

Open to the Open

Excerpt from the last day of the mahamudra retreat that focussed on James Low's book "Sweet Simplicity".

Retreatous Berghof, Wiesen, Germany, 4-12 July 2022

(<https://vimeo.com/741375728#t=56520s>)

Video 9/9 on Day 6 - Minute 09:46 to minute 22:55.

Transcribed by Francesca Fazzio, 10 November 2022

(...) When you go to the theatre, when you arrive and take your seat, in front of you is a curtain. The lights in the house in the theatre go down, the curtain opens and the stage is there opened and often already actors are on the stage. If you go to an orchestral concert, there is not usually a curtain. Musicians come onto the stage settle down, pick up their violin and tune it nicely. You see the preparation. Then conductor comes on stage with clapping, and then – silence. They begin. The theatre and the concert hall have a very different ways of beginning. One shows a little bit of the preparation, the getting readiness. In the theatre it is already ready; it is just that the curtain opens. When we say 'open to the open', the open is already open.

Curtains are our preoccupations – what we are normally looking at, our mental constructs, our ideas about the world, which are opaque. Like a curtain, we cannot see through our mental constructs. When the curtains open, or you could say dissolve, then it is just movement in the space.

The stage is always empty; various things are moving on it. When we do not see the empty stage, we arrive as if it were full. It is not that we are opening the curtains, the curtains open when we do not attend to them. As long as there is attachment, desire and aversion, this generates the thickness, the opacity, the impossibility of seeing through the curtain.

The curtain is just 'thought forms' which we believe in. If you do not believe in that thought form, or the feeling of the sensation, it arises and passes, and then you see: *"Oh, this is the radiance of the mind! This is the luminosity of the mind!"* It doesn't look luminous, it looks heavy because it's mixed with the grasping thought that says: *"This is, I am"*.

As soon as there is an assertion of something, a knowledge of what is there, a knowledge of what is here, you get curtain.

When we wake in the morning, where do we awaken? Here! We awaken in this place. What is this place? Wrong question! If you ask what, you are already into construction. It is here! You awaken into light, sound and moving experience. Ungraspable, but here. That is why, when you awaken, just relax into the outbreath... just here.

As soon as you start thinking about: *"I am here again"*, or *"I'm in my bed"* or *"I have to do this"* the curtains are closing, you are projecting onto the curtains, as if they were a cinema screen, and then you have the karmic movie of the day, and that runs and runs. So, waking is very, very important. What are you waking into? Who is waking? Do not construct this, just stay with the inherent thinnest clarity of arising and passing. We often have a sense that: *"I have to get myself ready for the day."* I have to gather myself together, I have to shape myself: go to the bathroom, maybe have a shower. If you are a man shave, or get ready to put your clothes on, go out into the world. *"If I'm not prepared, it'll be a bit much."*

This preparation, itself, is getting into the gearing of subject and object. In that situation, the preparation is like getting hold of the clutch that allows you to shift gear from reasonably relaxed at home, to in to the world. In that gearing you then dealing with events which are rising – I have to do, I'm doing... – there are a lot of background confirmatory commentaries going on, even if it's not very conscious.

Would I be safe if I'm unprepared? When you prepare you take up a position, the positioning creates a kind of definition or solidity (James stands, to give us an example of what he has just said). "So here below me is a red carpet. Image that this red carpet is the shape of a room: I get up and, I go to one wall and I push on the wall, the wall is fixed and definite and it gives me definition because I can feel the pressure in my muscles. I'm here, I've something to lean on, something to assure me about who I am. There is a kind of validation but it is also restriction because I am next to the wall. If I go over to the other side and push the wall, I get the same kind of experience. I have definition. This is a limit, and the limit maintains me in my limitation. However, if I go back to the middle of the room, nothing there, nothing here, nothing to lean against, and nothing to confirm that I am ok.

Reassured by being off balance, having the support of something. Here (in the centre of the room) if I do not want to fall over I have to find the line of gravity, I have to be centred. This is more subtle, this is not subject to object, this is subject to subject or more like the vipassana. You get subtle feeling in your body as to whether you're off balance or not. This is the proprioception in the sense that 'oh, oh, I can feel something in my hip.' It would be like the vipassana – too much pressure on the left hip so tilt over a little bit to the right and then sensation going on to the right hip, 'Oh!' Then you get it going straight down, and then it is very easy. From this position, I can go in any direction. I am not predetermined, I can respond in to whatever occurs.

This is the meaning of openness – I'm open to the open because I'm not protected, I'm not positioned; here's no pre-organisation. If you're grounded, you are ready to respond.

Once you get the sense of this, the skills – the knowledge base and so on that you have built up – can be a kind of defensive screening, a kind of ‘inner clothing’ that you put on. It is your access into role, you are like an actor preparing to go on the stage. Alternatively, it can be laid out like a kind of buffet with available resourcing as required, and if it’s not required we don’t take it up.

When your hands are empty they can respond to whatever is there. As soon the hand is holding something it is restricted. As soon as you get into role and experience that as a self-definition, you have a shape. You have an identity with which you can mediate your relation with other entities, other identities. This shape comes with a price. The price of this shape is a false belief about who you are: ‘I am this, I exist, I can define my existence’. That is very different from ‘I am here, open’. There is potential, and this potential can mobilize very quickly into the situation.

Do I need to act or not? Let's see. We don’t know before it happens. If the resources are to hand but not in the hand, then you have that freedom to move. But when you've already grasped at something – when we are pre-formed as ‘I am a teacher’ for example – it may feel like a supportive identity and so we need to take care.

Of course, most of us, of necessity, have to take on various roles. We might even enjoy taking on new roles. The issue would be ‘Can we take on the role in the manner of a dream?’ If I were a schoolteacher this is a co-emergent performativity. It may be a bit scripted but it is also a bit spontaneous and at any moment school teaching could stop. Some unhappy pupil could come behind me and hit me on the head with a brick. Now I’m in the role of hospital patient. *“I have amnesia. I must be someone but I can't quite remember who!”*

Any moment these things happen. Builders fall off buildings. Sailors get washed off boats. Sudden crises arise that bring about all kinds of situations. The external environment acts onto the subject. There can be sudden internal events like heart attacks, strokes and so on. Then we re-form ourselves since, *“I can no longer occupy this role.”*

So be aware that your role is not formal and fixed, that it is an identity you inhabit temporarily like an actor. Then when you get up in the morning, you have presence; you open and then you get in to role. Your role is formative as expression, not formative as identity. (Cont’d)