
Living in non-duality:

integrating experience in our lives

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*Retreat at the Maitreya Institut, Gutenstein
12th- 14th Sept 2003*

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Session 1	2
View and Practice within non-duality	2
The focus in Dzogchen	3
Sitting practice	5
Letting energy arise and pass	5
Dependent co-origination	7
The possibilities of duality	8
The functions of ignorance	9
Session 2	10
Non-duality: not two and not one either	10
Different views in buddhist teaching	11
The view of non duality	12
Alienation from the infinity of our own being	13
The difficulties of commitment	15
Meditation on a deity	16
The emptiness and fullness of sound	17
Tantra and Dzogchen	18
The mind is pure from the beginning	19
Three modes of existence: the three kayas.	20
Session 3	20
Traditional metaphors for awareness	20
The function of meditation	22
The importance of the view	22
Experience is not identity	24
The teaching of the Heart Sutra	24
The practice of the three A's.	25
Our reliance on a sense of self	25
In samsara there is nothing stable	28
The relationship between language and ignorance.	28
The three A practice	31
The dangers of collapsing into identification	32
Three modes of the awakened state.	35

Session 4	37
Our fragile skin of continuity.....	37
One taste.....	38
The cocoon of the ego.....	40
The emergent ego.....	42
Infinite bardos.....	43
Session 5	44
Analytic meditation.....	44
The meaning of karma.....	46
One ground two paths.....	48

Session 1

View and Practice within non-duality

Over the next few days we will be looking at how to make use of our practice in order to integrate our experiences into our life. To do this we will be looking especially at the view and practice of non-duality and its philosophical background.

The first stage, of course, always is that we gain some calmness in our mental activity, otherwise it's very hard to analyse the phenomena which arise. It's not that from the point of view of dzogchen, a calm mind is a better mind than a busy mind—if you have a lot of work to do, then the capacity for your mind to be busy and to hold many things together is wonderful. It's not about placing different *kinds* of experiences in a hierarchical order but rather to see that the various aspects of how we manifest have a particular function. If our function is in harmony with the context, with the environment we are actually living in, then by being present in that way one can be more useful for oneself and for others. But through time we have built up certain habits and tendencies and we tend to identify with these habits and tendencies as if they were somehow a true definition of how we are.

Some people tend to be laid back, lazy even, and don't get their lives together. They are calm when they should be busy. Other people tend to be busy all the time; they like things to be happening, they get bored easily and they structure their lives around crisis, always some trouble seems to be happening for them. They are busy when they should be calm. With both energetic formations there are situations that it is difficult to work with.

Dzogchen, in common with all schools of buddhism or buddhist approaches attachment and identification to fixed positions as the basic cause of suffering and the purpose of the meditation practice and of understanding the view clearly is to be able to recognise when we get tied in knots, when we solidify our situation, when we become conditioned by past experience and then not working to untie the knots, not working to *change* our situation, but by opening the space of clarity and relaxation to be able to

experience the limiting phenomena in a way that causes them not to be limiting. Because the problem doesn't really lie with the object, the problem lies in the relation between the subject and the object.

America and Britain are caught up in an obsession with destroying terrorism, as if there were some fixed entities out there in the world called terrorists and if only you can remove these people then the world will be peaceful. Clearly this is not what is happening because the view that America has is not shared by many other people in the world. What they see as good behaviour, as helpful behaviour, as gestures towards world peace are experienced by other people as murderous attacks on their religion, their autonomy, their culture and so on. What is experienced from one side as a gesture of peace is experienced from the other side as a provocation. Part of the problem is when we can't accept that this world is composed of very different views, very different interpretations, and see that these are energetic formations each with a function but not true or perfect in themselves. Then there is this solidification and the desire to give other people the truth that you believe in. That is, to change the objects around you so that people who frighten you become people who don't frighten you.

But people are not like tables. A table has a fixed shape. Of course it arises due to causes and conditions, it carries its history with it, the trees it grew from, the climate at the time when these trees were growing and so on, but it's a relatively stable phenomena whereas human beings, particularly in their cultural values and their political thinking, are very *unstable*. If we try to change other people and get them to be the way we want them to be we usually end up creating more turbulence. It's the same with our own minds. If you try to catch your mind, if you try to hold your mind in a fixed shape it will produce a reaction because the mind is dynamic and it has many styles of movement. These are described in buddhism in many categories and we'll look at some of these and they are also discussed in western psychology and in psychoanalysis. Both buddhism and psychoanalysis would agree that the mind is in movement, it is psychodynamic, and that if you try to be a good person that can often provoke a negative reaction. The Catholic Church is struggling with the fact of paedophilia practised by so many priests. *The brighter the light the darker the shadow* and so, when we approach our mind and we try to have clarity it has to be a subtle and a sophisticated clarity, it can't be just taking a pair of scissors and trying to cut a line between the good bits and the bad bits.

[The focus in Dzogchen](#)

The focus in dzogchen is not on changing the content of the mind, of trying to increase good thoughts and bring an end to bad thoughts, but rather to find a relaxed, open position in which the entire content of our experience can arise, but arise free of identification and attachment, and then we can start to see that it is our own impulse of

identification with arisings and our attachment to them, our investment in them, which gives rise to the energy of the arising. That is to say, a bad thought, say a murderous intention towards someone, a thought of hatred about someone, the energy of that comes because of the construction: *I hate this person*. There is another person who is strongly real and there is a subject, I myself, and I am strongly real, I'm taking myself seriously, and there are strongly negative feelings connecting the subject with the object. This provides a kind of triangle, an energetic matrix, in which the thought *I don't like this person* becomes invested with a huge amount of energy or libido, but when we relax the identification with I, me, myself and go from the felt sense of being an individual subject, separated from the world, away from that into the experience of our being in the world as a presencing which cannot be captured or defined or turned into an entity, we can still have the discrimination that how some people are is more pleasing to us than how *other* people are. You can still prefer tea to coffee or coffee to tea, it's not about some kind of bland homogenisation of all experience but that the arising of experience is experienced just as that, as waves coming into existence and going out of existence, there when they are there and not there when they are gone. That is say, we start to experience our mind, our thoughts, our feelings and emotions and our sensations and our experience of colours and shapes in the world as energetic movement. With that, the mind itself as an awareness, as a presence, can be still, undisturbed by the flow of arising, not needing to interfere with the flow of arising, and the flow of arisings of itself refines itself, because moment by moment, instead of being built up, layer upon layer leading to a kind of compression, in which you develop a composite image of say, for example an enemy, in which that enemy seems to be a continuing fixed object who is separate from me and other than me, we experience a more sensuous relational movement in which subject and object arise together and in that there is then more movement to move. Once you decide "I am like this" and you decide that "You are like that" then the number of moves we can have between each other is very small and we take our conclusion into the next moment and into the next moment so that the freshness of possibilities of the open dimension of being is covered over.

In dzogchen one is all the time trying to collapse and open up and deconstruct the creation of composite entities, of what seem to be fixed, static compounds and develop our experience of our existence in and of the world as a dynamic, ongoing field of interconnectedness in which what happens moment by moment is important but not serious. It's important, therefore we should give it our awareness, be present in the moment. Our life can only reveal itself to us if we are present in our life; if we are not here then we don't have much of a life! And through that commitment to being present the world becomes of value but in a light way, not in a heavy way. But at first it's important always to just create a bit of inner space for ourselves, to be able to start to

separate our attention from its usual absorption *in* whatever is arising. To be able to see how easily distraction is taken as our normal way of being.

Sitting practice

We start by doing some simple sitting focusing either on the breath as it's passing over the upper lip or you can focus on an external object, perhaps a mark on the floor or the carpet in front of you. You want to sit in a comfortable manner with the skeleton supporting the weight of your body, your belly free so that you can breathe with your diaphragm, deep, open breathing and generally with this kind of practice, the chin is tilted slightly down, the tongue is turned slightly up so that the tip of the tongue is resting on the hard palate behind the upper teeth, the eyes are slightly closed so that one's not looking widely but focussing the attention, usually running down the line of the nose, and usually with this kind of practice, one sits with the hands in front of one, with the tips of the thumbs just touching.

Then you decide on your focus of attention, whether it's the breath or an external object, and then just let your attention rest very gently on that, don't stare at it, don't examine it but just as if you were tired from walking, you would sit down and you would relax and rest *into* a seat, so that the seat was holding you. Your poor mind has been busy running around looking at this and that, caught up with many things so now you just let it sit down on this simple object and rest there. If your mind gets up and gets very twitchy and runs off to do something else don't worry about that, don't get angry about it, you just say to your mind, "Sweetie, you're tired, relax, you've had a long day. Sit down and settle back onto the object of attention."

So we do this for about half an hour.

Letting energy arise and pass

This world we live in is full of energy, you could say it's nothing but energy. The wind is always blowing around, the water's tumbling or rolling in the ocean, or lightening flashes across the sky. Human beings become very interested in trying to harness that energy, in controlling it and turning it for our purposes, so we use wind-generated electricity and hydro-electric power systems with rivers and high mountain lakes and wave energy from the sea because we like to get a profit from things. We don't like anything to escape us. And these things which happen externally happen in our minds a great deal. When we meditate we can see that our minds are full of nonsense, strange thoughts, weird patterns of associations, memories, hopes, fears and, if we relax a bit, we can see this is just like the wind blowing in the sky, we can just let it blow about here, there, everywhere but the ego sticks up its little windmill and all these crazy thoughts turn it round and round and that generates the energy of our sense of "Oh my God, I've got to sort my mind out, I've got so many things to do, I must remember to do

this and that.” It’s nice to just sit by the sea and watch the waves moving. Other people we might see are rowing in boats or windsurfing but we can just sit there and watch the waves, because it’s not necessary to generate activity, intention, construction, planning, getting benefit out of everything, because when we become busy we develop a practical, a utilitarian approach to the thing we are engaged with, we are caught up in our role in what’s going on. If we go windsurfing we are concerned about our balance and whether we’re doing it any better than we did it before and we can get a sense of achievement: “Now I can really windsurf”. But why bother? We can sit on the beach and watch the waves.

Human beings are destroying this planet because they’re so dammed busy. We can’t leave things alone. The Chinese are just completing a railway line into Tibet because they see in Tibet still many forests, they see that there are many minerals in the ground and they want to get them and they devour the landscape and transform it, destroy the existing culture, destroy the balance with nature and so on. But this is simply an external form of what we are doing with our minds the whole time. We find it very difficult to allow thoughts, feelings and sensations just to arise and pass. We want to do something with them, we see the potential in them, but once we take our thoughts seriously and feel that they are telling us something and we want to do something with them then you have to do something with it.

When I was a child, at about ten, my father bought a car for the first time and so, on Sunday afternoon, we would have to go for a run in the car. My mother would be tired and she would rather have a sleep; I had a bicycle, I would prefer to be out cycling with my friends, but now we had a car, we all had to sit in the car and drive out into the country. You can see that with people who have cars, they become very obsessed with them, because it’s there you have to use it for everything, you drive one kilometre to the shops.

We can see that technology very quickly takes us over. This year television has finally arrived in Bhutan and they found that after just a three-month period the rate of violent crime on the streets of Thimphu, the capital, had doubled. Because television is very powerful. You press a button and immediately you are in another world, you are right *in* that world, that world is right in you, it’s a very intimate relationship. The characters in the film or the television drama who maybe have very different values from yours come very close to you, so that their values are now moving inside you. When you watch the movie, find yourself gradually succumbing to it and you become less critical of what’s going on. You find yourself watching somebody being killed or tortured and you think, “Oh, that’s terrible!” but you keep watching it. And it’s foolish to imagine that we *won’t* be affected by these things.

Dependent co-origination

Of course, there's been huge research done particularly in America about the impact of violence in TV on children and it's difficult to come up with any definite statistical proof that it's a corrupting influence, but from a buddhist point of view, with the idea of dependent co-origination, we have the sense that the terrain, the topology of our being, the sort of inner landscape out of which we move towards the world, is itself moulded by the kind of world we are moving towards. That is to say, if somebody is telling you, giving you an account of something horrible that has happened to them, we are touched by their suffering and pain and we move towards them in a way that is softened and opened by the impact of their suffering on us. When we are touched we are changed inside, we are moved. In that way, the world that we encounter around us is the co-creator of our own ongoing process of identity. It's not that the world is sending us a letter that comes through the letter-box and we can walk up to the letter and then decide whether to open it or not, we don't have much choice because if we see something terrible the impact is immediate and we may struggle to have a balanced response to it but that struggle is intensified by the impact that has already come to us. This is why revenge is such a powerful force in the world. This is why this trouble between the Israelis and the Palestinians is so complex because each side feels so hurt and bruised that they move into immediate revengeful retaliation. Because we are not separate from the world, because we are part of the world, it is actually impossible to control the impact of the world on us. Therefore, as I was suggesting earlier, to focus all our attention on the field of the object and to try to control the object outside in order to maintain some stability inside ourselves is, usually, not very helpful.

Sometimes people become agoraphobic, they fear going out into the world because there is too much disturbance there and they want to stay at home, they feel safe inside their own little flat. But it's a very fragile kind of safety because it depends on the participation of other people to maintain it. I was talking to a patient recently and this is a young woman who is very, very self-critical. The particular object of her self-hatred is her body but generally, her behaviour, whatever she does, if she makes a small mistake, she is merciless in her internal persecution of herself. But she is also quite successful in her life and she gets positive feedback from many people about her work and she is actually quite attractive, so she gets quite a lot of sexual interest from men. But she was saying that for her, if somebody gives her a compliment, she has enough social skill to thank the person for the compliment but it doesn't touch her in any way at all and if any man shows an interest in her, that's the sign that the man is an idiot. She says very clearly, "I can define who I am by resisting any message, any communication from anyone else." This is a very strong position for her. It makes me completely useless as a therapist and I say to her, you know, "My words, just, it's like I'm blowing little

bubbles like a child, you pop my words, they don't go anywhere!" She knows she is in pain but for her there is a real terror in knowing that to exist as a human being is to be co-created with and by others.

That is really something quite terrifying, because I am 'me' and I think I am 'me' and I seem to be the same 'me' day to day to day and I can have self-referencing thoughts that remind me of the continuity of my identity of being me, myself and yet if somebody tells me a joke, I laugh, if they tell me a sad story I get upset and maybe I cry. They don't tell me a joke and then I decide whether I will laugh or not. If it's a good joke I don't have any choice, I just laugh. My laughing is done by them, my mood arises through the other, so how can I be me if I am them? This is a very important area to explore in buddhism because buddhism says that suffering starts from ignorance and attachment. Ignorance of the real nature, in particular the nature of our own existence and attachment to a separate sense of self, to the separation of subject and object, self and other and from that basic attachment of self and other, the separation of these two, all the other possibilities of duality arise.

The possibilities of duality

So much of our understanding of the world is generated out of binary opposition, that is to say, a thing is one thing because it's not another, something is good because it's not bad, it's green because it's not blue and we know there's a lot of difficulty in working out exactly what is green and what is blue and different people will do it in different ways, different cultures, at different times will identify something as green or something as blue, but the concept of green, the concept of blue creates a kind of entity, a sort of pseudo-entity, which then appears to have a kind of sharp boundary to it; like a square it has sharp edges and corners and you know where you're on: this is green, this is blue. When you have a concept it seems to give rise to the notion that there is some entity there which can be defined as if it had sharp clear edges and corners and we often do that in terms of good people and bad people. Who is the persecutor, who is the victim? If you are an Israeli you know very clearly who the persecutors are, these are the Palestinians. If you are a Palestinian, you know very clearly who the persecutors are, these are the Israelis. So how can someone be a persecutor and a victim at the same time? Very easily, most of the time. Life is complicated, it's not simple. We are good and bad, victim/persecutor, kind/selfish, but that multi-faceted, pluralistic concept of self is difficult to maintain under the pressure of feeling the need to be decisive, to make decisions, to know what's what. We tend to go for very partial identifications of any situation, we become partisan, we take sides. Taking sides is almost inevitable once we regard the objects of this world, the experiences of this world, as inherently real and as having a direction or an intention towards us. This is one of the reasons why, in all the schools of buddhism, the notion of equanimity is very important: that we should try to

see friends and enemies in the same way. When we do tantric visualisation and you're imagining a deity in front of you and rays of light and blessing are flowing from the deity towards you, it's usual to imagine that your enemies are in front of you and your friends are behind you so that your enemies get the blessing first and your friends get it last. We have to struggle to reverse our tendency to want to privilege those people who we like or who are close to us, who are our family, and take things away or give a harder time to the people we don't like or we don't feel so connected with.

The functions of ignorance

One of the consequences of ignorance is the disarticulation of ourself from the world so that the spontaneous, integrated movement of co-emergence is forgotten. [This is] because we have disarticulated from the felt sense of being part of the world, which is a consequence of ignorance. This separation *out* from the world means that we are faced with many choices. The more complex the world of objects, the greater number of choices you have. When I lived in a small village in India, food was rice and vegetables, there wasn't any choice: it was always the same. Nowadays, [when] I go to the supermarket, there are ten thousand things, there are all kind of vegetables from all over the place, so there are so many choices to make. Most of the time, we just put on the blinkers of our habit and we just buy the usual things that we buy. If you have an aubergine and a courgette (zucchini) which you buy, especially in January—the sun is not shining, these are summer kind of vegetables, they need sunshine—instead of having potatoes and turnips, some winter cold vegetable, you have these summer vegetables. This is happening all the time. It's what happens in fashion: people are faced with choice after choice after choice after choice. Creating a false sense of agency: *I am a subject in my world and make it the way I want it to be*. But of course, my choices are determined by the buyers in the department store, by the writers in the fashion magazine, by the owner of the supermarket who wants to bring in extra goods, like they have these special architects who planned the lay-out of the supermarket and advise how to change what they put on the shelves every six months. You think you know where the fish is, you go to where the fish is and it's not fish any more it's something almond, "What is that?!" So today you decide to get something different. You didn't decide at all! Like a bull, you have a big ring through your nose, and they just tie the rope on it and pull you. This the false inflation of the limited ego-consciousness to imagine that it has mastery over the world. You have the same function in democracy: once every five years you get to put cross on a piece of paper, elect a government, and when the government knows that nobody in the country wants to go to war, the government goes to war. Democracy creates the illusion that somehow that people are in power but the big decisions are not made by ordinary people at all.

These are functions of ignorance because when we don't recognise the natural openness of our being and the unlimited expanse of luminosity which we are part of, then we find ourselves trapped in this little skin-bag, full of hopes and fears, full of lies, deceits and pretension, always having to pretend that we are more important than we actually are. The function of meditation is to help us to not waste our energy in the illusion of false choice-making and be returned to the natural responsiveness which comes about from articulated being in the world. All the various buddhist practices move in this direction. Probably the most central and basic of all buddhist understandings is that of impermanence, because impermanence, when we look at external phenomena and our own mind and our feelings, sensations and so on, we see that there are no self-existing entities that we could rely on but rather what we encounter is a dynamic, moving flux of experience which we can either be integrated into a present-with, which is called nirvana, or separated from and trying to control it or feeling controlled by it, which is called samsara.

If we observe impermanence we can see how the swirling of energy creates the illusion or the epiphenomena of concrete entities. Just as, in the traditional buddhist example, if you have a stick and it's glowing at one end, on a dark night if you whirl it round your head, it will look, to someone observing you, as if there is a circle of light around you. The moment-by-moment movement, the dynamic nature of the stick, is lost when the mind grasps the image, the gestalt of a circle of light. In the same way, our mental business and the complexity of the world, if we don't adjust our awareness at the correct aperture or the correct speed, we see concrete entities rather than this luminous flow of experience. So the practice we will do in the next couple of days is designed to bring about reintegration into the non-dual experience, the experience in which subject and object are not separated.

We'll come to an end here for this evening. I would suggest to you that you just try to hold in awareness how you experience your separation from the world when you find yourself stepping back or stepping forward with desire or aversion. The greatest guru is our own mind, is our own capacity to observe ourselves in the process of becoming.

Now we will just sit quietly for a moment and if we feel there is any benefit or any merit from this practice together, we imagine it spreading out to all beings, imagining some rays of light coming from your heart, going out to all beings and feeling the connection with all living phenomena.

Session 2

Non-duality: not two and not one either

We start to focus on the nature of our own experience through the view of non-duality. Non-duality is central to the teachings of the Buddha because non-duality is the middle way—it means not two and not one. In some schools they say “all is one”, they can say “everything is emptiness”. Everything is emptiness, but emptiness is also everything and it is that double move, which you find from the prajnaparamita literature on through all the developments of tantra, mahamudra and dzogchen, which is absolutely central, that simplicity and complexity are inseparable.

Sometimes we can feel that our world is just very complex, very overwhelming, too much going on and we long then for a kind of simplicity and order and structure where life would be easy. We long for nirvana, nirvana meaning beyond disturbance, means beyond upset, beyond pain but also beyond turbulence but it's very difficult to do that because wherever you go there is turbulence. For example, refugees leave their country where there is war and persecution and they come to London and they encounter racism, alienation, sadness, loss of family and friends and so on, so leaving one set of problems with the hope of relief they enter into another set of problems because wherever we go, something is going on and we have to work with what is going on.

[Different views in buddhist teaching](#)

Now in what the Tibetans call the hinayana level of teachings of the Buddha there is the idea that there is a nirvana which is somewhere else, that stopping all mental activity and reactivity one can simplify one's situation so that there are no hooks from the world to pull one into complex reactivity. The problem with that is that in letting go of all these hooks one becomes very, very smooth, you become so smooth you are just like an egg and then you spend infinite time as an egg. This is a peculiar kind of enlightenment and we pray, “*May I realise the state of the Great Egg*”, but we are not eggs, we are connected into the world and with other beings.

From the mahayana point of view, from the point of view linked with the notion of the bodhisattva, the idea of a universal liberation, a freedom and awakening for all beings, we have to be connected with others, not because it's a choice but because it's given. Even for a little chicken, when it's inside its egg it's just inside, we can imagine it's not so exciting as a little chick waiting inside this egg and then a little beak comes, and you can tap, tap, tap, tap, and your little egg opens and there's lots of other little chicks, and then you have immediately fighting to get food, pushing other little chickens out of the way and entering into the social world of the chicken. This is the same as a meditation: when you meditate you go into your little egg—very peaceful—then after the meditation you come out and fight with the other chickens.

Being with others is always turbulent. If you stay in the egg you can get lonely but also you are not much use. As soon as you go out to other people and become involved with them you have to face the fact of your own confusion. This is why in mahayana buddhism they are always stressing the integration of wisdom and compassion because without wisdom, when we get involved with others, we will become lost in reactivity. And if we don't develop compassion we attempt to maintain our life on our own terms which involves on an outer level controlling others, controlling the environment, and on an inner level trying to control the content of our mind, developing the kind of thoughts we like, and blocking the kind of thoughts we don't like. This kind of activity becomes very self-referential: the more we focus on maintaining a state of calm the more other people and the world seem unpleasant, they seem to destroy our peace and calm. In that way, the practice of meditation can *increase* the dualistic perception of the importance of separating subject and object.

[The view of non duality](#)

In Tibetan buddhism, the view of non-duality says subject and object are not two things; subject and object arise together and what we experience as ourselves as the subject, when it is encapsulated inside our sense of self, is not the fullness or the expanse of our real nature, it is the aspect of our being which we are consciously aware of and because it arises from ignorance, from a forgetfulness of the fullness of being, it carries with it a sense of emptiness and lack of fulfilment. That is to say, we have a kind of existential emptiness.

This is not the same as buddhist emptiness, as *sunyata*, but it's the feeling that I am incomplete, I am not fully myself. That is true. In our ordinary selves, we are not complete or full but we have forgotten our own ground nature, the openness of being. Instead, because we experience ourselves as something finite, we look out into the world for other finite things to complete us. This is why subject is always interested in object. The world is full of wonderful things, especially if you come to a place like this, [which] has so many books and paintings and nice things to look at, but these objects, absolutely and for sure, lack the power to complete us as human beings. The Buddha says attachment is the cause of suffering because when the subject feels empty like a bowl and it sees some nice, bright, shiny object and then tries to get that object and fill itself up with it so that it doesn't feel empty, the subject and the object are held together by causes and conditions. As long as nothing changes, the subject can feel, "Oh, I have this wonderful, bright, shiny object". But life is not flat and easy, life has many waves and disturbances, and then the shiny thing falls out. Friends become enemies, enemies become friends, objects which we thought were part of our life become separated from us and no longer there as a basis for filling us up or on which we can rest.

This is the essence of impermanence, that the relation between subject and object is unstable. America and Britain became big, big friends over this war in Iraq; George Bush and Tony Blair smiling, smiling. Stupid Tony Blair says, “We will give you all our troops, we will give you our money,” then, after the way, they had the time for the contracts for rebuilding Iraq—all the contracts go to American companies. The American companies then need subcontractors. Now, because of America’s long-term strategy, it is upset at the fact that, particularly France and Germany, *didn’t* support the war so they want to make friends with France and Germany, so they give special encouragement to French and German subcontractors. No work for the poor British! This is samsara.

People really forget this. Friends become enemies. The world is not stable. Who is our enemy today can be an ally tomorrow. Pakistan is a country where there is still slavery, the big landowners in Baluchistan have absolute power of life and death over the poor people but is standing shoulder to shoulder with America in the fight for freedom! Like this. This world that we live in is so full of shit that it’s very difficult for our subject consciousness to make any sense of what goes on.

[Alienation from the infinity of our own being](#)

Fortunately the Buddha’s teaching is there to help us see that this anxious subject, which we are, does not have only one direction to travel in. Our happiness is not based entirely on external objects. According to the teachings of dzogchen, the most important refuge is your own mind. If you look out into the world you will not find your mind. As the texts say, you don’t have to buy your mind, you don’t have to create your mind, you don’t have to purify your mind, you simply have to be with your own existence which means that we have to examine the processes by which we maintain the alienation from the infinity of our own being.

Primarily that distraction, or delusion, is based on fantasy of object fulfilment. Romantic, erotic projection is very powerful but these feelings don’t last very long. There is no other person in the world who can return you to the completion of yourself. In Tibetan buddhism there is a lot about the teacher and the idealisation of the teacher but the entire function of the teacher is to help people realise their own nature. That is to say, the teacher is there as a mirror to try to direct the light which is projected on it, back into the student so that they understand themselves. Sometimes, in the summertime, you can see that the rays of light from the sun will hit a mirror or hit the window of a house and it will just be shining and glorious. All that does is hurt your eyes, and the cult of the teacher as something shiny is not much use. It’s a diversionary tactic to avoid looking at yourself and it maintains patriarchy and hierarchy and is not very different from the campaign to elect Arnold Schwarzenegger in California.

This is very, very important to understand from dzogchen because one of the problems of our separated ego identity is narcissism. Narcissism has a double edge; it means we feel we are useless and stupid and the other side, the defensive side, is that we feel we are special. When we feel inadequate, not good enough, and we look to something shiny outside ourselves to give us what we need, we stop looking at ourselves. Of course, it is very hard to observe your own mind, it's much easier to look at someone else. Our eyes point out, other people are there, we see them, and then we can say, "Oh, Rinpoche!" I know where Rinpoche is, this is Rinpoche. Even a three-year old child can do that. But to look inside and see your own nature, this is much more difficult.

For that reason, a lot of the practices of Buddhism are avoidance of the main task. The Buddha's last words were, "I have shown you the way. Be a lamp unto yourself." Being a lamp unto yourself means find a way to turn the light in on yourself and see what is there, examine the nature of your own existence, because he's saying *be* a light unto yourself, not *find* a light for yourself. Of course, when we feel sad and lonely, saying *Kamarpa, kyen no* is very nice, people can also say *Jesus, think of me* and it's very wonderful that there are organisations like Amnesty International through which you can write letters to people who are locked up in prison because when you are alone and sad, the thought that someone is there thinking of you is very wonderful and helps the heart to stay strong, but the fact that someone writes to you when you are in prison or writes a letter to the president of your country saying we have not forgotten you have this prisoner, it doesn't necessarily open the prison door. It makes the world a bit safer. In the same way, if you think *Kamarpa, think of me* or *Padmasambhava, think of me* that can make you feel a bit safer in your life, you don't feel so alone, but the heart of the practice is to realise that there is no difference between Padmasambhava and yourself. The purpose of recognising that is that what we take to be the object out there reveals itself as not different from the subject inside. Only by using object to turn our obsession *away* from object can the non-duality of subject and object be revealed.

This is the view of tantra in terms of non-duality. The reason for entering the mandala of a deity, of visualising a meditation god, is in order to focus full attention on that object and take all the yearning, all the hunger for fulfilment through the object and putting it onto the deity, so that by not being distracted towards any other objects, by believing that this object is the most important in the world, that you would rather be with Tara or with Chenrezig or Padmasambhava than with anyone else. "I would give up the whole world for you". Sitting, going *Om Ah Hung* or *Om Mani Padme Hung*, this is better than going to the movies, this is better than going to a wonderful restaurant, starting with some champagne perhaps and then some foie gras, properly prepared and then a little light fish, and then of course, some good steak, then cheeses of many

different kinds. Compared to all of that, we prefer Tara [laughter]. Holidays? Who needs them when we have Tara!

This is the view of the meditation practitioner. If you don't have that view there is no point to live in a cave or do a three-year retreat. The first stage is to feel revulsion for samsara, so you see that the things of this world are really foul and corrupt and then you turn your back away from it, no matter how superficially attractive things appear. This is why in the introductory practices we always think about the fact that death will come, that life is short, the opportunity to practice meditation—buddhist practice—is very rare, the chance to get clear instruction on meditation is very, very rare and the power of our karma to distract us and take us into places where meditation will be impossible is very, very strong.

The difficulties of commitment

These views are tools for shifting our attention away from the attraction to the many different objects in the world, in Tibetan they are called *lo-dok*, means how to turn your attitude or your orientation around, and if you do that then you can come to the practice more clear: “*This* is really what I want to do”, and then you use—and we are talking here about tantra rather than dzogchen—you use exactly the methods which ordinary people use to bind themselves into samsara, in order to free yourself. So we use attachment. Particularly in tantra people take vows or samaya and they say, “I will do this practice till I die, I will do so much of this practice every day, I will never forget this practice,” and in tantra it is believed to be very bad to break the samaya, because samaya represents our capacity to commit ourselves to a path. That is to say, it is an antidote to distraction but if we make a commitment to do a practice and then we decide later, “I don't like this practice, I don't want to do it, it doesn't make any sense to me, something *else* is more interesting for me to do,” then functionally, what we are deciding is that distraction is better than committed focused attention. That's very, very important in terms of meditation because if you introduce choices into an area you've said there won't be choices in, you introduce turbulence.

Any kind of committed attention will bring with it boredom, and the capacity to tolerate and to manage boredom is very important. Even if you really enjoy your work there'll be some days when it feels just tedious, a burden. If you are in a relationship, some days also you will be just kind of bored with your partner. If you have children, sometimes the way they talk and talk and talk is incredibly boring. What is important is that one manages this experience and doesn't make boredom the limit of the relationship, of the commitment to stay in contact in this particular frame.

Certainly in Britain, we can see every year the divorce rate rises, children spend more and more time watching television or playing computer games and less time

talking with their parents, eating round the table together and do on, so there is a pulling back from the capacity to stay with a process of interaction which is not always fulfilling for the ego. And you have exactly the same issue with the practice of tantra, because tantra means to develop a relationship with a meditation deity and through that relationship to work on a daily basis with the process of attention to an object which is also a subject, that is to say, the deity will send rays of light to you, will be active—and this object which is also a subject responds to us who are also an object for the deity but experience ourselves as a subject. One side of duality is our own split between being an object and a subject. Some people try to solve that problem by becoming mainly an object, by being mainly passive and compliant and adapting to the will of others. They become something which is acted on, which is reactive to. Other people avoid the tension of subject-object duality in themselves by focusing on being mainly a subject, they focus on control, they prefer to engage in a monologue than a dialogue, so they find conversation difficult and want to inform other people and tell them stories.

Meditation on a deity

When we meditate on a deity at first the deity is the object of our attention. But then we imagine light streaming from the deity, the subject, and being absorbed into us; now we are the object. In this way we come to see that the positions of subject and object are present in both the deity and ourselves. Then, when the deity comes and dissolves into ourselves and we dissolve into the light of the deity as it dissolves into us. Now you have this complex collapsing of subject-object and subject-object occurring inside the space of awareness and, by allowing the manifestation of self and other to dissolve, we experience their infinite absence and yet, in some way, we are still there, we haven't gone unconscious, there is still the presence of an awareness. This awareness, when we examine it, has no shape, no colour, it doesn't rest on anything, it doesn't need to do anything, it is naked, alone, unconditioned and present just by itself. In Tibetan this is called *rigpa*.

Then into this awareness arises, once again, the process of subject and object. This is the radiance of the mind. The energy of the mind reveals itself in the play of subject and object. That is to say, it *feels* like subject and object but because we experience that the ground of it is open and empty, we see that the subject and object, although manifesting, are empty of inherent self-nature.

Taking the mood of the meditation into the world, we believe now everything we see is the body of the deity, all sound we hear is mantra and all the thoughts and feelings in our mind, this is the mental experience of the deity. In that state we find ourselves talking to other people but that talking is the flow of energy, just as mantra is the flow of sound and so we integrate the semantic content of linguistic expression. What the words

mean, what conceptual elaborations rise from their use, with the felt experience of just babbling like a little river flowing down a mountain, it's just energy. This is the non-separation of sound and emptiness. The sound is empty in that it doesn't really mean anything, there is no inherent meaning in the sound.

The emptiness and fullness of sound

For example, I have been coming to Germany and Austria for many years now and I have succeeded very successfully in not learning German. It's a great effort to achieve this! It means for me, when I hear German people talking, it's just nothing at all. It's just sound. Clearly, for the people who understand German, it's *not* just sound, so it's a very interesting experience which we can have when we go to foreign countries. Observing how people get hooked into something, and you don't—you don't have the corresponding hook. We tend to think, when we speak a language that the meaning is just there in the words and we look up a dictionary to find out the meaning if we are not sure, but of course, the meaning of the word is in the dependent co-origination, it's in the whole set of cultural associations with the use of that language, particularly with the use of the language in a way that makes it feel a hundred per cent natural. So if you are learning a language there is a certain point where you become fluent and in English, 'fluent' has this idea of flowing, again it's like the water element, one's just flowing in this, one's now part and parcel of the linguistic interchange and there is a sort of joy and ease when you recognise that you can speak that language. In fact, of course, this is a point of great stupidity because this is a point when you fall asleep in that language. Before, when you were struggling to learn it, you were quite awake, you were having to think: "But how do they say that in French? What is this? Oh, God, I've got it wrong!" So the light is on a little bit. Once you are fluent, the light is off and your habits and your karma is now just found a new linguistic pathway to sweep itself into more samsara.

Of course, our lives would become paralysed if we were to try to just be beginners all the time and put a kind of hesitancy into ourselves like somebody who's learning to drive a car, and the car is juddering along, because now I want to maybe tell you about buddhism but I'm actually not sure, so while I make sure that I don't, er... [laughter] So that's not possible, and the purpose of tantra is to use a much more sophisticated way of this, that by spending time reciting mantras and holding the wider, aesthetic appreciation of the situation: the visualisation of the deity, the symbols of which each represent all the major concepts of buddhism so you have a condensation of the cognitive into the semantic, through that into the symbolic, and so inside a field of great meaning, the recitation of the mantra allows meaning to be held in a feeling-tone rather than a cognitive appropriation, so that when we say all the sound that we hear is sound and emptiness, the nature of the mantra, we mean that it's possible to be present

with the emptiness of the sound at the same time as allowing the semantic content of the words to move us and adjust us in relation to the other who is speaking.

You can see the same thing, for example, if you are watching television and there's a film that's not very good but some bits of it are quite good. When you come to a bit that's good you get pulled into it, you're sort of caught up in it, you can believe in it, you don't experience a separation between yourself and the movie, it's just... and then maybe there's a scene where the acting is not very good or the script is not very convincing and your attention isn't so held. At that time you can have more thoughts *about* what is going on. In the same way you can have a pulsation between being caught up in something and being able to reflect about it. Just as people, when they're learning in therapy to be therapists, they tend to get very caught up in the patient's story and only afterwards are they able to reflect on what is going on. Then gradually they start to have a pulsation, they hear the story, in it quite a bit, and then they come out, they have some thoughts and then they go back in and come out. And then after some time they can hear all the story and be very close, empathically attuned to the patient, and at the same time be running their various models and readings through it, so that you have complex vectors moving together. At that level the therapist is not located in a kind of anxious, consciousness, "Oh, God, I hope I can make sense of this," or "How will I ever remember what they are saying?" They have developed a confidence that they will be able to remember and so they can relax, and in that relaxation they have a shift away from consciousness which is focused on control into an awareness which is more appreciative and which therefore allows more complex interactions.

This is very similar to the process of meditation, that at first, particularly since we are talking of tantra just now, there are many, many things to remember. Some of you may have been to the Dalai Lama's Kalachakra initiation in Graz, and that's an initiation into hyper-complexity and it takes people a long, long time to be able to build up the sense of all the details in all their minutiae, and the mudras and the chanting rhythm, and moving things on the altar for the offerings, and to be able to hold that—again, not with an anxious consciousness but with a relaxed awareness in which the different aspects of one's being, breathing, making sound, moving the body, stilling the mind, creative visualisation, all are moving together but as if by themselves. Through that one has more of an experience of trusting the spontaneity of the movement of the mind in relation to the relaxed openness of awareness.

Tantra and Dzogchen

Now, dzogchen is different from this because this practice of tantra, as in the training of a therapist, is something artificial, that is to say it is about artifice, about art, which is an intentional construction. The practice of dzogchen is to try to go very quickly

into this ground state and thereby recognise that however the mind is arising it is the natural purity of the mind. So if you like, in tantra we have a two-stage process where we transform the impure into the pure and use the sense of the pure to integrate manifestation with emptiness. In dzogchen we use the power of awareness itself to integrate the raw forms of experience as they come. This is more simple but also more difficult because it presents us always with the problem of our own judgement. It's like if you have a party and you decide to hold the party in a club and you are very, very wealthy and you are very, very free and you think, "My party is for everyone," but the club on the door has a bouncer and so when the people come to the party the man on the door says, "You have no ticket, you have no pass," and from inside you are shouting, "Let them in! Let them in!" but this big guy, he thinks, "Hell, no! It's my job to keep people out—and it's not just my job, it's my pleasure, it's my life! You think I can't tell shit from chocolate?" And you say, "It's all chocolate, it's all Kuntu Zangpo!"

This is very difficult because the ego is always there as the bouncer, the ego's life is to make discriminations: I like this, I don't like that, you can come in, you go out, you're my friend, you're my enemy, and so on. The state of awareness has to be able to integrate the energy of the ego as it performs its reactivity and it has to do this without collapsing into being the ego and also without collapsing in its shadow pathway of trying to control the ego. The whole nature of rigpa is that it is open and accepting and so if it starts to move towards control it becomes the very thing that it is the liberation of. But what we need to be very clear is to separate control from discrimination. Buddhism is primarily concerned with insight. That is to say, to see into the nature of things. Behavioural modification comes after insight so it can also be a support for the development of insight. But the general formulation is view, meditation, conduct, result in that the conduct arises from the shift in our way of being which arises out of the realisation of the view through the meditation and in the view of dzogchen, it's not about making a lot of changes externally in the world, it's about self-liberating the arising of all thoughts, feelings and sensations.

[The mind is pure from the beginning](#)

This is very radical because it calls upon us to tolerate things we would normally like to control and if we do that, then it means that other people will develop their ego-control over us because people might not like how we are and then you are faced with the problem of shame. Do we believe that social convention is the limit of our reality, or the experience that we have in meditation? Generally speaking, in buddhism, we believe that meditation itself purifies the deep structure of the mind so that behaviour becomes, of itself, more light, more responsive, less harmful. And in particular from the point-of-view of dzogchen, it's based on the understanding and the belief that from the very beginning the mind has been completely pure. That purity is not the same as the social

conventions of goodness because in this world it's very rare to find things which are good in a straightforward way. Somebody might become a healer or therapist but in most cultures healers and therapists have some reasonable status and they earn quite a good bit of money so it's unlikely that the motivation is a hundred per cent altruistic; there's usually some shadow life going on as well, crossed motivations of pride, pleasure at having power over others and so forth. Therefore if you go with an external examination, a kind of ethical orientation and you try to work out what is good and what is bad according to convention you may find yourself trapped in what is really just a cultural, a karmic, construct.

Three modes of existence: the three kayas.

On the other hand, if you just go with your own spontaneous impulse and believe that it's pure and proper you may be cheating yourself and harming others. That's why at the heart of the practice has to be awareness and awareness is always subtle, soft, gentle, undefended, naked, and so again—and this is about non-duality—we need to have a feed-back loop from other people and take their responses seriously and at the same time, to know that the experience is like the reflection in a mirror. If we take other people too seriously, we lean to one extreme; if we say it's all an illusion, we lean to the other extreme, which is why we have the idea of these three modes of existence, openness, spontaneous expression and precise responsiveness.

This is the dzogchen way of talking about the three kayas, so from the point-of-view of openness there is nothing that has ever been born; from the point-of-view of spontaneous expression everything manifests just as it is, as the radiant energy of that open dimension; and from the point-of-view of the precise responsiveness our activity into the field of being with others, exquisitely attuned to a situation which is generated together. The three modes hold together at the same time, it's not that you do one and then you do the other. They are inter-facing, they are like vectors interacting in space, and that's why they are often represented as three tailed *tigles*, revolving. It looks a bit like the yin-yang symbol but with a third one, and they move together and they fit exactly together, dynamically interacting.

With this overview of the view we can now consider it in relation to practice.

Break

Session 3

Traditional metaphors for awareness

To take a traditional example, the mind is like the sky and that obscurations arise like clouds. The clouds arise *in* the sky; from the Tibetan point-of-view they are aspects

of the sky; the cloud you can't separate from the sky but sometimes the sky is without clouds, sometimes, like today, it's completely full of clouds and sometimes there is blue sky with clouds through it. Even when the sky is completely cloudy, like today, the sky is nothing but space, the clouds are filling the space. They fill the space but they don't destroy the space. The generosity of the sky allows the clouds to occupy it. When the weather changes and the winds blow the clouds will be blown away. When the clouds vanish the sky is as clear as it was before the clouds came.

In the same way, our mind is open and empty but it is also full of clouds; sometimes we have rainbows as well, but mainly clouds, difficult thoughts, thoughts which tie us into ourselves and when we're caught up in our thoughts it's as if that is all there is, that becomes the limit of our existence. There is always something to worry about; we can worry about work, about children, about parents, we can worry about houses, anything can become an object of worry and from the point-of-view that we were looking at before, it's not as if we are persecuted by the worry, we actually quite like the worry because the worry provides an on-going object for subject to concern itself with, and that is the exact point that we need to observe in the meditation: the desire for subject to have an object, and that awareness is not the subject that desires an object and yet the subject that desires an object occupies the space of awareness just as the clouds occupy the space of the sky.

In dzogchen the key focus is to relax the investment in, and the identification with, that which is arising. That means that we are not pushing the object away, we are not pushing the subject away but we are relaxing back identification, or investment or attachment *in* the place of the subject. This is both simple and difficult. For example, you might be sitting in a café with some friends and chatting about this and that and you start to tell them a story and then you suddenly become aware: "Oh, maybe I'm talking too much," and then you kind of pull back from the intensity of your need to tell the story and become more aware of where the other people are, that maybe they need to speak or respond or maybe they're a bit bored now of what you have been caught up in. This is exactly the same process as in meditation. We want to be able to observe the performative aspect of ourselves without collapsing into it and without defensively standing back from it. That is to say, instead of our awareness, as it were, being *inside* us as our aspect of self looking out at the world, our awareness becomes an awareness of the field of interaction in which ourself as subject interacts with others and this awareness that we have of that experience is both something ungraspable without shape and form and at the same time is uniquely connected with our embodied existence. This awareness, or *rigpa*, or state of presence, is both something that we are fully alive with in this interaction with the world and it is simultaneously the space within which self and other are interacting.

That is the integration of these three aspects I was describing just before the break. The openness of mind is not resting anywhere; it's not conditioned by anything or dependent on anything. The clarity we have of a situation is connected with our embodied existence and it's linked with the energetic structure of the body, particularly linked with the voice. When we are connected into this field of shared becoming our energy becomes light and attuned so that we experience our body as a body of light. This doesn't mean that we all the time see rainbows in our body, it means essentially that our body remains something ungraspable, that the body is a dynamic manifestation of energy that's changing moment by moment, and being present with the body as energy liberates us from the oppression of the concept that the body is a thing.

This third aspect of the precise manifestation or precise expression into the world is that our body becomes free to respond to others because the body is not then the defended citadel of the ego but is a mode of the expression of the energy of the open dimension of being.

The function of meditation

The function of the meditation is to help us to relax back from the identification of the body as a thing, the ego or a self as a thing, a thing operating in a concrete world full of other things because things can always be destroyed. As the Buddha said, whatever has a beginning has an end, and this glass continues in existence only because the factors of its destruction have not yet manifested. But sooner or later it will be destroyed. We know this about things in the world; we know this about our bodies. Old age, sickness and death are not something we can avoid, and if our body-world, our ego-body identity has become the basis of who we are one hundred per cent, then sickness, poverty, death, homelessness, and so on, become quite terrifying. This is very understandable. It's not a good idea to imagine that you are a thing, it's the basis for anxiety, and the anxiety is an energetic disturbance that drives all kind of appropriate behaviour.

In buddhism, when we talk about awakening, it's an awakening *from* the encapsulation, this egg-like structure of the ego's body-self, which is something apart from the world. But as we looked earlier, it's not awakening from that to some transcendent other which is somewhere else but rather it's an awakening to the fact that this ego-self is always already integrated with the spacious, open dimension of being.

The importance of the view

One of the ways into this, a way some of you have practised many times before, is the use of the sound 'A'. Some Tibetans will say that it's not possible for ordinary people to practise dzogchen because they have too many obscurations and first of all you have to do *ngondro*, this basic purification practice, preliminaries, and so on. That is a

tradition in some lineages but my own dzogchen teachers they always say that the main thing is to shift the view, so that's why, when I'm teaching these things, I always spend a lot of time going through the view because if you understand the view you can start to shift the balance of your identification. If you believe that you have so many obscurations, so many limitations and basically, you are a bad person then your belief in these things will make them very strong, just like the anorexic patient who believes that they're very fat. Human beings believe all sorts of things.

A belief that you are a small, limited, stupid person who can't meditate is both true and not true. It's true in that that's the function, that our meditation is not as clear as we would like it to be, but it's not true as an identity and ignorance is to confuse experience with identity.

We see this all the time in the realm of psychology. It's very tragic when terrible things happen to people because when bad things happen we often take them as some kind of marker of ourselves. For example, in my own clinical experience, and I think it's in the literature, that many people who have been raped feel that they have become dirty inside and defiled inside, so there is an event which is a terrible experience, which brings physical pain and emotional upset, but these things are a series of moments all of which are impermanent. When we identify with the event and become conditioned by it, determined by it, then the feeling-tone of the event seems to come inside us and permeate our being so that we become determined by that event, it shifts our sense of who we are.

As we were looking last night, by the notion of dependent co-origination, that is indeed what happens, we do get moulded and shaped by our experience. But this conditioning, what is its status? Is it like a great jungle on the far end of which is peace, happiness and contentment? And [that] in this jungle there are snakes and alligators and many thick trees and branches and the trees are so high we can't see where the sun is, so we can't plot our direction very easily, and we have no map, and a blunt machete? If you believe that, then bad luck! Because that view then means, "Oh, for many, many lifetimes I have to hack my way through this forest. In this life I am lucky, I have a good opportunity, I have managed to cut a one hundred kilometre path. Unfortunately, next life I'll be born somewhere else in the bloody jungle!"

The jungle is growing out of the earth; the healthy, happy land at the far end of the jungle is only earth. If you look at the earth, if you look at the ground, you are standing in relation to something which is directly there. From the point-of-view of mahayana buddhism in general, the ground of our being is emptiness; emptiness has no limit, it is everywhere, everything has the nature of being devoid of inherent self-nature,

so this jungle of phenomena which we experience all this time, this interplay of Indra's Net of complex reflections, is in fact the energetic manifestation of the open dimension of being. It's not a question of removing the jungle but of seeing that the jungle is connected to the ground. That doesn't remove the jungle but our experience of the jungle is transformed: instead of it being the enemy that keeps us from the promised land it is the quality of the manifestation of the open ground which we are happening to experience at the moment.

Experience is not identity

That's why, in the dzogchen texts, it always says: if you are very depressed, if you are unhappy, if your meditation is terrible, do not despair. Turn your attention from the depression, from the despair, onto the one who is the experiencer *of* the depression and the despair. The real nature of the experiencer is always the open dimension of being. Ordinary consciousness and mind or *rigpa*, awareness, are not two separate domains of being, they are like a brother and sister. Or as the texts often say, like a mother and child and when the child consciousness meets the mother awareness it recognises its own nature, its own lineage and then, even if difficult thoughts and feelings arise, we know: this is experience, this is not identity. Now this is not denial, this is not dissociation because it is still experience. It may not be very pleasant experience but it is not who I am, it is not a definition of me, it is not a contamination of my awareness because my awareness is present as the one that illuminates this experience. As in the traditional example, the mirror shows the reflection; the reflection is in the mirror but the mirror is not conditioned by the reflection. Our mind is like the mirror; *samsara* is the experience or the reflection that is in the mirror; when we recognise that *samsara* is simply a reflection in the mirror we see that it is like an illusion, like the reflection of the moon on water, like a mirage, something which appears to be there and which is there as an appearance and yet is ungraspable because it has no substance.

The teaching of the Heart Sutra

This is the teaching from the Heart Sutra: form is emptiness, emptiness is form. It's not that there is just nothing, it's not that it's all something but there's something [which] is nothing because the something has no 'thing' in it, it's just a 'some'. So what we have is experience which, if we tilt towards it and identify with, it will wrap around ourselves and we will get caught up in it and led into all kind of chains of association, and if we lean back from it then we see it just as impermanent energy arising. This is why they say that *samsara* and *nirvana* are inseparable.

The purpose of the meditation is to relax and develop or realise, recognise, the experience of openness and then to stay close with it as experience arises, resisting the temptation to control experience, not pushing away things that we don't like, not pulling

in things we do like, but staying relaxed and open with whatever arises and in this way coming to recognise that all manifestation is itself pure because of the nature of its ground which is emptiness, while at the same time we like some things and we don't like others. It's not that you have to move around in the world always giving yourself a hard time by doing things you *don't* want in order to overcome your sensual tendency—you'd have to wear a hair-shirt. On the outer level of course we make choices all the time: Padmasambhava made choices, the Buddha makes choices, it's not that everything is homogenised, everything has the same taste and therefore it doesn't matter, rather [it is] that we have a heightened aesthetic appreciation of differentiation in the world but it is not made heavy or made serious by the projection of hopes and fears. As it says in many, many dzogchen texts: *whatever comes, comes; whatever goes, goes*. We cannot control the field of manifestation but neither do we abandon ourselves to it as if we are being blown around like a feather in a wind, but we maintain this state of relaxed, open presence in whatever situation.

The practice of the three A's.

This is the integration of the three kayas. The basic practice for doing this is the practice of the three A's, so we sit in a relaxed way with our bodies supported by our skeleton. Our chin is slightly raised so that our gaze is slightly up. Our eyes are open, we are not staring but we are allowing the gaze to relax into the space in front of us. We're not trying to ignore the room and the people in it but we are not distracted by them, either. We practise it this way because we want to integrate manifestation and openness, and we make this sound 'A' three times. As we do this, we relax the tension in our body and release it into the sound, all the kind of busyness of thoughts and feelings. When we recognise this as energy, we can then release it out into this A which is a kind of ground energetic form. When we've done this third 'A' relax and it's as if what we've done is we've practised renunciation, we've let go of our attachment to all our possessions and we find ourselves in a place where we don't own anything and yet everything is available and present for us. We've no business to be pulling things in and pushing them away but we can just be open with them as they come and go, not going after past thoughts, not waiting expectantly for new thoughts, but just resting still.

Okay. So after lunch we will do a lot more of this kind of meditation practice and there'll be an opportunity for you to ask questions about meditation or share your experience so that you get the most precise sense of what to do and how to approach your own nature.

Our reliance on a sense of self.

One of the great enemies of a non-dualistic awareness is the belief in inherent self-nature. In Tibetan it's called *dag dzin*. *Dag* means 'I' and *dzin* means 'to grasp', so it

means grasping at a sense of a self but it can be the self not just of a person but of an object, like a glass. As some of us have looked in previous years, essentially it's like a gestalt formation. It seems to be a feature of our perception and our conception that the mind settles into forms and shapes, so in modern art when we had the development of abstract art, particularly abstract expressionism, it was very difficult for many people to relate to this because in looking at it there weren't the usual patterns or forms or shapes that one could recognise. No trees or people's faces or anything, just colours and very often, when people talk of this kind of painting they search to find some kind allusion, some kind of reference, to something else, that it should be bringing about the same kind of feeling maybe as looking at the sea or looking at a forest or being in the city. But when we just see streaks of colour running across each other, if we don't name these colours—and often the edges are so blurred one can't really do it very clearly—often you get a physical impact that there's a kind of disturbance that comes into the body, that what we would *like* to do in our appropriation of the image becomes impossible for us, because the idea to order becomes thwarted and it brings up a kind of displacement or confusion inside ourselves

In the same that in the Korean war there was a huge anxiety about brainwashing carried out by the Chinese communists on captured American soldiers. That soldiers would be put in a room and they would have random noises played to them and lights going on and off, a very disjunctive kind of experience, and that through that the soldiers' capacity to maintain a clear sense of who they were and what their identity was and what their purpose was and what they would be willing to say to someone who asked them questions, broke down. If the mind loses its capacity to structure then it loses its own ground. That is to say, if the patterns that I see in myself and in the world around me become unclear then I lose my capacity to construct myself in my familiar image of who I am. And that can produce collapse into depression, into a sort of automatism as you would see in that old Frits Lang film of Metropolis, or into psychosis. Of course, in meditation we're not trying for any of these outcomes but we are trying to shake or collapse the reliance on the fixed sense of a stable world and a stable sense of self. Not because a stable sense of the world and self is undesirable but because it's an illusion that is based on false perception. It's very difficult for us to see things clearly and to face up to the conflicts and contradictions which are embedded in our world.

The political issue of the economic integration of Europe and also the political integration of Europe, the new proposals that are coming out of Brussels with the notion of a European President who would have particular powers, is quite shocking for many people if they really think about it. National identity supported by democratic structures has been a basis for people's sense of self and direction for the last two hundred years in Europe, and that people's security gets maintained by difference from other people, so

that one has something secure to rely on, that although there have been changes politically in France, Germany, Austria and so on, somehow there is a sense of national continuity. But once the whole structure radically shifts, once the power base is shifted, it becomes very difficult for people to know where they are. Clearly political changes are happening with very little real public discussion because usually we prefer to imagine that things will continue in the same way even when we know they're changing. Making agreements, like with the start of the euro and the common economic policy, there was an agreement that rates of borrowing and credit rates would be fixed at certain levels. Both France and Germany have broken these, in particular France. Holland and Sweden are very concerned about that because the Swedes want to come into the euro but they have an anxiety that they don't want to enter that but who has the stomach to take on France?

These things are very close to buddhism because they exactly deal with the way one thinks: "Oh, yes, we'll set up something in this way, we all agree on the parameters, the frame. Now we know what we're doing, yes! But it doesn't quite fit, so people move about inside it and they break the boundaries so we then have two main readings. One is to say these people are delinquent but that means confronting these people and that takes a lot of trouble, or we say that the system doesn't really work but that's a big headache so we chose the middle way of stupidity and pretend it's not really happening until there is a real crisis. This we do moment-by-moment in our lives. The basis of samsara is self-deception in which we maintain an image of ourselves and the world that is false, and we have a lot of evidence that it's false, that it doesn't really work, but it feels like too much trouble to try to sort it out so we pretend that it's OK.

My mother is eighty-seven, she's not very well, but if I try to talk to her about death she thinks I'm being insulting. 'Death is something which is not to be discussed. If it happens, it happens, but I have no expectation that it will'. [laughter]. In that way it becomes very difficult to have a conversation about how many family issues can be managed. We behave in the same way: our own death, sickness and so on we hold away from us until it actually happens. If we face the fact that we become sick, that we die, that the world we inhabit is unstable, then many of the fantasies that we carry about the importance of our activities and our social role are put into question. As we looked earlier, the buddhist idea of impermanence is helping us to see that everything is a process, a process with many variables inside it. Because of this, it's very difficult to identify anything stable and secure.

There are two main responses to this. The first response is that of samsara, and that is denial; we pretend that the instability which is all around us and in us is not the case. The other approach in samsara is to attend to it but then to be overwhelmed by it, to become very anxious, to be depressed, to be worried, to be preoccupied. The middle

way is that if you are going to look at the instability of a situation you have to have some place stable to stand. The problem for us is that whatever we look at in the outside world is unstable. When the stock market collapsed, many of the big banks and insurance companies sold their stocks, then they had to look for some place to put it, the money. Put it in gold, put it in property, put it in bonds, it's a big question. Nobody knows. Why does nobody know? Because it's gambling. Your pension is a gamble. All banking is gambling because there is nothing stable in the world you can put money into. House prices in Amsterdam are going down because Amsterdam was a big centre for information technology, one of the big centres of all email connections and international networks, but when the techno area collapsed, many of these young people couldn't get jobs, they left Amsterdam, they didn't want flats so the house price went down. Now, in London, Frankfurt, New York, Tokyo, there are thousands and thousands and thousands of very well educated, very intelligent, very greedy, ambitious people working at computers all day long trying to work out patterns of economic behaviour. But it's not possible.

[In samsara there is nothing stable.](#)

I think it's important that we see that: that mistakes, confusions, misreadings happen all the time, even when there are enormous resources put into planning. The American government is spending a fortune in Iraq but there is no security that a stable outcome will arise from this. From the traditional point of view this is to really understand: *in samsara there is nothing stable* which means, if we want to face the insecurity and we need to find something secure, we cannot find it in samsara because even very intelligent people act in very stupid ways. For example, one of the very shameful, big stupidities in British psychiatry started about twenty-five, thirty years ago where they started to reduce the number of single-sex wards, so they put very disturbed men and very disturbed women together. This resulted in many sexual attacks. This was noted in the annual statistics and then patients' forums protested against it again and again but sometime the bullshit pseudo-theory was put forward: "No, no it's very important to help people to integrate and stay in ordinary life situations," and it's only now, slowly, that they go back to separating out the wards, and the women patients, female patients, feel much safer.

This happens all the time, where we can see that something is not a good idea, we can hear the screams of people saying, "Don't do this to me," and we continue to do it. So a psychiatric hospital, which should be an asylum, should be a place of relief from difficulty in the world, becomes just another place to be abused.

[The relationship between language and ignorance.](#)

How do we find a place which is stable? Dzogchen is only to be found in the open dimension of existence and it's called 'open' because it's not finite, it is not fixed as something with a shape, but because we are used to looking for shapes and things which have a beginning and end, it's very easy to miss this, because it doesn't look like what we are normally looking at. It doesn't have parameters to it, it doesn't have criteria or guidelines whereby you can come to a definite conclusion: "Oh, yes, this is it" because it is not an object of knowledge. Everything that we encounter in our daily life is an object of knowledge. Even if somebody says, "How are you?" we can say, "I'm well," or "I'm a bit tired," or "I'm very busy." That is to say, we get used to talking about ourselves as if we were a thing and one of the factors of mental health for a patient if they go into a psychiatric setting is that they should be able to give a reasonable account of themselves, so the capacity to talk about yourself as if you are an entity is a way of showing that you are a normal, healthy, functioning human being. This is a sign that somebody has a stable enough sense of identity to manipulate the registers of power which constitute our daily existence.

What does it mean when I say, "Oh, I'm quite happy"? Where is this 'quite happy'? Happiness is an experience. Where is your happiness? You keep it in your wallet, in a little locket round your neck, in your head, in your heart, in your underwear—so it's a question: where do you keep your happiness? We say also, "I'm *quite* happy"; 'quite' means not fully happy but not *not* happy. This kind of vague expression about the self allows us not to confront the fact that I am talking about me, so then there are two, there's 'I' talking about 'me'. What's the difference between me talking about you and I talking about me? I mean, it's easier me talking about you because this is me. Where is me? Oh, this me, all of me! But if I am talking about me, where is the line between the I and the me? Can we find an I which is separate from a me? And when we don't feel too well and we say, "I don't know what's happening to me," that's very strange. You go to the doctor and you say, "Oh, doctor, something's happening. I don't know what's happening to me," and the doctor says, "Don't worry. *I* know what's happening to you!" [Laughter] But if it is happening to me, how come *I* don't know? "Ah, that's because you're not yourself."

It's just nonsense! It's little games of language moving around which are covered in olive oil so they slip over each other because there are some real problematics in this in which we continue to attribute a sense of inherent self-nature to something which is an epiphenomena generated out of a mode of discourse. It's dangerous this kind of game because in it we talk about something as if it truly existed when it's just an epiphenomena generated out of a particular discourse or mode of language use, but because we talk about things in this way it creates the illusion that something is there. Indeed, from the point of view of buddhism, one of the functions of the development of

language is to be able to maintain the state of ignorance. Once subject and object come into a separation then instead of being at home in a complex field, an aesthetic field that one responds to through the integrated energy of one's being, we now confront a whole range of separate entities—things which are juxtaposed, placed together and yet appear to be essentially different. What helps us to work then with these separate entities is being able to name them clearly.

In Tibetan buddhism this is called *kun tu tag p'ai ma rig pa* which means the ignorance of naming and representing all phenomena. Language functions then in two ways; it helps us to very quickly construe and make sense of complex interactions between separate entities which makes it easier to survive in samsara, and on the other side, the very skill that we have in language can become a way of blocking the door to awakening. Language is like a waterfall, it covers the cave entrance. Again, that is one of the reasons why letting go of identification with the thoughts is so difficult in meditation because a lot of the time our inner world is dominated by language, and in our outer life, when we are communicating with other people, our ease of being in the world with others depends on our capacity to take our own and other people's words seriously. That is to say, we have to open to the flow of the other's words and the words come to us and impact us before we can think of them, so that we think about what we heard but we have to hear it really before we can think about it, which means we are already taken *in* by what we're hearing. The same thing happens in meditation: a stream of thoughts, a linguistic pattern catches us and we go off into that story, we are seduced by it, we succumb to it, and then we realise something's happened and we sort of pop out of it. But while we were *in* it we were in it, we had nothing else. It's important to recognise the similarity of that seducibility of our mind and the way in which we function in the field of language and social intercourse.

Generally speaking, it's a tragedy if a child cannot be seduced in this way I'm using the word 'seduced'. For example, in a condition like autism, the child finds itself unable to open and succumb and respond to being with others. The invitation to be in play in responsiveness with the other is felt as an attack and so in order to protect the fragile sense of self the child turns away, withdraws, engages in ritual bodily movements and so on, to create a reassurance of non-disturbance. Again, this is very helpful I think, for thinking about meditation because meditation is not about holding yourself apart.

For example, in India, there are yogis who act against the invitations of the world, the social world, and of their own body. It's not uncommon for people to take a vow of silence till the end of their life and perhaps to take a vow to hold one hand in the air until they die, and so day and night the hand is up there and gradually the blood supply system starts to collapse and the whole arm becomes rigid and the nails are twisted and twisted and twisted. Often these yogis also take a vow to stand and never lie

down. This tends to trap a lot of water in their legs so they end up looking as if they have elephantiasis. They feel that they are standing apart from the seductions of ordinary life but of course, in order to make this safety, they have restricted their lives enormously. Amongst ordinary Hindus there is a convention that they should eat with the right hand but if it is their right hand that yogis hold in the air then they have to eat with their bum-wiping hand; if they hold their left hand in the air they have to wipe their bum with their eating hand.

The three A practice

My example may sound a bit stupid but it's very helpful for seeing there is no place to hide in samsara. Samsara is a network of representations, of constructs and, as long as one is situated inside these, one will be affected by constructs. This is why when we do the three As the key thing is to relax, just let go and to practise again, and again, for short periods of time. At first, when you practice on your own do it for five minutes, and then ten minutes but better to do it for a short period of time when you're fresh and you want to just relax into that moment and catch that moment. A bit like if you go to the swimming baths and you dive from a high board, you're standing on the board and then *whooooo* in the air, and then you're in the water. The period of being in the air is very brief but if you're really present in that moment you're flying, it's an incredible feeling. It's very different from standing on the board, it's different from being in the water, it's different from walking back to the board. For that brief moment, when you launch yourself out, unprotected, you get some little taste of what it might be like to be a bird. Then, when you're in the country and you see a bird just launching itself off a tree your body can feel *whoooo, yesss!!*

It's the same thing with the three As, just when we relax there is some space, the space between our attention being focused in the sound of the A and the arising of the new thoughts and feelings. We just need to really feel that and see it by being present in it. So again this essential meditation instruction: *don't follow the past thought or experience, don't look forward to the next thought and experience, just be present in the moment.* This is very necessary, just as we've had the last sound of the A, fully present in that moment and then, the sense of the spaciousness at the time, when you're not resting on *anything*, can be held in the moment of the arising of the next phenomenon. That space is the space of *rigpa* or awareness. Although in a sense it's small because it's boxed between the A and the arising of the thought, when you find yourself present in it, that is to say, not rushing through it on the way to something else, but just relaxed and open, you find that it has no limit, and something which has no limit cannot be limited by something which *is* limited. That's the essence of this. If you think that the awareness is limited then it just becomes another phenomenon, another entity, another moment juxtaposed in connection in a series of events but when we see that it is *not* an entity, it's

not something that you can grasp or name, you cannot see it as an object, you can only recognise—Aah! And although we can use words to describe it, like naked, fresh, unconditioned, none of these words can really capture it.

So: very, very important, relax *into* it, like falling backwards.

Q: Whenever I relax out of being involved with the thought then I get sleepy.

James: Generally speaking there are several dominant patterns of energy in the mind. One is called *go-pa*, which means ‘wild’ or ‘excited’, and it means a little bit manic: thoughts come rapidly with quite an intensity, things seem very fascinating and important and it’s linked also with rising energy in the body. In that state it’s difficult to get the mind to settle and be calm. Another state is called *ching-ba* which means ‘sinking’, it’s described as like a tired swimmer so that although you make effort you don’t make any progress, and it’s linked with a lack of clarity and a sort of depressed feeling, not being able to focus the attention and a mood of hopelessness. It’s very difficult to think your way out of that.

In general, with the first state, with the *god-pa*, the excitement, the best way is to focus on your breathing, and with the sinking feeling, if you’re not actually very tired—if you’re physically very tired then you should have a sleep—but if you are physically not very tired then what is useful is to do the *Phat!* practice because if you disrupt the feeling then you interrupt a kind of energetic mood which is self-affirming. Just as, often when patients are depressed, if something that particularly interests them happens, then for an hour or two or three hours, they forget they’re depressed.

One of the problems with both these states is that when we are in them they seem to just be how things are. The problem with any extreme position is that it involves a forgetfulness of its polarity so when we are up we forget that we have been down and we forget *how* to get back down, and we are down we forget that we’ve been up and we forget how to get back up. The state forms around us, reflecting back to us the sense, “Oh, I am like this, I am like this.” If your meditation is strong, then the advice is always *stay with the one who feels*. Now this is an instruction to stay *with* that one, not stay *as* that one. This is a very small tilt but of course there is an enormous kind of gravity, an enormous pull to abandon oneself and collapse into the state. In the [first place] on the more outer level, if you ask a depressed patient to keep a diary of their moods through the day so that they can monitor variations in mood usually they tell you they were too tired to do it. Being an unkind sort of person, I always say, “I don’t believe you. You are two things: you are depressed and you’re lazy, and they’re not the same. Without effort nothing is gained.” This is the sort of thing my mother would have told me and so I tell other people. This is the one true lineage.

[The dangers of collapsing into identification.](#)

It's very important, it's exactly the problem in meditation; it is very difficult to do, but it's what we have been talking about a lot, about experience and identification. The experience is intense; it's turning and it creates this kind of gravitational pull. It's very tempting just to fall in it and be it but we have to struggle *not* to be it. Maybe some of you remember in the fairgrounds when they have this wall and it spins round and you get stretched against it. You pull your hand off and it goes back again, and you try to walk and you get pulled. This is the same feeling of these states, whether it's a manic state, a depressive state, an obsessional state. It's not that the state is not happening for the person, it's not that we are cheating ourselves about the intensity of our experience but an experience is an *arising* for us and experiences arise *for* us; it is we, ourselves who, in acceding to them, in identifying with them, make it the experience of ourselves. For example, maybe you have some work to do late at night. You come to a point: "I feel tired but I have to do it," or "I *am* tired, drop it!" We have probably all had that experience. In the first way, the experience is there, you know: "I am tired, I feel tired" but you're able to stay on the edge of feeling tired/am tired [enough] to say, "And I can choose to continue while I feel tired." That is to say, my whole self is not collapsed into an identification with the state of tiredness, and then you struggle in the face of the temptation to collapse just into the tiredness. In the other pathway you just become the tiredness and then there's nothing to do.

I work quite a bit at the moment with people with the post-viral experience M.E. and they often have chronic fatigue and find it very difficult to get up, and they say, "It's not like being ordinarily tired. I feel as if all the energy has been taken out of my body," and what I work on with them is a kind of mindfulness, so that, even when they feel so exhausted they can only collapse, we focus on attending to the separation or the differentiation of the mind that knows that the body is collapsed, and the body which *is* collapsed, so that, rather than beating themselves up trying to force themselves, which doesn't work, or feeling completely 'my life's over, it's never going to change' you can have a middle way, where the person's mental activity on a subtle level stays awake, alive and fresh in monitoring the collapse of their energetic system. Then, gradually the person awakens to the fact that they exist, always, as somebody who stands in relation to their experience and then their experience hasn't caught them, like some great monster arising out of the ocean.

It's very similar with people with post-traumatic stress disorder and it's the same with the issues in meditation, although meditation is more difficult because it's more subtle. It also depends on your own capacity to be sensitively rough to yourself. For example, in some Tibetan yogi communities, people would all have very long hair and they would tie the end of their long hair to a rope and tie the rope to a beam. Then they would sit in meditation and if they fell their hair would be pulled. Now this is not

the same as being in some kind of American Green Beret force, it's not about being tough like John Wayne but it's a way of using the body to support the mind's determination not to collapse into the identification with tiredness. That's why the view is very important: if you are very clear about the view you can use intense methods but if you're not clear about the view, the tendency is to use the strong methods just as a way of beating yourself up, to give yourself a hard time. So the key thing is always to be able to observe your own mind as much as possible and to see when the mind is becoming heavy.

When I lack the capacity to focus on something subtle but I want to practice in a way that will help me to remain relaxed and focused at the same time, then I could use a small white letter A in the rainbow circle and focus on using it as a support for the attention because it's quite concrete and it gives a clear focus for your attention, but because it symbolises emptiness it also gives a support for the non-appropriation of it.

[And then] You can just make the sound of A repeatedly. The sound A is clarifying and also it deepens your breathing so you'll be getting more air into your system and because the breathing is slow and deep it helps to balance the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system, so you make sure you don't have any adrenalin excitation. Many people carry low-level stress in their bodies all the time. They think they are relaxed but actually, physically, they are quite tight. And that leads to low-level chemical washes all the time, [where] the endocrine system is giving movements of different chemicals which are about fight and flight, anxiety and danger and the system is not fully relaxed. Therefore, even when you are meditating, although you may start to sit properly, after a while you probably slump into a way that collapses the chest, blocks the diaphragm, and the breathing moves up, so gradually stress builds. That's why it's useful to learn a range of techniques, and with that you have to gradually develop the capacity to know when is the time to push with a technique, to stay inside the method and just keep going as far as you can, and when it's time to change method to something that's more in harmony with your current energetic condition. Generally, if you have a tendency to be distracted and to be busy with many things, we should practice staying to one thing and keep going. And in the other direction, if you've got a tendency to be obsessional and lock onto something and not let go, then you should try different methods.

Any other thoughts and questions about the practice?

Q: I find my energy seems to localise and have a shape. What to do with that?

James: Well, the best thing, if you can do is simply to stay relaxed and present with this identification and it will change, because it's an arising and it will be impermanent. So, for example, sometimes I get a feeling up here. The rest of me has vanished but somehow I am up here, wherever this is, so if I say, "I don't want to be up

there, I know this..." But then I'm already into something, because to resist it or to try to change it is to enter into a relationship that takes this arising seriously as if it was something. What we can do is relax into the out-breath and become more spacious and that shifts the relationship with it, and that's useful. Or you can use the sound *Phat!* and disrupt it, and that's also useful. The problem with both of these styles is that they are active in the sense that you become artificial because, once again, you become a subject doing something and the attitude is also, "Oh, this is something that I have to do something about."

If one can, just stay quietly present with whatever it is, no matter how stupid it is or boring or humiliating even, when you feel that your mind is just doing nonsense. If you just stay close to it, it will move and when it moves, if you don't move, then what you confirm to yourself is: "The mind stays and the mind moves and I, this observing self, am the mind that stays." I am also the mind that moves when I am in my thoughts and thinking but this familiar identification with myself as the mind that moves is not the limiting definition of my entire capacity. Otherwise, every time I encounter an obstacle I have to walk round it or fly over it because I think I am the one that moves and, as with the previous question, there is a kind of validation of the self in mental movement, you can feel quite alive, it's whatever we call it—libidinal activity—it has a certain *chi* or *prana* involved in it, whereas, if we can stay still in that moment we recognise, "Oh, all manifestation moves," and very, very importantly, when I move, that aspect of myself is the aspect of manifestation.

So it's to move from the limited notion of—in our ordinary way of thinking—"I am me, this fixed thing, and I am also the active one who is doing things." Through the meditation practice we can shift that, we can deconstruct that which, from a dharma point of view, is a false understanding and by resting in a still way, we recognise, "I am still" and by seeing ourselves as the aspect of movement we can see that we are dynamic energy. The aspect of ourselves that is stable and doesn't move is not a *thing*. It's not I, me, myself but is a presence which insists, that is to say, it is there but it's not the presence of something, it doesn't indicate some entitative essence.

[Three modes of the awakened state.](#)

There again we have these three modes of the awakened state, the three modes of the natural condition, this open dimension which is radiant with awareness, which is a presence, which is vital and yet ungraspable and which is still and doesn't move, it's always the same, [and] every time we do the meditation and you touch that state, even though you're there for just one second, three seconds, it's always the same taste.

We are also the movement of our thoughts, feelings and sensations which are always different, and from the movement of that energy of the mind we come into the

third phase, our being in the world with others which is positioning itself precisely and uniquely moment by moment. Following the work of Noam Chomsky linguists have done a lot of investigation of tape recording conversations and analysing them, and what they find is [that] very little speech is repetitive so that although maybe you have a friend who has a terrible boyfriend and they are always going on and on about what an arsehole he is actually, the way they are saying it is different, sentence by sentence. It doesn't sound it when you hear it, you think, "Oh, God, not again!" This again is the quality of attention because we don't really listen and we don't really see; we see these fixed gestalts, these assumptions in our minds in which we think, "Oh, he's talking about the same thing, he's talking about the same thing." It looks the same. We don't stay with the incredible, varying, liquid surface movement of this universe.

To go back to the point of the question and the meditation: although it is difficult, staying still is very, very important and that's why it's very helpful to practise the outer forms of shamatha or shiné, calming the mind, because it's through that discipline that we learn to keep our mind with a clear focus in the midst of all the distracting thoughts that are moving around it. When we do that, we start to see that thoughts and feelings are impermanent. If you just stay on your breath, if you just stay on the object outside, the thoughts go past. It's like one of these war, or spy, movies where people are being chased and they jump down beside the tree and they hear the soldiers marching towards them. Usually we think, "Oh, my god, I've got to run!" but if you run, you get the bullet. You have to sit very, very quiet, and the soldiers... they walk by...at least in the James Bond movie! That is the whole thing: if you move you distract the attention. It's the same if a dog is chasing you: better to stand still. The more still you are, the more calm you are, the less there is an excitation to the pursuing persecutor. When you are still your surface is smooth but when you are moving your surface becomes opened up, it becomes porous and there is more capacity between the arising experience and the receptor consciousness.

This is difficult to do because we always feel we should do something to change the situation but it's a very, very important practice. One of the highest titles for yogis in Tibet is *cha-tral* which means 'work finished' or 'does nothing' and doesn't mean that the person doesn't respond in the world, doesn't talk to people, but it means that the kind of waterwheel of their mind is no longer being turned by lots of impulses and agitated nervous energy but that they have a capacity to be still and a capacity to be in movement rather than always being in movement. So that's why practising just staying there, even when you feel stuck and stupid, that's very important, but maybe don't do it for more than three minutes because you can also just practice mental dullness and that's not going anywhere, that's just dull. If your mind does feel overtaken by dullness or unable to separate out from what's going on you can get up, stretch a little bit, do some

breathing, wash your face with cold water, and then go back into the practice. We don't want to be struggling in the practice, because the key realisation in dzogchen is that this natural state of mind is free from the very beginning, that it's not a construct. If we are struggling and struggling in a kind of hopeless way that doesn't help; we need to bring clarity into the situation and see the point on which to exert our focused attention and struggle to stay in *that* but not just generally.

Session 4

Our fragile skin of continuity.

In buddhism, refuge and bodhicitta or the bodhisattva vow are considered very important. When we do the three-A practice and we rest in the open nature of the mind, this is taking refuge. The mind that is open is continuous and the mind that moves is discontinuous. That is to say, when I become aware of a shape like this piece of wood, then my consciousness responds to it and interprets it and makes sense of it and this involves a mental activity and when I look at another object a different set of mental processes are involved in making sense of it. If the mind didn't move, if there wasn't mental activity, we would be very stupid indeed. The movement of the mind is not bad but when it operates in a way which moves from one thing to another to another we actually have discontinuous or fragmented experience since the objects which take our attention are of different orders and classes and so we face various gaps in our experience.

These gaps are, for most people, unwelcome. In order to avoid the gap, we fill it over. We fill it with the idea of 'I', 'me' and 'mine', 'my experience' and through that we create the illusion of the continuity of a fixed self who is having all these experiences. But this narrative is deceptive because it takes us away from reality rather than helping us to stay with reality. Actually the gaps are important. Jacques Lacan, a French psychoanalyst, says a lot about the nature of the gap, and both Freud and Jung were very interested in these moments of slippage or collapse of continuity in consciousness and there is a big question in psychotherapy [about] whether it's better to help the person to repair their narrative of continuity or to go into an exploration of what lies in the gap, the unconscious phenomena that disrupt the seeming continuity of the ego's discourse. It's the second approach that is more followed in buddhism, particularly in the view of mahamudra and dzogchen because in these paths our problems *are* the path.

When we have problems we get shaken up. The complacency of our assumptions gets disrupted and so, if we can see our difficulties as friends, they will show us how fragile is this skin of continuity that the ego spreads like a spider putting out a web. In the meditation practice the key thing is to resist the temptation to re-weave the torn

narrative of self, to resist the temptation towards activity of control, of reconstituting the world the way we want it to be, and instead to take refuge in this natural, unchanging, open dimension of being.

This dimension is not secure in the way that ordinary ego security is stable. If you go to the seaside and you run along the beach you experience [that] some of the sand is soft and is quite dragging on the feet and when you hit some hard sand you feel quite strong because it gives you a good resistance to your movement. If you go into the sea and you maintain the same kind of body movement that you would use in running along the beach you may find that you're not very successful, in fact you may find that you're drowning because the body movement of running is not the same as swimming. When we're running we work, in a sense, with the resistance of the earth—with the contradiction—and so, if you like, it's a sort of aggressive movement, we push ourselves off from the ground; but when we are swimming in the sea we work collaboratively with the water. Often when children are learning to swim they fear the water and so they are pushing it as if it was the enemy, to push it away, and what they have to learn is to move their orientation and to see that the water is the friend and if you caress it, if you just move gently through it, it will keep you floating, so the movements that the body makes have to be more subtle.

In the same way, when we do the meditation, we move from a subject interacting with objects whereby energy is generated through the impact of subject on object and object on subject, into the field where the pulsation of subject and object become like the waves in the sea, and awareness is the depth of that. The waves and the depth are in harmony, they are not in opposition. We have to continuously relax and let go and open and allow these waves of experience, subject and object, to move through this spaciousness of awareness.

This is the real refuge, because instead of relying on the samsaric [*missing word*: ?nature] of consciousness in its interplay with objects, these phenomena are allowed to come and go without interruption and the mind rests free from them but not apart from them. Our awareness is still close to what is happening so we don't become stupid. In fact, the radiance of our mind, our intelligence, our perspicacity, our clarity increases. Because our position is not biased, it's not partial, but we allow ourselves to see *whatever* is going on because we don't start with a prejudice, we don't start with a position: "I want to have this and I don't want to have that." When we don't like things we attend to them in a different way from when we like them.

One taste.

One term that you see a lot in mahamudra and in dzogchen texts is *ro chig*, one taste. The taste of each phenomenon is the taste of impermanence, the absence of

inherent self-nature. Not being solid or concrete in themselves, these thoughts cannot strongly influence or mould or condition or damage the mind. Often it's described as being like writing on water: if you have a bowl of water and you write your name on it with your finger, as you put your finger through the water some mark will appear and you will be able to read the letter, but by the time you're writing the second letter the first will already have vanished. That is to say, manifestation is there, it is present, we see it but then it's gone. The moment is actually gone because we are writing in space, we are moving in space all the time and space is not marked. We get marked when we hold ourselves in a fixed position and think, "Why is this happening to me? I don't like that." "It's not fair. This should not be happening to me." In that case, what is arising comes as an insult or an attack on our sense of self, which is vulnerable.

Conditioning remains in our character due to attachment. One of things that's very interesting in psychotherapy research is the way that it's very difficult to predict how adults will behave on the basis of their childhood experience. Although we can see a correlation between disturbed adults and their difficult early childhood experience that cannot prove a direct causal link because many people who have very difficult childhoods don't have disturbed adult experience. It's not as if a childhood trauma is like some cosmological Big Bang and sends the person shooting out through their life with the débris of that trauma but rather, due to the trauma or the difficulty, patterns are created which are then maintained on a day-to-day basis in lived situations. That maintenance happens because of identification with the pattern, and identification [of this?] is usually out of consciousness.

For example, if you grow up in a household where your parents are very critical, it's likely that you will have internalised the voice of criticism and under certain situations you will be critical and you may not be aware that you are critical because being critical is as natural for you as the way you walk or the way you speak but of course, if we are critical usually people point this out. They say, "Stop criticising me!" They say, "I can't bear it that you always criticise me." To which, many people reply, "I'm not criticising you, I'm just telling you the truth!" [laughter] In that way people, through their own attachment to the position, switch the light off. Of course, the other person is maybe not switching the light on very skilfully, they may be shining a searchlight in your eyes, but nonetheless, if you are being critical you are being critical. It's impossible to be a human being without having character traits or behaving in particular ways but it's amazing how difficult it is to maintain an awareness of our bias or our habitual gestures into the world and this is occurring in social systems of feedback.

When people live in environments in adult life similar to their childhood existence they perhaps don't get their pattern contradicted very much. However, many people, from whatever reason you can say from karma, from past lives, whatever, decide,

“Oh, I don’t want to be like this,” and they struggle to change the pattern. In my experience as a therapist, the biggest restriction to any kind of change is essentialisation, in which we take what is impermanent and conditional as fixed and with that belief we continue to fix what is impermanent and contingent. Our own mental activity fixed that which we believe to be already fixed. This happens a lot of the time out of consciousness.

Buddhism would say this is exactly what happens on the level of attachment to a fixed sense of self. Every time I say I’m hungry or I’m tired or I want to go for a walk and in speaking and in hearing my own words I make a confirmation of the fact that there is an enduring person who wishes to participate in this activity [and so] then I am recreating the basis for the belief in the self, but I don’t know that I am recreating a basis for the self because in my experience it is as if the use of the word ‘I’ in ‘I want to go for a walk’ is simply the description of a given site of my existence. In that way I do not recognise that I am creating and maintaining the delusion of the fixed sense of self, and then because it appears to be something given, it’s very difficult to examine. One has to separate from the attachment and the identification before something can be investigated.

If you read the accounts of the early Christian missionaries in Europe they often contain stories of miracles because miracles are very good for disrupting the assumptive world of the other. People think, “Ooh, that’s weird! People in *our* group, they can’t do this! What is this strange person, what is this?” And in that way, the bubble of assumptions that the people are living in becomes disrupted because now there is an other and that other is in proximity and so it opens the seal of the limits of our own experience.

In the same way, very often, it is something unusual that opens up our experience. As we know in the story of Prince Siddhartha who became Shakyamuni Buddha, the assumptive world he had been living in as a prince in a very protected environment was disrupted when he came into contact with a sick person and then an old person and a corpse. Now, of course, at that juncture when he encounters these experiences he had two choices: one is not to pay attention to it, to dissociate from it, to repress the impact of it, to imagine it has not really occurred, and in that way, one can maintain the status quo but with a little bit of damage. If you look at these photos of Tony Blair just now, he is still the Prime Minister, but he looks a little bit damaged. [laughter] The Buddha was more open; he was shocked. It caused disruption in the continuity of his notion of who he was and what the world was. Something had come into his world which his set of assumptions could not integrate or digest or expel and that disruption caused him to bring a rupture in his family situation and to leave home.

[The cocoon of the ego.](#)

One of the very important things in life is to learn from experience; it's one of the big themes in psychotherapy, especially in group therapy, to help people to learn from what's going on. A lot of people talk *about* their experience, they tell you terrible, horrible stories about what has happened to them but it's as if between the story and themselves there was some kind of Perspex wall, so they can tell the story again and again and again but nothing is really changed. The shock and the horror is felt by the people they're telling the story to, but it doesn't really become a useful energy for the person telling the story.

Many people come to therapy and they say, "Oh, my life isn't very good, I avoid all these challenges and I really need to change," but it's just bullshit because the person has a look in which telling a sad story about themselves is how they construct themselves. You get other people who come in and they tell you about their pain and it's in the room and they feel it and their eyes are wide open and they're saying, "Help me!" and at the end of the session you say, "This is your homework, these are the things you have to do," they come back to the next session like a little puppy with its tail wagging. They have done the homework, they've seen that the world is different and they think, "Hey, this is good! This is wonderful!" This is why, in the dharma, there are so many meditations and reflections on suffering and death and encouragement to go and meditate in an isolated place, go to a cemetery, because it's always about trying to give you a slap, trying to shock in some way, because this system of the ego seals itself from the inside out like the caterpillar that starts to weave this cocoon around itself, and inside this little world that we weave for ourselves there is a sense of security and familiarity and so, even when we know it's not very good for us, we continue to do the things that give us comfort and give us a sense of who we are.

The more extreme behaviours that we have, perhaps like bulimic eating or self-cutting, are powerful because they have two main functions. Firstly, they give intense short-term relief and then they promote long-term guilt and despair. These two flavours go very well together like apple strudel and vanilla ice-cream. We have to examine ourselves and see what is the perverse nature of our attachment because it's one thing to be attached to nice things, it's another thing to be attached to horrible things. For example, in the sexual problem and relationship clinic I work in, we often have people who are in affairs so you have a triangular situation where everybody has a partial experience but particularly you usually have a kind of formal couple or a stable couple and then the one who is on the outside, and this third party doesn't have access to ordinary life, usually. Their position is usually secret to the other party, male or female but they are often sustained by the notion that what they have is special. "The other party, they get the duty but *I* get the love, *I* get the lust." "It is because he is a good man that he will not leave her, and I like that in him." But the person is also deciding always to

have less than, so the attachment is not just to this person who may be good or bad but it's an attachment to marginality, to be living with the maybe-one-day-he-will-leave-her. In that way there is always an open edge, a wound, a tear, not a tear that grows; very often a wound can be sustained for ten years, for fifteen years and then afterwards there's often a surprise, "What was I doing?"

Well, of course, the ego that can ask that question was not really the ego that signed the contract into being the third. It's in the nature of this sense of self, of our ego, that it is. Because it is discontinuous and has poor internal communication it is always divided against itself. Traditionally we say the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing but it's also true that the right lobe doesn't know what the left lobe is doing! Making sense of our existence is very difficult because of our very sophisticated way of telling lies to ourselves, cheating ourselves.

The emergent ego.

Going back to refuge, this is why relaxing into the state of awareness is so important. Consciousness, by its very nature, by its very structure, is embedded in the jungle, it cannot have a rounded view, it always has a shadow because it is close to and constructed in relation with objects which are arising and we often find this. Some event happens in our life and we tell person A about it and then we tell person B about it and we're aware that the description that we gave of the event is different to A than to B. That's if we're not completely obsessive. Obsessive people don't usually change anything for anyone. But if we're in a sort of normal neurotic range then of course we will speak differently to A than to B because communication is relational. If it dialogic, then the other is implicated in what arises out of our mouth and therefore to communicate with a range of people in the course of the day brings about the reconstituting of the self moment-to-moment in relation to the other. This is why self-knowledge is an illusion on the level of the ego—because the ego is emergent—it arises in the process of becoming with others. It is essentially slippery like a fish, it will always move away. Which is why totalising, or summing people up, is such a bad idea. People will always show different faces in different environments. The patient comes in for a mental health assessment with the psychiatrist, they show one state; and then later, you see the same patient on the ward hassling other patients for cigarettes, showing very developed social skills that were not at all apparent in the assessment.

This is very important for meditation, to see how dynamic and changing and contingent the constitution of our self is. We are energy, energy operating in a field of energy with no boundary between our sub-system and the other sub-systems in this great system. So just as, when we start to see this, we have to resist the temptation to grab other people or grasp them or fix them in some diagnostic category or

identification, we need to do the same in relation to ourselves, to observe how we apply limits to ourselves through concretised thinking, saying things like, “I can’t sing, I can’t dance, people don’t like me,” or even saying, “This is what I really want to do.” How do we know? We are very unreliable: what we want in the morning, we don’t want in the afternoon, and living with impermanence means being drawn towards a more phenomenological moment-by-moment experiential turn rather than one of abstraction, reification and concretisation.

So by relaxing into this state of openness we can observe the moves and shifts in our self as it becomes itself in relation to others. Having a self is not a problem in buddhism; the problem in buddhism is the experience of having a fixed, definite self which is internally constituted as a true essence. All lamas and rishis have a self; all buddhas and dakinis have a self; but the self is the movement of responsiveness in relation to the environment, it’s an energetic formation which construes and constructs itself momentarily in situations. A bit like these kaleidoscopes that children have: there are certain elements in it, just as we have certain constituting elements of our personality, but you look in the kaleidoscope and you turn it and you see a pattern, then it tumbles, then there’s another pattern, then you turn it: tumble, pattern, tumble, pattern. The tumble is simply a point between two patterns; the pattern is simply a point between two tumbles.

Infinite bardos.

This is similar to the Tibetan idea of bardos, of intermediate periods. We have a bardo of sleep, a bardo of waking, a bardo of moving into death, the bardo of the intense death experience, a bardo of the period between that death experience and the next birth, they have that structure of six bardos. But the teaching is also that you have many, many, infinite, millions of bardos because *bar* means intermediate, so the atmosphere is called the *bar-nang*, the layer below open space and on the earth, it’s intermediary, what you see in the middle.

In this way, we can see that all the moods and modes of ourselves are just moments on a transition co-created by our habits, impulses, attention and the field within which we are operating. In this way we can see that how we arise as ourselves is a co-creation this rich variety of our patterns, our habits and the rich complexity of the unfolding environment. Therefore this self is unreliable as a definite basis for being. Rather, it reveals itself as the point of movement out into our interaction with the environment. The paradox is, the more we take refuge in the open dimension of being [the more] it removes the burden of total self-identity from the ego so that the ego is free to take up its place as the interactive site of ongoing becoming. It’s like when parents become grandparents: they’re very, very happy to see these little small babies and then,

in the evening, they're very happy when their children take these small babies away! [laughter] They can play with them, but it's not their responsibility. This is the advantage of the integration of ordinary consciousness into its ground nature of awareness that the ego is relieved of the heavy responsibility of having to hold it all together.

[tea break]

Session 5

We have been using the sound of the three A's to help us relax and open but we can also do it just with relaxing into the out-breath. Maybe just try this just now for a few minutes, just relax, you can do it with your eyes open again, and just allow yourself to focus your attention into the out-breath and relax out into the space, just as the breath leaves your body. You can practice again and again if you're sitting in a bus or a train, or if you're in your office between bits of work, you can just sit and relax, focussing to the out-breath and open, and then just allow experience to continue, and whenever you find yourself trapped in the experience, relax more, and you can make use of the breath to do that.

Essentially, non-duality means that what is arising and the one who is aware of what is arising are not two separate things, so while one is developing the familiarity with this experience we can of course use strong external methods like the sound *Phat* and the three A's but it's best if we can use the minimal, most subtle, intervention because every time you make an intervention it carries it with it the felt sense of, "I am doing this; now I have to do this" and that has a tendency to take us away from the experience that we are opening ourselves to.

Analytic meditation.

Now I invite you to do a sort of meditation exercise which is analytic, it's to try to get a sense of three types of experience. You can practise it later, outside or in any place, but we can also practise it here. In the first stage, you find some object: it could be—if you are sitting looking this way—the shoulder or the head of the person in front of you, and you allow your attention to move towards the object, so it's as if you merge into the object, you get caught up in the object. You lose yourself in the object, so you have a forgetfulness into the object. This is not an uncommon experience; it's not too difficult to do. Then, you bring your attention to the fact: "I am focusing on this object." So your attention is now continuing on the object but also on your body and the sense: "I am sitting here and looking at the object." And then, when that's there, you then relax into the out-breath and with that, you relax the identification with "I am the one who is looking at the object" without stopping attending to the object, so that you have a sense of being present with the experience of attending to the object. So if you imagine

standing with one foot in front of the other and you ease your way onto the back foot, you're shifting the balance away from being out towards the object. There's a still a being towards the object but one's centre of gravity, if you like, is now back, so it's more relaxed, more spacious.

Is it easy to get a sense of these different experiences? Are there any questions about it? Anything unclear?

Q: I'm not clear about the third one.

The third one, okay. It's may be easier if you've got the object then between you and the object your looking at, [that] here is some space, so when you focus on the out-breath, maybe if you also bring your attention into the space between you, so that you're not onto the object so much but the object's not abandoned, and you relax into the space.

Any other questions?

Q: It was interesting to notice that the space was quite filled up. On the one hand it was being merged in focus but in the same time all this commentarial stuff happened and on the next level there was the comment, "Is this okay to experience all this? What I'd like to clarify is: do I see all this and just to merge it in even though many, many things are happening?"

James: Generally for this kind of practice we want to keep the number of variables as limited as possible, so if you find that you have a lot of thoughts or feelings coming in the way, then doing some simple focus of the mind first probably helps.

Usually though, when we have a sense that "I am looking at something" that in itself becomes a stimulus for the arising of thoughts because our relationship with the world tends to be commentarial, we give judgements about things, we ascribe values, and as you were indicating, we ascribe values to our own performance. "Am I getting it right? How am I doing?" and so on. I think what is interesting is not getting into the *content* of that too much but to observe how these different levels of relationship bring about different patterns of mental constructs, and that again varies according to causes and conditions. For example, sometimes being fully absorbed in something can be a great relief, it can bring a feeling of peace and happiness but it can also bring a feeling of boredom or suffocation in which we experience our mind wanting to be busy, wanting something else to happen.

Mainly this kind of practice is useful for providing ways of examining how the mind's energy arises. One of the things we have to do is bracket off the tendency to judge and to ascribe value and just investigate what is the nature of the experience in these three modes of attention.

Then, although one is caught up in what is arising, there is now a light feeling and you can feel refreshed by it since the immersion does not last long: lost, here; lost, here... But of course, a lot of the time we don't have a clear conscious intentionality when we get fused with an object. For example, the object might not be something external, it might be a mood, so you feel sad. For example, you often get this with people who have quite deep depression. They often say that the worse thing is in the morning because they wake up depressed and so they're merged in the depression, it's not that they *have* depression or stand in relation to the depression, but they come out of sleep depressed. In that sense there is no perspective. It's as if the experience is iconic because in the icon the living presence of God or Mary is there in the image. The representation and what it represents are not separated. In European art, the movement from icons into depiction of [?it] with a distance, was very related to the development of perspective *inside* the painting. But when we're doing a number, when we're caught up in one of our kind of habitual positions or obsessions, when we are *on* about something, we are just in it. Like, sometimes I get very crazy about the amount of dogshit on the roads in London. I go out in the evening for a walk with a friend, we're quite relaxed and we're chatting and then suddenly I'm ranting about dogshit on the pavement! Because I have quite a lot of thoughts about dogshit. So, if I confront this, especially on my shoes [laughter] then I find myself caught up in this packet of thoughts and ideas and then I have to: "What am I on about? What?" I think that's not an uncommon experience that there are things that get to us and when they get to us we go into them. It's very helpful for meditation practice to try to observe these moments. This is the structure of all neurosis, what Freud calls repetition-compulsion in which one is caught up in something as if it's terribly important when actually, it's pre-packaged. When it happens as a packet of assumptions, as a sealed set of signifiers that relate to each other, it's quite difficult not to be caught up in it.

[The meaning of karma.](#)

This really is the meaning of karma because the thing about when a karmic consequence arises for us is it doesn't arrive from *outside*, it arrives in us and as us as we are taken over by a foreclosure onto some particular thing. That could be about something sexual, something financial, about the mood of hatred or anger or violence but it arrives before being announced and the problem of dualism is that the ego is seeking an object for its own fulfilment and so our willingness to collapse into these states of immersion is very strong. The purpose of the practice is to try to go into experience and come back from it, so that one can come out of the absorption more easily. When people talk of sub-personalities or self-states they're essentially talking of the collapse of the over-arching observing self into self-aspects which become the entire performative reality. We do this all the time. All the time we lose the breadth of our

ordinary, conscious self as we fall into things. You can fall into a magazine story, fall into a conversation, a piece of music and it's very, very helpful to observe yourself in that process of surrendering and sliding into the object. I think the more we see it happening when subject and object are clearly differentiated externally, [the more] it helps for the same kind of mindfulness when it's happening internally.

The first stage of this is to practice just taking an object and merging yourself into it and when you have time you can try it with a range of objects. You can see, for example, how easily even negative—what we might call negative objects—catch our attention. For example, many people like to watch the news on television. The news is usually bad news. It's usually bad news about things that are happening to other people. So what is the quality of sadism in ourselves that draws us to being interested in catastrophes happening to other people? You can see people, they are looking at something: "Oh, that's awful! Oh, that's awful! Let me look again. Can it really be that bad?" What's really important is to see that we do that and we don't do it because we are bad people because notions of bad people is simply to essentialise a particular pattern of energy.

Rather, we need to observe how we get pulled into this and how we can then release it. It is part of being born in this human dimension that we get caught up in things and there is enough politics in Tibetan buddhism, Japanese buddhism, any kind of buddhism to let us know that this collapsing of attention is pervasive. People who have spent years meditating on compassion, who say their prayers to Chenrezig every day, are quite happy to attack people who believe in the wrong Karmapa. This is, again, not because these are bad people but it's because our dimension as human beings is fragmented, we move very rapidly from one level to another, like these lifts in a department store. One minute your are looking at carpets and sofas and the next minute you're in the basement with the pots and pans. People can be doing their practice, want all beings to be happy, and then here you are, feeling pissed off with someone else.

So again, the key thing is not to get into guilt or blame in these moments but try to observe the phenomenology of the collapse of the balancing of the observing self or the state of mindfulness *into* an identification with a narrow perspective.

The function of the second stage is to be aware of yourself in relation to the object. That is to say, I am looking at the flower. I am still looking at the flower, so I have the attention on the flower but I'm also simultaneously attending to the experience of attending to the flower, so I have a consciousness of myself in the process of my attending to the other. This is the basis for interpersonal being, this is what children learn, they learn it really early from about nine months onwards, they are working all the time with this, because in order to survive in society I have to observe myself in relation to the other so that I observe the feedback from the other, and use that to

modify my position towards the other. If I collapse into the other and become compliant with them my own needs won't be met and I will not end up in a happy state and if I only attend to my own impulses and needs I won't be able to maintain relationship with the other.

One of my patients was telling me about her daughter who is four and a half, and this little girl is very strong-willed and very determined to get her own way, and she goes to kindergarten where she has a best friend. In her last few months she started to be interested in drawing, so every day she was doing some drawings, at home, and she would go into the kindergarten in the morning with two or three drawings to give to her best friend. The best friend didn't want her drawings but she wanted to give her drawings to her best friend. She drove it to such a point that her best friend is now not her best friend and she is now distraught, but she can't grasp the principle that the friend is more important than the drawing and that the friend has a choice whether they take the drawing or not. This is very difficult. It's difficult for us as adults. How can I have the sense of what the other person needs and what I need and try to work out what's a balance in that? So the second aspect there is keeping our attention on ourself in relation to the object, not privileging one over the other, but having a sense: "I am me" in the process of looking at this so that it's still largely self-referential.

Then, for the third part, we do the relaxing into the out-breath, or if you do it on your own you could say the sound A as you focus into the space between yourself and the object and then, resting in the spaciousness, allow the presencing of the self and the object. This is hard to do because we tend to collapse into the self. The openness of the awareness merges back into the identification with "I am the one who is doing this". So again, we have to just relax in the out-breath, get a little bit of space, and observe—observe—how we collapse into the conscious "I am this one".

This is at the heart of the meditation. Without blaming ourselves or feeling bad or guilty just attend to distraction, attend to attachment and you find that you come to the point between samsara and nirvana.

One ground two paths.

In dzogchen, they say there is one ground and two paths. The one ground is emptiness, which is not a dull, dead emptiness but it is an emptiness with the presence of awareness. And then there is manifestation. Manifestation is the energy of this open dimension. It is what is arising in it and from it. If we take one path, we recognise that this energy is dynamic and changing, which doesn't mean that it is some chaotic morass. Rather, it is all the structures and patterns of the world that we experience, but we stay at the heart of time and so, without moving, in the timeless time which transcends the

three times, we experience the movement of all which normally appears fixed. If we do that then manifestation is self-liberating. It arises and passes by itself.

But if we take the other pathway, then when manifestation arises awareness collapses into identification with it but in a partial way, and identifies with this subject dimension and standing apart from all that then appears to be object. Then, the process is to stabilise this position I am now identified with, and maintain it. When we do that we become very busy; we become busy in our identification, managing the object field as it comes to us, liking good things, not liking bad things and so on, full of bias and discrimination. The purpose of these three exercises linked together is to try to observe more precisely how this occurs. It is happening all the time. The separation of samsara and nirvana happens with every breath, it's not something that happened a million years ago although it also happened a million years ago.

If it just happened a million years ago, we would be helpless because we wouldn't be able to go back in time and change the tracks. But just as we were looking at the different ways of thinking of the impact of childhood trauma, if you think that the trauma is locked in the past, you have to go into the past, but if you think it is located in maintenance in the present, you can work directly in the present. In the same way here, by observing this slippage from one state to another, we can start to see that it's not that we are lost but that we keep slipping away. This is what is called conditioning. We have strong tendencies to slip away. Therefore the struggle is to observe the conditioning without being identified with it. It's very subtle but its structure is not different from stopping smoking.

Somebody has stopped smoking and they're at a party and they've had a bit to drink; round about midnight they find themselves with a cigarette in their mouth because there is a conditioning to smoke cigarettes, especially at parties when you've been drinking. That is what happens. What is required is that the person maintain the clarity of the decision: "I don't smoke". Now, of course at first this carried attention. When somebody says, "Oh, do you want a cigarette?" of course I want a cigarette *but* I don't smoke, so in that case, the new position "I don't smoke" is held up to block the desire "I want a cigarette". Now, if the decision or the new identity "I don't smoke" is strong and clear, the desire "I want a cigarette" is revealed as conditioning arising from the past. But if this new identity is not clear, then the desire "I want a cigarette" feels like an essential truth about myself. Yes, I want a cigarette; I'm a smoker, why wouldn't I want a cigarette? All these months I wasted not smoking cigarettes!

This is exactly how the mind is working, in this slippage from open awareness into identification with these arisings. As with any kind of relapse-prevention programme the important thing is not to intensify emotion by guilt or self-attack because if you can slip back into what you had decided upon this interruption leaves no

trace, but if you think, “God, I’ve been trying to be a buddhist for years, I can’t meditate, it’s hopeless, this is stupid,” then these thoughts simply intensify the disjunction between the open state and the pattern of identification with manifestation. That is the practice that we continue and we can continue it in our meditation and in observing ourselves in daily life.

Now we’ll do some practice, more with the three As and then spend some time arranging the room to eat some food together. The eating of food together is traditionally considered important; it’s another form of doing practice together and particularly for us, it gives us a chance to observe ourselves as we move through these different states in contact with others. Maybe you get lost while you’re eating something, you just get caught up in it, or maybe you’re very fond of some olives or sausage and you’re watching them being passed round the room and you’re counting as they vanish [laughter]. All of these experiences are very, very useful just to observe “How does my mind work?” without blaming and judging: “Oh, this is attachment, this is what happens to my energy when I get into the attachment. These are the kinds of sensation in my body, the feelings and thoughts that arise, the way I look at other people, what sort of feelings I have towards them.”

Without blocking these feelings, just give them more space because in dzogchen we believe that we don’t have to correct ourselves, that’s why this method, dzogchen, means ‘great perfection’ or ‘great completion’. Everything is already there but the completion only occurs when the state of openness is integrated with the levels of manifestation. As soon as we lose presence in this open dimension, we are definitely and immediately caught up in manifestation and identification. That’s just automatic. It’s like if the sun is shining through a gap in the clouds it’s warm and then the cloud moves over the sun and it immediately gets a bit colder.

Every time we have the chance, we can monitor this process and practise to remain more present with this open dimension as it merges, as it integrates with the level of manifestation. That is the meaning of non-duality.

The end.