

Illusion, delusion and confusion

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SESSION 1/1 (EVENING TALK)

The theme for this evening, for tomorrow and the half-day on Sunday is the same. It's really about four aspects that move together: **1) magic, 2) illusion, 3) delusion, and 4) confusion**. They're not very different one from another, but they're all at the heart of the buddhist understanding.

In European culture, we usually scan things in terms of a polarity between reality and fantasy. We have a sense of 'the real 'as being something substantial, something we can rely on, something which is in some way enduring. From the buddhist point of view this is itself **delusion**. It's a very stupid thing to believe in reality – there is no reality. That's maybe a bit confusing at first, so it's important that we get a working sense of what these terms mean and how they're used. In dzogchen, mahamudra, madhyamika and all the various buddhist schools, we find many, many descriptions addressing this theme.

Illusion: taking an appearance to be having an individual essence

We'll start with illusion. An illusion is something which seems to be true, or, in our ordinary sense, real, and yet it's not. We've probably all experienced a mirage on a hot summer's day. You're going along in a car and you see this glittering water in front of you. It looks like water, you don't have to trick yourself into believing that it's water. It seems to be there, and yet it's not.

The **basic structure of an illusion** is that of an appearance that: 1) offers us the seduction of believing something is there, which is not, or 2) which is there has a truth status which it doesn't have.

Another classic example would be going out on a full moon night and looking in a pond and you see the reflection of the moon in the water – it is as if the moon is there in the water. Or, you see a rainbow in the sky and it is as if there is something there. What we have is appearance, but our move is towards a consolidation of the appearance. That is to say, we take the appearance to be an indication of having a personal or individual essence behind it, that this is the

appearance of something. Taking an example of rainbows, when a rainbow appears in the sky, it is as if there were an essential rainbow out there somewhere. That would be like a platonic pure idea: somewhere there's a perfect form of the rainbow and here we have this slightly imperfect version of it.

But when you see a rainbow, you see a rainbow. We name it, we start to learn the qualities of rainbows and we feel secure in our knowledge of rainbows. An **illusion** is: when we're taken in by an appearance and we give credence to it, we believe in it. We believe that there's something there which is secure, defined, predictable, that it's a site of knowledge. Then, of course, it dissolves. Because if you're looking at the moon in the water and someone throws a stone into the pond, the moon dissolves. The wind blows the cloud and the rainbow vanishes. The car accelerates, or you go around the corner, and the mirage vanishes.

From the buddhist point of view, it's about the nature of **perception** and **conception**. Usually our perception of the world, that is to say, the life that we have through what our senses reveal, is instantly merged with conceptualisation. That when interpretation – which is essentially the play of our imagination/ our mental activity – as it were fused into an appearance, we can take hold of it. We now can apprehend the world, which for the ego aspect of our individual existence is very reassuring because it allows us to build up a sense of competency, of being able to relate to many different kinds of phenomena. *Something is there and I know about these kinds of somethings*. So I develop a sense of personal efficacy and efficiency in moving through the world and I can create patterns of interpretation. I can compare this rainbow with the one I saw last week – *this one is better, or this one is more faint* – as if comparing and contrasting were somehow able to operate.

The strengthening of the differentiation of the real truth of phenomena, what we take to be their reality, arises from this possibility of comparing and contrasting. And in order to do that you have to have some thing, you have to have this thing and that thing.

If you just have a pure appearance, you allow your mind to relax, and you open your gaze to trees in the park or to the clouds in the sky. The more you relax, the more you release yourself from your habitual function of grasping at the

concept and of wanting to make sense of the world, which of course alienates you from your senses. If you release the meaning-making, you find that the world doesn't at all vanish, in fact, it remains. It remains as other than what we thought it was. There is more potential, more possibility, in our vision when it's not apprehended.

This is one of the chief aspects of training in the visual arts. Say you're looking at a tree that you're going to paint. If you start with an over determined notion of what a tree is like, you don't allow the conversational or the relational aspect of this appearance, that this patterning of phenomena in this very moment with your own mood, with your technical capacity, with the kind of palette you have available to you, whether you're painting outside or in... And this is what emerges. It's not the truth of anything but it's a gesture. Most of our life is gestural.

We move in particular ways and reveal aspects of our embodied being in relation to the field of appearances. The freshness of that tends to be covered over for us because we build up expectations. Because of our ability to imagine many different possibilities, we think we know what will be there before we arrive. So the terrible thing is that we end up encountering ourselves. It's actually quite rare for us to have a truly fresh experience. It's like psychotherapy, where there's a lot of attention given to this. When Freud talks about repetition compulsion, he's not talking necessarily about a drive to complete a reiteration of a particular pattern, it's more that you imagine you're doing the same thing again.

Here we have a sign outside the room that says we should wash our hands. In general, we know how to wash our hands. You open the tap, you get the soap and so on, and you make these different gestures. If you work in a hospital, they teach you how to wash your hands professionally because there are proper ways to do it – to get the soap in between the fingers and so on. So if you do it that way, you become an expert in hand-washing. We've all got hands here, now, when we're washing our hands, we're doing something very familiar. *I'm just washing my hands.*

But what are these hands?

We have **conceptual hands** and we have **presenting hands**. In this moment in which you're washing your hands, there's the temperature of the water, there's the soap which does or doesn't have a smell, you're in a mood, you're washing your hands vigorously, maybe mindfully, or unmindfully – this is the actuality of what is manifesting in this moment. You have never washed your hands in that way before, and, in fact, you've never had the hands that you are washing until this moment. These hands, the hands being washed, are fresh.

This is an appearance which is constellated in the midst of the vector of many different factors operating together. But what you have when you want to consolidate your idea of basic competence and a basic predictable knowledge of the world is that you don't attend to the immediate disclosure of sensation in your fingers and so on. You don't really attend to it at all because you go on an automatic pilot – *I know how to wash my hands*. So in that moment you can actually be thinking of something else. And if so, then what are you washing and who is doing this washing?

This is an example of an illusion, that you take it for granted that you have hands and that you can know what your hands are, and so you exist in the thingness of your existence. This is me, I know how I am. This is you, I've seen you before. You always do the same thing.

Then life gets heavy and stuck, it becomes what we generally call neurosis. This is **pattern reiteration**. The advantage of apprehending a particular pattern as an exemplar of an underlying deep structure, is that every time the pattern arises, even if you clock that it's a bit different this time, it's as if it's still the manifestation of the underlying truth of things. *That's what you're like, you always do that*. Ordinary language is full of such statements.

World as revelation depends on the quality of our participation

When we start to look into the IMMEDIACY of the situation, however, if we stay freshly in the senses, we start to see that there are two streams running parallel: 1) we have what's coming through the senses, and 2) we have how we interpret it. The interpretation manifests as the display of many, many different

factors – childhood, language, class, culture, gender and more – but, of course, the interpretation is not fixed.

We have a potential of interpretation that is evoked according to various things. For example, if you had to run to get here, you were breathless and wondering whether you'd arrive late, which creates a particular mood inside you. Then you enter the room, where everyone else is more or less calm, and you think, *oops, uh-uh, what now?* And that mood influences how you hear, how you respond, and so on. What we take to be subject side – the profile, the topology of myself – doesn't belong to me.

If I've had to run because the previous train was cancelled, or I just missed a bus, that running is part of my existence. I didn't want to run, I didn't plan to run, but I found myself running. That is to say, my sense of the requirements of the situation, my gaze into the future – *oh shit, we start at half-past-six, we have to get it together!* I'm entrained into running-ness and running-ness – brings me here in a particular mood. Or you might have arrived here very early and you've been sitting around, are a little bit bored, drifting off and thinking about this and that – *oh God, when are we ever going to begin, what am I doing, all these people breathing in and out, I'm going to get infected, I'm going to die....* All sorts of thoughts can arise.

This is the unpredictable, ever-shifting, wind-like movement of the mind – and simultaneously, of course, your gaze is changing. You just need to turn and look around the room, move your head one little inch and a whole new vista opens up, with different ranges of perception, colour, shadow, with seeing someone clearly, then not seeing them when they become part of your peripheral vision, and so on.

This is the interactive field, very unstable in its unpredictability, and into that, in order to function, we feel the need to be able to predict. If we know someone's name, we can stick their name onto them – it's as if we're seeing them again. *Hello John, good to see you.* Who am I seeing? Am I seeing John? What is John? John-for-John's-mother, John-for-John's-lover, and John-for-me are different Johns.

It's as if through the naming, you've got hold of something veridical, that rings true and is reliable, and this is an illusion. This is an illusion.

Language is one of the many vectors of illusion within which we operate, especially when we feel that language has actual, real reference. That if I say 'camera', I'm referring to a thing which is in front of me. Generally speaking, when the thought-sound 'camera' starts to arise in my head, it's arising as it were subject onto object. The signifier, the formulation of *this is a camera* is a mental event, and the signified camera is also a mental event.

What is signified is always mental, you don't get out of the mind. If you actually go over and touch the camera, and you lick it and you rub it on your face and put it down your trousers, this camera will reveal all sort of different qualities. What is the camera? You can only take care of, get close to, or have a real sense of the camera as camera-for-me. Camera-for-camera is a land you will never ever visit. What you get is camera-for-you: this particular camera, in this particular moment. That is to say, you cannot separate what you take to be the truly existing object out there from your interpretation. This has a lot of implication for buddhist meditators, as we'll explore in some detail tomorrow when we have more time.

The key point at this stage is to start to see that if the world is not established in itself 'out there', that if the world is a revelation not of fixed things but of potential. And the potential is revealed through my quality of participation in this moment, then there's both a freshness of engagement and a kind of bewilderment at the same time – because I can't make sense of it. Then, of course, arises the question, do I need to make sense of it?

If I live in my narrative sense of self, if I see the world as a whole stream of stories issuing out at me, wrapping themselves around the moments of my existence, creating patterns, shifting my desire to be close to or distant from different people, different situations, foods and so on, then it's 'my world'. What I get is my world. This is enormously important because if I don't get access to a real world that exists out there, then the world as revelation depends on the

quality of my participation. That is to say, if I fall asleep on the job, I'm going to have a dull world.

Falling asleep on the job means to fall asleep into the dreamlike weaving of my habitual forms of interpretation, so that I am carried along on a stream of thoughts, but I'm not actually thinking. There's an absence of freshness, so it is as if I know. For instance, I might think that I know what people from different backgrounds are like. *Pakistanis are like this, Chinese people are like this, men are like this, gay people are like this.*

Everywhere in the world we see prejudice, and this is its very structure. A 'pre-judice', a judgment made yesterday, is taken to be valid and projected into today – and I can extend it out from *oh, he's a Pakistani, so he's like this*, to *all Pakistanis are like this because that's what Pakistanis are like*. We see so many wars. So many of the difficulties of welcome and of inclusion arise from the idea of having definite knowledge about people.

The exploitation which occurred in the past, and which are continued on the basis of people believing that such behaviours are valid, is clearly a mental activity. If you believe that certain kinds of people can be enslaved and that, in fact, it's appropriate to enslave them because they are slave material: these are the kind of people who get enslaved. You might also believe that these kind of people should not be educated.

As soon as you begin to think of 'that kind of person', you're taking a category, which is a mental event or construction, and believing that it expresses a truth about what you actually perceive. And with that belief, you're saying, my category, my belief, my interpretive matrix, allows me to speak with absolute confidence about the world. At this point in time, we frequently hear many world leaders speaking in this way. They claim the monologic truth, that because they see things as they are, they don't need to enter into conversation, they can just shoot from the hip. They don't need to build it up as a matter for unpacking.

As we sit with ourselves, maybe we start to see, *I'm involved all the time in what's occurring. I don't really know what's out there, I can't really control that*

much, but maybe I could have a little bit more sense of me and see if I am present or not. And once we start to meditate, we notice that actually we're absent quite a lot of the time. We're just running along on this automatic pilot of knowing how to do things. You walk down the street thinking of something, you're not really having to look at the street. Maybe you suddenly notice that there's broken glass or some dog shit, or someone's pushing toward you and they're lost on their phone, but most of the time you're just sort of drifting along with a not very precise registering of this field which is your life! This is the field of emergence of which you are a part.

We participate inside a **shared field of experience**. 'Shared' doesn't mean that we all get the same share, not because of some mean-spirited hierarchy but simply because we are embodied in different ways. For example, through our own moods, we have different availabilities. Some people are morning people, some people are evening people. If you've had a drink of alcohol that will affect your mood, if you're hungry that will affect your mood, or if you've quarrelled with your lover that will affect your mood. There are so many things which are part of your existence.

From the point of view of meditation, these aspects are not optional extras: they're not something to be pared away so that you get to this pure form of yourself and awaken to who you really are as someone. You are, in fact, many ones. You are a multitude, a plurality, you are an ungraspable potential that is evoked situationally. You don't belong to yourself, you don't belong to the other; but you find yourself, co-emergent, in the pulsation of attention with that person.

When you have a pre-determined agenda, even if it's benign, there's a kind of violence in it. Say you have to be in a hospital lying in a bed and the nurse comes along to do something. She might speak quite nicely but she's going to stick this needle into you as a part of her job. She's looking at her watch, she's thinking about a cup of tea and going off shift, and in that moment, you're an object she's going to act on. She doesn't really want you blethering on about your anxieties and so on.

The field we are in is determined by our availability, and this, really, is the heart of meditation. It's these various strands and moods and flavours which give us more chance to be more available, and under diverse circumstances. It's the restriction of availability that closes down the possibilities of our existence.

Traditional texts say that **the mind is like the sky**. The sky has no gatekeepers, it has no immigration control. The sky accepts whatever is arising. Nuclear bombs, airplanes, viruses, bacteria – all sorts of things are flying through the sky. Easy come, easy go. Phenomena arise in the sky – self-arising. And then they vanish – self-liberating. And the sky just stays open. This is how our mind actually is.

However, when we collapse into the patterning of the content of our mind, into our habit-formed tendencies and selective turns of liking and disliking, of wanting more or wanting less, these tilts, these selectivities, bring us into the patterning that we recognise as I-me-myself. *I am like this*, and on the basis of being like this, this is what I choose.

When you're in a restaurant you scan through the menu and choose something, often something you're familiar with, something that you like to eat. There are plenty of other things, but you say: *no, it's not for me!* Why not for me? Presumably the restaurant isn't authorised as a kind of Russian roulette and some of these dishes will be poisoned, so you'd better choose carefully! Well, it's all food... there are other people eating the foods you don't want to eat, but you don't want to eat them. Why? *Because I'm me, I'm like this.*

This 'like' is a wonderful word. *I'm like this*. Cats are more like leopards than they are like dogs, right? **'Like'** indicates comparing and contrasting, so when we say: *I'm like this*, it means, in this moment the lived actuality of me and my idea of me are brought into alignment. *I am like myself*. Now what could that mean but that 'I am like my idea of myself', that the truth of me is not this body and the space around it, but the idea of it. In Buddhism, this is called **stupidity**, which means being very dull, because you think you're an idea.

The only advantage of privileging the idea is that it lets you turn down the attention you're putting through your senses. And this makes the world more manageable because you are tuning out so many of the factors which are arising. I mean, when you walk in the streets here, they're really, really interesting. The architecture's so chaotic in many ways – old buildings, new buildings, different shaped windows – it's just new experience. New experience and flowing, flowing, flowing. You can never get enough of it because it will change with the season, with the time of day, with the people who are out in the street, with when the electric lights are turned on. At first, it's kind of wobbly and then it strengthens and that affects the shadows. This is your lived world, this is what you actually inhabit.

But we don't inhabit it, because we are inhabiting a cocoon held in place by commitment to our ideas about ourselves. Then, in order to maintain an idea about myself, I maintain ideas about other people. That is to say, I want definite, predictable knowledge. It feels, then, as if psychology, psychiatry and diagnosis become very important so that you can formulate some indication of the key patterns operating in a person. And on the basis of that, you come to some kind of conclusion about how they are and what might be done in order to help them, or to shift them. This is very, very crude!

You take the living complexity of a person and try to squeeze it into the categories that you have. *Oh, so this is what they suffer from!* Now you're not at all interested in the person because you've got the truth on them, which is embedded in the DSN5, or the ICT10 or whatever, one of these books of identifications. You've got to the truth of them.

This person's a heretic! Or, this person is an enemy of the jihad, or this person is from a substandard race, or (if you're like me, if you're Scottish), this person is English! English is pretty bad if you grow up in Scotland. You wouldn't want to be English, you know what the English are like. And I grew up in Glasgow, you know what the people from Edinburgh are like... Jesus! It's like that.

It's so interesting when you catch your own prejudice because then you can see it. It's so delicious in its simplification that you don't have to think because you know. Nowadays we think, racial prejudice, gender prejudice, sexual orientation prejudice is not good. And it's not good because it packs people into a flattening, a homogenisation. *They're all like that, you know what they're like.* And so we decide, *let's not do that!*

Buddhism just extends this a bit further. You say: *this is a tree.* Really? Why do you want to put it into tree-ness? What is it? Have a look. When you look at the tree you can't speak. There's so much – the branches, the colours, the shapes, the light when the wind moves... It's not invisible, it's not hidden, it's a revelation, but it's not an apprehendable revelation. *But it's an oak tree.* Ah, now you've got your teeth into something! *It's an old oak tree, or, it's a young oak tree. Some disease is going around in oak trees. It's terrible! What can we do about it? Off we go – narrative, narrative, narrative...*

But if you stay with the thing itself, through the senses, without 'making sense of it', you can't speak, you can't think... and yet you are. It's like a holiday from the tedium of your mental construction. That's why the senses are so very important to us, but, of course, we live in a world where conceptual identification has become very important.

Magic (chom trul): something appears and it's there, but it's not really there

According to the tradition (and this is not necessarily about time, it can also be an immediacy), the arising of the potential, which is often called the ground or the base or the source, manifests in two particular directions:

- 1) In one of these directions, the arising of the energy of the ground is aware of its own ground – *I am the radiance of the ground* – before we think person, or anything. It's this self-luminous, here we are.
- 2) The other pathway is to lack awareness of the ground or source, and so there's just an *oh, what's this?*

For example, in the famous prayer or aspiration, the Kunzang Monlam, it says: “**These two, aware and unaware, arise like magic (chom trul).**” So, magic... miracle...

The Buddha Shakyamuni performed many miracles and these are translated into Tibetan as ‘**chom trul**’, which means that something appears and it’s there, but it’s not really there – **a blessed illusion**. And it’s a blessing because it kind of stretches your mind. This happened? *How did that happen?* You can forget about it, but if you stay with it, *this doesn’t make sense, it’s troubling. How could that happen?* Being troubled is a major part of our path.

As we know, Prince Siddhartha lived in a very protected environment when he was young. His father didn’t want him to be exposed to the world. And when he did go out of the palace, he saw an old person, a sick person and a dead person, and then he saw a yogi. He hadn’t encountered any of these experiences before, and they rankled, they got to him, like a stone in his shoe. He couldn’t settle, and this shifted him.

Well, if this is the case, what am I doing with my life? I can’t just put the blinkers on and go day after day after day business as usual. What’s it all about, what is this? I’m going to die! I’m going to die... and all the things I’ve done, all the bloody exams I’ve studied for, all of this, all the tax I’ve paid, what the fuck was it all about, what was it for? It must be for something. Is it for anything? Maybe it’s not for anything. That’s very troubling indeed, and the advantage of that kind of trouble is that it starts to loosen up the constrained patterns of our predictive operation. *Oh! Maybe I could do something different!*

So he leaves the palace and wanders around as a yogi, engaged in all kind of ascetic practices, and so on. So now he’s a yogi. After six years, as per the texts, he’s thinking, *what the hell am I doing? I’m a yogi, I’m starving, I’m cold, I’m hungry! I’ve come from a palace, what am I doing? But I can’t be in the palace and I don’t want to be a yogi anymore. I’ve had enough.* So he cuts some kusha grass, a grass

that has a very nice soft ending to it, a local girl brings him some milk-rice and he sits under a tree and says: *I've had enough. I'm not doing anything.*

And as he sits all kind of habit formations arise for him, all kind of interpretations about what's going on, so that he could go this way or that way, and he just sits with it. At some point he reaches down and touches the earth and says: *be my witness, I'm not moving.* And the more he finds himself able not to move, the more clearly he sees: it's the mind that moves! Sensations arise and pass, thoughts arise and pass, memories arise and pass, and if you don't get on them – because they're like buses and trains and you just don't get on them – they're just passing through, passing through, passing through.

Gradually his mental clarity, instead of it being organised as a consciousness of particular things in such a way that he can think about them and make more patterns, that particularising consciousness relaxes into a simply knowing, not in the sense of knowing about what is arising and passing, but of simply knowing or noticing that many things are arising and passing. This opens up to reveal itself as an awareness, an awareness which you can't take hold of. It's not any thing, and in this sense it's unborn. It hasn't been born into the world of real things. It's here, it's present, but not present as someone or something.

Awareness, the mind itself, has no race or colour, no ethnic or national identity. It is unconstrained, undefined and uncompounded, and because of that it can offer hospitality to everything, to everything we can see, hear, touch, smell. Everything we can remember, or imagine in the future, is the movement of the mind. It's the movement of the mind. When we encounter other people, we think: *how is it that the other person is not like us.* Potential is arising in that form and in that form and in that form. The potential is the potential of the emptiness of the ground.

When we look to find ourselves, our true selves, who we really are, we encounter lots of storylines: things our parents said, things our school said, what our political interest groups said. There are many, many narratives and interpretations. These are all storylines. You hear someone describing you, or you

describe yourself, and when you stop talking, it's over. Now you say something else, now you say something else, and something else.

The descriptions you give of yourself appear to be valid in the moment but they're just vanishing like steam. You switch off the kettle and the steam starts to fade. So all these constructs – racial identity, gender identity, age and so on – are positions in a dance drama, and there is no choreographer, nobody setting out to make it this way.

There's no originary God with a meta-plan to plonk everything into its place, but we find ourselves – due to infinite, interactive sequences of causes and effects – being this kind of person for a while. And we won't be like this forever. *And me, at my age, I'm certainly not going to be like this forever, and if I get this virus, [corona virus is just beginning to spread] I might be gone... all over... finished. Gasp! How could that be? I'm me – how could I die? It's not possible! I've always been me, I'm going to live forever. You guys can die if you want, but not me!*

It's the idea of a self, a permanent self, a someone who is like this, self-defining, autonomous. People want autonomy, self-definition, independence. Independence from what? If you declare independence from the air! Then stop breathing. *Oh! No, I think I'll keep breathing. I declare independence... from... food and drink... well, for a while. What are you going to get independence from?*

You are an interactive part of the co-emergent field!

We are interdependent, and yet we have the absolute particularity of ourselves as we are, moment by moment. This is not sustained by some enduring self-essence, but it's the pattern which is revealed. In a sense you have to be your own patterning as it patterns, so that if you're present in the arising of the patterning of yourself, this is who you are – functionally, situationally, in this field – and then it's dissolved, and then dissolved, and then dissolved.

The truth of our existence is inexpressible

The more you open to the openness which is the ground, the more ability you find you have, to manifest in different ways with different people. Then, there

is an undeniable thus-ness or is-ness to being alive, but not alive as a thing. We're starting to move to the very edge of language, into a zone of paradox, of allusion. That's why there are many metaphors, like the moon in water, rainbow, mirage, and so on, because it can't be stated. The truth of our existence is inexpressible.

Now, there are a lot of dharma books, and in the Tibetan language alone there were thousands and thousands and thousands of books, incredible books, but none of them could say how it is. You can't say how it is. The function of study is to allow the language of dharma to massage you into a relaxation that allows the truth of how you are to show itself, without you trying to say what you are. When you meet someone and introduce yourself, *I'm from this country and I do this and oh, I was there as well*. You start weaving all kind of stories and you're in the territory of thinking about and talking about, but we are not an about-ness.

In the immediacy of our existence, it is 'this', and the this-ness of 'this' is inexpressible.

Expression/ language, is not about wisdom, we speak in order to connect. Language is about compassion, or connectivity, or, it's a movement in the field of non-dual or undivided energy. It's an aspect of the potential of our existence, but through language you can't get to wisdom. Wisdom begins with silence. That's why we have meditation in which we're just present, not doing anything in particular, becoming less distracted, with less following after the past and less waiting expectantly for the future. And there's this... and this... and this and this... and we're still here. We're not holding ourselves in place, we're not being mindful as an activity.

When you're aware, it doesn't really matter whether you're mindful or distracted, because the movement of the mind is movement and the stillness of the mind is still. The still mind is silent and the moving mind can talk, walk, engage with people, cook dinner and so on – all the ordinary activities of life. That is the movement of the mind. As we know with our bodies, we need to have space to move in. The movement of the mind is movement in the space of the mind, and

the space of the mind is the fact that our awareness, our presence, is not a thing. Whenever you have a thing you have location and duration.

Right now we're in Hackney. We're in this building and we're going to be here this evening for a while. A certain period of time is allocated for this meeting. The seats are set out in a particular way. Your body is located here on this set for a moment in time.

Energy always has location and duration, but the mind as awareness is not an energy, it is the field revealing the movement of energy. When you're dancing or singing or eating, whatever the activity is, it's you, but not the whole of you, and if you are very still and not moving that's you, but not the whole of you.

The integrity of the individual is the space, this ungraspability of our awareness, revealing itself as a field. We're here in this room, this field is your field. No two people in this room are in the same field, but simultaneously you can't say that we're in different fields. According to how your body is situated a certain vista opens up in front of you – you see the back of some people's heads and so on. This is the unique specificity of your room. This is your room. No one else has it, just you. And it's like this. When you move your head or bend down to tie your shoelace, a whole different world arises. Ah... instantly arising, instantly arising!

In Tibetan, we describe it as '**lhun drup**' – lhun means a heap or a pile or a hill, and drup means accomplished, that is, **it comes all at once**. As you bend forward, suddenly you see the floor and then there is no floor as you're looking at someone's face and greeting them! It's like that. Instant revelation, moment by moment, moment by moment, and within that field we are moving.

So we have this ungraspable, open ground, the undivided field within which we have the unique specificity of our movement moment by moment, which is our movement as a descriptor. But it's not our movement as an autonomous intentionality because we find ourselves moving due to this or that. If somebody was to suddenly come into the room, you'd turn your head to see who's there. And

then you'd know that you are a puppet. *I'm a puppet! You make a noise and I look. Where's my autonomy gone?*

We are interactive beings. This is the shared quality of the field that we emerge from, in and as. Because we don't emerge out of the field, we emerge within the field, and the field is emerging within itself. What then is the individuality of the individual?

Individual is a funny word because it means 'impossible to divide', but we are dividing all the time. We're ceaselessly fragmenting. Now if we were just one thing, being fragmented would be bad news. If you had a vase and you dropped it, you'd look for the glue to fix it back. You wouldn't want it to be fragmented. But we are not one thing and we never were one thing. Culturally and socially, you're given a name and people talk about you as if you were 'a person', but you have never been a person. That is delusion. It's a cultural virus that infects you, it's a false belief, a cause of madness.

You should try to behave better. I've seen the report from school. You're getting into trouble. You talk to the child. *You are somebody and you have to control yourself.* The child says: *but he pushed me, he pushed me! What am I supposed to do? He pushed me, why can't I push back?* You may deny that and keep blaming the child. Kids have a lots of experiences like that.

Suddenly somebody's got the scissors out and they've cut around you, and you've become figural and everything else recedes into the background. There's just you in the spotlight. You're in trouble now, you wouldn't like to be in your shoes. All alone. *What's going to happen? I didn't mean to do it. I don't know why I did it!* So many people when they're caught by the police say: *I don't know why I did it, I just don't know why I did it. Shoplifting... I don't know why I did it!* Of course they were thinking of nicking something, but they don't know why they had the thought that they needed to steal that. It just came into their mind, they fused into the thought and put the thing in their bag. And when the detective catches them

at the door. They deny doing it. The police says: *you did it*. And they are like, *okay, I did it... but I didn't do it!* You may have had some experience like that in your life.

What is your agency? It's you, yes, but what is it that's expressing it? Is there some deep, true self inside, some master, some magus, some homunculus, some little essence of you? It's a field of experience. Due maybe to poverty, maybe to contempt for organised society – all kind of reasons lead people into shoplifting and crime. And all kind of factors also lead some people to be studying in the university library until ten at night. Everyone else has left, gone to the pub, but they're reading away because they've got their vision of how life should be.

Delusion: taking the illusion as having some inner defining essence

We get caught by ideas and the idea becomes the rhythm and the pulsation and the direction of our existence. So delusion is when you don't see what you're up to – it's an illusion. You find yourself having this kind of life. You might look back and think how you ended up like this. *When I was young I never thought I'd be living like this. What the hell, how did this happen? Come on!* You end up thinking it's you. At that point you can think that it's you, but it isn't you.

Whatever you take yourself to be has been a co-creation with other people – with your school teachers, with your parents, siblings if you had them, if it was a friendly family, a rivalrous family, a cruel family – all kind of factors are moving together, I am performative and without a personal essence! There is no performer of the performance of myself. There is no maker of the identity of myself. It is an illusion. You see the mirage.

A mirage arises due to causes and circumstances. The heat rising from the road causes the air to quiver in a particular way that appears to us as we move towards it to be the presence of water. There is no water. And there is no self. The self is an illusion. That doesn't mean you don't exist, but you don't exist as 'a thing'. There is no personal essence of you. The essence of you is emptiness, mahasunyata. This is the ungraspable, unborn, open ground of everything, and you are flowering, you are displaying, you are radiating from that, moment by moment.

Delusion arises when you seek to apprehend this formation as indicating who you are. Working in therapy you hear all kind of sad stories, but one of the saddest flavours is the people who take so much responsibility onto themselves, who always blame themselves, who think that the difficulties in the family were due to them. *If only I had been better then my dad would have loved me.* Really? What you see in that moment is the desire for agency: 'if only'.

I am an autonomous subject, I am myself, I have to take responsibility for myself, I have to try to make the best use of this life that I have. Pretty wild language! *I have a life.* Really? Where'd you keep it? In the bank? What do you do with it? Do you clean it? You have to clean your teeth, what do you do with your life? Kick it about? Give it to other people? *If you don't love me, I'm going to kill myself. Without you, I'm nothing.* So where's your life, where's your autonomy? Lots of young men, especially, get into this blackmailing of girls – *if you don't love me, I'll die.* It might look romantic with Shakespeare but it's not very pleasant if you get involved in it.

Where is this self, then? **The self is an idea.** We can look at this in detail tomorrow, try to see it in the stream of our own experience and do some practice to make it more immediately revealed to us. We're not trying to change anything, or develop something, or make our life different. We just want to see: when I explain myself to myself or to other people, am I revealing myself or covering myself? Am I showing myself or inventing myself? The narrative self from this point of view is a story. And the more you tell the story and develop the story, adding your adjectives and adverbs and bringing all kind of flavours and feeling tones into it, the more it is as if this is who I really am.

So the function of meditation is to give yourself time to pause: is this story true? We like the movies, we like going to the theatre, we like reading novels. We like things that aren't true. We like to believe things that aren't true, and one of the reasons for that is that we believe that everything is true – and it's not true. Everything is fiction. Somebody wrote the novel. The novel of yourself has multiple writers. It may have your name on the cover, 'This is My Life', but your mum wrote one chapter and your dad another, and there's all these other people. It's a group production, and it's you, and it's a construct.

There's nothing wrong with the construct because it's movement, and if the movement is released from its entrapment in the cocoon of self-reference, from this endless reverberation around itself, it becomes connective, and we say: *Oh! when I look at you I feel like this, and when I look at you I feel like this. I feel differently with different people.* So I come into being in connectivity.

I don't have a being, a private being inside, my true being, my true self. So who I hang out with is surely important, but more important is how I hang out. Do I actually receive people? Am I interested in people? Do I allow them to come in? What are the filters between me and the world? What is my editing frame of reference? *I get a bit wary, not sure about other people and what they're thinking... I want to know what you're thinking.* That's a pretty stupid question. You could never say what you're thinking because it's already gone. *What I was thinking?* No. What are you thinking now? It's already gone. Thoughts are very quick. You can never tell people what you're thinking. You just notice it as it's vanishing.

You can't know other people because they change and they're not separate, this is the same for us. **Delusion** is taking the illusion as an image which is created by something, that there is some inner defining essence which could reiterate, repeat and represent that kind of structure, and then we believe in it because we live in a world of representation. When you are a kid you gradually learn your name. Your mum says: *didn't you hear me? I was calling you!* Oh, okay. When I hear that noise I have to know 'that's me' and I have to run inside. So, I am that.

That's not a kind of Hindu mysticism – 'tat twam asi' – it's just, I'm this name, I am my name. Then the name/ the nominative gives you a noun, a something, and that thing then has people who like you and people who don't like you, and things you're good at in school and things you're not good at in school. And you start to get this profile, the topology of the lived experience of being yourself. That's what we inhabit, and it goes on and on, interacting and interacting. *I like this and I don't like that.* We have enthusiasms and we get bored and so on – all of this is movement.

Delusion is to imagine that the movement is manifested or driven by some internal stasis of true definition or true self. It is the movement of emptiness, the movement of awareness.

Now, if you're new to this way of looking at things it can seem very strange. It's a basic question: **how can something come out of nothing?** Well, it's very easy. When something comes out of nothing, it's the something of nothingness. **'Something'** is how nothing shows itself, and the something, when you look at it, is inseparable from nothing. **'Nothing'** is not an annihilation, it's not a homogenisation. We're not throwing everything into a blender and smoothing it all out. Each moment of existence has an absolute precision, but it's not a something – you can't catch it. What you catch is concept and language. You catch the idea of things. The things themselves you cannot catch.

Western philosophers have written a lot about this as well. 'Das Ding an sich', the thing in itself, the true thing – but you can't get it, it's not there. That's why phenomenology always kind of vanishes into the Sahara. It just runs out of gas. There's nothing there. *But we're here! I exist! I'm me, I exist, I'm me! Look, I'm me!* That's a statement. That's a tensing of muscles. *I feel like me. You're going to tell me I'm not me? Well, fuck you! Woah!* That's contraction. Relax the contraction. *Ahhh.* So we isolate and we connect, we isolate and we connect.

We are **pulsatory creatures**: closer and more distant, breathing in and breathing out, the heart moving with pump-pump and pump-pump. Pulsation is the truth of everything. To want to find true essence as a thing is not in the game. 'Thing' is delusion, a false, misleading concept. We live in a consumer capitalist culture with the fetish of the object, the fetish of the commodity, running just about every aspect of our life. It is delusion. It is delusion. It's just delusion.

Mr. Putin now is wanting to extend his total control of Russia for another twelve years. *Why? You're getting old, you're getting tired, go and hang out on the beach. You stole Crimea, go and hang out on the beach there. It's nice, have a vodka.* But he can't let go of power. Trump, too, will find it very difficult to let go of power,

and Mr. Johnson looks like he's fairly power-hungry. *I am this person! I am an important person!* No, you're not. You're there due to various wind and currents blowing through, creating this temporary pattern in the sand, and the wind will keep blowing and that pattern will vanish.

There is no fixed enduring self

The idea of karma is that every activity (and karma simply means activity) sets up particular tendencies, or movements, or vibrations, which show themselves at some other time. For example, if you've been in a place like the Sahara, you know that it's very, very hot in the day and then as soon as the sun goes below the horizon the wind starts to blow. Whoooosh. You get that in India as well in the hot season. Whoooosh. Why is the wind blowing? It's blowing because the sun's gone down. The heated air and the cool air meet together and whoooosh. The wind is blowing. That's our life. Factors which are not us, blow us. We are the movement of life.

Inside of that, we're not entirely puppets, and we're certainly not entirely masters of the game either. **We are participants**, and the most important thing for meditation as we manifest into the world is to find a delicacy of attention to the emergent field where we are with other people, and to respond into that. Finesse gives us timing. We don't talk over other people. We can hear, receive and respond, and find a healthy pulsation of that. Then life's very easy. But if you get sealed in yourself, it's very lonely and isolated. If you then want other people to do what you tell them to do, it's very tedious, because they never will. Who would want to be the ruler of the world? Everyone will disappoint you.

It's like the old saying: 'If you want something done, well, do it yourself.' When I worked in the NHS I'd ask some colleagues to do something, and then they'd write something and I'd go, *fucking hell, what is this? What is this?* And they say: *oh, well, that's how we thought it should be.* You don't have my thoughts. Only I have my thoughts, so if I want it to be an expression of my thoughts as they are

in the moment, because they won't be like this tomorrow as they are in this moment, then I'm going to have to do it.

That's how you become workaholic: not trusting other people because they fuck up. They fuck up because they're not you. And that's how you become The Great Fuck-Up yourself, thinking that everyone else is fucking up because they're not you. You bind yourself in and that's where we can see that my criteria for how it should be arise due to causes and conditions – my education, the forces that were around as I grew up, the people I've hung out with, my particular value system, and so on. All of these are valid, but they're not true; they are functional.

The first of all is the open **ground**. The field, the unified field, **the undivided non-dual field**, within which I am. The field came first. Although we don't want to know it, mum and dad were there before we were. The world was here before we were born and it will be here when we are dead. We're just passing through. We're not the alpha and omega, we're just a breath, a puff of wind. If we see that, it means we see that participation, connectivity, is more important than anything else.

You see that in work teams. If the team has synergy, if there is an alignment of the energy of the people who are working together, it's very beautiful. It means that people have to recognise that collaboration, the being in it together with others in the shared rhythm (which is never going to be my rhythm and it's never going to be your rhythm) is what counts, that if we all engage in a rhythm which is not ours individually but is ours collectively, then we can have really effective work teams. Or, if you're dancing with other people, it's also exactly that – you're not following one person's particular way of doing it, but the group is finding how it is that you're going to do this dance at this particular time. **The delusion is the isolated individual self, there before the event.**

From this point of view, there is no self, no fixed enduring self, what there is, if you like, is a '**selfing**', which might be a way of describing the unique specificity of myself as revealed to you and to me both in the moment of our

participation together. Because even though I'm talking just now, I'm talking looking at you and feeling with you. We're engaging together, hopefully, in something. This is a field of connectivity which is the basis of my talking. I'm talking with you.

The group is expressing something through me because how I can talk depends on the quality of attention that you bring to the task. If you look completely bored, as if you're desperate to leave, and I see you taking out your hip-flask for the third time, that's going to be a different feeling. But it's the being in it together that's so amazing. When we say the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, that's the whole thing.

Dzogpachenpo essentially means the whole. It means that which, although it has diversity, is never fragmented or divided. When we experience the whole there's always space for everyone. The danger of delusion is retreating into the definition of an essential self which is apart.

If, for example, you do tantric meditation you visualise the arising of a deity, in front of you or as yourself. You inhabit that sphere and then that sphere dissolves. And then you do it again, and you do it again, you do it again. You get up in the morning and you open the mandala of your daily life. You go to sleep at night and you close the mandala of your daily life. It's opening and closing, opening and closing, and each time it's different. Each time it has a different flavour, a different mood and different qualities. This is our life. It is not a thing.

All the different schools of buddhism are concerned with how to take the thingness out of life without life collapsing. In this room, we have pillars holding up the ceiling. Sometimes it feels as if my sense of the truth of myself, who I really am, is like one of those pillar holding me up, and if that collapsed, if I had a kind of de-personalisation, if I didn't recognise myself I'd kind of collapse.

Who am I? What am I doing? That is a cul de sac, a dead end road that arises because you're still trying to find a truth through narrative. I can't tell the same story about myself today that I told yesterday. You know that if you get a cold, if you get a bit depressed, if you fall in love, you tell different kind of stories about

yourself. You're happy, you're sad, you feel expansive, you feel contracting – these are modalities of how you express. But there is no truth to them because they are always relational.

This grasping at an enduring self, a kind of ahamkara, as if there was some 'I AM-NESS' which could be taken hold of, is often seen in buddhism as the great delusion. It's addressed in a different way in hinduism, in its various tantric schools and so on. Essentially, they go on the same point. There isn't much difference in the descriptions of Brahman and sunyata. But buddhists don't like to hear this because buddhists are inclusive/exclusive simultaneously. And inside the buddhist schools there are nyingmapa who are inclusive/exclusive. And inside the nyingmapa, there're people from Dorje Drak Gompa who are inclusive/exclusive. You can't have 'this' without getting rid of 'that' because if you get 'this-that', well, what's 'this'? It's part of 'this-that'. But what is 'this'? You get rid of 'that', bump them off, final solution... get rid of the problem. *Then there'll just be me. I am the ruler of the world, I define everything on my terms!* Then you get lonely. Where is the other?

The Upanishads say this is how the world began. God was sitting and he got lonely. He thought he should better invent someone, so he made a little man, a friend! And that's how everything began. But duality 'is' because a unified point would be totally bleak and lonely. Non-duality is not-one/ not-two; it's the interactive complexity which never fissures out into fragmented aspects, each with their autonomy.

In tantric texts, it explains how everything exists in the womb of the Great Mother. The Great Mother is Prajnaparamita, the wisdom, the understanding of emptiness, and we are in her womb, and you cannot become a buddha unless you are born in her womb. You're not born out of her womb, but in a funny way you're born into her womb, because this womb, this circle, the bagua, is actually emptiness. It is 'how-it-is'. We're born into nothing, but not nothing for long, because nothing becomes everything. We're in this field of everything.

Now, after some time we'll go out into the evening, we'll see people in the streets, cars, and so on. And you turn a corner and a corner and a corner, this way and that, always this and this and this and this. It never stops, this is the ceaseless display. The texts always say, it's unborn and unceasing. It's unborn because everything has the root quality, or heart of emptiness and it's unceasing because there's no limit to the openness of emptiness.

Now, there's a limit to me! In a while we'll come to an end and I'll go home because that's what you get if you live in a skin-bag. You get tired, you have a limited capacity. But emptiness has no capacity at all because it has infinite capacity. You could never totalise it. You could never say that you come to a limit. It has no inside or outside, no top, no bottom, no preference in any direction. That's why it's often compared to a **thigle**, to a ball, because a ball has no corners. If you get a glass ball and you spin it around, how would you recognise where you began? From every direction it looks the same. Emptiness is like that. But when you come into manifestation, it's easy to privilege your sense of self and get the rest of the world to recede into the background.

The figure in the foreground is me in my solitary majesty, then there's all of you guys. *I'm so sorry for you. It must be difficult for you not to be me, because, actually, I am me and you can't be me because I'm me, I've monopolised it, I've trademarked it, it's me.* It's quite upsetting when you hear other people talking about themselves as me. Why is that? Everybody sees that they are the centre.

Now, one reading of that would be that it's an extreme, a narcissistic position, that people are trapped in a bubble of self-reference. However, if you stay close to your lived experience, there's just this, and I am the only experiencer of 'this'. I can communicate a little bit and we can get some kind of resonance, some resemblance, some echoing so that we feel we're somehow in the same sort of field, but it's never exactly the same. Difference and sameness are always in a dialogue.

We're in this room together but we're all in different rooms. Both are true. If we were only in our completely different rooms, you could have infinite wisdom, but then you'd be like Shiva on top of Mount Kailash. And the wind's blowing and you're just sitting there. *Oh, this is great, this is so cool! I wouldn't like to be down there in the cosy warmth and all that food and all... aahhh!*

And so we are part of the world, we are with other people, but we don't get lost in being with other people because we are ourselves. We can be close and have connectivity, but the connectivity doesn't mean the dissolving of yourself. If you go confluent, if you merge into someone else in sex or some particular experience that may be fine, but as a way of functioning in the world, it would be impossible.

Psychosis is a condition in which people become confluent with distorted perceptions and unhelpful formulations of experience, and they merge into it and believe that it's true. It's not true. It's not true; it's like a dream, it's an illusion. An illusion is not a fantasy that you awaken from. An illusion is the likeness of being as if this were the case.

We have two main foci here: 'as is' and 'as if'. '**As is**' is open and empty: the truth can't be said. With '**as if**' you enter into engagement with others, sharing and creating. If you work with other people on a joint project, there's a to-ing and a fro-ing, and a 'this' and a 'that'. That's 'as if'. You realise that their perception is different from yours, and the key point then is always to avoid the vertical axis of better/ worse. Most of our life is structured around this axis, but if you collapse that axis. There's just DIFFERENT.

Then you can really be respectful of other people, and you can learn from other people. You can be awakened by other people's difference that they don't see the thing the way you see them. Which allows you then to ease yourself out of the cocoon, the eggshell, of self-reference. Then you get nurtured by difference – not same, not completely different, but always in that movement. That's why this image of yab-yum, of male and female deities in sexual union, is so important. It's because they are not one and they are not two. They are functioning together as a

unified cycle, with prana energy moving through the body of one and down into the body of the other, endlessly cycling round and round.

Confusion: trying to think our way out of delusion keeps us in confusion

As we come to an end this evening and you go out in the world, walking down the street, perception is occurring, judgment is occurring, memory and thoughts are occurring. You don't have to choose, you can have it all. Just relax into the out-breath. Everything is arising at once. If you try to sort it out, you will have to simplify.

The complexity of the sphere of experience is so multi-dimensional, so multi-flavoured. It's like taking a paper and pen and trying to draw a tree. It takes you forever. You can't catch a tree. You can appreciate a tree, you can receive a tree, through your eyes, through rubbing your face on its bark, through sniffing it. The whole shebang comes all at once, but you can't sort it out. It's non-linear. Rational thought, narrative, is linear, and linear thought goes from A to B – you've got to have A and you've got to have B. So you reify, it's here, it's this, and you reify B, it's that, it's over there, and then you move up and down, shuttling between these two points. But, actually, it arises all together, all at once, with space for whatever is occurring.

Say you're sitting in the train. You want to read something, and some people get in and they're laughing and joking. You can't read anymore. What shall you do? Shoot them? Get off the train? Close your book? But you don't want to close your book. Who's torturing you? Are they torturing you, or is your idea of how you want to be torturing you? There are moments for being strong and clear and decisive, but for most of us the lesson is about plasticity.

Plasticity is the midpoint between master and servant. Plasticity is our capacity to experience our potential interfacing with the potential of the situation: not dominating, not being dominated (although we could take up both of these momentarily). The problem always is when it locks into a choreography of power and the situation becomes over-determined. But if we want to find freedom, freedom for relating to people, it begins with not knowing who they are, always

meeting the other with the question. The otherness of the other means that whatever you've constructed about the other is for yourself – it hasn't brought you close to the other person. The more you see that more clearly you start to see: all that I KNOW about you is a wall between me and you, because who you are in this moment, you don't know – you're just being in this moment – and I don't know.

This is why again and again in the texts you have words like '**naked**' and '**fresh**', because the cladding, the clothing, of our assumptions, of our constructs, create a dullness whose advantage would seem to be a predictability, a self-reassurance. Actually, though it encloses us, limiting our revitalisation through profound connectivity and making us unavailable to find ourselves. We are revelatory creatures: we reveal ourselves through walking, talking, eating, sleeping, doing things, whether alone or with other people. Energy is unfolding. This is what we are. When that is not appreciated, we end up with confusion, and confusion condemns us to trying endlessly to sort out what's going on.

The problem is, you know, unless a child is brilliant in mathematics, if you took a class of six-year-olds who still do arithmetic and gave them a calculation requiring calculus to solve it, they would be paralysed. They wouldn't have the tools for the job. Likewise being in samsara, being in this particular socio-political nexus of conceptual formulations, doesn't provide us with the tools whereby we can get even a sense of what awareness means.

We understand consciousness, we understand intelligence, we understand rational thought, we understand the application of mental acuity to problem-solving, but awareness – this open, indestructible, revelatory quality of here-ness – is not something we have much sense of, and it's only awareness that allows everything to come at once without us being overwhelmed.

We hear a lot these days about PTSD and we see how easy it is to overwhelm the ego through pain, through torture, through car crashes, and so on. The self-structure is given a dose of a big world that it cannot metabolise, can't compute, can't dissolve, and so it collapses. But awareness is open to everything.

So that's the big difference. It's our confusion of trying to think our way out of delusion that keeps us in confusion. We have to shift gear into ourselves, because awareness is already present. It's about doing less, about being kinder to oneself, about observing how the false God of the will to power gets us going, and how our search for mastery is actually the path by which we become enslaved.

SESSION 1/6 (WEEKEND RETREAT)

How experience arise: the basis and the manifestation

There is a lot of panic around. People have a lot of fear. The reason for the fear is that people think that bad things will happen to them. It can be guaranteed that bad things will happen to you before you die, and you will definitely die. So, if you're clear that there is shit available and it's coming your way and you're going to die, then you can relax. This is not an unknown.

The basis of Buddhist practice is to free ourselves from fear. We feel that something is going to happen to me. That's based on the idea that I exist as an object that can be acted upon by forces. Now of course, there are aspects of how we manifest which are indeed impacted. If it rains we get wet, if it's cold we start to shiver. We are clearly in relation with the environment.

But if all of our identity formulates around a proposition that I am a vulnerable entity, I need to protect myself at all costs and I need to keep myself first, then we have both a hostility towards the environment and an anxious vulnerability about being at the mercy of forces. So we want to release ourselves from the entrapment of being a thing which is blown about like a leaf in the autumn wind.

The whole function of the many Buddhist teachings on all the different levels is to awaken to the **basis of our existence** and the **manifestation of our existence** and see that these are not two different things. It's not that we have a pure self somewhere or that we have a soul hidden inside us. At this very moment, this room here is being revealed to us directly in our awareness and indirectly as it's processed through our interpretation. Because we tend to be mesmerised by the conceptual movement of our interpretation, we're not directly in touch with the freshness of being here. The function of the practice is to relax our fixation on self-construction and become more aware of simply being present.

In the time before us, I want to set out for you how the mind actually is, what the mind actually is and how this becomes obscured, how this becomes covered up for us.

Practice: be with whatever is occurring

First of all, we could do some simple sitting. When we sit, we're just here. We're not trying to do anything. We're not trying to be mindful or develop a particular way of relating to our experience. We simply want to be with whatever is occurring. That may seem like a dull experience or quite a bright one, but whatever it is, we want to not be active.

Most of our life is spent in active processing, in working things out, in pattern formation, in making sense of things, in linking and thinking and building pictures which are busy, elaborated, but which collapse in time. As the Buddha said on many occasions, everything that has a cause or a beginning will come to an end. Whatever constructs or develops, vanishes.

When we think about our lives and the various stages we have lived through, we've encountered different kinds of experiences. Many events, activities or people that seemed terribly important, they've vanished. We don't do these things anymore, we don't meet these people anymore. All the energy that we've invested in these particular structures that seemed so vital, so vibrant, so necessary for us to be ourselves, vanish. And then we're re-constituted in a new formation and a new formation. This is how our life tumbles on.

When we sit, we don't want to get involved in relating to what is arising, but just observe it. We don't even want to know what's arising, but just to allow it to flow through our presence here, whether it's something arising in the body or in the room.

In this kind of practice, we usually sit in an open way, maybe with the hands on the knee, rather than in the lap. The gaze is open into the space in front of us. We're not separating inside and outside as we'll come to see that this is a somewhat artificial construction of the mind.

So we want to just allow whatever is occurring to occur and not do anything with it. We're addicted to activity. Part of that activity is to make our sense of ourselves essential and vital to our interpretation of what is going on. The world then gets constellated around I, me, myself – my embodiment, my thoughts, my plans, what's important to me.

We'll sit like this for a while.

Two main aspects of dzogchen

The key thing in meditation is not to try too hard. We're not attempting to construct something new. We want to take a holiday from construction. Dzogpachenpo, the name of this particular orientation inside the dharma, indicates something which is complete, finished, something which doesn't need any alteration, something which is whole, which has an integrity. This is the basis of our existence.

We live, however, in a world of fragmentation, of perceiving aspects, of selective attention, of privileging certain aspects of our experience. *This is good and I want more of it, and this is bad and I want less of it.* Because of that we become very active in trying to manage our life. This is the nature of the existence of the ego. We want to release ourselves from this as the primary fixation. The ego is not something bad, it's just overburdened. When we release the requirement that the ego does everything, we start to find that the ego is in fact a ray of light, a manifestation of the pulse of the energy of our basic awareness.

In dzogchen, you have two main aspects:

1) The purity of the mind, which means that it's never been contaminated, it's never been mixed with anything else. We'll look at that in some detail.

2) Everything arises from that purity instantly, immediately. Our experience is not a construct. It's not something which has to be built up. The build up we have is layered on top of the immediate freshness of the experience.

When we do the sitting practice, and we'll do it quite a few times, the main instruction is: **don't merge** with what is arising and **don't push away** what is arising. Merging is the direction for desire, a need for more, a confluence, fusion, the wish for the absence of the burden of self and so on. While pushing away is a gesture or a movement in the family of aversion or anger, it's a wanting for not to be involved. *I don't want to be involved in this, I want to get rid of this.*

These two aspects of meditation relate to **primordial purity** and **immediate manifestation**.

Primordial purity means it's untouched, it's complete. When we involve ourselves in a feeling, a thought, a memory, as if we need this, what do we need it for? A lot of the time your life is like being a child on the floor with a whole mass of Lego before it, and you're trying to build something. You're scrabbling around on the floor and trying to find exactly the right piece that let's you make the boat or the tower or the plane or whatever. Some things seem very important, others are not. Important for what?

When you sit with your mind you see that all thoughts arise and pass. All feeling arises and passes, all sensations arise and pass. You cannot build a house with water. These are all transient phenomena.

However, in our mental dullness, we imagine that we can do the impossible, that we can make a stable existence of transient phenomena. And this is why samsara – this movement of experience after experience, life after life – keeps turning. We're pumping so much energy into the impossible task of making something stable, reliable, enduring, wonderful, when in fact, it's fading all the time. Now if we want it to become stable, then the fading becomes a problem. So, we then have to try harder and harder. But it's fading.

All phenomena are impermanent, whether it's mental phenomena, the phenomena of the senses, the phenomena that we experience in the outside world, the five elements and so on.

Movement is what is effortlessly arising, **stillness** is the primordial purity of what is there from the very beginning. When we sit in the practice and we find ourselves wanting to hang on to a thought or caught up in a thought, we don't have to release ourselves because then we would go from merging to aversion. You simply stay present. The thought will go. The sensation will go. Then we start to see that a lot of the action that I am engaged in is unnecessary. Thoughts come. I'm not thinking them, they reveal themselves. If I grab hold of one or two of them, I say: *I am thinking this*. But I didn't make the thought. I didn't make the sensation. I didn't cause the memory to suddenly arise. This is offered.

We are the recipients of the unfolding of the generosity of the potential of the basis of our awareness. The more we see this, the more we can relax, and things come to mind. They manifest as required. We don't have to do it. It's doing.

The basis: the ground (kha-dag) and its 5 qualities

So I'll set out a little bit of traditional understanding on how our experiences arise and then we will do some more meditation.

Generally speaking, the teaching is set out as **the ground** or base or source, then **the path** and **the result**.

The ground is the basis for our experience.

If the earth wasn't here, we wouldn't be able to build things on top of it. You have to have some solidity. If you want to build a house, you have to check if the soil is strong enough to support what is being generated, what we put on top it, a foundation. Because we live in a world of our seemingly solid bodies, we want to have solid ground underneath our feet. We don't want to slip. We want to stand firm. So our mind shifts to the foundation conceptually to the earth element. A basis should be something predictable and reliable. It should be something you can get hold of and test. There are engineers going around with machines testing whether the earth is solid enough to build something on top. And they dig and put in concrete to make foundations.

As Buddhism comes to the West, we are faced with a lot of problems with language because language is a reverberating network. Words have meaning because of association. One word by itself has no meaning. Words play together and the interplay of words creates meaning. In the West, our languages have been around a very long time. We have a very rich culture and so our words are thick with associations. When Buddhism came to Tibet, their language was much thinner, you could say. And so they were able to absorb a lot of Buddhist ideas directly as the core meaning of words. If you are reading a Tibetan text, it's evident that this word is indicating that. While if we read a word like awareness or consciousness, people in the west have many different readings of what that means.

A word like 'mind' brings forth many different ideas. For a lot of people, it's something inside the skull, something generated by electro-chemical activity in the brain. That's not at all the view in dharma. So we have to be quite sensitive to how we use language and to try to hold a kind of open space of rethinking the connotations of certain kind of words. Ground is not about something solid from this point of view

The basis of our existence, as the texts say, is marked by **five qualities**. You could say it's marked by a billion qualities, but five are set out:

1) The first is, it's **uncompounded, dū-ma-jé**, (Tib: 'dus ma byas), it hasn't been gathered together.

When we look around this room, everything we see is a compound – the camera, the wooden floor, the electrical supply line, our bodies. We are like a marketplace where many different factors have come together to generate the sense that this is my body. We have teeth. If they go bad, the dentist takes them out. If you want to have short hair you got to the barber. He cuts your hair. You trim your nails. We're constantly adjusting the body. It's like a work in process. Motorcars, everything in the city, everything in the shops – these things are compounded. And the compounds are influenced by many different factors.

Now that people will get more anxious that the virus will cause them to be locked in the house, they want to buy things like tin food, toilet paper, tissues, sprays and so on. Two months ago, this wasn't on anybody's mind. Now that this thought form arises and we, as constructive creatures, incorporate this attitude into ourselves, it drives us to spend our money in new ways. That's what we experience. That's what compounded means. It's an interplay of factors. But the ground, the source out of which we are arising, and this room and the whole of London is arising moment by moment, is not compounded. It is simple, pure, not a mixture, not artificial, not contrived.

2) The second term that's used to describe it is '**arising of itself**'. If we say 'self-arising', it's as if there is some sort of self in it that's arising. It's not a little person in it doing it. There isn't a doer.

The idea of the doer is very strong in our culture. In the Christian tradition, God is the first doer – the one that makes things happen. But this ground is not made by anyone. And what occurs with the ground is not made by the ground.

Our notion of a subject and an object, a consciousness that regards the situation and does something is not what's applied here. In the book of Genesis, it's described that God makes the world. And every now and then he has a look around and finds '*Oh, that's good, that's very nice!*' That's why he has a little rest on the seventh day. He's done enough. But our ground is never stopping. It doesn't need a holiday because it doesn't get tired because it hasn't done anything. The ground or source is the space of revelation. And we'll start to see more what this term revelation can mean.

3) The ground is **not limited**.

The third aspect of the ground is called **long-yang**. In Tibetan that means deep and vast. Essentially it means infinite, that it has no border, no limit. You can't find it anyway. When we look around in our lives, we find that everything has a limit. First of all, your bank balance has a limit. Your health, your possessions, your energy to do things has a limit. The extent of a country has a limit. What can be described in a language has a limit.

Everything that you review has a particular shaping. That is to say that the formulation of the identity of any phenomena is inseparable from the law of exclusion. If something is a banana, it's a banana not just in its banana-ness, but because banana-ness is not an inherent quality of a banana. Banana-ness is linked to the fact of orange-ness, apple-ness. So apple-ness, orange-ness, toffee-ness is excluded. Once you've gotten rid of all this other stuff, you've got your banana. This is how the mind identifies phenomena. This means not that. That means not this. Our thinking would collapse, if that could be this and this could be that.

We get used to the fact that politicians lie to us all the time, and that's really annoying. When people lie to us, we think this is that. We don't like that. It's not very nice. We like people to be straight forward. If this is this and that is that, we relax a little.

Exclusion, otherness is the dynamic basis for the assertion of self. The this-ness of this is the absence of the that-ness of that. That's the de-limitation of apprehending something as an entity. If you're a man, you're not a woman. If you're a child you're not an adult, and so on. So, you have categories which are formulated by mutual exclusion.

The term long yang means none of that applies. It is not established through mental processing. It's not an idea. It's not created on the basis of categories. In London, although you wouldn't know it when you walk around here and see the crazy kind of building going on, you're supposed to have planning permission. And the planning permission tells you what you're entitled to do and what you can't do. This is valid and this is not. If you go for a job interview, they've got a checklist of qualities and they see if you fit in with their criteria or not. This is how life proceeds – organisation through categories.

The infinity of the ground itself is not contained or defined in any categories.

4) The fourth aspect is that it is **inexpressible**.

We're meeting here on the weekend because we're sad, bored, lonely people, who have nothing better to do. So we're going to talk and listen a lot about things which are inexpressible! There are so many books about the inexpressible. How is that possible!

It's because there are two factors, which are operating together. **Wisdom**, which is silent, gives us access to the inexpressible. **Compassion**, which is relational and connective, gives us access to the movement of belonging together. Going back to the two basic principles, silence and primordial purity are inseparable, and language is one of the aspects of instant of manifestation, revelation or instant presence. Language flow.

Through language, we throw out little lines, gestures of connectivity. Through that we can weave something. Sometimes that weave is constructive and sometimes it's deconstructive. That is to say, we're trying to create self-dissolving structures. When you're a child on the beach, building sandcastles, there's some excitement at building the sandcastle, but there's also some excitement at the

wave coming in on the other side and washing your sand castle away. All that you did is just washed away.

One of the great things about going to primary school is that you get a little wooden box with a pencil, a rubber, a ruler, a pencil sharpener and some other useful important things inside. The rubber is really good because you can rub things out. Of course, it doesn't rub out very cleanly. So as we try to correct our lives, we end up with this process of endless accretion of marking and rubbing, marking and rubbing. It is a technique used a lot in modern art.

When something is inexpressible, it doesn't mean you can simply find it through silence because we get lost. We are creatures of expression. We are energetic manifestation. Just sitting quiet, with all these reverberations around, we just find ourselves getting pulled this way and that, swirling all over the place, beckoned by the sirens on the rocks unless you find a way to release yourself from their intoxicating power.

The function of the explanations is not to make you a Buddhist or convert you into anything. It's to give you screwdrivers with which you can loosen this screws that are holding this fabricated structure of yourself in place. When you loosen the self-structure, it's not that you have no self but you get a flexible, pliable self. It's the rigidity of the self-construct that's the problem. Self per se is not a problem. Self as responsiveness or being able to relate to other people according to different circumstances is very beautiful. You wouldn't have any empathic attunement or compassion, unless you were able to do that. It is the fixation which causes the problem.

5) The fifth aspect of the ground or the base is that the **categories of samsara and nirvana don't touch it.**

Generally speaking, samsara means entrapment, imprisonment, being caught up in something. Nirvana means the peace that comes from the ending of that enthrallment, that elaboration, that ceaseless activity. The ground has nothing to do with that. All the constructs that we have, can't touch the ground. It is beyond conceptualisation.

If you spend your life learning, going to schools, college and so on and you spend your life moving concepts around, it is as if concepts are the sole vehicle of your existence. *The idea that something can't be caught with concepts really puts me out of the game because it's all I got. And I know that it's all I got.* And you think about it and wonder what this guy is talking about. After all we process experiences, customising what we see and hear according to our own experience. This is conceptual elaboration.

But this is not the totality of our presence. We also have a pre-conceptual awareness. So when we use the word '**awareness**' this weekend, that's what it is referring to: **something that is not generated by concepts**, which is not formulated through concepts, but also something which is not oppositional to concepts.

The manifestation: field of potential that we are a part of (lhun-drup)

Concepts are like clouds or rainbows. They arise in the space of the mind and they pass through it. When you have a typical day in London, you have this massive cloud and it seems like there's only cloud. Every now and then the blue breaks through – some special little moment. When a wind blows and all the clouds go, you see this infinite open blue sky. Oh wow! The state of the cloud is altered. Instead of the cloud being the definition of the sky that the truth of it as another grey day – this is me in my concepts about who I am, this is a kind of closing that I do.

Now as you **open**, there you are, you see an open space, a space of potential of possibility.

Therefore, the concepts arising, moving and passing in the space of awareness are not the enemy. They are like a breath of wind. When you look at these old maps, there are sometimes little cherubim in the corner, blowing and puffing and the ships are sailing around the sea. This is our life. A concept arises and it moves you. Open or close. We pulsate to this rhythmic arising of concepts arising in our mind. They are energy.

The basic view here, which is different from the view established in our education, is that concepts belong in the family of compassion. **Concepts are**

about linking and connectivity. In psychoanalysis, we say that thinking is linking. We're always linking ourselves into certain suppositions, propositions and so on. That is pattern formation.

Pattern formation allows us to relate to different people.

When we have a break and you can chat with different people. You'll find yourself talking in different ways to different people. That's just the way it is. You can't say the same thing to everyone, unless you're the queen. *Pleased to meet you! Pleased to meet you! Pleased to meet you!* Obviously that's a lie! When you're actually relating to people, you might find that you have nothing to say to them. That is an energetic vibration. That's quite valid. It's not usually allowed in the rules of politeness, because politeness means pretence.

If I pretend I like you, do I like you? No, I'm actually insulting you and I'm deceiving myself. If you find you have no energetic connection with someone, that is primary. That is what is here. That is the quality of the field, the phenomenological field that you inhabit. If you attend to that, you'll ask yourself, *what'll I do with that?*

Namkhai Norbu, the great yogi and scholar, who started the Dzogchen Community, pointed out again and again that we have to work with circumstances. Circumstances are not a projected idea of how we would like it to be. It means what is revealed to us in our interaction. We click with some people and with others, there's nothing to say. That is very interesting.

When you walk in the park, there are some trees that catch your eyes more than others. There are some bushes that look a little dreary, so there's nothing to do there. But if you were an artist, you might get out your sketchpad and be fascinated by the entangles nature of the small branches in it. It depends on you. It is not a final, objectivising statement about the other. If you don't click, that is relational. It doesn't mean that they're stupid or boring or whatever your definitive conclusion about them might be. This is a field of potential.

The question then is: **how do we work with circumstances?**

You can't make a silk purse out of a cow's ear. If it's a cow's ear-situation, what do you do? Make a soup! But you can't make a silk purse. An awful lot of our social life is artificial.

Whatever we feel about Brexit, traditionally, the British and the French are fairly hostile. One of the reasons for forming the European Union, was to put an end to wars and racist or nationalist groups that don't like each other, like the French and the Germans. The idea was to bind them together, so that if they attacked the other, they'd be attacking themselves, so that murder would be suicidal. It's probably not going to work in the long run, because there is actually a basic antipathy. Greece and Italy have been flooded by immigrants and the northern European countries say:

Oh, so sad for you! What a difficult time you're having there. Oh, I wouldn't like to be you. And, you'd like some of my money to help you? I don't think so. It's your problem.

That's what you see. That's life. That's the topology of our existence. People's blah blah blah is sweet and they act sour, bitter, selfish as per the circumstances. That's the fact of it. These countries are not being rescued.

We have to see the shaping of the world and not pretend that things are better, but not become depressed and make them worse than they are. If you stay with the actual shaping of your lived experience, however, and the environment, as it's revealed to you, then participation becomes meaningful. That's what the fifth aspect of the ground means.

This is good, this is not good, this is limitation called samsara, this is freedom called nirvana – this is conceptualisation. You won't find the ground of your being, you won't find your own basis by sitting in a concept. You don't have to block concepts, you just have to not use them improperly.

Nowadays we have a sensitivity to child abuse, to environmental abuse. We also need to have a sensitivity to **concept abuse** and to **ego abuse**. The ego cannot get enlightened. When people spend a lot of time meditating and try very hard from their ego position, the ego doesn't get enlightened because the ego is an aspect of energy. It is not the ground of being. If you keep misconstruing how the

mind works, you keep trying to make energy stable. The ego is an energetic formation.

Our manifestation is energetic and changing and pulsing in the field of energy. It's always moving. We have to participate.

Working with circumstances means being present in your circumstances, without formulating positions in a rigid way before an event; without building up energised positions of hopes and fears, but **receiving and responding**.

— This.

—*Okay.*

—This is it.

—*Okay.*

—*I would have liked.... It would have been wonderful, if...*

That's a thought. That's a feeling tone, which is arising and passing. Is it true?

—*If only it would have worked out with that person, it would have been amazing....*

—My dear, are you a virgin? Presumably you've been in relationships before. Did they work out?

—*No.*

—Did you believe they would work out?

—*Yes.*

—You're maybe a little bit daft!

This is how it is. We don't know. Hopes and fears are not a very good indicator of how it will be. How it will be is, how it will be. Which means you have to hang in there with the happenstance of existence.

As we saw yesterday, we're not the masters of the situation, neither are we the slaves of events. We are participants. We have a certain possibility of influencing events, but we're not in control.

'Influencing' is a very beautiful word because it indicates the fluidity of our selves. If you want to influence events, you have to become fluid. If you're rigid and try to control, exert some kind of mastery, action brings reaction. Whereas, if you're fluid and you get a proximal meeting with how someone else is, then something comes into possibility. What blocks that is our idea of: what I would like to happen, what I believe needs to happen, what I'm sure should happen. When you hear phrases like that, you can feel the solidity in them.

—*I need you!*

—What for?

—*I just need you*

—No, you don't!

One thing you don't need is another person. What are you going to do with them? Do you want them 24 hours a day? Do you really want them 24 hours a day? Probably not. So what you're really trying to say is: *I need you from time to time, on my terms. So, when you need me, I may not need you. I hope that's ok.*

It's a bit tricky. So we have to observe the solidification of the other. People are not things. People are not knowable. We are not things; we are not knowable. It's not set piece interaction, it's a fluid evolving matrix of potential.

This is the generosity of the ground, the un-fixity, the un-definability. It doesn't mean that it's something vague or over the hill. It's not some mystic quintessence which has nothing to do with us. It is the actual basis of how we manifest. In not being some-ONE, you can be some-MANY. You can be many people. And you are.

You behave differently with different people – with parents, with bosses, with children, with policemen. You are constellated. You come into your shaping in relation to the event. That's one of the indicators in psychiatry if someone is having severe problems if they're unable to do that. The person who is just themselves all the time is just mad. If someone is under the hellish power of intense obsessive compulsive disorder, they feel they have to wash their hands again and again, wash the towels in their house, they have to vacuum the floor...

They just have to! It's non-relational. That's a mono-logic universe, which is isolated and lonely and hellish.

We come into being in the pulsation of give and take, in mutual modification, which is something quite helpful and useful. That's the beginning of the outlining of meaning of the ground or the basis. This is our ground or basis, we're not talking about anything abstract or foreign.

Every moment we are manifesting from this space. We sit here trying to not move around. You are interested in some things I say, not in others. You have fluctuations of your presence in this room. If you were a fixed thing, you could just turn it on and keep it at a standard level. But you have pulsations, some of which are provoked by external factors, external to your embodiment and some arise from inside – a sensation or a hook into an idea – that seems interesting. This is pulsing all the time. How come you can have this variety?

Variety, diversity is not the same as fragmentation. If you have one thing like a glass, it's shaped and held in place by the factors of maintenance – that is to say it's not being hit or dropped – it's not existing in itself. The glass seems to exist in itself. It's a glass in my right hand. Now it's a glass in my left hand. It's amazing! I have two hands and this glass moves between these two hands. Ladies and gentlemen, this is spectacular! It seems that the glass is just a glass in itself, but the glass exists supported by invisible forces, the **factors of maintenance**. This glass is trying to weigh on my hand. There is a force called gravity and if I get tired and let go of the glass, it will hit the floor and break. It will fragment.

So the factors of maintenance are always present in everything we see. And they can be influenced. People get a pain in their back and they go to the doctor. The doctor asks you to have a scan. Through scan, the doctor finds out that it's a cancer. Then a whole process occurs. The person didn't order cancer, they didn't pray for cancer, but they have cancer. Or at least cancer is the word we use to express this particular structuring of the body. That is to say, the sense of self that we have is held in place by many factors which we take for granted. *I'm me, just being me*. No, we're not. We have **supporting factors** and **non-supporting factors**.

That's what this virus can show us. If the virus can come in your body and if you have many pre-conditions of vulnerability, it can be a cause of your death. For someone else it won't be a cause of their death because their respiratory system is functioning well and they're basically very healthy. They're probably not going to be affected so strongly. But if you have these vulnerabilities, the meeting of the virus and vulnerabilities leads into a condition.

Of course, we have the NHS, which is the best health service in the world! It's about to collapse. It's already collapsing. There are not enough ambulances. There's not enough A&E nurses. We've got shortfalls everywhere and if hundreds of thousands of people need to be admitted to intensive care, where will we send them? It's like that. The idea that the NHS is the best health service in the world is a lie maintained by naive belief.

We're the best nation. We're going it alone. We're leaving Europe. Britain stands up. We've been great before and we'll be great again. We'll great liars and cheaters. That's how we got our colonies and all our dosh by going to other countries, ripping them off and pretending we're their natural born rulers. That's what we live in – a world of fantasy ideas. As long as the factors that support the fantasies are running, it's maintained. And when they are not there, then the fantasy is gone.

What does that mean? It means this is unstable. Why is it unstable? Because it's dynamic and energetic and interactive. If you start to see that interaction may not be so bad. *Being with you might be difficult, but I think I prefer it to solitary confinement.* Imagine being confined to a room, in a prison all by yourself. There's a little hole in the bottom of the door and they stick a plate of food in twice a day. And that's all. The guard doesn't speak to you. That would not be very nice. You'd want the guard to at least say fuck off! or something to acknowledge that you exist. And if you didn't have that, you'd start to get a bit thinned inside.

We are interactive beings because we are part of this open field, **lhun drup**, the whole field arises at once interactively. This is a very helpful notion, I think.

In our lives we see that we open with certain people and we close with others. We are like these speeded up nature films, flowers opening and closing. We pulsate. You could draw conclusions as we normally do. *I like that person. I don't like that person.* But that's an interpretation after the fact. We find ourselves not being at ease with that person, which is an energetic quality. The vibration that goes on between you is muted. You can't find them. You can't get on their wavelength and from that you can draw the conclusion that they're not very nice. They're difficult. Well, they're difficult for you. Then you see them blithering away with someone else. They're not difficult for that person. This is the unique specificity of myself emerging in this field.

If you imagine that the ground is like the earth and on the earth, there is a field with many kinds of wild flowers, grasses, nettles, burdocks, thorns, all kinds of things are growing and in that there you are – a little daisy! I'm just a little daisy looking around and there's all sorts of other creatures. That's what we are. We're not homogenised. We're part of other people, we're not the same. Though culture is an attempt to homogenise.

The unique specificity is not an invitation to narcissism. It's not about the specialness of myself which puts me in a difference from you, but rather in being this energetic form at this moment, under these conditions which will not endure, I find myself available, or less available for some kind of interaction.

Now, if it's dynamic, moving, pulsating and unpredictable, the one thing you have to do is be there, be present. If you're not present something skites into you, you get bumped around because you were distracted. You were caught in thought and you were not part of the field. You see that when you're walking around the city, most people are not on the street. They're somewhere else, in their phone, in their memory, in their thoughts, but they're not there. They're not seeing the architecture, the glistening of the light on the street. They're not there.

When you're present as part of the field, the field is your existence. When you hear the blackbirds sing, it stops you. How can you continue walking when you hear it sing? This is the beginning and end of the world. Then the black bird goes silent and your feet start moving again. This is a life not interrupted by participation. If you put the blinkers on and you're very dutiful about doing what

you have to, then everything is an interruption to my trajectory into life, which is the basis for modern capitalist economy – people should be diligent, try hard and go to work and be productive. That their value is their output, not the process.

But being alive is about the process of receiving and responding. So when you hear the bird, it softens your heart and then you see and hear more, your body softens, your muscles and your sinews open and your hips relax, and you feel more alive. That can happen with anything all the time – listening to a motor car, looking at the shape of some dog shit on the pavement. Henry Moore might have been interested in that because it's fascinating. You think that it's dirty dog shit. What is it? It's a shape glistening, a paper bag blowing. It's just like that.

In the movie *American Beauty*, there's a wonderful scene where a bag is just blowing in the wind. And the mind stops. Mind can stop all the time. We don't have to have so much interpretation. We don't have to try to achieve a mastery of knowledge OVER events, but we can find ourselves BEING WITH events. So that's the possibility of the open ground. Moment by moment you are emerging fresh from the open ground, as is everything else.

We've got here a tension about our habitual, usual sense of sameness of the world, the predictability of the world. So some people have been in this room before. That's a reasonable sentence in the English language. They have been in this room before. *Which room is that?* That's this room. But they've never been in this room before. Because this room is this – the particular people in the room, the way the light is coming in through the windows and so on. This is a March light with a slightly grey sky, pockets of blue, different people, different bodies moving in different ways, different postures. This room is this. Fresh. Unrepeatable. This is time.

When we see the unrepeatability of the moment, it becomes the infinite moment. Just this. A hundred percent fully this. That's dzogpachenpo. It's complete. The whole shebang, fully complete, just like that. But if you think, *ah I know where the toilets are, there's an electric kettle there, and so on*, then you dull your sense of what's there. You're no longer curious because you know. It's fascinating.

Explore that for yourself. *My thought goes ahead of me. And what does it do?* It sprays shit over everything. If you drive in Germany through fields in the spring, they spray shit on the fields and the smell is unbelievable. We make the world toxic with our interpretation. And it's a movement of mastery, a deathly mastery. Instead of the freshness of the world stopping and alerting us to this is NOW, the projection of the thought encapsulates the field of phenomena into what we take to be the KNOWN. But of course, it's never quite the way we know it, which is a bit annoying.

—*I thought it's going to be like that.*

—*I'm sure it should be like that.*

—*I used to go this café, I was there this morning and the coffee was always good, but this morning it was terrible.*

—*I don't know what happened.*

People are blithering about these little disturbances in life because they want to believe they can predict. They want to believe that knowledge gives them access to things as they are, but in fact knowledge covers it. Awareness is always fresh. Conceptual knowledge is always stale because you're taking something from the past, bringing it into the present and using it as a tool to predict the future.

In Buddhism, this is called the movement of the three times – past, present and future. And the present in that is not the fresh present of being aware, but it's the conceptually wrapped present which stands as 'this-moment-because-of-that-moment'. It's riding on the shoulders of the past because I make this moment for myself as a construct, as an interpretation on the basis of having been here before.

There are two toilets around the corner. That's useful, helpful. The words can come out of your mouth, but it's what these words do to you. You can say these words in a very light way and they dissolve. Self-arising, self-liberating. Or there can be a small accretion, a small feedback, a self-reflexive movement of believing that you know. *I know that, you don't.* Often we're not very conscious of that. This is how the ego is fed – through affirmation of its enduring existence on the basis

of the assumption that the past, the present and the future are linked together. *I know something, it comes back to me, therefore, I can predict.*

When you're coming here and you know this building, you can predict roughly how it's going to be. But when you come in and if you are at all present, you have a fine experience of the actuality of how people sit, how their hair is, what kinds of clothes they're wearing, postures, gestures, and so on. That's not rough. That's exquisite. That's so unbelievably precise. Some people are leaning against the wall, some people are tilted, some people look as if they're about to fall over. That is how it is. *Oh! we should sit up straight! Why?* It's perfect as it is. It's just this. But you didn't know it was going to be like that. It's revelation.

The concept is the block to the experience of the revelation. If you think you know, you don't have to look. You assume. We'll start to see how assumption is a very dulling factor in our lives. **If you assume, then you don't have to look and if you don't look, then you won't see.** And so thought becomes the vehicle of mastery in the world.

Every time we do the meditation, we have the possibility of opening to the ground. The ground is the basis of the deconstruction of the empire of the conceptual self, the solidification, which is generated by the juxtaposition of self-liberating moments. Although the moments are vanishing, they can feed into the sense of their enduring presence. And the ground is always here, all the time.

One ground and two paths arise

As per texts, there is one ground and two paths arise:

1) If you see and open to the ground, you have the revelation of awareness, fresh awareness.

2) If you don't attend to the ground, if your life is based entirely in an immersion of conceptual construction, then this blizzard of thought encapsulates you in your feelings. And you wander in your journey down your restricted little pathways and then you die. But because you've been building up a sense of subject and object, me and a world out there, trying to work it out, get more of what I like, get less of what I don't like – the condensation, the

densification, the restriction into the reverberation of a predictable 'I' takes us into life after life after life, without liberation.

Liberation means you awaken on the ground.

The basic proposition, therefore, is very simple. **If you open to the open, it's open. If you close to the open, it's closed.** Most of the time, it's closed for us because we're holding it closed and we want it closed because if it were open, who we would be? We can't know. You can't know. It will be what it is. And when you look at your actual life, you never thought it would be like this. Life is surprising. *How did I get here?* It wasn't a plan. So we didn't know, but we pretend we know. That blocks us from seeing that we're working in a field of mutual evocation, I'm coming to be with you in this particular way in this particular moment.

This is it. And this it. And this is it. Forever, endlessly.

And it's not exhausting because this is arising from the ever open ground as the energy of the open ground. It's not solidified as me, myself, I, where I have to hold myself together and make sure my life works out okay.

The burden-self is terribly exhausting.

The free, present self in the interactive field is energising.

SESSION 2/6

One ground, two paths (cont'd)

The ground shows clarity and it shows confusion

As we touched on yesterday evening, this source or ground is always present, and **we can be aware of it or not**. Both, the awareness of it and the not-awareness of it, arise like a magical display. In magic, something arises out of nothing. What appears, seems to be there and because it's magical, it's unborn. This is very important because there are many philosophical systems coming from India where it is said that this world is a world of illusion, and you need to awaken from the illusion to the truth which is reliable as something.

When we see that both awareness and unawareness are like magical formation – neither can be grasped, neither has actually been born. Awareness is not a substance, not a thing. If you like, it's a mode or a mood of being. It's a quality of clarity which is transparent. You can see through it. You can't find it. It's everywhere. It's the basis of the illumination of everything, but it's not a thing.

It's very difficult to think about non-things because language is structured around thing-ness. If we try to hold in mind that we're not trying to go from the unreal to the real, but that there is no real. Real means thingness. But it's not about thingness.

The ground shows clarity and it shows confusion. Why? There is no reason and no intention. There's no god, no devil. It's not as if the good guys make the good stuff and some bad force makes the bad stuff. Neither has ever occurred. But it appears to have occurred. This is the meaning of illusion, of magic.

Therefore, when we're meditating we're not trying to go from an impure to a pure state. Ignorance is as pure as awareness because ignorance is unborn. It doesn't exist, it has never existed. Awareness also doesn't exist. However, we have to be very clear what this means.

Existence here means the density that gives us a sense that somehow this is apprehendable. Even if it is not apprehendable through the body, it's comprehensible, so it's apprehendable through the mind. I can get hold of this. I

can get a handle on this. I can grasp this in some way. Which is often how we approach dharma. We can read these books. They're interesting, but a bit strange. We struggle to make sense of them, comprehend them, but it's always dissolving. For example, you read a book, but afterward you can't remember what was in the book. Wonderful! It's vanished. It's gone. It's impermanent. *But I need to know.* You know a lot already, you know a lot of THINGS!

If dharma simply becomes another thing to know, it's not going to be an open door to anything. It's just going to be another room in the house of delusion. Some of this may not make much sense if you don't do any meditation practice, but if you start to relax and be with your mind, you start to feel the need to hang on to something. It's like being a child that's a bit anxious when it's learning to swim, it feels the need to hold on to the rubber matting or polystyrene to keep afloat. And the time when it lets go of that, is the time when it learns the coordination of feet and arms. You can't have feet and arms coordinated when the hands are holding on to the polystyrene. You have to let go and then the integrity of your embodiment in relation to the water starts to arise. Although it feels important to hang on to something, it actually interrupts the organismic integrity of your embodiment as an aspect of the field. Does that example make sense?

So, in order to protect ourselves, we do something which doesn't protect ourselves. We betray and cheat ourselves by thinking that we know the way out. This is why we study dharma. The buddhas of various kinds have laid this out, which we can't see. We start from here I am, here I grew up, this is what I learned, and I like this and I don't like this. From this position this makes sense to me and that doesn't. So we're always extending out from some fixed starting point. But the buddhas relax into the starting point and they show the view that is open. We start from the view that is closed. That is the leap of faith or act of devotion that allows us to imagine that. And this is a horrifying thought, that some people know more than we do, some people see more than we do, that we are blind.

In Buddhism, there's a lot of imagery around blindness. It's described that we have cataracts. That we have an obscured milky lens that is not functioning well. In tantric initiations, they tie a band of red cloth over your eyes, because in your blindness you can't understand what's going on around you. At a certain

point, after the ritual of purification, the band is removed and you see the mandala in front of you because you have to be able to see, to see the mandala. If you're looking for what you like, if you have selective attention, you don't see the whole shebang. The mandala is a circle inside a square. It's an enclosure which is an image of the whole. Our partial vision doesn't open to that very well. We go into foreground, background, having selective attention.

To see the whole, we have to be whole. It's a bit of a paradox. You can't get there until you are there. There's no way to do it. That is very important because 'it is' and we are an aspect of 'it is', the 'as is'. So how will we be 'as we are', when we are 'as we are'? How would you do that? There is no way to do that. It is.

The issue in dzogchen is not about developing, making something grow. You find a lot of that discourse in tantra. There are many kinds of visualisations and so on where you take the potential of something and you ripen it and increase it. In dzogchen, we're concerned with allowing the falling away of the impediments. We don't have to remove the impediments because they are self-liberating.

The term **rang drol** is found in the texts again and again. It means it goes **free by itself**. Since we've been in this room together your body has had many postures. You've been talking to people. You have had many thoughts. Each of these moments arose, is this, and is gone. So, we're actually very familiar with the experience. It's not something over the hills and in the next valley. It's always how it is. We are vanishing and replenishing simultaneously. We are emptying and filling, emptying and filling. This seamless pulsation between the two, which are not two, is how our mind is.

This is to give you some sense of not worrying. Anxiety, worry, striving, working out game plans, thinking of what to do... they are not very helpful. We have to work toward trusting intuition and spontaneity. This is at the heart of our existence. In Sanskrit, it's called **sahaj**. There's a lot of writings in Hindu and Buddhist texts. Sahaj means instantly arising. It's translated in Tibetan as born together. The environment which you are part of and your participation in the environment that you are part of arise together. So, instead of thinking of what to say and what to do and processing a response, your response is seamless with what is there. I've talked a lot about this in the past in relation to sport.

For example, in mountain biking down a steep slope or skiing, when you're going down at a particular velocity, you cannot think about what you are doing. You become aware that if you think, you will have an accident. You have to trust being part of the emerging experience. Because if you're with it, it goes well. But if you turn against it, if you try to extrapolate yourself, you now have a time lag between what is emerging with the field and your response. You're out of time and you have an accident. We've probably all had experiences like that.

It's exactly the same issue in meditation. When you find yourself getting caught up in a thought, you are mediating an experience. That feels important according to the criteria of our human existence because that allows us to create patterns of thoughts, narratives, which is mercantile. It's something you can trade in the world. That's the discourse and commodity training of information technology and so on. It's pattern, package, concepts.

But from the point of view of meditation the thought grasped is an impediment, not just to the relaxed openness of awareness, which actually never alters, but it's primarily an impediment to the actuality to the self-liberation of phenomena. The thought is going free. The sensation is vanishing. It's going. But it's special. *It's special for me. I like this kind of thought.* You are going to die. The specialness of your particular shaping, which allows you to say that this is special is going over the cliff. You're hanging on to built-in obsolescence. All compounded things are impermanent. We can see this in ourselves.

If you try to hang on to the thought which is always moving, you try to make the moving stable, and due to that you don't see the never changing. If you want something which is never changing, this is awareness. If you want something which always changes, it is concept, thought, memory, plan – all the contents of the mind that is blowing through. The sky itself doesn't change, but the clouds, the hail, the rainbow and the snow is always moving, and then, the clarity come.

So the content of the mind doesn't have to be gotten rid of, it's that we have an imbalance because we privilege the content as the real thing or the important aspect. And due to that, we don't see the openness.

Ignoring the ground tilts us in the direction of the delusion

So, ignorance means ignoring the open ground which doesn't block the appearance, but it lightens it, it shows it. You have a kind of internal illumination. You see that everything is shining, radiating out from the unborn ground. If you don't have that, then you have **conceptual solidification**.

So, whether it's aware or unaware, both are ungraspable. But unawareness or ignoring the ground tilts us in the direction of the delusion that we can actually grasp something. We know this very clearly in our lives, but we don't want to know this.

Most us will have had childhoods where we knew our mother. This woman was your mum. *Definitely, she's my mum. Mum.* But your mum wasn't just your mum. She was going to work, having a lover, having all kinds of things. She was a woman. *But she's my mum.* Because you saw her only as your mum, you couldn't have access to her as a woman. So the clarity of how you have taken hold of this potential as it manifests as your mum is both an illumination and a blindness simultaneously. Does that make sense? Taking up that figure-ground idea, if something comes up figural, this person is mum FOR ME. *But because she's mum for me, she's my mum.* End of story.

Mom! Get off the phone. Give it to me! I'm your son. Children really get desperate for that. But it's an absolute blindness. When we see the things that engage our minds, the things we fall into – our habit formations, they seem to be inherently true and real... FOR US. When we look around we see that other people don't do what we do. If you smoke cigarettes, you see that a lots of other people don't smoke cigarettes. You eat meat. Other people don't. People do different things. If what you did was intrinsically valid as the best possible option, then there's only two possible conclusions: either everyone else is nuts because they don't do what you do, or you've misconstrued it. You haven't seen that you make this special.

The **specialness** is not inherent in the object. If it was in the object, it would have such a pulling power that everyone would be sucked into that.

At the moment we see that toilet paper is becoming incredibly important for the citizens of London. What do you do when you're stuck at home? *Aw, I'll just*

wipe my arse all day. You get a reconstitution of the meaning of life. The value of toilet paper is arising due to mental formations. People are making it important. A few weeks ago it wasn't important. For meditators, this is really important. It's not in the object. The answer doesn't lie in the object.

When you observe the actual object, you see that all objects are mental. Wow! Going to the supermarket, you find the last packet of toilet paper. What do you see? Usually there're several rolls. It's got a cellophane kind of wrapping around it, so you're seeing a glistening kind of surface. Inside there's a more matte surface from the paper. Visually this is what you're seeing. Now you're conceptualising it by incorporating it into your frame of reference and your frame of reference has shifted because of the nature of the virus. You're thinking about the need to have these essential commodities in your house. So there's an over-valuation of this entity. Where is that coming from? This is projected. This is your mind. When you're so glad that you got the last package of toilet paper, this is your mind talking to your mind. Because what is it? If you think about toilet paper, it's quite soft. So you could soak it and quickly make it into a paper maché, that you could mould. Why not? When we were in school we used to chew the blotting paper and flick onto the ceiling of the room.

Everything is open. There's enormous potential in everything you encounter, but when you fixate on a particular reading, the potential recedes into the background and your situationally derived meaning becomes the true meaning, the true value, which you take to be inherent in the situation. Inherence of meaning is projected. Wow!

Practice: whatever is arising, let it come, let it go

The only thing which is intrinsic is the possibility of awareness and unawareness. Everything else is elaboration, which is arising due to causes and conditions, the force fields which are moving.

When you look at your own life, it's always very important not just to do meditation, but to do contemplation or reflection on the application of these ideas of the dharma to the lived actuality of your life – family relations, work relations. And you see how you are constellated into particular formations and

circumstances. Then you see that you don't exist as something. You cannot say how you will be. You don't know what thought will arise in your mind in the next minute. Something will happen. I'm speaking, but I don't know what I'm going to say. You hear it and I hear it at the same time. That's how life is.

If you prepare a speech for a conference, it's a different matter. Conference speeches tend to be quite deadening. They are dead because they have been prepared for the conference. They're presented, taken out of the freezer, warmed up a bit with the passionate expressions of the lecturer and then it's gone. But liveliness is unpredictable. It is co-emergent, so we don't know.

This is where the cusp between awareness and awareness is. That in unawareness, we fall under the power of the fantasy that we can know.

I'll say a little bit more about awareness and then we look at unawareness. But maybe we'll take a little pause and just do some sitting. So we just sit with whatever is arising – let it come, let it go.

(Practice for sometime)

The general recommendation is not to do the practice for very long, maybe five or ten minutes and then do it again and again when you have time. We don't want to be struggling to correct it. It's very easy to go under the power of a thought because generally speaking, we begin inside duality – subject and object, self and other. So, there's me with my body, my mind and the world outside. And we're living in this chopped-up-bit-existence. We're so used to having to manage and correct our existence that it's very easy to slip into that mode even when you're sitting.

The way it is: four aspects of awareness by Padmasambhava

So, let's look a little bit more at awareness. It's often described, certainly by Padmasambhava, as having four main aspects.

1) Non-dual: splitting subject and object is an illusion

The first is **non-dual**. Non-dual means un-split, undivided. That is to say the object side and the subject side are not two. They're not one, but they're not two.

When you walk down the street, your body is moving, the houses seem to be fairly stable. *I'm moving. I'm not the same as the building or the bus. I'm just me.* That's a conceptual interpretation. That's how the world appears to us inside the frame of duality. If we relax a little bit and we experience the field which is arising, then the movement of my body, the pressure of my feet on the ground, the bus coming along on the road, people walking by, it's all coming at once. It's all experience. It's happening to me. That's an interpretation.

The thought *'it's happening to me'* is part of the experience. Experience is not one flavour, it's multiple. If it was colours, it would be polychromatic. The subject side and the object side arise together.

For example, the thought 'I'm walking down the road' and the walking are non-oppositional. It's not that I shouldn't have any commentary on what I'm doing. If I only have the commentary on what I'm doing and it blinds me to the revelation of the moment-by-moment sensations of the body of the glistening colours of the world, then it becomes a veil of some kind, a dulling and obscuring thing.

But I can have both! I can have the commentary and I can have the sensation. I can have the memory and I can have the actuality of all the different things that are going on... IF the mind is big enough.

Consciousness, me making sense of what is going on is a small bowl. It is small and therefore we have to have selective attention. Some things are important, some things are privileged, and other things are relegated to being unimportant for me. If you like it, it's up to you, but not for me. The **selective attention** allows the pseudo-omnipotence of the small bowl. *I like what I know, and I know what I like. Perfect. 'I'm a smart bugger.* That's what it does. You don't pay attention to anything that would contradict the seeming wholeness of your interpretation.

When we relax, we let more in and more and more. The ego would get overwhelmed. It would start to vibrate. Release the fixation of the ego and the mind is big. Fixate into your ego constellation and you're inevitably drawn to privileging this, rejecting that and so forth. Does that make sense?

Walking down the road, sitting on a chair, going to the toilet, eating something – every activity is part of dharma because it is the revelation of the non-duality of experience. For example, in the traditional texts, we have awareness and emptiness, clarity and emptiness, appearance and emptiness, pleasure or sensation and emptiness.

What is emptiness? Emptiness is a way of talking about the ungraspability of things. Empty means there's nothing in there to find. There's nothing you can get hold of. Appearance doesn't have an inner essence that's pushing it out. It's not arising from its own unique little source, it's not standing on some personal essence of its own. Everything is the radiance of the ground. The ground is showing itself moment by moment as the unique specificity of all these forms – this and this and this and this. There's always more, and on and on. So non-duality means don't split or rather, there has never been a split. **Splitting is an illusion** and we'll come to that later.

Awareness is inseparable from openness. An image that's given to describe it, is the sun in the sky. The rays of the sunshine spread out and illuminate the vastness of the sky. Likewise, the illuminating power of awareness illuminates everything.

You can look at your hand and then you can start to look at the patterning of your fingers and the patterns of your palm and a lot of stuff. And the more you get drawn in to one particular bit of it, the more the rest, as we've already looked at, recedes into the background. But you can also bring everything forward at the same time. However, you don't know what's happening then.

If you go outside and you look at a winter tree, you look at the incredible complication of the branches, there's no leaves to add extra complications, just branches, the main branches, the subsidiary branches moving in all different directions – you get it all at once. If you try to think about it, you break the tree up. You look at the trunk... this is this... this is that. You look more on the far side of it and then you lose this.

Every gain is a loss inside duality because you're separating the world into different phenomena that you can get hold of. But just relax into the out-breath,

allow the tree to be present with you, to reveal itself and the mind goes quiet. Only a quiet mind can receive the tree. If you're thinking about the tree, you're making your own tree. You're not receiving this. And this is not a tree. 'Tree' is a name and it's a name in English. If you're from other countries, you don't say tree. The English have tried to colonize the world, so that everyone speaks English and we can rid of all these wrong names for 'trees', but it's simply a conventional term.

But if you believe in the conventional term and it seems to be the truth of what you're experiencing, it insidiously creeps in and gives you the sense that now you can get hold of it. *Beech trees, oak trees*, you build up more and more, *elm trees, oh I know what the leaves are like*. Now you're talking to yourself, you're not seeing the tree at all. You're just in a world of one. You're annihilating the tree, annihilating the world. In the bible it says: "Now we see but through a glass darkly. Then we shall see face to face."

In Dzogchen, we're concerned to see **face to face** now, immediately. Face is a very important term in Dzogchen. **The essence of mind is called face**. Because the face is here. Your face is here, but you can't see your own face. You can't grasp this, but it's here. The revelation is beyond appropriation. So, when you look at the tree, if you stop telling the tree what it is, you start to receive the tree. And in that moment you have the clarity of the non-duality of receptive awareness, the revelation of the potential which we can denominate by the term 'tree'. And you get more tree, the less you know about the tree. The tree surprises you.

We see this in art a lot. Many artists have been drawn to the same place again and again. Cézanne would go down to the south of France to draw this mountain. He had a place where he would sit and look across the valley and look at this mountain. And it was always different because it was always different. And that's the marvel. Because he could see with fresh eyes, he could see that the hill was always different. He wasn't painting his imagined tree. Of course what he painted was mediated through his mood at that moment, the colours on his palette and so on. But when you see his drawings, there is something authentic, you have a sense that he was really there. This person was not asleep, he wasn't fantasising. There's some breath of the hill there. That's the possibility that it will always be fresh. That's what non-dual means.

When you dualize, separating subject and object—when you see some one and you ask their name and where they grew up etc—as you start to build up a picture of a person they start to recede. This is very troubling for us as human beings because we are intelligent creatures and what this is saying is that human intelligence is overrated . Why? Because it is narrative structure that turns whatever is encountered into a story and that story is what we then work with. I heard a former Governor of the Bank of England saying on the radio that economics is about stories. It's not about figures and numbers. That's just a way of telling stories. 'The market is doing this, the market is doing that, a bull market, a bear market...', all these are symbolic terms redolent with feeling. They are ways in which we construe and make pattern identifications which allow us to deal with the abstract.

A ten-pound note is a funny plastic with some colour and shape on it and its value is entirely conventional. It used to be gold and silver where there was some kind of direct exchange of value. But the banknote is guaranteed by the Bank of England, which used to say that if you produced the note, they would exchange it in sterling silver. They don't promise that on bank notes any more. So, it's an entirely conventional system. And that's how we need to see what language is.

Language is, potentially, a tool of connectivity, but, used badly, a mediating structure which hides the immediacy of phenomena from us. When we have a lunch break you can practice this. You can go outside, look at the building, look at the people, there're some trees around if you walk a bit. **Just stand, breathe out and receive what is there.** When you find yourself wanting to tell what is there, what it is, consider that Britain has a long colonial history and now you're colonising Hackney. You're planting the flag of your imagination on the car, street, the person. De-colonising is better. We don't need colonies.

The ego-self colonises the world. It puts people into brackets. When you colonise, you rejig the map of the country. Human maps have lots of straight lines on them. The states in the US all have straight lines. When Britain was fucking up the middle East after WWI, it drew straight lines – this is Iraq, this is Syria – completely unnatural. Natural borders move in a very dynamic way. The shifting of historical maps in Europe are very interesting. Countries like Poland were very

big and then they got small. A lot was sheared off at the end of the war. Germany is moved around. If you see that, you understand that these are concepts.

Allowing the immediacy to be there

So we want to return to the senses. Phenomena reveal themselves. Light comes into my eyes. Sound comes into my ears. I am being receptive to the vitality of the gift of the ground. And then we think about it, we cut it up, and we package it and stitch it into the familiar patterns, which reassures us that we live in our world. But we're going to die and your world will be kaput. So, if you want to get out of that, have more receptivity and less narrative. It's a very interesting thing to do.

When you're going to eat with other people, very often people comment on the food, saying how is this and that. This is socialising. Socialising is based on opinion, contrasting and comparing. This in relation to that. If you taste a piece of food, bite into an apple, what is there to say? This in your mouth is inexpressible. *Oh, they're quite crunchy, they're good this year.* Now you have something to say. *I don't like this kind usually, I prefer another kind.* So, you blither away about apples a while. It's always a talking about. About-ness means at one step or more, removed. It is 'as if', it's not 'as is'.

'As is' is inexpressible because 'as is' is close to the ground. When awareness is in touch with the ground, this is non-duality. Non-duality basically means awareness on the ground, which is **tong pa nyi** (Tib. stong pa nyid), which is sunyata, emptiness. Inexpressible.

When we express, we are communicating. We're not establishing true meaning. So, if I say, "good apple", you don't know anything. I haven't given you information about the apple. I have given you the information in the moment, maybe I just wanted to say something or kiss you, so I said it's a good apple. There are all kinds of reasons why people want to say something or make relatedness. I can't say what kind of apple it is, except by betraying the apple. So, I'm going to tell you lies about the apple and you're going to tell me lies about the pizza and then we'll lie together – how romantic – on the basis of storytelling.

But Dzogchen is interested in **relaxing from the narrative** and allowing the immediacy to be there. When you have more of a sense for that, the lie can emerge as part of the immediacy. It's not that the thoughts are bad, but we're practicing juggling. The best way to practice juggling is to start with one ball, then you add one more and when you have three, they all fall. It's the same in the meditation.

If you just focus out, there is a silence in the mind, in the receptivity. And then gradually, as with a dimmer switch, you could increase the amount of commentary you have on top of it. And you can observe for yourself how you fall into the commentary and you lose the phenomena. The non-duality goes across all fields of our experience. We want to have the non-duality of open freshness and commentary. That is the unification of wisdom and compassion.

Wisdom is the clarity of the revelation. In the Dzogchen tradition, this is kind of the arena of *tögal* (Tib. *thod rgal*), and the communication, which is the working of freeing locked energies is like *trekchö* (Tib. *khregs chod*). Just as language can tie you up in knots very tightly, so exercises can loosen you up. And there are many kinds of exercises in Dzogchen.

In the tradition in which I mainly trained, it's not necessary to do so many techniques. Why is that? Because, when you apply a technique, it's extremely difficult not to have a feedback loop that I'm the one who is doing it. And the application of the technique provokes the question of whether I'm doing it right or wrong. So, it becomes a system of self-reference and self-rectification, which can get in the way of the practice.

More by just relaxing and opening, you can see very directly because you don't have any agenda, you can see the tilt whereby you go into identification. That's the key thing we want to see. If you're looking at the tree and we start to allow some thoughts about the tree, then you're just in your thoughts. You lost the tree. The infinite and the finite of my conceptualisation have somehow gone awry. Something's funny here because infinite means it could go in any direction, there's no limit.

So, how could my finite thought be excluding the infinite? It can't. It's not possible. **The finite is inside the infinite.** But if you over-fixate, if you fall into the finite, it seems – and this is delusion, an un-insightful mistake that you're not even aware of making it – what you're thinking is the real shebang, the truth of the situation. Does that make sense?

We just gradually allow more disturbance, which is why we don't generally do long retreats in this tradition. We do short retreats and then go out quietly and then into noisy places and increase disturbance. The function is always to integrate disturbance into stillness, so that they don't split off. It's not either/ or. It's always both/ and. Non-duality means both/ and. Both emptiness and awareness. Both emptiness and appearance. This is very practical. This is something you can immediately apply in your life and start to see: *this is what I'm doing. I've got scissors and I'm cutting, cutting, shaping, stitching, shaping, stitching. I am the maker. Why am I making this? Who is the maker?*

If you're engaged in art, generally speaking when the art is going well, generally speaking, art is art-ing you. You find art flowing through you. It's a benign, even blissful moment in which the doer has dissolved into the doing because there is an unmediated relation between the fingers and the palette knife, or the voice or the movement in the dance. There is no observer running a commentary. If a commentary arises, it's joyful because it's just flying through like shooting stars or fireworks. But you stay on the beat in it. It's not that you are in it, but in it-ness, which is fundamental, intrinsic, has been allowed to emerge because you've been self-forgetful. It's not about annihilating the self, it's not that there is no self, it simply needs a little bit of shrinking. It just gets over-privileged.

We will sit again for a bit.

(Practice for sometime)

Practice: hearing sound as sound

Firstly, it is important to observe how you can move up and down and register with regard to experience. For example, when we're sitting here quietly, you can hear this fan whirring more and more. As soon as you have the thought *that's the sound of a fan*, you can think where is it? Why doesn't someone switch

it off? Are we stuck with it forever? All sorts of thoughts arise on the identification of a fan. If that arises in your mind that's fine. It's just a passing interpretation. Relax a little bit more into the out-breath and just open to sound as sound. Because it's sound. What it's sound of, is your idea. If a fly or a mouse were in the room, it wouldn't be thinking about fans. Is there a sound of a cat? That's an interesting thought for a mouse. It's just a sound.

If we hear just a sound, we're hearing vibration. Then we hear it as part of the room. If I hear it as part of the fan and I feel annoyed by the fan, it is as if something is interrupting or disturbing my practice and I don't want that. So, there you have a very clear-cut duality. Something is oppressing me or undermining me. But sound as sound is non-dual with the space of experience. It is part of the space of experience.

In dzogchen, when we speak of the integrity of everything, the insider-ness of everything that there is no outside, the wholeness of the whole is inclusive. Hearing sound as sound, feel the INCLUSION. It's just sound. A car goes by, somebody moves – it's just part of what is happening. As soon as you start your conceptual identification of it, you can start to bring your opinions about it and you can observe the splitting of the world.

On a small level this is the beginning of samsara. There has been an open space with everything arising and passing, and now this is just fucking annoying! What the hell?! It goes on and on and thoughts can layer themselves around that. And then where are you?

Each thought wraps itself around you like a silkworm making a cocoon and after a short while you've spun the corset of your own identification. You've paralysed yourself... with thought. It's exactly like gossamer; when you start to take out the silk thread, it's fine but strong. And these thoughts, when they bind you, they're fine, but quite strong. What you want to catch is the moment like when the silkworm is exuding this silken substance, which comes out as a quasi liquid formation and that is what's happening. There is a fluidity. A thought is flowing in your mind, *that fan*, and it goes again there. But somehow the thought is becoming dense. It's becoming heavy, muddy, layering these accretions of

sediment. *That fucking fan, it's always there.* The something-ness of the fan is your mind.

This is the basis of freedom, if you see that whatever is happening is made by yourself.

William Blake said this: "heaven and hell, it is your own mind that makes this." Mystics have said this. It's not a new idea. You can see it for yourself. Your thoughts, when they conglomerate, they are quite glutinous like sticky rice. They go into this binding and the freshness and openness is lost. It's not lost, because the binding is only available to you, it's revealed through your awareness. But because of the intoxication of the binding, which is the radiance of the open ground, it appears as dullness. And that's the tragedy that **freedom is everywhere present in every moment, but hidden by our own intoxication.**

In the field of therapy, especially when you're working with younger people, you encounter on the edge of giving themselves a small life. You see the first kind of self-harm things like picking away at themselves or plucking their hair. They you see that their diet is changing, or they're not eating or going bulimic. All these activities are shrinkages of the world. These are self-referential gestures, which impede the non-duality of being in the world. Does that make sense?

Once you have an obsession like when you smoke cigarettes, the first thing you have to know is where my fags are. If you're a drinker, you look for you bottle? So there's no longer a simplicity of being. You think: *where can I do this, getting home from school, go to the bathroom, get out my razor, I hide behind the cabinet and do my cutting and bind it up and I have to do it before mum comes home.* This whole elaborated pattern of ritualised behaviour that go. Now there's secrets, there's patterns, there's a shamefulness, a feeling of abnormality. There are all kinds of factors operating to increase the density of the experience, which then cuts you off from the world.

It's very interesting – if we're working with other people, especially if we're working with ourselves – to again and again find the points of spiralling in, of layering of thoughts, of attributing value until it comes to a point where we think that we just have to. An extreme point is where people move towards suicide and

they say: *I just have to, I can't live.* When you read suicide notes, it's so often expressed in that way. *I can't do anything else. It's the only road open to me.* That is a thought. This person is killing themselves because the vast potential of their existence has been collapsed into a very narrow thought formation, which has just taken hold of them.

You get the same with religious prejudice, gender prejudices, sexual prejudices. So many prejudices and they're all about the thought. Because the mind in its openness as the non-duality of emptiness and awareness is the medium through which the thoughts are arising and passing. And yet, we get caught by a thought. So who gets caught by a thought? The one who gets caught by a thought is another thought. **The ego is a thought.** We'll look at that more in the afternoon.

The ego is a thought construct. Thoughts catch thoughts. Thoughts can't catch awareness. So, when you're meditating and you go off on a riff, who's the one who's gone off? It's important to gently keep the light on and try to see what this 'getting lost' is. You don't want to judge or blame yourself or make a decision to try harder. All that's irrelevant. We want to see how it operates. How do I get lost, how do I get carried away? Because if you see that, you see the moment of stickiness, you see that the arising thought seems to scrape the surface of your mind and reveal a subject who could catch it.

The subject needs an object, and the object needs a subject. But subject and object are moving together within awareness. Awareness is like a stage and on that stage subject and object do their pas de deux ceaselessly, endlessly, on and on. The characterisation of subject and object are of course changing and changing. They've got an incredible design department and costumes they can wear. But they're always dancing together.

What we want to do in the meditation: **to allow the object side to arise without the evocation of the subject.** That's why we have the instruction: don't go after past thoughts, don't wait expectantly for future thoughts, just stay relaxed and present. You're not blocking the object. You're not distorting the patterning of the mind, but you don't have to do anything with it. It comes by itself and it goes by itself. Then you start to see that the subject side is the same. Now the object

side can arise and go and the subject side can arise and go. And then when you get up from the meditation, you move in the world, go on conversing with other people, and you don't get caught because the subject side is the movement of the energy of the mind, it's not you doing something. It's not that I'm speaking to you. That's a conceptualisation, which is not necessary; it doesn't illuminate the actuality.

Because subject and object are co-emergent, they are non-dual with each other and with the ground.

These are a lot of words. They only really start to ring true if you sit and get close to yourself, and not get so carried away by thoughts. The world is a wonderful place, but it's also suffused with invitations to think yourself stupid.

SESSION 3/6

So we looked at the first of these four aspects of the view of awareness of the ways of describing awareness. When you look at traditional buddhist texts, you find many different ways of doing it because, as we saw before, this is like trying to say the unsayable. The key thing is to take some kind of flavour or colouration from the description and don't try to turn it into a kind of definite knowledge, otherwise it will become stale.

Tibetans have a saying. If you take a ball of butter, and in Tibet they hand churn it, scrape it out and pack it into a ball. If you put that into a bag of leather and hang that on the wall, the leather bag will dry out after some time and become crumbly. But if you take the butter and massage it into the leather, the leather will remain soft. This is how we are with dharma.

If you fill yourself up with dharma but don't apply it, it can make you pompous, rigid, theoretical and all kinds of unpleasant things. It's better to take a little bit of dharma and massage it in everyday. Then it becomes a way of softening yourself.

2) Lhun-drup: awareness is effortlessly arising

The second aspect is lhun-drup, which we touched on earlier. It means effortlessly arising, instantly present or fully formed in itself. Awareness is not created by anyone. It doesn't arise due to causes and conditions. It's not produced by interaction.

Most things in life are created by the meeting of two or more features. If you want to make a pizza, you have some flour, water, and so on and you mix these things together with the dough and the yeast or whatever. If you want to make babies, you get a man and a woman and they do jig-a-jig and if you're lucky, or unlucky, depending on the circumstances, you get a baby. Two and you get another. If you only have one, then you don't get production. One by itself doesn't produce anything. It is INTERACTION. If you have a seed and the earth, a little flower grows. But a stone doesn't really do anything. A stone maintains an isolated singularity. Causes and conditions means the meeting together of several

different causal factors. As these factors meet, they generate a particular form of manifestation. We'll look at this more.

At this stage, the key thing is to see that rig-pa is not like that. Rig-pa is not made. It's not a construct. It comes **all at once**. It comes all at once as nothing, but as the radiance of nothing or the brilliance of nothing or the showing power of nothing. It is un-apprehendable, it doesn't have a history. It is outside of time, always there. It is indestructible. So, you don't have to be too protective of awareness. You never lose your awareness because awareness is the basis of every experience that you have moment by moment. The thoughts and feelings vanish.

As I get older, I have a thought that when I go to the shops, I want to buy that thing and if I don't write it down, I'll forget. Because it was a thought, it comes and it goes, and as you get older, it leaves less and less trace. So I have lots of bits of paper everywhere. Thoughts are vanishing. Feelings are vanishing. Awareness doesn't vanish. Therefore, you can CUT on awareness. Some of you will have done the sem-dzin practice of PHAT! You make a loud sound of "PHAT!". You're cutting on awareness, cutting consciousness off awareness. You're cutting thoughts and feelings because they all go, they all die, while awareness stays.

You can be rough with awareness because it's indestructible. That's why there are many strong forms of yoga, breathing exercises and so on because you can just flush out all the unnecessary stuff, and you'll always be left with awareness. That's what lhun-drup indicates. You didn't make it, it doesn't belong to you, your mind is not yours. You are your mind.

The ego is the child of the mind. The mind is not the owner of the ego. The mind doesn't own the ego or catch it and the ego can't catch the mind. But the ego emerges as the movement of the energy of the mind.

Lhun-drup means this awareness is there by itself, unconstructed, and you can trust it. So when you are down, when you feel lost, when you feel confused, who is confused? You are confused as the person who believes that your thoughts tell you the truth about yourself. The reason you are confused is because you are confusable. You don't have to be confusable. But as long as you believe

that your thoughts, feelings and sensations tell you the truth about yourself, you will be confusable because you are stupid. But you don't have to be stupid.

When a thought arise – *I fucked up. I've wasted my life, I'm in a mess, I don't know what to do, I don't know how I should live or who I should be with, I just don't know anything, I am a mass of thoughts* – it's perfect! *I'm living in a snowstorm, a blizzard of thoughts and feelings.* Of course you are. That's what the mind is. It's just movement. You recognise the movement. *But it doesn't stop!* That's right, that's what the Buddha said. It doesn't stop. So, don't try to stop it. If it's moving and it's moving and if it's moving, that means there's no car crash. If you're on the M25 and the traffic is moving, that means no one is being crushed to death. But when you get a big tailback that usually means that there's a mangled body somewhere. If you've got a lot of stuff moving through your mind, it's OPEN. The mind is open. *My mind is open!* Let the traffic flow! If you identify with the traffic, you get a crash.

Anxiety, depression, confusion are all mini-car crashes because you've over-identified with the transient aspect of the mind. Again and again allow the flowing to flow. *But how will I know what to do?* You'll never know what to do. You'll find yourself doing something.

Who should I be with? Who would know? Your mum? Your dad? God? The pope? Who would you ask? I ask myself. I don't know. You don't know. Something will happen, something will arise. If you spend a lot time wondering whether I should do this or that, all you do is thicken barriers to the possibility. You intensify the interpretation of the structure of yourself and other people. If you want something to emerge, there has to be space for emergence. That's why we relax in the practice. We don't try hard. Because the one who is trying hard is the one who does things. The one who does things, that is I, has taken scissors and cut themselves off from the root of their being. They are self-orphaning. They are deceiving. It's like a little child having a tantrum saying:

—*I don't like you, mommy, you're not my mommy. I'm not going home.*

—*You're going to bed now.*

—*No, you're not my mother!*

—Well, then you better choose another mother, because I'm heading off now.

But the mother can't do that, because the mother never abandons the baby, although the baby tries to abandon the mother. This is it. Awareness never abandons you, but you say *fuck off* to awareness because you get involved in thoughts, ideas of who you are and this envelopes you in an ever thickening fog of self-reference. But you're still the child of space, you're still the flowering of the openness of the mind.

This is lhun-drup – always here, always open, always fresh.

3) Kha-dag: awareness is primordial purity

The third aspect is **kha-dag, primordial purity**, which we have already touched upon.

Awareness cannot be contaminated by anything that occurs. To illustrate this the example of the mirror is usually used. We have a mirror on the wall here, so it's easy to see. When you look in a mirror, you see a reflection. The reflection is a re-presentation. It re-presents something that is in front of the mirror.

The reflection seems to be inside the mirror, but you can't take the reflection out of the mirror. You could move out of the room and the reflection would vanish, but if look at the reflection, it's in the mirror. It's intimately connected to the mirror. When people move away, or the lights go off and it becomes dark, we don't see any reflection. Reflections vanish. They fill the mirror. They seem to be the inhabitants of the mirror. They seem to, in fact, be the expression of the mirror. They seem to be what the mirror is, because when you look in it, that's what you see. But they don't mark the mirror because when the reflection goes, the mirror is available. It's not tired, it's not burned out, it doesn't get exhausted. It doesn't miss the reflection that's just gone. It's not waiting anxiously for another reflection. Whether there is a reflection or not, it doesn't mind. That's like awareness. That's its purity.

Awareness vs. consciousness

Awareness is not improved by the quality of what's arising in it. If you have happy thoughts and you feel relaxed and a lot of love and compassion. It doesn't mean that you have good awareness. If you have sad thoughts, murderous thoughts, thoughts of hatred, it doesn't mean that you have a bad awareness, because neither good thoughts nor bad thoughts alter the nature of awareness. What they do, is to alter the nature of your consciousness.

If you're conscious of yourself, **consciousness is the aspect of knowing which takes an object.** When I turn and look at the clock, I'm conscious of the time. It's a quarter to three. There's an object out here. My consciousness relates to the object and generally through the interaction of my knowledge base and the patterning of the hands on the watch, it generates the understanding that it's a quarter to three. This is a production. Something is coming into being. If I had looked and suddenly discovered that it was a quarter to six, I'd think: *oh! What happened? Did I fall asleep? Life passes very quickly.* So, I will have a different mood. And if the time was quarter to three. *I will think: ah, we still have time to do things.* How the object impacts us, shifts us. That's very clear. A good lunch or a bad lunch makes you feel happy or sad.

Consciousness is moving. **Consciousness is a participating aspect of your mind. Awareness does not participate.** The mirror is not participating. When something participates, it is affective by what is there.

In the restaurant, I ate some food and when they take the plate away, they have to clean it because it gets marked by some staining of the food. A mirror may have to be dusted from time to time, but no one has to come at the end of the day and says: *James' reflection has been in the mirror all afternoon long, poor mirror! So we have to put some scrubbing and put James's reflection out of the mirror!* So if that's what consciousness is, people linger in our consciousness.

Kids come home from school and they say: *I hate it. I hate my teacher. I'm not going back!* They're really upset. *It's not right. I shouldn't have that.* It's really disturbing because consciousness gets infected and reformed by experience. This is subject and object. **Consciousness is the intelligent aspect of our subject formation as we participate in the world.** Awareness is not like that.

All the turbulence that you have in your life – the hopes and fears, things going well, things going badly, regrets, plans – all of this turbulence is just like waves on the top of the ocean according to traditional examples. Sometimes the wind blows a lot and the waves are big and crashing, at other times there's no wind and the waves are fairly calm. It doesn't make any difference because waves, big or small, is water, a form of water. The thoughts, feelings and sensations are forms of emptiness. They don't come into the world. They are unborn but unceasing. There's always something going on. And what is it?

It's empty of inherent existence. It doesn't have any internal truth of its own. What you do have is PATTERNING. The movement of these forces creates patterning.

Kha-dag, purity means **untouched, undefiled, uninvolved, untransformed, unmediated, just constant, open**. We're open a bit and then someone says something unpleasant to us and we feel hurt. So, we start to close down or become defensive or aggressive. *Don't say that to me!* So, then we start to realise, *I wasn't really open. I was only a little relaxed because things were going well, now you've spoiled it, you ruined the evening!* Sometimes you go into a restaurant and you see a couple sitting there and it's gone sour, they're sitting and trying to finish their food. Because they're Scottish, they're not going to get up and leave all that food!

And it's terrible, because you're trapped in something that's not very nice. *How could you say that to me? Will you stop looking at the waitresses' tits!* These are the things that get to people. *I'm here. Look at me!* We are very vulnerable in terms of personality, which is the emotion and historical formation. The skeleton with bones, that is like the consciousness, capacity of the mind to think clearly about things and the personality is like the muscles with the fleshy bits of ourselves, which of course has this hypersensitive skin on it that is always vibrating to what is around, considering advantage/ disadvantage.

Awareness is not like this. **It's unborn**. The mirror is not troubled if something beautiful is put there or if something ugly is put there. It's open and welcoming, and it doesn't have to bother because it's not touched. It shows but it's not touched. This doesn't mean that if you were to develop this quality that

you would be anaesthetised, that you would be so untouched by everything that you become completely flat. If you do the practice, you don't become flat. You become a bit more lively, playful, connected and creative because you're not blocking the flow of thought.

What it does mean is that things arise and pass. Rumination, chewing things over, turning to them, not being able to drop it, not being able to let go of something, that should be dissolving through the practice of meditation.

One sign that you're actually getting somewhere with your practice is that if something good happens, you feel that that was great and then it's gone. If something terrible happens, you feel that that was shit and it's gone. And you're here. The more you're here, the less tracing there is. There's less trace on you. There is less impact, and so there's less build-up of tension and positioning. In the inner yogic system, this comes about as the narrowing of the nadi, knotting in the nadi, the vibration in the prana and so on. Where you get cut off or over reactive, you respond to people inappropriately because you're buzzing with something inside yourself. All of that should ease its way out.

4) **Ye sang-gye: Primordial Buddhahood**

The fourth aspect of awareness is called '**ye sang-gye**' (Tib. ye sangs rgyas) primordial Buddhahood. From the very beginning, the qualities of the Buddha are present in the mind of all sentient beings as the truth of the mind of all sentient beings.

The basis of your existence is awareness. The delusion of your existence is the patterning of the content of the mind that you hang on to as the representation of who you are. For meditators, this is a very important point. Primordial buddhahood means that everything I need is already there, not in some potential state, but already there fully formed, the whole shebang. This is dzogpachenpo. It's complete. Nothing is lacking. So, I don't need to remove anything. I simply need to stay present with it.

Then we move from Primark to Haute Couture. There's a lot of prêt-à-porter meditation – read a book, five steps to meditation and so on. Buy a book off the shelf and this is what to do. But dzogchen is very different. This is Yves Saint

Laurent, somebody with a very good eye for how the cloth hangs, and sees the potential of the cloth. It's so important that when a woman walks down the catwalk moving her hips, the cloth should move as well. So, the cut is very important.

We are going to look in detail at ourselves. You can't do it from the outside. It's customised. This is the unique specificity of your existence. There's formulations that you can have from the outside, but the only way to do it is to look at yourself.

We've all heard of Milarepa, this famous Tibetan yogi, who spent many years in meditation in caves. When he was quite old, his close disciple, Gampopa, came to him and said: *Master, I've been with you for many years. You've taught me so many things and I'm very satisfied, but there's some secret you haven't given me. What's the basis of your success?* So Milarepa stood up and lifted up his yogic skirt and showed him his arse. And his arse was covered with these thick callouses of skin. *I sat on my arse in a cave for years, summer and winter. That's the secret.* He was looking at his mind. He was getting to know himself.

So, the time that you spend with yourself, not thinking about something, not making plans, not wandering in hopes and fears, but you actually sit with yourself, experiencing the unfolding of your existence is the central thing. Nobody can steal that from you. And you see that all of these things that come, go. And I try to hang on to what's going. I'm stupid. I have cheated myself so much of my life, thinking I was going to get some place.

When you're at school and you have all these exams and then you do your a-levels and maybe you get to a university. You get a degree and and now you've got a bit of paper. As soon as you have your degree, you find out that nobody cares about it. Maybe it gets you your first job. Did anyone ever ask to see your certificate? It's an illusion. You've got some place and after half an hour, it's gone. And then it's gone. That's life.

All these things that you've put so much time and energy into, they are vanishing. Over there is a pile of books that have my name on them. It's just a bit of paper. I remember all the hours putting together all these things, reviewing

translations, my inner process and so on And when it comes to the end, it's gone. I can't walk around with them saying: *hey mum, look, it's me!* Because it's gone. There's nothing to get from it. It's just gone because life is this unfolding process. So, whatever we're trying to get from life is sand going through the fingers.

This is another reason why awareness is important: **awareness is inseparable from aesthetic appreciation. Awareness is infinite and finely attuned.** It's very delicate. It picks up colours and shapes. It's the Manjushri of sound. It sees people's expressions and there is so much which is just amazing. In the pizza house, there was a guy serving and a woman serving. I was looking across the room. The guy was saying something to the woman and her lip just curled over so slightly, and I felt so happy inside. He couldn't and didn't really want to see it and the expression just vanished from her face. But she had given him a silent slap, *you wanker!* And that happens all the time. The world is full of the most delicious, nuanced moments. So much is revealed – how people are, their feelings come out in their face. This is the showing of life. Awareness allows us to have more of a sense for that.

Going back to what we talked about before, we're not assuming, we're not projecting, we're receiving. Then life is very bright and fresh, moment by moment.

Each of us has this primordial Buddha. In Tibetan, the word Buddha is made up of two parts: **sang**, which means purified and **gye**, which means expanding. Essentially sang means the unification of kha-dag and lhun-drup. Buddha means from the very beginning having no bad things, nothing needing to be done, fully ripened, fully present, needing no extra work. If you just imagine what that would be and then observe the movement of your mind, and then you think: *but I want to be a better person. When I look at myself, I find I'm not very kind. I could be more loving, more thoughtful about other people.* What's that a thought about? It's a thought about personality.

It would be very good if you were more kind before you died. But when you die, what will happen to your kindness? Will it be taken out of you with a kindness extractor. And in the hospital when a baby is born, it'll be given an injection of kindness!

It will be gone! Whatever you mastered as qualities, it will be gone.

You've mastered all of Chopin's Nocturne. Amazing! And then a little twinge happens, you get arthritis. The Doctor says: *nothing can't be done*. Then, bye bye nocturne! That happens to people. Whatever will be created is destroyed. It's not bad to develop compassion. It's not bad to develop any of these qualities, but we have to be aware of a kind of hubris, an inflation that I'm developing myself. I'm becoming a special, spiritual person... because it's all going to vanish. All the big lamas are burned in a pot. They make a little clay thing with bricks inside and they burn them down in that, they flog off the ashes and put them in a stupa! You bow down to ashes!

The Christians at least say: “ashes to ashes, dust to dust” and they throw it away. Non-attachment goes in a funny direction. You have to think clearly. Socio-political and cultural formations and dharma are not the same. Sociological formations in different cultures have nothing to do with the original teachings. Garab Dorje never mentioned building stupas. In fact, the tradition of stupas arose after the death of Buddha Shakyamuni because there were eight groups of sponsors, who were fighting for the body. Hanging on to the corpse of a famous person would be important! So, the relics were put into eight different stupas, eight different styles of stupas. That's called socio-political-economic discourse, not dharma.

You have to think that you're going to die and all your qualities are will vanish. They'll just be some trace of karma. What won't vanish is awareness. So, you have from now until you die to say hello to yourself. Not to say hello to the representations of yourself, to the content of your mind, but to open to your mind itself, which is primordial buddhahood. This is the essential point. No one can do it for you. It's there for you.

Introduction to the mind through 3 aspects of the face

Tibetans talk about **ngo trö** (Tib. Ngo-sprod-pa). **Trö** pa means to show or to introduce and **ngo** is short for ngowo, which means face. You can't see your own face. If someone shows you a photo of your face, that's not your face, that's a representation. You can be your face, you can inhabit your face. If someone is

authentic, they are shining through their face. So, this is the meaning: to get rid of the artificiality, the constructs that hide you from yourself and hide you from other people, so that you will shine through as yourself.

So, the introduction to the mind is really not something that anybody can do for you. **You have to introduce yourself to yourself.**

So how do you do it?

We've already been looking that awareness, the illuminating aspect of the mind, and the content of the mind are not the same. The mirror and the reflection are not the same. **The mirror is unchanged, although the reflections are always changing.** When you sit and open to how you are, then you're just with how it is. You're not cooking it up, you're not adding ingredients.

Mind is there. Mind is there, not empty. Mind is always there with something. If you're looking for the mind itself, you might get it for a second or five seconds. But generally the mind fills. If the mind remains empty for a long time, it's a dead end for meditators. It's the basis for being born in the upper realms of samsara where the mind is just peaceful and undisturbed and nothing is happening. Then after a while, when the karma or energy supports, that shifts, thoughts arise and you don't know what they are, you tumble and find yourself somewhere else.

The movement of the mind is not the enemy. The movement of the mind is the radiance or the glow of the mind.

The introduction to the mind, we can do it through the face. This is your face. Feel your face from the inside. If you feel your face coming up from your heart, it's very open. You can just feel it. You can feel light and warmth going out from your face. This is the **openness** of your face. It's not anything yet.

The second aspect is called **rang-bzhin**, which also means face, but here it's understood more as **complexion**. You have your face and it has a complexion. It depends on your health, whether you've been in warm place etc. It depends on all sorts of things. Your face has a particular way of showing. When you look at

someone's face, they may look tired, energised or whatever. This is the showing of the face.

Thirdly, you have the **expression** of the face – how the lips, the eyes, the smile come out. The face is expressing something.

So, you have the 1) unformed-ness of the potential of the face, the empty face, 2) the complexion, and 3) the expression. These three are inseparable.

This **expression**, in Tibetan is called **thugje** (Tib. thugs rje), which means the energy or sometimes compassion. It means the communicative mode, the nirmanakaya, how we relate into the field of experience and we do that by expression. If we go into a café and people are grumpy, it's not very nice. *Come on, smile, it doesn't cost you anything.* It's nice when people smile, it affects us. Expression is relational.

The **complexion** is disclosure. It's more like an availability.

And the **unborn nature of the mind** is ungraspable here-ness.

These three are inseparable. When you see this gakyils, it's like a yin yang symbol but with three aspects, this is referring to these three aspects. And this is how we are. This is who we are. This is how primordial buddhahood is present in us. But we become dulled and we don't quite get it. We hide ourselves from ourselves. That's a very sad thing to do.

If you want to find your mind, you have to follow the instructions. Of course there are some situations which can give you an opening. For example, Milarepa lists sneezing. If you have good sneeze, the mind goes blank. You might see some little dots and ahhhh... in that moment, it's called **hedewa**, nothing at all, then you can have some sense of the emptiness of the mind. You can have it in orgasm. You can have it in a shock, slipping and falling down. You're shocked out of yourself. But of course, soon after you're shocked, you're back into yourself and life goes on. So although, these moments can give some sort of flavour, they're lucky moments.

Don't judge: judgement is manifested duality

If you want to be with yourself as it is, you have to be close to yourself day and night, twenty-four hours a day. However it is, if you're bored, listless or however it is, stay with it and let it come through, because that is part of the expression of the face. So, you don't want to do any meditation. Ok, sit with that. *It's fucking boring, I don't know why! No point.* Not judging, not taking sides.

Judgement is always difficult because **judgement means I am making a judgement about something.** There is a something-ness that's the object side and there is a judger on this side, the subject. So I'm making my judgement on myself. *I can't do this, I won't do this.* This is terrible. This is manifested duality because I have split myself into I and me, and I'm talking about myself. I'm thinking about myself. *I don't like this.* This is not non-duality. Non-duality is one of the qualities of awareness.

Ah, where am I? I'm up my arse! I'm lost. I'm lost.

You are lost. Okay. Relax. Have a shower, dance about, then sit again. Don't struggle. **Don't try to improve yourself because you're not really lost.** If you think you're really lost, then you you have to try to find yourself. The effort of trying to find yourself is one of the great ways of becoming more lost. Because it's ye sang-gye, it's buddha from the very beginning. If it's buddha from the very beginning, you didn't get lost. *But I am lost. I'm fucked up. I don't know what I'm doing with my life.* That's a sequence of thoughts. Shall I believe your thoughts? Do they define you? Yes. No. maybe? You have to do this for yourself. I can talk a lot about this stuff, but you yourself have to become curious, if you're interested. *I'm failing myself from myself. I prefer to have thoughts about myself than to relax and stay with the naked presencing of myself.*

Remember **from one ground, two paths arise.** *I'm choosing the path of ignoring openness in order to hang on to the constructs which I have identified as being the truth about myself.* When you find that, you have to stay really close to yourself and ask: *all these constructs which I rely on, in order to validate who I am, are they true, are they real, are they enduring?* If you look, you find they're not. They vanish. *I cheat myself. More than anyone else could cheat me, I cheat myself.* The important thing here is not to go into blaming, but to see how do I cheat myself?

Now you sit and watch how you cheat yourself. *I'm going to stay relaxed and open and now I'm following a thought. Hang on, I thought I was going to be relaxed and open. What happened there?* It just happened. One minute, you were relaxed and open, now you're following a thought. It just happened. That's the state for most of us. That's why we can't work out how we put ourselves in knots. We're blind. That's a shadowy area in our personality. We have this ontological shadow areas where we have a transition from open into close and it's in the dark. We have to bring our attention more and more into how do I get lost, how do I give myself to nonsense?

On an outer level, we know these things are difficult. You decide to read something and suddenly you find yourself watching the telly. You decide you've had enough food and you've put it all away. And then you find yourself taking ice-cream out of the fridge. Why? *Because I want some.* No, you don't, you decided you had enough. *But I want some.* Then you realise that you're not a unitary person. I'm plural and my self-states or self-aspects don't like each other. So, ice-cream-eating-self says: *fuck off to vegan self. Don't speak to me, don't touch me, don't comment on me, I am ice-cream-eating-self and it's my time!* And when that's finished, there comes the sad-little-fat-self.

At least we recognise that we are multiple. The idea that I could sort myself out is clearly a delusion. It's not about sorting ourselves out. We are complex. This complexity when turned into the direction of compassion, it means that we can relate to different people, we can think in different ways about different issues. So it's not about homogenisation, but about bringing more communication intra-psychically into yourself, which then permits more communication intra-personally. Then taking that further, you start to see that the **communication is the energy of the ground.**

The expression of the face comes through the complexion of the face which arises due to the openness of the face. Then these three aspects of our existence are inseparable.

This is how we are, and we have to hang out with ourselves. If this remains just as theory, it won't do you any good. You have to observe. The key thing in order to observe, is that you have to shoot the accountant and the policeman.

Don't keep a score. Don't try to work out whether you're making progress or not. There's no progress in dzogchen. You're not trying to get anywhere. It's just being this. You shoot the policeman because the policeman is always making judgements – good/ bad, right/ wrong, you shouldn't have done this etc. That kind of thought is completely unhelpful. What we want is curiosity.

Our question is always 'how', not 'why'. Why takes you into all kinds of possibilities of more thought. With **How**, you're tracking your mind. The only way to track what occurred, is to be with it in the moment of its occurrence. When you ask what happened, you already have something to hold on to. Haven't you? There is a what-ness, there is a thing-ness.

Oh, I've gotten it wrong. Don't even go there. What there was was a closing or a tension. That is to say a process. It was verbal, not nominative. It was a movement of the mind into particular formations. And once you grab hold of it and say: *that was a terrible mistake, or a bad meditation or I don't know how to do this*, you've got a complete solidification, which excludes you from the fact that you tilted a bit that way and now you can tilt a wee bit that way.

If you stay in the movement, movement will be moving. It never comes to an end. But when you grasp it and start to make a conclusion about it, then the movement will freeze you and then, there's something to be done.

I don't like being this way. I'm tired of being this way. I need to do something different. Then you go and see the lama. He's got a big book of things for you to do. 101 Things the lama can tell you to do. This is absolutely true. Tibetan Buddhism is full of things to do. Not just a 101 things, but a 100,000 things to do endlessly. There's nothing wrong with any of this activity, but the question is who is the doer of the deed?

Dzogchen is different because it says: the only one in this town who does anything is the ground. And the ground does nothing. So, the doer of everything does nothing. That's your mind. The doer of everything does nothing.

But I do things. When there's a sense that I do things like *I do too much, I make mistakes, or I do things quite well or this good*, this is described with the term **byed-pa-po** – the doer, the one who does things. The best translation for this is

faiator, which is not such a common word in English. Its root in Latin is: to do, to make. Its meaning is impostor. The ego as doer is an impostor.

The impostor makes themselves, because they're making themselves into the one they're pretending to be, and then they make things happen from the position of the impostor.

The general heading for these qualities of awareness that we've been looking at is: the way it is.

The way of delusion: 4 levels of ignorance

This brings us to looking at ignorance.

Now we have the way of delusion, '**khrul lugs**. Lug means in a style or a fashion or a way and khrul-pa means, in this context, deluded. **It means you believe something that's false and you're convinced of its truth.** And because you're convinced about its truth, you don't even know that it might be false. So, you have no suspicion about yourself. You're committed to darkness, to a belief that is not correct.

Dumping rubbish in rivers was very common from the beginning of the industrial revolution. We are still trying to get pollution out of rivers. Now we've got this problem with plastic bags. There are photos of the bellies of whales and fish and sea creatures with lots of plastic bags in them. Why would you do that? You tie up a bag and throw it overboard, and the wind blows it into the sea. That's the world we live in. It's a world of delusion. We don't want to see what's on the end of our nose. This is not theory. This is who we are. So, we have to wake up to what's going on!

1) Seeing entities as self-existing

The first step of delusion, which you can see historically or which you can see in this instant – both are true – is called **dag-nyi chik-pai kyé ma-rig-pa**. Dag means self, an entity that is real. Nyi means this essential thing-ness. Chik-pai means alone, it stands alone. This is a self-existing, real thing.

In the openness of the mind, something arises, some impact. Now that impact has gone, because all arising things vanish. You can observe that in your mind. However, tendencies can be re-iterated, they can be repeated. And when they return and return and return you might think that it's the same thing and you have been there before.

2) Ignorance of separating subject and object

This empty, vanishing moment now appears to be something which is there. It's this – this is the second level of ignorance. There is the knower of the thing and the thing arising together as reflections in the mirror. Subject and object move together as whips of energy creating patterns, like in the desert when the wind is blowing and it makes these little whirlwinds dancing on top of the dunes. It's just like that... swirling. This is called **lhan-chik kye-pai ma-rig-pa**, the ignorance of the **co-emergence** of the ever-present ground and the inattention to the ground, which is giving rise to subject and object as separate things. This happens every moment in your mind.

When you sit to do the meditation, you can see that. One minute, you're relaxed and open. The next minute, you're involved. Volve is to turn, to twirl. Revolve is to go round something, you return to it. Who returns to it? The one who is returning to themselves. It is like when you were a kid and had a spinning top. That's what the ego is doing. The ego is spinning around and around, and the objects are spinning around. And they're kind of in harmony and they're just pulsing in the mind, and you're involved. Who's involved? *I'm involved*. Who are you? *I'm the one involved in the thought*. But who are you? *I'm the one involved in the thought*. In that moment you are exactly speaking the truth. You are the one involved in the thought. There's nothing else to you because **'I' is an empty signifier**. 'I' has no content of its own. Everyone in this room can say 'I' about themselves, which is very strange. I alone am I. You are impostors! But the reason 'I' works for everyone is that there is no truth in 'I'. 'I' is infinite hospitality.

This is a watch. You can do quite a lot of things with a watch. You could whack someone with it. That would be an eight-year-olds idea of a good time. That would be a weapon. But that's not all. There is a sort of watch-ness to the watch. There is a something to it. It's delineated by its function. 'I' is much more

dangerous. 'I' has nothing in it, so it can be filled with anything. 'I' can become murderous, or delicious, or kind or generous, I can be anything. This is the inherent freedom of the emptiness of the mind. And 'I', rather than referring to an inherently defined subjectivity, an ego essence that could be determined, the wonderful thing about 'I' is that it is so true.

The mind is empty and the 'I' is empty too. So, 'I' is always the truth of your awareness, though when you say 'I', you don't believe in emptiness and that's why you fill it because you don't just say: 'I'. I... what? You started out, you said 'I'. 'I', what? *I'm hungry*. So 'I' has to be filled. And it will. But 'I' is empty. That's how 'I' have a rich life. 'I' have all kinds of experience. If I knew who 'I' was, I would shrink my 'I'. But you can't shrink your I because it's empty, so it's always bigger. It can't be caught. Self-knowledge is a delusion. "Know thyself" – why bother? The self is always changing.

The self arises in dependent co-origination due to many factors, which are not in your control. You get happy or sad for all kinds of reasons. So, how could you know what that self was? The one thing you can know about the self is that it is empty like 'I'. Emptiness is the ground. On the basis of that the potential arises.

3) Ignorance of naming/ representing everything

On the second level of ignorance there is the movement of POTENTIAL, which is actually empty, but it's starting to be formulated as the continuity of the projected enduring self-substance that we had in the first level of ignorance. So, I'm here. I was here yesterday evening and I'll be here tomorrow morning. And then I won't be here because I'll be somewhere else, because I'm always somewhere. The self is always located somewhere. All forms are always somewhere. Whether it's newspapers or motorcars, things always have to be somewhere. Things always have duration and location. That's their structural quality. Your glasses are always somewhere, even if you can't find them.

I will be somewhere. Where will I be? I structure that in terms of the relationship that I have with the potential of the field. I could be here, I could be there, but I feel that I have to be there. It's a kind of necessity that arises through nomenclature, through naming and identification. This is the third level of

ignorance. It's called the **ignorance of naming or representing everything, kun-tak (Tib. kun brtags)**. Tak means a label or a title that you pin, almost like a kind of logo. As you start to identify everything in the room, you become more intelligent and more stupid simultaneously.

For example, in the dzogchen practices connected with tōgal (Tib. thod rgal), what you are primarily concerned with is, seeing light. It's not so miraculous because light is all you can see anyway. You cannot see a train. You cannot see a bus. You can't even see a banana. All you ever can see is light. You can imagine a banana, a bus, a tree, a person, but all you see is light. This kind of practice is designed to allow the illegitimate marriage of phenomena and conceptual interpretation to be divorced. They are allowed to be separated out, so that you have pure phenomena. And **pure phenomena arise as light and sound, ceaselessly moving.**

Now, you can enter into a play with the light and sound, which gives rise to all the objects in the world. This is like the copulation of all the binaries – the male, the female, the red, the green – everything oppositional can be brought in contact and that intercourse will give rise to different formulations, this is what language does.

So, on this third level of ignorance, we start developing the capacity to know everything.

Some of the knowledge we keep in encyclopaedias and dictionaries, but we have confidence that the frontiers of science will be ever expanding to get this universal knowledge. All these physicists are looking after one global, integrative theory of everything, knowledge, total power. From the point of dharma, this is a big, bad road. This is a cul-de-sac. This leads nowhere, except to the development of six realms of samsara. But it's terribly tempting, seductive because it appears to empower you to know the names of things, the qualities of things etc. so that you can judge them; you can put them in hierarchies of meaning and value and costs and so on. And you get paid money for that!

If you're a clothes buyer for a big store you go out on the streets and look what the kids are wearing. You fly off to Thailand, negotiate a good deal and so on.

You have to be at least nine months ahead of what's coming in the shops. There's a lot of activity that people are working out – trends, patterns and pricing and import times and so on. Many people earn their money doing these things. Turning ideas into commodities. Turning commodities into ideas. You get research laboratories where you get specimens and you unpack what they are. This all belongs to ignorance from the Buddhist point of view.

These are ways of surviving in this world of duality, but they hide the nature of duality. *I am making sense of this and this is not me.* Self and other are forced further and further apart.

You can observe for yourself when you're walking down the street and you have a visceral antipathy toward something, you don't like it, say you see a dead rat, *ugh!* You could take it home, get your scalpel and see if there is anything tasty to eat inside. There are people that are interested in eating roadkill in this country. You might find a badger! You can be interested in anything. So, you immediately have an antipathy to the dead rat. What did you see?

Colour and shape is what you see. And the colour is also an interpretation. With your capacity for pattern recognition, this colour and shape indicate 'rat'. Ugh! Until you knew that it's a rat. You didn't feel too much. *Ugh, a rat!* So, what are you frightened about? Your own thoughts! Your own idea of what it is. This is the meaning of this third level of ignorance, that there's a lot of emotion and passion involved inside it.

The five poisons

This links to the five afflictions or five poisons, which you find as a major interpretative structure in Tibetan Buddhism. The first is **ti-muk** (Tib. gti mug), which is a kind of **mental dullness** or **stupidity** or **opacity**, in which you think you're seeing something, but you're not. It's a bit like looking at somebody who's got these mirrored sunglasses. When you look at them, you see yourself. Instead of looking at the world and seeing things as they are, you see your interpretation reflected back to you. So the horror you feel at seeing the rat is not what was there, it was what you had projected, and it's shooting back at you. This is the nature of mental dullness that you don't get it – *I just scared myself!*

A classic example for this is: on a dark night in India, a farmer goes out for a walk. He's carrying a bamboo stick with him because there could be bandits in the field. He's going along with some flickering moonlight shining on the path and sees a snake. He backs away, pokes at it and it doesn't move. He looks again and it's a piece of rope! Is it a snake or is it a rope? As long as he thought it was a snake, he was afraid. As soon as he sees it's a piece of rope, he's not afraid.

So, we're in the situation of seeing ropes as snakes, of misapprehension/misinterpretation, and so we scare ourselves.

We say: *oh, President Trump, what is he doing?* He's just another nutter. We're all nutters. Everyone is a bit crazy. Where do you find a good politician in the whole world? People are not very balanced. We are emotional, labile creatures, blowing this way and that. *It would be a very bad idea if I was the prime minister of this country. It would not be good for the people.* But we are not good to ourselves, so we have to get close to ourselves.

When you have a strong belief that you have an accurate perception, it's going to be difficult, because usually the phenomena can be cut in a different way. So, it's a rope and the farmer goes home and thinks, *this is the last time that fucking bitch of a wife speaks to me and he strangles her with the rope.* So the dangerous snake becomes the peaceful rope becomes the murder implement. It's in the potential of a situation. Do you understand? It's always in the mind, not in the object. The mind can go beautiful, sweet, sour, bitter, chilly. All kinds of flavours and colours move in peoples' minds. Like the Buddha said: "friends become enemies, enemies become friends." Good people do bad things. Bad people do good things.

It is complex. It's not reducible to right and wrong, good and bad. So one of the things is that **awareness doesn't come to conclusions**. Awareness stays open, working with circumstances. Circumstances change. *But I thought you were my friend.* These words come out of people a lot in heartbreak whether it's political, romantic or in business. *I thought you were my friend.* You took refuge in your own idea about that person. That is a mental formation which you took to be the truth about that person. People change.

If the Buddha says: "Friends become enemies. Enemies become friends." Why are we saying: *I thought you were my friend?* Sad, isn't it? We are unreliable. There is no buddhist teaching that says: take refuge in your lover or take refuge in your mother. They say: take refuge in the Buddha. But we take refuge in all kinds of things. We take refuge in the chancellor of the exchequer. Why? If you take refuge in the NHS, it's not a good idea. Having worked there for a long time, I can say, it is a shameful, overworked, overstressed, inefficient organisation. It's terrible. But this is what we have and we don't want to see. So, we tell lies to ourselves and we say that something is made of gold when it's made of copper. It's madness. That's what's meant by mental dullness that we don't want to see how things are. We're self-deceiving.

Arising from this reification, the seeing of real, self-existing, solid entities, two pathways open up: **desire** for things that we take to be good, or antipathy, anger or **aversion** for things that we don't like. So, once you have a world of thingness of people, you like them or you don't like them. We tend to like them if they're nice to us and we don't like them if they're not nice to us.

Imagine a Buddhist complaining to their lover: *you've changed. Oh, no, how could that be? The Buddha said everything is permanent and we'd be married forever. Oh no, wait, that was when I was a Christian. Holy marriages last. Oh Jesus, thank you. You weren't married yourself, were you? No!*

It's crazy and you have to look sharply. These are stories and you can believe these stories and they're all like tunnels. You enter the tunnels and it takes into this labyrinthine movement and suddenly it pops open, and you think: *what was that all about?*

We went to war in Iraq, and in Afghanistan. The people there didn't want us there, they didn't need us there. The people in Libya do need us there. But are we there? Are our boys there? No, they're not. You have to look and see. Don't believe. Don't assume. These are the five poisons. It's not that people are bad. It's that we are all drugged/ intoxicated. That's why these are called the five poisons. If you take some poison, it will impact you. If you take some arsenic, it will affect your perception, your central nervous system. So, when these five poisons operate

inside you, you do not have clarity. You think you have clarity, but you have intoxication.

Then you have the second pairing which are **pride and jealousy**. With pride you have an overly affirmative belief in your importance, value, function, status and with jealousy you come in contact with the anxiety, that the framework which you've put in place to establish your sense of self, is put in question. The person I love, loves someone else, now I feel very bad.

—*Stop loving them and love only me. And if you don't do that, I won't love you.*

—But I love the other person.

—*But you shouldn't love the other person. You should only love me.*

—So, if I stop loving them and only love you, then will you love me?

But what about them?

—*Never mind them, ignore them. Just love me!*

That's not a very compassionate thought, because you are intoxicated with wanting to be special. Human love says: *What about me? Don't leave me.* That is to say: *I'm dependent. I am autonomously dependent.*

These five poisons are very powerful. They are the energy systems pumping towards and away from up and down, pulsing all the time. We're caught up in the sway of them. And they are all activated by the belief in truly existing entities. But when we look, there is no truly existent entities anywhere. There are movements of presentation. We're alive, we're in this room. We can hear, we can see. We're alive, but this is not a thing. It's pulsing, connective. We're in this together.

4) Ignorance of stupidity of not understanding karma

So, we have the fourth level of ignorance, which is the stupidity of the obtuseness of not getting karma. It means you don't get what karma is. **Karma** means activity, **a cause that has consequences**. We're used to the idea that actions have results. So, if I get up and slap you in the face, you get upset, that would be the result. But whatever it is that motivated me to get up and slap you in the face is not you, it's some tendency in me. So, I then have a pattern which is

overtaking my concern for you as a person, my thoughtfulness for how you might feel and I just want to do it. It's a self-referential action operated on to another. And that creates a particular kind of vibration or orientation or smoothing.

Oh, I better not do that, especially with the cameras on. They'll take me away to jail. So, there's an interruption for most for us – *oh, I'd better not.* The arousal into the thought is dispersed because you think of the consequences or you think of the other person. But when that doesn't happen, you're gathered into an uninterrupted commitment, to a very narrow, self-serving activity. Does that make sense? That's what karma is. That's how the tendency arises.

Some of you will know that from smoking cigarettes. You start smoking cigarettes and after a while you have to smoke cigarettes. You don't know why you are smoking cigarettes. *I'm not going to smoke.* A little later, you're smoking a cigarette. *Why am I smoking this cigarette?* Because you have the tendency. You stop smoking for six months, but then you go to a party and bum a cigarette from someone. You find it good. How come? Because of an echo from before, took you over. Very often these things happen when you're tired, not very well or a bit disorganised.

Karma, as it's traditionally described, has four aspects to it. The first is also called the **ground**, but it's not the primordial ground we were talking of. **It's the fact of duality and reification.** I exist. You exist. You're not me. I'm not you. So, we're two people. Looking at the space from me to you, I can formulate an intention. The frame of my intention is: you're not me. If you were me, the non-differentiation wouldn't bring about an intention.

My **intention** can be neutral or positive or negative. A neutral intention can be very mild like: may all beings be happy. It's an intention from me towards you, but it's not having much of an impact. A negative intention could be: *I wonder what's in that guy's bag. It doesn't look like he's got a purse in his pocket. I'll wait until he goes for a pee and then I'll have a wee look.* You start thinking, *I could take what is his. I want. Forget about what he needs. I want.* The formulation, the intention is coming around a sense of the other as a means to an end. I'm not valuing the living, existential validity of that person, their life, what's important for them.

If you're going to steal, you don't want empathic attunement. Not a good idea. You're just thinking: *I just want your money*. You can see what that brings – an increased sense of duality, a disregard for the existence and the complexity of the other person, and a me-first. So, the person goes out of the room and you take his bag and you find some money. *Great! Rich guy*. You put it in your pocket. *That's good, now it's my money*. Then he comes back in the room and looks for his money. And you lie about some other people coming into the room. So you cover your tracks and he goes out looking for these other people. Mission **accomplished**. That's the fourth stage.

The four stages are:

- 1) The other person/ he exists in a field of duality.
- 2) Your intention: to get something.
- 3) The enactment: Now You're taking it.
- 4) You've have successfully taken it, it's yours and you're glad.

At each stage you have an alignment or a non-alignment with what happened. If he comes back in the room and says: *they've taken my train ticket, how am I going to get home. I'll never get home*. And you look for it and say that you seem to have found it over there. You could back track a little bit and think about what you are doing. So, at each stage, you could back track or soften it.

But if you take these four stages fully through, you've annihilated the person as significant. That's the death of compassion. And you've taken the person as separate from you and solidly real and that's the death of wisdom. So, you have annihilated your spiritual life in that action.

If you stay present with the fact that everything arises as the energy of the ground, you would have no basis for exploiting other people. You could collaborate with people. You could say: *I've lost my job, could you help me out?* You could communicate, be honest about it and it could be that you get some help. But you would have to start from self-disclosure. If you're wanting to steal, you don't do that. You have self-hiding if you're a thief, not self-disclosure.

That's how ignorance or unawareness functions.

Precious human birth

Due to karma, we find ourselves in one of the six realms of existence: the high god realms, the demi-gods, the humans, the animals, the hungry ghosts and the various hell realms. These are all sequences of experience, which are intense and captivating.

If you go out into the country and in the field, there's cows and little calves, they'll come bopping over to you, with their big eyes, they'll pick some grass. There are flies all around their eyes. Their backside is very far away from their eyes and although their tail is very long, it can't quite get to their eyes. It's really heart breaking. In the summertime, there's flies all over their eyes. You wouldn't want to be a cow. You wouldn't want to be a snail. You wouldn't want to be a virus. There are lots of not so good places to be!

We are very lucky. We are crème de la crème, top notch.... for a while. We have access to so many things. We can especially look at our mind. See the little baby cow, it can't see its mind. If you see a lamb, though it's happy to be alive, bouncing around, it doesn't see its mind. Fish don't see their mind. They are looking for something, looking for food, looking for sex. Sex and danger, these are the two big motivating aspects in their life. Entrained in this over-determined positioning, how would they ever be able to reflect on life?

But we, in this brief period of time, have the possibility to sit and to just observe the actuality of our existence – how I am? Not who I am or what I am, but how I am. And if we do that, we start to open to unborn awareness. We start to see primordial buddhahood. And then this thick veil of ignorance dissolves. Just as when the sun starts to rise in the sky, the thick mist in the valley just dissolves. And it's as if it had never been there. In the same way, all your obscuration starts to dissolve if you stay with awareness. But if you choose to get rid of your obscuration by rubbing and scrubbing and joining Vajrasattva, it's an endless task.

Vajrasattva is like Sisyphus. He's condemned to roll this boulder up the mountain. When he gets to the top, it rolls right back down. He is stubborn and patient so he starts all over again. *I purified one sentient being. Thank God for that. These sentient beings, they just keep fucking and having more babies. Phew! There*

are always more sentient being to clean. Getting them in the bath and washing them clean is pretty hard work! I'm tired!

We see why we want to purify because we feel dirty, obscured, limited, we want to remove these things. But the path of dzogchen is different. Every phenomenon is self-liberating. Don't make effort. You'll only make it worse.

But I just want to help. Can I help? No.

You can help by sitting quietly in a corner and not doing anything. That's called meditation.

SESSION 4/6

Meditation

Practice: not impeding the flow of life

Although awareness and unawareness both arise like a magical illusion, there's a difference between them. The content of awareness is always changing and the clarity of awareness is present and open to that. Whereas with unawareness the intelligence, which would be dispersed in awareness gathers into a narrow, focal point of intelligence. Which links into the different kinds of consciousness, five senses, mental consciousness, consciousness inflicted by the five poisons and the ground consciousness, through which we can access all the ways of the history of the world.

Very often people get archetypal images or presences in dreams. We find ourselves thinking of something and don't know why. We don't know why we're suddenly drawn to knowing about the stitching of Japanese Kimonos in the 16th century. People write their Ph.D. on that. Not so interesting, but why not? Something arises in someone's mind and it's calling to them.

In that way the ego, because it wants to exist as some-thing, is always searching for proof of its own continuity and the continuity of the world. It operates against the intrinsic dynamic of the mind: **the mind is self-revealing and self-vanishing, rang-shar**. Thoughts, feelings, shapes, memories, colours, everything arises spontaneously by itself and then vanishes by itself. It doesn't need to be removed because it's just like that. But we dot trust that.

Just now we had a break. I came and sat down, the people gradually came and sat down. We didn't have to blow a whistle or ask everyone to come and sit down. But suddenly as the group gets quieter, the silence starts to have a voice. And the people that were standing in the corner and were talking, it's as if the silence were quietly caressed in their face and then they came over very quietly and sat down. It's so interesting. We are mood-inflected creatures in our sensitivity. But when we become full of our own ideation, we lose that gorgeous sensitivity. We push through, with the will to power, to do things on our own

terms. That's the quality of the ego. It's pushing through. **Awareness isn't pushing anything.**

Now we do more sitting practice.

The reason we keep our eyes open is to not impede whatever is going on. We're not staring at the distant wall, rather we're allowing the space of the room to be present for us. We're not looking at something, but just resting in space. The muscles in the eyes might need a little time to get used to this. The body is relaxed, the skeleton is carrying the weight. And we're just here. Life is always going on and we try not to impede the flow of life. We take our place with the flow of life.

This flow of life is a potential, which we can enter into at any moment. It's like camping by the side of the river. Whenever you feel a bit hot, you just dive into the river. The thoughts and feelings are moving in your mind. But when you have another break, you find yourself talking to someone. So a thought, when you were practicing, was just arising and passing, because there was no reason to do anything with it. That capacity of the flow of thoughts, you then enter into, in order to have a conversation with someone. Then the conversation is finished and the flow goes on, but maybe it's an internal flow. Sometimes you're swimming inside your own internal river and sometimes in the interpersonal river and sometimes you're not swimming at all.

So, in the meditation, we swim less. Let the thoughts just come and go. Coming and going. We sit for a while.

(Practice for some time)

The content of the mind is moving, the mind itself not

In the first stage of ignorance, when there is a momentary event, which instead of going on its way cleanly, self-dissolving, it is as if it is held in place by an attachment. That there is something there to attach to and we attach to it. This, as we looked at before, opens up the duality of self and other. This opens up the way for the contrivance or artificiality of polarity: high/low, inside/outside, good/bad.

Polarities are the basic structure of samsara, in which the conscious mind, the cognitive functioning mind organises its experience – comparing and contrasting, putting things in order. To do that, it has to be able to hold things simultaneously. For example, if you had two packages and you wanted to work out which was heavier, and you had a set of scales. You would put one package on the one pan, the other package on the other pan and you'd see which way the scale tilts. That means the two packages have to be present at the same time and roughly the same place.

So, if you want to compare your meditation today with the way it was yesterday, it is as if your memory of what was yesterday and what you're conceptualising as your experience today, could be brought together in the same place and time. And then you can say if it's improving or not. These polarities are a complete distortion of our experience because yesterday is gone. Whatever yesterday was as yesterday, both in its fresh purity and its conceptual wrapper, by the time it arrives here as a memory, it's been wrapped and unwrapped half a dozen times. So, it's a construct now. In order to compare it to what's happening now, you have to construct more of this experience. **Fresh and fresh cannot be compared**, because there is only this fresh, that fresh is gone.

When you're meditating and you're a bit heavy and you doze off momentarily, if you had a frame of reference that said that I should be fresh, alert and mindful all the time, that would be bad news. *I got it wrong. I shouldn't have done that.* Because now something has happened which I can review with reference to certain criteria. But if as you get sleepy and then you become more present; as you become present, sleepiness is vanishing.

And then you think: *but why was I sleepy?* Don't go there. It's gone. Let it go. Then it's this. This. If you stay present with the moment, there are no mistakes. That's why dzogchen is sometimes translated as great perfection. I'm not a fan of the word 'perfection' because – in English, it's very value-laden – it seems to be an attribution of hierarchical quality. But that may just be my reading of the word. But we say that it's not good to fall asleep. But it's an experiencing which is arising. And then we can see what sleepiness and heaviness are.

The mind has two main movements:

1) One is a kind of **rising giddiness**, a kind of opening up of the prana going here and there. In Tibetan, it's called **gö-pa** (Tib. rgod pa), which means a bit wild, dispersed energy moving around.

2) And the other is **ching-wa** (Tib. bying ba), a kind of **sinking feeling**. If you get sleepy and you go into this sinking kind of feeling, it seems to be an increasing density. You can't hang on. *But the only thing that's keeping me afloat is hanging on.* No, no, no. If you're sinking, sink and then you'll come out. Don't interfere with the mind.

If we really see that the mind is primordial purity, nothing is bad in the source. And if the source is pure, what arises from the source is pure. If you plant rice, you won't get barley. It's just like that. **The source is pure.** What is its quality? It's empty. It lacks inherent self-nature. It was a momentary patterning. The momentary patterning is already dissolving.

If you come to a conclusion that something was bad, what is that? You're talking about the past. It's gone. What does it mean? It's in the past. So, where are you? You're not in the past. You can't get in there. You're not in the present. So, where are you? You've created a little cognitive limbo land for yourself. You're in the echo chamber of your own conceptualisations neither present nor fully absent. You're sort of not here, not there. Familiar territory for most of us. Not a good way to live our lives. We could be more present. But if you're going to be more present, you have to let the past go. As I was saying earlier, look out for the policeman in your head, the valuator, the judge, that wants to know if you're making progress.

—Going back to how the mind is. The mind is here.

—*How do I get here?*

—You are here already.

—*Yeah, but what do I have to do to get here?*

—You are here already.

This is kind of stupid: *I'm going to find a teacher, who is going to show me how to be present.* First you do your ngondro. Then you have to do prostrations

and if you can, go to Mount Kailash. You'll get a lot of blessing. So all the dharma path practices are saying, the journey to here is a very long journey. Wow! You have to have faith, devotion, courage and diligence. But you're here. Yeah, but you're not really here.

Yes you are! You're just imagining, you're not here. This is the big division between dzogchen, some aspects of mahamudra and the general dharma teachings.

Dzogchen starts with the ground. If the ground is clear and you really get some sense, some flavour that my mind is unborn and open, it's just here. You went out for lunch, had various experiences and you had some sense that this is moving in the mind, and still there was space for more and more. This is here. The content of the mind is moving. The mind itself doesn't move. I'm here. **I'm here as unmoving awareness, but I can't find it.** I'm here, but not here as some thing. You can find things. You can find your concepts, your ego, your personality, your history, but you can't find awareness. It's not something to be found. So this is more difficult.

An example that I've used many times is learning to ride a bicycle. You get on a bicycle and maybe you've got little practice wheels on either side and you wobble about and maybe then you get more confident. Then they take off the practice wheels and you start to feel that you need help. Then your mom or dad takes your shoulder, which is helpful and unhelpful simultaneously. Because when you're wobbling, you're getting to know the line of gravity because you know you're getting off balance. As it were, you're in a conversation with the nature of balance. And if someone puts their arm on your shoulder to rectify you, you're not self-rectifying.

This is the danger with using techniques to direct you because you're always leaning on something. If you push on the wall, the wall will tell you where you are. It will confirm the seeming facticity of your existence through the resistance of the wall. But if you stand in the middle of the room and you have nothing to lean against, you have to find the line through yourself. You have to find the line of gravity and balance and then you're start to be able to move freely, but without falling over.

Allow the mind to be as it is, don't come to a conclusion

So, in terms of meditation, if you bind it too tightly and you give yourself a pro forma, some precise set of directions of how you should do it, you align to the template. That creates a triangle of mediation: this is how it should be, this is what's happening, and here I am. So, I'm working with this triangle and I'm trying to align itself with how it should be. Now you're into micro-managing and that's going to bring tension into your prana structure.

Allow the mind to be as it is. In this book *Simply Being*, there are three chapters that have some comments on meditation problems. The most common problem that is outlined, is **conclusion**. You come to a conclusion that your mind is dull or that you can't meditate or that your mind is always full of anger. You have a summative statement. You have moments of experience and you bring them together as if you could articulate some definite truth about how you are. This is a composite. This is something compounded. This is not how it is. This is not an accurate phenomenal description. If you stay close to the phenomena, for example, *I feel angry when sitting*, you'll find that you're not sure. Where is this 'I feel angry'? It's a conclusion.

As you're sitting maybe some anger arises, seems to find an object, maybe there is a something, an 'I am angry about something'. That's an interpretation. What was the anger? A slight tensing in the diaphragm, a slight shift in skin tension perhaps, a slight shift in breathing – these are the presenting qualities and they're all transient. You can't build anything on them. They are indicative of some kind of arousal, whether that be of lust, boredom or anger. Whatever that would be, there would be a colouration or a mood or feeling tone, which pervades you for a while and then it's gone. If you just stay with that, then you notice yourself suffused with that.

The object side suffuses me and I give myself to that, so I'm getting pissed off... this is all that there is. And as it dissolves... *where am I?* There is openness. So, **the self-liberation of the object brings the self-liberation of the mind.**

In Mahamudra, we generally focus on the self-liberation of the object to release awareness. In Dzogchen, we generally focus on the unchanging presence of awareness to self-liberate the phenomena. They've got the same basic function.

The key thing is: **don't be the one that moves!** We are described in all the different kinds of buddhist texts as wandering in samsara. We wander, moving, going. Who is moving? The mind is moving. Awareness is never moving.

In the meditation, if you merge into the thought, the thought will move and it's as if you move. If you stand at the bus stop... there's nothing to do, no money to spend and the bus stops, you get on the bus and nobody asked you for money, now you're on the bus. You're going on a journey. You don't know where you're going. The bus stops, you get off the bus and think that it's better get on another bus. That's what happens with a thought.

The thought takes you on a journey, the feeling, the sensation takes you on a journey. You are a mover. That's how you move around in samsara. The mirror doesn't move. The reflections move around in the mirror, but the mirror doesn't move. This is like a litmus test, that you do in school in order to test the shift from acid to alkaline – it changes colour. So you pick up again and again when you're not in awareness.

If I'm in this ego-identificatory position, I am vulnerable to FUSION. Why? Because the ego is empty. As we looked at before, the advantage of the ego being empty is that it can adopt infinite numbers of personas, different styles, moods, and so on. You can be yourself in any number of ways. This is the creative potential of relatedness. However, the ego doesn't appreciate the value of its own emptiness and longs for fullness. So, it's always trying to fill itself up and that's its vulnerability. Because you fill yourself with this transient form, and as that leaves, you have to find another transient form. Then, your life is labile, like the waves of the ocean, going up and down, having hopes and fears. We know very well what that is like.

So, in that moment, even if you are in a busy office, you can meditate. Relax in the out-breath and be with whatever is. You may be peaceful, you may be crying, upset, whatever it is, just sit! It shifts. I'm here. It shifts. I'm here. This is

the basis of meditation. **The moving moves, the still stays.** What is still? Empty awareness. What is moving? Everything else. The whole shebang is on the move, moment by moment. Turn your head in the room. Ten million things are appearing and appearing. There's a lot going on. And awareness is here. It's all being displayed in the infinite, multi-dimensional mirror of awareness.

Allow movement and find the stillness in the movement

You can waste a lot of time in meditation if you don't get clear about the mind and its contents. **The content of the mind moves.** You cannot stabilise the content of the mind. So, don't try. Don't make effort to build a house on sand.

How do we allow movement and find the stillness in the movement? **By not moving.** Who is the one that wants to fuse? Movement. This is the central point. This is where you get a new passport. I am the ego, I am me. We're withdrawing that passport. *I'll be a stateless citizen. I don't want to be that.* Don't worry, we'll get you another one. This one is better – the international awareness passport. You're always wherever you want to be. Instantly. But when you're travelling with your ego passport, you're travelling on your journey with your identity. And changes to that identity are problematic, because you start to not look like the picture on your document! You come to the border and get questioned about the picture that's in the document.

This is vital for meditators: **presence and re-presentation.**

Presence is presenting, presenting, revealing, showing, clarity. **Representation** is an image. And again you have a triangle: I, my image of me and the actuality of me that is I at that moment. Whatever we call it – the seer, the revealer or the clarity – how it is, this is me. How it should be, is the image of me. As long as you hold on to the image of me, you have a discordance between the image of me and the actual. Our tendency is to rectify ourselves towards matching with the image; to tilt our potential toward more of the same. So, that we're able to re-iterate the formation that we take to be ourselves. That's comfortable in some way. But when we're sitting, we have to dissolve the image of the self. **Stay with the not knowing.** Just not knowing or negative capability.

The ability to be present without knowing what could be or should be, brings you closer to the actuality, the moment of revelation as it is. So, you're peeling back your tendency for premature interpretation, which is always a projection, an interpretation. And this is very dangerous, as we looked at earlier, because it's vomiting the past onto the present. It's smearing the past onto the present. It becomes very hazy, like putting Vaseline on a camera lens. If we want it to be fresh, **the fresh is a revelation, it's not an idea.**

The ego-self is an idea.

You can see this on a very rough, outer level with small babies. When the baby is still inside the mother's body, the big people have thought of a name for the baby. If they are thoughtful, they've prepared a room and a special bed and so on for the baby. They're prepared to welcome the baby. Which baby? Their baby. And then they tell the baby again and again, what its name is. And then they're very happy when one day the baby can say its own name. It has internalised the abstract, external name. It's turned a living phenomenon into trademark 'Item no. 1'. This is mimesis – the mimetic internalisation of the shaping of the world.

Gradually the child is haunted by, infected by the various resonances of the family, the kindergarten and the school, so that the outer and the inner world start to vibrate together. That person is a construct. The potential of the mind has been formed by forces, which are not the child. And then the child responds. When the child then responds, the child is often identified as having an inherent agency, which is constituted of the situation, they find themselves in. Mom and dad divorce or mom dies. Dad's a bit lost. He finds someone else. He's interested in the new lover, he's not interested in the child. The child is upset. Dad is only interested in fucking the new woman. The distress of the child is very annoying for dad. Dad becomes annoyed with the child and tells the child that it's very annoying because you get in the way of me being who I want to be. Not at all uncommon.

Now the child is being made bad by the events: the death of the mother, the dad's new relationship, the dad's basic unwillingness to be a proper dad. These three vectors come together, but they're not displayed as three terrible events. They're displayed as this troublesome child who needs to go therapy. Then the poor therapists say: *we got the wrong one here!* This is like the scene in Casablanca

where the police chief says: *round up the usual suspects*. So once the child gets a bad reputation, all the difficulties go back on the child, although they're just trying to get the love and attention they need.

—You are the troublemaker. Why can't you just behave? Why can't you just settle down?

—*Because you don't love me.*

—I've given my best. Why don't you just see that?

Now the child is getting all this stuff whacked at them. Our anxious ego gets identified with so many patterns of environments that we encounter. But that's not who we really are. It's how we function, mediated through this patterning system.

This is why **meditation** is so important. When you sit and the invitation to merge in these habitual patterns arises, if you can just relax, breathe out and not succumb to them, they go by. Their power is your belief in them.

In child therapy, it is one of the saddest things, when the child starts to feel that they are bad. If only I was better, then my dad would love me. This is so wrong. But the therapist can't say that because (s)he is seeing them for fifty minutes a week and the child is stuck in this shitty system all the rest of the time. It's very, very sad. There is a misinterpretation of the causal sequence.

That's why I looked in some detail at the nature of ignorance because that's what leads us to the state in which we identify with these operational factors as if they were revelatory of our true value in the world. You get it with racial prejudice, gender limitations, glass ceilings in institutions and so on where people locate you somewhere. And if you're to be seen as a good person, you should locate yourself where the big, powerful people locate you. You should bend the knee, be humble, fit in. And if you stand up, you're a troublemaker. Again and again you see that it takes a lot of effort to be a whistle-blower in a public institution. You're not going to be welcomed. Meditation helps us to sidestep a lot of these political power struggles.

We can see there is no end to suffering, there is no end to samsara, if you step into it. When I meditate, the potential, the patterning of samsara is available and if I don't fuse with them, they pass by. Now seeing the openness and the freshness of the mind, and the indestructibility of primordial purity (which is also called vajra: indestructible, nothing can scratch it or harm it), these patterns arise.

Result: 3 kayas

On the level of the result:

- 1) This openness of the mind, is called the **dharmakaya**.
- 2) Seeing the illusory nature of whatever is arising is called the **sambhogakaya**.
- 3) Participating in the world, with confused beings, who are committed to the truth of their own concepts, is the **nirmanakaya**. The bodhisattvas don't get caught by their thoughts. They are okay whether someone likes them or not likes them. For them, it's a free country.

But that's not how it is for most us. You get troubled if your boss doesn't like you. It rankles. And then you try to get your boss to like you and you get entangled. It's not easy. You give them more evidence to get you, because you show more of yourself to invite something nice and it gets into a mess.

The bodhisattva comes into the world clean, gets very proximal, very close to whatever is going on but not entangled, because there is no benefit in entanglement. In our ordinary selves, we get entangled all the time and we see what happens. It's not about withdrawing from the world and avoiding people, but it's also not about merging in.

Practice: Relax with the space, sky to sky

So, we're back to the basic rules of meditation:

- 1) **Don't merge with whatever arises, and**
- 2) **don't hold yourself apart from whatever arises.**

Find the middle way, so that you're close and free like the mirror. The mirror has no protection. It's completely naked. There are no bouncers. Everything goes into the mirror. The mirror says: *hi, this is it, bye!* and it's gone. The mirror is like that all the time. No sweat. The more you let it flow through you in an undefended way, the easier it gets. The more we try to defend ourselves, the more difficult it gets. Dharma is full of these paradoxes. It's not how we think it will be. That's why we have to stay with the actuality of things and observe our own energy in life.

Let's do a little more sitting.

If it's difficult to have your eyes open, you can look down the side of your nose. It's preferable not to close the eyes completely because letting some light in helps a little bit to keep you awake and also keeps you connected to the world. We tend to go inside ourselves and have a sense that we have a self that I can go into, as if there is an internal creature. **Non-duality** would indicate that I am a part of a field of manifestation. By keeping the eyes open the environmental aspect and the inhabitable aspect are together. I'm a flower in the field on the ground.

Eyes open is letting light in. I don't want to be staring out at something, otherwise my gaze will lock onto something that's on the wall and it will become a kind of hook or anchor point, which can lead to conceptualisation. If possible we want to let the gaze resting in space. It's a bit difficult. For me at the moment, looking out, I get the brightness of the lights shining out. The eyes don't like it, so there's a kind of somatic response. Keep the eyes open as much as possible. At other times, practice in an environment with easier lighting.

What we are trying to awaken to in the practice is that we are meditating **sky to sky**. In front of us, there is the open sky and in the open sky there are the rainbow formations of everything we see – people, dogs, cats, ice creams, everything. And then we have the other sky, which is the sky of our mind, filled with the rainbow of feelings, thoughts, memories and so on. Both skies are so open and relaxed, they're not bothered by what arises. So, whether this fan keeps whirring, or a dog is barking, drunk people are shouting, or you have some obsessive thought in your head, it's a RAINBOW! It doesn't cause harm.

The basis of freedom is the ground, the vajra indestructible purity of the mind. Awareness is indestructible. Everything else will get wiped off. We get old, we get sick, we get tired, people leave, people die. I'm at the age now where lots of people I know starts to die. It's like that. They're vanishing. But something remains. This is our awareness.

So, we keep the eyes open, if possible, so that we have this flow. Allow the gaze to go down the line of the nose and have a sense of the open space there. When you're travelling in the tube, just a little space would be a blessing. Someone can be right on your face there. When they move just half an inch, you thank god. So a little bit of space is quite spacious. Same here. You have a little bit of space and it's not different from infinite space, so **relax with the space**.

Mind is like the mirror. When we look inside the mirror, we see everything inside the mirror. When you look out in this room, everything is inside your mind. This is a problem if you imagine that your mind is inside your body, if you imagine that your mind is linked to your brain. The mind is neither inside the body nor outside the body.

The mind is a great mystery. You can't catch it, you can't lose it, you can't find it, you can't buy it, you can't sell it, but it's always here, though you can't find it. It's not like anything else. It is the radical other. About everything else, you can think about. You can think about thinking, about feeling. If you're thinking about the mind, you're only thinking about your idea of the mind. **You can't catch the mind itself**. The mind itself is slippery, slipping away and yet always here. It loves to hide and yet always revealing itself. It's a mystery, it's not a problem to be solved. If you turn it into a problem, you will make problems for yourself.

How do you enter a mystery? You enter into it, you offer yourself to it. You sit with your mind, without knowing, but waiting. To take the example we had earlier, **rig-pa** is compared to the sun. The sun rises and its light illuminates everything. So, you sit in the darkness of not knowing, and then rig-pa will arise like the sun. But if you turn on the torch of your memory, of your hope and your consciousness, you won't be in the depth of the night, and so the dawn won't come. You'll be forever camping in your little tent! That's very sad.

In the dark, the sun comes. We don't have an image here of Kuntu Zangpo, Kuntu Zangpo is dark blue in colour, almost black. Kuntu Zangpo, the primordial Buddha, the 'always good' is the night. Out of the night comes the dawn, which is the day. The primordial Buddha is nothing. Nothing gives light and sound, which is everything. Everything in its dance and play arises as us moment by moment, moving in the world. The dark is our friend. You won't catch the dark. In the dark, you can't catch things. When you go into a dark forest, you don't catch things. If you're out in a dark night, there's nothing to do. If you want to find your way in the dark, you feel it; you read the dark through your belly.

When it's really dark, you can feel it coming up through your belly, you can feel it and you're picking up the vibration of the dark. When the dawn comes, it's very different. If you've been walking in the dark and the first light comes in the sky, it's really transforming. When it's really dark, you're so present, tentative without being afraid. But when the light comes, you turn into a soldier, stomping and marching, doing and you're back in consciousness. So for us meditators, the dark is our friend. We don't know.

So when we do the meditation practice, we have the desire to know, to name, to attribute value – good/ bad, helpful/ unhelpful. Don't do that. Turn off these small lights. Stay in the dark, just sitting. Thoughts are coming and going. I don't need them, they don't need me. Just sitting in the dark. The dawn will not come as a thought. What comes as a thought is not the dawn.

We'll do one last sitting before the end.

(Practice for sometime)

If you like, you can do a little more practice in the evening and especially when you're falling asleep. You can fall asleep in that state of openness. You wake in the morning, relax in the out-breath and just be in that spaciousness. And gradually the rhythm of your body will have you getting out of bed, having a pee or whatever.

So, always the middle way: don't try too hard but try to be present. Remembering to be present is a kind of effort. It's not a pushing effort, it's an effort of recollection. **Recollection** means you collect yourself. You don't get dispersed.

If you poured your life into the objects, if you made objects very important for you, then you lose yourself.

Remember the song that goes, 'every time you go away, you take a little part of me.' We invest little pieces of ourselves in people that we know, in our parents, in our friends, in places that we've lived in, so we become dispersed. Recollection means to gather all of you, all these tendrils, and to remember: the thought of this person that I miss, is my thought. *Oh, it's me. I didn't leak away. I miss them.*

'I miss them' is I, it's not them. Who are they? We don't know. We don't know what they're doing. They're someone else, having their life. They're not who we think they are. They are who they are, and who we think they are, is us.

Every experience is the radiance of the mind

There's no reason to be dispersed because it's all the energy of your own mind. If all the energy of your own mind is moving in the mandala of your existence, then it's like in the seven-line prayer of Padmasambhava, *khordu khandro mangpö kor*, all around him these dakinis are moving. Thoughts, feelings, sensations are swirling in the space of our awareness. Memories of the past, plans for the future, hopes, fears – it's movement. **There's nothing wrong with movement, if you recognise that it's your mind that's moving.** It's all here, so, you're not fragmented.

But if you start thinking things like *why did I say that? What would they think if they knew what I do?* and so on, then you cut yourself in pieces. What are you going to do then as a chopped up, little stumpy person! Everything is just as it is. Some people have to live with secrets. That's not the worst thing in the world. The main thing is to be careful about the wall of secrecy that separates this from that, the kind of compartmentalisation that it is functional and not ontological.

If in terms of compassion or personal deviancy, you decide to compartmentalise and have a double, triple or quadruple life, you just have to learn to do it. If you want to have a lot going on and you don't want it to bump into each other, the first thing is to get some space. So, worrying and anxiety is bad news for people who are going to have complicated lives. Be relaxed, be spacious.

It moves where it moves. Be at ease with yourself. This is what is meant by not trying hard.

Don't try to sort your life out. You can't sort it out, but you can be present with your life.

Now there's all this anxiety with the virus. People will get worried and all sorts of extreme action will come in. If you have a suspicious mind, you might be thinking about the major shifts in governments, the police/ army getting powers to intervene and police being on your side etc. But the police is on your side... for a while. This is how it is. There will be more rules and regulations. That's how it is. Sometimes the mind is relaxed, sometimes it's tight. Sometimes the world is relaxed, sometimes it's tight. There are many countries in the world with dictatorships, secret prisons, torture camps and so on. They exist. We open our mind to them, we pray for the people in captivity. We hold them in our hearts in our meditation practice. This is our non-duality, not sorting everything into high/ low, good/ bad.

Everything is welcome because **dzogchen is the whole**. Everything is the whole. If your life is simple and easy, that's the way your life is. If it's complicated, then that's the way it is. The key thing is to not blame yourself. Don't make yourself a bad person. Don't hate yourself. What advantage will that have? Hating yourself won't make you a better person. This is how it is... at the moment... due to circumstances. If you stay present with that, you get closer to yourself. And if you're closer to yourself and actually in your skin, then you have more contact with the world. The skin feels the world.

Our systemic embedded-ness, our vibration with the environment is revealed by subtle little impacts on us. And then you work with these circumstances. And it's best not to be heroic. Better to be skilful. Truth is often not very useful. Because the only real truth is that everything is empty, and you're going to die. So between now and when you're going to die, you make castles in the air, you make money, you sleep with a thousand people, whatever you're going to do, it's just going to vanish. It's just moments of experience and it's not so important.

What is important is that you recognise that **every experience is the radiance of the mind**. It's the shining forth of the potential of the unborn ground. That is to say, I and you, are each living in the heart of the Buddha. We are the energy of the Buddha radiating out.

So, you can say: this is good, this is bad, I regret... I hope... These are little gestures, like little fireflies in the sky. That's all. There and then they go. To deny them, would be nihilistic, that is to say there is nothing. To hold on to them and build a world around them would be eternalistic, which would also be one of the extremes. We take the middle way: Kind to yourself, kind to others and not so kind to the virus!

So, we will meet at 10'o clock.

SESSION 5/6

Different styles of practice

We're very lucky to be here in this kind of space. It takes a lot of effort by a lot of people to keep a place like this going. There are all kinds of practical issues, like the financial concerns and so on, that need to be attended to. When you have an organisation where the main teacher dies, there are all sorts of issues of how to continue. So, it's always good to see people collaborating and finding a way forward.

As we've looked at before, nobody knows what the future will bring. The past is not a good indicator. When we stay present, we try to find pathways of possibility that open up in the moment. That's probably our best way. So, I'm very glad to be here. Let's start with a little sitting.

The Tibetan tradition is very rich with lots of different methods of practice. The styles of practice are mainly associated with four main modes. The first is **very elaborated**, the next is **a little elaborated**, then there's one that's **hardly elaborated** and then one that is **not at all elaborated**. What we're doing, when we're just sitting, is not at all elaborated. Everything you find in the more elaborated practices is within the **non-elaboration**.

If you were doing a more elaborated practice, you would start with refuge and bodhisattva vows, you would remember all sentient beings and you would formally dedicate the merit. When you sit in an open way, there is no boundary. All sentient beings are in the mind. The openness of the mind is the immediacy of connectivity of inclusion. In dzogchen, everything is already in. It's like when someone says: *please come into the room*, we think: *no, I'm already in the room*. So, a part is that you have to trust that everything is already in the mind of the Buddha. Everything is already in one great thigle.

Levels of transmission

Important here is what we looked at yesterday, the nature of the ground. The ground is the most fundamental, basic aspect, which is truly the answer to

everything. Regarding transmission, we have nine levels of transmission in the nyingma system. We're usually concerned with the first three.

1) The first is a **direct transmission of the Buddha's mind**, where when we relax into a state of openness, our mind is not different from the mind of any Buddha. The buddhas don't have more of anything than we have. What they have is less of the crap than we have. When you see that the crap is not intrinsic to who you are, then you see that your mind is not different from that of a Buddha.

2) **Symbolic transmission:** The second level of transmission is the symbolic transmission of the wise, the vidhyadharas, the great yogis. The word 'dha' indicates a mudra, a gesture, a tone of voice, it could be a formal symbol like a peacock feather, a crystal, a mirror and so on. If you take up a symbol and think about it, then you come to the mirror as a symbol for the nature of clarity. The image of the crystal points out how the mind is clear. It is referential, representational. This is useful, but very dualistic.

The real transmission of the vidhyadharas is that everything that arises is the presence or the radiance of the mind.

When you're sitting in the practice and you have all sorts of thoughts, feelings and sensations, we often interpret them, we take them to be mean something. If you become aware that you have a pain in your back, you might think: *I need to get a massage or more exercise*. Or you have a practical thought like: *I have to remember to send an email when I get home*. We take our thoughts to be referential about something. This is to misunderstand the nature of thoughts. Thought is the radiance of the mind; sensation is the radiance of the mind.

So, **the second level of transmission is to see directly**, there is no other ground than the open source, which is empty and everything which arises is empty. But it's not empty empty, it is empty of display. Which is why we have the notion of illusion like a mirage, a rainbow. The rainbow is there. What is the rainbow symbolising? If you want it to symbolise something, it is already referring to something else. The rainbow is the showing of the brightness of the sky.

Your depression, your anxiety, your unresolved issues about your mom and your dad, all the neurotic formations that you have – which appear to be something to think about – arise and pass, if you sit with them. **Rang-shar**, self-arising in the sense of just appearing in the manner of a dream and then self-liberating. They're gone! They arise and they pass. When you take them to be referential, and you think: *oh shit, I have to think more about that, I have to work on that, that's important*, then you, yourself are chopping the world up into pieces, arranging it, creating a hierarchy of good thoughts and bad thoughts, helpful and unhelpful thoughts. Your mind is very, very busy.

So, the meaning of the first level of transmission is like **Garab Dorje's** first statement: **Be with how it is**. That's the essential point of Garab Dorje's first statement. Open to how it is. The second statement is: **don't mess about with how it is**. Don't get into doubt, don't think about it, don't process it or cook it. Stay with how it is in all circumstances. And the third point of Garab Dorje is about moving about in the world, where there are all kinds of turbulences. **Don't get pulled into over-identification** with the forms of energy because they will start very quickly to seal themselves and then you'll be in a world of entities. Then you'll be defined as we looked at before by their mutual rejection. If it's this, it's not that. Everything is the energy of the ground.

3) The third level of transmission is **language arising**. When I'm sharing this dharma with you, the breath comes out of the lungs, it goes through the voice box and it comes out as vibration. It is sound. You then have some reception of this. With minimal or great interpretation, resonance, elaboration. All of that is the energy of the ground. If you think that I'm talking about something, that's very sad. I am talking about nothing. I am nothing, talking about nothing. But this is a lovely nothing, not a nihilistic nothing. It's not nothing at all. It's the play of movement.

If you're painting and you make a mark, at some point it looks like a limitation, you've now defiled the infinite potential of the empty canvas. The mark beckons other marks and you start to produce an image. What has happened? Gestures have been made – an energetic conversation. There is the energetic conversation of making, which requires the body to move, look at the paints you

have, select a brush or a knife, a movement. And then you have the energetic relation of observing or being the recipient of it. Receive the colours. You make marks, you receive marks. Nothing is established except the aesthetic moment of the vitality of the senses. This is the meaning of the third level of transmission through language. It's called the **transmission through the earhole of ordinary people** which could make it seem quite heavy and dull.

The key thing when you hear is: I hear sound. You can't catch sound. I see light, but you can't catch light. You run your finger down your arm – sensation is there, but uncatchable. This is why sensation is important in some kinds of yoga practice. It is immediately manifest and you can't catch it. Everything is uncatchable. This is the real meaning of these three transmissions.

The ground is the starting point in dzogchen practice

When we're doing the practice, the important thing is to be clear about where we start from. If you start from idea of yourself and the idea of Buddhism and the idea of liberation, then you're already in a constructive system. You have something to think about, you know why you're doing the practice and the practice becomes a means to an end. *I'm here in samsara, I'm full of shit, I want to get free of this, so I'm going to apply this antidote and this will bring me somewhere else.* A lot of dharma is set out like this, but this is not the view of dzogchen.

In dzogchen, we don't start from the thought. We always start from the ground, which is why I spent a lot time yesterday exploring the ground and that's an invitation for you to find yourself in the openness of the ground. The openness of the ground is always there. It's the basis of everything you have. Everything you see, hear, think, every memory, it's not far away.

So, you have to relax into the ground. The ground is the starting point and then, when you're sitting, the thoughts and feelings that arise are the radiance of the ground.

Because the ground is not like the earth, located somewhere where you can't stand in relation to it, the ground has no location. It's everywhere. It's the basis of everything. It's not about coming from A to B. When a thought arises, it's not coming from a thought factory somewhere. It manifests immediately. It's

there and not there. Sensation is there and not there, and it's there in the place of its emergence because the mind, the openness of the ground is fertile in all directions. It's not some special core of the point of generation, coming from 'me'. It's coming from everywhere all the time. This is the luminous vitality of the sphere of revelation of the mind.

If you get into reading and studying the tradition and want to come to the dzogchen centre here, you can learn many ways of relating to energy. The basic thing is to see that all energy comes from the ground. This is so important and that's why we go back to the basic thing: one ground or source or openness and two paths arise.

The path of ignorance doesn't make bad things. It doesn't make any things. There are no things. It's an illusion. When you don't see, that an illusion is an illusion, you are deluded. And when you're deluded and you believe that your delusion is an accurate description of the world, you find yourself in endless confusion. That's how that works. Trying to sort your life out, trying to sort out samsara, doesn't take you anywhere. It helps a little bit, but the main factor is to see that my **confusion arises because I take my life too seriously**. I am unplayful. The mind is very playful. Subject and object are dancing together. Why? For no purpose at all. What is the meaning of life? It's meaningless. Meaning is a cul-de-sac. If you look for meaning, it's the royal road to stupidity. We are concerned with aesthetics, beauty, with the immediacy of the revelation, which is complete in itself.

There is another aspect of dzogchen, the great completion, **the immediacy of this moment**, which is just itself, as is. But what's it for? It's not for anything. It is the play of the mind. This is called rol-pa. In India, it's called lila, the dance or play.

Since you were born, you've had good times and bad times. When you remember the good and the bad times, what are you remembering? Nothing. The past is gone. It's ghosts that we are haunted by. We need to exorcise these ghosts and actually dzogchen is the perfect vehicle for exorcism because we offer nothing to the demons. We see that the demon is the play of the mind. Whatever thoughts you have – persecutory, self-attacking, lonely, confused – if you take

these thoughts as referring to yourself, you have an internal dualism. *I feel bad about what I did. I wish I hadn't done that.* So you're creating a kind of echo chamber. Imagine howling in a cave, so inside your mind, you're echoing and vibrating across. And as your thought reverberates back to you, it reinforces the need to think more, to make sense and sort it out. Why is my dad an arsehole? 'Why?' is a stupid question. 'How' is he an arsehole? That's more important because there you see a pattern of energetic formation.

If you see how it is, you find a way through. It's like wanting to go for a walk in the country and walking into a field that has a barbed wire fence that you have to go through. You have to look what the height of the barbed wire is and how long your legs are. If your legs are long, you can step over the fence, and if they're short, you have to go underneath. If you're fat like me, it's more difficult, so you may have to roll on the ground underneath. That's called working with circumstances.

So if your dad, mom, lover or you are like 'this', you're working with how it is. HOW. That means you're staying close to this immediate topology, this immediate shaping. Whatever is arising in the mind is not the enemy. We are not vulnerable people to be attacked. There is non-duality. As soon as you slip into duality, into subject and object, the object is thwarting the subject, the subject is trying to get the object lined up the way it wants – it's very very unhappy marriage. So, stay fresh and see how things are arising.

How is tantra practice different from dzogchen?

In tantra, we use the energy of devotion to bring the felt presence of the deity with mantra and different kinds of visualisation. You make an energetic bridge between the deity and yourself, light is flowing from the deity into you, purifying you and so on. Then the deity, the pure subject purifying you, the bad object and you, the purified bad object who is now a subject, start to come together, and you have the inter-subjective and the dissolving.

All tantra is based on the merging of subject and subject, or subject and object, or object and object, (zung-jug in Tibetan). So when you bring subject and object together, they go into a small point, a tiny little bindu, which then dissolves

in space. When you sit in space, out of the space, sounds, sensations and so on arise.

If you trust the direct immediacy, which is the natural initiation of the mind to the mind, then whatever is arising at that point is the mind. So, you arise. And that's why we say that everything is the mandala of the deity. It has no other source but that openness.

In dzogchen, we don't do this. You can do this as well, it's not bad. It's a different style though. These things are stylistic. Some styles suit some people more than others. At different times in your life you may have a different style. Or if you have different moods in yourself, you may have a main kind of practice, but at times it's not going to work, because you're not available in that particular nuanced way.

Practice: guru yoga with letter Ah

The basic practice in dzogchen is the **guru yoga**. Guru is the mind itself. Guru is primordial Samantabhadra, the presence of the non-separation of these three aspects that we looked at yesterday: the openness, the arising complexion and the expression. This is the truth of our existence and we experience this in front of us. We might think that this is very dualistic, but it's not about dualism. It's about diversity as non-separation, non-fragmentation.

Yoga or **nal-jor** in the Tibetan translation, is made up of nal and jor. **Nal** means relaxed or at ease, intrinsic, just no need to do anything and **jor-wa** means to join. So, it means a kind of being at ease. Being at ease with the Buddha is what guru yoga really means. It doesn't mean that you're humble or hoping or complacent. You're just opening and through that you become open to the openness that's there.

So, we do the practice. It's quite simple. In the space in front of us, we imagine a white letter Ah, which is the symbol of emptiness. Symbol here means that it is the presence of emptiness. It's one of the many ways in which emptiness shows itself. Emptiness also shows itself as dog shit and motorcars, but here we use the letter Aa. You could use a Volvo as well. It's true! Once you start saying

that the letter Aa is special and dog shit is not, you are in duality and you are insulting the Buddha. Everything is emptiness.

But for our purposes, because of this tradition, we use the letter Aa. Around that is the rainbow light of five colours – though these five colours have never been formed in any rainbow – the white, the red, blue, yellow and green. They express the five wisdoms, the five elements, the five poisons. All the potential of samsara and nirvana is hovering around, radiating from this letter Aa. So Aa is like the ground, kha-dag, the primordial purity. And the five colours is lhun-drup, the potential of emergence. This is what we imagine in front of us. The letter Ah, not so big, usually a couple of arms lengths in front of us, but it's just in the sky.

Some people can visualise quite easily, others not at all. It doesn't matter. The main thing is the feeling tone – Buddha is here. Then we make the sound of Aa three times.

An Aa is like the easiest form of spring cleaning. Imagine these poor people in Yorkshire with the river flooding and it comes into their house. This is a very pure flood that comes into your house and everything is washed out – you past, your future, your thoughts, every structure on which you've been basing your existence. All the points of reference that would turn you back onto yourself, *I am the one who is thinking, I am the one who is doing the practice*, we just wash that out, so we're just sitting with Aa.

So now we experience the sky here and when we make the third Aa. The Aa just dissolves in the sky like a fine cloud or a rainbow and then there is openness, openness of the room, openness of my presence. It's not that my mind is here and the object is there. Everything is the mind and it is empty.

The thing about having a body though, is that the body is sensation. It's very important to get to know what sensation in the body is, because if you misunderstand sensation, it takes you into reification. We live as interpretive creatures. **Interpretation is the basis of solidification.** You know this from school. When some bullying starts and someone says to someone: *you're small like a midget* and then other people say: *you're small like a midget. Hey midget, come*

over here. The projection of identification starts to almost be absorbed into that person. It becomes then as it were, their true identity or the truth of who they are at least in the school playground. So, we all have a lot of knowledge of that kind of bullying. But this is what we do in the mind as well.

We looked at the four levels of ignorance yesterday and the third level was the naming, the construing, the integration of the momentary phenomena into the semiotic web, the layering, producing more density, more gravitas – that is energy, process, activity. So, when a sensation arises and I think, *my back is sore*, that thought seems to be describing something that is already there that is my back. But the thought 'my back' is the midwife of your back. Until you had the thought 'my back is sore', you didn't have a back. As you are sitting here just now, how many of you are aware of your feet? Feet are just there. But then something happens and you think, *there's something wrong with my foot*. The body is not some coherent shape.

We're pulsing in and out according to the vagaries, the happenstance of the directionality of attention. When you think of something, attention is what feeds solidification into the object. So, where does the attention come from? This is the energy of the mind. The more you see that everything emerges from the ground, then you can have fully focussed attention without solidification, without reification. And therefore, you have attention without the accumulation of ideas, opinions, liking and not liking.

This is vital for the practice. Always stay in the moment. We err when we go into the past and into the future because these are the sites of accumulation. In the fresh present moment, there is only this (snaps fingers), and in the next moment this (snaps again). Non-cumulative and yet complete. There is neither lack nor excess in this moment. But once you step outside that and you think about what happened or what you'd like to happen, you're in the field of excess, where something has to be done – get rid of the things I don't like, add more of the things I do like – and then you're back in the ego's dualistic manipulation.

So, that's why, we sit very simply in a relaxed way. You want your skeleton to be carrying your weight, so the muscles are very relaxed. We want a nice, soft, plastic body that can play. Breathing is normal. Gaze is open. And we're imagining

this letter Aa with the light. And then, we make the sound and connect. We are always connected, so what we are doing is connecting inside the already connected. Because we have forgotten that everything is already connected, we have to do the connection. We're doing something artificial to remind ourselves of the un-artificial.

When we make the sound of Aa you want it to arise just very easily, deeply through you. The whole of you is just relaxing, open and empty.

(Making sound of Aa three times)

Post-practice (je-tob) instructions:

As I said yesterday, you'll want to do this kind of practice for a short time, five minutes, even two minutes and then take a little break and do it again. The relaxation, the releasing gives you the openness, but you have many karmic traces which will again gather around you. This gather-around-you can appear in the form of vultures, which is samsara or in the form of dakinis which is nirvana. You can tear yourself to pieces.

So, when you're sitting in the practice and your body has sensation, stay present, don't push it away, stay with whatever is happening and then you see the body is flow. The body is not a thing. There are no things, there is the flow of experience.

For example, you're sitting here, looking at the wall. You think the wall is hard. That's a thought. When you look at the wall, what is happening is that light is going onto the wall and coming from the wall into your eyes. Light is flowing. Light doesn't stop. Light has to move. Sound has to move. What you are living in is a world of light, a world of sound, a world of sensation. Everything is moving. Stillness is the unchanging openness of the mind, movement is everything else and between these two, there are no things. There's not one thing.

Movement: play of the unborn ground

Not one thing has ever been born. **To believe in things is to be deluded.** The reason we have the idea of illusion is because when you see the mirage on the road, you think it's water. But it's not water. Thingness, substantiality, separated

identities, things having their own ground, their own basis, their own inherent existence – this is illusion. **It appears to be that way due to causes and conditions operating together.** But it's not true. We are extremely capable of believing things that are not true. Without that there would be no theatre, no novels.

We believe in Mickey Mouse or in Ice Age. There are so many incredible cartoon movies now and when you watch them, you feel wow! there's a Mammoth and it's talking and having a difficult relationship and you believe it. It's not true, but you believe it. The Buddha didn't have access to cartoons, so he's talking about mirages and rainbows. But we have access to these cartoons. When we see them, we get taken in, we surrender disbelief. We don't stay in our critical, judging, controlling position because we want to be carried away.

You go to movies to get carried away. You read a novel for the immersive experience. When you catch yourself doing that, this is the same as we do in meditation. So when some potential arises in the mind and you merge into it and you want to merge into it, in the same way as you want to merge into the movie, then your meditation goes wrong. Why do you do that? Because you want to extend your self.

A Russian theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin, wrote a lot about the novels as being necessary to educate the peasants of Russia. He said that when people grow up in a village, and have only a very limited, social context based around their landowner, their land, neighbours and jobs, it's very difficult for them to open to the modern world. So he said: if you help people to become literate and they start to read novels, they start to be populated by the characters of the novels. So, if you start to read Dostoevsky, Raskolnikow will stay with you until you die. There's something about these scenes, the mood, which infects you. All of us are inhabited by many different kinds of characters.

If you imagine that your life is a huge piece of cloth and you're trying to hold this up to give yourself some breathing space, when all these characters are moving inside you like little tadpoles, each of them opens up a space because you now have an internal conversation. Of course, we consider what would my teacher or my parents think, but we could also consider what Madame Bovary

would do. Madame Bovary has an unhappy marriage, and she has some choices to make. So the novel is quite helpful as it helps you to think about what is an ethical choice, what is a self-destructive impulse. Then we can observe these things inside ourselves.

One of the functions of art is not to tell us the truth about something else, but to let us feel the resonances of possibility. Then we see: ***I am multiple***. The more multiple you are, the more useful you are because as we know, the Buddha shows compassion by manifesting in many different ways. We have the eight Forms of Padmasambhava, the twenty-one forms of Tara and you have the thousands forms of yourself. You can be in a good mood, a bad mood, a generous mood, a sexy mood – all kinds of modalities arise with an ambience, a connectivity or a disconnection. We know this. But it's about seeing all these aspects of yourself as the play of the unborn ground.

When we're doing the practice while sitting and there's sensation, we see that this is the play of the mind, the source. There is no other source. Some of the places where I teach are near a church and there are big church bells banging away all the time. Then we have the concept of course that the reverberation is coming from the church tower where the bell is. That's a thought. The sound is arising from the mind. **Everything is arising in the mind**. You see a plane going across the sky, that's a concept, an interpretation; there's a movement of colour and shape in the sky. This is movement.

So, always stay with movement. Movement, very gently, softly thins out the solidification that has come with the power of ignorance, the delusion of believing that there are truly existing, separate entities.

This is our work. To **relax and release**... relax and release. We're not constructing. We're allowing the falling away of what is always falling away. We're not interfering with the self-liberation of all phenomena as they arise and pass. Then, when you do the practice especially if you're at home, you get up. You might need to make a phone call, have a pee, make a coffee. Whatever it is, you always ask who is doing this? You have a long history of having a self-referential commentary on your activity and the one who is doing it, you think: *I am the doer of the deed*. But no, you are not!

You are the luminous flow of the energy of the ground. That is making the coffee and the kettle is the luminous energy of the ground arising on the object side and you are the energy of the ground arising on the subject side, and subject and object are arising in an interplay. You put your shoes on, put your coat on, open the door, go out, lock the door – it's movement. There's nothing but movement, ceaselessly. Shoulders, knees, hips, perception, recollection like *now I have to go back to get my travel card* – that's a movement.

A thought arises, *oh, I need that, I'm going on the tube. Why did I forget that?* That's a thought, thought is a movement. Who is it referring to? Who's the stupid one that forgot the travel card? No one! When you blame yourself, there's no self to blame. It's ridiculous. **The self you blame is born in the moment that you blame yourself.** That is to say, the negative comment is not referring to a self-existing, truly existing self. There is no such thing. But the image, the idea of the self, the image will be constellated in the moment you take it to be there.

Practice not solidifying and not totalising phenomena

This takes us back to what we looked at yesterday, the four levels of ignorance. The first level is **dag-nyi chik-pai**: there is a some-thing-ness, a solitary some-thing-ness. For example, you leave your house, , a thought arises: *I need my travel card*, you go back, pick it up, then go out. It's a seamless process. Onto that you stamp this judgement, evaluation: *God, I'm going to be late now.* You feel this kind of condensation, this densification that's occurring. Now you are someone who is late. And that is so sticky. It's as if you've poured honey all over yourself, and all these stray thoughts come and stick to you. Now you're worried, thinking you're always going to be late. You are making yourself. This is self-production.

There is no self! But it is as if there is a self.

The 'as if' has two aspects:

1) **If you recognise** the as if, it's the weird, playful energy of the ground, the play of awareness, **rig-pai-tsal** (Tib. rig pa'i rtsal) or **rol-pa** or **dang** (Tib. gdangs). There are many ways of thinking about energy in dzogchen.

2) **If you don't recognise** what it is, then these thoughts compact you.

Like in some countries, they take earth and they put it in a wooden frame and then they stomp on it to compress the earth to make bricks wall. They do that in the high part of Nepal because the rainfall is very less there. The earth is just little granules of dust, but when compacted, it takes on a kind of solidity. We're the same.

Moment by moment is like dust particles. But we gather them and whack them and make a conclusion – *I am like this, I always do this, my boss is horrible, she's always speaking to me in this way.* It's concretisation in the negative way, in the sense of once it sets, it's not moving. The basis of the **concretisation** of boss is the concrete experience of the boss. *My boss is unkind. They're entitled to be unkind. Human resources don't really care, we know that. So, they can be unkind.* You want to leave early. They don't let you, they're unkind. What is that? It is activity. It's a transactional activity.

Would it be okay if I leave at six o'clock tonight? The boss says: *no, I need you until seven because it's very important. Not important for me (the boss), because I'm leaving at six, but for you.* You think: *we can't have that conversation because you're very important. Fuck you!* At this point things are becoming very solid and you have a thought: *now I'm trapped by this bitch. Why is she speaking to me this way?* I'm cooking this up. I'm making this solid. What's happening is: a plan, a hope, a mental experience that I wish to extend into time and space, it's thwarted. My energy can't go out at six to be happy. I now have to stay in until seven doing things I don't want to do. So, I can do that with resistance, resentment or I just do it if it needs to be done. Then I can leave at seven, fresh. Or I can do it with resentment, cooking inside with a bad mood.

Now, I go to see my friend, they give me a glass of wine, I'm in a bad mood and they say: *oh sweetie, you don't look so good tonight* and I say: *What do you mean, I thought you liked me.* They say: *oh, yes, you look beautiful, what I meant is...* It's going to be one of these bad evenings because of the **solidification**.

So this is what the meditation is for. It's for us to always go back to the ground source, which is open and empty, which has no basis at all for

accumulation, that is why it's primordial purity. Whenever accumulation arises, we see that this is the play of the mind. It is like a nightmare. It is not truly real, but it appears to be real. The word real means thingness. It comes from the Latin *res*, an entity, a thing. There are no things, there are appearances. All things are concepts. **Everything in the world is a name put by the mind.**

Now, this is an unusual way of considering existence. Your mom never told you this, your dad didn't and neither did your schoolteachers tell you. But this is the teaching of the Buddha. This is only names put by the mind – the third level of ignorance. So saying, *I don't like my boss because she is like this... she is...* is me, not her. That's me. I'm bringing the density.

People worry about their children because they didn't grow up in the way you wanted them to. You had a template of who and how they should be and so on and they're not like that. They're someone else. Then we start to see that we become upset when my image of the world and the phenomena of the world don't align. There's either too much or too little. So we have desire for more, if there's too little and we feel aversion when there's too much.

So we have the Buddha's teaching. It's very precise and sweet. It shows the beauty of everything. If you think: *I want the world to fit in with me!* Well, the world is pretty big and we are a mere pimple on god's arse. Very small and not very significant. We stomp and have our temper tantrum. *It shouldn't be like this. Why do I have to...?* This is mental energy, it's thought. I'm doing this to myself. I am torturing myself. Like the dharma texts say: no one will cause you more trouble than yourself and no one can help you more than yourself. That is to say, you have to stay present and aware, and see the temptation, see the pulling power of delusion because it's so familiar and so pervasive in the culture.

What you see when you walk down the streets here are adverts for commodities. People are enjoying themselves by participating in a consumerist economy. This is a **fetish-isation** of the thing. But there are no things. You can see in some pictures that people in Tibet are living in caves without much food and in tattered clothes. And yet they're quite happy because they're giving their attention to the mind itself. They're finding the completion, the dzogpachenpo of their immediate experience. When we don't recognise the open ground, we're in

this endless interplay, like being in a pinball machine, echoing and reverberating between subject and object, hope and fear, me and you. All of these thoughts are the play of the ground. The ground is the most important. So, when we do the practice, we relax and open.

Of course, the ground is not clear, you have a kind of miasma, a kind of mist or murk that hovers over it. We talk about the swamp of samsara. It swamps you off with that dark movement, fata morgana, this deceptive light, that takes you into drowning yourself.

But we don't follow that. We sit open and gradually the mist will clear. *But I don't want it to be there. It shouldn't be there. I need to do something.* You need to do nothing. You need to trust that Garab Dorje and Samantabhadra are not lying. You need to trust that YOU are lying. You are bullshitting yourself by imagining that you have enough mastery in yourself to sort it all out. You've tried and tried and tried, and it hasn't worked out. So, don't try. Stay relaxed and open and observe... it passes... it passes... That's the main focus of the teaching.

When you're walking down the street, HOW is walking? Not WHO is walking, but HOW is walking? Walking is tense and release. Muscles tense, rise, bend the knee, foot goes down, sway through the hip. You just need to observe for yourself. Walking up the stairs is different from walking down the stairs because when you're walking down the stairs, you have gravity on your side, like in a plane, having a head-wind or a tail-wind. If you stay close to the actuality of the experience moment by moment, it's only movement.

Unfortunately, we live in a social world where it's polite to delude other people. When people ask: *how did you sleep? How do you feel?* They're asking for a conclusion, but there is no conclusion. It's always moving, always changing. What they're saying is: *sum yourself up. Give me something to work with.* It's like that in therapy. There are people that blether and blether and say nothing, and then they say something that you can hook into. Now you can get into the work. You can start drilling some little holes into that person. Constructing more of your image of who they are. Very, very, very tricky.

Therefore, when someone says who they are, this is sound and emptiness. *How are you?* Fine. *How's life?* Ok. It's not that you want to block them and keep them out, but they are looking for something, which is unavailable – the **totalisation** of yourself. The word total is a mathematical term, a summative term. You add things together and you get to a total. But **we are beyond totalisation**. We are creatures of infinity. So, I would like to suggest to some of the people who translate dharma books that they should stop using the word 'total' because it annoys me. It makes them happy, but it annoys me. It's completely the wrong word. But we totalise when we've got someone's number, when you can see what they're about, when you've got them in a box. We don't want to go in that direction because everything is changing.

All phenomena arise due to cause and circumstances. Circumstances change. Some people do a lot practice when they're young and then they vanish from dharma. Some people have a crazy youth and then they come into dharma. We have all sorts of pulsations in our life. We are not machines made in a factory, and therefore summing people up is an insult. It's as if there was someone there, who could be known, who could be apprehended. This is a violence. We should stop violence. We practice ahimsa, non-violence. So, we allow people to be as they are.

How are they? Well, stop for a moment and ask yourself the question: *how am I?* You can't say. So, why do you ask other people impossible questions that you can't answer yourself. As soon as you ask: *how am I*, you start to open to this terrain of multiple thoughts, sensations, memories and so on, and you come into formation.

We looked yesterday at the five qualities of the open ground. The first is that it is uncompounded, **dü-ma-jé**. The verb dü means to gather together. Ma-jé means not done, un-gathered, uncompounded, uncreated. Asking someone how are they is an invitation for the other person to compound themselves, to form themselves. The motive for how they form themselves could be that they might be to illicit pity from you or they might want to block you. There could be all sorts of motives behind it, but for most of us, when someone asks: *how are you*, we respond because we're trained to do that. Why? It's not because we're just

biologically in the family of group creatures, mammals, herd creatures. It's because of duality.

Duality is a lie. Non-duality is the truth. So, duality is always trying to find a rapprochement, a meeting, a packaging, which will then give some relief. So in a 'how are you', there is a connectivity, there is an empathic attunement which makes us feel good because someone has some sense of us, an interest in us. But it's an interest in us as a thing. That's the price you pay for love.

—I really love you, Don't you ever change. I love you just the way you are tonight. (It's a very nice song!)

—*Sweetie! I've got high heels on. I know it makes my booty look good, but I can't wear these all the time. Five-inch heels are death.*

—But I love you just the way you are!

That's the deal: *be my image of you. I love your image.* I'm not my image. *Well then, I don't know if I can be with you, if you don't know who you are.* I don't know who you are. I don't know who I am. Let's just see what's possible. But how can we make a relationship on the basis of the possible? Well, it's all we've got anyway. It's the truth of life. We don't know how we're going to be. We want to predict a future, which means we do a violence to ourselves and to others.

So, when it talks about this **all-pervading compassion**, which is one translation for this third aspect, **thug-je**, the expressiveness of awareness, the quality of the nirmanakaya, it's a connectivity which is non-reificatory. We're not turning people into things.

How to be close to someone without making a final judgement? Some things can be judged, others can't. I worked some time in a psycho-sexual clinic, linked a little bit to a sexually-transmitted diseases clinic. What was very beautiful to see was that the doctors are very precise about what's afflicting the genitalia – the pustules and lesions – but they make no judgement. Good/ bad is not their issue. Their issue is to say: *there's quite a lot of tear on the rectum, this kind of fistula is difficult to heal.* So, they are precise and if you like, summative about what can actually be diagnosed because it's visible, but not to make a moral judgement. That's very interesting for how not to come to a conclusion about the person.

People live in all sorts of ways. Who are we to know what is good or bad or right or wrong. Of course we have our moral readings, but on what basis would punish people. We want to relate to people in an open, clear way and people are energy not things.

So, the story never ends, but we shall end for a pause, for some tea.

SESSION 6/6

Other aspects of guru yoga practice

In a minute, we'll do the guru yoga, but there's another aspect to it that I would like to highlight for you.

Dzogchen is not a path of the lonely hero. You can't do this by yourself. Generally, we highlight this in Buddhism by saying that you have to take refuge. You can't work it out all by yourself. But especially when we relate to the field of which we are a part, we work with the energy of the field.

Sometimes the energy of the field manifests in the form of a physical guru like Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche, sometimes it manifests like pilgrimage places, sacred objects and so on. In that sense, anything can be the guru because the guru is like the reminder of yourself. It's something that you can open to, which doesn't have an agenda towards you. When you meet people, they have an agenda. They want you to take care of them or to make them happy or give them money. They're looking for something.

Dharma is described as being peaceful and free of desire. **Dharma doesn't want anything at all.** When we do this practice with the white Ah, you're not entering into a cult. There's no agenda there. It's open and you open to the open. But you have to open to that which is other than you. If you stay in this cocoon of yourself and try to work things out, it's not going to work. It's not that you look to the other to help you get something that you lack, because you don't lack anything.

Bringing alignment with the patterning of the world

When we do the guru yoga, we're bringing the alignment of subject and object together. Not the subject dominating the object, not yourself as a subject becoming an object – you get that kind of play or patterning in tantric visualisation. But here we're simply bringing about a kind of alignment. Almost as if you had a circle drawn on a piece of paper, then you have some tracing paper and you had a circle on that as well, and you had to bring one on top of the other until the circles are completely aligned. Then it is as if there is one circle because

there's no contradiction between them. Then of course when you move the paper, it's same and different, like a pulsation.

Difference isn't the problem. When we leave here and go out into the world, go on different journeys, are in different situations – some people live on their own, some have families. Many different experiences arise. This is the variety of the forms of the energy of the ground. When we have the moment of alignment doing the Ah, diversity comes into simplicity. When we finish the practice, simplicity manifests as diversity. The diversity and the simplicity are non-oppositional. They are non-dual.

Whenever you have problems with the diversity in life – relationships, kids, and so on – always try to see that this is the diversity of the ground. **If you forget the ground, you only have stuff, you only have manifestation.** Like when you go to the flower shop, you see all these corpses. All these flowers have been cut and are dying. Someone has taken a knife and now these tulips are about to vanish. When you cut the root of your being, when you are forgetful of the ground, of course you don't lose the ground, but you lose awareness of the ground. Losing awareness doesn't mean it has vanished, it simply means you're unaware of it. When that happens, all you have is movement and the movement is a bit overwhelming because there is so much of it. The movement is be a bit disturbing, so you try to sort it out.

Looking at anthropology shows us that there are so many different kinds of human cultures – the Amazon forest, Siberia and so on – people have worked out a way of making sense of their environment. Some cultures are devoted to sky gods, some to earth gods, some to matrilineal, some to patrilineal gods, formless gods. Some people do voodoo rituals, of magic and controlling. Every culture is trying to make sense of how it is. If you want to be a member of this culture, you have to have an initiation ceremony, which could be scarification, a clitoridectomy or whatever. Because the culture says you're not one of us unless you do this. There is always a price of belonging into any cultural formation.

In dzogchen, there is no price of belonging. If you're really open to what we've been doing this weekend, you don't ever, ever again need to go to another dharma centre. You can practice by yourself, it's completely free.

But you can observe yourself how you tie yourself in knots. The knots start to untie themselves, like a snake untying itself. And the less stuff arises, that is the more empty you are, it's like a thief entering an empty house, so he won't find anything. So the more you as in the subject side becomes flexible, loose, pliable, the less you are caught by the object. Because the other side, the object side can only catch you, if you are able to be an object, a thing. Sometimes it is as if you become an object. If you're in a queue at the airport, you wait for your turn, you do what they say, you take your watch off or not as they want, if they want the belt off, you take that off, so you're conforming to the choreography of the security people on this particular day at this particular airport. You're a dancer. You know how to dance when they ask you to take the belt off. While you may think, *why on earth do I have to do that?* You don't say that. These people do not like to be questioned.

This alignment with the patterning of the world is not a violence to yourself because you are plastic. Each person here has the most gorgeous skin. It's so soft, pliable, gorgeous. This is us. We greet the world with softness and pliability. We're not crabs, living in a shell. That means we have a finesse, a soft way of responding to situations. So, in working with circumstances, that's how we want to proceed.

And in order to do that, we do the three Aa practice. This Aa in front of us is like the presence of all the potential of all the forms in the world including neurosis, nastiness, torture. Everything is in the Aa. It's not high, pure and keep the bad things away. It's one ground of everything. What makes the ground pure, is that whatsoever the ground gives rise to, is always illusion.

That's why, the text says that awareness and unawareness are **cho-trul** (Tib. Chos sPrul) miraculous or magical formations. When people go wrong, it's because people solidify and there is nothing solid. We do the practice to have no resistance to the openness. We open to the open and find then that we are open to the open. Because we are open. Then thoughts arise as movement inside the openness.

Legitimate functions of the Buddha's energy

As we saw, in meditation, the focus is generally on the self-liberation of the phenomena, however they are – external, internal. When you get up from the practice, and you're interacting with people, it's participative. So it's about coming into a pattern of the moment with connectivity. You're not the servant. What is the function? The function is: not to fall asleep on the job, not to become complacent, not to fall into assumptions, not to fall into predictive structures.

So we have the four activities: **pacifying, over-awing, increasing and destroying**. These are the legitimate functions of the Buddha's energy.

Sometimes our job is to be sweet and **make the world sweet**. May all illnesses and difficulties go down, may all beings be peaceful. Sometimes our energy is **increasing**: may the crops grow well, may there be protection for all beings and so on. So, you're working to increase things. Sometimes it's about putting a marker of **non-involvement**. This is the third one, which is like charisma, presence. It's a non-violent way of saying *don't mess with me!* In the tradition, this is sometimes represented by the goddess Kurukulle. She is naked and dancing and fires arrows from a bow of flowers, a bit like eros. It's a slightly seductive quality but with a presence there that is saying this is someone! For me, President Obama had something of that quality.

There are various people that we meet in the world with all kinds of backgrounds and they are somebody. And then there are others who are not really anybody. They're just the role. So we need to bring up this energy into the skin which is the prana formation. Like a good schoolteacher knows when and how to take on a child. It's about knowing when not to compromise and when to compromise. This is a very important balance in life, isn't it? Particularly with children, sometimes you give away and let them dominate, and at other times you don't.

The destructive energy is a cutting or a slicing. What we're trying to slice on is the arousal of the five poisons in the other person. We're not trying to kill them, we want to interrupt that arousal. You can do that by your breath, through a visualisation or you can do that just by being very present. Because when you're very present, you have no contradiction to how the other person is. There's no vibration.

In a famous story the Buddha Shakyamuni is walking along a road and this mass murderer Angulimala is coming towards him. Angulimala is wearing a huge necklace strung with fingers. He needs to collect 1,000 human little fingers so he kills people and then hangs their little finger on this necklace. There's all this bloody, rotten flesh all around him and he's got a big knife. On seeing Buddha, he says: *Ah ha! Number 1000, hey my friend!* But Buddha just kind of looks at him. Angulimala is used to of seeing people fear him because he looks terrifying. He's a really, really scary guy, someone with no limit, a psychotic killer. So, there's no accommodating vibration and through that Angulimala becomes peaceful. Because his power and dominance was dependent on the parallel vibration of fear and anxiety in the other.

It's a spaciousness which has no resonance

When we do the practice of the Aa, the opening, it's actually a very powerful spaciousness. It's a spaciousness which has no resonance. Just as when strumming a guitar in a room where another guitar is hanging on the wall, the vibration in the air will cause the other guitar to vibrate as well. But here there is no vibration. You can do as you like. In the text they speak of **equanimity, nyam-pa nyid**. Nyam-pa means even. It's the heart or essence of sameness.

You're nice or nasty. Because nice or nasty are **judgements**, you're making a judgement. You've got a sour face! You can have a sour face. You can be unpleasant. You can be boring. If you're boring, you're boring. *I'm not going to be interested, but then I'm also not going to be interested if you're fascinating.* Being fascinated is being pulled in. When you start to see that happening, it's a sign that there's a lack and you're looking for something. *I want you to complete me. You make my life complete.* There are so many songs about these things. But we are from the very beginning complete. When you're looking for the other to complete you, you're turning around and farting in the face of Kuntu Zangpo. Now he doesn't mind, because he has equanimity. But it's not so good for you.

Equanimity means if you're happy, you're happy and it's going. And if you're sad, you're sad and it's going. There is no final solution. You never get to a point where the dance ends. The dance is always changing, so don't over-invest the bad as bad or the good as good. Stay relaxed and open.

Ok, so we do this three Aa.

(Making sound of Aa three times)

Five basic questions about the mind

Sometimes it helps to do a bit of spring cleaning. In the tradition, we have five basic questions about the mind which allow us to get close to some of the assumptions we might have about ourselves.

The five questions are:

1. Does the mind come from anywhere?
2. Does the mind stay anywhere?
3. Does the mind go anywhere?
4. Does the mind have any shape and colour?
5. Does the mind have any size or dimension?

Pretty much everything in the universe can be fitted into these five questions. This room has come from somewhere. Eventually this room will go somewhere. This thing will get knocked out. For a while it's here in Hackney. The room has a size, a shape. The camera has a size and a shape. The people in the room have their own size and shape. So we use these attributional identifications as a way of determining the presence or the fact of some thing's existence. A car – white, red or black – has to be some colour. People look healthy or not, they're tall or small. The garden looks well cared for or not cared for. **We're always putting attributions onto phenomena.**

When we look at our mind, does it have a shape? Does it have a colour? Is the mind a circle? A square? Is it red? Is it blue? Is it something with attributes that bring it into the field of other phenomena with attributes? That is to say **can the mind be compared and contrasted?**

We often have a sense that feelings have a colour. We could say that red can be associated either with intense sexual desire or with anger. Jealousy might have a green tone. These are conventional associations, but we get used to them. But

does our mind have any colour? You might have a mood, a brown, grey or black, yellow or bright mood. There are many different ways of thinking about moods. But moods come and go in the mind. These are patterns of the energy of the movement of the mind. But **does the mind itself have a shape or colour?**

Does it have a size or dimension? Most especially, is it small? Does it fit inside my body? Is the mind inside me? My mind is looking out through my sense organs. Maybe my body is inside my mind. Maybe the room is inside my mind. Maybe England is inside my mind. Maybe the world, the universe is all inside the mind. How big is the mind? How small is the mind? Does it have a definite size? Maybe sometimes it's big and sometimes it's small. These are very important questions.

Usually we don't look. We learn something in school, neuro-psychology and neuroscience look at the brain, the amygdala. On the basis of this received knowledge, we build up patterns and use it to interpret. But here we are not talking about patterning of concepts.

We're talking about direct access to our mind. If we don't have a mind, we're dead.

Everything is revealed through the clarity of the mind, so what is this mind? **Does our mind come from anywhere?** We have a thought. We didn't have that thought before. Now we have that thought. Now that thought is going. So thoughts clearly come and stay and go. Does the mind come and stay and go? If it comes, does it come from somewhere? If it stays, is it staying anywhere? If it goes, is it going anywhere? These questions are the five Buddhist dating agency questions. If you join a dating agency, they will ask you questions such as who do you like, what's your hobby and so on. So, if you're interested in getting to know your mind really, then why don't you explore through these questions? Would you like a red mind, a blue mind? What are you looking for? Then you start to see that you have some assumptions.

Breathe out, relax and just look. How is your mind? Again it's a how question. It's not a why or a what or a where or a when, but a HOW question. How does it reveal itself? So we have to take up the questions very gently, very

delicately. We're not investigating, we're being-with in the space of revelation. So it's as if we're like the mirror. The mirror reveals what is placed in front of it. The mirror is a showing. Awareness is a showing. So what is shown as a reflection in the mirror is not the mirror itself. If you study the shape and colour of the reflection, does that show you the shape and colour of the mirror? No. So, it's the same with your mind.

Your tendency is to take an arising, an experience and to think that it's like this! The thing to do at that moment is to stay quiet. You've found the answer and it's vanished. That's a sign that the answer was a reflection. It was a movement in the mind. It was a thought, sensation, memory, a construct of some kind. The truth of the mind is inexpressible, but we're using these questions to get close to it. In your own time at home, you can inquire into that.

Practice: inquiring if the illuminator has any qualities

Sit, do the practice, open. Life is going on. Experiences are arising. You have the feeling of your body sitting on the seat. You have sensation, you hear sounds and so on. *Ok, so I'm not dead, there is experience. I can talk about experience. I have templates for organising the raw data and formulating a conclusion about some experience. This taste is sour, this taste is bitter, and so on.* So these questions are bringing you close without a template to the question: can I apprehend my mind as something? Everything has a shape and a colour. Does my mind have a shape and a colour?

Let's just enter quickly into open sitting. As you're sitting, after a minute or so, here you are, experience is arising and passing. Your mind is present because that's what's illuminating/ showing this experience. So, does this illuminator have any qualities – shape, colour, size, location, origin, destination? Start to have an inquiry into this.

Again, with this kind of looking, you don't want to try too hard because the more you try hard, the more you mobilise your energy in the direction of getting something. **We're concerned here with revelation.** The mirror doesn't move. The mirror is just there revealing whatever arises. When we do this practice we

want to release ourselves from our subject-object relation. Then there's just the space. Things are moving in the space.

Who is the experiencer of the experience? Normally we think that's me. *I am the experiencer of my life. It's happening to me.* But we are meditators and hopefully not so naïve. So we see that that's a thought, a concept.

The concept arises: that's me, I am the one doing this, I am the thinker of the thought, and then it's gone. So, the vanishing of the answer opens a space. So, who is the thinker? Is the mind a production factory? Where do thoughts come from? They arise from the mind. Therefore, the primary question is what is the mind? Which is why looking at these questions are so helpful.

In a mirage nothing is produced, yet something is produced. Something which is produced is not a something. It's a form of nothing. Due to causes and conditions – the light, the heat, the road surface – the mirage appears. And then it dissolves. Nothing was born and nothing ends. When a thought arises in the mind, it's as if something has been born, but it's already gone.

When you look in this big wall of mirrors here, you see many different reflections. These reflections are very precise. You can see the details of someone's face and recognise a person. But it's unborn. The reflection is not something but it has the patina, the appearance, the surface of something. It seems to be imbued with something-ness. *Oh yeah, there you are, I can see you.* But you don't see them, you see a simulacrum, some illusory form. You seem to be able to catch them, but there's nothing to catch. You see that with your thought, it's like reflection – it arises in the mind, it has precision, it has impact because when you have a reflection, your body has a different physical reaction to the shapes of different people. We are relational in that sense.

Something is happening and nothing is happening

So, this is a thought, a feeling, a sensation. Everything is like that. It's appearance and emptiness. The Tibetan word for appearance is **nang-wa** (Tib. sNang Ba) that indicates light as well. So what we see is the appearance of light. What we hear is sound, whether it's Polish or Italian or English, it's a mixing of the

energy of conceptualisation with the energy of appearance. But the appearance prior to the interpretation is just LIGHT. This is the field of experience.

There is a show-ing. Is there a show-er? This is so important. Why did no one in school ask you this question? They ask you your opinion of Shakespeare, they ask you to remember a bit of Milton's poetry or algebra. But no one says: *you're sitting in this class, you're looking at me, you don't understand a single thing I say. So, we're going to get you to look at your mind before we look at history or geography or anything else. Because you don't know who you are.* The teacher wouldn't dare say that because the teacher knows who they are because they have a register in which they write comments, and at the end of the year they write a report card.

Johnny is having a real difficulty with algebra. So we know about Johnny. Johnny doesn't know about Johnny except that he's worried that when dad comes home, he's going to be pissed off. So, who is Johnny? Johnny is the anxiety of having a critical father who wants him to do well at school. Who is Johnny? I just said, Johnny is the boy worried about his critical father responding to his report card. This is how we were brought up. This is why we get deluded so easily.

Because we believe the construct, the narrative, the interpretation, the story about ourselves to be the truth of ourselves. Now we're moving from the about, the layering, the smearing over the projection to the direct perception.

Just sit again a little bit.

Take maybe just one of the questions: where's the mind? The mind is here but what is the meaning of that? Don't conceptualise it. Just try to allow the revelation of the openness of the mind.

(Practice for sometime)

Question: How much do you use language when you do this inquiry into 'where is the mind'? I am confused, please explain.

James: Very little.

So you want to be like the mirror, an open receptivity. The mirror doesn't run around trying to collect particular images. So, it's a non-selective open presence. Everything is welcome. Whatever comes comes, whatever goes goes. It's allowing the free flow without processing, without thinking about it. As soon as you get into thinking about it, you get located in your power base, into I am here, I am the experiencer of the experience. Awareness as the basis of the experience is not a personal experiencer, but it reveals everything.

If you get caught up in a flow of thought identifications, then you're just in this cocoon of yourself. You can't think your way to the answer. So, in that sense, you have to stop making sense. You have to not know.

In the Tibetan language we have **consciousness** and **awareness**. The Tibetan term for consciousness is **nam-par she-pa** (Tib. rNam Par Shes Pa), it means to know something, to be able to apprehend something. And then you have the clarity of the mind, **ye-she**, which is like a primordial knowing or showing. So, consciousness takes hold, shapes, apprehends. *I'm conscious that I'm in the room with you.* You're conscious when the thought arises that it's Sunday and so forth. Consciousness is always building pictures, images. It's a constructive thing how we human beings formulate ourselves in the world with others. Whatever construct arises will vanish.

Now **ye-she, primordial knowing**, or the knowing which is the clarity of the ground, is not doing anything. It's simply revealing the play of the energy arising from the ground.

So when we get caught in thinking, we're engaged in our familiar process of trying to work out what's going on. And we do this through identification, attribution, pattern formation and so on. Which means we are perhaps developing our capacity to function in samsara, but we are not going to get much freedom.

So when we find ourselves doing that, just relax in the out-breath. Or if the thought formations are very strong, you can get up, shake, look out the window. If you're in a room at home, see the wind blowing in the clouds, and then you come sit again. The subject is always intoxicated by thought.

When we're sitting and open, when I'm looking out here, when the presence of THIS is with me, this is my mind. The wall is my mind. The people are my mind, the camera is my mind. Sometimes the mind looks object, sometimes the mind looks subject. The mind is not a thing, it shows itself in multiple ways. The mind itself cannot be caught.

A summary

The mind is not a thing. It's emptiness, it's ungraspable, and yet it is the mother of all the Buddhas. It's the place where you find the illumination of clarity. When we go looking for something, we certainly find lots of 'somethings', but we don't find the mind. Because **the mind is unfindable, but always present.** This is paradox. This is mystery. This is not knowing.

Knowing usually means the product of the activity of our consciousness, in which we process what's going on. If I say the wall and people are my mind, this might sound like some of psychotic inflation. It seems very, very strange to say 'you are my mind'. I'm not even saying 'you are in my mind', but 'you are my mind'.

The mind reveals itself through the radiance of the field.

If we go back to the three aspects we talked about yesterday: **ngo-wo, rang-zhin, thug-je.** Ngo-wo is the emptiness of the mind. Awareness is inseparable from the ground that has the five qualities. It's infinite. It's beyond appropriation. It's just there by itself, rang jung (Tib. Rang Byung), it's just there. It's not made of anything, it's not a construct. It's just this. And this is this.

If you were to say that there is the pure mind and then that there's all the shit that arises in it, it's crazy! This is the non-duality of the mind and appearance – kha-dag and lhun-drup – together. That is to say it is because my mind is empty, that this is my mind. This is **lhun-drup.** Lhun-drup isn't something I have in me. This is in here, you. When I am egocentric, everything comes back to me. So this is the tantric view.

The tantric purification is the mandala. In the mandala there is always a **tso-wo**, a chief god, a central figure. So, you've got this central god and sometimes hundreds of different deities going out in the different directions. They all refer to

the central point where you have a pulsation that's centrifugal, centripetal – just pulsing all the time. But that central deity is empty. There is nothing there. This is all the flow of illusion. Tantra is all about the purification of imagination, so that the last trace of reification, of thingness falls away from it. And then you have pure imagination. In that way it's similar to some of the tö-gal practice, where you are just staying with pure appearance.

For our purpose, the emptiness of the mind is the basis of the showing of the mind, and the mind shows itself as the inseparability of subject and object. So you have, if you like, a two-way non-duality. You have the non-duality of the ground and the field of appearance. And within the field of appearance, you have the non-duality of the subject and the object.

Although I am called James and James seems to refer to this particular skin bag, which is separate from your skin bags, as Norbu Rinpoche used to say again and again, 'senza limita'. Don't try to put any limitation on the situation. **Don't try to apprehend what is going on, but open to it.** What is going on is all of this, lhun-drup – it all comes together without any division of subject and object.

So when we come to an end soon, we'll say goodbye, move the chairs a bit and then we go out into the world. A body is moving in a world of appearance. The body is an appearance with certain particular qualities. The street is an appearance with certain particular qualities. However you travel, in a motorcar, in a train, whatever you do, if you go to a café – it's appearance with qualities. If you go to a café, there'll be different kinds of seats, high seats, low seats, according to the seat you have a different posture, according to the posture you have pressure on the diaphragm and your breathing changes... It's all moving together. Subject and object are not separate. If you really see this, this is your mind! This... and this... This and this... No division. This is dzogpachenpo.

When you retreat into this little box and you look out thinking: *who are you, do you like me, do you want me?* It's terrible, disaster! *Poor, lonely me, wandering in my lonely life. Where will I go, what will I do, will you adopt me, please? I am an orphan, my mom is dead.* Every ego is like that. Pathetic! Pathos is also very moving. We go to the opera to enjoy pathos, so we can cry. Pathetic. Nothing to be done. That is pathos. When you see Michelangelo's mass of stone, the Pietá, you

weep. You really see this is mother and son. The crushed, dead body of Christ and the mother Mary in one block of stone. Amazing! But it's pathos. Touched, moved.

It's not about losing these feelings. Every feeling tone can be allowed. It's aesthetic. We're not going dead and neutral. Equanimity is not homogenisation. It's not dullness. The finesse, colour, shape or anger, all the pulsations are there, moving in your mind. When we say there is Padmasambhava and he represents the mind, and he's surrounded by dakinis – this is thoughts, colours, appearances, shapes. Tax bills, absence of toilet paper in the shops – this is the world as it is and this is your mind.

You are experience. Subjectivity is one modality of your experience. Sometimes you're an object. You might hate yourself. Some people bang their head on the wall, cut their throat, they jump out of a window. There, the subject is dissolving into the object. There are many possibilities of the energy of the mind. That's why in the meditation practice, we don't try to correct the mind. This is the big difference between dzogchen practice and practice in general Buddhism.

In general Buddhism, you're always trying to make the mind a particular way; before sitting down, you have an agenda. You're going to pray to Vajrasattva to wash away your sins. You're going to visualise Kalachakra or whatever because you want to do things. These kinds of practices are called **trin-le (Tib. 'Phrin Las)**, trin-le means activity. These are doing kind of things.

Here we are not doing anything. We're offering hospitality. Whatever comes comes. I'm not in charge. And I'm not afraid because, like the mirror, the reflection won't harm me. The reflection doesn't define the mirror. So you sit and you're full of a sad, jealous or angry thought, and you don't want that thought. Who doesn't want that thought? The thought of yours, doesn't want that thought.

Thoughts contaminate each other. You look in the mirror, somebody moves and then somebody else becomes obscured. Reflections interact and transform each other. They don't touch the mirror! You are the mirror and because you relax in the mirror, you can allow any old shit in the world. It doesn't matter.

When you come out of the practice, and someone is nice to you... WELL. Someone is horrible to you... WELL. You don't have to do anything with it. This is

an appearance. The appearance appears. They're not a thing to be gotten. To be pulled in or pushed away. *I like you, I don't like you.* Most of life is that kind of ego centric pulsation. It's simply arising and passing. Whatever has to be done, you do it with finesse, with delicacy, with attunement, and it dissolves. And it dissolves.

Everything is your mind. Everything is experience. It doesn't escape from the mind, but it isn't reducible to the mind. You can't take to a laboratory and dissolve it down. It is what it is, and it's empty and appearing, always, ceaselessly, for ever. This is something quite amazing! You might turn it into something a bit dialogical—*I am you and you are me and we are all together, kukukachoo* as the John Lennon sang—but it's not like that. Because in that situation, I'm here and you're there and, due to the wonderful power of drugs, we appear to be kind of merging into something. The mind, awareness, is not like that.

From the very beginning the ground is the source, the basis of everything. Everything arises at once. So when you go outside, the sky is your mind, the rain is your mind, the wind is your mind. The problem here is of course the language. The 'your' immediately makes it into a kind of possession, some centripetal thing has been pulled back to the central position. This stands in relation to me. *No, I am arising in relation to this.* This is the dialogic pulsation which is dynamic and never-ending.

It is so important to dissolve the fantasy of autonomy and mastery. I am sitting according to the seat. The seat is sitting me. If I was sitting there in the back, the level is a bit higher, so I would be sitting according to these seats. But I'm sitting according to this seat. And the people on the floor are sitting according to the mat. So their bodies are adopting postures in dialogue, in conversation/dialogue with the situation. Knife, fork, chopsticks, Indian hand – these are ways of eating.

You do particular things with knife and fork: you stab the potato, you slice the potato mercilessly and then you chew it up until it's nothing at all. This is the violence of life. But why do you do that? Because in this culture we use knife and fork. There is a logic in that. You hold the knife in a different way than you hold the fork. And if you had a spoon, you would hold it differently from a knife. You feel the mastery: *I can drink soup without spilling it on my shirt...* Sometimes. So, I

feel I'm the master. But simultaneously, I am the slave of the spoon because my hand is adopting the particular tension of muscles and tendons determined by the shape of the spoon, depending on the weight of the spoon.

When you cut something, you get tension if it's a hard thing you're cutting into. Or you get a simple, soft kind of giving-way if it's a soft thing. That will determine how the muscles in your arm or how the elbows or shoulder is going to be involved. The potato DOES you. If you see this, every moment of your life is dynamic pulsation. Moving out, moving in, together. This is the meaning of **non-duality**. I don't dominate the world, the world doesn't dominate me, but we're constantly in conversation, in pulsation. And the emptiness of that is clear, because we see it comes from the ground. It has no other source.

So you might like these chairs. You might think, they're very helpful. They fold away very easily. So you might ask where do they come from, and you're given the name of a shop. You go to the shop and ask: *where do these chairs come from?* They come from the big supply. You got to the big supply. *Where do they come from?* Well, the wood comes from the forest. You got to the forest. *Where do the trees come from?* We plant the seeds in the earth. *Where does the earth come from?* There is no end to these questions. It's beginningless... it's interaction, dependent origination, multiple factors. But we say it comes from a shop which is stupid and intelligent simultaneously. It's intelligent because, at least, you know where to buy the chair. It's stupid because you've come to a conclusion that allows you to go to sleep and not see the dynamic relatedness of phenomena.

If you stay in the flow, you cannot fall asleep. You have to be present. You have to be here. Here-ness is everything. Presence. Rig-pa. You usually translate it as awareness, that's how I usually use it, but you can also have it as presence. It's not a mental function, although it's the mind. Mind here means everything, dzogpachenpo, the whole. Everything arising together in its luminosity.

The luminosity of seeing the ground and what arises from the ground, inseparability of primordial purity and spontaneous appearance – that's inseparable from the ground. The arising of me as a person in a room, liking and not liking, that also arises from the same ground. One ground, one source, and these two pathways arise.

All we're trying to do is believe what the primordial Buddha said: if you see the source, you're free because you've always been free. You're not freed from anything except a delusion. You might know the feeling of camping in the countryside and waking up in the morning. It's completely foggy and you don't know where you are. You go out of your tent and there's just fog, fog, fog. After a while the sun comes out and the fog starts to disperse. Then you see where you are. Now you know! You were always there, but you didn't know where you were because you had an interpretive criterion you required for interpreting where you were. When you get out of the tent in the fog – *here I am!* But where are you? *I'm here!* That's not much good. *Yes it is! What could be better than being here in the fog! I'm having a foggy day! I'm lost. Hey, I'm lost! That's where I am. I'm lost. I'm fucked up, depressed. Everything is gone.*

C.R. Lama used to explain dzogpachenpo by saying imagine that you're lying in the gutter, you've got no money, you've messed yourself and people spit at you as they go by. That's dzogpachenpo! *It's not going to get better.* It is what it is. Wow! It's not bright and shiny. Perhaps you go into polarities: *"But I want to be happy all the time!"* Why would you want to be happy all the time? Children are dying in Syria and all over the Middle East. Hear one word of that and you want to cry. So how are you going to be happy all the time? It's ridiculous. Happy Buddha? Smug Buddha? Comfortable Buddha? We don't want to go in that direction.

We are affected, affective creatures. We are touched and moved. Otherwise compassion would have no meaning. It's not about stasis. It's not about arriving anywhere in particular, but about continuing to be open to whatever happens.

So, we'll do a little quiet sitting and then we'll come to the end.

(Practice for sometime)

We've covered a lot of ground. It's recorded, so you can listen again, if you're interested. Take half an hour and then reflect on it and bring it into your practice. The reason for giving a lot at one time is to help you see how this patterning fits together. Also, we never know, if we're going to meet again. Life passes very quickly. And whatever I've managed to get in my life from my various gurus, I want to make available to you.

Dharma is not serious and it's not holy. That's why, we can have some jokes and some funny examples. If you make it too serious, too high, too special, you make a cut, a dualistic formation: dharma and adharma (not dharma). Everything is dharma. Everything is within the dharmadhatu, the space of all dharmas. All charms, all phenomena have the flavour of dharmata, the thus-ness of direct presence. So, holy is not such a great thing. If you want to respect the Buddha, awaken to your own Buddha. If you do the dharma practice, it's going to make the Buddha much happier than bowing in front of a statue.

If you awaken to your own mind, in that moment all the tensions release, the negative impulses release and you're able to connect, because it's there from the beginning. It's not done by you. None of us are doing by ourselves, we are the blossom, the breath of the Buddha. That's all. Alive in this form for a while, dissolving and changing. We are not things. We are light and colour and shape and beauty. So, in this way hopefully we continue.

Maybe we meet again, maybe we don't. Thank you for your attention. I hope it has been useful for you.