

*Introduction to The Nature of
The Mother of All The Buddhas
via
Gonpo Wangyal*

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Transcribed by Sarah Allen

The text in various translations can be accessed here.
<https://simplybeing.co.uk/texts/translations/gonpo-wangyal-text-mother-buddhas/>

Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
COMMENTARY ON TEXT	6

Excerpts:

"... Where are we now? If we don't tell a story about it, if we stay in the immediacy of our lived experience, where is this? If we take off the name of the town, if we take off the name of the street, the number of the building, all the things we can say about the shape of the room, the names of people here that we may know, if you stop constructing your world for a moment and see what is there when you don't construct it, what is there? This is itself the womb of the Great Mother. This is emptiness itself ..."

"... Don't be artificial with your body, speech and mind." This means that it is ok to be depressed. What is wrong with depression is the interpretation that we have of it for we think, "I don't want to be like this. I want to be in a better way." In that way we are trying to create ourselves in the image we have created. This is not the practice of dzogchen. All the texts say that whatever comes, comes, and whatever goes, goes. Sometimes we get sick and then we are just sick; we don't feel well and maybe we feel confused. In life many hopes that we have don't get fulfilled and we feel sad. We might feel lost and unloved. However, everything which arises is impermanent. A feeling is arising and this feeling is looking for a seat. You can budge up the bench a little and let the feeling sit there and after a while it will go. That is a fact. Everything is impermanent. It is our own intolerance of our own state which makes us angry with ourselves for being sad, depressed and so on..."

"...When we look to find solid substantial identity to ourselves there is nothing to be found, and yet, moment-by-moment our experience is revealed to us through the ceaseless flow of thoughts, feelings and sensations. That is to say, the mother, as the emptiness of the mind, and the child, as the endless movement of the mind, are always together. We are not just the mother and we are not just the child, just as stillness and movement are inseparable, just as silence and sound are inseparable. The emptiness or the ungraspability of the mind itself is the very basis for all the myriad ways in which experience arises, including all that we say that is 'subject' and all that we say is 'object'.

"...developing revulsion for samsara means to observe the swamp-like quality of the ritualised habits of our own functioning. Essentially it means to start to become curious. Questions are better than answers for the answer is always a little bit deadening but a question is enlivening..."

INTRODUCTION

Gonpo Wangyal was famous as a meditator. He was particularly famous for his practice of *chöd*, a practice for realising the true meaning of the Heart Sutra. We are going to be looking at a text which is embedded in a practice of Machig Labdron. This was a practice which was very close to Chimed Rigdzin's heart. It is a good condensation of the main points that we need in order to understand how to recognise our own nature and to be able to proceed in the world with ease. It is not an abstract theoretical philosophical text but rather a series of 'pointing outs' directing our attention towards a clearer understanding of how we actually function.

It is useful to start to explore what it means to have a mind. In particular, do we have a mind or does our mind have us? Often when we sit in meditation observing the mind, we find that we have many familiar friends come to join us: 'I don't know how to do this', 'Am I doing it the right way?', 'What should I be doing?', 'Why am I bothering to do this?' These are the sorts of thoughts that could arise, for when we don't have an agenda there is often uncertainty. Generally, our lives are constellated around activity. Probably already today you were doing many things and probably you are quite good at doing many things. Our activity becomes a kind of mirror through which we think we see ourselves; if we judge our activity to be not very good then we feel that 'we' are not very good, and if our activity seems to go well then we can feel we are not doing too badly.

One of the things we will be looking at is whether the content of our mind, these movements of thoughts, feelings and sensations, actually constitute a reliable mirror or not. Maybe in fact there is another kind of mirror which is there, and that the thoughts and feelings that we take as the proof of our existence are in fact reflections rather than the mirror itself. We take the contents of our moment-by-moment experience as being fundamental, as being the basis of our experience. Yet, of course, if we sit quietly for just fifteen minutes many, many things are arising and passing: thoughts come and go, feelings come and go, and sensations in the body come and go. Each of these appears to be 'me' or at least to be saying something important about me, and yet, they don't remain long enough for us to establish any clear foundation. Thus, a lot of what we will be looking at is the relationship between the contents of our mind, or the flow of experience, and the mind itself, or the experiencer of the experience.

This short text is called *Introduction To The Nature of The Mother of All the Buddhas*. In some religions there is a special mother who has a special son but from the point of view of the buddhist teachings this Mother is able to have many, many children; all sentient beings that have a mind are able to recognise their own true nature by being reborn again through the womb of the Mother. All of us began our existence swimming around inside our mother. Nowadays if you get pregnant you can go to the hospital and look at the scan and see the baby moving and developing in space. If there was no space the baby could not move and grow, and if the baby stops moving that is a bad sign. Thus we have two basic principles here: space and movement. When you come out of your mother's body it is as if you take on a defined substantial shape. You are given a name and gradually you are woven into the texture of social identity. You find out how to eat, how to clean your teeth, you go to school, you find out who likes you and who does not like you. Through this

accumulation of experience we build up a picture, an image of who we are, with memories of the past and hopes and plans for the future. It is like living on the island in the middle of a traffic roundabout: thoughts and feelings are coming in all directions, and this busyness of interaction creates the particular constellations of ourselves which evolves moment-by-moment.

We can tell all sorts of stories about ourselves, about what we do and what other people do. Moreover, we use this capacity to give an account, an analysis of events, as a way of establishing our clarity and place in the world. This allows us to feel we know who and where we are, for if we look into the mirror of concepts we can establish particular maps and identifications. For example, we could say something about this building. We could talk about its location in this town, about the town's history and so on. In that way we can say, "This is where we are." But this is like a bird in the springtime: it fetches some twigs from here, some bits of cottonwool or stuff from there, and makes a little comfortable house to live in. In the same way throughout our lives we have been flying around in the world, picking up bits and pieces, which are now 'inside' of us, and we make this little house that we live in.

But where are we now? If we don't tell a story about it, if we stay in the immediacy of our lived experience, where is this? If we take off the name of the town, if we take off the name of the street, the number of the building, all the things we can say about the shape of the room, the names of people here that we may know; if we stop constructing our world for a moment and see what is there when we don't construct it, what is there? This is itself the womb of the Great Mother. This is emptiness itself.

Emptiness means there is nothing substantial. What we take to be substantial, what we take to be strongly real, to be fixed and defined, is the creation of the movement of our mind. When the mind stops moving, everything, 'the ten thousand things', vanish, and when the mind moves again the ten thousand things, all that there is, is suddenly there. It is not that we have to get rid of our cognitive assembly, all our ways of making sense of things, but rather to see the function of this interweaving of storylines which creates the sense of a stable structure.

Clearly we are in this room. Many things appear when we look around. It would be ridiculous to say there is nothing at all. Yet everything which is here is essentially nothing, for when you look around the room what you see as existing in itself is not actually there in itself because there is no true individual essence to anything. For example, as I was coming up the stairs into this room I was told that this place is used as a theatre. Then I noticed spotlights on the ceiling and then I thought, "Yes, indeed this is a theatre." The spotlights prove that this name, 'theatre', is the correct description of this room. However, it is not just the lamps or the shape of the room or the way the floor has been painted and so on that makes this 'a theatre'. It is because we are able to say, 'it is a theatre'. The potential which is present in the layout of the environment meets the potential which resides in the term 'theatre', and when these two potentials meet together they lock on and we settle into the convinced sense that, "Yes, sure, this is a theatre." The mind is always part of whatever is occurring as experience; there is no objective experience that we can have contact with. There may well be an objective reality but as soon as we get near it we turn it into a subjective experience for you cannot have an objective experience. Of course at school you get told that you can, and you might learn the rules of mathematics and start to move them around as if they were

somehow objectively true. But they are only objectively true for people who subjectively believe in the objective truth of the mathematics. That is to say, you get inducted into the mytho-poetic realm of a key component of the construction of western culture. If you go into the jungle in New Guinea many people there will not be very interested in Euclid, but we, in learning these things in school, start to take them as the building blocks of our understanding of the world. If you want your house to be stable you have to let the building blocks be where they are; you wouldn't be able to build a house if you kept looking at the bricks. You put one brick and then you put another on top and so on, that is the way you build a wall. In the same way we put one concept and another on top and then another and so on. If we examine the concepts too much it is going to wobble. The ease of being that we can develop operates on the basis of automatic pilot, the unexamined nature of the assumptions that we take for granted and build our existence on.

However, things exist only according to the circumstances which support them. As circumstances change, the nature of our experience changes, and from the point of view that is set out in this text, our experience is all that we have. In the buddhist analysis we get to see a very, very complicated world but luckily we also have meditation practice which points us in the direction of simplicity, not a simplicity which is a denial of or an avoidance of complexity but a simplicity which is open and spacious enough to integrate all the many different kinds of complexity which are the actual experiences of our existence moment-by-moment.

In the title of this text, Gonpo Wangyal uses the word *ngo tro*. In Tibetan *ngo* means space and *tro pa* means to point out, to introduce or to make apparent. Thus the text points out the meaning of emptiness. Emptiness is our own mother. We come from our mother. If we didn't have a mother we would not have been born. The mother is the ground or the basis of our manifestation. If we lose contact with our mother we become lost, for our mother ties us into a family. In almost every culture in the world, up until very recently, if you didn't have family alliances you would be in very a very difficult situation. Thus, in relative terms mother is the link point into the extended family and is the mark of the progression of your exiting her body and entering into the flow of time. If our mother stayed alive for some time after we were born we can look back and have different memories of our relationship with her.

Of course, nowadays, people want to have autonomy, independence, a sense of not being reliant on anyone else, and especially not relying on the mother. But separating from the mother is difficult: adolescents tend to be sometimes much fused with the mother and sometimes denying that they have anything to do with her. This is important to reflect upon because from a buddhist point of view we have the same adolescent relationship with the Mother of all the Buddhas. We think we exist just as we are: "*I am me.*" "*This is who I am.*" "*It is obvious who I am, I am me!*" By the process of being 'I, me, myself' I know who I am. You can walk around these sorts of propositions again and again but you cannot get through them for we appear to be sealed in ourselves, there appears to be a facticity, a givenness to the experience of being a separate self, an individual, something apart from the environment. But is this really the case? If the ground of our being is merely a linguistic proposition it is not a very solid ground.

Therefore what we want to look at is who is the one who says, 'I exist'? All the statements that we make about ourselves arise out of and pass through our mind. What is this mind itself? The mind

is the mother of all the buddhas. By recognising the nature of our own mind we can awaken to the potential, which is present in all beings, of presence and clarity. This will become clearer as we start to go into the text. However, this central point is very important. When we look to find solid substantial identity to ourselves there is nothing to be found, and yet, moment-by-moment our experience is revealed to us through the ceaseless flow of thoughts, feelings and sensations. That is to say, the mother, as the emptiness of the mind, and the child, as the endless movement of the mind, are always together. We are not just the mother and we are not just the child, just as stillness and movement are inseparable, just as silence and sound are inseparable. The emptiness or the ungraspability of the mind itself is the very basis for all the myriad ways in which experience arises, including all that we say that is 'subject' and all that we say is 'object'.

For example, the potential of this space to be used for the basis for many different plays rests in the emptiness of the space. As soon as we put any furniture or props into the space, the potential for hospitality for a production is limited. When one play is in operation it is very difficult to have another play operating at the same time, for the play arises in the space. Without space there is no theatre. Without space there is no life. Space is something that every manifestation is only renting. Manifestations cannot own space. For example, in the hospital where I work I have a room with my name on it. But as soon as I go out of the building someone else goes into 'my' room. That is, it is only my room when I am sitting in it. On an abstract level it is always my room because it has my name on it, but on a practical level it is a space with a computer in that many people want to use. We don't really own anything. We adopt or we rent things from the world for a while. When I was younger I managed to rent a very nice young body, but when I went back to the shop they said, "I am sorry we only have this fat, old body for you." It's like that isn't it – everything is moving and changing all the time.

The central point here is to see that whatever you think you 'have' doesn't really belong to you. When we are children our mothers say, "Eat, eat, you have to grow big and strong." By taking the food of the world and putting it into your body, your body becomes big. Your body is big with the world – your body is the world. If you rest inside this physical skin and you look out, the world can look like something else, something over there, but the body is part of the world for it is composed out of all the elements in the world. It is not something apart from the world. Thus, there are two aspects here. One is the inseparability of what we call 'self' from 'other'. The other is the inseparability of this inseparability, the non-duality of subject and object from its ground, which is emptiness. This might sound abstract and theoretical but as we get into doing some practice it is not abstract at all, and we will hopefully understand this.

COMMENTARY ON TEXT

*[For reference, please see the Tibetan and English translation of this text ...
<https://simplybeing.co.uk/texts/translations/gonpo-wangyal-text-mother-buddhas/>]*

The text begins by saying: *Bright, acute people with strong faith who wish to practise the directness of dzogchen should stay in a peaceful isolated place and consider themselves and all sentient beings.*

First of all we have to wake up and become bright and shiny with very clear minds. There is no chance if you are sleepy. So we have to think how does the mind become bright? There are two useful factors for this. One is hope and the other is fear. Hope gives you the sense that you are going to get something good. Like if you get a text from Canada telling you that an old uncle who emigrated a long time ago has died and left you a lot of money, we get a text that says, "Hey, you have buddha nature!" "Oh, I didn't know that; this is very good! This could be quite exciting." To have some hope is important, for if you are full of doubt about yourself, if you don't like yourself, if you think it is impossible for yourself, or if you become very intellectual and sceptical about it where you want to analysis it and to prove it for yourself, this can make it very difficult.

If hope doesn't work it is useful to have some fear. You are going to die. What is going to happen when you die? From the buddhist point of view you can go into places that are not so good. What is the best protection against that? Understanding yourself, for if you have clarity and openness then whatever is arising is arising in the space of your mind. But when we get caught up in attachment and we fuse into concepts, if these concepts are difficult, we tend to shrink down and become a small entity in a world of big entities. We probably all have had this experience at some time in our life where we might feel hopeless or stupid or unlovable. Maybe you make a mistake at work and things go badly, or a relationship ends and you find yourself in a state where you can start to feel that life is something which is happening to 'you'. When you have tasted this and you start to see the dynamic of it, it becomes clear that allowing yourself to slip into these small states, where you can be caught by any passing event, is not a good idea. Thus what becomes vital is to mobilise our energy to focus on breaking through the seal of our conceptual absorption, so that we can directly taste, directly experience, the ground of our own being which is not a thing.

Right here is an orientation, an attitude. Essentially it means choosing life and not death. It means not falling asleep in your life. This can be support with a mindfulness practice. For example, when you are walking down the street you might be daydreaming, thinking of something else. That is not such a good idea. Why is your idea more interesting than the sights, the colours, the smells of the world? Most of the time the basic principle is 'better out than in'. What is outside is new, fresh and exciting, and what is in the mind is not so fresh, new or exciting. Therefore, being bright and acute or sharp means not to allow yourself to drift off into fantasy and distraction, but to stay on an ordinary level just present and connected with the field of experience.

Gonpo Wangyal says here that as well as being bright and acute we also need 'strong faith'. This can be the kind of faith based on hope and trust where we feel, "*I trust that the Buddha and Padmasambhava would not cheat or deceive me and therefore I really want to do the practice.*" Or it could be the kind of faith that comes from despair. You might look at yourself in the mirror and think, "*Is this all there is? Is this thing that I have become the limit of my potential? Am I condemned to be 'just me' forever?*" Either we bang our head on the wall or we try to find out if there is anything else. Sometimes everything can seem simple and straightforward and the heart feels open and we can really mobilise ourselves. But sometimes life can be very dark and heavy and we lose our way, we get lost, we get confused, we don't know why we bother doing these things anymore. Thus we have to find a way to mobilise our dark energy to move towards the light, to alchemically transform the hurt and pain and the lostness into a fuel to drive the force of awakening. Therefore the real basis is to have faith in yourself. This doesn't mean having faith in your ego, in your

personality, in your intelligence and so on, for these are all temporary qualities and somewhat unreliable. What we need is calm, clear, deep faith in the open purity of all phenomena, which is a neutral quality.

For example, this afternoon I was in a lovely park in the town here. There were beautiful flowers and the trees were looking wonderful. Thinking, 'this is a beautiful tree' is a mental attitude. I am saying something to the tree. But if I don't say that to the tree, the tree is still there. So what is the tree-ness of the tree before I speak? What is the tree-ness of the tree before I think? This is a very simple experiment you can do for yourself. You can sit in front of something and you can add your interpretations. Then when you get tired of doing that, instead of speaking at the object, open your perception and allow the object to speak to you. We looked at some huge old trees and the bark on them looked like the skin of a very old crocodile, but if you stop putting your interpretation on, if you don't even say, "This is brown, this is green, this is a ridge," and so on, then the space between the experiencer and the actuality of that which is experienced is not being filled by all these assumptions and accumulations of knowledge. The tree then reveals itself in a way that takes us beyond any concept of a tree. It is the same with the sound of a train or a motorcar. If you stop telling the world what it is, the world has some space to reveal itself. Then you start to feel the immediacy, the non-duality of subject and object.

This is strong faith, a faith which is not based on your activity but a faith grounded in the experience of the inseparability of subject and object. This guarantees your place in the world. Even in you are a bit lost or you behave badly or you don't know what you are doing, the tree is not asking you to sit any examination or to bring a psychiatrist report. All the tree is asking is 'to see me as I am'. This is all babies ever ask, but as we know, babies get layered over with all kinds of assumptions and projections from their parents. This is the very quality of samsara – to be unnecessarily filling the space.

Gonpo Wangyal then goes on to say, that you might 'wish to practice the directness of dzogchen'. Dzogchen means great completion. It is the aspect of existence which requires no editing or improvement – it doesn't require anything to be done. For example, when I was walking in these lovely gardens I just think they look very nice. If I was a gardener employed to be there I would have seen many things to do, for the gardener is paid to know how to be busy in the garden. If the gardener were to come into the hospital where I work he would not know what to do. We all know how to be busy in our own little world – that is why our world is little. It is made small by our busyness. Dzogchen means if you are less busy your world will be less small. It means if you don't mediate everything through your beliefs, your assumptions, your concepts, your plans, then you have the directness which reveals the infinity of immediate presence.

However, we also have to hear that not everyone may want to do that, for there is some letting go that is required. It is not so much that we are pushing something away or renouncing it but that we have to live with the consequence of what happens when we let go. For example, if I am employed as the national watch carrier of Poland, at any time of day or night I am available carrying the national watch. Somebody says, "*James, what are you doing with your life?*" "*Is it not obvious? I am the national watch carrier of Poland.*" But then my shoulder gets a little bit sore and the doctor says that I have to put the watch down. "*Oh, doctor, my shoulder is better but I don't know who*

I am!" Thus as we put down all the assumptions that we hold onto there is a lot of space in which we can explore our potential. However, it is not nailed down, it is not definite, it is not defined, it is not predictable, and learning to live with freedom can be quite a challenge. It is one thing to say, "*Oh, I want to be more open,*" but if it is open it means there is nowhere to hide. That means we have to really accept and really be at home with ourselves as we are, with all our mistakes, limitations and so on.

If we would like to explore this practice, he says we should stay in a 'peaceful, isolated place'. A peaceful isolated place is a place where you are not disturbed, so you could go and find a nice little house in the forest. However, it is difficult to find such places, and maybe you cannot cut a little hole in your life in order to give yourself a year or two to do that. So maybe we can understand this in a different way. If isolated and peaceful means not disturbed, we need to think about what is the basis of our disturbance? Once when I was travelling on the train in India I was sleeping on the top berth in a three-tiered sleeper carriage. Down below there were five sheikh men playing poker and drinking whisky with a radio on. At two o'clock in the morning I am not sleeping very much and I said, "*Oh, brothers I am trying to sleep,*" and they said, "*Brother, please sleep.*" Why do I assume that the whole world should be peaceful so that I can be at rest? Tibetans also have the saying that it is better to cover your own feet with leather than to try to cover the whole road. So if we wait for the object to give us the conditions whereby we as the subject can become calm, then we are always at the mercy of events. Thus, practising non-reactivity, allowing the world to be the way it is, is the real basis for freedom.

Gonpo Wangyal then goes on to say that in this environment you should 'consider yourself and all sentient beings'. One of the basic propositions of mahayana buddhism is that you cannot become enlightened by yourself, and you cannot become enlightened for yourself. We need the help of others in order to find the way, and the way involves being connected with other people. This is due to the nature of non-duality. Non-duality means that because all the phenomena of the world arise together, without each having its own individual defining essence, there is no true basis for separation of any one so-called object from another so-called object. The separation is only conventional. Therefore, when we are thinking of ourselves, when we are reflecting on ourselves with ourselves, we include all other sentient beings.

All beings want happiness but they act in ways that cause suffering. When we are not full of our own prejudices and assumptions, we can see that the other human beings we meet are not very different from ourselves. By seeing the similarity between ourselves and others, the centre of gravity of our existence moves out from being something inside ourselves to being in the space that lies between. Often in dzogchen texts they talk of being without bias or being without corners, without edges. Thus rather than being centred inside ourselves – in which case there is a threshold or a barrier between us and the world where we can choose to come out or not – we can be centred in the space in-between which allows for a free movement in all directions. In that way we can be for the other and for the self at the same time.

One useful practice you can try as you are walking down the street is to have the focus of your attention in the space in front of you. For example, say someone is walking towards you, instead of feeling that you are 'inside' and you are getting closer to 'that person', experience that both of you

are moving into this space and through it, that self and other are movement in space. The more we have this sense of the outer space, which we all share as we move through, the more we can start to experience the space which is in the centre of the heart. It is the inseparability of the outer and the inner space that reveals embodied existence as the translucent form of the deities in the mandala; there is no personal essence and yet we have a presence, a presence which reveals itself as ourselves.

Generally, we have a materialistic notion of ourselves. At school, if we have studied a bit of science, we may have heard the story of Archimedes. He gets into the bath, displaces water and shouts "Eureka!" for he discovers that the volume of water displaced is the same as the volume of the object displacing the water. From this point of view we are a solid object which takes up space, and the impenetrability of the physical form seems to guarantee its integrity. This is the basis of the political definition of states: *"The borders of our country will be protected by the blood of our sons. You cannot come in here!"* If you keep getting invaded you are not much of a country, so everybody tries to throw the invader out. This is non-penetration based on internal definition. In the same way we say, *"I am me. This territory belongs to me. Keep out!"* It is something to be protected: *"If I don't protect it what will happen to me?"*

However, we go to the cinema to watch movies which influence us, impact us, and change our mood. Something funny goes on in our lives that we don't like and we don't want; we want to be touched and moved but only on our terms. This is the egos game of controlling the border. Everything I let in is called 'me' and everything I keep out is called 'you'. This is very important to see, for as soon as something comes in and becomes 'me' it shows that 'me' is not a sealed object with an internal essence, for how could the 'not me' become 'me'? It is only through a little bit of politics. If you look at a historical atlas of Poland, you can see that the shape of the country changes a lot. It is like someone playing the accordion; each time it gets re-drawn: 'This is Poland'. It is the same for us as people: sometimes we are big and happy and sometimes we are very small – but we are defining it. This is something to be very curious about. What is the process of redefining myself so that I maintain the illusion of a substantial essence to my being? Thus the invitation here is to start to listen to yourself, to observe yourself in the process of presenting yourself to other people and yourself.

Now Gonpo Wangyal says that: *At the moment, we find ourselves having the freedoms and opportunities that support practice.* This means that we live in a situation where we have some opportunity. In the general buddhist view you can be born into many different kinds of situations. We find ourselves in a human body at the moment but it is not the only place we can go. We can be born in an upper-realm where everything is very pleasant and easy or we can be born in a lower-realm where things are very difficult. Neither of these offers a good opportunity for practice. But when we are born as a human being we get a nice balance of pleasure and pain – sometimes we are happy and sometimes we are sad. This gives us the chance to reflect that our situation is not stable. Our moods, our states are arising out of the situation we live in; it is not something in us, in 'I, me, myself'. It feels like 'me' but it is created by 'not me'. This is very important to see for it helps us to see that there is no real boundary between ourselves and the environment.

We are able to arrive here today due to our bodies being reasonably healthy. Our minds are functioning with enough stability so that we are able to sit reasonably quietly and think about what is being taught. There are many people in Warsaw who are not in this situation. There are many people in hospital. There are people who have been drinking alcohol all night and so on. Many people's minds are not clear; many are preoccupied, caught up with the particularity of their situation. This opportunity offers us a chance to reflect on our own history and what brings us in touch with some buddhist ideas, and maybe to be aware that our life could have gone in another direction. For some reason we found ourselves being interested in this. Being interested we can learn about the buddhist view, learn the meditation practices and put effort into practising. But we have to remember that the situation that makes this possible is not stable – there is a fragility to this situation, as to all situations.

Gonpo Wangyal continues this sentence by saying: *so it is vital that we meditate on the impermanence of this life situation*. Impermanence is a most essential idea in Buddhism, for what it points to again and again is that our nature, our experience is dynamic. Dynamic means not fixed but changing. Changing means that you cannot hold onto it, you cannot stabilise it – but you have to be present with it. If you are watching a film, the film is revealed to you by you being there with the film as it changes frame by frame. If you fall asleep in the middle you don't get to see that part. In the same way, the more we experience our own life as being dynamic the more we have the possibility to be present in each moment in its potential, in its freshness. However, when we imagine that, 'basically, today is pretty much like yesterday' then we don't need to look around too much because we already know what we are going to find. This is to live in the realm of assumption in which we rely on the memory or the trace of a previous event rather than on a fresh awareness of what is happening now. These kinds of assumptions, as we looked earlier, are linked with abstraction. For example, we have come into this room after a break and now we know, "Ah, it is this theatre room." Knowing that we don't have to keep examining "Where am I?" for we know we are here in 'this room'. Sometimes a train goes by and the noise of the train comes into the room but when the train has gone somewhere else it is quieter and we are back in the same room. But is it the same room? I can lean far back in my chair so that from this position I am looking at the ceiling. It is quite an interesting ceiling and is not the same as looking at the floor. Now if I sit up and look forward you have all suddenly appeared. This is the lived experience of the room. The room is changing every second. People's bodies are moving, our attention is moving, memories and sensations are arising, and so on. This is not some kind of extra added on, this is the lived actuality, and this is all we have. Thus, focusing on impermanence, staying with the flow of experience allows us to escape from the prison of our assumption that life is a series of 'things'.

He then says, *Developing revulsion for samsara and abiding in the attitude of wanting to benefit sentient beings, allow one's body, speech and mind to be as they are without doing anything artificial*. Samsara means the endless cycle of repeated experience. Although each moment is fresh and open we have many habits of interpretation, and it is the movement inside the habit, which is taken as the true definition of our experience, that constitutes the experience of samsara.

We are in many ways prone to programming because we seek to avoid anxiety. If everything is impermanent, unstable, unreliable and unpredictable then that can make life somewhat uncertain

and insecure. This leads to the development of anxiety, especially if we think, “What will happen to me?” This is a very popular kind of question but a very stupid kind of question, for nobody knows what will happen to them. Thus in order to avoid this kind of anxiety we can think, “I know what will happen to me, I will go to work on Monday morning...” In some houses on each day of the week people eat the same food. They may they have spaghetti bolognese on a Monday and on Tuesday something else. In that way it feels as though you are stabilising your life for you can look ahead and know what will happen. However, this protection from anxiety brings a dulling to our experience, for at every moment our senses are encountering new aspects of the world. For example, just now we can hear some birds singing which is very nice. It means it is springtime and the birds are looking around to make a new life. Is that very important for us? Well it could make us reflect on our existence. We hear a train going by, people are going somewhere. Where are they going? Where are they travelling to? What are they doing with their lives? What am I doing with my life? Everything which occurs can be like a key that can awaken us to the fact that we are not on solid ground. We walk down the street and we see the doors to houses that we cannot enter for they are someone else’s houses. Who are these people? What do they do? “*Oh, they just live there.*” Being a bit stupid makes life easy, but if you really start to look it is very surprising – and being surprised is very helpful for it means not taking things for granted.

Thus, developing revulsion for samsara means to observe the swamp-like quality of the ritualised habits of our own functioning. Essentially it means to start to become curious. Questions are better than answers for the answer is always a little bit deadening but a question is enlivening.

When he says that *we should abide in the attitude of wanting to benefit all sentient beings*, this refers to insects, animals, god-like beings, people in the lower realms, in the hells, and so on – everything that has a mind will have experience. When we feel defined by our experience then we are moved around from situation to situation, and when we see that happening to all these creatures we can feel very sad. How can we benefit other beings? What would have to happen? In order to benefit people we have to find out what is wrong with them. Generally speaking, from the buddhist point of view, it is because we are at the mercy of experience, at the mercy of what happens without understanding the real nature of the experiencer. When we recognise that we are not dead, that we are in the midst of the flow of experience, we start to see that the passing contents of our mind are not stable. Then we can start to tilt back from the fascination in transient objects, which includes our thoughts, feelings, and sensations, and through that start to be aware of the nature of the experiencer itself.

Most creatures cannot do that. This morning as we were leaving the house, the dog was running after us very excited that we were doing something. We closed the gate and within one second the dog was off running after something else. First a car goes along the road and it is very interested in that, and then it is running around the back of the house – the dog is constantly caught up in experiences but tilted out towards them. What is the dog-ness of the dog? This is not a question for a dog for the dog is just sniffing and running and barking. It is us that sees that sometimes a dog is happy and sometimes a dog is sad. It seems reasonable to think that a dog has a mind, but the mind of the dog is not something the dog is curious about. Now if the teachings of the Buddha are correct, the way to attain some awakening or liberation is to understand the nature of your own mind. So even if you really love the dog how are you going to help it? You give it a nice biscuit –

and then its tail wagging. You can say to the dog, *“Wake up! Wake up!”* and it thinks, *“Ah, now we are going for a walk ... more things to sniff ...”* *“No, no, dog wake up! Find out your real nature!”* But the dog is getting interested because it is getting a lot of attention. This is very sad for we have this precious opportunity to learn some meditation, to look at ourselves, but the dog cannot do anything.

Horses are very beautiful, and with your feelings you can get very close to horses, but again it appears from our experience that the horse is always caught up in something happening. You could say that the horse is caught up in the contents of its mind, in the happening-ness of life, but it is not able to be present as the awareness of that happening. This is how we can develop some compassion for other beings. They have what they need, which is to say, they have a mind, but they find themselves in a situation where they are unable to awaken to what they actually have. Thus out of this we can feel, *“Oh, how can I help all these beings?”* In that way we are starting to include all living things in the sphere of our attention. So when we clean our teeth, or walk down the road, or eat our food, we can have full remembrance of all beings. That helps us to break out of the egg of our self-concern and allows our energy to be more linked to what is going on.

Sometimes you see statues of the Buddha and he is sitting very calm and peacefully. Often if you go into a monastery there is a sense of, ‘do not disturb as people are meditating, and it’s a very holy activity’. However, from the point of view of compassion, to be disturbed is very important. That is to say the nature of our mind is still and calm but the experience, the manifestation of existence, which includes ourselves, is always changing. This is why in dzogchen we don’t try to create a particular experience. We are not saying that happiness is better than sadness. If you were happy all the time you would have to be mad, for the world is full of sadness. And if you think, *“Ah, well ‘I am’ happy,”* then essentially you are saying that what happens to others has nothing to do with you. This is not enlightenment. This is a self-enclosed dream. Thus being touched and moved by the experience of others is very important. This is the nature of compassion. However, we also need wisdom at the same time, for wisdom never moves. Thus we have these two aspects: our stillness, which is unchanging, and our movement which is always in interaction.

Gonpo Wangyal then says to *allow one’s body, speech and mind to be as they are without doing anything artificial*. If your body wants to move you can move it. If your voice says something, which here includes all the changes in your breath, you can change that – and all sorts of experiences are arising in the mind. However, he is saying don’t do anything artificial. If you think about your body what is the most natural posture for your body? We can move around into different postures, for sometimes our body wants to be in one position and sometimes another. What does it mean to not do anything artificial with our body? It is a very interesting question, for we often have quite a lot of restrictions on what we can do with our body. For example, when I was I first in India studying with some lamas I was told that you should never sit with your feet out pointing at someone, for it is very insulting to show someone the soles of your feet because the top of your head is holy but the soles of your feet are dirty and bad. Clearly, that is a very artificial cultural interpretation. But for the people who believe it, it seems completely natural as everyone knows that the feet are dirty. This is not true but if you take it to be true then you live inside a particular reading. When we sit up straight our skeleton is carrying our weight and so the muscles can relax and our breathing is easier. In that way you feel a bit more alive, a bit more present, and then you

find yourself slumping again so that you then put pressure on the lungs and so you get a little more tired. Which is better, and better for what? It is not right in itself but is always situational. Some people would say, *“Well, it is very important to have a good posture. It is part of our dignity as a human being.”* But why do you want to have dignity? We could just be lazy and self-indulgent. These are choices and each has its own validity in certain circumstances.

What is useful here is to start to remember all the messages we got as a child about how to behave. When I was a child it was very important not to put your elbows on the table when you were eating, and not to make a noise on the plate as you put the knife and fork down. Why? Because it was better not to annoy my father. This whole cultural construction was based on the fact that he did not like that kind of noise and so it became the rule in the house. I then thought, *“Oh, it must be the rule of the world.”* Then I would visit other people’s houses and they would be clanging things and slurping their soup. Through this we can see that the rules of my family are only the rules of my family, and that they don’t really apply anywhere else – it is only a convention. In this way we can start to see the conventions of our bodies in terms of how we ‘should’ look, the conventions of our voice, and the conventions of our mind.

For example, you might believe that it is bad to have negative thoughts. You might develop a thought: *“I hate my boss.”* If you are a buddhist you might then think, *“Oh, I am a buddhist I mustn’t hate people. Really I should love my boss.”* That is to do something artificial. If you hate your boss you hate your boss. Does it matter? It matters only if you start to take poison into work. *“But it is not good to have thoughts like that!”* It is not good for what? *“I don’t like it.”* That is more interesting: ‘I don’t want to be the kind of person who has these thoughts. I want to be in charge of the kind of thoughts I have because I want to define who I am, and if I know that I am a good person with pure thoughts then I can trust myself’. This says that the ego is the centre of the world – but as soon as the ego takes up this position it is under attack. For example, my ego says, *“I am going to learn some yoga or Alexander technique. I know that there is a string coming out of the top of my head and it is pulling me up so my spine is straight,”* but there are other people living inside me, little lazy James, that says, *“Why bother...”* This is a game that never ends: *“This is how I should be but, Ah! I am not how I should be!”* I think you have probably heard the saying, ‘the road to hell is paved with good intentions’.

This is why Gonpo Wangyal is saying not to do anything artificial, for if you set up an artificial agenda for yourself it will keep you very busy looking at the patterns of manifestation, endlessly adjusting your experience in order to create the image of yourself that you would like to be – which leaves no time nor space to see who is the one having the experience. Therefore, it is much more important for us to start to observe ourselves without judging or trying to correct. Just observe how your condition changes according to circumstances.

For example, with speech, we will find it easier to speak to some people than to others. But we might think, *“Oh, all beings have been my mother in a past life therefore I should practise speaking to these people.”* We can do something artificial by trying to think of something to say but this is not something we can hide. We are actually, through our body, more at ease with some people than with others. So we can be curious about this. How does this occur? What are the factors that lead to a relaxed openness or a sense of withdrawal. For meditation this is very important for it lets us

see that life is an interactive process which is going on all the time, and that it's not created out of our ego intention. This is something you can explore in all sorts of situations.

Thus the best way to not be artificial is to let life happen, not to pretend, not to try to be a nice person – but also not to be intentionally a bad person. Moreover, by staying fully connected with the environment we will find how we are going to be in each situation.

Gonpo Wangyal then goes on to say, *The entire outer container consisting of the earth, stones, mountains, rocks and so on, and its inhabitants, all sentient beings, are only names and definitions put by your mind.* When we look around this room we see different people and the kind of clothes they are wearing. We see the shapes of the ceiling and the floor and so on. We have the sense that these phenomena exist 'out there'. However, as we were looking earlier, we need to check this out to see if it is really the case.

For example, I am wearing a blue shirt with white stripes. Really? I said it was a blue shirt with white stripes – but you would say something else. For me it is blue but if you are speaking Polish you don't say 'blue'. When we live in the world of language it is as if the words we use speak the truth, but language is an artificial constructive system. It is the name that carries the association; some-thing is here and we can put many different words onto it. If this was *really* blue everyone in the world would have to say blue. We take it for granted that by describing something it comes into true existence, and in that way the essence of some-thing appears to be in the object.

For example, when we look at this glass that is here on the table, the glass-ness of the glass seems to be in the glass. We say, 'this is a glass' but this is a concept, a word that we learnt when we were small. Each of us has seen many different kinds of glass in our lives, and we have used the word 'glass' many, many times. Thus we come to think [James taps the glass] 'this is the glass', but the glass-ness of the glass is in our head not in the glass. We are telling the glass it is a glass – the glass is not telling us anything. It is the mind which describes, the mind which names. The world is not made out of self-existing objects which are 'out there'. Rather, these objects which *appear* to be out there are constituted in a relationship; by the interaction of 'subject' and 'object', the experience of the glass, as existing-in-itself, arises. We are the co-creator of the glass. All day long from the moment we wake up until when we go to sleep at night we are making the world, for the world is an interpretation. You can go to the newspaper stall and buy six different Polish newspapers, read about the same event and get six different descriptions. The world is obviously interpretation. We are interpreting all the time. There is, however, a forgetfulness of our part in the creation of the world when we imagine that the glass is just sitting here all by itself as 'a glass'.

Understanding this means awakening to the fact that you are an active agent of your own experience moment-by-moment. The world is participative. It is revealed to us through the way we participate. If we participate in the sleep of our assumptions then it appears to us that we are a 'thing' in a world of 'things'. But if, as you participate moment-by-moment, you are attentive to the movement of your own mind – which is constantly interpreting, adding value, developing emotional responses to whatever is arising – then you start to experience that without the movement of our mind there is nothing there. That is quite something to see, that by the movement of my mind and *how* my mind is moving, the world comes into being in its particular formations.

For example, if you are vegetarian you will have a different relationship to a butcher's shop than if you were a meat eater. The vegetarian starts to think, "*Oh this raw meat is horrible,*" but someone else says, "*Oh, I want to have the liver.*" The butcher picks up the big piece of liver and the blood is dripping off it, and the meat eater is thinking, "*Oh, I must buy some onions to go with it,*" and the vegetarian is thinking, "*How can you eat this!*" Thus, if you walk around the world and you look you can see people making choices all the time according to the topology, the geography of their mind.

It is very useful to start observing for ourselves what kinds of naming we put onto the objects of the world, and in particular, what are the hooks that bring up certain kinds of naming? The more we start to examine our experience in this way we will find that there is nothing which exists 'out there', and nothing 'inside ourselves' which is not created by our own interpretation. Now, you might say, "*But look, this wall here is not created by my mind. That is ridiculous. The wall is there.*" What is there? "*The wall.*" If we don't call it a wall what is there? It is a white surface. If we don't call it white it is just a surface. If we don't call it a surface what is it? Something. What is something? Is it some 'thing'? As you look at it, it changes, for your mind moves in different directions, different ideas arise. That is to say, the world is revealed to us as the interplay of the movement of the mind and the arising of appearance. We have no way of accessing the object except through the mind. Thus the world is experience.

He then continues: *Examine this until it is truly clear.* This is not some abstract, theoretical idea but it is a practice whereby we can start to see how we fall asleep into language and concepts. If we stay awake, if we stay more present, we can be there at the moment of this interplay or interaction between the phenomenological field and our own awareness. In that way we can see that we tell stories, that the world is made out of stories. The world is a mental event, an experiential event revealed through the clarity of our awareness.

Whenever you find yourself making strong statements, having a definite knowledge about something, be aware of the process whereby the thought or speaking is arising. We construct the world in which we live. It is not a revelation coming to us but it is revealed through our participation. If you go to the south of Poland you can go to the Tatra mountains. You could sit outside in a cafe having a coffee and you could look at the mountains and think, "Ooh I have seen the mountains." But the mountains will show themselves once your feet start climbing, for each step you take reveals the mountain in a new way. When the path is steep you tend to look where your feet are going and you see mainly stones. Then when you get to the top of that part, suddenly you are in an open valley and you see flowers. Only by your own feet being there do you have this experience. If you look at a photo of the mountains it is a very different sort of experience. In this way, being aware of very ordinary experiences we can see the unfolding of the subject and the object together.

For example, if you want to buy some bananas, you go into the shop and, "Ah, there are the bananas." You go and look closer and we may think, "Oh, not so good. This banana does not meet my expectations." Some people like quite ripe bananas even when it is a bit black inside, and others like them when they are a bit firmer perhaps even a little green on the outside. That is to say, we each have a relationship with the banana. Although all these things are called bananas

some of these bananas are not 'your' bananas. It is the same with apples – there are many kinds of apples I would not like to eat. This is the dynamic unfolding of the mind in relation to the field. It is always changing and it is not completely open. The ground or the sphere of awareness itself is always open, but manifestation, how I am and how the world appears, is always unique and specific for each person.

We are not standard issue from a factory. We don't have to become a monk or a nun, shave our head and wear robes, for awakening is not to do with trying to turn yourself into some standard issue phenomena. Rather, examine the process and be present in the moment that you make these exquisitely unique choices. Through that you will come to see that what is arising 'in you' and what is arising 'outside you' are two parts of the same process. The illusion is that 'I am in here looking out at a world that I am always separate from,' but what appears to be 'inside' and what appears to be 'outside' are intimately connected, they are co-emergent. This is the dynamic unfolding of the flow of experience in which experience sometimes looks like an object and sometimes seems like a subject.

This is something that we can start to experience by ourselves by attending to it in a precise way. For example, if you go into a coffee shop and order a cappuccino you are causing the person to do something with the machine to bring you the cappuccino. This interchange is not just happening across time, but the words, 'I would like a cappuccino' arise because you have gone into the cafe. The fact of their being a cafe where you could have a cappuccino is meeting together with your desire to have a cappuccino. When we see the openness of the world we are more in touch with all the possibilities of the situation. We can start to see how we make choices and that if we say yes to one thing we are simultaneously saying no to many other things. There is no natural thing we should always say yes to, for our experience is situational, it is contingent. We find ourselves saying things; it is not often that we clearly know in advance what we are going to do. This is not a sign that we are somehow lost or wandering around without a clue in our head. Rather, it is the actuality of experience that we emerge, we arise, and the story that we tell ourselves about what is happening comes after the fact of the arising.

[\[Transcriber's note\]](#)

At the start of audio file 4, a section of teaching is not recorded relating to the part of text I have pasted in here:

Regarding your mind, you must again and again establish whether it has any form, colour or size, and whether it comes from anywhere, stays anywhere or goes to anywhere. When, due to relying on reificatory identification, you think that you have found some real essence, then search outside and inside, examine your own body from head to toe until you are sure that nothing can be found.

(the following transcript arises after James introduced a meditation practice after commenting on this part of the text):

[...] so again and again you can return to this kind of enquiry. This kind of practice is very different from a tantric ritual practice where you are repeating particular lines of a text again and again, for you can do that with more or less distraction. In this practice we have to bring our minds very precisely onto this point because it is very subtle. For example, ordinarily, we easily get caught up

particular formations, like anger. It can be quite simple to start to recognise when we are getting angry, for we can see the impact of the anger on the quality of our thoughts and breathing and so on. But to recognise that we are thinking is more difficult because usually we are going from one thought to another thought to another. Thus, in a sense, the recognition of thinking has to take place from a place of not thinking. This is the work again and again. Every time you find yourself being drawn into a thought, without pushing it away, without merging into it, stay present with it and in that way you can start to feel the movement of the thought.

Who is the one who can be aware of the thought? What we call the ego is a patterning of thoughts and feelings. It has no true essence itself. This is why it can keep reinventing itself. 'I' is an empty signifier and so it can be filled up with any kind of content you like. Ordinarily, what we are aware of when we talk of 'I' is what we are filling it up with: 'I am tired', 'I am hungry', 'I want to go for a walk' and so on. We couldn't fill it up if it was already filled. We can apply many words and descriptions around the signifier 'I' but ordinarily we understand this as, "Oh, 'I am able to do so many different things.'" But I am only able to do these many things because I am not any particular fixed identity. That is to say, 'I' is the space of becoming. We are very used to becoming many different things, and the practice is to slightly tilt the focus of our attention away from being caught up in what we are identifying with, into the fact that the manifesting of this new becoming, which we are experiencing ourselves being, is only possible because the 'I' is empty.

Thus Gonpo Wangyal says: *Again and again establish clearly that there is only emptiness devoid of inherent self-nature.* This suggests that when you read in the buddhist texts that the self is empty, it is not something mystical. The usefulness of the glass is its emptiness. It is the emptiness of the glass that can say, 'hello' to apple juice, orange juice, water, tea, or whatever. Similarly, in the one glass of the mind you can put anything. This brings us to the traditional example of the mirror. The mirror is also empty; there is no mirror-ness in the mirror. You cannot establish what the mirror really looks like because every time you look in the mirror you see a reflection. The reflection is a quality of the mirror but it is not the mirror itself. The reflection that appears in the mirror is empty for you cannot find nor grasp it. Sometimes dogs bark at their own reflection in a mirror because they are startled by something, but there is nothing there to get. In the same way the thoughts which arise in our mind are not something that we can grasp, they are like a rainbow, a mirage, or a reflection of the moon on water. However, the fact that something has no substance to it doesn't mean it doesn't have an impact. The impact is derived, as we were looking earlier, between the relationship of the habitual processes of our mind and the forms of what are arising.

For example, if you go to the cinema there is a blank screen and onto that many different films can be projected. When you are watching the film something really seems to be happening but at the end of the film they switch off the projector and there is just a white screen. The white screen does not get marked or scratched by the film. There were patterns of light without any substance and yet these patterns invoke in us the sensation that something is really happening, and so we get taken in by the film. If we can recognise that it is just a film then we can start to see what kind of film it is. If a film critic is going to see a new film and they have to write something in the newspaper about it, they need to look at the film from many different points of view. In the same way we can bring different qualities of gaze to our engagement with what appears for us, both externally and internally. When you stop believing in the film you can see more clearly how it is

made. In the same way when you sit in meditation, as you gradually believe in your own thoughts less, you can start to see how thoughts operate to create the illusion that something is there. Then you start to have the possibility of being quite calm so that the thoughts arise and pass, or you can go into the arising thought and move with it and start talking to someone about something. This would be goal of the practice, the union of wisdom and compassion, for to allow the thought to just arise and pass without leaving any trace is the aspect of wisdom, and to work with the thought, to move with it, linking out with other beings is the aspect of compassion. In that way, when we are moving in the world, talking with people, being engaged in many different things, the thoughts that reveal themselves are kept integrated in the state of the mirror.

For example, if someone were to ask me the time, I would say, "It's quarter-past four." We look at our watch and just say it. It is very easy to fall into saying something like that for it feels meaningful. There are very strong hooks for us to believe that 'it is quarter-past four'. However, 'it is quarter-past four' is revealed through the relationship of 'subject' and 'object': my arm rises, I look at the watch, I see it is quarter-past four, and then I look at the other person and say, "It is quarter-past four," and perhaps then a thought arises in their mind, "Oh, it is quarter past four, I have to...!" Thus what we have here is a transaction – but nothing has really been established. The point here is to experience our body, speech, and mind, all of our mental experience, moving through space and time, for it is this movement which reveals the illusory nature even when we seem to establish something semantic. This is why Gonpo Wangyal says, *'there is only emptiness devoid of inherent-self-nature'*.

Another traditional example is the sky. The sky is open and empty having no substance of its own. We can look into the sky and see a rainbow, which has an appearance but no substance. We see this appearance as different from the sky for the sky looks blue and the rainbow has its colours, but you cannot take the rainbow out of the sky. In the same way you cannot take thoughts, feelings and sensations out of the mind. These are experiences which are revealed in the very moment of their passing through the space of the mind. The empty mind is the host or the setting for all the empty appearances. However, it is important to see that empty here does not mean nothing at all, for something is appearing but the nature of this appearance is empty.

For example, say you are sat talking with a good friend about all sorts of things, and then you get into an area that feels very difficult and you end up very annoyed and leaving the table saying, "I am tired of speaking to someone as stupid as you!" You then look around the cafe and see a nice-looking person and go over to them and say, "Hello, I need to talk to you," and you continue your conversation. You then notice them retreating slightly for they are thinking you are mad. This is because we don't have permission to have a sudden intimate conversation with a stranger. In this way we can see how resonance and patterning is part of the quality of manifestation. That is to say, our own range of manifestation is revealed contextually according to the possibilities of a fit. Therefore, when we say that everything is an illusion it does not mean you can just chop it up in pieces and move it around, for the illusory forms of this world arise according to causes and conditions. Illusion is the middle way – it doesn't mean nothing at all and it doesn't mean strongly real.

Gonpo Wangyal then goes on to say: *Regarding this emptiness devoid of inherent self-nature, many different thoughts about the existence or non-existence of entities arise, yet these distinguishing concepts*

themselves are inherently free of the duality of the subject who identify and objects which are identified. Again this could sound like some abstract philosophy, but it is not that. It is very practical.

In our mind many thoughts are coming up: discriminations of 'I like', 'I don't like', 'I believe', 'I don't believe' and so on. For example, when the Americans claimed they killed Asama Bin Laden some people didn't believe that, just as some people don't believe that Elvis Presley is dead. This is what it means when it says, *'the existence or non-existence of entities'*. 'Elvis Presley is alive' and 'Elvis Presley is dead' are two sentences. Grammatically they are quite correct so why would you choose one over the other. "Elvis Presley is alive and living in Pakistan and having a homosexual relationship with Asama Bin Laden." This is the story the CIA don't want you to know – the human mind can invent any kind of nonsense and as long as it is grammatical it seems to make sense. This is like a kind of glue, for something is said and we think, "Ooh, maybe!" – because we want to believe. Our world is based on belief, which in buddhism is called attachment. We invest streams of ideas with a real significance. We think that if somebody says it, it must be true.

What Gonpo Wangyal is saying here is that when you see how you think about the world, using many different thoughts and ideas – all of which distinguish different kinds of phenomena and attribute qualities such as good, bad, strong, weak, and so on – all of these are merely empty flows, devoid of any capacity to create a real substance. We can make anything real and important. For example I might say, "I like goat's cheese." This is an understandable sentence. But goat's cheese is existing in relation to a mind, and the statement 'I like' is also arising in relation to the one who makes the statement. The 'goat's cheese' exists as an experience, and the 'I like' exists as an experience. Although one experience maybe called 'the object side' and the other 'the subject side', there is no true difference between them. In many meditation texts it says not to strongly hold the subject 'here' and the object 'there' for subject and object arise together – both are experiences. But who is the experiencer of these experiences? The ordinary answer to this is to say, "I am," but when we say, "I am," this privileges the subject side experience and makes it out to actually be the experiencer. This is what he is inviting us to examine. He is saying that these distinguishing concepts, these thoughts and so on, which separate out the meaning and value of other phenomena, are themselves devoid of the capacity to be able to create a 'real subject' who knows something about a 'real object'.

From the buddhist point of view this is a misunderstanding of the nature of the mirror, the nature of the mind. The empty signifier, 'I am' is not somebody somewhere else – it is the very centre of your own being. We exist, we are alive, we are present, and when we try to describe ourselves it is never quite accurate. If we say, "I am hungry," we know that this is just a temporary condition. Everything that we say about ourselves is only slightly true. All we can really say is 'I am' but I cannot say anything to define what I am. This is the emptiness of awareness or *rigpa*; our presence is undeniable but it doesn't exist as a definable essence. It is not a substance. Thus what he is saying is that the ground itself, the openness of being, and even the thoughts which manifest from it are devoid of duality.

He then goes on to say, *Therefore, without awaiting future thoughts or going after past ones, abide with the natural flow free of interference.* For example, if we are to have a dance performance here with a prima ballerina, we would need to have someone keeping the spotlight on the dancer. It helps if that person has seen the rehearsal for they have to track where the dancer is going. In the

same way, in meditation we are often tracking thoughts, moving after them. If the thought seems to go one way we seem to turn, and then the thought seems to be going another way and so we turn. In that way we are moving from one side to the other. This is not a good way to do meditation, for the mind itself is not a thing, it is like space. Whatever is moving through the space is not the mind. So when you find yourself tracking thoughts, you have merged into a thought that is tracking other thoughts, for the mind itself does not move. This is what is meant when it says 'not to await future thoughts', leaning forward with expectancy, and to 'not go after past thoughts', trying to hold onto them or make sense of them.

The mind is empty from the very beginning. It is complete from the very beginning. It is alone but not lonely. Thoughts are lonely for thoughts need friends. 'It is ... ' by itself is not enough; 'it is' needs a friend – "It is good." This is how the mind functions, and this is why, when you are in the realm of thoughts, you do not get any peace because thoughts are always looking for their completion in another thought. However, the mind itself is not needing anything to fill it. It is empty and it will always be empty. The mirror does not need the reflection but the reflection needs the mirror.

When we do this practice, relaxing into the out breath and then not waiting for future thoughts nor going after past thoughts, we allow the immediate freshness of whatever is coming. One of the experiences that can arise from this aspect of practice is that you become more aware of the discontinuous nature of your own mental experience. We experience that it is not clear, logical, and intentionally progressive. This again is a sign that if you want to have clarity, the clarity comes from the integration of the manifestation and the ground. It does not come from tidying up the patterning of the manifestation.

Gonpo Wangyal then goes on to say: *Thus the awareness of the one who understands, thinks or perceives is the arising of the natural expression of awareness itself. It is vital to always abide in that state.* It is not saying that the mirror is good and the reflection is bad, that the open state is better than the various forms of arising that occur, for the sun and the rays that come from the sun are the same. That is to say, feelings, sensations, all the qualitative aspects of our experience, are inseparable from this open awareness itself. However, when difficult feelings arise, perhaps jealousy, pride, anger, or so on, it is familiar for us to feel that we don't like that sort of thought, that it's not a good thought and we need to get rid of it. It is as though our mind is a beautiful garden but we have terrible neighbours who keep throwing their rubbish into it. All this rubbish keeps arriving and we feel that we don't want it and need to get rid of it. In that way we say, "It's not me" and then we have to be busy for a very long time struggling to get rid of what we don't want. From the point of view of meditation this is a problem of identification and appropriation. We believe that the contents of our mind define who we are; that if we have horrible thoughts in our mind it is a sign that we are horrible people. Thus we have to stop the horrible thought in order to become the good person that we want to become. But where do the thoughts come from? They don't come from elsewhere, and they don't come out of 'me' as if I am some kind of personal thought production factory.

This is why meditation practice is very important for it provides the basis for directly experiencing ourselves as infinite space. If something is infinite it has no boundary. If it has no boundary there is nothing outside of it. If there is nothing outside of it nothing can come into it from anywhere

else. As we experienced in the practice we did earlier, your own mind when you look for it, when you try to define it, put it into some shape, colour or place, slips through your fingers like sand. You cannot catch it and yet it is always there. When experience arises it is the radiance of the mind itself. This is its infinite nature. On top of that experience you can run any kind of story you like. For example, we are sitting here and a train goes by. The train comes into our sphere of experience and goes out of our sphere of experience. On top of that we can say, "The train has gone to Poznan." Where is Poznan? Is it outside my mind or inside my mind? If it is outside of my mind it is not particularly relevant – it is just a word. If it becomes 'real', if I go to Poznan and walk down the street, my body is in Poznan but Poznan is in my mind, for my experience is the house I may be in, the car, the bus going by, people talking and so on. So where is the objective existence of Poznan? We can know things about Poznan. Some of you may know people who live in Poznan and if you get anxious that Poznan is turning into an illusion you can phone them. That is to say, the proof of Poznan is in me being provided with concepts that I can believe in. Who is having these concepts? We say, "I am having the concept." But does that make Poznan real? Two levels are happening here. One is the immediacy of experience, and the other is the level of abstract rationalisation which creates the sense of a real entity with an inherent essence.

Everything that exists is our experience. Experience has its qualities through the five elements of hardness, hotness, motility and so on, but the essential point is that all of these experiences arise in, through, as and from the mind. The experience doesn't go out of the mind and the experience doesn't come into the mind. Again, if we take the example of a mirror, imagining that I have in my hand a mirror that I rotate in front of you, as it moves around you will see faces coming into the mirror and going out of the mirror. The reflection doesn't come into the mirror from outside – it doesn't require any postman to deliver it – and when the mirror goes by, the reflection doesn't come out of the mirror. That is to say, the reflection is an aspect of the potentiality of the mirror. In the same way our thoughts don't come into our mind and they don't go out of our mind and they don't go up or down in our mind. The mind in having no shape doesn't move in the direction of this side or that side. That is why going back to these questions is an essential part of dzogchen practice. It is not about believing a dogma. It is not about developing a belief. It is about looking again and again until you get the direct experience of your own nature.

Nobody can do this for you and nobody is stopping you doing this except yourself. The obstacles and difficulties that lie on the way are uniquely yours. That is why the first instruction or encouragement is to observe yourself, to get to know yourself. Through that you come to see the patterns where you get trapped. You see the things that you like and don't like and gradually you can start to collaborate with your own condition to maintain the openness in the presence of the factors which normally close you. The key point here is to see that the thoughts, feelings, and sensations that arise are your own experience and therefore you can be present with them. But they don't define you and they don't establish who you are. That is very important to see for as long as you are frightened about the quality of the thoughts that come in your mind, you will be trapped in the habit of anxious control. Moreover, there is something paradoxical here, for the more tolerant and welcoming you are to the content of your own mind, the more attuned your behaviour will become. This is because the more space that is given to each experience, no matter how intense it is, it will gradually settle down and you will experience the self-liberation of what is arising. But as long as you are trying to manage the contents of your mind, the reactivity that you

have towards what you take to be negative thoughts and so on, functions as an energising process for them. It is like when small children of six or seven come home from school and they say a word that you really don't want them to say. If you make an issue of it then they are quite likely to say it again because they realise they now have some power: "*Just wait until grandmother comes and then I will say it.*" But if you don't react in a big way then it just passes by. In that way you are not providing any energetic hook for the desire to establish some power in the world. It is the same with the thoughts and feelings in your head. We may have a feeling and we think. "*Oh, I hate being like this,*" but that energy is being pressed into the thought, it is condensing it and then it will have more power.

What Gonpo Wangyal is saying here is very important. It is a linked sequence of construction which firstly invites us to see the impermanence of all that we experience. Secondly, it invites us to keep looking at the one who has the experience, until we see that the experiencer has no definable qualities. Thirdly, we are invited to rest in that natural open state, a state without any limit, so that whatever arises, because it is arising in the infinity of our mind, we know to be the display or the radiance of our own mind. Although we can say that each of us is the centre of the world or has the ground out of which our own world arises, it doesn't mean that it is created as if you are an interior designer where you know exactly what sort of carpet you are going to have in your house. It is about working with what arises. What arises is your experience. You can try to deny or change it but it is what it is. It is not being supplied according to 'your' order but it is your share. The instruction is to just stay open to that, and so he says, it is vital to always abide in that state, the state of hospitality.

He then continues: *Whatever feelings come, be they happy or troublesome, they are the arising of the natural expression of awareness.* In terms of being ourselves we probably don't want to be sad and would prefer to be happy. The preference of happiness over sadness is just another thought. What we call 'good' or 'happy' feelings and what we call 'bad' or 'unhappy' feelings of sadness, loneliness, depression, and so on are all the arising of the energy of the natural state. When we see a thangka of Padmasambhava he doesn't look like he needs to come for psychotherapy. He looks like he is doing ok, basically a happy-go-lucky kind of a guy. Is he ever sad? That is a good question. A statue is not how things are – a statue is a statue. If you have a statue like that in your house and you light a little lamp it can make you feel good. You can feel it brings a kind of spiritual uplifting quality to your house. But imagine if the figure was slumped, that there was a discovery of a secret terma teaching of the ninth manifestation of Padmasambhava appearing as a severely depressed psychiatric patient. You would have to visual him as not washed for a month, as curled up in a ball making groaning sounds. I don't think we have this practice yet and I don't imagine it will be very popular. The point here is that you have to understand the function of this kind of ritual practice. It is a transitional practice in order to give the confidence to integrate in this state of emptiness. Padmasambhava is saying, "*Don't worry I have been to the other side it is wonderful, come on!*" Thus these figures are designed to inspire a whole confidence. This is very important if the centre of your practice is devotion for devotion is an orientation which allows you to increase your energy and to transcend your limits. Thus if you do a ritual practice, a puja, what you are doing is transforming your energy, and your energetic relation with the environment. But your own mind is what it is. Thus if you stand as the judge of yourself, liking this and not liking that, then the experience of non-duality will go far away.

Non-duality is to see that, whether you are happy or sad, these are empty illusory experiences like a rainbow. One of the central points of the practice is to develop equanimity. You can take equanimity to be that your state will be the same all the time but this is not what it means. It means that when you are happy let happiness be there; your face smiles, your body feels lighter and you feel more able to be in contact with others. Then when you feel sad you can just be sad. Maybe you want to avoid people or try to get some comfort from people – but you can just be sad. Whether you are happy or sad doesn't make much difference. This is not because you are holding yourself in some separated, observing position where you are just being mindful of what is arising, for then you have a split off subject and object. It is because you rest in the infinite openness of the mind, which like the mirror shows whatever is there without being affected.

This is a very important point for it means that the mirror is never affected but the reflection is always affected, unless it is being artificial. Thus as he says at the beginning, "Don't be artificial with your body, speech and mind." This means that it is ok to be depressed. What is wrong with depression is the interpretation that we have of it for we think, "*I don't want to be like this. I want to be in a better way.*" In that way we are trying to create ourselves in the image we have created. This is not the practice of dzogchen. All the texts say that whatever comes, comes, and whatever goes, goes. Sometimes we get sick and then we are just sick; we don't feel well and maybe we feel confused. In life many hopes that we have don't get fulfilled and we feel sad. We might feel lost and unloved. However, everything which arises is impermanent. A feeling is arising and this feeling is looking for a seat. You can budge up the bench a little and let the feeling sit there and after a while it will go. That is a fact. Everything is impermanent. It is our own intolerance of our own state which makes us angry with ourselves for being sad, depressed and so on. In this way the dharmadhatu is itself infinite hospitality. This is the realm in which awareness, this space, is unimpeded, just as the name of one of the great dzogchen texts suggests in its title, Gongpa Zangthal, meaning immediate, unimpeded presence in all directions. In that state there is no possibility of definition or contamination with the thought.

The mirror is smooth and the reflection is sticky thus when the mind is open and relaxed everything is flowing. Even if very dull and heavy thoughts arise they are simply passing through this space, but when you get caught up in a thought, when you start to feel 'this is happening to me and I don't like it' this is a sign that you have already fallen into the thought. As long as you are existing as a complex of thoughts you will be as sticky as if you are covered in jam. When that happens don't try to push it away, don't struggle with it, otherwise you will be like a fly in a spider's web. Rather just very delicately be present with the experience. We are the experiencer of the experience. The experience is very close to us but it doesn't touch us. Then the experience will go and the experiencer will remain. But if you become anxious and you try to push the experience away you lose the open ground of the experiencer and become just another kind of experience. How is this possible? Why do we get lost in meditation? This is because the one who gets lost is the energy of the state which never gets lost. No bad thing is coming in from outside, nobody is doing this to you. It is the radiance of the open ground or existence, which is the source or the mover of everything.

There is a dzogchen text called Kunje Gyalpo which means the King which does everything. The King does everything in the kingdom without getting up from his seat. He says, "*We will cut down*

this forest” but he doesn’t then take off his crown and his robes, roll up his sleeves and get an axe. ‘We will cut down these trees’ means that ‘you guys’ will do it. The symbolism of this in tantra is that in the centre of the mandala is the deity. Around the central figure or figures there are many activities going on: dakinis, messengers and so on are going out and doing things. However the central figure is not active but is the ground of all activity. In the same way, the mirror doesn’t move but if you put it on the wall of a house everything that goes by will be reflected in it.

The emptiness of the mind is sometimes called *kadag* which means pure from the very beginning. This open, fresh, nakedness is the basis for all that occurs and it can never be contaminated. What arises is no other than this ground itself and so it does not have to be constructed. In Tibetan this is called *Lhundrub* which means easily made, effortlessly arising, or spontaneously showing. The purity and this spontaneous expression are not two different things. Thus, whenever something is arising in our mind and we become confused, captured by it, don’t be afraid, don’t be upset, stay relaxed and easy, present on the point of the arising, not falling into it, not trying to escape from it – and in this way we experience the self-liberation of the phenomena for they are in fact the purity of the natural expression of the ground. By not reacting to whatever is arising, these arising will reveal themselves to be the natural expression of the hospitality you are offering to them.

Then he says, *Without the least effort or artificiality, whatever experiences arise will be liberated in the non-duality of our familiar intellect, conceptualisation, our mind engaged with objects and the original knowing of awareness. It is vital to experientially know that this awareness itself is the first and foremost.* ‘Without the least effort or artificiality’ means it is nothing to do with your ego intention. We are not going exploring trying to find a gold mine, and we are trying not to create anything – samsara is a creation. If you didn’t have buddha nature from the very beginning you couldn’t buy it or steal it from some place. What you are looking for you already have. If you keep looking for it when you have it, you lose it. When I was a child my mother made friends with a blackbird, and every day she would put a little cheese out on the wall and it would hop along and look at her and they would talk to each other a little and then the blackbird would go away. Then after some time she would have the cheese in her hand and the black bird would sit on one finger and eat the cheese. The basis of doing that is not being busy. You have to be very still for them to start to feel at home because birds are very frightened and are always looking out for danger. This is how to do the practice. Buddha nature is there but it has been ignored for a very long time so it likes to hide. But if you are very quiet and you don’t move about too much one day your buddha nature is going to hop onto your shoulder and sing you a little song.

Thus in this state, relaxed, calm, and open, he says that whatever experiences arise will be liberated in the non-duality of various aspects of ourselves. He lists these aspects as: ‘*our familiar intellect*’, which means our ordinary intelligence; ‘*our conceptualisation*’, which means all the business of our mind; ‘*our mind engaged with objects*’, which means all the thoughts that you can have, all the hopes and fears, all the activities you can generate; ‘*the original knowing of awareness*’, which means the quality of the mind, which from the very beginning has revealed what is there. This is not a knowledge of some-thing but it is an on-going experience of knowing, a freshness of the registering of experience. Thus he is saying here that the aspects of ourselves that seem very limited, very dull, built on concepts, closed in on themselves, and the aspects of ourselves that are open and fresh, the primordial purity, exist as non-duality, are not two different things – the

mirror and the reflection come together. The non-duality of the mirror and the reflection is the same as the non-duality of awareness and conceptualisation.

Therefore there are no real vows in dzogchen but the basic principle is not to hate yourself. Don't attack or criticise yourself, rather be present with the experience of all that is arising as it arises. If you do this then without making any effort to purify or improve or refine you will find that there is no limitation in what you previously thought to be a limitation.

He then says *that it is vital to experientially know that this awareness itself is the first and foremost*. That is to say, nothing in the whole universe occurs without the presence of this open state. It is the source of everything, the experiential field in which everything is revealed, and the final destination of everything, which relates back to the title of the text: A Pointing out of The Nature of The Mother. The natural purity of your own mind is the mother of the self-liberation of all phenomena. It is itself the mother for it gives birth to everything; the birth of all phenomena occurs within the womb of the mother. That is to say the mind itself is infinite thus nothing comes from outside of it. It's not that these buddhas come out of the Mother's body and then they cut the cord and go off as Buddha One, Buddha Two, Buddha Three as so on. All buddhas remain inside the womb of the mother. That is to say emptiness itself is the sphere of operation of all phenomena. However, Gonpo Wangyal says that you have to know this experientially. Words are not enough. There are many many words you could speak on this commentary and we could teach on this for two or three months, but even if you had millions of words it would not bring you to the point, for only you yourself can go to the point. You don't need to go into a special place to do that because the point where we recognise this is being present with experience as it arises.

For example, when you are practising on your own and you are sitting for a while and then you have to get up. How do you get up? Do you get up with your mind in your body, falling into your thoughts: *"Oh, now I have to get up and get ready for work"*? This is a good way to lose the meditation. You are sat relaxed and open, thoughts are coming and going, then the thought comes, *"It's time to go to work."* This thought is extended out into the dimension of expression, which is the body, and so we get up and the experience of the body getting up and the experience of the room that we are getting up in remain integrated in the spacious awareness. So you might go into the kitchen and put on some water to heat and then go to pack your bag, and each step of the way there will be many dangers and temptations because you can collapse into the thought, *"Oh I have to do this" ... "I have to do that"*. In that state you forget to integrate into spaciousness and you collapse into the identification with the thought. If that happens don't worry. As soon as you recognise it, relax into the out breath, open into the spaciousness, which already includes everything which is occurring, and proceed in that way. You are the energy of your mind, but so is everything else. The unified field, or the non-dual field of experience, is inseparable from the ground openness so if you get lost you have got lost in your own house.

That can be like a bad panic attack: you become so agitated thinking, *"Where am I, where am I?"* We want to say, *"Listen sweetie, it's ok, look around ..."* for if you don't recognise where you are you will go busily seeking for yourself somewhere else – and in samsara there are so many places to look, and you can be lost for a very long time. You can be lost in books, in study, in love stories, in any kind of substance, in prostrations, mandala offerings and so on. It doesn't mean that any of these

activities is forbidden for you can fall into anything – but who is the one who falls in? This is the energy of the mind. What is fallen into? This is the energy of the mind. Samsara is an endless interweaving of energy in a way that lacks clarity. However, the energy doesn't have to be put anywhere else, it doesn't have to be sorted out – simply you have to see where you are.

Now Gonpo Wangyal says: *Furthermore, original knowing awareness, unartificial, primordially open and at ease, is, of its own nature naked, unwavering, free of objects to rely on and the tendency to rely.* Original knowing here translates a Tibetan term *yeshe* which means the primordial or original capacity to know. It doesn't mean knowing something in particular. It is linked with the word *rigpa* or awareness. Thus this term is referring to two aspects of the mirror: the mirror shows whatever is there, but it shows it within itself. In the same way our mind is displaying everything here in this room and this is our experience, and because this experience is, as it were, inside that awareness it is immediate for us. That is to say, we know what is here and it is a knowing which is prior to a conceptual elaboration of it. Thus this term 'original knowing' means the freshness of the registering of what is here without having to pull it into our habitual frame of reference. If we stop telling the world what it is there is space for the world to show us what it is.

For example, if you sit in a cafe and watch someone drinking a cup of coffee you see the particular way they hold the cup. Perhaps they bring the cup up to their lips or they might bring the cup up and move towards it. In that way they are immediately displaying their embodiment. We know that if we have some prior knowledge of someone, when we see them in the far distance we can recognise them just by the way they move. However, 'original knowing, is even more immediate than that for it is just the reception of the world. Moreover, it is indicating that reception is more important than interpretation. When you get very used to interpreting, analysing, and making sense of things it is very easy to fall in love with the contents of your own mind, with your wonderful capacity to tell stories and join all the dots in different ways to make new patterns. If you do that too much you stop seeing what is there, and you project out the content with which you are familiar. For example, one way of making the world simple is to say there are 'good' people and 'bad' people. So when George Bush announced his war on terror, he sent many soldiers to Afghanistan and the instruction was to get the 'bad guys'. There are two Afghani brothers, one is a 'good' guy and the other is a 'bad' guy. We kill the bad guy but now the good guy is angry that his brother is dead and so he picks up the gun of his brother and goes to shoot the Americans. In that way more trouble goes out. The point here is that we cannot make these simple categorisations and expect it to work easily in the world for the world is complicated. So the point is to be open, receive and act if necessary.

We need to start to become suspicious of our own habit of being the one who makes things happen. One of the things we can notice is that the less conscious activity we make the more we notice that there is quite a lot going on in our mind anyway. That is to say, when we have an active thought it is moving within a field of thought which are already occurring. The active thought in which 'I experience myself as the one in charge', 'the agent', is in fact just another thought – and thoughts are arising and passing. Thus this first phrase, 'original knowing' means again and again, relax conscious intention and open to the unfolding of the unified field of experience. Moreover it is described as 'unartificial' which means it has no particular agenda. It is able to be with what is here because it is not afraid of anything. As we were looking earlier, if bad or difficult situations

arise for you these are particular flavours of experience but they cannot damage awareness itself. Of course, on the level of being a person it feels better if we are happy rather than sad, but that bias is not helpful if you want to see what is there. Once we see the indestructible nature of this open awareness there is no need to take up a particular position. Taking up a position means to import from the past a way of doing things. However, there is nothing wrong with having a position, a political, a religious position, and so on, but we have to see that these positions are gestures in the flow of manifestation. They tell us a situational truth about ourselves but they cannot tell us a fundamental truth about ourselves, for the fundamental truth, the basic truth, the ground, is this unborn, open awareness.

It is described as being *primordially open and at ease*. Open is the opposite of closed, so when we sit in the meditation and we find ourselves getting caught up in a thought, we close down a little bit. Sometimes it can feel as though we are wrapping ourselves around a thought and sometimes it feels as though the thought is wrapping itself around us. Just as if I take my watch and I hold it in my hand, my hand is restricted and there are not many things I can then do with this hand. But if I am not holding something in my hand and it is open there are many possibilities. The key point when we apply this to the meditation is to have the watch in the open hand. That is to say, we are not trying to block the thought, we are not trying to block the object, but neither do we want to be over involved in it. Thus it says, 'open and at ease', which means not tensing up but allowing whatever is there to be there.

Then he says *of its own nature it is naked*. Naked means not covered. Now, in the summertime we hope to see the clear blue sky, and if you are lying on a beech some place you don't want a cloud to cover the sun, for the cloud in covering the sun interrupts the direct relationship. So clearly there are two aspects of naked here. One is a dualistic understanding which says that by removing all the clothing, obscurations, habits, we have just the mind itself. This is an experience that you can have from time to time in meditation, sometimes by using the syllable *PHAT* or some kind of disruptive method. Secondly, from the non-dual point of view the nakedness of the mind is always present even when the clothes of thoughts, feelings, and sensations are being temporarily worn. For example, I have this watch in my hand and I put my other hand over it so that I cover the watch. I then have to remove that hand in order for the watch to be seen. But with respects to a mirror, when you look into a mirror you see the reflection and you can never see the mirror without the reflection. The reflection in the mirror doesn't obscure the mirror because the very nakedness of the mirror is its non-opposition to the mirror. The reflection in the mirror is not covering the mirror for the mirror doesn't exist as a thing like a watch that can be covered.

Now, in terms of our ordinary personality we can all experience being covered in some way. Something happens in life and you might say, "Ooh, I don't feel myself anymore," or "I think I have lost myself somehow." This makes sense on the level of the personality for what we are on this level is manifestation, the arising of certain thoughts, feelings, and sensations. We get used to a certain patterning of arising and we come to believe that pattern is ourselves because it is so familiar. But then something happens and we lose contact with that pattern – it is not arising for us, as us, for a while. Moreover, if we don't like this new way in which we are manifesting we can feel that it is something wrong or false and we want to get back to our 'true self'. But from a dharma point of view neither of these positions is true for both are conditional, situational, contextual patterns –

they are devoid of inherent self-nature. This then is the domain of the reflection and one reflection can displace another. If you look at your face in the mirror you see your face. Then you hold your hand up in front of your face and now you see the reflection of your hand obscuring your face. In this way different moments of experience are interacting and changing each other. But the mind itself is always naked to whatever is arising. It is not touched or conditioned or changed by any particular experience. If you really understand this then you can be naked and wear your clothes at the same time. Wisdom is to be naked, and to wear clothes is compassion. We manifest into the world with the style or the fashion which suits the situation.

For example, say you haven't seen a good friend for many months and you arrange to meet to have a drink. You walk into the cafe to see them, smiling as you get close to them, and then they say, "Hello, I have got some bad news." Immediately you stop smiling. They start to tell you that their mother is very sick and if you kept smiling that would be strange, for you don't generally smile when someone is sad. In that way you change your psychological clothes. You were in a particular mood and maybe you had some nice stories inside you that you wanted to share with your friend, but as soon as your friend tells you that something bad has happened in their life they are showing you that your expectation cannot be brought into the world without being a violence against their state.

In the Buddhist tradition we say that the Buddha taught 84,000 dharmas. Each of these dharmas is a clothing, a method. We need an extensive wardrobe of responses. However, clothes are not a person; we wear clothes which are socially appropriate for situations. One of the signs of psychological health is the capacity to be situationally appropriate in your behaviour. That is to say, our clothes belong to the world. When people wear clothes that are inappropriate that is often a useful diagnostic tool. In the same way, if we experience the non-duality of self and other, if we experience ourselves as being part of the world, then we can become willing to show ourselves in a way that is suitable. This is one reason why being with adolescents can be very unpleasant. It is clear to everyone that they don't really know who they are, but it is terrifying for them to be open about that, so they have to pretend to be someone, which is artificial and over determined and so they bump into the world. That shows us that if you are not at ease, you wear the wrong clothes. When I was in my primary school we had to wear a cap and I used to hate having this cap and would always put it in my pocket because I felt that this cap was an attack on myself: "How can I be myself if I am wearing a school uniform." This is the situation we get into when we feel that the form that we manifest in is definitive of some inner essence of ourselves.

In the tantric language they say *dharmakaya* is for yourself and the *rupakaya*, the form *kaya*, which means the *sambhogakaya* and *nirmanakaya*, is for the other. That is to say, our real nature is always open, naked and cannot be covered, dirtied or defiled in any way for it is the primordial purity, and the clothes we wear are as a social form for the other. We wear our clothes, all our qualities of connection, compassion and so on for the other.

Gonpo Wangyal then says that *this natural awareness is unwavering*. This means that it doesn't come and go in anyway. It is not sometimes stronger and sometimes less so, for it is not dependent on circumstances. This open nature, buddha-nature, is not created by the good deeds of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, nor is not a reward, it is something which is just there. It has no seasonal

variation but is like the mirror itself. The mirror maintains the capacity to know or to show and this does not alter. For example, if we had a big mirror on the wall here, the image of the room would look a little different to how it looked yesterday, for then there was more sunlight coming in the room and so the room was brighter. If we were to sit here into the evening not putting any lights on, the darkness in the room would show itself in the mirror. Thus the mirror would be dark but its capacity to show what is there has not changed – it is just showing exactly what is there.

We can easily imagine that the mind is always going to be bright for in some dzogchen texts it says that awareness or rigpa is like the sun, always illuminating everything. This is a little bit hopeful and you can make yourself confused with this idea because if what is arising is difficult then it will be difficult. For example, if someone for some perverse reason decides to make the main abattoir in Warsaw with a mirror-lined roof, everywhere you looked you would see animals having their throats cut or getting a bolt through their heads. We might find this disturbing and overwhelming, a bit too much. However, the mirror which is showing this scene is not having a difficulty. 'We' have a difficulty because we are one pattern of reflection which has likes and dislikes, a sense of suitability and unsuitability. Thus the term 'unwavering' is used in quite a challenging sense here, for it means not turning away, not editing, not feeling attacked by anything that arises. However, the one who is attacked is the reflection; it is the energy of the mind in interaction with other energy of the mind. As a person you are quite entitled to have your own likes and dislikes. Everybody likes some things and not others. There is nobody that likes everything. But the one who likes and the one who dislikes are not the mirror, the mind itself.

You can use this as a litmus test when you are meditating. For if you want to know whether your mind is open or not you can see if you are reacting to circumstances. If you are experiencing movement of yourself towards and away from things then this is a sign you are not relaxed into this open state of awareness.

He continues by saying that this state is *free of objects to rely on and of the tendency to rely*. I will go to the airport later today and when I'm in the airport I will relying on many things: the notice board to tell me if the flight is delayed or not, my memory for when to go to the gate, my watch to tell me the time, and so on. But the mind is not relying on an object to complete it or even to give it an existence. Thus consciousness – which goes through our senses or our mental processing consciousness – always takes an object. For example, the 'train' goes by and we hear the sound of the train – or at least we hear a sound. From the Tibetan point of view the ear-consciousness registers a sound, that sound is relayed to the mental consciousness, which interprets it and give a conclusion to what the sound is indicating, "Oh, it is a train." Clearly, there is some interaction between 'someone who knows' and 'something to be known'. But this entire theatre of interaction – sound, the understanding of the train, and so on – is arising inside the open field of awareness. That is to say, the subject and the object are in awareness but they don't touch awareness, just as we could say that the mirror is always free of the reflection. Now, that may seem a stupid thing to say for clearly the reflection is in the mirror, and yet as soon as you turn the mirror the reflection that was in it goes out of it. Thus there is a co-presencing of the mirror and the reflection, but even whilst the reflection is in the mirror, the mirror is not conditioned or altered in its nature – it is not transformed so in that sense it is free.

It is very important to hold in mind when reading this kind of text that it is speaking of non-duality, for 'free of' doesn't mean anything at all. It means non-contamination, that primordial purity is not affected. Our own mind has no need of any object but our personality, our sense of an individual self which arises as energy, is a manifestation of a state that doesn't rely on an object but it itself does rely on an object. That is, the fact that we rely on objects is revealed to us through the clarity of the mirror-like state which doesn't rely on objects.

One way of understanding this is to look at the three aspects of existence. The first is called *ngo wo* in Tibetan which means face, the givenness, that which is not artificial, that 'which is', the natural state. This is inseparable from the radiance of the revelation of the field of experience and is called *rang zhin* or *rigpai rang dang*. *Rang dang* means the quality of your complexion. If you are healthy it shows in your face, so it is meaning the expression of the situation. The third aspect, *thug je*, is the movement of your unique, specific formation in this situation in this moment. These three are operating without any separation between them.

[2] For example, we are sitting in the room together and we do the 'three A practice' or relax into the out breath and just open. In this openness everything is here; there is no division between what I call the room and what I call myself, which is the aspect of *ngo wo*. Within that something is moving as 'me', the aspect of *rang zhin*. The gestures, of myself are linked to the movement in the field because all that I call myself is an aspect of the field, which is the aspect of *thug je*. Thus the field of experience is inseparable from the open ground of experience. The open ground is not affected by anything that happens; the field is the display of the open ground and inside that field something is always happening. So in the language we used earlier the open situation is the primordial purity, and the field and its gestures are the effortlessly arising domain of spontaneous expression.

In this way we see the inseparability of samsara and nirvana. Samsara is the realm of turbulence, of cause and effect, of action and interaction, and nirvana is the state of peace, the unchanging, open domain. Ignorance occurs when we lose the immediate presence of the open ground. Then we are condemned to be moving in the field of experience making our gestures and trying to make sense of things. But if we awaken to the natural integration of the gestures in the ground – for they are always naturally integrated – this is the inseparability of samsara and nirvana. The key point is to recognise that all movement is inseparable from stillness, for all movement is movement occurring through the unborn space of hospitality, or dharmadhatu. So nothing has to be altered in terms of behaviour and interaction,

Gonpo Wangyal then continues: *It is clear, bright, the original unchanging ground and sphere of all the multitude of concepts that constitute samsara and nirvana.* The ungraspable openness of our being, as we looked earlier, has no boundary, no top nor bottom and so on, and so there is nothing outside. It has never changed; it is the same as it has always been. Thus it is both the ground, the source of all that occurs, and also the sphere or the field within which everything occurs. Again, he is saying that when there are good events, these are not coming from some good part of ourselves, and when bad events occur, these are not coming from some bad part of ourselves. All manifestation, whether it appears as subject or object, is like an illusion. It is ever changing. There is no essence in anything in this entire universe. As we have been exploring, all experience is relational and the

ground of the experience is non-duality. That is to say, there are no real solid objects and there is no real solid subject, so there is no gap between them – and this dynamic interplay is inseparable from its own ground.

Then he says: *See directly your own awareness free of all hopes and doubts.* This is a path or a journey which requires you to go nowhere. You don't need any map. You need to start by looking. Our hopes and fears and doubts are a sort of map, for we imagine things will go well or we imagine things will not go well – we are hopeful or doubtful about ourselves and so on. All of these movements are predictive of possible outcomes in the future. So we want to let go of these hopes and fears, for it is better to know nothing than to know something. In English we have a saying, 'a little knowledge is a dangerous thing'. But you just have to go into the national library and look at all the books. There is a lot of knowledge and yet we don't know very much. On the basis of the little we know we imagine many things. If you don't know anything there is no basis for imagining. That is to say if you relax the personal basis of your hopes and fear, your imaginations, if you experience this as just the arising and passing of thoughts, then the sense of the importance of ourselves starts to shrink. The glue of attachment that keeps subject and object bound together dissolves. Then we can see more clearly that what we call subject and what we call object are both the energy of the natural ground or dharmakaya.

Again, this is a meditation instruction: when you sit to do the practice don't try to do it on the basis of your thoughts. Thoughts are useful for some things but not for others. Skis are very useful for going on snow but not for walking about in Warsaw. The central point is to see the limit of the function of any manifestation. For example, the railway is very useful to take you to Poznan but it won't take it to your house for the train cannot come off the tracks to go down your street. It is not a complicated principle: different kinds of emotions and thoughts perform certain functions. If you understand their function, how they operate, and apply them correctly they are very useful. But they have a limit for they cannot be applied for functions other than they have. Hopes and fears are very important if you go to a football match, for if you went and weren't bothered who wins or loses there would be no point being there. Thus when we sit for meditation we need to see that thought in this particular context is at first like an enemy. But the less we identify with the thought it becomes like a signpost: through its own impermanence, the fact that it is self-liberating, it shows that it is without any essence. Then as you see the open ground, the thought then shows in itself its inseparability from the ground.

When he says here, *see directly your own awareness* it doesn't mean as in looking at some-thing. It means to relax into the state of the natural. Be the natural awareness. You will never see it as a thing because it is not a thing, and yet it is always available as the ground and sphere of operation of all the many things you do see including yourself.

Then he continues, *Essentially, it is necessary to come to a clear experience that all the many different thoughts that arise are nothing other than the natural radiance of awareness.* Presently we are very tilted in the direction of movement; our attention is caught up in all the comings and goings of our perceptions, thoughts and feelings and so on. We do the practice in order to rebalance this by attending to the open, unborn stillness, for the more we have the direct experience of this the more we see that the movement is inseparable from it. Otherwise, if we are only fixated upon the

movement, in order to make sense of what is going on we start cutting up the movement into parcels some of which we say are good, and some of which we say are bad. When this activity goes on there is no end to that adjustment. That is why making effort to improve your mind is not helpful. It is relatively helpful in the sense of developing more compassion and respect for others and so on, but as long as you have the duality of good, bad, right, wrong, mine, yours and so on, these thoughts, because they are being invested with an emotional attribution, will start to appear to us as having a true essence.

We know this. It is not a mystery is it? For example, if you get into a new situation in your life, perhaps a new job, gradually you learn among your colleagues who you like and don't like, who you may want to talk to and have lunch with and so on. Then maybe in the evening you are talking to a friend about what happened at work and you find yourself saying, "Oh I don't like that person ... they are like this or that." In that way we are now able to define who they are, and we believe what we say. We imagine that inside them is exactly what we see them as being. Moreover, when you have done that for some time it is then very difficult to think that 'this stupid colleague of mine' is the radiance of the natural state. This is very obvious: the more you separate out real, truly existing entities the more difficult it is to imagine they are integrated in an open state. This is why we need to do the meditation practice; to rebalance the attention from the movement. By experiencing more of the openness we then integrate the movement in the openness – and then we see without having to think about it or work it out like a problem, "Oh it just is like this."

Then he says: *The ceaseless flow of specific appearances, one's own experience, the appearance of clarity will improve and develop, and unchanging omnipresent awareness will become one's way of being.* Moment by moment we have our experience which is always in a ceaseless flow. For example, right now we are in this room: people's bodies, forms, colours, and so on are moving and changing, sounds are arising and passing, our own thoughts and feelings are coming and going, and when we put our judgement onto any of these *specific appearances*, that judgement itself is also part of our experience. This ceaseless flow of appearances is the appearance of one's own mind.

The term here for one's own experience is *rang nang* which is short for *rigpai rang nang*. *Nang wa* means both to see, and it means light, appearance. *Rang* means 'one's own' but it also has a self-reflexive form to it meaning the natural appearance – the natural appearance of awareness. Thus in each of these sentences he is saying pretty much the same as he said in the previous sentence but he is approaching it from slightly different points of view because it is so very important.

This room is as much my experience as my experience of this room. However this is not how it appears for we live in the duality of subject and object. There is 'the room' and there is 'my experience of the room' – I am the subject and the room is the object. But what we have been looking at over these few days is that the room itself is not a thing out there, rather it is the vibrancy of our own experience. The field of experience has different aspects arising in it: one aspect of what is arising we call the object and one aspect is the subject. These terms however do not describe any essence for they are merely conventions which are themselves part of the flow of experience. So in this way all these specific appearances, this town, the airport, the toilet, whatever it is, is one's own experience – there is nothing outside of one's experience.

There is an early translation of a book on dzogchen which has the title: *You Are The Eyes of The World*. This refers to the fact that each of us sitting here is the centre of the world. The world is revealed to us in terms of its relationship spatially around our body, and also of its relation to time, how we locate ourselves. In the tantric system this is represented by the mandala: in the centre of the mandala is the key figure and everything radiates out, and when you do the practice you become the central figure in the middle of the mandala. Everything spreads out from this point but this point is not a fixed situation that can be put in relation to another situation or place. The centre point of the mandala is emptiness. In the same way, each of us in the middle of our heart is a great openness. The space and openness of the heart is inseparable from the space and openness of the experiential field. At the heart of every object is the open sky and at the heart of every subject is the open sky. Thus in some traditional texts it says therefore you should meditate sky to sky. You cannot separate sky for it is the same open space with no boundaries.

Then he says if you do this then *the appearance of clarity will improve*. When you realise that everything you encounter is your own experience you are immediately relieved of the burden of being a small person a big world of stuff that you don't understand. The semantic content that we use to make sense of phenomena is not cut off from its energetic base as a thought which is arising in my mind. That is to say, everything becomes our own clarity. It doesn't mean that we homogenise everything into 'it is all emptiness' for each appearance is exactly and precisely what it is. But what it is is clarity; there is appearance without substance. There never was any substance. In removing the substance you don't remove anything. In India they use an example for this: if you are walking home at night maybe on the edge of the forest and suddenly you see in the shadows a snake, "Ah..!" Then you realise it is not moving and you see it is a rope. When you see a piece of rope the snake has vanishes. Where did the snake come from? Can the snake go? There was never a snake – it was an illusion. Thus awakening from illusion is not awakening from anything. What you are freeing yourself from is the fantasy that there is something to free yourself from. That is why in systems like dzogchen they say that you don't need to do a lot of preparatory practice, for if you do a hundred thousand mantras of *Dorje Sempa* will that take the snake out of the rope? There is not a snake. When you see that life is much easier. But you have to recognise that you have a strong habit of seeing snakes. This snake is the movement of our own mind. We project onto the piece of rope and then frighten ourselves on the basis of our own projection.

This is why we observe the movement of our mind, and when we meditate of course we get caught up in the thought, for this is a strong habit; energy is chasing energy. The movement of the energy is the aspect which creates the illusion, just as when you go to an old-fashioned cinema where they have the film playing frame by frame, running at a certain speed past the lamp which creates the illusion of movement on the screen. Cinema is very helpful for understanding this. You can help your meditation by going to a wide range of films as you can see what kinds of hooks are inside you. In meditation we are going to be liable to be caught up in particular patterns and this is why in the teachings it often says to observe yourself; both see the kind of patterns you have and how they function and work to increase your capacity by deconstructing the glue, the attachment to different patterns. Then we start to be able to see the clarity of the experience.

Clarity in this context doesn't mean the intellectual clarity of a cognitive understanding, rather it means seeing immediately the ground of manifestation. For example, if I am living inside my 'skin

bag' and I hear the train go by this is a cognitive process: my mind is saying 'it is the train', but when I relax and open, the field of my experience includes what I call my body and what I call the train. So the actuality of what is occurring moment by moment is the clarity of the revelation of my own experience, it is the display of our own ground. Another example is: if you grew up in a small village in Poland where people speak with a particular dialect, and one day you are standing in Warsaw at the bus stop and you hear two people talking in that dialect, as soon as you hear the tone of their expression you immediately know where they are from – it is that kind of clarity. That is to say you don't have to work out where they are from because there is an immediate recognition.

This is why he says that the more you stay open to this ceaseless flow, the clarity will improve and this unchanging awareness which is everywhere will become one's way of being. *Become one's way of being* means it becomes automatic, like *lhundrup* – just effortlessly how it is. So even if you are in a situation that you don't have a lot of cognitive information about, you won't feel lost because you are no longer looking to particular aspects of the external environment to reassure you about who you are. That is to say, moment by moment, you are aware of yourself and the environment arising out of this open source, so you are always where you need to be. There is no better place than this which is why this is called the great completion.

Then he continues: *With this one abides in presence of the inexpressible value of the inconceivable great non-meditation of the end of all things, the spontaneous mahamudra, the heart of Samantabhadra.* Earlier we looked at these three aspects: the real nature, or openness; its radiance, or the field; and the gestures, movement within that. When it says, *one abides in the presence of the inexpressible value* this means that the personal sense of oneself is inseparable from the impersonal ground. In the experience of the open ground we are not experiencing something other than ourselves, but the self that we are experiencing is not a particularised self to be named and described. The inconceivable great non-meditation is the on-going presence of the ground with its arisings. There is a story of a Zen monk who had meditated for many years and he had many kinds of experience but he was never really satisfied. He got very tired and disheartened and he thought, "Well what is the point of continuing this. I will have one good meal and then go back to having an ordinary life." So he went to the butchers where there was a goat hanging up on a hook and he says to the butcher, "Give me a good piece of meat." The butcher replied, "It's all good." And that was enough – it is all the dharmadhatu. We like 'this', we like 'that', but the thoughts of your mind, the discriminations that you make, don't cut any real difference for it is just a fantasy – it is all good.

This non-meditation is called the end of all things. It means that everything is finished – there is nothing more to be done. Of course we continue to live and life has daily problems, hopes and fears, but these are like an illusion, for the sphere in which they are occurring is open and empty. When we get sick, the sickness is a flow of experience. When we are unhappy, the unhappiness is a flow of experience. There is no end. Nothing is final. Death itself is not final. The flow of experience goes on and we only have two choices. In dzogchen we say that there is one ground and two paths: either out of this openness or emptiness either we go fusing into the thoughts, identifying with them creating a world of interpretation, or we stay with the immediacy of all that arises as inseparable from its ground. In this second path all things are already finished for there is only this radiance. Moreover, even the path of samsara is simply the non-recognition of what is the

case. The open state is like the rope, samsara the snake, and when you awaken from samsara and see the rope you realise there never was snake, samsara. This is called the spontaneous mahamudra. This means the immediacy of the arising is not something which needs validating from anywhere else for it is self-validating. This is called the heart of Samantabhadra which means this is the real understanding of the primordial enlightened Buddha.

He continues: *In the bardo you will be liberated in infinite hospitality.* As we move into death we can remain wrapped in ourselves as a small person afraid of what will happen, but if we relax from that then the openness of the heart will merge without effort into the openness of the dharmadhatu which welcomes everything.

He then says, *You will truly have the power to work for the benefit of all beings.* This means that if you want to help people you have to know who they are. All that we have been looking at is saying that all beings are stillness and movement. When we taste this stillness this will be the same stillness as all beings can taste. It is not different for men or women, old and young, European or Asian and so on. Thus when you are awakened into your own still, spacious, openness you start to experience other people as also inhabiting this state – although they don't know it and they keep seeing the snake. Moreover, the more you observe your own movement and you see how you change according to circumstances, you relax and deconstruct the fixed habitual definitions of who you are and with that you start to really see that you are situational. Then you start to see that what you call other people are also situational, so then rather than trying to work out who someone else is, as though you can know them as 'this' or 'that'. Then you can attend to the dynamic way in which you are encountering them in this moment, and so you have the vibrant freshness of the real encounter. In that way, without trying to push them into any particular form, a form that might please you, the dynamic movement of their manifestation is brought directly into relation with stillness because this is what you are manifesting yourself.

So then he says, *It is vital to practise in this way.* These kinds of instructions you can find in many books. They are not his own idea. This is the voice of the practice lineage. So it is a good idea to do it.

Finally, the colophon says that *This concludes the introduction to the nature of the Mother of all the Buddhas.*