
Dzogchen and its Relation to Mahayana and Tantra

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Lahr, Germany

5th-6th December, 2009

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Excerpts:

... Sitting quietly in meditation you can examine the birth of samsara when the openness of the mind gets lost sight of as the subject is mesmerised by the object and so forgets its own ground.

...

This world is meaningless. We give meaning to the world. The meanings which seem to exist out there are all projected.

...

Thoughts are very fragile; they don't live very long and they can't do very much. There is no end to thinking and thoughts do not establish anything reliable. However, we use these thoughts to create the whole world. Every day we are constructing this great edifice of samsara with our thoughts. Thoughts are very young, they like to play. Let them play. The point here is, don't ask your thoughts to give you the meaning of existence. They cannot do that. Don't ask thoughts to do what they can't do.

...

Tantra is a path of activity, and one of its strengths is that it gives us something to do. There are mudras to do with your hands, a dorje and bell to hold, instruments to play, things to read, and many things to visualise. The beauty and the skilful organisation of these patterns of movements allows such a focus of attention that there is no spare aspect of the mind to be caught up in distraction. In tantra you are working with energy, with the transformation of your experience of what is occurring. However in dzogchen one is concerned simply to relax into the natural purity of the open state....

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Devotion belongs to a particular path. It is very important not to mix the different levels of practice together. Each style of practice has a view, a meditation, a conduct and a result, and when we practice them we should do so according to the precise frame of the practice. If we start comparing and contrasting them, we will become disturbed. From the point of view of dzogchen, devotion is not so important. It is not that people shouldn't have faith and respect, but devotion is a projective quality.

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Zhiné: slowing down and beginning to see

Let us begin with some quiet sitting. We can do this by simply focusing on the movement of the breath over the end of the nostrils. One of the advantages of doing that is that the focus of attention is on sensation, and in that there are fewer hooks for the elaboration of thought. Or you can choose an external object, maybe a mark on the floor or the back of someone in front of you and just focus your attention on that. We want to sit in a comfortable position so that our spine is as straight as possible with the shoulders open and relaxed. The hands are usually in the lap with the left hand resting on the right, and the mouth is slightly open with the tongue resting on the hard palette above. The gaze is down, roughly running along the line of the nose, and the eyes are slightly open with the breath flowing easily without any pressure. Then when we find that our attention has been captured by some thought, feeling or external sensation we very gently bring it back on the simple object of attention. It is not important where the mind goes; all that is important is what we have decided to focus on.

The purpose of this practice is to allow the habitual link between consciousness and a diverse range of objects to settle. The habitual tendency to be curious about our own experience, to find some personal meaning in what is going on, is also being allowed to settle so that all the familiar objects of our interests, internally and externally, are just being redefined as 'stuff'. The more we can do that the more freedom we have. And as we will see later, the more we can have a neutral attitude to what is there we have two things: one is a greater choice about how we will respond to what is there, and the other is a greater capacity to see things as they are.

In Tibetan this practice is called zhiné. *Zhi wa* means peaceful and *ne pa* means to stay. Clearly, if you are at home relaxing, maybe listening to music or watching the TV, and suddenly the telephone rings it disturbs the state you are in. That is to say, the states of tranquillity that we usually have are very relative; they exist only as long as disturbing factors can be kept out of the situation. This meditation is a practice to help us move away from reactivity.

There is an old saying, "*All that glitters is not gold*" and in the same way a great deal of what happens in our mind is nonsense. But it is our nonsense and so it seems somehow fascinating even though it is nonsense. For example some young people go out to make graffiti. They can spend hundreds of hours doing their tag-signs again and again. It is an activity which seems to go nowhere, developing nothing, and yet, for those involved in it, it is incredibly important. It can be experienced as a struggle against the despotic power of the education system; society writes itself over children in very deep letters and so the young

people return the favour by writing their name over the world. Likewise any action or event may be invested with meaning.

Making our mark

The power of marking is very important; to mark means to leave a trace, to shape something. The buddhist teaching on karma is essentially an explanation of the nature of marks. When we act on the world, when we bring our energy out into the environment, we impact the field of experience, and through that we assert our individual identity. We say, *"I exist. I am like this"*. But of course when we do that, the world is not passive; the world will mark us back. The consequence of our action is returned to us not immediately but primarily as a later-developing pattern in the system of marks that constitute what we call our world.

For example, looking around in this room we see that it has four walls which are painted different colours. The basic potential of the wall has been marked in some way and four different pots of paint were involved. Having marked the walls, the walls now mark us. We look at the walls and they registers on us in some way. We can examine our own embodied experience and see what is it like to look at a red wall or a green wall or a yellow wall or a white wall? On the energetic level there is some difference and we are influenced by this.

For example, if we look at this wall here we see this is red. However, we don't actually see that it is red; we see some-thing to which we apply the name, 'red'. You cannot see red, as red is a name applied on top of experience, added into the matrix of experience. It is a conventional interpretation or shaping of what is arising. In the same way, we hear a sound outside which sounds like a 'motorbike', and in that way we are grasping something that is already vanishing. Through the marking of it we pull it into our system of interpretation. On a good day that makes us feel quite powerful because we are able to name and label things and we know what is what, and that habit of naming, labelling, knowing, moving things around, creating stories, becomes part and parcel of who we are. That is to say, our personal identity is primarily cognitive. Thus, when we sit to do the zhiné meditation practice we experience the continuous flow of thoughts, and these thoughts are the building blocks for our sense of who we are. But if we are not thinking, then who are we?

If you go fully into this practice it is quite radical because it means that you are letting go of the bricks and mortar out of which you construct your sense of who you are. To sit and just pay attention to the breath going in and out is to enter a diminished sense of existence. It is diminished in terms of our ordinary frame of reference in that we are not being very interesting as people, not making any great discoveries. It is like asking children, *"What did*

you do at school today?" "Nothing". "What did you do in meditation?" "Nothing." "What do you like to do when you have free time?" "Oh, I just watch my breath going in and out."

This practice involves a huge renunciation. Things which would ordinarily be seen as useful, supportive and developmental of our quality of existence are being renounced. We are saying, "The contents of my mind are not intrinsically interesting." And yet that is hard to do, for when we sit in a practice the thought catches us and says, "*Of course this is fascinating, and this is me, so there is no reason to ignore it.*" When this happens we are being interrupted by our own past habits. Why is it difficult to let go of these constructions? Because they are the interface between ourselves and the world in which we live. The whole world is a construction; everything is created by the mind, but having got involved in this process of creation of seeming entities through identification, some of our energy, some of our quality of life, becomes embedded in the object.

In looking at how Rembrandt's self-portraits developed throughout the course of his life, you get the sense of the presence of an actual person. It is as if Rembrandt poured himself into the paintings, and it is as if by looking at the painting, we *see* Rembrandt. In the same way our habitual thoughts have become invested with the qualities of our existence, so that when the thought arises it is as if the thought is confirming our identity. Therefore, letting go of these thoughts is to release the familiar building blocks of identity, and to see that life forces which have been projected out of us and taken to be a quality of the object, can be taken back.

This world is meaningless. *We* give meaning to the world. The meanings which seem to exist out there are all projected. On the road here we passed a big church that was built at a time when many people went to church. Nowadays not so many people go to church. A church has become a symbol of the emptiness of christian life. At one time it was a symbol of the fullness of the christian life. In these moments we can see how a wave of energy arises, coming through many people, and with it something comes into existence. Then something changes, a mood changes, the zeitgeist changes and the energy is no longer invested.

So many things in our life are like that; things which were once flowing in the sea of vitality, of immediacy suddenly become just 'stuff' in our life and we don't know what to do with it. For me that is especially the case with books. I have books that I know I will never read again in this life, but I still don't want to get rid of them. So I live in a clutter of books and papers all of which symbolise the past. I don't need them but I do need them. On a functional, practical, pragmatic level I don't need them, but on a symbolic level I need them

because they hold parts of me which once existed and which I still hear as a kind of echo. Who would I be if I didn't stand in relation to these phenomena?

One of the functions of zhiné meditation practice is to allow us to let go of the familiar objects of our internal furniture and external furniture of our lives. If I stop constructing myself who will I be? This practice allows us to see the process whereby we construct ourselves. It involves a shift from seeing these familiar thoughts as supports and allies to recognising them to be a disturbance. However we tend to have conflicting intentions. For example we might have an aspect of ourselves which wants to have more spaciousness, more calm, less turbulent, but at the same time we might want to be competent, alive and engaged in enjoying our lives. On a general level calmness and movement are opposites, silence and noise are opposites. When noise arises silence ends; for silence to be present noise has to vanish.

When a thought catches us what is happening? One minute we are sitting focused on our breath and the next minute we are caught up in a chain of thoughts. What is it like to be in a thought? Where did you go? It looks like we go somewhere; our body is here but we seem to have gone. That is very interesting. Where is it that the thought takes us? That is something for each of us to investigate again and again. There is a quality of having our attention merged into a thought so that nothing else seems to exist; we are found and lost at the same time. We find ourselves caught up in a thought and in that moment we are lost to the world.

We see this a lot in school classes: the teacher is doing their best to teach, the students bodies are in the classroom but their minds are somewhere else because they are caught up in daydreams. The teacher has to try to bring them back to where they are. But if this is where they are, where have they been? This is a real point of enquiry for us, for it opens another question which is *'What is the point at which we go from being where we are to being somewhere else whilst being where we are?'* This point of slippage is enormously important because if it is happening on automatic pilot, outside conscious thought, then we have no choice – it just happens. When this happens we are in our life, this is our existence, and yet our existence is happening to us rather than us being involved in the process of making decisions about it. In that way our conscious capacity to attend, to track what is occurring, collapses as we merge with an arising.

Sitting quietly in meditation you can examine the birth of samsara as the openness of the mind gets lost sight of as the subject is mesmerised by the object and so forgets its own ground. 'I' as a subject am enmeshed in the world of objects. I surrender myself, dissolve myself, into the moments of appearance, and then I come back to being 'myself'. Both self and its objects are experienced as being truly existing. Yet there is no defining substance in

either. How does our openness and presence, be it relative or infinite, suddenly become lost? Without going anywhere else we are gone; we are here but not here. This is the point of separation from a natural openness and ceaseless clarity, and the consequent falling into the waves of arisings which put us at the mercy of whatever forces are moving through us.

If we want to see what is actually going on we have to observe ourselves. The practice of zhiné is very useful for this. By slowing down the rapidity of reactivity in our consciousness we start to be able to hold a focussed consciousness for long enough to start to see what is going on. It is like having a pause button on the control for a DVD player. When you are watching a conjurer doing his tricks it is difficult to catch his sleight of hand. They have rehearsed their movements with the cards so many times that it is like a seamless flow, but when we can slow everything down and pause and examine then we start to see, *“Oh, that is how they do it.”*

We are doing something similar with our own mind when we practice zhiné. The key question is, *“How do I cheat myself. How do I get lost again and again when I have decided I don’t want to get lost?”* No amount of rigorous determination or heroic energy is going to stop this process of getting lost. For if you set up a further dynamic of trying to control what happens in your mind then every time you fail to carry out your clear intention it is likely to evoke feelings of guilt, shame, worthlessness and so on. This is not helpful in any way because it leads to a further level of alienation, separation and loss of attention.

This practice of zhiné is not a heroic path. In tantra there are many heroic practices – practices of power and energy, such as dominating and controlling – but this is a different style of practice. The clear motif here is collaboration. If the problem, as understood in buddhism, is the basic split, or duality, between subject and object, then conquering one by the other is not going to solve the problem. In the deeper tantric practices, of course, everything is done with the understanding of emptiness, but because of the ego’s insidious, sneaky way of coming into the heart of whatever is going on, it is easy to get lost.

The main focus in dzogchen is to see the actual collaboration between subject and object, so that their dynamic co-emergence can be integrated with basic openness. The status of both as energy can be directly perceived within the space of awareness. The natural state, or the natural condition of the mind itself, is neither subject nor object. It is not something which can be caught or appropriated; it is simply an open awareness which reveals whatever is there. The mood of our practice is therefore very gentle, very present, relaxed and open.

Opening up the practice of dzogchen

The basic principle of dzogchen is that from the very beginning everything has been pure. We have always been pure, our very nature is pure. That is to say, none of the limitations in within which we live are absolute. They are relative; they stand in relation to circumstances. What is the relative? It is the movement of the mind. Both our subjective thoughts, feelings, sensations, and the objects that they seem to be in contact with, are moving and changing all the time. On the level of the relative we have many limitations. The current patterning of ourselves and the current patterning of our environment often do not seem to fit well. For example, I don't speak German. That is a limitation for I cannot speak directly to you, and if you want to speak to me you have to move out of your mother tongue. Not knowing German is a limitation on the movement of my energy as it expresses itself in this environment. There is a limitation to my capacity. Does that mean that I am limited? On the level of being a person, it is absolutely the case because there is a limit to my conduct. Am I my personality? Is the structure of how I manifest in the world definitive of the totality of my potential? This is what we ordinarily feel: we exist in our body, we have our personal history: *"This is me and I can do some things and not others. I know this about myself and this is how it is for me."* We can go round and round this circle again and again and we don't find any door because, *'I am what I am'*.

The question is less 'what am I?' but "how am I?"

Reflecting on the impermanence of 'outer' and 'inner' phenomena opens up the question of *how* am I? What am I as my identity is spread out through time? Time is a medium across which our individual, personal self is spread out, in that different aspects of ourselves are revealed in different situations. That is to say, the more I see *how* I am, the more I start to recognise that I am an unfolding process rather than an entity which seems to be revealed by talking about *what* I am. We can apply this, of course, not just to ourselves but to anything. For example, I was learning yesterday that this town had a huge military airport, and now it is not functioning in that way. This has brought about changes to what this town is and how it functions; the kind of jobs that are available, the amount of foreign currency that comes into the local economy and so on. Thus the name of this town, when considered over time, indicates many different capacities and potentials. The name remains, whilst all that it refers to is changing.

There are two main ways of looking at the content of the mind. From one point of view I am a thing, I can define who I am, and from another, I am an unfolding revelation. The former view is familiar to us; it is the general paradigm of samsara. The view of unfolding is very different. It does not describe a showing of what was inside me but rather the co-emergence of what we take to be the subject and what we take to be the object. The showing of 'me being me' is co-dependent with the way other people are manifesting in relationship with

me. Seeing how the content of our experience is a dynamic unfolding we start to see that everything about 'me' is situational. For example your mother tongue is dependent upon your mother. It also depends on whether your mother spoke her mother tongue to you. It also depends on the kind of school you go to, the kind of relationship between what happens at home and outside and so on. That is to say, I become myself through being with others. The centre of myself, in the ordinary sense of a self, is not somewhere deep inside me but is the ever-revealing interactive surface of my existence.

Identity is surface not depth. We don't have a 'real' self somewhere inside us. Rather, we come into existence moment-by-moment according to the circumstances that we find ourselves in. In this view we don't 'exist' as something apart from the flow; our existence is a stream of moments in the flow. Thus how I can be is determined as much by the experiential field as by things inside me. But what does it mean to talk about things 'inside me'? 'My memories' 'My tendencies'? I can remember some things, but it's not always the same things that come to mind when I try to remember some event in childhood. That is to say, memories, tendencies and so on, are not located in a stable, fixed way inside ourselves, the way the contents of our bags are. You can have a photograph of some event in the past, which evokes certain memories when you see it, but we don't have memories in the same way that we have photographs. The memory is arising situationally, contextually. Whatever we are, what we take to be the constituent parts of ourselves are like little flows or streams, not even of water but more like different gusts of wind blowing in the sky. That is to say, I am constructed moment-by-moment out of the arising of little bursts of experience, which create patterns like a child's kaleidoscope.

The only way to actually understand this is to investigate your own experience. When you are sitting and not doing very much, maybe waiting for a bus or something like that, just observe what it is like to have 'stuff' happening inside you. We find ourselves thinking of something; the thought is 'inside us', it is our thought but we didn't particularly think it. It just seemed to come to us. It seemed to have come from us to us. That is something to observe. What is that?

As we begin to see the dynamic movement of our thoughts we see that nothing is fixed; there is no possible stability of identity in terms of what is arising and passing. Moreover, all the effort that we make when we move in this world of seemingly fixed, secure entities, and in particular all the stories that we tell, do not secure anything because we cheat ourselves and other people. We don't do this lying and cheating because we are essentially bad, but because we are dreaming, captivated by an illusion, and the illusion that everything is fixed and truly existing.

What is being pointed out here is the importance to discern what it is that we take to be ourselves. The patterns of energy, of experience, of all the thoughts, feelings, sensations, colours, and so on which we encounter and with which we are identified, are not who we are. This is an identification which is not done by someone, rather the someone who *seems* to do it is itself the fruit of identification. For example, if I say, "*I lift the glass,*" we normally have the sense that there is an 'I' inside who is doing the act of raising or lowering the glass. But this 'I' is co-emergent with the rising of the glass. The action of raising the glass brings into being the one who is raising the glass. That is to say, moment-by-moment our self-identification is coming into existence in the context of that which it manifests in. It is created out of the coming together of these events, it is not some *deus ex machina*, some kind of spirit or god hovering somewhere else.

It is vital that we examine this until we see it clearly for ourselves. It is not a belief that I am trying to sell you. Whether you believe it or not is irrelevant because a belief is only in your mind as long as you believe in it. You say 'I believe it' and it seems completely true and the next moment you are wondering about what you are going to have for lunch and then this new life-changing belief has gone out of your mind. However if we taste what is there, if we have a direct non-conceptual experience of the ungraspable nature of our being, of our presence, then that is a flavour that can be our effortless companion. It becomes massaged into our way of being. Therefore, whilst we are here together we can make some small experiments. When we have lunch, or when we are talking with people or walking in the street, we can simply observe ourselves in relation to circumstances. Perhaps you walk down the street looking in the shop windows, when suddenly you find you have stopped. Something in a shop window has caught you. What is that like, the sense that '*Oh now I am looking at that*'? Observe what happens in the body. What are we saying to ourselves in that situation? Is the observer something apart from the situation?

[We come into existence in relation to particular objects and situations](#)

The one who is looking is coming into being on the basis of the object that has caught it. Before that you were walking down the street, perhaps chatting to someone or wrapped up in your thoughts, and the sudden perception of something interesting in a shop window interrupts that and you find yourself being in a different way. That is to say, we come into existence in relation to particular objects and situations. Without this particular object we would not exist in this moment, in this particular way. We are being born anew in this moment.

It is important to examine this again and again in order to experience the dynamic nature of our existence, otherwise the false control system of the ego will always appropriate the

situation into its narrative of entities. The ego likes to colonise. It enters into the lived moment to put a mark onto it, a marker that says, *'This belongs to me. I am in control of this'*, or on a more basic level, *'This is about me. I have some part in this'*. The ego wants confirmation and it will achieve that confirmation by good means or by not so good means. We can see this operating in the world, in politics and in economics and, clearly, it operates in us.

The ego has an anxious desire to stay in existence and to get attention and this has to be relaxed and released. In the tantric tradition this is done by transforming oneself into a deity, an essenceless radiant form. This new empty open translucent site of identification reveals the mandala within which the anxious, grasping, centralising force of the ego can be deconstructed by means of offerings, or blandishments or even by destruction if necessary.

The view and practices of dzogchen have a different orientation. The basis is the natural purity of our mind, our presence, our being. That is to say we who are sitting here with our thoughts, feelings and sensations are *'having experience'*. The experiencer, that which is experienced, and the activity of experiencing are all revealed to us through the natural clarity of our own mind. We are both the interactive experiencer and the ungraspable awareness which has no content of its own.

Just as a mirror effortlessly shows whatever is put in front of it, so the natural clarity of our own awareness is revealing the movement of subject and object as they ceaselessly flow. A mirror has no personal content; when you look in a mirror the mirror is showing something which is not the mirror. Our awareness is always showing that which is arising, but what is arising is not the true nature of the mirror itself. If you have some good thoughts and you experience yourself feeling tender and compassionate towards someone, these thoughts may make you in some way a *'good person'* but they don't give you a good awareness. Similarly, if you have a series of very selfish, negative thoughts – if you strongly identify with these thoughts and want to put into plan the hurtful activities that arise in your mind –we could say that that makes you a *'bad person'*, but it doesn't make your awareness bad.

Awareness reveals what is there but it is never contaminated, marked or limited by what arises. This means that our true nature is not at the mercy of the karmic currents of whatever is manifesting for us. You don't have to improve the contents of your mind so that you become worthy of being present in, and as, the nature of the mind. This is not an initiatory path where you have to show that as the neophyte you are worthy of crossing the threshold into the sacred domain. From the very beginning the pure undefiled nature of the mind and all the stuff that has being arising in your mind have been inseparable, just as there are always reflections in the mirror. But, of course when we look at the mirror we don't see the mirror, we see the reflections.

This identification takes two forms. One form is of pushing away the things I don't want to be identified with, and the other form is of pulling towards me and fusing with the things I do want to be identified with. In this, we can see the three root poisons which give rise to all the troubles of samsara. Stupidity or ignorance is not recognising that the mirror is the ground of the reflections. On the basis of taking the reflections to be truly existing, truly real, the dualising view of subject and object start their interaction which operates on the basis of attraction and repulsion, desire and anger, or attachment and aversion. And this pushing away and pulling in is the central pulsation of all the interactions of the world.

Our existence as an ego is based on a continuous flow of discriminations: 'Yes – No', 'I like – I don't like', 'This is me – This is not me'. Of course, we live in a culture where we have an infinite number of choices and this may seem like a great luxury with endless opportunities to assert our individuality through our decision-making, but from a buddhist point of view, consumerist capitalism, with its focus on the endless development of commodities, is like a sign of the end of the world. For the more there is to endlessly intrigue the ego, keeping it busy searching for the truth of existence in the realm of the object, and the more the ego constructs its sense of self out of what it possesses, the intoxication with the realm of reflections becomes almost total. Then there is less and less possibility of a gap in which one could see ... "Oh! – there is a mirror."

In contrast, in the practice of dzogchen the central point is to relax *into* the ever-present natural state of openness. We let go of the desire to exist in a realm of busy dualistic involvement, and very gently observe the arising and passing of experience from the state of the mirror. With this we start to see that our calm, unchanging, open awareness is inseparable from the flow of experience which arises in the form of subject and object. Relaxing into the primordial purity of our own nature we are the presence which is present through all the different changes and movements of what is arising as our experience.

Nothing has to be changed. We are still here in our familiar world, yet now we see that both are a reflection. This body and this world are in the same dimension; there is no threshold between me and the world. Ceaselessly I flow out into the world and the world flows into me. On a bodily level that is obvious as we are breathing in and breathing out. But also we move out through our senses into the world and the world comes into us through our senses. They are not crossing any border; there is no fixed or real boundary between self and world. That doesn't mean that we are just at the mercy of what happens, for what happens is co-emergent. We are participants, not controlling agents or passive victims.

In this state of open awareness there is the immediate facticity, the givenness, of presence. Being alive, there is an undeniable presence, but not the presence *of* something, not a presence *as* something, but just this open clarity that eludes description.

Within this open state we manifest. Our body, voice and mind continue with their familiar patterns, yet they are summoned forth by, and within, the field of participation. They are not our personal possessions, being rather the modes through which non-dual compassionate communication occurs. Who are we? We are the open unchanging awareness; we are the inseparable arising of subject and object, the particular precise unrepeatable gestures of the interplay of the energies of the field of becoming.

Thus, we are the openness, the non-dual immediacy, and the precision of our energetic movement moment-by-moment. This is what is going on just now – it is not something mystical. We don't need to change our clothing to do it. We don't need to get a letter from our mothers to do it – because it is already like this. It is not an artificial creation; rather this natural condition is hidden from us by our own artificiality. This is why in dzogchen the focus is not on creating new and better experiences. We simply relax and allow the self-liberation of experience moment-by-moment.

Tantra is working with energy: dzogchen is about relaxing

The tantric paths are generally organised in two modes. One is the developing phase and the other is the completion stage. One creates or develops the mandala of the deity in all its details and recites the mantras which bring it into non-conceptual experience. Then it's completed or dissolved through its integration in the direct experience of its emptiness, through our understanding of the channels and so on. That is a path of activity, and one of the real strengths of tantra is that it gives us something to do. You have mudras to do with your hands, a dorje and bell to hold, instruments to learn to play, things to read, and many things to visualise. The beauty and the skilful organisation of these patterns of movements allows such a focus of attention that there is no spare aspect of the mind to be caught up in distraction. What is important to understand is that in tantra you are working with energy; you are working with the transformation of your experience of what is occurring.

However, in dzogchen one is concerned simply to relax into the natural purity of the open state. This is a state which is raw or unconditioned; it hasn't been cooked or prepared in any way, it hasn't been influenced by anything which has ever occurred. This is completely different from our ordinary sense of experience. On the level of the personality, unless we are under the power of some neurosis or psychosis, we are constantly responding to the environment. A sign of our mental health is our capacity to be touched and moved, as we

find ourselves changing in relation to whatever occurs. But the mind itself never changes. This is very radical. The reason for explaining this in detail is that when we sit in the meditation practice and relax and open, our experience continues. Our thoughts, feelings, sensations and so on will continue to arise, and all that require of us is that we relax into the openness and allow the arising of whatever occurs. The central instruction is to do nothing at all. In the openness of primordial purity everything happens by itself, self-arising and self-liberating.

The ego is part of what is self-arising, yet within this it claims a pseudo-autonomy. Just as Scotland is part of Great Britain but Scotland would like to have independence, so the ego is part of the integration of the three kayas but is constantly making claims for independence. It believes that life would be better with independence but it has no basis for it because it doesn't own anything. Scotland looks at Ireland and sees that it has a got a great deal of money from the European community, and thinks that if we become independent we will become a strong nation by getting a lot of money from someone else. This is the same as the ego, for the ego has nothing, it is only a name: 'I'. But it is very, very hungry, and it feels very entitled. This is not a theory, this is something we can observe in meditation; to can see how we repeatedly surrender into the seeming truth of what is arising and so feel the need to appropriate what we like and push away what we don't like.

Natural awareness is open and fresh to whatever comes

'Fresh' is another term which is used to describe this natural awareness. Fresh means not covered by anything and not collapsed in on itself. When an apple is growing on a tree it is absolutely fresh but as soon as you take it off the tree it begins the process of dulling. It is the same with every moment of existence. This moment is fresh but if we try to keep it as a memory it becomes dulled.

In European philosophy there has been a lot of consideration about whether it is possible to get or find or define the thing itself. From Plato down through Husserl and so on, in various ways many great minds have struggled with the question of whether it is possible to have a direct unmediated experience of something.

From a buddhist perspective, it is possible, but not if you start from the ego. The ego cannot have that sort of experience. Only the freshness of the unborn awareness can directly register the immediate facticity of the transient moment. By the time our cognitive processing has made sense of the event, the event has already gone. The ego is essentially a kind of ghost. The life of the moment has gone and the ego ghost runs around in the ruins, creating images and narratives of entities that once were. The function of relaxing into the open state is to have the direct, immediate freshness present moment-by-moment, forever.

In autumn, with the days getting shorter, we tend to feel a little tired and perhaps a bit depressed. It is not like the summer time where everything is growing and ripening. Then the sun was shining, you were relaxed, warm and everything was good, and you felt fresh. In the autumn we put on more clothes and nature looks like it is starting to close down. It is very important to see that when we talk of freshness in dzogchen, it does not mean this kind of freshness. Summer time gives us a freshness based on causes and conditions. We feel happy when the sun shines and cry when the rain falls. However, freshness in dzogchen means being open to the freshness of whatever comes without editing and without bias.

In order to experience this, we have to allow the self-liberation of our judgements, our biases and our prejudices. Thus, when we are sitting in meditation and for example, have a sequence of thoughts that we don't much like, there arises an aversion to them. It is as if the presence of these thoughts is contaminating 'me': *"I don't want to be the kind of person who has these thoughts."* This sequence is the interaction of subject and object: *"I am being persecuted by my thoughts."* The one who is being persecuted is a thought: one impermanent arising is tormenting another impermanent arising. In that moment don't do anything ... just relax ... the thought movement will continue for a while and then it will go. Don't get involved, leave the subject and object alone. Let go of the subject side and let go of the object side, remain in open presence.

[No need to help someone leave if they are already on their way out](#)

In dzogchen, buddhahood or enlightenment is not seen as something divine nor is it seen as something human. When it is described as the natural state, it is describing a state which is without any elaboration, without any artifice. Actually it is not a state—it is not a state of anything. It just is; it is the given. Openness is beyond any kind of grasping. You can't decide that it is 'this' or 'that'. It has no shape or colour. Yet it is the source of the various forms which arise, and they arise according to circumstances.

When you observe yourself interacting with others, if you relax and allow yourself to be present, you will find that you are different with different people. If you take up a rule-based direction for your activity then you can try to maintain a particular position. You might decide: *"I want to be a nice friendly person and to treat everyone in a friendly way."* That is your desire and your practice but it is quite artificial because it is actually full of deceit. Being nice to people you don't like is false. Why should you not be unpleasant to people you don't like? *"Well we shouldn't!" "What would happen if everyone behaved that way?" "No we have to be good, we have to do it."* The problem for meditators who act in this way is that when we are trying to be the person we think we should be, we are denying ourselves the opportunity of observing who we actually are. If you observe yourself you might see that sometimes you

are rather a nasty person and that you can be quite cruel, selfish, envious and so on. If you avoid getting caught up in judging the contents, you may start to see the discontinuity at the heart of the ego-self. Moreover, even if you do make a judgement such as, *"I don't want to be like this – this is terrible!"* the 'negative' thought comes and it goes.

It is very difficult and not very helpful to block the flow of thought. If you grasp the flow of thought and say, *"Oh, I am so envious, I am really troubled by the fact that I am envious,"* then on the basis of three seconds of envy you have created an image of yourself which you now have to spend many hours worrying about!

The purpose of meditation is to release ourselves from the habit of relying on assumptions such as *'this is very bad therefore I must do something to stop being this way.'* We open to what is the actual nature of these moments of envy or cruelty or selfishness. The more we see that everything, subject and object, is coming and going, the less there is to do. You don't have to help someone leave if they are already going. They have come, there is a bit of a problem, but they are going. If you try to make them go it will make them stay. Thus, in terms of meditation we are observing the coming and going, the self-liberating of whatever arises, whether it is good or bad. This allows us to see that the one who is present is indescribable, and the one that is arising is ungraspable, and so is beyond the categories of human and not-human.

Dzogchen has no rulebook for behaviour

Here we are in our body. The body is both a recognisable form and a potential that reveals itself in different ways according to circumstances. From the point of view of dzogchen there is no rule about how you should behave. In being connected with the situation behaviour will arise. Of course, actions have consequences, which is why the teachings say, *'Whatever occurs, occurs'*. The main thing is to stay present in the moment in the arising of whatever occurs and work with the circumstances.

For example, in your work you may say something to a colleague and they become so upset that they are going to make a formal complaint about your behaviour. You might then feel some anxiety: *"Oh why did I do that?"* But going into that kind of thought production will not help. Being relaxed and open is the best state to deal with a complaint. Activity moves ceaselessly as waves of interaction. Fearfully trying to manage the circumstances, to ensure an outcome that you feel safest with, tends to cut us off from attending to the actual field of experience which we share with the other. *"If that happened to me I wouldn't know how to cope."* *"Why?"* *"Well I am like this."* Is that true? We need to be careful not to limit our potential by relying on a habitual limited view of ourselves. In the course of your life you have been

interacting with many people, and you have seen people behaving in many different ways. They have done things that you wouldn't do and you perhaps even feel that you couldn't do, but they have not been arrested or shot – their lives have gone on.

One of the functions of meditation is to relax so that our deep anxiety dissolves. This is the anxiety that arises from feeling ourselves to be an entity who can be known and judged, weighed and found wanting. As it dissolves we get much more freedom to respond within the situation and find that the less we know, the more we can do. We gradually find our way out of the prison of fixed knowledge. Now knowledge becomes something to hand, a kind of tool or resource that can be utilised within the situation yet without it becoming the determinant of our activity.

From the point of dzogchen the nature of awakening is something very simple. It is not about becoming transcendent or becoming a god. It is a way of, if you like, not being human whilst showing the form of human.

For example, according to the tradition, when Padmasambhava left Tibet and went to the island of the rakshas, he entered into the body of the king of the rakshas and lived in the form of this demon-king. The people who knew the king didn't see any difference the next morning, since although the presence or the awareness was that of Padmasambhava, the form was that of the king. By maintaining the form of the demon-king he was able to stay in communication with the other demons without there being any great resistance. Then by gradually loosening his behaviour he led them into a path of transformation.

In the same way, when we practice dzogchen we don't have to change our external life. We can continue working, being in families and so on, but the ground or basis out of which this behaviour is arising is different. Instead of being centred in our ego concerns, our activity arises from an open, spacious awareness.

Guru yoga practice

Let us now do some practice to come into an experience of our open, spaciousness of mind. This practice is in the form of Guru Yoga. *Guru* means the living presence of the enlightened state, the natural state. It is our own real nature. It is present in the form of the gurus of the lineage. *Yoga* means to stay loose, natural. So Guru Yoga is to be inseparable from the natural state. There are many different forms of Guru Yoga practice but with this simple practice we imagine that in the centre of our body is a white letter A. Around this letter A there is a ball of rainbow coloured light. This represents the presence of all the masters of the lineage having the enlightened nature, and they are inseparable from our own nature. Because it's

our own nature we don't need to do anything elaborate to try to get there or uncover it or develop it.

We make the sound A once and integrate into the state of the letter A, which is infinite openness, endless emptiness. Then let the image of the A dissolve, and stay relaxed and open, being with whatever arises. For example, we are sitting here and there is traffic outside. What is that? If we enter into production and thought identification we will know, "Oh yes, cars are going by on the road outside." But if you relax and stay present with what is there, some sound is happening and then it has gone. We can just let it occur without having to make sense of it. It is the same with our sense of things in this room; maybe you see people's bodies moving a little bit. Things also happen in what you call yourself: thoughts, feelings, sensations. The point is, whatever arises leave it just as it is. Don't hold yourself back from it and don't fall into it.

Just as with the mirror, the reflection is *in* the mirror – the mirror is not protecting itself from the reflection – and yet no matter how many reflections come inside the mirror it doesn't damage the mirror or tire it out. In the same way, we are sitting and things are arising and passing. Again and again simply relax and open. There is no need to change anything or to do anything. If you find yourself getting bored, if you start to think, "*I don't know what I am doing. What is this? This is stupid,*" just relax into the out-breath and remain present ... and the limiting thought will go free by itself.

Because this is a practice of relaxation we won't do it for very long, but we will do it again and again in short periods in order to be as open and as at ease as possible. With this practice sometimes we do it with the eyes a little more open but you can also do it with the eyes completely closed or a little open. The main thing is to start to make some experiments and examine '*How does this work best for me?*' We are in the middle of the afternoon, a little after lunch, and it is often a time when people's energy takes a dip. Therefore, you may find that keeping your eyes open and resting in the space in front of you helps you to stay fresh and awake. We have to remember that the form the body takes up is only a method, it is never a truth. The method is only meaningful if it works, and so you have to work out how it is going to work for you.

[Practice of Guru Yoga]

That is a short practice that you can do at anytime of the day or night. It is a good practice to do while you are falling asleep. You can do it lying down or sitting up. You don't need to make the sound of 'Aa' if you are with other people. The key thing is to integrate with the presence of that which is always there, and through that to dis-identify or deconstruct the

attachment which has always been a construct, but which has been taken to be inherently real.

As part of the practice of observing ourselves, when we meet people and we have interactions, talking and listening, we observe this process. Who is the one who is talking? Who is the one who is listening? What is the actual process of this? Learning to observe ourselves is different from judging ourselves. It is more like allowing how we are to reveal itself, a bit like with old fashioned photographs you processed yourself in a darkroom. You soak it in the chemical wash and gradually you start to see the image starting to manifest. If you look too hard you won't see what is there as your very looking will be a kind of distortion. Therefore, explore for yourself the particular balance of active and passive that allows the registering of what is occurring.

With this kind of practice you can see that the content of the mind continues to arise. Nothing has changed, and yet we are no longer the owner of the content. It is like in England after the war. Many of the rich old families had huge country houses but no money. Often the family had lived in a house for hundreds of years with very nice furniture and so on, but they couldn't pay the tax and so they would often give part of the house over to a charity that administered such grand houses and made them into tourist attractions which ordinary people could visit. As a visitor you paid and you walked around and saw the house. The people who owned the house could also walk around and look at these rooms. They are their own rooms; nothing has changed, but it is no longer *their* room.

It is the same when we do the meditation; we have sold our mind to emptiness – emptiness is the new owner. So the thoughts wander around and look at the chairs, they may feel like sitting down, they may even feel entitled to sit there since they can see the mark on the cushion which fits the shape of their own backside, but it is no longer their own house. That is to say, 'it is just stuff'.

Tantra is a path of transforming: dzogchen is a path of not doing

This highlights a difference between dzogchen and tantra. In tantra we transform whatever is arising into a mandala palace, into something divine and beautiful, and in some ways this path is easier because it involves something to do. Whereas dzogchen is a path of not doing, a path of not identifying with the arising, not investing it with meaning. Just relax and open and see everything coming and going. Thoughts come and go, but the thinker of the thought is also coming and going. The thinker of the thought, "*That is what I am.*" But the thinker is also a thought, and it is going. "*What will I rest on?*" Rest in the natural state of the mind. "*But*

where is it?" It is not a cushion. It is not a seat. It is not any-thing. "Well, how will I be able to rest in it then?" Only if you let go of the burden you are carrying.

At the moment the ego is so heavy that it will fall right through emptiness since it is carrying a very heavy rucksack. All you have to do is unpack the rucksack. What have you got inside? Many memories, karmic habits, thoughts about the future, hopes and fears, telephone numbers, all kinds of stuff that you are carrying as 'me'. It is just stuff. If we really let it just be stuff, what then are we carrying? Nothing. Who is the one carrying nothing? No-one.

When we sit and do the practice, as soon as we find we are becoming someone, the practice becomes very difficult. As soon as there is an identification with a pattern of thought, this brings us into constellation with other patterns of thought, and they start to tumble together. However, whatever is occurring – whether it seems outside, like cars going by, or changes in the light of the room as the sun sets below the clouds, or sensations in the body, or thoughts, or memories – don't discriminate between inside and outside, just offer a spacious hospitality to each thing as it arises and passes. This won't make you stupid because everything is offering exactly what it has. You are not unaware; you are very aware. But you are not catching 'things'; you are not trying to use thoughts for some purpose because you have put down your rucksack. So what would you take? What will you do with this thought? It is already vanishing.

The best thing that the thought gives us is its instant arising, its instant staying, and its instant vanishing. When you walk in the springtime in the hills there are many beautiful wild flowers. After the dark days of winter they look amazing, but, of course, we know from experience that it is a very sad thing to try to pick them. By the time we get them home they are already dead. However, if you open yourself fully to this flower and you let it come in through your eyes and you smell it and it is completely inside you, it will stay with you forever, even though your hands be empty. It is the same in the meditation: whatever is arising it is just like a beautiful wild flower. Some are beautiful and some are not so beautiful – they are natural forms. But there is nothing to do with them. They give you everything they have without your asking, and then they are gone. So there is no need to be busy.

So this is a practice to do again and again. Let us do it again with a single A.

How 'A' represents awareness, clarity and emptiness

Participant: Does the A stand for anything?

James: The letter A represents emptiness itself. Clearly, it is the most open sound that the throat can make. In both the Sanskrit and Tibetan alphabet it is the root vowel which all

the consonants take, and the other vowel sounds are seen as variations on A. Thus A in that sense, is both empty and ungraspable, while it also represents the potential of sound to create all the words, and through that all the conceptual identifications of the universe. Also, in the mahayana literature they have a set of text called the *Prajnaparamitas*. These range from one text with a hundred thousand verses, down to one of ten thousand verses, to *The Diamond Cutter Sutra*, to *The Heart Sutra*, then to the four line verse-praise to Prajnaparamita, then to the mantra from *The Heart Sutra*: 'Gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha', and then to the condensation of all of the letter A. Thus, it represents the distillation of all the critiques of the entitative or reified readings of the phenomena of the world, including ourselves. It is both a mnemonic, which reminds us of all the meaning of this literature, and also a single point into which everything created out of conceptualisation can be dissolved.

In the English language the word 'nothing' indicates no-thing, which is really the sense that 'A' is carrying. When we say that everything is no-thing we mean that what we actually have is appearance and emptiness as an inseparability. For example, when we look around this room we see different things, we see different people, different colours, shapes and so on. When we see a person we immediately imagine that there is somebody kind of inside, that this is somebody showing themselves. But what we experience is an appearance. There is no fixed entity inside the appearance. There is no individual essence to the person. What there is, is an openness or a potentiality which allows the person to be all the many different people that they are. 'Aa' is representing emptiness in the sense that there is not nothing at all, but there are no-things at all. There are appearances that are the appearances of emptiness, not the appearance of some-thing, some essence. The essence of everything is empty, so we have sound and emptiness, taste and emptiness, smell and so on. The five senses lack a substantial basis.

Moreover we can experience clarity and emptiness. When we are relaxed and open, clarity is the quality of there being the arising of appearances. Before we constellate our visual realm as 'individual people' and so on there is an unseparated-out immediacy or directness of the whole experience field arising at once. That undivided, unseparated out immediacy is our clarity, the manifesting of lights of different colours. When we stay with that clarity we are the integrity of awareness.

Awareness, or in Tibetan, rigpa, is our basic noetic capacity. It reveals what is there and so is a kind of knowing, more ontological than cognitive. That is to say, it is primarily, 'a being present with' that allows whatever is arising to reveal itself. It is not a knowing *about* but a being present with. This quality of awareness is also empty. Thus when we release our fixations by reciting 'Aa' and are relaxed and open, the one who knows, the one who is aware, the one who is present is empty. When we look for our mind we don't find something

substantial or solid. It is this absence of any position or shape or dimension which introduces us to the indestructibility of our being. All constructed things will end sooner or later, but the mind's nature, in not being a construct, is indestructible.

However our consciousness is very easily evoked and lost. For example, we hear a sound – that is to say the auditory consciousness arises in relation to the sound – the sound then ceases and the consciousness vanished too. Suddenly we are aware of a pain in our knee and so the consciousness that deals with proprioception manifests. In that way we have a ceaseless pulsation of subject and object, coming and going. Consciousness is not fixed or reliable, but is emergent into the situation with the arising of the object. However, awareness is not like that. Awareness doesn't enter into relationship with anything, just as the mirror is not in relation with the reflection. One reflection can be in relation to another reflection, but the mirror, although it is offering the most infinite, unlimited hospitality to the reflection, is always untouched by it.

Awareness, clarity, and appearance are all empty. Whether it is in the midst of samsaric busyness and confusion, or within the most open and integrated meditation Whatever is arising abides in the core nature of emptiness. Therefore, the real difference between samsara and nirvana is whether one is awakened to the nature of emptiness or not.

When we make this sound of 'Aa', which symbolises and embodies the emptiness of everything, we don't have to clear all our thoughts out, we don't have to push away or repress our memories, for they are already empty. When we are sitting in the open state and experiences are arising, this is the experience of emptiness, emptiness showing itself as form and emptiness, or memory and emptiness, or sensation and emptiness – everything comes with emptiness.

Participant: If you do this practice, is therapy necessary?

James: If you fully enter this dzogchen practice you don't need much therapy. However, because our culture is very focused on individuality, and because the practice of dzogchen is very subtle – because you are going to have to catch yourself in the process of cheating yourself – unless your mind is very bright and sharp you can easily fall into an illusion that you have found something when you haven't.

Therefore, being in therapy is very useful for many people because it gives them the chance of being with somebody who is close enough to them through empathic attunement to pick up the contouring of how they present, but also has enough distance not to be seduced by their narrative. Through that attuned conversation, the person can start to see how they deceive themselves. All neurosis is self-deception. For example, say I am feeling very anxious

and I can't bear to go out of my house because I feel people are going to look at me, and I can't bear to have people see me. What does this mean? The person has fallen in love with an idea or a set of linked ideas: *"Something is wrong with me – people are going to look at me with x-ray eyes – and when they see my primordial fault they are going to judge me harshly – and this will be unbearable."* This is merely a theatre in the person's mind and there is no substantial basis to it.

People deceive themselves, not because they are bad, but because of their ordinary samsaric tendency to identify with and merge in the arising as though it were as inherently true. When this tendency meets the arising of a current of negative karma, fearful thoughts become predominant. This merging creates a situation in which one thinks, *"What I know about myself is more true than anything anyone else can tell me. I know the truth about 'me' and it is terrible."*

Participant: Would you say that the difference between a mentally healthy person and a mentally disturbed person lies in the gradation of how strongly fixated somebody is to their thoughts?

James: There are two aspects to this: the intensity of the attachment and the content to which one is attached. From a buddhist point of view, it is your bad karma manifesting for you to grow up in a family where life is very difficult. If your father rapes you and your mother doesn't care, this is very tragic. In our western, modern reading we would say the child is innocent—children are always innocent—and corrupt adults have been acting out their selfishness on a poor undefended child.

From a buddhist point of view it is one's own karma to be born in these particular circumstances. Either way, the fact is that the person experiences things that they may be unable to integrate into their level of development. This usually leads to spirals of preoccupation, a diminished capacity for self-soothing with an associated tendency to be volatile and impulsive, and this is likely to lead to trouble later. In this instance both the quality of capacity to process experience and the content of the experience are suboptimal. This makes it a real struggle to remain calm, to be able to think, and to restrain oneself, because the people that should have been helping to calm the child have over-excited them at a very early and essential stage of development. Due to this the experiences that occur are intense and they are taken to be real and definitive.

The dzogchen teachings indicate that the more one can allow oneself to relax and be present with whatever is occurring, the more one is deconstructing the limit where one says or feels, *"I can't cope,"* or, in its more active form, *"I have to."* So as we sit in meditation and allow whatever is coming to come, gradually we start to gain a clarity and confidence that none of

the contents of the mind either improve or diminish the quality of awareness. But, of course, this is very subtle as it involves the capacity to observe the activity of the mind without identifying with it, recognising that our consciousness and its moods are arisings and are not the mind itself.

All of us could rest in the practice more often than we do. We read about enlightenment, we get instruction on enlightenment in one lifetime but in the evening we open a bottle of wine and watch nonsense on television. We don't really care. Who is it that doesn't really care? The ego. Does awareness care? Not in the least. This is the problem: your awareness will not rescue you from the energy of your karma. The mirror is not touched – good things come and bad things come, it is just a mirror. The effort to do the practice is the effort of the ego; the buddha nature is already sorted. The buddha nature is already enlightened and the ego will never be enlightened. This is why meditation practice is difficult to sustain, as the one who is doing it is inadvertently preparing a sacrifice of its own identity, its sense of its centrality in our existence. Therefore, anything that affects our mental health, which increases our disturbance, is going to make the discipline of maintaining meditation practice more difficult. We have to be able to get ourselves to sit down and then to maintain attention and clarity whilst remaining relaxed

Buddhism is very beautiful, very deep, but it requires real refinement of sensibility. It is not crude. You can't just do it. It is not like hammering in a nail. It is a very subtle unknitting, and this requires finesse. Therefore, anything which is crude in our own tendencies has to be released from its place in the driver's seat. This requires our being not too hopeful and not having too many doubts. It means walking the middle way, calm and clear, not getting too excited if things go well, and not getting sad if things go badly. If life goes well, what does it mean? Nothing. If it goes badly what does that mean? Nothing. The good has already gone and the bad has already gone. Letting go of what is going and being present happen simultaneously.

Vehicles of the cause and vehicles of the result

The vehicles or ways of practice can be organised into two groups: the vehicles of the cause and the vehicles of the result. The vehicles of the cause are so described because they are the ones which seek to develop the 'causes' of enlightenment by accumulating wisdom and merit. They operate with the idea that we are here in samsara and we want to get to nirvana, and in order to get there we need to create the causes necessary for generating that effect.

Wisdom creates the cause of awakening in the dharmakaya—inseparable from the buddha's mind—and merit creates the basis for manifesting the sambhogakaya, the radiant body of

the buddha. With the gathering of these two accumulations, gradually the obscurations can be removed and the good qualities of the Buddha allowed to manifest. This is represented in a gloss on the Tibetan word for Buddha, '*sang gye*'. *Sang* means to purify and *gye* means to expand or increase. Therefore the word buddha represents the purification of all obscurations and limitations and the increase and development of all the qualities necessary to benefit sentient beings.

In the buddhist literature there are many texts which operate on this level, and most of us have read these sorts of texts. This view also informs the practice of the bodhisattva vow and taking refuge. When we take refuge we say that from this day on, in this and all my future lives, I take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. The Buddha, as is well known, gave the example that if you want to cross a river it is very useful to use a boat but when you get to the other side you leave it there. Similarly, with refuge, we take refuge until we get to a safe place and then we don't need to take refuge anymore. But the prayer is saying 'in this and all my future lives', which is giving us a sense that it is going to take a long time, that it is far away. Moreover, we are going to take the bodhisattva vow, "*On the basis of my accumulations of generosity and the other paramitas, may I develop the qualities to become enlightened for the sake of all sentient beings.*" Thus, in this practice the starting point is 'me as I am now'. I look at myself and I think, "*Oh Oh! A lot of work to be done,*" and therefore it makes sense to see that many, many lifetimes of work are necessary.

Often when something is far away, we can project many wonderful attributes onto it. For example, in the middle of winter we start to think, "*Ah, next summer! The sun will be shining and I will be having fun.*" But maybe it will rain all next summer, we don't know. However, in our mind it will be a wonderful time. In the same way, "*When I become a Buddha I am going to have a fantastic Buddha realm...*" People can elaborate all kinds of wonderful ideas about what that would be like, and this generates hope and a sense of purpose.

The other approach to awakening employs the vehicles of the result and these comprise tantra, mahamudra and dzogchen. They operate on the basis of acting as if the result had already been achieved. Thus, if you are practicing according to tantra, through initiation you have permission to become the deity. If you are doing an elaborate practice you might visualise yourself as the deity and then invite, from the pure realm, the actual form of the deity. These two forms then merge together so that you can feel you are the authentic presence of the deity. Then you have to act with the pride of the deity, manifesting its energetic qualities, and maintaining this view under all circumstances.

In the view of dzogchen the nature of our mind is always present; it is not something we have to create. It is not something that is far from us; it has always been right here. Therefore,

all we have to do is to relax *into* the presence of what has always been present. Patrul Rinpoche said that many people practice dharma like a person who keeps his cow at home and goes out in the countryside looking for its hoof prints. That is to say, everybody has their buddha nature but they go out in the world, for example going on a pilgrimage to Mount Kailash, in order to develop the qualities required to become enlightened. *"If I go to see this lama and get a particular blessing that will help me to get enlightened."* Many people say, *"Karmapa khyeno, Karmapa think of me."* *"You think of me and I think of you. We have got a love that is true."* But while thinking of the Karmapa I am not observing my own mind. *"You the Karmapa are enlightened. I love your enlightenment so please give me some of your enlightenment."* But the basis of our awakening is already with us.

From the point of view of dzogchen, devotion is not so important

Participant: Wouldn't that be something helpful, to develop authentic devotion which would be a real quality?

James: This is a very important question. Authentic devotion can help us to go from samsara to nirvana, and this is a quality of the vehicles of the cause. Devotion belongs to a particular path. It is very important that we don't mix all the different levels of practice together. Each style of practice has a view, a meditation, a conduct and a result, and when we practice them we should do so according to the precise frame of the practice. If we start comparing and contrasting them we will become disturbed.

From the point of view of dzogchen, devotion is not so important. It is not that people shouldn't have faith and respect, but devotion is a projective quality, *"I don't trust myself enough, I don't believe in myself enough to trust my own enlightened quality so I am going to entrust it to you to keep it safe until I am ready. By you keeping my buddha nature, I will work very hard and then one day I will be able to be that Buddha."* That is a very good path for those people who have great belief in the power of their obscurations. Thus someone might think, *"I am a bad person; I look at how I behave in the world and I think that I could have done so much more ...Why do I still do these things? My behaviour is terrible and, I have to be honest here, I'm a limited person. How could I be enlightened, being such a limited person? I don't want to cheat myself and I don't want to cheat other people. It is going to take me a long time to get there."* That is a very authentic but particular reading of the situation.

From the point of view of dzogchen, from the very beginning our own nature is completely pure. Obscurations are just reflections in the mirror. Obscuration and limitation is there but its true status, its actual validity, is that it is an illusion. We can't say it is nothing at all

because these limitations do manifest, and they have their consequences. But also we can't say that they are something truly real because their nature is empty.

Therefore, relax into the open nature and, as the limitation arises, integrate it into the vast expanse of spacious awareness. 'Integrate' simply means to integrate the experience of non-duality. The reflection is inseparable from the mirror. In the same way what arises in our mind is inseparable from the ground or the base or the true nature of our mind, the dharmadhatu, which is empty. While staying present and open in this state, each limitation that arises releases itself. So although we are limited persons, in the practice all of these limitations come to have no potency to tie us further into samsara. What we have to do is to trust the quality of openness and to see that it is our own belief in our limitation, our own grasping and attachment to our own sense of ego-entitlement, which is the cause of our badness.

There is a traditional story which illuminates this. Once upon a time there was a son of a rich man who had a servant. This son of the rich man heard that there was a good buddhist teacher visiting in their country, so he said to his servant, *"Let us go and get some instruction."* They went together and took refuge and started to do practice. After some time they returned and asked for further instruction. The teacher said, *"The nature of your mind is like the sky; it is completely pure and it has never been obscured. No matter what clouds arise the nature of the mind is untouched by them."* So the rich young man and his servant went away and they both started to do their practice. The rich son thought, *"Oh, because my mind has been pure and nothing can harm it, that means I can do what I like. I am indestructible."* And he started to beat up people and to rape women and so on. The servant thought, *"The nature of my mind is pure from the very beginning so I must relax, observe my thoughts and release them."*

After some time the rich son said to the servant, *"I don't understand why don't you practice like me? I am the one who has understood the teacher. Let us go and check it out with the teacher."* So they went to see the teacher and each one described what they had done. After listening the teacher said, *"Oh, you, the servant, have really understood what I have said and you, rich man, you have understood nothing. You have completely misunderstood me."* So the rich, young man killed the teacher and proceeded to kill many, many people and continued killing and raping until he died.

The story continues with many further details of further lives but the key point for us is the way our ego-centredness encourages us to misread the open potential of situations and to impose our own mistaken self-serving view.

The ego is always very busy trying to organise everything. The ego can take the dharma teaching and turn it to its own purpose. The dzogchen teachings never say you can do what you like, but they always say you can do what you like. Who is the one who is going to do what they like? The one who lives in the heart, the unborn awareness, and if it does what it likes that will be lovely. But the ego, what it likes is often not so good; it seeks instant gratification, power over others, and uninterrupted movement of its own desire. For that reason, listening to the view and truly understanding it is very important. This is why the view is explained in many different ways. In the state of openness everything is self-liberating but if you are not in the state of openness your own attachment will hide natural self-liberation, and then every action will be creating karma.

The path of the cause, where we start with the ego, involves having an honest review of our own qualities. We see that we lack many good qualities, and that we must try harder. The path of dzogchen begins with the initial recognition of our own true nature. The mind is not a thing or a person and it has no basis for wanting to kill or wanting to rape. Killing and raping arise from a point where somebody says, *"I want - I don't want,"* where the sense of self is small and fixed and full of energy. However, awareness is not small, it is not fixed, it is not full of a condensed frustrated energy. Relaxed and open it shows, easy come, easy go. There is no need for dualistic devotion because the object of devotion, the enlightened state, is already here.

In the dzogchen tradition we take refuge in buddha, dharma and sangha, in the guru, deities and dakinis, in the dharmakaya, sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya, and in the nature of our own mind. We take refuge in the first nine sites of refuge by integrating them in the nature of our mind. We take refuge by relaxing into the state of openness, and by allowing everything to be naturally self-releasing. When we meditate with 'A' in our heart we have devotion which eases us into our presence. This is helpful but it is a method, for if we maintain the focus of devotion we would be maintaining a duality: *"I am not so good, you are very good."* This is an attitude which is very helpful if you are, for example, reciting the prayer to be reborn in Dewachen, because it is completely in harmony with that kind of practice. But it wouldn't be helpful in practicing dzogchen because in this view the belief 'I am a limited person, I have many faults, I need to purify my faults before I proceed' is simply the voice of the ego. The ego believes, *"I know what I need to do. I know who I am and on the basis of this I know what I have to do."* This inflation – even this humble inflation, which makes it even worse – causes us to not see our own nature.

Dzogchen is about space. Now, we could say that there is some space in this room, but for us this room is organised according to the three dimensions of length, breadth and height. It space can be calculated and known. But dzogchen is not concerned with these dimensions at

all. Space has no top or bottom or no sides. If I am resting in the state of spaciousness then there is no limit. If you are resting in the state of spaciousness and I am wandering in my thoughts, you are not better than me. Are pears better than butter? What would be the basis for saying that? You are relaxed in the natural state and I am wandering in my thoughts ... which is good and which is bad? You cannot compare them. It is a category error to imagine that somehow they could be put into juxtaposition. Therefore, from this point of view, enlightenment is not about achieving some definable state and developing powers that radiate out impressing other people. Such manifest qualities are the secondary characteristics of energy as it manifests. The central point is the recognition of one's own nature, and this is a nature that has no defining qualities, although many words are used to indicate it, it cannot be nailed down or summed up.

"At last I am enlightened, I have no qualities. Dear mother you will be so proud of me when I come home. I have nothing on my report card. I am a great success. I have nothing to show." This sounds like madness. Everything arises from nothing. Yet it is not chaos, for order and ethics are implicit in the self-arising spontaneity which is the display of emptiness. This has nothing to do with the ego. Awareness and the ego are different dimensions; they never touch and yet are non-dual spontaneity. You can emigrate from Germany to Australia but you cannot emigrate from samsara to nirvana; there is no connection between them. Samsara is the misunderstanding of the nature of nirvana; it is mistaking, misconstruing. It is not an other 'place'; it is not 'somewhere else'.

The reason for studying these different yantras is to be able to enter dzogchen practice fully without thinking that there is something missing. So if we say, *"Karmapa kyeno, you the big Karmapa please think about me, don't forget me when I am wandering in samsara. I don't know where my home is,"* if you have understood the dzogchen teachings, then it has to be understood as a way of shifting our energy rather than as a statement of truth. How come you are wandering in samsara? Why are you not resting in your own nature? *"Ah because I was thinking, you know, I have been doing dharma practice and I have been in India and now there is a new lama in town and many people are going to see him, and I must go to see him too as he gives you a very short ngöndro to do, so if I get that..."*

In this way, we can elaborate endless tasks: *"There is something else to be done. I am not ready yet."* The ego will never be ready. It is not about the ego. The ego is the gatekeeper. The ego is the mistake. The ego is the misunderstanding. Why would you ask permission of the misunderstanding to get into non-dual identification or integration with what is free of mistakes. Thus the central point of the teaching is to trust yourself. Which self? Your real self – the open, spaciousness of your mind.

Advice for meditation

Stay exactly with whatever arises

The nature of the mind is peaceful; it is never moving and never changing. Thoughts and feelings are moving all the time but the more we relax the more we see this has nothing necessarily to do with us. That is to say, the movement into manifestation, the movement as energy, is always a choice. As long as we are caught up in karmic patterns of action and reaction then there seems to be a given-ness, an inevitability about being involved. Yet our individual subjectivity is itself energy, is itself part of the unfolding pattern. When we rest in openness, thoughts come and go, and when we get involved we – our sense of self – is energy moving with the movement of the thought. So when we experience ourselves as a thought, feeling, mood, sensation and so on, don't try to free yourself from this experience. Don't try to exchange an unholy thought for a holy thought; just relax and be present with the one who is busily involved. If we employ the metaphor of the mirror and the reflection, the reflection is in the mirror, they are not two separate things. The mind as awareness and the thought are not two separate things. The mind is the source of the thought; it will not be harmed by its own children

If you swim in a river and you get tired you can swim to the side and climb up on the bank and sit on the solid ground. Some kinds of meditation are like that. For example, with the practice we began yesterday morning, when we focused on the breath or on an external object, that focus creates a stable place, a position, like the bank of the river, and you stay with that and everything else flows by. However, in dzogchen practice there isn't a place to stand. There is just space, and space is never captured, space doesn't move, space is present everywhere. Thus, our awareness is always present with whatever is occurring; you can't put it outside of a thought. It is present with the thought, and so if you stay exactly with the thought or on the thought you will find that the thought will go. In Tibetan they say *tok tu* which means 'on top of'. Whoever one takes oneself to be, whatever position one takes up inside oneself, be present exactly with that point, not falling into it, not trying to avoid it, making no effort whatsoever.

Awareness is already present all the time otherwise we wouldn't know what was going on. But we are so used to discrimination, to differentiation. We say, "*This is an apple. This is a pear.*" They are both fruit but they are not the same. Thus, when we identify a thing clearly, we do so both in terms of what it is and what it is not. When we are thinking about ourselves, a great deal of the clarity that we have about who we are is based on knowing what we are not, and we have to be aware of that habit because it is a busy activity. It is a movement of knowledge and power. That is to say, I can develop for myself a feeling of

competence, by knowing what is going on, and that competence brings me to a particular kind of positioning. For example, say you get trapped in your thought and then you recognise you are trapped in the thought and you think, *"Oh, that is better, now I feel clear,"* you have exchanged an unholy thought for a holy thought. We have shifted from one position to another – but we are still situated somewhere, still identified with something finite. However if we just stay present with the holy thought, the holy thought will vanish and something else will arise. It will arise and be illuminated by the natural clarity of the mind so one doesn't have to do anything. The mind itself is not a position, it is not located somewhere, it is not this or that. It is the content of the mind, the energy of the mind that manifests as this or that.

When we first do this practice we find that there is a subtle activity which is the ongoing process of rebalancing. This is similar to a child learning to ride a bicycle and having to find their balance. Balance is not stable and is invisible; essentially it reveals itself by its absence. In the same way, when we get involved in something in our mind, this is a loss of balance. The reality of what is occurring pulls us and we lose our balance. Then just as with a bicycle, we make effort to restore our balance – and so are always busy. Often when children are cycling they move their handlebars a lot, as if something should be done. But less is more. Too much correction generates more problems.

It is exactly the same in dzogchen meditation – trying hard is not good. In some kinds of meditation trying hard is very important. For example, if you are doing prostrations and you have a visualisation and something to recite and you have to keep the body moving in a rhythm, there is a lot which has to be brought together again and again in the same place. Thus, you might be doing prostrations and find yourself thinking of something else. The body is going through the motions, the voice is reciting what has to be said but the mind is not there. Then suddenly you become aware of that and you bring yourself back into the practice; you recollect yourself. You recollect yourself on the basis of once again doing fully the activity you have decided to do.

However, in dzogchen the task that we have is to be present with whatever is occurring, so we don't know in advance what we are going to focus on. The item that we are going to be aware of is whatever arises, so if you lose that where have you gone? Wherever you have gone to, that is what you need to be aware of. If you take the wrong turning on the roads around here and you recognise it and turn the car around then you go onto the 'right' road. But in this practice, when the mind goes off, it is always taking the right road. This is why this is called dzogchen, the great perfection, for every road is good. If you feel very tired and sleepy this is a wonderful place to be. If you feel the mind is very active with lots of thoughts that is also good. The instruction is simply to be relaxed, open, aware and present with that.

Nothing that occurs is wrong or bad. This is very different from more familiar kinds of meditation, and it helps us to deconstruct or release the tendency to enter into evaluation of “This is good, this is not good.”

The self-liberation of conditioning is not achieved by effort

Obviously, things are seen to be good or bad in terms of their manifestation in the world according to our own criteria, which may or may not be shared by others. People can drive cars in a good way or a bad way; your pizza can be cooked well or not well. It is important to have some capacity to be discerning towards the things that manifest in the world. But who is the one being discerning? A manifestation. That is to say, energy is concerned with energy; how I am arising as myself is influenced by how you are arising. The subject and the object are both energy. These patterns of energy either fit or don't fit – that is what we discern.

However, when we sit in the meditation practice our focus is on our natural state or natural condition, open, empty and ungraspable. This openness is always suffused with, filled with, arising images appearing in their spontaneous immediacy. We have looked at these two aspects in relation to the mirror and the reflection, and the central point to understand in this is that what I call ‘I’, ‘me’, ‘myself’ or, ‘my embodied nature’ is a reflection. We are not outside looking in, nor are we inside looking out. Rather we are part of this non-dual field. The non-duality is non-dual in terms of subject and object, of the arising and of the ground.

So when we are sitting in meditation, we can experience the relation between the mirror and the reflection. Then we are aware of the self-liberation of everything which arises. Our presence, which is the mind's clarity, is present with whatever is occurring. Resting in presence you will see that everything you call ‘self’ is arising and passing, and everything that we call ‘other’ is also arising and passing.

When we practice on our own, at a certain point we get up to do something and move about. Where are we moving about? Inside the mirror. We never come out of the mirror. It is not that you are in the meditation and then the meditation stops and you get back into your ordinary life. If you practice in that way, meditation is simply a holy kind of artificiality, and ordinary life is a not so holy artificiality. When we relax into our natural state it is the ground of everything. Within this ground – which reveals itself in terms of the uninterrupted, undivided, panoramic manifestation, which is everything – we get up and we are moving about within the integrated field. You feel a bit hungry so you go into the kitchen. You open the fridge and perhaps there are a few things in there and you have to make a choice. So who will make the choice? *You* will make the choice. How will you make the choice? It will arise

from within you. For some reason you take out a jar of gherkins and start to eat them, for some reason that is what you want to eat. Life is like that. This is energy in relation to energy, or in a more mahayana way of thinking of it we can say that due to causes and conditions, some relation between your stomach and your palette moves your hand towards the gherkins. In that way, the patterning of our energy relates to what is available in the world. We come into being in relation to the world, as part of the world.

Due to the happenstance of the coming together of our tendencies and the situations we find ourselves in, we experience many different patterns. We can participate in that coming and going as part of that coming and going and then each moment is fresh and unrepeatable. Or we can identify with the patterns as being definitive of who we are. This gives rise to conditioning. The Tibetan word for this is *du che*. *Du* means to gather together and *che* means to do or to make. The conditioning of ourselves and of our environment occur together. We are reifying patterns and taking them to be indicative of the presence of something substantial. Now, we might decide that we want to give up all our conditioning but that is very hard to do because the ego itself is conditioned. For example, if you travel in India you can see many kinds of sadhus, holy men, some of whom are completely naked, some have very long hair, and some are covered in ashes. They have renounced the world but they have renounced the world into another world, the world of the sadhu, which has many cultural forms to it, many ways of behaving, and many expectations. That is to say, as long as you are in this world you will be part of culture. If we want not to be trapped by conditioning the key point is not the external forms of the conditioning but the attachment which binds us into the conditioning through the process of identification. I can say, "*I am British. I was born in Scotland.*" These are facts. What would it mean not to be conditioned by these facts?

Moment-by-moment, who is the one who is born in Scotland? Clearly, there are always two possibilities. In the dzogchen tradition there is the saying, '*There is one ground and two paths*'. One path is to say, "*I was born in Scotland,*" and to feel that fact as something reassuring and definitive of myself, like being wrapped in a duvet. We could see all identification with these conditioning factors as a kind of cladding, a kind of clothing which is placed around an existential emptiness. The nothingness or openness of our being seeks to protect itself from itself by becoming something. That is to say, when nothing and something becomes separated then the mirror, in the anxiety of its own nothingness, decides to become a reflection. And this is what we are: we are nothing pretending to be something, and this creates a lot of turbulence and unnecessary activity. The reason it is unnecessary is because we are nothing and we are something at the same time – the ground of something is nothing. This nothing is not 'nothing at all' because it ceaselessly gives rise to everything. In that way the two extreme views that the Buddha critiqued are revealed: eternalism – the idea that

somehow I truly exist and will continue forever – and the nihilistic view which declares that everything finishes at death and there is no continuity.

The non-duality of space and movement means that the self-liberation of conditioning – the self-liberation of the limitations which we put on ourselves and all the phenomena of the world – is not achieved by effort. It is achieved by relaxing our habitual impulses to make unnecessary effort. We are doing more than is required because we are endlessly trying to solve a problem which doesn't exist: *"I have to make meaning in my life. If I don't do that it will just be too desolate."* So day-after-day, moment-by-moment we are building up something. If we don't do that what will happen? *"We will tumble into the domain of fundamental absence and this would be a kind of spiritual death of the self."* This is not true and its falsity is experienced directly when we do the practice and we dissolve. Whether we do this through the tantric method of dissolving the deity into us, then dissolving into the ball of light letting it melt into emptiness, or in the more direct method of dzogchen, by releasing into the unborn state, we find the inseparability of nothing and something. Although our ego is no longer at the centre of things, we find ourselves to be there, not as we thought we would be, but as we are.

Don't ask thoughts to do what they can't

Thinking about who we really are is not so helpful for thoughts are very fragile; they don't live very long and they can't do very much. There is no end to thinking and thoughts do not establish anything reliable. However we use these thoughts to create the whole world; every day we are constructing this great edifice of samsara with our thoughts. Thoughts are very young, they like to play. Let them play. When you are with yourself your thoughts run around and make all sorts of things happen – just playing. The point here is don't ask your thoughts to give you the meaning of existence. They cannot do that. Don't ask thoughts to do what they can't.

In our lives we spend a lot of time creating worlds of thought and imagination. They have some validity for ourselves and a few people around us, maybe some family or friends. Every now and then we meet together and exchange ideas, and we find this interesting and stimulating, but if someone walking in the street was to overhear us they would wonder, *"What are these people talking about?"* Thus, we have to see that all this work that we do to create meaning and value is just play, just theatre. This is not because we are silly or not mature but because that this world is illusion. Illusion means that it is not real, not substantial. This would indicate that it is helpful not to take life too seriously. Whatever we do there will be problems. In the hospital where I work there are many bureaucratic problems, financial problems and so on. These are just things to be dealt with, they are

nothing to worry about. Worry is a waste of time. Anxiety is a waste of time. Things either will go well or they will go badly. If they go well, that is what you will have and if they go badly then that is what you will have.

Before the moment has arrived it hasn't defined itself and so your own creativity becomes the basis for problems and difficulties as you imagine all the things that might happen. In dzogchen we relax and open and trust immediacy and spontaneity. The best preparation for any situation is to be present, because if you are present and relaxed you will have the optimal access to whatever skills you and other people have. Over-preparation is an aggressive act because it leaves the other less space in which to manifest.

One of the big problems that can happen in couples is when one partner tends to do a lot of the planning and the other then has to fit in with the plan. The one who plans often thinks, *"Well if I didn't do it, it just wouldn't happen because you don't do it."* And the other is thinking, *"Well, whenever I try to do it you criticise the way I do it."* There is a double violence. The key solution to that is to find a way to co-emerge, to jointly bring together the potential of the situation and allow a shared solution to arise. The best way to insure that a project goes well, whether it is in a relationship, a family or at work, is to have everyone involved. When everyone participates there is a sense that 'we are in this together'. In order to have the 'we', each individual has to step out of their habitual frame of reference wherein they might say, *"Well, the way I think it should be done is this, and I have done this before!"* Letting go of our habitual frame of reference can be anxiety-provoking because now it is less easy to predict what will happen. 'Knowing what needs to be done' can make us feel big and important.

In order to be part of what is going on we have to become small and flexible. Being small and flexible is quite nice, as you get to play a lot. It's fun to be with people who are small and flexible! But if we take up a too big position, if we become the one who has to know everything, then life becomes very difficult.

Taking any project too seriously is not helpful because then the object is dominating the subject. The main thing is to relax and to be where you are because you can then work with what is actually available. If you are walking on the bottom of a big valley you can run to the left or to the right, but if you are in a narrow mountain path in the Alps you had better not do that! The fact that you have to stay on the path is not an insult to your existential freedom, it is just a temporary shape that is useful to adopt for a while

It is important to work with situations. I need to arrive at the airport in good time as the plane will not wait for me, so it is important to be there. However, if due to circumstances I don't get there, well, there will be another plane. If I am not where I had planned to be, then I

am not there and something else will happen. The other people involved will find a way to cope. Nothing is so important. It is hubris, it is inflation of the ego, which says that any one of us is indispensable. There are plenty of people in the world and someone else will do what we do. They won't do it the way we do it, but life will go on.

Semdzin of Phat!

Now we can do a different kind of practice. This practice is one of the twenty-one semdzins. It is famous because of Patrul Rinpoche's use of it in his commentary on the three points of Garab Dorje. This practice uses the syllable Phat! to open up some space in the mind.

When we practice we find that thoughts weave themselves together very easily. If we stay open this is not a problem because it is just how things are. As long as there is light in a room the mirror will show some reflection. Similarly, as long as the mind has radiance, thoughts will manifest. Thus, having thoughts is simply the nature of the mind as it shows itself. They are not an obscuration; they are not a problem to be removed. The issue is our misunderstanding of what they are and what their function is. Thoughts don't tell the truth; the truth is not something that can be said. So when we get mesmerised by thoughts they bind us into the production of narratives to which there is no end. When it says in buddhist texts that there is no end to samsara what it means is that there is no end to thinking.

The nature of the mind, emptiness itself, is not an object. That is why when it is being pointed out we use many different kinds of metaphors and images. You cannot see it; you cannot taste it or touch it. It is the very nature of being itself but it has no being as 'this' or 'that'. So for us, when we are trying to get some sense of openness, thoughts appear to be a problem since we are so used to relying on them, yet in themselves, thoughts are not a problem.

The aim of this practice is to get a moment of experience of the unborn openness so that we can see that indeed thoughts arise out of openness rather than as a kind of horizontal wave coming from past, to present, to future. Firstly we clarify the view, seeing that our real nature is naturally open, fresh, naked, and pure from the very beginning. We take that view into the practice making the sound of 'Aa'. Then if you find yourself becoming preoccupied with thoughts, feelings and so on, loudly and with force make the sound of Phat! Let it arise deep from your belly, and let it come out, as it were, through the top of your head. We don't want to shout it from the throat. You want to feel it coming right up through you. The making of noise is important because it fills the space of thinking and empties it. As the sound comes out, its force makes a kind of space. Rest in that space and when you get caught in your

thoughts make this sound again. It is best to do this practice on your own in order to cut out everything that is occurring. It is a practice for increasing space so it is something to do, especially in the summertime, out on a hillside, where at the end you can sit and be very relaxed and open.

There are two aspects to this. The first is releasing the sound so that it opens the space, and the second is to find yourself in immediate presence in that space. We have a strong habit of making sense of situations. For example, if, as we are sitting here, there is a sudden clang we think, *“Oh, what is that?”* Then you might think, *“Oh, the dog has knocked something in the kitchen. Now I know what it is I can relax.”* This dualistic clarity of the cognition of the ego looks like intelligence but it is actually the first taste of primordial stupidity. Therefore, when we do this practice we want to release enough energy so that we don't go into making sense of what is happening. No dualistic effort at all. Simply space and movement free of interpretation and elaboration.

Begin with one 'Aa' and integrate with presence of the lineage. Relax into space and then when you find yourself enthralled in thoughts just release the sound of Phat! and continue in presence.

Summarising the main points and final advice

In this short time together we have covered the main points of the basic view in dzogchen. The key point is to gently take up the practice of observing yourself, of seeing how you function without entering into judgment about it. Don't limit yourself by employing a particular frame of reference for evaluating experience. Simply observe how you function. When you have some time, it is also helpful to investigate the historical basis of the assumptions you adopt in order to see the relativity of the positions on which you build your sense of self. This allows us to loosen the points of identification with our stories, our belief systems and our strong views.

As for meditation, we want to enter it with ease. This can be done through visualisation practice and dissolving into the deity as the door to your natural state, or through 'Aa'. Either way we relax and relaxing means letting the breath flow freely, sitting in a way that allows the skeleton to support the muscles so that you avoid tension in the body. Relax your mind by dropping your investment with what is arising. When you practice according to the tantric system this instruction is given in terms of seeing that everything that arises in your mind is no different from what arises in the guru's mind. There you are using the respect and

devotion for the teacher or the deity as a way of allowing yourself just to leave things as they are because they are perfect, because they are linked with the guru's nature.

In dzogchen we relax the hope that the answer will lie in the object for we see that all that arises in the mind, quickly passes. How could the heart, or the depth, or the essence, or the true meaning of my existence be defined by an ephemeral thought? Remember also that the mind's nature is indestructible. Your mind is not an entity or a thing and so no thought, feeling, or sensation is going to destroy it. Seeing that there is nothing to gain and nothing to lose, relax and open to whatever comes.

At first it is helpful to practice for short periods of time, say, ten minutes and then have a little break and then sit some more. If your life is very busy and you are often tired or preoccupied or agitated, it might be useful to do some prayers first just to centre your energy. According to the tradition that I have been trained in the best prayer for this is the seven-line prayer to Padmasambhava. We pray to Padmasambhava with devotion and the experience of the stream of blessings allows our preoccupation with the concerns of the day, with planning for the future, and with anxiety about the past to all dissolve away.

When sitting at ease, very gently take up the questions, *Where does my mind stay? What does it rest on? Does it have a basis of some kind?* You may think or you may experience that the mind is somehow located in the body perhaps in your head. It may seem to be related to some memories or to a particular thought or belief. Whenever you feel that you have found the true location of your own mind just stay present with your discovery and see what happens. If it is a thought it will vanish. That thought will just be another thought telling you who you are. Stay with the one who is observing their mind. Neither distanced from it nor merged in it, simply present. The presence is the real nature of the mind, the dharmakaya of the buddha. Then you yourself will be who you actually are, not as an idea or as an opinion but a simple recognition, *"Oh"*. The taste of this will then linger and permeate whatever else you do. You drop from being a socially defined person into the infinite aloneness of the direct experience of the nature of your own existence.

When we do pujas or ritual meditation it is a good idea to do them together with other people, because as we looked earlier, puja is a practice of energy. Pujas are activity. They are something that you do and something that does have an effect. Pujas influence the world; they can influence the weather, they can influence health and happiness and so on. Doing them with other people can increase their potency due to the shared focus of attention. Also, the people who are stronger in the practice give newcomers a support as they explore something new. However when we are practicing dzogchen looking into our own nature, this is a solitary practice. The mind is alone, infinite, not in touch with anything else, not

conditioned by anything else, not standing in relation to anything else, inseparable from the ground of everything.

Stillness and movement are inseparable, the nature of the mind never moves but the content of the mind is always moving. Your body and your speech and your mental processes are movements in this infinite mirror of awareness. Our being in the world with others is as illusion moving within illusion. The real nature of our self is empty like the sky, and the real nature of others is empty like the sky. We meditate sky to sky, experiencing self and other as moments in space. There is no need to fill others with our assumptions, predictions and beliefs; we can experience being with them moment-by-moment, a co-emergence which is the unification of wisdom and compassion.

It is wisdom because it allows the emptiness, the openness of the other to be present with our own openness and emptiness. It is compassionate to the other because it gives them a chance not to encounter the fixed wall of our projections and assumptions. This offering of space allows them to be less defended as they start to see themselves from different points of view. It is also compassionate towards ourselves because the more we can move in a fresh way in different situations we can see the insubstantiality of whatever position we have taken up. In that way don't limit ourselves in terms of hope and fears; we don't sit inside our guilt and our shame and our anxiety, but reside in the open potential which allows us to become fresh and new moment-by-moment.

As long as we are alive something can be done, but if we over-anxiously try to be perfect then this is a kind of violence to the natural perfection revealed by ceasing to strive. Trust in natural purity opens a space for an unguarded reception of the richness of life. 'Good' moments and 'bad' moments come and go for everyone. By avoiding reification and objectification we can stay open and ready to respond, free of hopes and fears, pride and guilt. Presence is itself the basis for ethics. Trusting natural purity opens the door to ethical spontaneity and to an ease of being which welcomes the other as they are.

Now we come to the end, so we dedicate the merit of the study and practice we have done together. We do this by imagining rays of light spreading out from our hearts up to all the buddhas, who in turn send light down to all beings in all the different realms.

May all beings awaken to the natural purity of their own nature from which they have never been separated.