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# *Calm and Clear*

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*Darnków,*

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In the Tibetan tradition meditation is linked with intention. Of course in ordinary life we always have some intention. Our basic intention is to avoid pain and to get some pleasure. Yet this intention is governed by our particular karmic patterns and so we often don't see clearly what it is that will give happiness and what it is that will give pain.

The basic function of meditation is to give us more power to not be distracted. Why does the mind get distracted? Because it has two aspects. One aspect is emptiness, that is to say there is nothing substantial in the mind at all, and so it has no walls around it and is easily influenced. Emptiness itself however is never influenced by events since it is not 'something' that stands in relation to 'something' else. The other aspect is movement. At each moment of our lives something is moving in our mind: thoughts, feelings, sensations, and all experiences occurring through the senses. This movement never ceases. Meditation is a way of trying to recognise the movement of the nature of mind by stabilizing attention and decreasing the allure of the object.

Profound stabilization is awakened to by directly seeing the intrinsic integration of movement with the stillness of emptiness. This is the practice of Dzogchen. Whereas Tantric practices are ways of transforming the patterns of movement so that the seeming substantial and value-laden objects of our world, including ourselves, are revealed to be illusory forms

inseparable from the divine mandala. The large visualization practices we do are generally referred to as *trinle* (Phrin-Las) which means activity. This indicates that we seek to align movement with its ground so that it is unimpeded as it arises out of emptiness, moves through emptiness and resolves itself back in emptiness. The central function of this kind of practice is to show that appearance is the play of energy. When we look around this shrine room we see images of deities. These are energetic forms, they manifest clearly yet insubstantially. Devoid of internally defining essence, they show the potential of emptiness manifesting diverse compassionate forms in space and time.

We also are movement occurring in space and time, yet we tend to relate to ourselves as if we are a fixed, separate, definable somebody. The 'personal' structures and patterns we identify with have developed according to our specific historical circumstances; our lives have developed according to education, family background, the work we do and so on. These situations are not things but are sites of interactions which generate patterns that we take to be 'us'. The sociologist Emile Durkheim famously stated that 'social facts are things' and could therefore be treated as objective entities. This habit of reification runs deep in all of us and hides the unique radiance of each moment. The general worldly view of our situation is that the best we can do is to try to improve our patterning.

To offer an alternative to help ease us out of this limiting view, the outer level of Buddhist teachings gives instructions on the ten basic faults, the bad things we do with our body, our voice and our mind, such as attacking people, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, gossiping, telling bad things about other people, holding wrong views, not understanding karma and impermanence, and having a strongly fixed sense of self. The instruction is designed to help us to recognise when we get caught in these patterns and to try to drop them and adopt something better. Thus we may make an intention that instead of hurting other people physically we try to heal them. Instead of spreading bad gossip we try to speak sweetly. In order to avoid this being merely an egoic struggle we are offered a deeper re-orientation: instead of clinging onto the forms of the world we try to see them in terms of emptiness and impermanence. However this is difficult to do because we have habits of selectivity and these habits tend to be activated before we are even aware of what we are doing.

### Zhiné and Lhagthong

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The meditations we use to deal with this tendency are shamata or *zhiné* and vipassana or *lhagthong*.

In *zhiné*, calm abiding, we focus our attention on a simple object which could be the movement of the breath at the nostrils, an external ordinary object like a round stone, a holy object like a small statue of a buddha, or a symbolic object like the letter A. We make a clear intention to rest our attention on this object without being distracted. We are practicing at not being caught and led this way and that by whatever experience is arising. In order to transform our activity from habitual to consciously intentional we have to be able to resist the distraction of familiar karmic patterns. For example, if one wishes to take and maintain the bodhisattva vow, one has to have clarity and stability of intention. Otherwise when we feel positive and expansive, we say, "I'm going to save all sentient beings," but we are still very easily caught up in self-focused and self-cherishing thoughts and the vow is forgotten. Stabilising attention and intention is the basis of all other kinds of meditation practice. You can sit and recite a long ritual text, but if you are not completely present in the movement of the mudras, in the recitation of the words, in the visualization, then your actions are on auto-pilot while your mind wanders about.

In fact the recitation of ritual texts is what may be called dynamic *zhiné*. That is to say, instead of focusing your attention on a fixed object that doesn't change in front of you, the

attention is focused on the movement of the body and of the images that develop out of what one is reading. We can track through the various kinds of meditation practice and see that they are all require a focused intention.

In *lhagthong*, seeing clearly, practice we focus on attending to what is arising. We learn to do this by firstly focusing on the body, on the flow of transient sensation. Once stabilised, this intention to observe clearly can be applied to phenomena in the environment and to thoughts, feelings, memories etc. On the basis of calming the habit of fusing with thoughts, we now develop the clarity of being able to see what is occurring without editing or elaborating. The capacity to be calm and clear is vital if we are to begin to open to the spaciousness of the mind itself.

### Meditation with and without intention

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However these practices, and indeed all the methods and techniques which are employed in the dharma, are organized around an intention – and the structure of intention is always dualistic: “I will do this.” There is an I, the subject, and an activity, the object, and a linking intention which mobilises volition. Whereas in Dzogchen practice the basis is to have no intention at all, to make no effort at all. The space of presence reveals its openness as dualistic attention is relaxed, and this in turn reveals that the actual nature of attention itself is inseparable from non-dual awareness. What is the nature of activity when I feel I am doing something? What is the status of this sense of individual agency? For example, I can say that at this moment I am lifting and lowering my cup. I, me, myself are the only one in this room responsible for raising and lowering my cup. But who is this one who says that I am the one who raises the cup? The lifting of the cup and the arising of the thought, ‘I am lifting the cup’, manifest together – they are both transitory arisings, experiences devoid of substance or intrinsic essence. Both are revealed in my awareness which although intimately ‘myself’ is not an individual personal subjectivity existing as something in particular. The fixed sense of an enduring self-entity continuing to be itself through space and time is the fruit of ignorance and the dynamic identification keeps us wandering in samsara. It is this swirl of energy, the energy of openness, which hides within its own turbulence the fact of it’s own non-dual nature.

Moment by moment you find yourself here, you are alive, something is happening for you and something is happening as you. The actuality of our felt sense of being alive is our awareness or presence, our non-dual clarity present prior to the arising of thoughts, feelings, perceptions and so on. This intrinsic clarity, the radiance of being, is usually unnoticed as we tend to fixate on more ‘substantial’ items, the objects of our experience. Yet these objects or entities are not what we think they are. Or rather they are only what we think they are. Reflecting on impermanence allows us to see that the ‘entities’ out of which we construct our self and our world are actually no more than fleeting experience. We mistakenly see the repetitions of patterns as proving that there are truly existing entities. It is this mental activity of proliferation and elaboration which disguises the actual nature of subject and object.

Sometimes we are healthy and sometimes we are not so healthy; sometimes we are happy, sometimes we are not so happy; sometimes we are happy to speak with people and sometimes we want to be alone. Our body, our voice and our mind are not fixed – they change with circumstances in an on-going unfolding which does not stop. We can try to stabilise ourselves but this is extremely difficult for what we take to be ‘ourselves’, our seemingly separate existence, is in fact the unfolding of ceaseless communication in the undivided experiential field. Events in ‘the world’ alter ‘us’ and how ‘we’ are alters our experience of the events in ‘the world’ and influences how we manifest and act in the world. This creates a problem when we try to stabilize our sense of who we are. Actually we ourselves are somewhat unreliable as definable entities for the simple reason that we are not definable entities. Our usual, normal experience of being separate from and other than our environment is a delusion, a fabrication of the play of

our own thoughts, feelings, memories and sensation. We interpret arising events in terms of subject and object and take these interpretive categories to be indicators of real substantial difference.

If we look back over the course of our lives we can see that at each stage we have had many ideas of what we were going to do with our lives but then events occurred and we found our lives unfolding differently. Our life, our existence, is not a private possession but is part of the general field of experience. Subject and object are not two different 'things', they arise inseparably in non-duality. We have no fixed self-identity and neither are there fixed 'entities' out there in the world. Definition and identification are always extrinsic to the arising. All we ever 'have' is experience, and experience is always changing. This is the actuality of the vivid, vital dynamic nature of life.

However concepts, which are abstractions, function as the guarantors of the seeming stable self-substance of arisings. For example, I can say, "This is my watch. I've had this watch for some years and it is quite familiar to me. Every time I look at it I recognize that it is my watch." But most of the day although the watch is on my wrist I don't 'have' my watch because I am engaged with the experience of walking down the street, I am engaged with the experience of talking with patients in the hospital. When engaging in these activities I am not experiencing having a watch. Then when a thought arises in my mind, "What time is it?" then I look at the watch. When I look at the watch to find the time, the watch reveals itself, and if I am not looking at the watch the watch is concealed by my not looking. As experience the 'watch' is discontinuous, while as a concept it is continuous – but only in the realm of concepts. In this way all the forms of the world exist only fleetingly as experience while simultaneously seeming to endure when considered through the medium of concepts.

When we look out of the window we see the trees; there is the immediacy of the presence of these trees. Then if we look down at the floor, that experience vanishes. While we look at the floor we can 'know' that all around this building there are tall trees, we have that knowledge, but it is just the play of concepts. When we look directly at the tree there is an immediate aesthetic impact which is not a concept and which is not dependent upon concepts. If we open to the tree we are touched and moved by pure appearance prior to the imposition of interpretation. However, in our ordinary life we mix experience and interpretation together. This generates our conceptually mediated understanding of ourselves and our environment and this supports the idea that the world consists of truly existing entities, including ourselves.

Although we gain an intellectual sense of this through analysing our own experience, in daily life we tend to be swept along in the flow of assumptions. Language, culture, social formation all seem to assert the reality of self and world. There are so many hooks for habitual assumptions and so little time to truly consider what is going on.

### Tantra and visualisation practices

In response to this problem the Buddha taught methods employing symbols and imagination in order to bring us into direct aesthetic contact with pre-conceptual immediacy. These methods are known as tantra.

Tantra is a transition point or transformational method operating in the borderland between the dualistic, reified intentionality of ordinary samsaric life and the non-intentionality of dzogchen. The function of tantric visualization practices is to loosen our identification with the familiar physical basis which we call our own our body. By experiencing ourselves as Padmasambhava or Tara or any of the other deities we start to see that all the modes of our identity are only experience devoid of inherent self-nature. As long as I am one-pointedly maintaining the visualization of myself as Padmasambhava, I am Padmasambhava. Of course, at first, we easily slip back into identifying with our familiar sense of self. At this beginning stage

the visualization practice is almost like taking a holiday from ourself, and holidays don't last. But if we maintain the practice we can start to experience that what we call our ordinary body, this 'thing' which feels like the stable basis of our identity, is in fact just another pattern in the integrated flow which is the field of experience.

This is facilitated by following Padmasambhava's teaching that after the visualisation practice itself everything we see is actually the body of the guru, all sounds are actually the mantra of the guru and every thought that arises is in fact the movement of the mind of the guru. Our ordinary sense of self is maintained by the same kind of mental activity we use to maintain the visualization of ourselves as Padmasambhava. We are so used to imagining that we are our habitual identity that arises automatically, and so seems to be something existing in itself. However, as we practice being Padmasambhava we get used to also being that identity. Both arise due to a specific focusing of intention and attention. By doing a lot of mantra practice and opening to the developmental phase, *kyerim*, we gain a felt sense of the truth of our new identity and our ordinary 'personal' identity is seen to be just a circumstantial construct.

In the larger practices this is made particularly clear by the two aspects of the *damtsig pa* and the *yeshe pa* – the vow-based form and the natural form. On the basis of the permission to practice you gained at the time of initiation you can construct the visualization according to the text. This is the form you are entitled to access on the basis of the vow (*damtsig*) made at the initiation. Then we invite the deity to come from the pure land where they reside. For example we invite Padmasambhava to actually come here in his natural or wisdom (*yeshe*) form from Zangdopalri, and to merge into the form we have visualized. With many recitations of prayer and mantra we imagine Padmasambhava and all of his retinue moving in the sky singing and dancing and happily coming to see us. If we are visualizing ourselves as Padmasambhava then the actual Padmasambhava comes into us and we are completely inseparable from Padmasambhava in both form and nature. Then there is only Padmasambhava. This is who I am. Form and emptiness, sound and emptiness, mental events and emptiness. This is the mandala of truth in which we wish to abide forever. That is the function of the practice.

The key point is to maintain the confidence that whatever occurs is the manifestation of the divine mandala. In each new situation we abide in the view that this is the actual mandala and not anything else. Padmasambhava is going to the supermarket. Padmasambhava is not quite sure what kind of apples to buy. Our identification with Padmasambhava has to be able to contain the movements of ordinary dualistic experience, the ordinary movements of the mind including, "Well I'm not sure," and "Did I made a mistake?" These movements need to be recognised as the movements of the mind of Padmasambhava. This is the on-going practice of transforming ordinary appearance into divine appearance and to see directly that both are empty of inherent individual essence.

When you look you see colour and shape. That is all that is revealed through seeing; it is basic perception. Onto that 'perception' we add our interpretations and with these interpretations come our evaluations. It is this elaborated experience that we mistakenly believe to be our simple and accurate perception. For example, we look at a painting and say, "Oh, that's really good." or "Oh I'm not sure about the colour." We respond to it with a judgment which seems to us to be a true account of what is there. However if you see clearly, that is 'see' rather than interpret, you will not see an entity. There is nothing substantial put there, there is nothing fully formed in itself. What is there is potential which is revealed through our specific embodiment with our habits, culture, prejudices etc. Even the basic shape and colour is not there in itself.

This basic appearance seems to be like this when it meets the movement of our mind. The actual potential of the 'object' side is open, like the sky. And the actual potential of the 'subject' side is open, like the sky. Within this unborn spaciousness, the potential in this room, the many,

many shapes and colours, meets the potential of our active minds. What we see, what we take to be there, is actually a co-creation in which our mind provides the description, interpretation, and judgment. This interaction creates both our experience and the sense that it is essentially true and trustworthy.

According to the intensity of our ignorance and grasping we experience more or less reification, and this is the basis for whether we inhabit pure or impure relative truth. We are used to living in the illusion that there are truly self-existing objects out there. We imagine that we are seeing real things, things which exist in and of themselves. Moreover we believe that they are not directly connected to us. There is a lot of stuff out there and I am separate from it, for I am me living inside myself. This misinterpretation makes both the world and ourselves very solid. Through meditation we relax and release this deluded vision so that we can see the dynamic unfolding of our non-dual experience.

What is time? We are time. Time is not something that happens to us, it is the very nature of our existence for we 'exist' as moments of experience. Moment by moment, if we are present, we see directly that there is this, just this – and then it's gone. Just this – just this – just this ... Each moment is complete and inseparable from awareness. Each moment is the interplay of subject and object, the empty polarities of experience revealed within the mirror of unborn non-dual presence. However, when we rely on the constructs of abstractive interpretation and on the basis of that imagine that we can predict what the future will be, we have abandoned awareness of our own ground, our presence which is the infinite now. By relying on concepts and the deceptive identities they generate, we experience ourselves as apart from time, as powerful, permanent entities who are able to control and manipulate it. This is one of the particular qualities of ignorance, the sense of the givenness of constructs due to which we live in a conceptual or mental world rather than in the world of direct experience.

We are wonderful storytellers who can talk about all sorts of things, conjuring up all sorts of images. Yet when our creativity is in the service of the dualistic mode of experiencing, the freedom of expression which it seems to open up is in fact an imprisonment, a delusion. Our own awareness, our own buddha nature is hidden from us by our own addiction to conceptual elaboration. The very activities which make us appear to be intelligent, competent and able, become veils or screens that hide us from ourselves. In this way the creativity, radiance and vitality of the open ground is misconstrued as a plethora of phenomena which truly exist and which we can manipulate for our own ends.

C. R. Lama often said that he liked simple people. The highest compliment he paid anyone was to say that they were very natural. We get so carried away by our capacity to elaborate, to develop storylines redolent with affect and dramatic tension. We love the intoxication that this over-investment creates – yet there is no end to thinking and feeling. Although in Buddhism such mental activity is likened to a disease, it is not like being sick and vomiting. If you vomit enough your stomach will empty and you will feel better, but you can't empty the source of thoughts for this is the empty infinity of the mind itself. There is no end to thinking.

The way out of samsara is not through thought. You don't have to be very educated to enter the path of enlightenment, you don't have to be a scholar. In fact being a scholar is often very unhelpful because if you are a scholar you train yourself so that you can trust your judgement, 'this is right' and 'this is wrong'. But such judgements, no matter how intellectually fascinating, are merely the play of concepts generated by reification. Their movement, when we are caught up in it, operates as a veil disguising the raw direct immediacy of being present in the moment.

### Calm abiding

The function of *zhiné*, of staying calm, is simply to support us in not getting lost in distraction. In order to do that we choose a simple focus, either our breath coming in and out at

the nostrils or a visual object such as a mark on the floor or on the back of the person sitting in front of you. You decide what you are going to focus on and form a clear intention, 'I'm going to rest my attention on this'. We don't force our attention because if the energy of the focus is too intense it will become stimulating. In a relaxed sustainable way one simply lets one's gaze or attention rest on the object of our focus. If you find that your mind wanders off then very gently bring it back to the object of focus you have decided on. It is very important not to attack yourself or blame yourself because that is just another form of distracting elaboration. As soon as you notice that your attention has wandered off simply bring it back very gently to your focus.

All forms of meditation involve some degree of exchange where something familiar is let go of in order that a new experience can arise. In *zhiné* we are exchanging interest and excitement for calmness. For example, there is a little puppy outside our meditation hall and this little puppy is very interested to find something exciting, so it runs up and down looking for something stimulating. It is convinced that the highest state of engaged alertness is the basis for happiness. For many of us our mind is just like a little puppy that wants something fresh to be happening, something that will take us somewhere else, that will lead us to something that will make us feel more alive.

But *zhiné*, 'staying peaceful', indicates that whatever value you get out of this exciting moment is only temporary, and following it will only lead you astray. Undisturbed calm, which allows the mind to settle, is of much greater value. This settling is like a pond which has been stirred up so that the water is cloudy with mud. When the agitation stops, the mud gradually sinks to the bottom revealing the original clarity of the water. When distraction lessens we can see the difference between the transient contents of the mind and the mind itself. To achieve this we have to alter or reframe our orientation. In the practice we decide that an object which is intrinsically not interesting at all, the breath or some mark on the floor, is more useful to us than the interesting thoughts and daydreams and other distractions that arise in our mind. This practice is linked to the path of renunciation where samsara is said to be like a swamp. It is something which will suck you down and give you a bad time no matter how sweet it looks on the surface. Renunciation requires some degree of will power or determined intention to stand firm against our habitual tendency to throw ourselves into the flow of ideas, sensations and feelings.

### Seeing clearly

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In vipassana or *lhaktong* or seeing clearly, the focus is on finding the simplest clear experience of what is currently occurring. All meditations are methods even the dzogchen method of non-method. We use them or enter into them because we are trying to achieve something or arrive somewhere. They operate as antidotes to the various kinds of problems and tendencies we have. Seeing clearly addresses our tendency to formulate the fleeting strands of potential into the semblance of entities that are defined by their own internal essence. Due to this we see things as if they are out there and then engage with them without realising that we are the one creating what we take to be there.

Seeing clearly lets us slow the process down so that we can see what we are up to. The actual arising, the actual what-is-thereness, is not something that can be grasped. Yet we are habituated to grasp at our sense that self and other are real and graspable, and therefore we project our abstract concepts onto what is arising and thereby fashion something that has a hook which we can grasp onto. What we grasp at is not something truly existing 'out there' or 'in here'. What we manage to grasp at is only ever the content of our own mind. It is vital that we see this directly for two reasons. Firstly we will be more empowered to awaken if we see our central role in our imprisonment. Secondly seeing the transient nature of experience we are helped to open to it as the energy display of our naked, empty awareness.

The practice of seeing clearly helps this awakening. We start as in the previous practice by taking up our focus and developing our settled attention. Then we move the site of this focused attention from the edge of our nostrils, where our breath is going in and out, up to the top of our head. Then we direct that focused attention to gradually descend down through our head, through our shoulders and arms and torso, through our hips down to the soles of our feet. We are scanning what is occurring as the presenting actuality of our body in this moment. We are not concerned here about the anatomical body that doctors know about. We are attending to the body as it reveals itself to us in the moment that we attend to it.

For example, as you scan down, you might encounter some tension in the back of your neck. Now, 'tension' is already an interpretation so what is actually presenting itself? Is it tightening, heaviness, tearing? We aim to describe our experience to ourselves in the simplest possible language so that we avoid catching what we encounter and incorporating it into our familiar self-referential narrative. We aim to see just what is there without adding anything from our knowledge or memory. As you receive what is occurring as it is, continue scanning, noticing what is occurring at every part of your body. When you reach the soles of your feet move slowly up to the top of your head and then down through your body again. Pay the closest attention that you can to precisely what is there without elaboration. Elaboration, linking, is very useful in ordinary life as it is a key method by which we make sense of what is going on. But in this practice it is not helpful because if you develop the idea 'Oh, my shoulder is sore', when you come to pass through your shoulder again you are likely to be looking for something that you know is there because you've already formulated a rounded concept of what is there. However if you describe the moment of appearance in simple terms like burning or cutting or falling, then next time you go through that area you don't have a story built up about what you will encounter. It's simply a raw, unprocessed moment and that helps us to attend to what is happening now, without comparing and contrasting across time.

This is a very useful practice for meditators because it introduces you to yourself. You start to see the actual nature of embodiment. Rather than telling your body about itself you give space to your body to reveal itself as it is. Then you find it is not what you think it is! We encounter an emergence which is separate from and prior to the conceptual schema which is our usual focus of attention. If you keep doing this practice you start to see directly that there is no solid substantial basis to your usual sense of self. Not only are the emergent object side experiences short lived and always changing but the thoughts that can be applied to them also don't have enduring validity. In this way you can directly see the process of the construction of 'yourself' out of the interactions of these factors. With this experience you start to see why dharma is true.

Dharma is not a theory, not a set of ideas cooked up by someone who was very intelligent. It is what is actually there as your life. We are here, we are present – but not as a thing. We are not artificial, not put together, not made. We are not elaborated, not turned into something else, beyond being identified in terms of familiar dualistic opposites like, good, bad, right, wrong, mine, yours. This is the nature of the dharmakaya, and when you look directly you can see that it is your own nature.

Dharmakaya, the mind of the Buddha, is not something far away. It is not something high and holy. It is what is here, present in the midst of all that seems to cover it. In fact it is the source of what seems to cover it. This mind which cannot be grasped, cannot be defined, is the clarity within which the endless stream of experiences arises. Our experience is itself the energy of the dharmakaya, the energy of rigpa, awareness. When you simply sit with your own mind, without applying any technique, just opening to what occurs, you can see that this is the case. The reason we don't see it is because we are busy telling ourselves stories about what is going on. Just as on a dark night if you take a stick from the fire that is burning at one end and swing it around your head fast, you start to see a circle of fire. There is no circle of fire. It's an illusion. There is a point of fire turning around your head at some speed, and when these factors operate together they

create the illusion of continuity. Just as in the cinema when the frames of the film are put through the projector at the right speed this interaction creates the illusion of a continuous flow of images.

In the same way the stream of our experience is happening so rapidly that it appears to be self-validating, it appears to be just what it is and we are taken in by it. But actually there is no substance to what appears. Our felt sense of there being truly existing substantial entities is an illusion. Illusion doesn't mean there is nothing there at all. Illusion means there is 'something' there but it is an appearance without substance. These two ways of meditation are very useful because the first with its simple focus calms the mind, and the second allows us to become clear that there are no truly existing entities. These two experiences are very helpful preparation for when we relax into the openness of dzogchen.

'Calm abiding' and 'seeing clearly' are terms which refer not just to the dualistic practices of focusing on the breath and body scanning. In the dzogchen tradition calm abiding is to rest in the unchanging nature of our mind while seeing clearly is the luminosity of the mind revealing all possible experiences. We enter calm abiding by relaxing, by releasing our anxious and worthy preoccupations. As we allow appearance to come and go there is the ease of seeing that we are not responsible, not in charge. The unborn openness of our mind is revealed as its obscuring veils of identification are allowed to fall away by themselves. This calm spaciousness is naturally inseparable from seeing clearly. Whatever arises is appearance devoid of substance, the radiance of the mind offering a ceaseless display of the illusory interplay of subject and object.

In this way calm abiding is inseparable from primordial purity (*Ka-Dag*) and seeing clearly is inseparable from spontaneous occurrence (*Lhun-Grub*). As the ego individual self does less, there is more, there is everything. As the ego loses the battle for domination it becomes clear that there is no war in non-duality.

Ordinarily we move through the world on the basis of our judgements and conclusions. These conclusions, these final statements that give us the reassuring sense of knowing what's what, hide the dynamic nature of appearance which is actually the radiance of openness. Our conclusions do not establish something that is really true. Rather they are a graspable story denying the ungraspable moment. It is not that we shouldn't tell these stories, for they are the means by which we connect with other people. However, we have to see the function and value of such stories. Stories belong not in the house of wisdom but in the house of compassion. That is to say, our stories tell us not about what is actually going on as it is, rather they are gestures within the semiotic web, creating momentary patterns which other pattern making creatures can relate to through their commitment to stories as truth. Dharma seeks to deconstruct stories not destroy them – it seeks to show the inseparability of wisdom and compassion.

What we see directly is ungraspable, it is always vanishing in the moment it occurs. This is the un-artificial directness of the immediacy of experience. But without the compassion of the dharma stories we learn we would not find the door to our own nature. The compassion of others, inseparable from their wisdom, awakens our wisdom, our direct presence in openness – which in turn lets us see that all manifestation is compassion – and so we relate to 'others' in the openness of non-duality. This lets us relate to others as they currently are in their manifestation rather than according to some template. By fully receiving the presenting of the other, we engage with the co-emergent field of experience with grace and dignity.

For example, imagine that while we are sitting here we hear a girl crying because she has fallen over. If you see a child in that state, you say, "Oh sweetheart, what's the matter, what happened?" "Oh, I was running and I slipped and I fell and I hurt myself." The child is telling you their story. You have to listen to the story and tell her another story, "Oh, the reason you fell was because you were running so fast, and you can run fast because you are so big and strong." "Yes I am very big and strong." "Yes, and you need to be more careful when you are big and strong!"

That is how we relate in the way of compassion, we find points of connection and allow a new story to emerge, one which opens more space, more connectivity between the individual and the field they are part of.

The nirmanakaya comes into the world in a relational form according to the situation of beings. When we meet human beings we speak to them because human beings operate in the domain of language. With a little puppy we chase it around and this gets its tail wagging. If you say to the dog, "Your nature is emptiness," it would probably bark. And if you say to the child who has fallen over, "Oh, it is just an illusion," they would not feel met and loved. Speaking and acting out of our rulebook, our sense of what is right and wrong is unlikely to bring true contact – rather it is likely to install a choreography of power imbalance. After he was enlightened under the Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya, Buddha Shakyamuni decided he wouldn't teach at all. Then many different gods came and said, "Oh, please teach us the dharma." But he was reluctant to do so as he was sure people would not understand. This was not because he felt superior because he knew more. Rather he could see that sentient beings know a lot, they are full of tendencies, impulses, sensations, feelings and thoughts – and this does not leave much room for anything fresh. When somebody tells us their story we tend to wrap it into our story. It is quite difficult to truly hear something new. When we truly hear the freshness of the moment of communication it wakes us up – and that involves the loss of assumption of the familiar.

When later at Vulture Peak the Buddha taught the Heart Sutra the tradition says that 500 Brahmins fell unconscious. They could not believe what they were hearing for it did not fit into their frame of reference and so they felt overwhelmed. It was very good that they could go unconscious. This was a simple, honest response. Most of us are more narcissistic than that. We hear the teaching and think, "Oh, yes I know that", "Oh, yes I've always known that." In this way our stupidity wraps itself around the fresh point of awakening.

## Taking refuge

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To progress we need to stop taking refuge in our accumulated knowledge, habits and assumptions, and let go of them so that we can take refuge in that which is truly useful for ourselves and all other beings.

To take refuge requires a sense of vulnerability, a sense of needing help, a sense of disappointment and dissatisfaction in our present way of living. Our lives are not quite the way we'd like them to be, we feel unable to make things happen the way we want them to. We need to change but we can't do it by ourselves. This is not a sign of our personal inadequacy but of the actuality of non-duality. When we succumb to the illusion that we are an individual, a separate entity, we establish the conditions for suffering. Mutual aid is the flavour of the co-emergent field, giving and receiving is the pulsation of life itself.

In dzogchen the key refuge is our own mind. We relax our obsession with relying on transient thoughts and feelings and thereby open ourselves to infinite spaciousness, our actual ground, the basis for all experience. Relaxing in this open presence all fear dissolves. This is the true and only given. This is it, as it is, the indestructible ground of being, your original face – open, empty, infinite. You are it but you can't catch it. Within this presence the field of experience ceaselessly displays the interplay of the energy of the ground, the radiant complexion of becoming. This field is always now and within it you manifest as the flow of gestures of connectivity which are specific and precise and part of the unfolding of the Buddha's love.