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# *Getting the most out of life: a dzogchen view*

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Tibetan Buddhism offers us many different methods that can be useful in dealing with the difficulties we face in life. The central focus in all the various practices is to help us awaken to the nature of our mind. What we do with our body and what we do with our speech is determined by our mind. Of course, we are not always conscious about the movements of our minds. Sometimes we find ourselves saying something and we are quite surprised: *"Why did I say that?"* In western Europe now, particularly since the European enlightenment, we have a fantasy or perhaps a hope that we are rational creatures. However, when we look at our history there is not much evidence for this, and good Dr. Freud from Vienna has also pointed out that it is quite difficult to know yourself. From the time of Socrates and indeed before him there has been the notion that we should examine our existence, we should keep an eye on what we are up to.

Of course if you want to examine something it has to be there; you have to be able to look at it. If you want to make a drawing of a bird it is better to shoot it first so that you can put it on the table in order to see all the colours. Otherwise you are wandering around with your pad and paintbrush and the bird flies by. You get a little bit of brown and then a bit of green and one year later there is half a bird on your paper. And carrying out autopsies on dead bodies reveals very much about the person that the doctor did not know when the person was alive. That is to say, when we are examining ourselves we are usually examining a corpse; the thing that we are looking at is something that has already occurred.

For example, we come home from work and we think, *"Oh, why did I do that?"* But the event has already happened. You can write an account of it, you can think about it, you might think how you could change it when you go back into work tomorrow and how you might do that. In that way, we find ourselves moving between the past, which has gone and which won't come back, and the future which has not yet come and may well be rather different from what we predict. Moreover, in these situations what we are really doing is examining narratives. We believe the stories we tell, even when we know that it's likely that the other person involved in the event would tell rather different

story about it. We are all storytellers; even if the words don't come out of our mouths we are running these storylines inside us.

It is as if our own life and the world around us is woven on a loom of language. This can be beautiful, and powerful and enriching or tedious, narrow and demoralising. However no matter what the flavour of our stories they often function as a screen or veil that hides the immediacy of the experiential moment. We are absorbed into language in a way that is merged and intimate and this makes it difficult to be aware of what is happening in the moment.

Meditating on the nature of the mind can help us become aware of the process of the construction of our existence. This is a process that involves many factors including, significantly, our own interpretations. Once we start to look at our mind and we become aware of the arising and passing of experience a division or a slight separation starts to occur between the experiencer and what is experienced. For example, there may have been situations in your life where you became very angry. In that state you may have been shouting at someone completely filled with irritation and a sense of injustice at what was happening. Usually in that state we do not have much insight into what we are doing and we don't have much freedom.

The intensity of our arousal absorbs all our attention, we are focused with a narrow band of clarity which eliminates certain key features of the situation, the features we don't like, and plunges the rest into darkness. This fusion into an experience, whether it is an emotion, a thought, a narrative motif, a beautiful sunset, a novel, a movie, is a form of lostness – even when it feels clear, intense and alive. In Buddhist texts this is referred to as an attachment which here indicates not that we possess something, but rather that we are possessed by it, enmeshed in it, taken over by. We become the experience– there is only this. If this happens in sex or at the opera or wherever it can be beautiful– we lose ourselves in the experience and this can offer us relief from the concerns of the day. Yet it is still a lostness, an abandonment of the presence, of awareness, of the open clarity that reveals the whole field. Like an infant lost in a temper tantrum we are powerless to think our way out of our arousal and fusion, a state that seems to have a life of its own.

Intense situations can be useful because they can shock us into an awareness that we have been lost. It is more difficult to recognise how this fusion and its associated abandonment occur very frequently in our daily life. For example, many activities occur on automatic pilot. We are brushing our teeth or walking along the road and we are lost in thought. We are merged in the thought and have abandoned control of our behaviour to our well-oiled habits. Life is going on, our life is going on– but we are not quite there. Rational thought does not help much. In order to awaken out of this lostness we need a practice, a meditation practice that facilitates our resting in open, panoramic awareness.

If we want to keep an eye on ourselves and see what is going on we have to have a sense that there is a subject aspect of ourselves and an object aspect and observe both of them. Although this seems quite simple and straightforward in some ways, it can be quite difficult. For example, you might feel hungry. When you feel hungry you are hungry. You know you are hungry because you feel hungry. That is to say the feeling of hunger is arising for you, and you are merging into that feeling of hunger and identifying it as 'me'. If you are likely to be able to eat and there is nothing else around you then the feeling 'I am really hungry' is quite good because with a good appetite you can enjoy your food. However, if you are at work and there is a project that you have to finish, as the feeling of hunger is coming up you have to recognise that it is going to distract you from keeping your attention on the work. By gathering yourself together and returning your focus to the task the feeling of hunger recedes into the background. Once we recognise that we have been fused with the feeling that 'I am hungry' then there is more space for other possibilities. 'I am aware of feelings of hunger and I will attend to them later once I finish the task I prefer to privilege.' The feeling of hunger moves from being an arising 'object' that I am aware of to being my 'subjective' reality

and then with clarity and effort it is resisted and returned to being an object in my mind that I am aware of and I am able to manage within the wider field of the other 'objects' that I am attending to.

Most of us have succumbed to various impulses around food, drink, laziness, drivenness, and so on. Impulses are moments of abandonment into fusion with a habitual tendency. We're suffused with the sense of need and inevitability—it is difficult to resist something that we feel sure must happen anyway. The complexity of our mental structures, the polyphony of our myriad voices, are abandoned as we merge into the siren call of our impulse. Once we give ourselves over to the impulse our capacities to struggle gets weaker and weaker. Well we have to observe ourselves again and again until we can recognise the looming choice point and slowdown rather than excel irate through it.

This is an example of how our capacity to identify or disidentify with an arising phenomenon brings a particular shape to our immediate experience. Very often identification occurs on the basis of habitual formations so that we find ourselves in a familiar place. For most of us it requires real effort and struggle to become conscious of the choice-point where we can influence our tendencies to identify or disidentify. Learning to develop the capacity for focused conscious intention is important in life. Our *at*-tention follows our focused *in*-tention which allows us to resist our tendency to be distracted. Our world, however, is dynamic; there is constant change and so we have to make endless decisions about what we're going to focus on next. This keeps us busy trying to work out what is most important to do and then prioritising it in the face of all the other temptations and demands.

Our consciousness arises in relationship to events – when they meet there is the sense of experience. We have both internal experiences and external experiences; these are not two separate domains. There is no partition between them as they function together as an interactive system. When we are thinking about something our sense of identity starts to merge into the pattern of thoughts. This is because, just as there is no partition between what is outside and what is inside, so there is no dividing wall between a thought or feeling or sensation and the consciousness that registers it. The experience of the thought occurs, the balance of presentation can be tilted towards the subject side, so that we are very aware of our response to the thought and this can dominate the thought itself. The balance can also be tilted towards the object side so that the thought seems something quite other, as if it were an intruder. The balance can also be even so that subjective consciousness and objective thought are merged together. Then the thought can appear to be the subject or the object.

We may believe that we are conscious agents generating and directing all of mental activity, but on inspection we may find that this is a false proposition. Sometimes what we might call 'good' thoughts arise in our mind and we might assert that clearly, "*I am the thinker of the good thoughts.*" But sometimes we have bad thoughts—so who is making this happen? Is it the devil? It must be something like that because we are good people! But perhaps the so-called good thoughts and the so-called bad thoughts arise with a life of their own, and our consciousness is more of an observer or a reporter than the agent of production of these experiences. In fact my sense of what is going on, my sense of being the agent, is embedded in a narrative that is developed either before or after the event or experience.

Trying to control the mind is very difficult. When we sit and practice meditation we become aware that many different kinds of thoughts arise. When we are walking around in the street and we are caught up in a daydream it is easy to have a sense of 'Well this is how my life is, this is what I am like.' In this way we somehow accept that the chaos of our mind is okay. But when we decide that we are going to sit quietly and allow our attention to rest on a very simple object, for example the flow of breath at our nostrils, we find that our mind is being carried hither and thither. Who is doing this? 'I' am sitting here, 'I' have decided to focus on my breath, and someone is blowing my

ear and setting all these thoughts in turbulence like leaves in the autumn wind. In that moment we have to awake from the dream of narcissism, the self-sealing in which we imagine we have a kind of mastery over our own existence. Something is going on; I am experiencing it but I am not making it happen. Moreover, my conscious sense of self is something which is also happening for the experiencer. It is being experienced but not by itself. Does that mean I'm irredeemably split, at the mercy of multiple minds which can appear to be me or not me? At first it can feel like that, but gradually we become used to a more spacious sense of our awareness as we seem to shift from being an observer to be an open presence.

From a Buddhist point of view, based on the direct experience of meditation, the notion that the world consists of reliable objects that we can attend to by focusing our mind like a spotlight is an illusion. It is a very powerful and seductive illusion, which feeds the ego, letting it to claim that the clarity of its focused cognition illuminates the world as it is. This illusion is the basis of the rise of technical intervention and technological development, giving us the tools to apparently achieve mastery over the world. It also reinforces the sense that we are rational people, a neutral force in the world manipulating and directing phenomena, which are 'out there', and make them go in the way that we want.

However, when we sit in the evening, perhaps reading a magazine, we can find ourselves putting it down and letting our mind wander off, like a cat that sits by the fire for a while and then gets bored and wants to go out and walk about. Our curiosity, like our thoughts, is just like the cat – a little bit here, a little bit there. Our thoughts occur inside us so it seems that they must be 'our' thoughts although we did not consciously make them. Forces are moving in me, which are both me and not me. I can have an experience, which is undeniably in my experience because it is occurring for me, yet it may appear as a strange thought that seems to have nothing at all to do with me, as I believe myself to be. So although I would like to be a complete circle of clarity, of knowing who I am and what I am doing and so on, when I look at what is actually happening maybe it is not like that.

Unpredicted events are happening all the time. For example you might wake up in the morning and suddenly your shoulder is a bit painful. *"Why? It is my body. I didn't ask it to give me a sore shoulder. My body is doing things on its own behalf. So my body is trying to control me. So now I have to go to a yoga class and learn to control my body so my body won't control me."* This is the way a lot of life is structured. In the wintertime it is a bit cold so people eat more, and then at the end of spring they feel they are fat so have to do exercise. That is to say we are trying to adjust ourselves to make ourselves the way we want to be. Of course as the years go by we realise this is somewhat impossible. Research shows that although many people spend a lot of money on specialist diets they are not very effective. Of course, if we stay inside that model, it can lead us to hope that someone will invent a really good diet. Perhaps the problem lies in the paradigm itself: the paradigm of control, that 'I', the conscious ego, can control my life. What is this conscious ego? What is it made out of? It is made out of thoughts, feelings, sensations, memories and intentions. But none of these are stable. They manifest for us as an aspect of our experience due to particular patterns of causes and conditions. When these factors change, we also change. This view of life is very different from the notion of the hero, firm and steadfast, reliable under all circumstances. The image of the hero is part of the seductive myth of power and domination, conflict and control. However if we want to see how life actually is we have to observe it as it is rather than dominate and direct it. We need to collaborate with circumstances, working with what is there, participating in the co-emergent non-dual field.

Our mood is influenced by whomsoever we are talking to. It is influenced by the weather, whether the days are long and short. When the days are very short and the sky is dark then there is an increase of depression, the life force of plants sinks down and so does ours. That is to say, what I call myself is not an autonomous, self-defining phenomenon, but is a site of communication, not a fixed site but more like a point of manifestation. What I call myself is part of an infinite

conversation, an endless flow of energy manifesting the myriad forms which we take to be 'self' and 'other'.

All of us carry inside us echoes of our childhood, all the things and the manner in which they were said when we were small and evolving as people. In some families the child has a great permission to expand and fill the space, in others the child has to shrink in and check out what is not safe. These patterns of experience set in motion particular patterns of responding, patterns which, although they change in content, don't change that much in structure. For example, if you learn to be tentative and placatory as a child then you are likely to continue that in your life. What you precisely say and do will arise according to the context but your basic structure of fear and anxiety will continue to organise your thinking, feeling and behaviour.

This points to the dynamic nature of experience. The content of my mind, the thoughts that I am aware of arising and passing, and what I take to be my subjective experience of them, is also arising and passing. Since we were young how many billions of experiences have we had? Even since this morning, even since I started talking we have had many, many sensations in the body, movements of interest, memories, thoughts and so on, all coming and going. So although when we talk of 'myself' it seems to indicate something stable and enduring, when we attend to its phenomenological actuality, to how it is as it reveals itself, what we find is a ceaseless process or unfolding, some of which looks like subject and some of which looks like object.

For example we are sitting here together just now. All of us have a body. Presumably your body is saying something. Your bum might be saying that the seat is quite hard. Your back might be getting a bit stiff. This is both 'you' and 'something you experience'. You also can see the walls, light, people and so on; so you can be aware of your body and you can be aware of the wall. The wall is an experience which is arising for 'me' and after some time we will finish in here and go outside and leave the wall behind, but we will still have our body. That is to say, the body feels like a stable aspect of our identity, it seems to be something that is always with us. Strange as it may seem however, the stability of our body as a fixed reference points is in fact simply a concept, an abstraction. We tell ourselves what our body is. If we have trained in anatomy then we have a particularly rich vocabulary to apply to our body. Yet, what is your body? How does it reveal itself to you? If you listen to it as it presents itself you might well find that it is different in its actuality from the stories you are used to telling it.

What I am suggesting here is that you have a least two kinds of body. You have the body of concepts, the body you know about, and can tell a coherent story about. The stability of your story, your capacity to repeat and develop it, becomes the basis for the sense that the body as you know it continues through time. For example, you might think, *"I have never liked my feet. They just look the wrong shape and I hate it when someone comes and I have to wear sandals. I don't know why I was born with feet like this."* This is a story, an interpretation which you can repeat for forty years and feel persecuted by. This story establishes your ugly feet as a permanent feature of your appearance. Yet most of the time, experientially – which means actually – you don't have feet. Your feet are not in your experience. They come and go. And each time they come you can see them afresh, you can welcome them and start a new story.

So when you are sitting here how is your body? Just open to your body and let it show itself as it is in the moment. Maybe you become aware that your head is tilted a little forward and so you can feel the tension and muscle in your neck. Then for some reason you become conscious of your breath and you feel it is a bit shallow. Then because of how you are sitting you might be aware of a tension in the muscles of your thigh. By the time you are aware of the tension in your thigh what has happened to your neck? The experience of the neck has gone. You don't have a neck. In theory you have a neck and if you look at a photo of yourself it is always there, but as it presents itself, as it shows itself to you, it is not always there. That is to say, we have a discontinuous direct experience

of the body, just as we have a discontinuous experience of the mind. The body like the mind is the potential that reveals itself differently moment by moment. There is no actual continuous phenomenon which is the body or the mind. The body and mind are both fields of emergence within which the various aspects of these fields arise and pass due to causes and conditions. These aspects are discontinuous in terms of their manifestation yet seemingly continuous in so far as they are ongoing aspects of the potential of the fields. The term 'field' points to a space within which events occur. The body, the mind, the environment, are all fields of occurrence. Our basic nature is open and empty yet ceaselessly manifests, each moment of which occurs precisely here and now. In terms of experience the body and the mind and not 'things' that we have. Rather they are flows of moments that reveal themselves randomly and situationally. This fact is usually ignored as we rest in our reassuring stories about our body and mind as loved or hated possessions.

If we can be aware of the movement of the contents of our mind including the felt sense of subjectivity, of all that appears to be me, then what is this awareness? Is it just another content of the mind? Albeit somewhat numinous, ethereal? Or it is actually quite other? We are sitting here, we are not dead, and each of us feels that our experience is happening to us. This sense it is happening for me appears to be arising from the inside out. A thought arises within us such as, 'I feel a bored' or 'I feel tired' or 'I am interested' and then it vanishes. Yet I, the experiencer am still here. So if these contents of experience are arising and passing, yet there seems to be a givenness of the me-ness of me, what is that? Is it a secret substance, something like a concept of the soul, which we can't see or can't find and yet somehow believe to be our essence? That is a concept about the experience, not the experience itself. If you keep looking then you can start to see there is nothing there. That is to say nothing substantial that you can grasp or fix or define, nor is there a subtle elusive substance, yet you cannot say it is nothing at all because it reveals manifestation. It is the experiencer of whatever is occurring.

In the buddhist tradition the symbol which is often offered to give a sense of this is the mirror. When you go up to a mirror and you look into it you don't see the mirror, you see your face. You can see your face because the mirror is not full of mirror-ness. The mirror exists as an empty potential to reveal what is put in front of it. If you look at the wall, the wall is full of wall-ness. It stubbornly insists on showing the same thing. It is the fact that the mirror has no fixed internal definition of mirror-ness that allows its absence or its emptiness to be a fullness. One person looks in the mirror and then another and another but the mirror does not fall off the wall and say "*I have had enough!*" The mirror does not get tired; the mirror just shows what is there. It doesn't say, "Hey what about me!" It is just empty. This emptiness is, again, not nothing at all. The emptiness of the mirror is the generosity of the possibility of showing what is there. To put this in traditional buddhist language the emptiness of the mirror is like a wisdom, the wisdom of seeing that the nature of life is completely insubstantial, ungraspable. But this wisdom is not existing on its own as something apart, otherwise it might become a kind of nihilism. Wisdom is inseparable to compassion and compassion is the energy of expression, of participative communication interacting with whatever is happening.

Now I am sure each of us has the experience that sometimes we are more available for others and other times we are much less available. When we are more available I would suggest that is linked to the feeling of lightness, a kind of freedom where we are not over-determined or over-defined in that moment. But at the times when we are not very available for others I would suggest that we tend to be preoccupied about something, caught up in something in the labyrinth of our own mind. On a bad day other people feel like a terrible demand, so we say, "*Back off, give me some space.*" That is very interesting because indeed of course we need space: the basis of hospitality is space. You can't welcome someone into a space that is full. It is the emptiness of the space which allows the real possibility of a welcome: "*I would like to welcome you to my house but please don't sit in that chair because that is my chair, and you'll notice that I have a new white carpet so please be very careful. Also don't make too much noise because I have a problem with the neighbours.*" If you are a

guest under these circumstances you might find yourself shrinking a little and thinking maybe it's already time to leave. If we tell someone, 'you're welcome' that means there is space for them. In particular there is space for you to be you, not the you that I want you to be or the you that I remember you being, but the you that you happen to be today, now, under these circumstances.

## Recap

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To try to bring some of these threads together, the more we rest inside our habits, our habitual interpretations and predictions, the more we create a familiar shape of ourselves – this is who I am – and in parallel with that, a habitual notion of the way we like our world to be. This preoccupation and narrative is like a filling in a sandwich. One piece of bread is the open emptiness of the mind. The other piece of bread is the open potential of the situation. Into it we put a bit of limp old lettuce and a bit of tasteless cheese and it doesn't taste very nice. The plain bread on its own might even be better. *"But what about me?"* Because I know who I am and I know what I like, sometimes that is hard because the more I know what I like the less frequently I get what I like. It is a bit of a conspiracy. Our ego self is this squatter, a cuckoo, insinuating itself into a central position but then lacking the resources to carry out the intention it proclaims. Its privileges mastery over participation and in doing so traps itself in an ongoing need to be in control. The ego position is that, because I know who I am and I know what I like, I am endlessly frustrated by not getting what I need. I know what I need and I know how I want to live, but the world does not fit the clarity of my plan. I am right and I have got the wrong world! The ego establishes a closed world in which I know what I like and I like what I know.

This sets it up again and again for the two modes of suffering: not getting what you want and getting what you don't want. No matter how much we develop ourselves, we cannot secure a safe, stable and satisfying identity because the forms we construct cannot be made self existing—they are merely moments in the flow of arising. What I call 'myself' is a temporary content of my experience. Cleaning to this content as the truth hides the actual experienter.

In buddhism this is referred to as ignorance, the dynamic process of ignoring how it is. By being so busy with our thoughts and feelings and with the events in the outside world we live in this ceaseless flow of turbulence and experience. This flow of turbulence keeps us so full of stuff happening that we don't stop to look at who is the experienter. If I ask you, *"Who is having your experience?"* it sounds like a completely stupid question to which there is only one answer: *"Me, of course! I am having my experience!"* This sense that 'I am the one who is having this experience, I am the experienter of my experience' seems very clear and self evident, but from the point of view of buddhism that is exactly the site of our stupidity because it is so closed and self-reassuring: *"I am me. Who else would I be? I am me!"* This is a slightly solipsistic. It doesn't quite go both ways, certainly not in English. We can say, "I am me" but not 'me am I'. This doesn't quite fit. 'I am me' is an assertion, a proposition, an interpretation and it arises and passes in time: 'I am me and I am hungry.' 'I am' can have different things fitted on to it: 'I am hungry. I am me.' Eco-The ego fills and empties ceaselessly. The content is always changing, yet because we experience that there is always a content it is this if there were a fixed, enduring master of the content: I me, myself. Each statement feels true in the moment it is stated – it is performative, and vanishes when the performance ends. It is something experienced by the experienter – but it is not the experienter itself.

Now, into this glass that I have here you could put many things: milk, orange juice, beer or whatever. The 'I am' can appear to be a container like the glass. You can look at the glass and you can see its content, similarly we can describe our 'content': 'I am tired', 'I am hungry'. It is as if tired and hungry are variable contents filling the glass of 'I am'. However, 'I am' and its contents tend to fuse. When I am hungry, hungry is what I am – it is not a glass apart from the hunger – 'I am' is merged with the hunger.

If we return to the image of the mirror: the emptiness of the mirror allows it to show everything; beautiful things, ugly things – it just shows them. 'I am' is actually like a mirror: I am happy. I am sad. I am hungry. I am sleepy. I am excited. I am confused. There is no end to experience which can be linked with 'I am'. This is possible only because 'I am' has no content of its own. It is formless, shapeless, for if you are really hungry and you say 'I am hungry' that has a shape and if you say, 'I need to have a pee' that experience, that shape of experience, fills the space. Each concrete experience fills the space, although the space has no shape to be filled. It has no fixed capacity like glass. Space is filled by whatever is occurring without actually being filled. As an ego we are limited and shaped, while as an open awareness we're unlimited, unshaped, and so able to be filled with the shape of whatever is occurring. Without changing anything we can awaken to non-duality by seeing that 'I am' can express the specific self-content of a moment, and it can express the field of our subjectivity, and it can express our open awareness.

### Ngo-wo, rang-zhin and thug-je

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When we awaken to the fact that these aspects are always, already integrated then we see that these are the three modes of enlightened presence, *called ngo-wo, rang-zhin thug-je* in Tibetan. *Ngo-wo* is the natural openness of our mind, its presence, awareness, ability to receive whatever occurs without getting mixed up in it. It is pure, fresh, naked, ungraspable and indestructible. *Rang-zhin* is the radiant field that is inseparable from the open spaciousness. It is like the complexion of our original face, clear, bright, rich in detail, a feast to be enjoyed, not by appropriation, but within the satisfaction that is inherent in spaciousness. *Thug-je* is our presence in the world, a part of the world participating with other parts yet free of separation and splitting. Our specific, unique forms as they manifest variously, the variegated energy of openness showing ever-changing patterns; this is improvisational non-dual compassion that never abandons its own ground.

The sun of awareness illuminates infinite space, revealing its many colours and textures. The rays of the sun bring heat and light which is absorbed and calls forth life. This view indicates that we over-privilege knowledge, knowing about things, ordering and planning our existence. Presence, being, is indefinable and unknowable yet it is our heart, our centre, our ground. We exist, but not as something; we exist as the experience and the experiencer. Their non-duality is our openness, our radiance, our precision. 'Our' merely indicates an alive presence – it does not refer to an ego, an agent, an owner. There is nothing to hold on to so we relax, open, trust. The experiencer cannot be harmed and experience is always changing. This is how we are. This is it.

There is a paradox here. The more you try to hang on to your self and stabilise it, the more problems arise. The less you try to define yourself and simply trust to the openness of the situation, the more you find yourself as part of the interconnectivity. In ordinary language we might call this being confident. The word 'confidence' is linked to confiding which speaks of intimacy, because confidence is not a quality that we have but is the ease of being that comes about when you don't interrupt your being in the world, when you participate in the non-dual flow. Often we interrupt ourselves because we are holding ourselves too tightly. That is to say, we are trying to do our best. We are trying to work out how to make life go well for everyone. We look into our history and think, "*Well, I have made quite a few mistakes in my life so it might be a good idea not to make so many in the future. I have to be clear now about what I should do.*" This way of thinking creates a difficulty: I have made mistakes because I have got it wrong before, therefore I cannot trust myself, and so I have to keep an eye on myself in order not to get lost. But the one who is going to keep an eye on myself is me, the very one whom I don't trust. This is like a television drama in which the crooked policeman is going to uphold the law.

### Impulsivity and spontaneity

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It is helpful to distinguish between two ways of behaving which may seem similar but are actually very different. The first is impulsivity and the second is spontaneity. In the former we have a habit from the past that we have activated many times previously. It is now triggered by circumstances and so we suddenly find ourselves doing something. It is this if something were sleeping inside us and due to a prod from outside suddenly activating it, we are taken over by it and get angry or drunk or do something not very helpful. In response to this I might decide that I have to be vigilant and control myself. But impulse has a sneaky intelligence; impulse knows where light switch is. First it puts the light off and then we follow the impulse in the dark and then it puts the light on again. When the light comes on we think, *"Oh, I am so bad! How did I do that!"* In that way it is quite difficult for the ego to keep an eye on the ego because the ego is ambivalent. It wants to conform and be seen to be good, but it also wants to be free. This inner division creates the gap within which our impulses dwell.

Spontaneity, in contrast, is grounded not in the past but in the here and now. When we are present in our body, grounded relaxed and in touch with our senses, we're also right here in the world. There is no threshold between ourselves, our body and the world, that is to say, you're my world. If I look around I see your faces. I see your face directly. I never see my own face directly. Your face shows itself to me in a way that my face can never show itself to me. Your face is my experience. That is to say, when we take our conceptual scissors and cut a line between self and other, subject and object, this is violence towards actuality. It arises from confusion and generates more confusion. You are my experience– I see how your head is turned, how your hair is arranged, how your clothes are. This has an impact on me; it evokes emotions. This happens immediately, directly – I don't have to think about it and I can't defend myself against it because I am only conscious of it after it has occurred. My world is textured and contoured by how you are. It is not an idealistic or a romantic thing to say, *"You are my world"*; it is an accurate description of how things are. If this is the case, why would I not be attentive to you? Why would I not be respectful to you? Why would I not include you in my experience, since you are in my experience?

In that way the movement of the other and the movement of ourselves are part of the same experience. This is how spontaneity arises. We find ourselves participating and fitting in without having to plan how to do it. Our presence is non-dual; it is not something personal, private and apart from the setting. Our presence reveals ourselves to ourselves within the setting, the context, the field. The field of experience includes us – so getting in rhythm with it is not difficult if we relax and open. We are welcome. The experience is fresh because it is freshly prepared with fresh ingredients. We too are fresh, free of predictions and preoccupations. We manifest in the field, participating with situationally evoked moves that will never be repeated. This is the open space in which neurotic patterns dissolve. We are not importing something from the past but are relaxed and at ease, co-emergent in the flow of becoming which is the field of experience. This makes life light and easy. Other people become less scary, and when we don't have to protect ourselves it is easier to play. The sequences of movement which we call ourselves and the sequences of the world start to flow together.

This is not a dogma or a philosophy or belief system. It is the experience which is revealed when we attend to the actuality of our own being in the world with others. It can suddenly reveal itself as if we are being given the gift. This is facilitated by meditation. Meditation from this particular point of view, is not a technique. It is not something artificial which is imposed. Rather it is a space in which we offer ourselves the possibility to become at home where we are. As we settle, we become aware of how artificial we often are, how full of hopes, fears and anxieties, all of which alienate us from ourselves for while we pursue these stories about who we think we are, we don't attend to how we actually are in the moment.

In that sense meditation is something quite simple and straightforward. What is not simple and straightforward is behaving as a neurotic person running around trying to hold ourselves together. That is very complicated and exhausting because it is a work that never comes to an end. Moreover, if you act in that way you will be at the mercy of the changing forces operating around us, and we will be depleted by over-investing temporary moments of identity with a significance that they can't actually carry. Being at home with yourself is something very deep and profound. It is not based on a dialogic statement that 'I accept how I am'. It is letting go of the busy intellect which is trying to making sense of things. Then we experience directly the intrinsic meaning which pervades every moment of our existence.

The essential point is to be kind to yourself. This is the basis for being kind to others. All the bad things we have done are gone. The past has gone. The future has not yet come. All we have is now.