

# The world as the creative expression of emptiness

Teachings based on

The Cuckoo's Cry Heralding the Good Fortune of Glorious Presence by Vairocana

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*The infinite diversity of experiences and their actual nature are non-dual.*

*Yet the actuality of each particular occurrence is beyond judgement.*

*What is known as 'as it is' is untouched by thought.*

*Yet the forms of appearance are unobstructed, being complete as they are.*

*Being intact we are free of the sickness of effort,*

*Spontaneously abiding and so everything is settled.*

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\* These sections include descriptions and commentary on the Three Statements of Garab Dorje

## Excerpts

... As in many countries, in Tibet the cuckoo is a very special bird. It heralds the ending of winter and the beginning of spring. It points to the possibility of freshness and the reawakening of the earth, the reawakening of our spirit. Here it's used as announcing, of heralding, the good fortune, the beneficence, of radiant awareness or glorious presence.

... try just to be with the raw, naked presentation of life. Once you enter into judgement and you elaborate your commentary you enter into a parallel universe, a kind of cyber space, a world which is not concrete. It's not the actual phenomenology.

... trust our aesthetic response to the world, the immediacy of the world revealed through the sense rather than always making our commentary about what's going on. From the point of view of meditation, the commentary obscures rather than reveals.

... our consciousness, our personal history, our tendencies, our associations, all of these are manifesting moments or points of energy coming into being. But they don't remain. This is the meaning of the Buddhist notion of 'no self'. It doesn't mean that we don't exist at all, it means rather that we are not 'something'. We cannot know ourself in terms of our personality and our qualities because how we manifest in the world is situationally evoked.

... the more we relax and open and we feel at home in that spaciousness, the less desperate our lives become. We don't have so much of a territory to protect, we don't have so many private agendas because when we directly see that the mind itself is an indestructible presence then we don't have to protect it.

... the idea of a divided self can be quite shocking but actually being divided is normal. To put it another way, we are multiple and therefore to be a balanced person is to be skilled in running group therapy inside yourself! And it's always a dynamic balance...

... so the mirror is showing me my face, this is my face, but of course it's showing me a reflection. The face and the reflection are not the same. So it's like in the meditation, when we get caught up in something, what we get caught up in is the reflection and the one who gets caught up is also like the reflection.

... and it's exactly the same with the meditation. The calmer we are, the more relaxed and open, thoughts, feelings, sensations are still arising but they're just 'stuff', neutral phenomena coming and going. We have no need of them. They have nothing to offer us. The bridge that binds us into samsara is our own sense of lack. When we taste the contentment there is no need for this.

... calmness is very helpful. It won't make you stupid. Your mind can still be very bright, very connected but not busy. Not needing things for the emotional sense of filling ourselves like an anxious binge eater, but rather using things for their proper function in the world as a means of relating to others.

## Shiné Practice

### Focusing attention

So today we have a chance to do some different kinds of meditation and we start with some shiné. *Shi* means peaceful *né* means to stay, basically means 'staying peacefully'. This is an aspect of mindfulness. The word in Tibetan for mindfulness is *dran pa* and it means 'remembrance', or 'recollection' or 'not forgetting'. Essentially not to be distracted. It means to be present with what you have decided to be present with. In some ways this kind of practice is quite simple but it's also quite challenging because we tend to be fascinated by many things in the world. As long as we have no particular intention our mind can wander here and there, and this can be quite enjoyable, but as soon as you have a focus the tendency to move this way and that becomes a distraction. And this is one of the main concerns in meditation practice, how to not be distracted.

The danger with distraction is that it leads us into elaboration, into multiplication, into many, many different pathways and especially the fact that it's usually linked to a kind of interest or excitement. Clearly we want our lives to be interesting. We enjoy having a stimulus, going to see a good movie, or reading a book or chatting with friends. We get new ideas, there's emotional contact and we feel more alive. But of course this is not occurring all the time, some of time we experience boredom, feeling upset, lonely, regretful and so on, and these feelings, in relation to excitement and interest, come to seem very bad for us. So we tend to privilege excitement and interest over boredom and sadness. One of the central themes in buddhist practice in all the schools is the wish to develop equanimity. That is to say, to experience our mind as a calm and steady illuminating force that is able to be with whatever is there.

So if we start with various kinds of prejudice, what we like and what we don't like and that this is operating on a cognitive level but also on an emotional and energetic level, then this creates a bias which puts a twist onto the openness of the attention that we can give. I think in all the traditions, but I speak here for the Nyingmapa tradition, the intention of the various forms of mindfulness is to bring us to a state where we can rest at ease in the natural openness of the mind.

We will start today by focusing on something very simple. Looking down the line of our nose we find something on the floor in front of us. Decide on that and keep returning your attention to it. Because the focus is simple it doesn't have a great deal of inherent interest so it's easy to become distracted because sensation in the body, or thoughts, or sounds coming from outside are more interesting than the movement of the breath. That is to say, we are used to privileging diversity of experience over singularity of experience. Generally speaking, if we have a simple repetitive task to do we tend to automatise that process so that we have the freedom to think of something else whilst we're doing it. Whether its cleaning our teeth, peeling potatoes, driving a car or whatever, the movement of the body in these activities seems to happen almost by itself and the mind is free to wander off.

It's actually quite a rare experience to be fully attentive, fully gathered together onto what is immediately present. Now what is present for you may be a memory, it may be a plan, there's nothing wrong with that. Mindfulness is not just about being in the present moment, after all if you're planning to go walking in the high mountains it helps to think what you need to take with you. So you need to bring together your memories of walking

before, what is useful to have, what kind of bag to carry these things in and so on. That is to say, you bring together the felt sense of what it would be like to be in a place where you are not yet and with that imagination to plan properly what you're going to do. Bank robbers if they're successful are very good at mindfulness, a lot of planning goes into it. How much time it will take to get into the building, what will happen if people resist you, will you show them a gun and so on. Now why would bank robbers be so mindful? Because they are in touch with two of the primary forces of our life. Desire, they have a desire for money, and aversion, they have an aversion to go to prison. So we need to apply the same principle, we have a desire to become enlightened and an aversion to keep wandering in samsara. These are very useful motivating background factors.

Buddhist texts generally remind us of impermanence, of the rarity of having a precious human birth and so on, and this is very helpful. The central point is to decide on a focus and we stay true to the focus. So, the first practice we'll do this morning is a mindfulness with effort. Later we'll be looking at mindfulness without effort. Although whenever we do a practice with effort it's a little artificial. There are many clear advantages in the practice of effort, because it immediately links us into many of the main buddhist themes of Mahayana practice, for example with the Paramitas, the transcendent qualities that are essential in the path of a bodhisattva, one who wants to be available for the benefit of others. Generosity, generosity is giving, we can give food to people, we can give time people, if we're going to focus on our breath we are giving ourselves to our breath.

To give yourself to something means first of all you have to gather yourself together, then you can introduce it into that path. We need to have patience, not to be demoralised when our mind goes wandering, to think as long as it takes that is the amount of time I will give. And that requires courage, courage which promotes diligence. Perhaps you can see in that way that many of the main themes that are discussed for example by Shantideva are essential to what we're doing. Because one of the key supports for doing meditation practice is to remember the context. We live in a world which has no foundation, in the Tibetan language the word for this world is *jig ten*. *Jig* means 'destroyed' or 'to crumble', 'to fall away', and *ten* means 'place' or 'site'.

Our world is always changing, whatever is established and built up starts to crumble and fall down. This is its very nature. If some of you can perhaps remember the beginning of the Euro currency there was great celebration and lots of things in the newspapers and on the television that this was a wonderful new beginning and as we know, love is blind. So in the desire to make this wonderful new world a lot of blindness occurred. And only sometime later did the cracks start to appear. This is a general principle of our lives. If we look clearly we become demoralised. Is there any political party you would really want to vote for? Most kinds of occupations have some kind of shadow involved in them. In terms of being an ordinary human being we don't want to be demoralised. We want to have hope but unfortunately this kind of hope makes us stupid.

In dharma there's a different kind of hope. I would imagine here you have a thangka of the wheel of life somewhere. If you look at this painting of the wheel of life you can see the various activities which give rise to the six realms of existence, and up at the top there is the Buddha pointing to another domain, a clear circle. That is to say, the hope is not the hope that samsara will become a nice place, it's a hope in achieving nirvana. Nirvana means 'no trouble'. It's not the same as trying to make different moves to change the

economy or improve health care. It's to enter into a radically different experience and, in order to do that, we have to not be so caught up in what is going on. Not take things too seriously. So when we study emptiness and see the illusory nature of phenomena, essentially this means don't take yourself too seriously. All our plans create just very temporary shelters.

It's very interesting that when Al-Qaeda organised this attack on the Twin Towers in New York, they were immediately identified as terrorists. In fact they were realists because they showed that these creations of pride and pomp were illusory. In European painting this was a major theme in the eighteenth century, wasn't it, with these vanitas paintings — paintings which would show the collapse of richness and power. Symbols such as the sand glass that measures time. If we go right back into the Bible we have King Nebuchadnezzar sitting in his palace surrounded by all his wealth yet who sees this writing in the wall, 'All this is going to vanish'.

The history of our world shows things crumbling but we want to believe that it won't crumble. So when we sit and do the shiné practice one of the first things we encounter is the crumbling of our intention. I will focus my mind, proudly announce this (Laughter), like building the Twin Towers, but then the terrorist of our own karma blows us apart! This is very, very important again for seeing both that we don't have much power or focus. But also that the ego, our personal individual self is not a good basis for dharma practice. And this again is why reading Shantideva is so helpful. Patience, it takes as long as it takes. Just because we want something to happen doesn't mean it's going to happen. That is to say, we have to take our place in the movement of enlightenment. In order to do that we give ourselves into the practice and when obstacles come, difficulties come, we just return to the practice and our own personal response to what is going on, gradually we allow that to become irrelevant.

### Instruction for shiné meditation

So we can do some of this sitting now. Sit in a way that's comfortable, that's allowing your skeleton to hold your weight. The shoulders are back and relaxed, the hands are usually in front of us the left hand resting on the right, the thumbs just touching. The head is slightly tilted down and the gaze is running the line of the nose. The tongue is turned up to rest on the hard of the pallet. And you decide on your focus, the movement of the breath or a visual object, and you stay with that, and if you find your mind wanders off you very gently bring it back. Without developing irritation about this or being curious about why the mind has wandered, or where it's gone. Just very gently returning to the focus.

Ok, so now we'll sit like this for some time.

### **Meditation (35 mins)**

#### Not relying on thoughts

So one of the very useful functions of this kind of practice is to give us the sense of how much we rely on thought for the sense of clarity. That is to say, we're drawn towards relying on thoughts, merging with thoughts, identifying with thoughts because we believe that they're going to give us some real value and clearly many of the functions we have in

life could not be performed without thinking but one of the central points here is that thoughts illuminate the world of manifestation. They are a part of that world of manifestation. They are manifesting in relation to different kinds of experience some in the past, some in the present, some we imagine in the future. They create narratives, story lines, which offer us interpretations about what is going on.

When we're following the breath or focusing on a simple object, we can start to be aware of a different kind of clarity, a clarity which is simply being relaxed and attentive. There isn't a problem to be solved. There isn't any basis for elaboration or enquiry. There is a simple object and a simple mental response to that which is giving attention. Thought cannot provide any illumination to that and as we will in the progress of the weekend go more into dzogchen practice, this is an important area to start to trust the clarity which is non conceptual.

Again it's not about destroying thoughts or blocking thoughts. Thoughts are not the enemy. Thoughts are an aspect of the creativity our mind. But thoughts have been perverted through a misuse or misapprehension of their function. Our world is a system of communication, thoughts, feelings, sensation, all the different kinds of experiences we have are communications. Communication doesn't establish anything, in the sense of creating something solid and enduring but it is the arising of temporary patterns. So if you're sitting with a friend having a coffee and the weather's nice, all kinds of aspects of your lives are being woven together in that moment and sometimes your attention goes out to make a general comment, a metta comment, "Oh how nice to be here with you, how nice to see you again." In that way we connect out to the environment and into the particularity. That is to say thought, feeling and sensation is in the aspect or the house of compassion. Its function is linking, pattern creation. If you ask your thoughts to establish a true enduring identity for yourself or some external object, then you're asking it to do something it can't do. Thoughts don't establish eternal truths. What they can do is be part of the formulation of a dogma which by being repeated again and again creates a pseudo telling of the truth.

So when we do the shiné practice and you experience some degree of non distraction, resting simply with this simple focus. In that moment you're not relying on thought but you're still here. So an attentive focus is an aspect of presence. That is to say we are *being with* this focus that we have decided on and the one who is being with that focus is simple. It's not depending on your history, your gender, your nationality, on your age. I am attentive, I am with the object. This starts to open up the space to begin to examine 'who is the one whose paying attention?' But in order to make that examination we have to find a way to do it through not relying on thought. Because if we are going to look at the nature of the mind and we do it on the basis of identification with concepts then we're operating inside a familiar paradigm and it's most probable that the conclusions that we come to will belong inside that paradigm. That is to say, we will simply formulate many different concepts about who we are and what our basic nature is.

So this kind of practice we were just doing is very helpful to begin to separate, the sense of being here while free of concepts. That is to say, each of us in some way exists, we are alive, we're here. We can tell ourselves many stories about what it is to be alive and to be ourselves but we can use the shiné practice to step out of that and just have the direct experience of being here. And that's the basis for doing the other kinds of meditation.

Ok if we take a twenty minute break now.

### Ignorance and attachment

Ok, I'll say a little bit more about recollection and then we'll lead into a vipassana meditation. The root of samsara according to the traditions is ignorance and attachment. Ignorance is a falling apart so, for example, if we look at this side of the room and if we were only ever looking at this side of the room, we would be ignoring the other side of the room. Having a fixation on this side would mean that we had only a partial sense of what was in the room. And this is the essential quality of ignorance that when you're ignoring something other aspects are going to get over privileged. I will demonstrate this in a very concrete way.

**(James stands up)** Enlightenment... Ignorance... now all my weight is on one leg, more difficult to balance and not so good for the joints. So if you are ignoring part of the system not only is that part not functioning but some other part is having to compensate for the absence of that necessary part. It's not so complicated. This is what our attachment is, the attachment is the excessive energy or libido which has to be cathected somewhere.

So the objects of our daily life become very important to us. We invest them with a particular significance and on the basis of that we feel that they hold part of ourselves. There are many other things in the world but they're not so important to us. For example, just outside there is a baby, it's a baby. In the world there are many babies but for the mother it's her baby. If some other mother went to her and said, "Nadia would you like to swap your baby?" I think we can be confident that she would say, "No!" So in this way, something which is a general aspect of the world like a baby or a chair, a watch or a motor car, takes on a particular function as we put energy into it and of course an aspect of this is love. When we care for people we become involved with them. However we meet each other due to causes and circumstances. When these causes and circumstances change we go apart and what appeared to be the bubble of my world is popped.

In that way if we look back in the history of our lives we have had many small worlds. The world of our first toys when we were two and three then maybe the world of your bicycle or your ballet shoes, and then different worlds one after another as you proceed through life. But these are fragments and part of that fragmentation process is ignorance because not only on a horizontal plane do we not attend to many of the things in the world but on a vertical plane, using this as a metaphor, on a vertical plane we also ignore the ground of our being.

So, in my left hand I have a bowl and in my right hand I have the object for striking the bowl. You can see very clearly that these two objects are very different, one is made of metal and one is made of wood and cloth, and if we really examine them in detail we could find many, many different levels of difference between them, the chemical composition and so on. Then if we open our gaze and see we are in a room. These two objects, the bowl and its striker are contents of the room. They are both contents. So on the level of the room they are simply things which are in the room. And their individual qualities which seem to differentiate them so much become less relevant.

In the same way the ground of our being, the openness of our being is inseparable from what's called the *dharmadhatu* or the infinite space of all phenomena. Within that great spaciousness, everything which occurs is just stuff. It's just manifestation. Of course each manifestation has its unique particularity which differentiates it from other manifestation but on the level of the spaciousness, each manifestation is as it were both an expression and a guest of this infinite hospitality. So part of the function of meditation is to lessen our fixation on the details of our life, winning and losing.

When I was on the plane coming here I experienced my usual egocentric hopes and fears. I had booked a window seat. Somebody was sitting on the aisle seat. I put the papers I was working on in the seat in the middle, "Ah, I have a bit of space." Then someone else arrived and said, "That is my seat", so my world began to shrink. This lady had a very big leather jacket and she was very clearly well trained in the arts of elbow wrestling! (Laughter) So for the first fifteen minutes we had little skirmishes about who was going to have the arm rest! (Laughter) And it's like that, our world expands, it contracts. There is no rule book that tells us exactly what is our share. The boundaries between ourselves and other people are very unstable and flexible. So how shall we behave? This is part of the ongoing turbulence of samsara. I and this lady were sharing space but for both of us, in some ways, having our elbow on this rest was important. The basic fact that we were sharing space was obscured for a while by a sense of competition. Because we went into our individual worlds which always begins with, "What about me?" Now, this is the very nature of ignorance, that we ignore the fact that we share the space and we approach our existence as it were from the inside out about my personal entitlement.

### Understanding mindfulness

So if we go back to this term for mindfulness *dran pa* which means 'recollection', that means 'collecting together again', 'not fragmenting'. In English, remembering has the same idea that the members, the bits, come together again. So when we're practicing mindfulness it is an *inclusive* position. When we were doing this shiné first of all it looks exclusive, in the sense we're not paying attention to the thoughts that come, but the purpose of that is not just to get into a narrow fixation, it's a capacity to see the actual space we're in.

So if you come into this room as a buddhist of some kind there are many interesting images and so on, these attract our attention and we go to look at them. But if we imagine a non buddhist architect coming into the room, they're looking at the space. The fact that the space has stuff in it is not so relevant, they're interested just in the potential of the space and what could be done with it. And the thing is if you see the basic space here, many, many things are possible. But if you see the furniture, the artefacts which are filling the room, many fewer things are immediately possible. In the same way, we have a lot of furniture inside us, we have our habits, our patterns, our constraints and so on, as long as we are attentive to them we don't see the space we are operating in. We just see the furniture, our habits, our assumptions, the familiar voices in our head and so on.

So by focusing the mind, by simplifying down onto one point we're training ourselves not to be caught up in the familiar furniture. Because if we are mindful in our activity, whether it's walking or talking or eating or sleeping, we start to experience that all of these activities are in a context. When we're walking, we're walking down the road. If you go to

some kinds of buddhist places in India you'll see people doing this very slow mindful walking and they're so mindful that they don't know where they are. They can't see to get out of the way of somebody else... they're being mindful. This is not really what mindfulness really means because what they are doing they are privileging an encapsulated bubble of 'I am mindful of what is happening for me'. But ignorance creates the condition of duality and the movement out of ignorance is the movement out of duality into non duality. And non-duality begins with seeing that I am part of the world.

So being mindful essentially is being *mindful of ourselves in context*. That subject and object or individual and the field of experience are not two separate things. And by being mindful of both at the same time we gradually get less sense of being inside ourselves looking out at the world but rather that our senses are like a two-way street of pulsations of communication. We listen out of our ears and sound comes into our ears. We look out of our eyes and light and objects and so on, the appearance of them, comes in through our eyes. And by having this sense of pulsation the firm definition of self versus other, 'I am not you', starts to dissolve.

So *dran pa* is to recollect yourself, be fully present where you are. When you're eating there is holding a knife and fork, lifting, biting, chewing and so on. The fact that we know how to do these things can easily lead us to not to attend to the performance of these functions. So a very important part of mindfulness is to observe how knowledge can make you stupid. It's about not resting in assumptions but coming back to the absolute precision of this moment and this of course links with the Buddha's main teaching on impermanence.

This room is the same room we were in before the break. That seems to be a fact. It's a fact based on abstraction. The actuality of this room is the light coming through the windows is slightly different as the sun's moving up in the sky. Some people have moved where they were sitting from the first part of the morning and for each of us our postures are slightly different from before. What we actually are is also our posture, it's not kind of an optional extra where we can say, "I'm always me, I just happen to be sitting like this just now", as if inside there is a pure me and real me, who due to some reason sometimes does these other things but it doesn't effect the essence of who I am. That view is seen as the essence of ignorance that we have a true individual self substance which is unaffected by the changes of life. Buddhism is saying the very opposite. There is only change and this change has patterns to it, these patterns give the semblance of continuity but actually moment by moment there is a unique difference. This moment cannot be repeated.

## Vipassana Meditation

We can move now into doing a vipassana practice. In Tibetan, vipassana is called *lhag tong* which means 'excellent looking' or 'good looking'. That is to say, looking in the way that reveals how things actually are. So in this practice, which is sometimes called insight meditation, we are attempting to look very precisely at what is actually occurring and to avoid mopping up or absorbing the actual occurrence into the framework of our assumption. For example, 'my right hip is a bit sore', that's quite an understandable statement. How it is revealed to me is through different kinds of sensation. Sometimes

it's dull, sometimes it feels quite hot. There are many different sensations but I draw these together and formulate a statement that my hip is sore. Now once that reading or that conclusion is established, any other sensation coming from that area becomes a proof or a validation of the proposition, 'my hip is sore'.

Instead of taking the individual moments and massaging them into the texture of the statement, the way you would massage ghee into chapati flour to make a paratha, in vipassana we go in the other direction and we focus on the detail of what is arising. We renounce the desire to have a conclusion. We're not acting as a doctor, taking these various strands of symptoms and formulating a diagnosis, but rather we want to attend to the things themselves and to see what they actually are. So we'll do this and then we can think about what we discover as we do it.

### Instruction and posture for vipassana meditation

I'd like to say something first also about the meditation posture. Many people here are not at all used to sitting crossed legged. This is not a military camp, if you have to move then move. Punishing the body and sitting in a lot of pain is just a way of fabricating another distraction. As you gain more capacity to stay with what is happening then you get less troubled by sensation, but the main thing we need is the capacity to be present with what is going on.

So we begin as we did with the other practice, you get a stable focus on your breath or something external and then just very gently take that focused attention up to the top of your head. Then we just scan down through the body and back up again, and we keep doing this slowly with an even movement. Simply attending to what is occurring. If you want to give a name to what is occurring give the simplest name possible. What we're wanting to do is to avoid elaborating stories about what is going on, but trying to catch the first fresh emergence before its got wrapped in the network of representations. In this way we're exploring the body of experience, this is different from the body of thought. It's different from the body you take to the doctor if you feel sick. This is the body of immediate experience of what is actually occurring.

So we will do this practice scanning up and down slowly to have enough time to really see, 'how is it this basis of my existence, how does it reveal itself?' So instead of me telling my body what is going on as in I have a cold or I have a backache, we're listening in a mindful way so that the body can tell us just what its own experience is. okay.

### **Meditation**

Maybe just take a few minutes and share with a neighbour what your experience of that was.

Have you any thoughts or questions about that?

### Duality and non-duality (question and answer)

**Question:** When I'm watching an unpleasant sensation in my body I get the feeling that I'm much more than this sensation that there is wonderful space but at the same time

there is, of course, this sensation and I feel there is not only this wonderful space but there is also a new split between perceiver and perceived.

**James:** This is basically a dualistic practice so it's not wrong to have that sense because you are observing something so the observer and the observed are going to be a bit different, because when we give attention to something, attention is a quality of energy. Now say I'm reading a book, I feel I'm reading the book. I am doing the reading and so the reading of the book is a confirmation of my personal identity of somebody who is able to read a book. And again the tilt is, in the identification, is a kind of active one, subject to object. But of course you can also read a book in a more passive receptive way. Usually if you're reading an academic book if you have to write a paper or something like that you're actively taking the material and moving it, you are the shaper of the reading. But if you're reading a novel maybe in the garden on a nice day and you enter into the world of the novel, then it's the very receptivity that you bring to the novel that makes it come alive.

With this practice when you have that feeling of being open and present, that's a pleasant sensation in itself but you're then attending to the pleasant sensation and attending to the unpleasant sensation. Because attention is neutral. For example, if an autopsy is being carried out if when the doctor has taken the little rotating blade and removed the top of the head, if they then vomit into it because they feel horror that would not be helpful. At the same time if they had a pet theory about why this person might have died and they're looking for clues that's also not helpful. Because the task of the doctor in the autopsy is to establish the cause of death. So they have to look in a neutral way, attentively, but without prejudice. So in a similar way that's the quality of attention we want, we don't want to get too excited if we have a pleasant sensation and upset if we have a negative sensation. So we want to be just noting what is there, without giving any extra value to it. Because clearly as a person we don't like to feel pain in our body and we do like to feel some kind of joy or happiness, but here we're just looking.

So shortly we'll take a break for lunch and we also have some free time afterwards. You can walk out into nature, there are nice little roads going up in the hill a little bit. You can use this as an opportunity to practice being mindful. For example, walking on grass then walking on the wooden boards of the walkway then walking on the unpaved surface with stones on it up onto the road then walking along the flat road then turning and walking up the road that starts to go uphill. You can be looking at the movement of your arms, your sense of balance, the way you position the weight on your feet, if the surface is level or unlevel.

I think what is helpful is to try to take these two readings the active and the passive. So say for example you go to walk up the hill, the active reading is 'I am walking up the hill, I am mobilising my energy, I feel my muscles tensing a little bit.' The more passive receptive way is to see, 'oh, what is the hill doing to me?' So it's the shape of the hill which is making my body do these things. So in that way you listen you hear the conversation between the angle of the hill and your body. Different muscles are tensing, the gaze becomes a bit preoccupied. If you go on a rough surface you have to go more carefully. And in that way you can start to see how you can be mindful of being a participant *in* the world rather than reading the situation that I am acting *on* the world. Because this lived experience of participation lets you see the non-duality.

You could try eating the soup with your fork. (Laughter) Then you see, 'oh, the world is showing me what to do.' It's not that I know how to eat soup, but the world is showing a range of possibilities and if we engage effectively, we are responding to the nature of soup. And what is useful in that is there is a freshness, a curiosity, 'how will I do this?' What is the nature of this movement, what muscles are involved as I lift the spoon, how do I balance it so that it doesn't dribble? And then you see actually eating soup without spilling it is a very skillful activity. This itself is mindfulness. Mindfulness is self and world arising together attending to the mutual influencing. So if the soup is very hot you will want to blow on it and maybe you take just a little sip. Moment by moment you can start to experience the world as this pulsation. And then the world is not a dead object that you can have mastery over. But rather it's a dynamic field of emergence, indeed of co-emergence, because we are emerging in the world as part of it.

Ok and we meet back at 3pm.

### Mind - control versus collaboration

In the Tibetan tradition the mind is often compared to a wild elephant that has to be tamed and you get a similar image in the zen ox herding pictures. Again we need to think about what does it mean to control your mind. Who is the one who is going to control your mind? So it's as if the self *has* a mind. Most of us remember this kind of view from our childhood where parents or school teachers tell us that we have to control our bodies or control our mouths and control the way we think about things. That somehow we are in charge of ourselves. Now on one level it makes sense to say I have a body so I should try to control my body and not bump into other people, and that opens up all kinds of interesting explorations about how we inhabit our body. And we know that we should control our speech. Again, as children maybe your parents say, "Listen, you can talk that way in school in the playground but not in front of us. And especially not in front of your grandmother." So children learn that you can say different things to different people. And even that you have to say different things to the same person. So if you want to be allowed to stay out late or go to a party or something, if you look at your mum and she looks very tired, that's not the time to ask her. In that sense learning to control your speech and make it fit the situation is not an unusual request.

Controlling the mind is a bit more difficult because what's the relation of the controller to the controlled? For example, in my therapy practice I was seeing a young person who had very bad eczema on their skin. It could cover their whole face and they knew that if they scratched it, it would get worse but the irritated nerve ends were crying out, "Scratch me, scratch me". So the person had to work very hard to put the rational knowledge 'it's not helpful if I scratch', to put that in a dominant place over the uprising impulse to just scratch because of the irritation. So there you have some kind of internal dialogue, "I want to scratch, though I know I shouldn't scratch." You have to put more money on one of the horses than the other. It's the same with people who are drinking too much or who want to give up smoking. That is to say we don't have a unitary self. The very nature of the self is to be multiple and fragmented.

The idea of a divided self can be quite shocking as in the notion of schizophrenia. But actually being divided is normal or to put it in another way we are multiple and therefore to be a balanced person is to be skilled in running group therapy inside yourself! And it's

always a dynamic balance as with this central image in buddhism, of the middle way, that when the Buddha says with tuning a guitar, "Don't make the strings too tight or too loose." But we need to retune, because the weather can influence the strings. The fact that we live in the world with other people influences how we are attuned in ourselves. The question is, "If I am going to control myself can I trust that the controller knows what they're doing?"

In history there have been many great controllers, Mao Tse-Tung, Stalin, our friend from Linz and so on. These great controllers were able to dominate a situation for a while but at a certain point it flips over and you get an unravelling, the entropy moves towards chaos. And this is why mindfulness as a neutral function is so important. Because just looking, just observing without any agenda, without any bias, probably gives us our greatest chance of having a sustainable clarity in the face of these multiple demands that we experience.

Maybe some of you have seen elephants especially in more free places like in India. The person who sits on them, the mahout, has to control the elephant with a curved stick with a kind of point on it, ankus, and they pull it into its neck to pull it back. But they also need to make friends with the elephant. They have to get to know the particular nature of the elephant and try as much as possible to work with its tendencies as opposed to against them. And it's the same with our own mind, that if you try to control your mind from a position of hatred, if you're tired of being yourself, if you've had enough of your own stupid nonsense and you decide that you really want to change, you already have quite a problem. Because you're wanting to attack yourself, to stop what you're up to, but actually these tendencies are a part of ourselves.

I don't know whether you do this in school races in Austria but in England we do a three-legged race. Do you do that where you tie the legs together? It's a very nice race. You stand together, you tie the joint leg and then you have to run. It's an excellent training in collaboration because usually each child is trying to get the other child to run the way that they do. But actually you have to find a new rhythm, the rhythm of 'we' and it's the same with our mental functioning. All these aspects of ourselves need to be included in the family. So if we enter into desire for the bits that we like and hatred for the bits that we don't like, this will make the work of mental development very difficult. Which is why when we were doing the first practice this morning the instruction is, if you find our mind has wandered off bring it back very gently.

So we need to be clear about some of the terms here. When the word 'mind' is used, generally, it means manifestation, the energetic arising of the potential of the mind. It arises in the form of thoughts, feelings, perceptions and so on. It arises as experience. Generally speaking, the proposition is the more finally attuned, the more balanced, the more virtuous your mind is, the easier it will be to see what is going on, and for that reason controlling rough violent tendencies is seen as a good idea. What's important to see is that this is a method, this is an orientation, it's not a truth. So when you read texts like this or get this kind of instruction this belongs in what is called the 'sutra class'. With the idea that by calming yourself, controlling how you manifest, there will be fewer variables and they will be more predictable and therefore you will be able to see what's going on. This of course is very similar to the western scientific method. A laboratory should be very clean and tidy because if people spill a bit of this acid and a bit of this substance and just

leave them lying around you can never know whether the traces are going to influence the result of a new experiment.

## Nine Step Breathing Instruction

So we'll do one more practice which is related to control and then we'll move into another paradigm, another way of looking at how the world is structured. The advantage of knowing a range of methods is that when you find your mood varying you'll be able to apply some method which works with your capacity in that moment. That is to say, just as we wear different clothes in the summer and the winter and we tend to eat different foods so we can do different dharma practices according to our mood. This is important to understand because sometimes you can hear, "This is a very special dharma teaching which is very good, can use it all the time." Well, that's maybe true in theory but that doesn't mean that we can use it all the time because if a method is subtle and we are feeling hot and tired and stupid, then it's probably not going to be very helpful.

So the key point is put yourself first not the method, if you think, "I'm a stupid person and the dharma is very good. How is a stupid person going to do this holy dharma?" The real practice begins with respecting yourself because whether you like it or not you are in charge of your life. It's not like driving a car where the police can stop you and say, "You're drunk", and take away your licence. Until you die you have a licence to fuck your life up. There's no dharma police going to fly in the window and stop you! So it's important to really think, "Oh, I'm in charge of this existence. I may not be very good at this but I don't have a choice." So taking responsibility we need to think, "What is *my* situation?"

Ok so we do a little practice now, this practice is concerned with breathing. We'll do it in three stages, first the purification then a gradual extension of the rhythm of the breath, and then some holding. The reason we work with the breath is the breath is very much connected with thought. If you hold your breath you can stop thought. So in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions there are many methods of doing this. The point is that at the moment when very little mental experience is occurring if you stay present you can have a more direct experience of the unborn openness of the mind.

So some of you know this breathing called the 'nine step breathing'. Women use the left arm, men use the right arm and you breathe in, lifting your arm right up and then closing in the nostril and then bringing it down as you exhale out of the opposite nostril. And then you go over to the other and you do this movement, the exchange, three times. And then breathe in normally and then lean forward as far as you can and use the pressure onto your belly to push up the diaphragm and really empty the lungs. The alternation of the breath that occurs in the course of the day is usually about every four hours, the stress moves from the right side to the left side and back again. And this breath in the nostril is linked to the opposite frontal lobe. So it's clearly a way of influencing your mental processes. You can also control it by pressing into the arm pit, so in the Hindu tradition you have a *yoga danda*, a little stick, that goes up like a triangle, you put it under your arm and as you press on it, you can shift the breath across. You can perhaps see already some danger in this. You could become a nerdy technician constantly adjusting yourself which

will then make your life very artificial. But some basic familiarity on how to settle the breath is very helpful.

So in our own time just lifting your arm if you're a woman you start with the left, up, round, in and down, then over to the other side and then over. Ok?

### **Nine step breathing exercise (4 mins)**

Ok so now we start with a very regular breath just breathe in for two and breathe out for two. You can make these counts according to what's right for you but usually it's one, two.

### **Ongoing exercise (1 min)**

We want the breath to be coming from the diaphragm. We're not doing a short upper chest breathing. It's not a (James makes a breathing sucking sound) sucking the air in. As you breathe in imagine that you're pouring water into a jug. The water goes to the bottom of the jug and then builds up. So as you breathing in you imagine air's going right to the bottom of your lungs and then gradually filling them up. And as the lungs expand they press down on the diaphragm which should push your belly out a little bit. And then when you're breathing out, you imagine that the air is coming up from the bottom of your lungs. You're not pulling your belly in but you'll feel it gradually coming in as the lungs lose their air and there's less pressure in the diaphragm. So we want a feeling of a slow steady breath, no pressure, no strain, you're not acting against yourself but just gradually extending the capacity of your breathing. The general principle that we work with is that the out-breath is longer than the in-breath. This calms the system down. So if we do now breathing in for two and breathing out for four.

### **Ongoing exercise (2mins)**

Now increase it in for four and out for four.

### **Ongoing exercise (2 mins)**

Ok so now we do in for four hold for two and then out for four. At this time we hold it just here (James indicates where) you feel almost like you're tightening here and the air will stay there. So four in, hold for two, four out.

### **Ongoing exercise (2 mins)**

If it feels like a bit of a strain you can just slightly speed up the rate that you are counting at but try to keep the rhythm of the breathing constant.

So there are many progressions we can do but we'll just do one more, we'll breath in for four, hold for four and breathe out on six.

### **Ongoing exercise (2 mins)**

That's quite a useful thing to practice, you may notice your mind gets quite calm when you do it. It's particularly useful if you are a very mental person, if you're somebody who tries

to sort themselves out, because there's no end to thinking and it's like trying to fight fire with fire. If you just go into the body and focus on the breathing everything will calm down. It's very like the methods they use for controlling panic attacks.

We just do one further development of it which is after you breath in and you start to hold then you can increase the block by tightening the anal sphincter and perineum pulling it tightening it and pulling it up, tightening the muscle here in the diaphragm and pushing down. So it's as if you're creating a sealed container. And then when you finish the four counts of holding you release both together. But the thing you don't want to do is to build up a sense of kind of bubbly inside like a kind of sports car driver shaking a bottle of champagne. Because when you start to breathe out again, if you've been holding it tight, then the tendency is to release at the top of the chest and then you'll feel a tension inside. So it's a time to be just very calm, trust you're going to be breathing in quite soon, it's quite safe to be breathing out slowly and gently from the bottom up. okay so we can try this together.

### **Completing exercise (2 mins)**

#### **Energy channels and self identity**

Okay. If that interests you to do, you can try just a little bit and gradually build it up. You should never try to force yourself into that kind of practice. It is particularly useful to do a bit before doing some mahamudra or dzogchen practice. In the theory of pranayama or *tsa lung*, the idea is that the energy of the mind becomes dispersed through the body into the small channels. And when the energy gets trapped in a small channel it starts to vibrate and that vibration is the basis for a strong impulse.

So yesterday morning I was in the hospital and I saw somebody who when they wake up in the morning start to eat chocolate and crisps. He said that the reason he did this was because he felt empty inside and the feeling of emptiness was too much and so he needed something to fill him. So that's a very nice example of a kind of ontological alienation, an ontological insecurity, somebody is not at home in themselves in a very profound way. And in the arising of the feeling of being lost, the feeling seems to be a true account of the person's identity. That is to say, this particular self-configuration seems to be definitive of the person this is, who they really are and this is unbearable, but they have nowhere else to go so they vanish into the fugue-like quality of binge eating.

If you were looking at that in terms of the energy of the body, the person has lost the freedom of movement in the central channel. Like a Moscow intellectual being sent out to Siberia, this person's identity is locked somewhere in their thumb or in their big toe, so they're feeling completely ungrounded. "I don't know who I am. I don't know where I am", and in that state only something equally limited and intense will act as a pseudo-antidote. We see this with people using a lot of drugs or alcohol or cutting themselves, beating their head in the wall. There are many, many things that people do when they think this is intolerable, I can't bare it. And this is because their identity in that moment is a piece of trapped energy which can't find it's way back and settle and become spacious

So it's also helpful, if when we're with other people, if they are agitated. Sometimes when people are disturbed there's nothing you can really say that's going to make a difference.

All you can do is just be there with them. But if you have some skill with your own breath by bringing yourself down and centering as much as possible. It means that you're not going into a kind of sympathetic vibration with them. Their anxiety is not going to get to you but paradoxically your spaciousness may gradually get to them. So the central channel that runs through the body is the quality of emptiness, in the Tibetan tradition it's called the *uma*. *Uma* means like 'the middle one' and it's linked with the word for Prajnaparamita, the goddess, and also linked with Nargajuna's madhyamika philosophy. That is to say, we don't have an essence as a 'thing'. The centre of our being is a spaciousness an empty channel. If all the potential that we have, all the various kinds of movement of our energy can be reintegrated with this central channel then in this spacious openness we are more connected with the environment and our energy is then manifesting according to the actual situation.

So that rather than just doing what we do, doing our own familiar numbers because we have to do them, because that's how we confirm to ourselves that we are how we are. Because we started to taste that who we actually are is a spacious openness, the energy of manifestation that we can show in many different ways is not over invested with the burden of having to be our core identity. This gives you the freedom to be unpredictable and unreliable. This is very delicious! (Laughter) Because once people know what you do, you're pretty easy to track. Every time you use a credit card, every time you use your mobile phone, every time you use your computer, this is information which is going into the big state mind and people know what you buy, they know exactly what to do.

### Loosening patterns

So the less predictability you have, the less easy it is for other people to catch you. This might sound delinquent but it's actually compassionate because all of us are open to some kind of folie à deux, some kind of locking on into a little closed game with other people. In psychoanalytical language this is discussed in terms of transference and counter transference. But essentially it means if somebody installs a strong pattern, our tendency is to adapt or to find in our repertoire a pattern that will dovetail with it in some way. So when we encounter people who are trapped in repeated narrow patterns if we're not careful we'll find ourselves going into a corresponding entrapment. The question is, can we do something different that makes a difference, that opens up some new possibility, something fresh? So that the individual system, or the family system, the couple system, the cultural country system can move in a different direction. Not because somehow change is something good in itself but in the moment when you do something unfamiliar and you see that you can do it, you have in that point the possibility of a different perception of yourself. I know that I am me because of this and this and this and this. This is me. But now I'm doing this. I can't be this if I'm doing this. And then we start to see, "Oh, this and this are all things that I can do.". Manifestation is compassion, it is not essence, it is not core definition. And in that point we can start to unpack the attachment to the patterns whereby we give ourselves this consolidated sense of knowing who we are, which in buddhism is really just the fruit of ignorance.

So going back to the meaning of mindfulness, this Tibetan word *dran pa*, 'to recollect'. It's the collecting, not just of memories of ourselves, of all the mental forms but also the energetic qualities of the energy that are in ourselves, collecting these back into this open ground.

Ok so just before we have a break we can sit for a little. We can sit as we are we don't have to change your posture, you can sit off balance, any way you like. Because while it is very good to sit in a mediation posture with the spine straight and so on. Probably most of the time you're not sitting like that in your ordinary life so just in a kind of collapsed way, you can enter into the practice as well. Here we are so we can just sit for a short while being as we are. Just relaxing and opening to being with whatever is happening. You can try to do this with your eyes open, that might help, not focusing on anything particular and just be with your experience.

### **Sitting practice**

So we'll take a twenty minute break here.

## **Hung Practice**

### **Space and mind**

Ok, so now we do some practice which is focused on the experience of emptiness and space. It's a kind of practice that you get in a lot of dzogchen texts and different schools have variations on the method. One of the things we encounter again and again is the seeming facticity, the seeming givenness and truth, of the solid, self-existing quality of what we encounter. Of course in some of the schools in Tibetan Buddhism people spend a lot of time analysing phenomena to reveal their emptiness. That analytical approach is a very good preparation but because it's dependent on conceptualisation it arrives after the fact. That is to say, the situation has already arrived and now we have to see the emptiness of it. Having done the analysis you might think, "Ok, now I have a clear and definite understanding. I can apply that in any situation. I know that whatever I see is empty" but nonetheless, somehow we just get caught because there is an immediacy about our energetic presence in the world, which is prior to interpretation.

So, in the springtime many trees come into blossom. If you're walking down the road and you suddenly see a cherry tree in full bloom even before you know it's a cherry, you are impacted. That is to say, the world gets to you before you can tell the world what it is. So your narrative about the world, "It's a cherry tree", "Oh this year there is so much blossom" and so on and so forth, this is coming after the fact. This is why in tantra, and dzogchen, and mahamudra, many methods, were developed for being there at the moment of the emergence of phenomena. And we'll look more at this over the next two days but for our purposes just now we can focus on the nature of space.

Modern physics has very complicated things to say about space. Tibetan view is much simpler. Whether you see this as a reality or as a metaphor, I think it's useful. Space is infinite. There is no end to it, no limit to it. Everything is within space. Inside this space we have experience. Now western science says, and we probably all did some of this at school, matter is neither created nor destroyed. You can't get something out of nothing. Mahamudra and dzogchen schools have a very different view.

Given the infinity of space, given that it is in all directions and all encompassing, there is nothing outside it, there nowhere else for stuff to be made and imported in. Therefore everything we experience is coming from space. Now clearly if you have a materialist view this sounds ridiculous but buddhism is a non-materialist view. It says there are no self-existing substances. There are, as we've looked before, patterns of energy formation. This energy is contactable, it's palpable, you can engage with it but it's not established as something existing in itself. There's no indestructible matter. What is indestructible or *vajra* is the inseparability of mind and space. Because everything appears within this infinity of mind and space, experiences are ceaseless because the mind is always experiencing something but what it's experiencing is empty of inherent self-nature.

So, what we want to do is move to towards seeing the birth of the universe. This is not something that happened a very long time ago but it happens moment by moment, every time you turn our head a new world arises. Where does that come from? Clearly in terms of the linked interpretations of concepts you can give it a history - you think of the factory it was made in, you think how old the building was and so on. From the dharma point of view what we're seeing is itself the energy of the basic nature. Basic nature is not some abstraction far away from us, it is *our* nature. What stands between us and the recognition of this is reification whereby we create the sense of solid entities. This is a fundamental difference between a buddhist reading and a modern scientific reading. And the buddhist reading is saying that the mind creates the experience of entities. We are generally more used to a view that says there are real entities but as individuals we have our own relationships with them. That is to say our human creativity exists in terms of adjectives and adverbs.

### Objects as experience

So here we have an orchid. It is definitely there. Different languages will call it different things and each of us will have different relations with it, we might like it or not like it and so on. So our freedom is the freedom to position ourselves in relation to that which exists. Whereas from the buddhist position, especially in tantra and dzogchen and so on, our freedom is to recognise what is there is *only* experience. It has no existence outside of experience. That's not to say that I can just snap my fingers and imagine some other plant and it will suddenly be here. Something is here due to causes and conditions but whatever it is I only have access to it as experience.

In a sense this is similar to the issue that Plato raises in terms of the cave. He says that we are like people living in a cave. We never get to go outside the cave and see things directly, but what we experience is the shadows projected on the wall of the cave from objects outside it. Of course, the hope is that one day we come out of the cave. So he has this idea that there are some pure forms and that in this corrupted world we don't see these pure forms directly but one day we can do that.

The buddhist philosophy is not saying that, as with the image of the mirror and the reflection, you can't see your own face directly, you see it as a reflection. You have access to the reflection but what you have access to *is* a reflection. That is to say, everything is manifested in and through our mind. The less layers and obscurations that we have the more simply we will perceive what is there.

The key point is that what we get is experience. And this is very, very central because it puts each of us at the centre of the world. So with this plant here, it will have some latin name, there will be a history of how it came to Europe and somebody who has done botany could tell you a lot about this plant. And the more they tell us about the plant, the more stupid we feel. "Oh, I didn't know that. Oh, oh really, I didn't know that..." this plant is full of so much stuff. The object becomes very dominant and as we know with consumerist capitalism, the object is dominant. If you can get the right trainers, if you're at school, if you can get the right mobile phone then you become a kind of interesting person. The object carries with it a sense of value. This value is projected into the object by advertising but advertising is so sophisticated that the value appears inherent in the object. We're all familiar with this kind of pull towards objects which seem to be especially important.

Buddhist view is different, it's saying you never have an object. None of you owns anything. What you have is experience. So even if you own a watch, unless you're looking at your watch, you don't really have a watch and nice as it is to have a watch we probably don't want to look at it for hours and hours and hours! (Laughter) Unless perhaps you've been smoking some special substance. (Laughter) So this thing which I have, actually shows itself to me in the moment that I experience it, and that's the same for everything in the world. Of course, what ownership does is it gives you access to objects that lets you experience them. But the real issue is, if everything is experience, why is so much of my experience dull?

### Instruction for Hung practice

So the kind of meditation we'll be doing in the next days is designed to make our life fresh because the less experience is mediated through assumptions the more it's new each time. So one meditation that we can do to have a sense of that is to destroy everything. So probably all of you know what a vajra looks like. Has everybody got a rough idea? A vajra is a symbol, these statues of Padmasambhava have it in the hand, it's a symbol of indestructibility. The vajra is so powerful it can penetrate anything. So in this practice you just sit in a relaxed way and you imagine in your heart there is a vajra which represents the indestructible nature of awareness and emptiness. And then we start to make the sound of 'Hung'. Hung represents the five wisdoms or the purification of all limitations and restrictions. And as we're reciting this 'Hung' we imagine from this vajra in our heart, millions and millions and millions of vajras are flying out and they completely dissolve everything they touch.

First of all they dissolve your own body so there is just this vajra in space. Then all the people in the room, everything in the room then going out to the trees, the mountains, the cities in Austria, Germany, Slovenia and so on. Passing through the earth, destroying it - all the planets, the sun, the moon and so on. So there's just space filled with all of these vajras spreading out and then they gather together come into the vajra in this space and dissolve it so there's nothing at all. And then again we're back in our body, vajra in the heart and then 'Hung' and you keep doing this cycle after cycle. And we'll do that for 15-20 minutes and then we just sit in the open space, nothing at all and then experience occurs. Where is this experience coming from? Everything we knew before is gone. It is the manifestation of space. Sound and emptiness, colour and emptiness, texture and emptiness. Everything we experience through the senses is the unborn radiance of emptiness itself.

Any questions about that before we begin?

### Questions and answers on the practice

**Question:** Do we do this with our eyes closed or open?

**James:** You can try it for yourself but it might be easier to do with your eyes closed because it's more you're kind of imagining everything.

**Question:** Do you imagine the vajra a certain colour, golden or white or is it same or... ?

**James:** You could whatever takes your fancy. It could be golden. I'm saying here 'vajra' rather than the letter Hung because I think if people are not familiar with the letter Hung it's more difficult to visualise. Usually you do it with a blue Hung. So it could be a blue vajra but there are many different ways of doing the practice.

**Question:** When the vajra is in space it destroys all space?

**James:** There is one Hung left, it was the Hung that everything was coming out from and then as they return they destroy that and themselves, so there is just nothing.

**Question:** This destruction, how long does it take? Is it one Hung and everything's gone or is it taking long?

**James:** Well, you could deliciously enjoy the slow destruction of your enemies! (Laughter) If you can do it just in an instant that's one thing. If it really gives you a strong sensation because this kind of practice is about a conviction sensation. So it's probably more helpful to just imagine particular places that come to mind, a tree or a car or something, and imagine that being destroyed and being destroyed and being destroyed with a sense that all of these objects that are invested and seem to be something are now nothing. But certainly, if you're used to doing the practice you can do it in an instant there's nothing but space.

**Question:** And you don't sow any negative seeds with such visualisations when you imagine that with people?

**James:** Where would the negative seeds be planted?

**Question:** In the empty, luminous potential of the mind?

**James:** It doesn't accept negative seeds, It has a policy: no genetically modified crops are grown here! (Laughter)

**Question:** Usually we're told as to restrain from negative activities by body, speech and also mind and this sounds like negative action performed by the mind, doesn't it?

**James:** Ok, so first of all in order to clarify this we are all going to join together and we're going to commit a murder. We're going to kill Father Christmas and then we are going to

kill Mickey Mouse and then we're going to kill Pluto. And when we have killed Mickey Mouse, we're going together marching arm in arm to the police station in Gutenstein and we're going to confess. "We are criminals. We have done a terrible deed. The children of the world will be terrified and in horror, you must arrest us!" (Laughter) I think they are more likely to send us to the psychiatric hospital. If you destroy an illusion, nothing is destroyed. From the very beginning there has been no substance. What we are destroying is the *sense* of substance. Of course, everything comes back. Nothing has been destroyed but what we're destroying is our sense that something is really there.

Because Mickey Mouse is very helpful. When we see these figures in cartoons and on the plane yesterday, courtesy of Austrian airlines, I saw Tom and Jerry and at the end of it the little mouse was quite victorious, and the artist had drawn it with a little wry smile. And when we look at that we feel, "Oh", as if it was a person. These are coloured lines on a screen but just the angle of the line drawn by the artist evokes in us an emotion. This is very helpful for letting us see how susceptible we are to being caught in the illusion that something is there when it's not there.

So when these vajras are passing through everything in the world and dissolving them, it's not that we're killing real people and causing misery, it's not like what is happening in Syria. Rather this is a meditation practice to free us from the obsessive projection of a false essence onto phenomena, so in that sense it's purely ethical.

**Question:** So what about people playing brutal computer games? Aren't they training their mind so that they are more inclined later on also to perform brutality...?

**James:** I'm sure they are. I'm sure they are, but this is not a computer game, because we're not believing in the illusion, we are destroying the illusion. We're going in the opposite direction. The illusion is that something is there. Mickey Mouse is a construct but we *believe* in the construct and then when we see Mickey Mouse we don't think, "Oh, this is a construct how foolish of me to believe in it." The same principle with novels, when you read a novel, you're reading the stories of people lies, people who don't exist. If somebody is murdered in a novel should the author be arrested? This is very important this is the illusory construction of the mind.

**Question:** Perhaps a change in wording could be of help? If we don't say 'destruct' we say 'dissolve'?

**James:** Fine, dissolve, that's better. (Laughter) We will dissolve the word 'destroy'. Or liberate on the other hand, remove this falseness that allows us to see the freshness of the world. And one of the, going back to the earlier period of buddhism, one of the Prajnaparamita Sutras which is very early from the second turning of the Buddha's wheel in Rajgir is called the Vajracchedika which means the 'vajra chopper'. And its function exactly is to chop up ignorance and reveal that everything has the nature of emptiness. And the traditional text says the Buddha, well the Buddha didn't really teach it, through the Buddha's meditation it manifested through the teaching of Chenrezig... it's says that the Brahmans that were in the audience fell unconscious. The idea of emptiness was so terrifying to them that they vanished. And emptiness is very shocking.

**Question:** So it's quite okay that I look at someone here for example and I visualise all these vajras going... ?

**James:** Of course, of course, because it raises the question what is the James-ness of James? People can know things about me and build up some image of who I am but what you get then is like catching the cast-off skin of a snake. The snake is moving on. You get some remnant, some cast off, so destroying James. Well, James is destroying himself all the time. That's what we were looking at a bit last night in terms of self-liberation. That the movement of our becoming is eternally refreshing and what stops us experiencing that delightful freshness is exactly our attachment to there being some solid substance.

Okay, we'll try the practice now. You can even apologise in advance! (Laughter)

## Meditation

### Emptiness of all phenomena

So that's useful practice to do to really engage with the basis out of which arises the experience of 'being knotted'. If you were thinking in more analytical terms there's an early buddhist text called '*The Questions of King Milinda*' and in this sutra, an early Mahayana sutra, the king asks this monk to explain the meaning of the absence of inherent self-nature. And the king is then requested by the monk to have his chariot brought forward. The king's chariot is made of wood. It's very beautifully made. And the monk says, "Great king is this your chariot?" and the king proudly says, "Yes, this is my chariot." So then the monk asked if some of the king's servants could come forward and start to take out the wooden pegs that were holding the chariot together and lay the different parts of the chariot out on the ground. Then he asked the king, "Great king where is our chariot?" "I don't know where the chariot is. There are only pieces of wood."

So then the monk asked the servants to put these pieces together again and when they did that, again the chariot appeared and the monk said, "King is this your chariot?" The king says, "Yes". So then he asked him, "King what was added to the pieces of wood on the ground to make them your chariot?" The king is very troubled by this. Clearly there is no additional magical ingredient. There is no little bottle of chariot essence that you have to put three drops out from. But by putting these pieces together at a certain point they fall into place *in our head*. At a certain critical point we go from seeing pieces of wood to seeing a chariot.

Just as in these famous gestalt drawings where you see a candle stick and you look at it again and suddenly you see two peoples faces. So it's the *mind* that sees the candle stick, it's the *mind* that sees the faces, it's the *mind* that sees the chariot. What is added to the pieces of wood is the concept of chariot but when we add this concept, we don't add it on the surface like some kind of coat of paint, it seems to go right into the centre of it and not to be a projection but to be an identification of a truth that is actually there. It's merely a convention to call it a chariot.

For example, I saw a film made by an Iraqi refugee in which he goes back from Britain, where he's been a refugee for some time, to visit his parents in their village. And while he was in Britain he had been sending them some money and when he got home there was

lots of hugging and they were very happy to see their lovely son. And the mother says, "Come, come in the kitchen and see what we have. Look what we brought with your money." And there is a lovely fridge but in a village there is no electricity. So there you have a fridge that is not a fridge. It's only a fridge in name because it doesn't do any refrigeration.

### Dependent co-origination

In that way we can see that things are what they are because of their function. And their function lies in relation to something else. That traditionally is called dependent co-origination, on the basis of the other this arises. Without the other this wouldn't be arising. Without the electricity the fridge doesn't work. When these two come together you have a fridge. Then you open the fridge and you take out some ice and think, "How wonderful to have this. Isn't it amazing to have a box, this machine in your house, and whenever you feel hot you can get some ice." But without the electricity it doesn't work. So the fridge-ness of the fridge is not just in the box, it's in the electricity. We could say the essence of the car is movement but without putting petrol into it, it's not going to move. That is to say, all the phenomena that we see are arising as juxtapositions, as placings together, of certain factors. And these factors which are placed together are also dependent on other factors.

So in the first example when the pieces of the chariot are laid out, these are pieces of wood that have been carved into particular shapes by their carpenters skill, that skill is dependent on people having transmitted across generations how to make chariots. It's also dependent on the skill of the blacksmith who could make the iron tools that could cut the wood, which has a lineage going back to discovery of how to smelt iron, which we could take back into the development of planet earth, which led to these iron ore deposits being laid down. And then you have the wood that's made use of to make the bits of the chariot, you have the trees that grow they're dependent on the sun and rain and so on. Not only are they dependent on these positive factors but they are also dependent on non-manifesting factors. The tree was able to grow because when it was small no deer or cow ate the small sapling. So without the absence of the deer and the cow there wouldn't be a tree. And you can take this analysis ad infinitum seeing the endless linkings of all the causal factors of the world. None of these is self-existing, yet all are functional and impactful. So our world is made up of this movement of forces influencing each other.

If somebody burns the chariot what they burn is the wood. When the wood burns the chariot vanishes because it doesn't make sense to call a pile of ashes a chariot. But was there a real chariot that was destroyed? Only in as much as we all agree this is a chariot. That is to say, the true existence of substances is an aspect of conventional truth. It's because we *believe* that these things truly exist that they come to truly exist for us. It doesn't mean that there's nothing there at all. Something is there, it's an appearance. An appearance which has no internal defining essence and therefore which is open to being interpreted in different ways.

### Impermanence

So when we do this practice with the 'Hung', what we're trying to dissolve is our sense of some solidity, some solid essence existing inside phenomenon. This is an illusion. For

example most of us in this room presumably want to live. I would imagine most of us do maybe all of us do because we don't want to die. Being alive is nice.

What then is this 'wanting to be alive?' It's an attachment to this form. But we've already lost many forms since we were born. Unless we're interested in a particular kind of sexual practice probably at our age nobody is wiping our bum! (Laughter) You can go to brothels in America and be dressed in pampers and some pretty lady will come and wipe your bottom for you. You have to pay a lot of money for this if you're grown up. Babies get it for free! (Laughter) That is to say, there are certain conditions which we have at each stage of our life which are appropriate and if we do them at other stages, we start to think, "That's inappropriate." Yet we have been many different people. Each of these people we have been we like being, mostly, probably, and then they were gone.

When you are a child usually you are looking forward to growing up. As you get older you might get a bit worried. Usually becoming thirty and then becoming forty is quite tricky for many people because there is a sense of, "Oh gosh, now *I* am forty." We don't remember all the people who didn't reach forty, the ones who died before they got there. In being forty you get a whole new kind of life opening up. So where is the essence of ourselves? If you hang on to the past as if it was defining your essence the past becomes like a cuckoo in the nest and then you can't inhabit your own existence because you're full of remorse of, "I wish I had done that", "Why didn't I do that", and so on. It's a really wonderful thing that we can be so many people. This is entirely dependent on our not being someone defined. If you encounter people who are very strongly defined by circumstances, I think we tend to feel some sadness at that situation. If somebody is paraplegic or has a very limiting physical condition or is locked in solitary confinement in an American prison, we feel, "Oh, how sad to have a life that is just so, over determined by circumstances."

So the key point of doing the practice like the 'Hung' is to help us embrace the every changing movement of existence. To open to the various changes and because each one is offering us new possibilities of offering hospitality and in particular, offering hospitality to *everything*.

Now we live in a culture which is relatively prosperous, we've had reasonably good food in the course of our lives, we have reasonably good medical care available, it's likely that we're going to live quite a long time. It's a very interesting project to experience becoming older. How to offer hospitality to the decline of the body? At certain points irreversible changes start, this is something new but we often experience that in terms of a loss. "Oh, life was so good when I was..."

So all the things we have done today are helpful for focusing into this issue. Impermanence, absence of inherent self-nature, dependent co-origination, emptiness, focused attention, awareness of the dynamic nature of the body, relaxing and opening to what is there. This opens the way to having the continuity of *awareness* as the basis of our existence rather than the continuity of a self-narrative. So tomorrow we are going to focus on a short text. One of the foundational texts of dzogchen and use it as a way of opening up more understanding of the dzogchen view and the practice and in particular how to apply this as a way of loosening the solidifying forces which arise from our habitual concerns.

Good. Now you can have a rest. The end for today.

## Basic Principles of Dzogchen

So good morning, another day begins. So, today and tomorrow we're going to look at basic principles of dzogchen and from that get some understanding of our own nature. Of course, the particular focus of dzogchen is on yourself. It's not focused on becoming somebody else or something else but on looking and seeing how you actually are. Now it's a very interesting thing why knowing who you are should appear to be so difficult. In the Nyingmapa tradition there's a system of dzogchen we'll be looking at, or *atiyoga* as it's also called, is seen as the highest form of practice. And that very often people are encouraged to do a great deal of preparatory practice.

If, for example you live in Vienna and you really want to know about Vienna, it's advisable to go to Paris! Because when you go to Paris then you see what another city is. Then when you come back to Vienna you can compare and contrast Paris and Vienna and you'll get a different kind of understanding. And that opens a kind of clarity. But if you just observe yourself in the process of living in Vienna - how it is to walk along the street, the places that you know well in the city and the places you never go to - then you can find out your own relation with the place where you are. And through that you can start to see why you avoid certain experiences and how it is that you go about repeating certain experiences.

### The view

So this is more the practice of dzogchen. We're starting by looking at our mind. Of course we have many, many thoughts about ourselves and about the world. If we were to examine all of these it would take a very long time. Therefore in the tradition the 'view' is presented. The view is a way of seeing, it's an orientation that helps us to illuminate what is there. It's not a dogma. It's not a belief system. It's more something quite practical. For example if somebody here lives in the valley, they probably know what is a very nice place to see a sunset from. And if you come here as a tourist if you can find a friendly local person and ask them, "I'd like to see a beautiful sunset or a beautiful sunrise where should I go?", they can tell you. If you go to that place then you have your own experience, you're not duplicating someone else's experience. That's a function of teaching or the presentation of the view in this system. It's a very practical introduction or presentation to how you might situate yourself in order to see something different. Because there will be places in the valley where you never really see the sunset, you can look and look and look, but if you're facing in the wrong direction you won't see.

So what is it that positions us to be looking in the wrong direction? This is our own habits, our accumulated patterns, our ways of relying on concepts. Some of these elaborations are embedded in the very nature of having a human body. We have eyes which are able to see some things that are in the world and not see others. With the discovery of microscopes and telescopes we become able to see things that we couldn't see before. That shows to us that there is a limit in our ordinary vision. What we take to be the totality of our experience is dependent on the particularity of our sense organs. It's clear that

some creatures have a more developed sense of smell than we have and they use it much more.

So the fact that something seems like a given for us, it seems what we might say 'natural', needs to be examined. Perhaps it's only habitual, perhaps it's simply determined by the structure of our experience, and one of the advantages of getting older is to see that how you thought the world was is not how it is at all. For example, I now have marvelous glasses for reading, which I didn't need when I was younger. I took it for granted that I could just read or look at any page even with small print, I could see it. This is something *I* can do. But of course it was depending on the health of the muscles in my eye, and they get a little old, a little tired and they don't want to work so hard. And so I need to use glasses. That is to say an aspect of my experience which I thought was me, as an enduring and even a definitive quality of who I am, is now shown to be something dependent on causes and circumstances. And in that way we can see all the different factors of our life are dependent on particular frames of reference.

We have the factors of maintenance that keep us in our body and able to function, and we have the factors of dissolution or destruction or falling apart. To reflect on this is not about becoming demoralised but rather to start to see that how our world is, is a kind of dream. It appears to be the case, it appears to be the case on the basis of its own internal logic but actually it's dependent on a wide range of interactive factors. That is to say it's not reliable and this is the general buddhist reflection.

On the basis of this we are encouraged to take refuge. What shall we take refuge in? Generally in the buddha, dharma and sangha. Buddha means the Awakened One, that is to say, that there is a possibility of not being caught up in a dream. The dharma is methods taught by the Buddha but also the facticity of how things actually are, and the sangha is the assembly of people who study and practice together, and that on this occasion means us.

So how shall we rely on these things? Firstly, to rely on the Buddha means to recognise you are asleep. That is to say, to have some degree of useful anxiety. That is to say, our situation is okay but there are some problems in it. We're going to die, that's for sure. We get easily distracted and we easily fall into enthusiasms, interests, excitements. That is to say, our sense of self manifests in relation to the particular context we find ourselves in. But these contexts are just our particular luck or our karma. They exist for a while and then they vanish.

So life going on as it is, is not going to bring clarity automatically. Well, we may have heard that the nature of the mind is intrinsically pure and that we have buddha nature, we have the capacity to waken up. So how is it that we don't awaken? There are two main answers to this question. The first is we should try harder, the second is we should stop trying! (Laughter) In dzogchen the main idea is that we should stop trying. That is to say that our own nature is hidden from us by the nature of our own activity.

So in many of the buddhist teachings they are talking about a lack. That we lack compassion. We lack wisdom, patience, courage, endurance, diligence and so on. We lack the accumulation of merit and therefore we should mobilise our energy and build up the resources necessary to complete what is lacking and then our life would be good. From

the point of view of dzogchen they would say if you take a piece of coal and you wash it, and you wash it, it won't become white because it's coal, it will be black. If you try to purify yourself you will not become the Buddha because the Buddha is not a better form of yourself. That is to say, if you start with a sense of 'I am an inadequate human being and I want to become a really adequate and completed human being, and if I do that as a really good hard-working student and get 'A' grades all the way through then I will get a Buddha certificate, and my mother will be very happy'!(Laughter) This is what life was like when we were in school. It's a paradigm or a model, a way of thinking about existence.

From the point of view of dzogchen there is no lack. What there is, is an excess on the basis of the fantasy of a lack. That is, by believing that there is something wrong with us we are always trying to improve ourselves and this very energy of improvement creates the activity which obscures our own nature. For example, one of the things we can notice when we try to do meditation is that we are confronted by many kinds of experience. Some we like, some we don't like. Usually we have the sense that if we indulge the things we don't like, they are going to harm us or make our lives difficult or make our experience embarrassing if other people knew our kinds of experiences. On the other hand, we have things which we like and want to have more of. We might feel that if we have more of that then our life would be completed. This is a common theme in love songs, "You make my life complete", "I build my world around you", but nowadays divorce is very expensive. So we have to be careful what we say, because something that feels a very good idea at the time, later doesn't. "But I thought you loved me." "I did love you, but not now." "How can that be?" (Laughter) Life's like that.

Germany used to have the glorious Deutschmark and now it's tied itself to some very dodgy currencies. It seemed a good idea at the time. And this is the history of our lives because when we try to protect ourselves by pushing away the bad and pulling in the good, what seems good today may not seem good tomorrow. What seems bad today may be very useful tomorrow, which is why samsara is a very busy place because we are always having to adjust our position. This activity creates a kind of obscurity to what is actually there.

So the basic principle in dzogchen is to avoid being over-active. Dzogchen itself means 'completed', means 'nothing is lacking', 'it's fine as it is'. Now clearly when we look in the world and we see there are many difficulties this seems a little bit strange. This is a very important thing to observe. If we find out something about the troubles that are happening in Syria, and the terrible murders that occurred there, how could we say this is a perfect situation? This is to make the evaluation of what is happening in Syria, to sit inside a schema of judgement, a system of interpretation, which privileges some factors and doesn't privilege others.

Nowadays we are used to living in democracies. Human beings have not had democracy for a long time, they are very recent phenomena. Some years ago there was a big proposition that we had reached the end of history, that consumerist capitalism and democracy would spread through the world and we would all be living in an eternal springtime. Before democracy came into existence people were eating and shitting and sleeping, they had friends, they had enemies, life went on. We have no certainty that democracy will continue as a dominant political system. That is to say we live in the view from here.

## Explore your existence

Now here in Austria you have lovely mountains and if you imagine yourself going for a walk in the hills; you go up a little bit then down into a valley, then up a little bit and so on. As you progress up and down, at each point if you stop and look around, you see the mountain and what is around it. Each step of the journey transforms the view you have. It's always the view from here. So it's very important to start to explore where we are. Where we are is a limited view in which some things are privileged, and other things are pushed into the background or made invisible. So the practice of dzogchen is to explore our existence to see, can we find a place which gives us a panoramic vision which is not located in a particular context?

The ego lives in time, we live in history and that gives us a particular kind of bias. I grew up in my youth in the 1960s so for me if I hear rap music I am completely uncomprehending. Sounds like a kind of madness, that people would pay money to go and hear somebody shouting at them. But clearly many people like that because that is their world. That is to say, they have access to something I don't have, that as they're growing up and going to school and they're hearing this and all their friends are into it, this seems to be the exciting cocoon in which they have true value and their parents don't understand anything. Observing these things is very important because it lets us see the relative nature of our own clarity. What seems real and good to us depends on where we are located. And this is the basic structure of the maintenance of samsara, to take the relative as being absolute or completely true and on the basis of that over-investment or attachment to feel certain in the judgements that one makes, the attribution of value and so on.

So this is something we can all examine for ourselves to start to become interested in the choices that other people make. Why would they wear these clothes? Why would they do that kind of work? Why would they choose to live in that way? Well, maybe they feel at home in that. How is that possible? Because they are not us, they really are 'other'. So on the level of our manifestation in the world each of us has our own unique specificity. Working with couples, I hear again and again the total incomprehension that people have for the behaviour of their partners. "I don't see why you have to leave the towel on the bathroom floor you know it annoys me so much", and the general reply is, "Well I don't see why you have to be so uptight about this I'm going to pick the bloody thing up, just give me a bit of time." "Yes, but why do you do it?" Well, the reason they do it is because they're not the same as their partner. They don't evaluate the situation in the same way. Dropping a towel on the floor doesn't mean very much for one person and it can be everything for the other person. "If you love me, you would pick up the towel." This is not uncommon. So these things are very, very helpful for meditators to observe, because there you can see how the life energy, the libido, the prana, the chi, is invested in particular formulations that then seem to resonate with true value.

The basic proposition in dzogchen is that the key thing is we should relax, not take life too seriously, not over-invest very small things with huge value. Now that only becomes possible when you start to see that this small thing that seems big, is big because you are making it big. That is to say you start to observe how your mind functions to create the topology, the particular contouring of value in your world. And start to relax out of that

because you can't have a panoramic vision which is able to access everything which is available if you are committed to certain features being special. That is to say, that equanimity, seeing all phenomena having one taste, being balanced in one's attitude to what is going on, is fundamental. It's fundamental in all the schools of buddhism but it's very central in dzogchen as well.

### Introduction to the text...

So now we could start to look a little bit at this text. And this was one of the first texts on dzogchen to come into Tibet at the time of King Trisong Detsun. Vairocana first got this teaching from his teacher Shri Singha, and it comes from his teacher Garab Dorje and before Garab Dorje it came from Dorje Sempa, and from Dorje Sempa it came from Kuntuzangpo who is the primordial buddha. Kuntuzangpo represents the never changing, ever present freshness of our own nature.

So as in many countries, in Tibet as in the Himalayas the cuckoo is a very special bird. It heralds the ending of winter and the beginning of spring. So it points to the possibility of freshness and the reawakening of the earth, the reawakening of our spirit. And here it's used as announcing, of heralding, the good fortune, the beneficence, of radiant awareness or glorious presence. So 'presence' here translates as *rig pa*. *Rig pa* is our 'awareness'. Awareness and consciousness is not the same. That is to say, when we are present in a situation, the situation is able to register with us immediately. Just as when a mirror is held up the reflection immediately appears in it. That is to say, it's an unmediated connection. It's not been processed through sensations or thoughts or emotions. So it's not based on an accumulation of knowledge. It's not based on being intelligent in the ordinary sense of the word as somebody who can move thoughts around quickly and make images and so on. We could perhaps translate it as 'availability'.

Now this text belongs in what is called the 'mind series' of dzogchen. A lot of writing on buddhism coming from India is very oriented on the mind and has a kind of mental focus, and this creates a kind of orientation towards using mental language. So people talk of understanding as if one was going to catch hold of something. But the mind itself is free of grasping, it's not appropriating something, it's not apprehending. So *rigpa* is actually more in the direction of ontology, it's more connected with what we call *being* rather than *knowing*. However, historically there has been a conflict between hinduism and buddhism. In English we have a phrase, I imagine you also have it in German, 'The devil has all the best tunes'. So the Hindus have some quite good tunes, they talk of *sat cit anand*. *Sat* means 'being'. We have the same in *sattva*... *Vajrasattva*, *bodhisattva*... Buddhists get into a discussion about neither existence nor non-existence, and existence is then taken as the same as 'being'. But we need to understand existence and non-existence as being the equivalent of something being real or something being a fantasy.

### Continuity of being

So in my hand I'm holding a watch. We can say there is a reality to this watch. In my hand I'm holding a golden key and with this golden key I can open a magic door and then in front of me is a beautiful path leading into a forest. I have arrived in Narnia and, like that, that is a fantasy. So something which is real is not a fantasy and something which is a fantasy is not real. This is more the meaning of existence and non-existence. This watch

doesn't have 'being', it's not being anything, whereas we have being. That is to say, there is a continuity of ourselves which is not dependent on the particular moments of qualities we manifest. So in the course of our life we have been this, we have been that. When we look back we see that these moments of being truly something didn't last forever. This points to a sloppy use of language based on not being very aware of time because actually we were *becoming* whatever it was.

For example, when I was at school I went swimming almost every day of the week. I did a lot of long-distance swimming and trained as a lifeguard and so on. So I could have said, "I am a swimmer" this in some ways defines who I am. But of course swimming involves activity. If you don't do the necessary activity you go from being a swimmer to a sinker! (Laughter). So swimming was something that I was doing. A repeated activity on the basis of which I generated a form of identity but that identity was influenced by other factors going around. I was in the process of becoming different kinds of swimmer. It was an emergent quality which due to causes and conditions emerged for some period of years and then gradually ceased to emerge.

'Being' represents something else. Between that period in my life and how I am now, there is a continuity. There's a little bit of continuity of appearance though I'm probably three times the weight I was then. It's not the continuity of the content of my thoughts nor of how I spend my day nor even of how I sleep because when I was younger I slept very easily and as I get older it's a bit more difficult. So what is this continuity? As with the familiar example of the beads on a necklace or a mala, we have separate beads but a continuous thread. If the thread breaks the beads fall off. Our life is strung in that kind of way. These various periods of our existence when we look back we see they are like a bead, that is what I was doing then.

It's like that in our life, we imagine somehow the future is going to be like now. But when you look back you can see that what seemed so open then closed, and that we can't go back into these little beads of activity or qualities or relationship that we were in before. Thoughts, feelings, sensations, memories, amount of money in our bank, getting on well with colleagues, the age of your children, all of these things are moving in time. What is the continuity? We have various kinds of threads we try to run through our life. I think we often rely primarily on a narrative thread. We tell stories about ourselves. I don't know if in your Austrian German literature autobiographies are very popular but in English, it's incredible, everybody is writing and doing blogging and giving some account of their experience. You have a whole new genre of grief literature where people tell how their childhood was awful and how they were never loved, and how painful and difficult it was.

So in that way people make sense of what was going on and one of the functions of psychotherapy is to help people develop new narratives about experience. So if we go back to that image of topology, of climbing up the mountain, you might get stuck in one little valley and walk up and down, again and again. And along comes the therapist as mountain guide and says, "Let's go this way", and you walk down another pathway and suddenly life looks different.

Some of you may know this song by Johnny Cash, 'A boy named Sue.' This is one of the great songs of the world, in which this young man has gone chasing all over America trying to find his father because he wants to kill him because his father christened him Sue, a

girl's name. And because of that he was bullied at school and had many difficulties. And eventually he meets his father in a bar and his father is like an old drunk, and the father says, "Well I knew when you were being born I was going to prison, I wouldn't be able to look after you in any way. I had nothing to give you but a name. So I called you Sue and because of this you've had to struggle. Because of this you've had to stand on your own two feet, you've had to find your own way and here you are strong, healthy and able to track me down. So you can kill me if you want." But this being country and western they have a hug!

This is very helpful isn't? To see how due to the vagaries of life we take up particular shaping and you sit inside this thinking, "My fucking dad, he did this to me and my life's shit!" But the energy of that anger is cooking and helping the person to become strong and clear. Just as we say it's the grain of sand going into the oyster that makes the pearl. So that would indicate that when we have a narrative definition, a storyline definition, of who we are and how we are, even if it rings true and is redolent with feeling, it's just one take. There are many other takes that could be made. That if we free ourselves up to walk around our lives as if we were walking around a sculpture, we start to see many different aspects to ourselves. Aspects which had not been mobilised or manifested. This is the potentiality of our existence of our life which can be revealed if we put ourselves in the way of new situations.

So going back to *rig pa*, awareness or presence, it speaks of the continuity of our being *here*. It means a kind of 'being here-ness'. When we are here we are in contact with what is occurring. Presence and contact go together. If you're absent due to distraction or over fixation on something, we don't pick up what's going on. Having an open presence means optimal exposure to the entire phenomenological field and this presence is not a possession, it's not something we have, it's not something inside ourselves looking out through our senses. Presence is non-dual, that is to say it doesn't make a discrimination, a splitting between subject and object. This presence reveals ourselves and the world simultaneously. This is why for a lot of the mediation practice we sit with our eyes open. We're not going into ourselves to find some essence. There is no essence, it's the illusion of essence which is the nature of samsara.

If you want to have an essence you can buy essential oils or some brandy. If you want to make essential oils and brandy you have to exhibit many acts of violence. The sweet little grape is trampled and crushed, finally it's boiled and only a little of it is kept the rest is thrown away. That's a nature of an essence whether it's lemon juice or anything else. Essences are dualistic. You see this term used in some buddhist books and I think one should be a little careful.

So presence is the site of the revelation of experience. Presence has no bias. *Rigpa* is described sometimes as being like a ball. The ball has no corners, no edges, if you spin a ball it's the same on every place. You can't differentiate it. So it's not that our awareness is *ours* as a possession inside us, this is the example of the dog being wagged by the tail, because we don't have an awareness, our awareness shows us. Ownership, agency, mastery... bad news. *My* buddha nature, *my* meditation experience, *my* awareness. *I'm* in a state of presence, *I* feel really good, *I'm* open. These are how we lie to and cheat ourselves. Awareness has no edge. You cannot hold it. How could you have it? I can pick up my watch but I can't pick up my mind itself.

Hopefully here you can see that this is radically different from many other views in buddhism. It's not like the motor car of your buddha nature has banged into a wall and that a dharma practice is some way of tapping out the panels so that it takes on its original smooth shape. There is nothing to repair. There is no damage. From the very beginning the mind has been complete, perfect, without fault.

It doesn't need our smartarse attempts to do something better. This is the discourse of the ego subtly weaving its way in to say, "I'm a buddhist too. I'm a buddhist ego. I'm an enlightened ego. Yeah, I'm into ecology, it's very good and you know I've realised my nature is empty, it's beautiful. I feel really relaxed and I'm going to offer these workshops in Vienna where we are all going to have a nice shower first and wear beautiful white flowing gowns and we're going to dance emptiness! (Laughter) I'm going to feel really good and happy, so we'll be able to take pictures of each other and put them in the publicity, while we're all smiling." (Laughter) I was blessed by having a very grumpy guru who was often not very happy. He looked very bored and angry a lot of the time when I was with him so I'm not so addicted to pretty pictures.

So the key thing here is to be very, very attentive to the difference between the ego self, the formations of consciousness and being, or presence, or awareness. Presence itself is naked it doesn't need any elaboration, any public relations department. Relaxing into the natural state, we see all of samsara and nirvana arising, just like flowers in the sky, these are ornaments or radiance; they don't define the source.

The reflections in the mirror don't define the mirror. The mirror itself is empty and so beyond definition. When you look in the mirror you simply see reflections. You don't see the mirror itself, you can't catch the mirror without a reflection. Even if you creep into your bathroom in the middle of the night and put your finger on the light switch, look at the mirror. "I'm going to catch you out, I'm going to see you." Click. The mirror is quicker than you. It will always have a reflection on. This is the mind itself, you can't catch it.

So when you're looking to experience directly the nature of the mind, if you get something you can be pretty sure you're on the wrong track. That's why it says, "It's nothing at all", because there is no substance there to be discovered and yet it has the potential, the radiance, which shows everything. But everything it shows is an illusion. That is to say it's manifest, it's there, but it devoid of inherent self-nature.

We will take a break now and come back and do some practice and then we'll go into the text.

## Guru Yoga

Let's start with the practice of guru yoga. This guru yoga means... yoga means in the Tibetan translation 'to become at ease', 'to be easy'. And the guru means a kind of 'door'. A guru is a door into yourself. It's not so much about getting teaching to add something on, more about giving yourself a chance to tune into yourself, to be with yourself.

In this practice you sit in a relaxed way, the gaze is slightly raised into the space in front of us. We focus into the space about two arm's length in front of us. We're not staring at

the wall in the distance but simply letting the gaze rest in space. In the middle of this we can imagine a white letter 'A' surrounded by light of the five colours; white, blue, red, green and yellow. These are symbolic colours in the Tibetan tradition. The letter 'A' represents emptiness, the open basic spaciousness of existence. And from the tantric point of view these five colours represent the purification of the five poisons, of the five elements and so on. But they also indicate the radiance of the mind as it moves out of this open emptiness into differentiation as the manifestation of the world.

The body is relaxed, breath is at ease. There are many different methods of doing this practice you get in different lineages. Basically we make this sound of 'A' three times. As we make the sound of 'A' you can imagine all the limitations, the knots in yourself, the assumptions you have about the world, just dissolving into this primordial sound as it spreads out from you. You keep your focus on this 'A' in front of you as you're reciting and the 'A' with its radiance represents the presence of all the teachers because the teachers, like all phenomena, are the radiance of the open state. So we're using the teacher as a way of returning to ourselves. And then after we make this sound of 'A', this 'A' in front of us dissolves and we just sit in a relaxed open way with whatever is occurring. The experience of the room, perhaps noises from outside, the experience of sensations and so on in our body, thoughts. All of this is arising and passing so without any edit or bias, just relaxed and open to what is there. okay.

## Meditation

This is a practice in which there is nothing for you to do except just to be. None of the skills that you have learned in the course of your life are really of any help in that because the fundamental proposition is that you have all that you need. However all the skills that we have, all the various qualities we've developed, these are useful in terms of being available for others.

## The Cuckoo's Cry

### James reads out the first two lines in Tibetan

***The infinite diversity of experiences and their actual nature are non-dual.  
Yet the actuality of each particular occurrence is beyond judgement.***

These first two lines form a pair. The first line is describing non-duality. It has two aspects. *Na tsog* this first term means 'many different things' or 'diversity', and it means 'all the things in the world'. All the things which are actually there, all the things you can imagine. Another way of saying it would be 'all experience', both what we take to be internal and personal and what appears to be shared and out there in the world. Then the next term *rang shin* means 'one's own face' or 'its nature'. In particular it means the qualities or the complexion, 'how things are shown' and it says these are non-dual. It means that everything that you see is not separated from its own ground which is the nature of the manifestation of the open dimension. Non-dual is a very important term here, it means that there is not just one thing nor are there many different things. Non-dual means they are not the same and yet not different.

### The ocean and the wave

So to take a traditional example, you have the wave and the ocean. The wave arises from the mass of the water in the ocean. When you see the wave it has a particular form and nature. If you look standing on the beach looking at the waves coming towards you they are different, some are bigger than others, some seem to have more power behind them. And yet all of these waves are the movement of the ocean. If you say, "Well, it's all just water", that would be to deny the absolute specificity of this particular wave at this moment as it arises in relation to the other waves. And if you were to say that, "This wave is really something special." For example, if you're a surfer and you've traveled a long way to catch the perfect wave, and you say, "Wow, this was the best wave of my life!" (Laughter) Excellent, but you can't take it home with you. It's already gone, back into the water because it just was water.

So the wave and the sea are not two different things but nor are they the same thing. This is the middle way of non-duality. It means when we see all these forms in the world, all these incredible things that are in this room, all different people's faces and postures and how they are, all of this is the expression of the open dimension. This is the way that the infinite hospitality or dharmadhatu shows itself. But we can't homogenise everyone in the room and say, "Oh, this is all just the radiance of the dharmakaya". Dharmakaya is the quality of awareness that recognises its own ground and on the basis of that recognition it sees everything as radiance. It is all the radiance of the dharmakaya but it's not *just* the radiance of it because as we exist in this room we have particular connections with different people. When we meet people here we position ourselves in different ways. But it's not really that we consciously position ourselves, we find ourselves talking with some people and not with others. Some people seem easier to relate to than others. This is the way that these particular waves of the ocean move together. It's not that we can say that everybody here has buddha nature therefore I should be open to everyone, "Hello, hello, hello!" Because some people might be feeling a bit shy, some people here might be feeling a bit depressed, they might just want to be very quiet and not really relate to other people. As we looked yesterday, depression, anger, sadness these are also the radiance of the dharmakaya. So we can't have one response to everything.

### The particularity of existence

In England the Queen has to be smiling to everyone because we are all her subjects and because she lives off our taxes. We are actually her employers so she has to please us but I don't think that anybody has a sense that they get to know the Queen very closely because if you are the same for everyone, you yourself are nobody. So it's not that you have to kind of evacuate yourself to become some kind of neutral signifier but when we manifest in the world in this particular form some connections are easier than others. This is part of the first term 'diversity'. So we don't have to smooth the rough edges of the world. We don't have to make contracts with other people, "I can only be friendly with you if you change your behaviour". We can be open to everything but how we *participate* depends upon the situation.

Everybody gets something different in life. Some people are very attractive some, are not, some are very intelligent, some are not, some are very strong, some are not, some are very

healthy, some are not. We all get our particular share and that share allows us particular kinds of meeting or access to other people. Now, in our ordinary life we can often get caught up in the details of this, trying to manage our lives, to make them go as well as possible. And of course, that's a necessary part of being in the world but what this line is suggesting is that even in the unique specificity of being yourself you're not living in a bubble, you're not a monad, some isolated self-sufficient ball. But the very ground of your being is this unborn state and that we each have been in this non-duality with this from the very beginning.

The open state by definition is open, it's not a narrow gate. If you want to go to university to study you have to have certain qualifications. If you want to be a fashion model you have to look in certain kinds of way. If you want to be a soldier it helps if you can run. So there are specific shaped doorways or gates for many aspects of life, but our own natural condition has no shape. It's not like in the Christian tradition that when you die you go up to the door of heaven, St Peter is there with a big book and he checks your record... Everybody is welcome. Why? Because they are already *in* this state. There's no immigration control because you are not going from earth to heaven, from samsara to nirvana, but these states from the very beginning have been inseparable; not the same, but inseparable.

The second line begins by talking about the parts the *cha shay* that means the 'particularity of' or 'the aspects of existence'. For example, a crystal has many different facets to it and we ourselves have many different aspects, and Austria has different aspects. There are many ways of telling Austrian history just as there are many ways of telling our history. And we tell our story in different ways to different people.

So all these precise details of the world because they are inseparable from their own ground, cannot be judged. Now what does this mean? So you go in a cafe and you have a coffee and you think this is not very good coffee. What does that mean? It means you don't like that coffee maybe somebody else likes that coffee. If everybody who went into the cafe didn't like the coffee probably not many people would be going into it. So what seems true for us, is our relationship, it's not an objective fact about the thing itself. So again, this world is a network, a web of communication in which we have our particular opinions or aspects and what we get is what we get.

If you have children you will be very familiar with the statement, "Why I can't I do that? My friends are allowed to do that. Why don't you let me do that?" There is no real reply to that. All we can say is, "Well, I'm me, this is my house, when you grow up you can do as you like." If you are a buddhist parent you could kindly explain, "Well due to your bad karma in a previous life you've found yourself with a terrible parent like me." (Laughter) "So don't blame me you can't go to the party. Why don't you go and do some Dorje Sempa, then you'll feel better." At which point certain things will be thrown around the house. (Laughter) So in that way we have to see again and again there is no general rule book for the world. In the Jewish tradition justice is linked with the Messiah, and the Messiah means 'the not yet come'.

So justice is something that has not yet come into this world. We have plenty of law courts, we have plenty of lawyers who makes lots of money, but until now we don't have justice. So accepting that we are returned to the particularity of the situation. Each of us has to

live with the particularity of our own situation; our health, our money, our relationships and so on.

### Just experiencing, don't judging

But the actual nature or the quality, here it's described in this small phrase *me du* this is 'beyond judgement' or 'beyond conceptual elaboration'. This term *cho dang drol wa* refers to eight particular limiting conditions coming and going, beginning and ending, and in particular the qualities of being just one thing or being many different things. Because when we make a judgement, we sum something up. 'Summing up' is linked with arithmetic. That is to say we gather all the information, all the pieces of that together and we totalise it. That is to say, we can come to a definite conclusion, it is like this. But as we were looking earlier in terms of the topology we are trapped with the view from here. It's very difficult to make a definite conclusion. This is why writing history is very difficult.

When the Americans write the history of the Second World War they say they won the war. When the British read that their blood begins to boil. Who caused the war? If you read the British book they say the very bad Germans caused that. But then what of the Treaty of Versailles? If the British and the Americans and the French hadn't got together and put very punitive demands on Germany after the First World War maybe the Second World War wouldn't have come. okay then so why did the First World War begin? "Oh, that had something to do with the Austro-Hungarian Empire." So where did that empire come from? Then we're back in the territory of dependent co-origination. Because all phenomena that arise are mutually dependent and mutually influencing it's an act of violence to take some scissors and cut a little circle around any phenomena and say, "This is this, I know what this is".

De-contextualising is the basis of judgement. There are two aspects of context here. There is the context of the entire matrix of manifestation, the field of experience, and there is also the context of the ground. That is to say, the openness of being is both the ground of and the field within which experience is occurring.

So to look at the traditional example we have the mirror and we have the reflection. Without the clarity of the mirror, the potential of the mirror to show images, we wouldn't have any reflection. When you look into the mirror you see not just one image but lots of images. If you look at your own face in the mirror, you can say, "Oh, this is my nose, these are my ears", and so on. But it's better if our ears are connected with our face. When Van Gogh was searching for the ear itself, it didn't do him any good. Cutting off your ear is not going to show anything. The ear works because it's connected, the nose works because it's connected, and the lips and the tongue.

So what this line is pointing to is our tendency to grasp, to take hold of the world, to try to make sense of what is going on. This effort is not so helpful because it hides intrinsic meaning. Intrinsic meaning is what dzogchen means, everything is okay as it is. Why? Because it's already in the mirror. It's the energy or the display of the mirror. It's not a false fabrication. There is nothing that can be added or removed. So staying present with the mind itself as it is allows us to see that everything which arises is experience. Now if it's experience it's always directly related to our own state.

To go back to the example of the cup of coffee you don't like, you can drink it and think, "These things happen", you can drink it with a sour face and feel exploited, you can ask for another cup of coffee, you can refuse to pay or you can throw the coffee at the waiter. All of these are activities. These are arising from your opinion that this is a bad cup of coffee and, "I shouldn't be served a bad cup of coffee", and so on. That is to say, these are modes of participation. You can't step outside the world and judge it. We are always already *in* the world and how we will respond will depend on our particular balance, our constitution.

So in what it's saying is we don't need to enter into elaborating thoughts. You don't need to make sense of things. Now here we have to be very clear what this text is talking about. It's talking about meditation. It's saying, when you're sitting doing your practice, don't enter into judgement about anything. Dzogchen text they endlessly say, "Whatever comes comes, whatever goes goes". Don't try to construct your own particular world.

However, when you get up from meditation you have to do things. You have to phone someone, you dial the number, you wait, they reply, you have to say something. What will you say? You'll say what you can say in that moment. You're not up like an eagle in the sky. Eagles just looking what is there, the other person, "Hello, hello, hello..." The eagle is at peace. (Laughter) As soon as you speak you're into something. So what are you into? You're into the mirror. This is a reflection playing with another reflection. This is the basis for integrating everyday life into the practice.

So this term at the beginning *cha she*, the 'particularities of existence', they are what they are. Sometimes you're going to make mistakes, sometimes we make a lot of mistakes, sometimes we don't know what to say, we don't know what to do. When it says 'don't enter into judgement', this means you recognise, 'I don't know what to say'. You recognise, 'I made a mistake'. If you bring in the big rule book and you say to yourself, "Yes but you shouldn't make mistakes. You should know what you're doing", then you start to get trouble. It's also possible to say, "I'm sorry, I don't know what to say", "Oh, I appear to have misled you, I'm sorry". Then you are with the actual situation close to it but when you bring into yourself some demand system and then you start beating yourself up because you haven't lived up to your high ideal, then this conceptual elaboration makes having a direct response with the other person much more difficult.

### Recognise your own nature \*

So these first two lines are linked with the first statement of Garab Dorje when he says the first key point is to recognise your own nature or to see your own nature. In order to do this we have to be introduced to it but even though we're introduced to it again and again, if we don't see it, it won't appear or it won't be manifest. So what is this nature that we have? From the very beginning it's unborn, that means it's not an entity, it's not a thing in the world of things. Presence is without any substance inside it, it's described as being *khadag* 'primordially pure'. This quality of pureness means there is nothing one can do to defile it. Now that doesn't mean that it's completely isolated.

For example, you might put some money into a bank account and you might think that bank might be very safe and you go back after five years and they give you exactly the amount of money you put in or maybe a little bit of interest, and you think, "Oh, I made some money." But then you recognise, "Oh, but there's also the rate of inflation, so I got

two percent interest but inflation is five percent. This is three percent a year compound, not good". That is to say, everything is related, there is nowhere where you can put something and it be safe. Nowadays lots of people try to buy gold but gold is already very highly priced and if you look at the history of the market price of gold, it goes up quite slowly and it comes down very fast. There is nowhere stable and reliable to put the investment because everything is related. You can look everywhere in the world, investigate everything, talk to farmers about the price of wheat or what they get for milk, very unpredictable.

Now, they say that the mind is pure. It doesn't get moved around by the movement of things. It's like the mirror. If we put an ugly painting on the wall we say, "Oh, that's not so nice." Especially if it's painted as a fresco right onto the wall then we need to paint it over because it's terrible but if you do that now we have a big mark on the wall where it's been repainted. But when the mirror is held in front of something which is ugly it's not contaminated. The mirror is not spoiled. If something beautiful is put in front of the mirror, the mirror is not improved. The mirror is always open and available to whatever it is going to reflect. This is the basic confidence of dzogchen, the confidence of primordial purity. Your mind itself, your own awareness, your presence, has already in the course of your life been there in good times and bad times. And we can still be present. Your personality and your presence are not the same thing. Our personality is very much influenced by the various things that happen. Through time we develop various kinds of fears and anxieties and that's because it's accumulating experience.

But if we have a big mirror and we turn it around the room, reflection after reflection is arising and passing, arising and passing. When the reflection leaves the mirror it leaves no trace. The mirror is not being conditioned by this at all. This is very important and this is the importance of ethics in dzogchen because if you cheat yourself you are going to cheat other people. If you're not relaxed and open in the state of presence then you're in your personality, in your individual sense of self, and that is very definitely going to get marked by experience. And other people in their limitation are also going to be strongly influenced by what we do.

So it's often said the view, the nature, is that our mind is open like the infinite sky but our compassion and our behaviour should be as fine as a point of a needle. That is to say when we are present moment by moment we are in particular situations, with particular individuals, and these people we are with *are* our world. They are not just somebody else. We see each others' faces and we don't see our own. Other people are important because apart from anything else they are our world. And other people show us how they are. Their faces show expressions, are they available, are they not available. Are they happy to see us? Are they not happy to see us? Are they tired? Are they energetic? When we see this non duality of arising then we can feel these two potentials arising together. The quality of the field and our own quality. The key point is collaboration. We don't have to be dominated by the other but neither do we have to dominate them. Real ethics is grounded in co-emergence. That is to say, we share this space with others and the only way for this to work well is if all parties involved are attentive and responsive. That is to say, we see what is in front of our nose and we come into being in relation to what is actually our situation.

I think you can see, in that, this is a very radical critique monologic notion. "What about me? This is what I need. Why don't you listen to me?" In that way we establish our position and then we try to get in communication. So person A solidifies themselves, person B solidifies themselves and then they try to bash each other so that the other opens and makes some compromise. This is not very skilful. And so the point here is the more we relax into this open state, and after lunch we'll do more practice with this, this open state provides us with relaxation. The gradual relaxing and dissolution of these narrow knots which lie behind our impulses. And then because of that, because we are not blinkered and driven into personally defined agendas, we can try to respond to the field that we're engaged *with* and come *into* the field of co becoming. The advantage of this is the world will tell you what to do so then it's not all up to you. Then you can take off your badge of 'lonely hero' and you start to think, "Hey, we're all in it together" and life gets a little bit easier!

So we'll do a bit more practice and then we'll go into the lunch break. And we'll do it with the three 'A' again and when we finish doing the 'A' and we're open. As a kind of background thought you might imagine, "Oh, I'm the host of an infinite hotel. Everything which arises is my guest, please feel at home." If they want to sit in that chair and I want to sit in that chair, let them sit in that chair. Just allowing everything to be as it is and the good thing about hotels, in the end every guest leaves! okay.

## **Meditation**

### 'I' as a substance

Ok, so we can start with this three 'A' practice again.

## **Meditation**

Ok, so before we were looking at the nature of the mind and when we sit in this meditation, many thoughts and experiences are arising some we identify more with and some less with. Now in the morning if you're cleaning your teeth and you look in the mirror you'll see your face. Immediately we have the sense, 'I'm looking at myself'. Although we're making use of the function of the mirror were largely ignoring the mirror as mirror. So the mirror is showing me my face, "This is my face", but of course it's showing you a reflection. The face and the reflection are not the same. So it's similar in the meditation, when we get caught up in something, what we get caught up in is a reflection and the one who gets caught up is also like a reflection. Certain mental formations feel like 'me'. You might have a sense that you feel a bit tired or feel a bit damp from all of this rain. This is a thought. Who is the thought referring to? "Me." How do I know who I am? "Well, let me think about it." So thought, after thought, after thought are creating the sense of an individual separate essence. What is there is a process of thoughts, in which we say, "This is me". But when we say, "This is me", "I am cold", "I am tired", "I am hungry", whatever, as we were looking before this is a statement which is arising on the basis of circumstances so that something which is circumstantial is being expressed as something absolutely true.

When we're sitting in the meditation and a thought is arising, "This is me. I like this. I don't like this", it can feel as if this structure, "This is me", the felt sense of personal identity is

something enduring. This is based on an abstraction. For example, I come here once a year, when we arrive in the car, usually late at night, I get out of the car and walk down the little wooden pathway and I think, "Ah, how nice. I am back here." But Lea and Sylvester, who have brought me up from Vienna, were here in the morning and between this year and last year many, many things have happened here. Clearly for them it's not exactly the same place. But I can leap like a frog from last year to this year and land on the same lily pad. That is to say, this place here in Gutenstein exists in terms of its phenomenological reality as an unfolding sequence in very complex events. But it also exists as a few key signifiers which when we see them we think, "Oh, I'm here again." In the, "I'm here again" there is an ignoring of the many indicators that things have changed.

So in the same way, "I feel tired", "I feel hungry", "I feel sleepy", "I feel fresh", many, many particular specific events are occurring and then vanishing but the frame of reference is attention to what appears to be the continuity of *I, me, myself* and this is also based on a practice of ignoring. What are we ignoring? The fact that if I'm hungry and I can say, "I am hungry", and then I'm not hungry after eating the food and I say, "I'm not hungry" - what is the nature of this 'I'? One minute it's filled up with hunger, next minute it's filled up with not hunger. If we look at this, the only way you can be hungry and then not hungry would be if you weren't really hungry to begin with. So what then is hunger? Hunger is a message which is conveyed to us by movements in our stomach maybe changes in saliva in our mouth and so on. It's when this feeling is taken by us as an indication of something true about ourselves.

Because here we have a glass that has water in it, so we could say, "Where is this glass of water?" Here. Now we could pour out the water and pour in orange juice, "Where is the glass of water?" It's gone. Now we have a glass of orange juice. That is to say, when the water is in the glass it's a glass of water. The glass and the water seemed paired together, it seems like a composite, but this glass is willing to be filled with many, many different kinds of fluid. The glass is a container and the container is only useful if it's empty because if it's filled up with something and you can't empty it then it's not so useful.

If when we're meditating we have a strong sense of 'I' as a substance, we can just sit with that, don't try to change it and observe that it changes. This seemingly intense, factual definition that comes from being tired or being distracted or not being able to meditate or having a good experience, each of these is passing. Is there a glass? Is there a self which is filled up and empty? This is maybe how it feels. So we have to look for the glass because the emptiness of the glass is what makes it useful and similarly the emptiness of the mirror is what makes it useful. But the glass and the mirror are not the same. Because the mirror fills itself with the reflection in a way that is different from the way the glass fills itself with water. Because the mirror and the reflection are non-dual, that is to say, they are not the same and they are not different. But the glass and the water are different, the glass is not going to dissolve into the water. We can separate the water from the glass very easily but can you take a reflection out of a mirror? Not possible.

### What is my metaphor?

When we're meditating what we're also becoming aware of is our own personal heuristic, that is to say, the particular ways in which we make sense of our experience. What kind of metaphor do we have? Often we have a metaphor really of it being like a kind of sponge.

If you put a sponge in the bath it will fill up with water, it is suffused by the water, pervaded by the water. So if we have a bad day and we think, "Oh, I'm such a stupid person." In that moment, the mistake we've made or something we haven't done well, has come like a fluid and suffused itself, we are now full of this feeling, it is just what we are. This is how we experience attachment. It's not that we feel attached to something apart from us but in its extreme form, it is that we have *become* this thing that we are attached to. A slight improvement on that is to see ourself as the glass. We might think, "Oh, today I'm full of shit, never mind tomorrow will be better." The glass is not always full of shit and we can give it a good washing. "Where is the barman?!"

So, better than this is to think, "I am a mirror". The mirror is full but uncontaminated. So when we're sitting in the practice and the mind is confused. We might feel hopeless and lost and think we can't meditate. The thought, "I can't meditate", what status does it have? It's something arising and passing. Stay relaxed, don't worry, don't become involved as one thought chasing another. Stay present *with* the thought, "I can't meditate". That is, relax and open as a presence which is just here with the thought. The thought, as it were, we're not pushing it outside ourselves we're not merging into it. I can let the thought that I am completely useless fill me up completely because I have no fear. It does not define who I am. This is very important. We have to know that an actor and the role the actor plays are not the same.

In England we have a very popular soap opera called Eastenders and when the programme first began there were two main characters, one of which was a man who was called Dirty Den. So as his name would indicate he did many bad things and he found that when he was walking down the street as an ordinary person people would shout at him. And after some years he decided, "I've had enough of this" and he stopped playing this role. But he had a very distinctive face and whenever he appeared in another play people thought, "Oh, it's Dirty Den". (Laughter) So he gradually got less and less work. This is what happens.

Likewise we have to see that when these thoughts arise in our mind, it's like an actor, this is a script, a voice. That we are full of little bits of script and these scripts tend to come out at certain times of the year. For example, now is the time that people prepare to go to the beach. "Oh my God, how can I wear a bikini when my bum is so big?" This causes a lot of agitation amongst certain sectors of the community. Winter was a good time for eating but now... In the winter when it's cold, why think about a bikini? So the negative thoughts about certain parts of the body don't arise. But when the props on the stage of our life change these old story lines come back. This is what we have to see. "Oh, persecutory voices, negative defining voices are just passing through." They are like the police. If when you see a police officer you start twitching and feel very guilty, they're going to look at you.

So the glue is between two different aspects of the mind's movement. This thought has something to do with me, this thought is defining who I am, I don't like this thought. So that's when we're like a sponge. Relax into the out-breath, allow whatever is occurring to arise, it will go by. We will only gain the confidence of this if we do enough practice. But every time we get frightened and we move then of course this makes a vibration and everything moves.

Now we can go back to the text.

### The three aspects of experience

#### ***What is known as 'as it is' is untouched by thought***

So on the third line in Tibetan it begins with the phrase *je zhin wa* which means 'as it is', or 'the way in which it is'. It means the immediate givenness of our situation. This refers to three aspects of experience which are linked together, they are not three separate things. There is our actual nature which is the open, spacious quality of the mind. There is the radiance or the display or the spontaneous showing of that open space which is our clarity. And then there is the precise, present manifestation of this moment. In Tibetan these are called, *ngo wo*, *rang zhin* and *thug je*. So it means that the openness is suffused with clarity and is always showing something precise. Again this is like the mirror, the mirror itself is always open, it's never caught by any particular reflection but the quality of the mirror is its clarity, its capacity to show many different kinds of reflections, and the facility of the mirror is that it's always showing some particular reflection at any moment in time.

So in the same way when we look for the mind we can't find it as a substance, there is no essence or thing deep within us. It's just open, an ungraspable presence, but it's not just nothing at all because there is the clarity which reveals experience. A potential for many, many different kinds of experience which are arising without effort.

As soon as we go out of the door, we see all the hills and we don't have to carefully build up the picture like someone working with water colours. We are not constructing in the world we encounter. It's an immediate revelation and within that we always have a specific shape and the world around us always has a specific shape. That is to say, as soon as you are in your body, you are someone, somewhere. So the ground is infinitely open and this clarity is infinitely rich.

### Life is 'as it is'

Whatever is there, infinite amounts of it suddenly appear, but our being in the world with others is always finite. Nobody can stop time, if things are good and we want them to continue we rarely have the power. There is a unique specificity to each moment. Now this is very, very important because this *limit* doesn't limit us, this is the limit of the expression of energy. If you identify with the energy and you forget your own open ground then you can feel very frustrated.

For example, if you're in a traffic jam, you're stuck in car you've got to get some place, the traffics not moving, you don't know what's the problem is. In situations like that it's very easy to get into an antagonistic negative thinking, to feel persecuted by the circumstances. But of course it reminds us that we have very little power in the world, there is no particular reason why the traffic should flow easily because the world is as it is. If it's a traffic jam, it's a traffic jam. We will be late, something will happen.

So let's take an extreme example, you're going to the hospital because your mother is dying because of the traffic you don't get to be with your mother as she dies. This is sad,

it's not a punishment, it's sad. Life could have been different but life is what it is, "I don't want it to be... but why, but why?" There are a lot of reasons why. There were a lot of cars in the traffic jam each of the drivers has their own history and so on. It's just is. "This is terrible". You don't like it, does that make it terrible? When we say it's terrible, it is terrible, we're making a statement about some real object out there in the world that should not have happened. Actually we're sad, anyone can understand why we're sad. The world isn't conspiring against us. It's not a great plot to make us unhappy. It's just is this, the way my mother died. This can be very hard if we have some big map some big design in our head that tells us exactly how our life should be, what we are entitled to. And because experience is always precisely what it is with its particular shape, if you are over identified with manifestation you are very likely to be persecuted.

When I was in India at the end of the 1960s and meeting Tibetan people, many of whom were very recent refugees, it seemed to me that they were very able to be where they were according to the terrible circumstances that had totally disrupted their lives. And some of this I think is the quality of not taking the present moment as definitive of one's existence. Because these three aspects, the openness, the richness of the clarity of the entire experiential field and the precision of our life moment by moment they are inseparable. So the function of the practice is to awaken to the natural integration of these three. So that we are freed from the prison of over reliance on the sequence of manifest moments and the struggle to control them, and to make them go the way we want them to.

If we stay with the integration of these three and then the finite and the infinite are together and this frees us from the prison of being over identified with the passing moment and its consequent ongoing struggle to make events turn out the way we want them to. So this term 'as it is' is referring to these three aspects. When we look it's just open. Everything is here and this moment is like this. This is what we have to work with.

### Reducing reliance on unnecessary thoughts

And so it says this is 'untouched by thought'. It means here is that the kind of thoughts we develop in order to try to change and manage and organise our lives are often generated in the absence of an attention to what is actually here.

So for example, the kind of rescue plan that Angela Merkel is trying to offer to the people in Greece, has a lot of economic logic behind it. But clearly politically it's not all that popular and although economists in developing their models carry the fantasy of the rational person making clear consumer choices. Clearly politically people are carried by all kinds of waves of enthusiasms including nationalism. So in that effort to organise and make sure that everything works out well there are so many variables involved, it's very difficult. Because there are historical relations between Germany and Greece, which were sleeping for all the time rich Germans were going to Greece for holidays and leaving nice tips in the cafe. But then, when the squeeze comes, memories from sixty years ago come jumping back up.

This is why manipulation and management are so difficult. It always goes wrong. There are too many variables. So this kind of 'will to power' is endlessly leading human beings astray. This is the fantasy of the ego. That if we all think together and we try very hard, it will all become clear. So what the text is suggesting that all this incredible amount of effort

is not necessary. That this is endlessly layering human creativity on top and on top and on top. So that we end up persecuted by own own intelligence.

So what it's suggesting is don't rely on thoughts. Thoughts can do some useful things, if you are thinking, but if you are being caught by thoughts then you are imprisoned by your own creativity. Your creativity which has taken in a life of its own, in which these thoughts have declared independence and they are now not accountable to anyone.

This is very similar to the condition known as tinnitus. One major theory of tinnitus is that these little hair-like particles in the inner ear which vibrate to give us the message of sound, they get tired of being switched on and off by external sound and they think, "Hey, we can have a party all the time!" (Laughter) So they just keep vibrating, so you hear (James makes different sounds) and the other sounds that go with tinnitus. This is the same situation with neurosis, some thoughts get it into their head to keep coming back. They're saying the same things again and again. They take on a life of their own.

This is what's we experience in the meditation so it points to the central task which is to integrate the movement and its ground, which is open and empty, and it's field, which is the field of experience. When the field moves we have this particular moment. But the richness of the field is inseparable from the empty ground. So the less you elaborate unnecessary thought the more you start to see just how simple things are. And then the energy of the world can flow through us.

I'm sure we've all had the experience of being very anxious. Maybe you've had an exam or going to a party or you have to give a talk. You can worry about what other people will think of you, worry about what you might say, how you manage other people's responses. We might agree that when we get in that state we become very small. We lose touch with ourselves, and sometimes then we avoid situations because we are sure we are not going to do them well.

Now here we have a great teacher in this small child. The child wanders around very curious about everything. Then suddenly gets a little bit uncertain, something's happening, then it looks around where is mum? If mums okay then we can move on but if mums gone away for some purpose then some little amount of noise has to come out of the child. Because children when they're small cannot soothe themselves or reassure themselves. Gradually as we get older if our life has not been too traumatic we learn how to self soothe. We learn how to put an arm around ourselves, to give ourselves a sense that it will be ok, we'll get through, never mind.

The function of the meditation is exactly that, sometimes your arm is not big enough to put itself around your anxious self, the impulse of agitation is too strong. This is because your arms are too short. How to grow your arm? Relax and integrate into the natural state, this is infinite. Infinite means very long arms! Then we find space, calm... it's okay. And that's really what dzogchen means, 'it's ok'. Not that we will get through this, but more that this will pass, and because this will pass we can be there with it. So we go into a situation and it's not the way we want it to be and we can just be with that. As it is. But once you start to elaborate thoughts around it with hopes and fears, "It shouldn't be like this", "I want it to be different", "Why can't it be different?" This agitation, this movement

of thought, provides simply more turbulence that hides our infinite ground from ourselves.

### Being with the actuality of the situation \*

So then in the fourth line it says: **James reads out line in Tibetan (00:59:29)**

#### *Yet the forms of appearance are unobstructed, being complete as they are*

*Nam par nang dze* means 'fully illuminating' or 'showing many different forms'. *Nam pa* means a 'shape' and *ngal* means 'to show' or 'to appear'. And here it's saying everything appears just as it is. We translate it as 'the forms of appearance are unobstructed'. *Kun tu zang* means 'always good', 'good under every circumstance', or 'completely good'. So it means that how things are is how they are. In line two it was saying the actuality of each particular circumstance is beyond judgement. So here he's saying something similar, everything which appears is okay as it is. Now clearly some things are better than others. When we hear that somebody is very sick, we feel sad. Why do we feel sad? Because we would like them not to be sick. On the level of manifestation that's fine, that's a reasonable reaction, however what's wrong with feeling sad? Sad is an experience.

On our tongue we have various flavour receptors. We can taste, sweet, sour, bitter, salty. We have these six basic tastes with monosodium glutamate and so on. Now officially recognised as a natural taste. It's correct, present, naturally in many foods, it's not just another Chinese attack on the people of Tibet. (Laughter) Generally we like sweet or savoury. Something a little salty, bitter a little bit, maybe not every day. Sour from time to time. But these are all flavours they are just tastes. Just as our tongue says, "Oh, this is sour", our heart says, "Oh, that is sad". We may not want to feel sad but we have a sadness receptor. That is to say, sadness is part of our existence. So precisely it's saying, try just to be with the raw, naked presentation of life. Once you enter into judgement and you elaborate your commentary about it you enter into a parallel universe, a kind of cyber space, a world which is not concrete. It's not the actual phenomenology.

So if you taste something very bitter, "Eh, it's horrible". It's not horrible, horrible is a judgement, it's bitter. Some people like bitter. In England the most popular beer is called 'bitter'. The judgment, "Eh, it's horrible" comes very quickly. Does it add any value? Having decided it's bitter do we want to taste it again? No. So our curiosity has come to an end because we have inserted a conclusion and when we have been alive for a number of years, we have a lot of conclusions. And you can become so constipated by all your conclusions that you can never ask a fresh question. One of the qualities of being open is to allow ourselves to be fresh and naked and surprised at what is occurring. I know what I like and I like what I know. Now this is the emblem on the Tee shirt of samsara! (Laughter) Because in that case you are always going to choose more of what you like.

One of the fortunate things we can do now is we can go travelling. Now we are fortunate to live in rather wealthy countries. There's reasonable food and reasonable public transport and so on. So it's very important we go on holiday to a place where you find a terrible hotel. How wonderful to find cockroaches in the bathroom! Otherwise when else would you experience shock and horror? Our lives become very protected against many

kinds of experiences. What's important in terms of meditation is that we can then forget that we are actually afraid.

If you live in the city, there are bright lights shining all through the night, you can feel reasonably okay. But if you go out alone at night in a big forest without a torch. You start to feel that maybe some other creatures are living there. Which is why, of course, in the Tibetan tradition they have practices of going to scary places so that people can come to work out what it means to be afraid. That is to say, that fear can be integrated as part of the range of experiences which constitute this field that we inhabit.

Some people in this room will suddenly start to feel sick and go to the doctor and the doctor says, "You need an operation." That's a good time to start feeling fear. It helps if you are a bit familiar with fear, and you can give a place to fear, but not let it determine who you are. Because this is the central point of differentiation between being in the openness of the practice and the state of *rigpa* or 'presence' and being trapped in our limited personality. As we looked before the personality is impacted and changed by events. We are marked by the things that have happened to us. How our parents have been with us or not been with us and so on. And in that frame of reference, we don't want bad things and we do want good things.

The state of awareness is not marked or scared by experience so just being afraid, being lonely, being sad, being jealous, being angry... we can just *be* these things. When you don't obstruct them, when you allow them to arise fully, they're not going to contaminate you and make you more prone to having that kind of experience but what you can get is the real taste of freedom. "Nothing marks me, my nature is like the mirror. Whatever comes, let it come." That doesn't mean that you are being completely forgetful of your body. You still do your best to keep the body ok, but if we're sick, we're sick; if we're dying, we're dying. If people don't like us, they don't like us. These are all flavours.

Some people in the course of their life have plate after plate of sweet cakes. And some people have plate after plate of bitter herbs. From the point of view of dzogchen, it doesn't matter what lands on your plate. What matters is what is the plate made of. If the plate is like the mirror it doesn't matter what comes on it. But if plate is like blotting paper then it really matters. None of us can so organise the world to ensure bad things won't happen to us. None of us know what the future will bring for us, so expending the effort to control events is rather a waste of energy.

Rather what we can do is focus our attention on the nature of our mind and whenever we find ourselves getting caught up in mental turbulence, we can relax into the out-breath, open our gaze into space and just stay present with whatever is there. When you get used to doing this you don't even need to do it for a long time. "Huh, this is what it is. What now?" Rather than thinking, "It shouldn't be like this", "I don't want it to be like that", "It's irrelevant." So as it is, is the immediacy of existence and with presence we are there immediately in that moment. And out of that the spontaneity of our unmediated reply, a response can arise.

So what is important in this aspect of the practice is to go into it again and again until we have the confidence then just this is enough. That we don't remain in doubt. We don't apply ourselves to many different methods just to make sure. So this links with Garab

Dorje's second essential point, to become clear about the actual situation of things, how they are and not to enter into doubts and thoughts and fantasies about things but to stay with the naked immediacy of each moment as it occurs.

Ok so we take a little break now. This text is very dense so there is a lot of ideas, so you get a bit of fresh air outside.

### Relaxing out of automatic arousal

Ok. So what we've been looking at is the habitual tendency towards arousal. The sense that something must be done. Now this tendency is present in us. It's been there for a long time and it becomes fairly automatic. So how to relax the system so that we don't move into arousal so quickly? Generally speaking, different kinds of yoga can help with this. Particularly the focus on releasing through the breath but also getting to know your own obsessions. What are the particular situations in life that set you vibrating? I would suggest very often these are caused by two main things. One is a kind of trauma in which at a certain stage we have been over exposed to something or under exposed to something to create a lack of being at ease in a situation. The other main way is when we feel that there's some kind of betrayal of the rule book that we feel that life should function according to.

In the first situation with the trauma, the embodied system has not been able to find rest after the event. We tend then to go into either hyper vigilance or to a kind of avoidance, trying to cut off from stimuli. The key issue there is to become aware of our fear and as we looked before the break make friends with the fear. Because when people have things like post-traumatic stress disorder, the there and then, what happened a long time ago becomes like a cuckoo and squats in the nest of the here and now. There's a displacement and the displacement brings a forgetfulness that actually here and now is relatively okay. So there's a need to ground ourselves.

Similarly where we have the sense of there being a betrayal of the rule book. For example, over the last five, ten years it's become increasingly common in London for people to put their feet on the seats in the trains. In terms of the text the 'as is' is that it's now normal to put your feet on the seat of a train. However, being an old and grumpy man I get very annoyed and I think, "This is outrageous". This doesn't actually change anything in the world and probably has some impact on my blood pressure! (Laughter) Because I think for all of us, I think it's very difficult to see that the world doesn't fit into these maps that we have. "How could this happen?" whenever we find ourselves thinking this or saying this, this is a sign that we are not in touch with the complexity of the world.

So again the exit from this is to ground ourselves in the actuality of how things are and then you can see what is your freedom to move. There is a certain tipping point where a behaviour moves from being unusual and perverse to being normal. So it would appear that now it has become normal for people to put their shoes on the seat. And that means that with this crossover, the moral entitlement to say to people, "I don't think you should be doing that", this vanishes. And this brings us back to the point of conventional truth. It's a convention that people should not do that and conventions can change. When a convention changes, that's what there is. The cavalry isn't coming, nobody's going to re-

impose the law according to my desire. Then as mundane as this kind of example is, it points to the issue of anxiety.

### Accepting life the way it is

What keeps us safe and allows us to relax is the sense that everything's okay. In ordinary terms everything's okay means everything is predictable. But when we're in times of rapid social change and we can't predict, we're likely to have more anxiety. Which leads to more use of alcohol and so on, and potentially of course to more social unrest. From the point of view of dzogchen we need to think, "Oh, if I want something which is reliable and predictable why am I choosing something which is not reliable and predictable?" In our daily lives and our meditations we see that the mind is moving and changing all the time. This is the fact, whether we like it or not the field of experience is dynamic, complex, multi levelled and therefore, unpredictable. So if you go looking for security in a place that doesn't provide security, you are likely to be disappointed. So rather than me blaming the people who put their feet on the seats, I have to accept that due to causes and circumstances people will do many different things.

We are fortunate that in our lifetimes Europe has not been at war. Maybe war will come back. There are wars in many, many parts of the world. What we see is not guaranteed to continue as it is so what are we going to take refuge in? What is the one thing which doesn't change? The mind itself. It's ever open receptive mirror like quality. This provides a basis for seeing what is there and then responding to what is there. This is actually the best antidote to arousal.

In my practice of psychotherapy people often come and say how their mother didn't love them. Their father didn't offer them any care and attention. This is a fact. What does it mean? Nothing very useful. You can't take the wounds on your heart into a bank and ask to exchange it for some Euros. Misery doesn't buy anything and most people are not interested in your misery. Unless it's some vulture like me who gets paid for doing it or a different kind of predator, somebody who wants to exploit that weakness for their own advantage.

Okay, it's a fact my mother didn't love me. This is not fair. That's another fact. This is sad, that's another fact. What shall we do with it? I don't know. Paris is the capital of France, fact. The climate in Morocco is better than in England, fact. (Laughter) What shall we do about that? If something is a fact, it's just a fact. "But this shouldn't have happened. I should have been loved" then we get into fantasy territory. "Every child is entitled to be loved." In England we have a child protection act and it says that. This is the beautiful growth of some bureaucrat's mind. This is something you can't guarantee.

So learning to accept our life the way it is, is very hard. Because many things have happened that are unjust. And for meditators the important thing here is to *feel* the energetic vibration that you experience when you encounter injustice. "This is outrageous, this should not happen" on the level of the personality this is valid, this shows that you are a human being with a real heart. But what can it actually do? You think of what is happening in Syria, nobody really wants to get involved. You watch the news on the television, you just feel castrated by the events and this builds up a kind of tension or a charge inside the body.

It doesn't mean that one shouldn't get engaged. But generally speaking in Buddhism they talk of wisdom and compassion. And generally it helps if we develop wisdom before we engage in compassion. Because something has to be done, but what? Maybe we don't know. If we don't know it may be better not to act. "But it's outrageous something must be done. I don't care what, let's just do something." "Hmm, let's invade Iraq." That's something, it's useful, it's bombs. The people who make these decisions are not different from us, we also have these kinds of excitations.

So this brings us in touch with emotion. Emotion is an energy, a reactive energy. It is a force of volition but it's not inherently wise. If that energy is put to a good purpose it could be very useful but in itself the emotion has no guarantee that it knows where it's going or knows what to do. And again this is why sitting meditation practice is important and in particular practicing under all circumstances. Practicing when you are afraid, when you are angry, when you feel hopeless, when you are happy, when you are in love, when you've been betrayed and so on. Because the integration of the arising experience into its own ground which is open emptiness reveals the clarity of the situation. But if the arising emotion is cut off from its own ground, it's going to generate for us a sense that, "This is real, this is important, we must do something." And then it doesn't necessarily work out.

The basic meditation instruction in dzogchen is 'don't do anything'. In order to get the experience that the world is not created out of your volition. In order that the ego takes its place as an aspect of the emerging field rather than being in charge of the emerging field. The ego is not the boss. So when we build up these charges or tensions inside ourselves and we can't self soothe, then we need to do something. On an outer level you can take a cold shower or you can go running or have a walk in the forest, you can maybe talk to a friend, but that also might just be a way of winding them up. The essential point is to *bring agitation into emptiness*.

### Bringing agitation into emptiness - Avadhuti meditation

So as we looked yesterday, the presence of emptiness in the body is represented by the central channel or *avadhuti*. This is running from the top of the head down just in front of the spine to the perineum. This channel is small, usually it's depicted in different ways in different texts, it's often seen as being blue on the outside and red on the inside or vice versa. The colour is not the most important thing.

We can sit for a moment and you just imagine this empty pipe or channel running right own the centre of your being. You can imagine it blue on both sides, so it's blue on the inside and blue on the outside. And it's about the thickness of your small finger. So just imagine, this still empty, open channel running through you. Now you imagine this channel gradually getting larger and it expands equally on all sides. As it gets bigger it fills up more of your body. It expands so that it's bigger than your body, bigger than the room, the town, the world. Let it expand so it's encompassing the whole universe. Everything that occurs is now inside this open empty domain and so these appearances are like rainbows in the sky.

And then this channel starts to get smaller again until it's gradually back as a small tube running down your body. Then again you can let it expand. So we'll sit for sometime now letting this expand and contract.

## **Meditation**

Then the next time you're expanding this channel out bring to mind any agitating circumstances in your life whether these are current or from the past. Things that you worry or are troubled by, anything agitating, and as you expand the channel allow them to arise and just to be present in this expanding space. They're there but contained by this ever-increasing spaciousness.

## **Meditation**

Ok, so that's a method you can practice and it's something if, say, you're in a work situation or you have trouble in a relationship, it's a way of being in touch with what is going on but not being caught by it. All forms are like rainbows, like a mirage and by holding them in space, they return to their actual size, their actual significance.

So maybe take some time talking with a neighbour, we've covered quite a lot of ground today and see if there are any things that are unclear for you, any questions you have. See if discussing together can help you formulate anything you want more comment on. okay take a few minutes to do that please.

## **Question and answers**

Are any questions or things you want to raise?

**Question 1:** I've one question which is two parts and it's difficult for me. When you say that it has become customary for people to put up their feet on the seat opposite you and because a lot of people do it nowadays, it's part of reality and it's no use to speak up against it, take up a position against it, because it's not good for your blood pressure. Then, I think I understand what you mean, but I think also at a point where it is common or excepted idea that all Jews are vermin and have to be exterminated. Do I take up the same stance? ... or do I... I think what is necessary is to regroup at a level of openness and grounded-ness and think or experience that before you actually leap into action. But just to accept a stance which is perhaps adopted by a lot of people or the majority of people these days and not do anything against it, would seem to me to be difficult.

**Question 2:** This would lead directly to my question, that's why I interrupt. I'm sorry... which leads us to the point that if I adopt this then I'm in complete equanimity to whatever happens in this world and if it's like, I don't know, torturing people or groups of people whatever, because it is that way. What is then the difference between dzogchen and let's say nihilism?

**James:** These are two ethical questions from two ethically concerned people.

So, we have a paradigm of what it means to be an ethical person and to maintain concern for the welfare of others and not just ourselves. We also have this view of openness and equanimity and so on. How can these two be reconciled? This is quite difficult. If the basic ground we stand on is, 'life is precious, human beings are precious, we should protect human beings at all cost', in order to do that we need to empower people to act. Every year a considerable number of people are killed in Britain each year by speeding police cars and then we also have to consider how many insects are killed when the ambulance is speeding to take a dying person to the hospital. Human beings privilege themselves above everybody else and some quote religious scriptures to justify the domination of animals and so on. So again we are always speaking from a particular frame of reference.

What is to be done? Soren Kierkegaard in the 'Gospel of Sufferings' says, "The beauty of suffering is that it means something has to be done." This is a very common Judeo-Christian point of view. But the question is what, if you are going to be skilful in the world, how do you find the balance between making a symbolic sacrifice, or a sacrifice in the name of a symbol is a better way to put it, like a sacrifice. So for example when the Chinese came into Tibet, at first they were reasonably benign but rapidly violence started and many monasteries started to be destroyed and people were killed. At that point many lamas and Tibetan people fled over the mountains into India because of which we've had the benefit of instruction in meditation and so on. If they had stayed to fight and resist the Chinese, it may well have made matters worse. On the other hand, they didn't suffer as much as the people who were left in Tibet. And by fleeing that led to persecution of members of their families. This is the same for refugees from many parts of the country. If one person goes over the border then their family members get rounded up and put in prison and so on. This is the problematic of the complexity of our world. That if we can make a very clear decision about what is good and what is bad then we can act in a simple way.

So for example in the early history in Christianity many people were rounded up and burned alive, eaten alive in the arenas and so on. We can read accounts of them singing hymns as they went into the amphitheatre to be destroyed and also of people allowing themselves to be captured and coming out and saying, "I am a Christian" and so on. Maybe that was a very noble sacrifice, maybe it was not so wise.

In English there is a saying, not a dzogchen saying, but an ordinary saying 'he who fights and runs away lives to fight another day' which can raise the question of skilful means. At what point do we say, "This is worth fighting for"? And if we are going to fight, who are we going to fight? Who is the real enemy? Is it the person sitting with their feet on the seat or the five poisons, stupidity, anger, desire, jealousy and pride, moving inside them?

So I would say to someone with their feet on the seat, "Excuse me, looks to me like you're a very nice person but seems to me you've caught this terrible disease. You're infected with pride and ignorance and because of that you put your feet on the seat." I don't know that would be very helpful. What I'm saying is, personally as an individual, I don't know. What I have a sense is that to try to live an ethical life is very challenging moment by moment and that if we don't just put ourselves inside some moral rule book that tells us how to behave. Then being in touch in a complex situation with our own capacity, with the complexity of the situation, we need to find the most skilful way. And I think it's very difficult from the outside to predict what that would be. Clearly a word like 'skilful' could

be used for a cover up for cowardice but a word like 'bravery' could also cover up stupidity, because in Britain everyday one or two of our brave boys are killed in Afghanistan. And why are they brave boys? They've got a job, there's not so many other jobs to get, so they're not going there to be brave, they're going there to get some money.

So dzogchen is saying that to be present and to be aware and to find a way to respond in the situation will forever be challenging. That we can't fall asleep because we are each accountable nor can we rest in the security of knowing what to do in advance. We have to embrace the notion of participation and also look what is the ground from which I speak. What is my entitlement to speak? That is to say whose voice is coming out of my mouth? And what is my proper voice? I mean here its very helpful to think of this Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin who was very concerned in his analysis of literature particularly Dostoyevsky and he developed the notion of polyphony — that the characters in a well-rounded novel have many different voices. They're not two dimensional. And so there's a question of how do we develop our polyphony? Which is not the same as a symphony. there is no conductor, there is no score. It's an integration but an integration which is moving towards a harmony which is always almost vanishing. And that means finding some kind of rapprochement and not turning the other into a kind of enemy. So it all goes back to this issue of truth. It's true that for me, I don't like it that people put their feet in the seat. But I don't know that it's true that it's a bad thing for people put their feet in the seat. So, it's my opinion.

Now if we take your example about a dogmatic persecution of a group leading to extermination. There are many levels to the problem here. The fundamental problem is reification and objectification, these people are real and what they are doing is bad - my opinion. Their opinion, these other group they are real and they're shit. So how is my reification and objectification going to antidote their reification and objectification? In a sense once the political situation has already taken on a momentum, it's too late for anything subtle. Then we each have to decide what do we do, kill or be killed. But the point of view from dzogchen is to try as much as possible to live a life *not* based in reification and objectification and to communicate with others on the basis of potential of a situation, of seeing different readings, of wandering around a situation to get different perspectives.

The classic formulation of that is 'do unto others as you wish to be done by.' That's an interesting formulation but its rather narrow in as much as I'm only required to think of the other in terms of my own frame of reference. My sense is in order to develop an ethics which is effective in the world we have to observe our own tendencies to solidification and as the text is saying, to be with the actuality of the situation, beyond judgement. And if we can start to deconstruct judgement and not rest in it, that offers the possibility of a different kind of conversation. However of course you can't have a conversation with a fascist dogmatist. Just as the Tibetan lamas could not have a conversation with these young Chinese infected with the dogma of Mao Tse Tung.

So I think the real work of ethics is first of all to observe our own concretisation and to understand how the fundamental alienation arising from ignorance, in the way in which we become alienated from the ground of our own being, leads us to feel anxiety and that we human beings cope with that basic anxiety in many different ways. Some by working hard, some by drinking a lot, some by trying to consume as many things in the world including other people for sex, and some by binding themselves into a group structure. In

peacetime this might be a football team. In war time it might be a particular regiment or particular army group. If we can see, "Oh, I also have anxiety" and the people who do terrible things they do them out of anxiety, out of fear and you know we have the five poisons. The most basic is stupidity arising from ignorance, this stupidity doesn't mean an intellectual stupidity. It means a reification, a grasping at things as being solidly real. On the basis of this, seeing things as real, we either like them or don't like them.

We then have desire and aversion and if I desire something and someone else has it, that can feed into envy. And based on the envy I have a resurgence of my pride. "I am a good person, I am a special person, I am an aryan person and I am entitled to have the nice big house belonging to an outsider. It is offensive to my dignity that people so inferior should live in a bigger house than me." It's not difficult to see the logic of that and we see it all over the world. It happened in former Yugoslavia people cleared out and people taking their houses, they still don't get the houses back and so on. So I think generally the root issue is how do we relax this inner tension in ourself that leads us to see other people as basically separate from us and then that our wishes and needs are superior in their quality of demand and therefore we are entitled to do something to favour ourselves.

Collaboration is the only way forward but collaboration is very difficult. Buddhist groups are full of politics, psychotherapy training institutes are full of murderous politics, so the people who spend a lot of time trying to refine some insight, act like dogs. So sadly I don't have too much hope in this area. The best friend we have is the meditation mat, and to really look, what is the ground of my speaking? If I'm going to challenge someone, where is this coming from? Do I really have a compassionate concern for them? Am I concerned of their deep welfare or do I simply want to manifest my own intolerance in the name of truth.

I'm sorry that's a very long answer to your question.

### Awareness versus consciousness

**Question:** The differentiation of awareness and consciousness, would it be represent more the example of the water/glass and the water inside, or the mirror and the reflection in it or the sea and the wave?

**James:** According to the buddhist tradition we have eight aspects of our consciousness. Each of our sense organs has its own consciousness then there is an organising mentation consciousness, which takes the data from the senses and formulates conceptual interpretations. Then there is the consciousness which brings the particular interpretative spin of these these afflictions or these five poisons I was just outlining. And then the eighth consciousness is called the 'ground consciousness' in that contains as it were all the history of our activity but also the activity of other people, potentially it's a kind of universal consciousness.

The specific thing about each of these consciousnesses is it always takes an object. So say for example you're reading quietly in the garden and suddenly down the street next to you a motor bike roars very fast. There's a bit of a shock because while you were reading and the garden's fairly quiet, the ear consciousness is not in operation. It arises suddenly, it co-emerges with the sound that's arriving.

Now *rigpa* doesn't take on an object, it doesn't need an object. It's not called into being by an object. It's continuous. Whether a lot is happening or little is happening. So, one way we can tell the difference is when we're caught up in something in our head, we're thinking about something and we can construe that in terms of 'I am thinking about this' then clearly you have a subject standing in relation to an object. This is the functioning of mental consciousness. Tibetans have a lot of words for the mind but that one they call *yid kyi nam par she pa*. It's a function of the mind. The nature of the mind itself is empty but when the functions are very active, as we've looked before, that very busy-ness disguises the open nature of the ground.

So it's not that you have two things, consciousness which is limiting and bad and awareness or presence which is open and good. But rather awareness is present with whatever is occurring, whether good or bad, samsara or nirvana. And this awareness is both, it's described in different ways in the text because language can never quite capture these things. Sometimes awareness looks like the subject in the sense that it is a kind of radiating awareness that illuminates the world. And looked at from that point of view, everything is the energy of awareness. In Tibetan that's called *rig pai rang sal* just means the natural energy, the self-energy, of awareness shines out, like rays coming out from the sun. However this awareness can also be seen like the mirror, the mirror is receptive, the mirror is passive and receptive, it's not making any choices about what it shows.

These two aspects are there in the way that we experience awareness. But in terms of that first reading as the energy of awareness, one aspect of that is our consciousness. The consciousness is the movement of the mind; we're hearing, we're thinking. These are procedural, they are things which proceed through time. All our experiences are locatable in time but awareness itself is not in time. Awareness *is* time itself. So when thoughts move through time they're moving through awareness because awareness is both space and time. Time here doesn't mean sequential movement of the three times; the past, the present and the future. It means the time of presence. The time of being here *now*, which is infinite and continuous and always the same and always present. So resting in awareness there is no time whereas consciousness is always moving across time.

When I think, "Oh no, on Monday morning I have to phone this patient," this is a movement in the mind, this is moving across the space of awareness. The remembrance of having to make the phone call gives rise to a kind of anxiety, "Oh shit, I have to do that." So there's a kind of arousal. Who is aroused? Consciousness is aroused. Awareness reveals these two movements of the mind. So the awareness is always still, like the mirror, and consciousness is engaged in reactivity.

Well that's one way of looking at the main differences.

Ok, so see you tomorrow.

Today let's we begin with the **three 'A' practice**.

Now let's begin with the text. In the fifth line:

***Being intact we are freeing the sickness of effort***

Due to or because of being unbroken, being complete, being entire, we are free of the sickness of striving, of effort, of having to achieve something. So this links with what we were looking at yesterday that a great deal of our motivation towards activity in the world is generated by an imbalance within us. That is to say, we are propelled to do things because we are not settled. Of course, we can give all sorts of explanations and justifications for why we're doing what we're doing but many, many things that we do are not really necessary to do.

For example, nowadays houses are very clean. Cleanliness is not really necessary. Because people have showers they tend to have a shower once a day and then they have strong soaps and deodorants and so on, so everybody should be not be making any human smell at all. It's better to smell of chemicals than to smell as a human being. This is a battle that I fight every week because in the clinic where I work the toilets are on the inside of the building and they have no windows and up on the wall there is an automatic spray. It says clearly on the can, 'do not use in an enclosed space' but my colleagues would prefer to be poisoned by chemicals than to smell someone else's shit. This way lot of money is being spent just to make a very bad artificial smell. You can now get these monstrous things that you can plug into electric socket and it sends poisonous fumes into your home. These are all lifestyle choices. This is an essential part of the development of consumerist capitalism. If you don't have consumers capitalism starts to wobble.

In the economic crisis there are two main responses. One is more austerity and the other is that you should spend yourself out of the difficulty. If nobody's buying then nobody's selling, if you're not selling then you can't produce, if you can't produce you create more unemployment. Unemployed people are not going to be buying too much. So all these economic theories are based on some kind of dependent co origination. But an interesting aspect is that so much of our production is based on making inessentials and then tempting people to buy things they don't need.

In buddhism this is all within the discourse of the relation of the subject and the object. That because the ego sense of self is founded on an illusion, founded on a lie. That is to say, "I am a truly existing, self-existing entity", then the cracks in the structure, which are inevitable because it's false, these cracks require to be filled again and again. And you can fill them with many different things. You can fill it by desire by purchasing many things. You can fill it with hatred by knowing who your enemies are. And these are all activities that generate some sense of value and meaning. And so it goes back to the basic principle that if we lose touch with innate or intrinsic meaning then we have to fabricate artificial meaning. But every time we construct a meaning, although temporarily it may feel redolent with value, it's grounded in an artificiality. And the artificial is bound to fall apart; it has a built-in obsolescence.

So the first word in the Tibetan line *zin pa* is meaning 'something which is entire' which is completed; without lack so it's not needing to pull anything in, without excess so it's not needing to put anything out. The international market which has grounded in the principle of free trade is based in these two principles. Lack and excess. Hot countries have an excess of mangoes, cold countries have a lack of mangoes. Cold countries tend to have an excess of cash and hot countries tend not to have so much cash. So that's seems like a useful completion. But again and again when we're meditating, when we're

spending time with our own existence as it is, it's important to get a sense of these two movements. Lack, deficit, need, craving which leads to attachment, reliance, hunger. And excess, surfeit, more than is needed or even the definition of 'this is not needed'. This leads to aversion, a desire to get rid of the substance because when you have excess you don't know what to do with it.

In the 1980s in Europe there was a so called 'butter mountain' and the problem with butter is that you have to keep it in a cold environment. So you pay refrigeration costs to keep something that no one wants to buy. The reason they don't want to buy it is simple... the rain falls from the sky, causing the grass to grow, the cows eat the grass, the cows are milked, the milk is turned into butter, so if you have today's butter why would you buy yesterday's butter? That's a very important principle.

One of the basic Christian ideas is 'sufficient unto the day' means that there will be enough for today. Like in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread". Not thinking too much about the future, *trusting*. Islam is also based on that idea. If you trust then over preparing is not so helpful. How do you get the right balance between being under prepared and over prepared? Both are based on some fantasy of the future. This tends to be established by a division of labour, so some people become very productive and other people become less productive. And the excess of the productive people goes to benefit those who are less productive in the structure of the welfare state with social security. We know this story very well...

### Existence is situational - Three little pigs

Once upon a time, long long ago, here we're three little pigs that lived in a forest. It was summertime. The sun was shining, beautiful scents in the air. The first little pig said, "Ah, I've been born in paradise, I love to run around I feel so happy and free. But at night it gets a little cold so I will build a house of straw." The second little piggy said, "Oh, this sunshine is nice, but I've heard tale of winter, I don't know what it means but I'm gong to build a house of sticks." The third little piggy thought, "Hmm, I've heard of winter and I've heard of wolves." So he went into the forest and he picked some mushrooms and he took them in his little wheelbarrow into the town and he exchanged his mushrooms for some money and with the money he brought bricks. Then at the end of the day he trundled his bricks back into the forest and started to build a house. The first little piggy said, "Uh, you are just a boring stupid pig. You never want to play. I don't like you." So each of these pigs followed their own fortune through the summer and then into the autumn.

But as autumn advanced the first snow started to fall and suddenly out from the depths from the forest came a sound 'awooooo'. Piggies started to shiver and each of them ran into their own little house. Along came the wolf and he said, "I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down." (Laughter) And he did that with the first straw house and the straw blew away. So the first little piggy ran into the house of the second little piggy. But the wolf came there too and again he said, "I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down." And the sticks began to tremble so the two little piggies ran and knocked on the door of the third little piggy who was safe inside a lovely brick house. "Oh piggy, our darling, our best friend, our brother, let us in." (Laughter) And because the third little piggy was hard working and good hearted, he opened the door and let the two pigs in. And the wolf came and he cried again that he would blow the house down but nothing

happened. So the wolf climbed up onto the roof and he climbed down the chimney but piggy number three had put a big cauldron of water below it and the wolf fell into the boiling water and all through the winter the pigs had wolf soup. (Laughter)

That is a story that has some meaning. Basically, it's a meaning about how to balance. The three pigs weren't able to sit and collaborate and think, how shall we build our world together. There then an allocation of duties which then when we are read world history we see happens almost in all world cultures. Generally, you have three classes of people. You have the high noble people, the spiritual people and ordinary working peasants. And what happens then with this division of labour and function in society is that people's worlds become very small and they don't learn convertible skills. Skills which you can move to different arenas, you only have your own little remit. The purpose of this story is to indicate that we need into integrate all aspects of existence.

You can pass your life just going 'ha ha' and 'hoo hoo' but then it's gone. Or you can be very serious and dutiful and work hard in your meditation practice or earning money or developing your game of golf but that also has an imbalance. We are supremely fortunate beings. Probably for the first time in human history we have a chance to live these three piggy lives. We have the freedom to relax and play and enjoy sensory experience. We have the freedom to be a little bit cautious but also relaxed and we have the freedom also to really focus our minds on something important. And through making these moves through these different aspects of ourselves we can see how it is to be in different states. We can see then the different modalities of our existence are situational, they are contingent, they are not innate.

If you go to a city like Damascus or Baghdad, you can still see the copper beaters quarter and the zinc workers quarter where the different artisans live and they all live doing the same kind of task. And in these systems, if your father is working with copper, you're going to work with copper, and in that way your identity is there even before you are born.

### Direct experience of being complete

So we have a lot of freedom. This is a great richness if it helps us to diversify the experience of how our energy can manifest. But one of the things I would suggest we have to be careful of is that our activity is not driven by a sense of lack. For example, you can buy books that give you a hundred places you must see before you die. Now we human beings, we are entitled to travel the world and see these wonderful things. If you go there you get a wonderful experience. If you stay at home and eat potatoes, you also get an experience. Is there any real difference between experiences? They come and they go. They have a particular quality which can shift us in relation to the next moment of experience. So this gives us a chance to think that when we feel, "I really must do this, this is very important for me" what are we looking for? What is the lack? Why do we imagine that going to this movie is going to remove a lack? Or buying these new clothes? In our life we've already brought clothes, we know what the process involves... Why do we imagine that this new item is going to have an excess of value, an excess such that will remove the deficit within ourselves?

If you imagine that wrinkles are a deficit then you will be very interested in the excess value that resides in small bottles. The smaller the bottle, the higher the price. And then

you get a little plastic spoon. (Laughter) Why? "Because I don't want to have wrinkles. Wrinkles are making me less than." Less than what? "Less than somebody who's twenty years younger than me." This is obviously mad. But the whole cosmetics industry is based on fantasy and illusion. You will look better when you don't look like yourself. Then you are on a treadmill. Then you're endlessly, endlessly trying to align yourself with some illusory fantasy. We know that eating disorders start in children earlier and earlier, year by year.

This is linked to the absence of the direct experience of being complete. This is a moving world, a changing world. It will not become stable. It has never been stable. This is how it is. If you get wrinkles it's a sign that you are lucky enough not to have died very young. (Laughter) That's a nice thing to have achieved. So you can reconfigure how you understand your life if you accept everything is changing. Security and stability cannot arise and rest in manifestation. This is just a fact. If we can accept it as a fact, as something neutral but ever present, then we can free ourselves from feeling persecuted by it. And it means then that we can move from the notion of possession to enjoyment. Enjoyment is an orientation of awareness. That is to say if you're present in the moment, open to the moment 'it is what it is' as was set out in line three, can we be with that? If it's raining, it's raining. If it's dry, it's dry. We can be with the rain, we can be with the dryness. These are about being present with what's there. In order to be open to be with what is there it helps if we don't have a big shopping list. "But I want it to be dry. I was planning to have a barbecue in the garden." Well now you won't have a barbecue in the garden. "But I wanted one!" This is a kind of madness.

So when we have these desires, when we have these anxieties, we have two pathways to work with them. One is out into the world of manifestation trying to get the objects that will provide some compensation or rectification. And this will always be a 'work in progress'. It cannot arrive at a conclusion because of the dynamic structure that we inhabit. Or we can go in the other direction and look at the *actual* basis of our existence. Awareness itself is not moving. Now when we sit in the meditation, if we're not very used to it, we're mainly in touch with the thoughts, feelings, sensations and so on. It seems to be 'business as usual' and indeed it should be because we're not trying to change things and make anything artificial. However, we have the opportunity to relax into the awareness which is the revealing surface through which everything manifests.

This revealing surface is like the mirror. If you hold a mirror up to a big room it seems to have infinite depth. If you put a mirror on the front of the house the whole valley would be revealed in it. In the same way that our awareness, our presence, can show everything or it can show just one little thing or it can show nothing at all. And it does this without ever moving or changing. When the mind moves then all the objects of the world begin but awareness itself doesn't move. This is very mysterious. We can't explain it by language. You have to taste it for yourself. That awareness is always there, whatever is going on. But it doesn't have to be transported from one place to another because it's not a 'thing'. It doesn't have a shape or a colour, it doesn't have any dimension it's not big or small, it doesn't come from somewhere it not made somewhere else, it doesn't rest in some particular situation, nor does it go anywhere.

This is the meaning of this term here *zin pa* and it's also the meaning of the founding Buddha of the lineage Kuntuzangpo which means 'always good'. 'Good' here doesn't mean

good within the polarity of good and bad but it means more like 'always already present'. It's just what is there, what is the basis of our being. So once you have that basic satisfaction, that you trust that by relaxing you get more than through mobilisation and your mobilisation is no longer being run on a neurotic route of trying to make yourself have value then basically 'I'm okay. I'm sorted'. So why would I mobilise? Why would I manifest into the world as an aspect of participation? The very motive for being involved, being connected with others, is not to achieve this uncertain balance of getting just the right amount to make me feel okay. Because if you already have satisfaction why would you be looking for it somewhere else? This then frees us from the basic perverse behaviour which is asking manifestation to provide that which it cannot provide. It just can't do it. It will never do it. It's just a basic fact of life. Accepting that can provide a sadness if you are very, very committed to getting what you want in the world.

One of the examples I often use in therapy is to ask the patient, "If you want to buy spinach would you go to the butcher? A butcher is not selling spinach. There are other people selling spinach. But you are very angry that your mother didn't love you in the way you wanted to be loved. She didn't give it to you then. She's not giving it to you now. You want spinach she a butcher. Maybe she's bad but you're certainly stupid. You can't stop her being bad but at least you can stop yourself being stupid. You've got eyes and legs. You can look and walk around and find where they sell spinach." In the same way we have been wandering samsara for many, many lives. You were born into a body that's tilted out through the senses onto the environment and we become hungry for many things. Nothing wrong with that, if it's fitting, but the objects of the world can only give you what they can give you.

Again, for example, in couple therapy I'm often suggesting to people that they have many bruises around their heart. Often a sense of not having being loved. A sense of absence, of confusion, pain, humiliation and so on. And there is a desire to find someone who can take this away. But when you're grown up and you're out in the world the people you are likely to meet can provide something. They can walk with you, talk with you, sleep with you, do things about the house, hear about your troubles at work and so on. In terms of an ordinary shopping list they can probably provide most of the items on it. But when you bring out this big, deep shopping list - "Remove the pain in my heart. Give me the love I never had. Make me feel safe and secure in the world. Make me feel loveable as someone who has real value". It's not likely that anyone can provide that. And this is a very powerful force in the destruction of relationships, asking people to provide what they can't provide. There is nothing wrong with a person that they are hurt but they need to work out where to get the antidote for that particular difficulty.

So in the same way, if we look into the world, if we look to ordinary interactions and transactions to provide an awakening to our buddha nature it's not likely. Building stupas, sponsoring monasteries, sponsoring printed books and so on are very good activities but they are not a means for recognising your own nature. Going on pilgrimage also is not going to make you see your own nature. Your own nature is not more available at Mount Kailash than in Vienna. And if you go to Mount Kailash you might get sick, you might be in a car crash, many things could happen along the way that would not be helpful. So the question is, "Well if our nature is there all the time, how is it that we don't see it?" It has to do with the nature of looking.

## Being available without agenda

So here he's talking about the sickness of effort. It means busy looking, hungry looking, striving to get something. If you go to the market you can get bananas and pears and bread. If you go to the university you can get a qualification. If you go to a brothel you can get HIV but you can't get your own nature; you can't get it. Why? Because you don't lack it. "But I don't have it." Of course you don't have it, you will never have it. Never ever *have* your enlightened nature. You can *be* enlightened but you can't 'have it' the way you have shoes and a coat. So the problem is how you look. As we've touched on before, it's not looking like a detective trying to identify a criminal, it's not looking like a good housewife for a bargain in the market. It's more looking the way an ornithologist looks for a bird. Walking quietly into the forest, sitting very quietly, senses are open, body's not moving then the little bird starts to sing. It's about being available not too far forward not too far back. That involves being at peace but not asleep. Present but not aroused. Neither hungry nor fearful, not trying to control things, not giving up, just available.

The dimension we inhabit is sometimes called the dharmadhatu or the space of phenomena. This infinite hospitality is open so when we are available, we can experience the openness. Openness is to be without agenda, without a shopping list, calm, patient, hopeful. Not an excited hope but just a confident, quiet hope. Then we sit, then we sit and we sit and it starts to become clear because the calmer we are and the more open the less interested we are in all the things that are going on. These thoughts don't really have any true nature. They only have meaning if we see them as meaningful.

For example, I'm rather heavy at the moment so I have started a wonderful new diet which involves me drinking a somewhat disgusting shakes and it's very interesting sitting at the table with other people eating real food whilst I have my special food. Because if we're clear that I'm not eating that food then it's just something, it's just stuff that's on the table. Before I started the diet, I would be very interested their food and now I am looking at it as if it's an exhibit in a museum. Because the link between the food and me is me. The food has no hooks, we have the hook. And if we say, "I'm not eating that" then we're not eating it. And the fact that it's delicious has nothing to do with us.

And it's exactly the same with the meditation. The more calm we are, the more relaxed and more open, thoughts, feelings, sensations are still arising but they're just stuff, neutral phenomena coming and going. We have no need of them. They have nothing to offer us. The bridge that binds us into samsara is our own sense of lack. When we taste the contentment there is no need for this.

Of course, in society there are many conventions that make us feel that we have to conform. My teacher C R Lama lived in a small university, less than a town really, a sort of village in India. He didn't like to walk at all so there were always rickshaws waiting outside the house. He used to take a rickshaw to work and sometimes he would go out just in his lungi, this little wrap around cloth. And his wife would come out and shout at him, "Oh you can't go to work like that, shame on you, what are you doing?" And he would say, "Who do you think is going to work C R Lama or C R Lama's clothes?" (Laughter) If your clear then you can get away with everything in this world but once you start binding yourself into 'what will other people think of me' well there are a lot of people with a lot of thoughts so you can always be busy trying to second guess what they might be expecting you to be doing.

So this calmness is very helpful. It won't make you stupid. Your mind can still be very bright, very connected but not busy. Not needing things for the emotional sense of filling ourselves like an anxious binge eater but using things for their proper function in the world as means of relating to others. We are back with our theme that everything is communication. Because of the nature of non-duality every action we have, whether it seems to be internal or external, is connected with others. And a key question in any communication is, "Who is the addressee?" The Russian theorist Bakhtin, who I mentioned yesterday, was a great thinker in developing this way of understanding because he in a sense reinterprets the notion of transference and counter transference that is prevalent in psychoanalytical thinking. That is to say, that we tend to see other people or project onto other people some representation that we have of past situations in our lives particularly situations where there's some unresolved issue. But what Bakhtin is suggesting is that, whether it's in our communicative speech out in the world or in our own thoughts, this activity is always intentional. That is to say, it's moving towards an object in the sense that Merleau-Ponty describes in his study of phenomenology. And the question then is, "We have someone in front of us, we're talking with them but are they the addressee of our speech? Are we really talking to someone else whilst we're looking at each other?" And this is very helpful for buddhist thinking because the real compassion begins with meeting people as they are. That is to say the embodied presence in front of us is the actual addressee so if we are speaking to somebody else this is going to be a cross communication.

Clearly we might be talking to someone but we're really talking to the person we want the person in front of us to be. This needn't be done in a crude way, but we've probably all experience the discomfort of that, because it gives us the sense that the other person is somehow dissatisfied with us or disappointed that we're not somehow giving them what they want but they're not really addressing us, they are addressing some imago, some image. So yesterday we looked at this term that is in line three *ji zhin wa* 'as it is.' And 'as it is' means a very precise attention to what is *exactly here*. Across these three integrated aspects of the unborn openness, the spontaneous richness of the experiential field and the precise specificity of *this* moment, *this* particular person that we are relating to.

Because in buddhism one of the aspects of what is called stupidity or mental dullness is the over reliance on abstraction. By abstracting yourself from the actual phenomenological field you can imagine that things are other than they are. You can imagine that the butcher shop is actually a vegetable shop. And therefore it makes sense to go there again and again and ask for spinach. And you think, "I don't know what's wrong with this butcher shop but one day they're going to give me the spinach because this is a vegetable shop." This is the experience of not being in your senses but being in the world of conceptual elaboration. So here it is suggesting simply rest into this natural completion which is not some spaced-out space somewhere else, but it's the three aspects of the openness, the richness and the precision, and then respond *in that field* as it is and this in itself will free you from unnecessary striving activity.

OK we'll take a break here then we'll finish the last verse.

[When mental consciousness gets caught](#)

We will start again with a little practice, not the three 'A's, but just sitting quietly relaxing into a long out-breath. Then we'll sit.

Now let's look at the last verse **(James reads the line out in Tibetan)**

***Spontaneously abiding and so everything is settled***

Which means it stays spontaneously or easily by itself and therefore it is settled. *Lhun gyi ne pa* means 'immediately formed' just as a kind of 'given'. It means it's 'not a construct'. It's 'not depending on any kind of effort'. So awareness itself doesn't have to be settled. So when we're doing meditation and we're calming the mind what we're doing is bringing the patterns of energetic manifestation into a kind of vibration which is of minimal disturbance. When that's the case it's possible to have more sense of the openness. The energy of the mind, the energy of manifestation, is fascinating. It's mesmerising, enchanting. We're transfixed by it. We're carried away by it. Every culture has stories about that kind of experience. There's the story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin because he's playing this flute the children are completely captivated and he leads them off. And we can be caught by many, many things.

Even those who are wise can be caught. Like in the story of King Arthur, about Merlin, when he's an old man he becomes transfixed by this young woman. Merlin has a lot of knowledge of the world, magic and power but he doesn't see the danger because he sees just one thing, her beauty and youth captures him, and then he is imprisoned forever. And so we also can become imprisoned by the objects of fascination and that fascination can be with the most banal objects. In the Byangter lineage there is a famous prayer coming from Rigdzin Godem and he's says, "I realise samsara is a dangerous place so I renounce my possessions. But then I find I get caught by the objects for my daily use." You start to think that the bowl you're eating your tsampa out of is very beautiful and very precious.

Now if we go back to thinking about consciousness. Consciousness takes an object. It has to have an object. Without an object there is no consciousness. So consciousness is going to actively seek for an object in order to maintain itself. The sense organs or the sense consciousness linked with them these are more easily pacified. The main danger is in the mental consciousness which has the capacity to process memories, dreams, fantasies and so on, it's not linked to the world of the senses.

So we can experience this in terms of unrequited love. You develop some fantasy about them and keep imagining them and so on. In its extreme form it manifests as 'de Clérambault's syndrome', which is the basis for stalking, because you become so convinced that the other person *must* love you because you love them that you devote a lot of time to trying to convince them that you are the right one for them. This is just the extreme form of functioning of consciousness. "I need to have an object to fixate on" then you decide that this is the only object that will fulfil me. "I am nothing without you" - this is not true. I'm sad without you. "But I don't want to be sad", so it becomes easier to say, "I'm nothing without you." Much better to go through the door of sadness because in its extreme form it leads to murder. If I can't have you no one will have you. Every year people murder on that basis.

So consciousness wants an object and in particular a special object so this is just a manifestation of being unsettled. In just what we were looking at before, that the fantasy that an object can give us what we need and they lived happily ever after. Once upon a time there was a Prince called Charles and he met a beautiful young woman called Diana, and they fell in love and they married and they lived in misery until she died. That's maybe more like the real fairy tale.

**Comment:** That's because he had to marry her but she was not the woman he loved.

**James:** Exactly.

### The path to self liberation

These kind of stories are important. We linked ourselves to objects but the object can only do a little bit. So in order to experience this spontaneous or natural or easy settling we have to renounce the object. But it's not the object out there, it's what is called in psychoanalysis the 'object relation'. That is to say, the mental imago or image of the other, something which is artificial and constructed but seems more real than the actual object. That is to say, who is responsible for our misery? Ourselves. Once we accept that, life becomes much easier. Then we're not blaming other people and we're not looking to other people to rescue us. There's an early buddhist text called The Dhammapada and it says, "Not your father, not your mother, not your brother, not your sister, not your friend, not your enemy, nobody can help you more than yourself." And it repeats the same characters in the next verse and it says, "Nobody can harm you more than yourself."

So calming the mind through a wide range of mediation practices is useful so that you can experience the natural calmness and peace of the mind, to see that actually it's *always* settled. No matter what is happening. For example, here in this valley, the weather changes very quickly, it's cloudy then it's clear, always moving and changing. The openness of the sky is not being changed but our access to the direct experience of the openness of the sky becomes obscured because we feel that the clouds are filling the sky. Now it's not uncommon particularly with the mothers of teenagers to go into the bedroom of the child and say, "You cannot live like this. I can't see the carpet. I can't see anything. You have to tidy your room." Because in that way if there is a lot of stuff, the sense of the room is lost because there you have two polarities which are back to back. Order and disorder, and if disorder rises then order is displaced. But when the clouds go in the sky do they push out the sky? The space of the sky and the clouds exist together in non duality. It's not that when the cloud arises the sky vanishes and we only have the cloud. The cloud is in the sky the way the reflection is in the mirror.

So you don't actually have to lessen the disorder of your life if you can see the space. But if you get disturbed by the disorder and caught up in it, and you want to get rid of it or you get too excited by it, then for the sake of your own practice you probably have to reduce the disorder. This is a very basic principle in dzogchen, there's no fixed path that anyone has to follow. You start with yourself, you observe yourself, you get to know yourself, what your state is, and if you can find the relaxed open spaciousness as you are, then that's wonderful. If you find you're caught up in the agitation then you need to think, "What will I do about it?" The issue is that the agitation is not bad in itself, the issue is our *involvement* in the agitation.

When I was working on translating texts with my teacher in India we would do it in the back courtyard. At that time there were dogs on the roof barking. The servant was always clanging pots and pans. The lama's wife was always shouting at the servant and the servant was shouting back, and I would be writing out the translation ready for the typist. The typist was sitting next to me on the table going very fast and then whenever he had finished what was there, he was sitting tapping his fingers. (Laughter) Like that, many activities can happen in chaotic environments. The main thing is that we have the decision, a choice, whether to be distracted or not. If we're are waiting for external circumstances to come then we may have to wait a very long time.

This world is just 'stuff'. This is why shopping is very important. You go into a nice big shop and there's so many interesting things, at least you hope they're interesting. You came to a rack of tops to wear for the summer. As you walk towards them you think, "Oh this is nice" and you look at the colour and go, "No, no, no, no. Oh this is nice..." and pick it out, then you feel the quality, not so good, put it back and you look for another one. "Quality is nice, colour not too bad. I could wear that with my eyes, ok, but the stitching, not good." On and on and on. In this shop with a million items and only one is waiting for you and unfortunately someone else has just brought it. You could be very disappointed or you could recognise there is a lot of stuff in the world. In fact, ninety nine percent of the what is in the world I don't want. I don't need. So if that's true to go from ninety nine percent to a hundred percent is not very far! (Laughter)

Maybe everything is just 'stuff'. If that is the case, if everything is equal or as they say in mahamudra *ro chik*, 'one taste', then we find that we have in our own pocket a little packet of masala, a little packet of savoury spices to make this more interesting. We ourselves are making the object special which then catches us. Everything is the movement of our mind. So the more we see that then the more we get this experience that everything is settled.

So in the traditional example if you have a pond in the country and as soon as you arrive you stir it with a stick all the stuff from the bottom will come up and the water will become very cloudy. If you then leave it alone it will settle. It settles by itself but you agitated it. This is the principle of self-liberation. It is our own energy, our own over-active involvement, which creates the turbulence which makes the world cloudy. So just leaving things as they are we have the sense that the world is open and even. Because it's open we have access to whatever is here. You don't need to appropriate it or own it.

For example, if we come here we can spend some time looking at the statues and the paintings, and if we really look at them and open yourself to them they come and they're present with us. Then we go. Sylvester, however, is left here and he has to worry about whether the roof is going to leak or some other method is going to come and attack these precious possessions. Ownership has some advantages but it's also imprisoning. So, this is a very important thing, *how* to live lightly in the world without attachment even if we have possessions just to be ready to walk out of the house tomorrow and not look back. Because when you go out of the house you don't know if a car's going to hit you. You might never come back so this bubble of our precious world will then pop (James clicks his fingers) and the people who are left behind they look at the place and think, "My god what where they doing collecting all this rubbish". (Laughter)

So we need to have tools for living this includes shoes, clothes, food, friends, work and so on. That is to say, these are the pathways of our participation in the world. But if we build our world around other beings that's something different. And then we come back to this troubling word 'love'. What does it mean to love someone? In the general buddhist mahayana literature love is defined by the phrase, 'may all beings be happy'. That is to say love is a gift out to the world. It's not a boomerang. It's not a contract. It's a gift. But that's very different from the usual alliances people make, "I love you, do you love me? Oh you don't love me then I'm not sure if I love you then." That is to say we can be close to people, we can be open to them but we don't need to catch them. Very often we think we're open but actually the other person can feel these claws gathering near.

So being in the world we know people on different levels some were very physically close to, some were not, some we see every day at work but we don't know so much about them socially. In all these cases maybe the best orientation is to be friendly, which means thinking, "What can we give?". And the more we have satisfaction by resting in this open spaciousness we're not so concerned with what we're getting. Using other people to meet our neurotic needs is rarely a royal road to happiness.

#### Continue with confidence \*

And these last two lines are concerned with the third point of Garab Dorje, which is 'to continue in the same way'. That is to say not thinking that somewhere there is something better than this. Somewhere there is some magical teaching, the initiation of this particular deity. The initiation of all the deities is contained in these lines here. There is nothing higher or deeper or better than these few lines. Once again, the key thing is to use these lines as a support for exploring and getting close to our own nature. "How do I get lost?" More and more relaxing and just observing the process of getting lost. So you start to see that the one getting lost is not you. This process can be quick or slow depending on our karma or luck.

For some people at first the meditation is ninety five percent or ninety nine percent conscious movement and very little awareness. If that's the case then don't despair. Every time consciousness is moving awareness is there. Every mental arising is itself the experience of the presence of awareness. Just as every reflection is itself the showing of the nature of the mirror. Whether the mind is easily relaxed and open or often agitated, just sit and accept it as it is. By not being artificial, the artificiality is revealed as just the playful energy of the natural contentment of the mind. You know of course nowadays there are many books in European languages on dzogchen so you can read more you can go to more retreats and get many more teachings. But the most important resource is yourself. When you're reading a book *about* dharma, you're getting ideas *about* yourself. When you're looking *at* yourself, with yourself, that's much more intimate. Some people have a scholarly turn of mind but in the history of the tradition many people got enlightened without having any real knowledge of Buddhist philosophy or anything else. But they were willing to spend time being with themselves so that's the central thing. And this 'self' is not something precious, it's not esoteric, it's with you when you're walking, when you're in the toilet, when you're cooking. Awareness is always there; it's your best friend, it's yourself. So if you abandon yourself, if you abandon your best friend and go out looking for friendship from strangers it's not so likely that you'll be happy.

So now we will do a **final meditation of the three 'A' practice**

And now we dedicate the merit of our study and practice together. We can just imagine rays of light spreading out from our heart to all beings sharing with them what we have participated in.

**Dedication chanted in Tibetan**

That brings us to the end of our brief time together. I'd like to thank Sylvester for his translation, and Sylvester and Li for their hospitality and making our time here so easy, and everyone for coming and being very open to be part of it.