

NGÖNDRO 5

DORJE SEMPA: ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN TANTRA: DZOGCHEN
AND THE WEST: UNIQUENESS OF TANTRA: GURU YOGA: LAST PARTS
OF THE NGÖNDRO

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**Commentary On The Text Of The Preliminary Practice From The
Vidyadhara Guru Sadhana**

According To The Tradition Of Khordong Monastery

*So long as there are some things which cannot be incorporated into the
meditation, the underlying paradigm remains dualistic.*

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Saturday

The rough outline will be: taking up any thoughts or questions from the Dorje Sempa purification practice, looking at the role of the teacher in tantra and dzogchen and then at some of the issues of how traditional views of the teacher's position fit in with life in Western countries. Then we can take up some of the ideas around the role of the teacher in the short Padmasambhava practice, because that's an essential part of the final stage of the basic tantric preliminaries, the ngöndro. It's often translated as 'guru worship' and we'll get a bit more of an idea of what that means later.

... Period of sitting practice ...

VIEW AND MEDITATION

A lot of what we'll be discussing is about the relationship between the view and the meditation which in some ways is like the relationship between theory and practice. Because the view has been taught by the Buddha, it's often seen not simply as a theory nor as a construction, but as a revelation of what actually is the case. And yet when you start to read in the Buddha's literature you find that there are many, many descriptions of what's going on. There are many different views, often with many contradictions between them. Why? These views were developed by the Buddha and by the great masters in the past in relationship to people in particular situations, so they are contingent.

And it's always important that we remember that these are things that we make use of rather than things to be subjected to or subjugated by. Yet, as part of the practice we do have to subjugate ourselves to the things that we are practising.

It can be quite difficult to make use of the practice to open oneself at the same time as abandoning oneself to the practice. The question always arises for us: *"What position am I taking up vis à vis the practice? Who is the one doing the practice?"* One has to have some degree of intentionality towards the practice to enter into it, but at the same time the practice is being used to dissolve the matrix out of which an egotistical intentionality arises.

So when we do this simple shi-né practice, calming the mind through focusing on the breath, we notice how our awareness gets pulled into a merging with the thoughts that are arising. When we then become distracted from the breath and get caught up in the thought, we are positioning ourselves inside a particular contingent patterning of meaning as it arises from the juxtaposition of words, language, memory, association. These thought moments, a brief coalescing of thoughts into a particular positioning, become a momentary place where we can site ourselves and act and speak and develop some new planning.

TWO KINDS OF ATTACHMENT

We move forward into the future moment from this particular moment which is constructed out of the patterning of thought. So that the attachment that I might have to my watch—back to this same old watch!!—the watch goes onto my arm and comes off my arm and at night when I am asleep I am not really worried about the watch. However there's a sense that there is an "I" who is attached to an object, which is separable from the subject. There's a kind of object-relatedness. I can also relate to some of my thoughts and memories as if they were existing for me in the manner of a watch, as a discrete object that has a beginning and an end, a particular kind of boundary.

I think we can also see that when we do just this basic mind-calming meditation. When we become absorbed in a thought—when suddenly we are in that thought, thinking—we have an attachment which is not one of possession, but of an absolute pure identification; because at that moment the self is not sitting anywhere except in the moment of full identification with the thought that's arising.

So there are two very different kinds of attachment that are going on here. One is a notion where there is a particular basic shape or basic identity which then has qualities added to it or things existing in relationship to it. It is as if you have an essence which is then in relationship to other things, taking on some of the qualities, reflecting some of the shades and nuances of them, but somehow essentially able to be pared down to that core which can be separated off from other.

OUR BODY: KEEPING CLEAN

So that say for example we've been out doing some sport or something, and we feel we are very hot and sweaty and at the end of the day it's all kind of tacky. It's like our body has some kind of extra layer on it, like jam or something. Then we can go and have a shower and we use soap or we might have some kind of brush and we can rub on the skin, and then we can feel fresh, because we, as it were, reclaim this essential feeling of the edge of our physical embodied existence.

Having an easy return to that sense of the surface of one's body is one of the ways that we can know that people are reasonably healthy. There's a sense of that moment, maybe in the shower, you are just in your body enjoying the pleasure of being embodied. You might then want to take up a very rough scrubbing brush and rub and rub and rub on your arms until the blood is coming out, thinking "*I am a very impure person and I need to gouge out from myself these impurities*". Or in a state of abstraction or illness, someone may lose contact with their body, forgetting to wash, not taking care of it in any way. It might appear to others that this body is becoming unacceptable somehow. It doesn't fit in the social world. You can see from these two examples how it is as if the surface of our body exists as a boundary with the world. We expand out to the surface of our body, and the world meets us on

the surface of our body; but anyway we've got a point of reference in this embodied position.

In that simple example one has a sense that there is a 'me', there is an essence. I can see what is not 'me', so I can then make a division between what I will naturally identify as 'me', 'myself', 'my body, and what is not 'me', this dirt, this smell, which can be cleaned. And of course we can play culturally all sorts of games along the surface of this body boundary, piercing, branding, tattooing, hair-dying, all sorts of things.

OUR MIND: KEEPING CLEAN

Now, it becomes much more difficult when we deal with the nature of the mind. If you want to clean your mind, if you want to purify your mind, it's not like finding your shoes when you've been walking in the mud, taking them up and cleaning them, because you can't hold your mind in one hand and then sort of scrub the dirty bits off.

And in fact it's this attitude that we ordinarily bring in the world—which promotes structure, clarity, the possibility of discriminating between things—it's this very attitude which is the fundamental way in which the mind becomes defiled or confused, or in a state of non-simplicity. We have to remember that from the point of view of the dharma, the ways in which we exist in this world are generated out of an attitude of ignorance.

So the very process of identification through saying, "*This is my body,*" is on a gross level. In shi-né—the mental quietening kind of meditation where we become absorbed in patterns of thought that arise—we experience how a more subtle discriminatory identification takes us away from the onward flow of existence. Through identification with the body on a gross level, and on a more subtle level through shi-né, when we identify with what is arising, we find some solace and peace and security and predictability arising out of that. But it is at that moment that we disengage, we step apart from the flow of being or existence or whatever.

The practice of Dorje Sempa is a reversal of the ordinary movement that we make in order to install clarity in our lives. Usually we are establishing clarity through an act of will, through an insistence and installing of habitual patterns of identification on the phenomena of the world as they present themselves to us. This making of choices and constructing of our world—both out of objects that are common in the world and give a sense of security and belonging, and also through the precise insistence on our individual choice which gives us a sense of individuality—the meeting of these two means that we exist in the world with others, but with some difference.

Like on the plane this morning, they have a trolley with drinks, and it's very interesting to watch the kind of drinks that people have at breakfast time. Some people have whisky, some people five, six cups of coffee, others have orange juice in a big, big thing, other people don't want anything, and it's that way in which you could see people, because it's early in the morning, they are

saying *“This is what I need to be me for the day. I must have a cup of tea otherwise I am not myself. I must have that first cigarette...”*

But in the Dorje Sempa practice all of this movement towards stable identification in a moving world is being reversed by dissolving the familiar points of contact. Everything that one would construct oneself with is allowed to flow back into the ground matrix. Identification is then dissolved into a moment of openness.

MEDITATION CAN BE DANGEROUS

I'll just again go briefly over the view that supports this kind of meditation, and I think that the understanding of the view is very, very important because essentially what we are saying is, *“This is an opportunity to let go of everything that keeps you in place.”*

Meditation is powerful. If it doesn't do anything then it doesn't mean anything. It is powerful and I do think we have to remember that the power if you use it well it will be helpful, and if you use it unwisely, and without enough background, it can be dangerous. It's often very nice to be around Tibetans, and they smile and it appears that everything is very easy and very nice, but it's also has to be known that mental illness exists and mental illness can be promoted through meditation. Psychosis can be revealed through meditation.

I am trying to suggest that we keep ourselves in place by particular fixed points of identification. When you start to let go of this fixing of your identity, things that were hidden by this fixing of identity start to reveal themselves, deeper levels of the psyche start to reveal themselves.

It depends on your view, really. In the early days when LSD was first being taken, people saw this as a very powerful substance and very often when people would take a trip on it they would have two or three people around who would be there to reassure them, or guide them, to give a sense of clarity when they got lost. Then, later, when LSD came out on the streets, I can remember in the Sixties people saying, *“Oh, this is very bad acid. Bad acid gives you a bad trip. If you have good acid you get a good trip.”* Although the acid may have been cut with some contaminating chemical such as strychnine, the real point is that there are disturbances in a person's own psyche which can be revealed through the taking of a powerful substance like LSD.

Although we start really with the basic idea of the buddha-nature, that all beings have this essentially pure nature, and this pure nature is empty, is devoid of any self-substance, nonetheless this buddha-nature has been covered over with an accumulation or a dynamic patterning of confusions, conflicts, uncertainties, various kinds of violent erotic thoughts.

I AM WASHING MY MIND. WHERE IS THE DRAIN?

When you start to clean the mind as it were, when you start to work on what's there, it's not like if I take this cup to the kitchen to wash it, I hold it under the tap and the dirt in the cup goes down the drain. If I am washing my mind, where is the drain? If you remember the visualisation of Dorje Sempa, you have Dorje Sempa on top of you like a nice tap. He turns on the tap and all this pure stuff comes in *blublublublublub*, filling you up, and then out of a hole in your bum all this dirty black stuff goes down into a crack in the earth.

But when we are actually sitting in our meditation and thoughts are arising, where do we find a kind of sink to put them down? Especially if we accept the buddhist non-dual notion that everything is mind. If everything is mind, where in the mind do you put the dirty bits in the mind that you don't want near you? Have you got a near-mind that you want nice and clean and a far-mind that you put all the shit onto?

A traditional example for meditation, particularly the mind-calming meditation, is that it's like having a muddy pond, and you leave the pond to settle and then gradually the colloidal small pieces of mud will sink down to the bottom by the force of gravity and the water will then clear. Now, that's very nice. You have a beautiful clean pond, but you have mud on the bottom. So if you wanted to swim in that pond you would have to swim very, very softly, because if your toe just twiddled a bit all the mud would come up.

THE MAHAYANA CRITIQUE

This is the basis for the mahayana critique of the hinayana or theravadin approach to mind-calming meditation. It's also the critique that's applied to the advaita vedanta system of hindu meditation whose main proponent is seen as being Shiva. The Shiva who sits on the top of Mount Kailash, in the pure snow looking out into the clear blue sky....

Tape one side two

...It is said that Shiva can sit in this meditation for a whole *kalpa*, for millions and millions of years, but if anyone disturbs his meditation he gets very, very angry and his eyes become very, very red and he burns them up. Because there is still existing a distinction between what is meditation and what is not meditation. So long as there are some things which cannot be incorporated into the meditation, the underlying paradigm remains dualistic.

If we imagine that enlightenment or the openness of being is a state of freedom, then we have to think, "*What is it that constrains that freedom?*" From the point of view of tantra and in particular from dzogchen, everything that arises is an opportunity for us to discover the richness of the freedom of responding to others in an open ethical manner.

However if we have the idea that this world, samsara is very dangerous and that the way in which we can promote our happiness, and the happiness of others, is by calming ourselves down—so that we are not disturbed by the world, and that our behaviour is also not disturbing other people—then the calm that we achieve is always contingent on a kind of contractual agreement with the environment.

Communities of monks, for example, who are respected as being holy people in their village community act in a very calm way and the villagers act in a very respectful way to them. So in this way they create a place apart. That's what the word *ashram* means—it's a place of peace that's set apart. Likewise the Tibetan word *gompa*, means isolated, apart, something on the edge of ordinary life.

These environments are always embedded with many rules and regulations in order to keep clarifying the boundary between what is being maintained inside and what is being maintained outside. The peace that is generated in that environment is contingent on everybody following the rules. When the rules are broken the peace falls apart. It's essentially an avoidant kind of freedom.

TRANSFORMING THE SUBJECT-OBJECT CONFLICT

When we do the Dorje Sempa meditation we are not attempting to install that kind of situation. Rather what we are trying to do is to find a dynamic way of engaging with the particular patternings of experience that we experience inside our bodies, inside our thoughts as well as outside ourselves. We try to understand the way in which this inside-outside movement is actually something very, very different from how we ordinarily understand it. It's the transformation of the subject-object conflict, and an engagement which generates more of the same, into the recognition of an openness which cannot be claimed as a 'subject in itself', as 'something as such'.

It is then that you get a radical turning around of the perception. You disengage from siting yourself where the subject-object occurs, into a recognition of all that arises as the revelation of a being which never concretises itself as something-as-such. That is to say, a being who doesn't claim its identity through a kind of mimetic repetition of what's arising. In this recognition of manifestation as revelation, there is not the second movement of owning it. That's a whole load of fancy words, isn't it?

That's the theory. The implication is that what you actually have to do is to swim about in the muddy pond, kicking up as much mud as possible, and learning to feel at home in it. This is the integration of ignorance and wisdom.

AN AESTHETIC MOMENT

The essential purificatory point here is the relaxation of the desire to know what's going on, of the insistence of predicting that things will arise in a recognisable pattern. One's being in the world with others, as a state of non-

being, is essentially an æsthetic moment. That is to say, one is open to the phenomenological experience without claiming it as something-as-such.

It's again very similar to what you have in an art studio if say are trying to paint with a model. The big problem most people have is that they paint or draw what they think. They draw the memory, and so they predict from the past, from a construction. They imagine what they see, rather than actually just relaxing and looking and letting the eye move them into the future. Trusting the eye in that way is much less effort-full. I mean the lines come out more quickly but you have to know when to stop. You have to know when not to correct what has been created in the moment of spontaneity.

And that is exactly the central issue in dzogchen meditation. Allow the world to arise as it is without seeking to correct it; correcting it as if somehow the world was wrong and we were sitting there in the place of God tinkering and adjusting and trying to please everybody.

If you've had an experience of drawing in that way, maybe you'll know how in that moment when you are drawing, there is an absence of the self? Drawing is occurring. Drawing is going on. But who is drawing is not very clear. One doesn't really need to know who that is, but of course we are educated in a system which insistently demands that we should know who we are and what we are doing and take responsibility for it in a very concretised way, so there's that double-movement all the time.

QUESTIONS ABOUT DORJE SEMPA

Questioner: ... when I had done the practice I felt very cleansed, very fresh and new, and I felt very pure, and now I start a new life. Now, from what you say, I must also change from having a concept of purity to the view of purity, that for example you don't bathe away all your dirt and then you will be pure, but it is how you view the things, which is what makes them pure. A pure view as opposed to a view of purity?

James: That's the essence really. The basic structure of tantric practice, our Dorje Sempa visualisation for example, has these two main movements. One is an antidote movement, like you swallow poison, you take the herbs, and you feel better. The other is transformation, is the ability to transform the poison that's been swallowed and to realise that it has another quality.

These two movements are slightly different and could be seen as being in opposition. I mean, the hinayana system is avoidance, but a little bit of antidote. The mahayana is antidote moving into transformation. Both antidote and transformation are still, in their basic paradigm, dualistic.

When you do the Dorje Sempa meditation and you have the visualisation of Dorje Sempa on top of your head and you are reciting the mantra, then you are working with an antidotal view. I'm full of all this bad stuff, and this pure stuff is coming in and pushing out the bad stuff. The starting point is to have quite a strong dualistic perception, *"I am a very bad person. I have been*

many, many lifetimes; in all my lives I have been cruel and mean. I have tortured, raped, murdered. I have been very selfish.” You have all these thoughts, so you allow yourself to imagine as much evil as you can imagine in the world as being associated with yourself.

And not only that but you would also be trying to get in touch with points of shame and embarrassment in your life. Even shame evoked by a perception of the sinful actions of others, where you might feel, “Ugh!” and shrink back. Because you have a kind of projective identification with the bad things that someone else has done. For example, if somebody is talking very loudly or showing off you might think “Ugh!” You wouldn’t like to be like that person, or you feel embarrassed on their behalf.

Now, the reason that we do this kind of reflective meditation is because each of these points of identity is like a nodal point around which all sorts of thoughts, feelings, and associations arise. These implode, which becomes, “Uh-oh! It’s at that constricting moment that the self-other differentiation is installed.

That’s why at the beginning of larger pujas one reflects on rebirth in the six realms and thinks of the reasons why one is born in the hells or the heavens or whatever. One thinks about pride, anger, jealousy as causal forces so that we become aware them. Even if in this life we may have committed a fairly narrow spectrum of intensified interactions with others—hurting people, exploiting them, whatever, that we might feel ashamed of—we want to imagine that in our past lives we’ve done this with infinite numbers of people. Why? Then when you come to the purification, all the shit is in the toilet when you flush.

DORJE SEMPA DISSOLVING

You start with a lot of dualistic speculation. Then you bring that together with the visualisation of the *dutsi*, the purifying fluid coming down, and expelling all of this bad stuff. You can also imagine that all the sins of all sentient beings are also inside you as well, or that all sentient beings are around you, each with a Dorje Sempa on top of their head. It doesn’t really matter which one you do.

Then at the end of this purification part you come to the point when you dissolve. Because at the point at which Dorje Sempa dissolves into you—dissolves into a ball of light, dissolves into your heart—you dissolve into him and you have identification. You and Dorje Sempa are one; subject and object merge into one point.

But the starting point of the meditation is to say *“I and Dorje Sempa are not at all one. You are very pure, you are very high, and I am this nasty, shitty, horrible person”* So by moving that you are going from optimal tension between purity and non-purity, and bringing them together through the purification and dissolution down into one point.

When you've dissolved and you have the point of light getting smaller and smaller and smaller and all your attention is into this—everything is shrinking down and down and down and down and then, gone.

Later of course thoughts, sensations, memories and feelings start arising, but because the point from which you might look at these arisings and say that, "*That is happening to me*"—because the point of me-ness, the self-identificatory point, because that's been opened—whatever is arising you want it just to present itself, without position-taking.

WHY DO WE LOSE IT?

Let's think why we hold onto that state for a period of time but then we start to lose it. Why do we lose it? What is it that's gets in the way, when thoughts arise, that we become involved in them?

It's maybe not so common nowadays, but let us imagine about eighty years ago a *nouveau riche* business man made a lot of money and held a big dinner party. He invited all these proper respectable people to dine at his table and at the end of the meal, he offered some port wine. But he sent it to them the wrong way, because port should circulate around the table in a particular direction. So although this person had a lot of money, and knew many, many things, he made a *faux pas*. He exposed the absence, the hole in his past where that knowledge was not transmitted because he wasn't indoctrinated.

So there we are. We've been doing our apprenticeship in Buddha Bank PLC; built up this store of merit and virtue and now we have this dinner party and we are inviting all these thoughts to arrive and play and have a very nice time. And we want the thoughts to come. We say, "*Arise, this is the display of my wisdom.*" And then what do we do? We grab one and we put it in our pocket, because we were born as a poor beggar who's used to stealing. We forget. I am a buddha, but how come I am stealing things? And that's exactly what happens.

That's why you have to think at the very beginning of all the ways in which you sabotage yourself, through attachment, desire, these nodal points where things come tight, because you want to be very elegant, just allowing these thoughts to come and move and you, like a beautiful hostess moving around, seeing that they are all happy, but with no particular desire yourself. "*Enjoying yourself? Lovely!*" So this Dorje Sempa practice is like a Swiss finishing school for nouveau buddhas where you learn to identify all your old proletarian behaviours and leave them behind.

Tape two side one

Questioner: I heard some other description of this visualisation of Dorje Sempa, like bad thoughts coming out of your skin. Is this the way to do it, because the way you described it was going out of your bum into the earth? I've never heard this. I have heard coming out of the skin like insects, but I am

not too sure about this insect part because insects are sentient beings too. Maybe like black fog coming out of the skin.

James: All these visualisations they are described in different ways. Sometimes when it comes down from Dorje Sempa it's described as coming from his big toe. Actually, it should come through his penis.

It is very interesting why people should be ashamed and change that? Maybe some lamas feel that a proper description of tantra is somehow not appropriate nowadays. I feel that it is absolutely appropriate because everybody is so ashamed about these things. It's the exact antidote to exploitative pornography.

This pure substance is coming through his big toe or his penis into you, and then it can come out through your skin, often it says through the anus and then it comes out as snakes, scorpions, soot, black smoke, oil. The earth under you opens and it goes down and down and down and at the bottom there is a big demon with his mouth open who swallows it all. This demon can be seen as having a punishment because it is a very bad demon, or it can be seen as an incarnation of Mahakala, who is able through that profound wisdom to transform it into something illuminated.

Midday break

ESSENTIAL PURITY OF MIND

The main thing that we are trying to do is to recognise the essential purity of the mind through this practice. And that means recognising that whatever arises in the mind arises from and as the mind and is therefore not other than the mind. Hence there is nothing that could defile the mind and nothing which, as an arising or a phenomenon, could either be defiling or defiled.

Now, in terms of the goal, if you can actually realise this, it is maybe very exciting to be free of all problems and difficulties because everything's perfect. In terms of the path, in terms of the actual practice, what one's actually saying is, *"I take responsibility for any crap I meet. Anything that's wrong is my production because it's due to my misperception of how things actually are."*

That is a major shift that's also likely to make us a bit confused and uncertain because we're going to experience the world as if other people are real and separate from ourselves, with a will of their own. Yet at the same time, anything that disturbs us in our interaction with them, we're going to take responsibility for.

JAMES' VERTICAL HORIZONTAL NOTION

For this we can make use of the vertical horizontal notion which I've offered in previous weekends. Ordinarily, say, with X¹ I can project things onto her. I'm here, James, and I come here and I imagine or I see X in a particular way. And a lot of what I see about her is a construction from me on the basis of my own past history. So my expectations are not only blocking my sense of her real self, but are actually creating the only X I'll ever have contact with, because she exists for me as partly a construct of my own ratiocinations, my own thinking.

Of course I can pull back all my projections and assumptions about X, but will that give me the experience of the real X? X also exists for herself as a self-object which she projects onto, so that she exists for herself as a self-creation. If I stop projecting onto her but she's still creating herself as her own projection, then I have a more authentic relation to her projection of herself onto herself, through herself by herself.

But then, if she's also through her meditation starting to loosen up the projections that she makes—and another way of saying the word projection would be a point of identification—as long as she stops identifying herself as particular signifiers, particular memories, thoughts, words, around which can constellate the on-going notion of who she is, then there's a kind of wondering, "*Well, what on earth is here?*"

So I create an X for myself, and I also create a James for myself; X creates an X for herself and she also creates a James for herself. Once we try to deconstruct this and examine what's actually going on—this sort of activity is taking place on a kind of horizontal level—it all starts to fall apart and is very difficult then to clarify. It's not that I can scrape my projection away and see the thing in itself—X, as she really is.

So when we say that you have to take responsibility for everything that is occurring it's much more in a vertical sense. From the state of openness which we try to get to through this meditation, we experience the arising of thoughts, feelings, memories, which are the basis through being concretised, the basis for subject and object experience. It's at that moment that we have to take responsibility for our production of the whole interactive field. Not responsibility inside the dynamic interactive field, but for the moment of it's initiation through concretising subject-object experience in its most raw form.

I mean for me to think, even tomorrow night when I go back to London, I will still be responsible for X would be a persecutory paranoid vision: "*For everybody who's here, I'll be responsible for everything that you do, even although I don't know you, because somehow I am responsible for the whole of samsara.*" This is crazy. Because inside the dualistic perception, the fragmentation of possibilities, the complexity, cannot be restored to one point.

¹ James names a woman who was present at these teachings [ed.]

There cannot be an 'I' who is responsible for all of this, so that all of the chaos is out there and I return to a single point of absolute responsibility.

WHAT I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR IS...

What I am responsible for is whether 'I' or 'not I' enter into that particular dimension of perception. Samsara begins in the moment you perceive samsara. It's a kind of mass hallucination, if you like, and the more people believe in this group illusion, the more it is reified, strengthened, and then not to believe in it becomes an indication of madness.

What one is really attempting to do is to take responsibility for the moment when, following the dissolving meditation, when thoughts and feelings are arising, we can take responsibility for how we engage with these thoughts and feelings. Whether we engage with them as the display of awareness, which is the field of the interplay of subject and object, but it is not reducible to a self-identification as awareness: *"I am aware of all of this."*

Again, it's like the familiar story of the sorcerer's apprentice. When the sorcerer goes away, the apprentice starts to open the spell book and gets all the cleaning implements in the laboratory working; in the moment when he opens the spell book and says what he shouldn't say, he is responsible. But once the brush is moving around and the buckets and the water's going everywhere, he can't be responsible for that because these things, as it were, have a life of their own.

So, once I am already thinking there is a James and an X, the situation is lost. It's already so complicated that you can't work out all the variations in this and you end up like a crazy juggler because there that too many variables going on.

One has to go back into the meditation, dissolve it down to that point when the thoughts and feeling which become the signifiers both of self-identification and other-identification are moving in their most nascent form. Just recognising: *"This is a play. I am part of this play. The whole world is part of this play,"* and bringing the play back into the source, back into the source, all the time.

The traditional image is like a reflection in a mirror, where the reflection is there in the mirror, seems not to be the mirror, and yet is inescapable. You can't pull a reflection out of a mirror. Its life is only within.

All this may seem a bit abstract but I think it's very, very vital because when we get down to this level of deconstructing or unpacking our thoughts and unpacking the ways in which we move towards familiar positions, it's a very, very subtle business. It's not another object out there which you can use a spanner on to tighten or to loosen. One's in a kind of very subtle 'pre-self to pre-self' relationship; just on the point where a thought becomes a thought. The only thing you have to work there is relaxation and awareness.

DISENGAGING FROM HABITUAL IDENTIFICATIONS

From the point of view of tantra when you do this practice, we first of all visualise all these sins, bad things, things we might be ashamed of, getting a sense of them, getting in touch with them.

From the point of view of dzogchen we do get in touch with these things, but we also get in touch with all the things we might be proud of.

Any point that we might cling to at all, whether it seems good or bad, is an obstacle in terms of the primary identification with the state of openness. So when you do this, if you want to have a possibility of a wider opening to things, then you want to look for anything in yourself that you might cling to. You could cling to your age, your gender, your education, your children, your intelligence, your lack of intelligence. Whatever the points are whereby you define yourself, these are the things that have to be dissolved. Just as these same qualities were the things that you offered up in the previous mandala offering practice. Remember, you offered up everything that you have?

All of these practices are ways of trying to disengage from primary habitual identifications. The identification is always with something that is impermanent, and when you identify with something that is impermanent as if it were permanent, you usually cry when it goes. That's what the Buddha wants to protect us from.

PRACTICE: DORJE SEMPA

What we do is just sit quietly by ourselves for a few minutes, thinking about our lives, and thinking about what we are attached to, either with shame or with hope. Thinking about all the things we use to construct our lives. Then we'll recite this page ten together, reading out the Tibetan. Then sit just a little so you can get a sense of what the visualisation is, with Dorje Sempa on the top of your head facing towards you. In his heart he's got a letter *Hung*, and round it goes the long mantra that's on page eleven. But that's a lot to visualise. I think if you just get a sense of Dorje Sempa and in his heart there is the letter *Hung*, (You can see how it's written in Tibetan at the end of the third line.) or you can just see this as the essence of wisdom. Out of this letter is pouring white purifying fluid which fills up his body and then flows into yours.

An important aspect of this kind of practice is faith: to believe that this pure, purifying *dutsi*, this nectar that's flowing in, actually has the power to remove these stains and impurities. We want to believe that Dorje Sempa has the essence of all the buddhas, and that's very, very powerful and purifying.

We have our attachment to all our identity and all our own shit. So what are we saying is more important—the power of the buddha or the power of our own attachment? The basic assumption in buddhism is that we all have buddha-nature and that is our true nature. But if we believe that our confused or sinful or upset or bad nature is more powerful than this buddha-nature, then

we are caught up in a negative narcissism. There is pride in being caught up the belief that we are so damaged that we are beyond salvation; that we are beyond any real transformation. *"I am so damaged nobody can help me, nothing can change."*

Tape two side two

So we do the visualisation and then we will recite together the long mantra. We'll recite it seven times and then we'll go onto page twelve and we'll recite that verse there three times. And having recited that, we will then dissolve the image on the top of our head, from the top down and from the bottom up. So we imagine Dorje Sempa is shrinking into a small ball of white light which then goes down through the crown of our head, into our heart, and then we too dissolve from the top down and the bottom up into this ball of light. The ball of light shrinks down to a point, and we keep our attention as focused on this as possible, and then it just dissolves into openness. Then we do the dissolving and we sit in that state of openness, allowing thoughts to come and go, as long as we can.

When Sanskrit mantras like this are transcribed into Tibetan every syllable is sounded. Ordinarily in the Tibetan language lots of syllables are not sounded. Here everything has to be sounded, but Tibetans will pronounce this in many different ways. You hear them saying it differently.

I think for our purposes we shouldn't get too ritualistic about this. The main thing, if one is practising it in the spirit of dzogchen, is to take it through the anuyoga attitude, which is one of feeling. One is going for the æsthetic feeling-tone of the thing, getting into the sound. You can always correct the sound afterwards, but when we do it together it's to allow the sound to come through you so that your energy flows into what's being recited.

So just start reflecting on your life, all the things you've been up to, all the rest of it. Then we'll take up the meditation.

Break

SWIMMING LIKE A DOLPHIN

...watching how you climb onto thought, how you climb back into meaning and constructing things for yourself. It's as if you were playing in the sea and you had one of these plastic or rubber beds to float on, a lilo thing, and when you're swimming and you climbed onto that, you are still kind of on the water, you're connected with the water, but it's as if you're apart from it and it's nice to be carried for a while.

Because when we swim in the sea we get tired and so it's nice to be able to support ourselves somewhere. But dolphins don't have little plastic beds to lie on because dolphins belong in the ocean. I don't know what they do when they get tired, but I guess they have to keep swimming!

It's really the point of identification with the meditation when we do the dissolving—if we feel a bit heavy or tight as ourselves, then we are like a tired swimmer. We hang onto a thought and a thought takes us forward in some way. But through this meditation we want to reverse Darwinian evolution and revert to the position of the dolphin, so that we are just swimming in this ocean of becoming without being tired because we are quite at home in it. I like that idea.

We don't know what it would be like to be a fish in water. But you get the sense that it's a very close intimate relationship just as our relationship to the air is like that. The air is touching us all the time, going in our nostrils and coming out of it, we really are at one with the wind. It's just flowing into us, flowing out of us. And we're so at one with it that we are hardly aware of any separation. So we have to practise falling off and back into the water. It's not struggling to push ourselves forward, but just floating back and allowing the world to present itself with ourselves in the world.

QUESTIONS ABOUT DOING DORJE SEMPA

Questioner: How does Dorje Sempa sit?

James: Facing you. Even though the deity is on top of your head, the general idea is they are still looking towards you. So you imagine it's a kind of double movement: they are looking at you, they are smiling at you, but they are on top of you. You are seeing them this way and that way.

The main thing is that you want to feel that you have a relationship with Dorje Sempa, so if he is up there looking towards you—I mean, you can imagine him maybe something like this, just slightly in front of your forehead so that you have the sense of he's looking towards you, and this is coming down.

On one level these kinds of visualisation practices can seem very simple, but I think for most people they require quite a lot of practice before they become easy to get into. If you've got a busy life—you've got work and you've got shopping and cooking and friends and movies—I think it can be difficult to really get into it. But if you can do a bit of it every day and recite it so that you memorise the long mantra, then it all becomes more automatic. The more you do it the more you can have the visualisation, you can have the idea of this fluid coming down and filling you; you're reciting it; you're imagining the purification; you're in touch with the whole moving field of things.

It's a bit like children in school. When they get distracted, maybe the teacher's talking about history or something and then they start thinking about themselves as General Someone or other and then they are off in their own little world. Then the teacher has to bring them back to the topic that's being discussed, so they learn to use their thoughts to take them into what's being discussed rather than away from it. The tantric practice is a story too. *"Here is this man sitting on my head. He is going to make me happier. I like him so much because he's making me happy."* We go off and we get distracted by other things and so we have to remember: *"Bring yourself back to the story."*

This is a very big story and the more complicated the story, the more hooks there are in the story to bring you back into it. So it uses complexity in the same way that the shi-né practice uses simplicity, the simplicity of just observing the breath. But it's the same focus—to bring all the thoughts into one point.

Just as with this shi-né practice we are trying to focus on the breath, and if we lose that and we go off some place else, as soon as we recognise that we've wandered, we just want to very gently recognise it and come back. We don't blame ourselves, we don't beat ourselves up. Similarly with this kind of practice, if you can't visualise clearly, or you forget to do something, or you do it in the wrong order, the most important thing is just to be kind to yourself and think, "*Oh well, next time,*" Just bring yourself back to the part of the practice that's continuing. We should never use these practices to make ourselves feel more guilty and bad.

Questioner: The relationship of Dorje Sempa to the other concepts of ngöndro, like if you have your work all your daily life. Is there any point in the ngöndro which you should do most or mainly? How to do the practice? Would you suggest that you do it one by one?

James: I think probably you have to think of your relationship to your own condition. For example, if you have a lot of doubts, and if you're uncertain about things, it may be most helpful to do the refuge and bodhicitta because these are intentional and aspirational: "*I want this to happen. I will do this.*" It's that kind of energy. But if you're finding that you're losing energy in the practice, not so much because you don't believe in the dharma, or believe in the possibility out there, but you believe of yourself that, "*I am a stupid person. I'll never be able to do this,*" then doing more Dorje Sempa would be important.

I mean it is a sort of linear progression. The refuge creates the kind of new context; you replace yourself in the world. The bodhicitta shifts your relations with others. The mandala offering shifts your relationship with your possessions. The Dorje Sempa practice shifts your relationship with yourself. The next stage is when guru yoga shifts you into a whole different thing again with other people, but in a more precise way.

The traditional way of doing the ngöndro is that every day you read the whole thing through. When you get to the part which you are currently doing the hundred thousand of, you do as many of that part as you can and then continue with reading the rest of it though once.

Maybe for us it would make more sense—you might like to try it?—to read the whole thing through as often as you can. Let's say you start with the prostrations and refuge part, do that until you've done a thousand of them. Then you leave that at a thousand and go onto the next thing and do a thousand of that, the bodhicitta. Then do it by the thousand. Once you have done the whole thing through at a thousand each, at that point you can go back to the beginning again. It is important to feel somehow you are getting

somewhere. Otherwise you might feel as if you have this whole mountain to climb.

Questioner: It's not that you have to be perfect before you can go onto the other. I started to do the prostrations and had problems to know this thing by heart. I was reciting the prayer but the Guru Rinpoche was going somewhere else! I am counting and then the mala falls down... and then I miss twenty-eight! I'm very happy that Padmasambhava isn't there!

James: The thing is always to remember that we do this to support ourselves, we should feel better at the end of the practice than at the beginning. If that's not happening then we it may be because we are punishing ourselves in some way. So we have to remember that we are doing the practice. We are using the practice, not its servant and feeling terribly persecuted.

Questioner: To do it a thousand times means a thousand times the mantra or the whole...?

James: The mantra. Just the mantra here. Also if you have time you can also do a hundred thousand of the short one. That's very quick.

Tape three side one

You just do the best you can. If you can do seven then you just do seven. The thing is, if you just do seven because you are confident that you can do the seven and you can do it fully, then it means something. But if you think, "*Oh, I should do a hundred. I can't do a hundred, never mind, I won't do any*" Much better to do a small amount regularly and to stay in touch with it. It doesn't matter if you do a hundred thousand or not. The whole thing is to get into it, to get the feel of it.

SHIFTING ONE'S SENSE OF SELF

Maybe I start to hate myself, not believe in myself, and think I'm a bad person, but I also can recognise that I have Buddha-nature. So what's the relationship between me hating myself and me starting to believe that my nature is open and pure and that I have enough love and compassion for all beings? It doesn't balance.

Can I believe in both at the same time? If I believe in this open nature, hating myself is sabotage; it's an attack on what I really want to believe. Hating yourself may be like an old habit.

How do we get rid of an old habit, like wanting to give up heavy drinking or smoking tobacco or whatever? You have the habit and then you have a point: either "*I am a smoker. Oh, lovely.*" or "*I am not a smoker. I keep smoking cigarettes, but in my heart I am not a smoker. I don't know why I'm smoking. Every time somebody offers me a cigarette, I start to smoke. I don't want to be a smoker. I don't want to hate myself. I don't want to get into all this shit.* So,

I'm going to identify myself with Dorje Sempa and dis-identify myself with these old patterns."

That's where the work really goes on—in shifting this sense of self.

Break

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

What we'll take up now is to begin some thinking about the role of the teacher in Tibetan buddhism, and the different kinds of teachers there are; the different functions they have. I'll just make some general comments and tomorrow we'll go into more detail. In the *Blue Book*² from page forty-seven to fifty-two there is a very traditional account of the role of the teacher which it might be useful to read.

TALKING IN PAIRS, FOLLOWED BY QUESTIONS

What I would suggest is if we could maybe just take about five minutes in pairs thinking about various kinds of teachers that you have had in your life, teaching you any kinds of things, good teachers and bad teachers and what were the qualities in the teachers that you learnt most from? Attend to two different kinds of learning—learning something, and learning something about yourself. You might have had say, a teacher of mathematics at school and you didn't learn very much mathematics from them but you might have started to question how you thought about the world and who you were.

Questioner: In our circle we had there was the question: Is the spiritual teacher something different from others teacher? It was said there are other teachers, but a spiritual teacher is something very outstanding or special and can't be discussed on this ordinary level.

Questioner: In our circle we had discussion about primary school teachers and maybe they can also be like a spiritual teacher. If what he is, what he says and lives is also the same and his whole aura and vibrations are very congruent with what he is teaching then and it can have like a spiritual effect on you.

James: In the tradition of buddhism in different countries, the role of teachers has been set out in particular ways and teachers have different kinds of functions. One function certainly, in Tibetan buddhism, is that the teacher should give advice on how to live. So for example, it would be quite common in a village say in Tibet, a man or a woman might go to a lama and say, *"Oh, we've had this tragedy in our family. Last year with a lot of money we married our daughter to this farmer over here. You know, you were at their wedding, and now she has come back home. She says she doesn't want to go back*

² Simply Being: Texts in the Dzogchen Tradition (Vajra Press, 1998) ISBN: 0953284506. Also available in French and German.

and live in that family. It's very difficult because this family are our good friends but she doesn't like her mother-in-law. What should we do?" In the West probably if we had problems like that, we wouldn't think of going particularly to a religious teacher. We might go to family therapists or we might just talk to our friends, or go even to see a solicitor if there were problems.

Spiritual teachers in Tibet could also be called upon to perform magical functions on behalf of their students and the families that supported them. They would be asked to bless the animals to keep them healthy. They would be asked to bless the crops, to walk around the fields and bless the fields when the seeds are being planted. They would be asked to stop hail-storms coming when the harvest is almost ready. They would be asked for many functions like that where they use their spiritual powers in a magical sense to create an aura of protection in the community.

Is the teacher a good meditator? I think that is very important. If you go to see a teacher you might like them or not, but whether or not they are a good meditator or even a great meditator, is very difficult to work out. Whereas, if you've lost your cow, the meditation teacher can do something with his mala, and say, *"It's up that valley. You walk for two days and you will find your cow,"* and you go there and you find your cow and you think, *"Hey! This is something."*

SOCIAL EMBEDDED-NESS

So one of the things about life in these village communities is that social embedded-ness leads to a kind of accountability. People actually get to know whether your words bear fruit, because you are around, you are there. You become known in that way. And not only that, but in a village there's plenty of gossip, and if you've got women sneaking into your room in the middle of the night, someone will know. Some village gossip will expose those who are doing what they shouldn't be doing.

A large part of that function is what in English we would call 'pastoral care.' And you know, 'pastoral' is connected with the pastor as the shepherd looking after a flock, dealing with your sheep on a daily basis. You can't look after your sheep one month and then come back a month later, and think in the middle, *"I hope there are no wolves!"*

Now that particular position of social embedded-ness with social responsibility and accountability and acting with low-key minor adjustments, like a kind of thermostat, acting on a micro-level to keep the health of the community moving along—that's a positioning of the dharma which really doesn't exist in the West, as far as I know. I think it does a bit with say, Vietnamese communities or some Asian community groups who come to the West and who have their own priests. Some of the Chinese communities do too.

But certainly for Western people coming into the dharma I'm not aware that that kind of function exists. And in fact it's actually the reverse here in the

West because just coming here today is a way of being further removed from your own community. The more you come into groups like this with these kind of ideas, the more you become de-contextualised in terms of your family of origin, some of your childhood friends, work-colleagues, and that sort of movement.

Living in a Tibetan village, everywhere you looked, you would see images and reference points which indicated sameness, which indicated belonging. Here when you look you see things that indicate difference. You look out and you see churches; you don't see buddhist things. So every time you see a church you see that which you are not—that which you might have been. And that's a marking-out of a place which is unsupported, and which is in fact a meeting-point of refugees, of drop-outs, of people who often don't feel particularly comfortably socially-embedded.

I think this lack of a kind of ecological embeded-ness is very important, particularly when we think of the role of the tantric guru who is usually seen as someone who takes up a position that is directly and very often, indirectly, subversive to the position that you normally take up in identifying yourself as 'your self'.

MILAREPA

The place of Milarepa, for example, is very significant in Tibetan buddhism. He is an almost archetypal image of the intensely motivated person who is moving very strongly in one direction. Moving like this, he encounters a teacher who seems to be in front of him, but keeps knocking him sideways. Every time he tries to go straight onto the teacher and do what the teacher wants, be a good boy and get a reward... *[Clap]* Bang! He gets a bang and he keeps turning round. And he turns and turns and turns and *ugh!* He sees something different.

The movement of Marpa on Milarepa is just to turn him around, and he's doing that inside a context which has set out the kind of moves for the game. Guru Rinpoche had already been in Tibet. There were already a lot of stories about wild, crazy yogis; there were lots of hindu yogis travelling in Tibet, so this was an extreme form on a continuum of a culturally integrated set of possibilities.

CULTS

If we think of our current situation. This is a time when religions don't have very much public favour, when intense forms of religious practice are often seen as being signs of basically malignant cults, orchestrated by charismatic leaders who want to suck in individuals and then destroy their autonomy and destroy their rationality. Destroying rationality is one of the great crimes against the whole Western project since it is about installing self-responsibility, rationality, autonomy, that whole line. These cults turn the other way, Jonestown, Waco, in Switzerland the Order of the Solar Temple...

What some Tibetan lamas do could actually be seen as similar. In fact many people will say, “*This is just another kind of cult.*” People may say this is the case but it can’t be proved in any way. Who can actually show what benefit comes out of it?

QUALITIES AND FUNCTIONS OF THE GURU

One of the things I want to do is to look at the traditional descriptions of the qualities of the guru and the functions of the guru and to show how this is deeply embedded and consistent with a lot of the view of tantra. And then to raise the question about whether this particular positioning is indeed archetypal. That is to say, whether it has a definite and enduring symbolic function, a point of revelation of reality.

Is it just something given, or should we see it as being contingent on particular social forms and cultural periods? If that is the case, what sort of transformations might be appropriate in the ways in which the dharma is transmitted? And finally, what are the consequences of that for the actual practice of tantra itself?

And of course in doing this the position I take up is quite ambiguous. On the one hand I can explain these traditional texts, but on the other hand I do it in a way that puts some kind of questions into something which would not normally be questioned. So it would be also important maybe to question what I’m about in coming to Frankfurt to do this kind of thing. I think that’s very important because one of the traditional points is that the position of the teacher cannot be questioned, that the position helps by it’s very given-ness, since it is a place of projection.

The idea of samsara, the word ‘samsara’ has the idea of revolving and turning. In Tibetan it’s called *khor wa*. There is the idea that in going from one life to another life, one is moving from one realm to another. One returns and moves out and returns, so there is an idea of going out and coming back. It’s a kind of interactive process which is always enmeshing. The other movement, towards nirvana, is seen much more as a linear movement—in the shit—out of the shit. You move out in a straight clear line. So the dharma is seen as a path, as a way. You know, “Follow the yellow brick road.” Very healthy. And I think it’s important to keep an eye on these movements because they are very illuminative.

Traditionally, the teacher sits up on the throne and speaks down in a straight line, into the ears of the students, and through the ears into the hearts of the students. Everything goes in one line, one point. Just like in the Dorje Sempa meditation, as the good words of the guru come in, all the bad words of the student’s own thoughts go out. Whether out their bums or not I don’t know, but it should go out!

POSITION OF THE DISCIPLE

In the introduction of how to listen to the dharma they often talk of the three pot faults. The third pot fault is said to be like a pot with rotten food in it, so no matter how good is the food that you put in, the rotten food always contaminates it. The student's thoughts generally are seen as rotting food. They are something to be thrown out because they will contaminate the good things. If in doubt, believe the other, don't trust yourself.

This week marks the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and Birkenau. I think it is very important for us to think about how much responsibility we have to take in the relationships we have with authority figures. The linear discourse of the Nuremberg rallies, where people had to allow something to fill their ears and fill their minds, with any doubts extruded, is similar in many ways to traditional presentations of how the dharma should be: *"You should trust that somebody knows more than you, and if you doubt the fact that they know more, then you should let go of that doubt. That doubt is as a sign of your inability to transcend yourself through using the other as a vehicle, because the other has already gone beyond where you are."*

Tape three side two

In America at the moment, a woman has brought a case to the law courts accusing a lama of sexual abuse. Now, if you were looking at this from a traditional point of view you could say that any contact, particularly a direct bodily contact, with an enlightened being—or a being who has a superior understanding—would be seen as a blessing. It would be seen as something which would help to transform the person's energy in some way because these big lamas are operating on a level of energy and awareness that we ordinary people don't. It would be understood that this is why we will not be able to see the good effects their behaviour is producing on the various subtle levels.

A great deal of Tibetan buddhism is structured into this hierarchical patterning of parent-to-child discourse, so there are particularly important ethical issues for us to consider, given the context that we live in. Generally we have an absence of social embedded-ness in which people have long-term memories of other people's behaviours and in which people are quite deeply known in the various levels of their being. This means that people can come in from a distance, do very intensive things, and then leave without much continuity or holding. We have to think about whether authoritarian, top-down, parent-to-child discourse is actually very helpful in our changed circumstances.

But even to think about this—which in some ways is to take responsibility for one's own behaviour and one's own part in the relationship that unfolds—is paradoxically also to sabotage the very model that one is thinking about. This is because the position that one is required to take up as a student in this model is one of not thinking those sorts of thoughts at all.

QUESTIONS

Questioner: Maybe you see the things too clear-cut, too crude. Maybe one can also think oneself, and then make a decision. I had a guru who, from the very beginning said, *“Use your discriminating awareness. Don’t believe anything that I tell you.”* And I think what you say is also different from my own experience. But what you say is certainly right for the greater context of how dharma is taught in the west and especially how western students idolise their dharma teachers and put them on pedestals.

James: I would disagree. It is absolutely from the teacher and from the tradition. It’s embedded. What I want to do tomorrow morning I want to lock it into the theory, because the theory and the practice are one on this point. The teacher is superior, and if the teacher is not superior the path of tantra doesn’t open up.

“If you do what the guru says you will be happy.” This is the message that God gave to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. But God had already polluted paradise by including in the instruction, *“There is one thing you must not do: there is a tree and an apple and you must not eat that apple.”*

As long as everything they chose inside the Garden of Eden was good, choice had no meaning. As soon as the choice could stand against all other choices, choice itself was the contaminator and the choice was embedded from the very beginning.

So in the same way, in the Garden of Eden, of pure devotion, of faith in the shining heart of the lama. If you have some doubts, if doubt arises, you are already being excluded from the garden. Doubt must always be forgiven just at the very moment that it arises. If you have time, read the pages in *Simply Being* because it speaks very clearly to the rationale for this particular way of conceptualisation.

Questioner: According to my understanding, they say Tibetan buddhism is a way of step-by-step taking a path of steps, and steps you can only take one after the other. Now we are doing this ngöndro course with you, then what is happening when maybe one day this is finished. Will you then say, *“Now I am going to teach the next step, for instance mahamudra, and everybody who has not finished his or her ngöndro, is excluded from it? Or who has not even started it? Or who is not steadily practising ngöndro. He may not come and attend to any next step classes. Will you say anything like this or what is your mind on these things?”*

James: When you get a teaching, say on making prostrations, if you write down notes carefully on it, even if you can’t do the prostrations this year, you can do them next year. It’s fairly simple; you just have to learn to co-ordinate everything. Once you know these different things what to do, it’s very simple. It’s like getting a recipe book about how to make a curry or something.

DEEPENING YOUR PRACTICE

When you get on to practices in dzogchen and mahamudra, the instruction is very simple, but unless you do it, the practice doesn't deepen, because as you do it questions arise and then you need to be able to explore the question. So if people don't practise it, it remains—Tibetans have the idea that things remain self-secret. You don't need to keep them secret, because even although you tell people about it they won't know what it means, because they don't have any experience. In that way the practice remains secret. Because you don't do it, it doesn't reveal its secret. But then also the student remains secret to the teacher because the student has no question. If they don't ask the teacher anything, then the teacher never gets to know them, so they have no relationship. It's secret in both ways.

I am very happy, and it's my commitment, to explain the principles of these practices so that people can understand what the practice is, why the practice is structured in that way, and basically how to do it. But then it depends on people if they do it. And if they do it they have some questions and then it goes into a different level of experience. And if you don't do that then you don't have that other level of experience.

Questioner: Just the ngöndro practice?

James: Any practice. If you buy a motor car you get a manual with it that shows you the electrical wiring in the car, showing you the layout of the engine and telling you what to do if you get basic mistakes. Clearly some dharma instructions operate in the same way. They give you a general guide to the human psychology, so that when you do meditation common problems arise, problems most people will experience. And it gives you some solutions for that.

Other problems I think are more like problems in art. You can go to an art school and you can be given some general instruction in drawing, but usually what happens is after a while you work in the studio and the tutor looks at what you do and makes some comments. The tutor may say, "*Oh, you could put the line more boldly, you could have more definition.*" But they won't do a little drawing of it and say, "*Copy me.*" Not nowadays anyway. They will want you to find your own style. Even if you have technical brilliance, if you have no style, if you don't have something to say yourself, it's a bit dead.

FINDING YOUR DESIRE

And that's very much how practice in the dharma is. It's not that you should become a clone, a kind of construction of the dharma, or a construction of the teacher's desire, but that you should have your own desire to find out something about yourself, to develop wisdom, to develop concern for others, compassion. Through your desire to develop these, you interact with the dharma through people in the sangha, through seeing different kinds of teachers, and you use these to support you in your understanding and in that

journey you will become more yourself, with your own style, which is different from other people's.

Now you have to have desire. If you sit like an empty pot and wait for someone to put things into it, this is a very, very slow system. If you have desire, if you have hunger, you are running around to practise the dharma. You have to be hungry. Bulimia is no good, eating too much and then vomiting it up. You have to eat, chew and digest. You are putting your teeth marks onto the dharma as you eat it. Sometimes you might find that your teeth marks aren't very good, so you might have to go to the dentist and change your teeth a little. But still you can't stop chewing. If you don't chew you won't understand anything.

This is why there is the dharma and there is your effort. There are people you can use to support you, whether that's sangha, discussion groups, interviews with a teacher, with different teachers... People will have to work out what suits them. At this time there is nobody who has got the perfect plan of the map to enlightenment. Pay ten deutschmarks and get the enlightenment map to just follow. That doesn't exist.

SHORT RIGDZIN AND NGÖNDRO

Questioner: Since I have come back from India I always do the small Rigdzin puja. In what connection does the small Rigdzin puja stand to the ngöndro practice?

James: The small Rigdzin practice is an example of a short daily practice. These were developed in Tibet so that people who had taken particular kinds of initiation could continue their connection with the practice. With C.R. Lama³ every time we had an initiation, usually with a big puja text, then there is also a small version for when you don't have the time to do the big one. So it's a way of keeping in contact. We prepared lots of these: Medicine Buddha, Vajrakilaya...

Now, in general it's considered that when you start to practise tantra, doing this five-stage ngöndro is a good basis because doing these five different practices very, very strongly a hundred thousand times, really gets you into the shape of the practice. So it's a place for transforming your ordinary vision. With that as a good basis, you then go on to do these other tantric practices.

But people often get initiations before they start the ngöndro and so they have other commitments to do. You can do them in different orders. You could also say that this short Rigdzin practice is enough.

Questioner: I do it twice a day so that's enough for me. Once in a while I do the large Rigdzin practice.

³ In 1995 when James gave this seminar, C R Lama Rinpoche was still in his body. This is no longer the case and we pray for his swift rebirth. [ed.]

SHORT RIGDZIN IS LIKE TA'I CHI. LONG NGÖNDRO IS LIKE KARATE

James: If you are learning ta'i chi you learn the form. You start slowly, copying other people. At first you have to copy what they do, but then gradually you can do the whole form. Now, that's what the small Rigdzin practice would be like. It's a particular kind of form, and gradually you get more competent in doing the whole thing. If you do it a lot, if you memorise the whole lot, you don't have to look at the books so much and you can get into the visualisation.

The ngöndro is more like learning karate. You would learn particular moves. First of all you would learn falling. You would practise what to do if somebody knocks you over, so you do a whole lot of falls and rolls. Then you practise all sorts of blocking moves. Then you move on to attacking moves, and each time you are integrating the new thing on to what you've done. So you start with the refuge, then the bodhicitta, and you build it up in that way. So it's a different kind of way in. At the end a karate person can do all sorts of flowing things. So can a ta'i chi person, but the way into it is different.

Sunday

OTHER ROLES OF THE TEACHER

Yesterday I marked out one position for the role of the teacher, as somebody embedded in the community, having responsibilities in the community.

Gegen

There are several other positions, aspects of the total picture that can be identified. One is the position of the kind of school teacher in the transmission of the dharma. Somebody who might have a title like *gegen*, someone who would have a lot of learning and some practice and whose primary task would be to teach people the basics of Tibetan language, Tibetan culture, basic logic, history of buddhism in Tibet, the life of the Buddha, the structure of buddha-dharma-sangha. Teach the basic dharma ideas so that the person was introduced to what it means to be living in a buddhist culture.

The kind of position I was describing yesterday of a lama who is doing some pujas on behalf of other people and giving blessings and advice, the lama on that level is invested in the community and has, if you like, an implicit contract with the community.

The gegen who is teaching has particular syllabus, an explicit contract. He is engaged to teach in the village school, or to teach young monks particular things, just like a school teacher in Germany will have to teach a syllabus. Is 'function' the same as 'contract'? An agreement where people actually know what's going on?

SPIRITUAL FRIEND

The third position is of someone who would be what's called a *ge-wai she-nyen* or spiritual friend. A spiritual friend is usually somebody who has been a dharma practiser, traditionally a monk or a nun, but anyway a practitioner for many years who has a lot of experience. They are somebody you ask for advice on life and dharma practice but who is not so much embedded in the community as part of their general role, someone whom you take a particular relationship with. A bit like in the christian tradition, where you have spiritual directors, people who will lead christian prayer and meditation retreats, and you can ask that person, "*Will you be my spiritual director?*" They will give you particular kinds of advice and encouragement and explain things to you. It's a personal kind of relationship, but it's like an uncle to nephew, or friendly, elder brother to younger brother. It's warm rather than hierarchical.

Tape four side one

SCHOLAR TEACHER: KHENPO AND GESHE

Then another position is that of a scholar-teacher who in the nyingmapa and kagyupa traditions is called a *kenpo*, and in the gelugpa and to a certain extent in the sakya traditions is called a *geshe*. A *geshe* would be somebody who could explain all the stages of meditation say, on the large Hevajra practice. They would be able to explain the colours of the visualisation and the history of it. They would be able to tell you stories about all the people in the lineage. They would hold a huge database, if you like, about the practice. However they might feel that they are not able or not willing to give an initiation for it. They hold the kind of cognitive or conceptual understanding of what's going on, but would say that their own experience is not the main thing that they have to offer. So they have knowledge *about* rather than embodying knowledge *of*.

MEDITATORS

Then you have people who are explicitly meditation teachers. These might be yogis or monks, but they are people who spend a lot of their time doing meditation and who, if you want to practise a lot of meditation, you would go to, maybe doing some meditation with them. They would be seen primarily as meditators.

Most Tibetan monasteries have two different sections inside them: they have what's called the *she-dra*, the sort of study section which is like a college. Larger Tibetan monasteries also function as universities, and have a study section as well as a practice section, which is called the *drup-dra*. People go there to learn how to do the meditation practice. The meditation teacher might be one of the senior teachers in the *drup-dra*, or he could be a yogi in a cave. A person who has had the full monastic education for twelve years or so, would then go and seek out this person, if such was their desire.

If would be optional. If you are going to be a monk, you have to go through the education system. That's mandatory, but meditation always has to be volitional. It always has to be according to your own choice.

MONASTIC STRUCTURE

There are, maybe four main patterns of dharma practice in Tibet. We are talking about the old days, but I think it speaks into the structure of how this whole tradition formulated. The first is the monastic structure, and monasteries are very hierarchically structured indeed. Everybody is there according to particular rules—the monks, their monastic vows. They are also there because of family ties, because if you are a monk you usually have sponsorship from your own family. So you are there representing the honour of your family, representing the dharma practice of your family.

There are many different roles inside the monastery which people, in their evolution through it, will progress to. Some people may go right up to the top position, which is to be abbot. Others will stay at different stages. So it's like any institution. Like a university where you could end up as dean of the whole university, or you could remain a junior lecturer.

RINPOCHE OR TULKU

There is another position in the monastery which is that of *rinpoche* or *tulku*, somebody who is recognised as the reincarnation of someone in the past. That person is then given particular responsibilities which they have to fulfil.

GURU KUL

Now, we're coming slowly through all of this to think about the role of the guru. In marking out these positions one can see that there are many kinds of teaching going on.

If you go back to the very early days in India, and it still happens a little bit today in the hindu system, you have what's called *guru kul*. *Kul* means a family, as you get in the five families of the Buddha, the *panch kul*.

So the *guru kul* is the guru's family, and essentially it would be that the guru, in the hindu tradition often married, would be a brahmin and would be practising, but practising intensively. He might go and set himself up somewhere like on the edge of the jungle, with a little bamboo hut, and students would gradually come. The guru's job was to get enough money from sponsors to feed his students, and the students' job was to help, maybe if they had some cows to take them out, to milk them, to help build up the things especially in the monsoon when it washed it away, so there was a reciprocal interaction in which both were taking care of each other, and the guru was explaining what the student had to practise in the meditation.

In this traditional form the teaching is done largely through the oral tradition, and through the experience of being together in a supportive community. In

that setting, a primary function is to provide containment, support, nurturing, education, advice and a role model. That would be one of the things the guru would be doing.

GURU AS SUBVERTER

The other function of a teacher is to work on the student to try to subvert, to open up, to change the student's patterns, so that the kind of sense of security that the student might have in their ability to predict who they were and how the world is—which is being developed in the nurturing mode of the guru-student relationship—is attacked from the other aspect of the guru as a subverter of the notion that the world is a predictable, reliable place. This is really the most important thing to understand in this relationship. Because this is the point where people become very, very confused.

Let's take an idea from psychoanalysis: early bonding between the mother and the infant. The mother and the infant form their own closed little world in which the infant feels safe, and the mother and the infant are adapting to each other. Now, it's very important that this kind of space is maintained, but it's also very important that it's interrupted because if it was maintained forever the mother and child would just be in some terrible, incestuous bonding and the world would never intrude.

And so some force—very often set up as the father, the father representing society, the law—has to interrupt this. This is Lacan's idea. Certainly in Britain we have many single-parent families. Usually it's a mother taking care of children. And I think it's a very, very difficult demand that is made in that situation, because the mother has to take up both roles. They have to be the reliable one, who is safe and able to give comfort, and they also have to be the one who can interrupt these infant's desires: *"Go to bed now. I won't tell you again!"* She then also has to comfort the child she has just upset. The tradition in Britain was for the mother to say, *"Wait till your father gets home!"* Because she wanted somebody else to take up that position.

MELANIE KLEIN AND THE DEPRESSIVE POSITION

I just want to turn this around a little bit and to think of it from an idea from psychoanalysis again, about the child's position. Particularly I want to take up Melanie Klein's idea of child's development. Whether we believe in this or not, it's an interesting way of thinking about the problems here.

She had many ideas, but one essential idea: a small baby experiencing being on the mother's breast feels warm and safe, feels that good things are coming. But bad things also can happen: the baby is abandoned, or the baby is maybe fearful of the mother, then the wets itself and the mother doesn't come immediately so the baby cries, and maybe the mother still doesn't come. The baby then has an experience of horror, of abandonment.

So it has a strong powerful, positive experience, and also a strong negative experience. And for this small infant it is impossible to bring these two

experiences into a location on one point, namely the mother. There then develops an idea that there is a good mother and a bad mother, a good breast and a bad breast—a good breast that's always full and a bad breast that's always empty and depriving.

The developmental task then, as the child grows older, is to be able to recognise that it is one person that has had these two functions towards it. And the thing about doing that is that in the moment when you recognise she is also a bad mother—the good goddess-mother who gives everything, dies. If you have black paint and white paint, if you put them together you get grey.

So this position of adult acceptance of one's parents, which is usually what we all struggle in our teenage period to do, leads to what Melanie Klein calls 'the depressive position', because it makes you a bit depressed. It's as if part of the light has gone out of the world. You see small children with their mummy holding hands, "*My mummy*". Teenagers can't do that any more, because the world isn't like that any more. The world sinks, and then of course, teenagers want to fall in love very quickly. They want somebody else to put the idealising projection on.

Questioner: The outing of the mother?

I think that's a very nice idea, the outing of them, because if the mother is not outed, then when somebody betrays one's infantile desire for the perfect good object, we often leave. Nowadays many people go through a period of falling in love, being with someone for three months, then meeting another, then another. The search is always for the person who will be able to hold this idealised position and not reveal any of their messiness, because to share the depressive position with someone else is difficult. It's hard work to make a relationship move. But if it's going to survive through time it has to be through the sharing of the depressive position.

So just to link this up with what we were saying earlier about buddhism. The original situation of the *guru kul*, where people are living simply with the teacher, means that the issues of idealisation and the tensions that lead into the depressive position have to be worked through, because the depressive position is a mature position inasmuch as it says *both—and*, rather than saying *either—or*.

You can say that my teacher is helpful but is also a bit weird. A teacher might be very narcissistic; they might want to have a lot of attention focused on themselves; want to be very rich and famous; they might be greedy; they might be morally depraved. But they might also be very useful and helpful.

Another helpful thing that Melanie Klein pointed out was the importance of gratitude for supporting the movement into the depressive position. Often, as teenagers we can hate our parents so much, which has the useful function of helping us to separate and leave home, but it often means that it is only much later that we look back and think, "*Well, actually they were quite nice, and they*

did this for me...” Through gratitude we can go back and make a better relationship with them.

DEPRESSIVE POSITION AND PARANOID-SCHIZOID POSITION

Now in the West we have a culture which has been dedicated to individuation and the development of autonomy, and that is very different from traditional Tibetan culture which is dedicated to the maintenance of extended families, stable communities and a lifetime career in the monastery.

I think often it confuses Western people the way Tibetan teachers seem to imagine that dependence on them is a good thing. Very often we are struggling to become independent and they are saying, *“No, you just hang about here and I’ll talk about anything I want to and that will be good for you, because hanging out with your mum is very helpful.”* Because of our emphasis on autonomy and individuality, I think our culture’s also more focused on the depressive position.

Asian culture is not so much focused on that, it’s much more focused on splitting the good and the bad; which is what Melanie Klein called the paranoid-schizoid position. For example it’s general in most village cultures: *“Keep the shit in the family. Don’t tell any secrets about what we do in our family to outsiders. Show them the best face. We are all happy. We are very successful.”* Then in the middle of the night everyone beats each other up.

So for example, people associate India with Mahatma Gandhi and non-violence. But within the asian community in Britain there is a very high incidence of violent crime. The incidence of rape is very high, of murder, of the suicide or murder of young brides, of the most atrocious crimes and they are all hidden. I supervise a number of asian therapists who work with asian families. The stories of these families are worse than in the most depraved western crazy-peoples’ lives, and it’s all hidden over. Yet again and again comes the statement from the asian community: *“Oh, here we are all so successful.”*

This is exactly this splitting between the good breast, the good image, and the secret nastiness. Splitting it off so that the two never resolve. And this splitting of the good and the bad is promoted by an elected blindness. People choose not to see what is going on. And I think we need to remember that, when we think about the role of the teacher, particularly in hierarchical structures.

Because again, to link it back to my original point, when I am saying there are these different kinds of teaching that is one way whereby in Tibetan culture the nurturing function and the critical or punitive function is split off.

You have the people who function as the good teachers and who give information and support, and then you have the others who come in and do the wild stuff to rough it up a bit. And these functions are separated off.

You have the crazy yogi, you have the lama who is a bit odd, and then you have the very straight, supportive teachers. These are split roles. When they come together in one person, or when you desire them to be together in one person, that's a guarantee for disappointment.

Tape four side two

THE VICTORIAN WIFE

It's a bit like the victorian man's idea of 'a wife for children, a whore for pleasure.' The man's idea was that "My wife has to be very respectable and take care of the children and run a good family but I can't imagine her enjoying kinky sex. I have to go down the back street and pay somebody to do that, somebody who would enjoy that, because the kind of woman who would enjoy that, she's no mother for my children."

Hang onto the idea of the tension that moves in this, because then when you come onto the text and what it says about the teacher, we can see that they are trying to bring about an integration of these two positions in a very subversive move, which evokes a lot of psychological tension. That's where the confusion arises—by bringing together two things which really can't be put together without enormous fear. Just as this common police interrogation technique of the good cop and the bad cop induces absolute confusion in the criminal, making them confess much more quickly, if you can take that split up and play with it, it really it's very disorientating.

Break

THREE LEVELS OF CONNECTION WITH TEACHERS

There are three levels here of connection with teachers. One is on a social level where the teacher gives general advice and support and background information. The next level is for the teacher to teach you about the meditation to tell you what you have to do. The third level is for the teacher to actually be the focus of meditation. When the teacher operates as a guru a great deal of the teaching occurs through interactions which demonstrate how to live the dharma. He confronts the students with their limitations and through that, points them to where the work has to be done.

COGNITIVE THERAPY

You can think of the first model as being a bit like behavioural or cognitive therapy, in which somebody comes with a particular problem, say for example they feel depressed.

So then the cognitive therapist says, "*Well, tell me about your depression. What kind of depressed thoughts do you have?*"

"Well, I feel I'll never be happy."

“You’ll never be happy, never ever be happy?”

“No, never ever be happy!”

“So, you’re not entitled to be happy?”

“No, I’m not entitled to any happiness.”

“This is a very strong belief, what is the basis for this belief?”

“Well, I’ve just always believed it.”

“I’d like some evidence. This is a very powerful belief. Why do you have this belief?”

By challenging the person on their belief system, working on that level the therapist can help the person shift their position. So there are two people focusing on one task. And that is a contractual relationship in the sense that, if I’m the therapist, I know what sort of service I can provide. You are the patient; you know what sort of problem you have. We agree together to do therapy to solve that problem. So we all know what’s going on and why we’re doing it.

PSYCHOANALYTICAL TREATMENT

The second way is working in which the energy is more like a psychoanalytic treatment, where somebody comes to the treatment. Nothing is explained about the treatment except that you come three times a week on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and is told they will be seen for a fifty minute hour. That’s it.

The person comes into the room and says, “I’m not sure why I am here. You don’t speak to me.” More silence. “I really don’t know what is going on here. Why don’t you explain?”

“So you have an expectation that I should take care of you?”

In this second thing, a process starts that you are not very clear where it’s going or what will come out of it, but it’s working with the energy of a complex relationship, some of which is conscious and some of which isn’t conscious, so that although you have a contract, the contract doesn’t really tell you what’s going to happen, except that you will meet three times a week for something kind of weird to happen.

Now, if we relate that back to these different forms of Tibetan teachers, people like the village schoolteacher kind, or the *khenpos* and *geshes*, they are more like a cognitive therapist. They are available. You have a contract. They will teach you something. You know what the deal is and then you can know whether you are getting it or not.

If you have a meditation teacher who is working with energy, you have a contract: *"Will you be my teacher?" "Yes, I'll be your teacher."* That's as far as the contract goes. All kind of funny things happen. The guru might be talking about anything ...

C.R. LAMA'S STORY

Maybe I've already told you this, in which case you have a lineage story. When I first met C.R. Lama⁴, he told me this story at least two hundred times. The story of him being in Germany, on a Sunday, very hungry, unable to find anything to eat. He looked at these people going up to a wall, and it seemed they were putting money in the wall and seemed to be getting food out. He went over and he saw this happening, so he put in his money and he got food out and that was very good. And that's a very good story. Because it's such a good teaching story, he told me that many, many, many times. *Why?* As a cultural shock story it's very helpful, but as a dharma teaching story, I'm still not sure...? I had wanted him to tell me stories about Guru Rinpoche, of the magic and mystery of Tibet and instead I got ...

So what these things mean may take a long time to work out. And they can mean many, many different things. Clearly one of the things that C. R. Lama is not very interested in doing is talking about dharma all the time. But he is interested in people practising the dharma around his particular form of presentation. Sometimes you have to wonder, *"Why is he doing this? Is this dharma? Is this not dharma? What would an enlightened person do? Should they be very nice? Should they be very clean? Should they always tell uplifting stories? Should they be like Jesus at the cross-roads, saving souls? Or should they just be eating and talking and doing all these kinds of things?"*

In that way, the relationship with the particular person becomes, to use this word, a *koan*. It becomes a point at which very important work is done, not just in terms of trying to get a cognitive understanding, having understood it, but an energetic understanding. Because the solution to a koan is never a simple, *"This is what it is."* It's not a recognition on that kind of horizontal way of integrating it into the world, but it's a recognition that transforms something.

I think that's why it's very important to go and see people like C.R. Lama, these old lamas who have really got something in their life, and who embody a particular way of being which is absolutely unordinary. But I think you also need to have some tools for making sense of what goes on. If you have some understanding of meditation, if you've got some dharma ideas, then after you have a powerful experience you can think about it, and you can use the work of trying to resolve this almost traumatic encounter through a dharma understanding, so that it actually deepens your understanding of the dharma.

What you'll often encounter is the projections that you have, the expectations that this person will behave in a particular way, or take up the place of your

⁴ In 1995 when James gave this seminar, C R Lama Rinpoche was still in his body. This is no longer the case and we pray for his swift rebirth. [ed.]

good papa or your good mama and will give you all the things you've wanted. Often the guru is described as being the wish-fulfilling gem. The wish-fulfilling gem often gives you things that you didn't know you needed, and by giving you these things that you didn't know you needed; you now have something that you didn't want. So you then have an ideal of who the teacher is and you have the reality that you know the teacher every day.

DIFFICULTY IN HOLDING TWO ROLES

Questioner: ... question about lama's behaviour that can be difficult to understand

James: Sometimes for me too things can be problematic. It is not so simple for the student to simply be an empty pot for the guru to pour things in, because maybe what the guru is pouring in might be like acid; it's going to burn a hole in the pot. So what I think, in that sort of situation, is to go with some desire, wanting to get something, and with some knowledge of the dharma that will help you both speak your desire and be able to deal with what you get. In this way you can work it through. Again it goes back to this image that there will be one person who will give you everything. This kind of split. The all-good person, I think is not the case.

If you go to someone like C.R. Lama as a teacher, he won't explain the dharma very coherently to you, he won't explain how to do things, he'll just say, "*You do it. You do it because I tell you to!*" "*But what should I do?*" "*Just do it!*" So I think it is very important to know what is possible in one place, and not then to imagine that that is the whole story. Because that kind of approach is embedded—as I was trying to say earlier this morning—inside a cultural view which says that there are many ways into the knowledge. And you cannot, I think, just go for that kind of experience and nothing else. That would be like trying to live only on whisky.

And it's exactly on that point, if you engage with a teacher like that—and I hope everybody here will make some effort to meet C.R. Lama or some other teacher like him—when you find your liver gets weak, then clearly you are faced with a decision. Either you think, "*This is poisonous and it is going to kill me.*", or, you seek to strengthen your liver. And you can strengthen your liver in two ways. One, by an open faith which dissolves the toxins, but also, by expanding the place or nurturing, by studying texts, by coming to this kind of situation.

That's certainly the function of these weekends which I do here: to try to help you to have more of a conceptual understanding and a way into the practice, so that you then develop a way of having a more energetic engagement with somebody who expresses that energy, because they are very different orders of experience. I think, in my experience, the two very rarely exist in the same site and they also don't exist if one teacher exemplifies them. For example say, Z⁵ Rinpoche. He is a good scholar and he explains things very clearly,

⁵ Name of the Rinpoche is removed [ed.]

but the people he explains things to, he's not really their guru; and the people he's the guru to, he doesn't explain anything to. I think it's exactly back to this being a single-mother. It's very difficult to hold both these roles.

TRUE FACT OR TRUE FABLE?

The meditation practices that we do—say the short Rigdzin—are focused on Padmasambhava so the word 'guru' here means Padmasambhava. We can believe, according to the lineage stories that Padmasambhava is actually still alive; that he never died. Although he appeared in a human form, when he left Tibet, he left on a magic white flying horse, and he flew on this horse to an island off the south coast of India, (probably Ceylon, or near Ceylon,) where he lives on top of a copper-coloured mountain, in a wonderful palace. When you pray to him he comes from there to here.

Now, we've all been educated in school systems which have stressed the tension which exists between idealistic or romantic visions and scientific vision, and a lot of our education was probably affirming the importance of a scientific, materialistic vision.

This Tibetan world-view is developed inside a system of thought which is pre-scientific, which has no concern with rational materialism. So we have to be careful when we have a story like Padmasambhava is living in this palace on the top of a mountain and he has never died. What does it mean?

And then we can think, *"Well, what does it mean in terms of a positivistic, scientific, analytic thing?"* Well, it means it's a story, it's a fable. If we then take up that tack, we turn that story into something that eliminates our human concern but doesn't actually transform our human concern because the meaning of the story is to add to or illuminate something about how we are as humans, rather than to say there is another dimension which is not ordinarily human but which you can have access to, and by access to it, it will transform your human vision.

We have to be careful. Yesterday I mentioned Jonestown and Waco, because after that kind of event people say, *"Look what happens when people allow themselves to believe in these fantastical ideas of magical saviours. It always leads to horrible outcomes."* It's as if that neo-scientific rationality was our primary defence against the corruption of illusory, fantastical dreaming.

ETHICAL SAFEGUARDS: INTEGRATING AN ANALYTIC UNDERSTANDING WITH FAITH

Actually embedded in the Tibetan practice there are ethical safeguards which are part of this whole mythologizing, story-telling. I'm not saying that "It's just a story", but that it has that mode for us. So what we want to do is to integrate an analytic understanding of the structure of the practice, so that we are clear about why we do what we do, with a faith that lets us, with a very open-hearted energy, enter into the practice without thinking too much.

So that the analysis, as it were, comes first, so that you know why you are surrendering the analytic attention, so that it is actually safe. You use your thinking to let your heart open, because if you open your heart without knowing what's going on, then afterwards, when some doubts arise, you have no way of making sense of it.

And that's why, although my giving all these kinds of details and explanations might get a bit tedious for you after a while, I hope that they help us think about things.

Break

Tape five side one

EXPLANATION AND EMPOWERMENT

So just to again to bring together some of these themes. The deities that we meditate on come to us through two lines, which may be united. One is the explanation of the text (Tib. *tri*), and the other is the initiation and empowerment (Tib. *wang*) to do the practice. The traditional expression says that the initiation ripens people; it brings about a shift in the psyche so that one has a connection with the text and one is also ripened and able to practise. And the explanation brings about a freeing up, because you are then able to understand what it's about and why you do it and the way to do it. That's why it's important to get an initiation for the practice of Padmasambhava. The important thing is that if you feel that you need one and you want one, then you can ask and say, *"Please come and do this."*

In *Simply Being* when it's talking about the teacher, it means the kind of situation which I was describing as existing in the *guru kul* where the guru is living with the students and that's their life; just living together and practising together. I think these pages are very interesting to read because they are talking about a very extreme form in which the relationship with the teacher is used as a point or a place in which you can become clearer about your own egotistical position and the projections that arise from it.

TO ALWAYS BELIEVE WHAT YOUR GURU DOES IS GOOD

So if we just take one of them, for example Chetsangpa's instruction: *'To always believe what your guru does is good.'* So the text says: *"If your guru kills sentient beings you should believe that this is a good thing."* Is this really saying that murder is a good thing? We know that generally from the teachings of the Buddha, and just in general, murdering people is not a good thing. So we then have to think, *"Well, how is it that if the guru kills someone, it's okay, but if somebody else kills someone, that's wrong. That's kind of weird."*

Because the guru could simply be taking up the place that has always been occupied by wealthy people, by sons of royal families etc where they could

rape and kill whomsoever they wanted, and nobody dared punish them. I think rather we again have to take this up as a challenge. The question is, *“Why is he doing this? What does it mean?”*

IF THE GURU ASKS YOU TO ACT AGAINST YOUR CONSCIENCE

For example, when I stayed with C.R. Lama in Bengal, we had many white ants. These termites make a little mountain with clay, and they would make it against the house and climb up and go in and eat the books we had printed. We say, *“The dharma books are very good. How dare you eat them up?”* *Bang! “I’ve killed you.”* Now, clearly this is a piece of paper, and this little white ant is a sentient being simply feeling a bit hungry. It’s not able to see if this is a book or not. It’s not eating this dharma book because it’s a Moslem and it’s making an attack on the dharma. It’s simply hungry.

So, in the mornings I would do my practice and make the bodhisattva vow and then I’d have to go out and break all these anthills down and brush them away. When you brush them, they have very soft bodies, so some of them just.... And then we used to put kerosene on the top and DDT, and all these little things....*Brrgh!* So we start with the bodhisattva vow and then we go on to Auschwitz, because if we take the bodhisattva vow seriously, these are living things, so what are we doing killing them?

That was for me a major question. So every time the Rinpoche said, *“Hey, you have to clean these, they are everywhere,”* and would be brushing them down. Part of the fact is that we cannot live without killing things. This is part of being born in samsara, that we are always engaged, whether we want to or not, in murderous, cruel activities.

TURBULENCE COMES TO THE SURFACE WHEN WE ENGAGE WITH FULFILLING THE GURU’S DESIRE

So I had to spend a lot of time thinking, *“Why am I always being asked to do these things which seem very unpleasant and we could do something else? We could move this, we could do that...”* But at a certain point I was always called upon to do something. And I would think, *“Oh, am I just obeying orders? What kind of ethics is this? Am I killing people to please someone else?”*

The engagement with what was being asked of me raised all sorts of complex issues for me and forced me to keep thinking and keep being aware of how I existed in the world. Both on what I call this horizontal level of thinking; about where I had responsibilities. What was the most important thing, the ants or the books? And also on the vertical level, this problem was generated out of the perception that there are books and ants as separate things.

I could almost say, *“The ants are just emptiness,”* just as the Gestapo could say, *“They are just Jews,”* where you take up a definition and use it to disguise to yourself the meaning of the action you are engaged in. It’s really perverse

to use emptiness in that way. You cannot use it after the fact. Emptiness only works before the fact, so that the fact never arises.

When you read *Simply Being*, Chetsangpa says, in a kind of unilinear statement: “A good student will do this. If you want to be a good student you will do this.” This does not mean that over the door of the dharma there is a sign saying: “Leave your brains outside”. What it means is that one makes an effort to follow what is being requested. Doing this then digs up the dirt. Like yesterday’s example, the mud in the pond is shaken up. All your thoughts, all your feelings, all your judgements, all your moving, everything about you, wanting to be good, wanting to please other people, who am I, what do I believe in? All this turbulence comes to the surface through the engagement in trying to fulfil the guru’s desire.

MEETING AND ENGAGING WITH A TEACHER

In Tibetan biographies or hagiographies there are two main styles of story. One style is like the story of the yogini Machig Labdron, who desires to practise the dharma. She has many, many, many, many problems before she is free to find a teacher and practice the dharma. Everything she tries gives her problems. Then eventually at the end of all her trials: Ah!! She meets the guru and it’s all very easy. She sits down and meditates and it’s all wonderful.

The other kind of story is like Milarepa where he hears about the lama Marpa and he sets off with great joy in his heart. He sees the guru as: “Oh, wonderful, wonderful!” And that is when all his troubles begin!

I think for most people it is the second style. The process of engagement with the teaching, with an individual teacher or with different kinds of teachers throws up lots of confusion, lots of doubts, and lots of worries. We ask ourselves: “What does this all mean?” Through staying with the process of being unsettled—of thinking: “How does this help me? This is just weird!” of allowing that grinding to go on—we can get deeper and deeper into the matrix of our own assumptions, our own predictions, our own desires for security and safety.

It’s as if there is a dialectical process where the thesis is: “The dharma is good. I believe in the dharma” The antithesis is: “But, what on earth is the guru doing? This is weird.” A synthesis is somehow working through some resolution of these two positions (thesis and antithesis) in which each unsettles the other. This is a dynamic engagement with the path. It is not simple. It is not straightforward.

In that way it’s very similar to psychoanalysis, which is called the talking cure. One might think, “Well what could be easier? You go to see someone three times a week. You sit there, or you lie on a couch, very comfortable and you just talk. That must be very easy. You’re having an easy time.” Then you talk to people who go into analysis and they say, “I don’t know what’s going on. I just feel terrible. I’m so confused. I have these funny dreams. This person

doesn't help me at all. I don't know why I am going." That's what the analysis is. It's that work.

LAST PARTS OF THE NGÖNDRO PRACTICE

HRI RANG DUN: FINAL VISUALISATION

This last part of the ngöndro practice begins *Hri rang dun*. You have done the Dorje Sempa practice; at the end of the Dorje Sempa you dissolve down; then you arise out from that state of emptiness and you now start this visualisation. You are going from one visualisation into a dissolving, and then out into another visualisation.

The meaning of it is quite simple. There in the sky in front of me there is this lotus seat and on top of it there is a flat sun disc. On top of the sun disc there is a flat moon disc. Sitting on that is Padmasambhava, and around him there are his eight forms.

Again, if visualisation is very difficult for you, don't over complicate it; just keep it very, very simple. If you can't visualise clearly at all, just try to have this sense: "*Here is this enlightened form. Here is somebody who really cares for me,*" and you try to create the feeling, the sense that some powerful force is there. If you can visualise almost not at all, imagine there is a small ball of white light which is the essence of this entire mandala.

The most important thing would be to try to have a sense of his face. You see this quite impressive powerful face which is looking at you with eyes of tenderness, and with concern for you. You are trying to have a relationship with this figure. There are many forms of Guru Rinpoche. Some are very, very tender, some are peaceful and wrathful mixed, and some are very, very wrathful or angry. In the form of this ngöndro text, it's quite a tender form.

WHY THE LINEAGE GURUS ARE SO VERY IMPORTANT

So we are looking at this form and then we start to pray to the lineage gurus. The lineage gurus are very important in Tibetan buddhism because it is the transmission of a revelation which appeared at one time out of the nature of reality, and has been maintained by people who have kept it very carefully. It developed out of reality. Reality has revealed itself.

In zen buddhism they talk about the 'transmission of the lamp', because it's like the Buddha Shakyamuni when he became enlightened—'en-lightened'. He got light, he got open, he got fresh—and he was then able to pass this light onto someone else. In each generation, people are given this transmission. That's really what an initiation is; it's a way of opening yourself to the light, getting touched by the light of the teacher.

The teacher then has both to protect the light so that it's not blown out, (which he or she does by their own meditation,) and then they have to be able to display the light, when it is appropriate, to other people so they see

something. The lineage of gurus is the people who have passed this precious light to each other. And we know, from the history of the world, how many cultures have vanished—South American Indians, Papua New Guinea, whole cultural civilisations have just vanished like that. We know when the Huns invaded from the north, when Genghis Khan invaded from the east that a lot was destroyed. When the big library in Alexandria burned, many, many books vanished. It's so very easy to lose knowledge. So the lineage is a very precious thing, people who have tended this wisdom.

In a supermarket or in a book shop you can buy books, and it's as if we are a piece of wet wood and by reading the books and by struggling with the ideas we get a little bit dry so that when we go for the initiation, or we go on pilgrimage, or we do puja together, we get dry enough for the spark to catch. Some of us may be very, very wet, so we might not burn, but we may just smoulder with a bad smell and a lot of smoke! Each of these people has passed this on. It's a human communication. This enlightenment doesn't just fall out of the sky. It comes, in general, from one person to another, and so it's a form of human communication.

THE LINEAGE PRAYER

Gyal wa gong gyud. This is the first part of the lineage, where the Buddha transmits to another person directly, mind to mind.

The second is *Rig dzin da gyud*. *Rigdzin* here means 'like a great meditator'. These great meditators received a direct transmission from the Buddha and then were able to show it to other people by a symbol, or a gesture, usually a *mudra* of some kind that was transmitted across. It is a bit like if you had, say a very good dancer and a choreographer; the choreographer is just able to make a gesture and the dancer is able to interpret that. A very light intuitive wisdom in the dancer that can just take it forward.

Then the next is the second line: *Gang zag nyen gyud*. This is the speech lineage, where we communicate to each other through speaking into people's ears. That's like when the choreographer has to say, "Aha, not like that. Watch me; I'm going to show you. You turn your hand like that, and then you open." So you are describing very clearly, very carefully.

Then we have *Mon lam wang kur gyud* which is the lineage of people who gained initiation directly from Padmasambhava. In particular, in the Nyingma tradition, it means when Guru Rinpoche gave initiation to the close disciples and said, "In a future life you will be reborn and you will be a treasure-revealer, and you will go to this place and reveal this teaching."

Then *Ka bab lung gyud* is those who were permitted to do particular practices such as the *Vajrakilaya* practice.

Then there is *Kha dro tad gyai gyud* which is the lineage that comes through the dakinis. When Padmasambhava was teaching in Tibet he didn't just instruct human Tibetans; he also instructed the dakinis, who are feminine

goddesses or spiritual principles; however you want to imagine it. They held the teachings safe and then later transmitted them on to humans.

Then we have *Lae thro ter gyud* which means it goes back to the *ka bab lung gyud*; the people who were given permission, who were the close disciples of Padmasambhava. When these people later reincarnated they revealed these secret *terma*.

Tape five side two

The final lineage here is the *Shog ser tsig gi gyud*. Once the tertons had revealed the treasure for the first time they wrote it down, traditionally on a special yellow paper, and then transmitted it, usually to just one student. That would be the beginning of the lineage.

So these four lines contain a very condensed form of the whole Nyingma history of the treasure doctrines. This also has a cultural form. This is written in a traditional form where value and meaning are located in the past, and everything of value has to have an origin in the wise ones of the past. That's very different from our way now, where we think everything good lies in the future. For example what is now happening in laboratories, will result in cures for cancers and other illnesses in the future. It's a very different orientation.

The next two lines continue: *'We pray to all these people in the lineages just mentioned, and to the peaceful and wrathful deities who maintain the teachings that have been transmitted and to the dakinis and dharma protectors that support them.'*

We identify all these people right from the beginning of time, right from Kuntuzangpo, the original Buddha, coming down through Padmasambhava, to all the people in the lineage since then, right down to the present time, which is the people who transmit these teachings to you.

This is what makes studying Tibetan buddhism so unique. It's not as if there is a generalised buddhism where you can go and do a bit here and a bit there. When you come into the tantric practices, you actually have a lineage, which means establishing a particular relationship with particular people doing a particular form of practice. So although it's about opening yourself up and having more freedom, it also implies a particular commitment.

CONFESSION

The next three lines say, *"We pray to you with devotion. We offer you many wonderful things and we take refuge in you. And we also confess before you all the breaches in our vows, and all the ways we have made mistakes."*

One could go into many details here since many different faults have been identified and grouped into many different categories, sometimes according to what vows one has taken, such as tantric vows. For our purposes what is important at this point is just to think, *"I recommit myself to this practice. I am*

aware that I have been lazy, I've forgotten to do things and I have been confused. I want to clean out my relationship with the lineage, and with the practice."

IMPLORING THE GURU

Then we have this short prayer imploring the guru, where we call out, "*Guru, think of me!*" We are not just saying, "*I am thinking of you,*" but "*You also have to think of me, because I want a relationship with you!*" I don't want to sit in my lonely bed thinking about you, Guru. I want you to be thinking about me. So we phone each other and meet in the middle of the night for a good time. This is very important, because remember, when we do the dissolving meditation, "*I want you to dissolve in me,*" and the other is coming: "*I am happy to dissolve in you.*" It has to be mutual.

Sometimes it can appear as if the visualisation is just two-dimensional, it's a bit flat, like an image in a book. It's through this kind of prayer that we're saying, "*Think of me. You are real.*" You need to build up the relationship thinking: I need you and I also want you to think about me.

So this page, that begins *Eh lama khyen no* down to *khyen no khyen*, that's what you recite a lot.

The four lines after that you could also recite a lot of, but for this purpose once is enough. And then you say one of the following things: "*Me and all others, please give us initiation and teaching to free the minds of myself and all beings. Give us these four initiations. Remove the four obscurations. Protect us from going in all bad places and hold us. Keep us with you in all our future lives.*"

THE FOUR INITIATIONS

So your visualisation—particularly Guru Rinpoche in the middle surrounded by these other eight forms, with the whole tree, as much as you can visualise—as you are reciting these *lama khyen no* verses, you are imagining from the crown of his head rays of white light, from his neck rays of red light, from his heart rays of blue light, these are merging into you, purifying the sins of your body, of your speech, and of your mind.

So your body is becoming filled with rainbow light just as in the earlier meditation. You can do the meditation while you are reciting. On this last page, when it says on the second line *wang zhi kur*, "*Give us these four initiations and purify these four obscurations.*" that's what it means. It means the white light, red light and blue light, separately. And then all together, for the four initiations.

THE DISSOLVING

Having done that, visualise the whole refuge tree and everybody in the tree dissolves into the central Guru Rinpoche. Then Guru Rinpoche comes to the

top of your head and he dissolves down into a ball of light. Then dissolving in the usual way; and then you dissolve into that; and you stay with that as long as you can.

end