

THE DZOGCHEN VIEW IN TIBETAN BUDDHISM

BASED ON A TALK GIVEN BY JAMES LOW AT WATKINS BOOKS, LONDON

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Transcribed by Martin Lineham

Revised by Barbara Terris and James Low

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It's a pleasure to be here. I will be giving a brief introduction to Dzogchen and the Tibetan Buddhist understanding of the nature of the mind, and show how this functions to facilitate our being at ease in the world.

'Dzogchen' means great completion, indicating that from the very beginning everything has been complete in itself. That is to say, each moment is perfect as it is, but not perfect if viewed from the frame of reference of relativity. For example, a rotting tomato is a perfect example of a rotting tomato. It may not be a delicious tomato that you would want to eat. In terms of our normal dualistic framework of good/bad, right/wrong, we might well say, "this is disgusting, I don't want to eat this " but if we open ourselves to how it is in itself, we see that it is just this. It is only this and couldn't be other than this.

This insight provides a basis for seeing that a lot of what we do in life is focused on transformation. This has two aspects: the first is trying to become other than we are, a delusion wherein we wander away from where we actually are moment by moment and try to create ourselves as a better form of our idea of ourselves. The second aspect is that we apply this attitude to the world around us, judging what is here, imagining other possibilities, imposing changes because we have the resources to so do. However, as we know to our cost, the new and better arise with their own set of problems. Moreover both aspects are artificial and temporary since whatever we construct has a beginning and so is going to have an end.

The main focus of a dzogchen understanding is set out in the view, the meditation, the activity, and the result. The view is to see that from the very beginning, the mind, which is to say our mind, is not what we think it is. Thoughts have become like a veil, an intermediary, an interpretive device which hides its own ground. Our mind itself is pure and naked. It is empty and open like a mirror, and its clarity is not

improved by the veil of dualistic concepts. Although these concepts are not other than clarity itself they appear to veil it due to our unawareness of our own mind as it is.

In a mirror many different reflections arise. The reflections can be beautiful, they can be ugly, they can seem to last some time, they can be evanescent. But whatever the quality of the reflection, the mirror is not damaged or touched. Take for example the wing-view mirror in a car - as you drive along the road it is showing reflection after reflection after reflection. It is the very openness and emptiness of the mirror that facilitates this flow of images. A painting isn't like that; a plate with food on it isn't like that either. The painting limits the potential of the canvas just as our fixation on the seeming inherent value of our specific thoughts blinds us to the infinite potential of our mind.

When we have something, it seems to be its shape, qualities and so on; it seems to have self-substance. It exists, and its name, coming after the 'fact' of its existence, seems to merely acknowledge that existence. This seeming self-existence of the entity, which could be oneself, other beings, trees, teacups and everything else, lets it take up a position in relation to other things. This leads us to relativising, saying that this is better than that, this is older than that, this is newer than that. We do this because we are grasping at phenomena as if they possess their own individual identity. When all these things seem to exist in and of themselves we are pulled into comparing and contrasting, and then into adopting or rejecting, in order not to be overwhelmed by the amount of stuff we encounter and in order to bring some kind of definition to our ever-changing experience of ourself. However when we see that the mind is pure and free of any defining essence or substance of its own we are released from the delusion of attributing real existence to it. Our mind is open and empty in itself yet its play or movement or energy gives rise to the multiplicity of experiences that occur. They are the radiance of our mind, illusory forms devoid of self-substance yet manifestly here. Our mind is empty, shining and ever-changing. This nonduality of unborn openness and ceaseless display is the ground of our primordial freedom.

Dzogchen is in harmony with the buddhist teaching of the middle way in being neither eternalist, since we cannot find any fixed substances that endure through time, nor annihilationist according to which belief things, beings and actions vanish forever without trace. Dzogchen points to open empty awareness revealing patterns of energy in ever-shifting display.

Our life manifests as the immediacy of experience. Who is the experiencer? Normally we would say, *"This is me. I exist and I seem to exist inside this body; this is my home. I look out through my sense organs and have many different experiences."* The starting point for this would be, *"I am someone, and being someone I am always somewhere, always concerned about something. Moreover you are other than me."* With this belief we take our world to be located in particular positionings and the phenomena we encounter to have various periods of duration. Some seem to last a long time, some don't last so long. While we are formulating this 'wonderful' analysis, making sense of what is going on, what we often don't recognize is that we are telling ourselves a story. We are inventing what we seem to be perceiving.

We start with the assumption, *"I am inside me and you are outside me. You exist and you have your history, you were born in a particular place, and your parents were like this, you went to this kind of school..."* and so on. This edifice of the identities of myself and other people is actually a construct,

gradually built up layer upon layer, year upon year. On a general level we know this to be true. We know that we are not who we once were, that our parents die, that our children grow up and leave – yet somehow we maintain the fantasy of the reliability and predictability of ourselves and everything around us. Due to disregarding the fact of moment by moment change we are shocked by the seemingly intrusive crises of climate change, wars, famines and so on.

What is the ground that these beliefs and interpretations are standing on? If our 'self' existed as a true substance, it would have a reliability. But, as we know very well, we are fundamentally unreliable. We are labile, our mood is changing all the time. We are happy, we're sad, we're enthusiastic, we're bored. There are a lot of fluctuations going on. This is the actuality, the phenomenal experience as it emerges. Yet we blind ourselves to it because we want to maintain the illusion that 'I exist in a predictable way' and 'you exist in a predictable way'. For if I know who you are and you know who I am, we can start to choreograph our encounters. We spend a lot of our lives constructing these patterns. Yet they are contrived and highly edited. Such activity requires a huge capacity for selective attention, for taking up those factors which confirm my own structure of belief and rejecting those factors that might undermine it. However all this effort is unnecessary!

The openness of the mind has no content of its own. It is the basis, the source, the ground of all that occurs. It is nothing you can grasp hold of, yet is infinitely fecund, always generating new phenomena. These appearances arise in the space of awareness, like clouds or rainbows emerging in the sky. They present, they appear, but if you try to grasp them and hold on to them, you find that all you've got is a concept. The actuality of what displays itself through the senses is ungraspable. When you want to take hold of it you may say something like, *"Oh, this orange is more red than that other orange which is more yellow."* Whatever discriminations we make about sounds, colors, tastes, and so on are all on the basis of comparing and contrasting. You can only compare and contrast things if they are taken to be separate entities. Yet if we are looking clearly, unwaveringly, we come to see that this seeming thingness of these things is in fact a construct of our own mental activity. Our mind is seduced and confused by its own creativity. Instead of simply enjoying this magic display we take it to be real, merging in identification with the 'subject' aspect and ceaselessly selecting from amongst the seeming 'object' aspect.

Once we start to truly see by viewing with the view transmitted through the lineage, the view shared by all the buddhas, we see that our mind, which is the ground, the sphere, the environment within which everything is emerging, can in its emptiness only give rise to empty ungraspable phenomena. This is the basic non-duality of appearance and emptiness. When we recognize and are fully present in and as this undeceiving revelation we are the non-duality of awareness and emptiness, revealing the non-duality of clarity and emptiness, and manifesting moment by moment as the non-duality of appearance and emptiness.

This is not theory, not something abstract. It is the concrete unchanging actuality of our presence. It is not far away, not something to aim for but is always already present right here where we always actually are. If you look now, we are here in this bookshop. The space is not large yet as we look around many many things appear. They appear instantly, almost magically, altogether in an undivided field. But when our mental habits of conceptualisation start to work we instantly build up images of what is 'out there'. We

might say, *"The books on these shelves are concerned with Indian Philosophy, whereas the books on the shelves below are concerned with Myths and Legends."* The books have titles on their spines and you can see that they have all been carefully grouped by content so that you know what is where. We do this by relying on signs which seem redolent with true meaning. By understanding language, by having a sense of the semantic web within which we are operating, we can allocate different meanings and values. If someone who was interested in yoga were to come into this bookshop they could go to where the sign says Yoga. Someone without interest in yoga would not go there.

For each of us it is through selectivity that we become an individual person. We take on our particular patterns of shaping by being interested in particular aspects of the world. If we were interested in everything, we would rapidly become overwhelmed because our sense of our identity has a restricted capacity. I am like this because I am not like that — and by excluding 'that' from 'this', 'this' is unable to include 'that' without ceasing to be 'this'.

The very fact of our seemingly infinite range of choices within a consumerist society makes it difficult to be present with our own basic openness. Once you start to see the world not as open and radiant with appearance as inseparable from the spacious ground, you're stuck with stuff. Then you have to spend your whole life sifting and sorting stuff — which in its actuality is merely fleeting appearance. For the ego self there is an awful lot of stuff. It's everywhere, it's overwhelming.

Due to this, in order to keep ourselves sane, we tend to blank out a lot of what is happening. When we walk along the streets of London there are so many people, so much noise, chaos, people walking without looking where they are going. So we switch on our music machine, put in our earphones, and zone out. This is a way of protecting the shape of ourself when we experience ourself moving in a world of other shapes. *"I've got to hang on to the sense that I'm me and that I know who I am."* Or at least I can insist that I am the one to tell the many stories about me and through this maintain a sense of agency. I can generate different versions of me being who I am and these versions are consoling even if they are not happy stories for they confirm that I am me and that I exist in a knowable way. By being able to share some kind of story with you that is comprehensible — which I hope I'm doing at this moment — then you are being confirmed to me as someone who can participate in the world of my stories. This is where we meet and find ourselves: in stories. We are communicative beings. The beauty of this is that it can create a sense of intimacy, an absence of loneliness. However there is a price to pay since this method of self-identity and communication hides the actuality of the living luminosity of self and other.

HOW WE MANIFEST IN THE WORLD. THREE ASPECTS

From the point of view of dzogchen, there are three aspects to how we actually are. The first is non-manifest. It is the openness of the mind, the emptiness of the mind. The basic presence of our open awareness is not something we can find. It is not something we possess. It is how we truly are, the ungraspable ever-present ground of our being here. Open and empty, it is also infinite potential as the basis for the second aspect, the display of everything that occurs. This open display is not selected or edited; it is the clarity of the immediacy of the field of experience. For example, you came down the stairs into this room. There are people here, many shapes and many things happening all at once. You don't have to build up an image of what is here; it's comes all at once. This is the instant clarity of the mind, the

revelation of the display of the infinite potential of our basic openness. Within this radiant field we emerge as the third aspect, the unique specificity of ourselves moment by moment. Each moment is unique. I never repeat myself. I am not an enduring thing. In the immediacy of presence every moment is fresh. I am this blossoming moment, just this. And then just this. Each moment is complete, each empty of inherent existence, each the energy of the buddha. The richness of appearance does not need to be ordered or homogenised by concepts. Clarity is intrinsic to this infinite display and so we remain relaxed and present. When these three aspects of openness clarity and specificity are uncovered there is bright presence free of reliance on concepts.

However, although everything is available freshly each instant, we don't know 'what it is' as a 'thing' until we start processing it by applying our conceptual apparatus to identify entities. Awareness has no need of this conceptual construction. It is instant clarity, instant illuminating presence. However our habitual ego self arises with unawareness and lacks clarity. It must struggle to create meaning and relies on conceptual knowledge to do this. We developed this by engaging in comparing and contrasting, liking and not liking, saying this person is tall, this person has long hair and so on. In this activity, it usually feels to us that we are simply perceiving what is actually here. The stuff, the items that we take to be here, are perceived according to the way we have learned to perceive them according to our current mode of embodiment. We take that perception to be an accurate account of what is here as it is. Then, based on this, we develop our own opinions about these seemingly self-existing items. They seem to be things which exist in and of themselves and so seem to be inherently separate from us.

But is this really the case? What is emerging, in its emptiness, is ungraspable. There's nothing to get hold of, nothing to build on. It is immediately present and immediately dissolving. So when I see something as strongly real, or as strongly established in itself, this is because I have imputed to it an internal essence, an internal ground or self-definition. It becomes isolated from the field of revelation. And this individualized entity, whether it's a chair, or a book, or a person, is something which, in its shaped-ness, I can apprehend. By taking hold of it, the very act of grasping gives me a sense of power: *"I know what I'm doing. I know where I am. I can manage my life."* When these things seem to exist we can move them around in different patterns. This is our freedom and our power. The consistency of these patterns, and the fact that the patterns that I generate are generally accessible to, and understandable by, other people, allows us to live in this great *folie à deux*, or rather mass folie. We are all trapped in our imagination of truly existing entities.

As we well know, through encountering changes in politics, changes in the economy, changes in our body over time, changes in life experience, we invent and reinvent ourselves in an attempt to maintain the continuity of ourselves. We seek to find, or at least to establish within the ceaseless flow of change, some aspects which we can safely call 'I, me, myself'. We insist again and again that we truly are who we take ourselves to be – I am this definition, this memory, this idea. I know who I am by believing in the stories I can tell about myself. Of course I tell different people different versions of my story, or even quite different stories according to their age, gender, role in my life. I seek approval and form my stories for this person in this situation accordingly. But where is the enduring essence in all this activity? In constructing myself I betray my hope of revealing 'the true me'. Constructs are adventitious not intrinsic, and due to

this they cannot illuminate the intrinsic. This is the heart of the problem – a problem that no amount of further conceptual elaboration can solve.

When you are a child you encounter the sometimes annoying fact that your parents are trying to invent you. They've got some idea in their head about who you really are and they try to massage that into you so that you will become the person that they think you are. That starts to wash off as the years go by and we find that, instead of relying on other people to tell us who we are and internalizing that meaning, we can actually produce our own meaning. We imagine the world differently, on what we take to be our 'own terms'.

Is this imagination imagining a mere commentary on what is there, or does it reveal something more fundamental? Are we imagining what is here? When we closely examine the actuality of our experience, and let it reveal itself to us, we see that we imagine the seeming essence, the noun, and we imagine the qualities, the adverbs and adjectives. A noun is generally taken to stand for, to represent, to accurately name, something that is there, something existing as itself. This 'thing itself' is then able to carry the qualities that are ascribed to it. Ah, now we know where we are! This is this and that is that. Our belief in our culturally shared assumptions disguises the fact that we ourselves are reifying emergent transient appearances into 'real' entities. This is the fruit of our mental activity. This is our basic invention, our imagination. This is the engine that maintains our delusion, our self-deception.

So we say, *"This is an apple. It's a delicious apple."*

— Where is the apple?

— Well, it's here.

— But where is it?

— It's on a plate.

— How did it get on a plate?

— Well, it came in a bag.

— Where did that come from?

— From the shop. And it came from the supplier, and it came from the tree which came from the seed...

The apple is always somewhere; you never find an apple by itself. That's impossible. All things, forms, appearance arise dependently in connectivity. There are no individual items that are not actually dependent on and embedded in a shifting matrix of supportive factors.

We also are always somewhere. At the moment we are here in this bookshop. At half past seven we'll be out the door and in the street and our paths will separate. We will go in different directions yet each of us will always be somewhere. That is to say, the self and its environment are inseparable. Subject and object are inseparable for they share the same field of emergence.

This points to another quality of nonduality: we deceive ourselves when we privilege ourselves as internally defined, and project onto external phenomena our belief in their truly existing internal essence. Nonduality is not a policeman – you are quite free to be deluded in your fantasy of duality even while never straying from the actuality of non-duality. We don't understand or open ourselves to the illusory nature of phenomena. We seek solidity within the ceaseless movement of the events that constitute our

world. The hoped for and imagined solidity is like earth; the actual flow of experience is like water. When we mix earth and water we get mud – and so we find ourselves stuck in the swamp of samsara.

The dream-like web that we occupy all the time is merely the play of our mind. If we can see the absence of inherent existence in ourselves and in all other phenomena then if we are present and grounded and centered in its unfolding we will find that we are intrinsically ethical and kind. With the sense of the absence of true substance in ourselves, we have a sense of the fragility of life. Life is not a thing, but patterns of energy which are very easily swayed and influenced by other patterns that are around. When we see that other people are like this too, we see that in fact all appearance is a patterning of energy, a moment in the infinity of connectivity. It's like the wind. When the wind, which is air, moves the air around, it too is moving in unfathomable ways. This might all feel a bit overwhelming. How on earth can I ever make sense of life if it is so unlike what I have always thought it was? How can I stay open to this incredible complexity of existence?

THE WORLD AS DYNAMIC MOVEMENT

Our world is movement, the ceaseless patterning of the five elements: earth, water, fire, wind and space. Once these elements start to become more apparent for us, we start to see the world as dynamic, as display appearing and vanishing in front of our eyes. Rather like a gentle breeze in the summer that blows across your cheek, "*Oh!*", and then it's gone. Each moment is like that — undeniably here, ungraspable, then gone. The patterning of appearance is neither random and chaotic nor fixed and immutable. The patterning of appearance can be of brief or long duration depending on circumstances. It is vital that we attend to the clarity of the pattern as it changes—this ephemeral ordering is coherent in its non-duality with the ever-open ground. If we are not awake to this non-duality we are likely to conflate appearance and concept. Then the name and concept we apply seems to establish the substance of what we encounter. For example, 'London' is a name, a basically empty sign which can be used to refer to millions of moments of our experience of living here. London is movement and name. There is no fixed definable 'London' to London. London is myriad rivulets of experience, shifting and turning for all who participate in 'it'. The gap between the enduring name and the actual flow is hidden by our own attachment to our reified London.

When we awaken to this we can continue to engage with all our familiar points of reference, our street, our friends, our shoes. They appear as they have always appeared, yet brighter and fresher as they are gradually relieved of the obscuring burden of all that we have projected onto them.

If we are going to participate in the luminous field of their unfolding, we have to loosen up. Our desire for control, instead of being a stabilizing and reassuring function, starts to appear problematic. Our need for predictability introduces an imputed true essence and reality into appearances, dulling us to their actuality. We want to build walls which define, '*I'm me in here, you are out there.*' The ego works in just the same way as the economic system with an on-going tension between free trade and protectionism. I need you yet I want to be entirely autonomous, self-defining and true to myself. Living with this contradiction is painful. The exit from it is not to be found in isolationism. The other as potential is not the problem. The key issue is my own fixity, my tight sense of myself, my taking myself to be an enduring

knowable thing. Relaxing this allows the mind-forged manacles to fall off by themselves. We are part of the inclusive whole, the great mandala of universal enlightenment.

Our own body effortlessly shows us that we have to interact in order to stay alive. We breathe in and we breathe out. We eat and drink, we act and react. We are processes which are part of the general movement of processes, and yet we also want to have stability. When we are not able to find intrinsic stability, the unchanging ground, we seek to impose order and predictability. As a result we tend to become tight. We become anxious and worried that the world isn't the way we want it to be. This can easily lead to depression and frustration. When we do loosen up, perhaps using alcohol to help us relax control, we often end up being all over the place. We then have to tighten ourselves up again. In life we are often moving between too tight and too loose, pulsing between polarities.

The actual middle way, the grounded presence open to everything which is the true intrinsic basis for stability and ease, becomes hidden by our own mental activity. There's no god or demon doing this to us. We are not being punished. These are simply patterns. We are either aware of the ground of the patterning and abide in its intrinsic clarity, or we imagine internally defining essences in these patterns and thereby bind ourselves to the endless task of interpretation.

DZOGCHEN MEDITATION

The view already outlined points to the illusory nature of the limitations which seem to bind us. They have no power of their own— in fact we bind ourselves by imagining real separate entities. This unnecessary and unhelpful mental activity has come to seem both true and normal for us. Meditation in dzogchen is not another, even a special, activity of construction. It is simply to relax the fusion of being and doing so that our actual uncontrived identity is allowed to reveal itself. To meditate is to welcome ourselves back into the spaciousness of the presencing ground of our own being. With this openness of being we are not something as such: we are not being a banana as opposed to a pear; we are not being a man or a woman. We are 'being' in the sense of aliveness, the undeniability of the freshness of being here. Just being. Simply being. This pure presence is not resting on anything. It is inseparable from the infinite spaciousness which hosts everything and which reveals everything as its own ungraspable display. With the clarity of this direct experience unmediated by concepts, it is obvious that the more we cling to seemingly solid substances the more we are deluding ourselves.

The problem we have is our long history of grasping at entities, of building up pictures and stories about them. We learn it in our family, in school, we learn it in many settings. We have been encouraged to learn things and to use what we have learned in the way we have learned it, to pass exams, get certificates, and get a job. With a job we can now get money and with money we can get a holiday and feel successful, normal and happy.

Devoting ourselves to building up skills in patterning self and environment might seem like a pretty good way to live but it is quite exhausting. When you are young and healthy you can bop about; life is opening up, and there are so many new possibilities. So we try this, and then we try that, and accumulate memories and experiences — yet perhaps we never really get anywhere. Year after year we are running and running and doing and making, but there's a hole in our bucket — life leaks away and so we have to

keep filling up our sense of self, trying to shore it up with more fleeting experiences. Everything is transient, impermanent, so what can we actually find to hold on to? The ego wants to hang on to things and to get some security and it manages this impossible task by the magic of self-deception. By pretending that our abstract ideas are concrete realities we can, for a while, inhabit our own fantasies and reassure ourselves that we are fine and have found true value.

In dzogchen, to meditate is to ease oneself out of that dis-ease. Letting go of the over-aroused anxiety that says, *"If I don't have something to hold on to I'm going to fall apart, fade away, be overwhelmed, or have a breakdown. I need these supports to be able to tell myself who I am."* That is to say, *"My self-narrative is the defining mechanism, the factory that produces my identity. If that factory gets closed down, who will I be?"* We can't imagine who we would be and what would be around us since we have always been relying on concepts to fill the space, to give us the tools for thinking about, for imagining, for creating. If we were to let go of that, there might be just space... *"and then who would I be given that I have to be someone, something, somewhere?"*

We would be present in open space as open space. This awareness is known in Sanskrit as *vidya*, and in Tibetan as *rigpa*. It is non-conceptual illumination whereby everything is revealed directly without interpretation. For example, when we leave here and go out into the street, the street is there. We can look at the buildings and notice how they often have the year that they were built carved in the stone. That gives us a history and a basis for constructing the story of the buildings, yet in terms of our actual immediate experience, it's all here fully formed in the moment of our experience. Everything is already instantly complete. It is as it is and is not made more complete by our commentary. What we add with our thoughts covers the actual rather than revealing it. The people are here, the cars are moving and the buses are going down the road — each moment is always already complete in itself. Each moment is whole and arrives all at once. This is the clarity of the display of the potential of open awareness.

In meditation we release ourselves from our preoccupations and this effects a paradigm shift. Instead of thinking that I have to develop myself, accumulate more qualities, and build up more capacity to survive in this complicated world, the practice is simply to relax and open. Relax and open. Our wired-up hyper-vigilant ego doesn't like that message at all, because for the ego being on the job, checking things out, knowing what's what, is what keeps me safe. However, the more we enter into the practice, the more we see that there is a deep security and a deep safety in allowing the mind to run free. Like a stream coming down a steep mountain, it babbles along and then it comes to a waterfall and the water is just in free-fall.

When we sit in the practice the mind is in free-fall. We don't know what's going to happen. We don't need to know what's going to happen. So instead of worrying about what's coming, instead of looking behind us at what has just occurred in our mind, we stay present with each moment of experience as it arises now and now and now without arriving anywhere. We start to have a sense that linear progression is a story we tell ourselves. Everything is happening in this moment and this moment is infinite, as is each and every moment. The intrinsic infinite stillness of each arising relieves us of the need to be in charge. Life is self-sorted just as it is. To be relaxed open spacious awareness is the basis for the hospitality we offer to all the diverse phenomena and situations that occur. When we taste the infinite presence of each moment and see its self-liberation our anxious ego-self can relax and merge back into its own open

ground. It has been lost and alienated for too long but now it has a chance to be back home where it has always been. The ego is not the enemy: it is who we are when we are not awake to who we are.

The more we settle into this practice the more we awaken to another aspect of 'the great completion' which is that every experience is already in the mind. There is just one ground, one source, one basis, and it is the luminous mind which is empty of self-substance. There is no other factory anywhere. There is no export-import. It's all immediately here. Staying present with this, there is the arising and passing of the rays of the radiance of one's own mind. These rays manifest as thoughts, feelings, sensations and all that arises for us through our senses. As long as we live in our imprisoning bubble of isolation these arisings are shuffled between fusional identification and disowning exclusion. Things are not actually what we ordinarily take them to be and nor are we. Yet, without them having to be changed in the patterning of their arising appearance, their ungraspable luminosity is revealed simply by our non-interference. In order to open to the direct revelation of how it is we need to relax out of effortful habitual identifying with the subjective aspects of the emergent field. What I take to be 'I, me, myself', is not basic or central but is in fact a veil of dark radiance obscuring the bright radiant openness of 'my own mind'.

In this context to say 'my own mind' is not the same as saying 'my own watch' or 'my own shoes'. Normally when we say something is one's own, it's a possession, it's something we have. We have books, or money, or a partner... We situate ourselves in relation to that possession. But when we say 'my mind', or 'my own mind' or 'the radiance of my mind' this is not revealed through appropriation, not through grasping and building up an image of it. It is directly revealed by and as participation in the ceaseless unfolding.

Awareness is free of ownership. That is to say, what we take to be our personal self is actually impersonal, for it has no individualized, isolated seal of identity and self-definition. Yet, paradoxically, the impersonal ground manifests as the unique specificity of each of us here. We each have our own postures, gestures, vocabulary that we use, and so on. We are only ourselves and nobody else, and yet the ground of 'our' being doesn't belong to us.

So there is an inversion here. Instead of starting with ourself and moving out from there, instead of checking out where we are and what's going on by relying on conceptual interpretation, by relaxing into the open ground, we find that we are revealed to ourself in mode after mode after mode. These modes, the unfolding of the potential of the mind, are not created by egoic intentionality. I am not the maker or manufacturer of 'my experience'.

For example, if you go and have a drink with a friend after this talk, you'll sit down and start chatting. Before you arrive in the café you may have no idea of what you are going to say. Even if you have something in the back of your mind that you want to talk about, you can have no idea of the order that the conversation will unfold in. When you are actually sitting with your friend and you see their face, you have a sense of whether they are available to listen or not. Maybe you have already been talking too long; maybe they look like they want to talk and for you to listen. You are part of a moving field of pulsation, and you have to be present and attentive if you're going to stay with the rhythm of this unfolding

pulsation. Being preoccupied with your own thoughts and feelings will mess up your connectivity and timing. You'll miss the beat, coming in too fast or too slow.

A conversation is a co-creation. Subject and object are not two separated domains. They are actually like two wings of a bird. They are pulsing all the time together. You can't have a subject without an object. You can't have an object without a subject. Both subject and object are the movement of the energy of the mind – which both is and is not 'my' mind.

At this time of year we see flowers in bloom everywhere; they grow from bulbs or roots. What we see is the flower above the ground yet without the bulb, or the root, they would not be blossoming. We are like the flower: the root of our being is under the ground. That is to say, it is invisible to us. What is visible are the patternings of interactive experience. On and on and on, moment by moment, something is happening. We're happy, we're sad, we want more of this, we want less of that... We are pulsatory, and everyone around us is pulsatory. We are dynamic movement emerging from the open, empty ground.

Stay relaxed and open in everyday life and let life live through you. Everything we do is movement. We get up, clean our teeth, have a pee, make a coffee, rush to get to work. We go in to work. What do we do? We open the door, go into the foyer, maybe climb some stairs, sit down at a desk, look up emails, talk to a colleague, plan a meeting or whatever our work involves. Maybe you are a scaffolder and are doing something very physical. From morning to night all is movement. The body is always moving, moving in interaction.

We can formulate the story of our lives to ourselves as 'I am doing this. This is how I spend my days.' We can have a self-referential modality of the discourse, whereby we tell ourselves that 'I am whoever I tell myself I am.' Since I can tell endless stories there is never going to be an end to this. Then we live in an all-embracing fog of memories, thoughts, plans. Yet invisibly and non-dually the ever-open ground manifests and pervades each and every possible experience. The fog arises from the ground. The ground is open. It gives rise to clarity and to obscurity. Clarity is present as the intrinsic self-illumination of the ground, the ground revealing itself through the display of appearance — yet it is never an object to be apprehended. The fog which arises is how radiance appears when it is grasped at as being something. This appearance is a revelation of the actual yet it does not directly reveal the actual. It is a deluding imagining of reified substantiality. Although it seems substantial, when we pay attention to it without being captivated by it we see that it is like a dream or sometimes a nightmare – a seemingly real captivating play of illusion. Once this unreality is attended to it becomes an invitation to ease ourselves out of seriousness and self-importance since in fact there is no true difference between the actually open and the seemingly substantial.

The more we relax, the more we are able to move in the world intuitively, with less planning and more connectivity. Why? Because we are allowing the world to show us how to be. We find that the fresh openness of the ground of being opens endless, endless, endless possibilities of participation. We find that we manifest imaginally in a world of imagination free of reification and that illusion is the play of the clarity of the empty mind.

The result is that we experience much less hassle. Life gets easier. And when life gets easier, we're not so preoccupied. If we are less preoccupied, we find more space to be available, to be receptive. Because we are less attached to agendas we can now be more responsive to the unique specificity of the different people we meet.

In this way, we have the union of wisdom and kindness, wherein wisdom is seeing the empty open ground which frees us from the delusion of grasping, and kindness is to stay in relatedness, allowing our life to be co-emergent as we participate with others. Rather than having a dictator mentality, whereby we outline our master plan and then try to impose it on the world, we find ourselves being fulfilled through life as is. However life is, it is just this, as it is, moment by moment.

Emptiness, unborn emptiness, present from the very beginning, the womb of the great mother, is the openness within which all the possible patterns of manifestation occur. When we free ourselves from trying to ring-fence certain aspects as 'me' and separate off other aspects as 'other', we have real communality and commity. Where there's a common ground you have a concern for the commonweal, the common good.

As we become less isolated, instead of dividing, splitting and projecting, we awaken to integration. Actually, it's not that we have to integrate any-thing, because everything is always already integrated, integral as integrity. What the non-activity of meditation practice does is avoid dis-integration. It is the movement of our mind that is separating and dividing and privileging one thing over another.

Relaxing and allowing things to happen doesn't lead to madness; we are not left with chaos. Rather more clarity shines forth. Then we start to see, 'I'm already on the inside.' All our lonely striving and anxiety about how we are doing just fades away like morning mist. Here we are, and it's okay; we're part of the flow, however it is.

Dzogchen indicates that we are not a thing. We are a ripple in the ocean of revelation. The issue is how to stay present in the moment of experience. At first it is helpful to observe how we sabotage this freshness and full aliveness by going into daydreams, self-criticism, fantasies of compensating for difficulties in life and so on. We start to notice our tendency to go into a realm of mental construction rather than staying with the openness of the senses.

The dzogchen tradition talks about meditating 'sky to sky.' The world is like an open sky and moving in this sky are many different clouds and rainbows arising as the seemingly 'outer' events that occur, houses, dogs and so on. What we take to be 'my mind' is also like the sky, wide-open and full of clouds and rainbows arising as all the seemingly 'inner' factors of thoughts, feelings, memories and so on. The more we relax and allow these open spaces to be contiguous, to be in contact, and in fact to be without separation, the clouds and the rainbows are revealed as having an equal taste, the taste of the empty radiance of the mind. Then we are not happy happy happy when we see a rainbow, and sad, sad, sad when it's raining. Both arise and pass without leaving a trace. We become the hospitable space which is close to, and inseparable from, the experience of everything. Instead of being endlessly condemned to select what I like and to avoid what I don't like, which is a very exhausting busy-ness, we find ourselves present with the richness of life.

Rather than being one little pure essence which can be defined as 'my true self' or 'my real self', we find that the self is like a cornucopia. It's endlessly open and endlessly full. Its fullness is its emptiness. If we were just one thing and we were truly that, then we couldn't have any more experiences. It would be the end of the story. But each day we have so many experiences. We are a flow of experience in the radiant field of awareness. Well, this is not what we learned in school!

We are so fortunate to be able to inherit many of these great traditions from the east. They have been refined for thousands of years. This is such a wonderful and precious time in which we can access the richness of this open field where authentic new expressions of the unchanging truth are ceaselessly occurring. Rather than wasting our time expressing our ego's conceptual interpretation of what is occurring, if we wish to awaken we need to start today to use the tradition to find our own actual, non-conceptual ground. Then new modes will start to emerge, modes which are authentic and non-dual, the harmonious revelation of intrinsic integrity.