

RELEASING ATTACHMENT AND CONFUSION IN THE SPACE OF BEING

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CONTENTS

I and me: being subject, being object	3
The first level of ignorance: losing the ground	3
Three doors to liberation.....	6
The absence of hope	6
Emptiness.....	6
Signlessness	6
Awareness is the unemployment of the ego	7
The second stage of ignorance: projecting and investing	8
The river flows, but we try to freeze it.....	9
Who would I be if I didn't have the commentary?	10
Boring down through the layers of ground.....	11

Extracts

...In the middle of our heart there is a little box and in this box there is a piece of paper and on the paper is written our secret name: 'Pinocchio'. Pinocchio wanted to be a boy, but he was not a boy.. We want to be a person, but we are not a person. We are a buddha pretending to be a person. Why would we do that? Because we don't know we are a buddha...

...Here is the great mystery: in order to awaken to how we are, we should do less and not more. But the ego, because it's inflected, or infected, with guilt or shame, feels inadequate and incompetent. Then it feels it has to try even harder. Of course, trying harder gives it a job, a job for life. In fact a job for many, many lives. We want to be a person, but we are not a person. We are a buddha pretending to be a person. Why would we do that? Because we don't know we are a buddha...

...In dzogchen texts the ground is the most important factor. When you are a small child, our main ground is our parents or the people around us. Through this mimetic absorption we internalise many of their ways of being and their values. But as we get older we start to look a little more critically and we move from being grounded in our family values to being grounded in our beliefs.

All we are doing in dharma is exploring the status of these various grounds. Are they as reliable as we imagine they are? We are looking to see if there is another ground beneath the ground we stand on. Emptiness is the deep ground. We also have the ground of our perception, the ground of our assumptions and so on. There are many layers of grounding. If we go into a high residential building, on each floor people have a floor in the own flat and they stand on it. That is the ground of their life in their flat. But that ground is just above the ceiling of the flat below. It's not a real ground. We have to go way down to the basement to find the ground of emptiness.

This is what we do in meditation. We bore down into the many successions of false grounds. By staying with them rather than just believing in them we see that they are transient until gradually the true ground, the unchanging ground, the vajra ground starts to become present as the immediate basis of everything we are and everything we experience. This is such an important thing to stay with...

We have a little time together to look at some central themes in buddhism, particularly the nature of attachment and how that evolves. Although there are many different schools of buddhism, the central concerns are always the same: how to find freedom from habitual formation.

I AND ME: BEING SUBJECT, BEING OBJECT

Most of our lives we are repeating the same kinds of patterns and this is linked with its parallel, that most of the time we see the same kinds of things in the world. That is to say, we operate with a selective attention. Some things seem very important in and of themselves. Of course, we know that for other people these same things are not important. But when it's important for me, it is as if it has an inherent importance and this creates a particular topology of our existence in that we are habitually drawn towards some things and away from others. It is as if we are imprisoned by our biases and prejudices and this is how ignorance functions inside us every day. We don't have a panoramic vision. Even when we feel we are relaxed and open, there are certain features in the environment which pull our attention very quickly. We tend to be very blind to the nature of this pre-formed choice.

If we do a basic sitting practice like shamata or shiné, focussing on a simple object, we become aware that our mind goes after other things. That's where we start to see that we are not free. When we sit with ourselves we start to taste and experience directly the limitations of our ego structure. Even if we don't want to think about certain aspects of our life, we find that somehow our mind is entertaining them.

Renunciation was an early theme in what is now called theravadan buddhism: that we could separate from some of the things which seem to hook us. It can be helpful to try this for a while but after some time it may feel rather a hopeless exercise. When we try to cut off the object, we are actually cutting off ourselves because the ego is an object, not a subject.

We take the ego to be ourselves and then we go on to tell people about ourselves. So I may tell you a little bit about this glass of water I'm holding, because there is something in my hand. It's an object I stand in relation to. Likewise I can tell you about myself, because my self is something I stand in relation to. When I say, "*I am me*", the 'me' that I am is not the 'me' I can tell you about.

When we come to look at the mahayana point of view, as expressed by Nagarjuna for example, we start to see that subject and object, self and other, are like conjoined twins. Each twin has a scalpel and each twin is trying to cut itself free but because they are joined together it's a bloody mess. We pulsate between being subject and object. Grammatically we talk about 'I' and 'me', where 'I' is more the subject mode and 'me' is more the object mode. Because they are twins they have the same mother. In mahayana buddhism we start to explore the fact that we have many mothers. We have the flesh and blood mother whom we came out of. We have the mother of language in that we are born as a person through our communication; separating from that mother is very difficult. Our mother tongue lives through us all our life. We may think that we are speaking but the whole of our culture is speaking through us. We also have the mothers of school, education, friends, jobs and so on.

THE FIRST LEVEL OF IGNORANCE: LOSING THE GROUND

The mother we are interested in here is the mother of ignorance. In the nyingmapa tradition they describe two aspects of the first level of ignorance: ignorance in the first aspect is the loss of the ground. Although the ground is never lost, we lose the ground. For example, we are here together in a

room. We started together in the room and we are still in the room. The room hasn't gone away, but we have gone away from the room without leaving the room. How? Because when we look around in the room, our eye is caught by something, someone's face, a picture, how the mats are laid out and so on and when we fix on a particular image or appearance, where then is the room? The room is taken for granted. But without the room we wouldn't be able to see the particulars. This is exactly how the first level of ignorance functions. The open space of unborn awareness doesn't close, doesn't get lost, doesn't get covered over, although we can use that kind of language to describe what happens. It's there, but not there. Just as this room is here, but not here when we are looking at something in particular.

If we study art, we spend quite a lot of time exploring the nature of absences. Absence and presence are in a dialectical move. Often we understand it in terms of light and dark, shadow and exposure. Both are there at the same time, but our eye tends to go to the more illuminated feature. It is bright and catches our attention. It becomes figural and the rest recedes into the background. So, if I look at one person, everyone else becomes a little bit hazy. They haven't actually become hazy; they are just not registering so much. When I give some things more attention I find out more about them and so they start to take on more value for me. They become special for me, but they are just things in the midst of other things.

So, my mind, my mental activity is dividing up the world. This is the powerful movement of attraction or aversion. But it's all just what is here and 'I/me/myself' am also just one of the many things that are here. I am not you and you are not me. Nice enough as you are, at a certain point I have to go out the door. You are a temporary phenomena in my world. 'My world'. My world goes with me wherever I go whereas you are an optional extra, a side dish. I am the main meal for me. But I can see you, I look around and see you, and I can't see me. I can see my hand, but I can't see my face. In fact your face is more available to me than my own face. And how your face affects me. I am inflected by how you are with me. You are not neutral, since subject and object are twins.

One of the great uses of anger is to try to cut the other off: *"I have had too much of you. You are really annoying me now. Piss off!"* — *"Oh dear, now I miss you. Can we meet? I need you."* — *"I'm having too much of you. I hate you. Piss off and leave me alone!"* For many years I worked as a couple therapist and this dynamic played out again and again. We need and then we don't need. Pulling in, pushing away. It's like having a dimmer light switch and adjusting it to try and get just the right amount of illumination. Now, the great thing with electric lighting is that it come with a little adjusting mechanism and in relationships we often imagine that the other person has such a little switch. But while we are trying to adjust them, they are trying to adjust us, because we are tied together. Before we even met we were tied together! When we meet other people, they function as exemplars of the other. They are slotted into the structure of self and other. Self and other are born together from the same mother, which is emptiness. You can't have an object without a subject. You can't have a subject without an object. They are born together and they are mutually influencing.

Some schools of meditation emphasise trying to bring more space between the subject and the object. It's like applying a Teflon coating to the subject and the advantage of doing this is that the pan is then very easy to clean. This is the psychopathic structure of Don Giovanni. Kissing and having sex with you is okay but I don't want to hang around for long. If I get connected with you my smooth surface will get worn away. In a more polite and socially useful way this is the positioning of the monk. Protected by the Teflon of vows they can be in the world without being infected by it.

However the problem for the ego self is that it wants other people to be interested in it: 'I want you to be interested in me and not just in the idea of me. So, to try to catch your interest, I tell you all about me. But when I tell you about me, I'm feeding your ideas about me. Then you end up thinking that your idea of me is who I really am.' Afterwards you might think: *"James, I'm a bit disappointed in you. You are not who I thought you were."*

These ordinary kind of human emotions are very helpful for dharma practice, because we can start to see what non-duality means. It's not two and it's not one. We may wish to always be in a state of one-ness with someone, fused in some romantic dream that might last for a while, but life has to go on and we have to separate to go to work or whatever, and now you find you are two. At the end of the day when we come back we have to tell our beloved about our day, because they weren't there. We can't *show* them our day; all we can do is *tell* them about our day.

Even if we try to make intimacy by the exchange of narrative, narrative is a double-edged move being both connective and dislocational. When I tell you about my day, I am telling it through my embodied memory and all you are getting is words. I can't share my life with you.

The mind is alone. It doesn't have to be lonely, but it is certainly alone and all attempts to build bridges on the basis of so-called 'sharing', are rather thin. These are words, these are ideas, these are concepts. Probably the time when we feel closest so someone is probably not when we are talking. We might be out walking in the hills and then sit to look at the setting sun. If both of us give ourselves to what is, the self-forgetfulness of that generosity brings an openness which is without boundary. It is as if – as if! – as if we are having the same experience, but we can't really talk about it. In fact the more we try to talk about it, the further apart we become.

From the point of view of meditation practice we can start to see that what we call 'I/me/myself' is not the description of an entity, but is a movement of creation. 'I/me/myself' are potentials embedded in a great potential. I can tell you about different things. The potential to do that is embedded in awareness and from the nyingma/dzogchen point of view awareness is the lucidity, the clarificatory path which admits everything and tastes it directly.

Imagine somebody offers you a dry, sour cherry. You put it in your mouth and you close your eyes and give it your full attention. If you allow the many different subtle flavours to unfold into your saliva and through that to your taste buds, you are in a state of pure receptivity. If you are not judging and comparing and contrasting—*"this is sour, it's not sweet, it's not as good as the one I had last year"*—then you are simply becoming a space of receptivity in which there is the unfolding of the potential of the situation. In that moment the receptivity in your mouth is neither active nor passive. It's a kind of 'with the unfolding', not collapsing into it, not stepping back and judging it, but allowing the potential to unpack itself into your experience.

This is rigpa or awareness. Moment by moment many things are arising. Most of the time we approach the field of experience in terms of selectivity. That is the first stage where we say, *"This is worthy of my attention, that is not worthy of my attention."* I am then applying judgements about liking and not liking. I'm relating it to past experiences. In that way I am incorporating this current experience into the matrix generated by the accumulation of prior experience. Just as we look at a menu and choose what food to eat, then take it from the plate into our mouth and then through the digestion processes some of it is incorporated, in the same way mentally we incorporate some aspects of what is occurring. The ego has a very big mouth but very weak metabolising power which is why it turns food into shit. This is not how awareness operates. Awareness is not chewing up, it's not selecting, it's not devouring. It's appreciative, appreciative without a template.

But how will I know if it's good or bad if I have no template? Maybe knowing whether it's good or bad is secondary. It's me telling the world what it is. Maybe I should wait a little bit, relax my omnipotence and let it happen. The world shows itself to me through me, I get it all, but I can't do anything with it. In the same way we can look around this room where we are, turning our head, looking up, looking down; everything is coming, everything is here. You don't need to make the room, the room gives itself to you. There is an immediate, direct just-here-ness, but what is here? *"I have to think about it."* And whatever you think about it, is not what is here.

This is the nature of ignorance. Everything is available, everything is here. This is the meaning of dzogpa chenpo, the great completion. The whole is already in place. It's not a construct, it's not a totalisation; it's not made by adding or improving. This is what we swim in every moment of every day. But we can't do anything with it. In order to be an effective member of society I have to act on the world. And that is easiest when I am not part of the world. As a separate individual I am free to act. I act on 'not me.' I bite the apple and I'm very glad that the apple doesn't bite me. This is the domain of the ego agency: the capacity to make a mark. When we make a mark, we create a sign and the sign is then read and interpreted.

THREE DOORS TO LIBERATION

In the mahayana tradition they say that there are three doors to liberation:

THE ABSENCE OF HOPE

Hope as a taking hold of aspects of the world, it's a building kind of activity. *"Oh, I hope I will see you again!" "Why? The world is full of people! Seeing you or seeing someone else... who cares?" "No, I hope I see you!"* Normally we wouldn't think of hope as something negative. We go to the cinema and we hope it's a good film. That's a sign that our template is going with us, that I am the evaluator. From the mahayana point of view this is not a good idea.

EMPTINESS

Emptiness is the absence of inherent of self-nature. If we look around this room we see light. We imagine people, but what we see is light. As long as we keep imagining people and we find out what they do, where they come from, what their name is and so on, they become vessels which can be filled. But in fact they are empty, just appearance. But we fill them up. Why? We think it's friendly. *"Oh, I met you before!" "Unfortunately, I met Dr. Alzheimer on the way and so I don't know if I've ever met you before. I met somebody, I'm sure I did."* When we meet people, who unfortunately have these degenerative conditions, it's quite upsetting. They can't hold onto the conversation. They repeat themselves because they have forgotten what they said.

So we can see how our social formation depends on fullness and not on emptiness. But luckily the buddha explained that the fullness is also empty and the empty is also full. If I remember your name, that doesn't establish anything. When we say someone's name, some vowels and consonants resonate out of our voice box. They hear the sound, they think 'That's me, you remember who I am, how charming!' That's a thought. I had a thought. Two thoughts meet together. Conversation are dating sites for thoughts. Thought production creates the world and this is possible because everything is empty. We can re-invent ourselves, which we do, because we are empty of fixed definition. Emptiness is potential.

SIGNLESSNESS

Signlessness means that the signifier – John or Mary or whoever – has no signified. That is to say, you learn that someone's name is John and this gives you the sense that there is someone there. That's the first thing: Someone there. And that 'someone' is called John. So, now we know this is John. So, what do we know? Do we know about John? John is a stream of experience. This flow of experience is not intentionally created. We find different sensations arise in our body, different feelings and so on. We don't know what our ingredients of the moment will be. It's one thing in a café to have a *plat du jour*. But we have a *plat de minuit*. A *plat de minuit* and a *plat de second*, because it's

always changing. Who is the chef? Who is cooking me? This is very alarming. Someone is making me 'me' and sure as hell it's not me! We find ourselves being I/me/myself.

So what does the sign 'James' signify? 'James' is unfolding in dependent arising in the multiplicity of factors operating simultaneously. What we call 'James' seems to refer to something however if we attend not to concepts *about* the idea of 'James', but rather attend to the actual phenomena which are constituting James moment by moment by moment, they are so complex and diverse that we can't catch hold of them.

Mahayana says that this world is signless. When we fall into the seduction of name and form, we think we are getting hold of something. But each thing which arises is full of potential and whatever definition we have of it will never encompass the whole of it.

If there is a murder in Vienna, the police try to build up a profile of who the murderer might have been with DNA, fingerprints and so on. They look on the CCTV, interview people in the neighbourhood; they are building up a picture. All this is the work of the ego. That's what we do in this room when we start to talk to people a little bit. We build up some sense of what we could talk about or how we might relate to them. But this is like the murder inquiry after the event. The event, now, is just this.

AWARENESS IS THE UNEMPLOYMENT OF THE EGO

The implications of this are very important. Awareness is the unemployment of the ego.

Nowadays people are worried about artificial intelligence and how it's going to lead to the loss of many jobs. What is the work of the ego? It secures me as somebody. However I am not somebody, I am a nobody somebody-ing. The potential of each of us is so great that if we try to establish it, we can't say who is there. In a sense nobody is there. And yet moment by moment this nobody is somebody. My somebody-in-particular-ness here in this room with you now is a co-creation. I need you in order for me to be me. I wasn't talking like this on the plane. I'm talking like this now, because of the situation here. I am born into this moment through the causes and conditions of this matrix. Without you I am not me. My potential is revealed through you. If you don't arise, the aspect of me which arises with you doesn't arise.

We know that when we get older our parents may die. We realise that the conversations I had with my mother I'll never have with anyone else again. That seeing the face of my mother gave birth to me as her child again and again and again. The face of my mother made me my mother's child. However when I was out in the street, I wasn't my mother's child. I was being born or emerging as whatever the circumstances required.

This is the potential of emptiness, which is inseparable from awareness, the illuminating lucidity of the mind. It is an enormous freedom since there is no end to our potential but when we settle into a fixed definition of who we are, into our various neurotic tendencies, particular aspects of our potential, tend to manifest and because the ego scans across the three times – past, present and future – it builds up a picture: 'This is me. I'm like this. I have always been like this. It's just how I am. So what else could I do? I am me.'

Who is making this limitation? Thoughts, feelings, sensations are arising. Arising and passing. Dynamic, transient and ungraspable. It's already gone. When we catch a thought, we are catching an echo. When we then build up enough echoes, it's as if we've got something. In fact it's just a memory. *"But it seems so real!"* Real, because we believe in it.

THE SECOND STAGE OF IGNORANCE: PROJECTING AND INVESTING

Belief in inherent existence is the functional aspect of the second level of ignorance. Firstly we had the openness of the room which is forgotten as we tune into particular features. By building up a habit of selection we give a quality of attention to the selected items which invests them with importance for us. *"Oh, the object is redolent/full of/shining with importance. Don't you notice it? It's amazing!"* Later we may go to an art gallery with a friend and we look at an amazing painting and you look at them and we notice that they are bored. *"How can you be bored? Look, it's amazing!"*, we might even say. We see the meaning out there, but meaning is here. The meaning is our projection, our interpretation.

The mind is the most important thing. The generosity of the mind fills the mind, fills the world, with particularisations. This is the mind; it's not the things. If we recognise this, this is referred to as the energy of awareness, the play of the creativity of the mind of the buddha.

If we don't recognise this as the effulgence of unborn awareness, then we have a world of stuff. Then I am merely a thing looking at things. And so which things do I like best? There is so much stuff, I have to choose! But luckily I am skilled at adopting and rejecting. Adopting and rejecting are the two main dynamics of the mind and we read about them again and again in meditation texts. We try to get more of what we like and less of what we don't like. We edit the world.

How does this operate? Due to my deluded experience that subject and object are truly separate, I have to protect myself from being overwhelmed by stuff by screening out a lot. Since most of what we experience is neutral it gets disregarded. Because of this we intensify adopting or desireful appropriation or aversive rejection onto what is left. *"I have to do this, because I know what I like. And I don't want to have things I don't like."*

In this way our welcome to the world is very, very small. I start with me and then I look to see if there is anything commenting *about* me? And if there is, I'll have it. That's it. President Trump shows us this very beautifully. He is for himself, shamelessly. He is a pure form of the ego and from that point of view he is very helpful to us, because we are probably too self-deceitful to show ourselves in that naked shameless way.

Everything is here, everything is available. In terms of the immediacy of the unfolding there is no prohibition. In terms of acting into the situation, of course there are prohibitions. But the direct presencing of how it is is without limit. Any limit comes from me. This means that the door to freedom is in the palm of my hand. Nobody else is doing this to me. This is my mind, and my mind becomes habitual, obsessional, driven, lazy, depressed, anxious... When these experiences arise, it is as if this is me. If I am depressed, then I'm depressed. This is because the ego is empty of self-content. The ego is nothing pretending to be something and any something will do. So if I've got to be something and if 'depressed' is always available on the menu, then I might adopt depressed. Because I'm energetic, I'm happy, I'm sad, I'm this, I'm that, I'm always something.

This is when the Buddha weeps. We are always something because we are nothing! *"But I don't want to be nothing! If I was nothing, who would I be?"* The Buddha says: *"You would be a buddha."* *"But how can I be a buddha when I am me?"*

We take refuge in the buddha, dharma, sangha and we talk about renouncing samsara. We hear that we have buddha nature, but also hanging onto myself feels pretty important too. Well, who are we? When we look at ourselves, we are ever-changing. So, what is this self we are hanging onto? It's the idea of being a self, the idea of being some-thing, some-one. That is why in the middle of our heart there is a little box and in this box there is a piece of paper and on the paper is written our

secret name: 'Pinocchio'. Pinocchio wanted to be a boy, but he was not a boy. We want to be a person, but we are not a person. We are a buddha pretending to be a person. Why would we do that? Because we don't know we are a buddha.

THE RIVER FLOWS, BUT WE TRY TO FREEZE IT

This is where it's a little more difficult. The buddha is not an object of knowledge. Objects of knowledge are objects. The buddha is not an object, the buddha is awareness. We can't see awareness, it's not a commodity, we don't get more or less of it. It is quite other than everything we know. It's not artificial, it's not a construct or a creation, and it cannot be construed or made sense of inside any field of polarities: good/bad, right/wrong. We can't allocate value to it. We can allocate value to the ego, we can give ourselves a school report card: *"I must try harder. I really need to change my way of life"*... As one of the conjoined twins, we speak to ourselves as object from ourselves as subject.

- I'm going to meditate every day.
- Who are you telling?
- Myself.
- Have you had this conversation with yourself before?
- Yes.
- It doesn't listen.

This is the dialogic structure of the ego. Awareness is different. *...Here is the great mystery: in order to awaken to how we are, we should do less and not more. But the ego, because it's inflected, or infected, with guilt or shame, feels inadequate and incompetent. Then it feels it has to try even harder. Of course, trying harder gives it a job, a job for life. In fact a job for many, many lives. We want to be a person, but we are not a person. We are a buddha pretending to be a person. Why would we do that? Because we don't know we are a buddha* But maybe I don't have to change. Maybe it's okay as it is. *"No, I'm sure it's not. Let me tell you about my problems."* But if we look at the problem, it's there for two or three seconds and then gone. The self-liberation of phenomena is the same as the impermanence of all phenomena, which is the same as the ungraspability of phenomena, which is the same as the emptiness of all phenomena.

So what are we going to do? We go to the side of the river and we decide: When I was a child I used to build sandcastles. But now I'm too big to do that. I'm going to build water-castles. So we put our cup in the water and fill it up and we turn it upside down... it'll take me a long time to build that castle. I know: I'll freeze the river! And then I'll hit it with a hammer and I'll take the bits of ice and I'll build the castle!

That's what grasping does. We can't grasp unless you've got something to grasp. The flow of events moment by moment is ungraspable. What we grasp is a concept and we then pack the concepts together to make a house of thought. It is as if it freezes the flow of direct experiences so we can live in this fossilised mansion. That's where the ego lives, in a dead world, a dreary world. But the river goes on flowing. Moment by moment life is going on, fresh, different colours, sensations, feelings...

'What does it mean?' is the most stupid question in the world. Meaning is the door to damnation. *"I have to think about it. I have to make sense of it."* Why? Why would we do that? What can our thoughts do to add value to this great universe which is shining in front of us? The world needs our thoughts the way a teenage girl needs a pimple on her nose. This is how we burden ourselves. *"What will I do with my life?" "Is this is the right job for me?" "Is this the right*

relationship?" "Tell me, you know me a bit." Thinking, thinking, thinking. One thought leading to another and another and another.

The theravadan texts say that when the buddha enters nirvana, he enters the signless. We can't construe nirvana, we can't get meaning out of it. We can't interpret it and it doesn't need that. It is complete, dzogpa chenpo, the great completion. One of the words used a lot in dzogchen texts is *sim-pa* which meant contented. We don't need more, it's okay as it is. The texts say: whatever comes, comes. *"But I don't like it."* Are we adding value or spitting in our own mouth? *"I don't like it."* And? What is it? *"I don't know, but I don't like it."* We have a sensation in our body. What is it like? Don't tell it what it's like; let it show you what it's like. *"But I don't like it!"* I have already come to a conclusion. *"I don't like it. I don't want it. Not for me. I know what I like."* But we don't know what it is. *"I know what I like and I like what I know. I don't need the whole world. If I want strong experiences, I can sniff my own armpits."*

That's how most of life is. We create our own world with our own habits, our own rituals and we sniff them every day. Ah, ha that smells like me. We feel comforted.

This is different from dzogchen contentment. All the Buddha's teaching is about the middle way: not merged into the experience, not rejecting the experience, but staying and open and present with the experience. In the general approach of buddhism we develop a capacity for observing our experience. That requires a little bit of separation. But when we move into dzogchen practice we are not looking *at* something, we're allowing the clarity of the emergent experience to be unobstructed as it fills the space of possibility. This is sometimes referred to as the dharmadhatu, the space of all phenomena.

Usually we might think: 'This is something which is happening to me.' and then I am standing in relation to that. I am sited here. When we do the practice, we realise that every location where we might seem to feel that our mind is located is itself transient. Nothing is established. Nothing is fixed. We can't come back to the same place. If I say *'Oh, I was thinking about that yesterday'*, that thought was with me yesterday and now it's with me again, and it's as if I am some fixed reference point like the hub of a wheel with the spokes all coming into the centre.

But what is that hub? Again we've got these two things: we've got the idea of me, which is empty and can be filled with anything; and the facticity or actuality of me, which is the flow of experience which is passing through. The flow never stops, it doesn't fix itself anywhere. But the idea of me, like a transparent glass tube, seems to be the medium through which the flow of experience is happening. *"It's happening to me"* – That's an idea. That is an explanation to ourselves about what is going on.

WHO WOULD I BE IF I DIDN'T HAVE THE COMMENTARY?

This is the central point: to realise I am so active day and night interpreting the world. I am a commentary. Does the world need my commentary? Do I need my commentary? Who would I be if I didn't have the commentary? This is the heart of meditation, to let the commentary flow without thinking that it refers to you. We are created out of the commentary. It's not that we exist prior to the commentary and the commentary is about us. The commentary is coming after the fact of our true existence, but actually our belief in the commentary—in the meaning that seems to be pointed out by the commentary—this belief establishes and maintains the delusion that we exist as a separate entity. So the main point of meditation is to observe how we throw ourselves into involvement.

This is often referred to as the Three Wheels: me, the thrower; the self which seems to be thrown; and the connection between them which is what I am thrown into. And they are all empty. All

pure theatre. Sound and fury signifying nothing. But it signifies something to me because I have nothing but sound and fury. Or: I'm a buddha. I have a choice.

This is a central thing I wanted to set out in front of you. It's not that activity is wrong or bad, but that thoughts, feelings, sensations are methods. In the Tibetan tradition in the yab yum symbol, the feminine is the wisdom and the male is method. When these are inseparable then the method is an expression of the clarity of emptiness. But when the method loses its grounding in empty openness, then it becomes a will to power. Just as a sharp scalpel, as we looked at earlier, is a method. We can use it to heal someone or kill someone. We can slit someone's throat or we can carry out some medical operation. If the method is abused by a negative ego formation, it can be a root for murder.

BORING DOWN THROUGH THE LAYERS OF GROUND

So, the key thing is: what is the ground of emergence? In dzogchen texts the ground is the most important factor.

When you are a small child, our main ground is our parents or the people around us. Through this mimetic absorption we internalise many of their ways of being and their values. But as we get older we start to look a little more critically and we move from being grounded in our family values to being grounded in ourself: *"This is what I believe. This is what I'm prepared to do."*

All we are doing in dharma is exploring the status of these various grounds. Are they as reliable as we imagine they are? We are looking to see if there is another ground beneath the ground we stand on. Emptiness is the deep ground. We also have the ground of our perception, the ground of our assumptions and so on. There are many layers of grounding. If we go into a high residential building, on each floor people have a floor in their own flat and they stand on it. That is the ground of their life in their flat. But that ground is just above the ceiling of the flat below. It's not a real ground. We have to go way down to the basement to find the ground of emptiness.

This is what we do in meditation. We bore down into the many successions of false grounds. By staying with them rather than just believing in them we see that they are transient until gradually the true ground, the unchanging ground, the vajra ground starts to become present as the immediate basis of everything we are and everything we experience. That's what we do. We can do it, too. If we don't do it, we just start believing in things which are not reliable.

This is such an important thing to stay with. It doesn't matter what our politicians do. Our question is: how do I cheat myself? What is it that stops me looking to see what is there? I am the only limit to my own awakening.

We are fortunate people because we have some degree of sangha, we can meet together with other people and do practice. And the practice helps us live truthfully.

Transcribed by Lea Pabst, 2020