

Born Free:
you can't catch me, and neither can I

Gutenstein Retreat, September 2005

Talk by James Low

Transcribed by Johanna Stoll

Edited by Wendy Chozom

Excerpts

According to the teaching of dzogchen, attachment arises from a dualistic orientation: the setting up of oppositional categories, the poles of which appear truly existing. The most basic of these is self and other, in which I have a sense that I exist apart from others and apart from the environment around me.

Rather than the mind being a possession of the self, the self is a construct of the mind. When we don't realise this, the openness or potentiality of the mind is ignored through a narrow reification and grasping of a product of the mind, which is the self.

It is the subtle work of re-balancing the tilt, away from the centrality of the felt ego-sense of self and towards the more open and relaxed direct experience of the mind, which is at the heart of the meditation practice.

It's not so much the reactivity or the interaction of body and mind and environment that is the problem, this interactive flow is just how things are. The problem arises with the interpretive or narrative structure through which we make sense of an event. We are trying to make sense of our situation by taking in some things (those we like to arise) and pushing away other things (those we don't like to arise). However, all of this is movement; this is the energy of the mind which reveals itself, but you can't see the source if you are caught up in the product

The suffering of samsara arises because we know that we are infinite and unchanging but, in an effort to realise this stability of identity, we project our knowledge on to the individual ego-self which is always changing.

Contents

An overview of dzogchen	1
Duality, the root of attachment.....	2
Self construction	5
Bodhisattvas aren't busy looking after Number One.....	8
Tantra and the purification of ignorance	9
The purposes of practices	10
Integrating with the teaching	11
Dzogchen.....	12
The mind as a mirror	14
Ignorance; dis-integration by selective attention.....	16
In the practice we want to give ourselves space in which we can see how the mind is moving rapidly, seeking to satisfy itself by pushing away the things it doesn't like, and pulling in the things it does like.	18
A stable state whether or not desire is satisfied	18
Strengthened by appropriate refuge	19
Giving up the game	20
Freeing the mind	22
Non-duality	22
Self- liberation of thoughts	24
Primordial purity	26
Primordial buddhahood	28
Practising in daily life.....	29
Unpacking the assumptions	29
How not to be	30

Letting it go	32
Resources	32
Meditation posture	33
Stories and idealisation vs. applied phenomenology.....	35

An overview of dzogchen

This weekend the theme will be about being at home in the world from the point of view of dzogchen, which is a particular school or view of Tibetan buddhism. In particular we will look at the relationship between the mind and the felt sense of self – the nature of our alienation – and try to see how meditation can help with the re-integration of our lived situation into something more at ease, more spontaneous and more natural.

Traditionally we can say buddhism begins with a discussion of the nature of suffering, that we find ourselves distressed, ill at ease, not at peace with ourselves. This suffering, or *dukkha*, is different from ordinary pain. For example, if we hit our finger with a hammer, we feel a pain and we can suffer from that pain but the sensation of the nerves that have been affected by the impact actually starts to diminish very quickly. Often our distress is maintained by thoughts that we have arising in our mind such as ‘I can’t believe I did that, how could I be so stupid?’ In this way an event which has gone, continues as a basis for reaction; we keep it alive inside ourselves by reflecting on it. Even after it has vanished we continue to build all sorts of attitudes, and views and emotional excitements around it.

In his early discourses the Buddha talks about *attachment* as the cause of suffering; an attachment in which our mind clings on to a situation. He suggests that this root of suffering can be cut; that **we** can stop the cause of suffering, *suffering can come to an end*.

The way to do that is to follow the eight-fold path, which essentially describes being intelligent about the decisions we make in the world. This requires paying attention to the processes whereby one sees things, and stabilising the mind so that we can really see how it operates, in particular what the individual self is up to.

Looking a little bit more at the nature of attachment; attachment, desire, and craving all involve a relationship. The sense of self, to which one may be attached, is constituted in a dialogue; it’s not a simple monadic unit, our felt sense of who we are continues through a subtle subject–object relationship.

In buddhism there are many different schools and many different ways of examining these issues. According to the Tibetan buddhist tradition, all of these views were taught by Buddha Shakyamuni during his lifetime. Some of the teachings were given when the Buddha manifested in forms different from the usual form as a monk. When we look at it from a more western historical position we can see that many of the views evolved through an examination of internal contradiction and particular problematics.

There was a lot of discussion between the different sects in Tibet as to what was a true or authentic teaching of the Buddha; the proof that something was valid was often taken to be its source, or its cause. If it came from a good source, from the Buddha, it would be seen as being reliable.

However, the Buddha explained many different things *as methods* to help the different kinds of people gain some understanding; so it’s not so much about their truth, but about their usefulness. In the world of interaction that we inhabit, things take on an importance depending on whether or not they fit and so to say that something is *true* and **therefore** it is *useful* doesn’t speak to the incredible variation in how beings are constituted. I think that this understanding lies at the heart of the Buddha’s teachings.

In modern medicine there are certain drugs, like penicillin, which are *generally* very helpful but if you are allergic to penicillin this drug will not be helpful to you, you will have an adverse reaction; it is the same

with the teachings. Within the various traditions of buddhism you will find different interpretations or different presentations and if we are going to help people in any way, and if we are going to help ourselves, we have to stay with our own condition and find out which of the teachings is useful to us.

In some schools they would emphasis the holiness and the purity of the dharma. If you don't find that presentation of the dharma helpful, that would be seen as a sign of your limitations, your bad karma, your obscurations and so on. In the tradition that I trained in, we look at it differently. If the teaching is not particularly helpful then we try to do it from another point of view because, in order to bring about the end of suffering we have to be able to start to recognise *the basis out of which* my suffering, or my attachments, arise. That is to say I have to be able to start to really *observe myself*, to observe the nature of the energetic functioning of this existence. To carry out this investigation we have to find a way of being calm, being confident without being arrogant, and have the diligence to return to the task again and again. This requires some basic belief in our own potential. To maintain this belief it's very important to see that *all the resources of buddhism are designed to help you towards awakening*. Rather than being servants of the dharma, or custodians of the dharma, we want to use dharma as a means of removing our obscurations and loosening us up, so that we can feel more present and more connected.

Duality, the root of attachment

According to the teaching of dzogchen, attachment arises from a dualistic orientation – the setting up of oppositional categories, the poles of which appear to be truly existing. The most basic of these is *self* and *other*, in which I have a sense that I exist apart from others, and apart from the environment around me. With this view, as we sit together here, we experience ourselves in our individuality, *apart* from all the other people who are here. This creates a kind of gap between 'us' and what is 'around us' and this gap becomes filled up with many other dualisations: good/ bad, right/wrong, liking/not liking, and so on.

By developing categories into which we can place experiences as they occur, we try to bring a sense of order to the world around us and to our own mental processes. When we do that we find ourselves standing in relation to the world not directly, but indirectly – mediated through the categories which seem to hold meaning and value. Often we might think 'I want to be happy because I don't want to be sad. In order to be happy, I want people to like me; if they don't like me I feel sad or unhappy.' When I establish this position in my head, when I meet people, I will always have a concern...do you like me? I am moving out towards the world around me with a kind of shopping list or agenda, looking to have my needs met. From that perspective I may do many things to try to make you happy, but my motive is not at all altruistic. It starts from a self-referential point, that of the anxiety about the fragile nature about my self-identity. When I don't feel secure about who I am, I become artificial in my dealing with others and this can make me feel very agitated.

One easy way to deal with that is to cut off, to deaden ourselves inside, to dissociate; alternatively we can avoid some of the difficulty by becoming very impulsive. By just doing what I feel like doing and disregarding the impact of my actions on others I can feel a kind of freedom; there is a time delay before the arising of the negative consequence, so I can keep pushing ahead in a very blinkered way. All the many varied and wonderful ways in which human beings react to each other arise from the positing of the separation of self and other.

Why does this experience of duality occur? Well, our mind is not the same as our self. We are used to talking about 'my mind' in the same way as would refer to 'my car' or 'my hand' or 'my nose'. That is to say we speak about our mind as though we had a relationship of *ownership and possession*.

I can say, 'This is my hand' and generally speaking it doesn't cause me too much trouble. Sometimes I find it moving around and I'm not sure why it is moving around. Then I have to say 'Hey, James, you're Scottish, you're not Italian, put your hand down.' It would be unusual for my hand to slap me, we have

some discipline over the body, however when we sit to meditate we discover that the *mind* is very undisciplined. Unlike my hands or my feet, my mind has a mind of its own. I am not the owner of my mind. What I feel myself to be, what I think myself to be, is constituted out of experiences arising in the mind.

Rather than the mind being a possession of the self, the self is a construct of the mind. When we don't realise this, the openness or the potentiality of the mind is ignored through a narrow reification and grasping of a *product* of the mind, this is the *self*.

It is the subtle work of re-balancing the tilt, away from the centrality of the felt ego-sense of self and towards the more open and relaxed direct experience of the mind, which is at the heart of the meditation practice. We can then take this into the experience of being in the world with others.

Although we constantly have thoughts, we often don't know very much about their nature or the actual process of thinking. Through doing the simple meditation practice we come to experience more of the complexity of the flow of arisings in the mind. We can see that many of the thoughts that arise in the mind don't seem to have much to do with our ordinary sense of self. We might find ourselves thinking 'why do I have thoughts like that in my mind?' Much of this concern comes through thinking that our mind is a private place.

In our ordinary experience we remember some of our dreams and perhaps we're aware of day-dreaming, going off on fantasies of various kinds; many things which appear inside the box that we call 'myself' don't seem to be legitimate contents of that box.

In the area of psychiatry we encounter many phenomena where something which seems very foreign and strange can be arising for someone. Particularly in psychosis some very bizarre, very strange, very uncommon forms may be seen as quite common.

Conversely quite a few people suffer from conditions where thoughts about something very ordinary become impossible for them to entertain. Someone might find it impossible to eat food, because they think they are very fat, when in fact they are very thin. Somebody else might find it impossible to go out of their house, because they imagine all kinds of terrible dangers are there.

This indicates that our sense of security in the world is very fragile. Even if our lives are progressing well, and we find friendships, relationships, occupations, and earn enough money to survive, we usually experience anxieties and worries and concerns. We often feel the need to make life more secure, to have more solidity and more prediction in order to remove this anxiety but because the world has so many variables externally and internally, it's impossible to control them all.

When we look around the world we find that the people who have the most political power and those who have the most money also have many difficulties in their existence. The kinds of trouble these people have are the same kind of troubles that we all have. Perhaps ours are on a simpler level, but the kinds of difficulties are the same; we make small mistakes and then big consequences come from them. All of these situations arise because the nature of the self is inherently unstable. Subject and object are born together, that is to say, we exist in this world interacting with phenomena which appear for us, in the same way that we appear for ourselves.

To be alive is to be part of interactive sequences on many different levels, both internal to the body, and connected with the environment; as we are part of the world other people will disturb us. We could say

that one sign of mental health is the willingness to be interrupted; if we are very pre-occupied (if we are caught up in depressions or in anxieties or fragmented self-states or whatever) our capacity to be relaxed and open and responsive to the movement of the world is diminished.

It appears that we act on the world, and that the world act on us, but to formulate it in that way already pre-supposes that I am *apart* from the world and I am moving *from* my 'self' to act on the world which is *other* than me. From the point of non-duality there is no separation between our selves and the world. What we take to be our 'self' as a kind of individual basis for activity is itself an aspect of the interaction.

Through the meditation we can come to realise this, so that instead of having a fixed basis from which to move, our articulation or connection with phenomena as they arise engenders a flowing range of responses. Rather than the self being a fixed position, as the ground from which I am moving towards the other, the self is itself part of the interactive process. This whole interactive process is something which is revealed in the infinite dimension of the mind itself.

This may seem a little bit abstract, but it's very close to our lived experience.

In this tradition our primary focus is to observe the process of our mind in action and to see how much effort and energy is taken up in maintaining the different forms of differentiation. This energy is a movement, a movement which occurs on many different levels, one of which is inside our bodies. When our minds becomes very busy it's usually linked with changes in skin tension, in muscular contraction, collapse of the breathing, shifts in the hormonal structure and so on.

We experience *attachment*, when we fully identify with what is arising for us in the sense that **this** is happening to **me**, this feels strongly real to **me**; each moment of experience then becomes impactful. We know this very simply, because if we remember experiences in our lives which were very frightening, or very happy, or shameful, our body will respond. If you remember something happy, without any effort you will find yourself smiling. The smile arises even before you have a conscious notion that you are happy. In the same way if you remember something like a car crash, your body will tense up, you have fear and your expression will change.

The mind and the body are not essentially separate, so movement in one area will bring about movement in another, which why we generally keep our body as still as possible when meditating. When the body is still and the breathing is relaxed and easy through the diaphragm, the rapidity and intensity of the flow of thoughts tends to diminish. When we sit still in meditation and relax our breathing, slowing our thoughts, trying to develop a one-pointed attention on an external object, we are trying to give ourselves the moment to recognize the process of identification.

Self construction

It's not so much the reactivity or the interaction of body and mind and environment that is the problem, this interactive flow is *just how things are*. The problem arises with the interpretive or narrative structure through which we make sense of an event.

For example, if a thought arises which has content which stimulates us towards happiness then we think 'I am happy.' There is a positive or a pleasing feeling tone to that experience. What is occurring is that there is happiness and there is an experiencer of the happiness. After some time, different thoughts will arise with different feeling tones to them, perhaps sadness or anger. For each of these moments there is an experiencer and this experiencer has two aspects, one of which is very close to the arising of the sensation. In this aspect I experience a kind of *ownership* of the experience, it rings true for me, it seems to be exactly the case – I **am** happy, I **am** sad.

The other aspect is that of a more open awareness, through which what is revealed is happiness, sadness, various changing moods. This openness is not a kind of repelling distancing from the object. It's not as if I'm hovering above the experience, looking down and saying 'Oh, this is occurring, but I am safe in my little castle.' Rather there is the openness to the experience without the need to attach to it and incorporate it into the on-going construction of a sense of self. We are very familiar with the first aspect, where we are tilted towards an identification or fusion with what is arising, but we are not so familiar with this more open and spacious experience.

One of the problems we experience interpersonally, is that we often feel called upon to give an account of ourselves; situations where our social identity is developed on the basis of being able to express an opinion about things. The more time we spend with a relaxed open awareness the fewer opinions we have. A lot is going on, a lot is experienced, so a lot can be responded to, but when that moment of interaction and response is gone something else is there. If we can allow that moment to be gone, for sure something else will arise, then after that one for sure, something else.

This doesn't mean that you can't remember what has occurred, but by not being so involved you don't take up a fixed position. We can respond in different ways; this means that we can be unreliable. Reliability is greatly overrated. People want to be very reliable and fear to be described as unreliable, but actually if we stay close to our lived experience it changes a lot. This experience means that what we say as truth today may not be true tomorrow.

I work in a hospital, and one of my tasks is to assess patients who will then be seen by other therapists. I write very bad assessments which tend to be very short. I might say 'I like this person, we had a good conversation.' However this doesn't mean that the next person will have a good conversation with them!

Often, I have to read five or six page assessments written by other therapists and afterwards I have no felt sense of what the person will be like. You can describe symptoms and patterns of behaviour, you can formulate a diagnosis, you can encapsulate particular repetitive sequences but a person is *not* the accumulation of these repetitive sequences. This way of describing the patient creates a construct which is a kind of sign which operates through the institution to show that we are doing our work properly, but it has very little to do with the actual experience of being in the room with the patient and it may also be used as a barrier between us and the patient.

From the point of view of dzogchen each moment is fresh and we are required to respond as freshness. This doesn't mean that we don't know anything at all. What you know can be there, but rather than this knowledge arriving in advance and being held in mind so that it determines the nature of the encounter, it is feeding into the development of the direct moment of the encounter.

This is very similar to our general mental processes. We tend to have developed particular positions, particular attitudes. These positions give us a kind of confidence, a confidence that we know what to do, that we know how the world is. So by repeating this procedure, or this fixed gesture which I know well, I can confirm to myself that I am somebody who functions okay.

From the point of view of dzogchen the reason that we do this is because when we are trapped in the sense of 'I, me, myself,' we usually feel ourselves to be rather small. We often doubt that we will be able to cook up some fresh response, so it becomes safer to rely on something that has been prepared earlier, and like in a bad restaurant, we pop it in the micro-wave and make it look as if it is fresh. This is the problem of the anxious 'ego- self' which doesn't know it's own ground; experiencing ourselves as small and limited, we cut ourselves off from the open potentiality. In this way dualising, separating subject and object, sealing ourselves off as an autonomous agent, leads to a great deal of suffering.

As we start to relax and integrate into the infinity of the open dimension, all the resources of that are available to us, flow through us, and can come out into the world. So a key focus, one that we'll practise again and again over the weekend, is just relaxing into the non-obstruction of the natural integration of the various aspects of our existence.

Okay, so we can do a little bit of practice now and I'll describe it. As with all meditation in buddhism, the central direction is always the middle way. That is to say, don't try too hard to force your mind, and on the other hand don't just open and get lost in a flow of destruction.

This practice which many of you know is very simple, by reciting 'A' three times we integrate the space within ourselves with the space in front of us, and we use the flow of the sound of 'A' to release the tensions that we carry in our body, voice and mind, out into the space. Then we rest in the presence of what is occurring. Many thoughts and feelings and so on, arise. The key thing is just to let them come and go. If you find yourself getting caught up in a sequence of thoughts, you can just relax into the out-breath; be aware of your breath going out then open again. In this way we can start to experience the very dynamic nature of manifestation moment by moment.

It's helpful if, we can bring a little bit of space into our interactions with other people. So, especially when we meet together for practice, if you don't feel like talking to anyone, you don't have to do that. We are usually highly disciplined into being polite and coming forward and fitting in with the social discourses. There is nothing essentially wrong in that, but these social forms carry inside them many, many hooks to return us to a felt sense of being a separate person encountering other separate people. It's important to observe how you might be putting yourself more in the way of getting caught up in a familiar way of interacting – where you just collapse into it, with no light or awareness.

There are four traditional ways in which this dharma practise can be done – with a lot of elaboration, less elaboration, almost no elaboration and no elaboration. Here we usually do it in a very un-elaborated way, not spending a lot of time in formal recitation or taking refuge or dedicating merit.

This doesn't mean that our attention shouldn't hold these things. When we attend to the nature of the mind we have all the refuges in one. When we do the meditation practise and open, including the whole environment, not going into ourselves, we perform the action of the bodhisattva. When we maintain the

state of awareness, the meditation merit is dedicated automatically. In this way things can be informal but with a full content.

In buddhism our basic understanding is that everything is empty; that is to say there is no inherent self-nature, no self-substance, in any phenomenon. It follows that that which we believe in, that which we have a faith in, is in itself empty. We, the ones who have faith, are also empty; faith itself is empty. In this way the subject, the object, and the connection between them, all are devoid of inherent self-nature.

This is always the case, but it's usually hidden from us, because of our attachment, and in particular our conceptualization of attachment.

For example, somebody might feel 'I love ice-cream' and when they see a nice ice-cream shop they think 'Oh, I really must have some ice-cream.' Before buying the ice-cream there is a very clear sense 'Yes, I am committed to eating this ice-cream' and if they practice some mindfulness, and look from their head to their feet, they find no opposition to the idea of eating ice-cream.

So they eat the ice-cream and it's very good. If they then have another ice-cream it's also quite good, but if they have ten ice-creams then maybe they start to feel a little bit sick. By the time they have had twenty ice-creams, they think 'I hate ice-cream, I don't want to see another ice-cream in this life!'

In this way we can see how the momentary arising of an experience can have some immediate truth in it, but it becomes wrapped in a package which seems to give it an *infinite extension*. You go from the idea arising from a perception – I see an ice-cream and a positive feeling arises – *that's* immediate and in the moment, but when I package it, I put on top of this the general view 'I love ice-cream' which is very different. All the time, through the practice, we're trying to see how we cheat ourselves by making limited, finite, impermanent things, seem infinite, permanent, and enduring.

Sometimes I might think 'I am a buddhist' but what does this mean? This is not a very helpful idea and it offers no more clarity than saying 'I'm Austrian.' You could be Austrian but you might also be a spy for another country. You have an Austrian passport, but really you seek the destruction of Austria. In London we have suicide bombers, who have British passports and they want to destroy Britain. This kind of identification is meaningless; British, buddhist whatever it is, it's a kind of illusion or a fantasy. It gives us the indication that we have already arrived somewhere, that something is completed and finished, as if there is nothing more to do. What we need to do is to *practise* buddhism. With the view of dzogchen our task is to enter into a practice which means a commitment to stay connected with experience as it manifests and changes moment by moment.

Outer phenomena change all the time; inner phenomena change all the time but the stories we tell about outer phenomena and inner phenomena can be maintained.

We can see this very simply by looking around this room. If we were here yesterday, we can say 'Oh, yes, this room is the same now as it was on Friday' but this is a *concept*. When we were in this room yesterday it was evening and the light was coming in from different angles and with a different intensity. There were different people in the room, many sitting in different positions. What we actually experience when we attend to the information of our senses is something quite new. The shapes are moving, the colours move as the light and shade run across them; so much is going on, ceaselessly, endlessly. We tend to simplify things by making extrapolations, simple abstractions, and relying on them, that's what's happening when we say 'Oh yes, the room is the same.'

In buddhism, this is understood as the nature of stupidity. Stupidity is when we rely on an assumption, on a knowledge generated from a previous situation, and we import it to the present moment, without attending what is actually present. It's mental dullness, it's a prejudice and it's an expression of laziness because when we attend to the freshness of each lived moment, we start to see that the assumptions that we rely on are not very accurate.

So, if we want to stay alive and attuned to what is there we will have to be **present**. Present is not the same as busy. When we rely too much on conceptualisation, we have to make sense of things; we have to work out what is going on. We often do that by comparing and contrasting, seeking to find patterns which will give us an accurate prediction for the future.

Paradoxically the laziness of relying on previously developed assumptions involves us in an on-going busyness of correcting them and trying to apply them into the situation.

This is apparent in economic planning where economists develop huge computer models of cycles of economic change over the past hundred years or so, then try to predict from that, in the face of many, many variables, how things will be. Computers are used because it is much too complicated for us as individuals to do but even so, generally speaking, there has been a great underestimation of the impact of the changes in the Chinese economy on what will happen in Europe.

We struggle in the same way, trying to predict the best way in which to situate ourselves for future survival. This is the pattern of a *real separate subject* living in a world of *real separate objects*, and trying to have a relationship of control and dominance over them.

When the Americans went into Iraq, aided by their good allies the British, they had a clear slogan – they wanted to dominate, then to control and then to change. When we see what is happening in Iraq, it hasn't really happened too easily. Politics helps us to understand our mind because politics is a big canvas on which is painted exactly the same stories that run in our own head.

It is the ego's anxiety and belief that 'if I can control the situation than I will be happy' that leads to so much trouble; a function of faith is to try to give us a kind of holiday from the anxious need to impose our will on the situation.

Bodhisattvas aren't busy looking after Number One

Throughout the various levels of buddhist meditation practice we seek to find a stable and safe object, or practice, on which to rest our weary selves, so that we can be less busy and more relaxed and content.

In the basic calming meditation practises of *shamata*, we seek to take a simple support like the breath, or an external object like a pebble, a statue of the Buddha, or a painted disc, and allow the mind to settle on that object. Then the mind can have a holiday in the freedom from its habitual merging with the flow of thoughts, feelings and sensations.

In the general mahayana practice we develop a bodhisattva aspiration, an aspiration to free all beings from samsara. We make a commitment – In this and in all my future lives I will work for the liberation of all beings. When we look around sentient beings are not doing too well, they seem to have a lot of problems; the idea freeing them is quite a big commitment.

It's a paradox that taking this bodhisattva commitment to a very grand project, an infinite project, provides a kind of holiday; within that frame of reference, the ordinary problems of daily live become insignificant. If you go into Vienna and you can't find a place to park your car, that's maybe not such a big problem or if you have to do your income tax return and the time is running out, it's also not such a big

problem because you have committed yourself to helping all beings become enlightened, to be awakened, when in fact all *they* want to do is to watch television and to drink beer!

Certainly in my experience of working in psychotherapy, the people who suffer most are the people who are self-preoccupied. One of the things we try to do is to get people to move from individual therapy to group therapy but very often the patients resist this. They say 'But I am so full of my own problems, how can I listen to anyone else, and also I don't want to listen to anyone else problems, you need to listen to my problems!'

However, if the person can start to *see* another person and *listen* to another person, they are immediately given some relief from the collapse into their own boring, stupid stories (it's amazing how intoxicated we can be by this level of boredom!) Just as people, who become fixated on football, remember the names of all the team-members going back for fifty years and so on, so neurotic patients remember all the insults and hurts anybody has ever done to them. Football and neurotic stories are only interesting to the people who are involved in them, for other people they are just boring.

It's very interesting for us to have contact with other people and to realise that from time to time, we are each very boring. We also get to know how annoying it can be if we are very interested in something and other people are not interested in it.

When we take the bodhisattva vow, we make a commitment to drop narrow, self-sealing, self-affirming preoccupations, in order to practise being open and available for others. We start to think, what do I need to learn, how do I need to be in order to be of use to others? Then the beginning of my own identity becomes the other; I don't start from my self, from my habits, from my likes, from my interests, and then move out towards the other to see if I can find somebody who wants what I have to give. Rather I start with the inquiry into what is the situation of beings? What is the nature of samsara, the six realms, from the lowest hells to the highest heavens, and what is lacking in me at this moment that becomes an impediment to my being available and useful to others?

This is why, in the mahayana path, we study the six paramitas, or the ten paramitas, which are the classifications of virtuous qualities of character, generosity, patience, courage, wisdom and so forth. The buddhist texts are designed to be a kind of check list against which we can see both what our current state of affairs is and what we might need to develop in order to become more useful. Again, this is very helpful because it shifts our attention away from ourselves; it interrupts the normal self-sealing, self-regarding flow of thoughts and concerns.

Tantra and the purification of ignorance

Then, in the practise of tantra, we make use of the visualisation of many different kinds of gods and goddesses. These function to help us to re-identify ourselves, and to re-think the task of helping others. In order to help people we might think we should give them food or clothing or speak very sweetly to them, or help them to make sense of their problems and difficulties; but that is still inside the paradigm of 'How can *I* help *you*?' where I am *a real, separate person* and so are you. The basis of tantric visualisation is to imagine an infinite clear blue sky; this blue sky is empty of any substance, you cannot grasp the sky. Into this blue sky, out of a sudden radiance of rainbows, there arises the basic seed letter and the mandala, the palace of the deity, arises from this. Then into this palace come the central deity and all the other deities. All of these forms have arisen out of emptiness. They have no inherent self-nature, they are not **things**, they are not internally defined, they are the radiance of this open dimension of being.

Then, through reciting the mantra we evoke an energetic relationship with the deity and we visualize rays of light coming from the deity. These rays of light merge into us, turning our bodies into light.

Depending on the kind of practice, you may yourself suddenly transform into the form of the god. Then from a seed letter in your heart, rays of light go up to further buddhas. They send rays of light back into you, then rays of light spread out from your heart to all the beings in the six realms. As they are touched by the light rays these beings are transformed so that they reveal their own true nature as forms of light.

In the practice of tantra this is considered a better gift to someone than a nice steak and chips because ignorance is being purified. What is the nature of ignorance?... *Emptiness* is the nature of ignorance. Even when we are in our most limited, our most stupid state, when we are very angry with someone, shouting at them, saying, 'I hate you, and I never want to be with you, and I don't know why I ever got involved with you!' you feel very solid and the other person seems very solid to you, but *all that is happening is movement*. Your voice is moving, your body is moving, the other person is moving...running out the door! When you actually observe yourself in anger or in desire or in stupidity, there is a movement of moods or states which don't last, but we solidify that momentary experience by feeling '*I am really angry.*' This is not different from the earlier example of saying '*I love ice-cream.*' Again it is reification, turning of something which is not solid, not real, into something real.

According to the view of tantra, because everything has been empty from the very beginning, how could real entities have appeared, where would they have come from? When we examine phenomena and we examine ourselves we don't find any inherent self-nature. As everything has the nature of emptiness it is impossible to create real entities; what would you make them out of? Entities are created out of ignorance **but** ignorance itself has the nature of emptiness. So, in that way our experience of real separate phenomena is like a dream within a dream. This is why in the practice of tantra the movement of light, and the appreciation that all of our experience is a display or a revelation, is very, very important.

In this way we come to see that the one who is meditating is empty and luminous, the objects of meditation are also empty and luminous and the real nature of the many things which we might feel we need to purify through the meditation practise are also are empty and luminous.

When we really see that things are pure, we don't need to keep trying to purify them. It's not that we have to purify our sins or our obscurations, what we have to purify is our belief that these sins and obscurations *truly exist*. A person with obsessive compulsive disorder has a need to wash their hands many, many times a day because somehow they feel they have become contaminated. In fact there is nothing on their hands for them to wash away. What they need to do is to wash away the nonsense belief in their head, washing their hands will not wash away their obsessive compulsive disorder. In the same way, endlessly trying to purify your obscurations while maintaining a belief that your base is a bad person, will not give you the understanding of emptiness.

The purposes of practices

So you can see how important it is to understand the view or orientation inherent in all the different meditation models and vehicles. If we understand why we do a particular kind of meditation practice, it becomes much easier to get the full benefit out of the work we put into it.

The practise of faith is a method, it's one of the methods of calming the mind and giving a simplicity of focus. Many people don't like to do prayers, perhaps because they had a catholic education and they **had** to pray. They might think 'No, I just want to do proper meditation, I don't want to say any prayers. Someone else might say 'but I don't believe in Tara, I don't believe in Padmasambhava, why should I pray to them?'

The reason to believe in them is because you are a stupid person wandering around with a lot of problems! If you look in the mirror and you recognise that you are not the brightest boy in town, then it's very nice to say some prayers. Prayer is a method of calming the mind, raising hope, simplifying the content of our thoughts and so on.

It's a really terrifying to recognize that **we** are the limit of our own existence – that my thoughts, my habits, determine my freedom to exist in this world. There are so many amazing and wonderful things in this world, but we don't enjoy them, because we say 'No, I don't like that. I know this about myself and bringing *that* into my world would be an insult to the values which I hold to be important.'

In this way we diminish our potential. Opening to all the other paths is very nice, because when you bring yourself to try to do something that you don't want to do, it is like stirring up a clear pond, it gets the mud up from the bottom. You start to see 'oh, there is some resistance, there is some limitation here, I don't want to do it, No, no. It's not for me.'

In that moment we decide that we would prefer to stay comfortable and limited rather than to develop and open. But if we also want to take the bodhisattva vow we need to be aware that we are really saying is 'In this and all my future lives, I will help all sentient beings... from my limited and comfortable position!'

So, the very richness of dharma, the many different possibilities, is like a wonderful range of mirrors which can illuminate the various places where we get tied in knots.

Integrating with the teaching

Dzogchen is a very different kind of practice, because it is a way of practising which seeks not to engage with an aspiration, a sense of moving towards something, of trying to make something happen, but of simply relaxing and opening to being present with what ever is here.

Without changing the content of our mind, we seek to shift the relationship we have to the content of our mind. The basis of this is that *who* I am, 'I, me, myself,' is the content of my mind, rather than the centre of my mind. This brings us back to the meditation practise of integration with the teacher because the quickest way to relax into ourselves is to find ourselves safely connected, or merged, with something of ultimate value. The quickest way to integrate into your self and to relax and open, is to integrate with this.

We can practise this by simply opening ourselves to the sky in front of us or the space in the room. The space here is infinite, it has no limit. It's not different from the space of outer space, of the sky and so on. In the centre of this space, maybe two arms length distance from us, we can imagine a small ball of rainbow-coloured light, like the little bubbles that children blow, and in the centre of this there is a letter 'A' white in colour. You can imagine this either in the Tibetan form, if you know that, or as a capital 'A'.

'A' represents emptiness, and emptiness is the ground of all manifestation. This emptiness has the potentiality of manifestation, we see it as the heart-essence of the teacher – the one who has the function of transmission and communication. It's the essence of all the teachers you've ever encountered, maybe your grand-parents, parents, primary school teachers, university teachers and so on. All of these people showed you ways in which you could move out more easily into the world. Some teachers teach in the form of positive transmission of knowledge, other teachers teach through limitation and blocking you.

Say for example, you had a very harsh father, who never gave you any approval, and always seemed dissatisfied, there is a lot to learn from that. In its uncooked form it's not very easy, so one has to find out how to make use of that. That person, whom you may have experienced as very unhelpful, can be truly helpful. This is because although in the tradition they talk a lot about the teacher or the guru, the essential thing is *the learner*. If the learner is able to learn than almost anything can be useful.

Yesterday I was at the other end of this garden, looking at the horses, they were moving around, eating some grass. They looked very impressive. Then one of them suddenly opened his bowel, and a big mountain of shit arrived. The shit was sitting there steaming and a little chicken ran over. The chicken was very interested, pecking around, very excited, finding wonderful things in this horse-shit. So if you know where to look you can find that even a huge pile of shit has something to offer!

The principle is that out of emptiness great potentiality is available, and we are going to integrate ourselves into that potentiality. Integration means not standing apart and just looking at, as if it is something over there, nor does it mean a kind of fusing where you just collapse into something and go into a kind of dream, rather we open and stay present with the unification of emptiness and emergence, emptiness and the potential of manifestation. Then we relax in that state, the 'A' dissolves and we just rest in the openness of spaciousness, allowing whatever comes to come.

Dzogchen

Dzogchen means Great Perfection, which means that there is nothing more to be done, it indicates that there is nothing to be improved or changed. Now I will describe to you the nature of the mind, which is the nature of reality, according to the view of dzogchen.

In the tradition we have a lot of respect for the lineage, because the general understanding is that without a buddha initially communicating this understanding, we wouldn't get it. Although from the very beginning we have all have the buddha-nature, that is to say, our minds have been completely open and awoken and enlightened, this state or this potentiality has not been revealed to us, and without transmission it doesn't become awakened. It is a paradox that we need another to show us ourselves. The explanation is like a map, but you yourself have to make the journey; to see yourself and to recognize yourself is something which only you can do. Without the map we wander here and there, displaying many good qualities, trying many different things and yet not getting the point.

There are many aspects to the dzogchen view. Essentially the mind itself is that which has the capacity to know and be aware. This is not a cognitive knowing, but it is a state of presence of lively awareness. The mind is described as being non-dual in that the capacity of the mind to know, and what arises for the mind, are not two separate things. Because the nature of the mind is empty from the very beginning, it has no limit. It has no top or bottom, it has no sides, it has no fixed shape. If you look for your mind, you can't find it.

If you look for a memory, you might be able to find that. You might think, what did I do when I was five years of age? If you relax and listen to your mind, eventually some memories of being five are likely to arise for you. When these memories come, they will have a particular shape to them and they will have a story-line, some emotional qualities, some sensation.

This content, this arising, is something which we can know, but the *one who knows* is not an object of knowledge. You can know how your hands and feet work and where your two eyes are, because these things are experiences, they are things which present themselves to the mind. You can even know your self – you can know your history, your likes and dislikes, your beliefs and so on. What we take to be ourselves is a *manifestation*, it's something which arises, stays for a while and passes away, but the mind

itself is ungraspable, it shows itself through the revelation of all experience. As the mind has no limit it's not trapped in any place. Sometimes it looks as though our mind is living in our body and so the body is taken to be the stable container of the mind. However, if we stay with the experience of the felt sense of the body it starts to shift and move. We might think 'my mind is my brain', or 'my mind is produced by my brain', that's a very interesting idea, but see how long you can keep that idea in your mind... these solutions don't stay for very long. We ask the question 'What is my mind?' and when we allow whatever solution we find to be there, it will disappear. We become aware 'Oh, that answer has gone.' Who is the one who is aware that it has gone... that is the mind!

The mind itself has no inside or outside, no top or bottom. The sky, the trees, the earth, the mountains, motor-cars, trains, aeroplanes, all these are in the mind, they are not inside ourselves. This is not an idealistic fantasy, it's not a philosophy like Bergson's or some subjectivist view point because although we say *the* mind, it is also **our** mind. However, although we say 'my' mind, because it's ungraspable it cannot be a possession. The mind is naked; it's not covered over by any thought, by any memory, by any sensation. It's fresh, because it's not built up of old, stale thoughts. It's pure, because it has the same nature running through it in all directions.

Our sense of self is not like this. Our sense of self has many discontinuities...sometimes I'm happy, sometimes I'm sad, sometimes I feel confident and expansive, sometimes I feel shy and retreating. Our individual personal identity is always changing and is divided against itself; we are full of contradictions. The mind is described as being *sangta*, which means there is no obstruction, no limit, no boundary, no border, the mind doesn't stop in the face of any object.

It is for this reason that the awakening to nature of the mind is very difficult. It is not like anything else. We *could* say there are two basic categories – the mind and what arises for the mind. We have spent our life, and all our previous lives very caught up in what arises for the mind and we are trying to make sense of our situation by taking in some of the things that arise (those we like) and pushing away others (those we don't like to arise).

However, **all** of this is *movement*, this is the energy of the mind which reveals itself, but you can't see the source if you are caught up in the product.

If we want to recognize this mind we have to learn a new way of looking; language, certainly English, doesn't provide any good words even to think about what this is. A traditional example is to say that all that we see is seen by the light of the sun, however, if we try to see the sun and look directly at it, our eyes will burn up; the sun is not something you can see. We might say to '*recognize* our nature' but that would indicate a re-cognition, and 'cognition' is not correct, because the mind's nature is not some 'thing' that can be known about. Every 'thing' which can be known about is impermanent, but because the mind itself it has no limit in space it has also no limit in time, so we cannot find it as a 'thing', *we have to relax into it*.

For example, if somebody is very self-conscious and they spend a lot of time, worrying about how they look and what other people think about them. They tend to exist for themselves as a set of ideas, and from this they try to create a stable way of representing or presenting themselves. 'My identity is based on me keeping an eye on myself, finding the right way to show or disclose myself.' When somebody has that attitude to themselves, there is a certain rigidity, a degree of busyness, a need to manufacture and frame and present. Some activities, like dancing, become very difficult because in order to dance we have to have a degree of self-forgetfulness, so that we *find ourselves dancing*. If I *know* 'I am dancing', my dancing will be artificial.

In the same way, when we look for the nature of the mind, if we are too conscious, too constructivist in our approach, if we are trying somehow to manufacture the right position or the right way to do it, this artificiality will create another subtle screen. The mind is not what we think it will be, it is of a different order, a different kind of experience. The experience of being in our nature is not one that we can speak about so traditionally, we use images.

The mind as a mirror

For example, it's often said that the mind's nature is like a mirror. When you look at the mirror you see reflections. You don't see the mirror itself, the mirror is always full of something but if you take the mirror and turn it around, it will show whatever is in the room. So the mirror fills itself with what is presenting. If the mirror had a true content, a fixed content, if it had a substantial self-identity, it wouldn't be able to offer this generosity to what is arising.

Although you don't see the emptiness of the mirror, the emptiness of the mirror is revealed through its capacity to show many different reflections. In the same way, our mind is constantly showing many, many different things; if it were to have a fixed content this will be impossible. The more relaxed we are, the more open we are, the more we can be in touch with many different things that go on. This capacity or potentiality to reveal many different things is, itself, the direct sign of the emptiness of the mind.

So, when we sit in the meditation, and we do these three 'A's, we might have an expectation that when we finish this sound then our mind will suddenly be very open and nothing will be there.

Not so. We will see many reflections coming, but by relaxing and staying present with the flow of experience, the openness of the mind is present. As we allow ourselves to be present with whatever is arising – not going after past thoughts, not trying to correct our mental experience, not going after future thoughts, not trying to make particular experiences arise for us – the relationship of the mind, to what is arising becomes clearer.

There are three aspects to the mind's nature. The first is this open dimension we've been taking about, the second is the level of revelation, of potentiality, and the third is the movement of energy of revealed potentiality. Now, this second level of what is revealed is the level of the reflection. So, there is the mirror which is the openness and then there are reflections in the mirror which are the richness or the spontaneity or the potential of the mirror. What do we experience occurring in the mind on this level? Everything! External sounds, motor-bikes, people talking, what we see of the room, thoughts, feelings and sensations, and personal consciousness itself. All of this arises together. It's not that I am inside looking out, but through relaxing in the practice, what I call 'I, me, myself' arises together with the field which it encounters.

That is to say we don't have to get rid of our sense of self, you don't have to destroy your ego, but what we have to realise is that we have attributed the wrong status to individual, personal, ego existence. What we are as a person is a flow of experiences, inseparable from the field in which it arises.

Non-duality

These experiences arise as the display of the open empty nature of the mind. Our nature is open and empty and revelatory, and the revelation is the inseparability of subject and object.

When we sit here together I am looking out at you, you are looking at me. When I look at you I can see more of you than of me, so in that sense you are more real than I am. I can see your faces, I can't see my face. In that way you are my world, and I am your world. I can't separate myself from my experience; wherever I am I am experiencing something. If there is no experience, then I'm unconscious and in that unconsciousness there is no object, but there is no subject either. There is always a subject with an object, always a 'me' and a 'you'. Even if I'm sitting alone, maybe sitting with my eyes closed, I am up to something. Some kind of non-sense is going on; my mind is busy thinking about something. The subject aspect of the mind and what it's concerned with, the object part, are tumbling together. From this we can recognise that 'I' am the *content* of my own mind. I am not the mind itself, I am not the great source of everything; I am a ceaseless display, arising in the openness of my own nature, which is without limitation and is therefore indestructible. The moving part of me is always changing but the stable, open, mirror-like dimension never changes. The suffering of samsara arises because we **know** that we are infinite and unchanging but, in order to realise this stability of identity, we project our knowledge onto the individual ego-self which is always changing.

So, without changing anything about the content of your thoughts, it's simply about recognizing the dynamic movement of these thoughts and experiencing the ground from which they arise.

We might think 'What will I do next week?' or if I am going to the shop 'What do I need to buy?' These thoughts just seem to arrive; sometimes thoughts seem to come from somewhere else, sometimes they seem to come from self. Where does the thought, 'sometimes thoughts seem to come from self, sometimes they seem to come from somewhere else' come from?

When we become intoxicated by our own intelligence, we keep thinking all the good bits come from me, and the bad things come from somewhere else, but it's a quality of the surface of the mirror to reflect. This quality is its clarity, the mind's clarity is its capacity to reveal everything. It reveals factual things, fantasy things, true things, false things. All of these manifestations are without inherent self-nature, they arise due to causes and conditions. These causes and conditions are the interactive patterns which cause one reflection to interact with another. As the self manifests itself in relation to the other, so our mood is being written by the other.

The third aspect of the mind is the way in which we come into precise activity, moment by moment, in unique situations. When we are relaxed, and not over-invested in the need to maintain this reflection or this image of the self, we are more free to attend to whole field of experience. Then we start to experience that the field shows us how to behave. Some people, particularly men feel a bit anxious around babies. They think 'I don't know what to do with a baby' but generally speaking, if you observe babies, they will show you what to do. It's the same with very old people. Maybe they don't have the same kind of conversation as somebody who is twenty or thirty or forty, so we might feel, 'I don't know what to say to them' but usually, if you look in someone's face, and you look in their eyes, something will arise. When our heart opens and the light from the heart shines out through our senses, particularly through the eyes, then we have an energetic connection with what we see. If we trust that, we find that we are able to communicate and to connect.

These people whom we encounter are not aliens from outer space, they are our own world. Without knowing it we are already connected; what comes between us are our self-fixations and the kind of thoughts and internal communication that we have. It's our own experiences of 'I like this person', 'I

don't like this person', 'this person is easy to talk to', 'this person is not easy to talk to' which lead us to adapting and editing how we can be. In this way we interrupt, by knowing in advance, what is possible and what is not possible.

At the end of the meditation practice where we sat with our eyes open we can move into interaction with the environment, and without thinking too much we find ourselves in relationship. As we experience the co-emergence of subject and object, subject and object are born together, so why should we anxiously wonder what should we do? We are part of a feed-back loop, part of the same system, so by being present and connected with what is there, whatever is required will start to manifest.

Of course, that again confronts us with our limits. Because if you are connected with the anxious ego, and you like to be in control, and you want to be admired, then it's difficult to say to someone, I don't know what to say to you. It's not a terrible thing to say, it's actually quite connective, but it shows, *I don't know*. The ego very often needs to 'know', in order to feel safe, because the ego is itself essentially a construction of knowledge. This is why in the dzogchen teachings it says, whatever comes, comes; whatever goes, goes. If you go up to the highest heaven then you can be there, if you go down to the lowest hell, then be there. If people like you, that's very nice, if they don't like you, that's also okay. We can start to see, how every experience that we have is absolutely impermanent, that's just how it is.

This is the most basic of all the Buddha's teachings – impermanence. If we experience impermanence directly, it means flow, it means interaction, it means change, and it means the absolute impossibility of stabilising any situation in the world.

Recently, I was in Poland doing some teaching, and we had quite a nice time, it all seemed to be very happy, and at the end people are saying 'Oh that was very good, thank you very much.' Some nice people drove me to the airport at Prague, where again they said 'Good-bye, and thank you so much and what you did was so very good!' Then I'm walking down a corridor at the airport lined with boutiques selling nice things and in the very nice big shiny boutique windows I see my reflection. I see this fat, balding, tired, middle-age man and I look around and all these very nicely dressed, happy young people going off to have their exciting lives. So as Andy Warhol promised, I had my fifteen minutes of fame, and then I'm back in ordinary life.

Life's like that; what is manifesting is not stable, it's always moving. So, it's very, very important to be able to laugh at ourselves, and not to take ourselves too serious. In this big drama of manifestation, nobody can know their existence is going to be in ten years time.

The task in dzogchen is to integrate these three aspects of existence. The first aspect being the openness, the ungraspability of the mirror-like nature of the mind, it's potential to display everything. The second aspect is the level of the reflection – the clarity, the radiance, or the spontaneity of the unceasing manifestation of the richness of the mind, which we experience directly in meditation. Thirdly, there's the aspect of our existence, moment by moment, in its unique unrepeatable precise interaction with the environment.

When we trust the openness, the unchanging indestructible nature of that openness, we become more free to enjoy the spontaneity and creativity of being in the world with others.

So, we'll do a little more practice starting just with the simple three 'A's. While you're sitting, you can allow some of what I've been describing just to hover around for you. Then we'll continue looking at the view of dzogchen how it relates to meditation.

[Ignorance; dis-integration by selective attention](#)

Usually in Buddhism we spend a lot of time thinking about the nature of ignorance, because ignorance or a lack of awareness is seen as the key to the suffering of samsara. The opposite of ignorance is a kind of very mental quality, an awareness, a capacity to register things, but our nature is not just a state of knowing, it has a presence which is energetic. We reveal ourselves in terms of an openness, a clarity and a precise manifestation moment by moment. Ignorance, *ma rigpa*, or *avidya*, is essentially not recognizing that these three aspects move together, and privileging usually just one aspect, the aspect of manifestations. This function of ignorance has been around for a long time so we can talk of a *state* of ignorance but it's not so much a stable state as an on-going process. It's a process of selective attention whereby one concentrates on certain aspects of the total field and makes them figural whilst ignoring the other aspects.

We can easily observe this process. If you go into a clothes shop, or a book shop, or a music shop, you tend to concentrate on the things that you like; looking up and down the shelves for a kind of book that you never going to read would be a waste of time! In order not to be overwhelmed by all the choices and possibilities that exist we quickly learn to avoid giving attention to that which is of no interest of us. This repeats itself in all sorts of ways across our lives. We can be very committed to activities and so despite knowing that they are dangerous, we continue to do them. Over the last twenty years the warnings that are printed on cigarette packets have become more and more severe. They used to say 'cigarettes are not good for your health' now, in England, they say 'smoking kills' but still many people like to smoke. If you are a smoker, when you pick up the packet of cigarettes the fact that it says 'smoking kills' on it, doesn't really register. It's the same for people who drink a lot of alcohol.

This shows that we have a strong capacity to disregard aspects of the field which contradict our sense of who we are. This doesn't apply just to aspects of manifestation that we disagree with and find incongruent with our sense of identity, but it also relates to how we think about our existence in a wider sense. Very often people are doing a job that they don't like. They might come to therapy to talk about the difficulties that they have. You might look at possibilities whereby they could change their situation, but of course that kind of change brings an anxiety with it. The anxiety brings up a resistance and so there may be the decision 'Oh well, never mind, it's not so bad' and often the meaning of pain or the direct experience of pain is discounted.

When things are painful it's usually a sign that we shouldn't continue with them. The Buddha's teaching begins with the consideration of suffering, pointing out that suffering is *there*, suffering is *real*, and *maybe you can do something about it*. However, one of the reasons that people don't pay attention to this central teaching of buddhism, even when they feel they have become *buddhist*, is that attending to pain calls upon us to make radical changes.

Because we don't have much power of attention and we are easily distracted, it's easy for us to forget about the things that cause us pain and to distract ourselves with some kind of non-sense. This is why in the Tibetan tradition, at the beginning of practice, we reflect on the four thoughts to turn our minds from samsara.

We think about suffering, and how pervasive it is in this world we inhabit. We think about how rare and precious the opportunity to practise meditation and the dharma is. We think about impermanence and we think about death. With these four factors turning in our minds we can think 'Because I am going to die and be reborn the concerns of this world are not so important.' With this wider frame of reference we are able to protect ourselves from going into small avoidances, micro-moves whereby we avoid looking at what is difficult.

In order to think about our situation we have to be willing to think of the long term. Instant gratification is a real problem for people who meditate and it can give us a sense of power and control over the

environment. In this very wealthy consumerist capitalist world in which we live, it's not so difficult to get the resources to meet each need very easily. We can eat when we are hungry, drink when we are thirsty, sleep when we are tired, and so on. We can avoid the situation of being so hungry that we could cry. When people do long retreats they often don't have very much food and they do a lot of practice, so they don't have so much time for sleep. Under these conditions you realize that you are not very stable or balanced. The felt sense of the continuity of ourselves, is based on the coming together of certain factors and when these factors change, we don't feel so secure or stable.

In the practice we want to give ourselves space in which we can see how the mind is moving rapidly, seeking to satisfy itself by pushing away the things it doesn't like, and pulling in the things it does like.

A stable state whether or not desire is satisfied

Even if we do manage to satisfy our need in this moment, that doesn't mean that we can satisfy the need which arises in the next moment.

As we were looking before lunch, subject and object are born together. They can't really be separated and yet they also can't achieve any real stasis and come to rest. Subject is chasing object, object is provoking subject, and moment by moment our life is just turning, running and running and running. If we really see this, it's clear that satisfaction doesn't arise from the object.

If you drink one bottle of wine why would you have not another bottle? For people who like alcohol one bottle is never enough – if one bottle was good and I'm still alive, why not have another? Here, subject chases the object, object pulls the subject and they keep moving. Part of ignorance is not to see this.

You can see this very easily if just go into a magazine shop. I'm sure in Austria there are many different kinds of magazines for sale; life-style magazines, magazines for people who like bicycles, who go in yachts, who climb mountains, magazines on how to re-decorate your house, how to do the garden. Once you become interested in these objects there is always some new innovation, some new gear for your bicycle, some new design of wall-paper for your house. There is no end to desire.

So, if there is no end to desire, does that mean we have to stop desire?

From the point of view of dzogchen, that is not necessary. The key thing is – who is the one experiencing the desire? What is *their state* in the satisfaction, or non-satisfaction, of that desire?

Sometimes, if we don't get something that we really want we might feel desperate, but even if we *do* get the thing we feel desperate about, what's the point, what will we do with it? The object or the person can register in our mind as having a particular kind of significance so that we feel 'if I get this object it will give me something perfect, it will *complete* my life in some way.'

But if you think back in your life, how many objects have you wanted? Remember being a child, and thinking about what we wanted from Father Christmas? Very often we get things and then we don't play with them very much. Actually, what seems very important is the *idea* of the object, not the object itself. This is because the meaning, and the importance, and the value, of the object depend on the energy and attention given to it by the subject. The importance of the object is not inherent in its nature.

When the Chinese came into Tibet, particularly in the cultural revolution, they started to destroy the monasteries. These Chinese were not buddhist and had no interest in buddhism, in their minds buddhism was a non-sense so by destroying statues they were freeing peoples' minds from primitive beliefs. The

value that they placed on an object related only to the amount of gold or silver or precious stones they could extract from it. To Tibetan people who had faith in the dharma, these statues, which might have been in the monasteries for hundreds of years, were very familiar and invested with a lot of blessing power. To them, their destruction was something terrible.

So we need to examine, quite intellectually, with a sharp mind, how we invest objects with importance. When we look around we see that other people don't invest our precious objects with the same importance.

When we like something and someone else doesn't like it, this should be very helpful to us. Instead of feeling insulted that they don't agree with our taste, their dislike of our beloved object helps to show us the *relative* value of this thing, which we have invested with a great importance.

Objects do not have an objective value. You may think that the people who have different value systems from yourselves are perverse or wrong, but that's simply to reassure yourself about your own value system. All of this analysis is to try to help us to see how we close the world down, close our possibilities down, by avoiding the wider picture; this is one of the central meanings of ignorance. By looking at specific objects, that we either like or don't like, in the way other people look at them, we come to see that what things mean for us is always a relationship – it's always my mind in relation to the object, it's never the quality of the object itself.

Opening up our perception in this way helps us to see the dynamic process of cause and effect – of dependent co-origination – whereby objects, and people and situations, that appear to be self-existing, are actually constituted out of many different forces, coming together, and a key force in this coming together is the quality of our own engagement and investment.

The other aspect of importance in ignorance is that we ignore our own real nature. We don't ignore it in a wilful way, we are not setting out to ignore it, it's just that it exist in a way which our habit of attention is never going to reveal.

Strengthened by appropriate refuge

The people who live in the Amazonian jungle, who live very close to nature, hunting for wild animals and so on, don't have much difference in terms of intelligence from people who life in big cities in Europe. However, these people would be very unlikely to invent the eternal combustion engine because there is nothing in a tropical jungle that would bring to mind the need for such an engine. In the same way, certain conditions are going to be more helpful than others in instigating the enquiry into our real nature.

The teachings about karma suggested that we find ourselves born in a particular species, in a particular culture, in a particular family, because we share a particular set of tendencies. Within this, each family has its own small culture, its set of attitudes and values, which are transmitted to the children. If, say, a child has a great interest in music and the parents are also interested in music, that can be very creative. If the parents aren't interested they are unlikely to give so much support.

In buddhism the basis for the practice of taking refuge is that we want to come into the family of practitioners and find an identification with other people who practice. We need an introduction to an orientation, a way of understanding the world, and then support in maintaining and developing it. Without that support we forget what's going on. We can understand this as the force of ignorance, where our tendencies mean that we are drawn towards objects in the world and patterns of behaviour which are already invested with emotional value for us.

Maybe our investment in meditation and dharma is not so intense. When we look back over the last year, and we think, how much practice have I really done, maybe it's not so much. Moment by moment we come to a crossroads, to a set of choice-points, shall I do this practice, or will I read a novel, or chat with a friend? There are many, many things we can do with our time.

So, part of the practice is to attend to the process of ignorance, as it seeks to veil the open dimension which is always there.

Giving up the game

Being in samsara and so connected with many things, being busy achieving all our hopes and ambitions, is actually quite tiring. Meditation, which involves sitting quietly, looking at your own mind, developing positive qualities like wisdom and compassion should be rather easier, yet watching nonsense on television can appear much more interesting.

This is because the patterns of a television program are *familiar* to us and they support us in the particular patterning or constellation of our self as we understand it. So that in the moment of watching the program we feel hooked into something. Even if, as we are looking at it, we are saying to our friend 'This is non-sense, this is rubbish, I don't know, why I watch this.' We keep watching it, because it has a mirror image inside ourselves already. Our prejudices, our attitudes are displayed in front of us; we need to understand that ignorance is something quite dynamic. It expresses itself in the egos desire for reassurance and for the continuity of the same – I need to have this and then I will be happy, I need to avoid that so I don't become unhappy. This is a very, very familiar game. Doing meditation is completely different.

Interruptions to awareness appear to be normal and so the practices of meditation often feel artificial. According to the view, they are linking us to what is truly natural, so it would be helpful to interrupt these interruptions. One of the practices that we can do is to interrupt the fixation and the 'lock-on' or absorption into habitual patterns of relating. In this way we can open up a space in which we can have a more direct contact with what is more natural and given and we can change the relationship with the pattern which is hooking us and seems to have power over us. Instead of experiencing again and again that we surrender into the impulsive response, we can disrupt the impulse and reveal it as simply a spiralling of energy, turning and sticky, like the sticky paper that used to be used for catching flies.

A simple way that we do this is with the syllable 'PHAT'; we can do that now since we all look a little bit sleepy and heavy after lunch and the warm weather.

When we do this practice it's very important to remember what we were looking at this morning. Our real nature is not a thing, we are not a substance, our 'self', our felt sense of who we are, doesn't *define* who we are. Our mind, the mind through which we know our self, is itself something unborn, something ungraspable; because it's unborn it is indestructible.

So, when we do this practice, and we say 'PHAT', then our thoughts maybe pushed away, our emotions maybe destroyed, but *the mind itself* which is not a 'thing', cannot be destroyed. In Tibetan buddhism you will see the term *vajra* again and again, it means indestructible. The mind is indestructible, because it doesn't have any self-substance in it, it's like the sky.

Perhaps you saw the pictures on the television of New Orleans, in America. The city looks destroyed, but the sky above the city looks okay. The storm went through the sky, the sky looked very disturbed, the storm went and the sky said 'Oh, these things come and go' but the city was completely destroyed. This is exactly our situation. If you recognize that your mind is like the sky, then no matter what comes into it

you can just allow it to come and then go. But if you make your mind like the city, if you build your little levee to keep out the water, if you try to say 'I stand against the world, I can conquer samsara,' one day the big flood will come.

So, to do this practise we relax in our body, we have our belly free. And we allow this sound 'PHAT', to arise from deep inside us, passing right up through us, we can imagine coming out from top of our head. We are using it to disrupt the enmeshment in thoughts and feelings and so on, in order to just relax and open.

If you suffer from habitual mental disturbance like psychosis, then you should be very careful doing this kind of practice because on the relative level this is a practise of disruption. If your task is to keep yourself held together, as calm and clear as possible, and your own brain chemistry gives you more than enough disruption, then this is not such a good thing to do.

Okay. So first of all, we start just by letting some noise up. It's not uncommon for people to laugh a lot when we do this; you are exercising your diaphragm more than you normally do, also if you keep repeating this you feel very light inside (it's a very good way of spacing out) you can feel more light-headed and so more prone to hysterical reaction. If that should happen the main thing is simply to bring your attention into your breath, focus on slow deep breathing, and then when you've stabilised your breath, do a series of many rapid 'PHAT's until you shift your energy; do twenty or thirty in a row, just keep going very, very hard, and then you will become very calm.

It's a very useful practise because, in a sense, it's a practice of contempt. Towards the nonsense that arises in my mind, I offer only total contempt. I'm not interested in your story-lines, I'm not interested in these little beginnings of worry and anxiety. I'm not interested in these narcissistic compensatory fantasies 'PHAT!' 'PHAT!' is really quite dismissive; usually we treat the contents of our mind with too much respect. People who are prone to worry may recognize that worry is a waste of time and that problems are never solved through worrying about them, but they still tend to be pulled in to chains of worry as if they are going to be taken to somewhere fresh and useful.

'PHAT' is linked with the idea of cutting, just cutting through and cutting off, so that the spaciousness of the mind can relax a little bit in the face of all the stuff that it's always covered with.

Questioner: Is it also possible to do this 'PHAT' practise in a silent way inside. For example if I'm in society and I feel I'm getting into something that I want to cut off. Is there a way to practise by saying this silently?

James: You could. It's much better just to think 'bull-shit.'

Contempt is very useful. This is not a normal polite idea in modern western Europe, but one of the things that contempt does is to shift the balance of power. If we are frightened of people, and say we have to go for an interview with our boss, we are at a great disadvantage if we have already become small inside by projecting our power onto the other person.

So, if you have clarity of understanding the dharma – in that the important thing is to free the mind from enmeshment in these chains of signifiers – and you ceaselessly maintain the right intention and orientation towards sentient beings, then in order to help someone you need to return to your full potentiality. In that situation it may well be a skilful method to think of the other person as a 'fucking asshole' because that takes you from the fused state to a separation, and in the separation you reconfirm your energy and then you can move towards them from some spaciousness.

There is, however, a big difference between making defensive negative judgement of another person to try to pin them like a moth on the screen, and making an intervention with your own mind, which is designed to free up your energy so that you can relate to them in a more compassionate way.

Whenever we find our selves caught up in choreographed interactions with other people we have to be clear, are we entering into this set of fixed moves while maintaining a sense of presence that allows us to be aware of what is going on, or have we been caught up into something, and collapsed into it with an identification which completely restricts our freedom to do anything else?

In the language of analytic psychotherapy they talk of transference and counter-transference. This exactly points to how easy it is to be dragged into a habituated story-line of a past way of relating to the other person without recognising what's going on. It's not just that we are asleep in ignorance but we are dreaming, and these dreams are the shared communication with other people. We find ourselves going through the motions, just doing things 'because that's how it seems they have to be done'. We're not even doing this with compassion; we're not thinking 'I don't particularly want to do this, but the other person doesn't have so many options, so I'll fit in with them in order to make something happen.'

Freeing the mind

We may want to free other people and bring enlightenment and happiness into the world but if we can't free our own mind, how we are going to make this available to other people?

Meditation systems offer many different techniques which can be used. Some are soft, some are rough, some are erotic, some are very like a mother to her child, there are many different flavours of response which are designed to help us untie the many knots that occur.

The key process that we want to establish is the relationship between wisdom and compassion where, from our wisdom, we develop an openness to the environment and we go out towards others with compassion. Then due to this compassion we get caught up in knots, because lived experience is always more complicated than the map we have of it. So we then need to rock back onto the aspect of wisdom, of seeing the emptiness of the situation, finding some space to move inside ourselves, then we can return to the interaction.

Other people are very useful to us because they show us again and again very directly, very precisely, exactly *how* we are tied in knots. This is why in dzogchen, people often don't do very long three or five year retreats, they do shorter retreats, and then try to take the meditation awareness into the world with others. As the teachings say, there are no end to the complexities of karma. We may feel that we are sorted in some way, but when you meet a new person and you can't understand them or you find yourself very irritated, they show you that you're not so very clear. Our karma is not something inside us; our karma is what is revealed as we exist in relationship to other people. So somebody with whom we feel very irritated or confused is the mirror displaying our own karma. Our own limitation is shown by the fact that we can't *integrate* the arising moment, but have stepped into it and now we are trapped inside.

Non-duality

There are more aspects of the view of dzogchen we can look at; all these descriptions are just methods for trying to see differently. I can only say again, we have been oriented to looking at objects for so long that our tendency is to look at ourselves as if we were an object, but because we are not an object, we will never find ourselves if we look that way.

The explanations are given as away of trying to put some gentle traffic signs in our mind, so that when we go into our meditation practise we don't go down wrong roads. Padmasambhava, the great yogi and really the founder of Tibetan buddhism, gave a brief explanation of the key aspects of the natural condition. This was translated in the book *Simply Being* and I'll just very briefly go through the four aspects which he talks about.

He says that the natural condition of ourselves, our mind and everything, is non-duality; from the beginning there have been no separate positions with a barrier in between them. Fundamentally there is no difference between samsara and nirvana, there is no difference between our selves and others. Other people will die, we will die; other people become happy and sad, and we will become happy and sad.

So, whenever we create a marker of true difference, of absolute separation, we are operating away from non-duality. Appearance and emptiness are inseparable. This is also the teaching of the Heart Sutra in Prajnaparamita literature, where it says 'form is no other than emptiness and emptiness is no other than form.'

In the meditation we try to experience that *appearance* is the appearance of emptiness. So we do the practice with our eyes open, we're not cutting out the world or going into another separate existence. What we do is to try to see that everything is our own vision. What we see is the experience of the arising of a manifestation in the mind. Without the mind there are no objects. When the mind moves, everything arises, when the mind doesn't move then nothing arises. Therefore appearance of all kinds, visual appearances, sensations, feelings, thoughts are inseparable from emptiness.

When we do the meditation practice we see how we cheat ourselves again and again by taking appearances as being separate and real. In the meditation, if an unpleasant thought arises and it seems to impact on us, we're making a very, very big mistake. When we say 'this thought is in my mind and I will not tolerate thoughts like this,' this is a sure sign that we have taken our mind to be our self. The self is concerned with ownership, with control, and on an ordinary level that's quite important. Although the mind in which the thought has arisen is *your* mind in the sense that you are present with it, it's not a possession; you don't own it in the way that you can own a garden.

If you the neighbour's dog always comes into your garden to shit, you can go and complain. 'It's my garden, I'm entitled to say I don't want your dog's shit in my garden.' But if you walk up in the forest, and you see someone with a dog and that dog is having a shit, you wouldn't say 'your dog shouldn't shit in the forest', because the forest is so big it seems to be just an open space.

The level of meditation is not the level of interaction in the world, here the attitude to troublesome thoughts needs the spacious view. When thoughts arise, they arise and then they're no longer there. Where have they come from, where have they gone to?

We may think that thought came from *me*; that's *my* kind of thought, that's the kind of thought I always have. But *where* does that thought come from? Oh, that's the kind of 'buddhist thought' that I have about thoughts! In this way we rely on non-sense to explain the truth.

Say you observe your mind, nothing much is happening then you find yourself thinking about the summer holidays. On an ordinary level we'd say that the thought about the summer holidays is a memory, which is stored in my brain. But when we look at the arising of the thought – without moving various concepts around, staying present with the actual ontological phenomenological field – the thought arises *out of our* mind *into* our mind.

We look for the mind and we try to find this mind that gives rise to thoughts. Where is it? What does it rest on? Does it have a kind of basis? How big is it? What shape is it? If you look again and again, until you see that nothing can be decided about the mind, then you can see that this mind, without any limits without any self-substance, is the source of the thoughts.

When we observe the process of the thoughts, we see them coming and going, changing very quickly. It's not that the mind, which is empty, gives rise to a 'real' thought, rather the mind is empty and the thoughts that arise in the mind are also empty. Mind and thoughts are empty in slightly different ways, just as with the example we used earlier today. The mirror is empty, because it has no image of itself, also the reflections that arise in the mirror are empty, because they have no depth or internal truth in them.

Ceaselessly – in, through, and as, emptiness – manifestations, thoughts and so on keep arising. This is the nature of non-duality. You cannot separate the mind from the products of the mind. They come from the mind, they stay in the mind, then they dissolve back into the mind.

Understanding non-duality is very liberating, because if a very bad thought arises in your mind, maybe a murderous thought or very selfish thought, *who* has thought this thought? If you think that *you* are the thinker of the thought, you will bind yourself into reactivity. In trying to improve the thoughts that arise in your mind, you will be affirming to yourself that the thoughts are real and separate phenomena.

Self- liberation of thoughts

In the path of dzogchen, when thoughts arise, whether good or bad, just allow them to be there. The thought *will* go; thoughts themselves don't have any energy. The energy of the thought is the energy of the mind. *You* put discriminating energy into thoughts by saying 'this one is good and I like it, this one is bad and I don't like it', but if we relax the thoughts just come and go.

In the dzogchen literature this is called *rang drol* or self-liberation. It means you don't have to make any effort. This feels counterintuitive because we are so used to applying effort, either in order to improve things or to keep them good. By doing less we do more because if you keep your mind calm, if you stay integrated in this open awareness, the thoughts and feeling will come and go *by themselves*.

In Tibetan this automatic coming and going of thoughts is called *lhun drub*, it means spontaneously or easily coming. Just as the mirror doesn't have to do anything to produce a reflection, it's in the mirrors nature to allow the arising of reflections, so our nature is to reveal all sorts of things. What makes it difficult to recognize this is our desire that 'my mind should only reveal the things I want it to reveal.' Then through the busyness of trying to correct what is arising in my mind, I forget that what is arising in the mind is not produced by the self.

For the world to make sense, we have to say, the dog wags its tail, if the tail is wagging the dog there's something wrong. The dog is your mind; the tail is your self. Samsara is tail powered.

So, settle and allow the mind just to be as it comes. When we do that, we start to see that the mind is not dangerous. All sorts of thoughts arise, we might have a thought to kill someone, or that we want a sex change, all sorts of strange thoughts arise in peoples' mind. The thought can only become problematic when it becomes linked to activity.

For example, in the old days here in Austria, if a village was near a stream running down from the hills, a water mill would often be built nearby. When people took their grain to the mill the miller would put it in a hopper and then go out to the river and open the pipe. Water would flow from the river, down the

pipe, and start to turn the wheel. The wheel turns the gear, the gear turns the grindstone and then the corn is turned into flour and people can have their bread. When the water comes from the stream into the mill, a regular flow of water is needed in order to turn the water-wheel at a certain speed so then everything can be set up to mill the right quality of flour. When he's finished grinding the corn, the miller can go back out and shut off the pipe and the water just flows down the river again.

When the water is in the river, it's jumping over the stones, sometimes dropping down, sometimes it's speeding up, sometimes slowing down in a pond and so on, but in order to be useful to the milling process the flow of water needs to be regulated.

In meditation thoughts are like the river and can be allowed to tumble along freely, but when we are with other people, as with the water in the mill, activity needs to be modulated and specific to the situation. When you're with others in the world, it's very important to be very present, giving them a proper acceptance and welcome so that your very finely attuned behaviour moves smoothly with them. Very often people mistakenly try to control their mind and not their behaviour.

In meditation it's much better to just let the mind come as it comes. When you do that, many fears and anxieties arise. You might be sitting with some bad thoughts for quite a while and think 'Oh, I'm becoming a bad person, because I have so many bad thoughts in my mind.' This is the tail talking; it's not *your* mind, it doesn't belong to you! It is impossible for the mind, which is so wonderful and creative and dynamic and beautiful to produce boring neurotic nonsense forever. Eventually the root of your neurosis will end. As Buddha Shakyamuni himself says, all things arise from causes; patterns manifest for a while due to their interaction with other patterns. There is the pattern of the arising, but the ground of the arising is the mind itself, which is empty.

In the book *Simply Being* there is a text by Patrul Rinpoche called *Self-liberating understanding* which explains that 'some great meditators start to despair when their mind is full of very sad thoughts. This arises due to not understanding meditation.' When dull thoughts or bad thoughts or sad thoughts arise in the mind, don't push them away, don't try to transform them into something else. Just stay present with the thought itself, stay present with the one who is thinking the thought. Dull thoughts, bad thoughts, sad thoughts, all thoughts... will pass away.

The most central basic point is that the nature of the mind is emptiness and therefore it is indestructible. The self is not indestructible; the self is always anxious about what is going on. If you try to meditate from the position of the self, you will always be anxious. That's why we have to understand the correct view about the nature of the mind, and trust that. Really *feel* that this is the authentic transmission of the dzogchen view, this is the transmission coming through many, many, many teachers, for many, many hundreds of years, people who have really understood this ...***the nature of the mind is indestructible.***

The mind is unconditioned; it is not contaminated by anything that arises. The mind itself is not made by good thoughts, nor is it destroyed by bad thoughts. The mind and the self are not the same. If we really understand this, we take this again and again into the meditation practice, then you have a kind of touchstone, a stone which can show the difference between real gold and fools' gold.

When you understand the qualities of samsara and nirvana, then you can use these descriptions to regulate your own meditation. One of the key things is that, even if you practice together with many people, you are always completely alone. If you are practising with people who are good at meditation then there is some kind of synergy, some kind of building up of reinforcing focussed energy, which can be helpful, but when we are in our mind just being present, the actual experience is that we are completely alone. Everything is there, very direct, very immediate; we are there, we feel it, everything... but how could we describe that, how could we describe that to someone else?

In dzogchen we get a lot of teaching about the view, because we have to take the view into the meditation. Then when we are in that situation with our own mind, we use the echoes of these instructions as a way of helping ourselves to settle and to stop tilting towards movement.

Primordial purity

Then the third of these four aspects taught by Padmasambhava is *ka dag*, or primordial purity. This means that because the mind has been empty from the very beginning it cannot have been contaminated by anything. No limitation, no modification has occurred. Therefore when a thought seems to stick to the mind, the thought has really stuck to the self. The self is always changing, the mind is not. Because the mind has been pure from the very beginning, what are you trying to purify? Because the mind is the source of all experience, all experience is pure. If you plant wheat, maize won't grow. If you plant an apple tree, pears won't grow. Things are determined, in their manifestation, by their ground. Thoughts arise from, and have the qualities of, their ground. This ground is the mind, which is empty, therefore the nature of thoughts is empty.

Who says, that to say to someone 'I think you're a lovely person' is the expression of a good thought and to say 'I think you're a fucking bastard', is the expression of a bad thought? It's the ego which feels anxiety – I want to be liked, I don't want to be insulted or attacked, I don't want to be humiliated – so praising words seem good, attacking words seem very bad.

But what is the true status of the words 'you are beautiful'? It means that *I think* you are beautiful. A part of our problem is that we are very lazy, we speak with half sentences. We say 'You are an asshole' but we mean *I think* you are an asshole. Because we are lazy, we turn an *opinion* into a 'fact'. Then, having filled the whole world with apparently self-existing facts, we feel completely imprisoned. Whereas an *opinion* is something which arises in me, in relation to you, under these circumstances, for this period of time. When we see that, we start to see how *we* attribute *meaning* and *value* to the *phenomena* around us.

In the dzogchen literature, but particularly in the mahamudra literature they write a lot about *ro gcig*, about having one taste. *Ro gcig* means that these two statements – 'you are beautiful' and 'you are an asshole' – have the same flavour and the same nature, their nature is emptiness. Saying blablabla, blubblublu is just sound and emptiness – beautiful! Would you rather be bla or blu? That depends on your karma! You can see that *we* put the meaning into these phrases. Our mind uses the phrase to attribute meaning and value, and then place ourselves up and down the hierarchy of the register of importance. But the real nature of all speech is emptiness. Out of silence arises sound; this is the sound of silence. The sound of emptiness is the sound of no limitation. Then the sound takes on meaning according to its incorporation inside an interpretative system.

Every time Sylvester is speaking, I have a little rest. My rest is not disturbed by what Sylvester is saying, because I don't understand it; when he is speaking the stream of my mind is just tumbling down the mountain. But when he is speaking the mill in your mind is turning round, because you understand German and so his words are turning your wheel. In the moment when you hear him speak, the meaning seems to be coming out of his mouth but this is wrong because I can assure you what is coming out of his mouth is meaningless 'blah blah', I don't understand a word!

We constantly project out onto the phenomenal world meanings which *we* are *putting on to things*; if we just breathe in, and hold the energy in our belly it's completely different.

The central understanding of *ka dag* is our natural primordial purity and whatever we encounter is pure by its very nature. The one who is busy improving the world, is the self. From the point of view of dzogchen or the natural condition what is required is to integrate, to have optimal communication

between these three modes of existence – the openness, the clarity and the precise manifestation. But from the ego's point of view, what we have to do is to make ourselves more safe and more comfortable by acting on the world to create the conditions that we want. These are completely opposite views. One is nirvana, the other is samsara.

Primordial buddhahood

There's one more aspect of our natural condition to consider. Then we'll do a little bit of meditation, then we rest for the day because listening to this is very hard work.

The fourth aspect taught by Padmasambhava is ye-sangye, which means primordial buddhahood. This means that from the very beginning you have been buddha, you have been fully enlightened. As we looked earlier, if something is made of coal you cannot turn it into gold. If you don't have the nature of buddha, how could you become buddha?

From the very beginning all the qualities of the Buddha have been present.

The explanation that Padmasambhava gives depends on the way the word 'buddha' is used in Tibetan language. In Tibetan it is *sang gyae*; *sang* means pure and is similar to the *ka dag* that I have been describing and *gye* means expansive or big or vast. From the beginning we have been *sang*, we have been pure. This means that from the beginning mind has no impurity.

The mirror is not made impure if an impure or an unpleasant reflection arises in it. This purity has been there from the very beginning, it is the nature of the mirror; the state of stillness, of calmness, of silence; absolutely unlimited.

The other aspect is the *gye*, *gye* is expansion. From the very beginning the mind has been expanding, displaying an infinite cornucopia, an endless stream of all of samsara and nirvana.

Everything in samsara and nirvana arises from the mind. To recognize this is called nirvana, not to recognize it is called samsara.

Therefore, understand that from the beginning, all the qualities of the Buddha have been present in you, you don't have to develop anything. Just open to the presence of this unborn state of stillness and observe how all the infinite forms of existence, good and bad, arise within it. Because your mind has no limit, it doesn't stop at your skin; it doesn't stop at the boundary of Gutenstein, nor the boundary of Austria. Everything is inside your mind and there is nothing to be purified or improved. If you can understand these principles it's very helpful.

Now we do some final meditation for today. We'll start it with the three 'A' practice, then inside this practise once we open, just take up the exploration where is my mind, what does it rest on?

Practising in daily life

We'll begin with the brief guru yoga practice we started yesterday, just relax and open. In the space in front of us visualise a white letter 'A' representing, or manifesting, the heart essence of all the good teachers we've encountered. Then reciting 'A' three times, we relax all the tensions in our body, speech and mind, and integrate with the state of the teacher. This state is of the integration of the three modes of existence, the openness, the clarity and the precise manifestation.

This morning we'll look a little bit more at how to take the view and the meditation into the practice of daily life. As we were looking yesterday, the ground of all our experience is something which is quite ungraspable, as are our experiences. We have language and many concepts, through which we can give ourselves the sense that we have got some 'thing', that we have secured territory. This is an illusion, because what we can secure are mere representations, the actual moment of the experience has passed by.

When we think about ordinary daily life, we encounter something quite complex – there are many 'daily lives' happening simultaneously. For example, we have many bodies, we have the body of western anatomy which is described in many texts and we also have the body of Chinese medicine. We have the body of shamanistic medicine. We have the body that we think of, that we know, that we see sometimes in the mirror. We also have the body of our feelings about our body, due to feelings and attitudes we might decide that we either hate or love our body.

We might find that there are certain features of our body which seem to attack us, and that we want to have surgery to change that. As people get older they often have a sense that their *real* body is a young body and for some reason they wake up in the morning with an old body. So, in that way the body of memory, the remembrance of vitality, starts to displace us from the capacity to inhabit our actual physical body.

For example in Sylvester's house, there is a little twisting metal staircase which goes up to the floor above. I was walking up these this morning, and thinking 'Oh, yes, if I live long enough, one day I won't be able to climb these stairs.' I often look at children when they're running around, and my body remembers running around in that way, and I might have the thought 'Yes, I would like to run around in that way' but I don't do it, because my body is not that body anymore.

We also have the body of meditation, the body that we can experience when we relax, and we feel just the ceaseless flow of moments of arising of energetic manifestation. These bodies can all be occurring at the same time. In the same way when we encounter other people and the environment around us, we have many different ways of making sense of what is going on.

Unpacking the assumptions

Some of the methods of understanding that we have, allow us to have an immediate and direct and easy flow of spontaneous communication and some views or attitudes will make us feel very separated and apart from the environment. One of the functions of looking in buddhism at the different views and the different ways of seeing the world is to de-construct or unpack the assumptions, that things are 'just what they are.' What we take things to be turns out to be the construction of our assumptions about them.

In English, we say ‘travel broadens the mind’; by seeing ‘the way things are’ in different cultures you come to have a more relativistic view of your own way of being. Taking up the different view-points of the many different vehicles in the nyingmapa tradition has the same function, they allow the mind to move without leaving your meditation cushion. Through that you can come to see that however we manifest it is just a gesture; it’s just a movement into the particular situation. Our gestures carry the truth of the moment not some separated out absolute truth.

So, when we come into being with others, we have to think what is the function, what is the intention that we have in terms of communication. Sometimes we try to develop that clarity of intention before the moment of interaction.

For example, if you take the bodhisattva vow, you might think under all circumstances my intention is to be useful and helpful to all sentient beings and that’s a very nice thought, but it’s just about one hundred per cent meaningless. How will you know how to help someone if they don’t agree with your view? Should you attune yourself to the position that they are in, or maintain the clarity of your own position and insist on that?

This is what we do a lot of in life, sometimes surrendering to the other and feeling determined by them and sometimes insisting on our position and pulling them into subjugation under us. Central to this is a question of power. Should subject have power over object? Should object have power over subject?

What we were looking at yesterday, and what is really essential in this, is the understanding that both subject and object arise from the same ground and in the integration of these three modes, we are both the openness of the mirror and the clarity revealing the particularity of the reflection in the mirror.

When these two are held together we then have the precise gestures, which arise inside the movement between the reflections in the mirror. It’s not that when we do meditation we enter a state where everything is symbolic and magical and beautiful, and then we come out of the meditation and we meet real people and bang into them.

Our bodies and the bodies of those around us have the same ground. Each of us is the centre of the universe, and from this central point everyone else manifest as arisings in this mirror-like situation in our mind.

We are like nodal points on one great mirror. So, as awareness shines our through our heart and we find ourselves present in the world with others, these others have the same light and fluid nature within the mirror. Of course, the body has certain energetic quality to it.

We have to remember that conditioning, karma, all that we take as obscuration and limitation is itself empty. But the fact that something is empty doesn’t mean that it doesn’t manifest. We manifest in this form of emptiness with our knots, our limitations, our prejudices and our capacity. Each of these factors is itself arising and passing; our manifestation has no inherent self-essence, no fixed continuity.

How not to be

For example, I might feel that I’m an anxious person and I have a tendency to worry about everything. I might feel that, whilst I can see that other people have difficulties, somehow my life seems to be *more* difficult; I don’t seem to be able to cope very well. I might think ‘this is a belief I have about myself.’ Where is that belief?

It’s in my mind. When I look for it I find it, sometimes it pops out to remind me that its there. It feels that this belief is reminding me – this is how I always am. Each time we encounter it, it seems to ring true, it

seems to say 'Yeah, this is me.' It's like looking at a photograph of yourself ' Oh yeah, that's me.' But maybe the photograph was taken ten years ago. You don't look much like that now but you think 'Oh yeah, that's me.' These beliefs are existing on the level of our representation, which is to say a set of mental constructs, which create a pseudo -continuity, the illusion of a continuity, which exists only in terms of mental fabrication.

The anxiety that I experience is a *process*. It's a process that is constructed from several factors involving links between *perception*, of how I see things in the world, and *conception*, an identification with how I think these things in the world are affecting me. It's not exactly a linear process but when we describe it in a linear way we can see how it goes to multiple feed-back looping.

Say I see something in the world, which seems a bit frightening. This could be just a letter coming through the post-box. It's marked with the name of my bank. This is terrible; I'm sure its very bad news! I start to think of all the things I have should done. These thoughts make me feel a little bit scared. My breathing starts to change to upper chest breathing. My energetic system starts to change as I start to pump a little bit of adrenalin into the system. Now my brain is getting some messages ' Oh, oh, there is something really dangerous going on.' So the brain wants to find some solution to this problem so I take the letter and put it into the drawer. I think that will make me feel better, but unfortunately the thoughts don't stop at that point; I keep thinking 'I really have to sort out my situation; I don't know what's happening.' With that I have a sense that I have failed in my life, I have done things wrong, and the necessary corollary of that is '*they're going to get me!*' So, now I know that the world that I live in is rather dangerous and my *perception*, moving out towards the world, is infected with the *conception* that, people want to cause me trouble. In order to prepare for the trouble that the people want to give me, I have to think a lot about what sort of problems they could be wanting to give me. In order to help myself prepare for these difficulties, which I am sure are coming, I have a selective attention which highlights any potential danger in the environment. Each of these points will be turning and interacting with the other points, so the body becomes tense and the voice is either silent or turns towards self-attack or self-justification. The mind moves between being very, very busy and being collapsed.

In this way we can see that, in believing that things are *real* and that we are *real and vulnerable*, our capacity to stay relaxed and open becomes rapidly diminished. Almost all the problems in our life can be solved very quickly. Either we can change it, and there are a few things that we can do in order to change it, or we can't change it and we have to work out how to live with it, and there are not so many things you can do to learn how to live with it. Worry and anxiety form a whole extra layer of mental activity.

This means that we move into the moment towards the other, into the environment, already a little bit collapsed, and already a bit tired, without much hope. This collapses our courage, it collapses our endurance, our patience, all our good qualities... the energy leaks out of them.

From the point of view of dzogchen, this is a very painful demonstration of how *not to be*. How, by surrendering into conditioning as if it were real, we forget the integration of the three modes.

How should we try to do it differently?

From the state of the practice which we are doing with our eyes open, try to just allow whatever is coming to come. If you are sitting in the meditation practice and something happens, maybe a car goes by or you hear people talking outside or someone moving in front of you and you find that some thoughts rise in response to that. In that moment you can see that object acts on subject and this gives rise to different thoughts. These thoughts arise for a while and then they run out of steam, nothing else in that line is going on, but somehow you have been repositioned.

Perhaps when you hear a car going by, you start to think, Oh, when this ends I have to drive home, I need to make sure to check the oil before I start. So already you have arrived back in Vienna in your mind! Now this echo of your life in Vienna is the position from which you encounter the next things which are arising, so your view or orientation is already tilted. There is already a kind of virus or filter in place; some kind of mood, tendency or arousal towards the situation is already there which acts as a sort of back-draw to the next moment.

Letting it go

The key thing to practise, again and again, is just let it go. One of the essential points is, don't control what is coming into your mind, *just make sure it leaves*. This is the essence of the idea of self-liberation.

The mind is like an open park, it's a public space. All sorts and feelings arise. You cannot stop them arising. You can struggle very hard and push them away, but they have already come, and in pushing them away, you disturb yourself.

If you have your breakfast outside, maybe with some nice ham and honey, your friends the wasps will come. When the wasp come buzzing around your honey, you say 'Go away.' Your peaceful breakfast has been disturbed, because the wasp will keep coming. You can't stop the wasps from coming, unless you go inside, but you don't want to do that because it's such a nice day, so the wasps keep coming. This is the same as the mind, you can't control the territory, but wasps are not born *in order* to sting human beings. Every now and then, they decide to do it, but we have to believe it's not their number one priority. Give them a little bit of space and they don't cause so much trouble.

In the same way, you can't control the territory of the mind. When thoughts and feeling arise, we have to let them be there, but the aspect of our existence that we call 'I, me, myself,' finds this very difficult to do and thinks 'How can I be *me*, if I have *that* thought?'

The thing about the ego, is that it is a changing topography, it's a kind of geographical formation, that keeps moving and as we locate ourselves in any particular position we encounter an environment which either makes us feel safe or not safe.

Say that the earlier letter was from the tax institution and you put it in the drawer and had all your thoughts. Perhaps you've learned to let all the thoughts pass through but even so, eventually you have to open it. Now you've opened the letter, and you have a lot to pay, which will ruin you. What should you do now?

Pray to Padmasambhava!

Resources

We only really have a choice of two perspectives in all these situations, either the object is big and the mind is small, or the mind is big and the object is small.

Due to worry and anxiety and fear, we spin inside ourselves, often losing all sense our internal support and the resources available to us from the environment. So, from the point of view of therapy, one would be helping the person to relax, and to make use of the resources that are in the world.

From the point of view of meditation, if somebody has a meditation practice, clearly what they're encountering is that they have projected a lot of energy into this object, so in this case the letter has become very, **very big**.

One could do all manner of meditation practices to deal with that. For example, you could put the letter on the table in front of you, do the 3 'A'-practice and do a lot of 'PHAT'. As you open the letter, you could keep saying 'PHAT', and then when you see how much many you owe, then you change the mantra to 'Fuck', then you go back to 'PHAT'.

Or you could pray to Padmasambhava, you could pray to Tara. When you do the meditation you take the presence of the deity into your self and experience yourself as having the nature of light. You can recite the mantra of the deity, then when you open the letter you receive it from that state – these are all empty signifiers.

When we feel 'I can't face it', that is a sign that we have become fused with a diminished part of ourselves. We have collapsed from the articulation of the wider self-system, into a sub-system of the self which is very minimally resourced. So, on the relative level, we want to rearticulate this collapsed aspect of self into the other capacities and resources of the self, both its internal strength and its pathways of communication into the environment. You can do that through any kind of supportive practice, you could pray to the twenty-one Taras, feeling support and warmth; through that you can come back into yourself, remind yourself about your intention in life, and feel strengthened.

If my patients are Christians and facing this kind of problem, I suggest singing the twenty-third psalm every day, many times, because that sound is about having the sense of support, having the sense of comfort, of not being alone. Also, if they're willing to sing it, the energy of singing helps to relax to the body, relax the diaphragm and brings up the energy, giving a kind of radiance. Dancing would have a similar effect but of course many people who are collapsed into anxiety don't sing and don't dance.

Often these states of collapse have been engendered by what we call nowadays 'post-traumatic-stress-disorder'. There is more and more evidence that the best response to this is not to go into re-living the experience, or trying to think about it, but to do some bodily movement like psychodrama or inter-active improvisation. People often say that we actually make use of a very little of the brain's potential, but our body is also a greatly underused resource which can offer us so much; if you want to calm yourself, doing some movement is probably the easiest way.

One of the problems with anxiety and depression is that they act to make the body feel either disempowered or entangled so that easy movement of trust and relaxation are difficult to entertain.

Meditation posture

The ideal meditation position is designed for long-term practice, but most people don't have a good posture. Instead of the skeleton resting secure in itself, so that the architecture of the bone structure is holding the weight, our posture is off and the work of holding us in places is done by the muscles. This results in backache, headache and so on.

If you sit for long periods of time in meditation, and the meditation is going well, the musculature will relax. If the posture is off-balance the body will then tend to collapse. On an outer level this will bring physical pain, on an inner level it's likely to affect the ease of breathing and agitate the energy channels. So the postures, particularly padma-asana, have been designed to support the angle of the spine to hold the head so that everything can hang freely and openly. It's good to do some Alexander technique first,

because many people hurt their knees trying to sit in a cross-legged position, which in itself produces bad posture.

In dzogchen a key principle is to be kind to your body and work *with* your body. If it's sick, you can sit in a chair, you can support yourself with ropes and supports. Running through the Indian traditions of hinduism, jainism and buddhism is a somewhat warrior-like attitude of domination of the body which manifests in lots of yoga teachings methods.

However, the body that we are particularly concerned with in dzogchen is the energetic body; our experience of our body as part of the free movement and articulation of the whole frame of arising. As part of the path, for some of the meditation, you want to hold the body steady as a support for recognizing the innate stillness of the mind. However, the body is designed for movement; it's not designed for sitting still. I move about all the time, I'm not interested in sitting very still. When I'm with my patients I like to move around in the room because sitting very still as a therapist is very boring and it doesn't burn any calories.

Movement is the quality of the form kaya. In this general tantric system, we can say there are three kayas, dharmakaya, sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya. They are similar to but slightly different from the three modes of existence, we've been looking at.

It is said that the dharmakaya, the recognition of the mind's nature, is for yourself and the form kaya is for others. The sambhogakaya is the richness and the symbolic possibility of many different movements, and the nirmanakaya, the ways in which we come into the world for the benefit of others; they are both for others, they're gestures out into interaction with the environment. So movement is not a problem, when it is integrated with stillness. You can have a very still body and a big moving mind. Dynamic movement can be a very good way of helping the mind into meditation and the great master of this is Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche. If you have a chance to meet him and study something with him, then that is very helpful, but the basic principle is don't harm your body, but collaborate with your body and find a way of having your mind and the body as allies, as inseparable, as integrated.

Questioner: Why do you do this practice and why should we do that kind of practice?

James: To answer the second question first. The only reason to do the practice is if it takes your fancy, if it is your karma, if it is your luck, '*should*' doesn't come into it. One has to feel that it's something that one really *wants* to engage with; like if someone looks out of a window and they see a horse, and they think 'Wow, that horse is amazing, I really want to get to the horses, maybe I could learn horse riding.' That means that there is some kind of connection or pathway or possibility of mobilisation.

I think, there is a real problem often in the presentation of things like dzogchen, because in the Tibetan tradition they always say 'this is the very high, the most important, the most powerful path.' But if it's not your bag, if it's not the thing that is good for you, to do it just because someone else says 'it's the best thing to do', becomes perverse. The things that can be maintained are the things which *are* our existence, they're part of our life. So one of the things that we can do is try out many different things, going to see different teachers, try different practices, and see which one speaks to us; this is the view of dzogchen.

In other traditions they would say that you have to look until you find your teacher, then you ask your teacher what to do, and then you *do what your teacher says*. But if the path is about integration, part of that is finding a way of harmonising. When people are playing music together they have to be able to play, to perform and to listen at the same time and if you don't have a written score or even an

established melody, if you're just jamming, then you have to be very attentive in order to find a way when you might lead, when you can follow and so on.

Part of that is, can I trust myself? Do I believe that somebody else knows what I should do, more than I know? Maybe I can't decide for myself, so I trust my teacher to decide for me but that means I have decided to trust my teacher. So you've already decided, nothing happens without a decision!

In the old days, when the Muslims moved into India, they used to throw cow's heads into Hindu temples with the intention of desecrating the temple and forcing the Hindu worshippers to become Muslims. You can do the same on an outer level, you can force someone to join a group, but you can't force someone to do meditation, because meditation is not an outer activity, it's not joining anything.

So, going back to the first part of your question, I do the practice because it takes my fancy. I do it because I like it. Whether it does me any good or not, I don't know. When I go to see my mother, who is now very old she says 'Oh, James, you are just my wee boy!' So she hasn't noticed much progression.

Stories and idealisation vs. applied phenomenology

I think, that is very, very important, because 'dzogchen is wonderful, dzogchen is the highest,' is representation, it's a story; what is important is what we actually connect with. We live in the world moment by moment with the environment and what we have is what we can work with.

Some people gossip and say this lama is good, or that lama is bad, in the end some people will get benefit from what might be called a 'bad lama', other people maybe get no benefit from spending years with what is called a 'good lama.'

I know plenty of therapists to whom I would never refer anyone, but they seem to help people. So, perhaps we have to accept that on the level of manifestation, it is always particular and that nobody sees the whole picture. When great Tibetan lamas come to the west, they have to use an interpreter. They can't go up into the sambhogakaya and suddenly they are able to speak English or German, that is not possible. They manifest their own historical situation which is to speak Tibetan. Some people think 'oh, my lama is omniscient, he knows everything' but would he know how to work the machine in the laundrette?

So stories can be very, very deceptive; idealisation is one very quick way to become very stupid. Dzogchen is more connected with phenomenology, which is the practice of bracketing off assumptions and attending to things as they reveal themselves. Things reveal themselves in this way, in this moment, in this context. So, when we say this is a wonderful practice, it means 'I like this practice' or 'this practice is good for me.' It's not necessarily good for someone else.

The structure of a lot of dharma discourse is parent to child; in the end we have to be adult. How could we be enlightened without growing up? To develop a child-like faith while one is praying is a very useful support for meditation, but to go into an infantile regression around a teacher and make yourself inefficient in the performance of your own life is crazy, as far as I can see.

So, what I have tried to describe in these last days, is the relationship between the view, the meditation and the activity. If the view makes sense to us, if it seems to explain many of the mysteries of our existence, then it might be useful to engage in the meditation; this is the way bringing the view alive in oneself. If the meditation has some benefit for us we will start to loosen up, become more free, and able to respond to the world with less anxiety, less prediction, and greater range.

When we experience that effect, it encourage us to understand the view more. Then when difficulties arise in the meditation practice and in our experience of being in the world with others, instead of thinking there must be some fault with the view or the meditation practice so that we have to go and seek something else, we go back into the view and use it to loosen us up. Then we become less caught up in the limitations and in this way our doubts start to dissolve.

For me that's how it proceeds. Many of the things that my teacher told me twenty-five years ago, I remember in my meditation; if the meditation gets difficult, something he said will help to loosen something up.

My experience, like that of many people, is that we spend many, many years just with the words. We hear the words, we read the words, we remember the words, we might even hear ourselves teaching other people, but all we've got is words. Then gradually the words become massaged right inside us, and we become alive and connected through the words. We need to have a clear translation, so that we are not confused about the meaning of the path, but it's likely to take some time before it ripens in ourselves.

In some ways it's similar to what St. John of the Cross wrote about in the *Dark Night of the Soul*, of the abyss, where we often have to continue doing something which has become meaningless. Eventually the enthusiasm of our first contact with the dharma, when everything is new and bright and exciting, starts to fade away, then we are just doing it because we are doing it. Perhaps it feels as though you are becoming cow-like, just chewing the grass over and over, but maybe it is just taking time for the nutritional value to be extracted and a connection to be made. This is why faith is very important; why also, as we are looking always towards the nature of our own mind, the practise of Guru Yoga or connection with the teacher is very important.

Okay, I think we have to go into our final meditation. So we do the three 'A' practice and then sit; just being present.