact that you don't like something doesn't make it bad or worthless. The fact that you do like something doesn't make it special or good. It all

has the same taste and yet is differentiated in terms of our response. This is very, very important. Tibetans refer to *ro chik*, one taste or *nyam nyid* equality /equality but if you take that to mean that everything goes into the blender and is turned into some kind of purée, then life would be awful. It's not like that; life should become more rich, more alive, more fresh if you do the practice/ When we have that understanding, when that's very clear for us, then we can respond *into* situations.

Sometimes you have to be in situations you don't like. What does that mean? It only means that you don't like it. Distaste is arising. Distaste arises and passes. Now normally, if this cup had something distasteful in it, we wouldn't want to drink it since we have aversion to distaste. If we are saying that from the point of view of dzogchen, whatever comes comes, why should I not taste that which is distasteful? Why not have an unpleasant experience? What will the unpleasant experience do? What will it harm? This is the central question both in meditation and in post-meditative experience.

When dzogchen says, whatever comes – comes, whatever goes – goes, this doesn't mean we don't care. Don't care is very bad; *'I don't care'* is barbarian. Things do matter. What it means is that when an experience arises, you can feel upset, sad, disillusioned, confused... but be in the thought without the thought grasping you or conditioning you. That is to say, when you feel sad – be sad, and when the sad thought goes – let it go.

When we practice meditation, we find that thoughts don't stay. The Buddha's most basic teaching on impermanence is whatever arises, passes. When a thought arises you are in it, you are in it with awareness, you're still in it with all the feelings, and then it's gone. Something else is coming. We jump on that bus. This is the linked chain of thoughts – one to another.

How come you won't lose your balance? Because in each moment you will just be what you are, you won't be pretending to be something other than who you are. You won't be thinking, *'Oh I better not show my anger or people won't like me,'* which is what many people do. There are other people who stay angry for days and days, they overinvest.

If you can, be angry when you're angry then stop. Be happy when you're happy, then stop. This the path of the yogi: when you're hungry, eat. When you're tired, sleep. Laugh when you're happy and cry when you're sad. Very few of us do this. We are very artificial. We create a show and a facade for other people, but to what benefit? In cheating other people we cheat ourselves, we live a false life. We pretend, and pretending is always hard work. There are more encouragements to pretend than there are to be authentic.

### Are the five poisons really poisonous?

Life is always about disruption and this is a theme in European literature going right back to writers like Rabelais whose novels set out exactly the importance of being monstrous; the importance of being over the top and of not abiding by the rules. Rabelais himself was a monk and he had many troubles in the Catholic Church because he wrote about its prejudice and hypocrisy. In modern academic studies there is the discourse of excessive desire – disruptive excessiveness – in which, by going over the limit, you reveal the real structure hidden beneath it. This is very important to see.

This is the root of the development of tantra, where by engaging in activities which had been forbidden, people started to understand something about their ordinary structure. You may be a

very good monk or a very good nun yet never really know yourself, because you are living according to an imposed rule from something outside yourself. But who are you?

We all have anger, we all have greed, jealousy, pride, and confusion. Are these poisonous? Buddhism refers to them as the five poisons. But are the five poisons, poisonous? In the path of tantra, the five poisons are transformed into the five wisdoms which indicates that they are not really poisonous.

When we are frightened or envious or jealous we may think, *'I can't stop feeling this but I don't want other people to know because it's so shameful to feel something I shouldn't feel.'* In that way we tie ourselves in knots. If you feel envious, feel envious. If you feel afraid, feel afraid. None of these things are the end of the world, yet we say, *'Wouldn't it be better to be brave and confident and generous?'* Why? *'Other people would like me better.'* Then what? When you die will they go with you? Will they say, *'No I'll die instead.'* No, they'll say, *'Bye, bye. I hope you'll leave me something in your will!'*

The key point here is: what are the dangers in being more simple and direct? If I am myself, I might not be able to maintain situations I want. In order to maintain these situations, I will betray my existence moment by moment. This is something really important to think about.

After my father left the army, he worked in a bank for a many years and was very successful. When he came to retirement he said to me, *'All the years I worked in the bank I had to say, "Good morning," and "Well done," and "Thank you for investing here" to people I didn't like. My life has been false. I did it to feed you. When you grow up, don't do that for anyone.'* Such are the sacrifices people make and they know how they cut. We need to remember that. Each day of life is passing by. If you are false today, how will you be fresh tomorrow? Making sacrifices for other people doesn't necessarily make you a saint, or even earn their gratitude. It's very important to ask, can we allow ourselves more freedom?

We are very lucky, we live in a time where our society permits us to a lot of freedom . Maybe that can encourage us – even if our hearts are small and frightened –to take some risks and try to be more direct; to speak into the world. This doesn't mean you should be rough, or crude and obnoxious to other people. It means observe how you lock and limit your spontaneity, by already having judged that many things are bad and unacceptable.

When the Tibetan people came as refugees came to India, many of the Tibetan women became prostitutes; they had no other way to make money. That's a difficult thing to do, so how do you do that? You could do it and it could transform you, or injure you, or you could do it as something you do for a while to survive and then you move on. You say, *'I did that, now I am not doing that.'* That's the big difference between being present in your existence, and being *conditioned* by your existence.

To be conditioned says, *'Because that happened to me or because I did that, I am now forever that thing. The past has marked me'.* But this is not true. Events happen and we can also say, *'I did that, I felt that. I ran away. I was a coward. I was stupid, I made a mistake. Today I am not making that mistake. It's true I made that mistake in the past, but I am not making that mistake now.'* If you think

*"I am that mistake" you are wrong.* This is the courage and confidence of liberation. *Rang drol* means that phenomena are self-liberating, that the past is gone.

### There is no self apart from interaction

We come into the world through our body, through our speech and through our thinking so dzogchen directs us to stay in relation to our existence. Our existence is in the world with other people; other people are not the enemy, other people are arising in our own mind.

By opening to others, others will impact us and we will become one who has been in interaction with others. This is what our life is anyway, whether we like it or not. If a woman gets pregnant and has a baby she becomes a mum. Life changes us. When men become soldiers and go to war and kill people they are changed forever. If you kill someone you are changed forever, this is a fact. Since Buddha said everything is impermanent, why would we expect to be able to live without change?

We are always interacting and how we are is being changed and developed by other people. We are our interactions. It's not that I am me and things happen to me, I am my interactions. There is no self apart from interaction. When we see this, we don't have to create a barrier between ourselves and others. We just have to be better at interacting, to stay responsive.

This is to understand that manifestation is energy which never ceases. There is nowhere to stand still in samsara. Everything is moving all the time, and if you keep your senses open, if you keep your body relaxed, if you're attuned, then you can respond to different situations. There is no one way to behave; nobody can tell you how to behave.

The principle in dzogchen is be in your body, be in your senses, be with the world, relaxed and open. When these factors move together then response is most easy to achieve. When you do that, each response is happening in the situation, so you respond in different ways to different people.

Sometimes in group therapy, people running the groups like to encourage each person to talk, and try to make sure everyone gets about five minutes each. Why? Some people don't want to talk – for them it's a persecution to have to talk for five minutes. Other people want to talk for ten minutes, and for them it's a persecution to only talk for five minutes! Let people be and then work with how they are. If they can't reveal themselves, you won't know what you're working with.

This is the meaning of compassion in dzogchen, which is to say, energy flowing unimpeded into the world. And the thing about energy is that it is always just itself. It's not a solid thing, it comes in pulses – it arrives.

### Unfreezing the frozen flow

What we are doing is we are taking the world, which all our karma and all our effort has frozen, and we are carving the ice into a beautiful swan, like a chef preparing a wonderful dessert. When you look at it you see a swan, but the swan is ice; and the ice is water, and water's nature is to flow. It's like that for us, we are caught in the shape that we are in, but this shape is simply frozen flow, and if we unfreeze the flow we are back in the flow. We are just the water of life; the movement of life.

The purpose of dzogchen is to bring the warmth, the sun of *rigpa*, the radiance of the open awareness to shine into the world and to dissolve the ice; to dissolve the frozenness – the rigidity of grasping – and let life move and flow.

OK, shall we take a break now and do some movement. Then we can have a cup of tea and meet back together at six o'clock. As you do the movement, from the inside out, feel the flow of energy as you stretch and move. Don't do it from the outside in – just feel it flowing.

[Break]

## The world we live in

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We'll continue with this theme of manifestation in the world. Buddhism developed in India a long time ago, in a society which like all societies was dynamic and changing. Invasions occurred, monsoons brought floods... There were events in the world that people had to react to, and people generally made sense of these events according to the view that events happened to you because of your karma. What you get is the result – the fruit – of what you have done in the past.

We in the west live in very different circumstance and according to views that have developed differently. In western Europe the renaissance was already introducing an idea that intentionality should not be restricted to living a life according to a 'proper way' ascribed by Christianity and working towards salvation after death. Rather we should be concerned with developing ourselves, particularly through culture and art.

One of the functions of art is to introduce new experiences into people's lives and to help them see themselves in different ways. Hence as soon as perspective comes into western pictorial art, you have the depiction of people, not according to their social or religious function, but according to the laws of distribution of volume through space. This creates a very human centred world. One consequence of the crusades was the retrieval of Roman and Greek texts, through their translations back from Arabic, and again there was an awakening to a human-centred world.

When we look around we see our world is now very human-centred. Everything is designed for human life. In a city like London, there are no new, exciting churches being built. Modern architecture in London is consumer capitalist and the creative dramatic new buildings are for insurance companies and banking corporations. They are monuments to Mammon, to this force, this god, of consumerism and desire. This is the world we live in.

Our intentionality as a culture is about self-indulgence, self-protection, me first, within the framework of one life. We tell ourselves that we only have one life and we are here to enjoy ourselves, so we need to amass as many resources as we can and squeeze as much juice out of life as possible. This message is returned to us a lot of the time; it is certainly there all the time on television, in newspapers, in adverts, in how the political parties talk and so on. The immediacy of the consumerist directive, '*I need it now*', is linked with the modernist belief that we have to improve things and that we have to develop.

British politicians use the phrase '*to move on*' again and again. We may not know where we're going but we have to move on! This is very dangerous, very out of control. The idea is that somehow we can make things better; if we all get together we'll come up with some solution.

Hollywood loves to make big films about a meteor hurtling through space, and brave people going up in a nuclear rocket to blow up the meteor and save the day. But really when we see what happens when a strong wind blows across America, it's not so magical. Lots of people have a lot of pain and suffering because in fact no one can put up their hand and say, '*Stop!*' We are rather powerless creatures.

We live under these two forces of instant gratification encouraged by consumerist capitalism. The modernist project of changing what we have – of not being satisfied with what we have, of needing more and needing it to be better – is not merely the belief that it is our duty to make things better for ourselves, but that it is our ethical responsibility to the world. We would be failing humankind if we didn't export coca cola, didn't bring televisions to every village in India, laptops to every child in Africa... Many people believe this.

Sanjay Gandhi, a former Prime Minister of India, determined there should be a television in every village in India. What this did was to disturb local values; to make people think outside their frame. This could be wonderful and creative if you are inside a notion of expansion, or it could be very disturbing if you think, '*Actually, maybe we need to hang on a little bit to what we've got.*'

Within this frame of reference, the practice of the dzogchen view may appear to be passively adaptive. It is saying when you find yourself in a situation, don't try to edit it, don't try to push away the things you don't like and pull in the things you do like, but be present in your experience and through that immediacy, make a response. It's not about strategy, it's not about tactics, it's not about paradigms of control. It's about freshness, aliveness, alertness and responsiveness, in which you will move where it moves you.

From the point of view of dzogchen, modern life is a profound madness. When we try to integrate with our environment we have to be aware that it is especially toxic. The dangers of being contaminated by what is going on are much greater than they would have been in a Tibetan village. Being inside this culture, it's very difficult for us to see just how poisonous it is. When some spiritual leaders in the Middle East say, '*America is Satan. It is poisoning the world.*', someone like George Bush has no way of understanding what this means. He may puzzle, '*How can America be Satan?*' Then these people say very clearly, '*We'll show you.*'

In England now we have almost two million Muslims, and more and more they are establishing their own schools and saying, '*We don't want our children to be educated in this British way because British people are barbarians. They have no sexual morality nor ethics. They don't behave properly – look at their divorce rate. They don't manage to hold their families together. We may have come here to earn money but we don't want your culture. Your culture is the devil's culture.*' This is a culture conflict. These are different paradigms, different ways of viewing things.

### Impulsiveness versus spontaneity

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When we are inside the western way of living, we take it to be freedom and spontaneity. When people look at it from the outside they see it as the indulgence of impulsivity.

I would suggest we should make a distinction between an impulse and a spontaneous gesture. A spontaneous gesture is cooked fresh in the moment of arising with other people. In order to be spontaneous you have to be working with the energy of others. When you are impulsive, you don't have to pay any attention to other people at all.

When we come to observe our own practice and how we can be with other people, we have to be very suspicious. When we are bringing this kind of practice into the world, although we want just to relax and be present, that involves a very sharp attention to where this tilts. If we are alive and fresh, we will find that we behave in different ways. If we are impulsive, we will find that we behave in the same old ways but maybe call them something different, wrap them in different clothing.

We have to see how blind and stupid our world is; that people destroy the earth's resources very quickly and really give no thought to it. Nobody can say stop, we have a system which is out of control and driven by greed and hatred. This has always been the case for human beings but greed and hatred with a weapon of stone is very different from greed and hatred with a Kalashnikov rifle or a nuclear weapon.

Because behaviour in dzogchen is field related, it's not something you are going to learn from a book. We have to understand the field. If we were practicing according to the theravadin tradition, and practicing the rules of a monk or a nun or a lay person who has taken limited vows, we would get a list of things to do and not to do. These rules would be with you before you entered any situation.

Dzogchen is not a rule-based system; it is awareness-based. This means you have to look and see what is there. You can only see what is there if you are awake to the sleep of language, to the sleep of cultural assumption. This is why it can be useful to go to other countries, and useful to have immigrants in your own country. You can hear from them that they see your world in a very different way.

### What does it mean to be compassionate?

We need to be attentive and to think, *'Why do I do what I do?'* This is especially important when we think that our being in the world should embody compassion. What does it mean to be compassionate? How shall I direct myself in a way which would be most useful to you?

This involves some assumption of knowing what other people need but how can I trust that my reading of the other person's situation is correct? If I ask the other person they may tell me something which is embedded in their limited thinking. If I ask a street drinker what they need, they may say, *'I need money for alcohol. And I need to have drink shops open twenty-four-hours-a-day.'* If you ask people what they want, they will not necessarily tell you what they really need.

Generally speaking in buddhism we say that beings are here wandering in samsara and most of the time they don't know it. They think it's quite normal. But *we* recognise that this is samsara, therefore, we want to free people from samsara even although they don't know they're in it and if they do, they're not worried about it.

We want to give them something they don't want, by freeing them from what they do want! That's why we become bodhisattvas! People want to sit at home and have cheaper beer, more sex on television and free football, while we say, *'You should be enlightened! You should want to become like a Buddha!'* They might say *'But in Zangdopalri there are no football pitches, no TVs. Why would I want to go there?'*

We have to recognise that these are religious systems, systems which give *us* certainty by telling us that we know what other people want. But of course when we are in the world relating to other

people, they are not plastic in our hands. We cannot mould them any way we want, even when we want to. Other people have their own history, their own desires, and their own karma and so we have to work with them.

Of course as soon as you start to work with another person, how they are will influence *you*, not just you influencing them. And so you become a self-regulating, dual system. This can be problematic because what happens then to the clarity we had in our meditation? Here is why the practice of manifestation is very important.

We can say the dharmakaya is for *us*, and that the dharmakaya is the same for all beings. Dharmakaya is emptiness and the radiance of awareness and as this comes into the world, in terms of being with others, it becomes much more difficult. How can I present myself *for* the other, in a way that will be useful *to* the other?

From the point of view of dzogchen, the first principle is: observe how full you are of your own shit. Look at yourself and see how rigid, how determined and how cluttered you are; your beliefs and your strong opinions, these are not helpful. It's a bit like the beginning training for a therapist; they have to look at themselves and see that they are very prejudiced, and that they are often unconscious of the prejudice because it feels normal.

So, especially in dzogchen, we have to review and observe our mind all the time. Observing one's own faults and limitations is the heart of the practice. Seeking again and again to free the knots, to untie the narrow patterns, and allow oneself to offer more space to oneself and then to the other. If we are spacious we will find ourselves being able to receive more of the other; be more impacted by the other, and then we can respond to the other.

There are two main kinds of systems. One is the unconscious system of our own automatic beliefs and assumptions. The other is the formulated system of our learned, educated view such as a political system or a religious system. One way or another, we are going to be in a system.

In order to try to free ourselves from the system, we need to know that all systems are tilted towards predictability. All systems want to predict the amount of variation they are going to meet, in order to maintain their homeostasis. You need to allow something into your system to keep it alive but if you allow too much freshness in, you'll be overwhelmed and collapse. It is a very delicate balance.

## Other people

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Although we say that between self and other there is no fundamental duality, this doesn't mean that I become the other person. I may like black tea and you may like herb tea. We don't need to drink each other's tea or drink a mixed up tea. We can have separate teas. Although I am for you, we can have separate existences.

Being there for the other means we need more energy. What is the source of energy? It is the dharmakaya. Because the dharmakaya is open and empty it has infinite energy. Our energy is not coming from ourselves but out of this open ground of our existence. If we plug into this ground, the energy will flow out and we will be able to do many different things.

You can experience this for yourselves. I am sure you all know that when you are most relaxed, most happy, you get energy. When you're closed in on yourself, worried and anxious, you lose your energy. People have different amounts of energy. Some people can do more and some people can do less. It's not a competition but generally speaking, the more you are integrated, the more energy you will have.

First of all, we need to experience our own emptiness. Then we need to experience our own fullness. We do this through our meditation practice, through experiencing all these different kinds of thoughts and feelings. In particular, we practice being non-judgmental and being open to whatever arises. This gives us access to the broadest possible range of experience.

If you know what jealousy is, you can be with someone who is jealous. If you have never experienced jealousy, or if you are very frightened of jealousy, it would be very difficult to be really there with somebody when they are being very jealous. The same with anger – the same with depression. You look at yourself and there's a lot of stuff in there, hopes and fears, dreams and illusions. You don't need to go out looking for disturbing things, they're already inside you, in your dreams and in your thoughts.

From an understanding of openness and emptiness, be generous and welcome in many possibilities. Learn to be with these possibilities, and then take that openness and generosity into the world so that you are not editing people as good and bad according to how they manifest. People may manifest as sweet or sour, but sweet is good for some things and sour is good for other things. If you are interested in cooking you will know this very well. There is no taste which is not useful for some things. Vinegar is very useful in cooking and preparing dishes but most of us don't want to drink a glass of vinegar.

In the same way, the sourness, the bitterness, the nasty bit of you that feels unfulfilled, angry and hateful, can be a very nice taste to have, very sharp. Then when we meet someone else like that, we think, *'Oh yes, that is arising from a particular kind of tension,'* and we can work with tension. We don't think, *'What a horrible person. If I go near that person they will make me feel very bad. I need to avoid that person.'* After a while, you start to see that nobody is contaminating. Some people are very lively and some people are very boring. We won't die from boredom and we won't be overwhelmed if someone is a bit loud and hysterical. We have many different ways of being, and if we can give generosity and spaciousness to that, and not make judgements, we'll find a way of responding. This is the particular dzogchen way of being in the world, because it means moment by moment the freshness of energy is revealing itself.

The traditional example for showing this, is a ray of light coming into a crystal which has some flaws in it, as the light hits the crystal it refracts and you get these rainbow coloured shapes darting out in different angles. In the same way, the integration of our nature shows itself in myriad different forms as we enter into the world. We show different aspects of ourselves under different circumstances.

Just as Padmasambhava has eight main aspects and thousands of other aspects, we ourselves, like Padmasambhava, have many different aspects.

In the Tibetan texts it often says *gang la gang dul* which means to educate, or discipline or help. *Gang la gang* means according to need. It means don't give someone more than they can cope with; don't give someone less than they need. Give them what they need, which means cooking specifically for the other. How will I know what the other wants? Welcome them, look in their face,

watch their breathing. Feel the impact of their body on you. Other people are only strangers when you keep them at a distance. It's not so mysterious.

This is why in dzogchen we have exercises and movements to loosen up our body. It's not just so that we have a very nice loose body, but that if you are in your body, if you are in your skin, you will feel much more. People who are used to doing some movement can read other people's bodies. When they come into a room they are reading people's postures. They see who has a bad posture and who doesn't. People who are not aware of their body don't see anything, they just see people sitting. If you have practiced being aware of your spine for a long time, you don't just know where your spine is, you know where everybody else's spine is.

It's the same with emotions. If you have spent time looking at your emotions, when you see other people you read their emotions. It is through being attentive to ourself that we prepare for being attentive to others. What is self? An impermanent manifestation that is always changing. What are others? Impermanent manifestations that are always changing.

We have to know what the dzogchen intentionality is. The body is not a thing, it's not something to be corrected; it's a flow of energy. Whatever needs you have, whether these are economic, cultural or sexual, the best way to get these needs met is to be in the flow of your energy. There's nothing more seductive than energetic flow. The revelation of existence is through the eyes, and in dzogchen there are many meditation practices for working with the eyes, because they are the line of the heart into the world.

With walking eating and sleeping ... in all activities one should just be present to the flow of the energy. Sometimes it's easy to sleep, sometimes it's difficult. It doesn't really matter, whatever is occurring just be with that. Judging something as bad really doesn't help us. When we eat food, to make comments like, *'Oh, I don't like this,'* doesn't help us. We need to attend to what is the taste? When we put the food into our mouth it dissolves into us. Who are we? We are emptiness. What is this food? It is emptiness.

All the time our embodied self and the world are interfacing and playing together – dissolving into each other. When you listen to someone, you can dissolve right into them. You know when you read a novel you go right into that world. If you give that attention to another person, you can be completely filled by them; it's very wonderful. The more you take the other person into you, the more you will know who they are, and the more you know who they are, the more you can respond. Because who they are, is who they are at this moment. The knowledge you had of them yesterday is not going to apply today.

### [The three aspects of our primordial nature](#)

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Our nature has these three aspects. The first is the dimension of openness: the ungraspable presence of awareness which is here all the time, unchanging. Everything we are experiencing at the moment is energy moving in our awareness.

The second aspect is the clarity which reveals the movement of the energy in the openness.

The third aspect is the precise gestures and movements of energy as it interacts on the level of refractions moving together. It is by maintaining all three aspects of these, that we receive the fulfilment of Kuntuzangpo.

This is not so difficult to explain, but it is very difficult to practice. In order to practice we have to make a commitment to attend to ourselves twenty-four hours a day. You don't have to do anything special. It doesn't matter what you do, but you do have to attend to what you're doing. You have to be present in your existence. Nothing is forbidden except absencing yourself from your own existence. That is the big crime. That is the meaning of primordial ignorance – you've vanished.

OK, let's now do the *Three Aa* practice?

[Practice]

[Break]

### Questions and responses

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We are coming towards the end of our time, and maybe you have any questions from what we've done so far. When you are learning it's important not to know. When you are teaching it's important to know. That's a difference. It's really important for you to be free to ask lots of questions, and it doesn't matter how strange or silly they happen to be. As long as the question is tilted towards the view, the meditation and the conduct, some meaning can arise from it.

**Question:** You listed ways that we could shift our awareness when we do the *Three Aa* meditation and we get stuck with thoughts. Would you have anything else to say about these 'quick little things' we may remember when we need to?

**James:** The best thing to do if meditation gets difficult is to do less, and just try to hang in there and be with whatever is happening. That's not so exhausting

Also, never despair, because whatever situation is there, it will not last forever. It may get worse, but if it gets worse then that's different from before and as buddhists we are very interested in difference; we're interested in change. If something is changing then it means that it's not fixed, and if it's not fixed, it means it is not internally defined. If it is not internally defined, then it's amenable to some kind of reaction.

If you're doing dzogchen, you are not pushing yourself. You are not trying to get anywhere. The key thing is that 'bad' meditation is not 'bad' meditation if you don't let it trouble you. If you let it trouble you, you are already not meditating.

Since everything arises from the dharmakaya, personal agency is uncertain and fleeting. For example you may be walking down the road, not very conscious of walking, when suddenly, a piece of broken glass in the road brings you back to a particular consciousness. But most of the time you're on automatic pilot.

Conscious intentionality is not something required very much; it is one mode of experience, it is not the necessary basis **for** experience. If you think, '*I need to be in charge of my life,*' then you are over-privileging the felt sense of being an independent, conscious agent.

There are dharma paths which say that if things don't go too well – if things don't go the way you want them to – try harder. In dzogchen we say if things don't go so well, don't try so hard. Get out of the way, leave it alone. From the point of view of dzogchen, the main thing is just to let things be as

they are, and if you let them be, they will change. They may change in a way you don't like, so are you then going to say, *'My likes and my dislikes are the limit of the world'*?

Feeling is something that we over-privilege; we think because we don't like something it must be important. All that's happening is that a feeling of not liking is arising in our mind, staying for a while, and then passing away. What is more interesting is to observe the process of the arising and passing away. In that way, whatever the feeling is, whether anger, irritation, sadness, or a sense of betrayal or failure, it reveals itself as a movement of the mind. Which mind? Our mind. What is our mind? Our mind is the dharmakaya. This is important.

If you believe samsara and nirvana are different – if you believe that in samsara things are very bad and in nirvana things are very good – then you have two factories. One makes samsara and one makes nirvana, and the things in nirvana are all very nice and shiny.

This is not the case from the point of view of dzogchen, where they say there is one ground – one factory – and it makes both samsara and nirvana.

**Comment:** Because that's the way we see it.

**James:** Well, not just because that's the way we see it, but for some reason this factory makes all kinds of weird stuff. If you say it's because of the way we see it, you install yourself as the agent: I, me, myself, am the one who makes the difference between samsara and nirvana.

### *Not what is my role in this, but what is the source?*

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Actually, there is always a lot of stuff going on. The key thing is not what is my role in this, but what is the source? The source is this open dimension – the ungraspable state – the empty mirror: everything which arises is like a reflection in the mirror. If it's a reflection and it's a beautiful reflection, and there's another reflection that's an ugly reflection, is the ugly reflection worse than a beautiful reflection? On the level of aesthetics and manifestation you could say that it is, but on the level of its ground – of its nature, you cannot say that.

This is the difference between samsara and nirvana. In samsara everything is related to its surface quality – compare and contrast. But where do these things come from? From the ground, so you always have a choice about which way will I tilt?

If you are over-fixated on differentiation on the level of manifestation, then you need to focus more on the ground. If you focus on the ground, then whatever is arising, even if it may be formally unpleasant, is something radiant. When you see this, then depression is also a form of clarity; sadness is a form of clarity; anger is a form of clarity; even watching nonsense on television is a form of clarity...

### *How to watch silly TV*

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How can making yourself stupid when you are tired at the end of the day be a form of clarity? Well, if you think *'This is rubbish on the TV but I am too tired to look at anything else'* then that that makes you truly stupid. But if you are very tired and you just watch some nonsense, then you relax and observe, the experience of watching nonsense and the experience of the nonsense being watched,

are arising together. Where do they arise from? They arise into the mind, out of the mind and move back into the mind; they have no other place to come from.

We know this, not because of some philosophical view, but because when we do the practice and we ask, *'What is the shape of the mind?'* we know in a very concrete, definite way that the mind has no limits. If the mind has no limits, can the television set be outside the mind? Even if you are watching some silly series from America, is America outside of your mind? No, nothing is outside of the mind. It is your mind but it's not your mind as a possession –there is no basis for omnipotence or narcissistic gratification in this. The mind is the open space in which everything is revealed.

Therefore, it doesn't matter what you do, everything is pure from the very beginning. It's pure from the very beginning because of its ground, irrespective of its surface form. That doesn't mean that you can lie to other people and cheat them by saying, *'shit is chocolate'*. They may have the same ground, but shit doesn't taste like chocolate. On the level of manifestation, differentiation is important, but it's important as one of these three aspects: the openness, the clarity and the precise form of the manifestation.

Any other thoughts or questions?

**Question:** I have a theoretical question. What you say sounds a little bit like taoism. Is this true?

**James:** Maybe. I mean it's also Buddhism. Buddhism and taoism will have many things in common.

**Comment:** It seems to me, that most of the time the buddhism of the shaolin monks is completely different from the buddhism of the Tibetan tradition.

**James:** Now the shaolin monks have turned themselves into some kind of Disneyland spectacular; this is very sad. Let's say, every tradition can be inhabited by other forces. Of course in relation to taoism, in the long distant past, all these central Asian communities were very connected. People were coming and going along the silk route, and a lot of Tibetans went to China and made pilgrimage to the five holy mountains and so on. Taoist scholars came to the mountains of East Tibet to meditate and people would have understood each other's language.

Whether buddhism or taoism are similar or different is not necessarily helpful for practice. Comparative religion is useful if you want a job in a university but it can also be a kind of alienation.

**Comment:** For me there was one sentence that was very important for me to hear, when you said to *'change control into interest'*. During my meditation it can feel that the aspect of clarity is drifting into a dream-like state.

**James:** In dzogchen clarity means that the relationship between the ground and the manifestation is unbroken. In that sense, a feeling of depression or a feeling of dullness is a form of clarity **if** the awareness of the ground is present with the experience. It's not about something being shiny or bright, it's about the luminosity of emptiness, which is to say that the dullness or the closure that arises with attachment, when that is relaxed there is a kind of freedom within the arising of whatever it is. Clarity is linked with freshness, with spaciousness and at the end it's just clean; it doesn't carry a trace. That's the real test of clarity.

You get different kinds of clarity and also false clarity, which is when we feel more powerful, more clear, we have a sense of, 'Oh yes, it all makes sense,' and then we can sit inside that. This is why Patrul Rinpoche, in his commentary on the **Three Statements of Garab Dorje**, quotes another text saying, 'The yogi develops his meditation by destroying it.' This means that one has to engage with the experience as something whose value is the relationship with the ground, not its formal content. Therefore, if you destroy the formal content, it will become clear whether it was related to the ground or not.

C R Lama used to say the same to me, if you ever have any visions and you *think* 'This is Padmasambhava' or something, then you must say *Phat!* and throw it away. You shouldn't trust any kind of vision. If the vision is real it will come back. C R Lama also used to say, 'There is nothing special.' When he went to Calcutta, he would see these signs for 'special coffee'. Nothing is special, everything is the same. This is *Kuntuzangpo*.

### *How do teachers teach?*

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**Question:** Does the dzogchen tradition have some basic exercises like we have in the *ngöndro*?

**James:** Dzogchen is taught in all sorts of different ways. There are three main aspects to the general field: *Sems-sDe*, *Klong-sDe* and *Man-Ngag-sDe*, and these can be taught in the elaborate form or simple form. There are these exercises like trul khor or yantra yoga, which many groups do, so there are different lineages and different practice styles.

In the nyingmapa tradition they would say that all the other yanas are preparation. If you do that preparation, if you do *ngöndro* and prostrations and so on, and then you do *yidam* practice and then you do larger practice with lots of complex visualisations, all of this will make it easier to realise your own nature. Other lamas will teach it in a different way. They would say, first of all try to understand your own nature and if that becomes difficult then use these other methods to help to make it easier. It depends on the lineage and it depends on the teacher's preferences. It's not fixed, it's not a flat world.

It's useful to look around and find things which suit you. Everything is important but life is short. There are no practices which are not good to do, but each person has to know how much time they have to do the practices. Sometimes doing a long retreat could be very helpful, but if you are doing a long retreat you are not doing the practice of everyday life, and everyday life has many interesting things to teach us, particularly from the point of view of dzogchen.

People who go into retreat don't always come out very healthy. Often in these three year retreats one or two people get a little bit crazy, because it's a closed group and Tibetans are not all that experienced in group therapy. These group dynamics are often cooked up and can be helpful for some but not very helpful for others. A bit like an American boot camp: only the strong survive.

On the one hand, I think we could probably say all systems of buddhism and all teachers of buddhism want people to be enlightened, free and happy. On the other hand, they are usually embodying some kind of system, and that system will in order to survive, seek to strengthen itself through money, through activity and in particular through belonging.

Often teachers are like fishermen, throwing out a net or a line and trying to wind people in and then tie them into it. Maybe you go and ask, '*Rinpoche, what should I do?*' And the teacher replies,

'Maybe you should do *ngöndro*.' *Ngöndro* also means that for three, five or even ten years, you will be coming to see that teacher. It doesn't mean that this is good for you. It means: I bind you into my system. The teacher may think that it's very good for you to be bound into their system – maybe it is, maybe it isn't – and they have formal reasons for believing that. One has to know that sometimes people are saying things because of a belief which is not being 'cooked' freshly for you. There is a system, and you are being invited to take your place inside a system. The activities that happen in that system are not necessarily very useful.

For example, you might have a system of burning a lot of butter lamps, which means developing a lot of carcinogenic substances in the air. According to some systems that's a very good thing to do, other systems may say not. You have to decide. Some people want to build big buildings out of concrete, involving killing many insects, annoying the neighbours and so on. They think that that is a very good thing to do, and so they are all very happy when they do it. Other people don't think that's very good.

If you enter a system, '*Cut your tongue*' Rinpoche used to say. There is always a price of belonging. You can't enter any system without there being a deal, that's for sure. Therefore, I think the looser and more porous the system the better it is. That is also what we have to think about.

OK, shall we take a little break there?

[Break]

## Anxiety

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I will say a little bit now about the nature of anxiety, since many people talk to me about it. There are many levels of anxiety. There is the *outer* anxiety of having particular problems and situations in your life which are hard to deal with.

Generally speaking, anxiety is a relationship to a situation in which we fear that the outcome won't be the one that we want, or that the outcome is unpredictable and so we stay in a state of '*not knowing*' for longer than we feel we can cope with. When we are anxious, we don't settle. Our energy is pulled up, we tend to be in the upper part of our body. Thinking is more involved, and often we lose the support and sense of our breath. We are not centred in our energy chakra below the navel. This kind of anxiety is situational – contingent – it will arise according to the various provocations of life.

We need to develop the capacity relax. We can also observe how we feed the anxiety, by investing time and energy in thinking and feeling about it. For example, if a small thing occurs and we say, '*I have a problem*,' we've immediately concretised the situation. It may not be a problem, or if it is a problem that can be solved, it won't be helped by saying, '*I have a problem*,' in which there is an affective enrichment. It could be that we're giving a simple description: i.e. there is a problem, but when we articulate, '*I have a problem*,' there is a sense of being impacted quite firmly by that.

## Anxiety and language

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The use of language is often extremely provocative to the surrounding environment. Histrionic and anxious language use creates streams of upset and disturbance in the air around us, and these language uses are established in different ways in different cultures. You find extroverted anxiety a

lot in Middle Eastern languages, and in Italian and so on. You find Introverted anxiety in Celtic and Northern countries, where the person doesn't say something but the silence is making you shake inside.

Whether it's enunciated or not enunciated, how we respond energetically is not something held inside ourselves. We are always leaking into the world; whatever we feel will impact other people. And, of course, if it impacts other people – what comes around goes around – their reaction will impact us, and then you just have this escalation of feeling.

As much as possible, we should attend to how we speak and not over-emphasise situations. Try to keep them very simple. We can support this by the practice of vipassana which makes use of a simple naming. It moves away from affective, enriched description to simple phenomenological description, and by that getting the optimal distance from judgement. The problem about judgement is that it is prejudice dressed as truth, and is very solid. The more you solidify the world, the more you entrap yourself and coerce other people, so they feel a reaction.

On an *inner* level, anxiety arises because we are not at home; because we are alienated, we are not at peace with ourselves. This is not some personal failing, this is the very nature of samsara itself. Samsara is a state of anxiety. In samsara subject and object are separated, and we find ourselves strongly identified with the subject. The subject needs something from the object and yet is fearful of the object. The object is not really separate from it, the object is not really other than it, and yet it can't relax; this is the fundamental structure.

### Anxiety and openness

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Due to ignorance, we over-identify with our individual self and then look at the world from out of ourself, towards something which is other than us. We are drawn towards it by desire, yet being fearful and distrustful of it, due to stupidity and anger. This is just a structure. As long as you are not integrated into the ground – to the unborn openness – anxiety will occur. There is no anxiety in openness since it has no position.

If anxiety is infinite, if the mind is infinite, then even when anxiety feels infinite it will not be as big as the mind. One of the qualities of anxiety is that it is very pervasive; it seems to stretch out. When people are very anxious, it's consuming, it's expansive and it seems to affect everything in the world; everything becomes too much. But when we stay with it, the anxiety vanishes. How do we stay with it? Just by following the instructions we've been looking at here. Relax into the open dimension of the mind. Don't turn away from the object, don't fall into the object; just stay gently with whatever is arising. It will reveal itself and pass.

In that revelation, sometimes you are present *as* the object that's arising, yet with presence of the openness you manifest in ordinary interaction in the world. In that state anxiety will arise, but here we understand anxiety is a form of the dharmakaya.

We have to remember the view of dzogchen is radical, it says that *everything* – chocolate *and* shit – is the dharmakaya. The things which you don't like, which you think are a problem, which restrict you and bind you; these things are also pure from the very beginning. If you understand your anxieties like that, you can be anxious.

What is anxiety? It's a particular kind of vibration; it's a sensation. *'I don't know...I don't want this to happen...'* It could be the skin is tingling, the nerves are twitching and the hairs are standing up in the pores. It could be dread, it could be angst, it could be all sorts of things mixed in.

What is this?

This is a momentary sensation; subject and object arising together.

What does it mean?

Nothing much.

What is it telling us about?

Nothing much.

What is its nature?

It is the child of emptiness.

What is its content?

A message of doom.

A message of doom about what?

About illusion. This illusion will end; this illusion is uncertain.

So, what's new?

*'But it's my illusion!'*

The one who is being persecuted is the one who is taking it too seriously, this is always the case; we are persecuted by ourselves. From the point of view of dzogchen, clarity is vital. *If the manifestation is separated from the ground, the manifestation will attack you. If the manifestation is linked with the ground, you can enjoy the manifestation even when its formal content seems to be unpleasant.* We have to practice this again, and again, and again, and again.

In the dzogchen texts, it's always saying *pang lang me pa*. *Pang* means to push away, *Lang* means to take up, *ma pa* means without. Without pushing away, without taking things up, without saying, *'I don't want this.'*, without saying, *'I need this.'* Not identifying or dis-identifying; just being with. When you can just be with things, they are much easier.

When I was a teenager and I went on holiday with my parents, I hated it. We would be in a hotel and I would have to sit at a meal table with them and I wanted to wear a little sign saying: *'I am not with these people!'* I was identifying myself in opposition to them. I didn't get any benefit from doing this but I only had two choices; either to be with them and be like them which I couldn't do, or to be myself, which I couldn't do either, so I was stuck in the middle.

This is the nature of anxiety; we can't go forward and we can't go back. We can't just open to a situation, and we also can't free ourselves from it. When we are trapped as a separate self we have no freedom to move, we are always going to be constrained and bound into situations. The heart essence of this dzogchen practice is *'Don't try to control the situation; don't try to establish a situation that makes it easy for you. Because if you do that, even if you are efficient at doing it, all you will have done is establish the limit in yourself.'*

This is particularly important as people get older. When you are young and you have energy, or maybe your career is going well and you have money, you can to a certain extent make the world dance to your tune; you can make things happen. As you get older that becomes much more difficult, so the success that you had in the middle period in your life can lead to a lot of suffering later.

To relax means to trust that everything is OK, to trust *Kuntuzangpo*. This is why we do practices to integrate with the situation. Sometimes we can integrate with a deity, sometimes we can integrate with the teacher. There are many other practices to learn, but the essential thing is that it's OK how things are. Things are not as bad as we feel they are, things become bad because our mind does it. The Buddha said everything is created by the mind. This is completely true.

If our mind observes the process of creation – if it sees that the openness is the ground – it is relaxed. If the mind sees itself as an isolated entity, it will suffer anxiety. In buddhism they say it's like a tree. If you try to pluck all the leaves off the tree you will have a lot of work because there are many, many leaves on a tree. If you cut the branches, there are still quite a lot of branches but it will start to kill the tree. The best thing is to cut the root, because if you cut the root of the tree it will die. What is the root of anxiety? It's not recognising your own nature.

This is important to remember because so much of our time is wasted in anxious thinking and worry. *We think about the past with regret and remorse, and plan for the future with doubt and uncertainty.* These thoughts bring their emotions – emotions impact the body – months and years go by, and still we have no clarity.

## Questions and responses

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### Question about consciousness

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OK, see if there are any last questions you have about the view, or any of the practice we've done.

**Question:** Can you say something about awareness and the connection with emptiness?

**James:** Awareness, as we use the term here, is different from consciousness. Consciousness always takes an object. Awareness is the state of mind which is open and present to whatever is manifesting.

We are using awareness here to translate *rigpa*, sometimes we use the word presence to translate *rigpa*. To be aware means to not be absent – not to be asleep – It doesn't necessarily mean to be aware of anything in particular. Awareness exists even when there is no object. Consciousness only comes into being when there is an object.

The nature of awareness, as with all things, is emptiness, but awareness is inseparable from emptiness. That is to say, if you don't have a realisation of emptiness, you won't have awareness. Consciousness, although its nature is empty, functions without any conscious awareness of emptiness.

For example, I can be conscious of this cup, I could be very attached to this cup, I could believe it's *my* cup. I could be full of very narrow, grasping feelings about the cup. That consciousness is real and gives me lots of information about the cup, but there is no emptiness in it at all. There is no emptiness as a concept, and there is no emptiness as a mood, or an experience, or a feeling tone.

This is impossible with awareness: it is out of the understanding of emptiness that awareness comes. Emptiness, in the traditional description is like a very black night – there is nothing there – and into this dark night comes the sun of awareness. Illumination rises out of the dark, when we see everything is empty, there is nothing; it's just empty.

In the traditional example, it's like some loosely woven, coarse rope, like they make from coconut coir in India. If you light it at one end, it will smoulder and burn very slowly all the way through, and finally, the ash is exactly in the same shape as the rope was. But blow on it, and *Puff*, it is gone! This is like emptiness – you blow it and it's gone. The content, the substance, the reality of the issue has been dissolved; there is nothing left.

This is emptiness as the opposite, or the antidote, to substance. Emptiness is the absence of the inherent self-nature in things. There is no reality, there is no substantiality in anything. When we see that, then everything is arising together, this is our awareness, because we are not so pulled towards discrimination between this and that. But without the understanding of emptiness, our awareness will quickly turn into consciousness. Consciousness in Tibetan is called *nam she* or *nam par she pa*, *Nam pa* means to know, *She pa* means formed. The translation is not 'cooked', but it sort of means 'cooked'; it means something has been done to it, sort of customised or particularised.

When awareness is altered – is made artificial, or is cooked in some way – it becomes like consciousness. So, I am conscious of this particular thing, the consciousness exists and the thing exists, and this is the feeling tone. Whereas awareness doesn't exist, you cannot grasp awareness, you can never find your own awareness, but you can find your *consciousness*. You can be conscious of being conscious, and this is particularly easy in relation to the sense consciousnesses.

You can look at this watch, and you can know that you're looking at the watch. That is to say, you can have an awareness that your eye consciousness is recording the shape, and then your mentation consciousness can have an opinion about the watch, and you can have an elaborated consciousness of the mentation consciousness and the visual consciousness.

This is part of the basis of the internal dialogue of our experience: *our mind talks to our mind from its various standpoints. In each of these, it takes an object*, and the subject can be thought about. When people write novels and they write about the interior world of the character, whether it's Charlotte Bronte or Dostoevsky or whoever, they are giving you an account of the consciousness of the character, because the consciousness is reflecting – is making some kind of idea.

All novels are studies of consciousness, they are not studies of awareness. You cannot describe awareness, there is nothing to say, because awareness doesn't have a content in the way that consciousness does.

**Response:** Awareness has no energy? I don't understand that because emptiness has an energy.

**James** Energy arises from it, but that's different from having a content. In the sense that, *'I am conscious that when I come to this retreat I will be eating vegetables.'* That is a consciousness that carries a particular content and you could say there is some energy connected with that as well. But awareness doesn't have a content, in the sense that, the content of awareness is what is immediately placed in front of it. Again, in the image of the mirror, the reflection is displayed in the mirror, but is the reflection the content of the mirror because as you turn the mirror it immediately has a different content?

That is not the same as if you have a quarrel with a friend, and you think, *'Why did she say that?'* You don't suddenly let go of that – it is cooking, sticking to you and is inside your mind. It's not easy to get that out and that is the difference. The content of awareness is shifting and changing all the time, because it's not a content in the way of something which is inside. Awareness is the open field

in which is displayed the energy of the dharmakaya, because dharmakaya is awareness and emptiness. This is what it is.

We can see this very easily for ourselves. Whenever things stick to us, we can just observe that this is our consciousness. Consciousness is always reacting, and consciousness tends to have a time lag. Consciousness looks to the past and looks to the future. I am conscious tomorrow is Monday. I am conscious I have a lot of work to do tomorrow. I have to think about my time, and I also have other things to do tomorrow. The task of consciousness is management of the self in its experience of being in the world with others.

Awareness has a different task; awareness is just revealing what is there.

### *Question about breathing*

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**Question:** Should I breathe through the nose or the mouth or both when I am meditating?

**James** Generally, for this kind of practice, we use both the mouth and the nose. The lips are slightly open, the tongue is tilted onto the hard palate behind the teeth at the top, and the breath is flowing together. You can be breathing in and out through nose and mouth at the same time. Sometimes you are breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth, it depends if there is a particular breathing practice. The main thing for this kind of practice is just letting the breath flow easily, because you want to be forgetful of the breath.

In some kinds of practice, you want to have recollection or mindfulness of the breath. In some yogic practices, you are using the breath as a tool to bring consciousness into the state of awareness. But with this kind of practice you want the breath to be free, so you want your shoulders to be open and back, your chest open, and your belly to be relaxed. Let the breath go in and out.

A very good practice to do, is to lie down sometimes and put your hands on your belly and really have a sense of when you're breathing deeply right through your lungs, because then when you breathe in your tummy will come out. Do that for a bit and then run up and down the stairs until you are out of breath, then lie down and bring your breath back very quickly by going right into this deep breath.

Your breath will want to be up here [*James pants*] because you are out of breath, so you will be desperately pulling the air in. Now when you hold it slowly, you will become very calm, and if you can do this well, you won't feel anxious.

Most anxiety is established in the body through bad breathing. Bad breathing is part of our life; almost nobody breathes very well. Of course you can't really say what is right breathing. If you tell somebody something awful their breathing is going to move into gasping – even the Buddha isn't listening only with a very deep, calm breath – you can't receive the world without being affected. What you need to know is how you are affected, so if you are aware of your breath then you can regulate your breath as you need to.

However, if you regulate your breath, you'll regulate your emotion and in my therapy work, I shift my breathing patterns with patients. I know that if I hold my breath deeply that I can be very open to what they're saying, but I am not very connected. It's not exactly dissociated, but it's very spacious. They tell me all these stories that are awful and I'm connected but very spacious. For some people

that's good because it helps to bring down their emotion, and for other patients it's very abandoning and they want you to be with the emotion with them. Then you have to let your breath take you into the place where you feel the emotional upset. Learning to control your breath is helpful.

### *Question about tantra and dzogchen*

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**Question:** is the difference, between tantra practice of mandala and deity, and the dzogchen view that everything comes from the ground and is pure from the very beginning?

**James:** The function of tantra is essentially to transform the ordinary or the profane into the sacred. At the beginning of the practice, you are an ordinary person, then you do the preliminaries and the visualisation, and through the visualisation you become the deity. You go from being ordinary or profane to being sacred. As the practice develops, the rays of light come out to the whole universe giving it the nature of the deity, so the whole universe becomes sacred, and at the end of the practice you try to maintain this. You will forget and then the next time you start the practice as a profane person again. Tantra practice is moving between sacred and profane all the time. Dzogchen is not concerned with sacred or profane; there is nothing profane, there is nothing ordinary, there is nothing defiled, because everything is pure from the very beginning. Because everything is pure from the beginning, we don't need to make it sacred.

**Response:** I am also very sure that the tantric view is pure. If I am not, I cannot hold it.

**James:** You are sure because you are making it so, otherwise you wouldn't need to do the tantric practice. In the tantric practice you say, '*Out of emptiness comes this god and when I pray to the god, the rays of light make things pure.*'

We do Dorje Sempa practice. If everything was pure, we wouldn't need to do Dorje Sempa. C R Lama always used to say that Dorje Sempa is the *dobie wallah* – the washer man – you take your dirty sheets to Dorje Sempa and he makes them clean. If you don't have dirty sheets, then you don't need a *dobie*.

**Response:** I also try to see the things I don't like in a pure view...

**James:** This is the *result* of the practice, it's not the *reason* for doing the practice. The reason you do the practice is because you *don't* normally see things as pure.

I transform ordinary things into the realm or the vision of the god. The god is by definition not ordinary, so I am making the ordinary pure. By making it not ordinary – I am making it special. Whereas, from the point of view of dzogchen, everything is pure from the very beginning. The dirt is pure and the god is pure.

**Response:** But in tantra, I am not changing anything in the outer level...

**James:** Of course you are.

**Response:** I mean after the practice.

**James:** If the practice works then, for example, you see everything as the form of Padmasambhava. Seeing the form of Padmasambhava, means that you see it as light and emptiness,

which you probably didn't see beforehand. Every time we do the practice it reminds us that this is the view we need to try to hold. If we could just do it once and it was established, then life would be very easy, but we have to do it again and again because we forget.

**Response:** But the view is the same or is the result the same?

**James:** No, the view is not the same.

From the tantric view, due to primordial ignorance our nature has been covered up. Due to the blessing of initiation and introduction into the mandala of the deity, and due to the powers of keeping vows to the deity made in the mandala, I have a chance, by making use of the practice of the deity, to purify my obscured vision so that I can see things as they are, which is the vision of the deity. That is the view, and that view is different from dzogchen.

The first is using a method of transformation, without the deity you wouldn't see it as pure. Whereas in dzogchen we say that without the introduction to the view that we were looking at, without learning how to recognise your own nature, you wouldn't be able to see things as pure.

Tantra is making use of the deity as a method. Dzogchen is making use of direct recognition of your nature, as a return to the state which was there before the separation of pure and impure. On one level they are not so different, but on another level they are very different. Because tantra works with hierarchy, it works with the idea that the god is good, the god is pure, and I am not pure; that is why we pray.

In English we say, '*Absence makes the heart grow fonder.*' If people see each other a lot relationships get more difficult, but if they don't see other too often then they often improve. In the same way with Padmasambhava, you have a sense of, '*You are there; please come here.*' In the practice we say, '*From Zangdokpalri, with all of your entourage, please come here.*' and you imagine them coming. You don't need to imagine them coming if they are already here. But In dzogchen, you are not imagining anything coming from anywhere to here – it's already here. That's the big difference.

Tantra is working with space – with movement through space. Dzogchen is also working with movement but in a different way. The movement in tantra is the movement of the transformation of ordinary manifestation into divine manifestation. Dzogchen is concerned with the movement of everything; whether it seems good or bad, right or wrong.

In some ways you could say that tantra is easier, because tantra gives you more opportunities to make use of your personality. If you have a lot of anger, you can make use of wrathful deities, or if you are very sweet and kind natured, you can make a lot of use of Tara and Chenresig. You can have a bath before you practice, eat very pure food, and you think of the benefit of all beings. Maybe you cry because you feel so unhappy that things are upset. People's personalities – their history, their nature – can be utilised according to the different kinds of practice, but in dzogchen you don't have that so much.

In dzogchen, of course, they have lots of practices for balancing energy in the world. But balancing the energy comes *after* the fact of recognising the nature, not preparatory to it, whereas in tantra it is more preparatory to it.

Tantra is called a vehicle of the result, that is to say, you practice in the manner of having already arrived wherever you're going. You act 'as if' you are Padmasambhava, but it's always a bit 'as if,' so there is the real Padmasambhava, and you as Padmasambhava, and you are all the time trying to bring these two together.

The form of Padmasambhava that you are from your practice, is called the form developed according to your vow, or your *samaya*. You then invite the pure form of Padmasambhava that comes from *Zangdopalri*. And that is seen as being the true, or wisdom, or authentic form. These two forms come together. Now do they really need to come together if they were already the same? Tantra is working with the proximity of samsara and nirvana, starting with them being apart and bringing them closer and then merging them. And then they come apart and then they come closer and merge.

Dzogchen is not doing that. Dzogchen is saying that from the very beginning everything is the nature of *Kuntuzangpo* – my whole mind is *Kuntuzangpo* – everything which arises in my mind arises only from the ground of *Kuntuzangpo*. And when I lose that, then I might want to strengthen the understanding of that view through some yoga practice, or breathing, or diet, or whatever it would be. That's the main difference.

In the nyingma tradition they are often tumbled together, so you can have the view of dzogchen and the view of tantra. There are different views. Once you get into the details of it, you find people have very different views about these things.

### *Question about the difference between consciousness and awareness*

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**Question:** I want to come back to the distinction between consciousness and awareness. What is the difference of being aware, and being conscious of being conscious?

**James:** Being conscious of being conscious, certainly in the western way, is a higher order activity, that is to say it is a further abstraction of the same terrain. Whereas awareness is not a higher order function, in the sense that it's not a distillation, or a preparation of that which was preceding it. It is something which is there from the very beginning which is covered over by the function of consciousness.

Consciousness is a dullness, or a downgrading, of the open potential of awareness. In the western point of view, if you have somebody who is very impulsive, you are trying to help them develop a kind of meta-perspective and observing self, whereby they can become conscious of themselves in the moment of experiencing the impulse. They can then have some choices about whether to indulge the impulse or not. If they don't have that meta level, they can't do that.

To develop an observing position is quite useful in an ordinary sense. It introduces another level of dualistic separation, which creates space but it is the space of perspective, a gap between two things. So it reveals something, but it is also constrained and positioned.

**Response:** I can either breathe or concentrate . . . but not both at the same time.

**James:** Then better to breathe!

I think the thing is also that if you are used to focussed mental work, concentration probably gets quite tight; it closes down. Focussed attention is very different from a relaxed awareness. Focussed attention is usually developed through the practice of avoiding distraction, of being able to bring the mind back to focus, whether it's reading a technical book, or listening to a lecture, or doing a *shamatha* meditation. This is very useful but it's quite tightening too, so probably the main thing is to loosen up. To start to think, that the paradigm of the clarity of focussed attention – with the disparaging and the discounting of the other stuff – needs to be shifted so that everything is of interest. Of course is everything is of interest, and the focussed attention then feels overwhelmed.

*What will I attend to?*

*Whatever comes.*

*But I get lost . . .*

*Well, the consciousness that seeks to find a way will get lost, but maybe if one finds a way of inhabiting the situation, one won't be lost; but one will become somebody else.*

For example, Hansel and Gretel are forced into the forest because of this horrible step-mother and the weakness of their father. (These fairy tales always seem to have very weak fathers.) Anyway, they go into the forest, they are very hungry and they come to the gingerbread house – into an environment they can't live in. On one level it's quite sweet and tasty, but it's also very horrible. As soon as they can, they escape and they come home; they leave the forest. However, if you think of Snow White, she goes into the forest and makes friends with the local inhabitants and sets up quite a nice life. She finds a place for herself; she cleans the house and cooks the food. The dwarfs go off to work and come home, and she finds a new existence. It's not what she left, which was a palace, but anyway she seems to be quite happy .

In the same way, we also have to go into the forest – go into the new environment – and find a way of surviving. If we keep thinking, *'I don't belong here, I should be somewhere else because life is clearer and better,'* then the forest is frightening. But if you find how to live in the forest, it's a different world. The focus of dzogchen, is how to live in what comes; how to live in the forest where there are wolves but also fairies – good mushrooms and also poisonous mushrooms.

**Question:** My question is about how to practice the view and how to practice the meditation. I sometimes use the meditation as a way to beat myself up, because I think I don't do enough. Actually I would like to do more, I feel I benefit from doing it here, but at home, this often doesn't happen very much. Have you got some way we can guide ourselves with how we should integrate the formal sitting practice with the practice of integrating the view in everyday life?

**James:** It depends on how much time you have and what you have to do. Generally speaking, it's very useful at first to try to put aside maybe half-an-hour every day and just sit and do the *Three Aa* practice, and be present in that situation. Maybe also having half-an-hour reading some texts around the view, either after or before the practice depending on which is most helpful for you.

In any situation, the main thing is to observe yourself. In particular, to observe yourself without judging. Before you can observe yourself without judging, you have to understand what is the nature of judgement.

A very useful thing to do, is to find a little corner in your house, get some dough, and make a little representation of the judge in your head and then paint it very nicely. And every morning when you get up, you give him a little cup of tea, and you say, *'Judge, you've had your breakfast, sit quiet. I*

*will see you again tomorrow.'* Then you always know where the judge is, and if the judge comes into your head, you can say, '*Oy! You! Back to your kennel!*'

Tibetan buddhism is full of this kind of stuff. All these gods are things in peoples' heads, but you have to give it a location, because judgement and negativity will drive us, and all the mental energy that's spent running around with these thoughts is not helpful. If you can't separate from the judge, you may feel you are observing yourself, but you are not. What you will be doing is developing a further self-narrative which will bind you into limitation, even while you think you are freeing it.

In dzogchen books on meditation, they often point this out. Misunderstanding the meditation is a big fault. It goes back to this most basic, fundamental decision. Each person has to decide, firstly on a cognitive level, am I OK? If you basically think you are not OK, you have a problem, and maybe you need to do some therapy or sort that out. The only useful function of therapy is to separate people from the belief that they are no good.

Once you are aware that you sometimes fall victim to the belief that you are no good, you now have a relationship with that belief, and you can write it in a little book and keep it someplace. It's by separating yourself off from the investment in these things that you start to have some freedom. If you can really believe that your nature is pure, that means every judgement on yourself, every attack on yourself, is a lie. You can then approach it from the tantric point of view.

Like Armageddon, you can make it a battle, and you can have Dorje Drollo riding out like Lord of the Rings. Lord of the Rings is exactly the issue of the Manichaeism religion. The manicheans were also present in India, and buddhism is influenced by this kind of thinking. It means there is a final battle. The final battle is very real: either I am shit or I am OK. The idea that I am shit, that I am no good, that I am stupid, I am lazy and whatever else it could be – these ideas have to be killed. You can kill them with church, you can kill them with *Phat!*, you can kill them with all sorts of things. You can do Dorje Sempa and wash them out, but you have to be able to separate shit from chocolate; it's the most basic thing.

Once you do that, then you can start to do the practice. But if you try to do the practice really believing you are a bad person, you will be like a workman who comes to your house when you have damp on your walls and puts on a coat of gloss paint to cover up the damp. If you cover up your faults, they won't go away, they will just intensify under the surface. We have to look at ourselves. We have to think, '*Who am I?*' Dharma says this is my nature: it doesn't feel like that to me, I would like to believe that, but it doesn't feel like that. I feel stupid, I feel this, I feel that, this is what it feels like. In the two scales, which is going to have the most weight?

This is why we take refuge in the Buddha. We are trying to say, the 'scale' of dharma – the scale of the Buddha – should be heavier, so that when we weigh these two things, our dharma belief is strong enough to tilt us towards letting go of these negative beliefs. As long as the negative belief is heavier, the dharma is just a kind of cosmetic. This is really at the heart of it, and you can do this all the time.

OK, so we'll do the Three Aa practice.

[[Three Aa practice](#)]

Now we do the ***Dedication of Merit:***

GE WA DI YI NYUR DU DAG  
OR GYAN LA MA DRUB GYU NAE  
DRO WA CHIG KYANG MA LU PA  
DE YI SA LA GO PAR SHO

*By this virtue may I quickly attain the glorious Guru's stage. Then may I put all beings without even one exception, on that same stage!*

We are very lucky to be able to meet together and to do some practice, and to think about these things. All over the world, many people have such stark problems of hunger and physical difficulty that they have no space in their mind or in their heart to think of anything; so we are very lucky.

I thank you all for coming and for participating so well. It's always a pleasure to be with good hearted people. In particular thanks to Eva for organising and liaising with Kamalashila and for leading the movement practices. It is very much appreciated. Thanks also to our recordists for immortalising these impermanent moments! *[A round of applause]*

Maybe we meet again, maybe not; we never know. We can have all sorts of hopes and ideas and thoughts but many things flow in the world. Hopefully this is a good experience and good things will come.

**Response:** Thank you very much for your teachings. It's greatly appreciated.

**James:** My pleasure. *[More Applause]*