

## Illusion, delusion, confusion

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“We have so many experiences in life. This is possible because our mind is intrinsically open and hospitable to each new moment. Yet this openness is hidden for us by our own involved busyness. Engaged in the never-ending task of self-delusion we impede the unimpeded and obscure the unobscured. To release ourselves from these self-defeating habits would make a good New Year’s resolution for each of us!”

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## FRIDAY EVENING, SESSION 1

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### *The movement of the mind*

Our basic topic for this weekend will be the relationship between illusion, delusion and confusion—which is to say, how we have more or less clarity in our experience of ourselves and of the world around us.

We'll begin by doing a little sitting practice. There are many ways to think about why we would sit, why we would meditate. For our purposes today, in regard to this topic, we're not really trying to calm the mind. A lot of meditation is concerned with the management of experience, with trying to have more of what might be called positive and less of what might be called negative—more peace and less agitation, more compassion and less selfishness, and so on. The orientation that I'd like to highlight, however, which is concerned with the practice of dzogchen, is to become more aware of the movement of the mind.

The mind is always moving (sensations, memories, thoughts, perceptions—all that arises through the five senses) but because we tend to be reliant on the idea of a stable sense of self, even when we see that a lot is going on, we think, *oh! this is happening to me, things come and go but I remain!* From a dharma point of view this is a really stupid idea, but it's familiar and, in some ways, comforting. What we want to do is get closer to the actual movement and see what is constituted out of this movement. What is experience and who is the experiencer? We might imagine this experiencer, if taken to be outside the movement, to be calm and stable. When we examine our lives, however, we find that we are rarely calm and stable; in fact, we couldn't function as human beings if we were calm and stable because we are touched by events in the world: we are moved to respond. We come into formation in interaction and yet we carry this idea that there is a stability to us. This, then, is one of the main things we'll be looking at.

Let's begin by sitting in a relaxed way and seeing what occurs. If your mind isn't the way you'd like it to be and you find yourself having a judgment about that see if you can observe the movement of the judgment. When such thoughts arise as *I can't do this*, or *I don't know what I'm doing*, that looks like a definite statement, as if something were being established, and yet the thought has already vanished. This is a central theme that we'll return to again and again: how is it that a moving thought seems to establish something stable? One function of our sitting right now is to give us some time just to be with the process, with the flow of our experience, however it is.

[sitting practice]

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### *Value is relational*

As we sit we might notice that something is always happening, which gives us a sense that our life is a process of experience. Through culture and education we

come to have a sense of the reality of things: *in life there are important things that should be taken seriously*. Coming into the Vienna airport as I walked along the corridor I saw a lot of adverts for banks and business consultancies. Most of them were pictures of a group of three men in expensive suits with ties, all looking concerned about something very important. Money is important. One of the reasons money is so important is that it is abstract—it only takes on value through participation, through exchange. If you have 100 euros and go into an ordinary supermarket you can buy a lot of stuff. If you go into a casino you can lose it in a minute. The value and the function of things are relational. What is the inherent value of 1000 euros? It could be used to buy a prescription, something to help preserve health, or it could be used to buy an injectable drug, which would be undermining of health. It has no particular value in itself.

It's the same for us as people: we don't have a fixed value. Some people like us, some people don't like us. For most people we are irrelevant—we walk down the street and nobody cares. We have no explicit value. If people get to know us our value might increase, or perhaps it might decrease. Generally speaking, our value for other people depends on their mood: it's not fixed or inherent. The reality of the value of a person shifts according to politics, with economics, or with coming to know the group membership of the person. Are they in the same religion as me, or in the same political party? Are they one of us, or one of the other, the enemy? There are many factors for the attribution of value. Looking in this way we also see that such value changes through time.

As the Buddha pointed out on many occasions, all compounded things are impermanent. Everything which has a beginning will have an end. We've all been born so we'll all die. We don't know when we'll die, we don't know how we'll die. We don't know if we'll be healthy and then suddenly die, or if we'll have a long illness. We think, *oh! here! this is my life*, but maybe it's not mine at all. I find myself inhabiting this body. Sometimes it's sick, sometimes it's not sick. Sometimes it's energetic, sometimes it's not. This is me, but I'm not the master of me. We can pick up viruses from other people and then we're sick. It's their sickness, but now I'm sick. I could say, 'I'm sick with your sickness and now I'm going to sue you,' but if I'm sick then *I am sick*. If I am sick then I'm not healthy. Some tiny little virus that I can't even see makes me feel that I want to stay in bed. I can't think quite clearly: I've been robbed of my sense of self by something 'other' which has now become part of me. When Buddhist texts talk about compounded phenomena this is what is meant. We are not just one thing: we are changing. We change due to factors that seem to be internal and factors that seem to be external. Somebody smiles at us and we feel good, somebody ignores us and we feel sad. We are relational: what then what is the reality of myself? It depends.

On the table in front of me is a burning candle. We can say that the table is stable, that it's red in colour. We know how it is—it has tableness—but if we take the candle and put it underneath it after some time the table will start to burn. Then the tableness of the table will be exposed as something not inherent to it. The table continues to be a table as long as it doesn't get burned, or hit by a hammer or thrown out the window. It's the same with everything in the room—it depends. We have

electric light because the electric bill is paid. If you stop paying the bill then you won't have electric light.

Cause and effect are in constant pulsation. We might ask what the reality is of the world we are in. Now we're seeing climate change in very strong ways in various countries. With the fires that are burning in Australia many species are being totally annihilated: they won't come back. Due to causes and conditions they survived for millions of years, and now, due to a shift in causes and conditions, fire engulfs their environment and the last members of the species die. Had you been watching a programme made a year ago on nature in Australia you'd have got a nice description of those cute little mice-like creatures that wander around in the bush. When you see a programme like that you think, *oh yes, those creatures are there in Australia, maybe someday I'll go and see them...* but now they're gone. Were they real? What was the reality of them? They were not protected from circumstances.

We are not protected from circumstances. Our life is interaction. We breathe in and breathe out: if breathing stops we start to move toward death. The blood is going around in our body: if it stops we start to move toward death. We need our kidneys to function, our liver to function. Function means movement. The stomach helps to break down the food, which then is metabolised. These all are processes. I am a process, a process in a world of processes. How I exist in my processing, in my unfolding, influences the way that other factors around me unfold. So am I a thing? In English the word 'reality' is linked to the Latin root 'res', meaning thing or entity, something which has an existence, its own existence. *I exist*. Well, maybe. We all feel that we exist, but we exist dependently and interdependently—we are not self-existing. Without drinking water and fluids the body isn't healthy. We eat, we move, we walk to do the various things which maintain our social sense of self. It's an important question for us to reflect upon: what is the reality of myself?

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### *What is the essence of me?*

Each one of us has an identity. You have a formal identity, which is represented in your identity card or your passport and is the mark of your social existence. If you can't be formulated according to the requirements of a state identity then you have a difficult situation. Many refugees are like ghosts. Their body is there, their knowledge and skills are there, but because they lack the papers represent a social identity their capacity cannot come into manifestation. This is quite an amazing thing, that the validation of our existence, which just feels to be kind of on the inside—*I'm me*—is not very powerful. In order to function we need to have this social identity, which is extraneous. Your identity card has a number, which is given to you by the state. On it is your name, which was given to you by other people. The components of your identity have been adopted by you, but after the fact of having been given to you by events.

We have a body, which changes over the years. You find out as a child if your body is going to be good at sport, whether you can climb trees, and so on. Your capacity, your potential, is revealed in your body's performance. Some people are good at

singing, some are good at dancing. If you say, 'I'm good at singing,' did you make yourself have this capacity for singing? It's something which is revealed, which is expressed through the balance of your capacity to hear, your vocal chords and so on. You find it by showing it. The capacity is performative and is also influenced by whether or not people like to hear you sing, whether or not you're encouraged and get a singing teacher, whether or not there's a religious or a gender prohibition on your singing.

The reason I'm opening up this kind of description is to help us think about what is truly innate in us, about what the 'mine' of me is. Maybe when you're a child somebody says, 'You look like your uncle.' *I don't want to look like my uncle—actually I look like me.* The simile is saying, *'this is not you as you, this is you because of participation in an inherited genetic patterning.'* What is the essence of me? It depends. It depends on the time of the year or the month (some people won't sleep well tonight because there's a full moon), and so on. We're influenced by many, many factors. I am me according to circumstances. That is to say, I am co-emergent with circumstances. When we reflect in this way we might wonder whether there is any essence of me inside me. Do I have a private, substantial basis for the me-ness of me? What is real about me? If we take 'real' to be some kind of autonomy, of independence, of reliability, then, from that point of view, we're not real! We are part of belonging. We feel we are apart, that we are separate, that we are different. We start from *'here I am.'* We wake up in the morning and it's *oh, here I am.* If you have small children they demonstrate this every morning. Even at five o'clock sometimes they come and shake you and say, 'Here I am!' What they really mean is, *'here I am, but I can't really be me until you wake up and play with me, I can't be me without you because my 'me' is part of you-me.'* This points out yet again how relational we are.

Some of you are familiar with basic Buddhist ideas. You may know that in the so-called Mahayana, or Great Vehicle Path, we think of the benefit and enlightenment of all sentient beings. If I was truly an independent subject I might think, *well, I could just get enlightened and then I'd be fine, and if you want to get enlightened, go and get your own.* In the Mahayana tradition, however, we reflect exactly on this interdependence, this connectivity. That is to say, what is the limit or boundary of myself? If I need you in order to be me are you really outside of me, away from me or different from me?

Walking around Vienna you see many grand buildings. Someone might explain to you that this is the opera house and that is the museum. Actually, they are piles of stones. Many piles of stones were destroyed in the Second World War. Some were rebuilt in pretence that the war hadn't happened, but they're all piles of stones. In part these piles are held in place by a bit of cement—maybe 10%—but the main thing that holds the buildings together is belief. *'This is our city, this is our heritage: we have to protect it. The fact that these buildings are here is part of what makes me one of the local people.'* People's identities are projected into buildings. People who live near the high mountains like to see them every day, to take their dog out for a walk and see the snow glittering in the sunshine. *Ah, now I feel like me—on the basis of looking at a big hill!*

From the Buddhist point of view we should try again and again to reflect on the many factors which go into generating this felt sense of our own independent identity. Everything that we see is impermanent. Because people come into this building, and they breathe and there's central heating, gradually the wall starts to change colour. Our existence leaves a mark because our existence is about marking. When you buy new shoes they have the shape of the maker: after six months they have the shape of your foot. Then they might no longer look as smart but they're more comfortable. We shape and we accommodate the environment. We mark the world around us, leaving traces of our activity, but we are also marked by other people, by how they speak to us and whether they are efficient in helping us or not. I am coming into this particular formation in this particular moment according to circumstances: I am 'forming'. I never quite fully arrive at a finished form, but I co-form with what is around me. It could be the weather, it could be whether we are running late, whether we have to run or whether we can walk in a leisurely manner. If you reflect on how you are, moment by moment, you find that your postures, your gestures, your facial expressions, your way of breathing, are all arising relationally.

In that sense, then, none of us here are entities, nor are we things, although we can think about ourselves as being things. Say you have a difficult period in your life: you might make some mistakes in a love story, or at work. You might be angry with yourself—*I'm so stupid! I can't believe it! Is this me? How the fuck am I like this? I'm really like this...?* In moments like these of intense emotion it almost appears to be an eternal truth. It is as if I had found the deep truth about myself: *I'm useless, I'm a failure, I can't do this.* Probably we've all experienced such moments. They can be linked with feelings of depression, anxiety, slightly manic arousal, and so on. In their intensity they feel definitional, and then they're gone. When you're in them, though, it feels like a shaping, like the exposing of a true limitation to who you are. If we're interested in meditation these moments are very useful because they help us to see how we merge into a belief. The intensity of the belief seems to establish a truth.

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### *Is what we believe really true?*

Recently we had this killing of the Iranian general. People from the Pentagon were being interviewed and they all agreed, 'This is a very dangerous person, a terrorist who has killed thousands of Americans, and we know this because we have the facts. It is undeniable that he organised campaigns which led to the death of these soldiers, and this means that he's a terrorist and deserves to die.' Well, from the Iranian point of view, if you take the same fact of his behaviour leading to the death of many Americans, 'He is a hero, a wonderful person, ridding the world of a scourge. The Americans are toxic! America is the great Satan!' That's a belief, and if you believe it then it's true—for you. Terrorist or hero? It depends. Some people would say, 'No! These Iranians are all crazy! They're under the power of an evil government and that's why they don't understand that America is trying to liberate them.' America has a long of history of 'liberating' people—*all over the world America does its best, bringing democracy.* What is true? This is where it gets scary. We want to have something to hold onto. What will we believe in? If we believe in something which is not able to sustain the intensity of our longing then trouble will arise. The

object of our belief will not be able to perform the function we're hoping for. We want to be happy, safe and fulfilled. We want to feel that we are good people living a good life. How shall we do that?

In Britain now the National Health Service is collapsing. Many doctors are leaving, many nurses are leaving. They've had enough of terrible management. They want to help, which is why they go through their long years of training, yet they can't help because the system is mismanaged. They believe in public health provision, but this public health provision system is shit. If you say, 'I believe in shit,' it doesn't feel very good. When people realise that this is not a momentary problem, but a deep structural flaw, they start to feel that instead of helping people, instead of going to work to really help people become healthy, what they're actually doing is shovelling shit. Many institutions are like that—prisons, for example. They're there to punish and to reform, but in most countries the amount of time spent in educating and reforming the prisoners is diminishing. The good feeling you might have in trying to help people come back to a healthy place in society starts to diminish. Everything depends. Imagine that you are a farmer who keeps cows. The cows are out on the high pasture, the grass is beautiful, there are wild herbs and little flowers that the cows are eating. It will make a delicious milk, but every time the cow farts it undermines our climate. It's like that.

Most of the things we encounter in our life are polyvalent—that is, they have multiple angles and energetic formations. This can be seen as an invitation to ask ourselves, 'How secure is my conceptual interpretation of existence?' Through family, education, culture, gender, and so on, we develop an identification with certain assumptions, and on the basis of these assumptions we act. They have a certain predictive capacity that allows us to plan. They give us a sense of some competence about knowing what is going on. Moreover, we can come to an understanding why it's going on as it is. Not everybody will agree with our interpretations though: it may be what I believe but it's not actually true. Truth is a delusion, because it all depends on how we take things up and how we function with what we take to be true.

Many prescribed medications, for example, are addictive, particularly those designed to deal with mild depression and anxiety. If somebody gets a prescription because they feel anxious it might help a bit, but then when they try to stop taking it their anxiety returns, intensified. Is this, then, a good medication? It depends: it depends on the person. Unless you marry your doctor they're probably not going to see enough of what happens to you to decide what the dose and duration should be. Doctors tend to say, 'Come back in six months and we'll see how you're getting on.' Helpful or harmful? We want to believe that doctors will not give us anything harmful, that the medication will be useful—will be useful 'for me'. What does your doctor know about 'you'? Probably not very much. You are a standard format patient. Like in a biscuit factory you're coming down the conveyor belt. In the factory your job is to put the cherry on the biscuit, and in the clinic the doctor's job is to give you a prescription. It's not really relational. We are very, very complex and we operate in a crude system, which means that a lot of the necessary information required to fine-tune the prescription is just not available.

This same goes for a lot of life. How many people do you know who really listen to you, who give you their full attention? For most of us it's not that many people. Other people are pre-occupied and we also are pre-occupied, so our conversations often drift across each other. We remember a few things 'about' the person, we can formulate a story 'about' the person, but that doesn't catch the person. Phenomena are always more than narrative, are more complex than narrative.

As we'll see, this is why we have meditation. The function of meditation is to allow how it is to show. When we rely on storytelling and interpretation we are telling the arising phenomenon what it is, and in this proactive subject-to-object mode there is little space for the true display of the fascinating complexity of the object. As we'll see when we do more practice together, the function of the practice is to allow the revelation of the immediate actuality of this moment, and this moment, and this moment.

Is this way of opening things up useful to you? Is this meaningful for you?

We'll have time for some questions a bit later, but now let's take a break for about twenty minutes.

## FRIDAY EVENING, SESSION 2

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### *Open potential, limiting conditions*

Initially when we consider it, we might have a sense that our mind is a kind of container. Here I have a glass and it has water in it. The glass is the container and the water is the contained. Moment by moment the contents of me are what's coming through my senses—thoughts, sensations, memories and so on—which means that we have two things to investigate. One is the nature of the content, which sometimes presents itself as strong and seemingly real, and sometimes as more vapid, less tangible, and we also want to investigate the container: what is the self? Generally we have a sense that 'myself', a kind of irreducible essence, is the basis of me, and that I manifest from myself as myself. I show myself as if there's some 'self' inside which could then come and show itself outside. But is the self a content or a container?

Imagine that a child comes home from school and says, 'You have to listen to me. We learned a song today and now I'm going to sing it to you.' In the morning when they went out to school they didn't know the song. Now they've learned the song. It has become theirs, and now they are going to sing their song for you. Not only are they showing the song, which they have internalised, but, in giving themselves to the song as they sing, it is as if the song is them, that it is the fullness of that person. It seems like a validation of the identity of the child—*I am the one who does this*—but, of course, on the basis of many other factors. The singing of the song is a content arising through the body form and the psychological energy of the child in relation to the parents who look with nice eyes at them. They congratulate the child on two

levels: *you sing beautifully*, and *you are wonderful*. The first comment is about the movement of the organised energy of the breath and the remembering of the words, and so on: it's about an activity. The second is an affirmation of being, of existence: *the reason you are able to sing so well is that you are wonderful*. There is something marvellous, some inner beauty, that is the basis of the song coming out. This second kind of comment feeds into an essentialising of who the child is, and this happening, whether praise or blame, tends to feed into a mixing and confusing of the two categories. Then, when we do things badly we feel stupid: *something is wrong with me*. The error was performative, it was a manifestation of embodied energy and it was a little bit out of sync with the situation and therefore didn't go so well; however, the distillation of that, or the indication that's taken from it, is that *this mistake is an x-ray of myself: I make mistakes because there is something wrong with me*.

As situation follows situation we can see somehow a kind of compacting of the sense of being inside this body-frame. The child in its free expression of singing or dancing is expressing a potential, but whether it is received well or critically seems to affirm not just an open potential which is situationally evoked but something more essential. *You can't sing, you're not good at dancing*. 'You're not good at dancing' might be an accurate description of the motor skills of that person, but most of us, given that something like that would be said to us, wouldn't take it as useful information, but as a wound, an insult, an embarrassment. We might become defensive because we're taking the description of an activity or action which was unfolding moment by moment in time as being indicative of a true essence that is the true source of the activity.

In this we can see the beginnings of the Buddhist notion that there is no real self. Now clearly we are, each of us, in this room with our particular bodies, with how we are sitting just now, with our postures and with our ways of breathing, and so on. There is a unique specificity to each of us. That is to say, we are not made in a factory: we are each different. The question then is whether this difference is a difference in style, in this form of a manifestation arising from a moment of configuration of our potential, or are we unique because of our essence? *'I am like this because I'm me'* is an interesting sentence: it may be personally meaningful but it's rationally meaningless. It feels right—*I'm me, that's why I'm like this, because I'm me*—but it doesn't explain anything at all. It sounds like a causal expression, that the way in which I manifest is coming out of some truth of me. But, of course, if I had a true defining essence I would have to be like this all the time, and I'm not. If, then, I'm not a pre-determined essential self, but rather a range of potential, much of which is constrained by the repertoire of my familiar self-identifications, then the seeming continuity of me-as-me is based on repetition—pattern repetition and rhythm repetition, each of which is dynamic and adaptive.

I may well have this open potential, but how it manifests (or, if you like, how I access it) depends on certain constraints, some conscious, some less conscious, mainly arising out of my history in this life. When I was young, for example, I was very shy, which is a particular patterning of embarrassment in social situations, of not wanting to be seen. Now, as I'm talking with you I'm not talking with you: talking is going through me. If I was to become very conscious that I am talking to you then I would objectify myself and I'd start to freeze myself. I would consolidate according to the

patterns of my neurotic structure, and then I wouldn't like being here and I wouldn't even have come here. I'm here because I'm not me. Because I'm talking *with* you without you I wouldn't be talking: so the truth is, you are talking me—not my fault! We all know what it's like to be a bit embarrassed, to retract. You lose your immediate connectivity with the situation around you and start to work out what to do. If the anxiety increases the possibility of a conceptual understanding begins to collapse. If that's happening for me, is it that *I* am becoming embarrassed, or is embarrassment becoming *me*? If you take the first reading, it's 'poor little James' inside—*help me, very scary! what will I do?* That's how '*I'm embarrassed*' feels. Or, taking the second reading, if a mood of embarrassment arises and generates a particular configuration of myself then the embarrassment is producing me. Does that make sense? These two readings are very different. Whenever we take the first reading it condenses the moment back into some affirmation of an essential limitation. This is why they say in dzogchen that it's very important to observe yourself, not in a critical way, but in a friendly, enquiring way. Of course, we also find this in certain aspects of the zen practice—in Dogon, for example, who said that to follow the way is to enquire into oneself.

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### *A flowering in the world*

It's not about following dharma as some system out there with which you have to align yourself in order to become a 'good Buddhist'—that's perhaps not very useful. What is more important is to have a sense of *how I arise in this way*. Can I have a more panoramic sense of the many factors which are influencing how this is showing in the moment? In traditional Buddhist language we would refer here to dependent origination. We'd say, 'On the basis of this, that arises.' On the basis of people liking me I feel more relaxed and happy: now, I may know that I feel relaxed and happy because people seem to like me, but a subtle process is going on here that's separating cream from milk, a skimming off of something. The moment is arising, it's quite dynamic, but I might come out of the situation thinking, *I feel good. That was good, I feel good*. There is a confirmation, a firming up of the profile of 'my self' that I am able to hold at this moment. Then, on the next day, if life is not so easy and I feel unliked and lonely and sad, there's another skimming from that. The moment of the sad mood is passing, but the cream is there, *'and that's me'*. 'I' am the one who is sometimes happy, sometimes sad. In that description 'I' am the reference point. Someone is happy. Who is happy? *I am*. This seems to be pointing to someone. Then we might think, *well, where is this 'I' inside?* Is it in your heart, or in your head? In your feet? Can you locate it? If you feel very sad you might shrink and fall inside, and if you feel very happy you might expand out of your body. It's by observing your own life in different situations that you can see: the topology of what you take to be yourself is shifting according to circumstance. You see that having a self is a kind of modality of our participation in the world with other people.

For example, during the break many of you will have been chatting with other people. In each of these engagements you had a sense that *I'm talking with you*. If you didn't know that you'd be a bit crazy. That is to say, there is a kind of illumination of who is the speaker. You know that you are speaking and by your way of reading

the patterning of the other person's expression you get some feedback as to whether they're happy to continue talking with you, and unless you're drunk or very narcissistic, you're going to stop talking if they look bored. That is to say, you are talking *with* them—and that's when conversation is interesting. If you're talking *at* someone it's a monologue, not a dialogue. Conversation helps to dissolve the prison of depressive isolation, because in interacting with another person we are touched by their presence and we find ourselves responding. We didn't know what we were going to say, we didn't know how we were to going to say it. The other person is the revealer of this moment of myself.

We've been looking at this point in several different ways, that the self is a flowering, or an outcome, or mode of contact, rather than 'a something' inside. When they say in Buddhism that there is no self it doesn't mean you don't exist at all. It doesn't mean you are so chaotic and random that you lack all continuity and other people can barely recognise you. It's more that the patterning of your life is a syncopation and that there's not necessarily anything inside that's doing it. The Buddhist critique concerns the belief in a separated island inside which keeps you essentially apart from everything else, and that you identify the same autonomous essences in other people—and in cats, dogs, houses and countries.

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### *The me-ness of me*

We are in Austria: Austria is a name. The hills and mountains of Austria do not know that they are called 'Austrian', and so the tourist department sends out photographers and produces brochures indicating that these are indeed Austrian mountains. There's nothing intrinsically Austrian about the Austrian mountains: 'Austrian' is a name. When some years ahead the Chinese invade this country [laughter] we don't know what they're going to call this place. Many countries have been re-interpreted. The Tibetan people thought they had a degree of autonomy and now they're being swallowed, the people in Taiwan are wondering when the mouth of the big fish is going to open, and we know from the historical atlas of Europe that the borders of its countries have changed a lot—these are names. One of the reasons that the Russians were able to act on the Ukraine is that the Ukraine in its modern form is a new country that was carved out by Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill. The Ukraine is a construct, and so of course you get nationalistic uprising. It's the same with Russia: the borders of the modern Russia are quite new. The borders of Poland are also quite new, so you get upwellings of nationalism, which are ways of stamping identity onto the rocks and rivers and lakes, none of which are intrinsically anything—they are names.

Everything we say about ourselves is momentarily true and generally false. When you come in from outside—*oh! very cold!* I shook many people's hands and they were very, very cold hands. After a couple of hours in this room—*oh, it's quite warm.* 'I am cold', 'I am warm': how can you be cold if you are warm? It's situational. When you said you were cold is that not really true then? No, it's really true—but only for a moment and according to circumstances. Now that's very sneaky [laughter] because what are we saying? *It's really true, definitely true.* Yes, when you need to have a

pee it's true: you must pee. But after you've had a pee you don't need to pee—it's gone, but in the moment it seems so real. Here, then, is the confusion: the intensity of the situation, or the intensity of the feeling tone, makes it seem real.

*Poland for the Poles! Hungary for the Hungarians! Scotland for the Scottish!* People go and they march and they shout and they wind themselves into these identifications. People die for that. Soldiers go off to battle saying things that remind them they're ready to die for their country. A lot of Austria is made of rock, so *I will die for my rocks!* [laughter] Why? *Because they are mine—my father and my grandfather walked on these mountains.* This is madness, and we are likely to see a big increase in such nationalistic sentiment. Nationalism externally is the same as identity internally. We want to have some definite knowledge about who we are and where we are; and yet, when we stay open and alert to the phenomenology of our existence, to the way it manifests moment by moment, we find it to be unstable, responsive and sometimes unthinkingly reactive. I exist as me, but the me-ness of me depends on you. If you are Austrian part of being Austrian is that your country does trade with other countries. Export and import is part of what helps the Austrian economy to keep going. The Austrians need the non-Austrians in order to enjoy being Austrians.

It's the same with our ego-self—we take information and experiences from the world which in turn nourish our sense of self. You have a delicious meal and you feel better: you feel more like you. You see a good film and you feel nourished: you have thoughts and feelings moving inside you because you're allowing yourself to become creatively multiple.

After the Russian Revolution the government was faced with its huge population of poor and completely uneducated people. Many peasants had been released from serfdom just sixty or so years before. Psychologists, literary theorists and educationists were all thinking how to bring people living in small villages where nothing much is happening toward the modern world. There was a process of encouraging the reading of novels, with intellectuals like Mikhail Bakhtin pointing out that when you read a novel the characters and their interactions begin to move about inside you. You become populated with them, which stimulates a dynamic movement among, and an opening up of, your own self-aspects. In this way you can start to move from having a very naive and simple definition of yourself to having a much more complex sense of internal conversation, which in turn leads to a sense of the dialogic self. The self is conversation: not a singular monad but an ongoing movement of conversation, both internally and across the interpersonal boundary.

Also from a Buddhist point of view this is interesting because it's another indication of how we come into this moment of who-we-are through interactions—some internal and some seemingly external. You can no longer be contained inside the description 'stupid peasant', which means that you can't be caught. The more complex you are the less you can be caught in a one-liner, in a simple definition.

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*Stretching the skin of the self*

Tomorrow we'll be looking at emptiness, the nature of illusion and how the self can be dissolved in emptiness, or, more so, can be shown that it always *is* emptiness. Now, however, we're talking about expanding it, that the wrapper can no longer contain it once you know you are multiple. If then someone tries to catch you by saying, 'You're just fucking stupid,' where is that label going to get pinned? *Sometimes I'm stupid, sometimes I'm wise. Sometimes I'm sweet, sometimes I'm bitter—all, all is me.* There is so much of me that a term like 'me' dissolves. I'm too much for 'me', there's so very much of me. That's an interesting way of looking at it, especially with regard to the alienation within modern culture and ever-increasing diagnoses of post-traumatic stress disorder—generally an indicator of somebody saying inside, *'How can I be me if this has happened to me? That is to say, I have a notion of who I am, my 'pot' of me, and something's arrived in the pot that I can't integrate, and because I can't integrate this new event it's going the other way: I'm disintegrating.* 'I'm falling apart' is in part an absence of elasticity. The self-skin, the membrane of me-being-me, is too thin—because our narcissistic culture protects children as if they were fallen angels. Many children are never shouted at and this is remarkable in human evolution. You can't slap children. All across our current world that would be seen as perverse. *All children need is love, love will soften them.* Yeah, they become so soft that they become overwhelmed, there's very little resilience. I don't mean this in a superficial way: I think it's the truth of the situation. Bad things happen in many people's lives. All across the world people are made homeless. They're raped in huge numbers, beaten, enslaved, yet many survive and find a way of containing that event—*because that's what happened: I was hurt, I was beaten, I was blinded,* whatever it might be.

The more you open the mind to the lack of definition of yourself—and with that a parallel opening of compassion or empathic resonance to the state of others—the more you can say, 'Any of these situations could happen to me'. In Mahayana Buddhism there is the practice of tonglen, in which we say, *'I give all my happiness to other beings and take all their unhappiness into myself.'* This is a way of stretching the skin of the self. *'Instead of it being my happiness which I protect I'll give it to you and take your unhappiness.'* Why would anyone do that? It seems mad, completely mad. Well, once we start looking, we see that we are truly interactive: that is to say, this unfolding of the potential which we never quite directly see is activity moving with other activity. If I become me through being with you, and if how I am in my potential (or my availability, or my possibility of connecting) is linked with how I was with my parents, teachers, friends and so on, then it becomes clear that there isn't really a separate me inside, that I am connectivity. Yet, sometimes what I'm connecting with is a bit much in its intensity. Some of the reluctance to being impacted comes because I start thinking, *oh, if this really happens to me I will no longer be the me that I know myself to be*—but who is this, this 'me' that you know yourself to be? It's a false construct: you are coming into this formation through interaction, moment by moment. *I'm frightened about losing my essential self,* when, in fact, there is no essential self. If the boundary, therefore, between me and the other is not made of steel, if it's actually, in fact, permeable, then necessarily so: I am a sub-system of the world, and all systems need connectivity, or they die. Like the cells in your body, all living systems need a degree of impermeability—yet if there's too much

impermeability they get flooded, and if there's not enough they starve. When I say that I give all my happiness to others this is a way of helping to regulate balance in the meta-system of which we are a sub-system. Then I can take all your suffering into me—because in what way is it yours if there are no autonomous selves? In the system, in the shared system, there is happiness and there is sadness, there is grief, and there is joy: these are qualities of the system.

When the I-me-myself aspects of the system want to put a wall around the sub-system of itself interaction within the system breaks down—and sadly, dearly beloved, you will recognise that I am talking about Brexit [laughter]. We are saying, 'No!' to an interactive system. *'We will seal ourselves into ourselves, so just fuck off —and make sure to give us a good trade deal.'* This is very beautiful, the genuine human behaviour [laughter] of love and hate simultaneously. *I love you, I hate you... I need you, I don't want you.* Most human relationships are a bit like this. These issues are all concerned with the skin of the self.

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*'Everyone is on the inside'*

When we say in Buddhism that there is an absence of inherent existence in persons it simply means that no people (or dogs, or frogs) are defined by a truth inside themselves. They are—that's undeniable, you can see that they are—but what are they? They are participants, and they're already on the 'in' side: everyone is on the inside. Another way of saying this is that all sentient beings have Buddha nature, all living things are within it. There are no outsiders, there are no 'others'. If you are going to have a strongly defined 'self' then of necessity you are going to have a strongly defined 'other'—the illegal immigrant or the person from a minority religion. If we have the question, 'Are you one of us?' the essential question that follows is, 'And what do you mean by *us*?' If 'us' means 'born in Britain, white British person, family been here for hundreds of years', if that's us, then there's a lot of not-us, because 'us' has a very narrow circle around it. If we can say 'we Europeans', 'we human beings', 'we sentient beings including centipedes and scorpions, snakes' and 'may all sentient beings be happy' then all are included. *If we're all included then who are my enemies, because if I don't have enemies how am I going to have friends? You mean I should be kind of equal with everyone, that I should practise equanimity?* You can see the implications here of how Buddhism takes the reading.

Whenever you see a living thing, even if it seems annoying to you, it's just something doing whatever it does. In Bengal I lived for many years in a tiny room that I shared with a great many cockroaches. They would make a lot of clicking noises in the night and crawl over my face. *Why are you here!!* But they were born in India, not I [laughter]. They were annoying to me because I was afraid of them. Now, the risk I pose to a cockroach is much bigger than the risk a cockroach poses to me—but I didn't like them. When you observe that in yourself—it could be wasps, it could be any creature you don't like, or that makes you scared, like spiders in the house—then once again you see why in Buddhism it's said that all sentient beings have been our mother in a previous life. *This spider... my poor mother?* Come into the house for the winter. *But I don't want them to be in here.* But this is your mother! *Then I'm not*

*sure if I like my mother* [laughter]. When you observe this in yourself then you see how the ego-self is editing, including and excluding: *this is good, I want more of it / this is bad, I want less of it, which points* to the most essential of meditation instructions.

When we're sitting and things are arising (various thoughts, sensations, memories and so on) the instruction is always this: don't adopt, warm to, or fuse with some aspects that arise, nor reject or turn away from others. Any evaluation that you make of the qualities of these thoughts is a projection of yourself—it's not inherent in the thought. When you project you're telling the thought what it is, for you. Then, having decided what it is for you, if you don't like it you say, 'Go!'—an energised movement of aversion, and if you do like it you might go off on bit of a riff, or into a daydream, fusing into it because it's enjoyable—that's the desire for more. The meditation session has then simply been a kind of gymnasium for exercising your muscles of bias. Liking some things and not liking others doesn't tell you about what is out there: your likings and dislikings are an x-ray of you.

From the point of view of dharma, if we want to allow space for things to arise as they are and not pull them into the interpretation of how they are for us, we can just relax and say, 'It is as it is—if it's sweet it's sweet, if it's sour it's sour—it is as it is.' The thought will not kill you, the pleasant or unpleasant memory will not kill you—you're sitting in a safe place doing meditation. The positive or negative power that you feel in what is arising comes from you: it is this that keeps our mind so very busy. We live in a garden where there are flowers and there are weeds: we want the flowers and we don't want the weeds. And so we are busy, busy, busy because the winds of life blow all sorts of seeds into the garden. If we say, though, 'May all growing things be happy,' then maybe we look and see, *oh! these weeds are really rather charming, the only problem with weeds is that they are not flowers*. That is to say, the problem is conceptual, not intrinsic. *Oh! may all growing things thrive, may all sentient beings be happy, may all that arises in the mind arise and pass freely!* Linked with this is the advice just to let the mind flow freely, like a stream running down the mountain—the water tumbles through the rocks, spraying and going in various directions and the wind blows. Don't interfere. This brings us back to where we began. We began by sitting. I suggested then that you can use quiet sitting as a way of managing excitation or movement in the mind. Making your mind calm, though, is like taking a holiday—it won't last long. In deeper meditation, then, we are concerned with how to stay calm and relaxed and open *with* all the diverse movements of the mind.

Understanding the illusory nature of phenomena will be helpful—we'll start to look at that tomorrow morning at 10:00. I wish you a good evening—the end!

SATURDAY MORNING, SESSION 1

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*Getting a flavour of the ground*

Now we have some time to look at the nature of illusion. We'll be looking at it from the point of view of dzogchen, an aspect of the Buddhadharma which points—always—to non-separation and non-duality. Some of you are quite familiar with these ideas and understandings, and other people not so much, so I'll give a brief overview.

In reading any book about dzogchen we come upon this term: the ground, base or source. In Tibetan it's gzhi, 'the earth', the base from which plants and trees and all arise. It's supportive, hospitable and generative. We need not get too caught up in the metaphor, though, because this base is not a thing. It's not something that we stand in relation to. I can say, 'I have a hand' or 'I have a watch', but if I say, 'I have a ground' it would be like saying that I've come from the ground. When I walked here this morning there was a little street market where I saw lots of fresh vegetables—they come from the ground. They were picked or cut, put in boxes and brought into the city—they've come from someplace. I've come here from London. I could also say that I've come from my mother's body. We are used to that notion of a source as a thing, or a place that's elsewhere, not here. I am here having come from the not-here, and the source of my being here is not-here: that's a basic dualistic view. But in dzogchen when we talk of the ground, base or source, it's not referring to a place, it's not referring to some metaphysical entity, and it's not a substitute for a word like god. Theistic religions believe that everything comes from God. In the Bible it says that we are made in the image of God, which is an interesting idea. If we look around this room we see that we were not made in the image of each other because we all look somewhat different—so are we each made in the image of our own god? That could cause the pope some problems [laughter]! If we are all made in the image of the same god then that god doesn't have an image. How then could we be made in the image of that god, since we *do* have an image? I'm pointing this out just to indicate that when we speak of what is fundamental it immediately takes us to the very limits of language.

In dzogchen there are many descriptions of the ground. Generally, though, it is said that there are five ways of having a flavour of it—not to define it but to give us a sense of the mood of opening to it—and this is a problem. How could we possibly apprehend, how could we take hold of the ungraspable? Words give us some purchase, a certain capacity to hold and to work with what they describe. If I say, 'It's Saturday morning', that maybe conjures up not having to go to work, less demand, some sort of relaxation. In that way, whenever we have a term we have a tendency to elaborate further thoughts about it, or to have feelings or sensations that arise in relation to it, and when we're exploring how the ground is we don't want to block our mind: all kind of associations arise. Perhaps we can just allow them to move in the space of the mind. Trying to block the movement of the mind is conscious, energetic and ineffective, and getting carried away by the thoughts and believing in them—thinking you're getting somewhere or understanding more—takes you into a particularised reading. Exploring dharma is like going to a gallery and looking at a good painting—'good' meaning one that's got some complexity to it: when you look at the painting certain feelings are evoked in you, perhaps associations with places or people. Then some days later you go back to the gallery, look at the same painting and have a different kind of experience. That is to say, the quality of the painting is evocative, it opens things up for you. If something has this quality we don't want to put it back in the box—*but what does it really mean?* Paintings don't

mean anything. Paintings are possibilities for interaction: you give yourself to the painting, the painting gives itself to you. Then something arises—in this moment, influenced by how you are, by the kind of light coming into the gallery, and so on.

In the same way, in looking at the qualities of the ground we want to follow the middle way: not too tight, not too loose. If you think you've got it, it will slip away, and if you think there's nothing to get, then what are we doing? Getting what can't be got is paradoxical. To practise dharma, especially when we move toward appreciating our own mind as it is, is to be with ambiguity and paradox. Whatever is said is true but not the whole story. The whole story can't be said. That doesn't mean that we shouldn't speak or study or try to gain more clarity, but perhaps we should also see that the part, or the partial description, or evocation, is primarily about us: it's to soften us, to soften up the mind, to allow us to be more flexible, more at ease with possibilities, less anxiously needing to be in control.

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*The ground: uncompounded and self-arising*

In the evocation of Samantabhadra, a well-known dzogchen text, it says that the ground, or the base (which is to say, that from which, or in which, everything is presenting), firstly, is uncompounded. Everything in this room is compounded, put together with bits and pieces. There is nothing in this room which is simple. The bodies we have, the languages we speak, the clothes we wear: these are meeting places of many different factors. But the mind itself—and the mind, of course, is inseparable from the ground—is not a thing: it hasn't been made by anyone. When we read the traditional texts they always talk about 'primordial' or 'original', 'from the time before time', meaning that this is not something which has entered into time, nor has it entered into space. It's not to be found in any of the interpretive categories that we have. It is prior to that and is the basis within which all complexity occurs.

The mother knows more about the child than the child knows about the mother. That which manifests, if you like, is the child. The child can't understand the mother. The mother had many years of experience before we appeared. The factors which drove their existence have shifted in the culture and therefore it's difficult for children to make sense of their parents. In the same way, when we think about the ground it is the ground as our basis. I, as an individual, from the perspective of '*I'm this person*', cannot comprehend the ground. How do I normally comprehend things? By thinking, reflecting, analysing, comparing and contrasting, none of which can catch the ground because they are all fruits of it. That's why we have to find ourselves *in* and *as* the ground. Thinking about it won't take us there. We are caught by thought, but we can't catch the source by thought. This, then, is the sense of uncompounded.

The second quality of the ground is that it is self-arising, or self-originating: it just is, not dependent on anything else. When we study general Buddhism we look at dependent co-origination, which means that everything arises in relation to other phenomena. Phenomena are co-generative but the mind itself just is. Words like 'mind' are difficult because we use them as if we knew what we were talking about. Some people have a materialistic notion of the mind, seeing it primarily in relation to

the brain. Others might see it as a free-floating consciousness. Here, mind indicates that there is an intrinsic brightness to the ground. If you see a painting of Samantabhadra, the primordial Buddha, you're seeing a representation of the ground. He is the ground in a symbolic way, shown as dark blue in colour, just near the black of night. On a moonless night out in the country where there's no electric illumination, it can be very, very dark, especially if clouds should be blocking the stars. You can't discern differentiation in that which is around you. Then you have the first light of dawn, and it's as if the shapes of the world gradually reveal themselves. They were there before, but now they are revealed. This, then, is the illuminating quality of the ground: the capacity for experience to arise is the mind aspect of the ground, and it's just there.

Now, when we are children, we frequently get told that we don't know very much. We're shown that our mind is like a pot, that we should keep our pot clean and learn to put lots into it, that the more of the world we carry in our pot the better we'll get by in exams, and so on. In this way, generally speaking, your mind is concerned with knowledge, and when you become this knowledgeable person you become a second-hand salesman [laughter], essentially selling second-hand Lego. Say you are a professor in a university. Due to years of study you have a huge collection of Lego pieces. You move them around and make patterns, you put your name on them and have them published in a journal. People say, 'What amazing new patterns of Lego you've made!' This is how our knowledge progresses. But the mind itself is not primarily a repository of knowledge: it is illumination. Feeling that we know things and having knowledge available to us we construct our own patterns, but it's with the simple brightness of our mind that we look around the room and immediately we see, and what we see we have immediate access to, and it's now, now, now and now as we look all around—the room is revealing itself and we are availing yourself of the revelation.

We have two ways of entering into this: staying with the simple showing, or packaging it according to our capacity for identification and categorisation. We look at people and we see attributes. We see, and we say, 'They are like this.' We think it's something there that we are seeing, but we are the one attributing qualities to the other. We think we are seeing what is, but we're fabricating an idea or image of the other. We like, we don't like. We feel that we know or we don't know. We have many ideas or memories we can associate to the people we see—this is our construction. But as we just saw, the mind, or the ground itself, is not a construct, and, self-originating, it just is. There's nothing wrong with the mental activity which creates all these kind of patterns, but activity generates a particular quality of perception. When we were children we used to spin around really fast, then suddenly stop and feel very dizzy. It was the first natural drug experience: how to get spaced out. It's like that: when you have a lot of thoughts going on inside yourself, when you're anxious or worried, you get dizzy and you don't see clearly—you're under the power of intoxication. It's not that the thoughts or the feelings are bad, but their rapidity is obscuring rather than disclosing.

Seeing that, that which 'just is' is best approached by our 'just being'. You don't have to make yourself different, but perhaps it helps if you stop making yourself so busy. The ground, as we see from these two qualities, is clearly not resting on anything.

This is our ground—but what are we resting on? We rest on our thoughts, our memories, our plans. When these seem to be defining some autonomous agency or entity, where then is our sense of our ground? We're not talking here about Buddhist philosophy. The description of the ground is a way of getting closer to how you hide yourself from yourself. For example, if I say, 'I am Scottish,' what could that mean? It could mean lots of things—*I like Scotland, I don't like Scotland, I happened to be born in Scotland*. If somebody says to tell them about being Scottish, or about being Brazilian or Austrian, there are a lot of things to say. You talk and talk and talk, and where do you get? There's no end to this kind of description. If you say, 'I am a woman,' or 'I am a man,' so many things could be said, but where do we arrive at? Does it get clearer? Does each thought, each association, each memory, each interpretation make a clearing in the forest, or does it plant more trees? This is something you can look at yourself. There is no end to talking, there is no end to thinking. There is always another word to be said because our descriptions never quite get there. How could you possibly sum yourself up? We are non-summative because we are excessive—we exceed any shape.

You might think that you know someone well. You describe them to a mutual friend and that person says, 'No, no, it's because her mother died when she was very young,' but you didn't know that—there's always something we don't know. When you make a compound, a composite, and you think you've gathered everything together, there's always something more. When we read that the ground is self-arising, or self-originating, it means that it's intrinsically complete, whereas we all are like Dr. Frankenstein's monster—we are put together and have big stitches-marks, the fault-lines of our neurotic anxieties. This is how it is to be a construct. We're going to be looking, though, at how the notion of being a construct is a delusion, at how it's the product of unnecessary activity.

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### *The ground: infinite and inexpressible*

Returning first, though, to the five qualities, the third one is that this ground is infinite, without boundary in time or space or according to quality or definition. This leads, then, to the fourth quality, which is that it's inexpressible: you can't describe it. Now, if you are quite at home and settled in being an intellectual kind of person, at this point you might be thinking, *Okay, time to leave, because if we can't think about it and we can't speak about it what the fuck are we doing? Have we got to sit here and believe in this weird thing which is unlike everything else? Omigod no—spare me the headache!* But if we start to do some meditation practice perhaps we become more aware that although language and the quasi-rational thought it supports is a wonderful tool, as with any tool there's a limit to its range of competencies. An electric kettle will boil water, and we use a knife and fork to eat, but you can't boil water with a knife and fork. Something can be useful for a certain area of operation but not useful for others. It's the same with language and conceptual thought, with conceptual manipulation: it has an arena, an area of activity, and when we fully identify with it the limit of language becomes the limit of our experience and of our world.

But we also have occasional experiences that are beyond language. In fact, we have them frequently but don't attend to them because we're attending to that which can be described. For example, say you go outside and you see a tree—even in this season when the leaves are gone there are big branches and fine branches—you immediately encounter the complexity of its appearance. The quality of detail is great and immediately available just through your gaze, but if you try to describe it a thousand words are not enough, a hundred thousand words are not enough. You look at the tree and make your description, then you move one meter to the right and your description collapses because now you're seeing the branches from a different angle. You go to a gallery and look at a painting and think, *oh, she has really caught how a tree is*, and this is a moment of profound darkness—this is the triumph of the ego. You cannot catch a tree, no matter how the tree is depicted. What you got was a gentle caress from the painting, a brief 'pouff' of tree-ness. The tree is always in excess of the painting or the description, and, again, this is not philosophy.

You can see how this is directly related with meditation. The immediacy of experience (Tib. lhun grub, meaning 'coming all at once', or 'full in an instant') is what is there, all the time. On top of this, obscuring this, we layer our conceptual interpretation. The tree as tree is beyond thought, and yet you receive it. But if you sit inside your capacity to describe the tree you get the tree-for-me, which hides the tree-as-is, and this is tragic: if I get tree-for-me and café-for-me and street-for-me everything is 'for-me'—that is to say, as it is for me, on my terms, mediated through me, through my likes, my dislikes, my mood, my education, and so on. I end up in an echo chamber of my past, projecting onto the present moment signifiers that seem to elicit meaning from this moment, but actually they cover it over. Say you walk down the street and you see a car, and you say to your friend, 'What kind of car is that?' and they say, 'Oh, that's a Porsche.' Have they added value? They've added concept. Now you can start to think, *it must cost a lot of money*, and now you are thinking. Is this getting you closer to the car, or further away from it? What do you see? You see shape and colour. Now you are thinking, *where is shape, where is colour?* You've gone into a mental world, leaving your senses behind. What you've got is something to talk about. Now the car is not a vehicle for carrying bodies through time and space but is a vehicle for increased conceptualisation. This is what we do. We are educated through schools and colleges and so on to become good at this.

Most of us earn our money by our capacity to conceptualise. Say you work in a shop. Somebody comes in and says, 'Could you give me an apple?' and you say, 'What's apple?' 'Oh, that roundish green thing over there.' 'Okay, I'll give you that roundish, green thing—here you are.' Within an hour you'll lose your job! You have to know what an apple is: apple is a name, and we approach the world through the mediation of names. In a day you might sell one hundred apples. Have you appreciated the quality of any of them? 'Apple' has become a means to an end, utilitarian—it's being used. You can be very efficient at using a thing without ever actually encountering it. If you look at an apple and just look, your mind starts to relax. When you really receive the apple there's nothing to say. When you start to think about the apple there's a lot to say. If you see the point of this it solves many, many meditation problems.

Conceptualisation and the development of reflective thought depend on there being something there to think about. When you sit in meditation and your mind goes off, riffing about this and about that, you're thinking about something. Something has caught your attention and it's being elaborated for a while, and then something else, and something else. But what was the thought? It's very difficult to describe a thought. If you actually attend to the thought you see it dissolves—you're speechless. If you actually look at the apple and you receive it... just this. What could you say? *It's green*. But what is green? There are a thousand shades of green. *It's a dark green*. But now I'm covering the apple in my idea of qualities of greenness. The apple as apple is there. The thing about the apple is that it shows you to be redundant. You are irrelevant to the apple. The apple is, and you? You think, think, think, think, think. The Buddha apple sits there peacefully, calmly, not causing any trouble, and you, like a lost soul, are saying, 'Is it this kind of apple, what kind is this, Granny Smith or Cox Pippin? I'm sure these apples taste different from ten years ago.' This is how we start to see what is meant by mental activity—it's like fireworks in the sky. When you look at fireworks you go *oooo* and *aaahhhh!* They're not really for anything. It's the same when lots of thoughts arise inside you—*oh!* and *oh!* They don't really do very much, because the apple is just there—and none of your thoughts can catch the apple. They get close to the apple and form a patina over it, a fine covering, almost as if you were to take the apple into your hand and breathe on it, and the fine mist of your breath would settle on its skin.

With this fourth quality of the ground, when it's said to be beyond language, beyond thought, beyond expression, that's an invitation to us to pause and consider: is the sense of power and mastery which competence in language gives me as helpful as it seems? Within the human frame of reference clearly language is important. When I go to my local park early in the morning it's full of people with dogs and they all feel a need to shout at their dogs, 'Hey, come *here!*' The dog, having found something interesting, wants to go *there*. Instead of the human being getting down on the ground and running after the dog, saying, 'Hey, what's so good here?' [laughter] we try to pull the dog into the human world, as if *walking quietly beside me is the fulfilment of all your capacity*. In a day there are so many opportunities for hubris—for inflating human identity, only for it to be collapsed by the world.

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*The ground: free of containment within terms*

The fifth quality of the ground is that it is not contained within the terms 'samsara' and 'nirvana'. From a Buddhist point of view you're either in samsara or nirvana: these are catch-all terms—everything can be popped into one or the other. But, to say it again, the ground is beyond conceptualisation, this ground that is the ground of each of us. We all have the same ground. We can't say it's just one ground, because that would be to put it into a one/many polarisation, but we can know that it's the same ground, because as we open to it we find that we are in the same territory. We manifest in infinity, inside completeness, inside this whole which is without boundary, which is free of splitting and division. This is our experience: this room, manifesting for us according to our positioning, and to the lighting, and to whether you have a tall person in front of you or not. You see 'this room'.

Now, normally we have the sense of *here I am inside my skin-bag looking out at you*. We take the separation of subject and object to be fundamental. *You are not me, I am not you—I am me, and being me is the basis of my being*. In that sense I, James, am self-existing as James, because *I feel just like me*. Of course, every single thing 'about' me is 'not me'. I speak English: I personally did not invent English—I am a user of English. I did not make this body—I am a user of this body. I did not make these thoughts—I use these thoughts. Everything which 'I am', I am not. That is to say, I am a thief. I steal from the world and make it mine. 'When you speak you are speaking,' is what we say according to English grammar and vocabulary. '*No, I'm saying it, it's mine, this is how I make use of something which is not me.*' That has a weaker sound to it than '*I'm speaking... my words... arising from me*'—words I learned from somewhere else. We are second-hand merchants running a market stall, the stall of ourself. Before market day we try to pack in a few more things, then we put ourself on display.

But what is mine? If you spoke your own language no one would understand it. The reason you can speak Portuguese or German or English is that languages are shared. It is what we have in common which allows the function. We wear clothes, and so we share the possibility of going into shops and buying them. We eat and drink, and have cafés and restaurants. That is to say, the factors which make me 'me' are patternings of the common. Taking from the common, from what is shared, from what is available, this particular patterning arises and I claim it to be me—*it's special, it's not you, this is me*. This is how I pattern the common. We have nothing that is not in common—how amazing! Everything is from the field. We blossom individually in the field as flowers of the the field. The basis of the field of experience is the ground. Each flower is distinct and unique, but its ground is the common field of interaction. Within this field we share our capacity to work with the five elements, creating the forms of our experience. When we look at the basis of these phenomena what can we find? Is there any individual essence in them?

The field is a field of interconnectivity, but not the interconnectivity of entities, though we could say that Taisha [the translator] is sitting here beside me and I am sitting here. If I look at Taisha then I make more connection, I make more sense of Taisha to me. She is one person, I am another: this is our normal way of thinking. But when I look at Taisha I also see other people beside her. There's Taisha and there's this lot of people. If I look the other way I don't see Taisha and that lot of people, I see another lot of people. There's always a lot going on. So, I may say 'Taisha', may think about Taisha, but Taisha is always in a place, a place that is full of not-Taisha. You here and you over there: all of you are not-Taisha. What's the difference between you and Taisha? You have arms, legs, noses. You speak, you sit, you walk, you talk—you have a lot in common. Taisha is one particular formation of humanness. If we focus on one form then the intensity of our focus manifests like a pair of scissors: we cut around the shape of that person and remove them from the context—*I'm only thinking of you, of you alone*. But the other person is never alone. They're always somewhere, and it's that very somewhere-ness—our being inhabitants of the field which is the expression of the ground—which means that when we see an individual and forget the field and forget the ground, we are deluded. We are deluded! Now you might be thinking, *I can still get out of here, put*

*my shoes on, go out in the street and never see you guys again—I'm just going to be me.* Okay, you can get free of us, get this mad Buddhism out of your head, but you're still going to be somewhere. Your feet will be walking on some ground, your eyes will be seeing some things, your ears will be hearing some things. There is no end to the field. You walk down the street, you turn a corner—and the field shows this, the field shows this, instantly, instantly. So we see, *oh! this is the ground, this is not something that I've come from, it's something I am within!* If we had come out of the ground then we would have a dualistic split.

In the market stall they have broccoli; you can see how it has come out of the ground and been cut. We want one bit of the broccoli and we don't want the other. Some of it is too tough for cooking—we give it to the pigs to eat. In this way we make the selection, *this is good* and *that is not so good*, but everything which comes from the ground is good. It comes from the ground in the ground, though, just as the reflection in the mirror seems to arise in the mirror, yet when we focus on the image in the mirror it's as if it's not in the mirror. Look at your face in the mirror—*that's me*. Look at your eyes—*gosh, what's happening?* It seems real, but it's a reflection in the mirror—it doesn't come out of the mirror. In the same way the field is in the ground, and the blossom of ourselves, our manifestation, is in the field. The individual, meaning 'indivisible', is not a whole entity: we're not a thing in ourself. We are the showing of the potential of the ground. For each of us this potential shows itself as 'me', and so I have both the diversity of my showing and all the unique things about you, what kind of breakfast you like, and so on. These are markers of you being you, you being you in your performativity, in the performance of you-ness. But the ground of the unique specificity of you is the common field that you have never left, and that common field has never left the ground. This is the main basic view in dzogchen—it's called complete because it's not made up of different parts. If there were different parts it would be a construct. The implication of this is, *okay, I'm here as part of the room, but why don't I feel that, what is the basis of my sense of separation and autonomy?* This is a question to take into the meditation practice.

Okay then—if this room and everything inside it is inseparable from the ground, how come it's clear to me that a car is not a tree? *A car is not a tree*, we agree: we don't put everything in the blender. The precise detail is the potential, and the potential expresses many different forms, just as the mirror shows many different reflections. 'Detail' in English is an interesting word. It comes from a French military term for what in English we call a detachment. Say you have a hundred soldiers and the captain says, 'You ten, you go over there!' They become a detachment in that they are detached from the main army group. That's what detail means, being that what we see: if I see you and focus on the details of you, for me it detaches you from the field. When the ten soldiers go over there, though, they are still soldiers in the same army. So whether you are here or not here, whether you become figural for someone because of their attention, or whether you recede into the background, you haven't become bigger by getting a lot of attention, nor smaller when getting less. This is something for us to keep examining—what is the nature of splitting? What is the true basis of the seeming autonomy of the phenomena that we encounter?

Okay, we'll take a half-hour break now, and when we come back we'll do some meditation practice to try to get a more direct feeling of this.

## SATURDAY MORNING, SESSION 2

*Introducing guru yoga*

First I'll explain this practice called guru yoga and then we'll do it together. The root of the word yoga is yoke, a means for bringing two cattle together to pull the plough. Yoga means the uniting of two, the uniting of body and mind. When the word yoga was taken into the Tibetan language it was translated as naljor. Jorwa means 'to join' (especially to merge, as in sexual union), and nal means 'intrinsic, natural, as it is'. Naljor, then, means being with what is. In that sense, it's not that we start with two and try to bring them together, but rather that we release ourselves from our individualising self-fixation, from the misperception that maintains our sense of being apart. That is to say, we are already within. The delusion that we are apart, or singular, is a mental structure, and mental structures are maintained by mental activity. When we release our life energy, or our capacity for arousal, from merging into the thoughts, feelings and sensations which we experience as our sense of apartness, then there is no boundary, no impediment to just being within.

'Guru' can mean teacher, and a teacher's main function is to give you a connection with the path, with possibility. In the tantric system it would be through initiation, and in the dzogchen tradition through what's called transmission, or direct connection, these being outer forms. The inner form, based on the truth of the view, is that from the very beginning you have never been separate from the ground and the field: it only appears that way because of your intoxication with thoughts and feelings as vehicles of truth. Our task is to relax out of unnecessary identification.

Should you go into the centre of the town here you will see lots of taxis, buses and trams. If you are okay with being where you are though, all these opportunities may be there but you don't need them. I don't need to get on the tram because I'm here: I am where I want to be. The only reason for getting on a tram would be that I don't want to be here, or its parallel feeling, that I need to be somewhere else and this vehicle will be very helpful to get there. When we meditate and a thought comes along it's like a bus—you could get on the bus, but why would you? *It might be nice looking out the window and seeing different things. It's okay being here but nothing much is happening.* There's also a tourist bus for taking a little journey. When you get off that bus you get on another bus, then another bus and another bus. So many buses and trams! This is most people's meditation—a travelling practice [laughter]. The Tibetan word for sentient being is 'drowa', meaning someone who goes, which makes clear that we are wandering in samsara, that ever since we were born we've been travelling. You can travel with a sensation, a memory, a plan or a hope; you can travel with your body. In all these journeys something new is happening, something new is happening, but when not much seems to be happening we tend to get bored. Then we look for excitement, but if we get too much of it it's exhausting and we want to rest. If we get too much rest we get bored and so we stir it up a bit. This kind of bipolar pulsation is part of all our experience.

Once again: our teaching is the middle way between the polarities. We want to stay with the middle way, and that, in this context, is the meaning of ‘guru’—the guru is the integrity of ground, field and blossom, which is how you actually are. We’re not wanting to unite with someone else. The karmapa is no doubt a very wonderful person, but why would you want to unite with him? You need to unite with yourself. People can spend a lot of time in devotional practice, *‘Karmapa khyenno! Karmapa, great guru, think of me, remember me, keep me in your awareness,’* which is good, but where is my awareness? Projecting your own potential into another being is a way of avoiding finding yourself—unless, of course, you’re doing a tantric-style guru-yoga. Then you visualise the person, either in their own form or in the form of a deity, and you recite the mantra, which is an energetic method of developing connectivity. Then you have the three lights: the white light of the body, the red light of speech and the blue light of the mind, coming from them into your body, removing all the finite traces of your individual identity. The guru deity comes then to the top of your head and dissolves into you. Their body is light, your body is light: light flows into light, like water into water. Then this combined field of light becomes smaller and smaller, down to a tiny point, and vanishes, and you rest in the openness of the mind, the mind which has been progressively cleared of identification with its own content, just sitting. In dzogchen we do the same thing but in a much simpler and quicker way because we hold to the view that from the very beginning everything has been integral and without division, so that no part is set against another part and there is no conflict, nothing to be purified. There’s nothing to be done except to do nothing, which is why it’s about relaxing into how it is.

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### *The white letter A*

The integrity of these three aspects of the ground is represented by the letter A [say ‘ah’]. ‘A’ is the quality of emptiness, of ungraspability. It’s not a nothing which is a mere nothingness, but rather a nothing which is ‘no finite apart from the infinite’—this is what emptiness means. Look, here is a glass. Clearly, one of my hands has the glass in it and the other doesn’t. The glass is a ‘something somewhere’ which has its own truth. When we think of the glass it’s, *oh yes, James is holding the glass.* But what will James do with the glass now—because something has to be done with it. When you focus on the glass it looks autonomous, entire, complete in itself, because *you can see the glass*, but you don’t, of course, see the glass: you imagine the glass. What you see is the-glass-in-hand, but because you are so in love with the glass you ignore my poor little hand [laughter]. However, I am here as the voice of the hand, holding this fucking glass: without me what is this glass? It’s glass and hand, glass and table, and so on. The glass is always somewhere. There is no independent entity. *Oh, it just happens to be on the table right now, it’s always the same glass*—that is an abstracting concept. When you think in that way you are in touch with the idea of the glass. The actuality of the glass as a phenomenon is that it is somewhere, and this somewhere-ness is important. We are in the field in the room. We are in the room in Vienna, in Austria, in Europe. We are *inside*, but when we look at ourselves in the way we look at the glass, with the idea of ourselves, the idea blinds us to our actuality, to the phenomenological actuality of our being. When we

get fixated on our seeming autonomy, or that of any entity, we are focusing on the idea of the object. Then the object, isolated by our manner of thinking about it, comes to exist as something moving through the world as itself. But if we put petrol in the glass, then pour it out and put in water, the water won't taste very good—because we are impacted by the environment, we carry traces of our interaction. We carry traces: somebody tells you some sad story and you feel sad. You walk along the road, the sun is shining, but you feel sad because you are suffused with their sad story. That is to say, the environment is not just something outside of us: it comes into us through our moods and through our sensitivities, and so on. The problem is not the object, the problem is not the subject—it lies in the connection between the two.

To do the practice we imagine in front of us a white letter A. If you know the Tibetan form you can use that, or the capital letter A—it doesn't really matter. Tibetans like their letter. They think it's holy because they put their meaning in it. Christians think a cross is holy because they put their meaning in it. Symbols only mean something if you believe in them. So, it's A: 'ah' is a vanishing kind of sound, a free vowel sound not blocked by consonants, a light and free vocalisation on the breath. If you just breathe out it's as if there's nothing there. You add this little flavour—aah... aaah—it's very soft. Often when we do this practice we go 'AAAAAAAAAH'—this is a little bit patriarchal [laughter]. Why shouldn't it be soft, simply the sound, the aspiration of the sound on the breath? The important thing about the sound is that it's the point where nothing becomes something and goes back into nothing. As you come to the end of 'aaaaah', if you're doing it by yourself you can hear the fading of the sound, the silence, then breath with the slight sound, and then silence. Now, just as the wind blows in the sky, so it moves the air, but it doesn't move the space. When you say this A, if you're alone and have the time, you can experiment with how you say it. We want to be present with silence and with A as a sound *within* silence, otherwise we have silence and sound, this and that, and there's a barrier between the two—if it's silence it's not sound, and if it's sound it's not silence. Then we have duality and we go from one thing to the other.

When you allow the sound to arise in the silence you see that the sound is unborn, even in its sounding. It's moving in the womb of the Great Mother and doesn't come out to become something. Even when you move from 'ah' to 'mama', 'papa' (where there is more hook, more landing pad for conceptual formation to arrive onto), if you see, *oh, this sound is inseparable from silence*, then it's like looking in the mirror and seeing a face, but there is no face there. It's as if this reflection is something in the mirror, but what it *is* is an illusion. So, mama, papa, and so on: these are the movements of imaginal energy in the field of potential. It's not either/or. Things are neither real nor nothing at all.

'A' is a beautiful, soft sound in which we can really feel that expression is like a wave from the ocean that remains in the ocean. Just as the wave doesn't leave the ocean so the sound doesn't leave the silence. You can extend this and start to see that all your movement—walking, talking, and so on—doesn't ever leave stillness. The vajra ground is always open: it is unchanging. Within it there is movement, but it's the movement of stillness within stillness. When you forget the ground and fixate on the movement it is as if you have taken the reflection out of the mirror, and this is

delusion: it hasn't happened, but it's as if it has happened because you believe rather than see. In English there's a common saying, 'Seeing is believing,' but here it says the complete opposite: unless the belief is inside the seeing, believing is not seeing.

When you look around the room what you see is light—light comes into your eyes. If you looked at someone and they would come into your eye you would be very unhappy. If even just one of their fingers came into your eye you would be very unhappy! Light comes into your eye: you see light and you imagine people, which is not the same—and this is the basis of our practice. When we make the sound 'ah' we release the tension of the subject/object bifurcation and we just sit. We make the sound 'ah' three times while imagining this white letter A in the space in front of us. The A in front of us is the openness of the ground, the 'ah' sound we make is the openness of the connectivity and the source of the A is our unborn awareness. When we finish the third 'ah' we imagine the white letter A dissolving, and there is just space. Of course we can see the people in the room, and so on, but this is light, light flowing in space. If you start identifying, this is mental activity. If that occurs don't stop it, but don't merge into it—stay relaxed and open. Whatever comes comes, whatever goes goes, without selectivity, without privileging or adopting some aspects and rejecting or denigrating others.

Just stay open. In this openness sky and sky are inseparable. What we take to be the outer sky (or our experience) and the inner sky (or the experiencer) are without differentiation. Whatever moves in these skies—be it clouds, rainbows, the breeze—just let it come and let it go. In this way we give ourselves the opportunity to see the inseparability of the ground, the field and the momentary manifestation. Because it's a practice of relaxation we'll do it for just a short period of time, and then we'll repeat it, again and again. We're not trying to do something: we're allowing ourselves *not* to do something.

We've been trained to reactivity through our families and schools, but also we are reactive through karmic formation. Karma simply means activity, with the idea, as is said in Tibet, that karma is activity which is cause for future consequences. That is to say, the nature of activity is an intention arising from duality, from having a sense of *I want to do something* or *I don't want to do something*, and that taking us towards the object of our intention. Then we have a conclusion—*that was good, I'm happy that happened*, or not. These are the four stages of karma: dualistic frame, intention, action and conclusion. This movement into form with a concluding formulation (*I'm glad I did that, or shit, what have I done!*) leaves a trace, like a snail's smear on the ground. There's a karmic trace, a tendency which will be evoked at a later time, usually when we have forgotten all about the originating circumstance. Such tendencies are a part of our experience. We may find ourselves responding to situations and people and not knowing why. We meet someone and we feel a connection, or not. There's some vibration or patterning there and it's being evoked in that moment. This is not theory—it's what you encounter in meditation. You sit and you are vulnerable to the impact of the different things which occur. They get to you. When that happens, don't think about it and don't worry about it, because if you do you build up one thought, one sensation, on top of another. Come back to balance. Balance is already here. If you have a lot going on you can find support by relaxing

into the out-breath. Then you'll be here, and when you're here whatever is occurring has the chance of going. But if you're involved with what is occurring, or defensively or disparagingly holding yourself apart from it, then you're not here. Both of those positions create energetic charge.

Okay, now we have the chance just to relax and sit and be here with whatever comes.

[sitting practice]

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*The body as a site of flow*

In this kind of practice it's very important not to try hard. In the first dzogchen text that was translated into Tibetan by Vairochana it says, 'The truth of our being is forever free from the disease of effort.' Effort means duality, subject operating onto object. So, we all have a sense of our body. Our body has sensations, and with an old body like mine many of the sensations are not so pleasant. What is a sensation? You could take it diagnostically, indicating some condition, or you could have a judgment of it as pleasant or unpleasant—but, either way, it arises and passes. Ordinarily we think, *this body is my home, the support or basis for me being me*. Then it appears to be like the ground, that I'm acting from my body. When we sit in the practice, though, whatever comes comes: light and colour in the room, movement, sensations, memories, thoughts—all is coming and going. Where is the stable reference point which says that this is my body? The impermanence of the presentation of what we take to be our body means we could say that the body is a site of flow. When I hold on to aspects of that flow as having some intrinsic truth or meaning they get solidified and separated.

In the yogic system we think of the body as being various pathways of energy, with two side-channels that become the point of meeting of all the smaller pathways, or nadis. Side-channels, solar, lunar, male, female, positive, negative, expanding, contracting: these are the pulsation of the polarities. The most basic polarity is 'me and you'. For us it seems foundational that you are not me. These two, self and other, are held apart. In yoga we want to bring the vibrations of these two differential pulsations into a mingling in the central channel, the avadhuti, which is emptiness. That kind of yoga is an active yoga. Actually, everything has already been in the avadhuti. In the Prajnaparamita literature we talk of the womb of the Great Mother. We are all reborn in the womb of the Mother: we are born in emptiness. We have been born into materiality with a body of karma, of delusion. To be born in emptiness is to become a buddha, or to know that we have always been buddha. This womb and the avadhuti are the same. Buddhism has many different terms for all these aspects. Put in the most simple way, the whole is undivided. 'You' and 'I' are pulsations within the whole.

When you go to the sea and see the ocean, the waves have a peak and a trough, a peak and a trough, a peak and a trough. Without a peak there would be no trough, and vice versa. Self and other, other and self: I'm here with you and you're here with

me. The heart has its systolic-diastolic pulsation, our lungs expand and contract, communication moves through our nerves in pulsatory form. In the same manner subject and object are pulsation. When you have a connection with someone you come into formation with them. The peak of the wave and the trough of the wave are born together, with one going up, the other going down. In conversation with someone you speak and they listen, then it shifts over. It's a to-ing and fro-ing. When you sit with your body without telling it what it is—when you don't cover it with 'knowledge about'—it's all fine, it's arising and passing, arising and passing. The seemingly inner arises and passes, the seemingly outer arises and passes. That's why we sit: no difference between inside and outside, no difference between appearance and ground. It's 'all at once' and 'all together', with so much diversity, with such precise diversity, and yet it's unborn, never coming out but showing within. Within what? Within the space of our awareness.

This afternoon we'll be taking a look at the nature of ignorance, at how this open self-liberating infinity seems to become hidden from us. In ignoring the actual ground we have illusion, delusion and confusion: if you see the ground these are not very important, if you don't see the ground they're quite a lot of trouble.

We'll do the guru yoga now, then take a break for lunch. As you move around during the break, choosing to be on your own or with other people, try to leave whatever is arising for you in its simplicity. If you find that waves of thought and interpretation are arising just be lightly present with them and let them dissolve. All mental experiences dissolve quickly, but they're sticky, and when they come into proximity with other mental arisings they stick and adhere to one another, building up pictures. Each moment is actually fresh, with colours, shapes, sounds, smells. Stay with the freshness. Stay open.

[sitting practice]

Okay, back at 3:00.

## SATURDAY AFTERNOON, SESSION 3

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### *Hospitable to everything*

Take just a moment now to reflect: when you were out during the break, walking along by yourself or talking with someone, how many things were there that you didn't see? [laughter] The field is always much bigger than our personal experience. What we can observe is that when we fold into our own experience, although we're only having this personal experience because we are part of the field, the experience is somehow blinding us to the field: we're taking it for granted. Now, if we were walking down a street where landmines had been found that would be a known danger, and we would be looking for signs of that danger. The danger that arises when we are not really present and mindful doesn't have any signs because it's open. What has a sign is what already caught you—you've already gone lost, giving

yourself into the interesting conversation or some thought in your head. Just reflect on that for a little bit, how blind you are. Try to have a sense of how you limit yourself. That was one of the main teachings of Namkhai Norbu—don't limit yourself. You can be precise and focused but it always occurs within the wider field. The second important point here is when you see that you get lost, or that you have a limitation, don't take it personally: it's not a personal fault, it's a structural fault. We'll start looking at the nature of ignorance, which hopefully will make this clear, but first we'll do the guru yoga again.

### [sitting practice]

When you do a practice like this at home and you're in a room by yourself you can pay more attention to how you open out from the practice. Although we do the practice with our senses open, we're sitting, which already puts a limitation on the amount of sensory information coming in. But when you get up your body turns and new planes of vision open up—there's a tensing and relaxing in your muscles and the turning of your spine and so more is arising for you. The key point here is to have hospitality for everything. The one thing we don't want is to make meditation a special thing, something extraordinary—and especially not something holy. Meditation is just being here, and how here is, is how here shows. Sometimes here is not much going on, sometimes it's a lot going on. The key thing is that we want to be here. When you get up from the practice the danger is that you start editing and judging the input coming in. You have something to do—maybe you have to get to work, or go to the toilet. As soon as you have an organising aim certain factors in the field become relevant and important, and others don't. When you have this experience you should recognise how crazy you are. Any four-year-old child could demonstrate to you that you are mad—because when you try to put shoes onto a four-year-old to go outside very often they take them off, saying, 'These are the wrong socks,' or 'I don't want to go,' or 'I need to sing now.' They are allowing life to happen and this is disruptive to efficiency. Efficiency is the false god of modern life—our lives are governed by it.

I don't know about in Austria, but traditionally in Britain workers had what was called 'small beer' to drink, a beer with a low alcohol content of maybe 2%. If you're in in Ladakh at harvest time you'll see the people cutting the crops and they're drinking beer to refresh themselves. This was also common with agricultural workers in Europe, even for weavers and so on, who had their work to do but also some control over their own time—when they took breaks, and so on. When the new machines came, though, and mass production, the rhythm of the machine became the rhythm of life. Because of that you can have a cup of tea in a factory but you can't drink alcohol. There's a real contradiction: the caffeine is useful because it makes you work harder and stay focused on the task. It's like a training in mindfulness and, in fact, most of the work in factories is nearly as boring as observing the breath at your nostrils [laughter]. The point here is that the mind is ill-disciplined. The difference between dzogchen and mahamudra and other forms of practice is that from the point of view of dzogchen disturbance is not something to be controlled. If you're practising on your own and in the middle of it you find yourself singing a song, you could think, *oh, I'm distracted, I need to go back to my proper focus*. But in dzogchen you don't have a proper focus. Your focus is whatever is arising. You might then

wonder why you are singing, but you'll never know—you just are. Or, maybe you've fallen over and are lying on the floor. There's no law saying you have to be sitting upright to do practice. *But I want to show other people that I'm a proper meditator—I shouldn't move when I meditate. Why not? Because I have to keep my mind steady.* But your mind is not steady. *That's why I have to sit still.*

If you stop your body from moving, which you can do, and you do it in order to stop your mind moving, which you can't do, is this helpful? What you want to do is to make your mind calm, but your mind is not calm. The people who have calm minds live in the protective asylum of buddhist centres where they walk up and down in the garden, being aware of their feet going up and down. Why? Because they want to be more mindful, but of what, and why? *Because it's good to be mindful.* Why? That question you don't usually get to. If you go to Bodhgaya you see these people doing mindful walking and if you don't get out of the way it's even worse than them walking down the street with their mobile phones [laughter]. It's a spiritual self-referential activity and it's very serious. You could also be laughing and mindful. In one of Dudjom Rinpoche's texts he writes that there ten meanings of dharma and one of them is women laughing together. When you have a group of women laughing and joking together it's often easy, free energy. This is not to say that mindfulness or focus is unhelpful, but there are some things you cannot unscrew, trapped in duality. The four foundations of mindfulness talk about dualistic relatedness, about being caught in a dualistic paradigm.

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### *Three forms of ignorance*

Earlier on we started to look at the ground. Awakening to the ground of being in this way *is* awareness or presence. This is rigpa and on the basis of that you have clarity. Traditionally rigpa is compared to the sun in the sky. The light of the sun moves out, illuminating everything, and so awareness and clarity are born together. They are not two things. The sun's rays have both heat and light, and when they impact what they touch the rig-spot changes. This is the participative quality of being a blossoming individual, responding in this moment and in this situation, and this quality arises according to circumstances. We often find, however, that we are not like that, that we are pre-formed, taking from one moment into the next a sense of who we are. The momentary production arising from our potential takes on a sense of being the showing of identity—*I am like this*—and that limits our capacity to respond. This is due to the fact of our being under the power of unawareness. Unawareness and awareness both arise from the ground, The primordial buddha Samantabhadra describes it as being a kind of magical display. There is revealing, but it's not the revealing of anything: it's like an illusion. If you see the illusion this is awareness. Awareness is illusion seeing illusion, and unawareness is to be taken in by illusion.

What I describe now you could see as a kind of historical account of the development of the experience of sentient beings, but it's also our experience of ourselves, moment by moment. This ground is open. We are here. We don't need to have any particular focus. Then, within this openness there is something, not even any particular thing, just a little something, like a breeze blowing across your face.

This is the first possibility of ignorance, called the ignorance of there being something (Tib. *gyu daknyi chikpü marigpa*). The term for something there is *bdag nyid*, which means the selfness, or the thingness.

The thingness of the thing is emptiness, but the thingness of the thing could be what we take it to be. As we read in the Heart Sutra all phenomena are unborn from the very beginning. By unborn is meant: it appears but doesn't come into its own discrete existence. Something occurs, a moment which is this and not anything at the same time. It's like when we look in a mirror—the reflection is something which is also nothing. Its nature is to be nothing at all because you can't catch a reflection in any way. It has no weight, and yet it appears. *What is it?* It's a reflection. *What is it, a face?* Both are true, simultaneously. This is the second level of ignorance, called co-emergent ignorance (Tib. *lhenchik kyepé marikpa*). *Lhan cig* means 'at the same time' and *skyes pa* means 'to arise'—it comes together.

You can try this for yourself: go into the bathroom, with the light off, and while you're facing the mirror turn the light on—*oh, there I am!* What is there? *Me and a reflection, born together.* With the emptiness, the 'nothing there-ness', of the reflection and the showing of the potential of the mirror, there's a formation that seems to be shown—which is me: *'Here I am, it's undeniable, this is me!'* I think I am a reflection!

When the two, the emptiness and the showing, are there there's the possibility that you could relax into the openness. Then the status of what is appearing would obviously be that of a reflection, and because it's a reflection it has no substance of its own. It has no personal essence inside it, yet its appearance permits me to claim it as me. If you stay with the quality of its having no substance and you begin thinking about it, that's like building a house on a cloud—as soon as you start to build the house you no longer see the cloud-like nature of what you take to be its basis. You start imputing some kind of substantial presence in this image. As you look at your face in the mirror you might think, *I should get more sleep, or, maybe I need to go to the dentist.* Some thought arises for you. On what basis does this stream of associations and thoughts arise? On the basis of the false imputation that I'm looking at myself—*I'm doing that, I'm creating the seeming substance or entity-ness in the reflection.* You look in the mirror and think, *I look terrible.* If you're a meditator, you might think, *'what an illogical thought: I don't know what I look like, this is only a reflection, probably I look as if I'm twenty-one [laughter]. I'm not going to believe these reflections!* But it's not like that for us: we get hooked. This is a key point.

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### *The famous five questions*

The key point is that we fall into the presentation because we take it as a representation, a representation. *This, this here is my face.* You can see my face, I will never see my face. I can see representations of my face in a photograph, in a mirror, and so on, but I have no access to my face. My face is the nakedness of my presence. My face belongs not to me but to you, because you see it—I don't. When I

look in the mirror I see a reflection, a re-presentation of my face, and I make a false alignment between presentation and representation, attributing the actual and the image of the actual with the same status. The actuality of our presence, as we've already looked in relation to the ground, is that when you look for your mind you can't find it. Sometimes we do this by using the famous five questions. We start to practise and then gently we look:

- *Does my mind come from somewhere?*
- *Does it stay somewhere?*
- *Does it go somewhere?*
- *Does it have a size, an extension in some way?*
- *Does it have a colour and a shape?*

These are very useful questions. If you use them again and again they can bring you close to the actuality of your mind.

You can apply the same questions to whatever is arising in your experience. For example, you can apply it to a thought or a sensation. The muscles in my lower back are a little bit locked at the moment, so I experience various kinds of sensation. Where does the sensation come from? I suppose it's due to the muscles being a little bit tight. But if I stay with the sensation without applying that interpretive matrix, where does the sensation come from? Then, *oh! it's gone...* but where has it gone? And in the moment of arising, where is it? I have to tell myself that *it's in my back, it's near the spine*. Where is this state? *It's near my spine*—that's an interpretation. Interpretation is like representation. I'm taking the raw, the naked representation and I'm packaging it in a formation that allows me to take hold of it. *Oh, yes, I've got this pain in my back, I wonder if anyone else here has a pain there. Maybe we could form a small lower back pain support group because now we have something in common*. But this is not true—what we have in common is that we can talk nonsense together [laughter]. What is actually troubling me is something very subtle, and then suddenly sharp. Where is it? It's nowhere. It's here, but it's nowhere. And where does it go? It doesn't go anywhere. It doesn't come from anywhere, it doesn't stay anywhere, and it doesn't go anywhere. It is itself, but when you bring it together with an interpretive apparatus you can build a story out of it. The same goes for memories, plans for the future, and so on. The mind is not a thing. It's an open arena within which momentary experiences arise and pass.

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### *The magic of our existence*

Some patterning which arises may seem to be on a cycle, may seem to repeat itself. This is for you to investigate in the meditation. Whenever you have the sense, *here I go again, I've had this before*, you're far from the bus stop.... You've gone off wandering. What is this? If you stay with it, it is beyond comparison. In school you learn to make sense of things by comparing and contrasting. You read some history, some literature; then you read various interpretations of them, with one author saying this, another author saying that. They are talking 'about' something—'the role of The Fool in the plays of William Shakespeare'—the sort of thing that you get in school. There's a king and a fool and different contexts; it's presented as a formulation of something you can think about. If we go back to having a sensation in the body, or

having some memory, if you stay present with it and allow it to be, in its naked freshness, as it is, you can't catch it—it's impactful and undeniable, yet ungraspable. This is the magic of our existence: everything is here, vibrant, bright, as it is, and when we receive it we're not apart from it. We're with it, neither collapsed into it nor looking at it. In that moment the naked object is received by the unborn mind, and the other way as well—the unborn mind receives, or is with, the naked object. Nothing to say. It's just this: perfect.

But, you can't live like that—you have to speak, and then you give a description. How do we describe it? Actual sensation is difficult to describe. That is to say, the mode of presentation and the formulation of linguistic representation are like train tracks: they're parallel, they don't meet. This is why it's said, 'You can't think your way out of samsara,' because the thinking is on one track and the immediacy is on the other. Description comes after the fact, and presence is here, on the beat, on the button.

Let's go back now to ignorance. An appearance and its emptiness are present together. If, as it were, you open your focus to the ground the moment resolves and there's nothing to take hold of. But if your attention moves toward the seeming thing-ness, to the something-ness of what's there, then you're starting to get a build-up. Some of you will be familiar with this as the main object of vipassana meditation. Vipassana is about seeing clearly, seeing how it is. There are many different ways of doing vipassana, but, generally, you bring your attention to the top of your head and then scan down through your body. When you do this out of the calmness that you've achieved through doing shamatha you're not in the mode of elaboration. As you go through the body various little markings, or fireflies, or moments, seem to appear. You just keep going, and then when you scan up again through your body they're not there—it's all different. You go down and up and down and up. It could be, on some particular day, that every time you go by that spot something is showing in its rawness. It's just there and then it's gone—very difficult to relate such rawnesses one to another. They could be a scratchy feeling, a hot feeling, a very cold feeling: they don't seem to have much in common.

But, if in going down the first time you caught hold of that sensation and re-presented it to itself as 'pain', the next time then—instead of 'scratchy' maybe it's 'hot'—you identify 'hot' as a modality of pain. Now you have imputed the abstract identification 'pain' and transformed it into the sensation: you're taking raw, momentary feelings to be indicators of the existence of pain. Pain is an interpretation. The actual phenomena are exactly and only what they are. If you want to enter into linguistic communication you cook: you put the sensation into a pan with some butter of conceptualisation and fry it quickly so it browns on both sides. Then you add a little salt and pepper of feeling... *owwww, I don't like it...* and serve it up to anyone who might have pity for you [laughter]. You have cooked this up yourself! If you don't yet know vipassana meditation it's very good to do. We could also do some here, but most people do know it. It's very simple, just exactly that, scanning up and down.

The real gain from vipassana comes when you can see directly that *when I add value I lose value*. That is to say, in establishing that *I have this pain in my back*, I become dulled in my sensibility, and now the nuances of what is actually impacting

are not being precisely attended to because I already know, *I've got a pain*. Now 'pain' absorbs all these various and different moments: the idea of pain is blinding me to the actuality of the phenomena that are here now. This is the third level of ignorance (Tib. *küntu takpé marikpa*), the ignorance of labelling things. That is to say, I start pulling all the moments of experience into my interpretive framework.

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*We are all ungraspable*

Some aspects of our interpretive framework are very finely tuned. If we say, 'Someone is wearing a blue top,' it's as if we know what that means. But if you go to art school and you start investigating blue you see that 'blue' doesn't really mean much at all. That is to say, it can mean so many different things that it doesn't really mean anything. We have crude categories and subtle categories. For example, when eastern Europe became incorporated into the EU and there was freedom of travel, many Polish people came to Britain. They met with two main categories of interpretation. The first one: *these guys are amazing, they build, they can do plumbing and electricity, they can do everything, and they're cheap—welcome to the Polish builder!* and the second one: *these fucking immigrants—what are they doing here?* That's where we say that no category is value-free. Whatever the situation, the interpretive categories you apply to make sense of it arise from your value system and they project that value system—and so you imagine that the value you think is the value you see. *They're like that, we all know they're like that, they come to our country, they want to get housing, they want this, they want that....* These interpretations come in a package.

This level of ignorance, then, is about employing and enjoying the undeniable power of concepts to organise phenomena. However, it operates on the basis of reification. Going back to the previous, the reflection is in the mirror, and when we ignore the mirror in our fixation on the reflection we take the image to be the image of something. Then this something-ness, this individual, separate something-ness, is what it is: that becomes the basic sense for everything in the world. We have, for example, a category we call 'chair'. Actually, there are many, many kinds of chairs, but when you see something which you feel belongs in the family of chair and you apply the category, then it's as if you've arrived someplace. Some existential problem, as it were, has been solved. *What is this? This is a chair. Oh, I didn't realise that. Okay, it's a chair.* We know what to do with that notion, *I know it's a chair*, and knowing it's a chair not only indicates that I know how to behave toward this chair but also that the chair is a guarantor for my intelligence—because although there are many things in this world that I don't know, I think I'm confident of being able to know when something is a chair.

This is the reflexive mode of knowledge: as you claim ownership about territories and feel in power to ascribe to them qualities which you take to be intrinsic to them you feel more intelligent. It's this intelligence which gives us power on the third level of ignorance to keep putting our concepts up, to keep putting names on every single thing, on every plant. People are desperate to go into the Brazilian jungle to find insects that haven't yet been named—*now I can get my PhD!* If you're lucky you can

even have the insect named after you. Then, because the forest is going to be cut down you'll be the last person to have known this insect and you'll have your place in history. Many people's careers are built in this way. This is the practice of inhabiting the semiotic web under the veil of reification. It's the same practice which allows us to say things like, 'I love you.' We don't say, 'I love you as I take you to be although I'm sure you have many qualities I don't know about and maybe don't like.' Falling in love is based on our both agreeing that you are who we can agree that you are. I will never know who you are, because you are not a who—'who' implies that there is some essence, or an enduring pattern, that guarantees you to be who I think you are. Here we get a sense of what illusion is: *I take you to actually be who I take you to be*. That is to say, *how I construct you is the truth about you*. This is clearly not true—other people construe you in different ways. *Ah, but that's because they don't love you*. We have all kinds of sneaky ways of maintaining the illusion that somehow we get the truth of things.

In the Indian traditions going right back to the Rig Veda (earliest writings and thoughts from probably 2000 BC) illusion, or *maya*, was seen as the power of creative imagination which makes things appear. It differentiates between how things actually are and how they appear to be, a distinction you get in buddhist analysis as well. Now, when you are in your conceptualising orientation, when you are 'making sense' of your experience, you are taking hold of something: it becomes how you have taken it up: because we don't wash our mental hands very well it becomes that which was in your hand when you touched it. We contaminate new experiences with the habits of past conceptualisation. In this way I start to smear you with my habitual likes and dislikes. Now we have you-for-you and you-for-me, and when we have our first fight we are going to be disturbed by the fact that you-for-you and you-for-me are not the same. *I never thought you'd be like this—how is this possible, what's happened?* Nothing has happened except that you're seeing the person with fresh eyes [laughter]. You thought you had caught them, but human beings are uncatchable. We have so many characteristics, moods and qualities.

As we saw yesterday evening, we manifest in interdependence: I'm not just manifesting out of me, but my manifesting is according to who I'm with. The you that I think you are, the you that you showed to me when you could see the light of love shining out of my eyes, is not the you that arises now that I'm pissed off with you. There is no other person. It's not, *oh you've changed...* You were never there as a thing: you are potential, moving and changing, not showing a self but showing patterns—it's clear that you show. What I see is patterns, and what I impute, or imagine, is people, and then I think I know what you are like. I have an image of you, of the changing immediacy of you, and if I keep attending to the immediacy of you you will dissolve my image of you. That would be lucky for us because 'you' I will never get—we are ungraspable, open ground, infinite field, ever-changing flowering. There's nothing to grasp in there but there's a lot to receive—everything!—moment by moment, just this, just this.

Illusion starts to arise when the separation of the image and its ground occurs. Then we have the question, *what is this and who are you?* That question already imagines something being there, and on the basis of that I elaborate further. The illusion is that an ongoing essence is the personal basis of a patterning which is occurring—*'I speak out of me. Who is speaking? I am—there must be someone inside of me putting the words into my mouth.* But, nobody is speaking: sound is arising. Breath goes through the voice box, which sets it into vibrations that move through the world as potentials. If you have knowledge of English you can decode some of the potentials. If what I said was intrinsically meaningful we wouldn't have any need for decoding. It feels meaningful if you get it. You hear it and it's as if the meaning is coming into you, dissolves into you—a bit like when the pond isn't yet frozen but snow is falling on it, and flakes dissolve on the surface of the water. You're just hearing the words and the meaning's dissolving into you, *oh yes... mm hm...* but only if you know that language. There is interpretation going on right now on your side: you are construing, you are shaping what you hear. This is the joint creation of meaning. The speaker and the listener are both engaged in the production of meaning, which is very tricky because generally in communications theory we say that the meaning of a communication is in what is received, not in what is said—and I have no idea what you are receiving [laughter]! Something's going on. Maybe we should have a written exam [laughter].

This, then, is where we can see illusion. It's like in summer when you see a mirage on the road: it's there, but not as how it appears to you. A heat haze is shimmering and the impact for us is that we see water. We interpret this shimmering as the presence of water: we misidentify. We're not aware even of having followed any process of identification; we just see it and *it's there.* This is an illusion in the same way that an echo is an illusion. You hear the sound—something is there, but, in a sense, it's nothing at all, it's ungraspable. Now, if I were to say, 'Good afternoon,' in a place that echoes there would be some kind of an echoing 'errrr'-sound, which we'd take to be more empty than the meaningful phrase, 'good afternoon'—maybe only because the echo sound has fewer hooks to hang our meaning-projections onto. Once again this might sound abstract and theoretical, but while sitting in meditation with subtle phenomena arising and passing (thoughts, memories and feelings), if you take hold of them and begin to interpret, as soon as they become 'a something' you also have liking and not liking, pulling in and pushing away. But what is the essence of these subtle phenomena? This is something to look at again and again. I put the essence in the object—it has no meaning. *I give it meaning—oh!* This recognition is the door to liberation, because if my strange and corrupted meanings were actually intrinsic how could I ever get free? I'd be surrounded by a forest of weirdness, but, *oh! I'm doing this, this is in the palm of my hand! I am interpreting, I am projecting meaning and this is an activity and maybe I don't need to do this activity!* The more skilled and calm I am the less I do it.

We know this ourselves from ordinary life: if we're agitated and worried thoughts come more quickly, more densely, and are more vibrating. There's more reactivity arising from my agitation. When we do the guru yoga with the three A we hear sound returning to silence and we imagine a white A dissolving in space. Then, whatever arises is energy moving in space. I'm not doing it: it's happening, arising and going. The trouble begins when I start doing something, like entering into judgment or

construction. What I construct is meaning but it's also blindness and stupidity, because in grasping at the thought I don't see its intrinsic self-liberation. It's like the snowflake, there—*oh!*—and as soon as it hits the water—*oh!*—gone. If you look you see the whole pattern of the snowflake exactly as it's falling, especially those big ones that float gently down. But you can't catch them, and this is like a thought: it's there, undeniable, and uncatchable. You don't need to catch them because you can't keep them—they're going anyway. This is why we look at this in trying to understand how the mind is, and so we do less and we trust more: everything comes from the ground. I come from the ground. I'm not like some international franchise '*here making French fries for you on behalf of McDonald's International.*' It's coming—and this is the genuine thing—everything is coming straight from the ground, every moment: there is no other source. I am the flourishing of the potential of the ground, but when I'm not present as that I have the illusion that I am the ground of myself, that *I'm just me, this is my life, these are my thoughts.* The two are very close together.

Okay, we'll take a break and then have the last session for today.

#### SATURDAY AFTERNOON, SESSION 4

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##### *The building of illusion*

We'll start with the guru yoga.

##### [sitting practice]

Illusion (Tib. *gyumé*, Sanskrit *maya*) indicates something that could lead us astray. We might imagine a true reality where there is none. There are many images used to indicate the illusory nature of our world. It's not that something is being made out of absolutely nothing, but rather that you have a false perception. A traditional example would be, you're out in the country and you see a post in the distance, or a scarecrow and you take it to be a person—as you come closer you see that it's not a person. There was an indeterminacy in what was there, and because the natural clarity, the *oh! this is how it is*, isn't available, you substitute an imagined clarity, *oh, it's a person.* We have this traditional example which probably came from Hinduism into Buddhism: someone's going home at night and suddenly sees a snake on the path. You're sure it's a snake so you step back, you hit it with a stick, and as you hit it seems to move. Then you stop hitting and it stops moving—*aha, it's dead!* The snake is dead, so you go closer and you poke it and then you see that—*oh!*—it's a piece of rope. The rope was always a rope. It was never a snake. You didn't kill a snake; you killed the illusion of a snake, and you killed it twice—you killed the illusory snake by beating it and you killed the illusion of the snake by seeing that it's a rope. The rope represents awareness, the illumination of the ground and everything that arises from the ground. The snake is the ego-self, that which we take our awareness to be.

You might think, *I'm actually quite an intelligent person, many things are clear for me*, and then imagine that this is your own light which is illuminating things. But the ego is like the moon—it's undeniable that the moon shines, but she shines with the light of the sun. In the same way the ego-self has brightness, but not a brightness which is intrinsic to itself. Its brightness is the light of the sun of awareness, as reflected by the manifested qualities which are arising and being taken up as I-me-myself. If we have a sense of self it's like standing on the edge of a swimming pool: *I ... I... I... could dive in*—I could go anywhere from 'I'. A presence is there, but it is indeterminate. It could be many different things. *I am* starts to thicken, a kind of gravity begins to apply. With *I am tired, I am hungry, I am happy* 'I' is taking on shape and colouration, a feeling tone. It's being defined, at least in this moment. 'I' by itself is quite light, spacious. 'I am' has more texture, there's some kind of assertion to it, like going from inside to outside. When we just have I—*!... !...* it can be quite surprising. With *I am* you bring yourself into play, and then it's *I am this, I am that*. So these, if you like, are the three aspects we looked at earlier: the openness, the field and the blossoming, but in a more veiled form, more dull and less open. When you get to the third aspect the manifestation comes as a formulation: *I am tired, I am hungry*. Form is being given to the openness of I. It is as if something essential is being described, but actually that something is arising due to causes and conditions. We can see that it has impact. If you see someone on the road and clearly they are hungry, you want to get them some food, and if they eat then the hunger goes away. Hunger arose as the display of a formative quality, but no essence was generating it. With the application of food the formation dissolves. Now, if you say to a hungry person, 'It's just an illusion,' that would be incorrect and unkind, because they *are* hungry. It's not the total truth of them, but it's the impactful truth of their conditionality at this moment.

When you read a buddhist text and it talks about illusion it's referring to the illusion that there is an enduring essential basic state. Due to the shifting of causes and conditions some other state will arise. 'Everything is illusion' means that many qualities appear—shapes, colours, smells and so on—each of which is interactive, but non-establishing. In the more analytical buddhist literature they talk about the absence of inherent existence. If I am hungry there is sensation, probably changes in the saliva content of my mouth, and so on. There are sensations, ideas and feelings indicating hunger, but there's no essential hunger within me generating those symptoms. Hunger is an indication of a problem of supply and demand in relation to our being in the world with others. We live in a culture that says money is more important than hunger. You see beggars outside supermarkets. Certainly in London we now have many, many beggars. There's plenty of food in the shops and at the end of the day there's food to throw away. Often it gets sent to the pig farms. But the beggar doesn't have money to go in and buy something. This is the relative nature of experiences.

Going back now to the ground, when awareness and unawareness arise from, or on, the ground, they are illusion, like a magical formation. When the cloud appears in the sky we can say that there is cloud and there is sky, or we can say that there is a cloudy sky. The cloud is in the sky: it would be difficult to take the cloud out of the sky. Where would you put it? It is very fragile. The cloud is in the sky, is of the sky, but we think, *oh! the cloud and the sky are two things*. This is the second level of

ignorance, in which there is appearance which is the appearance of the open, empty ground, yet we say, *oh! it's a thought*. 'Thought' is a name applied, something which is already integral with the space of the mind. The misapprehension of the cloud leads us to see it as something apart from the sky. The misapprehension of the reflection leads us to see it as something apart from the mirror. Then, with the third level of ignorance, we're wrapping it in concepts, intensifying our sense of its existence as an autonomous entity.

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### *Illusion in language*

So as a man, and as a man getting much older, I might say, 'After all these years I still don't understand women'—not an uncommon thing to say. It could be meaningful, but, of course, it's meaningless because there is no such thing as 'women'. 'As a man': meaningful or meaningless? Meaningless! *As a man? As a frog! As a living residual member of the European Union, as a fan of Mickey Mouse*—you can say anything you like, and it won't be true. It seems true but there's nothing in it. What does the word 'man' indicate? What is the essential signifier? If someone has had cancer and has had to have his testicles and penis removed, is he still a man? There are all kinds of potentials in which the category of 'man' applies, or doesn't apply. You can have more or less hours in a day—it's left to you. Can you be more or less of a woman? Which woman is the most womanly woman? How do we establish the hierarchy? *He's a real manly man*. There you see how language makes us stupid. When we talk in this way it's illusion. It's as if we are saying something, and *yes, I understand you*, but it's an understanding that doesn't bear much weight. Language is full of illusions like that.

*In Britain we have a democracy*. Really? [laughter] Possibly. On paper there's a definition and you can say that it fits in the category, but if you interview people at the demos they're not saying, 'Yes, we really feel understood—the government expresses our wishes.' In terms of illusion, this third level of ignorance means that when we use language we are like flies captured inside the spider's endless weaving of the semiotic web. We're speaking language, but really language is speaking us; and as it speaks through us we find ourselves saying things we don't understand, but because other people seem to nod we think *oh! that must be meaningful*. Languages are full of empty signifiers. You say to someone, 'Oh, hey, you look really cool.' How could you know what cool means? *Oh, that's a good thing to be, don't know what it is, but as long as it's going up I'm with it*. There we have illusion. We believe in things that have no real substance to them—they function because we believe in them.

Languages are conventional sign systems. That is to say, the speakers of a language agree what is and what is not meaningful. As Chomsky pointed out, you can formulate sentences which are semantically meaningless but grammatically meaningful. So if you say, 'Green cows fly quietly,' it makes sense—according to the grammar. And, of course, that's the basis for cartoons, because in cartoons mice and ducks do all sorts of things that they don't actually do. But the narrative in cartoons has to be grammatical, almost like if you have poetry which is written as a sonnet:

you have a certain rhythmic structure embedded in the number of feet in the line. The words could be meaningless but the rhythm would carry it through. In jazz singing you have scat style, as sung by Ella Fitzgerald and others, where you get a stream of meaningless sounds, but they're in harmony with the rhythm and there seems to be meaning in them. I'm giving you these examples to highlight the way your own mind fills in the gaps: you take the hints and the clues and on that basis you generate a story, and then you can live inside that story.

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### *Illusion in the psyche*

For example, there are various kinds of obsessions, in which we might imagine that we have to wash our hands, and again and then again. We've washed our hands and we haven't touched anything: it would be reasonable to assume that our hands are clean, but the thought arises, *oh! maybe they're dirty—I need to wash them*. An extra insert has been added and so the person is entrained into compulsive activity. Or there's Clérambault's syndrome, a stalking syndrome, where someone maybe meets someone else in the street and the other person smiles and the thought arises, *oh! they like me, they really like me, I'm sure they love me*, and that leads to years of persistent stalking, with the other person saying, 'I don't know you, I don't like you, I don't love you—go away, leave me alone.' The police come and the person is arrested for causing a nuisance, *but I know they love me, I just know it, I feel it, I'm sure it's true*, and they go back. It's very sad because this is the imagination creating an image that the person believes to be true, but it's hovering in space with no connection to the actuality of the other. That's the illusion. When it's very strong we say, 'This person is deluded.'

There are many psychiatric disorders like this, for example, this fairly psychotic paranoid jealousy. In its dangerous form it's usually held by men. They're sure that their partner is having an affair. They fix cameras in every room in the house, they track their partner's phone—because they are sure, they are convinced, *she's going to betray me*, and, of course if somebody was checking on you twenty-four hours a day you would want to leave. As the person who's feeling oppressed by the attention tries to find an exit this is interpreted by the sick person as a sign that their belief is true, and it often results in the murder of a partner. Here we see that an alignment of phenomena and a rational interpretation of phenomena is not guaranteed. We all have imagination—otherwise there would be no novels, no plays and so on. We create and construct. When small children do this they happily tell you, 'I'm just playing.' When we're adults we take our play seriously and so become trapped in our fantasy projections. In Buddhism we try to understand what the imagination is, this capacity to have an image. In the Old Testament Moses comes down from the mountain bringing the ten commandments directly from God and says, 'You shall have no graven image of me.' *No images of God, image-making is bad*: many religions have that idea. Fundamentalist Muslims don't like images of the prophet either, because you have the presence and the representation—and it's as if the representation is a defilement of the purity of the presence.

So, a person is sitting in front of you. Do you see them, or do you simply interpret them? They come to form an image for you, an image that you keep inside—in psychoanalysis this is called ‘object relations’. The infant gradually has a sense of its mother. At first the mother is an immediate embodied presence, with the warmth and softness of her body, the taste of the milk, and so on. Gradually the presence of the mother comes to be there as a symbol, and this symbolic representation helps the small person in their separation from the mother’s body. Now the child has an idea of the mother, and that might be promoted by having a soft toy to suck or hold onto. That is to say, the image of the mother, the imagined presence of the mother, becomes a substitute for the actual. This is the heart of buddhist meditation: when we are sitting phenomena are arising. Depending where you are, there might be sounds, smells in the air of someone cooking nearby, all kind of sensory materials coming in as well as stuff in the body, mind and so on. This is direct, coming and going: you can see how it comes and how it goes—it’s here, and it’s gone, here, and gone, here and gone. *But what is it?* It is not a ‘what’. *No, no... what is it? I need to know what it is.* What it is, is ‘this’. ‘What it is’ and ‘as it is’ start to bifurcate.

Phenomena are manifesting here, it’s undeniable, but they’re uncatchable; and our idea of what’s going on within our narrative account of what is going on starts to take on more density and more value because we can use it across the three times: *I will be on holiday in the summer, but it’s only January and I’m not on holiday.* So here we can see that phenomenon and idea are not the same. *But, oh, let me tell you about last summer—I had a great holiday.* And, as I talk about it, 1% of the value of the holiday hovers in the air, like the smell of a truffle that was eaten yesterday. It’s thin, but because I can massage it into language it becomes a truffle oil—90% olive oil with a little bit of truffle. This is a story, a substitute, with social value. But the actuality of your holiday is non-transferrable: you were there—full stop. There is no doggie bag. Whatever you take away is not that. ‘This’ is only available here and now, here and now, here and now. What is taken away is a re-presentation—and this is the important thing for us as meditators to see, that the re-presentation is thinner and thicker at the same time. No amount of talking will truly evoke how it was to be on the beach in the sunshine, yet by reflecting on it you can massage in associations and other ideas and compare it with other holidays, and it thickens, the actual moment of that beautiful sunset vanishing. Mercifully, you don’t have your mobile phone with you so you actually see the sunset, and then it’s gone. It’s gone and it will not come back, not ever. It was ‘this’ for you: that’s it. But you took a photo of it and sent it to a friend and they sent one back to you, and now you talk about sunsets that you’ve seen, and you start sending each other photos from famous sunsets across the world....

Representations are exchangeable but experiences are not: this is the heart of it. When you meditate it’s absolutely alone. You’re sitting, you’re open, it’s just you... *this!* What could you say? But if you fall into the thought, afterwards you could say, ‘Oh, I found myself thinking about this and this and this....’ But if you just sit, and a thought arises and goes, it has brushed across you like a ghost... gone! It was there — *this!*—and it’s gone. In dzogchen this is called the self-liberation of phenomena. So if we don’t build conceptual interpretation we come to silence: there’s nothing to say. Generally speaking the advice is not to talk about meditation experiences. The time you spend in the practice which takes you closer to the edge of language then is

reversed as you pull yourself back into language by talking about what happened—because to speak is to formulate. Now, clearly today I'm speaking a lot. I'm trying to formulate various lines of viewing so that you can let your gaze, your attention, run across them so that they illuminate something. Because the whole cannot be illuminated, I am condemned to talk 'about' it. When we meditate together hopefully 'it', whatever 'it' might be, comes into the room a little bit—and if we don't talk about it it's difficult to get close to.

In the tradition they say that there are nine levels of transmission, the first three being the direct transmission of the Buddha's mind. This means that for all the buddhas, however they are, whatever is arising for them is arising immediately and directly for every other buddha—we don't yet have access to that. From that state the Buddha makes some mudras, or gestures, and the symbol is understood by the vidyadharas, by those with awareness—but we don't get that. In initiations the teacher might hold up a peacock feather. When you look at the end of the feather it looks a bit like an eye, a symbol for illusion. So they wave it in front of you but you are more concerned with the export and import of banned body parts of animals, *and you're not supposed to buy peacock feathers, they're not supposed to export them from India anyway, so Gurujii, why are you waving the peacock feather—don't you know the country's not doing that?* [laughter] That's why we don't even get the symbolic level: we're hanging on the word level. But language is a messy business since each of us, with every word used, has our own echo chamber—our own field of association, emotional context and so on—but we try. The main thing is to try to apply what we've been looking at today to yourself. We've heard many examples, many images. Simply to have some cognitive apprehension is not enough. Does it ring true? Can you feel the truth of it in your lived experience? Otherwise it will just wash away.

Especially to consider are the five questions. You are here, your mind is here—otherwise you wouldn't know you are here—but where is your mind? Is it inside you, or outside of you? Bigger than you, the same size, or smaller than you? Where did it come from, where does it go to? Has it colour, shape, smell, taste, and so on? Although we say five questions, you can open them up to include all the attributes that you might apply to the mind. This is your mind. You can read books about Buddhism, which might get you a job occasionally, or give you something to chat about, but whether you remember it or not is maybe not so important. But if you don't know who you are that's very sad. We know about the content of our mind: it shows itself in thoughts, feelings, memories, and so on. This gets to us. It's impactful.

Now I'm drinking water. The water I like and the container is irrelevant. There are a lot of different cups in this building. *This glass will do: the main thing is the water.* Now, if I didn't have this glass in my hand the water would have come all over my shirt and trousers and I would look like an incontinent old man, so I'm very glad that the glass is there to protect me from this indignity [laughter]. We take the glass for granted, but it is essential, because I can't pick the water up with my hand, and still, I'm not interested in the glass—I'm interested in the water. This is your relation with your mind. You're interested in your feelings, sensations, memories and so on. You are aware of them but you take the awareness for granted. *This is it.* What is this awareness? Without the awareness the thoughts and the memories would not be

there. We are like a small child with their mother. *Mum, tie my laces! Mum, tie my laces—you have to tie my laces! Okay.* The child would be embarrassed to get such a bill from the mother: *You're four years of age: I've made a list ten pages long of all I've done for you and since you don't have any money I've sold you to the slave ship and you're leaving tomorrow—good-bye!* But we don't do this. The mother is taken for granted, which is maybe a developmental necessity, but if there's no gratitude for parents the world becomes a sad place. How often does your thought say, *'Thank you, dear mind, for letting me be here'* ? Never! How ungrateful, fully entitled! But without the mind there are no thoughts and no feelings. The true nature of your mind is awareness which is inseparable from the the ground. This is the all-illuminating, self-existing awareness. But when you fixate on the content of the mind it is as if thoughts are something in themselves, as if feelings are something in themselves, existing in denial of their mother. They arise from the mind and they vanish into the mind, like a wave coming from the ocean and going back into the ocean. This is something to be aware of.

Maybe you'll go out this evening to eat something. You look at the food and think, *'Where did this come from, where do they grow rice, where do these potatoes come from?'* And then you think, *'Where do my thoughts come from?'* To say, *'Thank you, farmer, and thank you, buddha-mind'* shifts everything: no longer am I in my bubble of ego-isolated self—I am a child of the ground, my mother is infinite awareness, my father is the energy of prana. Prana flows through the energy system and meets with wisdom, and so I manifest, and so it's an illusion to imagine that I exist as an isolated entity. In order to dissolve this illusion we have to see the nonduality of the ground and what manifests from the ground, the nonduality of the mirror and the reflection.

That brings us to the end for today. Tomorrow we'll have time to do more meditation and to look at how illusion thickens into delusion and how we live in a world of confusion in which we are fused, or mixed up, with evanescent moments. As you move around this evening take a moment to relax in the out-breath, even sitting just for sixty seconds— ... *open ...open*. You can do it in a café. You can see what's going on, the people coming and going. All of this is the field of experience. *I'm in this, not, this is happening to me*. I'm in this field of emergence, whether I'm walking or talking or sitting. I am within the mandala of the buddha.

Have a good evening and see you tomorrow.

## SUNDAY MORNING, SESSION 1

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### *Staying close to the truth of emptiness*

So, here we are, here but not quite here. It's the inability to be fully here which makes us so busy. We'll do the guru yoga now, and as we do the Three A we release our tendency to distraction. The ego self is always hungry. It always want more and that is the basis for our distraction, but awareness itself is peaceful. There you can

clearly see the indicator of how to know whether you are lost or not. Just being here, relaxed and open: what is lacking? So, we'll do the Three A and just sitting—that's all.

### [sitting practice]

In some systems of meditation there is strong emphasis on sitting still. Here it's not so important. The problem, always, is about how you take up and hold onto whatever is occurring; so if you're sitting in a way that you're not used to and you get some pain and therefore move, continuing in the practice, there is no problem. But if you struggle heroically not to move then you get a problem, and, at the other extreme, if you move and feel guilty because of it, or if you feel that you're not doing things right, you get a problem. All compounded things are impermanent: our thoughts are impermanent. Thoughts, feelings and sensations arise, and they pass. In dzogchen language this is called the self-liberation of phenomena: you can't keep them even if you want to, and you don't need to get rid of them because they're going—you just stay with them. The main thing is to collaborate with the three aspects that we looked at yesterday: being present with the openness, being present with the immediacy of everything which is here all at once, and being present with the specificity of this moment. That's the main thing in this practice.

In dzogchen there isn't that much talk about compassion. Generally speaking compassion is linked to the idea of taking care of others, of being thoughtful about them, of not abandoning them, of holding them in our hearts. *May all sentient beings be happy.* As the Heart Sutra points out, though, there are no sentient beings: this is a conceptual interpretation. When you look to find yourself it's difficult to establish anything except a patterning of ideas. So we have the compassion of intending to work for others and the compassion of actually working for others through doing the meditation practices, and so on. This is strengthened by three aspects: before the practice we express our intention to help beings by stating the bodhisattva vow, then during the practice by being aware of others, and at the end of the practice dedicating the merit for the benefit of all beings. Clearly this is an ethical orientation, yet it operates within the sense that others are separate from me. The third aspect of compassion is called the compassion which doesn't take an object. That is to say, there are no sentient beings to be helped, and therefore there is no activity of helping. This is not abandonment, but rather it's staying close with the illusory nature of all phenomena, that their truth is emptiness.

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### *The great completion*

Dzogpachenpo is the great completion, which means that everything is included, there's nothing to do, it is as it is. What then is the status of someone who is suffering? Let's take as an example that someone's in hospital: they're not well—they had an operation and got an infection and now have a lot of tubes into their body. We have a sense, *this is not a good place to be, they are suffering.* This seems undeniable, but who is suffering? *Fräulein Schmidt is suffering.* Before this consciousness entered into the womb of her mother was it called Schmidt? No. So

the person lying in the bed is Fräulein Temporary Schmidt and if the infection is not cured she will be Fräulein Used-To-Be Schmidt. What we see as the truth of a person is conceptual. This is not to say, of course, that if you hit me with a hammer I will not be in pain—that is to say, pain will register. The question is, who is the one who experiences the pain? From the view of dzogchen, there is pain which is arising, changing and vanishing, but there is no ego-self who is the owner of the pain, or the one that is acted on by the pain: that is a conceptual interpretation.

Most of us have had pain and difficulty at times in our life. You might have been in hospital for a while. Who was in hospital? You were in hospital, and now it's a memory. You can tell a story about it. That is to say, it was a sequence of movements. Various people who are entitled by their qualification come and stick needles into you or cut into your body with sharp knives. They're not cutting into you—they're cutting into the patient with the number on the bed. They don't know you. If they were really concerned about you as a person then they shouldn't be cutting into you. That's why surgeons are not permitted to operate on members of their own family except in emergency. When you have the identification of someone, and an emotional colouration to that, you lose clarity, you worry about them. But the person who's carrying out the operation should be clear—they should have a clinical equanimity. This is the same as in meditation: if you react to circumstances then waves of emotion, with expansion and contraction, will move through your mind. Under such circumstances it's very easy to be especially concerned about some people and not very concerned about others.

From the time of ancient Greece and the development of the hippocratic oath the intention has been that the doctor shall work for any person who is suffering, independent of their gender, race, religion and so on. They shouldn't have any bias, not only because that could be prejudicial to the care of the patient, but because it would make them inefficient in what they have vowed and trained to do. When we say, 'May all beings be happy,' we're wanting to maintain an attitude of equanimity, not biased in favour of people we like or biased against people we don't like. Often we organise people according to how close they are to us and how distant they are. Mr. Trump says, 'America first—we don't really care about other countries because America is for the Americans, and the interests of Americans comes before the interests of any other beings.' When other countries also adopt this attitude we have the basis for conflict. When doing a general mahayana buddhist practice then, we always imagine that our enemies are in front of us and our friends are behind us. In this way, if you are visualising a deity and rays of light, of blessing light, are coming to purify you, your enemies get the blessing first. This is done as a way of reversing your prejudice. In order to rectify the balance we say, 'I am going to do more for my enemies than for my friends.' Just as we tend to be focused on our own wellbeing, so we give our happiness to others and take their pain. All of these practices are designed to antidote prejudice. That is to say, when we see particular sentient beings we don't see them with a neutral gaze, but our gaze carries flavours of interpretation. It could be because we like how they are physically or emotionally, because we have some obligation toward them, or because we are frightened of them. How I am constituted becomes the basis of how I act toward the other.

In this way my approach to the world is not open and even but seeks to privilege some people and disadvantage others. You may think, *I don't want to disadvantage other people, I just want to give some extra help to people I like*, but in the moment your mind is caught up in duality you don't see that by saying yes to one person, de facto in and of itself, you are saying no to other people. Our gaze is not panoramic, just as when we're in this room if you turn to the left you see some people and ignore other people, and when you turn to the people you ignored then you are ignoring the first people. When we relax into the openness of the mind which is inseparable from the ground everything arises together. What we might call good people and bad people, friendly dogs and dogs that might bite you, good cafés and bad cafés, everything arises from the same ground. What is the value of the arising? That it comes from the ground—the ground determines its quality. The quality arises and has some impact in the horizontal field, where there are different people with different qualities. These are qualities of connectivity. The actuality of the phenomenon is *just this*. Each person in the room when we encounter them is *just this, just this*. In the nakedness of their showing they're *just this*. This is beyond comparing and contrasting, but when you project your web of interpretation and you have a sense of *I like this* and *I don't like that*, then it's like an earthquake: it throws up huge mountains, and then you have peaks and valleys, with some people in the sunshine and others kept in the dark valley. That is a structural prejudice.

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*Not too slack, not too tight*

Here again are the three aspects that we've looked at: the openness of the ground (Tib. ngo bo) as the original face, or how it is; the display of transparency (Tib. rang bzhin) as the brilliance of everything occurring at once; and the movement of ourselves within this and in relation to whatever is arising—not as separated islands but in collaboration with the factors in the field at this moment (Tib. thugs rje kun khyab, or 'all-pervading compassion'), which means that the movements I make are not coming from me to you but are rather pulsations within the field.

Imagine you are at the sea, particularly on the Atlantic coast where you have these long fronds of seaweed, and as the waves come in the water moves around and the seaweed, which is very slippery, flows frond over frond. This is the way we move through life: very easily, in very close connection, not tied in knots. That is to say, we are available for interaction, for connectivity, but not for capture. We don't need to capture other people and there's no advantage in being captured by them.

This links with what we looked at yesterday concerning the third level of ignorance, when we come into naming. If I say, 'I really like John,' that is an expression. It comes out of my mouth and takes a few seconds to say, but what is established? Does it establish the truth of the value of John? No. Does it state that forever I will like John? No. Also, who *is* John? So, I like John-for-me. I like John-for-me as John is for me at this moment. I like John-for-me as John is for me in this moment because I am for John according to how I am in this moment. So, 'John' and 'me' are like two fronds of seaweed: in this slippery moment there is some overlap, but nothing is established. However, in the formulation '*I like John*', it is as if there is a

truly existing John who can be known, and that I am capable of speaking the eternal truth of my likes and dislikes. Although there is a warmth that arises with intimacy—and it's part of our quality as human beings to want to be close to people, to have emotional connections, sexual connections and so on—these are, in the actuality of their presentation, ephemeral. When we conceptualise them they seem to have a continuity, but the John I think about and can speak about is not John: it's 'my John'. John as John is being influenced by many factors around and is shifting and changing, and so on. John is beyond capture. We are all beyond capture. Sometimes people want to capture us—they may have structural power over us, in an organisation or in a bad relationship, or they may say things like, 'I know who you are.' If you ever hear that, you know, *oh! this is a liar, it's just their idea in the moment*. We are beyond capture: this is our intrinsic freedom, that, whatever concept is pinned onto us in any particular situation, it cannot catch us as we actually are because we are not actually any 'thing'. We are a ceaseless stream of arisings, and so we need to be very careful how we are with other people. As the Buddha said, 'The middle way', like tuning an instrument—not too tight, not too slack.

Yesterday we mentioned these five questions:

- *Does the mind have a colour and a shape?*
- *Does it have a size—is it big or is it small?*
- *Does it come from somewhere?*
- *Does it abide somewhere?*
- *Does it go anywhere?*

The inquiry into these five questions is probably the most helpful inquiry in dzogchen because in order to come to the truth that the question is opening up we have to avoid falling asleep in our concepts. We already have lots of ideas about who we are and how we are, and we can stick these ideas into patterns to give a more or less coherent picture of ourselves, but each brick of this edifice, of this self we build up, is impermanent. So if I say, 'I was born in Scotland and I live in London,' now we have two things about James, but they dissolve: I live in London but if some country decides to fire a rocket at my airplane this evening I won't get back there. 'I live in London' is an idea. Whether that idea will be able to continue we don't know. I could have a heart attack on the plane. I could arrive at Heathrow as a corpse. It happens: people do die on airplanes. It's like this—I assume that I will get home, that I will do this or do that. The confidence that you have in your story is a lullaby—you fall asleep in the concept. So the function of asking the question is to relax this tendency to fall into the concept. Instead of being the maker and the doer, the one who tells myself who and how I am (which would simply be the reiteration of my own storyline), instead of that we relax, we open, we're receptive. How it is shows itself. It shows how it is: naked, fresh, raw. As soon as you start telling yourself about yourself you're cooking, adding the past, and each of us has many herbs and spices from the past—what your mother said, what your father said, and so on. Then you only taste what's in your own kitchen.

Now we'll take up the first question: *does the mind have a shape or a colour?*

We are here. We know we are here, we have a sense of being here. We're not dead yet, so we have a mind. Our mind is registering the events that are in this room. We'll start with the guru yoga, then we'll sit. *Does this mind which is here have a shape and a colour?* Let how it is reveal itself to you. If you find yourself caught up in a lot of conceptualisation just release a long out-breath, allow more space. Experiences are arising and passing. We're meditating with our eyes open. There is seemingly what is 'out there', and we have a sense which we regard as 'in here'. Both are arising, both are registered with the mind. *Is the mind outside or inside?* If you find yourself explaining this to yourself, just observe it—*oh, that's a stream of concepts.* The concepts tell me about my mind, but what is the mind itself? This is the real challenge for us in the meditation. We are addicted to stories, and the story seems to reveal the world, but when we look we see that it actually hides the world. If you find yourself caught up in a chain of concepts just relax, very gently, and ease yourself out of that identification, and in that instant: *does the mind have a size?* You're here, you're in touch with the clarifying capacity of the mind. If the clarity of the mind is here, the mind must be here—*does it have a shape and a colour?*

Now we'll do the guru yoga and in your own time you'll gently take up the question. Our practice is always very tender because the mind is something hidden from us, hidden by our own brutality, the crude quality of our own conceptualisation. The practice is more subtle. So rather than posing the question in a cognitive way, it's more like you want to pose it in an aesthetic way, as if you were in an art gallery and you were looking at a painting, maybe a Cézanne. In many of his paintings we see his favourite mountain, with very soft edgings between the colours. There's a clarity when you receive the painting, rather like a mood, but there's also a finesse to our sensibility. This is how we want to approach the guru yoga practice. We're not trying to get something—we're trying to be available. It's like in the drawings we see of Francis of Assisi: he has some seed in his hand and birds come and land on his fingers. That's quite a risk for the bird. Francis is clearly not a scary guy. That's how we want to be in our awareness—not scary at all. The ego is always scary because the ego is prejudice and the fulfilment of prejudice is killing. We want something very soft, but present.

#### [sitting practice]

You can go back to that again and again. Although straightforward and simple it's profound. The ego is dependent on the content of the mind; awareness is independent of the content of the mind. The content of the mind arises dialogically as the interplay of subject and object. The ego is always wanting to participate in the conversation, to have opinions, judgments, conclusions. When you find yourself caught up in that in the practice it's a sign that you're operating out of the ego-nexus. As we looked yesterday, the ego is an idea, a sticky idea, an idea around which things form. There's no self-substance to it and it uses linking with other experience as a way of generating a pseudo substance. If you're practising and it's very difficult, you can get up and stretch. If you're at home you could take a shower. The key thing is not to struggle, not to try harder. With many things in life if you don't try hard you won't succeed—that's especially the case in relation to the ego. You can develop

your personality, you can modify your character traits and you can work on yourself because the ego is there as a pseudo substance. Sometimes the ego looks like the subject, sometimes it looks like the object. But awareness just is—there's nothing to work on. Awareness is presence, just here-ness, this. When you find yourself starting to identify particular features this is the interpretive work of the ego. If you can see that this pattern movement is expressing itself through the space of awareness it's not a problem, but if you merge into the pattern of thought production as 'you' try to work something out to get to some clarity, then you find yourself in endless activity. What you're looking for in the practice is not compounded, is not constructed. When you're trying to construct a picture of how your mind is you're veiling your mind from yourself—you're doing what you do because you know how to do it. It's this sort of thing: you're on the Costa Brava and you go into a café where there are a lot of British tourists who believe that the Spanish people actually understand English but only if you say it very loudly, so they're shouting at the waiter. That's the realm the ego is in—*if I 'do' more of myself then it's going to get clearer*. But it's not like that: the domain of awareness is different—we find it by relaxing, by opening, by doing less.

Okay, now we'll do the guru yoga again and sit with the second question: *is the mind big or small, does it have an extent, can we find a limit to it?* Linked with this is the question: *is my mind inside my body, is it in my brain?* Many people believe this. Try to see if the thought 'brain' arises. Maybe even more bits of brain arise in your mind. 'Amygdala'—*my mind must be there*. This is a story. The story vanishes yet you're still here. *What is the extent of this awareness?*

#### [sitting practice]

If you practise this at home do it for just short periods of time (three minutes, five minutes) because it's the freshness that you want. Awareness is pre-conceptual or non-conceptual. This is not to say that awareness rejects concepts—concepts are not its enemy—but that it doesn't rest on them. It's the ego that rests on concepts and uses them to build patterns of meaning. We want to relax out of our habitual employment of concepts, and when we see, *oh! this mind has no border to it*, then we're seeing that nothing is outside of it: everything is inside. Everything is the mind—sensations, feelings thoughts, concepts, love, hate, jealousy, pride... and all the aspects of our experience which we might regard as negative. In some approaches of buddhism we would say, 'These are obstacles to be overcome. They should be removed, purified, because they are obstacles that stand between me and awareness', but that's only because of how we situate ourselves.

Generally speaking the whole range of buddhist approaches can be structured in two ways: as vehicles of the cause and vehicles of the result. The vehicles of the cause think, *'I have the potential for enlightenment, like having a seed. I have to plant the seed, water and protect it, and then it will give rise to a shoot. Some greenery will come out, and finally it will fully ripen and blossom. In a similar way I have to work with my buddha-potential: it will take time. I have to select the supportive factors and inhibit the negative or destructive factors.'* This refers to the Theravadan tradition, the general Mahayana tradition and the lower tantras—they are vehicles of the cause. But in the higher tantra, dzogchen and mahamudra we follow the result. In tantra you

visualise yourself as a divine form and through this you see the whole world as the mandala of Tara, or whatever deity. We are already in a buddha-land and the practice is to transform the ordinary into the special. In dzogchen we don't do this transformation. We say, 'From the very beginning the ground, the field and the ripening, or the fruition, is already here; and if it's here then we should open ourselves to it.' From this point of view there is no path, or, to say that in another way, the path is simply to be here.

This evening I will go from Vienna to London, but, hopefully, while I'm in the Vienna airport I will really be there: that will be my here. I'll stand in a queue as an ordinary economy passenger, waiting humbly. Then I will sit in my seat—here. Then will come Heathrow—here—and the train into Paddington—here. We can be 'here' in each place. So on one level I can say that I'm going to London, but if I'm projecting *when I'm there then I can do that*, then I'm not 'here'. I can be here and the thought of being in the airport can arise—here: it can arise in the space of presence. Or I merge into the thought of being 'there' and I leave 'here' for a kind of limbo-land of conceptualisation. What do I get from being lost in a thought? I get dispersal, I strengthen my commitment to believing that the answer lies in the thought. The thought is not the enemy, the thought is not the friend. It's just coming and going. We stay 'here'—always here, always now. All the memories that you have can be arising in the presence of here and now. All the plans that you have to make for next week, for next year, can arise here and now. There's no restriction. In buddhist texts you read about the three times of past, present and future. The present is on this cusp-point between that which has gone and that which hasn't arrived. When we are present here and now, though, this 'here and now' is not the filling of a sandwich—it is the infinity of the mind and everything is within it. That is the practice of the result, and the result is already here because in dzogchen the ground, the path and the result are not really different.

We'll take a break now, and when we come back we'll be looking at the other three questions. Then there'll be time for some general questions.

## SUNDAY MORNING, SESSION 2

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### *Sitting with Questions 3, 4 & 5*

Inside the dualistic structure of samsara everything is caught up in the chain of cause and effect. Having been born we interact with the environment, and depending on the environment we develop in different ways. From a general point of view we say that having found ourselves in samsara, experiencing ourselves as a doer and a maker, sometimes acting on the environment, sometimes being acted on by aspects of the environment, we find ourselves surrounded by things which all have come from somewhere. Here we have a nice wooden floor which comes from trees. There are mats which come from cotton. On a general material level we have developed according to the impregnation of the potential of the mother's essence by the father. From a Western point of view the potential in the particular DNA structures of the

mother and father manifest together to allow the physical development of the foetus, and so on. If you follow the Darwinian view, through your parents and your grandparents you go right back to the very beginning of evolutionary life. In each stage the arising of the result of previous causes becomes in turn a cause for future results, which is like our idea of karma. If we don't understand karma then we have the fourth level of ignorance, which is the mental dullness of not seeing how karma works. You might think that when you die, that's it—*I'm an accident of nature and when I die that's the end of it*. In that case, if you're a successful thief and the police didn't catch you, you got away with it. But the teaching on karma suggests that you're going to be born again. It's because you have a mind that the potential to take on a form is present. The mind takes on forms due to the linking together of mental contents, some of which look like subject and some of which look like object. The subjective mental content is what we call our consciousness, how we make sense of what's going on in the world.

The Tibetan word for this is *namparshepa*, *shepa* meaning 'to know' and *nampar* meaning 'a particular form or shaping'. So it means 'knowing something'. It indicates having come to a conclusion about something. So, the people working in the pentagon come to a conclusion that someone is a dangerous terrorist and they decide to do something. Afterwards they decide to tell lots of lies about why they did what they did in order to appear good, because they have realised something very fundamental: people are stupid and willing to believe lies. *Mr. Trump is wonderful, he is amazing!* He is the illuminator of the joys of being as thick as two planks [laughter] —he shamelessly does whatever he does. *I don't need to pay any attention, what you think is irrelevant, so you are nothing: wonderful! I have a whole army of frogs that will croak at midnight and drown out the voice of rationality.* This is an attack on cause and effect: if we want to understand anything we have to be truthful. We see that we make mistakes, that we get confused. *Maybe I can't trust my thinking:* this is like the clouds opening a little. *I'm not who I think I am*—then who am I? This brings us to the five questions; because we have been thinking quite a lot in terms of cause and effect (and it is better to think in terms of cause and effect than not), if we think, *oh, it's just like this*, and there's a kind of solidity in that, that's very different from '*just this*'. '*This*' is vibrant and connective and immediate. If you say, 'Oh, I'm in Vienna; that is where I am,' then you know that you're starting to get stupid. What is Vienna that you can be inside it? Inside Vienna there are many roads and there are many houses. You may live here and have with you the keys to your flat, but you're not entitled to go into anyone else's flat. So, I am in Vienna—the bits of Vienna that I am entitled to go into. I am in a bit of Vienna. Which bit? It depends. Sometimes I am in that bit, sometimes in another bit. But I thought you were in Vienna! You are in Vienna, but that is meaningless because you are always someone somewhere, and you're someone somewhere due to cause and effect. Because you are caught up in this kind of cause and effect it means you are a storyteller. You can give an account of your life and how you decided to be in that particular flat. Maybe because it's cheap, maybe because it's near your work, maybe because you fell in love—it could be all kind of reasons. The Buddha said, 'All phenomena arise from causes.'

Now we come the third question: *where does the mind come from?* Say a thought arises in your mind when you're not in the meditation but maybe sitting in a café—*oh, I haven't thought of that for a long time!* Suddenly you're remembering a holiday

in Greece. You don't know why that thought came into your mind. It's in your mind 'because I was there': this arose because of that. The contents of your experience, whether sensation, memory, plan or thought, have lineages, a generative genealogy. But is the mind like that? We know that box very well: *this has come from somewhere*. Apples, potatoes, bananas, motorcars, ebola virus: all these things come from somewhere. *Don't eat monkeys! Lots of viruses are coming from animals, so don't eat monkeys. If you know that these viruses come from wild animals don't eat them*. There: origins, causes and the result. When you make that link it's really helpful. We already have a lot of skill at working out patterns of cause and effect, we just have to know this about ourselves: it's what we studied at school. So when we look at the mind it's very tempting to come up with an explanation for how it is the way it is. When you're doing the practice and an explanation arises in your mind—*oh, my mind has come from here*—don't block it: just allow that conclusion to be present in your mind and see what happens. Then look again, and look again at every conclusion. What is its status? Is it the mind showing itself, or is it a thought telling you about your idea of what the mind is? It's so vital to see the difference between these two—otherwise we're just in seamless thought production.

Okay, so we'll do the guru yoga again, and then we'll gently allow this opening to the question: the mind is here—where does it come from?

[sitting practice]

We come now to the fourth question: *does the mind stay someplace?* If it stays someplace does it stay inside our body, outside our body? Does it have a location? If it has a location does it have a duration? Does it stay for a while or is it always there? This is our mind—how amazing that we don't know it. We know words like Caracas, Venezuela, Scotland, Edinburgh.... We know all kind of things about things about things. We have absorbed very much information, but who are we? We tell our story, but what is the basis of the story? Where does this story come from? It's an aspect of the mind. What is the mind? This is fundamental, the basis of our existence—if we don't know this we are simply putting together lots of ideas. And again, as the wonderful Mr. Trump has pointed out, there's a lot of fake news around [laughter]. So many of the ideas we have are not true. *I live in Great Britain*—well, not so great: *pathetic Britain hopeless, stupid, cruel, selfish, mean, vicious Britain, Britain of the troubled royal family*. It's like that. But if you say 'Great Britain' it directs the gaze in another way, to our historical achievements—invasion, enslavement, rape and murder. In a general sort of way, it's fair to say we're full of shit, and we don't even know the difference between shit and chocolate. When you're looking for your mind you have the shit of repeating thoughts, and then there's the chocolate of ever-fresh awareness. Both are brown, but they're not the same, so choose wisely [laughter].

We'll do the guru yoga again and open to the fourth question: *where does the mind rest?*—if indeed it rests anywhere.

[sitting practice]

Hopefully it's starting to become clear to you that your mind is not what you think it is. But if it's not what we think it is then it's quite disturbing: I believe lies about

myself. It's partly because we speak in a linear way, one word after another, that our accounts are always limited and partial, but we also distort our situation by telling ourselves comforting fictions. We know that other people die, but we might hope that we won't die—somehow it's not going to happen to us. Many people live as if they will not die. Many people live as if they won't get old; they don't save any money for their pension. There are all kinds of construction that go on. That is to say, the mental world I build for myself, the values I choose to believe in, are taken to be indicative of truth. One of the benefits of doing the practice, then, is that we get to see how much we deceive ourselves. As some of you know, C. R. Lama was a teacher I studied with for many years, and many, many times he said of himself, 'I am liar number one, cheater number one.' I hope we can all achieve this understanding—because we do lie, we cheat and deceive ourselves. *I'm going to do it.* Teachers also lie to their students. *If you do your preliminary practice this will be very good.* How do they know? Is there any research evidence? You're writing the prescription, but has the treatment been checked in a laboratory? It's a custom. In African countries they say, 'Clitorodectomy is good for you.' So one day you get grabbed, the women hold you down, and your granny takes a piece of glass and cuts your labia, maybe your clitoris too. *'Now you're a proper person, now you're one of us.'* A lot of cultural formations are like that, an initiation rite, how you come to the inside. For example, in many armies there's a lot of bullying of new recruits. Having a bed which other people have shat in and so on is a way of showing that you can survive anything, and if it was done to me then I will do it to the new recruits five years from now.

We are full of shit. We believe things which are not true, we say things which are not true—because we believe them. Like my dad used to say, 'Just do your best—that's all we can ask of you and then life will be okay.' Really? Not at all! All kind of things happen to people. Some people work very hard, do a lot of gymnastics when they're teenagers and maybe get in the national team. Then when they're twenty-one they get multiple sclerosis. We are blind and stumbling in the forest. We don't know very much but we comfort ourselves with funny stories, then we try to give them to other people. *'Jesus will save you. There is no way to the father except through the son. The gates of hell are wide and open for Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Taoists. I only say this because Jesus loves you. You're damned, but if you like, you can become one of us.'* Buddhism, too, is full of stories like this. They are resting on ideas and patterns of thoughts and concepts. Again and again we have to go back into the practice. *'I am here. I have a mind but I don't know where my mind is, I have no idea how it is.'* If it were about driving a car, this would be the same as driving after drinking a bottle of vodka. You're drunk in stupidity and in charge of your life! So these questions are really important. Rather than believing in ideas, which always last a few seconds, we have to look again and again and again until we have the sense of it, of awareness which doesn't change. No idea can do what awareness does. Ignoring the potential of awareness and privileging the contents of the mind in terms of thoughts and feelings, and so on—this is foolish.

Now we look at the last question: *does the mind go, does it vanish, is it not here sometimes, and if it goes does it go somewhere?*

[sitting practice]

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*Phenomenon or appearance?*

This inquiry brings us to something fundamental: the difference between the fresh and the cooked. How is the mind—how is *my* mind? It is here. If I have a direct opening to it I get a taste of its rawness, its simplicity. But if I only have my thoughts about it, my imaginings, my culturally inherited imaginings, that's very different. As we saw yesterday when we were going through the stages of the development of ignorance, at first the mind is like the clear blue sky, open and without any limit, and then, like a fine wispy cloud developing, something seems to be there. Sometimes when I'm in a plane and we're flying up through cloud I can see little wisps on their edges, and it's as if they're arising and then vanishing. Due to causes and conditions, the potential for the cloud emerges from the invisibility that the element of water has when present in the air, and forms a small wisp of cloud. It can dissolve or it can thicken. This is the same with a thought in our mind: if you don't feed the thought, if you don't believe in it and rely on it, it goes. Thoughts vanish, feelings vanish, but when you try to apprehend the thought and put more attention and interest into it, linking it out by associating it with other thoughts, memories and so on, you get this gradual consolidation. This ethereal, ephemeral thought comes to stand in the place of a thing. You have the mental turn of reification, of thinking in terms of things, and, in parallel, due to the constellation of the five elements you get a compounding, a thickening, on the object side. As I develop the capacity to see objects so there are objects to be seen.

Now, one of the objects to be seen is myself. I become aware that I am having a thought. The thought is arising and passing: *my thought: it's in my mind, it must be my thought*, and this appropriation is due to the fantasy of ownership. Now, Austria has Austrian airspace. The Austrian airforce is very concerned about what happens around its airspace. There's constant monitoring of planes which move into Austrian airspace. This space is just the big sky, but we cut it up and say that this bit of the sky belongs to Austria and you can't just come in—you have to ask permission to enter Austrian airspace. There you see confusion. Something like space, which can't be caught, is caught. *It belongs to us. We recognise your airspace if you recognise our airspace. We both know that we own the ungraspable and we do it by calling it what we call it. Austrian airspace is Austrian airspace because it's Austrian.* This is a conventional identification: the object is generated out of the process of the conventional agreement that it exists. When you describe Austrian airspace you're not referring to something that's there: you're referring to something that you imagine—but if enough people imagine it it's as if it were there. A great deal of our cultural formation is like that. This is the semiotic web: the linking of idea with sign and bringing that into relation with an appearance.

Okay, so we say, 'This is a glass—it is a glass and I call it a glass.' If we knew many languages we could say it in many ways because such identification comes after the fact of the existence of the real object: it has inherent existence. It was made in a factory. After it came out of production it went along the conveyor belt and got packaged, and so on. In the factory they make glass, so there are various kinds of

moulds, and when there's a need for a particular shape of product the glass is directed to that mould. First we had sand, then we had molten glass, then we poured it into a mould, and now we have this particular glass—it is something. Where is its history? *That's irrelevant.* Yet if it didn't have its history it wouldn't be here. It's only here because there are shops that sell glasses and they're able to buy glasses from the factory at a price that allows them to make a profit margin that keeps the shop going. There are so many factors which have gone into the production of this glass. When we cut these lines of creation and maintenance then *it's just a glass, existing by itself.* So we have to look: I fall asleep in the concept of the glass. When I believe in the unity between the concept of glass and what is in my hand—that is to say, when I believe that language refers to real objects rather than referring to concepts about objects—then I know, *this is a glass.* Or I can soften it a bit—*'glass' is what I call the thing which is in my hand, and 'thing' is what I call the [pointing to the 'glass'] which is in my hand.* We're talking about concepts. The phenomenon, the appearance, is light, a momentary appearance and then shifting. The shape of the glass seems fairly regular, but as I turn it around it is revealed slightly differently. Is there something there which has different views, different facets, or is it merely an interpretation? Are you making the glass that is in my hand? *If I'm making the glass that's in my hand what do they do in the factory? They made something, they sold something, they got their money!* What did they sell? They sold the opportunity for you to take up the idea of 'glass' and rest it for a while on this thing. What I'm holding in my hand is a mirror in which you see the reflection of your own concept of glass. Where is the glass? It's in the mind, it's always in the mind.

That's probably confusion enough for now, but fortunately we have this recorded. If you're interested you can look at or listen to it again later. The advantage then is that you have a pause button—you can listen a little and then think about it. You don't have to believe me. I'm not trying to sell you anything. This is simply an invitation to look, to see and to understand that you are not an observer of your existence—you are a participant, and how you participate in your life, how in this particular moment you gather the subjective aspects of who you feel yourself to be (sensation in the body, influence of hormones, and so on), is in conversation with the potential of the object. What we take to be the glass is a co-emergence of subject potential and object potential, which means that each person here has the-glass-for-me. You have *your* experience of the glass. You have no idea what this is for someone else. If you ask them what they see here what they'll tell you is *about* their experience. *No, no, tell me directly, what is this?* But they can't say: it's impossible. What they can do is tell a story about it—they offer concepts about the phenomenon. This is what we saw before. It's a double move: the ever-shifting field of revealing and concealing. The belief that it's a glass is a conceptual guarantee of truth. Now you've revealed it to me: *it's a glass.* What is thereby concealed is the complexity of the object through the senses—and this is mental dullness. It offers the advantage of the pseudo clarity of definite knowledge, but this clarity functions as an anaesthetic: if you know what it is you don't need to look, and if you don't look you don't experience the quality of the glass, the way it is for just your gaze, now, with the candle, with colours refracting through it.... The phenomenon that is in my hand is so complex that I could never describe it, but I don't have to—because *'it's a glass'*. Welcome, stupidity! This is what we're dealing with all the time. It's not that we shouldn't use concepts, but they're like a good, sharp Japanese knife in the kitchen: it cuts the carrots very

quickly, and can cut your finger. These concepts are like that. They chop up the world and they chop you up, too. Where is awareness? This is our work.

We'll take a break now and when we come back we can open up any questions you have from all that we've covered so far. Try in particular to bring questions about how this could apply to your daily life.

## SUNDAY AFTERNOON, SESSION 3

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### *Question & Answer*

Okay, are there any questions you want to raise?

**Questioner:** When we start to perceive the world the way you're showing us how does it influence relationships?

**James:** If you stay closer to the present moment and don't build accumulations, then it keeps people light. The main trouble that arises, certainly for couples, is that they get to know each other—things are better when you don't know who this person is [laughter], because then you're building up a picture, and, as we looked before, the picture mediates how you relate to the person. When you're working with how it is in the moment you take it for granted that people will change—you don't expect them to be so reliable and you don't get so disappointed. *Disappointment* comes because you've appointed someone to be in some particular way, and they won't be like that. They will become somebody else. More generally, you can see how there are national prejudices, regional prejudices, gender prejudices and so on, whose function is to provide predicted knowledge. If I build up a picture of a person, or a country, then I can predict how they're likely to behave, and that is reassuring because it lets me believe that the world is safer than it is.

From the dharma point of view you don't want to have too many expectations about other people. In romantic love songs you often get lines like, *'I build my world around you.'* This is really stupid—people are going to die, they get psychotic disorders [laughter], all kind of things happen. In the Christian marriage ceremony it says, 'For better or for worse, in sickness or in health.' When I was about ten I used to play with a boy who lived in the road behind me. His father had been in the army and was very active. Sometimes I'd go with them and we'd go sailing out in some of the lochs. The boy's mother had developed multiple sclerosis and was in a wheelchair. The husband was with her because 'he was honourable'—and he hated her, shouted at her, insulted her, told her she was a fucking bitch for ruining his life, but he wouldn't leave her because 'he was a good man.' When you are involved in couple therapy you encounter this kind of thing. In many ways the greatest blessing for women has been the reform of divorce law. In Britain most divorces are called by women. How should people be together? Who knows? Should you stay, should you go—who knows! America says, 'If you are in NATO you should pay your money and you

should fight with us because we have common enemies.’ Monsieur Macron says, ‘Non!’ America is probably more of an enemy than Iran—who can say?

In terms of this practice you realise that everyone is intoxicated with ideas. In politics, in national treaties, and so on, you have friends and you have enemies, but from the dharma point of view we want to have equanimity. We want to try to have an equal attitude to everyone, because everyone has a buddha nature and everyone has five poisons. So we hope that people will get better, but we know that they’re not very good. It’s not a good idea to be naive. People lie and cheat—a lot, a lot. What shall we say? The Buddha said, ‘Friends become enemies, enemies become friends.’ The Americans came late into the second world war, but they spear-headed the invasion in Europe and then made a great march to Berlin. At some point they became aware that the Russians were also marching to Berlin. So while the Americans were coming from the west to the east, the Russians were coming from the north to the south, a classic pincer movement. They were allies, with but every kilometre nearer that they got to Berlin ‘friends became enemies’, The Americans really started to hate the Russians, and because of that, when they caught gestapo officers who had good secrets for rocket-building and so on, they allowed them to go to America. Here in Austria too—many people went from Vienna over the mountains to Italy, and the Americans looked the other way. Friends? Enemies? We’re all full of shit. The wind blows this way, the wind blows that way: we are unreliable. The polite word is impermanent. In human relations, then, having too many hopes for people, or too many fears, is not very good. If you are mindful you know that people’s moods change, which means you shouldn’t lean on other people too much. But we want to feel safe. ‘I will always be with you.’ Jesus said that—Buddha never said that! Buddha said, ‘Bye bye, I’m going. Look after yourself.’ [laughter]

Anything else?

**Questioner:** When conflict arises some people are strong and can stay put and deal with it, while other people flee since they can’t bear conflict. But they take the structure of conflict with them in their flight and harbour feelings of embarrassment or shame for not being able to deal with it. How does this feeling of embarrassment or shame stand in relation to the ego?

**James:** The world is full of horrible people. Some people enjoy conflict, they enjoy the suffering of others. So if you have a boss at work who has the taste of Schadenfreude in his mouth he will enjoy humiliating you by setting impossible tasks and so on. You might need to eat shit. You might be trapped, needing the money and it’s difficult to get another job. The best thing is to pray for them, because if you go into hostility toward those that are hostile to you, even if you develop so-called ego strength and stand up to them, you increase the likelihood of conflict. If they have more structural power than you have you make yourself more vulnerable. In English there’s a saying, ‘He who fights and runs away lives to fight another day.’ There’s no rulebook about how to live. We live in our skin. Our confidence and our anxiety fluctuate. Some people are strongly affected by winter, by grey skies—it brings a slightly depressed kind of feeling and that’s part of their profile at that time. A basic idea from dzogchen is to have a sense of your own capacity and to know that your

capacity changes. Give yourself the permission to be changeable and work with the situation.

In some Mahayana texts it says, 'In any conflict let the other person win: give victory to the other.' That could be stupid, it could be wise. Who knows? Nobody knows. Some years ago, the Dalai Lama, reflecting on his life, said that maybe he'd made a mistake, maybe he should have encouraged, or at least supported, more resistance to the Chinese. In any given situation, as we looked before, you have partial vision, you see a little bit. But if somebody is stronger than you, or has more power than you, that's just a fact; and if you become oppressed by their power you will be squeezed—that is normal. If somebody drives their car over your foot it will hurt. We wouldn't say it's a sign of your personal weakness. We'd say that the foot is a complex structure of bones and for it to be massaged by a car is not good. So, we don't know: that is the only answer.

Of course in the Tibetan language there are rulebooks for how to behave. Just as we have Machiavelli from the Medici period, there are many different Tibetan books with advice for kings, some written in India, some in Tibet. In the lived situation, however, which is not an idea, we may encounter people who have more structural power than we do, and they will often be quite stupid—it's a particular quality of institutions that bosses are often stupid. What are you going to do? You can do tantric visualisation, you can do the guru yoga in the toilet whenever you feel upset: how will you be? We don't know. There is no right way to do these things, because the boss or the horrible person is also not a fixed thing. *I am afraid of John*. But who is John? I might say, *I am afraid of hot iron bars being stuck in my eye*. I think we could agree that's a fear that would continue through time; but a boss or a lover, or a mother or a mother-in-law—they all change. The essential point here is that we're educated to have the idea that we should know what to do, and that if we know what to do life will be better. But in dzogchen and mahamudra it's turned around: we *don't* know what to do, because knowledge is predictive. We *don't* know what to predict, so we stay present in our senses, knees slightly bent, diaphragm relaxed—and we see what happens. We don't know. We shall see. *But you should know*. Well, we don't know. *But what will happen?* Let's see—nobody knows more than that. What will happen in the Middle East? Let's see. Russia is expanding. What will happen? Let's see. Maybe America will assassinate Mr. Putin. Who knows? Let's see.

Our problem is that we want knowledge, the currency of the ego. But the more you ply this currency—*I can work it out, I'm going to find out how to do it*—the more likely you are to get a big slap on your ego. I remember reading a comment by a famous Chinese martial arts expert. When asked about the best way to deal with an attack he said, 'Not to be where the attackers are,' which is very good advice. Don't take life too seriously. We don't know, we truly do not know. Ten years ago who could have predicted what would happen in Syria?

If you want to think about embarrassment, there we should all be embarrassed—we, members of NATO, abandoned the Syrian people. We are the liars, the cheats, the cowardly ones. Every day in Syria helicopters drop barrel bombs. They drop them on schools, on hospitals. Where is our protest? In Paris now you have a million people protesting about pensions. We are governed by self-interest: it's *'me and my friends*,

*and fuck the rest.* This is true. We say, 'May all beings be happy,' but that applies after you get out of the swamp. It's like that: we are not admirable creatures. We shouldn't expect too much from other people. Who apologises for anything in this world? So many crimes are committed and people walk away. Mr. Cameron, who set up the referendum to bring us the joys of Brexit, resigned from his post, wrote his autobiography and goes giving speeches for ten thousand euros an evening. This is why we need to understand how the world functions. These are the forces inside which we are living. We shouldn't adopt a position.

Remember, we have the five elements. Two of them are fixed or unchanging—earth and space—and three of them are moving—water, fire and wind. Mostly we think our best protection is earth, which means rules, regulations and knowing what to do. So we have the United Nations, which makes declarations about what is good and bad and tells people, 'Do this', or 'Don't do this.' They issue critical judgments. They say to Israel, 'Hey, don't go into these territories, leave the Palestinians alone, leave them some dignity.' And what happens? No dignity—every year less and less. There you can see it, the horror of our world. Those who were the victims are now the persecutors, and they are the most skilful persecutors because their public relations department always says, 'We are the victims.' *We are the eternal victims while we persecute.* So when we think of 'illusion, delusion, confusion' that's quite an interesting place. The new best friend of Israel is Saudi Arabia! How is this possible? Because this is samsara. You don't need the Buddha to teach you about samsara: everyone is doing it everywhere. For the sake of money, security and hatred of Iran, people who from a structural point of view would hate each other are allying. This is why looking to the earth element for support is not so good.

In dzogchen we always go to space. We relax and open, see how it is, feel how we are, do what is possible. But if we go into concepts—*they are our friends, they shouldn't do that*—nobody cares. Really, nobody cares. The cavalry are not coming, they are not coming. This is very helpful to know, because when you see all these abandoned people in the world you can feel some pity, maybe you can even do something. But also remember that you're going to die, and even if you die in a nice home, surrounded by friends and family, when consciousness comes out of your body it goes alone, into a big, dark place. The friends are no longer there. Ooo-ooooh, wooooo: yeah, really fucking shitty! 'Read it!' everyone said, 'Read the Tibetan Book of The Dead, Tibetan Book of The Dead!' If you do read it you'll hope you're never going to die [laughter]. But we are going to die: our life, like that of all beings, is hanging on a thread. A sudden stroke—gone. Heart attack, car crash—gone. All that you know and all that you believe in—gone.

What is it, then, that doesn't change? It's awareness. Ego structures are always arising and collapsing, arising and collapsing. So, in terms of dealing with anxiety in relation to difficult people, from the dzogchen point of view the most important thing is to stay with the anxiety, to feel what anxiety is. There's fear and there's the interpretation *I am afraid*. You know what staying with the fear is like: your stomach and your muscles tense up, and so on. That's movement, psychosomatic movement: —tensing up and then after a while relaxing again. If you wrap it in a concept, it's *I am afraid, that person makes me afraid, I need to not be afraid*. That third one is stupid. *I **am** afraid, that person makes me afraid*, then full stop. 'I shouldn't be

afraid’—why not? In this world there are a lot of people who make me very afraid. I would not like to be in a basement torture room. I would not like to have my teeth pulled out with old pliers. If someone did that to me kaka would come out of me, I would be crying and screaming. I wouldn’t be pretending to be a hero—because it’s really scary. As it says in the instruction to the yogi, ‘When you’re walking, walk. When you’re sleeping, sleep.’ So when you’re afraid, cry, and when you’re happy, laugh. You get young men who want to join these special groups in the army where they get trained to withstand torture. Why? Why wouldn’t you just cry? That’s very unnatural, like being some kind of an android, and why are they trained to do that? Because they are secretly going into another people’s country to kill someone. It’s hardly surprising that someone would like to pull their fingers off.

Dharma says that everything arises from the five poisons. The first one is mental dullness, when you don’t understand how it is and you think that things are truly real, that you are real, that I am real. *If I like you you’re my friend and I desire something with you. If I don’t like you you’re my enemy and I want to control you or send you away.* This is what we are full of: not getting it is a real poison. *I think I am who I think I am, and I can’t stop thinking about who I am and what happens to me and what they said to me and what I felt,* and so on. But we don’t just have the five poisons, we have the five questions—uh-huh! Much better! Where is the mind? Is the mind full of fear? Is fear in the mind? Is the mind like a little pot and you fill it full of fear? The ego gets full of fear—awareness doesn’t. Find awareness: it’s the one true medicine.

**Questioner:** My question concerns the practice in a concrete way, how to settle in it, how to be in it. When I start my practice ideally I have these pictures of the sky and the wave and the mirror and it’s all fine. Then it’s as if I get pulled away from the stream of awareness, or that I want to have an overview of what is happening, and I end up feeling separated from it. It’s like when I watch a movie: either I feel totally with it and within it, or I feel like a viewer, just with myself as a watcher watching the movie. It isn’t possibly to do both: either I am too relaxed in awareness, propelled with the stream, or I’m trying to stay aware as an onlooker and I get separated from what is happening. Is there a trick to staying between the poles in a natural mingling sort of way?

**James:** You’re describing very clearly a polarity. Polarities are the conceptual structure of duality. As soon as you have a sense of self-and-other meaning gets generated through comparing and contrasting. *Who is stronger than me, who is richer than me, who is more intelligent than me?* There’s the good side and the bad side, and there’s something in the middle. We try to follow the middle way. So, the polarities that you have are either confluent like two rivers flowing together and merging, or separative, which is the isolated position. There are many approaches to this. As regards separation, you can purify it through mindfulness. Mindfulness is separative because you are mindful *of* something. It brings connective clarity into the separation. You can be mindful of how you walk, or of how you hold your knife and fork, so that instead of observing from a distance you’re observing through your shoulder and your elbow, your wrist and your hands. You’re in an embodied mindfulness, not merged. Generally speaking, for merging we use tantric practices. You merge into and become inseparable from Tara or Chenrezig, or whoever,

because it's safe to merge with them: they're not going anywhere—they're just open. When you merge into them you merge into openness. If you merge into a thought the thought will take you somewhere, then vanish and leave you.

When I was young I used to hitch-hike a lot. While hitch-hiking to India I would hitch-hike in the day, and if it was cold and wet at night, I might take a lift to a place I wasn't really going because I didn't want to stand in the rain anymore. That's like the meditation when we get carried away somewhere: it's a little bit of protection. Who is being protected? Your construct of your ego-self, and that's why you're drawn into *I need this, this is good for me*. Do you need it? *It feels like it*—but maybe it's not true. As we looked earlier, the ego needs a lot of things while awareness doesn't need anything. Awareness is like the mirror: whether the mirror has a reflection in it or not doesn't improve the mirror. But for the ego, you find your meaning through what you have enveloped or what you have internalised. You can observe in yourself what is the nature of lack. Often the problems that we have in meditation are actually life problems that we haven't yet looked at. It's like when you walk down the street, or when you're walking around in your house or talking with people you know, you might get bored and feel cut off. Yet if you stay interested and connected you might get carried away by their story. Meditation is not a special activity: it's the same as being in the world—something's going on. It's easier to observe in interaction what's happening, so the goal is to stay with it.

Let's say you're having a conversation with someone and they say something, and then a thought arises in your mind and you want to say something, but they don't shut up. You don't want to forget what you wanted to say to them and you become less and less absorbent, and because they are absorbed in themselves and not reading your facial expression, you go on retreating, trying to hang on to the one thing you want to say. When you observe something like that, *I'm not going to let go of my idea, I've lost them, I've lost me, but I'm hanging on to this piece of driftwood* [laughter], when you observe something like that, to be available means always to be willing to abandon yourself. It's like the old saying, *'You have to lose yourself to find yourself.'*

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### *Married to awareness*

When a situational construct of myself arises it may feel like me, but it's not me. It's one moment of my potential—if it doesn't fit then let it go. Therapists experience this every week. Young therapists have to come to someone like me for supervision. They pay me money, we think together about what they could do, and then they walk away with their little box of something. Then they sit with their patient, the box on their knees, ready to untie the bow—*what I did with my supervisor, very important*—but the patient is not interested. They want to talk about something else. You try to bring it in this way [laughter]: *this is very important*—but important for you, not for them. Who will win? You're there for them. You spent all that money... and nothing! You got a bit of exercise in making your mind flexible. So, letting go is very helpful, then you come back, and then you come back, and so on. As soon as you start to drift off let it go!

Say you're married and you go to a party and you see someone very sweet, there are two people there: a man and a married man. They are in the same body—goodness me! The man is thinking, *that is a very cute ass!* The married man is thinking, *I should go home....* It's like that. Life is full of little crossroads. In the meditation practice the thought is interesting—for me, but for which me, for limited wandering-in-samsara me? The thought is impermanent and vanishing: I don't need it. This is married-to-dharma me—*such a pretty thought... ah yes, I'm married* [laughter]. It's like that. You need to be married to awareness because temptation is always there. We are educated people and we resonate with many, many things in life. But if we are looking for awareness and awareness is open, how will we find awareness by being closed—whether closed by distancing or closed by merging? That's why the basic meditation instruction is to relax and to remember when something is arising that it's arising in the space of the mind, this mind that has no shape or colour, that's neither big nor small, this mind that is open space and clarity. The thought is arising and passing, very close. When you look in the mirror the reflection is inside the mirror. It's not the same as the mirror because it's not connected and it will vanish, but it's right there. It's the same with the thought. It doesn't come with the postman, it doesn't knock on the door. You don't have a choice: the thought, the feeling, the memory—*whoosh*—is here! It can come out of any direction and with any degree of emotional intensity.

That's why we want to be spacious. When you see that the mind is nowhere then it's everywhere. The mind as awareness is always where the arising is occurring. It's always here, and you're here, already here; so you stay here, not pulling in, not pushing away. The thought will go. You and the thought: it's like the game that children have of staring at each other to see who will blink first. If you move because of the thought, the thought is there—*woo-hoo, you're wobbling, you blinked!* It's unmoving, but if you don't move you will see: the thought always moves. We are habituated to moving, though, and if you do move, well, these things happen. Don't criticise yourself, don't try harder, just stay relaxed and open. Maybe you get carried away and get carried away and get carried away—*oh-oh, it's one of those days*. You might have half an hour of nothing at all: *is this meditation, sitting in a blur of thought?* What has happened is that you are more settled. Turbulence was there, but it didn't catch you as strongly, nor as often. There's no special technique to putting a barrier between you and that. You just have to be with it and find your balance, and find your balance again. When you're riding a bicycle you tip to the left and then tip to the right; you avoid and you merge, and you might even find some balance. You go one way, *oh! I lost my balance*, and then the other way, *oh! I lost my balance....* Gradually you get a more subtle sense for this balance. On the television you see these cyclists doing the Tour de France, really pumping to go up a hill. The bike is going this way and that. There's a lot of movement but they don't fall over. It's like that: you allow the movement but you stay grounded. The issue you're occupied with is completely normal.

Some people are quite held back; they like it on the cool side. Some people are enthusiastic and leap into situations. Both are just patterns of energy. You can't say, 'This is bad.' It's not about the formation—it's about how you work with your own condition. How *do* you work with it? In my work as a therapist I've had several patients who as children were saved on a fundamental level by horses. These were unloved children, hurt, upset, destructive children, brought by the wind of fate into contact with horses. In one case this particular girl got a job cleaning stables, digging out the shit, and she made friends with a horse, the biggest, most dangerous horse there. The children weren't supposed to go near it, but she would go and hug the horse and the horse would snuggle into her—amazing. This angry horse that would kick and bite was, of course, hurt, and these two hurt ones came together—very beautiful. Whatever our condition may be, if we don't blame it we can find value in it. Every one of us in this room is wounded in one way or another, everybody has some difficult history. The wound, the tendency—if you don't blame or attack it, yet also don't turn it into a self-pitying condition—can be helpful.

So, you sit with your situation. You don't have any choice: this is all you have. It doesn't matter what experiences other people have. You work with your mind on your terms and then you get very close to yourself, very tenderly—not controlling, not abandoning—just being with. Gradually you can be with any situation and then you can say wonderful things. You can say, *I'm sad*. You can say, *I'm lonely*. If you walk on the streets around here and look at people's faces, you see that they look pretty sad, pretty lonely, but they're not going to tell you that. We all pretend to be better than we are, and this is very sad. We are hurt, lost, confused—*I'm confused, oh yeah, don't these things happen....* It's like that, giving a tender welcome to yourself as you are, but in our anxiety we imagine we will only be acceptable if we present ourselves as a particular kind of image; and so we develop a persona, a mask.

In terms of meditation you can do this as well. We don't know how to meditate, and that's a blessing—we're going to find out. If we knew, we wouldn't have to find out. If you're going to do prostrations someone can show you how to do them, and you'll do them on the basis of knowing how to do them. You can do the same for a mandala offering, reciting refuge and so on. But the meditation that we do is not mimetic—you can't copy it from the words of someone else. You get a general idea, but you have to be there and find yourself in that. It's really quite difficult, because then you think, *but I really don't know what I'm doing*. Now that might sound bad, but it's really only half the sentence: *I don't know what I'm doing but I'm here*. The 'being here' is much more important than knowing what you're doing because the being here is fresh. *What shall I do when this happens? Why ask me? Why would I know?* It's your mind. *Oh, I'm sure you know more about me than I do*. Never, ever say that to anyone—many people will say to that, 'Of course I do.' I had schoolteachers like that—horrible! They didn't know, they projected, and I in turn introjected, which was not good. They didn't know. Nobody knows. But we find out—fresh, naked, open. It does mean, though, that you have to learn to live without knowing.

We return to that basic existential formation, whether knowledge precedes experience or experience precedes knowledge. If knowledge comes first then experience will be shaped by the knowledge, but if experience comes first you will have to find your way in the experience, and so something new arises: you have the

revelation of not yet encountered aspects of your potential. That's a key thing, and it means trust. We were looking at the ground, which is your ground, uncompounded. It has not been made. It's not like an Ikea sofa which gets delivered in a big cardboard box along with some instruction on how to put the bits together. There you can know in advance, but we are uncompounded. We are emergent, and the emergence is emerging with conditions that cannot be known, nor can their impact on you be known. This is such an interesting area, the anxieties that we have of not knowing.

I remember being in primary school and people were just getting televisions. My dad was not at all interested in getting a television. He said, 'I pay taxes. The taxes subsidise the public library and you can get books there. Why would I pay for a television on top?' So we didn't have a television. I would go into the playground and the kids were all talking about what had been on the television programme. My ears would get very big trying to pick up what was going on, because when you don't know you feel a bit stupid, as if you're on the outside—*I should know*—and you'd get these messages in the classroom as well. If you look at your own history you can see pathways of some of the anxieties of not knowing what to do. When you see that, it's helpful to stay with it, and then you see, *this is a pattern and the pattern tells me about my past—it doesn't show me I should be now!* But if I look to the pattern as being the truth about me, rather than as how I experienced life at age ten, then anxiety arises: *I want to protect myself, I want to know what to do.*

When they were doing early research on medical practice the importance of the placebo effect was found, part of it being what was called 'the bedside manner'. It became obvious that the doctor should be calm and attentive, exuding a feeling of confidence, but shouldn't say too much. '*Hmm, signs of progress...*' but they don't say what these signs are—they might not be there at all. '*Ah, looking different today...*' That's something kind of warm and efficient-sounding. Nowadays you go to the doctor and they give you lots and lots of information because they want your informed consent. *But I'm going to you because you're the doctor—I don't know. You want me to help decide with you what I should take? How will I know?* When we talk of devotion it's pointing to the placebo effect. Tara is smiling and looking at you, she's concerned—not worried, but concerned. All the Buddhas are smiling. *Oh, really? Ah.... Mmm.... Yes....* This is good. Worry doesn't help. Turning life into a problem doesn't help. Having calm, quiet confidence helps. Things will go wrong, you will make mistakes, you'll have regrets. Never mind: these things happen and life goes on. You're still alive—amazing! It's like this: very very gentle—you're on the bicycle and Papa is saying, 'Oh, you're doing very well!' Both knees may be bleeding but you're still on the bike [laughter]. It's a bumpy ride and there's no way to take the bumps out of the road. I think that's the mood we want to have: *just keep going, don't judge, don't evaluate, don't do a performance review, just keep going, do what you can.* If you think about it you'll spoil it—just doing is better.

Okay, let's take a break now, and when we come back we'll do some practice.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON, SESSION 4

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*The hidden power of description*

We'll start with the guru yoga.

[sitting practice]

You might think this is a very simple practice. Perhaps we've encountered a lot of different kind of problems in life—how could it be enough? Essentially it's like a shoehorn, designed to ease your way into how you actually are. Or, it's as if you'd been wearing a mask for a long time and your actual face is underneath it, but you're used to the reaction you get when you wear the mask, not just from other people, but also from yourself: if you take it off who will you be? Of course, since the one you will be is your authentic self you don't need to ask who—the question, rather, is how: how did I come to mistake the mask for the face? This is the confusion of being in samsara. From the buddhist point of view everyone we meet has the same ground: the same intrinsic, open ground, and the same obscuring ground of not being aware of the open ground. Unawareness is what masks awareness, and because we are in a world of masks everyone is confirming the concept-based interpretations, plans and conclusions which we use as the formative structures of our daily life. The strange thing is that it can be quite confusing to start letting go of confusion. There's a kind of nowhere land in between. You have the familiar, which through study and practice you start to see is actually a site of delusion—illusionary forms arise and I believe them to be true, to be real. This is delusion, because in believing them to be reliable and of inherent validity I don't question them. What is operating here is something we already touched on, and that is the hidden power of description.

When you use a noun it appears as if something is there: *this is a table*. The description comes after the fact of the existence of the table. Everyone agrees on this, but when we start looking we see that the arising of the formulation *this is a table* is generative of the experience of there being a table. This table could have many purposes. If it were snowing outside you could turn it upside down and sledge down a hill: the limit of the table is the limit of your imagination. This is an interesting point because in order to maintain the table as a table you have to limit your imagination. This table is of an ideal size for a child of about three to make a little house underneath. We often see children being able to take a new vision of some familiar object because of their tendency to follow perception rather than idea. If I'm secure in my knowledge that this is a table it allows me to function, and then I'm part of the knowledge economy, the currency of social interaction—but if seeing, *oh, table is just an interpretation, one possible interpretation*, I try to open that up with people at work I will be problematising the simplicity of their existence in a complex world. In environments of stress most people are quite overwhelmed already. *Things are not what you take them to be?* We don't want to know that because it increases confusion—to recognise confusion increases confusion.

Here we get a sense of the resistance we can have in opening to dharma. A question I commonly hear is, 'Why is it when I decide I want to do practice I don't do practice?' Some sabotage comes in between me and my heartfelt intention. When you do the practice you are destabilising your ordinary ego-sense of self, the advantage being that there's more room to move in. Recognising that the tableness

of the table is an idea which you are holding and that you therefore are an imaginer of the table allows you to see the incredible potential of imagining: your imagining is right in there with the phenomenon. When it says in the text that everything is illusion it doesn't mean that if you remove the illusion there will be nothing at all. There is something there—there is light and sound. Opening that out, there are smells and tastes and so on, which are the basis of elaboration into all the other forms. They show themselves directly. We then put a conceptual wrapper around them and that's when they become illusion. We look at the mirage and say, 'Oh, there's water.' The perception was shimmering light; the false interpretation is water. Delusion would be to remain convinced that there is water.

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*Everything is belief*

In order to release ourselves from delusion we have to observe what we believe in. In the general buddhist schools we use quite a lot of analysis to help us see that many of our beliefs are quite irrational. In the meditation we're not analysing—we're experiencing belief directly as unimpeded alignment with the validity of what's occurring. It's like when you watch one of these cartoon movies like 'Ice Age'. They're skilfully made and very seductive with their colours and shapes, and we can readily believe in the character. It doesn't exist anywhere except in the movie, and yet it rings true. I can fully believe in things which I know to be an illusion. I give myself, I willingly enter delusion. I do it, it happens, it seems obvious. Allowing people to believe in things which are not really true is a multimillion business. This indicates, if we observe, that belief has nothing to do with truth. Belief is a succumbing to, or a flowing into confluence with a formation. You align with it, go into the same line of expression—it's quite comforting. Children show this in the way that they become fond of soft toys and so on. They make them come alive in their imagination. Received as a present, the stuffed bear becomes invested with the child's projections and imaginings. Then the mind of the child is found inside the bear, because the bear seems to be inhabited with parts of the child's mind. It's the same with this table: the table is an idea for us. How do we deal with that? Holding it in place seems important. A value system is manifesting as the table.

As an example, in the last European war, while training in England before going off to fight in Burma, my father, an officer, was billeted in a big old country house. It was winter. Many soldiers were billeted there and the house had many rooms, with oak panelling on their walls. My father went into a room where many soldiers were and a fireplace with a big fire burning in it—the men had ripped panelling from the walls to burn. He said, or so he told me, 'Hey, you are British soldiers and you're not allowed to do this. You must respect the property. We are fighting for an ethical world,' and the soldiers replied, 'Hey, we are going off to fight, maybe to die, and we're cold—we'd like to have the fire.' My father left the room, saying, 'I'm not coming back in here.' Gradually they burned everything in the house. In wartime the structures of standard cultural investment that hold things in place get collapsed. In your own family histories you may have stories like that. What they point to is the nature of conventional truth: under certain conditions we all agree that this is the right way to

behave, but when conditions change how do we behave then? There's no big rulebook. Things are held in place by shared beliefs.

If you examine your life in that way you can see how social agreements construct particular kinds of edifice. In Vienna you see these huge palaces, which indicate that a few people had an incredible quality of life compared to their servants. That was normal at a certain period in time—now that's not so normal. Even if you were very, very wealthy it would have been difficult to get enough workers to build you such a huge stone mansion. When you walk through Vienna you're seeing belief systems from various historical periods, periods when certain populations, now vanished, once were, and then new populations moved in. Everything is belief: belief is what joins subject and object together. *I believe this is possible, other people believe it is possible, and so it is possible.* On a Saturday afternoon hundreds of thousands of people are out in the cold watching other people kick a leather ball, and this is believed to be meaningful. There are many ways of interpreting the meaning of how the ball moves between the people. There are legitimate movements and illegitimate movements, skilful movements and clumsy movements, all of them meaningful to those who believe in passing time that way. So that's what you can see—everything is belief. When it becomes normal to believe in things that are not true, confusion arises because then you can't think straight.

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### *Who owns my self?*

One of the things that Karl Marx wrote about was the way in which there is a mystification of the market process. How does it come to be that the owner of the factory, who doesn't seem to do much work, has a big house and a big car, while the worker, who's in the factory in the noise and the dirt, doesn't have a big house and has no car? Having the ownership of the means of production they don't have to produce actively themselves, and because the whole process and all the products belong to them they take the profit. This is a mystifying experience for many people. The workers live inside a false consciousness: they feel that they are part of the organisation and form strong bonds, as, for example, in England with the coal miners. The coal miners were highly articulated work teams and had whole cultural formations, like societies and brass bands, and so on. *We are the miners and this is our mine*—but they didn't own it, and when a mine got sold they could easily lose their jobs. Then there was a lot of grief because *we belong here*. Years of sweat and effort went into making this—'*but it's not yours, you have no right, you have no entitlement.*' It's very sad to read these stories.

Now, you've been working in the mine of the self, digging yourself out every day, constructing this self and trying to keep it healthy, educated and meditated. *My self*, but you don't own it—you're going to die. You're not the owner of the self. This is a false consciousness. Where will the profit go? In Buddhism this is called 'the karma' [laughter]. So the fruit of your labour will manifest in another life, for someone else who will be, sort of, well, sort of you [laughter], but not really you. You're doing it for a future self who, if you met them, you might not even like [laughter]. Why are we doing what we do? We're producing for the future, for the 'other'. Who am I?

Nowadays, certainly in Britain, we have a big rise in artisan bakeries and in small breweries, where a few people get together and start to produce something. They know each other and they collaborate together—they're not just employees. You get a very different feel in such a workplace because each worker understands the whole process, rather than just, like in a modern factory, being delegated to only do this or only that. Then people come back to their fingers, into physically engaging with their situation. They see the arc of beginning, middle and end, the first ingredients and the final product, and this is empowering. From the meditation point of view as well we need to come close to ourselves. Joining the great international factory of buddhism is unhelpful. Why do you want to be a buddhist? Is it a good thing to be? Tibetans say, 'Chipa and nangwa'—outsiders and insiders. Hang on a minute—what about all sentient beings? *No, no: it's outsiders and insiders.* Hmm. Buddhism has plenty of problems: money scandals, sex scandals, conflicts between sects. What's the point? If you're a Tibetan you can become a lama and get food in your mouth. In the West that's an inefficient way of putting food in your mouth.

What is it we are trying to achieve? Two aspects: wisdom and compassion—which is to say, I don't want to continue deceiving myself and I want to help other people not to deceive themselves. In dzogchen we are especially not constructing anything, least of all a social identity. Tibetans have a term, *bepay naljor*, which means 'secret yogi'. Nobody needs to know that you do dharma at all. You can be completely invisible and then you have no conflict with the people around you; and if you don't have conflict then you get close to the profile of situations. You get the felt sense of situations and you can work with that. You are close: not special, not different, not superior. This is a way we can easily practise.

What are we doing? Not getting lost. How do we get lost? The more we engage in simply observing—not observing from a distance, but observing closely, in the moment of manifestation—the more we find out that what I take to be me is co-emergent with the environment. Everything around me is dynamic and interactive, everything within me is dynamic and interactive, and between these two interactive, dynamic systems there is no real barrier.

What shall I do, how will I live? Live as you like. Some people who practise dharma make a lot of money, some live in poverty. Some are quite powerful in the world, some are very humble. The key thing from the point of view of the practice is this: you don't have to be other than you are—you have to be with how you are. Every arising formation of yourself will find points of harmony with the environment and points of disharmony with the environment. I met many famous lamas and they all had enemies, even people who tried to poison them. Traditionally in Tibet they always had a special cup that would break if someone put poisoned liquid in it. Quite a few lamas were poisoned in the 1980s in northern India. Why? Because they were bad buddhists—according to people who knew that they themselves were good buddhists. It would maybe be better not to be a buddhist! Before you're entitled to become a buddhist you have to be you. You have to bring along your membership card where it says, I AM ME, and on each person's card is marked, NUMBER 1. Only you are you. But who are you? Don't tell me stories—stories, stories, stories! You are not the story—and you are the story. If you can't tell a story you're in the

wrong kind of body—you should be a cow or a goat—and if you can only tell a story your life is going to be quite small. You have to be a storyteller who doesn't believe in their own stories.

On this theme we have the wise words of C. R. Lama, who said that he was liar number one, cheater number one. He said, 'I don't believe anyone, and, number one, I don't believe myself.' That used to annoy me a great deal when I lived in his house, but he was trying to be helpful. Believing is not what it's all about. If you're doing tantric practice you have to have faith, but that's a nondual faith. In dzogchen we don't have belief. We're not relying on anything. We are the space of the emergence of the field within which we shine forth as 'this'—we don't have to 'believe' it. When you sit in the practice you find out there are a lot of things you believe; as thoughts arise you find yourself engaging with them. The contents of the mind, the contents of experience, are organised according to belief systems. Every time something is arising in your mind it's trying to hook your attention, because it's your attention that makes it real.

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### *'First things first'*

In Tibet there's the story of the man who goes trading every year in India, and his mum says, 'Oh, I'm getting old! Bring me a relic of the Buddha!' Each year he forgets, until finally she's really getting quite old, but he's forgotten again... and he gets in a rage with himself. He's on top of a hill looking down into the valley where his house is and he kicks a skull that's lying on the ground. A tooth comes loose—*oho!* He takes the tooth and wraps it in a khata, a ceremonial scarf, goes down the hill, tells the village boy looking after the goats to run to the monastery and have them blow the big rhadan horns because a relic of the Buddha is coming. He comes to the house and presents the tooth to his mother. She's most grateful and makes a shrine for it, but he feels very guilty. The time comes for his to return to India to trade, and when he's there he spends months and months looking for a genuine relic but can't find anything. As he's walking home he decides that he has to tell his mother the truth and thinks, *she's going to be so ashamed of me, she brought me up to be honest.* He's walking up the hill that leads into his valley and sees people going ahead of him. 'Where are you all going?' he asks. 'We're going to see the miracle!' Coming to the top of the hill and looking down he sees many rainbows in the sky over his mother's house. There, on the shrine, is the tooth, with rays of light coming out it. And so it is said, 'With faith even a dog's tooth can give out light.'

How does that work? Who said it was a dog's tooth? That's a conventional category: the mind of the Buddha is much bigger than that. Faith is very important, but you can believe in the wrong things. You can believe that it really is a buddha's tooth—anything gives off light if you believe in it. When you fall in love and look at me with the love-light coming out of your eyes this poor, lost soul wandering in samsara starts to shine—this is the eye of love. Two things are possible: we might say, 'Love is blind', but it could be that the eye of love allows us to see the truth that is covered by judgments. This is simply an encouragement to observe yourself. How do you make sense of the world? Is your investment of mental energy harmonious with the

potential of the situation, or is it covering over the potential? We do both, and the quicker you can identify which line you are following the better. Confusion means not necessarily that you are bewildered, but that you can't get to clarity, and the more you try to get to clarity the more you get lost.

Buddha Shakyamuni said, 'All beings everywhere want to be happy, but they find themselves behaving in ways that bring only suffering.' In dzogchen it's said, 'The most important thing is the ground. Everything arises from the ground and everything which arises vanishes.' Rang sar rang dröl means 'self-arising self-liberating'. There's nothing to hang onto, but we want to hang onto something. We hang onto ourselves as being something apart although we are the presence of the ground. If we don't awaken to being the presence of the ground we stay in our imagined identities, our mistaken identities; and no matter how we try to protect these identities we remain confused since they are always under pressure from a changing environment. We don't have the capacity to create something stable. The Chinese could go into Tibet and completely disrupt that traditional culture—we should reflect on that. Dreams of mastery lead us astray. *This lama is so powerful, he can do this and he can do that.* Mao Tse Tung said, 'Power grows out of the barrel of a gun.' You can shoot the lama and he can't stop the bullet: that's the fact.

Why then do we put out so much energy into the world, manipulating circumstances in the attempt to create patterns that make us feel momentarily happy? In restaurants the menu lists starters and soups, then main dishes. First you eat a starter and then the main dish, and, if you're still hungry, you can have a dessert. Ego-indulgence is the dessert. The ground—awareness, rigpa, your mind—that's the main dish. Twenty slices of cake is not a good diet. Feeding the ego shit will not make psychological health. With illusion, something is there but we're not seeing it clearly: the ground is always present, but we imagine real people, real entities and inherent existence. In believing our own imaginal forms we are blind to the ground, and this is our delusion. Being committed to the truth of our delusion we become confused when things don't work out well. This is always the choice that we have—what is most important, what should come first? In dzogchen texts there are many terms for 'first'—the equivalent of primordial, from the very beginning, the original, and so on. 'First things first'—not last, but first, and first is the ground. If we want to practise this should be our continuous focus of opening. Whether you're meditating or out in the world everything you see is the radiance of the ground. The guru yoga is excellent for coming deeper and deeper into this. There are many practices of trekcho and trögal for increasing our sense of the transparency of our world, but they are all dependent on opening to the ground. When you do the Three A and you open and relax, and mental experiences arise (memories and so on), this is the fundamental choice-point of freedom: we stay relaxed and open, not interfering, and gradually we see, *I'm not interfered with. If I don't interfere the thoughts don't bother me, but if I get engaged in editing, managing, correcting and so on I will never have a quiet time.* These are the main points of what we've been looking at. So, we'll do a last sitting of guru yoga together before we end.

[sitting practice]

Okay.... Our brief time together comes to an end, and now, ceaselessly moving in the unfolding clarity of the field of experience, everything which arises is neither friend nor enemy, is just this display, and the more relaxed we become the more we can enjoy the display. Everything is interesting if we don't have pre-established criteria. This is why we find terms like 'fresh' and 'naked' used a lot. Uncovered from assumptions, \*this\* is all there is. Each moment is this. The past is gone, the future hasn't come: only this. This is the whole—unbroken, unfragmented, as it is. This is our life.