

CREATIVITY AND MEDITATION

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One is simply in the moment, of shared revelation or co-emergence with others, and in that there is a spontaneous responsiveness to the precise movement, within an openness which is infinite....



If we can use their confusion and their poisons as fuel for our wisdom, then we'll be able to recognise it and feel gratitude—which will allow us to be generous towards them. This will then give them the space in which they can relax from being such an asshole. That's the theory. In practice, of course, it's slightly more difficult!



That is why the start of the meditation—the clear blue sky—is a new beginning for everything. And the middle is a further dispersal of the old, the solid, the enduring. The end of the meditation is rebirth in the unborn flow of becoming.



The basic point is always the relationship between openness—between the unfixed moment, the space just before we speak, or move or think or act—and the arising. Are we going to arise and fill that moment on the basis of what we want to be there, so that we close it over, we know what it is in advance? Or are we going to attempt to relax and open and be there? Be surprised by the world and by ourselves?

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Preface

This is the lightly edited transcript of talks given during a week-long summer camp in Tuscany in 1994. The focus of the camp was on the relationship between meditation and creativity, and each day there was movement, dance, painting, clay and the possibility of using the resources of the wild environment.

The transcript does not contain the details of all the painting exercises and so forth, but focuses on the relationship between buddhist philosophy, buddhist meditation practice, and the role of creativity in everyday life.

If you have any questions, things that you want to talk about individually, just let me know, and we can make a time for that. You know, if you're feeling confused and uncertain about something, and you don't want to say that in the group, do make sure that you come and talk about it with me. Don't suffer in silence. Also, I'm very happy to repeat things if necessary, because I know that people here have had very different experiences of buddhism, meditation and creativity.

SEEING WITH FRESH EYES

One of the things we will be exploring is the way judgements and fixed opinions, restrict our lives. One of the strongest judgements we carry is that's it's shameful not to know things; it's shameful to be stupid in front of other people; it's shameful to be the last one to understand something. I think if we can really allow ourselves not to get trapped in this we'll have a lot of freedom to be clear about our desire to learn, to understand. Recognising that we don't know can be exciting because it opens up a space of possibility, of exploration, of freshness. It's important not to close that down through fear. Maybe we all need to observe in ourselves how we make our world small, and then start to explore how we can relax and let it open.

It is customary in Tibetan buddhism to begin spiritual practice by taking refuge in the Buddha, and then by developing a compassionate attitude towards other beings. There are very elaborate ways of doing this, but here we will use the simplest form, and reflect on our motivation. When we start to do any practice, take a few minutes at the beginning to reflect on "Why am I here? What am I doing this for?" Allow yourself to be in touch with your doubts and uncertainties, the points of confusion in your life. Taking refuge in the Buddha involves starting to trust that the confusion can be overcome, that the Buddha has pointed a way out of messy entanglements, anxiety and depression. Recognition of our own pain is a key motive to effecting real change.

Having recognised that we suffer and want help, we move on to thinking about others and their suffering. Expanding our attention to encompass all beings, we concern ourselves with their state, allowing ourselves to be touched and moved and prepared to act on their behalf. By using the methods taught by the Buddha, we can remove the suffering of ourselves and all beings. If we take responsibility to be in touch with this intention, then we can merge ourselves in the key point of the practice.

There are two main aspects to buddhist meditation: to open to new possibilities, and to focus on removing the obstacles that keep us trapped. One is trying to find ways of getting free of the habitual patterns that tie us in knots, and also to relax into a state of openness. Sometimes these two desires can appear to be in tension or even opposition. For example, when we focus our attention on the breath as it moves in and out of our nostrils, we are directing attention away from the thoughts, feelings and sensations that we are usually caught up in. We can use this meditation as a kind of detoxification space, a means of becoming less involved in seductive complexity. When you start to do something, and you get lost in thoughts or you get into a judgement, if you recognise that that's what's happening, then just come back to being present in your breath.

Say for example, you're drawing something, and you feel, "*This is awful, this is terrible, this is stupid,*" and you get into your head, at that moment you just have to recognise: "*Ah!*" Go back into your breath, stay in that for a few minutes and then come back out with a sense of openness, because when you get into judgement, you're locked into an old story, you're telling the same old story to yourself.

Having refreshed yourself in the meditation, go back to the image you have created, and see what's there. You might well be pleasantly surprised. When you make a judgement, you put your past, your history onto the present, so that the present is always a re-telling of the past. What we want to do in meditation is to be fresh, to see with fresh eyes. So always, if you get trapped like that, beating yourself up, try to recognise what you're up to and just cut through it, by going back in to the breath. When you are calmly focused, return with fresh eyes, just looking, practising looking without thinking.

Here we are supporting this by doing some practice outside as well, just walking calmly, with the attention focused on the breath. If you find yourself losing the presence of the world then just relax back into the breath and continue walking and looking without conceptualising.

In buddhism there are two main lines of development for understanding the world that we live in. One is the line that develops out of ignorance and the other is the line that develops out of wisdom, and I'll say something in detail about both.

It's usually said that suffering and the related dualistic mode of experiencing, or samsara, arise out of ignorance. Ignorance is a non-recognition of the open display of the world, and it has various levels. On the most subtle level, as phenomena arise, as experience occurs, thoughts, emotions, feelings on the very edge of language, we experience something occurring to us which is not us. We have the experience of inside, an observing subject, and outside, an object that's observed. We have the sensation that sound comes from the world through our ears, and then we hear it. And light comes from outside to our eyes, and we see things. Taste comes from outside, onto our tongue and we taste them.

All our senses relate to a split in the world, focused around this body boundary with self being somehow inside the body, and other, or the world, outside the

body. Because of this, we have a somewhat anxious relationship to the world, because the world is very big and is full of all sorts of different people with different opinions. When I turn this way and try to please you and do what you want, I have to turn my back on someone else and risk their displeasure or rejection. We often we grow up feeling that in order to survive, to live, we have to please everyone we meet. And this can make us a bit crazy, because we're almost paranoid, sniffing out, "*What do I have to do now?*" All our attention is focused out onto the world to try to see the demand before it arrives at us, so that we can satisfy it, and in that way ensure that we survive.

When we have this approach to life, knowledge and prediction become very, very important, and as a consequence it helps us if the world is dead. That is to say, if the world is stable and fixed, then the knowledge that we have on Monday will be knowledge we can use on Tuesday. But if the world is changing, maybe by Tuesday the world's changed and we can't use the same knowledge. So there's an enormous desire to kill the world, to fix things in place. This also means killing people who might change too much, subversives, undesirables...off to the gulag! And that's of course what we do with our thoughts as well—which is the Freudian notion of a defensive unconscious. Repression is this gulagging of anything which will disturb the status quo.

VALUING OUR CREATIONS

In this way there arises from ignorance a process of separating ourselves off from the world, which creates a fear of annihilation. This fear restricts creativity to a manipulative stance within the tension-ridden dimension of dualistic perception. We probably all learnt when we were small that we could produce things and be helpful and be appreciated, and so our creativity got channelled into these directions of ambition, passing exams and all the rest of it. If we found that we were successful in this we may well have become addicted to it and all our potential was put into this narrow way of creating a product. This is because what is of interest is to have a product, a thing, which you bring out of yourself and put into the world and say, "*What's the exchange value of this thing? I will give you this thing. What will you give me for this thing? If I pass my exams, Papa, what will you buy me?*" [Laughter].

For those who are not successful in this, life is difficult and the sense of exclusion can often lead to rebelliousness and delinquency. Not finding a way to have my own creations valued I turn to attacking the creations of others. So creativity becomes an aspect of commodity-exchange. This is particularly visible in the world of science, where an enormous amount of money and talent is invested in development. For example, in computers and electronics there are very intelligent, creative people developing incredibly spacey ideas full of open potential, which is then taken to the financial development department which turns it down into a little box to make money. This box is actually made by women in Korea, bent over a little frame, soldering very precisely all day long making perfect replicas of someone else's idea. The workers get arthritic shoulders; the creative geniuses multi-million condominiums in California, and we get computer software to pass the time. Space is turned into commodities, useful commodities, but commodities which fill the space of our lives till we die surrounded by our possessions.

THE RICHNESS OF THE WORLD KEEPS COMING OUT

From a buddhist point of view, although there are clearly many problems in this whole process, the most basic problem is the first one: the experience of being a subject inside looking out, resulting from the dualistic split in which we are separated from the world. The traditional view is that what this separation misses is the fact that awareness accepts whatever occurs without bias or judgement. But in everyday terms, a pain in your knee is clearly different from looking at a branch in a tree. These are different things, and we can say, *"This is a pain in my knee, this is mine. The tree is not mine."* But if we really allow ourselves to relax into awareness, we get a more basic sense of something here which I say is a pain in my knee, and something out there, which I say is a branch on a tree. But these are both phenomena arising in an open field of awareness. It is a secondary move that conceptualises one as internal and me, and the other as external and a tree. By relaxing more and more into the openness we experience this field of phenomena manifesting so that we start to experience the world as revelation.

The world reveals itself as trees, as birds, as aeroplanes, as me, as knees, whatever it is, but this revelation is within awareness. We can't split some of it out, and say, *"This is outside, and this is inside."* So it is revealing itself in the way that if you walk towards the horizon, you never get to the horizon, just more of the world reveals itself. We never get to a point where you can grab something definitive because there's always something more that's coming up.

But when you go into the domain of ignorance and dualistic splitting, then you begin to appropriate and you get something that seems very real, "This is mine. If I lose this, what will I get?" Because the world of ignorance says there are finite objects in the world, everything is owned by someone, so if this is yours and you've lost it, what were you doing? As your parents might have said, "Do you think money grows on trees? You've lost your shoes, I have to go and buy you more shoes, what do you think, eh? This money comes from me working in the factory..." So there's an idea that everything is fixed in some place and once it's lost it's gone, as if there's a hole in the world, and what's going to fill that hole?

There's a kind of fearfulness, a kind of anxiety that our duty is to fill the world with good things that please other people, and hide all the bad things that won't please other people. If we do a drawing, we have to do a very good drawing, and then everyone says, "Ah, what a good boy! What a good girl!" And if you make a bad drawing, "Urrghhh! Go away! You don't belong here!" It's very, very frightening to face success and failure all the time, the sense that acceptance can turn into rejection if we don't come up with the right goods, that everything can vanish into nothing.

However, from the point of view of awareness and revelation there are no holes because the richness of the world keeps coming. You know, in the morning, the sun comes up; the birds start to sing and fly around, we hear, "Tweet, tweet, tweet." We go for a walk, the flowers are there. Under the ground there isn't God hiding, pushing up little plants. He'd be very busy! It's just, well, coming out. I think what's very important is to allow ourselves to

relax and feel ourselves as part of the revelation. We are not dependent on the revelation, neither are we the masters and kings and controllers of the revelation. We are just revealing ourselves in and as and of the revelation of the world. It's completely a play within a movement which has no beginning and no end, and because it is moving, we cannot appropriate it.

This is important in terms of our creative activity and how it can be blocked by judgement. Judgement appropriates things, good, bad, mine, yours, rather than just being open to the richness of things. Appropriation tears the world. You can think of it in marxist terms as well, that there's a kind of basic communism, a basic communality of ownership that we all have as some entitlement, and yet it's ripped asunder by somebody taking a lot and pushing only a little over to the rest. You can do that in terms of money or ownership, but you can also do it in terms of ideas, and I think from what people were saying earlier today, we do it here with our work. We say, *"Oh, the good painting was done by you! I did the bad painting."* So we push the good things out to the other person and take all the shit back to ourselves, as if this is all we are entitled to. It's not as if the ego is greedy always for good things, it can also be greedy for very negative and destructive things. Having made this little mountain of shit to sit on, it's kind of difficult, because at the same time you want to be loved, so you say *"Oh love me and love my shit!"* So we get *"I'll love you if you love me, and we'll love each other's shit!"* We end up being a perverse, sniffing culture.

REVELATION AND THE THREE KAYAS

This idea of revelation is expressed particularly in Tibetan buddhism in terms of what are called the three kayas. The word *kaya* means body, body as dimension or aspect, a mode of being, and it is believed that the Buddha has three modes, or ways, of being. The first is called *dharmakaya* or natural mode, which is the uncontrived state of relaxed, open awareness. You might get a taste of the meditation when your mind sometimes feels very relaxed and open, and thoughts just come and go, passing through it without trace. A traditional image is that it's like a clear blue summer sky, and clouds pass through it. Clouds don't stain the sky, they don't stay in the sky, they just pass right through it, they leave no trace.

This basic state of awareness is open like the sky. But like the sky, it's also full of things, clouds, aeroplanes, rainbows, sun, moon, so the sky's both empty and full at the same time. This way of being full is the way in which the richness of our thoughts, feelings, and emotions arise out of this open spaciousness. This is called the *sambhogakaya*, or radiant mode, for it is the spontaneous radiance of openness.

I'll give you an image which might act as a metaphor, giving you the sense of what this mode is like. When I speak, I just speak, I don't have somebody in the back of my head with a little script; words just seem to arise. Where do they come from? They just come. When we finish here and we get up and walk, we don't have to think, *"How am I going to walk?"* We just think, *"Ah, time for dinner,"* and we go. There's a way that we just move in the world, that we don't have to plan and process most of our experience. Most of our experience is just quite relaxed and easy. That kind of easy being in the world

gestures towards the infinite playful energy of awareness revealing itself to itself through the display of thought, feeling, sensation and so forth.

The third level, which is traditionally called the *nirmanakaya*, the level of the manifestation of the buddha, is the way in which, here we are, in this particular body, in this particular time, with particular people and with the potential of being open to each other. Now most of the time we get closed, we feel inside ourselves, worried about what other people think, “*Will you like me, will you not like me?*” and all sorts of game-playing.

VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL MOVEMENTS: WAVES IN THE BATH

We get into planning rather than just trusting that the revelation is not inside-to-out, but is everywhere, so that I am the revelation of openness, and so are you, and together there is a movement, which is a sort of vertical movement, a kind of epiphany, a kind of descent from this openness, but without ever separating from the openness, without becoming something as such.

At the same time it’s happening on a horizontal level as well, so that we are all equally points of manifesting, like dynamic nodes. If you have a bath and you fill it with water, and you bang the side of the bath, you get all kinds of little waves and they come to little crests and then descend, and each little crest appears to be something separate, but is actually an expression of the same bath.

So each of us are like a little wave coming up and then going back. At this moment I am speaking and so it is as if this node, ‘me’ is energised and you are more still. Then, later you will be speaking and the energy will manifest in many different ways. We are all points arising from, in, and as, this same dynamic space of awareness.

If we trust that, then we know that the other is not really a stranger to us. At the same time, the other is not the same as us—it’s not a kind of ‘we all are one’ because we don’t know how the other node is going to be. In each specific person, each precise person as they are, there is a uniqueness, which is also a unique expression of this openness. You can’t appropriate or claim the openness, but you also can’t appropriate the individual because we never know how the individual’s going to be.

RELAX JUDGEMENT: TRUST AWARENESS

This brings us to the point of how to be in the world with others, which is I think, very much about respect: respecting the fact that we benefit ourselves and others by open responsiveness rather than control. We don’t know the future. We can’t control world events, the actions of others, or even our own behaviour. Yet many of us were raised by parents who thought, “*In order to survive you have to be a good girl, you have to be a good boy, these are the rules, follow the rules and you’ll be OK. What is important is not to be yourself but to be what the world wants you to be.*”

Their concern to keep us safe actually imprisoned us, for they were respecting the values of the world rather than respecting our potential. It is as if we are

basically bad and can only be kept on the straight and narrow by tight constraints. Others' fear becomes introjected as self-doubt and self-hatred, and we come to believe that we are only worthy of respect if our actions please others. Pure, simple valuing of life, of aliveness, of experience, of revelation is too scary, too subversive, for it requires the one who is doing the valuing to give up prejudice, to open to what is there, to allow value to reveal itself rather than be sought out according to some template that installs the valuer in the place of mastery, evaluating rather than responding.

It's a really big struggle to relax judgement because, after all, the ability to judge has kept us safe in a dangerous world. To relax judgement and trust that awareness will also keep us safe is a big step. Trying it out, we can come to see that being respectful and open to others, revealing ourselves as they reveal themselves, is not only more ethical, but it is also quite powerful. One is not putting oneself into the position of a martyr who's going to be destroyed, but is actually taking up a place where there's a lot of space to dance, so one's not going to get trapped. This counters the deep fear generated by dualistic perception that one will get trapped, be unable to flee and so be annihilated. The dance of respectful responsiveness takes one beyond the paranoid dilemma of being either in control and safe, or not in control and at risk.

If we stay in touch with revelation, everything keeps changing and moving, and so we're never trapped. That's why one of the most basic notions to reflect on in buddhism is impermanence; the fact that moment-to-moment, everything is changing, the world is in dynamic flux. Our breath goes in and out, blood circulates; life is change. The earth spins and revolves around the sun, day and night flow into each other and everything is in movement all the time. Because of this movement we are actually in the presence of incredible creative display, an endless procession of images. Images of delight, images of wonder, and we are not distanced observers, we are part of the flow of images, images among images in the infinite field of awareness.

SURFING THE WAVES: CRESTING ON THE MOMENT OF AWARENESS

Meditation helps us move from being fearful, controlling observers to engaged revellers in the display. It's like surfing. You've got to find the right moment when the wave is coming up and then ride on the crest and stay with it even when the wave starts to break.

Surfing on the point of awareness is difficult too, it requires good balance. If we go into the past and try to hold onto it, we sink. If we go too fast, the wave takes us over. We just have to keep cresting on the moment of awareness, being open and fresh to everything that arises. I think basically all buddhist practice is trying to help us to stay in this moment of fresh newness.

When we paint or use clay, if we find ourselves thinking in advance, "*I want to do a good painting*" then we have already put one fixed image from the present into the future. We've created a form in our heads which enslaves us. It is too heavy, laden with judgements and knowledge. We've lost the wave; we're already struggling in a concept. If we can trust our meeting with the world, as the world, inspiration expresses itself very easily, very directly, for

we're caught up in the wave of something and it's moving on, carrying us with it in an infinite present.

Not many people in the world are interested in this kind of creativity. You know, most of human endeavour is about creating things which can be exchanged for other things. What we are talking about here is a state of awareness in which you are always on the edge of the wave and so it's not about the experience becoming a thing. Clearly I'm not suggesting that we should all live in the forest here, eating nuts, and wearing little grass skirts. Neither am I saying that things like motor cars and TVs are bad in themselves. A motor car and a television are also aspects of the revelation.

We suffer from the notion of western science as having gone into nature, taken out the raw materials, taken them into the human domain and created these wonderful, sophisticated objects, which are social, cultural, and not natural. But this is just another form of dualistic splitting. The television is completely natural. What is it made of? Everything is nature. Plastic is natural. Where does it come from? It comes from oil. Where does oil come from? It comes out of the ground. Where does the ground come from? There is no finite, true source. All is the manifestation of the energy of awareness in its dimension of openness. The ground of all is infinitely empty, devoid of any limits and defining characteristics. This notion that some things are not natural

is crazy. Everything is part of this revelation. Whether you're rich or poor, whether you're very ambitious or not, it doesn't really matter. The wave that you're surfing on may be full of wealth and success. You can ride on that. Or it might be a wave of simplicity, of minimal indulgence. The form of the wave doesn't matter. What is important is to be able to ride on it without getting wet, without being caught up in the display as if it were something to be appropriated and manipulated.

As soon as we go into a discrimination and say, "*Living like this is good, living like that is bad*" we move towards fixity and are likely to lose our balance, become anxious and seek to put our feet on stable ground. This is impossible of course, there being no stable ground—so reality becomes fantasy. However with the buddhist view there's a huge permission to be in your own life as it reveals itself and to be open to the revelation of other people's lives.

However, we clearly have apparently instinctive reactions to certain situations, reactions that are full of turbulent feelings and which seem to impel us towards impassioned action. It is difficult to be open to the situation when its status appears to be predetermined. Let's take a contemporary image say from Rwanda¹, of somebody taking a knife and cutting off the front of a child's

¹ At the time of this talk there was civil war in Rwanda

face. Well, it depends how we perceive this. Clearly, on one level, that's not at all a good thing to do. On the other hand, when we conceptualise 'child', we set child as innocent against adult who is sophisticated and guilty. You have an innocent child being abused by a sophisticated adult and you are already inside a dualistic construction, that you shouldn't harm simple children. You shouldn't harm complex adults either. We shouldn't harm snails, we shouldn't harm ants. There's a particular cultural construct around children.

But also from the point of view of openness, the child's body dies, maggots come out and move in the skin. What was a child becomes a home for maggots. In our conceptualisation, child/good, maggot/bad, we're again back to separation. Maybe it is a very wonderful thing for a body to become a home for maggots. There is a particular way in which because we are in judgement all the time, we put our values, our human values, up and other values down. I'm certainly not saying that it's good to kill children, but there is a particular way in which one might be aware that all the time we are structuring this openness to fit a pre-determination of what our culture says should be the case; and that if we relax this, we can see these things.

Now the reason that adults take machetes and chop the faces off children is because they have no openness; they are caught in a completely vicious thing. *"You are a Hutu, I hate you!" "You are a Tutsi, I hate you! I've never met you before, but you're a Tutsi and I hate you!"* It's completely stupid. This is where there is no awareness of this open revelation. There is simply the imposition of a judgement 'I know what you are.' The identification of the other leads to a prediction and a predetermination of response. It's a completely sealed argument which seeks to impose itself on the world, and this is achieved by becoming not at all open to the other.

ALLOWING OURSELVES TO BE IN TOUCH MEANS WE WILL BE TOUCHED

However, by entering into the revelation of openness one experiences a sensitivity towards the other. If you actually have sensitivity to someone, you cannot take a knife and cut their face off. If you're looking in the eyes of someone, I don't believe that you could kill them. Surely that's why people always get a bullet in the back of the head. Or why, when they do a military shooting, they put a blindfold on. The blindfold is not for the person being shot. It's for the soldier, so he doesn't look in the eyes of the person he's shooting.

But if we allow ourselves to be in touch with people then we will be touched by people. If we see them, we will be good, because our goodness lies in the eyes of the other person. When we allow ourselves to be touched by another person, how can we be other than good? How can we be other than concerned? But it's when we already 'know' who the other person is *"You damned this or you damned that"* that we don't see the other person. This is the end result of the development which in buddhism is called ignorance; where we take up a fixed position and then generalise from that position onto the next moment. The past predicts the present, and the present predicts the future, and it's all foreclosed, it's all going in one direction.

Revelation, on the other hand, means that we don't know. All we can do is be open, aware and responsive, which is both a kind of terribly tender vulnerability, and also enormously powerful, because we allow ourselves to engage with the other person, and say *"Who are you? Let's explore something."* We are immediately in the world and we're not frightened of other people because the gesture is one of connection, interest and value.

WORKING THROUGH LIMITING FACTORS

Maybe what I have been saying sounds a bit airy-fairy, a bit perfect, and rather abstract. It seems rather far from our daily experience. As I said at the beginning, the process of opening runs in parallel with the work of avoiding getting caught up in familiar knots, so we need to address purification, or the working through of the limiting factors that stop us getting to this revelation.

MAKING A MANDALA OF OUR OWN POISONS

Tantric buddhism makes use of mandalas. A mandala is basically a kind of circular setting which is used as a point of transformation where limitation can be experienced as a mode of freedom through the creative presence of diverse forms. It's usually described as a circle which has a central part and then four sub-divisions. The central part is where stupidity is and then you have a sector for desire or attachment, a sector for anger, aversion, pushing things away, a sector for pride and a sector for jealousy. These five factors are seen as the main poisons, the main ways in which we get confused.

The work then is to try to understand the root of these five poisons, stupidity, anger, desire, jealousy and pride, and to transform them into openness; in traditional buddhist language, into 'the five wisdoms'. These are not mere abstract words, stupidity, anger, desire—they have a living presence in all our lives, affecting our decisions on a daily basis.

In order to get more in touch with them, so that we can start to recognise and transform them as they arise, I am suggesting we each try to make a mandala of our own poisons using the wild landscape available. Using leaves, branches, paint, clay and so on, you can construct images that make present for you the impact these poisons have on your life. Find ways of representing the factors that condition your experience, like fears, the way we try to please people, our anxiety, and the emotional or neurotic things that make us small and frightened in the world.... When you sit with these images, be in touch with their power.

Then either do the breath-focus meditation or do the dissolving meditation. Experience how you get blocked in the meditation, then explore that block, how precisely does it affect you? The best way to find that out is to engage with it oneself. Every time we hit our block, if we're doing it with awareness, it's a very good thing, because we're then more aware of it. So actually in this sense, making mistakes is very useful. You know, when you get to a point where you feel you've drawn something and you feel shame and you can recognise, *"What I feel is shame"* then you can see, *"Shame is a limiting factor for me. Because of shame, I can't show my painting in the group, because I*

fear you are going to say it is rubbish, and if this is rubbish, then I am rubbish, and I don't want that. I want you to see some nice thing and to like me."

In the week ahead, through these various experiments, hopefully we will get some sense of these; we can try to find out what it is that limits us. This is really the struggle in our life, isn't it, to recognise how we remained trapped and to learn how we can resolve the entrapment? So the first thing is really allowing ourselves honestly to recognise what it is that makes us tight. That's often quite painful. We might identify some limitations back to our childhood, and from a buddhist point of view, the childhood experience would be the first disclosure of our karma as it manifests in this life.

FRAMING AND VIEWING AN IMAGE

Now, from where I am sitting I can see out of this window. Maybe those of you who can't see out the window, can see out of the door? Anyway, looking out of this window, I can see a bit of a tree. It's not the whole tree, but the bit of the tree I can see is framed by the window. It's the same when you do a painting on a piece of paper. If you like your painting you can mount it later on and put it in a wooden frame or something like that.

So we have your image which is separated off from the world by a frame. The frame pulls the image into being; it makes a point of dislocation and says, 'This is separate.' In front of me I have the wall, and then there's the window, and the window has a frame, and the frame marks out the wall and the tree as separate things. We view the world through physiological, cultural, historical, political frames, many, many different frames. Most of the frames appear as givens, just as water is a given to a fish.

HINAYANA VIEW

In buddhism there are many different views or frames of reference, each with their own rationale and implication for behaviour. You have the view that says the world is a dangerous place; take care, be very good, and if you're very, very good and stop doing all bad things that will make your mind calm. When your mind is calm you will be able to see something and you'll become less and less involved in the world, and the less and less you're involved in the world, the more you get space from it, you can eventually leave the world and go into nirvana or enlightenment. This is said to be the view from the hinayana position.

This view is very much like the frame around the window or the frame around the painting: it lets you see something very clearly, but it hides something else.

MAHAYANA VIEW

Then we have the mahayana view which says what's important in the world are all sentient beings, animals, insects, gods, devils. Anything that has a mind is important. From this point of view you should pay attention to beings that are in the world, be concerned about them, and involve yourself in the

possibility of helping others. With this attitude, when you see someone you don't see them as dangerous, but as an opportunity to be of service.

In the first view people are a bit dangerous, they might make you angry; they might make you desirous. They could stir you up in all sorts of ways, so you want to back off from people. A consequence is that you might want to become a monk or a nun or lead an isolated life. However, from the second point of view, the mahayana position, the compassionate view, other people are an opportunity to be more friendly, more caring, and so you're actually drawn towards beings, not frightened of them, and other people then become part of your path.

TANTRIC VIEW

Thirdly, there is the view of Tantra, in which all beings are seen as being divine, essentially pure in nature. When you see sentient beings you try to see them as deities, as god-like creations, devoid of substance and limitation. By being open to other beings as divine you are reminded of your own divinity, and the world becomes a divine palace or mandala house, where the five poisons have become the five wisdoms. As with each of these frames, when you view the world through it, you see a different picture.

DZOGCHEN VIEW

In dzogchen, the view is that from the very beginning everything is completely pure, whatever it is; whether it is gods or children without faces in Rwanda, everything is perfect just as it is, on the level of acceptance. On the level of moving out and having a response to the world, one is called by an ethical responsibility to intervene to stop people suffering and to increase happiness, with the understanding that happiness and unhappiness have the same nature because they arise from the same source.

So it's quite a complex move, wherein one acts ethically, but with the absolute awareness that it makes no difference whether you act or not. We can only act ethically when we have a choice. I can only be compassionate to someone if I know I can also not be compassionate. Inside openness or spaciousness, whether I allow myself to be taken up by the other or not, remains a possibility because, just like in meditation, a thought arises and you can respond to it or you can just let it go by. In the world you can respond to someone or you can just let it pass by.

It's the movement to respond to the other which is the call of compassion, and in dzogchen this is seen as the play or *rol pa* of this open state. In dzogchen the three kayas, or three buddha modes, are described in different terms which open up a more dynamic aspect; *ngo wo*, *rang zhin* and *thug je*. *Ngo wo* means the open dimension, completely uncontrived, while *rang zhin* is its display, and *thug je* is its actual effectiveness. As an example, *ngo wo* is said to be like the sun, *rang zhin* is like the rays of the sun as they shine forth, the effulgence, and *thug je* is like the warmth of the rays of the sun, impacting in the world and making things happen.

With this frame, all frames are seen as a frame-up, for whatever view we take sets up a frame, installs a particular way of viewing. The dzogchen view seeks to deconstruct or open up the concept of frames themselves by showing how you can watch yourself homing in and framing something, and then see that that process is also a part of the revelation. Whether something is framed or not doesn't install any real difference since all that arises is the unborn display of the ground openness beyond conceptualisation. In most buddhist paths one installs a particular frame, *"This is how I will see the world and other beings."*

In dzogchen one is much more accepting of the world as it presents itself. One is not looking for anything in particular, one is not trying to see that all sentient beings have been one's mother therefore one should be kind to them, or that all sentient beings are like gods, or that all sentient beings are very dangerous. One is simply in the moment of shared revelation or co-emergence with others, and in that there is a spontaneous responsiveness to the precise movement, within an openness which is infinite.

From this point of view, one is acting without any predicative frame already in place. There is no action which is prescriptively better than any other action because the action is always precise, embedded in a unique context. If somebody asks, *"How should I behave? What should I do?"* I have to say, *"I don't know. But what you might try is to relax and be yourself in the world and see what happens. The world will tell you how to behave."* There is no rule-book or guide book or true word of God that will let you know on the basis of the past what you should do in the future. Though of course, this unknowing can generate great anxiety, and people often seek to deal with the anxiety not by facing it, not learning from it, but by constructing codes of proper behaviour and punishing those who don't conform.

AS SURFERS, WE ARE NOT SEEKING MASTERY

Often we are taught that the world is dangerous and that unless you get it right, you will be wrong. But as surfers we are not seeking mastery, we are not trying to dominate the wave. Clearly if you fall off your surf board, it's not so good. But we stay on the wave not by controlling it but by harmonising with it, integrating our awareness with the changes in the wave.

Whereas a lot of what we are encouraged to do is to learn how to control the world, to take up the boss position, the top-dog position, rather than just to be in touch with things. But actually for most of us, we probably see that every day we have to keep moving, even if we have a fairly secure job; every day there's some new demand or other. It's actually more like surfing; we never arrive at a place of safety, but there are many fantasies around of how we can be safe. Like my father. He didn't like his job so much, but he always used to say, *"Well, when I retire I'm going to move out into the country,"* and he retired, and shortly after that, he died. You know? Working and working and working to get the money to buy this wonderful place that never came. And it's like that. He wasn't on the wave, he was pushing it from behind, and that is very, very sad.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN JAMES AND PEOPLE PRESENT

Questioner: Paradise now!

James: Yes. *[Laughter]*

Questioner: So if you fall from the surf-board, you shouldn't judge yourself.

James: Yes, that's right, because there'll be a next wave. Shortly after another wave will come and you can get up onto it, if you are alert and ready for it. If you fall off and you think, "*Oh god! What have I done?*" You turn in on yourself and lose the freshness of the moment and get stuck. It's like in meditation. If you lose focus on your breath, you go into thinking. Then when you recognise this you get upset, "*Oh man! I can't meditate, this is really hopeless, I just don't know what I'm doing!*" *[Laughter]* then more and more thoughts come, and you get further and further from the possibility of just relaxing and going back to the breath.

The first thing really is to get the sense of what it's like to be on the surf-board, which here would stand for the experience that can arise when we do the dissolving meditation and go into the state of openness—when we are just open and thoughts are just moving through us, and we are not being taken over by them. When we lose it and move into judgement and construction in some way, what we need to learn is how to get back into that. The task is to relax and not to create.

I think that's maybe one of the experiments that we can do with materials here: so when we relax and let the painting flow through us, something different arises from when we have an intention which we try to impose. We can move from control to co-operation and collaboration. We let the paintbrush lead us, we let our eye tell us where to go rather than having to think and plan and impose something.

This view is not trying to construct a better world or a better painting. It starts with an openness not constricted by knowledge. We don't know, and because we don't know, we have to attend. When we attend and actually look, we're not in this world any more. You may have had the experience when you meditate, that there is sometimes a gap when you don't have many thoughts, and you look at the trees and the sky, and it's like, "*Wow! Where is this?*" It's not the ordinary world, and yet it is completely the ordinary world. It's completely normal yet completely different. It's not transformed into something else; it's simply that the world reveals itself more clearly for what it is.

Questioner: This has nothing to do with the mandala?

James: This has nothing to do with the mandala. The mandala is a way of saying, "*This is very ordinary and shitty and horrible, and by doing this and this and this, we turn it into something very wonderful and perfect. We take our limitations and turn them into this wisdom.*" So it's a place of transformation, whereas the view in dzogchen says there is nothing to transform. All you have to do is see. But until you see, there's nothing to do. It begins with an experience of recognition.

It would be like on the surf-board. If you actually get onto the surf-board and you've found your balance, there's nothing to do except keep your balance—because the wave does all the work! Once you are actually in the world, in the revelation as revelation, it just keeps revealing itself, and then... Bang! You lose it, you fall off, and then, because revelation is continuous, you just get right back on again and move.

Or else you can think, *"Oh shit! I've lost it! What do I do now?"* and at that point the brain becomes very busy. We start to construct a frame, a story, a narrative, which is the way ignorance starts to create the world. Instead of being in the world we see ourselves as apart from the world, giving ourselves a dialogue, a story, about the world, *"I know you. You do this, you do that. I do this, I have to do that ..."* You know?

Because we can get lost very easily it is useful to have different methods or frames available. Then we have a range of options available to use while we wait for the next wave. In order not to drift away and get lost we might need to know when to be frightened. For example, you might be in a relationship with someone, and then you get interested in someone else. It might seem very interesting to have an affair. But you might think, *"Hey, this is just going to cause trouble. Although they're very attractive, this person is dangerous for me."* So you put a particular frame on the situation. Clearly this approach is very useful sometimes, because it makes life simple.

Paradoxically the best protection in such situations is just to be relaxed and open. Difficulties arise when we feel there is something hollow in ourselves, some kind of empty space. It then seems that the person outside has got this wonderful thing, and if I can get that person then they will fill up this gap in me, and I will feel complete again. It is a kind of stealing from the world, motivated by a sense of lack. Whereas if you feel completely in the moment—open to all that is there—you are not so hungry. Of course we get lonely or sad, or anxious, and then we need to think about how to manage what is arising for us.

Things fall into place when we are sensitive to the details of situations. Once you've learnt to ride a bicycle, you need only make very small adjustments to stay on the bicycle. You can then trust the fact that the bicycle will keep moving and you won't fall off. This is not a blind trust, as it arises out of an aware sensitivity which is integrated into every action. One can develop a similar trust that the world will keep revealing itself, that opportunities will open up, and that one will be able to respond.

From time to time, situations arise that seem terminal, enforcing a real limit. We might find that we've got cancer or something which we think of as terrible, and it feels as if this terrible thing is spoiling our lives. *"But I was planning to go to India and do so many things, and now I have this disease and have to go to a hospital and maybe I'm going to die. My life has been wasted."* Although it is understandable that we might think this way, it is a sign that we have been living in the future, we haven't been in the present. The more we are actually really present in the moment, it doesn't matter too much what happens. We go through things because we accept them, not in a

passive, victim way, but with a generous openness, interested in what is happening.

If you do a painting, you can respond to it through your schema of assumptions, labelling it, often with an accompanying anxiety. Or you can be interested and allow your attention to flow with the image you have created. Similarly you can be interested in whatever occurs, not becoming caught up in it, but just staying on the one who is having the experience, staying on the ceaselessly arising point of awareness. We can learn to observe our pain, watch it rising and changing and passing. However, if you strongly label the sensation as 'pain', then you are no longer interested because you already know pain is shit "*I don't want pain, it's a bad thing.*" You are only interested in removing it.

But if you actually sit with it, it will change. For example, when you sit in meditation and your knees get sore, if you are open to the sensation without attachment, then it does start to change. It feels warm, and it's hot, and then it's cold and it's sharp and all sorts of things are arising, and if you just stay with the process of change, you realise you don't have to change things—if you give them space they will change by themselves.

A key notion in dzogchen is represented in the form of Kuntuzangpo, who is depicted as dark blue in colour, naked and without ornaments. He represents the simple purity of all things, perfect as they are, uncontrived and without need of adjustment or ornamentation. Kuntuzangpo means 'always good' indicating that everything is good all the time, not in the sense of a good/bad opposition, but good in the sense of value; that we live in a world that's completely rich with value.

Questioner: I've got a question about the frame. Is buddhism a frame as well?

James: Buddhism offers many different frames—and also shows how to deconstruct all frames. The general frame of buddhism would indicate that the way we live at the moment is not the best way to live. Because of ignorance, because we assume certain things about the world, we are returned to suffering again and again. However it is possible to live without these assumptions, it is possible to be more free. Part of the buddhist frame is that there is no God who will save us; there is no final heaven to go to. We are invited to take up the responsibility of cultivating awareness, and developing compassion towards others. This is an infinite work, but it gets easier as we learn to make use of reality.

A familiar Tibetan image for this is the eagle. An eagle with a big wingspan uses the wind to fly. It doesn't have to make much effort because it's moving with what's there. Similarly with the two wings of wisdom and compassion, we glide through the world using the world to carry us forward.

DISSOLVING MEDITATION

I'll now relate this view to the dissolving meditation. What keeps us in the state of suffering and confusion is the experience we have of being inside

ourselves, looking out at a separate world. This arises from the basic separation of subject and object. The purpose of the dissolving meditation is to provide an experience where subject and object come together and thereby effect a shift from being a consciousness inside looking out, to the more open state of awareness. This is a really profound shift in the way in which we experience the world.

There are various methods for doing this, but the most common one in the tantric tradition is to do a visualising meditation, and throughout the visualisation to focus attention completely on the form. The visualisation is both our own effortful creation and also—through the blessings of the deities involved—the display of their enlightened nature.

The form that we will practise here is a very simplified one. In more elaborated forms you see a deity, you develop a lot of emotion towards the deity, and you pray to the deity, *“Please you must save me, you are so powerful, I am so helpless...”* You intensify the separation: *“You are very, very good; you are very, very powerful. I am very, very weak; I am very, very helpless.”* That kind of intensification is like stretching a rubber band. The object is wonderful, wonderful and then at a certain point you let go, and Bang! The object and subject rush together and cancel each other out, leaving an open space of awareness.

BALL OF WHITE LIGHT: VISUALISATION

In the simplified form we are doing we start with visualising in front of us a clear blue sky which symbolises emptiness. In the centre of it there is a ball of white light, not too big, circular and transparent. You can see through it, it is shimmering white light, like the first radiance of the clear blue sky.

It is pure light in the sense that light has no substance, you can't get hold of light, light is simply a revelation. If you block light, it goes out, as when you put your hand over a projector, no light comes out. Light is always in motion, light is motion. It represents the fact that we are in a world of movement, of motility, of revelation. If the revelation stops, if the light is switched off, it ends.

As we focus our attention on the ball of light we recite Om Ah Hung, the syllables which represent the buddha's body, speech and mind. Reciting these activates the blessing of the sphere of white light, which is the sambhogakaya aspect, so that rays of white, red and blue light flow from it and merge into our body.

The white light comes into the forehead. It represents the purified body of the buddha, and the light coming in purifies all the heaviness of our body, the way it seems solid, substantial, a thing that's separate from the world. We imagine that our body is full of this white light.

We then imagine red light coming to our throat, purifying all the sins and faults of our speech. All the lies we've told, the ways we've used our speaking to cheat or manipulate other people, ways in which we've kept secret or done bad things with our speech, all is purified. This frees us so that we can trust

our own speech; we can speak freely into the world without being caught up in funny games. The red light fills our body.

Finally blue light comes shining into our heart and purifies our mind of the basis of anxiety, of our fragile ego-sense of self, so that we can relax and trust ourselves. All our tensions and worries and fearfulness dissolve. As the blue light pours into us we feel our tight, anxious thoughts such as, *"I'm no good, people don't like me, I should be like this, why aren't I like that?"* being softened and gently melting away. Allow the thought that, *"My mind is pure, my mind is open, whatever arises in my mind is good."*

This practice is a means of allowing us to trust ourselves as we are, through re-orienting our self-identity. All doubts and anxieties, hatred of one's body—that one's too fat or ugly or whatever it is—all of that is purified. All the doubts and anxieties about speech, all the doubts and anxieties about one's thinking process, all of this has been purified. *"As I am, I am good enough."* This is what is really, really important, that we have a deep self-acceptance. *"Whatever I am is OK because I am part of this revelation. I can't take my place in the revelation if I am always putting myself outside it by saying I should be better. However I am is OK because this is how things are."*

One recites the core mantra Om Ah Hung for a while. In reciting it one intensifies the sense of the light coming towards one; but one is also speaking, one is also making noise, one is making a mark in the world. So this kind of meditation is a transition from silent, retreating meditation, away from the world, into being in the world. Tantric meditation tends to have us doing things which are reasonably similar to ordinary life, because that is what it's really trying to transform, so it's very important to make some sound with our voice, really feel our voice being purified.

After some time—and if you're doing it on your own, this can be as long as you like—the ball of white light comes to the top of your head and starts to dissolve. It shrinks into itself, getting smaller and smaller. Then imagine that it enters the crown of your head, and goes down into your heart. At this point you maintain the visualisation of your body being full of white, red and blue light. It is not that you have got a thick skin with light inside it, with the light up to your skin. It is your skin as well, and your hair... You are completely just this radiant body of light, and in the centre of your heart is the sphere of white light.

The red, white and blue light of your body now dissolves into the white ball, so that your attention is focused solely on the white ball, which gets smaller and smaller. Don't let your mind waver. Full attention is very important—a total identification with the ball of light. You are not standing back from it, observing it. You are the white ball of light. It is all there is. So remain fully identified with it and then allow it to get smaller and smaller, until it is just a point which then vanishes. Nothing. Open. Nothing to focus on, just a relaxed open awareness.

And then of course, thoughts, sensations, feelings, emotions will arise. When that happens, just let them arise, however they will. Pain might come which you seek to locate *"Oh, it's my head, I've got a headache."* It could be a thought of what you have to do tomorrow, or a memory of things you forgot to

do. You could be pulled into the past, into the present, into the future. Whatever arises, stay relaxed and let it pass, for it is the natural display of the mind's radiance.

Gradually you will find that what arises is the experience of being here in this room. Allow this to unfold as a further stage of the manifestation of presence. Whatever you see with your eyes is simply the display of pure light. Whatever sounds you hear are just forms of Om Ah Hung, an echo of the mantra. Whatever thoughts arise are the display of the ceaseless movement of the mind, which never solidifies into something as such. One is not trying to block anything that is occurring, but just welcoming it. You're not pulling things towards you and you're not pushing them away, but just accepting them as they pass through. And then we get up and have a cup of tea or whatever it is!

If things start to get tight, you can just go back in and do the practice again. When you get used to it, you can do it very quickly. It's like getting onto the surf board and when you fall off you just try to get back on the wave again.

Visualisation is very easy for some people and very difficult for others. If you don't have a particularly visual imagination then go with the mood or the feeling-tone of the image. If it comes in another colour, don't really worry about that at this stage. As you do more, I think it will get clearer. I think we have to work with what we've got. All our life we've been living in a body that we have experienced as being very real, solid, vulnerable, the basis of our identity. Trying to shift the frame on this is going to be hard, especially since when we are all the time in our social world, people are affirming us as solid, real bodies. This practice is a move in a radically different direction. We shouldn't be sad if it doesn't happen immediately. Clearly it will take a lot of effort and practice.

IMPERMANENCE

One of the most basic reflections in buddhism is that all phenomena are impermanent. That is to say, they don't endure through time, they change. With some phenomena we can see that this happens very quickly, for example, when we watch our breath, we see that it's moving in and out all the time, or if we feel our pulse, it's moving quite rapidly.

If you stand at the pavement and watch the cars going by, it may seem to be the same car that was at this end of the road and has now moved and is at that end, and so there seems to be a process of change, but the process is occupied by entities which don't themselves appear to change in the process. That is to say, it looks as though there are entities or things in movement.

There are two ways to look at this. The first is on the objective side, and secondly on the subjective side. When we look on the objective side, even at a car, then there is a moment-by-moment molecular change. All the components of the car are made up of atoms. All the atoms are composed of sub-atomic particles which are moving and vibrating and constantly in flux. The particular patterns of vibrations create at the surface level of our eyes the illusion that something is real and substantial and enduring. This is a kind of

hallucination or illusory phenomenon which is not the actual case of the entity in front of us. That is the most basic level. Of course the substance of the car is also changing, in that it gets hotter and colder so that the metal on the outside of the car will increase in size, the tyres will be a bit more swollen at mid-day when it's hotter than they will at night when it's colder, as the air expands and contracts. There are all sorts of subtle movements going on that we don't normally pay attention to, we just look with the assumption "*Oh, that's my car. It's just the same as it was before.*"

The view of impermanence leads us to look further than we would normally do. It means not resting on the usual word or concept, but trying to think about what is actually going on and attending to the minute movement, moment by moment. I think if we do that we will see very subtle changes that are occurring all the time. Even on a kind of external substantial level, like a wooden floor, there are all sorts of movements that are occurring through the day or night, of expansion and contraction, of absorbing moisture at certain times of the day, giving it off at other times. There's a movement, a play between phenomena.

Then of course, on the subjective side, the way in which we perceive the world shifts according to the amount of energy that we have, our emotions, the time of the day, the light, whether we are busy and distracted by something else. So you might be late for work and rush downstairs and get in the car; and then you're driving, and you haven't really thought about the car at all. Or you may decide that you want to sell the car, so you become very aware of cleaning it or covering up all the rust, things like that. Your own subjective state very much affects how much attention you give to the object, whether the object is real for you or not.

And our subjective state is clearly changing all the time. One of the things we notice when we do the basic sitting meditation is that these thoughts and feelings are just flowing and flowing and flowing. There is a flux, a movement, a flow, and yet inside the flow, there are repeated patterns that persist. There are patterns of perception, for we see each other and we recognise each other. Although we are changing all the time we are nonetheless able to recognise people. There is some kind of transfer from one moment to the next of a similarity of form on this level of manifestation.

Similarly, in our emotional life we often find that we have particular patterns of feeling that come back, that we feel depressed or we have an angry nature or we're very jealous and worried about what's going on. We have particular repeated ways in which we approach the world. We may struggle to change them, but actually we very often find that this seems to be who I am. As the years go by and we try therapy or groups, all sorts of methods of change, we find that there seem to be underlying patterns, some character traits that are very hard to shift. This is our karmic shape.

These patterns repeat, but they're not the same. They are a re-constituting, a re-installing, a re-stating of something that existed before. It is this moment-by-moment re-establishment which gives us the sense of "*This is me. I'm a nasty bugger. I'm always fighting with people. Because I used to do that and I still do that, therefore....that's me, it's the same story.*" But actually, if you read

a story in a book, a story is made up of word-by-word-by-word and when we read a book we link all the words together and we have the continuity. Or when we go to the movies, we sit there and we're looking at frame after frame after frame all within the frame of the cinema. But it appears to us like a story, and if it's good we just fall right into it, we're right in there.

Similarly, although moment-by-moment we are re-establishing these patterns in ourselves, or to express it in another way, we are subjected to the re-manifestation of these patterns—for they are not always conscious ego-constructions in that we just find ourselves being jealous or frightened—re-establishment happens in a moment, which is preceded and followed by a gap.

We can try to change our nature by stopping one kind of manifestation and developing another. That's to say, I might feel very shy, very frightened, and I want to be more confident, so I learn to see the kind of situations that make me feel shy, and I try to think "*Well, what will support me in that sort of situation?*" So if I'm going to a party, maybe I should wear clothes that I feel comfortable in so that at least I'll be relaxed in myself and won't get so worried about how other people are seeing me. One can make small adjustments like that. Or one could go with a nice friend who is very extrovert and then try to ride on the back of them "*Hey, I'm with this nice person and everybody likes them, so maybe they'll like me.*" This kind of effort is very useful since from our childhood we have particular habits or dispositions which are limiting to us and so we have to struggle to change them.

In buddhist meditation it's often suggested that it helps to spend time in the gaps between the moments of manifestation. Because if you focus on the manifestation, you're pushing something that appears to be quite solid. Whereas, if you allow yourself through meditation to get into the gaps between the arising—even just recognising that the gaps exist—then that is very helpful, because most of the time we experience our life as a stream of continuity. If we go into this gap, we'll find a spaciousness in which the next moment of the arising is softened as it were, from underneath. Rather than changing it from the outside in, one is able to sort of tickle its soft underbelly, so that it trembles a bit, and starts to dissolve.

RIPPLING ON THE SURFACE

In relationship to creativity, one of the other things about impermanence is that it can lead us to experience the whole world as an ongoing, dynamic flow, what I referred to earlier as the revelation of openness. Openness is not just a big, black, empty hole, but is full of colours, forms, shapes, tastes that are displaying themselves and then vanishing back in. A traditional example used to illustrate that is the surface of a mirror, in which something arises, and seems to be there, absolutely real, and yet you can't grasp it or touch it. It's just rippling on the surface.

The more we attend to impermanence, by observing the effect of the times of the day on the colours of the plants, the nature of the sky, our own feelings and so forth, the more we actually pay attention to the small changes that are going on moment-by-moment, the more we start to experience that the world

itself is really in movement. It's not that we ourselves are fairly solid entities which, having legs, are ambulatory, and so move about inside a world of fixed things, which is our ordinary perception. But rather that the world itself, with us in it, is a procession. Clearly, if we take this seriously, it's quite a radical idea.

When I return to London and go to my flat, I'll go in up the steps, and I'll know what's there. It's my home and its familiarity gives me a sense of security. And yet, it won't be the same place. I will be making it the same place by this assumption that it is the same, and through that assumption I will be recognising the things that I particularly want to recognise. I will be installing the past in the present, bringing the assumptions and knowledge of the past into the present so that I can predict the future. If I am really attending to impermanence, then going up the steps to the door and putting the key in the door, there has to be a sense of, "*Well, I don't know what will be in there.*" I can fill the flat with all the knowledge I have of it, or I can actually attend to the flat. If I do that, it will reveal something else to me. My eye will be distracted by cobwebs or something to be done... [*Laughter*]. So it sometimes feels safer to follow this narrow, predictable track.

Yet when we allow ourselves to be, as it were, distracted away from the familiar by looking at it with fresh eyes, we see something new. If we stay with that newness, if we look at what seems to be familiar, it's actually quite different. You may have had some experience of that today, doing the meditation and then just looking at something, and it looks different. When you look with fresh eyes, the world is fresh. So what you thought you knew, you don't actually know. The 'knowing' is a kind of layering over, a smoothing, a foreclosure of the potential or the possibility which is actually present in front of us.

It can feel as if there is a thing, a real thing, which is somehow hidden by our assumptions and when we remove the assumption we see the thing in itself. That's a fairly familiar western kind of notion, of removing a veil of ignorance. Sometimes in the dharma they use that kind of language too. But a focus on impermanence shifts this, for it's rather that the veil, the assumption, is moving and the thing itself is moving, and so you have an infinite procession, a ceaseless display. Ignorance covers arisings in a solidifying fog which creates the illusion or the assumption that things are real and separate. It's more a case of attending to the process, observing that everything we experience, including our own experience, is moving and changing, on very, very subtle levels, and on quite gross levels too. The whole world is like a wave that we surf on, with ourselves as part of the whole world movement. Thus the world is itself creativity, a ceaseless process of revealing itself to itself. I have been talking about a world process but in buddhist texts they would talk more of a mind process. Whether we focus on subject or on object—in their most infinite mode as *cittata* (Tib. *sems nyid*) and *dharmata* (Tib. *chos nyid*)—they are however, inseparable.

When we are in that process of revelation, it is as if, by cresting on the wave, subject and object are linked on the same point. Subject and object are rising together inside, or held together in a field of awareness. Although I can clearly recognise that I am sitting here looking out across the room, seeing other people, there's also the fact that my sense of what's out there that I'm looking

at, is contained in one movement of awareness. Thus awareness is both the container of what's going on, the infinite medium, and also the lively sense of being aware. An aspect of the awareness is the sense of a consciousness inside looking out. It is not that one has to remove that sense of a personal consciousness, but personal consciousness is part of the way in which awareness reveals itself as the world. It is not as if we have to completely lose who we are and merge into a vast, infinity with nothing else; the precise awareness of being here in the room is embedded in the open sphere of awareness. The important thing is to integrate the moment of the relaxed, open awareness with the return to consciousness.

This is why it can be very helpful to meditate in focused brief sessions of fifteen minutes, ten minutes even, so that you go into the state of awareness and then allow that to integrate with the arising of the presence of the world. You get used to the pulsing of open and then precise, open and precise. These two are part and parcel of the ground nature of enlightenment, like two sides of the same coin, they are not different. You are not trying to get rid of ego-consciousness, throw it away and then vanish into this infinite nirvana. Rather you realise that samsara and nirvana are the same, an endless pulsing in and out.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN JAMES AND PEOPLE PRESENT

Questioner: You said that it would be very helpful if we would start to watch just how the colours on the trees change in the morning and evening, to compare things and see the changes. But if I do this, then I'm in the duality: now it's like this, before it was like this, and then I'm again in my head and this is putting my stamp on things. I thought this was what we want to come out of. So where's the middle way?

James: What I'm suggesting is, if at first you're very much under the power of assuming "*Well, that's just a tree, and it's always the same tree*" you may need to do some analytical investigation first of all, and of course, from a higher position if you like, or a more open position, that's still an enmeshment in the dualistic vision. Nonetheless it's quite helpful to put into question the assumption we have that the object continues all the time, because it's looking at the phenomenology of perception rather than imagining that there are real objects that exist separate and in themselves. Objects always exist in relationship to subject, so the tree is part of my phenomenological field and as such, its change is my change. The more we have the sense of being in this field of experience, and that in the field of experience both the object and the subject side are moving, then we can start to bring the dualised poles to one point which reveals the nature of dynamic integration.

The enlightened master is not fixed somewhere, has not arrived at a point of cessation. Rather his/her nature is becoming because the world is becoming; out of stillness he/she is called in to become, as a compassionate response to the world. To recognise the nature of becoming, that's what enlightenment is. Becoming is dancing in tune to the world, not being at odds with it. Enlightenment is simply to be in the dance and not to get tired; to be able to let the music carry you forward. In that sense we can't predict what an enlightened master would do, because they'll just keep on dancing.

The real issue around this level of creativity is always about relaxing. It's not so much about the need to construct things as to de-construct them, to provide some space inside the flow of things, so that the flow continues in a more healthy way. It's not to end the flow, but to remove disturbances and blocks to the flow. All these distortions and blocks arise from attachment, the urge to become something as such, to hang onto what we like and get rid of what we don't like.

Break

KARMA AND PATTERNS

The fixity of self-identity feeds into the development of karma, that is to say, actions which have consequences beyond their immediate effect. A traditional example is that if you kill someone you get born in one of the hells, and in hell very unpleasant things happen to you. So if you do very unpleasant things to other people, there'll be a turnaround and something very unpleasant will happen to you.

A more subtle way of thinking about it would be that in order to carry out an action like killing someone, one has to have a particular kind of intentionality, one has to have a perception of the person whom one is going to kill as strongly real, and as troublesome to oneself, *"This is someone I don't like, and that's why I'm going to kill them."* So they exist for you, *"You're a bastard, and I don't like you today, and I won't like you tomorrow or forever or forever. So I've got to kill you now!"* There is something fixed in this. The person is something. He is my enemy. It's a very solid thing, it's not creative, and it's not changing. It's not that *"You've hurt me, but I like you so anyway we'll talk it over and it will get better."* It's *"No!! You've done something to me. It's cut a line between us and I hate you! I'm going to kill you!"* Somehow this person has been cut out from the world of change and possibility and fixed into a state of being the 'enemy'. With this attitude one is already in quite a frozen, narrow state of mind. If once you have killed the person and you are glad that you've done it, then this fixed state of mind is reinforced as part of our karma.

We often inherit cultural hatreds such as racial or religious antagonisms which prime our attitudes, making us very sensitive and ready to respond. When you see such a person, your mind goes into a particular reductive set, and you know something about the person without knowing anything about them. The main consequence of this is that when something from the object side comes towards you, you are in the same blinkered situation and you can't re-edit it.

There are four stages in the formation of karma. In the first you have the basic perception of the other as a separate real entity. Next, on the basis of that, you have an intention towards them. Thirdly, you put the intention into action and do something to the other. Fourthly, you see the result of the action and feel satisfaction with it. So in terms of hatred, the four stages might go something like: *"I don't like you. I'm going to kill you. The knife is in. I'm glad you're dead!"* When all four stages are present, this gives rise to a karmic impulse of full intensity.

SOFTENING KARMA

The way you soften the karma of a particular action is to put a gap into any of the four stages so that you are not fully aligned with them. For example *"I've killed you! Oh my God, what have I done?"* The action is now put into question, *"I've made a mistake,"* I've separated myself from that narrow pattern, or in the moment of killing, you think *"Ah! I can't kill him! This is crazy. We should talk about this."* So already some doubt has entered. Or I have an intention. I think *"Hey, this is mad! I shouldn't think this way, you know, something needs to be done."*

In backtracking these stages one is always opening up this narrow intentionality, this focused foreclosure which drives one into meeting a consequence later. One has become so used to imposing one's will, investing a kind of control on the world. Then when it turns round and you have to face the consequence, you're just trapped, paralysed, because you've never been used to moving, to re-assessing, to taking up other viewpoints.

It can be very confusing to enter the world of Tibetan buddhist practice because there are so many points of view, so many methods. Although it can be complicated, it can also be helpful having many different methods to put things into question, making us soft, and less dogmatic. We have to be sensitive to our own situation and relate it to the dharma methods that we know. You can make use of the teachings of your guru, but it is you who have to apply them in the precise situation you find yourself in. If you are trapped in the rigid template of a fixed learned response it will be difficult to respond openly to whatever is arising.

We get a sense of our karma when we experience ourselves coming back to the same pattern again and again. This may also reveal itself in art, and some people here have talked of drawing the same shape again and again. Sometimes it may be a relief, it may be a point of identification *"Aha!"* For others, it may just feel like a terrible prison: *"Is this all I can do?"* Fixed patterns both give us containment and security in a sense of self, and also provide a kind of imitation and narrow self-definition which stops us doing anything else.

The dharma approach, as always, is about finding the middle way between the two. Because if you throw out all the structure you might get really lost, but if you go too far into structure you get really tight. It's finding the middle way, a way of accepting and integrating the karmic patterns that we find unfolding in, and as, our lives.

One can be more relaxed and tender towards oneself inside the fixity and repetition of these patterns. Trying to control them will often make them stronger, just as when you push the wall, the wall pushes you back with an equal and opposite force. If we push psychologically, we tend to intensify the patterns that we're pushing at. It's about making friends with these patterns, knowing them, accepting that this is the way in which the revelation is occurring. This gentle attention transforms the patterns in a subtle way by revealing that each time it's different, because each context is different. Attention to detail is vital to interrupt the grand organising concepts which we

apply in order to give us a sense of being in control. Freshness and possibilities lie in the details.

FIVE SKANDHAS

We need to have responses appropriate to our own situation. At first, if we're caught up in lots of confusion and we don't know what's going on, then we may have to do a lot of mental calming meditation. Having learnt to observe the breath and gained some degree of calm, we might take up from Vipassana the use of certain categories of identification, to help us order and simplify what is arising during meditation.

The principal set of categories are the five skandhas—form, feeling, association, sensation and consciousness. For example, when I'm sitting doing my meditation, I may have the sense of a pain in my knee. I can then identify this simply as 'sensation' and leave it at that, just acknowledging sensation whenever it occurs. Rather than going into *"Oh, I've got a pain in my shoulder, maybe I should go and see the doctor. I wonder what's happened to me?"* One simply identifies the arising as belonging to one of the five categories which encompass all arisings. Thus you contain the confusion of the massing up of thoughts by applying this structural analysis to the first moment of arising. We are often very good at doing this kind of structural analyses, except that we tend to use not the neutral ones like the five skandhas, but the negative, personal, pathological ones that we learnt in childhood: *"I'm no good! I've messed up again! No-one will like me!"* We use that kind of category to take a whole lot of information and turn it into another little sentence in our story.

What we need to do is relax that and pay attention, not to the sentence but to the words, and the letters in the words, to the punctuation, to the fine points. By doing that we see that each telling of the story is a different story because the world is in movement. Although then there's a familiarity, it's not an entrapment. We haven't gone full circle back to the same point; we've gone in a kind of spiral. The turnings of the spiral can get wider and wider so we get more and more space. We're covering much the same territory because we've got our families or our jobs or whatever it is, it's the same sort of story, but there's spaciousness in moving through it, rather than a sense of Bang!

If you are reasonably secure in your sense of self, that is to say, if your early childhood experience has been fairly containing, it probably makes it easier to relax into meditation. However, even if things have been really a mess and been very chaotic, if you understand the structure of the meditation and the principles involved, I think that gives a deeper level of containment. Even on a personal level, if you are neurotic and get lost and confused, once you understand the meditation and relax into it, that will contain all the confusion, which will gradually dissolve in the meditation. But if instead of trusting the meditation, you take up a neurotic position towards it and think *"Oh God, maybe I'm a bad person, maybe the Buddha wouldn't like me. He likes everyone else, but the Buddha's rays of light come out and they go to everyone but they don't come to me,"* then it could be hard!

So it depends really on where you allow yourself to be held, what you believe is sure. If your interpersonal experience has been that people are not very reliable, then trusting is quite difficult. However, here we are talking about trusting a process, rather than a person who is fixed. Often we are betrayed by people who say *"I'm reliable, you can trust me,"* and then they don't behave in that way. Something has been set up inviting reliance, and then there's a betrayal of the contract.

DANCE! DON'T BE A WALLFLOWER

Trusting the dharma is not trusting a thing, but allowing oneself to enter into a process. It is not about setting up a fixed position, thinking *"I am here and I'm going to trust you,"* rather it is a movement towards what one is trusting. That is why in the meditation we have the ball of white light or Guru Rinpoche or Tara. In trusting Tara, we trust Tara as a function, as something to make use of, not as a thing, separate. Faith is a quality of relationship that helps us move towards integration and non-separation with the realisation of emptiness.

In that way impermanence allows us to let go of the hope of a fixed world. Usually we work very, very hard to build some security. Building up a pension plan, buying a house, taking out medical insurance, people use all of these things to make life safe, thinking *"If I have all of that then I will be safe."* But from a dharma point of view the way to be safe is to be in contact with the world as it moves—not to step back from it and see the world as dangerous, and then try to control it—for there is no place where you can hide from impermanence.

We will all get older. People spend millions and millions and millions of dollars on face-creams and liposuction, and all of this is a fight against ageing. You can have every little line in your face removed, that's possible, but it doesn't make a difference. If you look at somebody who's sixty-five and they've had all this treatment, they look like somebody of sixty-five who has had all that treatment. They don't look twenty-five. You can't cheat the world in that way, for life moves on and that's why the Buddha said suffering arises from attachment. We try to hold onto something, but we can't, because everything changes. Whether we like it or not, we have to learn to dance. We can't just sit back and watch other people do it, because we are called into the dance. It's not safe to be a wallflower, that path will shrivel you up and make you crazy!

Break

ABSENCE OF SELF AND EMPTINESS

What I'd like to do now is to briefly take up the buddhist idea of the absence of self, link it to emptiness, and to comment on the notion of 'unborn' and 'unceasing'. We only have a short time this week to look at these quite complicated ideas which have profound philosophical underpinnings. We are just sort of skittering on the surface, a bit like those bugs that walk on the water, using the surface tension to stay afloat.

Reflecting on impermanence, early buddhist philosophers started to enquire *“Well, how is it that this moment and the next moment are separate and yet linked? That one thing endures from this moment to the next and yet between these moments there is somehow a gap?”* It seemed to them that events, moments, are a bit like on this rosary; you have separate beads but they are joined on a string. There’s some kind of continuity, with separate beads that move along it.

The idea at first was that there are basic atoms or building blocks, which are linked together and which flow moment by moment, one arising and passing in an instant, and then the next and the next and the next. As one moment or one building block passes, the next one arises, so there is a sort of rapid rippling which creates the illusion of endurance and stability. A bit like when you run a relay race, holding a baton which you pass on to the next runner. Except that there is a new ‘baton’ every time it passes from one moment to the next.

When this view was analysed critically by Nagarjuna and others it was seen to have lots of flaws. At first it was assumed that there were just a few kinds of ‘atoms’, or basic building blocks which gave rise to all the forms we see. These could be grouped as the five skandhas or elaborated as the fifty or so samskaras. Then somebody said *“Well, if you have one moment and then another moment after it, then the moment that’s in the middle has got one behind it and one in front of it, so it is looking both to the back—to the moment that was before it—and also to the moment that’s in front of it.”*

Thus the moment, instead of being a unitary entity, has a back side and a front side, and if it’s got a back side and a front side, you can slice it down the middle because it has two sides. The same can be done with whatever is left with this splitting for each half also has a front and a back.” You have a reductio ad infinitum of splitting and splitting and splitting, when it becomes very clear that what you have is not these moment-by-moment discrete entities, but a very intangible flux, a bit like the modern physics ideas of wave and particle. It became clear that when one really examines manifestation, appearance, we find no substantial ground or essence, no irreducible entities. All entities are revealed as being essentially empty, an appearance which is the appearance of emptiness, of nothing.

For example, this is a little hammer for the bell. It’s made out of wood, I think. It’s in two parts—one rounded part and one long part. We know that this implement, being wood, came out of a tree, and the tree came out of a seed, and the seed came out of another tree. So this hammer, although it looks like an entity, something existing in itself, has a huge history going back to the beginning of trees. It also won’t endure in its present form. Probably if it’s used a lot it will get dirty and then one day maybe it will get broken or people won’t want it anymore, and they will burn it or throw it away and it will be transformed and go in another direction. This object is located in space and time, it is held in place by the meeting together of all sorts of factors. Although it appears to be a separate individual object, it’s actually a meeting place of hundreds and thousands of moments and situations and choices.

This kind of an external conceptual analysis is used to clear a space in which we can see how we construct our familiar world on the basis of assumptions. If we start from the assumption that this hammer exists in itself, then we are hooked into taking up a position regarding it: liking it, disliking it, being indifferent to it. The world is full of such things, and it seems that they just are, whereas in fact, everything is history. This house was built by particular people who carried the stones. They were married, they had uncles who used to get drunk—you know—endlessly everything moves out and out and out, with each thing related to another.

ECOLOGY AND INTERDEPENDENCE

This interweaving of phenomena is part of the process of dependent origination, which means that every single thing is contingent, contextual, inseparable from a vast net of causes which links all phenomena in an infinite interdependence. This view helps us to question our assumptions; it also has some similarities with ecological considerations. For example, the awareness that we live in a world with finite resources can remind us that every time we buy a hamburger this action has wide-reaching consequences.

However the advertising of commodities like hamburger sets them out as being a special thing in themselves, as a distillation of the good essences of the world. Eating one of these things will cut you off from your ordinary world and bring you to a special world which is happy and free of problems.

So there are two conflicting views, one which emphasises interconnectedness and the other which promotes a sense of special events separate from other things. The former view questions assumptions while the latter promotes them. Putting our assumptions into question is a very important part of developing a dharmic approach to living.

Instead of simply being hungry and wanting lots of things from the world, one thinks *“Aha! This object is not just a thing out there; it’s linked to all sorts of things. Being in contact with this thing actually connects me to everything else.”* The more one thinks this way, the more one is softening the sense of *“I am a separate individual, ‘me’, and what I want is important. You take care of your stuff because it’s not my concern.”* This is very much the way our lives get structured in consumerist capitalism.

But from the dharmic view of dependent origination, we would recognise that *“Your life and my life are interwoven, the choices that you make affect me, and will affect my children’s lives. I am not a separate, individual person. My existence is part of this whole movement.”* And because of that, one becomes open to the possibility of reflecting about connectedness *“Well, who are you? You know—if I’m connected with you, then who are you?”*

This can develop into a sense of interest, respect, and responsibility towards other phenomena. It is developing both wisdom through which an attention to how the other is, and compassion, a concern that they are healthy and happy. This leads us to behave in a way that will make ourselves and all other beings healthy and happy. There’s an ethical responsibility in connectedness, an unavoidable and infinite responsibility to the other.

This kind of analysis is perhaps more useful for those who have developed their thinking function. For those who are more connected to their feeling, the same kind of understanding of interconnectedness can be developed through prayer and visualisation. It is not that everybody has to follow the same path, but that there are different methods of coming to a direct understanding of the key points.

EXAMPLE OF HAMMER

It also leads to the idea that the little hammer doesn't have a self. Clearly it is separate, it's not the floor because I can bang it on the floor and then I can take it off the floor. The floor is the floor, but this is on the floor and now it's off the floor. So it's separate from the floor; it's separate from the wall; it's separate from my head. It's existing in itself on one level, but at the same time its existence is dependent on the context, so it does not exist in itself, it's existing in relationship to the other. So, it seems to exist as a separate phenomenon which would be our conventional, our ordinary way of seeing it, but when we become aware of it, it's actually embedded in the whole structure of becoming. At the moment, it's existing in my hand. That's where it is, it's stuck at the end of three of my fingers. That's how we are aware of it at the moment. When I put it down we're not aware of it, and when I bring it up we are aware of it; it's always in relationship to what we do, it doesn't float in some empty space by itself.

In this way there is no real inherent self-nature to this little hammer. It appears to exist, but in itself it has no self-existence. That is to say, its separate existence is a concept, it is a particular kind of perception that I have of it, through which I take it out, I extrapolate it from the environment. I make it separate, but actually it's always embedded in the flow of becoming. All the time, through our use of language, through our way of conceptualising a 'me' in here and things out there, we are pulling things into reality and then pushing them back. If I pay attention to you and you become real, then I don't look at you, and I look at someone else—you've vanished, and the other person has become real. All the time we're making this figure and ground movement, taking something up and then pushing it back. A bit like on a camera where you have a zoom lens; when we get something in focus we think "*Ah, it's real!*" then we shift the magnification on the image and it goes into the background. We do this all the time.

IN THE WOMB YET NEVER BORN

But if everything is part of the ongoing context, if nothing can be truly extrapolated from this context, then in a sense, everything is within, is not separate, and nothing comes out as a truly individual entity. This points us towards the understanding that all phenomena are unborn and unceasing. It is as if we all are existing in the womb of the Great Mother or the womb of wisdom. We exist in the sense that we experience our presence in the world, but we're never born, in the sense that we never leave this womb, we never leave the mother and become something fixed and separate. We are always becoming something else, ceaselessly. We don't get born as something as such, with a name and a fixed identity, but rather we are in a state of continual

becoming, changing as the world changes, part of the ceaseless flow of interdependent becoming.

We are unborn in the sense that we don't become some fixed separate entity, for what we are can never be grasped, and we are unceasing because we are part of the continuous and changing display of the world. A traditional example used to illustrate the unborn nature is a mirror. When you look in a mirror you can see an image. You can see it but you can't get it. It's in the mirror; you can't take it out of the mirror. It is there and yet there is nothing as such. In the same way, we are here, we have a manifest presence—but if we try to grasp the presence we find there is nothing there. We cannot extrapolate entities out of the process of infinite en-worldment. We are always in a context in which we mark the world and the world marks us. We are in a constant interplay in which we have no separate self, for when someone smiles, we smile, someone gets angry with us and we get upset or frightened.

We are part of the infinite display ceaselessly occurring within emptiness. Emptiness means that there is no solid, separate self, each thing is empty and is an aspect of the sphere of emptiness, the infinity of emptiness, infinite openness. Each thing that arises has no inherent or separate self-nature, for it manifests in relationship to all other manifestations. The whole field of becoming is moving together at the same time.

In our ordinary life we don't appreciate that. We don't stay in touch with this dynamic movement because we hang onto the sense of a 'me' inside trying to secure a particular shape in the world: *"I hope I'll get this experience in my life."* *"God, I hope that doesn't happen to me!"* We're trying to pull in the things that we want, and we feel unhappy if we don't get them. We try to push away the things we don't want and get unhappy when they stay. So we are constantly trying to manipulate and coerce the world as if it was our enemy in some way, as if we had to act on it rather than be part of it. We take up an approach of mechanical agency to the world, rather than accepting that we are in it, like how a fish is in water.

JUST LET THOUGHTS COME

A key element in meditation is to relax our sense of separation and anxious agency. When we dissolve in the meditation and relax into the state of openness, thoughts will arise, but we just let them come and go with any hopes or fears.

If we hang onto a thought and relate to it as if it were real, then there is a thinker and a thought. The thinker is not the thought, because the thought passes and there's still a thinker, busy thinking about the thought that's passed, or waiting for the next one in order to have something to do, to maintain its sense of importance. Once we go into that split, we create our identity through our relation to thoughts and this then generates our familiar experience of a world of fixed affect-laden entities.

What we need to do is to relax and keep dissolving this. Relax and dissolve; a very gentle approach allowing the thoughts to sink back into the womb of openness. A thought arrives and it's as if it's something; it seems to be

struggling for birth, and so we give it a helping hand. In London there is the Battersea Dogs Home and if you go there all the little dogs go, “*Bow! Wow! Wow! I’m nice, take me home! Bow! Wow!*” So when you’re doing your meditation, these thoughts come up and say, “*Oh, I’m a beautiful thought; I’m an interesting thought; I’m an anxious thought. Take me! Adopt me!*” And we say “*Oh yes, this is important. I’ve got to get involved with this,*” and that’s how samsara is born. *[Laughter]* So you have to harden your heart. All these little whining dogs... and sometimes that’s very difficult.

USING ENERGY TO CLEAR THE SPACE: PRACTICE OF PHAT!

To simply allow them to dissolve them back into space is hard, and that’s why a more forceful technique is sometimes used, the syllable Phat! Phat! in Tibetan means to cut. When you say Phat! let it sort of explode out of yourself. You want the sound to arise from your belly, from your centre of energy, just let it come out.

The practice is as follows. First of all we do the visualisation practice, then we dissolve it by letting the ball of light descend into us, and the final focus of attention, the point of light, dissolves into space and we relax into the state of openness.

Then after a while we might recognise that we’re getting caught up in our thoughts, so we need to be able to separate from them. We already have two methods for doing this. The first method is to attend to the breath, nothing more. We then have a fixed point of reference to return to. This is an effective method, but one that is still operating within a dualistic paradigm.

In the second method, if thoughts arise you try to relax and let them sink back into the unborn state. You recognise that this thing that seems to be coming into existence has no real existence, that it is the radiant display of the mind, and so you let it go without attachment, letting it vanish just as morning mist melts away on a summer’s day.

Now we can learn this third way to free ourselves from enslavement in thoughts. When you recognise that you are getting caught up in thoughts, feelings, sensations, whatever is arising, let a strong, sudden Phat! arise. It will create a gap, blowing arisings away. By doing it forcefully you give yourself a shock. It shouldn’t be: “*Thought coming, I’d better say Phat. Phat.*” *[Laughter]* That wouldn’t take you very far. It’s a funny kind of move in which you’re going to surprise yourself, which is hard to do at first because you can be a bit too intentional. You just have to practise, but gradually it becomes almost automatic. Just as if you’re riding a bicycle and you go onto some cobbles and the bike starts to wobble, you automatically adjust your body so the bicycle doesn’t fall.

You might say Phat! and immediately *think* “*Oh God, that was funny!*” or “*I didn’t do that very well!*” so you’re already on a conceptualisation about the Phat! So you need to do another Phat! to clear that. *[Laughter]* Very exhausting. But it’s something to experiment with because it’s using energy to clear the space rather than conceptualisation or relaxation.

VALUE OF RITUAL

Tibetan buddhism is full of rituals. That is to say it's full of established forms that people learn. In learning a ritual and a form you can get a sense of direction, of purpose. You learn something to do and to say. Even if you don't know in yourself what you're doing, even if you feel lost and confused, if you just do what you've been told, you will somehow be doing something which has a value installed by the whole tradition. In this way, the tradition is a vehicle which we can travel in, which supports us, carrying us with it. It helps us to focus our attention on the task, even though the task remains personal. It's always up to us to reflect on our own motivation. We have to develop a living, lively relationship with the tradition.

REFUGE AND BODHICITTA

I will now explain the practice of taking refuge and developing bodhicitta, and we will learn a verse that is used at the beginning of many meditation practices to ritualistically establish our refuge orientation and our development of altruism.

Seeking refuge is a very normal and natural part of life. When our present situation is insecure in some way or we feel uncertain, then we seek refuge or someone to provide protection and succour. For example, if you're walking home and it's a long way and then you see a bus, you will stop it and get on. You seek refuge in the bus because it protects your legs from getting too tired. If it starts to rain, you look for a shelter or an umbrella and you take refuge in that. A refuge is anything you go to help you manage an environment which has changed to give you difficulties. Nowadays there are many women's refuges. A woman having a hard time with domestic violence or whatever can find a place to go where the man won't be able to trace her. She will get protection and support to get on with her life. A refuge interrupts the flow of difficulties that you have, it gives time out from complexity.

From the buddhist point of view we are always caught up in painful complexity. This is called experience of samsara. Samsara simply means the on-going, cyclical movement of birth and death, birth and death. And within one life we are moving from one situation to another, always on the move, never quite sure why we're doing things or whether they have any meaning.

A buddha, existing in a state of clarity is able to have a larger vision in which the over-all meaning of life is continuously present. For us it is different. We get a bit lost and confused, as if we were living in a maze. So we go to the Buddha for refuge. We say *"You've understood something useful that I can't understand at the moment. I need your help."*

There are two common ways of experiencing refuge. Firstly we can see the buddha as a symbol of the possibility of living with clarity. Somebody got there. We can get there too. For example, if you were living in East Germany thirty years ago, you might have known somebody who escaped to West Germany, and just knowing that person's name would give you the hope that one day you could get out if you wanted. The buddha is the symbol of freedom, showing the possibility of freedom, and inspiring us to change. The

first view is more common in the theravadin countries like Ceylon, Burma, South Vietnam, where the idea is that there has really only been one buddha, who has died and is gone. He is present primarily as a symbol of human potential.

The second way would be to imagine that there's more possibility of a relationship. The buddha has not only got over the Wall and he's now living it up in Berlin—champagne, having a really good time—but he can also send little food parcels to you. So: *“Hey Buddha! You're having a wonderful time; here we only have this terrible old bread, and we have to work in the factory all the time, please send me some caviar!”* From this point of view the buddha is not just an inspiration, but he is available, is able to respond to our wish for help.

This view, which is strongly present in the Tibetan tradition, is based on the idea that we all have the buddha nature, we all have the possibility of greater freedom, greater clarity, greater compassion, greater openness to life, and that the buddha will help us to do this, because the buddha doesn't just have wisdom, he has compassion. Having attained infinite freedom and joy, he hasn't just gone off into self-indulgent bliss, but he is available to share this out. So when we take refuge in this system the usual thought is *“I go for refuge in the knowledge that you will do something for me.”* The idea is that if you go for refuge to someone who is committed to taking care of you, they will take you in. This is similar to the old idea of hospitals; a hospital was a place of hospitality, of welcoming. If you went there sick and tired they would take you in and feed and restore you.

Nowadays it is very common to feel lonely, to feel that other people aren't really available to us. This can give rise to a sense of being rootless, disconnected, floating in a desolate personal space. But with refuge, we engage with the idea that the world is not neutral and dead but is warm and welcoming, so that if we make a gesture out towards it, we will get a rich response. It depends again on our vision. We can see the world as a place that will nourish us and make us strong and healthy, or we can see it as a thing out there that we may or may not be able to act on and exploit and use. So much depends on the view we take. In taking refuge in the buddha we develop a respectful openness to the buddha's high status, and also we have enough respect in ourselves to know that we can receive the blessings back in return. It's a two-way process.

Now to focus on the verse we will learn it in Tibetan and I will explain the meaning of the words since it is very important to know both the traditional form and its meaning.

REFUGE PRAYER

SANG GYE CHÖ DANG TSOG GYI CHOG NAM LA

JANG CHUB BAR DU DAG NYI KYAB SU CHI

DAG GYI JIN SOG GYE PE SO NAM GYI

DRO LA PAN CHIR SANG GYE DRUB PAR SHO

To Buddha, Dharma and the best Assembly

I go for refuge until enlightenment.

By the merit created by my generosity and other virtues

May I gain buddhahood in order to benefit all beings.

The first two lines deal with taking refuge. *Sang gye* is the Tibetan word for buddha. It's a very interesting word because the first syllable *sang* means purified, and the second syllable *gye* means vast or open. The usual reading of this is that the Buddha has purified all sins and obstacles, and is rich and full of all good qualities. Pure and complete, that is the central idea of buddha.

Chö is the Tibetan word for the Sanskrit word dharma which has been adopted in European languages because it is rather difficult to translate. Dharma means both the teaching of the Buddha and the reality he realised. It means both things as they are, what you experience when you have a pure vision, and it also means all the teachings, all the methods, all the meditations which take you in that direction.

Then the next syllable *dang* means and. Then *tsog gyi chog*. *Tsog* means assembly or a group. *Gyi* is the genitive particle and *chog* means best. This phrase is the equivalent of the Sanskrit term *sangha*, which means a group of the followers of the Buddha. Sometimes it refers to all the monks and nuns, sometimes it refers to all the bodhisattvas, which we will look at in the second half of the verse, but essentially it means 'all people who are moving in the direction of greater understanding.' *Nam* is a syllable that indicates plurality, and *la* means to, towards.

The 'best assembly' here means like the best gang, means the best bunch of people to hang out with. Really! If you hang out with people who are smack-heads you get messed-up. If you hang out with people who are very ambitious and greedy you will feel pulled into competition. Everywhere we go, we are subject to peer pressure because we are not separate from the world. That's why it is so important whom we spend time with. We are always influenced by the company we keep. The sangha consists of people who are concerned to be open and compassionate and these are the best kind of people to be with. Taking refuge in them means attuning yourself to them and their interests so that you can be protected from the temptations embodied in people interested in more worldly pursuits.

The second line begins *jang chub*, which means enlightenment. *Jang* means purified, and *chub* means complete. So *jang chub*, enlightenment, carries much the same meaning as *sang gye*, buddhahood.

The precise meaning of these Tibetan words is helpful to us because they remind us that buddhahood is not a place as in: "Oh, it's *shit* living in East Germany, I want to get to West Germany where everybody has a big car." You are not going to a place where there are definite things that one can get

possession of. What is being talked about is a way of being, that one is purified, that is to say one is not constrained by habits, assumptions, all the baggage of the past, and so on. One is open. And one is complete in the sense that one's not desperately hungry, not trying to get things from the world. One satisfied, relaxed, open, and able to give because there's enough. So it's an attitude of relaxed satisfaction. This is not a specific definition, for the revelation of buddhahood is specific to each individual in terms of how they feel called upon to respond.

Of course, people often see the Buddha as a god who will give us what we want when we pray. With this view the Buddha becomes a useful adjunct to our daily life. Thus we might think, *"We are very small people, and the Buddha is very great. Everyday we put some flowers in front of the Buddha, and the Buddha makes our cows grow very fat, and we get a lot of milk and then we make butter with the milk, and from the butter we fill the butter lamp and we burn it to the Buddha. So then the Buddha, because he likes the butter lamp, helps the cow, and we have a good cycle."* This view is common to most religions, and while not harmful, is not very useful to meditators who want to understand their own nature.

Bar du means until. *Dag nyi* means me. *Kyab su chi*, *kyab* means refuge, and *su chi* to take. I take refuge. So these two lines are saying:

To the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha (or best assembly, or this assembly of people committed to practice), I go for refuge until I gain enlightenment.

The basic meaning of this is that when I have troubles in life, when I have difficulties, the way I'm going to try to handle these difficulties is by relying on this particular perspective. We in the west have all grown up with a culture that says if you want to be happy you have to work hard and get things, because it's through possession of things that people become happy. That is the basic belief. Buddhism says the opposite. It says that it is through attachment to things that we suffer. So there's a real tension between the view of the culture we live in, and what this verse is saying.

In taking refuge we shift from trying to control the world towards understanding the limitations of our ego-driven power. Through taking refuge we open to the possibility of a vision greater than our own. This helps us to face the fact that we do have to go with the flow. We do have to allow life to arise as it does without such strong attachment, which doesn't mean, of course, that we're like some helpless leaf blown in the wind here and there. We also have intentionality. We also have the possibility of doing things in the world, of helping other people. It doesn't mean we have to live in caves in the mountains, but it does mean that we accept that it's not just we who mark the world, we who do things to the world, but the world marks us, and we accept the world marking us.

THIS TOO WILL PASS

This means accepting our karma, accepting that we are caught up in fate, and that things happen that we can't control. Taking refuge means that when life

gets difficult, one doesn't go to the Buddha and say *"Hey, Big Daddy, take the pain away! Come on, Good Mummy, make my life safe again!"* Rather, we use refuge to give ourselves space to review what is going on, becoming less caught up in it. The view of the world developed in taking refuge gives a fresh context, a space to reflect before we act—and this helps to reduce the accumulation of karma. This is why in all the meditations, we try to relax and open and let thoughts and feelings pass through, so that we can recognise that our open nature, our awareness, is not the same as its content, the experience which is happening immediately.

Mind has no beginning or end, but phenomena are always beginning and ending, beginning and ending, and by taking refuge in the state of enlightenment we have more freedom to endure the moments of horror and recognise that they pass. Instead of thinking *"Oh, my God, it's my life! I'm ruined! I'm destroyed! I can't bear it! I can't bear it!"* one can just relax and know that it will pass. This will pass, this too will pass.

This is not a victim-like passivity where one just lets it all happen, for one is present with one's experience, responding to one's experience, but knowing that it's not total, it's not the end of the world. Something different will happen, and that acceptance gives a frame in which we see the world differently. There are many traditional commentaries on the nature and function of refuge.

Many of these are now in European languages and I would recommend that you study them since the work to shift our engrained attitudes is enormous and we need all the help we can get. There is a commentary on this verse by Patrul Rinpoche which is translated in *Simply Being*² which gives a great deal of detail and would be useful to consult.

The next two lines of the verse deal with the development of bodhicitta or an attitude of altruism, of turning one's intention towards the welfare of others.

Dag is I, and the *gyi* here is the instrumental case. *Jin* means generosity, *sog* means 'means' and so on, and refers to the six paramitas. *Gye pe* means generated or developed. *So nam* means merit or something of value, valuable aspects. And *gyi* again indicates the instrumental case. *Dro* means sentient beings, a being that has sentience, who can feel things. *Dro* is short for *dro wa* which is the verb to go or to move, and the idea is that all beings, that is, those who have a mind or sentience, are moving. Our fate is to be moving all the time, we are always in motion. We are going here and there. When we walk in the woods here we see butterflies flitting here, flitting there, moving,

² *Simply being: texts in the dzogchen tradition*. James Low. (Wisdom Books, 1998). Available in French and German.

moving, and there are ants and all sorts of bugs, everything is in motion, following some kind of intention or desire.

All this movement suggests that we are not at peace. Everything that lives seems disturbed, off-balance, motivated by peculiar concerns which, once satisfied, immediately give rise to another. The movement and change is not in itself a problem. Difficulties occur out of the desires and aversions that we bring to our experience of busy embodiment. Inside the bubble of our obsessive involvement, many activities can seem vital—but when the bubble bursts we often wonder what it was all for. People can spend all their lives working but when they retire and look back, they think *“I spent my whole life doing that - why? What for?”* But when you’re working in an office or a university or whatever, and you’ve got colleagues and deadlines, that world seems terribly important. It generates its own sense of meaning which you absorb so that your life has meaning via your participation.

Drol la indicates that we are caught in this kind of obsessional moving and doing, making meaning as we go, but with a very limited perspective. It also carries the idea that we’re not just talking about human beings, but about animals, insects, gods, devils, whatever kind of beings might exist on other planets or under the sea. If there’s someone somewhere that’s thinking and feeling, then they’re part of our concern. *La* means to or towards. *Pan* means help or benefit. *Chir* means in order to. *Sang gye* means buddha, the first word that we looked at. *Drub* means to achieve or to accomplish. *Par sho* means I must, expressing intentionality. Thus these two lines say:

By the merit that I have created through my generosity and other virtues, may I gain buddhahood in order to help all beings.

BODHISATTVA VOW

The intention to gain enlightenment for the sake of others is the essence of the bodhisattva vow. A bodhisattva, or a being who is focused on bodhi, on enlightenment, is one who is turning every aspect of his or her life towards helping others. This is achieved both by the quality of open awareness that excludes no one and is ever ready to respond, and by the ability to act in ways that put the other first.

These four lines are normally said at the beginning of any practice to orientate ourselves with a clear, conscious motivation. Thus we do the practice because our lives are not fully in control, we do get problems and suffer, but we want to deal with the problems through the direction of the dharma, through meditation and increasing our understanding, and not through increasing control over the world. Our motivation in doing this is altruistic, towards being more open and generous to others and not towards being selfish and self protective. It sets up the general orientation of any meditation practised according to mahayana buddhism.

To decide to use your energy and your life to be more open to help other people cuts across not just what the culture asks of you but what your ego asks of yourself. This task is something of value; it’s something to be respected, and in taking this up we should be respecting ourselves. We may

have done many bad things and have many guilty and negative feelings about ourselves, but in as much as we take up this task, which is a great one, we become great beings. Of course we still get confused and lost and all the rest of it, but this view is something of enormous value, to want to be open, to want to be available to help others. This is amazing!

At the end of every practice we recite another verse in order to dedicate the merit. This is based on the idea that whenever we do something that accumulates some kind of value, then we need to invest it. The practice and of meditation generates a positive energy or potential which could be used to secure an immediate benefit for ourselves. But in keeping with the altruistic attitude already developed, we give this merit away, using it for the benefit of all beings.

There is a paradoxical move here, for although it is said that the bodhisattva needs to complete the two accumulations of merit and wisdom in order to gain enlightenment, as soon as any merit is accumulated, it is immediately dedicated to others. It's a bit like trying to become a millionaire by having your wages paid into other people's accounts. Yet the door to enlightenment is the face of the other, although it is rarely seen.

DEDICATION AT THE END

GE WA DI YI NYUR DU DAG

CHOG GYUR SANG GYE DRUB GYUR NE

DRO WA CHIG KYANG MA LU PA

DE YI SA LA KO PA SHO

Ge wa means virtue, whatever is helpful and not harmful. *Di* means this, that is, the virtue created by the practice that you've just done. *Yi* is a particle indicating the instrumental case. *Nyur du* means quickly. *Dag I*, me as a person, subject.

Then, second line: *chog gyur*. *Chog* means best or excellent and *gyur* means to become, so it means basically, great, supreme. *Sang gye* means buddha. *Drub gyur* means to become or accomplish. *Ne* means then.

Then the third line: *Dro wa* means sentient beings. *Chig* means one and *kyang* means even. *Ma lu pa* means without exception.

Then the last line: *de yi*, that, which is referring back to the stage of buddhahood, *sa* means a stage or a level, *la* means on, *ko pa* means put, and *sho* indicates must or will or may, so it expresses both desire and intentionality.

By this virtue may I quickly

Become a fully enlightened buddha

Then all beings without exception

May I establish them on that same level!

This embodies an idea of inclusiveness similar to that in the Christian story of the shepherd who goes out in the snow and brings in his sheep. When he gets home he counts them and finds that one is missing, so again he goes out and looks all night to find the one that was missing. It means essentially that we take up an attitude without prejudice towards beings, that our commitment to help beings is not simply to help the ones who are rich, young or sexy or whatever we like. We help everyone, even the people that we don't like, people we think are horrible and especially those who are our enemies, who have hurt us or done bad things to us. It is really a generosity which takes us over the limit of our own selfishness.

Wisdom and compassion are always linked. You cannot really be compassionate towards others unless you have the wisdom to manage your own selfishness, judgements and dualistic vision. This verse for dedicating merit is used very widely in Tibetan buddhism. The first four syllables in the second line can be changed to accommodate the name of the deity in the practice you are doing. So you could say *Jetsun Drolma*, holy Tara, or you

could say *Pema Jungne*, Padmasambhava. So whatever god you're really into, you pop it into that slot, 'cos that's who you want to be like.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN JAMES AND PEOPLE PRESENT

Questioner: What do these last words mean, 'May I put them on the same level'?

James: It means: "I, by this merit, want to get to the stage of buddhahood. And then these beings without exception, I want to put them on the same level." It is like saying—you know—typical immigrant story, poor Italian boy goes to America. "I'm going to work really hard there, I'm going to get a whole lot of money and I'm going to bring my whole family over and I'm going to put them all through college, and we're all going to have that life." It really means that. Whatever I get, they're going to get too.

MANTRA OF GURU RINPOCHE

Now we will learn the mantra of Guru Rinpoche³. It is **OM AH HUNG BENZRA GURU PEMA SIDDHI HUNG**. Mantras help to protect the mind from

³ Guru Rinpoche, as he was known in Tibet, is also called Padmasambhava

distraction and to evoke the blessing and presence of the deity. The mantra of Padmasambhava is believed to possess great power to free the mind from suffering and bring about a realisation of the mind's true nature.

Om Ah Hung, the thing that we've already been reciting, this is said to be the essence of all mantras, because Om represents the Buddha's body, Ah the Buddha's speech, and Hung the Buddha's mind. That is to say it's the essence of the purification of the world. Just the simplicity of form manifesting in and as emptiness. The simplicity of sound arising and passing away. And the simplicity of thoughts and feelings arising and passing through the open dimension of awareness. The mantra supports us in experiencing life as it is, in a very simple way.

BENZRA

Benzra is a Tibetan transliteration of *vajra* which is a Sanskrit word indicating indestructibility. When the Tibetans were transliterating the Sanskrit word *vajra* they wrote it down phonetically, using their knowledge of Sanskrit pronunciation. Through time they began to pronounce the word in a way more consistent with how the Tibetan language works. Sometimes it was pronounced, *vajra*, sometimes *bajra*, *benza* or *benzra*...

The first vajra is said to have arisen from the bones of a yogi Rishi Dadhichi, who practised patience for many lifetimes. Due to his absolute imperturbability, nothing could rile him and he was purified of the root of anger. This means that he was not disturbed by external or internal forces. He was afraid of nothing in the world and of nothing in himself. He was free of attachment to the body and to pain and to guilt and shame.

Developing merit through virtuous action is a useful way of dealing with feelings of guilt and unworthiness. Confession and purification also helps. But in buddhism these practices are done from the point of view of a return to the innate purity of our nature. We make use of the blessing of the deity to awaken us to the presence of the unchanging purity of the mind.

Because the mind is unborn it never comes into the world in a way that can be marked. For example, here is a piece of paper, and I can mark it by touching it with a crayon, because when the two things meet they mark each other. But is the mind a thing? We often experience ourselves as if we were things, as if the world marks us irreparably, in the way that Tennyson wrote in his poem *Ulysses* "*I am a part of all that I have met.*" But what we identify as being ourselves is a stream of arisings, a stream which in tantra is seen as the display of the mind. Mind itself has no substance. When you look into the mind, and you really look, you don't find anything, for there is nothing there that can be grasped. Because there is nothing there that is substantial, it is indestructible. For example, here is a crayon. I'm now going to mark the paper. "*Can everyone see this mark? Is there anyone who can't see this mark? Ladies and gentlemen, with this same crayon, you see the same crayon? The crayon hasn't changed or moved. With the same crayon I am now going to mark the sky! Do you see the mark?*" Well! So it's like that. If there is nothing there, you can't mark it. As long as there is something there you can mark it.

Often we feel inside, as if we are 'something'. Reacting to events we adopt all sorts of positions, expanding and contracting, pushing and pulling around this central point of a self. The more we are marked by pain, the more we learn to be wary and try to control the interaction. But if we can relax and open, we accept and recognise that we are much more like the sky: vast, empty of substance, a space of infinite potential, offering no support for the leaving of a trace.

GURU

Next comes the word guru, indicating a spiritual teacher. It is difficult to recognise the pure nature on our own, and often we need a teacher or guru to help us go beyond the limits of our karma and our habitual attitudes and responses. The first gurus that we have are our mothers, because they are constantly keeping us safe from things that we can't deal with, and introducing us to things that we can deal with. In that way, the guru holds the boundary of useful expansion. And then, if we're lucky, we go to school and have reasonable teachers, who can do the same. Because if you make too many demands on people, they get in a mess, and if you don't make enough demands, they kind of fall apart, they just collapse back into themselves.

Very often the guru teaches a body of traditional knowledge, which can be learned and used as a way of getting one's bearings. Often the guru says, *"The Buddha said this and this and this, this is how we do it. You should do this because, if you act any other way, you'll get lost. We do it this way, and that's a very good thing to do."*

So the guru acts as a kind of compass or lode stone, giving a sense of direction, a means of not getting lost. Of course, through this process the student needs to be learning not just a mass of information but the principles which underpin the information. We need to learn to understand the principles of the dharma and trust them as guiding notions for our lives. Otherwise, if we run to the teacher to ask advice on every little situation we end up in a regressive dependence which makes us less able to cope with life. Learning how to learn is difficult, for we have to avoid the two extremes of inflated and fearful premature independence, and helpless and cosy but undynamic dependence.

The guru is not only a point of alignment but also acts as a point of exploration. Again, this is like the image of the mother who lets the child play around in the house with some safety, and encourages the child to explore and become interested in more challenging things when she is ready. This is perhaps particularly important in our time, when we have to be able to take responsibility for ourselves and be autonomous in our work.

Buddha Shakyamuni often offered to people who came to him an experiment to engage in, rather than giving them a direct answer. You perhaps know the famous story of the woman who came to the Buddha carrying her baby, and she said, *"You're a great man, you're the only person left who can save me. Bring my baby back to life."* So the Buddha says, *"OK. But first you have to go and bring me some salt from a house where nobody has died."* So the woman goes off with her baby and comes to the first house, *"May I have some salt?"*

“Yes, of course you can have some salt.” “Has anyone died here?” “ Yes, my mother, she died last year.” She goes to the next house, and the next, and in house after house after house she finds that somebody has died. By the time she comes back to the Buddha she has recognised that death is all around. People die at all ages.

In that way, he wasn't forcing something onto her, but letting her actually come in contact with the world. I think that's really what it should be—that the Dharma should help us go out into the world and learn from the world. Thus the guru helps us to connect with the principle of openness and awareness rather than being just a person who is telling us what to do.

The next word is *pema* which means lotus. In the Indian and Tibetan tradition the lotus is a symbol of purity as it is a flower which grows in a muddy pond out of the dirt of the mud, and blossoms on the surface. It represents something beautiful arising out of something dirty. It represents purity in an impure world, as well as the innate purity of all that appears to be impure.

In particular in this mantra, Guru Pema stands for Padmasambhava, who was a tantric yogi who came to Tibet in the late 7th Century, at the request of the king of the time Trisong Deutsen, to help build the first buddhist monastery in Tibet. Padmasambhava was widely known in Tibet as Guru Rinpoche, 'Precious Guru'. The story is that each day the monastery walls were being built, but every night the local gods would come and pull them down. People would build all day long, and when they went back the next morning, the walls had come down. The monk who had come from India to set this up had not been able to deal with these local gods, so he invited Guru Rinpoche, Guru Pema, the Lotus Guru, or Padmasambhava (he has many different names.) He represents the kind of energetic power of tantra that is able to engage with demons, to engage with all the dark forces and transform them. He was the one who really established tantric buddhism in Tibet.

Siddhi means an attainment, an accomplishment, usually a sort of magical accomplishment, but here it means enlightenment. We do the practice in order to get something although what we want to get is not something that can be got. Through the practice we exchange our energy, transforming the “demonic” patterns that limit us into the radiant presence of wisdom.

The *Hung!* at the end of the mantra is a kind of reinforcement: it must happen! This is so! *Hung!* It's got a lot of power in it.

So the mantra means: Body of the Buddha, Speech of the Buddha, Mind of the Buddha, indestructible guru born from the lotus, you must grant me enlightenment!

When we do the visualisation practice the next time we can recite the whole mantra instead of just the Om Ah Hung! and at that time, inside the ball of white light we can visualise a blue letter Hung or you may visualise Guru Rinpoche himself.

POWER OF THE MANTRA

The idea of saying this mantra is that it introduces an emotional dimension in the sense of *“Here is something wonderful, here is something beautiful, you must come, you are glorious, you are beautiful!”* So there’s a sense of opening to something splendid, something to unify with. It is not a case of going under the power of the guru. It’s not a case of slavery at all, for Guru Rinpoche but is the most beautiful representation of your own potential. It is a bit like a little girl of seven going to the ballet and seeing Swan Lake, and coming home and thinking, *“I want to be a dancer and look like that.”* She might have a photo of Margot Fonteyn or someone, and look at it and dream. This image acts as an inspiration, and when she goes to ballet class, and her legs get sore and tired, the image restores her energy and gives her a focus.

But this mantra has the additional power of Guru Rinpoche’s promise to help those who pray to him. He is a bodhisattva and is committed to helping all beings. His help is guaranteed, it is not dependent on his mood. When we meditate on him he is present, and this certainty is very important for giving us confidence when we come to the point of merging with him and then dissolving the light back into openness. The main thing is to use the intensity of the emotion, *“You are wonderful! You are great!”* so that *“You are my whole world, I’m not interested in anything but you!”* This increases our non-distractedness. At the end of the meditation, my whole world—full of emotional feeling—is coming to the crown of my head and dissolving into me. There is an intensification of the emotion through dualistic feelings of separation and longing, leading to a one-pointed focus that leads us through the dissolving of appearance, to the direct experience of non duality.

The only reason we do practice is to get enlightened for the sake of all beings. We make use of the Guru as a method, to realise his stage of understanding. Mantra seeks to mobilise every aspect of ourselves towards the task of developing wisdom and compassion. We can make use of our fear and loneliness; we can be like a very small child, *“Mama! Papa! Save me! Give me all that I need!”*

In that way you are using the frightened, fearful qualities of samsara to integrate with nirvana. Everything is method. Everything that we experience can be used as a method in the dharma if we understand the central principle, which is that whatever appears is empty of inherent self existence.

That is why we have to understand that Guru Rinpoche is emptiness himself. He is the pure form of emptiness. I am also the pure form of emptiness, but I don’t recognise it because I think I am a real separate individual. By seeing Guru Rinpoche as a pure form and opening to him merging into me, I recognise *“This is my nature.”* Meditating on Padmasambhava is a method, to increase faith in order to open the heart and focus the attention, but the goal is merging, attaining non dual realisation. Through the devotion we bring to the practice we come to realise the dynamic pulsing nature of form and emptiness. We experience the flow of the world without anxiety or tension. This leads us to the open, blissful and compassionate state of Guru Rinpoche.

Break

ENDURING FRESHNESS OF TRADITIONAL FORMS

We will now consider further the relationship between alignment and exploration in dharma practice. A great deal of Tibetan buddhism is orientated towards alignment, about learning and fitting in with structures which have already been established. These structures are very meaningful and helpful and function like an icon, an image which is returned to again and again and again, both absorbing devotion and dispensing profound value and a sense of connection.

This is very useful as a kind of reminding mechanism, a sort of mnemonic device, to bring us back to a place of importance or familiar knowledge. It reawakens a particular kind of understanding, so that returning to the image means a returning to a particular view or insight. There is reliability in this, since the view can be applied whatever situation is occurring.

Thus the established form does not change, but is used to transform all the new and transient forms that arise. This is very different from the way we are used to in modern Europe. As a culture we have turned our back on many traditional forms and have sought to develop new means of dealing with new situations. This approach has led to enormous developments in science and technology. For as each new form is only valued for its functional value, changes in technology emphasise the impermanence of all forms rather than the unique and enduring value of some specific forms.

TIBETAN MEDITATIONAL DEITIES ARE A KIND OF EPIPHANY

The Tibetan meditational deities are a kind of epiphany, or descent of the holy. Appearing out of the clear, open spaciousness of the enlightened awareness of some master, a particular vision has arisen, which is pure in both source and form. Meditation on these deities offers us a way of being less busy, since by having found one reliable way of making sense of whatever is arising for us, we can relax and trust the process. Instead of having to think hard and try to work out the best way forward, we learn to trust the intuition that arises from a profound attunement with the world as an integrated manifestation of open awareness.

So coming from a culture which has trained us to think of doing new things we need to learn to trust the enduring freshness of traditional forms, forms imbued with the blessing of the lineage. By developing trust in one form we have space in ourselves to observe the nature of manifestation; being aware of the gap between thoughts, we recognise their nature as they arise. Thus the whole world reveals itself as an ongoing display of creativity without us having to be busy trying to create something as such.

The essential point is when the deity dissolves into you and you dissolve into light and vanish into space, rest in the openness in which nothing is predicted. Whatever thoughts arise, whatever feelings arise, whatever emotions arise,

allow them to come and go. Don't try to determine what should happen. Whatever arises, be open to it.

In that state we are preparing for a world which is changing very rapidly. Free of attachment, we won't be trying to hang onto the past and develop a known, predictable base. We'll feel free to dance with and respond to the new things that are coming. The traditional structure of the practice helps to bring us to a point where we relax into a place of non structure so that we can integrate all structures into spaciousness and move decisively beyond dualistic reliance on form.

One becomes unshockable because one is not saying *"This is the known where I feel safe, and outside it is the barbarian, the alien who must be destroyed because they are other, different, unknown"*. Nothing can attack us because everything is a revelation within the mirror of awareness. This is not a territory which I own, the openness of the ceaseless unfolding of subject and object in their unborn play.

MANDALA: TANTRIC TOOL FOR TRANSFORMING OUR FIXED PROJECTIONS

Another key concept in tantric transformation is that of the mandala, a Sanskrit word indicating a circle or assembly. The Tibetan equivalent is *khyil khor*; *khyil wa* means a spiral, a whirling into a centre, and *khor wa* means a circle or revolution. Traditionally, the mandala is the domain of the deity where the five poisons are transformed into the five wisdoms. There is a still centre point and an outer circumference. A dynamic tension exists between them. Usually stupidity is in the centre, anger is in the east (the direction facing us), desire is in the west, pride in the south and jealousy in the north.

In some of the earlier buddhist formulations there are three poisons, or three afflictions: stupidity, anger and desire. The movement into five, whereby pride and jealousy are added, came a bit later. Basically the three-fold form comes about in the practices where the deities are not in sexual union and the five-fold form comes about when there is sexual contact between the deities, where they are dealing with a more elaborate understanding of energy.

The essential view of the mandala, is that samsara or this dimension of experiencing life as problematic, difficult, conflicted, has in itself the very nature of openness and wisdom. If we remember that in the theravadin formulation of buddhism there is the idea that here we are in this world that is full of problems, but the Buddha has come saying *"Hey, there is a better place to go."* A bit like all the Irish immigrants who went to America: *"Here we are sitting in the west of Ireland, it's raining all the time, and even the potatoes are rotten. Now there's a little boat. Let's get on the boat and go to America, the land of milk and honey where everything's really nice."* That's the idea. *"It's shitty here and it's good over there. Let's leave here and go there."*

The problem with that formulation is that the only person who ever got over there is Buddha Shakyamuni, and he made it a long time ago, so: *"Once upon a time my great, great, great, great, great, great, grandfather made it to this wonderful place and he's so happy. We are still here in the shit, but maybe one day, one of us will again go out and get there."*

Whereas from the tantric point of view whatever is arising that is problematic for us, is problematic because we don't actually perceive it properly, we don't see it in its real essence. Because we become addicted to fixed perceptions of things, we are not free to experience the object revealing itself to us. That is to say, we tell the world what it means, and because we are projecting our meaning onto the world, there is no space or freshness in ourselves to experience the world directly, as it is. We always see our own projection and never the thing itself.

This is similar to the idea of transference; that you see the therapist as if they were your mother or your father or some person in your life, and it's only by working through the misidentification of the other that you are free to see them more clearly. The feelings that were being transferred are recognised as having a precise source in the past which frees the patient to get on with ordinary life, be more open to all that is encountered, and so end the therapy. Being free of the transference is quite a relief, financially as well as emotionally! In tantra, we try to free ourselves of 'the great transference', the web of illusion spun out of ignorance on the loom of subject/object interaction.

STUPIDITY IS A STRUCTURAL FAULT

Ignorance gives rise to stupidity which generates the other four poisons. Ignorance is the non recognition of the ground of our being. Stupidity is the sense of being a separate real person living in a world of real, separate objects. Stupidity clearly does not mean being unintelligent in the usual way. Stupidity is a structural fault in our relationship with the world. When we separate from that fault we inevitably act on the basis of reification and then, no matter how brilliant our thoughts and actions, we are fundamentally confused, because we are acting on the basis of axioms which delude us.

When we practice the dissolving meditation and merge into light and then into space there is at least some little moment of a gap in the addiction to arisings before the first thought comes. If we can relax into that spaciousness, we're not locked into a subject/object relationship; it's a moment of infinite freedom. Gradually our habits of dichotomising arise and we may get trapped in them. But in that moment of freedom, space really has no boundary. It's bounded by what went before and what comes after, but if we are actually in it, there's nothing before and after, because there is just infinite openness.

ONE IS BOTH THE SPACE AND ITS RADIANT MANIFESTATION

Developing this leads to the realisation of what's called *dharmadatu jnana*, in Sanskrit. In Tibetan it's called *chö ying yeshe*, and in English we'd probably call it 'wisdom of openness' or 'infinite spaciousness'. It is the wisdom of presence in the openness within which all phenomena manifest. One is at it were, in that moment like the sky, and in this sky-like openness phenomena keep manifesting. One is not a phenomenon manifesting any more but one is in the spaciousness, which is the mother or the basis for all that manifests.

That is the fundamental shift. That is the essence of what this practice is all about. That is what one has to return to again and again, shifting one's self-identification out of the position of being a phenomenon or a thing which is

arising, and recognising that one is actually the space in which things arise as unborn and unceasing manifestation.

One of the things that arises in the space, is oneself. And that's very tricky. One is both the space and the radiant manifestation of the space. There is no separation or contradiction between these modes of effortless existence. The transformation occurs by relaxing the fixation on the two separated points of a subject and object, allowing them to dissolve, revealing infinite spaciousness. When one has developed the ability to stay with this at all times, every experience in the world is seen as the display of the creativity of space. For example ordinarily, say somebody is doing something which I don't agree with, I don't like what is happening and I feel angry about it. This perception of the other as separate and antagonistic generates all sorts of thoughts: "*Why are you doing this?*" I want to contradict or attack what that person is doing. In that moment there's a sense that what they are doing is real and it's bad. First of all it's real, and secondly it's bad.

My starting point in coming into relationship with this person is "*I exist and have rights and I'm a person concerned that things are good and done properly. Why are you doing this? You shouldn't do it!*" I start from a feeling of solid presence and immediately you do that, you're solid too. Separation is always there with a potential to generate feelings of attraction and aversion.

However if my starting point is the sense of spaciousness, then whatever is arising is arising inside spaciousness, not outside. There isn't a territory of self that needs to be protected. Inside the openness, something is arising: "*Wow! What's that?*" There's a sense of being interested in what's arising, and because there is no sense of danger, no basis for antagonism; and because one is interested in what the other is doing, there is more possibility of helping the other to change it. In this way awareness never loses the sense of openness even when complex interactive manifestation is occurring.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN JAMES AND PEOPLE PRESENT

***Questioner:* But what can you do, when you feel the anger?**

James: Well, first of all you have to dissolve it. You have to go back to the central point. As an example: if you're working with adolescent people who have trouble, they're often very, very angry and aggressive, and will be very provocative. If you get provoked by them, maybe as a therapist, it becomes very difficult, because they actually want you to be provoked and when you are, and you respond, they say "*Ah! I knew you couldn't help me, you're just the same as everyone else!*" One actually has to really be interested in what they do. If they're into doing graffiti maybe go out and look at the graffiti or whatever it is, and by entering into their world, you diminish the conflict of two separate things, and you take up a position alongside that person, looking in the same direction. You're not against them, but you're also not ignoring them; you're working with them.

By practising the dissolving meditation one develops enough space not to get caught up in an ego based response. One sees the situation as an illusion, one's not overwhelmed. So instead of responding antagonistically, "*Don't you*

dare do that! Hey! This is a waiting room, what are you doing spraying paint all over the wall? We're going to have to have this repainted! Do you know what our budget is?" One's able actually just to see what's being done, and to talk about it. *"Hey, why are you doing this? What's this pattern? Does this mean something?"* Through that, one invites the person to move from the position of being a stranger and excluded, into being on the same side. One does this by offering the space of interest, fascination, rather than the foreclosure of a fixed response, of a pre established identity and attitude.

Questioner: When somebody hurts you, I think it's good to have anger and say "No, stop it."

James: Well, first of all, one might need to think about how one got into the position where the person hurt you. I mean, clearly there are situations which are imposed on us. If you're going home at night and there's some psychopathic stranger who wants to attack you, it's a very good time to say "No." That's absolutely clear. But it may be that there is space available that we haven't recognised. Say you're working with some colleagues and gradually there's some tension in your intentions. You don't address the tension and one day it explodes and there is an angry argument. Part of the problem is not speaking when the difficulty was still fairly simple. Perhaps you hoped it would go away or you were too busy there is always a good reason. But the reason is just another form of stupidity, of being caught up in subject and object as real and separate. Because of this separation at a certain point communication breaks down, so instead of having a friendly chat, you just pick up your coffee and go back to your own desk. After a week the tension builds up until there is an explosion. So part of the answer would be recognising when the object is getting more separate, when one is no longer open to the other, for that is the basis for anger arising in relationships.

Clearly, if somebody is being vicious towards you, at that point you need to defend yourself. But you need to defend yourself while maintaining wisdom and compassion. Wisdom is to maintain a relaxed spaciousness whatever occurs. Compassion is to act towards the other to stop them accumulating more bad karma and to provide them with an experience which might open a gap in the closed world of their habitual assumptions. Part of the bodhisattva vow is a commitment to put others first. This doesn't mean allowing ourselves to be abused or exploited. It means being open to the other, being aware of their situation and responding to it with compassion, with a concern for their infinite happiness. And this may mean thwarting their immediate ego based gratification.

Questioner: We are taught in western psychology that it is very important not to repress your anger but to feel the anger and to express it. How does that view combine with the buddhist one?

James: Well, western psychology is not a non-dual philosophy. In terms of the formulation we have been discussing, western psychology is in the kindergarten, because its approach is: *"I am me, I have these feelings and I need to be true to myself,"* which is a very good basis to begin with. *"I am an important person, what I experience in the world is of value, don't tell me what to feel, I can feel my own feelings!"* That's a good solid kind of basis. Having

that solid basis, you can then start to dissolve it and open it up. If you don't have that solid basis, I think you get problems later in meditation. It's a good initial starting place to know what your anger is.

That's why I was suggesting this morning that you draw your emotions, explore your relation with them and allow yourself to know that you have them. They're not bad in themselves. From the buddhist point of view they are a distortion of energy, tying energy between the two points of a dualistic perception. The expression of anger is destructive to both self and other. Either we give too much anger to the other, so that we have a fight with our friends, and lose friendship. This excess anger is not creative or clarifying something for it drives the other away. Or else we don't show our anger to the other person, but turn it back on ourselves and beat ourselves up: *"Why did I do that? I didn't want to sleep with that person, I didn't want to do this..."* So it's very common for anger to go out too much or come in too much rather than being an effective form of communication.

Anger arises when the other is too real. We can use the flow of light in the dissolving meditation to purify the objects that frighten, provoke and disturb us. Visualising the person we believe to be harmful to us, we can fill them with light so that they don't feel as disturbing when their radiant, empty nature is revealed. In this way, we purify our karma as it manifests in the form of the other, and by filling ourselves with the light we purify the internalised voices which are the continuation of karma. Then we have permission to express ourselves in the world, without worry if that expression is good or bad, for motivation has been purified through wisdom and compassion. The question is whether it's effective or not.

If somebody's attacking you, you must show your anger if it will halt the danger. You don't have to be attacked but you must develop awareness to guide you in your response. Motivation is the key. Anger motivated by hatred, a desire to hurt or punish, is unhelpful for it offers no space for change to occur. Cruelty arises from a hardening of the heart, and this hardening occurs when subject and object seem very real and very separate. This can be provoked in situations where others are cruel to us. The more we relax and open and recognise this pressure to hurt other people or be cruel, and dissolve it through the meditation; we start to trust ourselves in our spontaneous being in the world.

PURIFICATION

Desire or attachment essentially arises because there is a perception of some object which I feel will in some way complete me, or enhance me. It starts with a sense that as I am, I am not enough. I need more. It's a kind of basic hunger, where emptiness is seen as the enemy. The wisdom that arises in the purification of this limitation is called 'the wisdom of precision and clarity'.

When we enjoy a beautiful place it is difficult not to be attached to the beauty and pleasure of enjoying it. When we leave there is a sense of loss, for what is coming cannot be as good as what we are leaving behind. The discrimination we make, the heightened response that opens us to one

situation closes us down to another. This leads to the turbulence of hopes and fears.

PURIFICATION OF DESIRE AND ATTACHMENT

The purification of desire and attachment requires a commitment to an unbiased phenomenological interest in the world, so that whatever arises is interesting. The rain is interesting, look at how the rain is pouring down the window. Look what happens to my skin when it's cold, I get all these goose pimples. So we attend to whatever occurs with a focused awareness unobscured by fixed habitual attitudes, likes, dislikes and so forth.

I think this is a really important thing for us to practice here. When we do the dissolving meditation, or the still-sitting, when our attention returns to the senses, allow them to explore all sorts of textures. Observe how you are drawn to some things and not to others and relax this tendency, allowing it to pass, so that we return to a sense of the fresh potential in all arisings.

You might find some dog shit or cat shit, and, you know, touch it or smell it, usually things that you would be horrified of, allow yourself to be interested in these things, and explore them. You can go into the woods and have a shit, and even play with your own shit *[Laughter]*. Because so much of our life is restricted by these discriminations. I'm not saying one should do this all the time *[Laughter]* or everyday, or get into some kind of perversion! But I think there's a way in which our beliefs can seem absolute, particularly what we've been told when we were very small. So it's very important to put them into question. Of course because they are so deeply embedded questioning them can provoke a lot of fear and anxiety, as if we were going to be punished.

By this exploration, we can free ourselves to be interested in things that would normally not be available to us. This open interest means that the richness of the world is always present for us. If we are really in touch with the richness of the world, we can always be satisfied. So often our desires and longings are a displacement from the present moment, a present moment that is not as fascinating as the images we create for ourselves. This occurs because our experience of the present is layered with projections from the past and so we use fantasy to escape the sense of boredom and entrapment this en-pasted-present generates. From this basis we identify the entities we believe will free us and focus on appropriating a future to free us from the past. But from a buddhist perspective this is bound to fail because appropriation merely intensifies alienation.

It is very important to look at the way we cut off from objects because we don't like them or we think they're dangerous, and to practice relaxing and allowing ourselves to be open to whatever occurs. That's basically the idea for the purification of desire.

Ownership often hides the facts of change. When we stay with an understanding of impermanence we are freed to attend the process of perception rather than the illusion of the possession of fixed entities. If you go to an art gallery and see a beautiful painting, you look at it, you see it, you enjoy it. You don't need to have that Monet on your own wall. If you actually

open to the moment that will in itself open you to the next moment so that an infinite vision of revelation unfolds.

PURIFICATION OF PRIDE

Now consider the issue of pride. Pride is a further expression of the sense of being separate from other people, *"I am more important. I am more special."* It's very much related to the earth element, it's like rock, it's solid. It's a place where one is. It's something quite tight and restrictive. The purification of it is called the 'wisdom of equalness', in which one is able to see the values and qualities of everything that's around. One is in touch with one's own value, but also in touch with the value of others, and in that moment one doesn't feel threatened by other people's value. There is no need then to consolidate one's own position for one is part of an infinite display of value that can be enjoyed and respected.

There is a quality of openness and appreciation; not putting the other above myself, or putting myself above the other, but infinitely, in all directions. Probably in the west, pride is not our problem so much as the other side of it, which is low self-esteem or self-hatred, the negative narcissism of thinking, *"I'm the worst person in the world and there's no one as bad as me. I've done all these things..."* Feeling worse than others, becoming self-conscious about one's shortcomings can develop as an intense separation from the community of sentient beings. This acts as a limiting factor in the development of both wisdom and compassion.

Just allowing oneself a space, integrated with the space of others, not more than them, not less than them, but a kind of being together, is the basis for a lively community. Working together in a collaborative way and not being frightened of people is very important. The first wisdom we looked at sets out very clearly that if we all arise from the same source into infinite spaciousness, then the other is not my enemy, but is my colleague, one who is with me, who can make the revelation manifest to me. Without the other I'm just speaking into a lonely, empty void. The other completes me by giving me an endless space to open up and be more real.

PURIFICATION OF JEALOUSY AND ENVY

The fifth position, jealousy, is also linked with envy, and is the sense that the other person is a threat and will take away or destroy whatever it is that I have. It's the archetypal triangulation, *"Now I've got something special and this other person is going to come in and take away my specialness, leaving me abandoned, lonely, worthless."* Which is a fear that other people are more fascinating, more interesting, more sexy, whatever it is, and so will have the power to destroy whatever I set up, whatever I appropriate.

A lot of this fear is based on the idea that there is so little that's good in the world that if I get this one nice thing, I have to hang onto it, and if someone else were to steal it, I would have nothing. So again it arises from a belief in minimal resources, an economy of restriction there's only a hundred, and if somebody else has ninety, there's only ten left for me. It is not an economy of

richness and possibility, and so the other is always a threat. Whatever I have I can lose, and then what will I have?

Well, if you lose this, what you will have is not this. But you may have something else. *"But this was the only thing I wanted!"* You know, and that's very, very hard. *"Only this person. Only if I can be with them will my life be fulfilled."* *"Only if I've got this job will I be really happy."* *"Oh, my life was really spoiled; I should have married that person, or stayed with that person."* You know, we probably all have thoughts and feelings like that from time to time, but they become quite destructive, because it's as if a moment in time somehow determined the shape of all that was to follow. Whereas in fact, if we are in becoming, there are always new possibilities. But we can close the new possibility by saying *"Well, the truth is in the past and that's where it should have happened. If I only could go back I would have done my life differently."*

Whereas from the central wisdom of openness one is open to all the ways in which things arise. Then one is much less vulnerable to the fact that people can steal things, that the divorce rates are very, very high, that unemployment is very, very high.

Envy and a lack of respect for relationships means that there are lots of predators, lots of hungry wolves who will screw up other people's relationships, cause chaos and not give a damn. There are many people who are out of control, intoxicated by the five poisons. The world is dangerous. However, if we believe that our safety lies in attachment and finding protection from impermanence, we are living a lie, we are living an illusion. The world is not safe in that sense. Our partner may die in a car crash; they may go off with someone else; they may become terribly sick; whatever we've worked hard to establish may not endure. We cannot predict that the future will be the way we want it to be. Jealousy is just one particular way we are tormented on that hope, *"Why has this happened to me? Why did that person have to come and interfere? We were getting on so well and now it's all spoiled."*

The pain arises from the sense of attachment, of hanging onto something. Whereas in fact, the world as becoming means that hanging on is not a possibility. Situations may endure for a while; that may be our karma, we may be very fortunate. Some people live long, easy, happy lives, but for many people, there's a lot of turbulence and difficulty, and the real antidote to that, the real way to deal with that is just to be open to things as they become, and be focused in the moment, in the richness and fullness of the moment, rather than trying to deal with the past or manipulate the future.

The mandala is a structure that supports us in transforming the habits of reification into a relaxed responsiveness, where the desire to create a safe space can be transformed through the recognition that the only safe space is the space of open becoming. A space of appropriation, control, possession, can never be safe, it will always be vulnerable. Maybe there are some thoughts about that?

APPLYING THE FIVE WISDOMS

Questioner: Maybe if I am back in Berlin for example, and for a few weeks I'm living my daily life and I get a job, and I'm in this, and I feel I'm losing what you taught, I mean, I'm simply losing it. I have no more this capacity of taking a gap and opening up but I find myself continually going more into the tunnel. Should I use the method of then making Phat! ?

James: Yes, that would be a good method. Go outside in a park or someplace where you can make a lot of noise, and do the dissolving meditation. Then use Phat! when thoughts come crowding in. Going for a walk, looking at the stars, buying a bunch of flowers and sitting and looking at the flowers, we can use the world to open up a space which is separate from the intoxication of worried thoughts. The world is very penetrative. We are constantly being raped by the world. All these images are pushed into us when we don't want them. We get full, we get pregnant with all these thoughts, we're always coming up with new schemes, so we're constantly giving birth, after being raped by all these horrible things. That's very much how we are, we're in a reactive position and it's very important to take some time out. Go for a walk in a forest, something very simple like that. Or go for a bicycle ride. These things can help, but the essence is the meditation practice, making use of focused attention to transform the existential basis of our engagement with the world.

In terms of applying the notion of five wisdoms here in this retreat, it would be helpful to set up a situation where you get in touch with these five poisons for yourself. First of all, focus on the main one, the stupidity, and transform it through focusing of attention, calming the mind, and then doing the dissolving meditation.

Say, for example, your particular problem is anger, that you get pissed off with people and you feel very thin skinned, reacting to things very quickly. You could imagine yourself in a situation where you're responding like that. You can think of going back to your familiar situation, and someone there who might provoke you. Just try to imagine how it might be, seeing this person not as the person you know them, but just as a form of colour manifesting in front of you. You're seeing the person without the projection onto them of all that you know from the past. Because it's what we know of the person from the past that makes their next movement towards us seem very provocative.

So focus on somebody one is already very angry with. *"They always do that. I hate this person; I wish they didn't work with me"*. Now if we can drop the sense that they are always like that and see them as fresh, there's much more space in which we can respond to them.

Imagining the person in front of you, you can include them in the dissolving meditation. You can imagine all your enemies situated just in front of you, all the people who provoke you. It could be particular people, it could be political parties, it could be any kind of thing. Imagine all of these people in front of you. Then you do the visualisation, and focus on the rays of light coming down, purifying yourself and these people. Imagine these people full of light, dissolving into you, then the ball of light dissolves down into you and through you, to them, and you go into spaciousness. You keep opening up to the

other, opening up to the other. Rather than knowing who the other is, you can be surprised, and then there are new possibilities. The main thing is to try to experience non separation, the fact that whatever you meet is a co-manifestation in the state of revelation, not a separate entity. Although of course, they appear to be very separate. That's what we have to try to struggle with. The more we are open to their possibility, their unpredictability, the more there is space for them to reveal something. And certainly we won't be so trapped.

You can then try doing the same for the other poisons. Both self and other need to be purified of the basis of reification. This means learning to experience the world as light.

That would be something we could practise tomorrow afternoon, of really engaging with the five poisons, and allow ourselves to be honest with ourselves. Who are the people you're frightened of? What are the situations where you get proud? Then we have to think "Well what is it out there that makes me react in this way?" and take up both these things, the stimulating object out there and our own view of ourselves and dissolve them both in light.

Of course it's very, very difficult. Yesterday when one of you found a wasp on you yesterday it was a real and powerful situation, "*This other has come and bit me! And maybe it's put poison in me, and maybe I'll die!*" There are all these thoughts, and these thoughts are also real, and can be supported by medical fact. Fear arises very quickly when we feel our own space invaded. We live in a world that has all these dangerous things, snakes, scorpions—except increasingly we live in a world where we don't have them because we find ways of killing them off. All the bugs get killed off because we are frightened of them. Rather than sharing the world with creatures that might be a bit scary, as soon as we identify something that's scary, we want to destroy it. Part of this openness is to allow space for people to be different, that people have a right to live, although they're maybe not the kind of people I would want to have around on my planet.

The world is not my garden, it's not a place where I am entitled to take a spray can and kill off the things I consider to be weeds. New weeds will always arise, and our perception of what is or what is not a weed will change. It is a particular kind of dualistic vision that says one group is dangerous or one kind of person is dangerous. Part of the openness is not just openness to beauty and fresh flowers; it's also openness to vipers, to cruel people, to rapists, to murderers, and a willingness to find a way of dealing with that situation and transforming it without fear. As soon as we have fear we try to destroy the other, and the more we try to destroy the other the more we go into a conflict which leads to a further sense of "*You are real, I am real and either I kill you or you kill me.*" We go into this kind of Armageddon situation.

The real transformation is always about dialogue, the unpacking of the dual construction of horribleness. Recognising our part in the situation introduces a space for change rather than insisting that it's the task of the other to change.

Of course we have to prepare ourselves through regular meditation practice. When a traumatic situation occurs we will find it difficult to respond creatively if

we have done no prior preparation. All the little fearful situations with bugs, dogs etc. are a preview of how it might be at death, when we face a radical change and have no safe home to retreat to. What we need in moments of crisis is not just to remember the words of the dharma or an intellectual understanding of it. We need to be able to evoke an actual experience of transformation in order to find our freedom in the moment. That is why the daily work of meditation practice is so important.

It's a bit like a bank account. If you put some money into it every week, when you need a holiday or some hospital treatment or something like that, the money's there. You can't wait for something to happen, and then pull the money out of the sky. Not only that, but if you put money into the bank regularly the manager gets to know you, she can see that you are a responsible person, and so in a crisis may be willing to bail you out. In the same way, the traditional nyingma view is that if you pray to Guru Rinpoche everyday he will get to know you and will willingly respond in a crisis. But if you only practise when you go to a teaching, then Guru Rinpoche will not know you so well. When you pray he'll wonder who you are, "*Who? I seem to remember your name. Oh yes, once upon a time, hey, we had a connection...Who did you say you were?*" [Laughter].

PRAYER TO PRAJNAPARAMITA: MA SAM JO ME

Now we will learn a four line verse which is seen as being the essence of Prajnaparamita, the view of transcendental wisdom. Essentially it's a brief statement of the view of emptiness. It's written as a verse in praise of a goddess, the goddess of supreme wisdom. She is female because the female form is seen as the expression of wisdom, of openness. The male form is seen as the expression of method or compassion. The unification of wisdom and compassion introduces the enlightened world of revelation, and this is why in tantric buddhism we often meditate on deities who are in sexual union, since this represents the unification of wisdom and method.

MA SAM JO ME SHE RAB PA ROL CHIN

MA KYE MI GAG NAM KAI NGO WO NYID

SO SO RANG RIG YESHE CHÖ YUL WA

DU SUM GYAL WAI YUM LA CHAK TSAL LO

Beyond speech, thought and expression is transcendental wisdom.

It is unborn, unceasing and its nature is like the sky.

This open, transcendent awareness is the realm of the precise awareness that sees things just as they are.

To this transcendental wisdom, who is the Mother of the Buddhas of the Three Times, we pay homage.

Ma means speech, *sam* means thought and *jo* means expression. *Me* means without or beyond, *she rab* means wisdom, in the sense of openness; an intelligence or an awareness which doesn't close itself down but is able to keep attending to things in an unimpeded way. *Pa rol chin* means transcendent or gone beyond, *pa rol* means the other side, and *chin* means gone to. So it means it's gone beyond the ordinary kind of intelligence which says this is a pen, this is a stone; the intelligence which names things and puts them in their place. It is rather a wisdom that's open and able to attend to things without labelling them and putting them in boxes.

So the first line says: *Beyond speech, thought and expression is this transcendental wisdom.*

Ma kye, *ma* is a negative form here, *kye* means to be born, so *ma kye* means unborn, without being born. *Mi* is a negative form too, and *gag* means ceasing, so *mi gag* means unceasing, without ever stopping. *Nam kai*, it's in the genitive form, *nam ka* means the sky, so *nam kai* means the sky's, in the possessive. *Ngo wo nyid* means nature.

The second line comments on the first. The first line says there is transcendent or supreme wisdom that is beyond speech, thought and expression and the second line says it is unborn, unceasing and its nature is like the sky.

The sky is a very important image in Tibetan buddhism. In the visualisation we imagine the clear blue sky with a ball of light arising in it, and this morning we did the practice of looking into the sky, relaxing our awareness into it. The sky is the presence of infinity. If you're driving home, when you cross the Italian border into Switzerland there is a line across the road but there's no line in the sky. I mean, there are radar positions and the air force might shoot down a plane invading their air space, but none the less if you went up to a hundred thousand feet, they wouldn't be so interested to shoot you down. There's a way in which the vastness of the sky, the openness of the sky is really unimaginable. We usually just look up and think "Oh, it's a nice day today, the sky's blue" and leave it at that. But if we actually look into the sky, it's incredible. If you just sit and relax like we did this morning and look into that blue sky, and look, without staring, not trying to find something but just opening to it, you start really to dissolve, and become as vast as the sky. It's infinite.

That's why the sky is used again and again in buddhist texts. The sky is the openness inside which this planet, the sun and the moon and the stars are arising. It represents an absolute openness, which in itself is unborn and unceasing. Inside it many things seem to be born and to move and to come into being and come out of being, but in itself it is unchanging.

Then, *so so rang rig ye she chö yul wa*. *So so* means precise or specific, each individual thing. *Rang rig* means awareness. *Ye she* means wisdom again, but it's a pristine, pure, an original cognition, a pure awareness. *Ye she* is an interesting word. *Ye* means original, from the beginning, and *she* means to know. Thus it means the state of awareness that is there before everything else. Like in meditation you dissolve and you have openness, and then a

thought arises, and then a feeling arises, so it's that space which is there before thoughts and feelings arise, and it's there during thoughts and feelings, and after thoughts and feelings. *Chö yul wa* means something like a sphere of operations, in the sense that for us the earth is our *chö yul*, it's where we operate. The sky is where the birds operate, and we can't fly, while the sea is where the fish operate. So a *chö yul* is your realm or your dimension, where you're at home.

When we come to the world with our karma, with our ideas from the past, we see things in terms of our own ideas from the past. With this kind of open awareness we see things just as they are, in themselves. The world reveals itself fresh to me, free of all the knowledge and projections that I put onto it.

The third line says: *This open transcendent awareness is the realm or the dimension of the precise awareness that sees things just as they are.*

Du sum, du means time, *sum* means three, the three times of past, present and future. *Gyal wai* means victor and it's another title for buddha. *Yum* means mother. *La*, 'to'. *Chak tsal lo* means 'I pay homage', 'I bow' or 'I show respect.'

It says: *This transcendental wisdom is the mother of all the buddhas of the three times.*

Just as when we were born into this world we came out of our mother's womb, in order to be born into buddhahood, you have to be born out of the womb of this great mother, the transcendental wisdom. First we need to go into the womb of wisdom. As in the dissolving meditation, you dissolve down, it's like going in and in, almost like the reverse of a birth process, everything's shrinking down, and then you're in open space. It's like going into the womb and then you come out of that, reborn, with a sense of openness, enlightened, open to the world. It's a re-birthing process.

In bowing to the mother of all the buddhas we also bow to our own mother because this wisdom will be our mother when we become buddhas. That happy day! And apparently birth as a buddha involves no contractions, blood, no epidural...

You can recite this verse while visualising Prajnaparamita as a goddess in front of you. She is golden in colour and has four hands, two hands raised, one holding a book, the other a lotus and two hands in her lap. Thus one can recite the verse in a devotional way to the goddess who is the expression of emptiness, or in a more abstract way as a means of relaxing into the principle of openness.

If you're back in the city and you're driving around in your car, you can sing this to yourself, reminding yourself that this wisdom is always there, and your car is travelling through the middle of this woman's front door [*Laughter*]. Prajnaparamita is sitting having a cup of tea: "*Hi!*" Because she is all around, this wisdom is always open, very nice, like everybody's favourite granny, tea and cakes always available, something nice, something interesting.

Often when we leave a retreat where we have gained some clarity, we start to feel that the experience is slipping away and we start to worry about how we can hang onto it. But as this first line says: *“Beyond speech, thought and expression”*. Whatever it is that we get it’s not something we can hold on to. If it’s slipping away and we run after it, we’ll just lose it. If it seems to be slipping away, let it go, relax, open and there it is again. But the more you try to get it, and think *“God, what did we do? I’ve forgotten the prayer, what was the tune?”* you lose it. Whenever you get anxious like that, you lose it. So just drop the worry, relax, open, and there it is. It’s always there in the heart because it’s there as innate buddha nature.

Today is Thursday, and tomorrow is Friday and then Saturday morning our retreat is finished, so keeping that sense of time, and particularly if you’re driving back, it’s important to be not too buzzed up about things. If there are some experiments that you want to do today for yourself in terms of taking up some of the things we’ve talked of, you should really do it today and not leave it for the last moment, because I think in order to be compassionate to yourself, you want to be moving out of this space, focused in a way that fits in with the world again. So if there are things you want to do, making lots of noises in the woods and getting into your energy and setting up a lot of emotion, I would advise you to do it today, really don’t leave it for tomorrow. It’s safe to do it today and we can always talk about it. If you leave these things to the last moment then you go out kind of buzzy, you don’t have a clear entry back into the world, and what we’re really trying to do is to take what we learn and develop here into the world, so that it becomes part of life and not just a special experience.

I’ll start by saying a bit more about meditation and we can do some of it together, and then we’ll take it out into the environment, it’s such a beautiful place we’re in.

DZOGCHEN MEDITATION

The meditation practice I want to talk about this morning is a basic aspect of what’s called dzogchen in Tibetan. Dzogchen means an openness that is not about striving but rather being satisfied and accepting what comes to you. The main focus is very much what we’ve been doing already, being in touch with the presence of awareness that is unchanging and yet welcoming whatever is arising. It’s not about hanging on to a particular territory, or building up a particular intentional view of the world.

CREATING IMAGES: IN VISUALISATION AND IN PAINTING

For example, in the more elaborated visualisation practices in Tibetan buddhism one spends a lot of time imagining gods and goddesses of various kinds and colours, in palaces with doors and gardens and flower trees. One uses the imagination to construct a particular form, which is then collapsed down into emptiness. In dzogchen one takes quick ways of entering into the open state. One doesn’t do the elaboration so much, but goes straight into the simplicity, and then uses that state of simplicity to work with things as they arise.

In many ways the strands of Tibetan buddhism are like the strands that we have in art, particularly in the field of western art at the moment, where we still have the tradition of representation of nature as it is. Thus in portraiture you paint someone so that the painting looks like the person. Within that approach there are particular canons or rules for constructing the image. Through our childhood we gradually learn the rules of that sort of representational art, so that when we look at such a painting, we know how to read it. In learning to paint in that way one takes on a whole discipline of particular techniques and skills through which one is able to produce a particular kind of image.

At the other extreme, we have the whole field of abstract expressionism where painters give an informed and yet free expression to their response to various aspects of the environment. The image created is not a random outcome of self indulgence but a distilled essential response formed in a mood of attentiveness to the process rather than to a set of rules.

In modern art, these two approaches have been in profound opposition. The rules developed over centuries can provide a wealth of helpful knowledge, but they can also imprison. The freshness of an uninhibited creative expression can subvert that imprisoning stagnation but it can also seduce attention into a series of dead ends.

DISTRACTION

In the buddhist view we are all caught up in particular patterns, patterns of anger, of desire, of jealousy, of stupidity, patterns of hating ourselves, patterns of being very needy in the world, patterns of being depressed and helpless, which repeat again and again. By doing formal meditation we make use of the structure of focusing on the breath, visualising a god or a goddess or a ball of light, reciting a mantra, we focus our attention onto something which is given to us by someone else, that we don't create for ourselves but is given by the tradition, and we use this structure to give ourselves a time out from the repetition compulsion, from the incessant desire to mould the present and the future in terms of the past. That's often very difficult because when we try to do the meditation we get distracted.

What do we get distracted by? We get distracted by our own patterns insisting *"I'm no good, this won't work. I can't meditate; it's not happening for me. All these other people know how to do it."* The kinds of thoughts that come up also occur at work or in relationships. The tension between the formal structure, the iconic movement of the meditation, and our difficulty in applying it, shows us more clearly the repeated patterns that we bring into ordinary life.

The more that we can bring ourselves into alignment with this formal structure the more we can use it as a tunnel to bring all our energy, all our focus into the image to prepare us for the essential point of dissolving. That's why, once we've understood the structure, it is very useful to develop an emotional relationship with these images through chanting, making offerings and so on.

METHOD

I think that we need to remember that this is always a method. When we do this sort of chanting we are not praying to a god who is going to save us. If the god was going to save us they would have done it yesterday. You know, God's not sitting up there on his bum, waiting for people to pray! If God really had the power and the compassion, the world would all have ended very nicely. It's not going to happen like that. That is a dualistic fantasy. If we make the effort, we get the result. If we don't make the effort, we don't get the result. The path is relational because it is through clarifying the nature of relationship that we come to a realisation of non duality.

These practices are not ways to become enslaved to some god that does nothing, but are methods for transforming our own perceptual field. They transform the world. Therefore we have to take responsibility and do it. If we don't, nothing will change. We actually have to take up the practice.

We can put all our emotion, all our regressive fantasies, our desperate child neediness, we can put all of that into the practice, but we have to remember this is a method. We can use every aspect of ourselves. We can use our pride, our desire, our anger, "*You must save me! Oh, please save me!*" We can cry and weep and storm and rant, and all of this emotion brings us more and more into the practice, and means that energy is not dispersed over the world, but it's all coming into a point, and the more you bring it into this, then at the moment of dissolving the more the whole world, all the little tentacles that we normally have dispersed everywhere, are coming together, coming together, and the dissolving really becomes real. Then we go through this point and there is nothing but open awareness. That's what it's all for.

Everything is method. That's why in tantra they have many, many methods so that we can look and find things that will actually be effective for us. Everything, every aspect of ourselves, our narcissism, our ego hunger, our selfishness, all of these things, our jealousy and our pride, all can be turned into the practice. We can mobilise that energy to bring us more powerfully into that point of dissolving. After that the world gradually starts to reveal itself and we have various ways of responding to it.

In the tantric tradition employing the symbolic dimension of gods and goddesses, the usual practice is to see all that arises as being the form of the god or the goddess you've focused on, all the sounds that arise being the sound of their mantra, and all the thoughts that arise as the radiance of the mind of the deity. One is using a particular kind of transformational grid, through which one is transforming experiences as they arise, by re-framing them in terms of another narrative, by making a representational transfer.

IMAGES ARISE AND DISSOLVE IN THE MOMENT

However in the practice of dzogchen, one doesn't do that. In the practice of dzogchen, whatever arises, it arises just as it is, in its simplicity, without being transformed or altered, and one lets it dissolve the moment it arises. A traditional image used to describe this is that it's like writing on water. If you write with your finger on the surface of a pond, you can quickly see the letter,

but as soon as it's made it dissolves back into the water. Images arise, and dissolve in the moment. In the flow of ceaseless becoming we don't need to push any object away, because we know that in the moment that it arises it's going to dissolve. Horrible things are not so frightening because they dissolve, and wonderful things are not so graspable because they dissolve as well. The world is changing and transforming, and we are in the flow, the creative flow of the unfolding of the world.

A simple way to practise this meditation is to use the dissolving meditation to enter the state where we are relaxed and open. Then, when a thought comes and we are going into thought, getting involved, what we have to do is go onto the one who is thinking the thought. As a thought arises, there is a thinker of the thought. Often we feel we are just thinking. But if we watch attentively it's as if something comes into view, as if I'm here looking over there, and something's coming into view. Now when I'm looking at it, I'm caught up in it. But there's a particular moment, as it comes into view, that there's still a kind of gap between me and the thing that I'm going to look at. At that moment I need to recognise and stay on the point of openness which is an awareness within which this appearance is arising. By doing that, the appearance passes without enmeshing the awareness. One always has to stay on the one who is watching, the one who is looking. However, it's not a tight looking, it's not an examining, because that will then pull you into a focused ego attention, but it's a relaxed openness in this moment of awareness, staying on awareness and not being pulled into whatever arises.

This is very different from maintaining a focused attention on the breath, because that method has a point of reference. Whatever comes, and especially when you get distracted, you just come back to your breath. In mantra meditations if you get distracted you come back to an awareness of the visualisation and the mantra.

The dzogchen approach does not return the attention to a specific object; rather it maintains the presence of non-reified awareness, whatever arises. We can use Phat! to cut distraction and open up a gap for recognition of awareness but once we clear a space we need to relax and allow the spaciousness to remain clear by simply letting appearances arise and pass with awareness unmoving from the place of the watcher.

WATCHING: DIALOGUE BETWEEN JAMES AND PEOPLE PRESENT

Questioner: But does it mean that I'm a watcher, myself, during this meditation?

James: Yes, you're not dead, so something's happening. You might be relaxed and suddenly have a sense of your body. Instead of thinking "Ah, *this is me!*" and going into the image, remain relaxed and stay on the one who is observing without entering into observation of the body. If you do that, the sense of 'my' body will pass, because it is simply something passing in time. The more we go into the arising, the more we re-affirm it, and so it seems to be real. But if we stay just on this observing awareness, the arising phenomena will pass.

Of course, it's quite tricky at first because our tendency is always to affirm what we're seeing, and that's why saying Phat! is useful, because it cuts the affirmation and creates a gap. The main focus is not just making gaps but is trying to stay with relaxed openness whatever arises, be it experiences in meditation or the revelation of the world. At first it's useful to do the meditation with your eyes closed, but as you become more confident you can do it with your eyes open, integrating the ceaseless display of phenomena with the relaxed maintenance of open awareness.

Questioner: In the beginning you said something like 'We work with the images that arise.' What do you mean, 'work'?

James: Well, I mean that you don't put something else in its place, like the image of a god. You are directly engaging with whatever is coming. You're not working to transform it into something else. Whenever something comes, you give it space, and as it says in the text, you should have the attitude of 'whatever comes, comes, whatever goes, goes.' It goes back to the image of the sky: one wants one's awareness to be open so that things pass right through it. This is not the same as being like a traffic policeman on a little island in the middle of lots of cars. That's a common position we can take up, being a controller in the middle trying to organise things according to our desire or the rulebook we have inherited. This practice is about trying to dissolve that controller and go completely into the state of the sky.

This is completely radical! It is a total subversion of the ego's desire to maintain territory. This is why the image of the sky is so important, because clouds go through the sky, birds go through the sky, planes go through the sky, and they go in every direction. There isn't a central hard core of sky with a soft bit around the outside. Every bit of it has the same nature.

When thoughts arise I think what we find is that they bring us in touch with the hardcore of what we cling on to. We find our sensitive spots, and see that we respond to some thoughts more than others, because there is still a centralised director full of prejudice. What one is going to have to encounter for days and months and years is the understanding of how we get tied in knots; the recognition that in our heart there are tight, tight knots. To get this tight, central place to relax takes quite a lot of practice.

In the week you've been here, how much real meditation have you tried to do? The relaxation of a holiday attitude is easier to get into than the profound relaxation of this radical shift of focus. Sitting and chatting in the sun does not transform the deep rooted structure of attachment. There's nothing wrong with sitting in sunshine, but it's a place where old habits reaffirm themselves. Even in this life, we've spent a lot of years, a lot of months, days and hours, building up these defences, tying knots in reaction to other people.

In order to practise kindness to ourselves and all beings we therefore need to attend to the task of integrating relaxed and open awareness into every moment of our lives, both waking and sleeping.

Questioner: What about emotions that arise?

James: It would be the same thing. Who is feeling this? I'm feeling angry. OK, stay with the one who's feeling that, so that there's anger and there's a gap of just observing it, a naked perception which isn't involved in it.

Questioner: You're not going to stare into the anger?

James: Well, I'm not really sure what staring into it would be. I mean, you don't really have eyes at that time. If you stare then you've already tightened yourself up. You want to relax and be aware. It's not so much staring as just being aware, scanning. Like the Queen of England, when she goes in the royal carriage. [*Laughter*] Gazing without involvement.

We will practise in here with our eyes closed and then open, and then go outside and try to maintain the state of openness while in touch with all the colours and shapes, seeing a tree without thinking about the tree. At first there is an object and a perceiving of the object, but it's very relaxed, and gradually the complications are stripped away.

Questioner: Will you say anything in between? About when to go outside?

James: No, I think you use your own feeling about that. What we'll do is start again by briefly doing the visualisation and the mantra. And if you find when you're outside you're really getting lost and you can't just get back to the state of awareness, then do the visualisation again. You can do three or four minutes of recitation and then dissolve, and you are back in the state. It is very useful to become proficient in the brief dissolving practice because then you can do it at work, or you can do it at home. If the kids are getting too much, you just go in the kitchen, sit down, do the practice, and then go back in and be with them, but now there's a bit more space. It doesn't have to be a big, formal, elaborate exercise.

CREATIVITY, WISDOM AND COMPASSION

Now I'll say something about creativity in terms of wisdom and compassion, particularly in terms of making creative responses to other people's five poisons as opposed to our own. It's one thing to learn to recognise how you're getting trapped in a particular emotion and try to transform it. It's another when you have to encounter or live with other people who are manifesting their own patterns of confusion.

Real compassion from the buddhist point of view is a gesture towards the other that opens something up for them, so that they can move forward in a different way. In that sense it's not simply doing something for the other person in order to fill up some kind of deficit. If somebody's hungry, and you give them some food, that's a fair enough thing to do, but it is not likely to transform their existence very much. It may in fact make them dependent on you. Or if somebody is feeling very hurt and sad, they may need to cry, and you may need to comfort them and take care of them. That's also a good thing to do, clearly, but it may not help to transform the situation for them.

The two things that do seem to help people to transform are new structures and more space. We can give people new ideas, or some permission to experience more of their emotions; or some concepts to allow more of their energy to arise and manifest in the world. Thus we can help the person to be more confident, more assertive, to express themselves through their body and so forth. That kind of support provides new structure which helps the person experience the world in a new way.

However, it can also be controlling, because by giving them that knowledge, you are maybe creating them in your image, cloning them according to pre-existing templates. This is a familiar issue in psychotherapy: whether one should give people specific skills, or offer them space in which they can find themselves. It can often feel safer to offer particular techniques which seem to establish a clear cause and effect and are backed by research or tradition. Opening up the space of possibility one is also opening up the possibility of lostness and existential confusion—which is why faith provides such a helpful background to the practice of dzogchen.

The practice of tantra and dzogchen integrate technique and space but it is up to us to get to know ourselves, to understand what we need to do in specific situations. We need wisdom to understand our own condition and we need compassion to offer others space without controlling them in order to reassure ourselves. In that way we are dancing, moving with whatever arises, without getting blocked by our own or others' reactions, without feeling that we've made some kind of fatal mistake so that we have to jump back and tighten up and apologise, but are able to keep moving with whatever it is that has been occurring, maintaining the sense of space.

COMPASSION IS OFFERING SPACE TO THE OTHER

In terms of compassion, this means having the generosity to offer the other person the space to be the way they are. We apply the techniques to ourselves to transform our experience in order to be able to offer space to others. This is a reversal of the normal operation of imposing techniques on others in order to maintain our own sense of free space. On that level of compassion, what one's trying to do if somebody is full of anger, or pride, or jealousy, or is coming on like an asshole and really giving you a hard time, is to allow them to do just that.

It may seem a strange notion of compassion, but consider your motivation when you try to change somebody else's behaviour. Or try to correct them, or even confront them and say *"Now look here! When you behave like this, I get really upset. You have to realise that you can't go on just treating me like this!"* You are presenting the other with a proposition, a position to react to. The focus is on the mode of arising rather than on the ground of arising itself. Your intervention might create an easier form of being, easier for the other and easier for yourself, but it maintains the focus of attention on the external and in so doing it supports dualistic perception.

But if you actually give the person the space without any resistance in which they can manifest with their complete asshole nature, at a certain point it will exhaust itself because it's coming from a kind of impulse. People are not in

their true nature, assholes. The true nature of all beings is infinite spaciousness, the ground of ceaseless becoming. It might be difficult to sit through all the stages of becoming of an asshole until it transforms into something else. *[Laughter]*, but that is essentially what compassion is about, to give people the space to find themselves, to go through their changes.

In relative terms we may need to make suggestions, pushing and pulling their mode of manifestation, but it has to be done with a sense of spaciousness, not taking it too seriously, not foreclosing on the infinite possibilities of becoming and especially not blocking the possibilities of recognising basic openness. Otherwise, tension is built up, and most of us, if we are pushed into a corner, will come out fighting. So when we try to change other people, or correct them, or improve them, we must be aware of the consequences. It may be that in the moment the person will be compliant and will go along with our suggestions but there's often an undercurrent of resentment which will manifest in time, so we need to observe when we become frightened of the limitations of others. When we are frightened of the limitations of others we are operating within duality.

And if we seek to help others and tell them *"This is samsara, you shouldn't be here. If you want to get enlightened, you're going to have to stop doing what you're doing and do something else"*, we are operating out of a control position which is likely to undermine our commitment to the bodhisattva view of altruism. It is also a sign that we have lost touch with a sense of revelation; that how things are manifesting at this moment is OK. When we come onto what the other person is doing with a judgement, even when we have a good intention, we are subtly saying *"There's something wrong with this revelation, this form of manifestation. The world shouldn't be this way. The world has to be another way so that I can feel OK."* There are always ways in which we can operate on the world to improve it, and often we seem to have a lot of justification for the kind of improvements we try to make, and we might even get many, many people who will agree with us, *"That's a very good suggestion. Yes, this is what we must do."* But it does take us into a push and pull situation in which one uses authority of some kind or another, a construction of some kind or another, to enforce one particular idea of how things should be over another. This is basically a dualistic conflict in which the most powerful person will win, because they will be able to coerce or seduce the other into going along with their wish.

BUDDHISM IS NOT EVANGELICAL

As long as we, the helpers and the others, the helped, are caught up in the five poisons we have to keep questioning our motives. This is not to say that we should adopt an avoidant, quietist position. Fear of the world is not our guiding principle. But neither is a manic hope of being able to create nirvana here on earth! Suffering arises from attachment. Compassion must entail reducing the attachment of both self and other. Awareness of the richness of the world, of the ceaseless effortless nature of becoming, this is a gift that can free oneself and others, to relax attachment and ego-centred control.

This view of compassion is quite radical. It can often appear like letting people stew in their own juice, just letting them stay stuck. However, in that

stuckness, if you like, by not pushing them into it, by just being with them in it, with an openness and an acceptance of it, one is giving the sense that there is space to move, but that the movement has to come from them. Buddhism is not evangelical; there is no strong doctrine of the importance of converting people to buddhism. Rather the dharma is made available to those who want to understand something about themselves. However, by the quality of our being in the world we can inspire others to question their own existence and to think about making changes.

It is only by our own desire that we can make any kind of ongoing change. It's one thing to go to a weekend workshop and get all buzzed up but a couple of weeks later, where is the inspiration? People have said this quite a few times here, that after a retreat they start doing a lot of practice but gradually the energy dribbles away. Somehow, you suck in from the retreat environment something which inspires you but then you can't hold it; otherwise you'd choke! You have to breathe out, and with it all the energy goes as well!
[Laughter].

Rather than thinking that the world is a dangerous place and then striving to find moments of safety, pockets of nourishment, we need to become at home in the world. The practice is about finding a deep way so that every breath provides inspiration, because one is actually moving forward into a space that is alive and energetic for oneself. If we are going to be able to move forward, if we're going to open up, we have to be able to use space, and use the forms of the world as they arise, without fear. So that someone being angry towards us, someone being very selfish, someone being very proud, someone being very stupid and messing up all our plans, that person, if we are open, is providing us with enormous fuel for our wisdom and compassion.

And if we can use their confusion and their poisons as fuel for our wisdom, then we'll be able to recognise it and feel gratitude—which will allow us to be generous towards them. This will then give them the space in which they can relax from being such an asshole. That's the theory. In practice, of course, it's slightly more difficult!

DIALOGUE BETWEEN JAMES AND PEOPLE PRESENT

Questioner: One example. You mean if there's somebody doing something which I find completely nuts and I don't like it, maybe he's killing an animal, or doing some cruel thing, I should be just to try to be open and just let him do it? Or what?

James: Well, the fact that he's making you unhappy is a point for you to recognise and consider that: *"I'm now caught in a dualistic vision. So I need to quickly dissolve and open to what's going on here, then I will be able to appreciate the situation in a different way, with some gratitude to this person because they've reminded me that I was getting lost anyway."* Through that generosity one can be in touch with why the person does it. People always act from some reason. It's not because some people are innately bad, you know. People are cruel or selfish because of fear, anxiety, a desire to own things, because of the pattern of the five poisons. It's not because they are other than us: *"I'm a good person, you're a bad person"*, it's because we all get caught

up in the same shit. So we can use our dharma understanding to recognise why the other person is acting in that way, and then respond with compassion that will let them feel understood. And when that happens, they may open and have some possibility of movement.

However, that's just on the edge of a dualistic perception again, because in the moment of somebody cutting the throat of an animal, what is it that's so horrifying? You see, there you are, *[makes animal cries]*, and the blood's coming out in a little pan *[makes sound of blood coming out in little pan]* and we don't like that, hmm? Two hours later *[makes sounds of sizzling]* frying pan's sizzling *"Mmmm that smells good!" [Laughter]* There is a particular way in which something is very, very nice and something is very, very horrible. And as long as we are making these judgements we are pushed into *"I don't want any of that,"* and *"Hey! Can I have another helping?"* It's very difficult.

I mean, that's why the question of passivity is always around when we take up a non dual view. And we are repeatedly pulled into action through the power of habitual 'shoulds'. So how to respond?

Questioner: That's a very good question! I mean sometimes I don't see the difference between being passive or even masochistic and being really aware of things, and letting go, and giving space. It's sometimes very hard for me to distinguish, and it's the same with political situations.

James; Well, from the buddhist point of view we have to try to integrate the two aspects of wisdom and compassion. If your wisdom is open there's no reason why you can't act with compassion, but if you simply try to act with compassion without any sense of the openness of things, sooner or later you will enter conflict. You'll be saying, *"Just you stop that!"* Why? *"Because my idea's better than yours, I'm better than you, and if you don't stop it, then..."* And then you're pulled back into the same kind of cycle that you went in to stop. So one has to have some kind of spaciousness in order to act on the situation.

DIALOGUE: EXTREME SITUATION

Questioner: I want to give a more extreme example. If I'm in the city, and I walk together with X and I see a woman getting hassled in the streets, raped or what, and then my impulse is to try to put an end to it, you know.

James: Well, let's go back to the basic perception. You're in the city, walking along with X, seeing a woman. You're already in a situation which is generated by a conventional dualistic perception. And on that level, if that's the dimension you're in, clearly the thing you should do is shout and do whatever you want to do. The question would be, if you could be more open might that help the situation to dissolve? You might be able to go up to the person who is doing the raping and say *"If you're so desperate for sex, let's have sex!" [Laughter]*

Questioner: Then he will go just down to the earth.

James: That's the biggest way to remove his erection, isn't it?

Questioner: Maybe his fighting thing comes up.

Another Questioner: But when you offer yourself, why should he fight anymore?

James: This approach is illustrated in a traditional story about Yeshe Tsogyal. Once when she was going on a pilgrimage she was stopped by seven bandits, who wanted to rape her. With the fearlessness of her realisation of emptiness she was not trapped in the situation and through her meditation as she was having sex with them, she gave them an experience which transformed their energy. This experience shifted their perception and created a gap in which they became curious and so Yeshe Tsogyal was able to introduce them to basic dharma ideas which supported them in changing their lives.

Now, that's very radical, maybe very, very far away from the level that we're at, but it does point to the importance of openness in protecting us from being victims so that we are free to help others. If one's actually in a place of generosity then one can give all sorts of things. Like people say, "Oh, you need a kidney. O.K., I can give you a kidney." I mean people do that, don't they? We've got hospitals all over the place; people give bits of their bodies to others. I don't know if I could do that but people do it, and regularly give blood for transfusion. People act with enormous generosity, they give a lot of money, they give food, they give houses. People do it all of that giving without the advantage of dharma methods for loosening attachment. So why shouldn't one give one's body? Why shouldn't one give one's energy?

Questioner: This is too theoretical, I'm sorry.

James: Well, the story is supposedly an account of what Yeshe Tsogyal actually did. It may seem like theory because we are so caught up in our attachments, our hopes and fear.

Questioner: But what's happening now in modern times is that women go along in the street and something happens, nobody cares, people pass by, and it just happens. So for me, I walk around and I try to look at these things. And I walk with X because if I'm alone, it's difficult to fight a man or whatever. I try to go into it and help. But you're saying that's wrong?!

James: It's not saying it is wrong! It's not saying it is wrong! What I'm saying is that we always act inside a particular view, a particular way of understanding. When the appearances of the world are strongly real for you, your responses will be governed by that. Acting to help beings trapped in dangerous situations is not bad, but it does involve a lot of potential complications.

OK, so this man starts to fight, you've got a knife in your pocket and you stick it in the man. Or you stick your thumb in his eyes. It's a very good way to stop someone. You can kill them. You can rip his wind pipe out. You can kill someone, and that will stop their bad action, but then, where are you?

How do you stop someone being violent in a situation like that? You may have to be violent. Are you prepared to be violent? That is the problem with this

way of seeing things, where you fight fire with fire, responding on the same level. I would in no way say that one shouldn't do that, but it has a consequence. It makes the whole situation tighter, more real. What I'm saying is that the dharma offers us other possibilities of approaching situations through developing generosity and openness.

DIALOGUE: ORDINARY SITUATION

I think we're in danger of going into a familiar philosophical error where one uses the most extreme example to try to prove the case. Children being tortured and people being raped are very, very extreme. On a daily basis we are troubled by more ordinary situations, like someone pushing in front of you, driving dangerously near you, banging you in a supermarket queue. Or if someone new comes into the office, and they are pushing ahead of you for promotion, unsettling you. In these situations one already knows some social skills for managing difficulties, saying "*Hey, why are you doing that?*" "You probably know how to, confront the person. But from this new dharma view, you might be able to relax and offer a bit of space in which you can see that the person's uncertain and worried, and through that recognition you can give them some space to relax so that their urge to go forward is lessened. Then there is more space for everyone and different options start to appear.

Clearly it's not something we should try in the most extreme examples but step by step we can check out whether it's effective or not. We need to taste it and see if it actually works.

When we see ourselves as real and situations as real we are drawn into responding in predictable ways, ways permeated by the five poisons. And action on this level doesn't actually transform the situation; it just shifts it on the same horizontal level, so that for example, instead of being bad, we're now good. But we are still operating within the same solid framework, which can still trigger a negative run of thoughts leading us back into bad action.

There is a story about a yogi who spent many years in a mountain retreat, meditating. Before he had become a yogi, he had been a general. But he had stopped all his fighting and done a lot of purification and he had been living very peacefully for many, many years. One day he came out of his hut and sat in the sun to relax. He put out some bread and pigeons came down to eat it, as happened every day. However, this particular day as he was watching them cooing, he thought, "*Ah, if I had an army with as many soldiers as these pigeons, then I would be able to go out and take over this whole valley!*" This idea just came up in him and he thought, "*Hey! That's a good idea!*" and he went down the hill, got an army, and went back to being a general.

INSTEAD OF PRACTISING PATIENCE, WE PRACTICE IRRITATION

Negative emotions will always swirl around dualised, reified perception. So as long as we are not free of this kind of perception we are vulnerable to the sudden arising of thoughts which close the situation down and fix us on a narrow path. It's only through a kind of openness which allows others to be in their own situation, without us wanting to change them or do things to them, that we're actually free of an impulse to control.

There is a Tibetan saying that it's easier to cover your feet with leather than to cover the whole road. But for many of us, we prefer to cover the whole road, because we think, *"I have a divine right to have soft tender feet and if anybody hurts my feet, I'll kill them"*. Instead of practising patience, we practice irritation and power and control. But putting leather on our own feet means that we commit ourselves to maintaining a space for reflection, relaxing, letting go rather than rushing in. We commit ourselves to dissolving karmic impulses before the project is into enmeshed engagement. This is difficult. It can feel like a sacrifice. But it does open a gap for the arising of a compassionate response.

To take this on is a big commitment. It's really something to think about: to take on an attitude of generosity to others. Allowing people to be proud, to be stupid, to be selfish, to be cruel, to tolerate their cruelty. It seems to be a fact that people don't really change just by being told, *"You mustn't do that"*. That does seem to be the case.

Change seems to occur through a kind of understanding, an understanding that develops when there's a feeling that the other person is actually on your side, is prepared to see the world from where you're sitting. But it's very difficult to see the world from where the other is sitting if I've already taken a position against them and decided, *"Well, you shouldn't be like that."* I think that's proven in psychotherapy all the time.

It's extremely difficult to be so generous because most of us have been brought up to know what's right and wrong. When we were small our parents told us what to do, and they said, *"If you follow these rules, you'll be OK in life, because everybody follows these rules."* But when we grow up we realise that everybody doesn't follow these rules. We can then feel cheated, and get angry with the people who don't follow the rules, because if they did, then we'd all follow the same rules and everything would be fine! *"If only you did what my Daddy said, then we'd all be happy. But you won't do what my Daddy says, so I'll have to be like my Daddy to you! You are small and bad, and I'm big and important."*

When the rules can no longer be imposed a profound insecurity can arise. This is quite visible now in London, where we have a huge immigrant population with people coming from all over the world bringing many different cultural and economic expectations. There is no longer a common body of shared expectations of behaviour, so you cannot predict what someone else should do. It makes social interaction very, very strange. People get very frightened, because they can no longer make any assumptions about other people. When you have never been brought up to be interested in differences between people, but have been brought up to believe that your own rule book is the right one, then you feel everybody else is bad. It is then very tempting to retreat into your own corner and want to get rid of the other people and ignore them. To be open to the other puts oneself into question. If we are not willing to do that, we end up either ignoring or controlling others.

ALLOWING THE WORLD TO REVEAL ITSELF FOR PLEASURE RATHER THAN APPROPRIATION

So from this point of view, the more we do this dissolving practice the more open we become in our perception of the world. We are more available to be actually interested in what's there, engaging with the smells of the world, the tastes, the textures, actually allowing the world to reveal itself for pleasure rather than appropriation. This direct experience cuts through our judgement, our prediction, our knowledge and lets us see something fresh in what we already knew, letting us respond in a different way. Compassion arises from the spaciousness of wisdom and carries no prediction of how the other should be. Compassion is not about control but is a gesture of responsiveness directed by the real nature of the other.

BETWEEN IMPOSED ORDER AND WHIMSICAL DISORDER IS THE BUDDHIST MIDDLE WAY

Between imposed order and whimsical disorder there is the buddhist middle way of attention, respectful awareness to things, and a really precise attention to the details of other people's lives. This means not resting on assumptions, not making judgements on the basis of age, race, gender and so on, but really being with the person so that there is space for them to shine through, and to find out more about themselves in the process.

Of course this is very hard to do. Given the distress they cause us, we are surprisingly attached to our prejudices. It's as if it is easier to stay with the complacency of false knowledge than to struggle for trust or even just to relax and see what happens. Freedom is scary.

Some of you might like to be controlled by other people, bossed and told what to do. To have to take responsibility for our own lives is often very difficult, and if we've got somebody who'll be 'the master' and tell us what to do, that can be quite reassuring. So if somebody says, *"No, here is your life, carry it yourself. You're the one who knows what it's about. Explore your own life,"* that can feel like a terrible burden. We might want to say, *"Well how should I live? What should I do? Tell me, tell me, tell me so that I can do what you say, and then I can know that I'm right because you said I should do it."*

If we can relax our fear of getting it wrong and actually look into ourselves, then we see that our life is moving in this unfathomable vastness, this openness which cannot be organised by following the words of another. Through meditation we experience the playful pleasure of being at one with the process of display. But we can never find this if we are seeking to align ourselves with someone else's representation of our identity. But in our daily life we are constantly being told how and what we should be. Through advertising, through gender-focused propaganda, we are being told we should be this shape, our faces should have this kind of colour, we should have this kind of education and so on.

We are suckers for it because we are all so desperate to fit in. 'Fitting in' means sharing the burden of our identity with others, it means gaining love and acceptance by being the kind of person who is wanted. It means

managing the fear of rejection. To enter into openness confronts us with these hopes and anxieties. If I'm true to myself, if I allow myself to be spontaneous maybe nobody will like me, because as I reveal my true nature maybe everyone will really see I'm just a pile of shit. All my deep fears that I'm unworthy and unacceptable—the fears I've covered over by trying to be the nice person who pleases others—all that will come to the surface.

As we contact our own natural openness we become aware of more and more ways in which we limit ourselves. But the more we are in touch with these patterns and their related sense of inadequacy and worthlessness, the more we get a sense of how these borders from the past can be dissolved. This gives us the space to open with compassion to the fact that everyone else is in the same situation. It's not that other people have got it all worked out. I think that this is often our fantasy. *"Everyone else knows what they're doing; everyone else is clear about who they are. It's only me who doesn't know."* But the more we actually engage with ourselves through the meditation, and experience the way our thoughts and emotions arise, we can also see that this is how thoughts are, and that everyone else is stuck in the same stuff. That is a good basis for real compassion. Because what will help people to become free is the space in which they can experience the process of the complexity of their life and then allow it to drop away. No amount of coercion or pushing people into boxes, or giving them the right solution will do that.

This is probably, politically, the best defence against all the totalitarian moves that we're likely to encounter in our lifetime. With all the fear and sense of lostness around now, as we move towards the millennium, we're likely to experience more and more social pressures of control and constraint. The fear of chaos provokes a feeling that order has to be imposed, and in-between there's no space to think, there's no space to explore. And that's exactly the space that's marked out by this kind of practice.

Break

PADMASAMBHAVA AND THE SEVEN-LINE PRAYER

Now let's focus on Padmasambhava and the *Seven-line prayer*.

STORY OF PADMASAMBHAVA

While Padmasambhava was in Tibet he gave many teachings and in particular gave many instructions that would be of value in later times. He established a treasury of meaning and method. A great deal of the driving force of the nyingma tradition has been to return to that source. So he represents a kind of well spring of wisdom and compassion that people return to for nourishment again and again.

This name, Padmasambhava, 'born from a lotus', indicates that which remains pure and simple no matter what is going on. So Padmasambhava represents the opening of the lotus of wisdom in our own heart. He embodies our own true nature. When we remember him we are returning to ourselves.

I'll say a few things about his life to give you a flavour of his story. Translations of some of his biography are available and it would be useful to read them to get a more detailed sense of the symbolism. A long time ago in north-west India in the area called Uddiyana, there was a king called Indrabhuti, He was very old and blind. He had no son, no successor, no one to inherit his kingdom, and he was full of despair. Various calamities came to the kingdom. There was drought and there were floods. He thought, *"Things are really falling apart, I have to do something."* So he got all his priests to perform various religious ceremonies.

Amitabha, the Buddha of the lotus family—which is located in the western direction of the mandala, the area of the transformation of desire—was aware of their suffering. From a letter Hri in his heart there radiated a vajra with a letter Hri, and this manifested in the Danakosha Lake in the land of Uddiyana where it transformed into a lotus. In its centre was a smiling, eight-year-old boy. Many dakinis appeared in the sky around him and sang the Seven-line prayer to welcome and honour him.

The king's minister had a vision that this wonderful thing had happened, and he took the king to the lake, where the king was introduced to the boy and the boy was introduced to the king. "What a nice boy! I must adopt you and give you my kingdom." said the king. So that's what happened.

But then, after some years, Padmasambhava felt constrained by the responsibilities of taking on the kingdom for he had other tasks to perform. Since his father was old and blind, he found it very difficult to leave home. He couldn't really fight with his father because that wouldn't be a good thing to do. So he climbed up to the top of a tower and took a vajra which he threw in the air. It came spinning down, down, down, down through the air and hit a little baby, on the head. Now the baby's dead. Big scandal! Just like you get in the royal family in Britain. *"My God! The prince, he's freaked out, he's killed a kid! Ah, shit! We thought everything was going in the right direction. What are we going to do with him? We can't kill him. The King's heart's broken; we're going to have to expel the prince from the kingdom."* The biographies helpfully explain that the death of the baby helpfully resolved some of the baby's karma but this of course was only understood by Padmasambhava, not by the people of Uddiyana.

They sent him far away across India, to a big cemetery called Chittavan, just outside Bodhgaya. In the cemetery Guru Rinpoche met a dakini called Leykyi Wangmoche, or Karma Indrani dakini, [*Tib Las kyi dBang mo che*] who gave him many initiations. Then although he needed no teacher, he travelled all over India visiting teachers in order to show the importance of making effort in spiritual practice.

In the course of his travels he encountered different situations and responded to them in different ways. These ways of being are called the eight forms of the Guru, and they include being a monk, a yogi, a philosopher and a wrathful controller. The different forms each exemplify an efficient and impeccable response to the world and they also show the importance of having a range of responses generated by compassion rather than by ego-protection.

Eventually, he was invited to Tibet and on the way to Tibet he went to a cave just south of Kathmandu, at Yanglesho where he did the phurba vitaba practice to control all the local gods and demons in Tibet before he arrived. These local gods were the protectors of places, seasons, water, wind, mountain, plain etc. Tied to place, their worship reinforced local identities and commitments.

He gave many teachings to the king of Tibet, King Trisong Deutsen, and to his court. This had been the usual way for buddhism to enter countries, with a king's support, going from the top down. The king is converted, often through seeing the need for a wider view, and then he persuades his ministers to be converted too, and it goes like that. It's what happened in China and in Japan.

But in Tibet there was some resistance from the nobles because they felt that their own links with the local gods gave them a particular power. The noble families had a strong sense of place, and this was reinforced through their support for the practices of appeasing the local gods. But now with this new religion coming in, emphasising universal concerns of enlightenment for all sentient beings, the importance of local deities was diminished. So there was quite a tension between universal and local concerns. One of Padmasambhava's great gifts to Tibet was the integrations of these concerns so that the local deities were given an important place within the buddhist practice as dharma protectors. In other buddhist countries the local gods were left outside the dharma and so local people have two loyalties to maintain.

Padmasambhava taught many kinds of practice, some of which he instructed his followers to pass on to their students. Other teachings and initiations he gave only to twenty-five main disciples and he told them that in future times they would be reborn, and would remember what they had been taught when they encountered the 'keys' that he was hiding. Through this symbolic key the teachings would then re-enter the world as fresh and clear as when Padmasambhava had taught them many centuries before. That which is hidden is not contaminated by the changes of time, just as our buddha nature is uncontaminated by all the changes we go through on a karmic level.

Then at a certain point, Guru Rinpoche said he had to leave Tibet, and a magic flying-horse arrived. He climbed onto the magic flying-horse and flew to an island south of India, on which there was a copper-coloured mountain.

On top of the mountain there was a demon king who was going to take over the world. In the middle of the night Padmasambhava entered into the body of this demon king, and the next morning when the courtiers came in to see the demon king, they saw the demon king, who was really Guru Rinpoche in disguise. Guru Rinpoche slowly, slowly, bit by bit, by changing his behaviour, subtly induced these very nasty unpleasant, people to be calm and nice and kind and good. And that's still what's going on to this day.

HE NEVER DIED: IF YOU PRAY HE WILL COME

That's a potted version of this story which has all sorts of symbolic readings but it is also taken at face-value as a story. The important thing in terms of the prayer is the idea that he never died. He has not gone off to some paradise

somewhere else, but is still alive. So if you pray to him, he will hear this and come and see you. Some people are attracted to this notion, other people aren't. You can interpret this story in a symbolic way, but as a concrete reality, Padmasambhava is the manifestation of the purity of the mind, unborn and undying, he ceaselessly reveals itself in many different forms.

CULTURAL CONTEXTS

If you really want to take up the study and practice of Tibetan buddhism, it's very helpful to also read about Tibetan culture, because it gives you a way of locating a particular religious tradition inside a social context and a history, and you can see how these things have evolved. And then you can also see how the philosophical system used to make sense of local conditions and how the psychological practices of tantra developed in particular contexts.

Although the essence of dharma is unchanging, the forms it takes in the world are determined by the teachers' compassionate skilful means, and the particular needs of students in particular places and times. The inspirational stories and philosophical view need to be harnessed together so that faith—living, emotionally-committed faith—can be integrated with clarity and simplicity.

Now, some people like the myths and stories, and find them helpful for meditation practice. Other people feel that they are too like the biblical stories of their childhood and this gets in the way of their practice. The main thing is to firstly explore the resources of the tradition, secondly to identify what helps you and what doesn't, thirdly to examine your own judgements, and then to make use of what you can, with an open mind and a committed heart.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN JAMES AND PEOPLE PRESENT

Question: What is the meaning of the Copper-coloured Mountain?

James: There are different ways to think about this. One way is that it means the human heart, for the heart can look like a copper-coloured mountain. So he sits on top of our heart, and a heart that is full of demons which are going to take us over. And slowly, slowly every day he transforms the ruler of the heart. When we do our practice, we invite him to be more manifestly present in our heart and we support him in his work of transforming us.

When we receive the transmission of these useful, psychological techniques, and useful philosophical views, they are embedded in a cultural context. It is very difficult to know what to take up and what to leave out. It's difficult to see what is essential and what is dispensable. It is all part of a living culture. Since we cannot tell we should try out what comes our way and not rush into premature judgements. This is a major movement in western culture. In America there are millions of buddhists now, and every year thousands of books on buddhism are coming out. There is a huge investment of people's emotional and intellectual energy in trying to find connections with the dharma. Part of the work for us is resolving our relationship with our own culture, perhaps a christian upbringing, perhaps an atheist one. What are the

cultural assumptions we are relying on, and what are we rejecting? This will influence how we meet the dharma.

Faith is important, an effective faith that increases wisdom and compassion. If you fear that faith will make you helplessly dependent, then study. Give yourself the information you need to make your own decisions. And that's going to be easier as more and more translations appear.

PRAYING

One of the advantages of prayer is that it helps us into a more emotional relationship with the deity, which helps to mobilise our energy towards the practice. What I mean is that it is one thing to be very intellectual and to know lots of things about things. It's another to really open up to one's deepest longings, and to be able to say and feel, *"You are so wonderful and I'd like to be like you and please come here and save me."* We want to go to them; we want them to come to us. This creates the emotional charge that turns a meeting into a merging.

IT'S HEARTBREAK HOTEL, BUT WITH SOME HOPE

As I was suggesting this morning, this is method. This is a method for us to utilise all the resources we have to achieve the moment of integration. So, we use our feelings of longing and need and all the hurt, lonely, sad bits of us. *"Please save me, give me something, I need you!"* helps to bring our minds into this one-pointed longing. As it says in the traditional texts, "You should pray until your skin is tingling, until the hairs on the back of your neck stand up." Because you long for this meeting. This is the end of the world. *"If I don't see you I'm going to die!"* And so it's putting all one's energy, all one's longing in, in, in. "Oh baby! Don't leave me, I need you! Aaahh! aaahh! aahh!" And the heart opens. Doesn't it? *[Laughter]* It's a familiar story.

It's really Heartbreak Hotel, but with some hope. And this is really, really important. In the early days of tantra, it was common to dance and sing during the puja—to be moved literally, to be so charged up that it had to find expression through the body. Gradually puja or ritual worship has become more formal, more symbolic, and less expressive. But getting up and dancing was very important. It's really important because this is real, this is something I want. This is something that's very important for me. We're just at the beginning of moving into that level of engagement with it. And we can use the seven-line prayer to develop our faith.

THE SEVEN-LINE PRAYER

The seven-line prayer was first sung by the dakinis, and it appears in all the nyingma traditions. It is called the Dorje Tsig Dun, the indestructible seven lines; indestructible because it's power never wavers. It is a great resource to help our practice.

HUNG UR GYEN YUL GYI NUB JANG TSHAM

PE MA GE SAR DONG PO LA

YAM TSHEN CHOG GI NGOE DRUB NYE

PE MA JUNG NAE ZHE SU DRAG

KHOR DU KHAN DRO MANG POE KOR

KHYE KYI JE SU DAG DRUB KYI

JIN GYI LAB CHIR SHEG SU SOL

GU RU PAD MA SID DHI HUNG

Hung. In the north-west corner of the land of Urgyen, upon the stem and stamen of a lotus, are you who have the marvellous and supreme attainments, Padmasambhava of great renown, with a retinue of many dakinis around you. Following and relying on you I do your practice, therefore, in order to grant your blessings, please come here! Guru Padmasambhava, give me the real attainment of buddhahood.

The prayer gives us a location and description of Padmasambhava and expresses what we want from him. On another level, the north-west corner of the land of Urgyen, the cusp of north and west represents the border of nirvana and samsara. At that point resting in changeless purity, represented by the lotus, is the wonderful expression of wisdom and compassion, which is Guru Rinpoche.

This is our own real nature revealed to us through meditation. When we go into the meditation, we start in samsara and finally dissolve down into the openness of nirvana. The linking point is Guru Rinpoche appearing outside us, inside us, and as ourselves, revealing thoughts and sensations as the non-dual manifestation of buddha nature.

Surrounding him are the dakinis who remove all obstacles by showing themselves as all the thoughts, emotions and feelings that we have. Our basic openness, like the clear blue sky is not different from Guru Rinpoche. And passing through it without trace are all our thoughts, memories, hopes and tensions, all the phenomena that we experience as both inside and outside ourselves. Thus the whole world is the dance or play of these dakinis.

The first four lines describe the natural situation, and now in the fifth we express our desire to unify with it. I want to be like you (*Kye kyi je su dag drub kyi*) means “I need to recognise that this is my true nature, because I keep forgetting who I am. I think I’m James born in Scotland Hey, silly! So, I want to forget that, and recognise this.” That’s what that line means. You must come here and do this. Through absorption in the other, I forget who I thought I was. This gives the space for me to remember my natural condition, to rest in my simple identity with Guru Rinpoche. And I don’t need to create it, indeed I can’t create, I have to just let it come. Let the truth shine through.

The prayer ends Guru Pema Siddhi Hung! This reiterates that the blessing or attainment of unity with Guru Rinpoche must arise now, So when we say this we’re praying on an outer level to the pure form in the sky to come and bless

us and save us. And we're mobilising all the energy of our longing to ensure this. On an inner level we're recognising that the state we long for is already here and that we just need this moment of recollection to open to it, so that the revelation can continue unimpeded by reifying self referencing.

Now we can incorporate the seven-line prayer in our meditation. We start with a clear blue sky, and then visualise a ball of white light or a Hung or Guru Rinpoche. With this visualisation we'll sing this seven-line prayer many times, and then we do the dissolving practice as before. Then we relax into openness and make use of Phat! when necessary to return to spaciousness.

Break

ENDINGS AND IMPERMANENCE

This is our last full day together and so our focus will be on ending or the impermanence of our experience together. As we split up as a group, and go off in different directions, what do we want to take from here? What do we want to leave behind? How can we take useful things from the past to support us in moving openly into the future?

And how can we leave the restrictive patterns of the past behind us, so that we are fresh? And that's often very difficult because we are often deeply attached to things that consciously we do not want. The meditations we've been practising together are all methods for opening up some distance from the incessant repetition of our familiar patterns. Because the patterns are deep seated, they will return. But when they return, hopefully as they return, we will have more space to let them pass through, and if that fails we have space to at least reflect, "Well, how can I manage this? Can I, in some way, have some choices in what's going on?" We can use this with our anxiety or depression, or if we get fixated on some event from our childhood or something that we've done in life, when we feel a loss, or when we get caught up in something.

No matter how real experiences may seem, there is nothing graspable to be found. We might be walking along the road and suddenly an image comes to us of playing on the beach as a child. It lasts for a minute or two and is gone. We might sit down that evening and try to bring the memory back. But even if we can, it's only there for a few minutes, because something else happens, the telephone rings, or whatever. Thus all the time, whatever we're involved with, it's in flux, it's in flow, and we can't really hang onto it in a substantial way. For the mind's very nature is to move.

Not grasping, just allowing phenomena to arise and pass, lets us accept that we have no 'pot' in ourselves to hold things. What we encounter are not states, but patterns, and the patterns are maintained or dissolved by the manner of our relating to them. There are processes which are changing and evolving and going on from moment to moment. We need to let go of the idea of fixed things that can be held safe or pushed away. Happiness and freedom come not from manipulating the world but from resting in space, and allowing our attention to focus on the total field of arising without the bias of self-

concern. Obsessions and repetitive thoughts about the past, something we've done or not done, something others have done or not done, these patterns focus our attention on chimeras and lead us far from the present moment.

THE BEST WAY TO LET GO OF PAST TROUBLES IS TO GIVE THEM SPACE TO BE PRESENT

Each time we focus on the pattern, we put more energy into it. We make it more real by the attention we give, by being hooked by the story and believing there is something there that needs to be worked out. This is not the attention that you would have in meditation when a thought is arising. It's really enmeshed attention, in which there's a pushing and a pulling which energises the sense of object as separate phenomena, and it makes the return of that troublesome thought more real.

The best way to let go of the troubles of the past is to give them space to be present, not to try to sort them out. On a very simple level we accept that that's what's happened. Accepting that we've done some actions that weren't so helpful. Accepting that we've been cruel and unkind or selfish, and just staying with that. Accepting it and letting it go, not making a big deal out of it.

Questioner: Are there other ways of diminishing the intensity of past thoughts?

James: Yes, there are many ways you could do it. One way used in tantra is to visualise a wall of indestructible vajras or fire, to cut you off from things that disturb you. Every time a thought or image comes, you imagine there's a wall around you keeping you safe. Of course, that doesn't remove the cause of the thought, but it gives some kind of distance so that you can relax your mind and be less involved.

Say you frequently have the thought, *"My mother never loved me, I'm unlovable,"* and you keep going back to instances in which your mother was unavailable, and maybe you've started to read books on psychology or gone into therapy and you've made some kind of construction about this: *"Because my mother didn't love me, my life's screwed up."* This seems to explain a lot, so you go back to this idea again and again. There's something in the past which determines that there's no way forward. You've made a closed system for yourself. You have the security of the certainty of knowing what's what, but you're also trapped by knowing that the cause of all your woes lies in the past.

Before anything can change you need both a sense of distance from the cause and a sense of control over it. You could adopt the tantric notion of a defensive wall and work with an image of the perceived cause of your troubles. (The real cause of course is your own attitude.) You could take an image of your mother, a painting, or a photograph or something that represents her for you and, and bury it in the forest, so that she is there and you are here and there's some kind of spatial distance. This distance helps to reinforce the temporal distance from what is perceived as the causal situation, so that now, whatever continues from that situation is only what I will be taking. The actual historical situation itself is no longer causal. If there's anything continuing from it then it's your work.

If you are say, forty years of age, and you haven't been living with your mother for twenty years, and you're still thinking, *"My life is spoiled. She did all these bad things to me,"* then you are taking a particular causal reading like the 'big bang' theory that I was describing before. This one thing happened and you are at the mercy of the movement out from that event, shooting through space, driven by the fact of having had a faulty mother. So you are off course forever. This is clearly crazy, and an avoidance of the responsibility of living your life in the only place it can be lived, now in the present moment.

There's a christian story of the desert fathers: two monks are going along the road and they come to a river. There's an old woman there struggling to cross, and she says to one of the monks *"Oh, my son, how are you? I haven't seen you for a long time. Can you help me across the river?"* So the monk picks up the woman and carries her across the river on his shoulders, then puts her down and says good-bye. He walks on with his friend, but starts to notice that his friend's face is looking very troubled. Ten miles go by; twenty miles go by, then the first monk asks what the matter is. *"Well,"* replies the other, *"I'm very worried about your spiritual health. As a monk you know you shouldn't touch a woman, let alone carry her on your shoulders!"* To this the first monk says, *"Yes, I carried my mother across the river, but I left her there. You've been carrying her for the last twenty miles!"*

Actions belong in their contexts. They need to be left there. It's a bit like the image that the Buddha offers for understanding meditation practice. He said that you need to apply different methods in different situations, and then you have to leave them when they are no longer necessary. It's like going to a river, finding a boat, using the boat to get across the river and then on the other side, picking it up and walking in the hot Indian sun, carrying a boat, just in case there's another river. When you get to a river, you can find a boat there. Boats and rivers go together.

The buddhist stress on impermanence helps us to accept the passing of time. Events occur in time, and as time passes, the event becomes of the past. It impacts the present through dependent co-origination, which is an aspect of our dualistic involvement. The event itself is not continuing, only our involvement with it. So if we don't want it to continue, there's no reason why it should. Events are impermanent. It is our ego's need for secure knowledge and a predicative interface with the environment that encourages a false sense of permanence.

We can use different kinds of meditation to disrupt this tendency. For example, doing the dissolving meditation, you could get in touch with your feelings of self hatred, low self esteem, guilt etc. and when you visualise the rays of light coming into you imagine the light is dissolving them, like morning mist being dispersed by the rays of the sun. In this way you both accept responsibility for your actions and their consequences, and also allow them to be integrated into the basic non dual nature.

ENDING A MEDITATION PRACTICE

One of the other kinds of ending that is very, very important is the ending of a meditation practice. Meditating in a group has some advantages in that it

helps us to be a bit more disciplined and structured in the way we practice, but there can be a difficulty in the ending. When you have got a bunch of people meditating together as part of a structured timetable, you've all got to end at the same time. So someone rings a bell or starts a particular chant or something like that and this can interrupt each individual's own process. Ideally, when you're practising on your own, you can do the dissolving meditation, and then sit for a while, saying Phat! when you need to. As far as possible you want to be free of external time pressures. You just sit in the meditation and gradually the world will present itself. You'll find yourself in the room. But if you allow this to happen in its own time, the spaciousness will increasingly be part of the return of the world, until you start to experience yourself and the world as an expansion or aspect or mode of the spaciousness. (As long as meditation is one thing and ordinary life is another, there will be little real benefit since most of us spend most of our time in the world.)

That's why I think doing the kinds of things we've done here, doing some meditation and then taking that experience into walking and talking, eating and sleeping, transforming the world as we go, is enormously important. The non-dual view encourages us to break down the boundary of inside and outside, by relaxing into the integrated process of revelation, one flow of becoming. Whether it appears to be internal or external, subject or object, it's still in the same unbroken flow.

If in our meditation we have a sense of, *"Oh, it's all safe in here and Ooooh! It's all horrible out there, but as soon as I open my eyes I'm back in this ordinary world"* then we are in retreat from the world and the possibility of compassion. Such a view may make us more calm and peaceful but it inhibits wisdom and compassion. So how we move with the state of relaxation and openness into the arising of the world is vital, for that moment is really the boundary between nirvana and samsara.

If we have the sense that while we were meditating the world continued to be out there, we are like a child covering its eyes and saying, *"You can't see me, I'm not here!"* but knowing that it can still be seen. It's a weak magic which doesn't work because there has been no real faith in its transforming power. Then although we've been dissolving inside it's as if we've been playing a game. Like at school, you go out to play in the playground feeling free and able to become whatever you want, but then you have to come back into the classroom. And the classroom's real because you get all these orders and you have to sit in a straight line. So in that way the meditation doesn't actually transform anything.

I think you have to believe that when you are doing the meditation it is the whole world; the meditation is what your world the world becomes. When you imagine the clear blue sky, this sky fills all available space. There is nowhere else. Whatever is needed will arise as it is needed out of this clear blue sky, the infinity of emptiness. Everything has just in an instant dissolved into this clear blue sky, and then from it arises the ball of light. And that's all there is. It's not me imaging this while actually knowing that I'm sitting in a room here in Italy. One has to really go into an absolute identification with the practice so

that our one-pointed attention enters without trace or fragmentation, and then, in the openness whatever is arising is arising fresh.

This is the way we realise the three kayas, the three modes of buddha. Awareness is like the sun; thoughts, memories, emotions and so on are like the rays of the sun; and our activity is like the impact of the rays, heat, light etc. As awareness rises in basic spaciousness it reveals our being-in-the-world. The world is the play of the light of awareness which we experience when we stop acting on the world; the world is the extension of this state of awareness. Not as some personal, omnipotent fantasy, *"I am God the Creator! I've just made the world! And I happen to have made you guys at the same time, so you should be terribly grateful!"*

It's neither personal nor impersonal; it is the whole movement that is coming out, fresh in each instant. It's not that the meditation's made me feel fresh while still in the same old shitty world, but the world itself is absolutely new as the unborn realisation. It's not just a subjective fantasy. That is why the start of the meditation the clear blue sky is a new beginning for everything. And the middle is a further dispersal of the old, the solid, the enduring. So the end of the meditation is rebirth in the unborn flow of becoming. And each time we do the meditation we relax more, trusting that fresh infinity carries all that we need as we move in and as part of a world of light and sound, the energy of awareness.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN JAMES AND PEOPLE PRESENT

Questioner: Could you explain the wall and the dissolving of the light again?

James: OK. In essence, if you've got a wall it's made up of stones. Now, clearly these stones are real. If I kept banging my hand on it, my hand would start to bleed. If I really went at it, I could break all the bones in my hand until I was taken away to the hospital. On that level, clearly it's real. And it's separate from me because I can hit it and I can take my hand away.

A lot of modern philosophy says *"The wall is real because it is real. It's made up of these atoms and molecules and that is the nature of the world and we are also made of these things and we are separate and different from that."* That is the common-sense and scientific view that buddhism would be trying to deal with. One way that it deals with it is by saying that the sense of difference in the wall is because of our dualistic perception. *"The wall feels real and separate to me because I have that sort of perception. And if I didn't have that sort of perception I might be able to walk through the wall."* Tibetan stories are full of these, you know, Guru Rinpoche comes in and puts his hand on the wall and leaves a big hand-print.

Whether we believe that or not, there is the sense that the separation of the wall, the qualities of the wall are a mental construct hovering somewhere between experience and representation. Now, when we visualise the ball of light, it is present as something that you can see, which is there, and yet it's luminous, it's transparent. It's as if it is there and not there at the same time. When we visualise, we seek the precision of the description given in the text

and shown in traditional thangkas, coupled with the experience of their translucent radiance, the absence of any solid essence.

So in that moment of focusing on something that is there and not there, one's working with how to perceive the wall without projecting onto it the sense that something is substantially there. So one's getting used to the idea of perceiving things as light rather than projecting into them, "*Well, this is a stone, this is a hard stone, they wouldn't build houses out of light*" Certainly not in this wet climate! You need a solid house with a good roof on it.

So that's really what the practice of visualising is designed to do: it's anti-doting our ordinary projection that things are solid. And this form, this object which is light is not a dead object but exists in relationship with us. For example, when the rays of light come from the ball of light in response to our recitation of the mantra, it is as if we are greeting each other. We say Hello and the light says Hello. So, "*Hello,*" "*Hello.*" It's the world as relationship. We say Om Ah Hung Benzra Guru Pema Siddhi Hung and then rays of light come. It's like going into a cafe and saying, "*Can I have a cup of coffee?*" "*Yes. Here you are. Good morning.*" It's very simple, but it's saying that everything is in relationship; it's not existing as a separate thing. This image arises in our meditation, but the wall also exists, in this sense, only when you look at it. It doesn't exist as experience if we don't look at it.

The traditional question that is asked to help us think about this is, "*If there is a forest five hundred kilometres from anyone and a tree falls down, does it make a sound as it falls?*" You know, is there a sound if the sound isn't heard? It's an interesting question.

Questioner: But what about avoiding situations when they get too real?

James: Well, I certainly think we know we can do that. I mean, often we do a kind of repression or avoidance because things appear so real. But when we can see things as they are, they usually kind of shrink, or diminish, and are not so frightening. Words can magnify the significance of situations, but once you get into relationship with what is actually there, you get a handle on it. Perceiving things openly and honestly usually gives us a better handle on them than trying to edit them out since as long as they are experientially there, they will affect us.

However, through the tantric practice of visualisation we can learn how to change the quality of experience. When the light comes and dissolves into us, the potential of the object to be separate is now being diminished by its coming towards me, for that object can come and dissolve into me. Now, if I was to take a brick out of the wall and drop it on the top of my head so that it had the force to go through the top of my head into my heart, that would be a good way to end this life's meditation. It won't take me very far though! It would prove to me that there is a fundamental separation between the brick and my head, which has now been dissolved into some kind of mushy goo. So, that would be our ordinary fear.

Whereas in the meditation here is some white-ball-object that is coming, shrinking, dissolving into us and we're dissolving into it. Thus it's radically

transforming my sense of: *"I am this shape, I am fixed like this in a world of other people."* Object into subject, subject into object, open and dissolve, so then there's that sense of space. In that moment, the whole world has gone back into space, right? Then, we stay in space and thoughts arise.

Now, we could get into any of these thoughts. Each of these thoughts is a vehicle for entering the world. A thought arises, *"Oh, what about that?"* You can get out of your meditation, get a bit of paper, *"I've got to do that"*, so you can immediately jump from your meditation by means of getting caught up in a thought and arrive back in the world of separate, real objects.

...or you can let the thought pass...

BORN AGAIN

In the Tibetan point of view this is a purification of the birth process. In the Tibetan idea it's different for different realms but if you are going to be born with a human birth, as some of you will know, the idea is that you find yourself moving in this long tunnel—driven by a particular kind of impetus—and see two people having sex. You particularly focus on the genitals, so there's some kind of sexual excitement there, and you're drawn towards that because of your own sexuality. If you're drawn towards the penis, you will enter into the vagina and be born as a girl, and if you're drawn towards the vagina, you'll enter into the vagina and be born as a boy. Fear and desire pull us into connection with the fire elements and lead to rebirth in flesh and blood bodies. And it's very interesting; here is a phenomena arising which one is somehow sucked into, and then you find yourself conceived.

Similarly, you're sitting in your meditation, you've done the dissolving part and you feel open and relaxed, and a thought arises. *"Wonder what time it is? I need a pee."* So immediately, you open your eyes and look round and everybody else has still got their eyes closed. *[Laughter]*. Maybe you are in touch with needing to have a pee, so you're now stuck in having a body with a bladder that's full, and that's where you are. So that's a moment in which you have been born into the world in that particular form. So each time we're in the meditation, if we really go into this dissolving we have the possibility to be born again. It's a fundamental kind of rebirth; we can actually choose the way we are reborn.

MOVING FROM OPENNESS INTO THE WORLD

Lots of thoughts are arising and passing, and many of these thoughts will be our usual kind of neurotic worries. We can come out of the meditation riding on one of these, which will just bring us back into our ordinary neurotic world. So we try as long as possible not to get caught up in these thoughts that's why the meditation instruction is always, *"Don't go after past thoughts, don't wait expectantly for future thoughts, just stay open and let them go."* In that way one is increasing the possibility of being not drawn in where you don't want to. One's not going to be taken over by a repetition-compulsion to just jump into it. If you've decided to stop drinking for a while and somebody says, *"Do you want a drink?"* *"Oh, yes thanks."* Or, if you've given up smoking and

someone says, “Do you want a fag?” “Oh, yeah.” We know from daily life how easily the old tendencies take us back into familiar patterns.

Exactly the same kind of impulse towards involvement arises during meditation and if we can resist it there, we will find more space to dissolve daily limiting habits.

How you actually move from this state of openness—in which thoughts and feelings are going by—to coming into the world in a fresh way, is absolutely vital. And at first, you know, when we’re practising we don’t have much choice. We just find that suddenly we’ve tumbled into a thought and, zip! we’re out. It’s like hitch-hiking. All the nice cars go by, and then a funny old truck comes along and you get inside. After five minutes, someone’s hand is on your knee and you think, “Oh, screw this!” [Laughter].

The main thing when we’re beginning is just to spend as much time as possible to avoid birth. The pope would fully agree with this! We have got an immaculate conception here and we are waiting for the divine child to arise, but no screwing allowed. So you have to avoid contact: “We’re just good friends.” So as the thought arises, “Hi, darling,” it just shoots by. That’s what you have to do a lot of. As soon as you get interested, oops! You’re born.

So your thought is like your partner. A thought arises, “Aah!” you get into the thought and who is born but you? Because you come out thinking your own thoughts, and in that way, you are your own parent.

TANTRA: THREE KAYAS

Ideally, in the tantric path, one of the ways that one’s prepared for entering into the world is to think that the world one is coming out into, is the mandala or the pure palace of the deity you’ve been praying to. Every phenomenon that you see is an aspect of that deity, and every sound you hear is the mantra, and every thought that arises is just the spacious flow of enlightened understanding in the deity’s mind.

When you’re in the depth of the meditation, it’s as if you’re in dharmakaya, in the state of the pure buddha mind. As the thoughts and feelings are arising, this is the richness and effulgence of the buddha’s qualities, the sambhogakaya. Then out you pop as the nirmanakaya, a manifestation of the energy of open awareness within a world where everything that occurs has the same pure ground. These are the three stages of manifestation of compassionate being in the world, and they are described in great detail in buddhist literature.

DZOGCHEN: NGO WO, RANG ZHIN, THUK JE

In the dzogchen tradition you have pretty much the same movement but it’s expressed in different terms as *ngo wo*, *rang zhin* and *thuk je*. *Ngo wo* is the natural mode, the state of unborn openness free of all limitation. *Rang zhin* is the display mode, how the natural mode displays itself as infinite potentiality. *Rang zhin* also means your own face, how you reveal or display yourself similar to the idea of the face being the mirror of the soul. Light arises from the

openness, light and sounds, a shimmering potential free of limiting essential substance. Then this radiance takes on a more defined presence as *thuk je*, the manifest mode, the effective energy of openness moving in a field of vibrant manifestation.

A traditional example used to indicate this is that the sun is like the ground-openness, quite ungraspable, and from it arise illuminating rays, which are like meditative visions and our thoughts, feelings and sensations, and the sun's rays bring heat and energy, a manifest presence, like our being, our embodied presence in the world.

So here we are in the world, picking things up and putting them down. One can conceptualise that as, *"I am picking this up and putting it down. I am in here and that is out there."* But you can also see that both the thought, *"I am doing this,"* and the experience of doing it, are connected. So the thought, *"I am doing this,"* is a ray coming out of open awareness, rigpa. Open awareness is effulgent and gives rise to the rays, the radiance of thoughts and feelings which, although diverse, because they're coming from that one source are not in contradiction. So the thought, *"I am picking this up,"* and the perception of what is being picked up, is all one ball, one *tigle*, it's all coming out of the same flow, the same ground, so it's not split. Although I'm using the language of dualism, it's not experienced as being dual. It's experienced as being effulgence or radiance without limit because self, I, me, is an aspect of the flow, within the flow. Experience is infinite; rich, diverse yet non dual as the heat or effective power of the radiant display of openness.

But what do we act on except ourselves, except the world that we know? So there's a kind of interplay on the surface which goes back to what I talked of earlier this week, the idea of 'unborn.' So this ray that's coming out, doesn't leave the womb, it's just a movement within it. And so, in the meditation, if one imagines *"I'm in here, doing my meditation and then Bang! I'm out in the world,"* and I'm born solidly out in the world, as it were, this is the error.

For when we come out of meditation, or rather, extend meditation as the birth of the world, we and the world are unborn, born inside this womb of open, expansive spaciousness. Thus it is not about giving birth to a thousand separate things, but to an arena of the display of this effulgence. Just like the sky is open to all the different clouds, lightening and storms that pass through it, and then when they are gone, reveals itself as open blue sky again. And again and again it happens. But if we recognise the cloud—not as a covering of the sky but as a transient aspect of it—then there can be spacious grey days, the dawning of the union of samsara and nirvana.

MEDITATION: THIS ENDLESS WEAVING OF OPEN, RELAX, DISSOLVE

So that's the cycle; the meditation is openness, and then the manifestation, with all this incredible detail we see, and then back into the meditation. So then one has this endless weaving of open, relax, dissolve, spacious, out. It's just like a cosmic wave that's moving all the time, into depth, out into radiance. The more one does that, the more one sees that fundamentally there's no difference between the depth that you dissolve into in meditation, and the radiance. You see that they are the same thing.

In the dzogchen tradition that's what enlightenment is. It's called *nyam ja yer med*. *Nyam ja* is meditation, *nyam* means equal and *ja* means to stay or to keep. So: staying open, even, relaxed. *Je tog* means what you get afterwards, what arises from meditation, being in the world. *Yer med*: means that these are inseparable. So being deep, open and relaxed in infinity, and then open, relaxed, and responsive and precise in the world, these are just part and parcel of the same play. And whenever we interrupt that with thoughts, "Oh, I've finished my meditation for today," we've blown the whole thing.

Meditation is not something that we add onto life to improve it, like saying, "Oh, it's really important for my self esteem that I give myself a treat every day, so I'm going to have a bar of really good chocolate. I'm going to eat it and enjoy it and I'm going to feel "Mmmn, because I'm worth it." It's not that kind of thing. If we turn meditation onto something that you add onto life as a compensation, then yes, you can use it to reduce stress, but it loses its fundamental role, which is transforming the dualistic separation into this free, relaxed flow.

ENDING PRAYER FROM LE'U DUN MA

So, one last little verse which sums this up, and then we'll do a bit of splashing paint. This verse is part of four linked verses. It is the final one which expresses their essence. It was taught by Padmasambhava, and it's to be found in a collection of prayers called the Le'u Dun Ma, the Seven-chaptered prayer book.

In this little verse here, Guru Rinpoche is saying how you should perceive the world at the end of meditation, so it's very helpful.

**CHI TAR ZUNG PAI YUL NANG DAG PA DANG
NANG TAR DZIN PAI SEM NYID DROL WA DANG
BAR DU OD SAL RANG NGO SHE PA RU
DUE SUM DE SHEG NAM KYI THUG JE YI
DAG DRAI RANG GYUD DROL WAR JIN GYI LOB**

I'll go through each line word by word, and then give you the whole verse.

Chi tar means 'externally' or 'outside', then *zung pai* means 'held' or 'grasped' and *yul* means 'object', so *zung pai yul* are the things that we hold onto like a mala, or the floor or the wall, the things that seem to be real and separate. *Nang* means 'fully', and *dag pa* means 'purified', and *dang* is 'and'.

Nang tar, 'internally', *dzin pai* means 'grasping', that is to say this is the active thing which creates the *zung wa*, the objects in the first line; so there's something which is held and something which does the holding. *Sem nyid* means 'mind'. *Drol wa* means 'freed', 'liberated', *dang* means 'and'. *Bar du* at the beginning of the third line means 'in between' or 'in the middle', and has the sense of 'while this is going on'. *Od sal* means 'clarity'; it has the connotation of a visual clarity because *od* means 'light', so it's like 'perspicacity' in English, or 'lucidity', the sense that we understand something, or something is revealed to us, so we're clear about it because we see clearly.

Rang ngo, 'my own nature', 'who I really am'. *She pa* means 'to know' in the sense of experiencing directly, and *ru* here means 'with' or 'in that state'.

The next line starts *due sum*; *due* means 'time' and *sum* means 'three', so 'the three times' meaning past, present and future. *De sheg* means 'buddha', *nam* is the plural, so *de sheg nam* is 'buddhas'. *Kyi* is the genitive 'of', *thuk je* 'compassion', *yi* is the instrumental case and means 'by'.

The last line begins, *dag* is 'I' and *drai* means 'similar', so it means 'me and people like me', it's another way of saying 'all sentient beings'. *Rang gyud* means 'one's mind-stream'; *rang* is 'self', it's another possessive, and *gyud* means 'stream' like a river stream, and it's the idea of 'I exist as the continuity of my being. "Oh, who are you?" "Well, I'm James, I was born in Scotland, I did this. I did that." I give an account of myself as a stream of events, like where everything's linked up on the basis of these things in the path, "Oh yes, I'll be going back to London and I'll be doing this." So I'm experiencing myself as this extension through time, which in some ways is real, but it's also a foreclosure. I'm always re-presenting myself in terms of these events. So that's what *rang gyud* is, it's that representational self. *Drol war* means 'freed', 'liberated' and *jin gyi lob* means 'may we be blessed'.

"By holding to the actual purity of the appearances/ideas of the outer objects of grasping (in other words, don't go under their power), and maintaining the liberation of the grasping mind within (in other words, keep the mind free of mixing with the confusing afflictions), while doing these two things there is clear illumination in which one's own nature is known. In this manner, by the compassion of the buddhas of the past, present and future, may I and all beings gain the blessing of the liberation of our natures."

These five lines bring together the essence of the view we have been exploring, and you can say them at the end any meditation, you've done, just before you do the dedication of merit. It's very nice to recite these five lines just to remind yourself that the view that you're going to carry on into whatever you're doing, is that everything is pure. You need to remind yourself that although you still have tendencies to see things in the old, familiar ways, no, actually, the situation has already been purified. So you have to trust the view of the meditation, believe that rays of light have purified everything. Everything has arisen out of this openness. This is really how things are.

When a thought arises that's solid and real and is evoking our dualising habits, we can use this remembrance to waken up. '*Maintaining the liberation of the grasping mind within.*' Right? This is what we practise. When we've done the dissolving, and thoughts are arising, we try to relax and let the thoughts pass through. But when we find ourselves getting tight around something, that's when this grasping mind, this *dzin pai sem nyid* is coming into action. So we say "Phat!" and we cut the grasping, creating a gap where openness is present. We've already practised this and we know that we can do it. The old tendency will come back, but we do know that we can liberate this.

When both these things are in place, the sense of spaciousness in the world, the sense of relaxed, non appropriative, non graspingness in ourselves, then,

we recognise who we are. We recognise ourselves, not as a thing, but through this immediate, direct experience of unfolding; we know for sure that we are not a person, we are not a person of substance, thing. We are the crest of this flow of revealing. And because of that we are unborn, we are undying, we are safe from all danger. Because whatever arises, we are the awareness of whatever it is that's occurring, and the awareness is like the sky, it's never scratched or marked.

So this is what we have achieved through the meditation, or we're seeking to achieve. We want to open this up, and so we say, *"By the compassion of all the Buddhas of the Three Times may all beings have this understanding."* May we get free of this narrow sense of self, and experience ourselves as this movement of open awareness revealing itself in the world, as the world.

This verse is a very nice condensation of a lot of what we've been doing this week. It can be recited quickly or slowly depending on your mood or need.

Break

CREATIVITY WITHIN OPENNESS

One of the important things that we've been dealing with has been creativity within openness, which is more an attention to the process than to the content, or the product.

We have in front of us a product, our paintings, sculpture, whatever we've made, a product of our process, and we have a question of what to do with it. All over the world, people are very busy in the process of producing products like this. *[Laughter]* If we put it in the sea how many fish will we poison? If we burn it the birds will fall out of the sky, you know, if we leave it here the local Italian people, their eyes will pop out and they'll go blind! So we have created this very dangerous product!

So much of our lives, particularly in cities, are directed towards the creation of products, and also we are consumers of products. In every gesture that we make towards consuming a product we are caught up in a process, usually a process of desire generated by anxiety that our own sense of self is not sufficient, and so we need this extra thing, caused[?] by someone else, somewhere else, to pin on, to tag on to ourselves to make us more complete.

Clearly, in order to live, we need to have some possessions. We need to have a way of dealing with things, and not be falsely afraid of the richness of the world. But at the same time, when we get a product, we can easily lose the sense of it as something dynamic and in process. It becomes a dead thing.

I spend a lot of my time buying books, I'm always going into second-hand bookshops, and I love buying new books. When I'm in the bookshop, buying, it's really, really exciting. I bring the book home, I show people, *"Hey! Look at this new book!"* I put it on the shelf, and it sits there, and then five years later I think *"Wow. Hey! I never read that book!"* So there's a particular way in which a living process turns into a dead product very easily. We take the energy of

our life, use it in our engagement with the world and we end up just with a piece of shit. We have to think maybe, *“Well, why do I do that?”* What’s the point at which the excitement goes out of it and the process comes to a premature finishing? For me, instead of bringing the book home and being able to make a space and engage with it, I’m caught up in something else, the telephone rings, somebody comes, and the time’s filled with something else.

I do think my life is not unique in that. So often we start a project with a clear intention, but something happens and we lose our original purpose. It’s like the trees that we’ve been looking at. You can see how they’ve grown and how various influences have come to bend the trunk and branches until the original shape is unrecognisable.

The shape of our lives can be like that. When we look back we don’t see a straight line of intentionality leading to the satisfactory conclusion of a project. We usually see here, there, movements of change in which we are constantly at the mercy of forces greater than ourselves, and which we can’t predict.

In some ways, this is not bad because it’s as if the world is offering us a critique of our own omnipotence; that we think we can set off in the morning with some plan of how the day’s going to be, but, the world tells us, *“No, there are other things to do.”*

MAKING A MARK

So it’s not as if we can mark on to the world, just as we can mark onto paper; we can’t clearly mark out what’s going to happen. Because as I think we’ve noticed this week, once you make your mark and you start to draw, somehow the marks you’ve made, call you to make other marks, and you lose your own sense of what you’re going to do because you’re caught up in an inter-play with other things that are there. This sort of inter-play, this exchange of views, with real people, with inanimate objects, this vibrant texture of our experience, calls into play the definition of our subjectivity.

NOTION OF SELF

In buddhism there is a strong critique of the notion of a self; the notion that we have some fixed, referential point we can come back to and reinforce, and get clearer about so that, as we get older, we get clearer and clearer about who we are. That’s one story which is popular and can give a sense of security and hope. It’s certainly not my story. As I get older I have less and less idea of who I am, because I can look back and see all the people I’ve been, and I can see that in the future I’m likely to take up different rôles, different positions. So which of these is my true self? If I was doing that at one stage of my life and I’m now doing this, have I lost a bit of myself by giving that up? Have I left a bit of myself in India, a bit of myself in Scotland?

Although the notion of a cohesive self is comforting in a romantic emotional sense, when we enquire into it, we see that this is a false story. What we actually have is a fragmentation, diversity of selves and of experiences. The cohesive point is the fact that we are aware of the rich diversity of

experiences, and we've entered these experiences from different starting points. From our birth to now, it's as if we have actually been different people.

On a relative level, the linking point is subjectivity, and the narrative is simply a false narrative that creates the illusion of something enduring, which then has to collapse when life intrudes. When we get sick, or ill, or retire, or die, suddenly the construction is deconstructed. But with the experience of openness we see that the one who knows, rests nowhere; has no fixed identity, no delimiting history, no shape nor colour.

PROCESS AND PRODUCT

We've been exploring a great deal this focus on the process, on trying to stay attentively, moment by moment, in the world as it unfolds, with ourselves as part of the world. In this, in each moment, process and content are co-emergent. It's not that in one moment there's a lot of activity which is a dynamic process that comes to an end. Bang! You're left with a product. Because, if we can remember, when we all finished working on this group painting, the paint was wet, it was alive. The sun was in a different position, and what we were looking at was actually quite different. When we come up just now and we look at it, we recognise, "*Oh, this is the painting that we did.*"

But this is not the painting we did. This is a new experience. By claiming it, by appropriating it on the basis of the past, "*Oh, I did that bit, oh, I really like that bit, and then some bugger came and spoiled it,*" then we are back in a story which actually doesn't exist. The bit I'm looking at and I'm saying is mine has been cooked by the sun, has been walked over by ants, has been blown by the wind, has been through so many processes that I don't know about, but I'm still projecting ownership onto it. It's like when I go home, my mother says, "*Ah, James, ma wee boy!*" I'm unfortunately not a wee boy. I've got twenty kilos to lose! Well there's a way in which her sense of identification of me is not really me as I am. And our identification of this image is not really the image as it is.

In this way, because we go back, retrospectively, to an identification of a product which was one moment in the movement of a process, we exclude ourselves from the ongoing dynamic process which is occurring now. As whatever is here is transformed by the sun setting, the shades of plants coming across the painting, the bumps in the paper taking up different shadows. This is a process. But we lose this if we know what this is: 'This is a painting we did this morning.'

In order to open into this process we have to drop a lot of the conceptualisation, the reification, the solidification of our perceptions. On one level, this might make us somewhat stupid, because there's a kind of questioning which is imposed in a place where most people would have confidence, and say, "*It's a painting. Didn't you guys do this morning?*" "*Yes.*" End of question, it's all stitched up. But that sort of easy certainty, which is very much what western capitalism is constructed from, always installs dead objects in the place of life. If we want to open to the unfolding process, we have to reverse that.

We have to install life ceaselessly, in the place of death. In the place of knowledge—following the Cartesian project—an internal subject, the pure cogito, seems to shine its light out and illuminate a dead world. But if we think that we've got the light inside us, then we're blind to the fact that light is an effulgence all around, coming through us, into us, out of us. Light is the substance of our being here.

Let's stay with this question of an on-going process. In Tibetan it's called *lhun drup* which means effortlessly arising, a dynamic effulgence or unfolding, then is that an evasion of responsibility? Because, after all, we do things in our lives. At a certain point you might park your car in a busy street, particularly in London, and you come back to it, and there's a parking ticket. And if the parking attendant is still there, you say, *"I was just in the shop. I was in a hurry. Look it's a chemist shop, I had to buy this medicine, my baby's dying...."* You tell them some story. And they say, *"Ah, ah! Your car shouldn't be here. Here's the ticket. Twenty-five pounds!"* And that feels pretty real, something horrible being stuck to your life from the outside.

There's a moment there where the process is interrupted and then a new process starts. There's the process of just being in the shop, in a hurry, nothing else matters. It's interrupted by somebody else defining the situation in another way. We have to accept responsibility, *"Yes, I did park there. It is my responsibility."* So one can't just dissolve everything into this open, spacey, Californian everything-goes way, because at a certain point, the world shifts and one's presented with a bill that has to be paid. However the cause of the shock was one's prior total absorption in a situation. By taking the need for the medicine as strongly real, we lose contact with the open ground of the whole situation, and it is this that sets us within the separate, real, dualistic frame where the ego feels trapped in conflicts.

This takes us into the dimension of ethics that we were exploring a little bit yesterday. When we encounter situations in which our own behaviour is problematic, or the behaviour of the people whom we meet is problematic, how can we respond? What to do if we are attempting to be relaxed, open, and free of reification? If we are trying to experience the world as the ongoing movement of revelation? Because there are certain behaviours of ourselves, or of others, which seem to interrupt the process; in which there seems to be a certain distortion of the movement, which calls us back to thinking, *"Oh, oh, I shouldn't have done that,"* or *"Why are you doing that?"*

I think from a buddhist point of view, the main thing is to be prepared to accept the consequences of the action. The consequences of the action are simply another moment in the process. But often the consequence feels like a dead moment in which one is pinned to the spot, as in the example of the parking ticket, *"God! This shouldn't have happened! Oh, damn! Twenty-five quid! I was going to spend it on food!"* And there's a whole spiralling of thoughts around one point.

Each such point is nodal point, like a whirlpool in the sea, a vortex, in which energy is sucked down. The sinking feeling is one of narrowing, of entrapment, a spiralling down of depressive, anxious thoughts that brings us

more tightly into ourselves. But that swirling is also alive and in process, it's just that we fail to recognise it as open and evolving.

But if, through our meditation practice, we can recognise the process, and not get stuck in a rigid sense of what is going on, then we can relax back with the flow and always be moving freely within the unfolding. Thus we realise that the 'I' who thinks, "*Yeah, now I'm getting worried and anxious. I should have been there, I'm late. I'm going to have to deal with this,*" is an aspect of our becoming. It is not the totality of our identity.

By staying in touch with that, one doesn't get wrong-footed. It's always when we have an attachment to one particular trajectory or construction, and imagine that we can predict how it will go, how the world will be, or that we can impose it onto a particular situation, that we are most vulnerable. The Buddha said very clearly, all suffering arises from attachment. By that, he didn't mean that one has to abandon one's house and live in the forest, though that might be helpful. His focus is much more on the micro level, the very minute level where moment by moment we are constructing the present on the basis of the past, with an intention towards securing a particular future.

But as we have perhaps experienced in meditation, the present moment is also a gap, a gap between thoughts, a gap between emotions, in which there's a freshness of a new possibility. By a new possibility, I don't mean a new colonial situation as if some new Africa opens up where we all rich white people can go and stake a claim. It's much more a gap which can subvert the foreclosure of our intention, a gap in which the world can intrude and call us into a response we were not expecting to make. We are then open to responding on the basis of the present time situation, not of our own desire, not of our own sense of what we need or feel we should have, but just in terms of what is present and there.

There was a storm last night, so this morning we come out to the lovely space where we have been doing exercises, but today the ground is wet, so we have to go inside. Now, one might find oneself thinking, "*Oh, the time's going by. I'm going to be back soon in Germany in a house, and I'll have to sit in a dark room. I want to be outside here, it's not fair! Why is it raining? We only have one day to go...*" Thinking in that way one can become depressed and sad. Something has been stolen from us "*I wanted it to be like this.*" But we can free ourselves from these absorbing thoughts, either by a quick awakening with Phat!, or we can just relax and open, "*Oh, yes, being in here is interesting. See how the shadows are. See how cool it is inside as compared to the humidity and warmth outside.*" So if we stay fresh and open, we can pick up the bill, pick up the responsibility we have to face moment by moment, but at the same time not feel trapped by it; not feel antagonistic as if the world's against us, but experience each moment as an opportunity for us to explore more of the infinity of our possibilities of becoming.

This is the key experience which all the buddhist theorising of emptiness—absence of inherent self nature—and compassion, help prepare us for. Buddhism is full of very complicated technical terms, there are many, many books of philosophy that we can engage with, but the basic point is always the relationship between openness, between the unfixed moment, the space just

before we speak, or move or think or act, and the arising. Are we going to arise and fill that moment on the basis of what we want to be there, so that we close it over, we know what it is in advance? Or are we going to attempt to relax and open and be there? To be surprised by the world and by ourselves?

SURPRISE: LIFE AND DEATH

That's the essential point of life and death. Death is the power of fixing, locating, knowing what's what, stamping the sense of ownership onto the world. It's my garden, it's my house, my world, While life is adaptability, responsiveness, openness to being surprised. It's very difficult to allow ourselves to be surprised, to be suddenly awakened out of prediction and identity. Because most of us have to struggle so hard to keep anything together, keep a job down, get there on time, remember to pay the bills, to look after the kids when they get sick, help them with their homework, all these intensive things where we feel the world is shaping us, and we just want to say *"Back off! Give me space! Keep it out!"*

But the view we have been exploring suggests that we can welcome whatever comes if we can experience ourselves as space, for we then have enough room for whatever occurs without feeling trapped. So that what was formerly a demand can now be experienced as an invitation to openness. We then see that the other, rather than squeezing us, pushing more and more pressure onto us, is actually providing a moment of space in which we can surprise ourselves, by being other than what we imagine we are.

Now these words are easy to say, and as we know from the meditation we've been doing, to bring them into experience is actually quite difficult. When we try to focus on the breath, we find we get distracted, distracted by the same thoughts. Probably we've all found that the same patterns of thoughts come to us again and again. You'd think we'd be bored of it you know, ten years of meditation, and still having thoughts about your mother or your kids, or this or that? How come these problems aren't resolved? But that's the way the patterning goes. We have to engage in this on-going struggle with the force of karma, the repetition-compulsion, the urge to go back to what's familiar, to what has already been established.

These patterns are not just our own. They are reinforced daily by our environment. Our obsessions are firmly embedded in our culture, underpinned by everyone's expectations. Our parents support us in the thoughts which maintain the shared belief in duality. Our children demand that we believe this, that we be normal. Our employers demand that we fit in. Everyone wants us to know what the world's about, to develop the present on the basis of what's happened before.

Whereas in meditation, something we do rarely, we are turning it around and opening to a very different experience. We do the dissolving meditation and in the space of openness, thoughts arise. We don't try to pull out a particular kind of thought. We don't try to push away other, bad, disturbing thoughts. We just allow whatever arises, to arise. That is very, very radical. That is not what happens in the ordinary world. It is not samsara and that is why it's so incredibly difficult.

In that moment the mind's openness is like this blank piece of paper. But it's an infinite piece of paper which allows endless things to be painted on it, painted in all manner of shapes, forms, colours, sounds, and then dissolved. Remember that example of writing on water? When a finger traces letters on the surface, you see them for an instant and then they're gone. So in that state of openness the mind offers an eternal, undying moment of creativity where we experience the world itself as creativity. Whether the arising is on the side of the object—of what seems to be out there—or the side of the subject—thoughts and emotions—there is just this ceaseless display, which is not being done by us, but which we are the enjoyers of.

This uncontrived experience reveals the world, including ourselves, as creativity, and as enjoyment. Creativity is the freshness of interest, of present awareness, no matter what happens. Perhaps we're in a car crash and get smashed limbs and end up in a hospital with lots of pain and drips going into us, and we can still be interested. *"Beep! Beep! Beep! Beep! Isn't it amazing? There's a little machine above my head that's going to tell me if I'm dead or not. [Laughter] Beep! Beep! I'd better listen to this."* And it's easier to be interested in these things when our ego is not our only point of experience. When we can relax into open awareness, an awareness that does not rest anywhere, we become so slippery no situation can grasp us and define our identity.

LIVING WITH AWARENESS

Of course the key arena of our attachment is our body, in particular when our body makes itself known through pain. And what is pain? It's certainly an experience we often have in meditation when our knees and backs start shrieking, demanding that we move. If we allow ourselves to be interested, to pay attention, without knowing in advance, *"This is pain and I don't want it,"* what do we find? If we leave a gap, something is occurring; what is it? As soon as we apply the label pain, we don't want it. As soon as we allow ourselves to have some interest, we don't know what it is, because we are exploring, and in that very moment our awareness goes back into this world process and we're caught up being carried by the world further into the world. Through this we have a freshness in which new experience is possible. Try it out for yourself when pain arises.

This approach can be applied to any experience that we want to get away from. For example, if you get bored driving home, you might want to avoid the boredom by distracting yourself with music. That's fine for a bit, but then you get bored with the music. So you could try exploring the experience of boredom without entering into judgement about it. Though of course, driving is very different from meditation. You can't drive your car, moving in and out of Italian drivers, with this spacious openness or they'll be right up your arse! You have to be little bit careful.

So the question is then, how can one then have a basic open awareness, which is wisdom, and at the same time have a precise compassion, which is the ability to respond to the situation as it manifests. When things are tight, when you're driving a car and you're going 120 kph and someone's overtaking you, you need to be very, very clear, you need to be absolutely in touch. But

perhaps the best way to do that is to be relaxed, to be relaxed in your mind and your body so that you can quickly respond. If you're very anxious and nervous that's going to create a block, because as your body gets tense, you're going to be having anxious thoughts *"Oh God, these people can't drive, what's going to happen? I don't have insurance if I have to go to an Italian hospital..."* And then there are thoughts and thoughts and thoughts....and where are you?

If you're an architect and you've got to do very accurate drawings, the awareness one needs is just a very precise, soft, gentle awareness. It's not a macho gouging into the world, making a profound mark, I mean, that just blunts your pencil. What one needs is a very sensitive responsiveness to the space that's available. So that attention and relaxation in the same moment is the best preparation for the very precise detailed work that all of us get involved in, whether it's cooking, or shopping or taking care of kids, driving, answering on the telephone, paying your gas bill, all of things need attention. If you make a mistake it costs you money, it costs you time, we can't afford that.

There is a pressure to get things right, but it need not make us anxious if we remember the view. But when we forget it, we see the world as danger, the world as threat and then the world is already established as real and separate. *"All these people out there, they know what they're doing. I'm the only one who doesn't know what he's doing. I've got to find a way to fit in; they're so powerful and they're so big..."* We're already dancing in a cemetery! Everything is closed and dead to us, and we get smaller and smaller and more helpless, feeling we have to push ourselves harder and harder. Inside we feel very small and vulnerable and hopeless, and outside we try to be very grown up and busy, and we just get exhausted.

The tragedy is that this way of experiencing things is increasingly seen as normal. However, perhaps we can allow the fact that the awareness that we develop in meditation is not some kind of bizarre perversion which we've taken up because of some terrible blight from past lives, some weird confusion that makes our friends and parents think we're a bit nuts. But it is actually a way of connecting with the ultimate, the most developed sensitivity that we can have for being in the world with ourselves, with the environment, and with other people. That open energy is very, very efficient at helping us lead our lives. It's actually better for us. Which is not to say that the prime motive for doing meditation is simply self-satisfaction or having an easy life.

There is the responsibility to be compassionate, to be concerned for others, to be open to the needs of others. But awareness is also—in its compassionate form—not just towards other people, but it's towards all sentient beings, including ourselves. The best way to take care of ourselves is by living with awareness. Living with awareness is on one level, very difficult, but on another level, if we can just spend twenty minutes a day doing the dissolving meditation, we will experience a shift in our experience.

If you're at work, you can have a coffee break, just sit by your desk, close your eyes and do the meditation. Nobody needs to know what you're doing. But you will have got in touch with openness. When you come out of it, there's

more space, you feel more energy in your body, and you're more able to return to the task that you have. You're bringing a freshness out of yourself into the world, that's replenishing you and making this task ahead easier. It doesn't take a lot of time. If we do it every day, twenty minutes a day, seven days a week, seven twenties is a hundred and forty, that's more than two hours meditation a week. That's not bad. And if you add that up, fifty years, fifty two weeks in a year, it starts to mount and it starts to mount. But if you just wait, and think, *"Oh, well, I'll go and do a weekend sometime..."* then you have a huge fasting period. Then when you come to the feast, your stomach is so small you get full before you've taken much in. Your ability to meditate is so small, and you arrive feeling so guilty because you haven't practised any of the things that you learnt the last time. You then spend the whole weekend thinking, *"Oh, I must do this more often, this is really good, hey this is really important!"* You are not even present because you're either in the past feeling guilty, or creating a perfect future where you'll definitely practise for hours every day!

The only way I think that we will keep doing meditation is if we prove to ourselves that it's worthwhile. You may decide that eating fresh vegetables is good, even if this means going to a shop further from home. But you cook the vegetables and you taste them and you think, *"This is really good! This is better than buying it from the local supermarket where it is always some days old."* You see for yourself, it tastes different.

All I can say really is that I hope you get some taste from the meditation, and that that taste lingers with you, and entices you to go back and eat more of it. If not, then you end up making a kind of super-ego demand on yourself, *"I'm not good enough, I should do more"* and so the battle continues. You're at war with yourself, trying to push yourself further. We probably know from the past that forcing ourselves may help us to practise meditation for a month, but then we'll give up. It's only by introducing meditation as a user-friendly practice—something which in the moment of doing it, is good for you, makes you feel good—that we create a positive-feedback loop. You see that it helps you, not just towards getting enlightened, whatever that might be, but it helps you in the next moment to take care of your kids, to get their breakfast in time to go to school. If it's helping you on that level, then it's sustainable, it's not an abstract idea.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN JAMES AND PEOPLE PRESENT

Questioner: Sometimes there's not the time in the west to go into this field of interest. I mean, if I meet someone we seem to get locked into something pretty quickly, we're just in it

James: Well maybe you have to be interested in the gap before you meet the person. If you wait till the moment of crisis when things suddenly get tense, or there's a sudden demand, it's too late. You have to try and keep that mood all the time. If you're walking down the street, you can do it with awareness, and then you might meet someone, but you're coming into the new situation from awareness.

Now it may well be that other people seem at first like the enemies of awareness. You know, you come out of meditation and you feel fairly spacious, you have a cup of tea and then the telephone rings and you're talking to someone, and immediately you feel pulled into this and you come out of it and you're buzzing with all ideas. But if you've been in a more open state before the telephone rings, then the telephone bell is going to arise in awareness. As you move towards it you can feel yourself getting to, *"Oh, I wonder who it is? Oh, I..."* You can feel that tension, and then just, *"Ahh I'm getting tense."* There's an expectation arising. Dissolving it before you pick up the phone brings a space to *"Hello..."* You're not devouring the moment. But when you're very eager the experience goes right inside you.

I think if you leave it till the critical moment it's impossible to deal with it there. It's like the summer holidays. Unless you put money in the bank to save for them, you can't pay for them. So every moment when you're more relaxed and free, that's the time to do meditation. Not as an antidote to some horror that's arisen. I mean, you certainly need to do it then too, but I think your ability to antidote difficult situations is dependent on the ability you've had before. It's the same as using ta'i chi as a martial art to protect yourself in the street. You may have done ta'i chi five years ago but not kept it up and now someone's going to attack you and you think, *"Oh, shit! I think there's a class on Thursday nights. It's time I went back there!"* It's too late.

Questioner: Do you think meditation is an evolutionary form of development?

James: Evolutionary in a Darwinian sense? Well, you know the statues of Buddha all have an ushnisha, a bump on the top of his head, which is one of the marks of enlightenment, so it may be eventually that all meditators will grow a little bump. So that could be the next evolutionary move, I don't know, but I think it can certainly help us in terms of social qualities, to be more attentive to others, more ethically aware, less driven by cultural prejudices. For example, violence towards children is very entrenched in many cultures. Through meditation and through realising the nature of cruelty and violence in ourselves, we can start to and through that we will hopefully be able to stop being so violent in the world. If you see there being less violence in the world as an evolutionary development, a reframing of 'survival of the fittest', then buddhism or meditation in general would be helping that.

Certainly in the traditional accounts of the buddhist path, many different stages of progress towards buddhahood are spelled out with the clear understanding that meditation helps us to evolve to these better levels of existence. That could be just a cultural story. Perhaps, for us, rather than focusing on the huge meta-narrative, the big story, we could focus on day by day experience; for it's there that you can check it out for yourself.

End