
Nature of Tantra

JAMES LOW

Karma Thegchen Chö Ling, Bremen, Germany

29-30 January 1994

Transcribed by Liz Fox

Unedited

Excerpts

"...Many people drift into buddhism then they drift into hinduism, here and there doing all sorts of different things, leaving behind them a trail of broken vows the way modern men leave children scattered here, there and everywhere. Well of course the children are real and they suffer if their papa isn't there. And every time people take vows and break them they piss in the face of reality. And that's not good because it brings karma; it brings consequences..."



"...You make a commitment to stay in touch with reality but then you have to confront the fact that when reality becomes difficult, you will want to retreat into fantasy. This is how samsara is structured; this is how dualistic consciousness works. It is all the time fabricating fantasies about things. So it's very important to know what we take on before we do it. That way we respect ourselves and we respect others and we respect the tradition ..."



"...The tradition tells the story of a yogi who practised calmness and equanimity for many, many lifetimes. And he had many, many lifetimes where he experienced no anger at all no matter how much he was provoked. Then when he died his bones couldn't be burnt in the burning cremation fire because they had become indestructible. This was the first vajra - this yogi's bones..."



"...We might be a bunch of guilty Protestants sitting in this room, who feel that if it's easy it can't be right! But let's hope not, because pleasure is very important. That is why this shrine room is decorated with Buddhas and all these offering goddesses all around, and all of that. The Buddha is not nailed on a cross. Suffering is the beginning of buddhism, it's not the path of buddhism. Pleasure is the tantric path...."



If we get lost or we forget to do our practice we have to remember that the Buddha is not going to be angry. It's like the story in the Bible about the prodigal son. He blows all his money and wrecks his life, but when he comes home there is a welcome. Now that story is symbolic in ordinary life, since this is samsara and real parents get pissed off, but in terms of reality this is absolutely true. There is always a welcome. So in a sense we should go where we're wanted. Hanging out with the Buddhas is fun!

Contents

Tantra indicates continuity and connectedness	2
Question about not having the enthusiasm to do practice	5
We are all refugees	8
Paying the bill.....	9
The first vajra	10
Tantra: we assume the confidence of acting ‘As if’	11
How karma and tantra fit together	12
<i>Karma is the only thing you take with you when you die</i>	15
Finding a practice that suits you	16
The dharma is taught to effect some change in us	16
<i>Question about karma</i>	17
Buddhist compassion means being open and able to respond.....	21
Tantra is the continuity of energy	22
In tantra things keep transforming into something else	23
Looking with the eyes of love.....	24

Maybe we could start by sitting quietly for a few minutes and take that time to reflect on why you're here and what you would like to get out of our time together. Usually when the dharma is presented it is as a kind of teaching in which you are invited to take a fairly passive position of just hearing what's being said. But I think that it's also important that, hopefully, you have come here in order to learn something. I don't know what you need to learn I don't know what you want to learn. *You* know that. So we have to find some way of you communicating together and with me to make sure there is some kind of fit. So that you get something of real value for *you*, rather just getting all my stuff and taking that away.

So we'll have some pauses every now and then where you can talk together in twos and get some sense of what you're understanding and what your own ideas are. You can then feed that back and ask questions. Hopefully we can get more of the texture of an ongoing conversations because dharma is something that we all have an interest or concern in, and this will be a useful way to take it forward.

So we'll just sit and allow ourselves to arrive here and have a sense of what we're about in choosing to spend this time together, what do you want?

We're meeting here in this dharma centre and since it's good to continue the tradition, we'll start by reciting three times a refuge and bodhicitta from the Chenrezig practice which I know you do here. Please start and I'll follow your tune, because every place sings these things to a different tune.

Now we started with these two possibilities; one is to enquire for ourselves what we want and the other is to learn ritual texts which in a sense tell us what we *do* want or we *could* want or what we *should* want. In the Tibetan tradition people, in practising the dharma, find themselves through the

structure of the dharma. As we look around this room there are examples of Tibetan painting and its iconographic and in that system there are many set rules and instructions of proportion, of colour, or background. How the painting should be done is exactly set out in particular texts and in traditions of oral transmission. There's not too much link between that and abstract expressionism but we live in a time of abstract expressionism and so we have to find some way of moving inside the dharma tradition with its rules and regulations and fixed patterns—making some attempt to adapt to them and move with them—and at the same time keep a looseness and a flowing awareness that fits into the fragmentation of the world as we inhabit it now.

Tantra indicates continuity and connectedness

The subject for the three meetings that we have here is tantra and the word tantra in Tibetan means continuity or connectedness. Traditionally this indicates the continuity of awareness through all the moments of experience. So that awareness is like the open sky and clouds and sunshine and rockets pass through the sky but the sky itself is open to all of them. That is to say the continuity of the sky, the sky-ness of the sky, is not interrupted by things passing through it. On a day like this when we look out the window and see this sort of grey horror it's very difficult to remember that the sky can be blue. Because we might believe that blue is the real colour of the sky and we want the real sky to come back, but of course the sky isn't blue, its blue is only a colour that runs across it due to the circumstances of the construction of the atmosphere and the way the rays of light bend coming into it.

Due to causes and conditions we get used to one particular mode of experience and regard that as normal and regard other conditions as abnormal. And the knowledge that we have leads us to predict the next moment. And some things, if we don't like the present moment, we want the next moment to be different. And if we do like the present moment we want the next moment to be the same. In that way we are trying to structure of the world to maintain the continuity of the sense of self that we have. Our sense of self - our ego - wants to continue. I don't know if it makes sense in German, but in English if we are feeling a bit sick we can say "*I don't feel myself today.*" It's the sort of idea that "I'm not me, I'm different, This isn't really me. I should really not be sick."

So the ego is wanting to have a continuity, but it's a continuity that it has to struggle to maintain in the face of impermanence. This desire for continuity, in this sense of self-maintenance, is the root of suffering. The Buddha taught that the root of suffering is ignorance and attachment and these two terms are almost the same in meaning. By ignorance it means absence of awareness of a natural openness and when one loses that open sense of spaciousness one comes into precise relationships with particular objects. Moving from a state of non-dual awareness into a dualistic perception.

And it's this dualistic perception that is the basis for attachment. So there is a subject, a self, which is perceiving an object and has a relationship with that object and is trying to either pull the object towards it because it likes the object or push the object away because it doesn't like the object. We don't want somebody to come and take a knife and stick it into us because that would hurt us or kill us and we don't want people to insult us and we don't want other people to tell stories about us against us because having got to our present age and having been able to survive a bit in the world we have some sense of self. And it may be a rather confused and uncertain sense of self that we have but it would probably be our experience here that the more clear and confident we feel about who we are the happier we are. So that we know that to maintain our sense of self existing for ourselves and for other people is a way of promoting our happiness.

So we seek to bring from the environment things that support our sense of self and push back anything that is going to cause our self to be questioned. Although putting oneself into question can be quite exciting. WE can do it in a very focused and dedicated way through psychotherapy or meditation, and we can do it in more reckless ways through drugs or parachuting or riding a motorbike very fast in the rain. But even if we are riding a motorbike very fast in the rain and it's very exciting and I think am I going to crash...! And then you crash and then you have a leg gone then it's not so exciting. So in a sense it's the thought, the excitement or the dissolution of self rather than the actual experience of the dissolution of self that can be exciting.

There are many medical conditions which are very difficult to deal with because they raise this question of the continuity of self. Early senile dementia. The partners or the people who look after people with Alzheimer's suffer the most terrible depressions because they may have been living for twenty years with this person and now suddenly the person is there, their body is there, but they're not there. And it's extremely disturbing because they're not dead, and one has to live with the hope that somehow they'll come back. But of course they don't come back. So the sense of continuity of the person - I've known this person for so many years and they're like this and this is the way they like their coffee and on Thursday afternoons they like to go here and have a schnapps - it doesn't work any more. On a lesser level but still very painful we may have encountered the teenage trauma of being very in love with someone and then suddenly it goes wrong and they've gone off with someone else. Because this first real partner has been a very good ally in getting space from the parents having somebody to love and become very identified with gives you a sense that you will be able to survive moving away from your parents.

And then if that collapses where am I going to locate my sense of self? Who can I have as a mirror to let me know who I am? So I'm sure we could find many different examples and you may have many examples in your own experience of way sin which your sense of continuity of your sense of self was interrupted by something inside yourself - getting sick or whatever, having some depression, anxiety - or something outside - having some disturbance in the family or work or whatever. And in this we feel the tension between attachment, the sense of stability and reliability in the world and the pressure of impermanence. The continuity the tantra speaks of is a very different experience because the continuity of the ego is a particular point a particular self-referencing point - me-attempting to maintain itself in a world of flux.

But in tantra the basis of continuity is an open awareness which is not referring back to any fixed territory. And that's why in the practice of tantra, the kind of visualisation meditations that one does, there is a constant movement of manifestation and dissolving back into spaciousness. At first when we practice and we are visualising ourselves as Chenrezig or Tara or Guru Rinpoche it's usually still with some sense of attachment because you've got to remember what you're holding and all these different things, so the one who becomes Tara is still me. But gradually by practising, and particularly by practising the stages of dissolving back into openness one has more sense that the basis for the manifestation is not a narrow fixed self but is a state of open awareness. Until you have that experience directly yourself it's just words.

And it's a bit like sex. When you are small and you maybe hear in the school playground about sex you have all sorts of ideas, and you might explore your body and masturbate and have all sorts of thoughts about what you might do if you got together with someone, and then eventually you meet someone and somehow you end up, I don't know, in a motor car or in a bedroom somewhere, and somehow you are doing something together. And it's the same with meditation experience; one can

read about it in all the books and get all these fantasy ideas but when you start to get some experience yourself it's much less certain.

I think that it's well known that there is some connection between the prevalence of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa in women and the high amount of money spent on advertising with very thin models. It is very difficult not to feel that you should look like that because a particular image of what a woman should be is set out and publicised and pushed a lot. It is the same thing also for men. It does exert a lot of pressure when what is set up as an ideal image is different from one's actual reality. It might be healthy and may be good for me to lose some weight. The fact is that I am how I am at the moment. So there is a tension between a complacent sense of me as me, which might be comfortable, and the other self that I could be, more healthy, more attractive, but it's a lot of work. So should I struggle to change and become something else or should I relax and accept myself as I am?

This is a question that runs right through the dharma because there are many practices that involve becoming something else, which involve striving and effort and change and transcend one's present limitations. And that's of course a very important thing to do. To become aware that if one is prone to telling lies or stealing or being confused in one's mind, that taking a decision to follow some vows and not to do these behaviours any more is undoubtedly a good thing to do. So that one uses one's will, one's energy towards a different goal, towards transformation.

But it's also very important to observe what is occurring without judging between, making judgements of good and bad. And in that way to be open to the ways in which reality manifests. So in tantra one is trying to enter into the state of open awareness and with that awareness to observe phenomena as they manifest and dissolve. And by that process of manifesting and dissolving the sense of a fixed point is opened up but then one also needs to link this with intentionality, with the will so that one can create a precise visualisation, so that one can maintain an awareness of a particular view and impose it on the familiar field of appearances.

A typical view there would be when you come out of the meditation, say you've been meditating on Tara, the usual instruction would be that you see all appearances as Tara and you hear all sounds as Tara's mantra and you maintain your mind in a state of Tara. And then it's important to remember that this is also Tara.

So at certain times one has to impose or reframe the understanding of the glass as Tara. And in that you can feel the tensions, the struggle between habitual karmic perception of reification - seeing things as substantial and solidly real - and the new view of form in emptiness. And that struggle is very important. It is a very important part of practice, because in it you are taking on your familiar patterns and really trying to change something with effort.

It can be understood as a bit phallic in the sense that it is dominating and is imposing and trying to structure reality in a particular way. Indeed in the tantric tradition, manifestation is seen as male. But one also needs to be able to practice by openness in a more feminine form of wisdom. So that by taking a tender view, a tender approach towards the world one allows Tara to reveal herself. One is not struggling to impose this view but relaxes and just allows it present itself in delicate nuances, delicate ways.

In that way it helps through practices to unite emptiness and manifestation - these male and female principles - and through that the point of disruption into form as strongly real, emptiness as something different is undermined and then the real continuity of tantra reveals itself.

Now I'd like to invite you to take about ten minutes and you find someone to talk to and just discuss together what we've been talking about and see how it relates to your own experience of ordinary life or your meditation practice. Then we will come back together and see if there are any questions or thoughts that you'd like to share.

Any thoughts?

[Question: Could you explore more on the subject of openness?] Yes I'll be doing that shortly - stay tuned!

Question about not having the enthusiasm to do practice

[Question: You talked about this glass of water and Tara - What happens if I feel like only the glass of water and where does the will come from to change this?]

Well, in the early stages in the development of mahayana buddhism they developed this idea of the Two Accumulations - the accumulation of Merit and Wisdom. Merit provides the basis for stability and confidence in a person so that they can start to apply wisdom. For example, on a Tibetan altar one typically has seven bowls offering incense and flowers and light and all these nice things. By offering this up something good comes down, and then you get all this good stuff and then you accumulate it without attachment (!) and then on the basis of that one would have more sense of direction and purpose and would be able to have the will power or desire to work.

People want to know things, because it feels uncomfortable when you don't know, and so the world is full of systems of knowledge which people learn, and then they feel very confident. This is a time of experts. Nowadays many people want to be business consultants. This is this idea that one can control the world through knowledge and information. But as a general principle, people who are anxious very often move towards obsessional compulsive disorders. Having ritualistic behaviours like checking that the gas is off, checking all the taps, locking the door twenty times. You could see these as disorders of knowledge. They don't trust that they know what they know. We don't want the anxiety in our life of turning off the gas and then thinking "Is the gas off?" so you do it again. We want to know it's off. We want to have knowledge so that we feel secure.

I think that there is a real danger that we can turn dharma knowledge in the same way so that it becomes a defensive structure. So if there's a question about why might somebody not have the will to do their practice every day, who knows why? You can read books or I can give you lots of traditional reasons for thinking why you don't want to do it - but who knows?

There is this story from Shakyamuni Buddha who said if someone gets a poisoned arrow in their arm, is it important for them to enquire who has shot the arrow? What direction was it shot from? What tree is the wood made of? Or should they try to remove the arrow from their arm? So although one can think about why one might not want to do the puja, one can then think what do I need to do in order to do it. And if one wants to and if one doesn't want to, then one may be faced with the fact that one doesn't want to do it, that one isn't who one thinks one is. So there is a choice there of either trying to control oneself and push oneself back into where one thinks one should be, or to open up, to examine, what's going on.

I was in Germany in the autumn and I was travelling in a train with a friend, and there was an old woman in the corner by the door and the guard came and checked her ticket and then about ten minutes later another ticket person came and asked for the ticket and the old woman said "I've had my ticket inspected" and this inspector man said to her "Kontrol ist besser." And of course this is the attitude that many aspects of the dharma hold as well - that everything should be under control in the right way - very obsessive. "If you follow the rules you'll be OK" But samsara is not a military camp and you all the time confronted with new situations that we don't know that we don't understand and either we can be open to the new potential of the new situations and try to engage in a realistic way or we can try to project from the past on to the future.

Tibetan buddhism, being particularly caught up with ideas of tradition, and historical continuity, has lots of problems about thinking about how to confront new situations, because essentially it's a closed system of thinking, it's a revelation-based system in which the truth was revealed in the past. So one's often confronted with a choice that one tries to implement particular kinds of practices or ways of being that don't quite fit with the situation and so they're very difficult to do and so one loses energy because of that. Or else one tries to find one's own way but then one starts inventing one's own past and gets lost in a kind of anarchy where you are not sure whether the motivation is coming from your own ego's desire or from something different.

I think the resolution to this conflict lies in the dharma, in the nature of reality. Basically it is about understanding the essence of the relationship between openness and manifestation. Again this goes back to having an experience. So there is the question of hunger; if one doesn't have a real hunger to know, unless it's a burning desire, it's very difficult to break through to something different.

We have all heard of artists who follow some vision at enormous cost to themselves and are never really sure whether they've achieved it because it's their own vision that's important, not really whether they're rich or famous or recognised. We can't all be like Milarepa, but we can all privilege our own excitement and desire and longing and pay attention to that. So that whenever we have moments of inspiration we maximise what is going on there and learn, through observing ourselves, what are the triggers that make us most likely to do meditation practise.

But I think it is a very real condition about how to maintain the energy to keep studying and to keep practising when life is so disruptive all around us. As long as our experience of the dharma is essentially knowledge about something it is as if we've got a rucksack on our back and we're putting the dharma in there. And so the more we continue along the Buddhist path the more we put in our rucksack and the heavier it becomes. So it's important not to put it in the rucksack. It should be something playful. And it should be something that is ours. It's a question of desire really. The dharma is about life, it's about freedom, and it's about things that should make us feel light, joyful, happy.

I remember in India going to these pujas with all this grim determination. What that has to do with anything I just don't know. I don't want to be like that when I'm older. Nothing to do with my life, thank you. *"By the power of this meditation may I control the world and make it the way I want it to be."* No, to have the ability to control things and to feel in control from time to time is very important. Mahakala may be very big and strong and dangerous, but I don't think he ever did the kind of things that the Americans can do in Vietnam - wipe out huge forests and raze villages to the ground.

One has to stay in touch with tantra *as a symbolic system* and not get lost in fantasies that what you imagine in your mind actually happens in the world. Otherwise the Chinese could not have got across the border when they invaded Tibet.

One can be attached to the dharma. There is a difference between taking refuge in something because it's helpful, and being attached to something because it's built up as an ego defence and gives you a false sense of security. But of course it is very difficult to know whether something works or not. One can take the masochistic position and say *"Nothing happens in my meditation because I am a really bad person and I have all this very bad karma and I'm just a pile of shit."* Or one take a sadistic position and say *"This is all rubbish, it doesn't mean anything, these people are stupid..."* but the truth is somewhere in between its about relationship. The problem with masochism and sadism is that they're perversions of effective responsive human relationships.

So we need to be able to build up for ourselves a healthy living relationship with the dharma so that it is a form of subtle inspiration that is moving with us all the time - not a persecutory voice that makes us feel guilty, or a sphere in which we feel "easy come easy go" and make our own rules. And that's why being able to talk about and discuss one's own experience is very important. In a place like this dharma centre people can begin to build up a real community in which it's possible to be honest and to share about what your experience is, rather than to just meet in a very formal way.

Of course it might be easier just to come in a very formal way and every now and then there is a talk and you sit there and you make some notes and put them on the shelf and sit through the puja and then go home. But on that level it's as if there is a wheel turning like on a bicycle the wheel's turning but the chain's come off. Nothing can really happen. Because the actual engagement with the dharma produces anxiety, produces confusion. You don't know - have I understood it? Have I not understood it?

If you were living in a village in Tibet traditionally and you had your teacher there and you could go and ask questions once or twice a week, or even every day that would be one thing. And hopefully that teacher would have studied the dharma and so know the texts, they would have had their own meditation, and just as importantly they would know you. They would know how you were in you relationship and if you had kids how you kids were and if your granny was sick what you were doing about it. They would know whether you were drinking a lot, they would know whether you were violent, they would know all sorts of things about you because they would be in the same village. This situation doesn't really exist in the West. There are people who come around and give traditional teachings and then you have to make the effort of finding out the relevance of that traditional teaching to your own life. And people come and give very powerful initiations and go away and you are left working out what to do with all of that. And then there might be some people like me who come and talk some funny things and then go away again. But I think in general teachers come and go, so there is some kind of input followed by some kind of space.

The danger is that when somebody comes and you all get together and *"Phew! That's really really good and now I'm going to practice that!"* Then they go away and the energy goes down, it gets dispersed... Now if that's the reality of the situation there is no point in saying that it is difficult. It is just what there is. What one has to do then is to think what one can do to make it a bit easier if that's how it is. My suggestion is that it can be done by talking together, by making the sangha more real, by having people actually supporting one another and getting to know each other and through that interconnectedness have one's life brought into the being of the dharma rather than coming to a dharma centre and leaving one's ordinary life outside.

We are all refugees

The first thing that we usually do in practise, and really the first thing that we do in order to become Buddhist, is to take refuge. And the ideas around refuge are very important. They give us a sense of direction and belonging and a sense that there is some kind of containment for our anxieties and pain. And on one emotional personal level it is important to think that we are refugees. We've lost our motherland. We've fallen out somewhere and here we are wandering around in samsara. Every time we're born we get our passport stamped with our visa and we don't know when it will expire, we try and hang in there and make a little home, but then we have to leave.

And our loneliness and terror and desolation in the face of samsara is a very powerful motivating force. And so to seek refuge and support is very important. But at the same time the idea of being so dependent is a poor metaphor because we need to be very active in taking responsibility for our own lives. It's very important to pray with a great faith and with a full conviction that these things will happen but it's probably better to go to the shops to buy food than to sit and pray for food to come. So there are some things that we can actually take control of. Rather than waiting for the great teachers to come and transform us, we can do the daily work and create a situation that supports us.

Traditionally the idea exists whether anyone is aware of it or not. And the dharma in its embodied form in the world includes us. We are the dharma. And we are the sangha. And we are the Buddhas-to-be. And it's by taking up that identification and by taking up a place inside that system that one has a sense of belonging, of including oneself in. And it raises all sorts of questions about who can we trust in the world?....

[Gap while tape is changed]

... then one would have the image of the good kind parents taking care of the devoted grateful children and the universe forms a complete whole. And of course Tibetan lamas sometimes find it difficult the way western people don't like their parents. But of course it may be simply that we don't have the fear of our parents that Tibetans have of theirs. We should never forget that this is samsara - driven by ignorance, attachment, greed, pride, jealousy, anger... And while it is very important to be attentive to the good qualities of people, and the bad qualities of people, so that we know things accurately, so that we engage in the world as it is, this is reality.

It's also important to be able to have faith, that is to say, an aspiration that helps us to transcend ourselves and our own limitations. However one of the things about faith means that one puts a lot of positive projection or idealised fantasy onto the object that one has faith in. So faith is stupid. But it is very important that it makes us stupid because our ordinary conscious mind with all its thoughts, has an intelligence which is even more dangerous than the stupidity of faith.

But this raises the problem of authority. Who can you believe and what is the basis for belief? People get surprised because people who are known as lamas have sex with their students, cheat them out of money, commit political crimes, murder, but why? These are people living in samsara. The whole tantric view of the Guru and the place that the Guru takes up makes thinking clearly about this almost impossible. Because the basic rule of guiding principle is that whatever the Guru does is good. And this is very important because this is the point at which all form becomes like Tara. It's exactly the point at which one struggles to understand that samsara is really nirvana. So it is absolutely vital and it is something that must not be lost. But at the same time the idea that the Guru is always right

is very similar to ideas of papal infallibility. So how one works out how to mediate these two things is extremely difficult.

I would suggest that there is no answer to it except to examine it and be aware. Firstly you have to take your own life seriously. That your existence means something. Secondly, to take responsibility for your own actions and your own thoughts and to take responsibility for them. And thirdly to be honest to yourself about what you're up to. And fourthly to have the confidence, to have the honesty to ask other people what they're up to. And not be seduced into accepting statements which are purely formal and which express traditional authority and all the rest of it. It is very important to do this and it is very hard. A lot of us had heavy times either from our own parents or from schoolteachers or whatever - we are brought up in authoritarian structures - so fitting in can make us feel comfortable. And standing up and asking questions can make us feel extremely anxious as if we are going to be annihilated.

But we have to remember that if we are to become mahayana buddhists we take the bodhisattva vow which is a commitment to save all sentient beings. And you can't do that if you are a coward. Coming into the buddhadharma can be a pretty heavy thing to do.

Paying the bill

In London in Soho they have these bars and a tired businessman goes in and this pretty girl comes over and says, "Would you like a drink? And wouldn't you like to buy me one too?" And he says "Well what are you drinking?" And of course she's always drinking champagne. So they have a glass and another glass, and she drinks it quite quickly and it doesn't really affect her so she has some more. Of course she is not really drinking champagne because it's a deal isn't it? And then it gets time to leave and the businessman asks for the bill and maybe they had two bottles of champagne which would be about £50, but the bill is about £500. And he's a bit shocked and tries to protest. And then instead of the pretty girl there are two big heavy guys!

Now in some ways the dharma is like this. Because you come into the dharma with this fantasy of having a nice time and getting salvation and enlightenment, and the bill doesn't seem too much. In fact at first you think about the initiations you are getting, you are not thinking about the bill at all. But then after a while there is all the meditation you haven't done, all the mantras you haven't said, all the prostrations you haven't finished. And you might start to feel a bit guilty and think "Oh maybe I need to get out of here?" But there in front of the door, my God, it's Mahakala! And he says "Whoa there! Sorry you've signed the check... you've got to pay, you made the promise."

And that is a point that many people come to. At that point you can say. "It's just a dream I'll wake up and it doesn't really matter and I'll go back and do whatever I did." And many people do that. They drift into buddhism then they go into hinduism and here and there and do all sorts of different things. Leaving behind them a trail of broken vows the way modern men leave children scattered here, there and everywhere. Well of course the children are real and they suffer if their papa isn't there. And every time people take vows and break them they piss in the face of reality. And that's not good because it brings karma. It brings consequences.

That's why it is very important to understand these two levels of the dharma. If we take the dharma seriously one is taking on a huge engagement. You make a commitment to stay in touch with reality and then you have to confront the fact that when reality becomes difficult you will want to retreat into fantasy. This is how samsara is structured; this is how dualistic consciousness works. It is all the

time fabricating fantasies about things. So it's very important to know what we take on before we do it. That way we respect ourselves and we respect others and we respect the tradition.

So it is a long way back to your question. If you find you don't have much motivation and energy and willpower to do the practice it is really worth sitting down and thinking "Do I really want to do this?" Because it is not a game and one ties oneself particularly in the Tibetan Tantric tradition into all sorts of energies that are very powerful. And so to enter into that one has to have an intention, one has to know why one is going to do this. Otherwise one gets a bit lost after a while and then the burden feels too much and there's a danger of just giving it up and getting lost. And that's why having a sense of sangha and belonging with other people and being able to talk over the difficulties and understand them is helpful, rather than feeling guilty one gets support.

Tomorrow we'll do more meditation practice together to try to get more of a sense of this state of openness and then I'll talk a bit more about the principles behind the structuring of tantric practices. Are there any questions before we stop for this afternoon? So if we maybe just sit quietly for about five minutes...

[Day Two]

The first vajra

So this morning I will talk more about tantra. Tantra is a method. It's a particular method of practising and understanding the central meaning of mahayana buddhism. And it's important to remember that it is a method, that is to say that it is something that you do and it's a way of doing it. It's both practices and a way of applying the practices.

The view of the practice of tantra developed as a way of trying to shorten the time that it takes to attain enlightenment. And the basic cause or method for shortening the time that it takes to gain enlightenment is confidence. Tantra is something that is sometimes referred to as a vajra vehicle, as vajrayana. Vajra indicates something which is indestructible. There is a story that there was a yogi who practised calmness and equanimity for many many many lifetimes. And he had many many lifetimes where he experienced no anger at all no matter how much he was provoked. And when he died his bones couldn't be burnt in this burning fire because they had become indestructible and this was the first vajra - this yogi's bones.

It's a funny story but it's a traditional story and there is the idea from that that one can attain this situation of not being affected by the world. And so in a sense vajra can symbolise something secure and safe. Where there is an idea that the world is a dangerous place. And if one can attain this vajra situation then one will not have to suffer it. So that one can see that there is a particular taking up of the notion of subject and object here. That is to say that the subject can become so clear and so calmed down, so smoothed out that it doesn't get drawn into responses to the environment. But also one of course needs to have a softness and responsiveness.

And so in the vajrayana one is trying to have an understanding which is indestructible. But it is not an understanding that is concretised in the way of these bones. Rather the thing that one is relying on is an awareness that is totally nourished with emptiness.

So for us maybe the simplest symbol is the sky. The sky cannot be destroyed because it has nothing in it to take up a position of opposition. The openness of the sky is able to welcome the presencing of whatever arises in it. And the confidence that one requires in the vajrayana is this realisation that one's own nature is like the sky.

Tantra: we assume the confidence of acting 'As if'

And it's a paradox because you have to assume the confidence in order to get the confidence. It's a metaphorical pattern that is taken up in the vajrayana that one does things "as if" and one needs to completely believe in what one is doing "as if..." Because when we meditate on Tara or Chenrezig or Guru Rinpoche we are making use of their manifestation as a method for us to understand our own way of manifesting. Tara exists for us as method. Method here means compassion. Out of the space of the open wisdom of her emptiness her beautiful form manifests. We, having the initiation in to that practice, can practise manifesting in that form too.

In practising being Tara or Chenrezig we experience going from emptiness into the form of Tara back into emptiness, back and forth, back and forth. And in doing that, in making use of that method, when we return to this ordinary way of manifesting we have an altered relationship with it. Because in doing the visualisation practice of Tara what we've done is to disrupt or interrupt the continuity of our ordinary way of making sense of who we are. And so the more time you can spend being Tara the more time you have away from your ordinary way of building up your sense of self.

And you may have experienced some times when you go on holiday that it takes a little while to relax into being on holiday, but after a while it seems very natural. And then when you go back to work "Why am I doing this?" And at that point you may have some thoughts or fantasies about changing your life or opening a little cafe on a Greek island... and doing tantric practices is in many ways similar to this. We probably all have the experience of for a while not doing the practice very much and then one day sitting down and really doing it. And then you think, "Ah this is really good I should do this every day!" and then somehow it drifts away. But it's in that moment when you really do it that something different happens. And so this struggle between staying in one's ordinary state and doing the practice is quite real.

I don't think we should see it as being lazy or lacking faith or something like that. Because I think it is more like the conflicts that arise in psychotherapy, where somebody makes a commitment to enter the therapy and work on themselves and yet finds that they are blocking it. When we find it difficult to get into the practice we are really in the presence of our own karma. Now we can get angry with ourselves and try to push ourselves into doing the practice and that may work for a while, particularly if there is a group situation, like if you are living in a monastery where there is a group shame that can keep one on the task. But for us it is perhaps more important to examine our karma at that point.

Because, as I was suggesting earlier, the main method for the practice of tantra is confidence. And if our confidence in the practice and in the whole meaning of the path is unclear it will be unable to challenge the repeated ways of karmic fixity that arise. So at that time if we find that our desire to practise and our confidence is wavering it is very useful to sit quietly and to pay attention to the thoughts that are arising, and to go back and to review the basic preliminaries.

For example, the four thoughts that turn the mind away from samsara; the reflections on impermanence, suffering in samsara, karma and the way in which the pattern of existence continues. Most large tantric practices will have some description of these at the beginning of them. And I think it is very important to take them up and really think about them. Think about suffering and samsara and think about the six realms. We're not considering a strange Eastern cosmology, even though it is kind of strange, but what we have is a way of radically rethinking our own sense of cause and effect.

In the west the notion of how human beings develop into healthy patterns or into disturbed patterns is very much a one-life psychology. Children blame their parents for getting it all wrong, and parents often feel guilty that they have made mistakes and feel sad that their children.

[Gap while tape is changed]

This is the view of the understanding we experience in the West. And this is not at all the Buddhist view. So I think that the practice of tantra has to really take into account that we are practising it in an environment of a belief system that is completely opposite. Increasingly in Western countries there is the idea of the absence of any God. And even for those Christians who believe in God there is an absence of a belief in hell. There is less and less sense of any moral consequence. So it becomes very difficult to think, what does it mean if people do good things or bad things? If somebody does a good thing they might become famous and win a Nobel Prize, but there is not, in our culture, much sense that it leads to something different after death.

So we're working very much in a sense of a precise relationship of cause and effect. But not of a karmic notion of cause, effect and consequence. So that there is an idea that something happens which creates a particular effect, like stealing something. You may be found out, you may not be found out. If you are found out you may be punished, and you might become known as a thief. If you become known as a thief there's a kind of social stigma in that. You take on a particular identity. So it might effect how people speak to you, or your chances of getting a job, but that would very much reflect current cultural attitudes which change over time.

How karma and tantra fit together

The view from karma is very different. It is the idea that every time we are engaged in activity and we are in activity all the time; this activity is generating particular charges or build ups of energy which will propel us into future connections of subject and object. Sometimes if we think about karma particularly in relation to the past we can feel a bit helpless that we've done all these actions and there is all this stuff waiting to arrive on our heads but we can also turn this around and have the sense that the world that we experience is our own creation. That due to our actions there is the consequence of a future construction, so that the world, our experience of the world is not random, it is not an accident; it is our own creation.

So that when we get depressed or sick or unhappy this is our own creativity in play. But usually we don't want to look at it as creative to have a headache! We see the headache as some damned nuisance that is troubling us. Because we want to label it "not me". This shouldn't be happening to me.

I think you can see here how this way of viewing karma fits in with tantra very nicely because exactly the view of tantra is "out of the nature of our mind everything is arising." This is not different from the idea of karma and if we really understand karma properly we will be able to move into tantra

much easier. Because in tantra one has a more conscious intention of visualising and creating something whereas through karma one is creating these situations without the conscious intention. Particularly with negative karma we want to do the action but we don't want to get the result of the action! And this is precisely the reverse of practising tantra, where for many of us, we don't want to do the practise but we would like to get the result!

It is very important to really struggle with the idea of karma and rebirth in the six realms because the idea of rebirth and these different realms that one can go through in this body which seems so familiar, which is our basic identification "I'm a human being" to being in another body is very radical. Because if I can believe that in my past life I was maybe a dog and in my next life I am going to be a rat then the sense of me as me, as a human being, has to drop. There was this question last night about what's the nature of the consciousness that moves from life to life? And it's exactly through thinking about this sort of issue that one has to struggle with it. I would suggest that it's not just a case of finding a clear teaching about this, but that this is actually something that one has to struggle with because the struggle is about shifting the orientation of one's mind.

In Britain most people start to take out life insurance in their late thirties. And it's probably very common for young people to believe they'll die when they're thirty. I used to be convinced I wouldn't pass twenty-six. I thought I'm going out then... So then if you are twenty it doesn't make any sense to have life insurance if you are going to die at thirty. Now when you get to be forty and your joints start to hurt a bit and it's hard getting up in the morning then you think "Hey I'd like to retire even though I have no money" so you take out some insurance. There is even a joke that if you are forty and you wake up in the morning and you don't feel any pain then it's certain you are dead!

So we can see that from this point of view ordinary western society is like a youth culture where people will die before they have to experience the consequences of their youthful indulgence. And indeed one can see how this affects the world globally in terms of ecology since people become focused on their own present existence and what they want and are not prepared to look into the future and the long term consequences.

From the buddhist point of view if we think about infinite future lives, that is quite disturbing. Because you can't get away with anything. It will always follow you. In my work as a psychotherapist the question of suicide is around all the time. And many many people spend a lot of time thinking "Should I kill myself?" I have had patients bringing me all the pills they have and all the razor blades they have and wanting to put these on the table so they can look at them. This is very important because it is a kind of exit. When people work from the basis that if life is too much, if life is too much, they can just go out. In general people are working from the assumption that if they cut their wrists and enough blood goes out, the brain will cease functioning, then they will die and that's it.

There's something to be said for that philosophy. What evidence do we have for rebirth? Why don't we just form the local suicide societies? Suicide is in fact a traditional Indian practice. At the time of the Buddha one common practice for committing suicide was to make a vow of walking in a straight line. You would start walking in a straight line and if you came up to a tree you just kept walking in front of the tree, because you had vowed not to deviate left or right. So you would have to keep going until you fell down. There was an idea that by intentionally abandoning this life, by sacrificing it, one could burn up some of attachment.

But from the buddhist point of view, believing in the buddhist idea of the continuity of experience from lifetime to lifetime, one has to live with the consequences of actions. The idea that just by killing oneself, by wiping out the body one would end everything would be seen as a basic wrong view. Buddhism speaks of 'the middle way' between the two extremes of eternalism and nihilism. So this would be an example of a nihilistic point of view and buddhism would object to that, both in terms of the complex constructions of Buddhist philosophy, but more importantly on the direct experience of meditation. Most precisely on the experience of dissolving into emptiness, this state of openness, and then having thoughts and feelings arise out of it, so that the spaciousness and the manifestation pulse back and forth into each other.

Of course it is important to enquire into this because this is working on the assumption that the awareness that is around at that moment is not derived from activity in the brain. So it's working with the assumption that whatever thoughts and feelings arrive may in some way have a physiological location. The buddhist sense would be that it is the heart chakra, whereas western science would describe it as patternings in the brain. But that this all arising within the field of awareness and that awareness is not a product that is arising inside that field.

So we have this open dimension of awareness and inside it this patterning of arising. What is arising is not merely random, but is structured as the moral consequences of our own previous actions. So this is why it is very important to think about karma and to think about the six realms, because in moving from one realm to another the whole notion of who we are is challenged. And just as death is often experienced for us as a fantasy - it is difficult to really imagine that we'll die or that we'll get old - but when we do actually realise I'm in a body that's going to disintegrate if I live that long. But if I live that long this body is going to get pretty sick and die. And it's this understanding that will get people into paying money for a pension plan and stopping smoking. And the dharma is the pension plan. That's why we offer all this stuff.

Because if it's not just theory - reincarnation - and you look at the wheel of life and there are hells - if you actually think "I can go there, like I can go to the station and get a train to Berlin. Because Berlin exists, I can do that. So in the same way I can get to in hell." Now, at the moment, we have a choice whether we go to Berlin or not but it could be that suddenly some alien force invades our town and there are people saying "Get out!" and you have to leave your little house and go somewhere else.

This is what happens when you die. Yama comes and says "Get out!" and your will-consciousness has to run very quick with this big deal coming behind you! This is why in Tibetan they describe people and all beings as *drowa* - going things - we are in movement; we can't stand still.

In a few years time Hong Kong stops being under British jurisdiction and will come under Chinese jurisdiction. Many Chinese businessmen in Hong Kong have moved a lot of their money overseas because they don't want to wait to the last minute when the Chinese come in and take all their money.

If we are also going to be kicked out of our lovely little bodies to wander somewhere it would make sense to send some store ahead of us. Different cultures have thought about this problem in different ways. In some cultures if you were a king when you died all your followers would get the chop as well, so that you'd have all your friends around you inside your pyramid or burial tomb. The Christian tradition of putting coins over people's eyes is a trace of the old idea of having some money to pay your way across the river of death. We want to have the idea that we take something with us, something both of what we've got but also something to make sure that it is safe for us over there.

Karma is the only thing you take with you when you die

From the buddhist point of view the only thing you can take with you is your karma. That's why on a relative level you want to make sure that you have as much good karma as possible. And if possible shift your relationship to karma so that when you get to the customs post at death and they open your little box you have your sandwiches there but no contraband, no little stash of drugs. If Yama saw that he's pounce, "Hoy! Hoy! What is this? Downstairs for you!"

So one needs both of these things, both a clear understanding of emptiness as a way of resolving this difficulty, but certainly to sustain us in the practise, a very clear sense that this is how it is. Because if rebirth and the moral definition that we create our future fate through the value of the actions, isn't true, then why bother to meditate? You could lie in bed this morning reading the papers. So it is very very important to see whether these ideas of karma, rebirth, suffering, precious human birth, whether these are actually meaningful to you or whether they are just words.

So maybe we make a pause here and I invite you to take about ten minutes to talk with someone about your own experience in the dharma and to think about your relationship to these ideas. Does it feel just like some theory, some story, or can you get a handle on it and make it a living presence in your life? And then we'll see if there are any questions or comments that you want to take up from that. We will then have a short tea break.

[Break]

[Question: She say sometimes this thought of karma, if she thinks about it very strongly and it can make her smaller, just subjugate her and suppress her, and then she does something or she comes into some situation, or has some feelings and she says "This is my karma" so it is just like suppressing her very much. Sometimes she finds it's easier—take, for example, a cold—to say 'It's just a cold, and not to say, "Oh, that's my karma"']

It's just a cold AND it's your karma. Both.

It is very interesting because it raises the question of fear in the dharma. Particularly in the hinayana approach, fear made us of. For example there is a famous collection of sayings from the Buddha, the *Dharmapada*, which includes ideas like that one should be as afraid of committing sin as of drinking boiling lead. And in general the position in the hinayana is that the world is a very dangerous place. Dangerous because there are many dangers that will arise to us which we haven't predicted which are the effects of our karma, and even the things which attract us and seem to be of value seem to generate more karma so that one is sort of trapped.

I don't know if you've played a "Gameboy" with Mario? It's really exciting because the game starts and you have to go very quickly and there all these big things that come up and are moving around - you know - so this is a bit like karma. From this hinayana point of view and one of the basic ideas they have is that by thinking about his you will have a sense of revulsion for samsara, hatred for samsara. And that ripening of revulsion of horror for samsara, the fulfilment of that, traditionally in the hinayana tradition is to take a vow of renunciation - to become a nun or a monk. And being a nun or a monk you live in a way which says "I am not in the world - I am separate from the world" But the particular thing of Tibetan buddhist practice is that layers them hinayana, mahayana, tantra, dzogchen. It all runs right through the same puja, through the same practise.

It's a bit like maybe two hundred years ago, if somebody had an accident and got their leg crushed, the doctor could get a saw and saw it off. And there was no anaesthetic. Hinayana is like that. You saw your own leg off, and rejoice. "Oh samsara is suffering!"

Nowadays if somebody's leg is crushed very badly they may need to cut it off, but they can have anaesthetic and also the medical procedures to make a very clean stump. In Tibetan practice one is also trying to cut off the attachment to samsara, but in the cutting off of the attachment to samsara through the madhyamika view of emptiness, one has a *clean* cut, with the great anaesthetic of *sūnyatā*, of dissolving into emptiness. That way you don't feel anything because it is not your leg anyway!

Finding a practice that suits you

In the traditional example it says that you shouldn't look on the guru as a musk deer and the dharma as a musk pod and yourself as a hunter. Because the deer has this little musk pod and the hunter cuts it off and the deer dies. So you should go with respect and attention. The traditional example is you should consider the Guru to be a doctor, the dharma to be the medicine and yourself as the sick person. So if you are looking for a Guru and you recognise that you have this crushed leg, you want to find out does this doctor know about operations? Can he give me refuge? Has he got the kind of prosthesis that I want?

So if, having met to Guru and taken refuge, I have my one little stump where my leg was cut off, and he says. 'You have to do five years of Kalachakra practice', you think 'The last thing I want to do is Kalachakra'. You have a problem since it doesn't fit on the stump. You can't walk properly with it. That's why one needs to come into a kind of practice which feels very automatic and easy - which fits - just like a good prosthesis- fits as part of your life.

So that if you are practising with Tara you feel when Tara is in front of you this deep love and you feel this desire to identify and to be one with her. And then one Tara comes and dissolves into you and you arise as Tara, you can fully believe and yes I want to be Tara. This fits. Because if that Tara really fits, then you can look at your stump. Because then you have the confidence to know, 'I have a new home in emptiness', and I can turn round and look at my old home, at its impermanence and suffering and all the rest.

The dharma is taught to effect some change in us

But we have to remember that the dharma is taught in order to create affects in us - to shift something - to change something. So it's going to churn us up in some way. Something is going to change. And some of the things we need to think about are probably going to cause us some distress and pain. However it may be that on a certain level we hate ourselves, that we pull ourselves to pieces and push ourselves down all the time, very critical, and that relationship of cruelty to ourselves can be acted out through the dharma as well. By doing practices one doesn't like, or doesn't feel helpful, or by practising too long, by hurting your body through the practise. So I think we have to be aware of our own sadism towards ourselves. So that we can know when reflecting on something that churns us up is actually useful, and when it is simply a way of beating ourselves up.

Any kind of dharma practice means if you are going to do it, you are going to do it as you. You can't start anywhere other than where you are. And no matter how much people want to imagine that their therapist knows them well or their Guru knows them well, in the end we know ourselves better

than anyone better than anyone else. So by being aware of one's own nature and how one traditionally, habitually reacts to oneself one can find out how one needs to go about practising the dharma.

Carl Jung had this concept of 'the shadow', that we always have a shadow because we are always moving in some direction, and there's some bit of us behind us that we don't see. And you can see this if you go to Bodhgaya, this great and very beautiful temple erected at the place where the Buddha Shakyamuni gained enlightenment. Because in front of the temple there are people making the big prostrations, and for sure part of them is quite in this prostration, but nonetheless the way it is set up it is also a spectacle. So somebody is doing prostrations and somebody else is looking at me. And one might be able to imagine that there is a subtle way in which the person doing the prostrations has some ego connection with being photographed.

So some narcissistic needs to be special and important are being met by doing this action which is designed to purify the narcissistic situation. And in a sense we can't help but do these things. We are caught up in very complicated patterns of karma and we can't see the whole thing at once. But by gradually being more aware of our own complex motivation we can watch the way we set ourselves up in these different ways. That kind of self-honesty requires two factors. It requires the sort of discriminating wisdom or *sherab*, which actually is able to see things very clearly and to analyse them, but it also needs compassion and kindness. So in enquiring into ourselves we need to watch if we are being critical in a harsh way that is grinding us down, rather than attending to the process of our becoming - trying to understand more of it. And in that understanding that we make mistakes, and we screw up, and we do all sorts of funny things.

From the dharma point of view we are all under the power of ignorance. We act in an unclear way. So it's not surprising that we make mistakes. I often have this experience with patients when they are very upset and sad and tearful and say, "I don't know why I feel like this." Maybe sometimes I can point out that some terrible things have happened in their life, and that they are depressed. That it's reasonable for them to be depressed since all of these things have happened to them. And because they are depressed it is not surprising that they cry, and don't feel so hungry and all the rest of it. What we suffer from is the disease of ignorance, so it's not surprising that we get confused and make a mess.

Very often when people get depressed they feel "I shouldn't be depressed" and say "But doctor, I'm so lucky, I've got a job and these people love me and I shouldn't be feeling this way." Nonetheless they *are* depressed. And it's our situation as well. We are in samsara. To imagine that we shouldn't really be in samsara doesn't really help us. So accurately recognising that we *are* in samsara, and exploring phenomenologically the ways in which we are in samsara – the ways in which we maintain our *samsaraness* – is the starting point of our own individual movement towards transformation.

Any other thoughts?

Question about karma

[Question: He says that is it not also possible that you cannot stand in the ocean of just being the plaything of other powers who influence you. People who have experienced some suffering induced by others cannot stand this idea. But they have just to seek this solution in the idea that 'It's my karma', it's like myself who has made it. Is this not also possible?]

From the buddhist point of view everything is karma. If somebody is walking along the road and a car swerves and hits them, that's their karma. Karma, not in the sense that one needs to do some kind of backward analysis, as if there was a world computer that stored all the information about every event you could backtrack to find what particular past event created that one.

There's a psychiatric condition that has been recognised in the last fifteen years or so called post-traumatic stress disorder. It occurs when there has been something like – well in England there was at a football a stand collapsed and many people were killed and they saw that and many people went into shock. And the police who had to take the bodies also went into shock and that flashed back again and again. Often the person's life up to that time was just going along quite calmly but then this thing comes along and hits them and they fall down. Then they get up but there is a lot of excitement and confusion about what is happening. Then it goes outwardly back to the same old pattern but inside it is all disturbed. There is an undercurrent of deep disturbance.

A lot of the disturbance that comes afterwards is because something happened which is so different from that person's ordinary life that it cannot be integrated – it is just “Uh!” – shock. And they think of these situations as an accident. That is shouldn't have happened. Earthquakes, in legal terms in Britain are called ‘Acts Of God’ on insurance policies. Because it is just too much to imagine that this is some accident happening from nowhere.

With Nietzsche and the idea of the death of God, and the whole Modernist movement, say in the plays of Samuel Beckett – I don't know if you know “Waiting for Godot” where there is this sense of total meaninglessness? – this sort of existential despair which is all-pervasive often becomes our normal way of thinking about things. We can then feel totally powerless.

Then in the midst of this desolation that we live in, of disasters everywhere, of feeling that the world is somehow out of control, somehow the dharma is telling us we have to take responsibility for the whole thing. In some ways this is made even more difficult by the media because we can see very quickly on television terrible things happening a long way away. And newspapers and magazines and TV programmes know very well that people become addicted to news. We want to know more and more of all this stuff. But we can easily end up with a sensory overload where there are so many details and how on earth can we work out what could our relationship in its any sense of causal or relationship of responsibility be to these situations? I think it is very difficult to think in karmic terms in terms of the large picture of what's around or in terms of particular difficult events like traumas and disasters.

The purpose of thinking in terms of karma is (a) as an analysis and (b) as preparing a plan of action. Through the analysis one understands the principles of how the actions lead into consequences. If this is the principle that is underpinning the way in which reality is manifesting itself on this relative level, then I need to adjust my behaviour in this and that way. Karma is not there to work as some kind of car mechanic's guidebook, for adjusting the engine when it doesn't work properly. If something terrible happens in one's life – and I hope it won't happen in any of our lives – but say some terrible accident happens, it is not really much point in the moment to think about karma. That's the time to pray to Tara, to meditate on the nature of the mind to arrange for butter lamps to be offered, things like that. Engaging in positive, goal-directed activity which will give oneself as sense of efficacy and control in the situation.

So I suppose what I am suggesting is that karma is a sort of macro analysis. It is a larger, meta level analysis. The principles of how things happen. And where it has a precise application is in terms of

analysing our present action in terms of its likely consequences. So thinking about present events in terms of karma is probably a self-punishing activity. I don't know if that's helpful in terms of your question.

[Question: He says it was very helpful but maybe my mistake of translating – it was sometimes it is easier if something happens to me – I say this is my karma or that's like my own doings once and now I experience suffering – instead of thinking somebody did this to me. Because as long as I can think – whatever I did now I will just suffer – but it is my own responsibility – my own thing. But if I have to think somebody did it to me the situation is out of my control totally. And I just have to submit to somebody else's power or domination or whatsoever.]

Because subject and object arise together karma is always represented in the subject field and the object field. When we have the notion of ourselves as a separate person living in a world of other separate people then I have a sense of "this is my nose" "My nose is not your nose" and we do that with lost of our things. And we could take the same kind of thought about karma. And then karma becomes something like in the sixties people would say I'm going to do my thing – you do your thing and that's fine. But karma is something which arises in the interaction between subject and object. It's not arising in me and then out onto the world. This would be to take a western Cartesian sense of an autonomous subject acting onto a differentiated world.

When you have these situations which seem to become more common where somebody gets onto a train or goes into a shop and pulls out a gun and just shoots and then they shoot themselves. So five people are dead and fifteen people are wandering about. How come I'm alive and you're dead? How did that happen? And in that sort of situation does karma mean anything? Or is it better to say it is a crazy madman and we're going to put these people in prison for as long as we can. We have all sorts of disturbed ideas in response to this kind of situation. And twenty people, some of whom die and some of whom don't die. And indeed we could take this modernist position and say we live in a world that's just so crazy these things happen all the time, it's just horrible.

I know in cities many people, young and old, don't want to go out at night and so their freedom is greatly diminished because they feel that the streets are dangerous. Whether the streets are more dangerous now than they were a hundred years ago I don't know but certainly there is more fear and concern about what could happen. The response to that seeming chaos in the world is to have the control of withdrawal, of not participating. That sort of avoidance is quite understandable, indeed it's the hinayana approach to samsara.

But it does mean that somehow the power's all out there. And so even the most naive fatalistic notions of karma can help to empower people: 'Somewhere there is a bullet with my name written on it and I can only be killed by my bullet.' This is how they survive. Or one can say it's kismet or at the moment of birth God wrote it in the book of my fate. One can use karma and this sense of responsibility and controlling that sometimes as a useful thing. But on the absolute level if a gunman has come in and killed you and not killed me, this is karma. Because all that arises is in the mind. And the division of subject and object is one that is occurring in the process of manifestation in the mind. And so to say that it was all the responsibility of one bit and not the other bit would be crazy. It's a born-together mutuality of becoming.

Of course, just to see that it's your karma as a kind of fatalistic solution that gives you a retrospective sense of control doesn't take you very far. One needs to use these experiences of feeling destabilised and out of control to put one's sense of subjectivity, one's sense of self into question. Instead of

using language as a way of trying to resume control by saying "Aha it's my karma, now I know where I am, I know what's in control" The cogito goes back into central locking position. That would be to use language as a defence against experience. Rather we need to pay attention to what has happened. That my sense of self has been blown apart by this activity coming seemingly from outside, so what is the relationship between subject and object, between self and other, between outside and inside?

For example if somebody has a test in the hospital and then they are informed that they have cancer they can say "Oh this is my karma" Much more interesting is to get the x-rays and to look. "There is a war going on in me. I'm divided against myself. There is a bit of me devouring another bit of me." Or I can say that the cancer is not me. The cancer is like some alien mutation form which has invaded my body and which is taking it over....

[Gap while tape is changed]

I started this morning mentioning this idea of confidence and I think one of the things, if we can have confidence that the dharma will give us the tools to think about and to meditate on our experience then when situations arise that are difficult or dangerous we can try to rely on these methods or tools to maintain our interest in the phenomenology of our being rather than to retreat into anxiety. So in that sense one would need to think about how one was using the idea of karma. If one is simply using it as a label to give an illusory sense of control, or whether thinking of it, an incident, as karma helps to open up for us a real enquiry into what it means to be in the world with other people. What is our power? What is our responsibility?.. Does that take up your issue?

[Question: How is it to deal with these kinds of things she say I don't know the English like taking chances, like doing a lot of dangerous things, driving cars too fast, risky behaviour. There is an ordinary way of living... Is that this idea of karma?]

Yes you could read it in that way. From a western point of view you could interpret it as a fear of depression. I have friends who are mountaineers who say "I only feel really alive when I'm on the rocks." To me this is a statement of absolute madness because they are very rarely on the rocks although they think about it a lot! It's like somebody who says "I am only really alive when I am in your arms" Particularly women spend a lot of money buying these sort of books that tell them this sort of story. What I am pointing to is that a particular situation is invested as the place of reality. Which means that every other position is less than life. Then rather than looking into the less-than-life feeling of the ordinary situation, and trying to understand it, one goes back in an increasingly addictive movement towards being in the place of maximum life.

So particularly high risk activities that put life into danger are like what the person is playing with is death. There is a fixation on murder, murder of the self. So it is using anger and aggression in a modified way to accelerate excitement. And I guess if you wanted to do a traditional kind of linking you would say that that would lead to rebirth in one of the hells. But because it is not a full killing it may be not in the hells but because it is a very stupid activity, it is to ignore reality; it would be cause for rebirth in the animal realm. So probably in the animal realm in a place where another animal had a great deal of excitement chewing you up. So you might well be an antelope in Africa. With a lion... and the hot breath as it rips into your throat. Something like that is pretty engaging. Having your throat ripped out.

Very often such activities are quite cruel to other people. I was watching a programme about a woman who had been in a relationship with a climber who had died on Everest. She had also been a

climber, but she was describing all the times when he was up on the mountain and she was looking up on him maybe on a particular face and she would be just so full of fear. Now in the old days, particularly when the men went out on the fishing boats onto the sea the women would be in great fear. And it was fairly risky behaviour, but it was there for a clear purpose, to bring back food. Many sports people in these areas are driven by pride, they want to be the best, they want to go up the most dangerous route, or get to the top, so it's their ego that they are elevating at the expense of enormous distress to other people.

Western culture makes heroes out of such people but it's a position that is the exact opposite of the buddhist idea of compassion. On the most ordinary level, buddhist compassion, I suppose any kind of compassion, is based on the idea of putting the other first. Now if we have to put the other first before ourselves there is some limitation on what we can do for the other because no matter how generous we want to be, we come to our own ego's self-limiting of feeling it's going to be exhausted if it keeps on giving. So the more we can relax and open our sense of self we are more fully able to just respond to people in the particularity of their need. Because usually we have our own agenda at play. We have our own thoughts of how we should live our lives. Or how people should be. And many of these assumptions are built into language. And so we are unconscious of the assumptions that we have because we are flowing through them. They are flowing through us. They are not other really, they are us.

Buddhist compassion means being open and able to respond

So the more that we can, through our dissolving meditation, through our visualisation, have this sense of openness, of not locating our life around a fixed ego that wants to protect a territory and seek to maintain that territory. So as we dissolve that, so we are more able to respond to what the other is being. And this is why the Buddha, and Bodhisattvas, are often described as being wish-fulfilling jewels. To be a wish-fulfilling jewel is not to be the kind of person that buys other people Christmas presents, giving them the things you'd really like to have yourself, it's the ability to actually see the person in the real particularity of their situation and respond to that. And that is enormously difficult to do. That's why we pay homage to the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas, to those ones who are able to be open and respond.

Traditionally it is said that the Buddha taught 84,000 dharmas, 21,000 to deal with stupidity, 21,000 with anger, 21,000 to deal with desire, and 21,000 to deal with the melange of all three. Anyway it means he taught a lot of different things. And we would believe that he didn't do this because he had a fickle or an uncertain personality. Just as if you are thinking about a philosopher you might say "Oh yes, the early Kant used to think in that way, but by the end of his career he modified his opinion." the feeling would be that the Buddha taught these different things because he wanted to help different people get some kind of handle on the things he was talking about.

It is absolutely important for us to remember this because it means that the driving force of the beginning of the dharma or the current presentation of the dharma from Buddha Shakyamuni was saying that people need to find their own way into the dharma. It's not like Moses coming down from the mountain with Ten Commandments, which are things you should do or should not do. Rather he set out these principles, these four truths, suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the way to bring about the cessation of suffering. And he taught this with the invitation that you enquire into it and to see is it true for you, does it make sense? And as you enquire into what you find out is the truth of your own suffering, the way you suffer.

So it's not like the ten commandments where we set a law up there, and then go into a kind of child relationship with this parent law and then try to fit our lives into that law. No rather we need to take this adult relationship and engage with the dharma and to take our own effort seriously. There is a Tibetan phrase "*gang la gang dul*" which means something like "precisely to each", or "to each according to their need".

"To each according to their need" has certain communist resonances. And of course the other part of that sentence is "from each, according to their capacity". There is a lot of value in the communist manifesto but the problem is that it is a manifesto. If it is an enquiry, "What exactly does it mean from each according to their capacity?" then it is a question, "What is my capacity?" "To each according to their need." What do you need? Who are you? This is the basis for the three kayas, because when we enquire into what is my capacity, who am I, we understand the wisdom of the emptiness of our own nature which gives rise to the dharmakaya.

And when we enquire into what other people need and we become attentive to their nature and their situation as a manifestation limited by ignorance, but pure in its own real nature, we manifest in effulgence towards them in the form of the sambhogakaya and the nirmanakaya.

If we recall that samsara is the continuity of the subject-object relationship in which one is taking one's experience as being real in itself. And the dharma is running across this notion of our ongoing individual self and opening it up through lots of different methods so that we can have a different experience of our self. Some of the ways are through thinking, through conceptualisation, when we think about impermanence and suffering, and thing, what that does, is work on the content of our thought so that we are shifting one kind of thought and replacing it with another. Then we can also do calming meditation and by observing the breath keeping our mind focused on the breath we slow down the speedy interaction of our thoughts. And both of these methods are ways of sort of pulling back from our ordinary involvement, sort of taking a step back and then having a chance to reflect so that we are not quite so caught up in what's going on.

Tantra is the continuity of energy

Now what's different about tantra is that it installs, it puts in place, a different kind of continuity. The whole way of the continuity of the sense of self is altered, not just the different kinds of ideas. What one is working with is the continuity of the manifestation of energy. So that by dissolving into the state of openness, when thoughts and feelings start to arise, one knows that the source of these thoughts and feelings is the openness itself.

It maybe a common experience that when you are doing calming meditation like *shamata* and the mind is becoming more still you may be able to have for a period of time not many thoughts coming, you just clearly focused on the breath. And then some thoughts, or feelings, or memories arise and usually as they arise, you are into them before you have noticed that they have arise and then you are off into thinking. Does that sound like something familiar?... You would be having a sense of one state that is calm and open and then another state which is busy, and end up alternating between these two kinds of states. And because they are sort of contrary, they are sort of opposites.

When one moves from this state of just calm stillness to an awareness of the openness of emptiness, then whatever is manifesting is not cutting across and blocking out the quiet and undisturbed state, but is manifesting though it, as it and of it. And this again is the continuity of tantra. It's the

continuity of emptiness and manifestation. Emptiness or openness doesn't dissolve manifestation into nothing at all, and in the other direction, manifestation doesn't make a mockery of openness and emptiness. But they are modes of reality.

This is very important that they are aspects of the same thing. The mind is empty and it is very rich and productive. The creativity and richness is the creativity and richness of emptiness. And this is what we try to get the sense of when we bring our minds towards tantric practise.

In tantric practices you often have the situation where one thing transforms into another. For example you might start visualising an open clear blue sky in which appears some rainbow light, which transforms into a lotus, in the centre of which manifests a letter and then the letter transforms into the deity. Normally when you meet someone, and you say hello to them they don't transform into something else. What they transform into is more of themselves. Because the more you talk to them the more you get the sense of who they are. When you meet someone for the first time they could be anything. After you've talked to them for a while you get more of a sense of who they are. So you have this sense of a movement from infinite potential to someone you know.

In tantra things keep transforming into something else

In tantra it is the opposite. The things keep transforming into something else. The situation doesn't stand still; it is moving it is changing. And it is a change, which although is very complex, is meaningful. One gets used to it by doing this kind of practise, to things changing into other things. It's not that you have one thing which then ends and then you have another thing, rather you have an appearance—for example a Sanskrit-style letter—which then transforms into a deity. But the essence of the deity is the letter. And the essence of the letter is the rainbow light. And the essence of the rainbow light is the emptiness. So the more you can go forwards the more you can go backwards.

Yet no matter how far forwards you go – and in some meditations you visualise a very elaborate mandala with all sorts of doors and roofs and thousands of people inside – this creation is still not other than emptiness. It's the play of emptiness and because it is playful it doesn't matter too much.

One wants to try to keep some sense of the visualisation as it is described in the text, but there is no benefit in making a tight anxious striving. In the visualisation you can imagine you are sitting on a beautiful hill in summer time looking out across a valley, there is this blue sky and in the middle of the blue sky you see these things and you see them just in the way if you were to look in the other direction you'd see hills in the distance. What's most important is to have the feeling of the presence of the deity or whatever is being visualised. This would be the view in anuyoga. One wants to get as much clarity as possible, but the main thing is the feeling. Tantra is essentially aesthetic. By aesthetic we mean the maximum capacity of opening up the senses and using the power of beauty to structure through the sense a relaxation into openness.

You may have had the experience if you go to an art gallery, and you look at a painting that you can go into the painting as if you were a hunter trying to get something out of the painting, or you can go as a critic, or you can relax in front of the painting and allow itself to reveal itself to you. Allow your eye to be led by the painter's intention, to move through and round the painting, being delighted and surprised by all the different shades and curves. You might agree with me that if you go with this latter one you get more feeling tone, you get a sense of the painting. You don't have to be an expert art historian. You don't need to know where the painter was born. All you have to do is to attend to

what is there. And it is very similar in tantra, with this visualisation, although one needs to pay a bit of attention to build up the sense of it, it is very much allowing the presence of the deity to speak to you...

[Gap while tape is changed]

So it's important to allow the texturing of the description to speak to you. Often it is described that the deity is in a particularly shaped palace, but if you have maybe been on holiday some place and maybe gone to some beautiful chateau that lingers in your memory, then you can put Guru Rinpoche in that chateau. So these depictions in Tibetan art or depictions in Tibetan art. And we know in the history of iconography that the shape of the Buddha's eyes changes as they move from country to country. And this is very important because it has to speak to us.

So what's important is to build up a relationship with the practice so that it feels like a familiar place to be going to. So that moving into the practice is familiar and easy and then moving out of the practice becomes familiar and easy. So one goes into the practice, goes through it, dissolving, and then at the end opening out, eyes out into the world, and the world is taken some of the flavour of the practice into the world. So that gradually more and more of the flavour of the practice goes out into the world. The usual instruction is at the end of the practice is to see all that appears as the form of the deity. So what does that mean?

It can only mean that you get what your experience is. If Tara is just a vague idea then when you look around the room and you see the watch or whatever it is, you are having to combat your ordinary perception of the watch with this vague idea of Tara. And there's no competition. Your habitual conceptualisation around the watch will win every time. However if Tara is somebody very special, if Tara is your goddess Tara, your baby, your honey, your princess, somebody who you enjoy meditating on because it is such a great thing to, then because it is so wonderful then why wouldn't that feeling just flow off it the end of the meditation and pervade everything that you see?

Looking with the eyes of love

In English we say, "looking with the eyes of love" and that's how we should look at the deity. This is something we love. By this love, by this identification, by this warmth, by this feeling, by this beauty and joy, we are filled with something rich, which can flood out. It's something of a cliché in cinema and novels that when somebody falls in love the whole world is transformed. But I guess it's true. And that's really the essence of tantra. Because joy arises. And there is all the technical stuff about the four joys and different chakras and what's moving there, but the essence of that is joy, is pleasure, is movement of richness, of light and responsiveness.

So that the beauty that one becomes familiar with in the practice starts to reveal itself in the world. Tantra should lead us into a fascination with the world. From our practice we know that everything that arises is the form of emptiness so we don't have to worry about naming it and labelling it and putting it back into its 'proper' shape, since the concern is really with allowing the senses to take us wherever they'll go, because we know where they'll go. They'll simply go into the exploration of the manifestation of emptiness, because everything is Tara.

So we have glass Tara, and wood Tara, and paper Tara, and because we know that it is all Tara, these are simply the textures of Tara. The shades of Tara, the moods of Tara. Wherever you go there is nothing but Tara. And since we're in love, what else do we want? But as with all love affairs there is

temptation. Someone else might appear. And then we would break our vows and be dishonest and Tara would cry. That's why we have to love only Tara. Because if everything is Tara there is no dualism. Because I am Tara in a world of Tara. There is simply Tara-ing. This is why the practice is done in this way, this is what it means. There is only Tara. This is non-duality. This is what the philosophy is all about.

We have to remember that tantra was taught for people in the dark period, the kaliyuga, who didn't have the diligence and the effort to practice in the traditional ways, but who had beauty as their root. In the kaliyuga when everything winds down towards entropy and the annihilation of values, it's very helpful to have this tantric path of beauty and light. It's more easy to practise. We might be a bunch of guilty Protestants sitting in this room, who feel that if it's easy it can't be right! But let's hope not, because pleasure is very important. That's why there is the Buddha with these offering Goddesses all around, and all of that. The Buddha is not nailed on a cross. Suffering is the beginning of buddhism, it's not the path of buddhism. Pleasure is the tantric path.

With this sort of mood hopefully we move in to do this practice.

[Question: I have a question. I think it is very exotic, and very difficult to merge into this context and be Tara and to see her everywhere. Wouldn't it be more simple to put instead of Tara a loved real person?]

The problem of the beloved real person is that the beloved real person is real in the sense of dualistic vision. Which means that they exist in duality. So they wouldn't be able to transform you. What transforms with Tara is the belief that Tara is form and emptiness.

[But everyone is form and emptiness.]

Yes but you don't know that your beloved friend is form and emptiness.

[But you can experience it.]

Sooner or later, and probably later unless you are with someone like Tara. Tantra is a quick method because you start with what is pure. And if you know that it is pure, then it is pure.

For example, the question. "Are you German?" "Ja", so you're German. So forgetting about legal issues, "Is your daughter German?" "Ja" If the mother is German, the daughter is German. The tantric issue now would be if Tara is pure, and that is the starting point, then the daughters of Tara are pure. We are all the daughters of Tara.

[It's like with the Jewish tradition. If the mother is Jewish the child always will be Jewish and not through the father line.]

So the starting point is faith. You have to believe that the deity is form and emptiness, which is why emptiness is the beginning of tantra. If you don't have any sense of emptiness you can't do the practice. But of course you have to do the practice to get the taste of emptiness This is a catch 22 situation!

Having the deity is important because the experience of emptiness is not a concept; it's an aesthetic experience. It's being fully alive, alive in the world. You don't need to be very intelligent to

understand. You don't need to be a philosopher or a mathematician. You just have to be open to the experience.

[Practice]

What I would suggest is that you now read through this practice, reading the German text to make sure that you are all familiar with the flow of the practice and see if there are any things that you are unclear of or any particular words, or what particular passages mean. So if you take about five minutes. Read it through because you will be sitting together with someone and make sure that you are clear about how the practice goes.

Have you any thoughts or questions about it. We have our chanting master to lead us in the rhythm. So we are doing the refuge and the bodhicitta three times. Then we do on page 2c we do this four aspirations three times. Then you start at the bottom of page 2. Then we just read straight through to page 5 and then in the bottom line there is "khyab ne kun du" That four line verse which continues to page 6 we'll read about twenty times. So by that time you want to have a sense of this visualisation in front of you. If you don't know very much about Karmapa or if you know a lot about Karmapa you might want to visualise somebody else. And you can do that too because this is a very open practice. Because everything is emptiness everything is the incarnation of every other deity. It is not as if different Buddhas have their Buddha realms up in outer space somehow and defend them with nuclear missiles. What we have here is this sense of the Karmapa as this great yogi who has seen enormous realisation and who here is representing Buddha nature – our own nature.

As it says "khyab ne kun du drin chen la ma la" To this precious Guru who is the essence of all the refuge. Let's just say when we see Karmapa here we see all the other refuges, and if for you, you want to see that in the form of Tara that's fine. You can see Karmapa as Tara or Tara as Karmapa. This is what the text says. We do the practice to get enlightened in order to help people. We do the practice for a purpose. It's the compassion of the great Gurus and the deities like Tara, Chenrezig, Guru Rinpoche, it's their compassion to manifest in a way that lets us make use of them. It's our wisdom to make use of that compassion. It's as if in presenting themselves they've baked a big cake. We should eat it. And it tastes good!

So having prayed to them that all sentient beings may have the darkness of their confusion clarified, removed. Then the last line is particularly important. "Chi me o ser cher war dze du sol." "Chi me" means unborn. This is the real nature of emptiness. It never becomes anything. Emptiness and manifestation together are unborn. Because everything is occurring inside emptiness it is never born out of it. It is born into it. It's like if reality was a pregnant woman but the baby is always born into her and born into her. It's never born out of her. Whatever arises is born into her.

And this next word "o ser" here has the sense of a radiant understanding. That is to say the manifestation of the world as it is in all its beauty in all its horror, is light and that light is the light both of object and subjects in the same time. "O ser" is not object and is not subject. It's the way in which subject and object arise together in the state of open awareness. "cher war dze du sol" may this arise for us. We want this to arise for us. We want to get this. So we're praying, "you have this, this is your nature. This is my nature. Let me see my nature. I can't see myself I have ignorance I don't know who I am. Because I don't know who I am I do all these bad things and make trouble for me and other people. I don't want to do it any more. Help me now. I want it now. I must have it now.

Because we need to focus our attention really into this point. This is the only reality in the world. And then with the intensity of this devotion we then have these three lights coming into us and purifying

all our obscurations. If we don't believe in this, if we have no faith how is it going to work? I think it is very important to allow yourself to become emotionally involved in this kind of prayer. And it's often described of yogis like Milarepa, they would pray with tears streaming down their faces with all the hair on their bodies tingling. And this is because what is at stake here is understanding yourself.

When you get on a bus or you go into a shop or you go into work nobody comes in and says "Hey you are emptiness" Everybody is saying to you "You are real" "You are this person in this world. You are solid." In every week you have experience after experience after experience of people affirming your limited karmic-controlled nature. So in the moments like this when you can actually have a different kind of experience are pretty rare. So we have to put some energy into it in order to mark it off. And that's why, if you are doing the practice at home, you should try to do it in a room and at a time when you can make noise. If you were to imagine that you were swimming out to sea and you suddenly started to feel not very well and saw your friend on the beach, what sort of sound would come out of your mouth? That's the sense that one has here. This is brief chance.

So then one visualises these rays of light coming in and the purification and with that there is this purification of our nature so that we recognise this total liberation of the svabhavikakaya, of the essence of the three kayas. And then in this last line, the bottom line on page 7 it is saying may we relax into this uncontrived natural state. And then we say this "Karmapa cheno" and then we do that for about one mala, and then the Guru comes to the top of your head and merges into you and you dissolve. So that your body, speech and mind and the Guru's body, speech and mind are not different. So we then sit in an open state for as long as we can. Just relaxing and being open and as things are arising it's with the sense of them being the form of the Guru. And then gently we are back in this room but with the sense that everything we are perceiving is the form of the Guru. And then we'll just complete the practice.

So we start on page 2a...

[Gap while tape is changed]

... Doing a practice like this regularly can simply be a way of simply reminding us what we need to stay in touch with. To stay in openness is very difficult because we living live in which we have to enter into judgement in order to maintain our situation. We're pulled into language in which the power of dualistic vision is deeply implanted. So we're going to get lost but then we can always be found again. And being lost when you know how to be found again is not so bad...

... There is a British psychoanalyst called John Bowlby and while sitting in the park he observed a very common thing. Small children, about the age of three or four would be maybe playing with a little car or toy and be moving with it away from their mother, and then they would turn around and look at the mother to make sure she was still there. And when the mother would smile at the child then the child could go on travelling. But when the mother looked anxious or call the to the child to come back, the child would freeze a bit and come back close to the mother. He started to see that if the child felt secure in the attention and love of the mother they were able to travel out and take some adventures on their own. Because gradually the small child was introjecting or internalising the image of the mother. And if the mother was relaxed and open and confident that was the sense of internal mothering they developed for themselves.

Similarly in these kind of practices, when we do the practices, it is as if we are in the presence of our loving mother or father. And when we recite the mantra we want to look at their face and see them smiling at us, and when the light flows from them into us, it is as if it is the blessing of their being

that comes into us, they make us one with them. Just as a loving parent will open their heart to their child. And then at the end of the practice the image of the parent figure is no longer with us. But if we have really opened to receive this it will go with us. It becomes internalised as part of ourselves. And all the self-hatred and all the negative attitudes we might have towards ourselves is dissolved by the installing of this very positive sense of our own value.

And that's very sustaining for us in every aspect of our lives, day-to-day. You might forget the words of the practice or you might forget to do it sometimes, but if we can allow the mood of the practice to really come into us and stay with then we can really be transformed by that. Texts like this are like the wish-fulfilling gem. Whatever we want comes to us. This beloved figure, this figure who can show us our own enlightenment dissolves into us; here is no difference at all. This is the sign and the experience of our own absolute value. And in that moment all sins, all defilements, all confusions can be purified, but we have to believe in it.

If we get lost or we forget to do our practice we have to remember that the Buddha is not going to be angry. It's like the story in the Bible about the prodigal son. He blows all his money and wrecks his life, but when he comes home there is a welcome. Now that story is symbolic in ordinary life, since this is samsara and real parents get pissed off, but in terms of reality this is absolutely true. There is always a welcome. So in a sense we should go where we're wanted. Hanging out with the Buddhas is fun!

So maybe that's about the end.

It's been very nice to be here in Bremen and meet you all. And I'd like to thank Annemarie for her very good work in translating. It has made it very, very easy, I haven't had to think about it at all.

End.