

NGONDRO 2

PURIFICATION

Commentary on the text of the preliminary practice
from the

Vidyadhara Guru Sadhana

According to the tradition of Khordong Monastery

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*Really what we have to do is understand the various forces which impinge on us
and seduce us into the belief that the way we are construing the world is the way
the world is.*

*Compassion is not forcing ourselves to like someone we don't like. It is, rather,
allowing ourselves to find an openness to all that is likeable, in the people whom we
tend not to like.*

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Saturday

CONSCIOUSNESS

In the traditional Indian understanding of substances the diamond was the hardest strongest substance that was known. You can use a diamond to cut glass, but you can't use glass to cut a diamond. In the same way the mind of awareness is able to cut into the world, to expose, to develop an understanding of the world in all sorts of ways and the Western trajectory of science is an aspect of this power of the mind to penetrate things, to cut through them.

But if we turn it the other way round, all the developments of science in many ways don't tell us very much about the nature of the mind. At least, science can tell us a lot about neurophysiology and the kind of chemical reactions that in some way are in play with the thoughts that we have. The research that is done into these is trying to understand how it is that the mind works, but from outside in.

From a buddhist point of view that would be compared to trying to cut a diamond with glass because what it develops is a whole load of fragmented concepts which one can build up to create a composite picture of how thoughts arise through brain chemistry. Science tends to examine moments of consciousness, momentary arisings. For example, looking at what movements occur in the brain when people do mathematical problems or when they experience different kinds of emotions, tracking that sort of thing.

However, what buddhism is marking out, with this idea of an indestructible nature, is the awareness through which one understands whatever it is that is arising. This awareness is not posited, it is not being put forward as something as existing apart from everything that is arising in a sort of dualistic distanced sort of way. For example, I'm over here with my pure mind, looking over there, at what's going on over there. Consciousness, in buddhism, is not consciousness in the Cartesian sense of a pure cogito, separated and looking onto the world, rather it is a pervasive awareness which reveals whatever is arising within it.

Consciousness is often compared in traditional examples to being like the sky. The sky is vast and open, the sky doesn't object to anything arising and passing through it. If a beautiful bird flies through the sky or a beautiful rose blossoms in the sky, the sky doesn't do anything, it just accepts this. If you have in a hot place like Rwanda¹ with many corpses rotting with a terrible smell, the sky also accepts these rotting corpses.

In this way it is suggested that awareness itself is devoid of any bias, it is simply open and able to attend to what is occurring. However it also has the quality of responsiveness. In being open and accepting things as they are and

¹ Reference to the war and slaughter going on in Rwanda at this time

allowing whatever is arising to touch us, we are then called forth to respond to them in some way. But usually something interrupts this process of open awareness and free responsiveness and what gets in the way of it, is ourselves. We interrupt the openness of our being by trying to fix ourselves as a particular person having needs and desires and things that we can do and things that we can't do.

SUFFERING IS GETTING WHAT YOU DON'T WANT AND NOT GETTING WHAT YOU DO WANT

HOW WE CONSTRUE THE WORLD

So it is with this basic view, (which we can turn to and elaborate, because there's a huge literature on this in Tibetan), that the issue of purification becomes clear because what is to be purified is the obscuration that comes about from taking up a fixed position. In being born and living in western European countries we are very used to a society which encourages a sense of a separate self but in many countries, people live in extended families. They live in tribal groupings, or large kinship groupings, in which the person's sense of identity is primarily derived from belonging to the group.

The tension of this is revealed a lot, for example, with young immigrant Asian people in Britain, where the young person feels this tension between going to school in a Western culture which is encouraging them to take individual decisions about their own life and the family requirement which says "*You have no identity apart from being a part of us.*" Western people often think of an arranged marriage as being something quite bizarre because we imagine that if we are going to be intimate with someone and spend our lives with them, or have some intense relationship with them, then this should be a choice that we make ourselves. But this is not the case for many, many people in many countries of the world.

I think this is particularly important for us as Western people who are interested in buddhism because we have to remember that buddhism developed in India and has mainly developed in Asian countries where the extended family is the norm. If one has grown up in the Asian extended family system where other people have a lot of rights to tell you what to do and to decide your life for you, because your life is part of this wider movement of the family or the group, then to let go, from that position, of a sense of an individual self is perhaps a shorter journey than it is for us in the West who have been encouraged all our lives to be very individual and to struggle against the world. I think that it is very important for us to remember our own context as we try to think about buddhist ideas and think about their relevance to our lives.

A great deal of the developmental movement of modern societies is through a notion of conflict. I think we are used to language like the 'battle against nature'. In the 1950s you would get lots of films, particularly say in Holland,

building up the dykes against the sea and the struggle against the elements. Nowadays with ecological thinking we have a return to a bit more of a sense of harmony and being in the world, but nonetheless the driving metaphors of a lot of our capitalist movement has been conflict. Conflict with each other, and conflict against the environment itself.

One way of thinking about this contextual issue is to see it as a kind of group karma, that in a sense we are all experiencing together the impact of choices from the past. There is, within the Western milieu, a group focusing, a group belief in certain principles. Like when somebody doesn't get what they want, they blow their horn. But saying this about the nature of conflict, I am not suggesting then that we need to see the world as a dangerous place and try to run away from it, that we should leave our ordinary lives here and try to go off to some other place where things might be better. It's not that an external context in itself, no matter how supportive it is, is enough. Really what we have to do is understand the various forces which impinge on us and seduce us into the belief that the way we are construing the world is the way the world is. That is to say, it is the process of starting to put into question all the assumptions we normally operate from.

IMPERMANENCE: ASSUMPTION & PREDICTION

The thing about an assumption is that it prejudices the next moment, because an assumption is a way in which we are predicting that the world will be in a particular way, and very often it is quite comfortable to be inside our assumptions because then we know what is going on. We may feel very upset and unhappy if the world changes, so that our assumptions no longer had this same predictive power.

As the Buddha says, suffering is getting what you don't want and not getting what you do want. We have an intention or an assumption which goes out into the future and maps it out as if we can control it, and structure what we want. That is why what we did in previous weekends, the buddhist meditation on impermanence, is so very important. Impermanence is really one way of sitting with your assumptions and watching the way they arise and pass and don't have a continuity that is reliable.

There is a double play here because in order to survive in the world we have to be able to predict to some extent. If you go shopping in a local supermarket, it helps if you know where the shelves are. When you go into a new supermarket you don't know where things are and you have to go up and down the aisles looking for things. In our busy lives it is often very helpful to be able to predict, because then we can do things very quickly. It is part of how our existence is structured.

However, in predicting, it means that for the thought which we have inside, we are able to identify its consequence or the object that will support it very quickly, which makes us blind to the other possibilities. Now sometimes that is very useful, in the supermarket because if you don't know where things are and you look around and you see all these other very interesting things, you

will fill up your trolley with many, many things and then when you pay for it, it is very expensive!

There is a way in which being open, opening our eyes from the sort of tunnels of our own knowledge and intention, that sort of distraction can be very expensive, because we lose track, as it were. That sort of distraction can be exciting, but it can also be destructive, like in a sexual affair, whereby allowing oneself to really see someone else, one is torn out of another relationship or some tension is built up.

Certainly in terms of efficiency and control and mastery, the idea of prediction and assumption is very powerful and very useful, and living as we do in a culture where material possessions and material security is very important, the ability to maintain the continuity of a socio-economic situation is usually considered very important. With rising unemployment, anxiety about the future, and technological change, people are concerned to find a reasonable place to stay, to hang onto a relationship, to get a career that will mean that they won't be in a difficult situation when they get old. Clearly there is nothing wrong with this story in everyday terms.

These are reasonable human aspirations, to have some security, to take care of one's children, or just to hold one's life together in some way. However, it is not free of certain problematics. The first would be the facticity of impermanence, the fact that things are changing all the time, the external objects of the world are changing. The world climate is changing. The streets are changing.

IN 'KNOWING' THE WORLD, WE DON'T SEE IT: CONCEPTS KILL THE WORLD

There are a lot of changes we don't perceive because we are caught in this bubble of assumptions whereby we recognise things just by a very crude identification and pay no attention to the particular details of them. A lot of the ways in which we understand and recognise things are through the assumption of essences, in particular, the way in which a word stands in to represent what it is that one is perceiving, to oneself.

So, for example, you come out of your house and you come into your street. You're probably hardly even aware of your street because you're off going to do something. But as you open the door and you see the street, "*Ah! There's the street.*" Now it may be that the last time you saw the street the evening before, there was a red car. In the night that person drove off, another person arrived and when you open your door, now there's a blue car instead. You have got your street and in your street there is a blue car. It's not your car; you don't really care about the car, so you hardly even notice the car. It doesn't really disturb anything. And yet, if we just try to remain on the level of perception, when we open the door, "*Wow! Something is different here.*"

But that level of awareness and attention to the world is usually not there for us because we don't see the world. We know the world and in 'knowing' the

world, we don't see it. In this way, habitual conceptualisation, the way the mind rests on concepts supported by language, is the way we kill the world.

The basic movement in meditation is to try to allow the world to come back to life for us, so that we are actually alive in an alive world, in a perceptual field that is vibrant.

It is interesting that in modern literature there is also a concern about the deadly nature of language. The French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty wrote about language in pretty much the same way as Nagarjuna did many centuries before. It is this double play, this tension, between our need, our ego need, for mastery in the world, for knowledge, for the ability to impose order and predictive power and the fact that the world is itself revealing itself to us as this endless vibrant play of sensation.

But the vibrancy of the world can often seem overwhelming to us. We live in a culture that tends to split off these two modes of experience. We can see it in the relationship between parents and children. When children are in a play park and they go swinging round something, and it is going faster and faster. I don't know if you can feel that memory in your body from when you were very small, maybe running very fast down a hill, and it is really alive. The colours are very bright and you are just running out of control, or maybe times when you played at the seaside with a little bucket and spade and just the waves.....and it is just too much. But it is okay for it to feel too much because usually there's a mummy or a daddy around or somebody around to take you home and feed you and put you in bed, and put boundaries around if somehow it is feeling out of control. These are often magical moments with children, but then you have to remember, "*Oh-oh, shops are going to close,*" or "*We've got to get to the car.*" The pressure of the world and the need for mastery or imposing order returns.

One of the ideas in buddhism is to find a way of bringing these two orders of experience together and integrating them so that instead of being seen as conflicted they are seen as a kind of wave in which one can take up power and authority and be effective in the world, then also relax and be open and responsive to the world.

This integration is often described as the integration of wisdom and compassion, so that through wisdom which we develop in our meditation through dissolving, through the experience of integrating subject and object inside ourselves into a point of openness and empty awareness, and then through that state of openness, as thoughts and feelings arise, we allow them to pass through us like clouds passing through the sky.

PURIFYING THE URGE TO RESPOND IN AN ASSUMPTIVE WAY

Through this we perform the purification of the urge to return to an assumptive way of responding. We may have experienced sometimes in our meditation a moment of openness, but soon we find ourselves caught up in the same old

obsessive thoughts; thinking about work, or love, or parents, or whatever it is, telling ourselves the same little stories.

It is through allowing these very tempting and seemingly very meaningful patternings of thoughts to just pass through, without attachment, that we let go of the sense that we have to rely on, or be seduced by, the familiar in order to know who we are and what we are doing. Then gradually one gets more sense of openness. With that openness, when we return our attention to being in the world with others, it opens up the possibility of being with the others as they really are, so that instead of 'knowing what the other wants' because of what we've experienced in the past and therefore 'giving them what they want', we are actually able to attend to the other in the moment, and try to have some sense of where they are and respond to that.

For example, with children. Children very often have a favourite food that they like to eat, and it is fairly predictable, it can be fish fingers, baked beans, chips, and if the children are anxious or worried or unhappy and you give them that kind of food they feel reassured because it is something predictable and pleasurable and just what they want. So clearly sometimes being able to predict is very helpful. It helps to reassure the person of their familiar place in the world, because things are falling into place. It is a bit like when they were younger and had a teddy bear to cuddle.

But then, another time you might be busy or whatever and you cook something, or there are other adults coming, and you have to say to the kids, "*Listen, this is what you there is to eat, you have to eat this, we are all eating this,*" and they don't want to eat it. In that way the child is not being reaffirmed in its habitual thing, it is being forced into something new and often goes into a kind of resistance to it. The child will often say something like, "*I don't like this, I don't want to eat this, I can't eat this.*" And if they are very small and you put it in their mouth, they spit it out because they feel that if this substance comes into me, I won't be the same, I will be changed by this thing because it's not me, it is not familiar, and it will disturb me, and ugh!

Probably as adults we continue with these games but in a slightly more subtle more socially acceptable way. We have more power to control what we do and what others do to us but nonetheless that basic movement of being reassured by what we like and being disturbed by what we don't like links in very much with these discussions of suffering and what causes it.

When children maybe have a nightmare and they wake up very disturbed, then we tell them a familiar story and help them get back to a sense that the world is sensible and safe and predictable. In an ordinary relative way this is a reasonably effective thing to do. It is a sort of tactical deceit, because as parents you can't make the world safe for your children. The world is not safe. But very often in order to feel secure we have to act as if the world was safe and secure and then see anything that might disturb our sense of security as the enemy and if possible attack them, and shoo them away.

WISDOM AND COMPASSION

'KNOWLEDGE' CAN MAKE US STUPID

Now to return this to the issue of wisdom and compassion, with wisdom as the sense of openness and awareness, openness to all the possibilities of the world, compassion is then a very sensitive attention to the precise way of being of the other. It is not about reassuring the other or about controlling or disturbing the other, but it is a very precise attention to the moment-by-moment changes that occur on the other in relation to oneself. This offers little moments of openness in which some new kind of connection, some kind of responsiveness, can actually occur.

Paradoxically, if we know someone well we may actually be diminishing the possibility of an open compassionate response to them, because the space in which they reveal themselves is already filled with our knowledge of them. That is the how knowledge can make us stupid—stupid in a particular sense. Just as I described before, coming out of your front door and instead of a red car, there is a blue car. Now you could say that to be surprised at the blue car would be stupid. I mean, it would be as if someone had taken some LSD and Ahhh, amazing! Because we take that kind of openness as a kind of madness or an altered state, and yet, clearly, just to go out and see something that is different and not be surprised, is a kind of stupidity because there is something new in the world that is different. If it was our car outside the house and someone had smashed the window or stolen the car radio then we would be surprised because the particular shape of that car the gestalt of it had been interrupted. We can no longer predict onto it and be reassured by it. But as long as the shape of the world continues in a reasonably predictable way we can hang our assumptions on it, then we go a little bit stupid. We no longer attend any more.

Afternoon

AWARENESS (RIGPA) AS DISTINCT FROM INTELLIGENCE

This idea of awareness, awareness in the sense that I am using it, in Tibetan is called *rigpa* and in Sanskrit *vidya*, and in both these languages this term has a wide spectrum of meaning. We can refer to a solid kind of knowledge, knowing something, I know this is a jug, and that knowledge can exist in memory through time and can be evoked by the appearance of another object.

But in the particular way that I am referring to it now, which is more a view from dzogchen, *rigpa* is not something which is an individual possession in the sense that one's intelligence is an individual possession. You probably know that there are certain factors which can increase and diminish your intelligence, so that if you are very tired or you are very anxious or you get very drunk, you get less intelligence. The connection of how you can think of

things, make sense of things, link them with memories, that tends to diminish in its efficiency.

Intelligence in that sense is a quality that if one has it, one is able to predict from it because—particularly in things like mathematics—you become aware of where the limit of your intelligence is. You probably had that experience in school. You could follow things up to a certain level, but after that you just can't make it, there's an invisible limit that you cannot go beyond. In a sense that sort of intelligence is more like an energy of the body. It varies according to the energy system of the body.

However with this sense of open awareness, it's not that I have this awareness, but it is in the moment where there is this awareness that the continuity of being in the world is not being directed or shaped or formed by a self-referencing function. Usually we are making sense and ordering and holding in place constructs or gestalts through a linking-back to a self-referencing point. It moves around and we can locate it in ourselves. In a sense it can't be described in words, it is beyond words. All one can really do is describe it through a negative definition and say it is not this, it is not that. This awareness is inseparable from the emptiness or openness.

It is often our experience that when we try to do visualisation—followed by the dissolving part of the visualisation—some sensation arises. It may be like a physical sensation, and although you are kind of opened up and not too focused, the thought might arise, "*Oh, it's my shoulder.*" So you have a sensation which is a brief momentary passing and what rides behind it is a comment, a comment which locates the sensation to a particular matrix of meaning.

There is clearly a certain intelligence in that comment, but it is an intelligence serving stupidity because it is reaffirming the dualistic perception which is not grounded in the moment. It installs something and then pretends that its creation is a revelation, so that the construction appears to be an identification of something which is pre-existing. It is through that that the ego self-referencing that we have, the location back into me in a relationship of mastery and control in the world, is reaffirmed.

Not to do that, is awareness. So what one is trying to do is to interrupt the way in which one returns to the concretisation. There are various techniques, such as shouting *Phat!* to interrupt the foreclosure back into a familiar terrain of predictive knowledge. It is a different way of experiencing. It is not held in place nor made sense of, nor developed through conceptualisation.

In a sense that's the radical difference between this kind of practice and tantric practice where one uses the intentionality of developing the visualisation, or through work on the body, through breathing techniques or counting in particular ways, in order to bring about a shift through a model of control. 'Tantra', the word, indicates a continuity, a movement which never ceases. It's the continuity of *samsara* or *nirvana* as a continuous interplay, and as subject and object, and of form and emptiness. So it is a kind of post-

structuralist play, around binary oppositions essentially, because it sets up the discontinuities, the points at which things separate out, and then seeks to keep them in motion, in the flow.

FOUR ACTIVITIES OF TANTRA

Tantric practice is basically magical. The mandalas of the four outer sections of the centre deal with four basic activities and tantric meditation practices. Recitations with visualisations and mantras are often called *trin ley* in Tibetan, and that's a word that means activity. The four activities constellated around this are pacifying, increasing or developing, overpowering, and destroying. These four positions are taken up inside the flow of the integration of *samsara* and *nirvana*, as a way of managing the continuity of being in the world in different circumstances. It is a bit like, some of the fairytale notions of going on a journey. Or maybe like in the children's book, The Hobbit. Do you know The Hobbit? In going on a pilgrimage or a journey like that, you need to be able to take care of sickness, you need to be able to take care of hunger, and you do that by pacifying them, by applying antidotes, because if Bilbo Baggins in his journey was to get very sick he would not be able to continue.

And similarly for us living our lives, if we encounter a situation which is too powerful for us to manage, it overwhelms us, it becomes liminal, it is a boundary situation. Then the sense of confidence that we could have that practising meditation is useful starts to break down, and we start to think, "Oh god, I can't cope with this any more. I need to have a much more ordinary kind of life because this isn't giving me enough sense of power and control in my life." So in this kind of pilgrimage or journey through or towards an ever-increasing way of relaxedly integrating *samsara* and *nirvana*, being able to manage whatever arises and to make sense of it inside the experience of the mandala, inside the experience of the identification with the deity, to keep this moving, one needs to have a repertoire, a range of antidotes, whereby one can transform situations that would interrupt that process of integrating.

Of these four functions, *pacifying* is basically dealing with sickness, famine, climatic change, infestations of insects like locusts or things like that, something that would create a disturbance to the environment so that one's reasonable happy existence would be interrupted.

The second, *increasing*, is about increasing happiness, increasing wealth, increasing health, increasing the richness and the variety of experience in the world. Life's not simply about keeping the dangerous things at bay, but it's also about opening and entering into a field of enjoyment and pleasure.

The third factor is *overawing*, or overwhelming, and it's a way often you see it in statues like Guru Rinpoche there in the centre, where he's looking in a sort of grand position, it's like in England when the Queen gets dressed up with her crown and her big robes and it looks very, very grand. And just the way that that person is, is different. In Britain on television there used to be a somewhat terrible man called Terry Wogan, and he used to have a kind of chat show where they invite people in and just talk, and then one day I was

walking in the centre of London and I saw him getting into a car and the car was quite grand, it was a Rolls Royce, and he had a chauffeur, but he was also wearing a very beautifully cut suit and he must have come from the studio because his face was all made up, and somehow he was larger than life because all this energy had been put into him. His hairdressers...he had soaked up all this attention and he was radiating this. He was a star. He was important.

It's that sort of quality, in which one is able to take the power of the world into oneself and use it as a way of effortlessly getting things. When people like that go to the airport they go in through a special entrance, and when they go to a restaurant they immediately get a very good table, and everything flows easily because of this particular quality. This is not to suggest that we should develop some kind of peacock narcissism, but nonetheless being able to allow ourselves to be powerful and to use our power to move through the world is also very important.

On an ordinary level, for example, you might go to assertion training in order to be more assertive. Particularly, there's been a lot of work done by women on being more assertive around sexual issues so that if they say no they can do it through their body in a way that keeps them safe. You use your power to protect yourself. So there's a way in which, sometimes, not to be permanently in that state but to be able, when that situation requires, to take up a place of power and authority and then move on because these are always contextually appropriate responses.

The fourth function, *destroying*, is symbolised usually by the wrathful deities; you've got flames around them and maybe they are dancing on a corpse, living in a cemetery. This principle of destruction works on the basis of the clear understanding that everything is essentially open and empty. There is no inherent self-nature in anything. We are all in the constant movement of impermanence, of appearance arising and passing, and if we can really get some direct understanding of this so that it's not just a concept, if we really experience the passing away of things, being in touch with the impermanence of our own bodies, of everything of our experience, then there is a freedom to act on the world to open up gaps where necessary.

In tantra the two main kinds of symbolic motifs are copulation and murder. Copulation represents this continuing process of samsara and nirvana being together, and it speaks into the danger of splitting them off, as would be done from the hinayana approach. If we think of two figures in sexual union, what makes sexual union pleasurable is a genuine interest in the other person. Sex is not simply about genital contact but it's a way of being fully open to the experience of being with the other, to experience the beauty and the interest and the fascination, and through that to have a full response to them.

The implication of this is when we find things in the world that are different, different from us, different from the sort of experience we want to have, difficult, and we want to push them away, then we need to think again. In a sense we have to copulate with the world.

And this figure in the *yab-yum* state [Gestures to altar], it's really two figures, two people if you like, and one figure. It's a kind of union which is androgynous. So you know with this idea that we have to copulate with the world, we can do it from a feminine position and from a masculine position as well. Sometimes if we take up the feminine position we have to open ourselves and envelop the world and welcome it into ourselves.

From a more masculine position, sometimes we have to go out and penetrate into the distance of the world to make sure that we have some contact. As long as we are frightened of things or make judgements that we don't want this, we are pushing things away, and in that way excluding them from the possibility of being open and responsive to them. In that way our egocentric judgement causes the split between samsara and nirvana. Then we end up editing the totality or the vastness of the world in terms of our own particular disposition, likes and dislikes.

EXAMPLES OF USING THE FOUR ACTIVITIES

But, of course, this is not to set out on some omnipotent fantasy. Clearly, we live in limitations and we do have particular dispositions, and that's why in order to optimise, to increase the potential for being open and responsive to this wide range of richness that the world presents to us, we need to take use these four different activities in order to come back into the dance. For example, you start to get sick. Then, in the first activity of pacifying you may want to do some meditation which would be concerned with pacifying that sickness. It's as if—if you've been doing some practice—say you are getting a pain, a pain in your foot. That pain is starting to become a little vortex around which there's a separation: *"Why is this pain here? I wish this pain wasn't here. I remember when I didn't have a pain."* There's all sorts of thoughts swirling around that and if the pain intensifies one's whole world can shrink down simply to that throbbing sensation of pain. Now clearly that would not be very helpful if one is trying to be open to it because the pain then seems to be like the enemy. So you might be trying to pacify it and let it go away, and maybe visualising some peaceful deity like Tara. Tara's tears are falling onto your painful foot and dissolving the pain and it's feeling better and better.

Or you might visualise that all of the richness of the health of the medicine Buddha is flowing into you and you are being filled up with these rainbow lights and distillations of all the medicines are pouring into you and you are filled with all this richness, which overwhelms the little bit of pain that you have. That would be using the second way of increasing, generating.

Or you might, through visualising yourself as the deity, be able to incorporate the pain into your being as a tingling glow, and to reframe it as a sign of your own spiritual effulgence so that you transform the experience of pain into the experience of spiritual achievement. I remember I used to have very bad pains in my knees and my teacher said, *"Well, you have to concentrate as Guru Rinpoche and experience this as just the blissful radiance of the body."* And it's actually quite helpful because pain itself has no quality inherent in it.

We react to it from a particular point of view, and we can change the point of view that we move from.

Or one can take up the fourth position of destroying, in which you can visualise a wrathful deity swallowing the pain or destroying it. You might then visualise that the pain is being caused by a demon who is the manifestation of all the harmful things that you've ever done in the past to other beings, so this pain represents the most intense presentation of all your own negative karma in which one is trying to take the intensity of the pain and take it down into emptiness so that it no longer becomes a dualistic point of reference.

I think from these four examples you can perhaps get a sense of the way in which, through a tantric practice, awareness is used in a focal way which plays on the cusp of dualistic/non-dualistic attention. One is using the sense of transforming the relationship that you have to a problematic situation, or one that you want more of, and using the efficacy, the efficiency of this system of visualisation, to give one a sense of an unimpeded and uninterrupted movement with the world so that samsara and nirvana are in play dancing together. Of course the important thing is that all of these movements have to be made out of and with an understanding of emptiness; otherwise they are just egocentric manipulations.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TANTRA AND DZOGCHEN

This particular way of dealing with things in tantra still primarily located in the metaphor of mastery. It is not what awareness is about. The open awareness of dzogchen—and also particularly this dissolving kind of meditation, which is on the cusp between tantra and dzogchen—is concerned with free responsiveness. It's absolutely democratic. Tantra is trying to alter our experience of the way the world presents itself to us, by us taking up an active position in visualising and in identifying in a positive intentional way, identifying things in a new way, so that we gain more ease of being in the world.

Whereas in dzogchen one is not concerned to alter the way the world arises. What one is concerned to do is not to respond to it in the familiar way of concretisation. So the primary focus is on how we dissolve the world rather than holding it in a different way. It's quite a subtle way. That phenomena, the world, our experience, arises as normally, but one is all the time sheering off the assumptions which would return us to the familiar place of the mastery of ordinary samsaric knowledge and shift into a more open allowing of things as they are.

INDRA'S NET

There is an image in one of the later mahayana sutras that's taken up in the Lankavatara Sutra and developed a lot in Japanese buddhism. It's the image of Indra's net. 'Net' is like a fishing net. The thing about this net is that at each point where the directions would meet in this diamond structure, there you would have a crystal which is like a mirror.

So, if you can imagine that this net is infinite, and it covers the whole of space and time, and each crystal has as many faces as there are other crystals in the net, each face of the crystal is showing in its reflection all the other crystals that are in the net, so the whole universe is reflected in each face of each crystal. It is used as a symbol for the interpenetration of all phenomena, kind of ultimate statement about contextualisation.

Which is to say, that in our lives as we breathe out into the world, our breath is going out into this infinite vastness and bits of our breath will be breathed in by all sorts of creatures. And when we breathe in, the air we breathe in is full of specks which contain parts of the dead bodies of other creatures, part of their excreta, part of their food leavings—all of these micro particles flow into us. We can hear the car going by and the church bell ringing and the sounds of the world flow into us, and our thoughts flow out into the world, filling the world and identifying it.

What one has here is a matrix or a patterning of intense complexity. If you were to try to analyse this complexity in a kind of western scientific way by adding it all up, naming it and labelling it, the mind would just be overwhelmed. But what we can do is be open to the way in which we can, like a mirror, reflect the world as it is, having the experience of everything in its place revealing itself. It doesn't have to be explained after the fact.

I think this view is particularly important when you are coming in to study the dharma really for the first time. It's very easy to feel overwhelmed and confused by all the technical terms and all the different references to gods, practices and all the rest of them. We've got a desire to find some system to arrange everything and to a certain extent that's important but one can easily start to feel overwhelmed and quite stupid that it's all too much, and that's not very helpful.

I think one can also start to experience things so that if something rings true for you, or you have some connection with something then you can reverberate with that. Other things that you don't really connect with, then you can let them just slide by without trying to hold on to or pull them into a relationship of meaning. Each point of the dharma is a door into every other point of the dharma just like this net of Indra. If you look into one crystal everything is revealed. Similarly if you take up just one idea, like impermanence, and you really allow yourself to go into it very deeply, a great deal is revealed.

SUFFERING

Now for some reflection on suffering. We could see out in the park there were families playing together. I could see families where the man is drinking quite a lot of beer and the children are running around quite wild and the woman is stuck with the cooking and keeping all the plates. One can imagine six, seven o'clock at night, the children are very tired, the husband's a bit drunk, the woman's a bit angry and that's the end of a happy summer's day! So we have

suffering, impermanence and emptiness because they have spent all their money! And then the weekend's gone too, and [it's] back to work...

So, in that way, if we take up one or two simple ideas and follow them through as we move in the world, like a mirror, everything starts to unpack and reveal itself. The whole world becomes just a constant teaching, a way in which the emptiness and the openness and the painfulness of existence is revealed. Through that we can open in our compassion towards beings. They also want happiness; they try their best to be happy; even to help others to be happy, and yet somehow it returns to a place of dissatisfaction and suffering.

REFUGE AND BODHICITTA

REFUGE IS LIKE AN ANCHOR

When we take refuge in the Buddha, the dharma and the sangha, it's like putting an anchor, a sea-anchor, down in a boat, if you're sailing in an open boat. The sea anchor doesn't go to the bottom, but it floats in the water, slowing you down. You're not fixed but you have got some more control about the currents that are taking you here and there. Through taking refuge one gets a certain reference-point, a kind of frame of reference, through which one can view the sort of experiences that might ordinarily seduce you or overwhelm you or blow you away in some way.

With this sense of direction and the possibility of getting a space to breathe in, a calm place out of the storm of daily existence, one can move from being simply in a re-active position towards the world, having to react to whatever the world throws at us, and start to develop a more pro-active, a more intentional activity onto the world.

Usually, with our worldly aims like wanting to earn money, get a good job, pass exams, or whatever it is, one is engaged in a meshing with the world which pulls one into action/reaction, action/reaction. One is en-bubbled, encased, in a belief in the importance of one's own activity. This operates in two ways. One both has the sense that in taking refuge in the Buddha, the dharma and the sangha, that somehow, perhaps in a naïve, anthropomorphic way, but at least one can have some sense that these things that one takes refuge in will act on one's behalf or will have an intention to welcome one into something new. And, at the same time, we are developing an intentionality towards enlightenment, towards being more open, less restricted, less attached.

This opens up a space in which a different kind of thinking and experiencing can occur which is why we use the word 'refuge'. Just like how romantic poets like Goethe and Schiller would use nature, leaving the city and going into nature, thereby having their soul refreshed and replenished—nature in the physical sense acting as a kind of antidote which helps detoxify the poisons of urban sophisticated culture and existence.

Nowadays we find ourselves living in a world where there is almost no natural nature left. The deserts of central Asia, the mountains of the Himalayas, everywhere has roads, telegraph poles and forestry commissions in which society takes upon itself the ownership and the management of the forests and the seas and the natural environments. Governments pass policies on protecting the wildernesses. But if you can protect the wilderness it is no longer wild. In this way our world shrinks and shrinks and shrinks until everywhere we look we see the mirror image of ourselves. But this is not the infinite opening and mirroring of Indra's net, this is not a mirroring of multiplicity and diversity. This is the mirroring, the banal mirroring, of just one face, the face of (usually) a white man making a profit. The result is that in our culture, we have fewer and fewer places to really get a holiday, a refuge away from the particular insistent pulses of our current dynamic.

REFUGE GIVES YOU A SPACE TO THINK

In taking refuge in Buddha, dharma and sangha, what one is doing is opening up a space apart from the increasing compactedness of our world, a place, as I said before, where we can reframe. We can see from another point of view the ways in which we get entangled in subject-object interaction. The way I'm presenting the refuge is that it gives you a space to think. It's not that one goes for refuge as one might go as a small child to mummy and she gives you a cuddle and you could suck your thumb and feel very safe. That notion of a safe place exists in buddhism but it's not the beginning of the path, it's really the end result of the path.

Finding the world a difficult place, we start to take refuge and then the real work of understanding something begins. Again, there's a paradoxical move in this because the more we do the work of struggling to get to this place that's safe, the more we realise we don't actually need a safe place to arrive at because we've found a safer way of being open to whatever it is that occurs. Refuge in this sense is a bit like having a convalescence, that having been, as it were, been wounded by the world, one finds a place of stepping back, starting to take care of oneself better, recover one's resources and then apply them in a way that will take one less close to damaging situations in future.

DEVELOPMENT OF BODHICITTA: MASTER POSITION OR SERVANT POSITION

The second stage, in the mahayana tradition, is the development of bodhicitta. Bodhicitta in this context is basically an altruistic impulse. The best form is to put the other first. Very often when we want to take care of others or act on behalf on others, it's because we feel some security in the expert position of knowing what's best for the other. This would be the position of the doctor who is able to do very powerful and important things to help people, but does them on his or her own terms. They get paid and get a lot of social status at the same time, and have a whole powerful legal edifice to protect themselves against claims of mismanagement. So there you've got a movement of helping others, of definitely doing something that is helpful for others, but it's not quite clear if the other is being put first or one's own self is

being put first, because of there being career development in all of that too. So that's taking care of the other from the position of the master.

But we can also take care of others from the position of a servant in which the other is central and their needs dictate the kind of help and support and attention they receive. If they have a need that we don't have the resources to meet, then we attend to our ability to meet the need which they have, rather than telling them that they don't really have that need. So in that way the need of the other continuously interrupts one's own sense of competence.

I had to learn traditional dancing like waltzing and the fox-trot in school. I went to a boys-only school so we had to learn to dance with the leading position and the following position, and of course in our culture, it's the male that leads and the female that follows. It's a very different experience, being male, having to go into that position where you are having to follow what someone else is doing because you have got to be exactly tracking what the other person is doing but sort of half a, half a, half a second behind them. You also have to let the person who's leading appear very competent and in control. But, of course, if you're not sensitive and going exactly with them, they won't be able to show that they're in control! So, actually in following, you're really leading, emotionally and psychologically.

The idea of being a servant is a very familiar one in christian mysticism and it's one of the main motifs in sufi training, where the deputy head of an order is usually called the servant. In Tibetan monasteries as well, one of the main roles that people take up in their elevation through the hierarchy, is to be guest-master, similarly in zen monasteries, where one's attention always has to be focused on what the needs are of the people coming in. How can I structure the environment in such a way that people can get on with their task with the minimum interference? Using my competence to open up a space for others to unfold into, to reveal themselves into, rather than filling up the space with my own thoughts and desires? And that requires a great deal of awareness because usually we want to expand out and fill the space that's available.

That's something, I think, for us all to reflect on. It's normal that when we have been small, other people have moulded us. As we get bigger and get more power we tend to end up in positions where we start moulding other people. If we are teaching, or whatever, we can take up a position of power in which other people will readily adapt their lives to please us because we have the power and authority to make them feel wanted, that they're doing something of value, and all the other stories that keep us happy. Power is very seductive. All of us want to be loved, we want to be important. If we can please other people so that they like us, then we will probably want to do that.

That's a very common thing in life. We learn to be charming or playful or amusing or whatever it is, so that we transform ourselves into what the other person wants in order to get our main desire, which is the attention of the other. We may have experienced that in work, or in relationships, or friendships, that we go along with a situation that we're not really happy with,

making all sorts of adaptations in ourselves to please other people just because we don't want it to end. Afterwards, we might think, "*God, how come I stayed in that so long? I've put up with all that shit!*" I think we will find that we go along with this because the hope that we will be loved, that we will be wanted, that we won't be abandoned and kicked out, insists so powerfully. As if what we yearn for is this warm enclosure in which we can just relax and feel safe, and outside that there is this empty lonely place where we will feel very, very frightened. It is the very common dichotomy of either: I'm on my own and feel independent and not controlled but lonely and a bit lost; or I am in relationship, I'm close to someone, I can feel a little bit warm, but I feel overwhelmed and controlled and I've lost myself.

It can often appear to be a very, good thing to make gestures towards people. Through this gesture we offer them a link across the space that exists between us, a link of connectedness so that they won't feel so alone or rejected. Someone might feel lost and lonely and we reach out and we rescue them from that. But I think it is also very common, that when we do make that gesture of rescuing, we rescue them into the web of our own controlling desire.

Bodhicitta, in offering compassion, is trying to do is to create a space which will not fall into either of these extremes, that by offering space to the other, the other can reveal themselves as they are, rather than through the reflection of what they feel they have to be in order to be the object of your desire. This is absolutely central in the dharma.

It has a tension which echoes through the artistic representations of all buddhist traditions. There's a way in which the representations of the buddhas tend to move towards the abstract, but in doing that, losing the particularity of the people who had the experience of the achievement that took them into a state of enlightenment. You may have seen photographs of a very famous collection of Chinese sculptures called *lohans*, which is the Chinese word for *arhats*, the close disciples of Buddha Shakyamuni. They are very wonderful sculptures made of ceramics, and they stand out because the faces are so intensely individual. They are absolutely real people. Whereas, when we look at the buddha representations, they tend to have this smoothed-over quality as if they represent some general psychological or spiritual principle, rather than a precise achievement which has been struggled for.

Just to finish this association of ideas: if one sets up as an image of one particular kind of buddhahood which already exists, preordained, out there, then one's task is to cut away, to pare away, to smooth off all the little bumps which we have as an individual, so that eventually we will fit inside this buddha-mould. I think this is quite a perversion of what the dharma is about. It's a reassuring image: "*Someone, somewhere, knows what I should be, so if I do what they tell me then I'll know who I am because they already know who I am.*" On that level it functions like a story, a reassuring story to soothe a child who's woken in a nightmare. It's not a bad thing to do to reassure those who are anxious but the dharma is much more than a reassuring story. It's a way of opening up and relating directly to reality.

GENEROSITY OF COMPASSION

Responding to reality as it unfolds cannot be a safe reassuring story, because the future cannot be predicted. All sorts of things may arise and we can be open and flexible and dancing, able to just change rhythm as the music changes. This requires that we are not responding to some pre-existing image of what we should be, but rather that we have the relaxed and open confidence to reveal ourselves in a way that responds to whatever is arising, so that the world is this play of responsiveness. It's a play of responsiveness happening across and through this space of generosity in which we are open and let the world arise, as it arises.

This is the generosity of compassion. Then, as the world reveals itself, we just move and dance with that. Not trying to direct it towards some preordained goal which has already been inscribed, whether we call that 'enlightenment' or 'buddhahood' or 'realising your buddha-nature'. What one is experiencing is a dissolving of the desire to link the past to the future through the present, in a predictive manner.

By taking refuge in the openness and responsiveness of one's own nature, one is no longer taking refuge in ego's desire to predict the future. The space of the next moment is not ready-filled with the prediction that one has made on the basis of the past moment. This openness cuts samsara.

This is what actually cuts samsara, because samsara is the continuity of past, present, future spiralling on and on and on. In each moment, as samsara arises, it's liberated as nirvana. In this way you have the exact moment of the integration of samsara and nirvana, not a bland homogenisation of having realised the state of buddhahood. Instead you have this dynamic interplay of the moment of samsara and nirvana, inside the space of compassion, which is opened up by trusting that one will be able to dance.

Instead of setting up a place of mastery and control, one just allows oneself to be the servant, the slave of the world. When this music comes on then I dance like this... And when this music comes on then I dance like that... But because all the music is my music, and I love dancing, it's not a problem. And that's the dynamic moment of the integration of subject and object in emptiness.

So that's the way in which refuge and bodhicitta can be taken up from the point of view of dzogchen.

FEAR AND ANXIETY

In general, fear and anxiety are simply forms of attachment, attachment in the sense of subject-object interaction. Our attachment to our subject self as something apart from object makes us liable to anxiety and fear. All the paths of the dharma taught by Buddha are primarily to deal with attachment as the result of ignorance. Because of ignorance we become attached. Because of

attachment we suffer. Any of the dharma paths will in some way help to deal with particular issues of fear.

On the most general level, we have just to be aware of the environment. For example, the street where I live in London is a very mixed street. People from all over the world live in it. There are some high rise flats where they deal a lot in crack and last week, at two o'clock in the morning, someone at the end of my street had their throat cut. Now there's a big bunch of flowers there because local people have put a little shrine to this person who had his throat cut. The reality is that inner-city London is a dangerous place, so if I am walking at night I am a little bit careful. I walk down the middle of the road. That's the reality of the situation.

There are many things on the most general level like that. For example, if you are very tired, don't drive your car down an autobahn. Don't drive if you have been drinking because it increases the likelihood of an accident, where you or someone else might be killed. In general, fear constellates or gathers around a point. The point is either one's own sense of self or the sense of the value of something that one is attached to. So you might be frightened about yourself getting ill, being attacked, dying; or you might be frightened about your children or your parents. Your parents may be getting old or they might be getting sick. Your children might not be home at their usual time so you start wondering what has happened to them.

There are various ways in which one can manage to create some buffer zone of comfort around these points which hold fear. For example, you might learn a mantra of a deity, and as you start to get frightened you might say that mantra and believe that some protective rays or something from that deity are coming towards you and are going to keep you feeling safe and protected. It's as if one is installing between oneself and this fear-point, a particular protective sphere. In tantric meditations or visualisations you do that at the beginning of large practices, when you visualise around you a huge wall of flames and a wall of indestructible vajras, something very, very strong so that any negative attacking forces are kept outside. There is a general tendency to anxiety as long as subject and object are separated. As long as one exists as a subject in a world of varying and changing objects, one's own base of identity can be undermined.

Whenever one does a visualisation at the end of it one tries to relax into that moment of openness, and maintain that openness. This cuts the root of fear, which is located in the fundamental ignorance of identifying with transient arisings, thereby constructing the felt sense of a seemingly enduring self. Openness is the most profound and important way of dealing with fear.

DEATH

We live in a culture that is in absolute denial of our fear of death. There's a total denial in our culture of the experience of death. But we know that on an ordinary level, one of the things that helps us deal with fear, is to have a kind of knowledge of what is going to happen. I think it is fairly normal practice now

for doctors and dentists to explain in detail what they are going to do. Certainly that's a change that's happened in Britain in the last twenty years. Before, dentists didn't say anything; they'd just say "*Open your mouth.*" Now dentists are trained, particularly with children, to explain very carefully and to make sure that they understand, so that the two people are working together in the same direction.

The same basic principle works in the Tibetan meditations around death, for example in the famous *Bardo Todol* meditations. One meditates and visualises what is said, in that tradition, to happen when you die, so you get the sense of knowing what will happen, and you get a sense of how you might respond to the display of noises and lights. Of course if the dentist holds up his drill and goes zzz in front of you that's very different from when he actually puts it in your mouth and makes the hole in your tooth. So, the explanation and the reality are different.

PITFALLS OF MASTERY

We can prepare ourselves, but the actual moment may be somewhat different from how we had expected it to be. Which returns us to this issue of mastery, because if you imagine how things are going to be and you practise very hard to prepare yourself for them, if they are not the way you imagine they are going to be, then you might be in trouble.

I've just been marking some exam papers for the University of London and I could see how some students had in their mind what they thought the question would be. They had been reading and preparing themselves for that question. They wrote a very well structured, coherent answer to that question. But the question that they were answering was not the question which was on the question paper! This makes it difficult for an examiner, because you know the person's obviously working very hard, but in terms of reality, they're an asshole! Real intelligence is not about predicting and imposing the trajectory of control, it's about being able to engage with the question as it comes. If you have not read any of the books for this question, then bullshit! That's the reality. That's how people get through exams, because what they show to the person marking is that they are intelligent. They may have been lazy, but it's better to give a good mark to a lazy, intelligent person than to a rigid person who can't read the question. The danger with the rigid person is that they will always want to transform the world into their vision, always a movement towards totalitarianism.

LITERAL AND METAPHORICAL: RECOGNISING DIFFERENCE

I think it is so important in studying the dharma to take up this position of flexibility and not to turn it into a kind of medieval suit of armour and to recognise the difference between the metaphorical and the literal. I remember being at a dharma centre in Britain where a woman talking about her practice of Chenrezig. Her practice was to visualise everything as having the form of Chenrezig and she was saying how she felt that she was able now to really transform everything into the actual experience of Chenrezig. She felt

absolutely protected in this because she was simply one form of Chenrezig, and everything was Chenrezig. I asked her a question. I asked her *“How would it be if you were crossing the road and you saw a car coming towards you?”* And she said *“Well if I was to visualise the car as Chenrezig, it couldn’t harm me.”*

I think this is madness. I mean, it is a metaphor. It’s a way of understanding form and emptiness, the illusory nature of things appearing. This sense of the metaphorical play of form and emptiness allows us some space of movement in the world, but it doesn’t take us to this place of omnipotent mastery where simply by visualising something and saying *“Om mani padme hung”* some magical thing happens. I think in that sense, that that woman could have probably done with more fear rather than less, because fear, in a sense, is a remembrance that because of our attachment, loss will be painful. It’s like an early warning bell for suffering. In that way it can be very useful to us, in reminding us to do the practice of opening and relaxing.

I think it is one thing to feel open and relaxed, so that if a car does hit you, you don’t mind so much, because to be alive is to be alive and to die is to die. That would be a kind of recognised dzogchen approach to life, moving towards that kind of openness. But that’s the absolute opposite of saying, *“This car is Chenrezig. It will not hurt me.”* A basic principle is that as long as we are caught up in fantasies of control, we will be vulnerable to fear. Cutting the root of ignorance, by really having a direct experience of open emptiness, is the key point.

FEAR AND PURIFICATION

We also need on a more personal level to link this fear not just with ignorance—just on the abstract structural level of the separation of subject and object, leading into attachment, leading into suffering—but we can also bring it to the particular focus of this weekend which is on purification. From the buddhist point of view all the troubles that we have arise from karma which is generated out of ignorance. This sense of karma is the idea that we have been born many, many, many, many times in the past and each time we have acted with an intentionality derived from subject-object perception. This has created a consequence that goes beyond the immediate result of our action because it creates for us a disposition in the future, a tendency in the future, to have another kind of experience.

KARMA AND SKIING

It’s a bit as if you go skiing on a fresh slope and you spend all day swishing about and you are making all these tracks. That night there is freezing and when you go back the next day, the hill you encounter is somewhat different. The tracks of your past, of yesterday, are now icy and slippery, directing you in particular ways. You may want to just move easily over the slope but every now and then you will catch on a piece of ice on a track that you’d made before and you get drawn into that.

This is very much the experience that we have with karma. The difference is that it's not just one day's skiing that we encounter, it's many, many lifetimes. Also when you are skiing you can at least see the glittering ice tracks in front of you. In our karma we don't. We just go into a situation and we find ourselves drawn in a particular direction. We find ourselves sliding in a particular direction towards someone, or away from someone, and we're not sure why. We're just caught up in something.

In the purification meditation with Dorje Sempa we have to undertake the very difficult work of melting all the snow on the hill.

The first thing that one has to do is to be convinced that it's worth the effort. You might have the idea that, *"Well, I'm very good at skiing. I don't mind how the hill is because I know what I am doing."* You're so identified with the way that you're moving that you think you are in control, meanwhile not noticing that in fact you are slipping down the tracks you'd already written out for yourself. That is to say, you are so identified with your own karmic arising that you fully accept what it is, because it excites you. When that's the case, nothing much is likely to change.

DEVELOPING A SENSE OF REGRET

If you feel some sort of discomfort at what's going on in your life, *"I thought I could ski but I just keep losing balance all the time! I try to be close to people and be loving with them but it always just gets in a mess,"* at that point one might start examining one's own view of oneself. Reflect along the lines that: *"Maybe I am also not so good. Actually many of the things that I have done in my life which seemed to be important and meaningful, were actually subtly deceitful, involving lying and cheating and manipulating others. Through self-interest I may have stolen things, taken other people's partners, done deceitful things in order to get money or power or something else"*. That's really the very important first stage of this practice, to allow yourself to think about your own life and reflect on the various bad things that you have done.

Unless there is a genuine recognition of the evil that one has done and a genuine regret about it then there is no gap between oneself and one's involvement in one's life. One needs to develop a sense of regret. This would cover all sorts of activities including killing—and all of us have probably been involved in killing in one way or another. In order to have nice roses in the garden we may have sprayed the greenfly. In order to protect our clothes we may have used some moth sprays. We may have killed animals or been party to them being killed through eating meat. Even cutting the grass you chop up worms; walking on the street you step on ants. Probably there is no-one in this room who in some way is not implicated in the death of living things.

On one level one can say, *"Well that's just the way life is. I didn't mean to harm them but, you know, that's just a side-effect of being alive."* But then if you walk in the woods and you see little ants walking on a tree they look kind of busy in their own little lives. I don't know what ants think about but I guess

they are all caught up in their own little dreams of Saturday night going out to boogie.

So there's a way in which, if we start to allow ourselves to be respectful to the other living things in the world, then the enormity of the damage that we do by the unaware way that we live, becomes more apparent to us. On the general level we can see that sort of struggle in ecology where some people are prepared to take on the extra work of recycling and others aren't. Either we can put the suffering onto the other or we can take the suffering onto ourselves.

The same thing we can apply to stealing. In the buddhist way of describing it, it is called '*taking what is not given*' so there's a question there of how do we steal things from the world. One way of stealing might be to take more than you need. But how can we work out what we need? Are our needs real or are they simply the indulgence of some selfish desire? There isn't a right or a wrong answer to this thing. But what it does invite us to do is to reflect on our own lives. What is the way in which we live in the world? Do we use the resources available to us in a respectful way or in a contemptuous devouring way?

I want to map out this territory a little bit. What I would like to invite you to do this evening, when you've got a bit of time—you might be walking around or whatever—is just to start to reflect for yourselves on your own lives and what you've been doing up till now and to allow yourself to get in touch with the things that you regret having done. I think one of the things that are important is if you've got events in your life that seems to be quite simple, to reflect on them a bit more and allow them to unpack.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

For example, I have one brother and he's two and a half older than me and I think it was probably very difficult for him when I was born because he then had a rival. As soon as I became conscious I was pretty aware that he was my rival and we fought all through our childhood. At certain points he left home to go off and do some things and I was very happy. It was only quite some years later that I started to remember all the different kinds of nasty things that I had done to him; hitting him with stones, pushing him off a wall, cutting his bicycle tyres.... It's in the details of the daily nastiness of these kind of relationships that sinful things or harmful or limiting things arise. Usually I may think, "*Well I don't get on with my bother, I never have,*" and that will be that. But if I go back and look into the details of it, it was actually a terribly hateful battle that we lived through. I think it's very important to think about your relationships—with your parents, with teachers, with friends, when you were small, with lovers, with whomever—and go into the details of them and try to remember particular incidents. What you did and how you responded. So often, when we are caught up in an emotional reaction to someone, we are blind on a cognitive level, on a thinking level; we're just 'in there'. What we need to do is to get back in touch with the affect, with the emotion that was

involved in these situations, and experience being able to reflect on the structure of it as well, what we were doing, why we felt we were doing it.

There's always a reason. We are not concerned here with a justification, or even a psychoanalytic interpretation of why things have occurred. Rather, get back in touch with the powerful, blind emotions that were driving us into actions which were unhelpful for ourselves and for others. It is these deep emotional experiences where we were just caught up in something that continue inside us—like these ski tracks, very slippery polished slopes which when again we hit a similar situation we just whoosh down....

Because we have been taking the other person as strongly real, as separate from ourselves—for example, me hating my brother—there was no space inside that for me to be relaxed and playful with him. That intense locked relationship which I had with him was blocking any capacity of mine to relax and open. In that way it became an attack on awareness. But also in the intensity of hating him, and feeling that he always got more than me, and always being angry that he was bigger and stronger, I could only see him as the enemy, frightened of him yet trying to destroy him at the same time. In that space it was impossible to feel any love or compassion because it was a situation in which I fixed him as 'the enemy'. Being locked into that situation was an attack on any capacity I had to develop compassion. To my friends I could be friendly and generous, but to my brother I was always thinking resentfully, *"Why should I do that for you?"*

We see these fixed patterns happening in racism, in sexism, in family feuds, in fixed positions where you feel somebody has hurt you and you can never make a gesture of forgiveness towards them. That is to say, by our definition of the situation, or our definition of who this person is. We become so addicted to our definition, so believing it, that we can't move forward to reframe things, to see them from a different point of view. That is what blocks the open responsiveness which is the real nature of compassion. Compassion is not forcing ourselves to like someone we don't like; rather, it's allowing ourselves to find an openness to all that is likeable, in the people that we tend not to like.

OUR POTENTIAL FOR GREAT CRUELTY

So I would encourage you to reflect on your own lives and things that you have done that you are aware of. Of course, from a buddhist point of view, we've all had many, many previous lives, so part of it is allowing ourselves to imagine—not as a literal truth, not trying to create some false-memory syndrome, but as a metaphorical exploration—that we have done many different things in past lives. From the buddhist point of view we are infinite, and what we know of ourselves in this life is just a tiny bit of what we are. It's just the very tip, tip of the iceberg.

If we are moving into a practice of purification I think it can be useful to allow ourselves to imagine that in past lives we have murdered, we have tortured, we have raped, we have been any kind of creature. If, in this life, we have not

done many bad things, that may not be due to the fact that we are very good people but rather, that we have been fortunate to be born in an environment which has supported us.

When we think of the people in Rwanda at the moment who are cutting off other peoples' faces with machetes, are they any worse than us? Do we have the same potential? If we were given that freedom might we act in that way under those circumstances? How would we have behaved in 1937 in Germany? Would we have been able to resist or would we have got caught up in the group madness and found ourselves doing bad things? Reflecting on past lives, and the enormity of the possibilities of things we could have done, is one way of making ourselves more aware of the potential that we all have; for great kindness and for great cruelty.

FOUR STAGES OF KARMA: DUALITY; INTENTION; ACTION; SATISFACTION

The four stages of karma are absolutely vital for thinking about this.

The first stage is called the base and the base means 'I am in the world and the world is separate from me'. It's basically the subject-object situation. I am in my body looking out at the world.

With the separation of subject and object there comes an intention towards the world. That's the second stage, the intention. Through me being in my body looking out I see something, and I can see something that I like or I can see something that I don't like. I'll give an example based on desire—though the intention can be coloured by any of the five poisons or further afflictions. Here I've got a glass. I see this glass and I like this glass, and in liking this glass I develop the intention to have this glass. The intention is moving from an interest in something towards an appropriative intention, towards a situation in which I want to have control over the object.

The third stage is when the intention links up to the formulating of a plan of how I am going to get the object. I've now taken this glass, and my plan is that I'm going to put this in my bag when I leave Frankfurt tomorrow. Sometime, when people aren't around I'll just put it in my papers and take it, and put it in my bag, and then it's in my bag. That's the third stage, which is the enactment. In Tibetan the word for this enactment is or *jyor wa* [sbyor wa]. *Jor wa* is the same word for copulation, for sex, because it's the point at which my thought, my intention, meets the world. It moves from being a fantasy into being an actual enactment. I've joined my fantasy, my thought, with the world. They are engaged together.

The fourth stage is I'm on the plane and I look at my bag and I think, "*Hey, that's good I've got this glass. When I get home I'll fill it with whisky and have a good time.*" This fourth stage is a stage of completion in which I am fully in agreement with the satisfactory outcome of my intention.

Should these four aspects of duality; intention; action; and satisfaction be in place, then from the Tibetan point of view, you get the maximum karmic

impact. You've put your energy in a particular direction and you have carried it right through. You've completed something. You've set up a positive feedback cycle; stealing is good, so you feel affirmed in that.

REDUCING THEIR KARMIC CONSEQUENCES

However, when I'm on the plane I might recognise I've stolen something and think, "*Shit, what kind of a cheap German glass is this?! What did I want this for?*" I may feel some regret. I've done something; I've stolen something from a buddhist centre. What was the point? It's as if I were in a bubble and at the last moment I wakened up saying, "*Uh, that was a bad thing I did!*" Thinking this way reduces the intensity of the karmic consequence. It would be as if in the night a light fall of snow had come and gently covered over some of the tracks.

I can also reduce it on the third stage; when I take up the glass and I'm going through to put it into my bag. I might put it into my bag and then think, "*This is stupid.*" and decide to put it back. So, in that way, instead of the thought being carried on to the object into the world, the thought is then pulled back and the object's left there.

I can also block it on the second level, and remember these three stages of the second level: the interest, the developing attachment and then the planning. I can stop it at the level of planning, saying, "*This is stupid. I don't want to do this. This is nonsense.*" I can stop it at the second level in terms of an appropriative attachment to it, where I am starting to think "*Well, actually this could be my glass,*" and because I am using it all the time, it starts to feel like mine.

You often see that with small children when they go and play at a friend's house and they are playing with that car. They've played with it all afternoon and it feels like their car now. When they go, they are holding it in their hand. It's letting go on that level.

The first part of the second stage is the interest. This is a very, very important point: whether we can allow ourselves to be interested in the objects of the world, to have an open æsthetic appreciation of them, without moving into the second stage which is the desire to appropriate them.

In the hinayana tradition it is said that the world is a very dangerous place full of very tempting objects, and so one has to renounce the world and act as if all these things that are actually very interesting weren't interesting at all. But I think the important thing is to explore being interested in things, without going into a desire to have them. Then we can fully open to the world, to the richness of the world, and enjoy it without trying to carry it forward into the next moment so that we will have it, so that we stop ourselves moving into a paradigm of 'having', and try to stay with the openness of 'being with'.

These three stages can be done by anyone, christians, moslems, everybody can have a moral struggle not to be greedy and bad in the world. The

particular contribution of buddhism lies in the first stage and its analysis. In this first stage, one is dealing with the way in which subject-object perception arises. From the buddhist point of view, subject and object aren't given, it's not that everybody is just born into the world as a separate being, but rather that this sense of subject and object are constructs which are maintained by us actively, following the first experience of ignorance. The way in which one can deal with stages two, three and four is by an effortful struggle not to succumb to negative tendencies.

The first stage can only really be dealt with through meditation. You can't do it through a conscious struggle because the one who is consciously struggling, is the separate ego identity, which is part of the basic problem. This is why we have to do this sort of dissolving meditation in which we try to get in touch with the moment at which subject and object come together and open into the open awareness through which the world manifests. Through this experience, the world is ourselves. We are not outside observing impermanence — I can see that the seasons change, I can see that the sun is starting to set, I can see these things; 'I', in here looking out, seeing everything — rather, this is the total flow of the self-revelation of the world, and I am part of that flow. This is the way that the first stage is purified.

Sunday

REFUGE AND PROSTRATIONS

Everyone slept well? Here we are ready for another day. Gyamtso is printing copies of the first part of the basic Ngöndro text which we will work on today so once we have these, we can start doing the refuge and bodhicitta and Dorje Sempa together.

PROSTRATING

First of all I want to say something about prostrations in general and show you the normal way that it's done. Making prostrations is an Asian social custom. It is performed in India, in China, in most south-east Asian countries and you can see from examples in medieval European art that it was also a European custom. Obviously it symbolises a surrender of the body. When you see dogs fighting and one of the dogs is defeated, if it's two male dogs, the male dog that's been defeated will usually turn over and expose its belly and genitals to be ripped by the other. Clearly, if you lie down and prostrate yourself in front of someone they could stick a sword through the back of your neck quite easily, so it's a very open and exposed gesture of surrender.

Traditionally it takes place between someone of lower status and someone of higher status. It's both something that somebody who has been defeated by the other, may do as a way of accepting that the other has power over them. It is also a sign of respect whereby someone may want to elevate the other person, and say, "*I accept you as having a superior set of qualities to myself.*" I think both of these elements are in play in making prostrations. One is both

indicating respect towards the buddhas and the dharma and all the other associated factors, but it's also an invitation from a state of powerlessness for the other to come and take care of one.

We need to think about the significance of this. How safe it is for us as individuals to surrender some of our ordinary ways of thinking and coping with the world in order to progress? We are faced with a paradox. I think everything in the dharma and everything in life is a paradox! In order to shift out of our usual egocentric desire to control and place things, we need to open. In order to get free of this busy mind that's constructing and containing we need to relax it—to drop it, as they say in Zen—in order to accept a merging with something that's operating on a different level.

And yet all of us are probably caught up in various kinds of self-destructive behaviour. A certain degree of masochism runs through most people. The thing about masochists is that although they may appear to be the victim they are actually the controller of the situation. In the name of being punished or being controlled by the other, one actually ends up being quite in control. So I think we have to be aware for ourselves of ways in which the desire to surrender, to open, can also be quite perverse.

Instead of the opening and the surrendering, being one that actually allows the other to transform us, it can become a way of manipulating the other to our own end, which is primarily that of being the holy victim. We have to remember that it's the masochist that instructs the sadist in how to give them the pain they need.

In going to various dharma centres I have come across people who have been in the dharma for some time, and they say, *"Oh when I started I was with this teacher and I got these initiations, and then I had some difficulty in that and so I went to this other teacher, and I have now so many vows and so many commitments of things that I should do that I find it very difficult to do them all. So, every time I manage to sit down and do some meditation I am consumed with guilt for all the things I haven't done."* I think this is an exquisite spiritual masochism. Christians used a hair shirt and beat themselves, Tibetans use broken vows. Because it's invisible, the pain is just that much more enjoyable.

We have to be very careful not to enter this nonsense. We have to believe that the Buddha taught these things in order to help people, and that everything we do has the principle of understanding more running through it, so that we can relax more, open more, and then respond with compassion towards others. That basic principle for me is like a lighthouse, guiding me through all the complexities of study and practice.

If you take up a basic intention like that, which I think is really what being enlightened means, then one has to carefully manage this question of opening with respect for oneself and respect for others. You can link it with what I was saying yesterday when I was encouraging you to think about things that you've done that have been harmful to yourself and harmful to

others. The purpose of this reflection is not to take you into a state of feeling bad in order simply just to cook and gently stew in it, but to use it as a transformational activity which would be a buddhist kind of practice.

USING HOPE AND FEAR

The set of five practices which are called the *ngöndro*, the preliminary practices, are: taking refuge, developing this altruistic attitude to help others, offering the mandala as a way of developing generosity and selflessness, meditating on Dorje Sempa in order to purify oneself and have a freer sense of being, and meditation on the guru in order to gain an experience of openness inside the complexity of life.

All of these five stages, which we'll go through in some detail, are driven by a double pulse. They are driven by fear and by hope, and by making use of both fear and hope they are a way of transforming the very basis of fear and hope.

You have to remember that in the path of tantra one is always trying to make use of whatever is arising in order to transform it, so that nothing is so dangerous or so seductive that it has to be avoided, but in making use of these things, we have to use them in a way that transforms them rather than reasserts the old patterns that we have around them. We can take up an attitude of fear and through that become more frightened. That wouldn't be very helpful.

However at the beginning of the practice, as we'll see, we start with some reflection on the sufferings of samsara, and then reflect on the nature of karma and how difficult it is to free oneself. And then we think about the rarity of the opportunity of practising the dharma, and then finally, thinking about impermanence and death, we recognise how little time we have actually to make any shift.

If people don't want to change and don't really want to do something with their lives then the dharma is really not very helpful to them. Otherwise reflections on sufferings in the hells and all the rest of it return us to some kind of medieval world of fear, and it's not very helpful to make people feel guilty and bad if they don't actually want to take the responsibility to do something to change their situation. I think that's one of the reasons why buddhism is not evangelical. You don't get people out on street corners saying, "*Come to the Buddha, he will take away all your sins, etc. etc. etc.*"

Although I was talking about magic yesterday in the four functions around the mandala, buddhism doesn't have the sense of instant magic which christianity does: if you accept Christ as your saviour then "Bang!" you've got a place in heaven. It's not about being special or one of the elect or having your name written in the Great Book of Truth, like having a diplomatic passport. Rather, it's that in thinking about the difficulties of the world, we have to actually engage in a way that will make a difference.

What we make use of are the dharma methods. Everything that we do becomes a method for transforming the limitations that we are ordinarily operating under so that we can be more open and responsive. The intention is to be open in order to be available for others. To respond to others is a mahayana or compassionate aim, which means that it doesn't go back to the foreclosure of *'I want to become a special person. I need to attain this just for myself.'*

When we go to take refuge, basically we are trying to have a sense of the hope and the potential of the dharma, some belief that we can move beyond the restrictions that we live under, and that the dharma and the Buddha and the sangha represent this. But this hope is also reinforced by the fear that if we don't make use of this brief opportunity then again we'll simply get caught up in our usual worldly business and that will condemn us to endless suffering. So in making a physical prostration one is both showing respect and also yearning to escape from something that is very, very dangerous. Prostrations have developed in the Tibetan tradition as a particular way of doing this.

Another way in which respect is shown and refuge is taken is through circumambulation, whereby people walk around stupas, Stupas, or in Tibetan *chorten*, are built in a range of styles and sizes. When Buddha Shakyamuni died his remains were put in eight containers and eight stupas built to house them. This tradition continues to the present day when stupas house sacred texts, statues, the ashes and relics of lamas and other holy objects. It was a practice that was also done for kings. It was very normal to walk around the king in a solar way to represent the glory and majesty of the royal position. So although it's not the formal tradition, if bending down is going to be very difficult, I think it would be fine just to put up a statue of the Buddha and go around this saying the refuge prayer. Better this than, if you have very painful joints, turning prostrations into a torture. It's not for torture; it's in order to open the heart to be more available.

IMPORTANCE OF LINEAGE IN TANTRA

If you're coming from a culture where you have the Bible or the Quran or the Torah, this may have some difficulties for you, since what is very important in the tantric tradition is lineage. Each person who comes into it comes in, not through a relation to just one book, but through a particular transmission of interpretation and understanding.

In Tibet there are probably at least ten thousand different Dorje Sempa practices. The basic mantras will be the same but the prayers and the way the visualisation is presented will be slightly different—one can see various historical reasons for that. Buddhism came into Tibet in dribs and drabs through various passes over the Himalayas, the only way of transport was by foot, so going from valley to valley was always a long journey- but it also means there's a lack of standardisation. Another aspect is that it means that from time to time people have had an inspiration, they've had some vision or

some sense of something of value and they have manifested that in the world. And so it's taken up as a new practice.

One way of thinking about it would be to think about early European art and a theme like 'the death of Acteon'. In European art there are so many of such themes, repeated again and again but according to different artistic schools, where each atelier would take up a different style, use different pigments. If you had been an apprentice painter in renaissance Italy and then you had travelled to Germany, although people might respect the art you did, they couldn't really have you working together with them on a painting because your way of going about it would be very, very different.

And that's pretty much how it should be between practitioners. One respects other people who are doing a similar practice but it's difficult to do it with them if you are in a particular lineage. There is both connection and disjunction around this multiplicity of practices.

NGÖNDRO FROM THE LINEAGE OF NUDEN DORJE

This practice comes from Nuden Dorje. His full name is Nuden Dorje Dropen Lingpa Drolo Tsal and he was the first incarnation of Chimed Rigdzin. Nuden Dorje himself was a reincarnation of Kyeuchung Lotsawa. Kyeuchung Lotsawa was one of the twenty-five main disciples of Padma Sambhava when Padma Sambhava was in Tibet. There are no paintings of it here but a common thangka is Guru Rinpoche or Padma Sambhava in the middle with the twenty-five disciples around him. One of them you will see holding a bird in his hand and this indicates that one of the things that Kyeuchung Lotsawa was able to do from his meditation was to call birds down from the sky. In a sense you could see that as symbolising a freedom over thoughts since thoughts are what fly in the sky.

TERMA

This text is what's called a *terma* text or a treasure text. You can tell it's a treasure text because at the end of the line, when you see these Tibetan lines at the very end, it's got two little circles one above the other. This is a text that has been discovered by someone. It has not just been written because someone wanted to compose a text. If it was done like that, then there would be a straight line coming down to mark the end of the line.

What this means, in saying that this is a treasure text, is that at the time when Padma Sambhava was in Tibet he gave teachings both publicly and more privately to a particular group of disciples. He gave them in particular to these twenty-five disciples, to an inner group of eight disciples, and to five disciples. In giving these teachings, he said to them that in future times *"You will be reborn in times of difficulty when the dharma in Tibet is not prospering well, and at that time I will give you a sign whereby you can remember these texts"*.

Then, it's said, he hid some texts in the air, some in water, some in stone. He hid them in caves, in crystals. He also hid keys for the texts, which could be a

scratching on a wall, it could be a particular shaped stone, it could be a small text, it could be many different things. Then at a later time someone would find this key and become aware that there was something of significance hovering around it. They themselves may be able to use that to find the terma, or they may pass it on to someone else who was able to make use of that to find the terma. Then the terma would be revealed.

It could be that it was found in a written form and the person who revealed it then made a commentary on it; or it could be that they found just one small symbol or syllable, and out of that the whole text arose for them. Because the texts, when they were hidden originally, they were always written in a particular script which was not the ordinary Tibetan language script, but is called *khandro da'i yigé*. It's a symbolic language of the dakinis. A 'dakini' is a particular aspect of femininity in the widest sense, really a sort of æsthetic movement of communication—the way that things get linked up in the world, and brought together, and brought into richness and fecundity.

So, having found the text, the person who found it was usually called a *terton*, somebody who shows or reveals this treasure. The terton would practise it for some time, and then teach it, very often only teaching one person in their own lifetime. Although the feminine principle and female deities are very important in Tibetan buddhism, among the close disciples of Guru Rinpoche there was really only one woman, Yeshe Tsogyal, so most of the treasures that were found later, were found by men.

VIDYADHARA GURU SADHANA²

This particular text was discovered about a hundred and twenty, a hundred and thirty years ago, and in structure it's a fairly standard, basic ngöndro text.

So if you would like to read on this bit that's starting at *kye ma* and read on to the bottom of page 3 and see if you have any questions arising from that because there's a lot of commentary in it.

Questioner: Does it mean that all people that don't practise dharma will not be reborn as human beings any more?

James: In the traditional idea, with the six realms, with the gods at the top and the humans in the middle there are more pleasant places to be than to be human. To be in a god-realm is much more pleasant, but it has less opportunity for change, so a human birth requires, you know, according to the

² This sadhana has also now been published, with a commentary by James. *Being Guru Rinpoche: A Commentary on Nuden Dorje's terma Vidyadhara Guru Sadhana*. Edition Khordong (Trafford's, 2006) ISBN: 1412084075.
<http://www.khordong.de/Engl/Edition/bgr.html>

idea of the five poisons, that in order to be born as a human being you have to have a lot of desire and a lot of pride. And on the basis of that particular disposition, one can have desire to get something better and a pride that one is able to get something better. Again, I think if we understand this text as method, what it's saying is like the expression in English "*Pull your finger out!*" which is rather impolite. It means 'Get on with it—you don't have any time to waste.'

In one sense, it's at this level it's a dharma teaching for village people. It's not that different from two hundred years ago, when all over Europe you had these wandering protestant ministers who would be shouting at people to waken up and turn to God. People like to be shouted at because they get very excited as well. So if it works as a method to shake us up and make us want to do something, then it's very helpful.

Whether or not it's an actual proper description of the way the universe is structured I don't know, it's more a cultural motif perhaps. I would have great difficulty defending this kind of view in terms of astronomy and what we know about probability. But nonetheless it is a heuristic device. It exists in order to explain and open up the possibility of having something new.

Yesterday we walked a bit in this forest park where we could see all these very many insects, if you looked at the earth. One square metre of earth, if you dig down a metre, you have thousands and thousands of things bugging about. If you imagine that these are sentient beings with the same basic potential as us, then we can see that most beings are not in the human realm at all.

Read these six lines once when you are doing this ngöndro practice. At first, until you're familiar with them, it's worth reading them very slowly, pausing after each line, and allowing yourself to contemplate them. By contemplation, I mean something different from meditation. Contemplation means taking up the ideas and thinking about them in quite a discursive way so that your thoughts go out and make links between the meaning in the lines and experiences in your own life, or things you've read about, so that you're able to have a wide-ranging reflection on the meaning of the lines.

These lines, apart from the first one which has the additional *kye ma* at the beginning, are nine-syllable lines. Tibetan language is a bit like Turkish. It's a sort of quasi-agglutinative language, which is to say that it's made up of morphemes which also carry their own discrete semantic content, so that each sound that's being represented represents a meaning. By the juxtaposition of these various sound-meaning particles, words and phrases are built up. It's a very beautiful language, so if you are interested at all in learning it, I would thoroughly recommend it. It's a lot of fun.

When you are chanting this or reciting it, the rhythm is in nine syllables, basically one-two, one-two, one-two, one-two-three. Not particularly difficult. So one starts with the *kye ma*:³

KYE MA...: THE FOUR REFLECTIONS

KYE MA RIN CHEN LUE DI U DUM VA RA TAR

NYE KA CHI NAE...

and just allow yourself to reflect on that meaning.

Then we go on to the refuge and bodhicitta. It's a particular way that we do these generalised reflections. Then life surprises us, because one way of thinking about a lot of the dharma practice is to be shocked out of something rather than to go into something. First of all it's to be shocked out of samsara in the crudest way of waking up and seeing there's another possibility. And then, at a more subtle level, one can use these various techniques to shock oneself out of these assumptive ruts, these paths, so that one's into a more open space.

There's always this possibility in the methods. One is to simply leap out of whatever one's in and be somewhere else. The other is to develop a particular goal, to develop a clear intentional aim towards it and then try to move in that direction. These possibilities suit different kinds of people and at different times in our lives. Sometimes we need the security of an aim-directed activity, and sometimes we need the shock of just being displaced in some way.

In this visualisation you've got the short paragraph and then you've got four lines. These four lines spell out the visualisation. Now, visualisation meditation is a way of allowing ourselves to have a relationship with an object which exists on the level of effective interaction with us just as intense as in an ordinary way. But, at the same time, the essence or the nature of this object is empty.

In the buddhist analysis, when one starts to look into the nature of the basic building-blocks of the world, one finds that they are juxtaposed in a way which points to their relativity. And through this one starts to see that although they appear to be absolute building-blocks, they are actually moments in a play—an illusory play—where a precise existing phenomena is actually a surface consequence of a wave. Underneath that, when you take everything down as a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*, you find that each juxtaposition, each play, then reduces to another level of a juxtaposition of play and you never come to a final point. There's just a movement out into just openness.

³ On page 42 of *Being Guru Rinpoche*

So there's this open dimension, in Sanskrit it's '*sunyata*', Tibetan '*tong pa*', emptiness, openness, and from this openness form arises. And you can see this three-stage movement where there's an open dimension, out of which energy arises into a particular structure. Energy on the level of this structuring gives rise to the surface phenomena. That's on a conceptual level—you can see how the mahayana critique of the hinayana notion of definite entities gives rise to this idea of the three kayas.

This is a juxtaposition of lots of technical terms and it actually means a lot, but slowly, slowly you get an idea of what the words mean. So what this is opening up is the possibility of an open dimension. Later, when we come into tantra this open dimension is taken as the starting point. In the abhidharma buddhist system of analysis it is the end result, but it's the starting point of tantra.

RANG DUN...: REFUGE AND BODHICITTA

RANG DUN CHOE YING PADMA NYI DAI TENG

Rang dun means 'in front of me' and *choe ying* means this open dimension of space which we usually visualise as a beautiful summer's blue sky, vast, in front of us. *Choe ying*: *choe* here means phenomena, anything that could possibly occur any place and *ying* means an open dimension or spaciousness. It has the sense of infinity, but a rich infinity as the place in which phenomena come into being and pass out of being. That's why, if you look around at these thangkas, generally in the background you have the sense of this sky.

Out of the openness of the sky and the precise formulation of the hills and the lakes of our context, the deity arises as a linking signifier. This is the middle level of the structural formulation, or *sambhogakaya*. So whenever we are visualising the sky in this way we should try to have a sense of openness. You can do the visualisation with your eyes open or your eyes closed. If you are beginning this I would recommend you just experiment a few times and see what's easiest for you. Just allow yourself to relax into yourself, imagine yourself very, very relaxed, and you are on top of a mountain, and you are looking at this vast blue open sky, and then just maybe opening your eyes and keeping that sense of vastness in front of you, gently allow whatever you are trying to visualise to manifest in front of you.

For some people visualising is very easy. Some people can just close their eyes and see their friends' faces very clearly, or see where they went to school. They have a very, very visual memory, and if that's the case for you, then it's good luck because that helps you a lot in doing this kind of practice. But if you don't have that facility and you find that if you close your eyes you don't really see very much, and when you are trying to visualise something you don't have the sense of it, then it's very important to relax and not try to push yourself. One can do the practice through perception, but you can also do it through feeling.

If the visualisation is not very clear what you have to do is to allow yourself to go into the feelings and just imagine for yourself that something that you really admire and adore is there in front of you, so that the visualisation is arising out of your heart, rather than struggling to do something with your head.

In front of you, you imagine that there is a lotus, and you can see that most deities are standing on a lotus, and the lotus is sometimes a pink lotus, or it can be lotuses in the five colours, In a sense that's up to you how complex or simple you want to make it. I think it's important to have some freedom to allow your own imagination to elaborate this for yourself. It says a lotus sun and moon disc. In most of these you see the white surface that's like the moon disc. So there's a lotus, and underneath you just see the golden edge of the sun disc and on top of that the moon disc.

This is the lotus of purity or emptiness which carries on top of it the sun of wisdom and the moon of compassion. Sitting on top of this is Padma Jungne. The text it says 'Pema Jung', it's because they ran out of syllables in the verse, so it's shortened to Padma Jung. *Pema* or *Padma* means lotus. *Jungnay* is his name, *Jung* means to arise, and *nay* means to play. So it's 'born from a lotus', that's what this person's name means. So this figure, who is also called Guru Rinpoche, or in Sanskrit, Padma Sambhava, whom you see as the main statue here on the altar, when we say he is born from a lotus it means he arises out of emptiness. We have to remember that lotus is also a very common symbol for the vagina and so, in a sense, it is born out of emptiness but also the possibility of being a human being.

Padma Sambhava introduced tantric buddhism into Tibet and in that way he is the founder of the *nyingma* lineage. Nyingma means 'old' or 'ancient', and it refers to traditions that started back with Padma Sambhava in the seventh and eighth centuries. This text is a *terma* text that belongs inside his lineage, so he is the main focus of refuge here. He represents the fully-enlightened mind with its necessary corollary of fully responsive compassion. He is described as being *kyab kun dag nyid*. He is the 'essence or the embodiment of all the refuges'.

If you focus on Padma Sambhava, all the other deities in whom you could take refuge, are contained inside him. The dharma books which would represent all the teachings of the Buddha are contained in him. The sangha, all those who are following the dharma are contained in him. He is the essence of these because his mind is the Buddha, his speech is the dharma and his body is the sangha. And I would suggest that you just focus on this one image of Padma Sambhava. If your visualisation gets very clear and you want more details we can do that another time, but I think just focusing on this one thing will be enough for most people.

Then the third line represents the eight forms of Padma Sambhava who have attained all these wonderful enlightened powers, and many, many *vidyadharas*, and these are all gathered around him. I think, at first, if you just imagine around Guru Rinpoche, around this figure of Padma Sambhava, rays of rainbow light, that is enough to encompass all these other beings. If you

want some descriptions of the eight forms there are pictures of them in the large text but I would really say don't confuse yourselves. I think it's much better to have one thing that's simple and clear and you feel competent about and you are able to do that, rather than have a huge mass of stuff where you get overwhelmed and you keep feeling you are making mistakes.

The fourth line says 'visualising this very clearly'. Just keep it very simple. Later it can become very complicated.

So when you are doing this, you just read these four lines through once. We have this refuge verse and tagged on to it is a one-line bodhicitta or development of compassion.

We're imagining in a vast blue sky in front of us, on this lotus, Guru Rinpoche, rays of rainbow-coloured light around him and he's looking at us and he's smiling. He's very pleased. He represents our own potential. He is the living expression of the buddha-nature that we have. In a sense, in looking at him it's like looking into a mirror and we see our own potential and that helps to awaken us to unfold, not as clones of him, not as if we are going to turn out like him, but by finding the spontaneity, and freedom of being, that he possesses.

We say:

NA MO DAG DANG THA YAE SEM CHEN GYI

'I and all sentient beings', and in particular, we imagine in front of us all our enemies, behind us all our friends, on the right side our father and all the males, on the left side our mother and all the females, so we imagine that all of us are making prostrations together so that the whole world is going to find itself. The very structure of this practice, by including all beings, is not separating us off as special or different in some way, but is saying all together we get this wonderful benefit.

All of us go for refuge to:

LU MED KYAB NAE NAM LA KYAB SU CHI

All the unfailing, uncheating places of refuge. Many people promise to save you. Many, many, many, many people—Muktananda, Rajneesh, Jesus Christ, Mohammed—so many, many people say, "*Come to me and I'll make it okay.*" But somehow, somebody else going to save us can actually make us more vulnerable because we can hand over responsibility for our lives through that. What one's trying to do here is to use our dependence, our feelings of longing for someone to take care of us, to use that as a way to really get into the meditation, and that's the important first part of it. So that we can go into the second part of the meditation where the Guru Rinpoche, whom we've taken refuge in, comes to us and dissolves into us. Then we go into ourselves and find our real nature.

PROSTRATIONS

If you are reciting this with prostrations you usually end up saying it quite fast, once you get into the rhythm of the prostrations.

For those of you who want to do prostrations: what you have to do is do the visualisation up in front of you. First of all, put your hands at your forehead and then at your throat and then at your heart. The forehead represents the body and speech and the mind and these represent the totality of our being. So we are saying, "*With my body, my speech, and my mind, I am going for refuge.*" Usually you hold your fingers slightly open because you imagine that inside your hand you are holding a wish-fulfilling gem. Just as if you went to somebody's house for dinner you might take them some flowers or some wine or something, so we also offer this wish-fulfilling gem, this wonderful thing, to Guru Rinpoche, to the refuge.

So we do it like this and then you go down on the ground which you can do in various ways, but throwing yourself down is not very good, until you have done at least two hundred thousand, then you can do throwing! Before then you get too big an ego as well as broken knees. You can also do a half prostration. In India they often make a wooden board to do it on. The wood gets very polished so you can go up and down quite quickly. It's not an attack on the body.

Ordinarily, if you are sitting very quietly in meditation, it's a bit like a research chemical laboratory where everything can be very, very precisely contained and directed, but what you can do there is difficult to do in your kitchen. So, when you do this kind of dynamic meditation it's more like an industrial chemical laboratory, which is very messy and noisy and a different place altogether. It's like a halfway house between a very finely-tuned research situation and the messiness of ordinary life because you find yourself getting tired or you might hurt yourself a bit or you get bored doing it and you think "*God, how many have I done?*" All sorts of thoughts come to the surface: sad thoughts, selfish thoughts, self-pitying thoughts. So, in that way, it's a very, very good way of cooking up your own *karma* and letting you see a bit more who you are and you know what you are into, what your commitment is. It's actually going for refuge, and getting blocked on the way by your own self-indulgence.

On a practical level, if you are doing the full-length prostrations, you'd usually have a long mala with a hundred and eleven beads extended in front of you and every time you go down you move a bead along, so if you are doing prostrations it helps if your mala has quite a big gap between the beads. If your health and your time permits, it I think it is very useful to put aside maybe one week to do a lot and to do about two thousand a day because then you really get a different experience. It's okay to do a hundred a day or fifty a day or at the weekend doing some more, but if you really get into an intensive immersion in it, you get a different kind of experience.

Lunch break

Okay. Now we are going to go for lunch and this involves a particularly difficult kind of meditation because, as these offering dakinis bring the plates towards the table, at that moment you have to use all your tantric visualisation power to increase the aroma, to increase the beauty of the plate. And a little soy sauce! And we start back at three.

There are many many different practices in Tibetan buddhism, even inside this lineage from Chhimed Rigdzin. Altogether there will be a thousand different practices you can do!

Now, I think at first it is important just to do something very simple and basic. Later you can elaborate that according to your own desire in terms of what you are drawn towards.

SHORT RIGDZIN PRACTICE

Last time I was here I gave a brief commentary on the short practice of Padma Sambhava, and those who would like to hear about it could listen to the tapes or read the transcript⁴. It has many advantages. Firstly you may have met the person who has the main connection with it, Chhimed Rigdzin, and through that have connection with the practice.

These practices work on two levels. One is the level of the meaning and one's effort to understand the nature of the practice according to the words, and move in the direction of the visualisation that's established by the words. The second aspect is the quality of transformational energy which can be contacted through doing the practice.

One of the things that I have been suggesting is that that moves in two directions. One direction is the element of support and prediction and reassurance, so that you have a daily practice that you become familiar with and you know where you are; and the second is the movement of confusion, disturbance and doubt. So if your prime focus on the first movement, the second movement seems like something horrible, some awful mistake has come. How can you get rid of it?

[Something you can do is] take doubt up in a creative way as a kind of sandpaper, a saw edge, that is cutting through the bland veneer of our desire for reassurance, to know who we are, to be masters and all the rest of it, and open up the raw edge of a being that will be touched by the world. In many ways that is a position that C.R. Lama, Chhimed Rigdzin, takes up very well. He is often, for many people, a disturbing factor. He said things or did things which are difficult to understand on a conceptual level. And at that point one can say, *"He doesn't fit inside my schema or meaning. He's doesn't make sense!"* Or one can allow some of the confusion that's around to have a

⁴ See Ngondro1

meaning and then start chewing with it, thinking, “*Well, why did that happen? What did that mean?*” Through that engagement of doubt and confusion there’s a possibility of a movement. I think there’s a danger that I’m starting to sound like a warm-up band at some kind of gig! I think you have to work that one out for yourselves.

The other advantage of this Short Rigdzin text is that it is indeed short and that you can do it in half an hour or quicker. You could do it in ten minutes. You could do it in half an hour with some time to attend to the meditation. The thing about a text like this is that you can use it in all sorts of different ways. If you get used to it you might want to use it just like a teddy bear. You’ve been out in the world and you’ve had a bad day, so you take your little text and... “*Make me feel better...*” That’s one way, and why not? Faith!

However, the thing about this practice is that it contains all the essential elements of a tantric practice. Simple visualisation: visualisation of the deity outside yourself, visualisation of yourself as the deity. It also has inside it some very, very important prayers including the Seven-line Prayer to Padma Sambhava which, inside the *nyingma* tradition, is regarded as one of the most profound hooks for hooking down, for pulling towards you, the power and the blessing of Guru Rinpoche.

And it has the dissolving part in the meditation in which one can use the practice to connect with the more open dimension of one’s being. In that way it’s a very powerful transformatory tool that helps people gain a profound connection back to themselves.

Connecting with the dharma is important, but as long as the dharma exists as if it was something outside yourself it can always slip away. We have to remember that the Buddha taught these things to help beings, not to create disciples of the Buddha. There is something quite perverse in human nature, a story that repeats itself again and again, in which some person experiences themselves as being constrained, as being tied and limited by a particular situation. They struggle with enormous energy to break through and get to a place of freedom. Having achieved that, other people become interested in what they’ve achieved, start to idealise them, and then, after twenty years, the person who found some freedom is stuck as being a guru in a tiny little box with all sorts of dependent disciples who become mindless slaves.

FIND FREEDOM AND DON’T GET STUCK

This is the story of Freud, of Jung, even in many ways of Shakyamuni Buddha. Understanding that general principle, we need to make sure that we align ourselves towards the initial goal, which is to find some freedom, so that my freedom doesn’t become a cause of somebody else’s dependence and loss of freedom. So, at every dharma centre, every setting where people meet together, the question of freedom—respect for each other, awareness about what contributions people make, gratitude for that—all that is enormously important.

So for those people who want to have a daily practice, this Short Rigdzin practice is very, very useful. If I was a Tibetan, I would say you *must* do this practice. I am a western hippy democrat, and I say it's up to you, because in the end you have to do it. Doing things because you have a developed superego function which punishes you and makes you feel guilty, is not a particularly liberated way of being. I, personally, would always say never trust anyone who says they'll take your responsibility and carry it for you, because whatever carries us is going to dump us in the shit sooner or later, whether it's alcohol, drugs, the special beloved or the guru.

MAKE USE OF THE GURU

If you hand yourself over to another, by definition you can only be lost. One has to turn it around: one makes use of the guru in order to help oneself be helpful to others. Gurus have made a commitment to be useful, and all the corruption that happens around gurus is because they forget that their primary concern is to take care of others, and they start thinking about themselves.

Through doing a Short Rigdzin practice like this one, one makes use of the visualisation of Guru Rinpoche, and through that— included in Guru Rinpoche is the essence of all the teachers you've ever had, your primary school teachers, your parents— is anybody who has ever helped you to learn anything. These are all aspects of the guru principle.

Even somebody who broke your heart and made you learn about jealousy and anger, very useful... That person helped you. He gave something that worked with you in some way and in that way it's useful. But your mother who wiped your bum when you were very small was also very helpful, there's is no doubt.

Questioner: That's right, but not the mathematics teacher!

James: Then, when you visualise, put your mathematics teacher in hell and then rays of light go to save him!

I'm talking about people whom we feel have helped us, because part of the whole thing about respect is that we learn some generosity. Generosity arises from the fact of knowing that we have been helped. Having been helped, we are open to the fact that we live in a world of movement, rather than in a box. The real danger is where somebody says, "*Only my guru knows things*". This is the basis for sectarian madness.

Many people in the world know things and, if we respected each other more, we would be able to find out what each other knows. I think if we understand the principles of the dharma, it actually can open us to be more liberal in our appreciation of all the richness that's in the world.

Now, if you want to do this long Vidya Guru Sadhana ngöndro you could do it every day as well, if you like. If you have time you can do that. Maybe, if you've managed to take out one day a month and have the whole day just to

get into the ngöndro, then when you come to the prostration part, do a lot of prostrations.

What I would encourage you to do is to check it out for yourselves, try different formulations. Try doing it every day if you think you've got time, but if that gets too much try doing it another way. You will see that this is sort of swings and roundabouts. There are some advantages to doing it regularly, other advantages to doing it in a clump. You live in your life. You are the one who has to take that responsibility.

The third line of this verse is:

JANG CHUB SEM KYE DRO LA THUG JE ZIG

Now you can recite this third line linked with the first two lines. I would think that if you are going to do prostrations, although if you look at the end at the note at the end where it says to recite it three times, it says you can recite just the first two lines doing the prostrations, but I think if you are really determined and you want to do a hundred thousand prostrations, given all the complexities of our lives, you should just say these three lines together and in that way you'll do the prostrations and the bodhicitta at the same time, because in the visualisation you are imagining that you are surrounded by all sentient beings—and we have to remember that sentient beings includes gods, angels, whales, pet rabbits, teddy bears, whatever there is, even the wasps that sting you.!

All the objects, all the beings towards whom one might feel compassion are already there with one in this process of taking refuge, and so, adding on this third line, what one is saying is, *"In my developing of enlightened mind, I'm asking you, Guru Rinpoche, to reaffirm this in me, to look on me and strengthen my resolve to be available for helping beings."* I think that often we find that if we've got something that is difficult to do it helps if there are other people around.

And I think in some ways it's similar, that if you take a bodhisattva vow, and you really decide that you want to work and be available for other people, sometimes it's just too much, and so, at that time, if one is able to strengthen one's commitment to stay open to others through the sense that one is being directly supported in it by Guru Rinpoche, and you've made the connection through doing the prostrations, I think that's something very helpful.

FOUR UNLIMITED THOUGHTS

Now what I'd like to take up very briefly is the four unlimited thoughts. These four thoughts, or attitudes, are love, compassion, joy and equanimity. Love is described in Tibetan through this thought: *'May all beings be happy and have the roots of happiness'*. This desire that beings should be happy is the desire that they find for themselves a way of satisfaction in being with others.

Now if we think of the way that the word 'love' is taken up in western culture at the moment it carries a somewhat different meaning. It speaks of *'I need you. You are very special. I don't want anyone else to have you. But if you want to be with me that would be very good. And in particular I am incomplete without you.'* So we have many popular songs saying things like, *'I am nothing without you,'* and it may well be that we have all had this experience of falling in love and having exactly these feelings, of feeling quite sad and empty if the beloved's not there, feeling we need their presence to make us happy and complete. But this is a notion of love as a kind of closure in which— by creating this sort of symbiotic merging with the other who permits one to seal one's life around the other and just dissolve into it—all negative things will be excluded. It's a kind of *folie à deux*, of complicity in blindness.

And yet, if we are not blind, if we keep our eyes open to the complexity of the world, it's just so hellish. Everything seems so out of control, it's difficult for us to work out what we want to do with our lives; we have so little control over what happens, and so it's enormously seductive and tempting to find someone who's attractive and just move into that primary bonding with them where the world can be excluded.

But taking up this buddhist notion of love is quite the reversal of that because it's saying, *'May other beings be happy. May all beings be happy,'* and it also says, *'May they also have the root of happiness.'* Now the root of happiness is freedom from attachment, so we're not saying, *'May you be happy because you've got a good car or your children are healthy,'* or whatever it is, but we are hoping for people to have the happiness that arises about a freedom to move in whatever situations life presents, which returns to this song which is around in popular culture: If you love someone you must set them free.

Of course freedom is not something that we can give to someone else. As soon as we move into the language of giving or removing freedom then freedom's not around at all. First of all we have to start with the understanding that other people exist. Other people are not just shiny objects on the edge of the important bubble of our world. Other people are the centre of their world, so each person is the centre of the world.

It's a funny world with so many centres! But I think that's really what we have to struggle with in an understanding of others, that they are not an adjunct, something added on to our lives, but they are centred in their life in that mysterious way that we are centred in our lives. And just as we look out into the world from the centre of the world, each person does that. Each person is the eyes of the world, the ears of the world, the body of the world.

And so, in wishing for the happiness of all beings there is an enormous tolerance and respect for difference embodied in this. Although we say that the root of happiness is non-attachment, we cannot say what that will be for another. Someone might like chocolate ice cream, and you might say to someone else, *"Do you like chocolate ice-cream?"* and the other person might say, *"Yes, I like chocolate ice cream."* And then you think *"Oh, that's good, we both like chocolate ice cream, so we'll buy some chocolate ice cream,"* and

we have this very synchronised movement so the spoon goes into the mouth exactly the same moment. But these mouths and this ice cream—who knows? *“It’s quite good, huh? But remember, in Italy, it was a little bit different—tastier—do you think?”* And through language we create this illusion that we are talking about the same things but we cannot actually know. I cannot know the inside of your mouth. I cannot know what that is for you.

This is so absolutely fundamental in terms of thinking about the dharma: that nobody knows your experience, and the relationship between language and experience is extremely problematic. But what we can do is respect that the other is speaking out of a space which is different from our own, and not listening like a greedy colonialist, taking it over and demarking the lines of meaning with a big red pen.

The same applies to the second principle of *‘May all beings be free of suffering and the cause of suffering.’* Again the cause of suffering is the same thing, attachment. And so this is an aspiration, *‘May beings not have suffering.’* If suffering arises from attachment, is it simply sufficient to say to someone, *“Ahem! I see that you are starting to be attached to this thing. Do you realise”*? Then they’ll say, *“Oh, thank you for warning me!”* In general people need to wake up to that link through direct experience.

It may be that somebody really has to fuck up in order to realise something, and that an act of compassion is letting the person continue until they really hurt. It is often very difficult to know, when we are working with others, at which point rescuing someone or taking them out of their pain is actually helpful or not. Generally you could say it’s not good for people to be heartbroken and sad and crying, and yet sometimes it is. And I think people can find that through sickness of various kinds, bereavements, disappointments in work and so on, where the trajectory—the path they have outlined for themselves—is suddenly interrupted by the world. Where there’s a shock in which this palace in the air, by collapsing, allows you to return to just moment-by-moment perception.

In the practice of compassion we just have to be very, very sensitive. There’s a whole lot of very predictive, dogmatic teaching in buddhism about compassion, about what you should do and how you should feel about people: sending rays of light out to help people... There are many things to do onto others, or to do for others. But it may well be that a lot of real compassion is just being with others in their pain, offering them the space in which understanding can arise, rather than plucking them out of it.

The third of these thoughts is a concern about joy, in the sense of a joy which is not diminished by suffering of any kind. Now, the restriction on our joy in the world is not simply the burden of gross or crude suffering. The term that’s used for joy in this setting in Tibetan is *ga wa* has a sexual connotation meaning the particular joy that arises in sexual intercourse. This *ga wa* as joy is very similar to the idea from Jacques Lacan in his use of the word *jouissance*, and through the *jouissance* (which is the French word for orgasm, the pleasure of orgasm), there’s a sense in which there’s an abandonment of

the self. There's a way in which as long as we are caught up in the preoccupations of our own sensation and through that to the other's sensation as if it were a foreign object, the subject-object dichotomy just is increased. So that although one's getting close to someone, or is encouraging the other in some way to be in the world, this is generating a particular kind of anxiety across the gap.

And so some of the things that we need to monitor for ourselves are the ways in which we inhibit ourselves in being freely embodied in the world. I think you can see that, if you are around Tibetan lamas or hindu teachers or any kind of people involved in that. Some people are more natural, more spontaneous, and seem to be more freely present in themselves, where others seem more restrained, more formal, more pompous or whatever. Perhaps it's important to reflect on that and see what kind of inspiration you can have from that. Don't use the inspiration of the other as a way of demeaning yourself and thinking, "*Oh God, I'll never be like that,*" but rather using the other as a support for a kind of mimetic, a copying, a movement to just try it out, to explore the body, to explore space and movement and freedom.

If we don't live in our body through our senses, if we don't attend to the tastes of food, the pleasures of touch, the smell of flowers and dog shit, then there's a way in which we are alienated from the world. If we are alienated then it is highly unlikely that we will be able to bring other people towards joy. So the attention to pleasure, I think, is enormously important in this path. Which doesn't mean promiscuity or delinquency or that kind of wildness, that's not at all necessary. Just a commitment to be fully alive in our body in the world. And through that, wishing it for others and through our own sensitivity to it, being aware of the ways in which others are blocked off from this. We can see especially with children, how their pleasure in their own bodies, or in noise, or in making a mess, can be limited by our desire for order and efficiency and all the rest of it.

Then onto the fourth thought, which is equanimity. This is basically the idea or aspiration that *'May all beings be open to being with others, without being particularly nice to the people they like, their friends, their relations or being particularly unpleasant to their enemies and the people they don't like'*.

This, of course, is very difficult because we always find ourselves in particular situations, drawn in particular directions or not drawn in other directions, and there is some play of judgement that returns on the basis of the four stages of karma, of the first stage of seeing the other as separate. Because there's a separation, across that gap we have projections of good thoughts and bad thoughts.

These four thoughts are very important and they are very useful for contemplating or thinking about. They are the sort of the things that, if you are going to work, driving a car or in the bus, you can just think about them looking out the window. Or, if you're out shopping in the supermarket or wherever, just watching the way that people destroy their own happiness. All of these attitudes develop our awareness of the world and help us to get

some more opening ways of thinking about what's going on. They also help to soften our hearts of its assumptions and confidence in habitual perception.

Any comments or questions that you would like to take up before we close?

Questioner I have a question about visualisation. When you visualise the guru, then you dissolve the guru in yourself. You do the visualisation, you say the prayer, you do the prostrations and after that you dissolve the guru into yourself?

James: Yes.

Questioner Does one just keep on this thought that one is Guru Rinpoche or does one also have to dissolve oneself as Guru Rinpoche?

James: In general, with all these practices, you are doing the prostrations and at the end of the prostrations you've still got this visualisation of Guru Rinpoche in front of you.

If you are going to end the practice at this point then you bring Guru Rinpoche to the crown of your head and do the same pattern of dissolving as you would in the Short *Rigdzin [Practice of Padma Sambhava]*. So the guru dissolves down into a small ball of light, down into your heart. Your body dissolves into that small ball of light, that ball of light dissolves out into space. Then you stay in that state of openness for as long as possible. And when your consciousness is starting to return into the room, you take up the thought that all that appears is the form of Guru Rinpoche, and all sound is the speech of Guru Rinpoche, and all thoughts are Guru Rinpoche's mind.

If you want a commentary on that, if you have this large Rigdzin [*The Vidyadhara Guru Sadhana*], page 107-111. There is a four-verse prayer spoken by Guru Rinpoche and it's a very beautiful prayer to chant. Anyway, the basic principle in this is that your return into the world with the understanding that the world is now the mandala of Guru Rinpoche and just as in *vipassana* meditation, when a sensation is arising in the body and you might get caught in that sensation, by being able to name it according to the category of the five *skandhas*, you gain a degree of space, but it's a space that's developed in a slightly reductive way in which the complexity of the world is reduced to these five little baskets.

Here you have a similar kind of generalised identification in which whatever is arising, is identified as being the free expression of the guru's body. So it's not to say, "Oh, *this cup is really the guru's body. It's not really a cup. What it is, is the guru's body.*" Rather it is to recognise that the cup *is* Guru Rinpoche and so to be fascinated by all the qualities of the cup as Guru Rinpoche. You're not putting an imposition onto the world to push it away and distort it, but rather you increase your æsthetic pleasure in the world, and through pleasure you come to recognise the beauty of the world as Guru Rinpoche. So it's anti-reductive and an intensification of pleasure—marvellous!

So you could see how beautiful Guru Rinpoche is or you might see something very, very ugly and say, "*Oh, how ugly Guru Rinpoche is,*" but everything in that way is the guru, and so it's a way of allowing the senses to be completely open and be at one in the world without fear because you already know that it is this endless display of light.

There's time for one last question and then we'll do some quiet sitting...

Questioner: Is it stupid to combine prostrations and mantra recitations?

James: It would be the refuge verse that you would combine with the prostrations rather than the mantra. Many people, *nyingmapa*, do prostrations saying the seven-line prayer...