
Garab Dorje's

Essential points in three statements

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Excerpts

...Dzogchen means the great perfection, the absolute simplicity of our situation. Although there are many improvements that could be made there is nothing to improve. This is the paradox. This tradition comes from the Buddha Samantabhadra. Samantabhadra means 'always good' or 'always already good'. That is to say, the basis of our experience is a presence, an awareness, which is already shining and clear. Within that clarity many different forms of experience arise, some of which are not so clear. The clarity of the mind reveals the dullness of some of the contents of the mind.

...The first point of Garab Dorje is to simply be in your own situation. Sometimes it is explained as seeing yourself or seeing your own nature. In Tibetan this word for nature is ngo wo which also means face. It is impossible to see your own face; you can see a reflection of your face in a mirror and other people always see your face but you yourself cannot see your own face. Therefore, when we say, seeing your own face or in the Zen tradition they talk about seeing your original face, it means finding the way to see the thing that can't be seen.

...Garab Dorje's second point is: not to remain in doubt. This means not to inhabit a state of confusion that lingers. In particular that means having got some experience of the open nature of the mind and how the energy moves, we often feel a need to correct our experience, to prepare ourselves more or to try to find a way of developing ourselves in a better way. That is not necessarily useful. However, it is habitual, because, as we have touched on before, there is a double move here. That is to say, if I apply

...The third point from Garab Dorje is simply to continue in this way. Day and night, waking and sleeping, whatever is arising is the energy of the dharmakaya; it is just the unborn energy that manifests in its myriad ways, whatever your activity is. Not taking it too seriously is at the heart of it.

Contents

<i>Preparation from the dzogchen point of view</i>	4
<i>The teaching lineage of Garab Dorje</i>	6
The first point of Garab Dorje: seeing your own nature	6
<i>Observe the points where you cheat yourself: examining the nature of 'I'</i>	7
<i>Looking for our own nature in the correct way</i>	8
<i>The nature of mind: the mirror and its reflections</i>	9
<i>Attending to impermanence: things go free by themselves</i>	12
Keep observing your habitual habit of identifying with what is arising but passing.....	13
<i>Three 'Aa' Practice</i>	18
<i>Compassion: open spaciousness welcoming all phenomena</i>	19
<i>The mind is naked like the sky. Thoughts and feelings radiate like the sun's rays.</i>	23
Why don't we recognise this nakedness	24
<i>Raw and indestructible</i>	27
<i>Don't do anything: self-liberation of thought arises through allowing energy to flow</i>	28
<i>Three 'Aa' practice</i>	30
Second point of Garab Dorje: not to remain in doubt	30
Third point of Garab Dorje: simply to continue in this way.	31
<i>Three traditional examples of the qualities of the energy of the mind</i>	32
The example of a crystal ball	32
The example of the mirror.....	33
The example of light passing into a crystal prism	34
<i>Three 'Aa' practice and final advice</i>	38

We have a bit of time to explore an understanding of ourselves through dzogchen. Dzogchen is found in the Tibetan buddhist tradition and it means *the great perfection, the absolute simplicity of our situation*. Although there are many improvements that could be made there is nothing to improve. This is the paradox to be explored.

This tradition comes from the Buddha Samantabhadra. Samantabhadra means 'always good' or 'always already good'. That is to say, the basis of our experience is a presence, an awareness, which is already shining and clear. Within that clarity many different forms of experience arise, some of which are not so clear. The clarity of the mind reveals the dullness of some of the contents of the mind.

In many spiritual traditions there is a great stress on the difference between the sacred and the profane. In this view our ordinary lives are seen as being diminished and full of problems. We are not as good as we would like to be, we don't have the qualities we would like to realise, and, from this point of view, we have a hope that there is something better somewhere else – some sacred sphere in which good people live. Maybe this is up in heaven or in a monastery somewhere in Tibet but it is certainly not where we are living. Therefore, we have to go from the profane where we live, the spoiled and the damaged, to find this Holy Grail. This can take us on many a long and winding road and perhaps we can never be quite sure if we get there. However, the very intention to look towards something other than ourselves for our salvation is already fixed in an attitude of certain knowledge and decisiveness: *I know my situation. I know myself. I know what is lacking in me. Because there is something wrong with me I have to repair myself.* The very clarity of this kind of knowledge, from the point of view of dzogchen, is itself a kind of stupidity As it conflates knowing about something with direct knowledge of it.

Of course, in this world there are many ways to repair and improve yourself. Every town has places to do yoga and tai chi. There are people who can do all sorts of things to your body: put candles in your ears, tubes up your bum to wash out your colon, give you hair transplants and liposuction – you can have any kind of improvement you like. As soon as you have an idea of what is wrong with you, many people will arrive offering to give you what you need. However, from the point of view of dzogchen this is a wrong turning which can only lead us astray.

When we examine our situation we easily find that there is always something to be done, always something to be busy about. This very busyness, good as it can be on a practical interactive level, is also a way of being preoccupied. There is always an agenda, something to tilt ourselves towards, to be busy about, to be anxious about and to seek help somewhere in the world. Someone, somewhere else, must know how I can make myself better. This could be to make myself more relaxed, to make myself stronger and clearer; to develop particular qualities. However, busyness, in many ways, is embedded in a particular reading of our situation: *there are a lot of things that go wrong*. But what are these things? What is our relation to them? This is at the heart of the practice of dzogchen and I will try to open this up and show it to you in various ways.

This is a kind of practice that I have been doing for a long time. I originally studied it in India with various Tibetan teachers and I try to integrate it into my life. Essentially it is a way of seeing, directly experiencing, the natural integration of all things. That is to say, whatever occurs offers us two possibilities. One is to categorise it, to place it in relation to faculties of knowledge that we have, in order to make sense of it. The other is to be with it *directly*.

However, when we stop the busyness of organisation, of control, of mastery over the experiential field and open ourselves to that field in all its complexity, two things happen. One is we realise that the pot we have for putting the whole world into is very small and we then get

overwhelmed and think we need to get a better pot. In this, however, there is a kind of slippage or displacement from the *immediacy of the awareness* which is open and welcoming to all phenomena, including the pot itself. This pot is also just one of the things that is happening. That is to say, who we think we are – how we have become conditioned and constructed by events, which feels exactly like ‘me’ – is itself one of the things that we experience. There is, then, a slip into *an identification with these particular structures* which are historically generated. This includes our genetic inheritance, what life was like when we were in our mother’s womb, our birth experience, and all the interactions that have occurred since then. All of these bring about particular tensions, particular tendencies, of our organisation as an energetic field. And, clearly, there is no steel wall around us; our nature is energetic and immediately in contact with the energetic field around us and so we are touched and moved by all sorts of circumstances. And if our luck or our karma has been to encounter many disturbing circumstances it is likely that our energy is pretty disturbed. Therefore, when we identify with that, we are then faced with the fact that I am not comfortable in my own skin and so need to do something in order to make this better.

This is where this choice point occurs, the crossroads of our existence. One path leads to control, to the assertion of mastery, to finding out ‘how to do’ what is going on, to be in charge. The other leads to a recognition of the immediate resolution of the tension by observing how it is moment-by-moment. That is to say, the more we concretise the problem, the more we develop a story in ourselves of: *My shitty childhood, How I wasn’t loved, My crap time at school*, or whatever it would be, we build a particular positioning for ourselves, and this position opens up a particular vista, a particular view in front of us. Just as if you went for a walk on the Downs here in Brighton. With each step you take the world around you is altered because each step, especially if you are going up a hill or down a hill, changes what you can see. What you see is what you get – that is your world. And of course, when we have this inner geography going on as well, this inner topology of our emotions, our thoughts, our ruminations, our hatreds of ourselves, our protective fantasies and so on, the outer landscape and the inner landscape meeting together creates an intensity where we think: ‘This is it, this is my life.’ Inside that view we don’t really see very much because moment-by-moment something is happening: either we are going out to the world or the world is coming at us...it never stops...morning to night it never stops.

Even in your sleep it doesn’t stop. Something is always going on. Therefore, on the level of manifestation, that is to say, our lived experience, so much is happening that if we try to control it we will be, first of all, very, very busy, and secondly, not very successful. This world – samsara – means not sorted, but, *we want to get sorted*. Therefore, we are in the wrong place. How, then, do we get to being in the right place without joining the ‘Jonestown society’? Suicide won’t help if you believe in re-birth. We want to be somewhere else whilst still being in the same place. If we wait for death, we don’t know what will happen then; many people will tell you many stories about that but we don’t know for sure. Therefore, we have a choice moment-by-moment: identifying with this seemingly solid, real, impacting frame of experience, or trying to see more precisely what its actual living quality is. And this is really the heart of dzogchen. I will explain this in more familiar and classical ways shortly.

Preparation from the dzogchen point of view

Dzogchen is embedded in the Tibetan buddhist tradition and in that tradition there are many preparatory practices which are often seen as necessary. From the view of dzogchen itself, no preparation is necessary, because the more you identify with the one who is *preparing* oneself, that is to say *I, myself with my difficulties and limitations*, the more you make this the site of your existence, the more you create further problems.

'Who am I?' is always the central question. Moment-by-moment the infinite potential of our situation is grounded in the incredible qualities of creativity, imagination, and our inseparability from the world. Here in this room, now, are many things; we just turn our head and we see them – immediately have a rich world. Even if you feel depressed, hopeless, and useless, if for just one second you stop whirling in that, there is a sense of amazement: 'Ahh!' There is all this stuff! What is it?' Therefore, if you allow the 'stuff-ness' of the world to put out a hand to you, then you can make some contact. As Mr Obama told the Iranians in 2009, *'If you stop looking at us with a clenched fist and unclench it, you will find there is a hand waiting there for you.'* This is exactly the teaching of non-duality.

The universe itself is always like this – very, very friendly. It is ourselves who are clenched and held in ourselves, full of our own thoughts, pre-occupations, and imaginations. Therefore, in a sense, the preparation is to begin to see how tied in knots we are. We don't need to prepare to go anywhere else. The preparation is about seeing how the knots are tied so that we can begin to let them untie themselves, and in doing that one is not being very busy. If you are caught up in something, if you are very invested in a project, especially if you are anxious, very often the more you try to do, the worse it gets. In order to untangle a ball of wool you have to see how the wool is moving; you have to look and then work with what is there. And, essentially, dzogchen is concerned with collaboration, with working together.

The idea that one can control oneself or control other people is not very helpful. This is because manifestly we are out of control. When we sit simply doing this basic meditation, observing the breath or some simple external object, we find that our thoughts and feelings don't stand still for very long: some new 'something or other' is coming. We find ourselves going off here or there, into the future or into the past. Given that is how we are, why would we want to attempt to control ourselves? If you sit in a car with a little boy who is four or five years old they will move their arms pretending to drive, because, they want to drive the car – but they *can't* drive the car. We are like that: we want to control our lives but we can't find the real steering wheel and our legs aren't long enough for the foot pedals. Therefore, maybe we could just sit back and be passengers. If you are the passenger you can look around and see everything.

This is really the basis of meditation: to observe how busy you are, how active you are in trying to construct and direct, and in particular, acting to say: *No, that is bad, yes that is good. I need more of this and less of that.* That sort of activity keeps us busy all the time, because, in as much as we exist as our familiar sense of self, we want to be nice, we want to be good, we want to be happy. However, that means looking for things which will make us better, make our lives better, and looking out for things that will make life more difficult and dangerous, both external and internal. In that way we push away things that cause trouble and bring in the things that will help. This is an ongoing process because our human situation, our existential situation, is always in danger. It is only on the level of dreams and fantasies, our narrative, that we think the world is good.

Now we are in the middle of an economic crisis and nobody knows what will happen. From the point of view of dharma or meditation practice this is very helpful because it points to a kind of hubris, an inflated sense, a fantasy of control, which permeates the world. In the story of the 'Three Little Piggies', Piggy number one thinks, 'Ah, it is summertime, it is so beautiful, I want to sing and laugh all day. Piggy number two says: 'I heard about the wolf' and piggy number three says, 'I know there is a wolf!' Therefore, Piggy number two makes a stick house, piggy number three works very hard to make a build a brick house but piggy number one says, 'Ah, life is good, stock markets are going up, I can pay off my mortgage and buy a second house. Maybe I will retire early'...and then the wolf comes. Except in our world economic situation piggy number three doesn't seem to exist. We are all in this situation together: this will affect people's

pensions, it affects how much money is available for schools, for hospitals and so on. Why didn't people see it coming? Because, we are pretty stupid: the Buddha explained very simply the three root poisons: stupidity, desire/attachment/and anger/aversion. As soon as you take things as solid and strongly real you want to push away the bad and get the good. When the sun is shining and everything looks good you think, '*Ha. I will just have lots and lots of good, because now there is no bad.*' – and we want to believe that.

However, meditation is a completely different view of the world. It says that if you stay preoccupied with game planning, strategy, tactics, and working things out, you will *imagine* that you know what is going on but, actually, even in that moment of clarity the subtle blinkers are operating and many of the complex factors in the experiential field will be invisible to you. Therefore, sooner or later, 'BANG!' you crash into a wall. This is not so surprising; this is samsara and people have been doing it for a long time.

The teaching lineage of Garab Dorje

Dzogchen originally manifests in the quality of the Buddha Samantabhadra. Buddha here indicates an eternal presence. It may sometimes show a form, as we see in thangka paintings of Samantabhadra, but, actually, Samantabhadra has no form, he is ungraspable. However, for the sake of beings, in order to communicate something, he shows a form. He gave the teachings to another Buddha called Vajrasattva or 'Indestructible nature' who then gave the teachings in a way that came into this world through *Garab Dorje*. It is Garab Dorje's Three Points, or Three Instructions, which form the basis of dzogchen.

The first point of Garab Dorje: seeing your own nature

The first point of Garab Dorje is to simply be in your own situation. Sometimes it is explained as seeing yourself or seeing your own nature. In Tibetan this word for *nature* is *ngo wo* which also means face. It is impossible to see your own face; you can see a reflection of your face in a mirror and other people always see your face but you yourself cannot see your own face. Therefore, when we say, *seeing your own face* or in the Zen tradition they talk about *seeing your original face*, it means finding the way to see the thing that can't be seen. I can hold up my hand and see it and you can also see my hand; seeing things which exist as objects is easy to us as this is what we are trained to do. However, this is a radically different kind of seeing. This involves – in relation to how we talk about this – trying to listen in a different way. There are many things that can be said about dzogchen but it is not about trying to build up a composite picture; we are not here for academic study. It is not to construct a theory, a set of ideas that we can wrap around ourselves like a duvet, so that if we feel a bit wobbly, we can take this dogma and hold onto it. Dogmas have to be held in mind and, of course, when we practice meditation, we realise that our mind is not very good at holding on to even one thought, so, no matter how holy and perfect a dogma is, it is not going to do you much good. It will be blown away. Therefore, we want to find a way of integrating and living the awareness so that it is never lost.

Now, clearly, everything in our lives can be lost. Health can be lost, memories can be lost, money can be lost and belief can be lost; there are plenty of lapsed christians in this country. *I choose to believe. I choose not to believe.* You can do Sufi dancing for a couple of years and then go and do something else. At first things seem bright and shiny; you realise that the teacher has some problems and then go to something else. In this way we jump from one thing to another. The point here is that all of these activities – and a lot of buddhism as well – can be constructs that we use to help us feel better, and as long as we stay in relation to them, as long as we

remember to do the practice, we have some kind of lift or support for ourselves. However, it is effortful, arises due to causes and conditions and therefore is vulnerable. It is impermanent.

Observe the points where you cheat yourself: examining the nature of 'I'

The name of the Buddha Kuntu Zangpo, Samantabhadra, means *always good*, always already good, pure from the very beginning. This is our nature. It is not a construct. If our nature was not pure from the very beginning you couldn't make it pure; if you take a piece of coal and you devote ten years to washing it, you can use any kind of detergent you like but it is not going to become white. Coal is black. If your nature is impure what is the point of doing meditation practice? You are just going to be impurity with a little bit of make-up on top. Make-up is all very well but if you want someone to kiss you, your make-up is going to get smudged. And if you have got too many secrets hidden behind your makeup, later at night it will be difficult. It is like that isn't it? Everything slips if it's artificial; if it is false it is not true. Cheating other people that is one thing but cheating yourself is another.

Therefore, recognising our own nature or awakening to and as our own nature is to observe the points where we cheat ourselves by taking something which is un-reliable, changing, not-self, and pretend it is our self. This can be a thought, a feeling, a memory, a sense of our body, a sense of our future, or our potential. Whenever we do the meditation practice there are many opportunities to do this. However, of course, it happens absolutely invisibly in our interactions with other people. For example, whenever you sit in a cafe and chat with a friend you are just in 'Ga – ga ' land...lost. It is very nice, very warm and you feel good afterwards but what you have done is a mutual confirmation of stories: 'Hello I exist,' 'Oh I am glad you exist but I am a little bit unsure that I exist so could you just validate that I am truly existing...' It is on and on like that, like these big apes grooming each other. However, do we really exist? In what way do we exist? We have a name, we have our history, we have some activities that we do – whether these are paid or unpaid – we have worries, we have necessary tasks of life maintenance. All these can easily be seen as determining our existence. However, what are they? And this is what we want to do in the meditation; to give ourselves a space to observe ourselves in the moment of our own existence, not adding some new interpretation onto that but just seeing very precisely the moment-by-moment construction of our world.

The only reason for doing meditation is that it happens quite quickly and if you don't slow it down you can't quiet see where the joins are. Just as if you go to the cinema and you see a film, if it is good, you are taken in by it but if you observe it, if it is not a modern digitalised film, it will have the frames and there will be a gap between each frame. Our existence is constructed in the same way; one frame follows another. Therefore, when we do some sitting practice we get a chance to see that this turns into that endlessly. And as long as we are taken in by what is arising, as long as we believe it and it seems valid and real, *Oh, there seems to be something there*, we move towards what is arising, we validate it and it validates us – who is the one who is meditating? *I am* 'Who is the one who is confused? *I am* 'What is the nature of that 'I'? *Well, I am happy. I am sad. I am tired. I am excited.* I am ... dot, dot, dot – fill in the dot. That is to say, in each of these situations there is an identification.

Since you have got up this morning how many things have you been? The most important thing in your life, and one moment today, was probably having a pee: *I just need a pee*. There is a complete pre-occupation with you and your bladder; the bladder is relieved and then do you think you need to pee? No, you think: *I need a cup of tea*. You have a cup of tea and then you have something else. How is this possible? This is because the 'I' is empty. The basis for our sense of self is something which is insubstantial, it is an empty space. The 'I' appears to be existing by

itself but is an empty signifier. It is so open it welcomes everyone, every possibility can be there. 'I' can take on any colouration but it is very difficult to see what it is. We take for granted that this 'I' exists, that 'You' exist and 'I' exist. Now, if we say 'you' exist and we look at other people, we see they have a physical shape and then they tell us something about themselves and we say, 'Oh yes, this is John. John comes from Manchester and John works in a factory, and there is the story. John says: 'Yes, that is true, I come from Manchester and I work in a factory.' And in that there is nothing to think about; it is quite reasonable, a nice story. And we like stories; the stories are so good, so interesting, so seductive, why would you question who is the 'I'?

Clearly to look at the world of objects is quite simple but to look at the world of the subject is much more difficult. When we go into the realm of philosophy or psychology and we start to examine the nature of subjectivity we deal with more subtle qualities which are taken on as being definitive of ourselves. We might say: *I am depressed. I am depersonalised. I don't feel like myself, I feel confused.* In all of these states our attention goes towards what is being described and we make sense of that in relation to other things.

For example, all of us know what some kind of anxiety is, so that if someone tells us they feel anxious we can say, 'Oh, I know what that means.' In that way, our nose, our curiosity, follows the object, the quality. This is why real deep meditation is difficult, because, when we sit, stuff still happens. These are the qualities of ourselves. These are, if you like, the endless possible ingredients of our existence.

Meditation is like going into the pantry and seeing what is there, perhaps raisins, dried nuts, four kinds of flour, five different kinds of rice. How many things can you make with this – lots. When you finish the meditation you start cooking; you come out and you are off. However, at least in the meditation you can check your basic stock of ingredients. This, then, is what we make ourselves out. However, we still have the question: who is the one who moves towards the ingredients to do the cooking? I can use these different ingredients: *I can be anxious. I can be depressed. I can be happy. I can be warm and loving. I can be cruel and unkind.* This 'I' is able to do everything, especially, to avoid being caught. As far as we know the Americans are still looking for Osama Bin Laden. He appears to be hiding in some caves in Pakistan. What kind of cave is our sense of self hiding in? It hides in the object: *I am happy. I am sad; I hide in happiness; I hide in sadness. I hide in hunger. I hide in thirst.* The object and the subject appear to be the same thing. It is very tricky. Something which can merge into everything else, how will you find it

Looking for our own nature in the correct way

The reason I am giving this long explanation here is because in the meditation, if we look in the wrong way, if we look for ourselves as if it were an object, we will certainly find lots of objects. And, as we have already being looking at, this is because our mind is full of all sorts of things we can identify with. I am sure we are quite familiar with this experience.

Therefore, when thoughts and feelings and sensations arise, just be there with them. Don't fall into them, don't be mesmerised but just very gently, very delicately, be present with whatever is occurring. We don't want to have this quality of being present as a self-reflection. We don't want to be thinking: '*I am* the one who is doing this' and thinking about how we did it: *I did it well. I did it badly.* The field of meditation is not one in which we want to score points or make progress: *This was a good meditation. This was a bad meditation.* This kind of thought is completely poisonous because it means, then, that you stand in relation to what has been done. Dualism, subject and object, is hard enough but if you then triangulate it, wherein you are the participant and the judge, and you are with the object as well, that triangle solidifies. And once

you are running a little meta-commentary on top of your own experience, 'Oooh, how busy can you be...forever and forever and forever...

Therefore, presence and letting go belong together; being with what is occurring, not chasing after it, not pushing it away but just allowing whatever is there. This allowing is not 'I allow it' but the allowing is the not being busy in discrimination. When you judge, when you evaluate, when you make choices, this is an activity. The essence of dzogchen meditation is non-activity – absolutely no activity at all – and when you are not active, you will still be there but not as who you think you are. It is, as we have been looking, our mental activity that provides thoughts with which we identify, and this pattern of thought construction creates the familiar sense of identity which we then trade off with other people when we talk with them.

The nature of mind: the mirror and its reflections

This nature, our nature – 'nature' here standing for the innate, what is there from the very beginning, unchanging – is traditionally described as completely pure. This means not touched or defiled by anything else. Now, as soon as something is used it comes into contact with the situation and that makes an impact; when forms touch each other something happens. For example, if you use a knife to cut something there are some little grains of bread, or whatever, that stay on the knife. That is to say, our actions lead to some kind of marking. How can it be, then, that something is pure in that sense, unsullied, not mixed with anything else? It means that from the very beginning it does not stand in relation to anything. The traditional image for this is the mirror.

When you look at a mirror you see many things inside; you can hold it in front of you, tilt it to the left, to the right and it will show different images. These images, we can say, are *in* the mirror – they are not anywhere else. However, as the mirror moves and the images change, the mirror is not touched or marked by the images. The reflection leaves no trace on the mirror; the mirror will not be marked. Reflections interact with reflections but the mirror is always the same.

However, what is the mirror? When you look into the mirror, the one thing you will never see is the mirror; the mirror always shows something else. This means that when you look in your own mind, if you are looking to find 'your mind' you will never find 'your mind'. What will you find? You will find thoughts, feelings, sensations, and stories – there is always a lot of stuff. The stuff is there thanks to your mind. The mind's nature is empty like a clear blue sky and inside that open space many things occur, many agitations, and excitements. These thoughts are coming and going just as the clouds move through the sky. Sometimes, particularly in hot countries like India in the summer of the monsoon, there are big storms. Huge black clouds come rolling in with lots of thunder and lightning. It looks incredibly dangerous and powerful...and then...it's gone and you have the clear blue sky. The sky is not destroyed by the thunder and lightning; the clouds change their shape but the sky never changes. In the same way, our nature is both the mirror and the reflection. On the level of the reflection your mind will always be moving but on the level of the mirror, the mind has never changed, never ever. It is undamaged, untouched and indestructible.

However, if you don't know directly your mind as the mirror, all you have is the reflections. And because the reflections are always changing what you get is movement and change, and if you identify with this you will necessarily feel out of control. Therefore, it makes sense to try to get in control – and so you have a lot of work. When you try to stabilise your mind by dampening things down, by pushing the bad things away and holding onto the good things, this can only be done for a period of time; sooner or later a big wind comes and things start to tremble and shake. This is what we do: we try to control our mind, and there are many

meditation practices for controlling your mind. However, from the point of view of dzogchen this is a waste of time. It is helpful not to be too agitated but being agitated is not *so* bad. The agitation does not cause any trouble to the mirror; it causes trouble to the reflections. But, if you only have the world of reflections that is what you will encounter.

There is a famous Bonpo lama, Tenzin Namdak, who teaches dzogchen. He escaped from Tibet at the time of the first Chinese invasion and spent many years training young Bonpo lamas and running monasteries in India. He was doing this for a long time and then he met one of his colleagues who came from Tibet, who had been in prison under the Chinese for about twenty years. He was talking with this lama and the lama was saying, *'Well, you know, in the prison we couldn't do any rituals, we couldn't do any of the ceremonies that require particular kinds of tools, making things with wood and threads, tormas, and so on. All I could do was the dzogchen practice.'* And Tenzin Namdak thought, *'Well, this lama who has been in prison for a long time looks well. However I'm quite a tired old man, worried about the monastery and with so many things to do. Perhaps all these rituals that I have been going is not so necessary.'* And from that time onwards he stopped doing rituals and now travels the world, although he is very old, and teaches dzogchen.

There is, then, an important lesson in this. If you only can do a formal structure which requires a lot of support and the external circumstances change, for example you are in prison, in a work camp, how can you integrate your ritual and the forced work of breaking stones? You can't. One requires you to recite mantras but if you recite mantras you get hit. Therefore, it is very important to see that even holy paths, even sacred paths, have a particular kind of vulnerability because they are mainly concerned with working with energy. There is nothing wrong with working with energy but if you are acting on the energetic structure of the world, you are vibrating at a particular level and there is no clear security that you will be able to do that. Sometimes life is very easy. Sometimes life is very hard: accidents can suddenly happen, people close to us suddenly get sick, relationships collapse, financial disasters occur. What shall we hold onto?

From the position of dzogchen the choice is much clearer. If you identify solely with the reflections in the mirror, with manifestation, with your body, your external circumstances, the balance of your own temperament, as long as these factors are held in place you will be ok. However, when these factors change you might be very unhappy. What else, then, can we take refuge in? In the nature of our own mind which is like a mirror. How do we do that? Because the mind is pure from the very beginning and is not a construct, you don't have to make it; there is no shop that sells it. It is always there, where it has always been – everywhere. *'Why didn't I find it?' You weren't looking for it. You were looking for other things. 'Oh, what was I looking for?' You were looking for reflections and there are always a lot of them.* The mind and the reflection are never separate. This means, as you are, in your life without changing anything, without changing your job or relationship or way of life, everything that you are, everything that you do, is like the reflection in the mirror. Who is the one who is experiencing these reflections? What is the site of clarity that illuminates and displays these reflections? This is our own unborn nature, the indestructible or vajra quality which is just there. This we can awaken to.

However, it is not something you can create and that means it is not gained by effort. In this life most things that we have are gained by effort. When we are small we have to learn how to do many things like going to the toilet on our own. We have to remember to wash our hands, and then we have to learn how to clean our teeth and put our shoes on; then we have to learn how to sit still in the classroom, and then we have to learn French verbs. How much of your life is spent is developing your existence with the sense that something has to be done – and if you don't do it you get trouble. We are coming to the end of the tax year and if you don't have your

tax return in you get fined money – the tax man wants dosh from you. Therefore, if you don't do it you get a slap.

In this world of reflections there is a lot of slapping going on. However, the mirror is not made. This is the most important and the most essential thing. It is not like anything else in existence, it is not this existence. Our existence, everything we learn in school, everything we learn when we go to work is about: if you do A then B will happen. We learn cause and effect; the concatenation of circumstances – dependentco-origination. There are many ways to describe these things but essentially if you want it to happen you have to make it happen. The mind is not like that. Therefore, when you practice meditation don't be busy.

However, busyness is not the enemy, it is the quality of energy of your mind – it is you and is not you. That is to say, we are not one simple thing. It is not like we are our personality: 'I am just me.' We exist on the level of something completely open, unborn, *and*, on the level of ceaseless change and manifestation. This manifestation comes out into the world in our physical form. No matter what we do in the world with others, the unborn open state of the mirror is not changed or affected. This is the great mystery of life. This is why in these Indian traditions it is called non-duality. Non-duality means it is not just one thing and it is not two different things. Our nature is infinite, unborn and spacious, and at the same time, simultaneously, precise and specific – just this and that. And the 'just this and that-ness' of it is not created by us from the inside out, it happens in relation to the world. That is to say, we come into existence according to circumstances. For example, somebody says something sweet to you and you smile. Somebody says something sad and you look sad. Why does that happen? Because you are not separate. This existence, this skin bag, this 'I', individual me, is inseparable from the world around you. Therefore, you have two axis of integration: the non-duality of subject and object in the world which is why we are always changing and affected – we don't sit in our little box protected from everything else but are constantly in relationship and we can't be other than that – *and* this whole field of interaction, the movement of the reflection in the mirror is inseparable from the mirror itself – it is unborn.

The difference between what is called samsara and what is called nirvana is that in samsara we attempt to stabilise the things that can never be stabilised. That is to say, we try to make the realm of reflections, the realm of movement, stable. This is pretty stupid. That is why the Buddha explained, very helpfully, the cause of samsara is ignorance, that is to say, you don't get it. If you build sandcastles on the sand when the tide is out, when the tide comes in the sea will wash away your sand castle. That is it. That is what happens. The tides of experience are always flowing through our lives. Our lives are never how we expected them to be. If you think back five years ago you probably didn't expect your life would be as it is now; you didn't know it would be like this. That is to say, our lives are not ours. What we call *my life* and *my plans*, this is just children playing. Our lives are revealed to us as we interact with circumstances; circumstances we don't know. This interaction is the reflections in the mirror. Whatever we have today in some years' time will be gone. Without any effort, without me doing anything the hair falls out of the top of my head. Not only that, it falls out of the top of my head and it starts to grow out of my ears; without any effort I am becoming an old man. That is life. Life is running through us. We are not in charge. Life shows these things. When you are small you never imagine these things will happen to you. These are flowing patterns of existence.

It is, then, very important just to have a sense of, and to start to observe, the busyness of your own nature. To see how easy it is to identify with forms which are manifesting: with thoughts, with feelings, with sensations in the body and so on. For example, when we have the break maybe you will talk with people or find yourself walking, or perhaps will be in the building and then go outside and suddenly see the big sky or people across the little river wandering in the

park – something is always happening. Just allow yourself to experience this dynamic nature, the moment-by-moment unfolding. Then, try to notice these moments where you run a story line across it, sort of pulling it all together where you may say: ‘Oh yea, this is a nice day’ or say to someone, ‘Oh, where are you from?’ It that way, you go into some story line, and in that story, like taking little beads and putting them onto a string, you join up facts and give an account of yourself. That is to say, one of the functions of language is to make our existence more coherent than it actually is. This is why going on silent retreats is very useful because the less your familiar forms are validated by language the more you start to see this weird situation in which you find yourself. Therefore, without holding yourself tightly together, without collapsing, observe the forming and un-forming of patterns; patterns which are situational and have no inherent self-nature.

Attending to impermanence: things go free by themselves

In Buddha Shakyamuni’s first teachings one of the points that he highlighted was impermanence. Impermanence is an enormously powerful and helpful understanding to bring to our being in the world with ourselves and with others. Clearly, we can see impermanence in an outer way. The seasons change, for example. The snow drops are out, then the crocus will come and then the daffodils and so on, as the flowers follow their progression in the seasons. Day follows night; this movement of change goes on all the time. On an inner level, the state of our own body is changing: we drink and then we need to pee, we eat and then we need to go to the toilet, we breath in and we have to breath out, the heart is pulsing one way and then another, systolic and diastolic, the blood is going around the body, the endocrine system is sending information, and so on. We have more and more understanding that the body is, in a sense, nothing very solid and fixed but more an incredible matrix of communications; vital energetic pulsations interacting with each other.

In the same way when we sit in meditation, thoughts, feelings, proprioceptions, perceptions, come and go. We know this but perhaps one of the things that we don’t quite do well is to use their very impermanence as a tool. If you really examine your external experience and your internal one you see that everything changes. When you look back in your life you see that there were times when you were very happy, and they came to an end. There were times when you were very sad, and they came to an end. Everything has its time, its period. It comes in according to circumstances, stays for a while according to circumstances, and then goes according to circumstances. In the hindu tradition they see this as the function of the three main deities: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.

However, from the buddhist point of view there is no external force operating to keep these patterns there; it is just beginning, middle, and end, beginning, middle and end – it is a part of how the world manifests. The Buddha said that every arising thing is a ceasing thing; there is nothing that has a beginning that will not have an end. This is not just a sort of dogma or something to know, a bit of knowledge to keep on the shelf; it is an absolute truth, a phenomenological truth. That is to say, it is a truth which is revealed to us again and again moment-by-moment, by how things are.

Therefore, if situations are impermanent and, particularly, when we look at it, if the situations of our own intimate experience when we meditate are impermanent, then perhaps we can start to trust that because things go free by themselves we don’t have to intervene. In the dzogchen tradition this is called *the self-liberation of phenomena*. This means why make effort to cause something to do something that it will do anyway. Because they are impermanent you don’t have to *make* them go.

Keep observing your habitual habit of identifying with what is arising but passing

Phenomena as are impermanent; you cannot make them stay. Therefore, the effort of trying to make things stay, trying to make things go, is wasteful energy. This is an energy that gives the conscious sense of an individual self something to do but is a job which has no purpose.

For example, like in some of the Eastern European countries under the so-called communist regime, there was a commitment to full employment, so everybody had to have a job. In some cases, people would go along to the factory, not do anything, and come home again at the end of the day. However, the main thing was that you should have a job. In the same way, the ego, in the sense of the active individual agency, has a similar kind of job: a job for life, a good pension, it seems to be important, seems to be productive, but, actually, not doing anything very necessary. Thoughts come and they go by themselves, however, if you keep putting a stamp on them it is as if you made them happen. It is like when you buy eggs, they have a little stamp on them that says 'British Standard Agency' as if someone is sitting there with a thermometer up the hen's bottom. However, it is not like that; the hen lays an egg and the stamp comes afterwards. Hens just do what hens do...they lay eggs. Thoughts come and they go. You don't need to standardise it or organise it.

However, what shall we do then if we are redundant? Maybe we don't need to do anything. *But won't that be terrible?* Well, for anyone being made redundant or becoming unemployed it is not very easy. Retirement is quite a trauma for many people, because, they have constructed their sense of self on the basis of their activity. That is to say, they engage, while in the world of work, in feedback loops where people say, 'hello', see them in a role, performing certain tasks, and validated that. This is who they *feel* they are but at a certain point, due to economic situations or age change, they find themselves not doing that. Therefore, who are they? They are who they always were. They are the mirror. However, they never looked in the mirror because they were working in a factory, being a social worker, being a teacher, and so on. For the sake of participation in the world there was a forgetfulness of the ground of their own existence. Therefore, when that loss of identity occurs, we could either relax and start to look or we could try to find another job. Generally speaking, we look for another occupation and there is always something to do.

The point here is to first of all see how the loss of familiar habitual identification with its associated mobilisation of energy towards a task, which is taken to be important, leads to anxiety and agitation. The anxiety makes us feel that something must be done: *I have to generate meaning in my life. 'Why?' Because without meaning what is the point? I might as well be dead.* That is to say, I need to have a task. This is the individual ego's discourse. 'What task do you need?' *Anything will do but this is my individual preference.* We all know the kind of activity we would like to be involved in. This activity may be helpful on the relative plane, but it is truly poisonous in terms of any kind of awakening to the nature of ourselves, to awakening into the state of the mirror. This is because subject is looking to object to tell subject who it is. If we say: *I am a carpenter. I am a social worker* then the activity is defining the subject. And if I know I am a carpenter I don't need to construct anything else for myself.

Therefore, on a more subtle level, when we come into the meditation, our habitual occupation, in terms of the individual self, is to keep identifying with whatever is arising. These forms are always going; they are arising and passing. When they pass, the next one hasn't yet arisen: *I have nothing to relate to. Who is that?* This is at the heart of the practice. Without a fixation on an external object or an internal object we are still there, but if there is no reflection there is just the mirror itself. However, of course, our consciousness is used to having an object.

When we get into discussing the nature of the mind it becomes very difficult because when we use words like 'consciousness' or 'awareness' different traditions give different particular meanings to them. Generally speaking, nowadays, as we use the translations from the Tibetan tradition, consciousness means the aspect of mental activity which takes an object. For example, you have eye consciousness linked to perception through the eye, or mental consciousness which is thinking about something. Whereas the state of awareness is like the quality of the mirror itself; it is not caught up in what is occurring, it is not standing in relation to it. That is to say, I look out and I see you, you are the object of my visual perception. I look inside and I can feel sensation in my body which is the object of my proprioception. However, awareness itself is not taking an object. It doesn't need an object to exist.

One of the big problems that can arise in meditation is that we don't recognise our own addiction to objects. Addictions to alcohol, to self-cutting, to eating issues, to heroine, and so on, are quite difficult to deal with. However, much more difficult to deal with is addiction to thought. Thought is available everywhere, you don't have to buy it, anything can stimulate it, and it often seems very fascinating. Therefore, when our consciousness becomes dependent and addicted to thought, the thought *seems* to tell us who we are. We tell stories about ourselves but we also analyse situations we are involved in. That is to say, we make sense of them for ourselves through thought construction; thought juxtaposition which reveals new insights of permutation. However, all of these thoughts are impermanent. The thought is a reflection and the consciousness is a reflection as well. Consciousness is situational. For example, maybe we hear a dog barking or a car going by or someone slamming a door. Or, we are sitting here, maybe quite comfortably and not aware of our feet, and then, suddenly, we get an itch and our feet are returned to us. That is to say, consciousness arises with the object; while we weren't conscious of them it is as if they didn't exist but as soon as we become conscious of them the *object* and the *proprioceptive sense* of the nerves arise at the same time. And both of these are illusory phenomena.

Illusory here means, in the buddhist teachings, like the reflection of moon on water. Something is there but without an inherent self-nature; it has no self-substance. We look in the pond: 'Oh, it is the moon!' It is exactly *like* the moon, but it is *not* the moon; it is a representation, like a reflection in a mirror. That is to say, when we look in the mirror – and we could say this room is like a mirror – we see everything and we think: 'Oh, this is the thing itself.' However, it is just a construction. Without our own mind's habits, knowledge, participation, we wouldn't be experiencing the room as we do; each of us gets our own take on this room, our own individual room. On an abstract level we can say we are all in the same room, but our individual histories and natures create this room for us. And this room, for us, we cannot speak of. It is so complicated, so rich, so multi-textured, that when we try to say it, we come out with normal social statements: *This is an interesting room* or *So many fascinating things here*. Why bother speaking at all? The actuality of the room is mind boggling: all these shapes of people, natural asset, colours, sounds – all this stuff – it is amazing.

Phenomena are arising but what they are we cannot say without destroying them. Language both illuminates the world and destroys the world at the same time. Like a postman with his pigeonholes for sorting out which street the letters are going in, we pigeonhole things from the world into our familiar categories. However, in the direct moment of perception, the aesthetic experience is immediate, ungraspable and un-sayable. Everything we do in the arts, painting, dance or music is a gesture *into* something which is always edging away. The horizon always eludes us, because we can't grasp the world, we can't appropriate it. Again, this is why the fantasy of mastery is so ridiculous.

Whenever we find ourselves seemingly on secure ground, having a stable basis to rely on, knowing this is 'me', this is what is happening, there is a seeming intensity and truth in that which caresses us gently and reassures us: *Ah, you know a thing or two about life. You are not so stupid after all.* This is what we seek all the time: self-reassurance. However, the conclusion we came to has already gone; the content of the mind is changing moment-by-moment – it is impermanent. But what we distil out of it is the fact that we are in charge, the fact that we know what is going on, and this distillation is very strong. This is like homemade alcohol where you never quite know how strong it is. You think you are just having a small glass but you are quite drunk. And this is samsara; we are drunk on the fantasy that we know something. As if you were crossing a river on old fashioned steppingstones, you step on one stone and then your body moves onto the next and the next and the next – you can't stand still. That is to say, each thought that comes gives you re-assurance that you exist, you understand something, that your life has direction and meaning – and then – it has gone – and then the next one – and the next one. Each one is a moment of reassurance: This is real – This is real. However, what is telling us that this is real is in its own way directly showing us this is an illusion. We are mugs. And this is why Buddha says ignorance gives rise to stupidity; stupidity then gives rise to attraction and aversion. You *think* you are real; you *think* what is occurring is real, however, this is basic ignorance: the separation of subject and object. Stupidity, then, is being caught up in and objectifying what is around you, and then, of course: *I like. I don't like. More of this. Less of that.*

Therefore, it is important to observe for yourself the habit of taking for granted, that is to say, being caught up in things. We know this from ordinary life: if you start to read a novel, after a while you get into the novel and it becomes really meaningful for you. However, really what you have is a piece of paper with some marks on it. You, for your historical reason, know how to put these little marks on the paper into an order and make words, but there aren't words on the paper. If a pigeon came, they wouldn't think there were any words on the paper. If a cat came, they wouldn't think there were any words on the paper. 'Words on the paper' is a construct in your head. You play with the construct, you generate the novel, and, inside that, the characters become real. And then the book is finished. However, you were captivated by it, entranced by it, enchanted by it – taken in. Just like if you go to the theatre or the ballet or you watch television, you go into something which is not real and you take it as real.

This is exactly the same as we experience in meditation. In the theatre of the mind new dramas are always occurring and we are a very willing audience; we sit there with popcorn in hand, ready for the show. The instruction is 'focus on your breath' and its, *Boring...Rubbish.* And then...the thoughts come and, *Ooh this is more like it. This is good.* Then it is over and you think, *Ah, Mmm I had better try more meditation next time.* Why are these thoughts so fascinating? They always cheat us. They are very unfaithful lovers: they are very sweet; they give you a kiss and suddenly your knickers are off – and then – they are gone. They don't stay the night; they don't even stay for one minute. However, somehow it is seductive and exciting. And this is what we *really* have to be able to observe: the power of infatuation, of believing the thought has something to give me. 'I need the thought! Without you I am nothing – please don't leave me! I will die without you! These things that lovers say, we also say to our thoughts.

When the mind is empty the consciousness fades. What will occur? If you wait long enough awareness arises like the dawn. However, when the dawn comes, at first it is not very strong, it is not the noon day sun; it is not bright, not shiny. Staying in that slow early dawn and experiencing the light and the clarity, that is the innate quality of the mind, is difficult when thoughts, like little fireflies, distract your attention. And that is what happens. How can we be calm, clear, patient and open when we are already mesmerised, transfigured by something which

always cheats us, and yet, because it always promises us something new, we go towards. This is called attachment.

Buddha said: 'The root of samsara is attachment.' Attachment doesn't mean something like: 'I am attached to my watch' or 'I am attached to my body.' It doesn't mean a sort of memory based cognitive thing: here is a real object 'I am here and I want it.' That is the most outer level. Attachment is the *belief* that things truly exist. It is attached to the fantasy of reification and need: *'I need the object to complete 'me'. If something is not happening to me then who will I be?'* This is the basic structure of samsara according to the Tibetan tradition. And if you see the structure of this it is very helpful, because, it explains why we are so stupid – any port in a storm. Abba used to sing: 'Give me, give me a man after midnight...' Why? Because *I need someone to take the darkness away.*

Now, we can also call this an existential crisis. It is a kind of ontological oblivion in which desolation, the collapse of familiar signifiers, lostness pervades us, and we want something. That could indeed be popcorn or drugs, it could be anything. Most people have some experience of eating all kinds of rubbish and thinking they need to eat it. Why? How could that be possible? You look at these empty packets: *Why did I eat that? I know I don't like it.* That is emptiness. And the Buddha's teaching, in the mahayana tradition, is the truth of emptiness. All phenomena are devoid of inherent self-nature. I also am empty in nature. However, sometimes this emptiness is like a howling void: 'I need to consume the world. I need to stuff things into me, experiences, sex, alcohol – anything to fill me up. This is the dark shadow side of emptiness experienced as an attack by the ego that insists it exists. However, it has been empty from the very beginning. We live in a materialistic culture which is completely dedicated to this cult: if only we get more things, we will be happier. Of course, as we know, the more things we get, the more things we need, because there is no end to desire.

Therefore, when we start to look at how the mind functions, the central point is to *see*: who is the one who is looking at the object, because the aspect of the needy self will always accept the object. You may think you are observing but actually you are participating. To really be able to observe our mental situation we have to relax the tensions in the body, relax pre-occupation and allow there to be nothing – to let everything go – good thoughts and bad thoughts. One thing not to do is to keep a dream diary: 'Ah, I am really fascinated in my psyche.' I remember when I lived in India one of my good friends would take a stick and poke around in his poo everyday examining it because he was convinced that it would be telling him something about the state of his health. And it may well have been so. Dreams, however, can also be like poo; there may well be something to learn from them but basically they should go. You think of your mind, you think of: 'Oh, my mother didn't love me' or 'My dad was always like this.'

Working as a psychotherapist means that I myself am a toilet attendant. People bring their cacca to me and I also have a little stick and poke about in it and we examine it together. However, the purpose of this is that at a certain point we can flush the toilet and the cacca can go away. If we just become very skilled at analysing it, this is not so helpful.

This is what you can do on a very subtle level in the meditation. A thought comes but we didn't get enough of it and so the next thought comes and the next and the next, and we are poking about fascinated. But why? If it is gone it is gone – nothing. There is no value there, nothing to find out. The main thing about things which arise is that they pass; something else will come. If you are in the middle, in the moment, life is completely fresh and each moment is enough. This is why they say Kuntu Zangpo – always good. It means everything is great. However, if we think: *Yeah, but that was really good, that was special* then you are already looking over your shoulder. And if you walk down the street looking over your shoulder you are

going to bang into a lamppost; you have to look where you are going. If you look where you are going and you are just walking, each step takes you to a new world. However, to be in that new world you have to be there, which means: hello-goodbye-hello-goodbye. Luckily, phenomena do this anyway. It is *we* who are attached. Phenomena are always going: thoughts, feelings and sensation, the things we build our sense of self out of, are always saying goodbye to us. We are the ones who hang on.

In terms of meditation the key thing is to allow phenomena to be in their own place. In the dzogchen tradition they have a term for this which they call '*rang bap*'. '*Bap*' means to fall and '*rang bab*' means falling by itself; it is said to be like a waterfall. If you sit in the countryside you can see the water and it just tumbles down, not always in the same patterns, it is not organised, it just goes here and there. In the same way our minds are like that: coming and coming but moment-by-moment it is gone-gone-gone. *Surely, we need to make sense of this? Why? Ah, because I have to be able to give an account of myself, someone might ask what I am doing. I might get audited, and have to provide evidence basis for my own existence.* This is the world that we live in, increasingly fascistic: CCTV everywhere, identity cards, and no doubt we will have DNA testing soon. This is the world that we move toward wherein the actual flux and change of our existence, ever-fresh, ever-exciting, ever-satisfying is covered over by fantasies of order, prediction, correct patterns, and incorrect patterns.

The central function in the meditation is that we relax the energy. You cannot relax the mind itself because the mind itself is always relaxed. We just relax the energy, the fixation, and in that state we stay present with whatever is coming. In the tantric tradition this is the heart of all the different tantric pujas. Except, there, we use energy through visualisation, mantra recitation, chanting, and so on, to focus the energy to a point wherein we integrate with the deity and *then* relax with the mind just as it is. In dzogchen we do it more directly. However, if you know all these other paths, you just bring yourself to that central point quickly, and in that state just be present with whatever is coming. Part of what is coming is your sense: 'I am having this experience.' Observe that thought. What happens to it? That thought is gone. However, what it told you goes into this helicopter that seems to float above us, the level of abstraction, and seems to speak of a truth that endures through time. This is why really attending to impermanence *all* the time is the most helpful support there is. It is the simplest of the Buddha's teaching yet the most profound. Therefore, observe whatever thought comes, and, whatever it tells you, take the ring out of your nose, otherwise, it will tie a string on it and pull you. You are not a donkey or a buffalo. These thoughts are deadly; they say, 'I tell the truth.' However, they don't.

Nowadays, everybody is aware of this so called 'grooming' in which paedophiles find lonely children and prepare them for something terrible. However, this is what happens in your own head: grooming yourself to become intoxicated and seduced by thoughts. Therefore, when we start the practice, relax, and observe how you are seduced. Don't blame yourself if you get lost but as much as possible see how you fell in, how you got tied in knots. What are you particularly prone to succumb to? Maybe it is self-doubt, self-hatred, maybe a kind of inflation. It can be any kind of pattern, but, it catches you and you follow. Don't worry about that. What we are observing is the structure of the knots which limit ourselves.

This kind of conditioning is very powerful. Some of you may be familiar with the Tibetan teaching, or Indian buddhist teaching as well of the *twelve nidanas* or the *twelve steps of dependentco-origination*. First of all, there is ignorance, which is to say, not to be aware of the state of the mirror. Following on that is conditioning, because, as soon as we take ourselves to be separately existing, we start to build up a memory of the impact of events. And this conditioning leads to thickening of skin and thinning of skin. We have thin skin towards the bruise around are hearts – our own personal traumas and the things we are frightened and afraid of – and thick skin

or indifference towards other aspects of phenomena. In that way, each of us has a particular, unique, specific profiling towards the environment. For example, with some of our friends, we see they can do things we could never do. Maybe you are with them and they speak to someone and you think, 'Wow! How could you say that? I couldn't.' They say it because it is easy for them – they are not you. That is their conditioning, their psychological profiling or karmic profiling.

What we are trying to observe, then, is: 'Who is this one who calls himself *me*?' We are *both* the ground spacious openness for the phenomena *and* the energy. And as the energy is tied in these knots, arriving in these patterns, it gives a particular take, a moving toward and moving away from. At the first stage we simply want to observe that. And the less we are involved in identification with what is happening, the more space we have to relax into the state of the one who is present. In the hymn book there is a hymn which begins: 'Immortal invisible god only wise, in light inaccessible hide from our eyes.' This is very beautiful but in the dzogchen tradition we don't believe there is *any* god but 'immortal invisible nature only wise'. This is our own nature; '...in light inaccessible, hid from our eyes.' It is the light of your own mind, your own creativity that hides the nature of the mirror from you. These thoughts are your own creativity – it is fantastic. However, you don't see the ground of this creativity because it *seems* to be self-existing outside itself; it seems to be just there.

This is why observing the dynamic nature of the mind in process is so central, because, the normal story line we have is: *I am like this. I am like that. I like this. I don't like that. In the future I am going to do that. I used to do this.* And all of these are quite substantial statements; we talk about ourselves as if we were a 'thing'. Of course, that is also our internal structuring and when that is operating it is very difficult just to catch the immediate movement. In the tradition it is said to be like a fish turning in water: 'Shhosh' – you have just got to catch it – 'That's it' – 'Ah.' It is like an aesthetic moment; you have to be naked and it impacts you, that is all. It is not about making sense of it, building up a picture about it, but just 'Ah!' and then it's gone, 'Ah!' and then it's gone. And we continue in this way.

Three 'Aa' Practice

Let us now do a little bit of the practice. Tomorrow we can do some different practices, but this is the most simple and basic. We use the sound 'Aa' and this is a very releasing sound, into the out breath. 'Aa' is the least elaborated of any sound, the basic aspiration. All other sounds are some kind of play on it, certainly, according to the Sanskrit and Tibetan alphabet. When we say this sound 'Aa' just release all the tensions in the body, all the situations that have occurred, all thoughts and feelings just relaxing out, release whatever is coming. We do this three times – slow deep sound coming out. Our eyes open, our chin is slightly raised and we are looking into the space in front of us with the gaze about one and a half arm's length in front. Therefore, you are looking into space and, of course, you will see the wall of the room around you, but just let that be around you like a kind of background. As we make the sound, we integrate ourselves into the space so that the space in our heart, the space which is the basis of our existence, becomes inseparable from the space outside; inner space and outside are the same. Then, we sit relaxed.

The gaze is open and then, whatever comes, comes. If there is a noise outside, someone coughing, a car going by or a door slamming, if there is some sensation, as it were, inside, don't discriminate between the two. 'Outer' and 'inner', these are interpretations. Just allow whatever is coming to come. Then, we sit in this state for some time. If you find yourself being critical or not being in this at all just relax again into the out breath, and then just be with whatever comes observing all the seductions of thought, feeling and sensation.

We won't do this for very long because for some of you it is a new kind of experience. If you don't feel very grounded then please relax in yourself and take responsibility. This is not a process of getting spaced out. If you get too spacey you can just focus your attention back in on something concrete and then relax. It is not about getting dissociated and out of your body. It is about integrating the body into spaciousness.

[Practice of three 'Aa']

Compassion: open spaciousness welcoming all phenomena

By revisiting this state again and again you can experience the dynamic flow of experience. And in that there is always the possibility to move into identification, which brings us out into the world being with others, or in letting things go. These, however, are not two separate phases; they become more integrated in which you can be with others without it being strongly real and yet be connected. In the buddhist tradition compassion is very important and it can mean: 'Oh, this person is suffering and I want to help them' or 'This person lacks something I need to make their life better.' Both of these are interpretations and potentially positions: 'I now know something about that person's state.' However, what do people want? Do they know themselves? Do we know what we want? From the point of view of dzogchen the main thing missing is the experience of openness, and, it is this openness or spaciousness that welcomes all phenomena. Therefore, compassion is not necessarily about removing the bad things and creating the good but about helping us to experience the self-liberation of the bad and the good.

Certainly, of course, in the Tibetan tradition they have the whole belief system in Buddha lands, in pure lands like *Sukhavati* in the west and *Zangdopalri* where Padmasambhava is. These are very nice places to go where there are no problems and no difficulties. This is a mode of energetic manifestation which is useful to be in for a while, but these realms also are impermanent. Nothing is permanent. No phenomenon is permanent. Therefore, what will make us safe? When you are strongly identified with the physical body in a world of turbulence, this identification will not make you safe because the body will die, the body will get sick, and harm can come to the body. I read recently in the newspaper that a man was standing at a bus stop with his three-year-old daughter waiting to go to the hospital to visit his wife who has just had another baby, when he was stabbed to death by someone in front of the three-year-old child. Where is 'secure' in this world? Nobody can make this world secure.

Tibetan lamas have many mantras however the mantras didn't keep the Chinese away. Myths of power are very dangerous. What we *can* do is work with circumstances. Sometimes difficult circumstances arrive that we don't want to be there, but not wanting them there and being upset about them usually doesn't help. Being able to be with them very precisely, however, and through that, feeling the exact contour of the situation, you know you can move in some way. In this world to be a dancer is the best thing. There is nothing stable and fixed here and so fluidity, movement, connectivity, in a world of movement and flexibility and connectivity, would make sense. To try to stabilise something is not so wise. Therefore, from that point of view compassion in being with others is to be as close to them as possible, to really connect with them when we meet them but not to try to do anything *to* them or *for* them. It is that intentionality in itself that solidifies the territory. Let moving things move and stillness doesn't do anything. You don't have to improve anyone's stillness because it is always still.

In the mahayana tradition they developed the understanding of the Buddha nature: that all beings from the very beginning have this Buddha nature or Buddha potential. This is not something far away. It is something that all beings have. Nobody can give it to you – you already have it. We have to find our way back home to ourselves, a home that we have always been

inhabiting. And this paradoxical movement between infinite spaciousness and ceaseless movement...you have to find the rhythm for that. It is a pulsation of existence and rigidity has no part in it. The Buddha nature is not an object; its nature is emptiness. It cannot be grasped. It cannot be shaped or moulded. You cannot do anything with in and yet it is always there. And our energetic forms also are shaped and moulded by circumstances and so cannot be grasped. Ungraspability is the very nature of our existence. Therefore, compassion has to be dictated by the state of the other; before you see someone you don't know what to do for them. Preparing doesn't really help. The preparation is to relax, to learn to be in touch with yourself; there is no script that we can learn in advance that will tell us what to say.

There is no wall between us and the world. We are part of the world. That is why, when we do this meditation practice, we have our eyes open. The world and ourselves are the same thing. We are not inside a little box looking out. Although it feels like that, just as it feels like the sun goes around the earth, light comes into our eyes, the world comes into us; we are part of this movement. We don't exist as human beings if we are not with others. Babies need to have people close to them who know them, because we weave our lives together as interactions. This is the level of energy and energy is always interactive. If you look at yourself in the mirror, unless you are so close to it you can't see it, you will always see a bit of context around you. You clean your teeth and look at yourself, but you see the room behind you, because, you are in the world. Reflections arise together. Therefore, compassion is not something that we *do* to *others*. It is how we allow ourselves to arise in the world with others. It is a 'with-ness', a co-emergence, a co-creation of moment-by-moment-by-moment. And in that way we don't need to be experts, we don't need to know what to do, but we *find* ourselves speaking, we *find* ourselves in the world with others and – something is happening. That is the nature of energy; it emerges in the shared field but is always vanishing. Conversations begin and they end. Things are interesting and then are not so interesting. It is just pulsation. You can't stabilise the world.

This is really the essential point and I will repeat it again. Samsara is trying to stabilise that which can never be stabilised. Nirvana is to recognise that which is always stable, always unchanging which is our own nature, infinite emptiness, infinite openness, and, *through* that, letting go of the need to control and allowing moving things to move, including ourselves. We get old, we get sad – we have all sorts of things. Sometimes we are angry, sometimes we are jealous. 'No big deal.' If you make a big story about it and then say: *I shouldn't be like this. I don't want to be like this. I want to be a better kind of person. I want to be the kind of person who doesn't do this*, what shop are you going to go to, to buy a better self in? You are stuck with yourself. If you want to work with yourself the first thing is to be nice to yourself: *Oh, I am quite jealous. I am quite anxious*, whatever it is. In that way, it is just a fact and that is neutral. You can add negative onto it if you want. You can hate yourself because you are anxious – that is an additional pleasure. However, you can just keep it as it is: 'I am anxious...and maybe I'll be anxious all this life. So how will I live as an anxious person? What is anxiety?' As soon as I say 'anxious' – and it has already got so many negative projections onto it – the feeling is, *I have to do something about it. I shouldn't be like this. I don't want other people to know that I'm like this. I have to pretend to be better than I am otherwise people wouldn't like me*. All kinds of games start coming. However, if you sit with the anxiety you get to know it, you feel it and then you can move with it a bit more: *Ok, so I am anxious but what is it? What is this anxiety?* It is the same with anger, if your nature is angry. It is the same if your nature is a bit dumb, not everybody is bright. If your mind is a bit slow and often you don't get it, you don't get it – so? Lots of things won't happen for you – it's like that. 'Ah but I'm missing out.' It is not your share. None of us can get anyone else's share. That is a fact isn't it? However, being caught up in other people's share we can lose our share; being so preoccupied to be somebody else we never work out who we are.

This goes back again to Samantabhadra, to Kuntu Zangpo, 'always good'. However, what can it mean to say, 'It is good to be anxious'? Well, 'good' here doesn't mean good as if we were evaluating it on a scale of one to ten. It means, if you stay present with your situation whatever it is, whether sickness, chronic pain, mental anxiety, relationship difficulties, abandonment, loneliness, absence of family, whatever it is, and observe it, be with it, you can work with it. Because the one who is observing – in truly observing without making judgment, without making evaluation – gradually will separate out from the fusion with the event.

For example, 'I am hungry'; when I am really hungry, I notice that 'I am hungry'. I *observe* the fact that there is hunger – it is not just vipassana, there is hunger. And who is the one who is having this hunger? *Me! I am hungry*. Somewhere there is the middle way between these two: *I observe that I am hungry, I observe that I am eating*. And the more we have that observation, which is not held back and not plunged into – really the middle-way – we integrate the subject and object moving together. And you can do that to anything. You can do it to very shameful things: 'I hate myself, I want to die. I want to kill myself.' You can stay with that feeling and really explore what it is: 'Who is the one who wants to kill me? What is it that is so intolerable with my existence?' You can look at all the things about yourself that you don't want other people to know, all the things you are ashamed of. And by offering hospitality to these phenomena, they will show themselves for what they are. They are like little ghosts that live inside you, little voices: *I hate myself. You are stupid*. All of us our haunted like some old house with creaking floorboards. So what are these voices? They are energy, this is karmic energy; this is the resonance of what has happened before.

In Sanskrit they call this *vasana* indicating a karmic trace. Therefore, if you are a child and your parents shout at you or treat you badly you internalise that, you internalise both positions. That is to say, you internalise, 'I am useless, I am stupid, I am unlovable' which is when you accept the message, but you also internalise the attacking voice, 'you are stupid, no one will love you.' Both of these continue inside us just like echoes, and, of course, when we believe them, when we operate from them, they are like a colour filter which influences the world, just as one of those lamps which keeps changing colour. When it is green it brings one colouration, when it is blue it brings another. In the same way, when these different voices through us, we position ourselves differently in the world and we can do different things. If we are in a period of self-doubt and self-hatred, we don't want to meet other people, we don't feel up to it, and then, some new wave comes up, some different voice, and we go out and feel more able to cope. Trying to lock these voices in a box is not so good, but just being able to know: 'Oh, today I should be by myself' and being able to say that to people: 'I am not very sociable today. It doesn't mean I won't be sociable tomorrow but today I am not very sociable.' In that way, it is just neutral. And if it is neutral – beginning, middle, and end – it will arise and vanish. It is when we put the extra thing onto it: *...and I shouldn't be...* This is like the other half of the Velcro pad. For example, the thought: *I am socially anxious* which is already – for most of us if we have that kind of feeling – vibrating a little bit, could get us going *and* if you just add the other bit: *...and I shouldn't be, there is something wrong with me*, you become locked into it. It then starts spinning and spinning and turns you.

It is an amazing thing the amount of intolerance that we feel for ourselves. However, this is samsara, and the entry ticket to this world is being messed up. If you weren't lost and confused you wouldn't be here. The Buddha taught eighty-four-thousand different dharmas because there are eighty-four-thousand different ways to get in a mess and you haven't tried them all yet. Therefore, maybe we can all relax a bit – we have all got a ticket – we shouldn't be surprised. The only thing then is allowing yourself to be as you are and to be a bit interested: 'Well, I am messed up in this way, how are you messed up?' In that way you can be curious and learn lots of different

things. However, don't imagine that you are going to be 'fucked up' in this way for ever as your karma will change. In this way, we can really begin to see what sort of knots we tie ourselves in and what sorts of knots other people tie themselves in. We are not taking it too seriously but not discounting it either.

Therefore, compassion is the quality of attending to the unique specificity of each moment, whether we are on our own or we are with other people. That is to say, being present enough to let the world reveal itself as it is, rather than, smearing it over with our projections and fantasies and doubts and so on. This is a lot of extra activity which doesn't reveal anything because if you project, all you see is your own projection, you get more of the same. In the Freudian tradition they say that projection is a defence and is always linked to splitting. That is to say, I split something off in me that I don't like and I project it out and then it is everywhere in front of me. In that way, I didn't get rid of it I just see it in a different form. Now, if this teaching of dzogchen is correct and non-duality is the case, whether the shit is inside or outside, it is still shit and you are walking about in it. Therefore, splitting doesn't help. It is learning to observe ourselves and be present with ourselves, being very tolerant, that makes life and the world easier. When we hear and see that people do terrible things we think: 'Oh! Cruelty exists, stupidity exists; why are we surprised? As long as human beings take themselves seriously, others seriously, and the relation between them seriously, these things will arise.

In the tradition this is called *the three wheels of existence*: I am real, you are real and what goes on between us is real. And this reification, this objectification, creates an intensity so that we bang into the world because it never quite fits. If I am really like this and you are really like that what the hell are we going to do? *Why should I be flexible if you are not going to be? I am going to wait until you are flexible – but you are not going to be flexible until I am flexible so...* It is like that: nobody wants to give ground. You see what has been stitched up for Zimbabwe; what is Morgan Tsvangairi going to do? People are bending his arm and now he is going to be prime minister of a country without any power and authority. And this has been done to him by people that are too damn cowardly to sort the problem out. Because everyone has got to say, 'Oh, great founding father of the nation you are a holy man.' This is called stupidity. It leads to children starving to death, medical supplies not getting through – this is samsara. This is what it is like. And it is very saddening, we could weep all day, but it is not surprising because that is how it goes. You see the straight way but why would you want to go there, let's climb this mountain in the dark and let's break our fingers first. It is heart-breaking isn't it? This is why Chenrezig, or Avalokiteshvara, these Buddhas, weep all the time – it is so simple but we make it so serious. Because, as soon as you take moving things as stable and try to make them through politics, these power games can only make trouble. The people that do that are not necessarily bad, but they didn't get it – this is why if we are lucky enough to meet the Buddhas teaching and we learn the authentic possibility of awakening it is a different story all together.

Everything is an illusion. Illusion doesn't mean that you ignore it if a child is crying. Illusion means it is not inherently real; don't take it too seriously but be there. Compassion comes into the world in the manner of a dream. It is seriousness that kills the world. People take national identity and the defence of their world very seriously; most wars are caused by identification. That is to say: *If I am me I am not you. You are getting at me and because I should have a better life, and, I should have the things that you have... anyway I don't like you...* It is not much more advanced than that. We get this in the primary school playground, and you look at world politics and it is very similar. This is why being very active in the world is useful to a certain extent but even more important is to practice this deep dharma, waking up to the state of the mirror. (We will do more practice with this shortly.) Then, through the understanding of the

mirror and the reflections, starting to experience everything as just a reflection, just light on the water, sound and emptiness – seeing exactly what it is but nothing to be grasped.

The mind is naked like the sky. Thoughts and feelings radiate like the sun's rays.

The reason that I talk a lot and giving all this explanation is that we are trying to use these words and the energy of the connection to just loosen some of the knots and to see where we can get tied, because, struggling when we are tied, unless we see the nature of the knot, can just tighten the knots even more.

This first point of Garab Dorje, is setting out how to recognise our own nature or see our own nature. However, essentially, it means to be present as one's own nature. And, again, as I have said, the word for nature here is, *ngo wo* which means 'face'. If you look in the mirror you can see the reflection of your face but it is difficult because of the way our eyes go to see our face directly. However, if you sit quietly you can, from the inside, get the sense of your face. It is not the same as seeing an object. If you mindfully bring your attention *into* the quality of your face you can feel your face starting to reveal itself to you. Therefore, it is a very similar thing that we do here. We are not struggling to get somewhere else but just allowing ourselves more and more subtly, with more and more attention, to be present as we are revealed to ourselves by ourselves. Nobody can do this for us. However, there are ways that make it easier and this is the whole purpose of the explanation.

This nature – which is, we could say, our mind or the seat of our awareness – is not the mind in the sense of the site of thinking and feeling and so on; it reveals that, but it is not the actual agent of it. And it is said to be naked, and naked means uncovered. Now, there are different views of the contents of our minds. For example, if we are doing focusing meditation, shamata meditation, trying to calm our mind, when lots of thoughts and feelings come and we get caught in them we call these distractions because they take our mind away, take our attention away from where we are trying to put it. In the tantric paths, when you meditate as a deity, when thoughts and feelings arise, we experience them as ornaments. When we see these pictures of the Tibetan gods and goddesses, they always have lots of jewellery on, and this jewellery represents our thoughts and our emotions and feelings. Their body is naked, but they are adorned. That is to say, that whatever is occurring is not something to be worried about but, as long as you are grounded in yourself, they are things you can play with, you can enjoy. And, in the dzogchen tradition, whatever is arising is the energy of the ground itself. That is to say, creativity, manifestation, the movement of thoughts, feelings, of everything we see and hear, is the natural flow of energy. Traditionally it is explained as being like the sun: the sun stays in the sky but the light is ceaselessly coming out of it, without moving the sun gives out its light. Western science would give you a very different reading of the sun but anyway for the purposes of explanation Tibetans use that example.

In the same way, the natural spaciousness of ourselves is constantly radiating out all different kinds of experiences. And these experiences are both ourselves and not ourselves. As we looked earlier, they are like the reflection in the mirror. The reflection is *in* the mirror, but it is *not* the mirror. You can't take the reflection out of the mirror as it is part of the quality of the mirror to show the reflection, just as it is the nature of our natural clarity that many different kinds of experience arise. There is no need, then, to block these experiences because whatever occurs the mind itself is naked.

That is to say, if you get full of very anxious thoughts, depressed thoughts or very repetitive negative thoughts and you feel heavy and dull and stupid, this feels not very nice and we think this is a terrible state to be in: *I don't want to be like that.* 'Who is the one who is

persecuted by these thoughts?' *I am. Who am I?* There you have the choice: *I am me, it is happening to me.* When the subtle object is attacking the subject as an individual self-essence we get problems because we feel obscured, invaded, persecuted, contaminated by this stuff and we can't get rid of it because it is 'us'. However, who is the one who is having this experience? This is the most important thing: to be able to be present with the natural clarity of the mind.

We know that sometimes our mind is more clear and sometimes it is more cloudy. For example, you might feel a bit tired, but you still want to read something. As you read you kind of fall into it and then have to wake yourself up and say, 'No, I must finish this today.' In that way, you force yourself to be clear. However, when we talk about clarity in the dzogchen sense it doesn't mean that at all. That is with effort fully turning up the intensity of your focusing attention. Clarity here is the quality of the mirror which allows everything to be revealed. Therefore, even when different thoughts are coming – heavy thoughts, obscure thoughts, maybe very vague thoughts that you can't quite get a feeling of, where you don't know where you begin or end and you might feel a bit lost and confused – instead of trying to sort it out and get into relation with it, again, we just relax. The relaxation is to release the energy which is invested in this interplay of subject and object; the sense something is happening to me. And when we do that there is more spaciousness and in that the natural clarity of the mind is revealed as always naked. That is to say, no thought has ever obscured the natural light. When we are caught up in the thoughts, we don't see the natural light and that can give us the sense: 'Oh, yes, sometimes my mind is clear and sometimes it is not and if I try harder I can make my mind more clear.' On one level that is true; without some degree of effort, certainly in the first stages, it is difficult to understand this. However, the danger with this is that you then believe it is all up to you: 'If I don't do it, it won't happen.' And in that way, you end up feeling it is a product of your effort, that you are making it happen. However, as we looked earlier everything which has a beginning has an end and if we make it, it will also come to an end sometime. It will be dependent on cause and effect, and so these shining moments will simply be other impermanent aspects of samsara – sometimes good and sometimes bad.

The nakedness of the mind means that whatever is arising in your mind is there but the mind itself is not covered by it. Who then is covered by it? The aspect of our own energy which refers to itself as *I, me, myself*. When you meet someone, say, for the first time, and you start to have a conversation maybe telling them a bit about who you are, you say things about your history, about what you do, your likes and your dislikes, where you stay and so on. The one who is saying this is clearly the functioning sense of a subjectivity in a world with other subjects, with other people. This subject has to keep speaking otherwise you won't have a conversation. You say something and then you stop speaking but when you stop speaking, the structure you have created by speaking is now the past. Every aspect of *I, me, myself* is an energetic manifestation which is only true and only impactful in the moment it is being expressed. If I say: 'I was born in Glasgow, in Scotland...' now that has gone. You have to say it again. Therefore, if you don't say it, it is not there. We talk ourselves into existence, we walk ourselves into existence, we bend and move ourselves into existence, hear into existence, smell into existence, and so on. And all of these are moments. Moments of what? Of the revelation of an energetic movement; there is nothing stable and secure in that.

[Why don't we recognise this nakedness](#)

As we looked earlier, this is where attachment comes in. In being attached to these moments, we build up a composite picture, a kind of amalgam which we then take to be something self-existing. This is a very nice building [James talking of building where teaching is taking place] because it is very generous in showing us its structure, it is not very covered over.

Therefore, we can see how the walls are built with breeze blocks and we can see how the roof is put on; every bit is functioning together to make this building. We can see here that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. If we take all the parts out and lay them out, nothing has been destroyed; you put them together in the shape of this building and you have the building. However, what is the building-ness of the building? It is the coming together of a form which exists primarily in our mind. *We* say, 'This is a building.' It is given an address so that the postman can come and deliver letters; it exists in the world and then people start to function towards it as if it was existing in itself. However, without the materials, the effort, the planning permission, and so on, it wouldn't have come together. And the planning permission, and so on, can change; they might want to knock it down at some point. It depends who owns the land and so on. It is therefore, contingent on these factors. However, we take it as being given, as inherently existing, as being something in itself, but, it is *always* dependent on the factors of maintenance. The time of causation of the building of the building is over and now it is the time of maintenance, and after a while, it will be destroyed as other factors come into play. However, while it is here we relate to it as if it exists in itself.

Now, this applies to everything about us. At one time we were swimming around in our mother's belly. Then we came out of there, moving about in the world. The years go by and we say, 'I am me' and then you look in your photo album and you see photos from when you were very small and you say, 'Oh, that is me!' However, that 'me' is gone. In this way, we lie and cheat to ourselves and others; we pretend that something is enduringly there. What is that? We know that the cells in our body are dynamic and changing, that every part of our body supposedly changes every seven years. It is gone; there is nothing of the same essential quality which remains. What we have is patterns, patterns of energy. They show this form for a while and then they disperse. While they are in this form this is what we are, this funny thing that moves about. And we say, 'but – it is *me*.'

It is very important to see this adding on, this coherence, this reification; turning something which is not a thing into a thing. There is no 'thingness' in the self. It doesn't mean that it doesn't exist at all because here we are. However, what we are in being here is some dynamic movement which is always occurring. That is why we have to give a sort of process report: people phone their friends or pop in to see them to say what they have been doing. We need to do that just to keep speaking ourselves into existence. Of course, people do silent retreats as a way of not speaking themselves into existence, of exploring what happens when you stop talking, when you stop wiring yourself all together and making this composite picture.

Again, from the practice of dzogchen, the mind is naked and thoughts and feelings are the energy moving out of it and that is all it ever is. Therefore, *I, me, myself* is the energy of my own nature. Energy is not a reliable source of identity because it is unstable. It is there but moving. The early pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Heraclites said, 'You cannot step into the same river twice.' Clearly, you can say: 'This is the river, I know this river, it is the river Thames and every time I go down to the river I step in and it is the same river.' This is how we operate; we take the name of the thing to imply a constant essence which is always there. However, each time you put your foot in the water the water is moving on. It is a different river in its manifestation, in the phenomenology of it, it what is actually there, but it is the same river *in terms of the abstraction*.

Now, this is so important, because, we have to use language, we have to talk in abstractions. We are in a town here and later in the afternoon I will go to the station and get a train back to London. Therefore, I hope London still exists. And when I get to my house, I will put the key in the door and I hope that it still works in that lock. Prediction and abstraction are a necessary part of life – but – it is an illusion. We are acting *as if* it was the same. When I get out of the underground and walk down the street to where I live: 'Oh, it is my street.' However, it will

be different, because, the cars will be parked in different ways, there might be different people standing in the street, someone has probably done something to their garden, and the light in the sky mediated through the clouds will make the buildings, in their direct presence, uniquely how they are in this moment. This moment will not be duplicated but we can say: 'Oh that is my house. The number on the door has not changed.' However, numbers are abstractions, street names are abstractions. These are just concepts.

Therefore, we have these two things operating at the same time: the immediacy of existence which is ungraspable *and* this pattern or patina, this kind of veneer, of conceptual stability that we place on top of things. In order to function in the world as human beings we have to have the latter, because, as we have seen, if you can't use abstractions you are lost. However, if you fall in love with the abstraction, if you decide to have that as your home, it will cut you off from the living vitality of the unpredictability of experience.

Therefore, as we have been looking, when we say the mind is naked it means: thoughts, feelings, sensations are always moving. However, why don't we recognise this nakedness? This is because instead of relaxing into the openness we rely on the abstractions. Language helps us to organise experience and to make it seem reliable and predictable. Therefore, our point of reference is our capacity to put grids onto the world and know where things are. Clearly, if you are driving a car and you have got to go from one place to another it helps if you know where the one-way streets are; if you don't know where they are you could get lost easily. That is important for functioning.

We move, then, through life a bit like kids with computer games; it is a virtual reality. Because, if you are just tracking the maps and the street signs you are not actually in that world at all; you are mediating concepts: 'I started here and I am going there.' And in that busyness there is such a preoccupation that we can take that virtual world to be the real world. There is always so much to be done: letters to be opened, phone calls to be answered, things to remember, people's birthdays and so, endless amounts of stuff. Somebody's birthday is an abstraction. For *them* it feels very real and if you forget it, they let you know but it is just another name on the calendar, it is just another day. Therefore, in this way, we invest these abstractions with our particular personal significances and look to them to give us the structure of our existence.

This is a very central point. We have to be able to use abstractions without taking them too seriously. Again, this is what the Buddha's teaching means when it talks about illusion. It means that things are going on, a lot is happening, but it is like the reflection of the moon on water – it is not something you can grasp. If you imagine going home to your house, it is your house in a conventional sense. Whether you have bought it or you rent it, you are just passing through. The house was probably there before you moved into it; someone else was there and they probably had all sorts of different ways of using the rooms and so on. You are a temporary squatter; we are all just squatting in this momentary little caravanserai existence. However, our need for security and identity causes us to *cling* to these external foci and make them more real than they actually are.

This is why earlier I was highlighting the importance of impermanence, because impermanence is Heraclites' point of: 'You can't step in the same river twice.' When you meet someone, they are not the same person that you met yesterday. We act *as if* we are the same people; our names continue to be the same and some facts about our lives continue to be the same and people may say: 'So how are your kids?' or 'Do you still work there.' However, these are all abstraction. The actual existence that we have is the breathing in and out, where our gaze is going, what we hear, the taste in our mouth and so on. It is our existence as it presents itself and this is always changing – never repeated.

Therefore, the nakedness of the mind is its hospitality to the ceaseless stream of immediate experience, and that immediate experience includes the use of concepts. That is to say, our concepts, which seem to stabilise the world, are simply part of the energy of the mind. Who says I live in London? *I do. It is a fact, and I can show you letters that have my address which have London on it. Who has the letter? I have the letter.* Who reads the address? *You read the address.* In that moment, in reading the address, what are you doing? You are projecting your knowledge of English and geography to identify 'Lon'- 'don'. And in that way, we agree that 'I live in Lon-don.' This is a momentary mental activity – that is all it is. It is the movement of the mind. Everything is the movement of the mind. The mind never stops, but one of the things it has to do is to keep repeating things in order to create the illusion of their stability.

Raw and indestructible

Therefore, what is stable is the openness of the mind, its unborn nature, its nakedness, and what is moving, is the ceaseless way in which we cloth ourselves from moment-to-moment as the expression of these thoughts and feelings and so on. Another term which is used to describe this nature is 'raw'. Raw of course, means not cooked, we are not prepared with anything else, we don't need any spices, we don't need to have oil or boiling water; we don't need anything to prepare this quality itself. Clearly, in terms of our ordinary cognitions we need to do a lot of cooking. If you want to learn French you have to learn the vocabulary, the grammar, and practice the accent, and so on. If you want to learn carpentry or to drive there are all sorts of things to be done. Through going into the process of instruction you become cooked. That is to say, these qualities somehow start to permeate into you. It is just as if you boil vegetables in a bouillon and the flavours of the herbs and salt, and so on, will go into the vegetable; we take the knowledge into ourselves and it gets massaged in and becomes part and parcel of us. We are then exponents of that knowledge; it flows out of us. So in that way, our personality, our knowledge is always cooked; we keep cooking new things, new tastes and flavours.

However, the mind itself is not like that. The mind itself is radiating a natural clarity without any preparation. Therefore, it doesn't need to be prepared. What we prepare is different qualities or different aspects of energy and we need to know that this is simply new flavours, new movements, new gestures of our energetic manifestation in the world. It is not anything truly self-existing. I am sure we can remember having been at school for many years, sitting at little desks listening to people talking about things. At one stage we could do exams on these things and we could write them down: the main rivers in South America, the mountains ranges in North America... We could probably have written these down. But do we know these things now? No. Mountains and mountains of useless information have come into us and gone out of us. We had to absorb all of that as a means to an end; to get through an exam to get a bit of paper. Therefore, information which is generated feeds into the possibilities of movement, but it is unstable; we can forget a lot. However, the mind itself is raw; it doesn't need any of that cooking. It is always the same. It has the same taste. If you do the practice on a Monday or a Friday it will be the same. The person who sits down to do the practice *will* be different as the level of manifestation of being in the world is always changing. The mind itself never changes.

In the Tibetan tradition they use a word for this: *vajra*. This means indestructible, and indestructible means nothing will change it, it is not marked by anything. Clearly, we as people are marked by our experience: happy things occur, good things occur, and we feel happy, light and spontaneous. What we take to be bad things happening to us we feel depressed, useless, we sink into ourselves and maybe we don't want to meet other people. This is the quality of interactive energy. However, from the point of view of dzogchen, there is no need to try to stabilise the movement of energy. If you are happy be happy. If you are sad be sad. There is

nothing wrong with crying. There is nothing wrong with feeling lonely, with feeling unloved, with feeling confused. In that state – it is there – and then it is gone. What do these things tell you about *who* you really are? Nothing. What does it tell you about *how* you are? Quite a lot. *Who we are*, our actual nature is not touched or marked by any of these things but *how we are*, the basis of our movement into the world with others is always being influenced by these things. Therefore, if you feel down you probably don't want too much contact, that is just, *How I am* – which is always half a sentence. That is to say, *That is how I am... now. I don't know about tomorrow.* 'Oh, what is the matter, Ah, you are not your usual self.' *No, I don't actually have a usual self.* This is, of course, the persecution of other people's expectations and we do it as well; we say to other people: 'Please be stable, please be reliable, because, if *you* are *you* in a stable way that will help *me* to be *me* in a stable way. I will understand what is going on. I will be able to take you for granted but don't you dare take me for granted.'

Don't do anything: self-liberation of thought arises through allowing energy to flow

Again, the nakedness and the rawness of the mind are a form of openness which doesn't need any preparation. And as we were saying earlier, it is also called primordial purity or natural purity. That is to say, it is not been touched or affected by anything else. Therefore, in terms of the meditation practice, there is nothing to be done; the most basic instruction is don't do anything. When we sit and stop being the active agent, energy comes and goes. It shows itself in the form of thoughts, feelings and memories, some of which take the form of the first person singular, that is to say, '*I*'.

For example, we are doing the practice and a sentence arises: *I am cold*, or *I don't understand* or *This is not meditation*. Because it has '*I*' on it, it is so hooking, so seductive. It catches us because it seems to be talking about *us*. If I call out 'John' then maybe there is somebody here called John and they say 'yes!' In the same way, when the thought arises and says, '*I*', we stand to attention. 'Yes, I am here!' We always reply to '*I*' because it is '*me*'. A thought comes in your head: *Oh, I don't understand this.* 'Who doesn't understand it?' *I don't understand it.* This thought is speaking on behalf of us; it has not only got a content but it already knows who is the one who is saying it – '*I*'. Where is this '*I*'. We cannot find it. However, it is delivered to us in this linguistic format.

Therefore, we have to be very careful when these thoughts are arising because they *seem* to be just ourselves: *This is 'me'*. *This has to do with 'me'*. No, it is something which is arising and passing. If you *identify* with it, if you *merge* with it, if you *believe* that it is telling the truth it will take you, you will travel with it and then it will go and you will be left. Then another thought will come and take you somewhere else and then you will be left. And this is the internal movement, going here and going there. And of course, what it is always doing is saying is that this '*I*' is a particular self, a particular essence, which is apart from other things; '*I*' stand in relation to *these events*. '*I*' stand in relation to the *future and to the past*. This '*I*' is therefore, by definition, small. It is like a little peanut, a peanut that wants to claim to be very big but is then returned to itself as actually being quite small. And that is part of our confusion; actually, we can do many things but the one who seems to be doing it is full of doubts and insecurity and anxiety. Why? Because an anxious thought arises and we have the feeling, 'Oh, I feel anxious.' Before we felt hopeful and now we feel anxious. When the thought 'I feel anxious' comes then what is the '*I*'? It is anxious. And so the linguistic signifier brings together, collects together, various sensations in the body, organises them as 'I am anxious' and then we react to that and feed into the pattern of anxiety.

When doing basic vipassana meditation, you do body scans and investigate the construction of composite experiences like 'I have a sore back' and start to look at what the basis for this construction of 'sore' is. There are little moments like *Hot. Cutting. Stabbing* and as you scan up and down the body, you come back to what you call your shoulder and it has changed. It was hot and now it is cold; it was rough and now it is itchy. If you go onto the level of abstraction all of these can still be subsumed under the idea of sore. However, when you look at the detail you see that it is fleeting and changing. Therefore, this is what we are doing in the dzogchen meditation. We are not doing this kind of body-scan but we are staying very precisely with whatever is occurring and observing how many false messages arise, messages which, if you believe them, will be what you have got. If you *don't* believe them, they are just opportunities. It is like if you go to an old-fashioned fair and you have the people running the stalls and they shout: 'Oh come here, come here, try this, try this!' This is what is happening in our mind all the time. The people in the fair have to shout you over because they have to make some money, and in the same way these thoughts need you to believe in them and identify with them otherwise they have less and less power. Therefore, the self-liberation of thought arises through allowing energy to flow; to come and to go, to come and to go. However, the difficulty is our own habits of involvement. That is to say, the thought, *I need to do this- I like to do this- I don't want this*, is taken as a true message. However, it is just a thought.

In the first world war they used to have these posters up of Lord Kitchener pointing out: 'Your country needs you!' Your country doesn't need you at all. What is the country? You walk up on the downs here in Brighton and it doesn't need you to go and fight a battle. These are the lies. However, if you are a young man in 1915 and are walking down the street and lots of other young men are in uniform you feel a social shame and people point you out as a coward and so you are coerced into going and dying for your country. However, who is this country that needs you? It is a bunch of politicians who go into a war because they made bad mistakes. Every day some British soldiers are killed in Afghanistan. What are they doing there? They are obeying orders: 'My country right or wrong.' Who sent them there? *'We did, they are our soldiers, and we should be proud of our brave boys.'* Our brave boys, I didn't ask them to go. 'But we are supposed to support them.' That is to say, all the time we are caught up in these story lines as if they are true. And when you start to look inside yourself in meditation it is much worse [Laughter in room]. The public relations department of the ego is fantastically sophisticated, it is better than Saatchi and Saatchi; it hooks you every time. We are suckers for this stuff.

The one who is being told they are in charge is just another thought. Thoughts are telling other thoughts what to do. When I was a kid and we used to play in the field near where I used to grow up, there would always be a thing about who was going to decide what game it was. If it was going to be cowboys and Indians, which involved throwing bits of mud at each, there was always a thing about who was going to be a cowboy and who was going to be an Indian. The person who decided on the game first, usually, would be able to say, 'Now you are the Indian this time I want to be a cowboy.' However, there are no cowboys and there are no Indians but there is some consensual movement that creates that game. In the same way, inside our mind, one thought arises as *object*, another thought arises as *subject*, and the thought that looks like a subject in one minute is now the object the next minute, because the thought that seems to be coming at us now is something we can think about. And in that way, they chase each other; it is an endless game. Who is telling me I am this? – just thought. The ego is simply a nexus, a coming together, an operational point, of thoughts redolent with feeling and libido; that is to say, energy of manifestation. And the more we see that, we see that we don't exist. However, we do exist; we exist as energy which is ungraspable and yet palpable – we manifest in the world – we impact other people.

Three 'Aa' practice

That was more of the explanation and now we will do some of this practice.

Sitting comfortably in a relaxed way with your skeleton holding you well, gaze slightly up into the space in front of you. Keep your eyes relaxed and open, having a sense of this space. If you look straight ahead at the wall or at the objects in the room you can identify them. There is something, green or red, hanging or pinned, strong or soft; there are many things to say about all the objects in the room. However, bring your gaze into the space in the middle of the room. What can you say about this space? Is it good, bad, red, blue, hot cold? Nothing – just space – full of potential. And this is what we integrate with. Here is the space in front of us, relax into this three 'Aa' sound, releasing the tensions in yourself; this outer space and the inner space integrated – no difference. In that state whatever occurs, whether we think it is external or internal, just let it come and go. Not identifying with anything just allow whatever occurs to come by itself and go by itself. This is the heart of the practice.

Second point of Garab Dorje: not to remain in doubt

Garab Dorje's second point is: not to remain in doubt. This means not to inhabit a state of confusion that lingers. In particular that means having got some experience of the open nature of the mind and how the energy moves, we often feel a need to correct our experience, to prepare ourselves more or to try to find a way of developing ourselves in a better way. That is not necessarily useful. However, it is habitual, because, as we have touched on before, there is a double move here. That is to say, if I apply a method which is designed to improve me, I can feel some more substantial progress, but I am also affirming that *I am the one who makes it happen*. When we stay in a state of openness, what we start to experience is the self-arising and the self-liberating of phenomena which undermines the sense of individual agency, and yet, still somehow, our lives are going on. We wake up in the morning, we get to work and so on, but we are not having to do it seriously, we are not having to manage it so much; it is more like an effortless illusory play. Therefore, if we have an anxiety about the fundamental nature of our identity, to seek reassurance through re-installing ourselves as the *one who has to do it* can lead to a solidification and a falling out of the practice.

For example, you might have a doubt: *I am doing this, yet my mind is not getting any better. I sit in the practice and yes I see thoughts and feelings coming and going, I can see their illusory nature but they are still not the kind of thoughts that I want. I should have better thoughts than this and so I should do something to improve my thoughts*. In that way, we install, again, the ego-self as the master who is entitled to a particular quality of life. And in the very moment of improving ourselves we condemn ourselves to building more of a wall between 'where we are' and 'where we want get to'

Surely, this can't be as good as it gets? Maybe. Very simply...the answer doesn't lie in the object. What does the object show us or what does the content of our mind show us? It shows us the content of our mind. If you have a golden bowl and you piss in it, you have a golden bowl full of piss; the piss doesn't make the golden bowl not a golden bowl, it is just a golden bowl full of piss. Now, you might feel it is a golden bowl and the last thing you should put in it is piss. That may well be the case, maybe we should have some champagne or strawberries in it, but the golden bowl has piss in it. It is still a golden bowl. What is the focus of your attention, the golden bowl or the piss? 'Well, I am so disturbed by the fact that there is piss in my golden bowl that I can't enjoy my gold bowl anymore and until I get rid of the piss I don't care about the golden

bowl.’ However, this tends to lead to throwing the baby out with the bath water; in getting rid of the piss you forget about the bowl. Therefore, this is what it means not to remain in doubt. The key thing is the state of the mirror. In the mirror many different reflections arise, some happy and some sad, some expansive and light, some dark and gloomy. These reflections show the nature of reflection, they don’t show the nature of the mirror. However, as long as we feel persecuted by the content of our mind, feeling that it should be different from this, we are agitated and always going to be busy. Therefore, the fundamental decision is to see that the mirror never changes and the content changes. What do you want to stay with, the thing that changes or the thing that is stable? This is the big decision.

Resting in the state which never changes allows the changes to occur. The changes occur on their own terms according to their own logic but don’t worry because it doesn’t determine who you are. However, it *does* indicate *how you are*. Therefore, the fundamental question of *identity* is resolved in the issue of integrating with the state of the mirror. And the temporal moving question on *how we arise* is dependent on many complex circumstances, not just our own will to power; we can’t make it happen the way we want it. Therefore, by allowing the reflections to come as they come, we can know: *This is my experience and this experience includes my mental state, my physical state, my emotional state, the state of the environment around me – happiness and sadness coming and going*. This is the turbulence. The turbulence of what? The turbulence of the reflection. However, the reflection is only a reflection, so don’t take it too seriously. And yet, the reflection shows something, it shows *how energy is manifesting*.

Now, you can work with that if it gets very stuck but working with it to make it more dynamic, working with it to develop it in some way, is best done if you don’t take it too seriously. Therefore, if you are over identified with the content of your mind and you feel persecuted by it and defined by it, then changing that content becomes very important. However, if you can just see, *Oh, these are temporary phenomena, arising and passing, I can still be a participant with it and make some sort of movement, but it doesn’t matter too much*, then we have less attachment, less is at stake and we act in the manner of a dream. And this is the path you will see in all the strands of buddhist teaching: the theravada, the mahayana, the tantric, mahamudra and dzogchen. All saying the same thing: ‘In the manner of a dream.’ That is to say, it is occurring, but it is not strongly real. If it is not strongly real, then don’t take it too seriously. That is very important.

Third point of Garab Dorje: simply to continue in this way.

The third point from Garab Dorje is simply to continue in this way. Day and night, waking and sleeping, whatever is arising is the energy of the dharmakaya; it is just the unborn energy that manifests in its myriad ways, whatever your activity is. Not taking it too seriously is at the heart of it.

Continuing in this way, means, again, not imagining there is anything better than this. Otherwise we go looking for the answer as a particular object: *If only this was happening I would be better or the situation would be better*. This is true but to a certain extent is irrelevant because it is still in the discourse of the will to power and the issue of control. And this is the big problem. It doesn’t mean that you have to put up with everything that happens, and you can’t, in some way, manage your life to make it better. However, for the purposes of meditation and practice, because we are usually over-active as agents, over-determined as the *one who has to do it*, the rectification comes from relaxing and allowing the mind to be however it is. And if you do this enough, you will come to see that my mind is indestructible. The unborn awareness is

indestructible. And when you have that you have a great freedom because it is indestructible. What changes are patterns: the physical health of the body will change, our mental states will change, our situation in the world with others will change, and so on. However, these changes come and go like the reflections in the mirror. This is the central thing.

In the bible it says: 'Don't build your house on sand, find a solid rock.' This whole world is impermanent; it is only made of sand. If you try to build the true house of your identity on temporary phenomena you will be unhappy because sooner or later it will move, it will shake. There is absolutely no reason why we can't have another war in Europe. We haven't had a war for a while. European history would indicate that wars are quite popular in this continent and there are various pressures building up. All sorts of bad things can happen; they have happened before and the human race hasn't changed very much, people's karma doesn't seem to be improving. Therefore, there is a likelihood that big bad things will happen again. This economic downturn could be very severe. Predicting you will have a happy life, predicting that you will have such and such, an amount of money when you retire, all of these, start to be revealed as fantasy projections. We think that ten years from now will just be an onward and upward development of how things are at the moment. However, there is no reason historically to believe this, because history is about incredible pulsations and some periods of difficulty last a very long time. It doesn't look a long time when you think five years but if you yourself personally have to live through five years of war it is very unpleasant indeed.

Therefore, part of taking refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha is ultimately to take refuge in your own nature, the buddha nature you have had from the very beginning. And this quality is something which is unchanging. *Everything else* is unreliable; everything else is prone to destruction and decay. This is a sad fact, but I think it is a fact.

Three traditional examples of the qualities of the energy of the mind

The example of a crystal ball

Therefore, it is very important to again and again go back into the practice, exploring the state of the mirror and the nature of the reflection. Sometimes this is explained with different examples, and I will give some just now.

A traditional example is that if you take a crystal ball and you put it on a red cloth it will start to look red and if you put it on a blue cloth it will start to look blue. That is to say, a crystal ball is translucent, the light passes through it, it has no colour itself, but it shows the colour of things close to it. This is a quality of energy of the mind in which, because our mind has no form or shape or colour, it doesn't come from anywhere, it doesn't stay anywhere, it doesn't go anywhere, you can't catch it, and yet, it is always present. Because it has this completely ungraspable nature it has no boundary, no front and back. This means that whatever is placed by it suffuses it.

For example, here we are in this room. This is our world at the moment, our experience. For those of us who have been here since yesterday this room starts to feel quite familiar. However, in a few moments of time we will come to an end and we will leave this room. We may return or we may not. It will be gone, but at the moment this is our existence. Existences are not *things* at some distance from us, they are directly there; in our awareness this is what we are aware of. We can think about other things but in being here this is what we have got. This is all there is directly. Everything else is a thought of a thought of a thought about something else. Therefore, the mind's emptiness offers infinite hospitality to whatever is occurring.

The example of the mirror

Empty from the very beginning without fixed content doesn't mean nothing at all so that you see 'Oh my god I am not anything' wherein there is a sense of horror and attack. It is *because* we are not anything that we are everything. Most of the time we are stuck in the middle thinking: 'I am something, but maybe I am the wrong thing – I had better become the right thing.' The Buddha is very kindly saying: 'Ah-ah...you are nothing and so you are everything.' And this is our infinite potential, and, again, this potentiality is often displayed in the image of the mirror.

Because the mirror has no content of itself it doesn't block what is there. For example, if you have a piece of paper and you put a line on it, the potential of the paper is now diminished. If onto that line you draw some other lines to make the shape of a tree the potential of the paper is further reduced; the more marks that come onto the paper the more determined the image becomes and the more the image then determines the nature of the paper. We then look at the paper and we don't see the paper, we think: 'Oh that is a tree.' The paper has become invisible, but we are stuck with the tree. With the mirror we turn it around the room, and it shows each and everything in the room but it is not marked the way paper is marked. As the mirror turns the image fills it and goes, fills it and goes. That is to say, the potential of the mirror to show everything is infinite; it doesn't block anything coming towards it, and, at the same time, it is not conditioned by any of these things. In this way, the natural state, or as it is sometimes described, nirvana, is hospitable to every situation. It is not conditioned by anything that arises. Therefore, the state of openness is hospitable to limitation but is itself without limitation.

For example, you have a mirror and in front of the mirror you slaughter a pig. You cut its throat and there is a lot of blood and the pig is squealing. All of this is being seen by the mirror and it doesn't mind. *You* may be feeling a bit squeamish, you might even be vomiting, but the mirror doesn't get involved. This is *very* important because the mirror is not conditioned by what happens. We get conditioned, we think, 'Ah god!' and feel affronted, invaded and disturbed. However, this is a reflection being influenced by another reflection. Of course, on the level of manifestation and personality we are definitely impacted and changed by what occurs, but the mirror is not.

This, then, is the quality of energy which instantly displays whatever is there without being compromised. And this is the root of a further quality of generosity towards the world. We don't *have* to be concerned because it is ok. That is to say, if you are taking care of small children, they might vomit on you; if you are taking care of old people you might have to take them to the toilet but whatever you have to do, whether you like it or you don't, it is just something passing. When you start to observe how you limit yourself by saying that there are some things that I can't do: *I wouldn't be 'me' if I did this*. That is probably true, but it doesn't mean it can't be done. What is the anxiety about transgressing a limit? All of tantra is established through the nature of transgression. In tantric practice people did things which would normally be forbidden to them: living in the burning ground, drinking blood, and so on. It wasn't in order to be some provocative self-destructive force but, rather, it was to see how the conceptual definition of the self creates a boundary which *seems* to be the thing which is holding me together. And when that boundary is crossed with awareness you realise the boundary is only conventional; it has no true definition. It is an anxiety about a juxtaposition of sacred and profane, good and bad, clean and dirty, and so on. It is not *truly* the case.

Therefore, in relation to the mirror – and, again, we are still talking on the level of meditation as sitting down and observing yourself – seeing how different thoughts arise, coming and going, good thoughts and bad thoughts, this is the potentiality of your own mind; these

thoughts have nowhere else to come from. However, they don't define who you are. For example, say if you get a very selfish thought arising in your mind and you think, 'Oh, I am a selfish person, I don't want to be selfish.' You are then feeling limited by the thought and so you have to take some kind of reparative action. In that way the thought had marked you; the tail is wagging the dog. This is not the correct way to proceed because then you are at the mercy of whatever thought arises. Observe the thought and observe that it vanishes and then you will see that it is just a thought. The thought came out of the infinite openness of my awareness, passed through it like a cloud through the clear blue sky, but, it has not touched or harmed or defined who I am. It has shown, in the moment of its transition, *how I am*. And because *how I am* is changing anyway, it doesn't matter too much.

This is the really central point and hopefully you will get a sense of it, that what is at stake here is whether you have a true or false definition of your own basis nature. As long as your basic nature seems to be composed out of patterns of arising you are at the mercy of whatever happens. However, if you see directly it is like the mirror then you can have much more tolerance of yourself so that you can be more truthful in your relation to yourself and you can be more tolerant of other people in all the strange things that they get up to. And you can both see very precisely what is going on and not take it too seriously, therefore having more room for manoeuvre. That is the second quality of energy.

The example of light passing into a crystal prism

The third quality is given by the example of light passing into a crystal prism. The light is refracted and so it shows diversification, it shows many different possibilities. This, then, is about how energy comes into the world.

Therefore, you do your practice and then *from* that state of practice but also *in* that state of practice your body moves; you find yourself getting up, maybe making a cup of tea or starting to talk to someone, and so on. The body is now moving in the field of experience. When we are sitting in the practice it is just the open field and clearly the body is in it, but now, the body is in it and moving with intentionality and this intentionality will start to change. For example, you go and make a cup of tea and then you stop doing that and you start to drink it. As you drink the cup of tea you think about what you are going to do next. You open your diary and think, 'I have to make a phone call.' You get the phone, you dial the number and you drink the tea while you are waiting – and so on throughout the course of the day. That is to say, just as when the white light hits a prism and goes into these rainbow-coloured lights and shows different aspects, so too, while still being fully integrated in the ground nature, do you show yourself, in the course of the day, as many different people. For example, you go to work and you talk to your boss in one way, then you go and have a coffee with a friend and talk in another way. You might then phone your mother and have a different kind of conversation. The tone of your voice, the kind of vocabulary you use and the sort of things you reveal about yourself or not, are situationally determined. Does that seem right?

Hopefully, you would have to be pretty locked in an obsession not to be that flexible, but this in fact is an encouragement that you can be more flexible and especially, to let the situation determine how you are. You get these kind of intensive weekend courses that used to be 'Est' and then became the 'Forum' where people spent three or four days together. They would try to have this breakthrough experience and then were encouraged to phone up their mother and tell her what they really thought. They may phone their mother at 2 am: 'Mum, there is something I have to tell you, this is what I have always known...!! Now do you understand me!' Poor old mum, what the hell is that. 'Ah, I feel so much better now. Now at last I have told you.' Did mum

need to know? Who is this mum? 'Twenty years ago this is what you did to me! Twenty years I have been carrying this!' But who is the mother you are speaking to? It is twenty years too late. The mum on the end of the phone probably can't even remember. Everything has changed; impermanence has been tickling her every day and she has turned into somebody else. This is a real issue. You can't go back in time. Therefore, how shall you speak to your mother? Who is this mother? You have two mothers, if your mother is still alive. One is the mother out there and the other is the mother in your head. The thing you want to say to your real mother is really a message to the mother in your head.

This is very important. The people that we address live in the world in their skin bag with their own likes and dislikes, feelings and moods. If we want to connect with *them*, if we want actual contact, contact means 'here and now', it doesn't mean anywhere else. And it is not contact with illusory beings it is contact with *actual* beings who are *actually* how they are, not *how we think* they are or *who we think* they are but this person. Therefore, the fragmentation, the crystal, is the crystal of the world; as *we* move *into* the world as it is, we refract into these different patterns, colourations and moods into the moment. Then the moment changes and another colour comes out and another and another. That is to say, if you want to be in contact you cannot be reliable, you cannot be predictable. That is good news because we are not a thing; if we were a thing we could develop ourselves in order to be reliable. It is good to have a reliable watch as I want the thing to work well. However, people are not things.

Therefore, how to live ethically and unreliably? First of all, don't tell people they can rely on you. Some therapists say, 'I offer a safe space.' Why? What sort of space is a safe space? That is the space where the patient comes into the room and the therapist goes out of the room. As soon as the therapist comes back into the room that room is not safe. Being with other people is unpredictable so you can't say in advance it is safe because you don't know what is going to happen. Your intention can be not to cause any harm, but you can't know that, because you never know where the fault lines in that person's heart are, where the scar tissue is. You can say an innocent remark and the person can feel insulted or misunderstood. Therefore, safety is not really the issue there. The issue is as I move towards the other what is my intention.

Now, through doing the practice, relaxing into the state of openness, there is a satisfaction that comes with that. Satisfaction is: having got this I am not hungry anymore. The deep meaning of my existence is revealed in this state of awareness, so I am not looking to you to provide the meaning of my life. If you like me you like me, if you don't like me, you don't like me. If you love me you love me, if you don't love me, you don't love me. What these attitudes you have *can* do is to move my energy around a bit. However, your moods are unstable and my reactions are unstable so that can't possibly be the meaning of my life; it is just what has gone on just now – that's all. However, if I don't have this vajra nature, the indestructible state of the mirror available to me, all I have got is you. Therefore, if you tell me you love me on Monday and then on the Tuesday you tell me you don't love me, I will be upset. And in that way, my mood, my state, my life, the meaning of who I am is all determined by your mood, which gives you an awful lot of power over me, which might cause me to say, 'Well, fuck off then.' But then I will be lonely and sad so then I will have to go out and find someone else to love me on Monday but not on Tuesday. And so life goes on, round and round and round.

When we take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha it means refuge. Refuge is not something which is unstable, it means something stable. What is that? It is the unchanging nature. That is not a thought, it is not a feeling, it is not a sensation; it is a quality of awareness. The unchanging awareness when you have that satisfies the deep yearning for meaning, for value and identity and therefore we enter into the world in a manner of a dream. And when we go towards other people, we are not looking for anything and because of that you have the

beginnings of real compassion. Because, as we looked earlier compassion is not a contract, it is not a boomerang, we don't send it out in order for it to come back – it is a gift. If you like it – good. If you don't like it – good. It is yours; I have given it to you. Do what you like with it, think what you like about it. I don't care. And I don't care because I don't have to care. However, if I am concerned that you love me, if the root of my existence is a narcissistic pre-occupation then it is very important that you like me because then I will feel good and I will feel my life has meaning and value. You see how fragile that is? When the inside is fragile and built on sand, outside we are looking for more sand to make the sand stable. However this is not going to work, and we feel betrayed, let down and disappointed: *But I thought it could work out. I don't understand what went wrong. When I met her she was so sweet and then I...it is always the same...* However, Buddha said it would be like that: attachment is the root of suffering. It is not that you shouldn't be with people, but it is how you go to be close to people. Inside us we have these old wounds, these empty spaces, all the feelings of having missed out in childhood, of being unloved and this is a very big shopping list. If you meet someone and you give that to them and they will be a little bit overwhelmed, so at first you hide it and say: 'Oh, I don't know, I just like being with you. Maybe we can hang out a bit and see how we get on.' But gradually another little item is being slipped on: 'Oh, I thought you were going to be with me this weekend. I thought you liked doing that. Aren't we going to go to that yoga class together?' And the shopping list gets longer and longer: 'I want you to be with me always, to like the same things as me, to like all my friends, to get on with my family and never to be upset because I don't like it when you are angry.' This becomes a big shopping list and therefore it is not likely to work.

What can we expect from another person? Very little. What do we need from another person? Very little. Basically, just that they are a little bit flexible and a little bit kind. The rest of the stuff we can probably manage ourselves. However, we slip these other items in, because of this regressed infantile need: *I want someone to take care of me. I want someone to do it for me because it is so lonely being an adult carrying the burden of my existence.* Again, this is why dzogchen can be very helpful, because, in the practice, if you enter the state of the mirror you go from being lonely to alone – this infinite aloneness which is awareness without any boundary... 'Aaa'. And because it is so vast and full of everything you are never lonely, although, you are always alone. And if you are not lonely you are not desperate for someone to come and fill it up. You are empty but not *hungry empty*, you are *satisfied empty*. It is a plenum void, a void which is already full of everything. And this means that you can be with people in a light way; we are not saying to someone: *Save my life. Take care of me. Love me forever and make it so that I am never afraid again.* This would be ridiculous.

Therefore, as the light goes into the crystal and refracts, many, many things are possible. And in the Nyingmapa tradition we look at Padmasambhava and his eight main aspects but also many different aspects. The history of Padmasambhava, this great saint who brought buddhism to Tibet shows how, in different circumstances, he showed completely different forms. He wasn't being just a bit different, he was radically different. He let the need of the situation determine how he would manifest. And, again, this is the real beginning of compassion in which what you need, determines how I am, rather than how I am determining how much of your need I can see. In this way, it is then truly altruistic; it is about the alter; the other. That is to say, that how the other is, calls me forth over the limit of my self-definition to become what the other needs rather than what is affirming to my familiar sense of self. That is very radical. And that is only possible if we are not over invested in our ordinary personality. Therefore, when we are with different people, we can be truly different. If you are playing with children this requires a very different tone of voice than if you were dealing with a traffic warden.

However, some people don't get it; some people want to have the same voice, the same posture all the time. Tennessee Williams in his plays is very good at showing this: characters who always want to be just themselves. However, this always ends in tragedy. That is indeed the structure of tragedy isn't it? For example, as is seen in King Lear. An old man gets tired, makes a grand gesture, gets annoyed and then goes off in a huff. He then goes to visit his poor daughters and they say, 'Dad, you gave the power to us and because you did that it is not your power. You are just an old man.' And the old man becomes distraught and goes off into the wilderness. He always wanted to be the king even when he stopped being the king. However, if you stop being the king, you are not the king. The tragedy of King Lear was that he wanted his cake and he wanted to eat it, and as is well known this is impossible. If you give it up it is gone; that chapter is closed. That is very important. Each chapter is a new beginning; each aspect of ourself is a new beginning.

Therefore, attachment is also attachment to our history and our sense of self; to our own neurotic structure which then becomes the basis from which we move into the present moment. What we then do is more of the same: *It hasn't worked up until now but anyway it is 'me' so I will just do it again. Sooner or later, I will find someone who likes it.* Is that wise? No. The basis of capitalism is: give the people what they want. The basis for British industrial production is: manufacture what you want to manufacture and then find a customer. The market is king. This is why we have a lot of bankruptcy. In the 1950's and early 1960's British businesses, old family businesses were going out of production very quickly because, there was a changing market. However: *But what we produce is very good quality, you can't get this quality elsewhere else.* That is because other people have stopped producing it because nobody wants it. That is what happens. The same applies to being in the world with others: what is the market? How is it? The value of investments goes down as well as up and that means impermanence. Therefore, what are *you* investing in? Are you observing the state of the market? Maybe your self-product is out of date. It is possible; you have been running it for a few years now. Have you had any major renovation? Have you had a make-over? When we practice wisdom and emptiness this is the ultimate makeover; emptiness right to ground level, scraping the walls down, wallpaper off and carpets up – nothing at all. And out of this is compassion. Compassion means: *how will I arise? I will arise as is required not as is what I have got in my storeroom, all the things I have not managed to flog yet – final closing down sale.* 'Give the people what they want.' 'Why should I? Why should I be the one that has to do that? Why don't they change, there is nothing wrong with me.'...bankrupt! Therefore, compassion is quite a dynamic phenomenon.

This, then, is the third quality of energy. In Tibetan it is called *tsal*. *Tsal* is quite a dynamic quality; it is energy as it impacts the world. As the sun's rays hit the earth, they bring light and heat, and it is this quality of vibrant contact with the environment which is effective in generating something new. And this is the main part of the practice in the world; to allow oneself to arise as required. And this means not interrupting yourself according to a rule book in your head. When we grow up in our families, there is always a rule book and that rule book we tend to internalise as part of our normalisation process within that family. You then go to school and you have some interaction between the home rule book and the school rule book. Therefore, you can build up a whole range of rule books, almost like chapters in a book, on etiquette that show you how to behave in different circumstances. However, what we are talking about here is quick cooking. It is not about using these fixed recipes but about trying to see precisely what the situation is and make it fresh into that moment. And that is quite challenging.

Laziness causes us to cook something, cook a lot of it, put it in the freezer, and then take it from the freezer into the microwave. Freezer to microwave is very quick but there is some diminution in taste, in vitamins and so on. Cooking freshly into the moment, quickly, and cooking

something the other person wants to eat, is how we should practice in dzogchen. Therefore, when we meet people, we should try to see them and listen to them. We will often get it wrong at first because we haven't quite heard and so you get a kind of bump of assumptions. At that point it is always important to keep looking and keep listening as being right is not important. Fitting is much more important, because, if you get a fit, you can do something because you are already engaged, like when gears run together; if you get a fit some kind of mobility is going to occur.

Again, this is going back to what we looked at earlier: the basic quality of the mirror-state is that it is naked, it is not covered. That is to say, the content of the mind is only contingent; it is not essential or necessary. Therefore, new contents can arise; we can become different, show different things. Whatever we were in the past we don't have to be in the future. Of course, there is going to be residues and tendencies and so on, but if we are free of the felt sense of the *necessity* of continuity, change becomes much easier, especially change for the other.

How do you want your life to be? In many ways, again, that is an irrelevancy, because your life is likely to be the way your life is going to be. Your life will be revealed to you probably not built on a Stalinist five-year plan. Because, when you make a plan, you then have to implement it and when you implement it you get resistance. The dialectic between the thesis that is being implemented and the resistance leads to a synthesis and so you have a progression, but you very rarely have the power to brand with a hot iron your template onto the world. An awful lot of energy can be wasted in that because the circumstances of life will show you the paths that open up. What do you need in order to do that? You need to be there, you need to be fresh, attentive, connected and ready to move.

Therefore, that gives us a sense of some of the problems that have to be dealt with in meditation: not being present, being spaced out, fusing with ideas, not being available, having lots of plans and things you want to resolve inside yourself before you are ready to move out, being able to mobilise not being in your body, not being willing to change; these are all problems which can be dealt with in meditation. Therefore, the more we have the integration between the ground openness, the richness of the potential, which is there in the infinite possibilities of manifestation, *and* the precise moment of our being in the world with others, the more they come into a healthy pulsation in which one movement is influencing the others and they massage each other and keep each other alive and alert. This, then, is the way of taking the practice into daily life.

Therefore, nobody can tell you precisely what you have to do. The key thing is that it will be revealed if you stay close to the state of the mirror. And all the work, then, in the sitting practice of meditation is to observe the tendency to attach into the content of the mind and to build it up as a pseudo identity, a false identity. If you sit in that you will not see your own nature and you will also have a distorted position from which to move into the world. Traditionally this is called samsara. However, if you do relax and open and become present in the state of the mirror and see its rich potential and you follow that in the non-dual arising with the environment, then you have the effortless self-liberating of manifestation moment-by-moment. Traditionally this is what is called nirvana.

Three 'Aa' practice and final advice

Let us do a bit more practice. We start again with this three 'Aa'. This time if you find yourself being caught up in some particular thought pattern, some belief or some identification don't try to push it away, don't try to get rid of it, don't fuse into it, but just allow yourself to be present with whatever is occurring. In that way, you are not standing back and observing it as if it

was something different because then you open up a dualistic perception. And neither are you fusing into it as if there is only one thing. Being present means to be just alongside — as if you imagine this example of a crystal ball on a red cloth taking on the red colouration, so your presence is offering a hospitality to the thought; you are not blocking the thought but you are not merged into it. When you merge into a thought you kind of believe in it, there is a collapse into it, a slippage into it. We are not doing that, and we are not pushing it away we are just with it. In that way, the thought is not being held there, it is coming up and it's gone and we are present all the way through that procession. If you get more tense then just relax into the out breath since the out breath helps to release fixation on thought; just a slow even out breath and then return to be present with whatever is occurring.

[Three 'Aa' practice]

This is a very basic practice. It is not too difficult to do. At the beginning you can do it for a short period of time, maybe five or ten minutes, and then gradually for longer. It is not something that you are struggling or straining to do, it is just relaxing and opening and seeing what occurs. As with this central metaphor of the mirror, whenever you look in the mirror you see reflections. The mirror is there but it is revealed to us as a mirror by the reflections. It is the same with the mind. People often imagine that they can find the nature of their mind as something sitting apart from everything else; that everything will fall away and there the pure nature of their mind will be sitting in solitary glory on a golden throne. But it is not like that at all.

The mind itself is the basis for the arising of all the thoughts, feelings, sensations and so on which occur in the meditation. The mind is revealed in its function, the mind is never revealed as anything else. It is not a thing, you cannot see it, you cannot taste it, you cannot touch it, but its presence is shown by the energy that it displays in all the thoughts and feelings which you experience as hiding the mirror from you. The mind itself is the one which is the presence of the thoughts which obscure the mind. Therefore, if you look for it somewhere else, if you look for it as something bright and shiny it is not likely that you will find it. You will find it where it is performing the task it has been doing from the very beginning of time which is to reveal all that is arising. However, you don't 'get it', you just settle back into this expansive infinity which is what we have always been.

This, then, is a practice to continue quite easily and observing these three points: relax and open, acceptance of the rich complexity of all that is arising, and then moving into the world with fresh attention to the possibilities of being in contact. Contact is the most important part of being in the world with others. Contact here means that we exist as this vital radiant potential, as do all beings. The people we meet are not solid real things, each of us is workable. When we become frightened of other people or dislike other people or bored of other people, we start to consolidate them as if they are a thing, and then we have a problem: What am I going to do about this person because they are like that? However, they are only like that due to the movement of causes and circumstances, part of which is us. Therefore, the more flexible we are, the more we are aware of the potential in the other person, the more we can move with them to help them to untie themselves. It is not so different from being with a small child who is having a temper tantrum. The temper tantrum of the child is best changed by the adult doing something different. Trying to get the child to do something different is ridiculous because the child in a temper tantrum can't do anything different (their temper tantrum is actually a communication to the adult). If the adult, however, does something different then the child, because they are bonded with the adult, will necessarily do something different too.

Therefore, from that point of view it is always up to us. Expecting other people to do things is ridiculous. Seeing how people are, that is one thing, but making the move oneself is the

eternal generation of the gift towards the other. And the more we are grounded in the open dimension of the mirror, it is not so exhausting. The mirror has no bottom to it and there is always more, so we can always do more. The ego is a very small pot and will quickly feel drained, angry and frustrated. Therefore, real compassion is always linked with real wisdom. The openness and the richness, they are born together.

We are now at the end of our time together. In the tradition we dedicate any merit which has been generated by this study and practice for the benefit of all beings. And of course, all beings are not far away, they are not somewhere else, they are always connected with us because there is no limit to our mind. Whatever happens anywhere is part of our world, part of our experience. Therefore, we can just gently reflect on all the beings in the universe and rays of light spreading out from our heart to them, and being at one with them in this state of connection.