
Meditation in Everyday Life

Buddhist Ethics and its Relation to Wisdom and Compassion

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Frankfurt, Germany

12 – 14 February, 1994

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Excerpts

The Buddha's teachings are radical, disturbing—they turn our world upside-down and shift the basis of who we think we are. Everything that we know, everything that we're connected with, is still here, but we start to see it differently.



Buddhism is primarily an ethical view in which responsibility for others can never be abandoned. Having been born into this world of subject and object, one cannot simply liberate 'subject' and leave 'object' to its own devices. Taking refuge means having an awareness of other peoples' suffering because one of the things that we need refuge from is suffering, and the cause of suffering is the attachment that gives us the sense of a self that is separate from other people.



By doing a practice of creation and dissolution, one is able to integrate manifestation - the way in which oneself and the world are manifesting all the time - with a direct insight into the ground nature out of which they manifest. This insight transforms the basis of being with others out of the subject-object dichotomy, into a spontaneous reaction from a state of spacious awareness. This is the purpose of doing tantric practice.



It is attachment to our sense of who we are that stops us becoming what we might become.



We don't look at the world in the way a camera takes an impression. We look at the world through our values, our beliefs and assumptions, our likes and dislikes. We don't simply say "I like this cheese" which would indicate our relationship to it, but we say, "This is a really good cheese". In this way the 'goodness' seems to be inherent in the object. However for someone else it might be a very 'bad' cheese. Our 'truth' is only an opinion, is only the view from here.



Relax into your own ground, the natural perfection of your own presence. Experience its limitless infinity and see directly that it is the ground, the source and the field of all experience. This is your home territory, this is where you belong. So why not relax and enjoy it?

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What I would like to do is take up the question of ethics in relation to Buddhist ideas of wisdom and compassion and then through that, go into discussion of basic Tibetan tantric meditation and then we can practise on that. The practice will be more tomorrow and the discussion of ethics and relationship of wisdom and compassion will be more today. There will be plenty of time to ask questions and to think about these things in relationship to your own lives. It's important that you feel a bit comfortable and relaxed. So if you feel you want to move or you have to move, then do that.

A first principle of ethics is an attention to what's happening. From that one can see that there is an intimate relation between meditation practice and how one lives in the world. If the primary focus of attention is our own thoughts and concerns then it's very difficult to be aware of others' conditions. If the focus of our attention is on thoughts as they arise, and absorption in these thoughts, and identification with these thoughts, then we're often caught up in very habitual patterns of behaving and responding. So what we are experiencing in the moment is a repetition or a replay of a situation that is familiar.

Four methods used to interrupt and subvert our habits

Buddhism is always concerned to subvert or to interrupt our patterns so that the absorption that we have, the identification that we have with the sort of karmic bubble that we live in, can be opened up a little bit. Some of that interruption is through the use of formal rules; some is through the utilisation of creativity, some through logical analysis, and some through direct awareness. Thus we have the system of *shila*, of vows, in which we agree to submit our behaviour to rules that have been ordained by someone else. And then as we live our lives, we experience our own karmic impulses, our own habits from the past, and we experience them coming into contact with these rules that we've agreed we won't break.

Later I'll say something more about the basic systems of rules that exist for Buddhist practitioners, but you can see from that how the structure is basically one of conflict. There's me leading my life deciding that I want to change and deciding that I want to live in a different way. And then I have to live with the conflict between the way that I want to live and the way that I have a tendency to actually live.

Secondly, through the *abhidharma* there is a system of the analysis of thoughts. So that, through an attentive analysis of the mental constructs that are arising in one's mind, one comes to an understanding of their nature. By taking up the position of the observer, and observing one's life, one creates a distance that optimises the possibility of choice. Developing the ability to step back and analyse situations is of course something that children have to learn in order not to be overwhelmed by the powerful emotions that they feel. So essentially it is using an attentive, focused thinking to interrupt a direct identification in a situation which would evoke a habitual response.

A third way of working is through creativity in which one takes up an intentional, fantastical reading of a situation. For example, instead of imagining oneself in one's ordinary identity, in the ordinariness of one's life, one imagines one is Tara or Chenrezig or Guru Rinpoche - any of the deities that are meditated on. Through this one gains again a place of difference from the ordinary pressures of karmic movement. So that for example, when somebody acts in a way that provokes anger or desire in you - perhaps someone at work irritates you - one still feels that irritation, but at the same time one has a sense that this is a form of Tara that is irritating you. Now, because Tara is good by definition, or any of the meditation deities because they are perceived as being very good in their own nature, it means that the person who is irritating you is also very good. So hanging on to the idea that this is Tara, interrupts the identification of the person as somebody who is annoying you.

In this way this tantric path of transformation is used to take up a situation or a relationship which normally would trouble you when perceived from the direction of your dualistic karmic perception. By transforming our experience of ourselves and of the other and of the environment in this way, one diminishes the likelihood of having an unethical response. After all, if we are developing the experience that we are pure and the world that we live in is pure, then what would be the motivation to distort it through anger or desire or envy or pride?

In the fourth way, through maintaining a state of open awareness at all times, and understanding that phenomena arise in, of, and through that awareness, the purity of both phenomena and of one's own thoughts is revealed directly in the moment of arising. So that it's no longer as if one has a disturbing situation that one is trying to transform, but rather that in the very moment of the arising of the situation one finds oneself in, there is the experience of the openness of the situation. This last way would be the view of mahamudra dzogchen.

So very rapidly we have mapped out some of the territory here and for some of you this may be very familiar and for others it may be not at all familiar. But I'll go back again over the stages and I'll bring out a lot more detail. And as I said there will be time to ask questions. I think it is important to give yourself permission to ask questions. The Buddha said very clearly that the basic root of all suffering is ignorance. By that he wasn't meaning the ignorance of the absence of a particular kind of knowledge, in the way that, for example, I don't know German. I am ignorant of German but even if I learnt German that wouldn't remove my basic ignorance. If I *did* learn German I might feel more at ease and more comfortable walking here in the streets of Frankfurt. That's what happens when you're ignorant.

However you *could* learn the dharma in a way that is similar to learning German, so that you could come into the room and you can see all these paintings and statues, and know lots of things about them - identifying who all the figures are and what their stories are. In that way you are less ignorant of Buddhism, but you're not necessarily any better a Buddhist. But what transforms our lives in a better way is really an understanding of the dharma in a direct way and that's the important thing.

So I may be talking about many things, and some of it you might not follow all of it, or have your own ideas about it and that's fine. But what I think is important is for you to listen for your own questions. What is it about the dharma that both intrigues you and that you are uncertain about? We have to remember that Shakyamuni, who is the historical Buddha for this period, left everything he knew because of a question. He had had a very protected existence and suddenly he encountered something that he couldn't understand. He wanted to understand "Why is it that people suffer? Why is it that people grow old and die? What does this mean?" And that enquiry, that question which stayed alive in him, gave him the energy to enquire deeply into himself.

We can be here as people who have questions. It's not a case of decanting yourself and then filling yourself with the dharma. The traditional teaching may say that—that you should forget how you thought before you met the dharma and just learn all this new stuff— but the danger for us is that, since it is unlikely that we are going to live as monks and nuns in full-time dharma practice in the safety of a monastery, and that in order to survive in the world we need to have jobs or take care of family or whatever, so we have to find a way of being in the dharma that helps us in our ordinary life

We might have some thoughts about this about how one earth we can do this, and I think it is very important to have these questions and thoughts and know that they can be raised here.

So maybe if we just take about five minutes and if you talk to someone sitting next to you and say a little bit about why you have come here and what you would like to get out of this time together.

[Talking in pairs]

Have you any thoughts or questions?

Examples of the above

Question: Please give us one example to explain the different ways to approach these things.

James: A traditional example would be a monk who sees a beautiful woman. [Buddhism is a very phallogocentric religion. It's a very interesting religion, which has monks meditating on naked

women!] Anyway, a man sees a beautiful woman. From a point of view of a most basic morality he might think he shouldn't have anything to do with this person, to get into any kind of relationship with this person's would make a mess in my life. So there's the surface impression of "Here's somebody who is very attractive and interesting". So long as I stay with this surface impression there is a big risk of me getting lost, but I know that inside this woman's stomach there is all sorts of half-digested food and that as it leaves her stomach it is turning into faecal matter. Then inside her chest there is this heart, this little bag of blood going plub plub plub. So, by allowing my thoughts to concentrate on this hidden aspect of the woman, which nonetheless is what's going on behind the layer of beautiful skin, I can start to develop some degree of revulsion.

So that would be an example using the first method of a rule, 'I shouldn't do this, this is dangerous for me.' You try to implement the rule, to maintain the rule by taking a different reading of the actual interactive situation that you're in. So the intention to change that you are trying to set up in your mind by relying on the support of certain rules of vows, is maintained by using thoughts as antidotes. Thoughts are anti-doting one's habitual response. It's a kind of lateral thinking; you take up a perspective which would not be the normal one of a person in that kind of interaction.

Then in the second method, through an abhidharma kind of analysis, one will become aware of the sorts of responses that are happening. This same male looking at this female, might become aware that his eyes start to focus on the person. That might lead to a change in the rate of breathing, a certain flow of blood into the genitals, and the arising of particular thoughts. Through an abhidharma analysis one would be trying to operate with a calm clear mind, and watching the arising of these phenomena...

[Gap while the tape is being changed]

...excitement, interest and one's attention will go onto the label that one was applying to the sensation that one was identifying. Being aware of the warmth, one is actually cooling oneself down by being able to observe the arising.

In the first attitude your attention goes out onto the object, but understanding the object in a different way. In the second one the attention would be on what's arising for you in your subjectivity.

An example using the third method, of tantra, would be to perceive the person as a deity. So this person who is very beautiful and interesting and intriguing is seen as being a goddess which allows us to have a very appreciative æsthetic sense of the beauty and power and seductive presence of the person. One is totally open to the presence of this person, but the presence that one is opening to is that of the godhead. Because of this, the perception is suffused with awe, which creates a respectful awareness, a full appreciation, but one in which again there is a gap which cuts through an appropriative, erotically-driven desire.

So you can see how this third way is rather different from the other two because it's allowing the full presence of the other without distorting it, and in fact even enlivening it more, heightening all the power and potential that's inherent in this situation.

Using the fourth method, one tries to remain relaxed and open in a state of free awareness. The preparation for this has to start prior to the incident of meeting the person. So there's a situation: it's me and I'm walking along the road and I see someone. I'm already then in the realm of dualism:

there's me walking on the street seeing someone. From the point of view of dzogchen, from this open kind of awareness, I've already blown it, because I am already in a state of dualistic perception of subject and object. All I can try to do is manage the situation and that again takes me back to the three methods that I've already discussed.

For one to start practising in this method one would need to sit in one's room, or in the park, or wherever, and relax into a state of open awareness and have the absolutely direct experience of the fact that mind is not located anywhere. This is a kind of deconstruction of subjectivity which goes way beyond the projects of Derrida and other post-modernists since it's not dealing merely with fragmentary chaos. The organising principle is that which can never be appropriated; chaos and order are born together. Binary opposition.

In dzogchen one moves out of that frame of binary oppositions because the ground from which subjectivity and all object phenomena arise, is not something that can be identified as something which is existing in truth in itself. It's not a primal starting point the way that God is, in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions. It's neither a point nor an open vastness because it has neither centre nor circumference. Hopefully this is not just dogma, but is an experience that we can get. So with this experience as phenomena arise, both the phenomena that we would normally consider subject and the phenomena that we would normally consider as object, there is a sense of the world does it by itself. This is called *lhundrub* or 'spontaneous manifestation'.

So here I am in this state walking along the road—because we have to speak in a language which is always predicated in the field of subject-object dichotomy—but the experience that I am having cannot be expressed in words. Anyway it appears that I am walking along the road. In this moment all the phenomena are there completely open, revealing themselves as the free expression of this unimpeded awareness, and so there would be no basis for a particular attachment towards this one person, this beautiful lady. I might walk by, or I might get very involved, but it wouldn't really make any difference because no matter what was the nature of the phenomena that manifested, they would never have come into substantial being.

Mirror example

A traditional example for this is to think of a mirror. If women look in the mirror and do their hair and put on a little bit of lipstick, why shouldn't men? It would be nice, so one could really get into one's appearance. The mirror doesn't do anything. Or you might wake up one morning and find you've got a spot. You are looking into the mirror trying to squeeze this spot. Again, the mirror doesn't do anything. It doesn't run away off the wall. The mirror has this quality of open reflexiveness. It's not impressed by wonderful beautiful things, and it's not depressed by the most horrible things. It simply reflects. It simply offers itself as a place in which phenomena display themselves. Inside the mirror there are no replicas of what appears to be on the surface of the mirror. It's not as if when you look into mirror there is a double of you inside it. It's a very interesting phenomena, but has no depth, no substance. You cannot grasp it.

If we think of the story of Narcissus, and the sort of auto-intoxification that occurs, gazing at his reflection in a pool of water, then of course when he reaches to grasp it there is nothing there. The reality of his being could not be represented to him in a way that was confirming of his enduring truth. He could never find a way of representing himself to himself outside in a way that he could be safe with. And that was his great wound. Very often in our lives we try to hang on to our

conceptualised, concretised notion of who we are, what we are, by having a defined personality with its limits and parameters. With this we mark out a trajectory of things that we like, things that we don't like, certain arisings in the world disturb us, others excite us, but in this state of open awareness that is not occurring because it's as if the awareness is like a mirror. All that's arising is there in perfect clarity but without any depth, without anything to hang onto. As one patterning of arising transforms into another there is no distress because there is no attachment or there is no privileging of one pattern of arising over another.

Maybe gives you an example of how these methods can work? We'll have some time to come back later to this fourth approach because I think it raises very interesting questions.

Going back to the basics: suffering

Maybe we should ground ourselves a little bit by going back to the beginning. When Buddha Shakyamuni, well when the person who was Prince Siddhartha, gained an insight or an understanding about his own nature, he presented it in it's first form in a place called Sarnath in North India. His first presentation of his experience was through four principles. The first is that life is suffering. Secondly that suffering has a cause. Thirdly that suffering can come to an end and fourthly that there is a way to bring about the ending of that suffering. Suffering in this sense is any kind of dissatisfaction that we experience. Some of the suffering that we experience is because of our attachment to our body, or is focused around our sense of self.

You might be sitting in this room and suddenly your back gets a bit sore so you want to move, to remove that suffering. You can say that that is a very personal suffering. But we also suffer through, and on behalf of, others. We might be aware of the suffering that's going on at the moment in Sarajevo. We might watch something on TV and feel something, and that suffering that exists there far away in another country as it were, comes into us, touches us in some way. Unless we are very very blind we won't be able to protect ourselves from that sort of experience. If we are very rich and healthy and protected, we still couldn't keep suffering out. The only way we could do that would be by closing down our responsiveness to the world that we exist in. And of course we *do* do that; many times we blank off, we don't want to be impacted by the horrors that we encounter. But when we employ that kind of defensive strategy in closing down our perception or the world we are closing down a part of, an aspect of, our being in the world.

So suffering is taken up and defined in many different ways but a basic principle would be two things: one form of suffering is getting what you don't want and the other form is not getting what do you want. The frame for that is quite clear: there is a self. There is a subjectivity existing in an environment, a frame of experiencing, and this interactive situation is not stable. It changes. In that change, either an internal change or an external change, there is some discomfort. The strategies that we ordinarily adopt to deal with that suffering are usually strategies of control, so that we might know that if we spend all our money quickly at the beginning of the month, then at the end of the month it is difficult to buy food. Therefore when we get our money, when we get paid, we don't go and blow it all on nice things.

Sometimes people don't manage that, because the problem is that we live in time. No moment, no matter how wonderful it is, endures. When you are young and you fall in love for the first time—notice that I say "the first time", because the first time you think "this is it. this is forever" because it

seems to total, so absolute—yet the feelings change through time; the image that we have of the other person cannot be maintained. They do things that contradict the way we think they were. So we say things like “But you’re no longer the person I married and if I’d know you were going to be like this I wouldn’t have married you.” Because all the time we take up a position as if this moment could somehow, through our hope or desire or our manipulations, be extended through time, that we would have a stable notion of the shape of the world. So we have this attachment, this desire to stabilise, to hold on to things, but we don’t actually have the *power* to do it.

From the point of view of Buddhism they say that if you don’t have the power to stop change, and if things really do change, then why do you try to hang onto them? What’s the advantage of pretending that they are what they are not? And that is a very good question - “What’s the advantage?” Well one advantage is that you’re normal, because everyone else is also pretending that things are stable and is working very very hard to get their life together! If everybody is going in the same direction and doing the same kind of thing, then they can reassure each other of the meaning of their activity, since subjectivity is maintained through shared signifiers, through a shared language which affirms the fantasy which is being maintained.

So maybe you should take ten minutes to talk about suffering in your own life and try to think of situations, both gross extreme forms of suffering and more subtle forms of suffering, and see if you can get a sense of what the structure of that suffering is. Can you identify for yourself the principles that seem to be in play? I’m aware that what I’m asking you to do is quite an intimate thing, so we would need to start with a basic ethical principle of confidentiality, and if somebody says something about their life let it remain just with you in your pair, in what you’ve been talking about.

In order to understand something about ourselves we have to be able to enquire openly and honestly, but in ordinary terms, in order to maintain our sense of self we very often have to disguise things because we imagine that if people knew these things about us they wouldn’t like us any more - given that we normally interact through a whole set of judgements.

Talk in a way that you feel comfortable with talking about them, but also with the awareness of what are the limiting factors in opening up about your life, so that you could learn something about it. It’s attachment to our sense of who we are that stops us becoming what we might become.

We will do that about five minutes each way and then take up any questions or reflections, and then we’ll have a tea break.

[Talking in pairs]

I’ll say a little bit more about the cause of suffering. The most basic cause of suffering is a misunderstanding of the way things are. All suffering is predicated on the basis of there being somebody who suffers, that is to say that the various sensations that we would group together and call ‘suffering’ are experienced, identified, and grouped together by someone. That is to say there is a consciousness in relation to the phenomena that are arising and that consciousness moves into a place of identification with the phenomena that are arising.

Thus, for example on this watch there is a little point. If I stick this into my hand, when I do it gently there is a slight sensation, and if I do it more then the sensation intensifies and when I do it really hard I will really start to feel some pain. Now I would say, ‘I was feeling the pain’ because I think that

this is my hand. If I thought that this was *your* hand I could go on! We know that in states of psychiatric disturbance people lose the sense of whose hand it is.

That fragmented sense of self, where somebody is so disorientated from their life experience that they can't work out where they begin and where they end, seems to be increasingly common in western cultures. In general, Buddhist teachings start with the assumption that people have a sense of self and these more extreme forms of dissociation and confusion about embodied existence would be seen as the result of demonic intervention. Basically ordinary human existence, if we can use such a term, indicates somebody living in a body, identifying with a body in a field of interaction with other people.

There may be some advantage in dissociating if the experience of pain is too great. We know that children, if they are being severely physically or sexually abused, will often dissociate, will often have the experience of hovering over their body, of being outside their body as if it were happening to someone else, but people who develop a habit of doing that, take up a rather avoidant relationship in terms of interaction in the world. Anyway you need to go beyond that, to come back into owning your own body, as the basic starting point. You have to have degree of ego strength before you practise meditation. From my experience Hindu ashrams in India are full of mad people. They offer a kind of psychiatric care service because it is place where there is great acceptance of strange behaviour. But we have to know when we are mad and when we are sane because if you don't have an ordinary sense of self and an ordinary sense of just being in the world in a very simple way, then one has a very unstable basis for taking up meditation methods since they can cause a dislocation of that ordinary sense of being in the world.

And this is an important thing for us in the west since if you *do* start to practise meditation in the west the cultural supports, the embeddedness of the symbols and practice which contain and direct meditation practice, are actually absent.

I work in a London hospital as a psychotherapist and sometimes when I am going home I sit in the underground, in the tube, and someone who's crazy sits beside me and starts to talk to me. But I can't do psychotherapy in ten minutes to a mad person in a public transport system. All I can feel is some sadness at this person's obvious distress. And I think it is a very similar thing in meditation. One needs to have a secure frame for holding together one's sense of ordinary reality as one makes journeys into different modes of perception. There are all sorts of structures for the practice of meditation; doing six sitting sessions a day, doing particular number of mantras, doing fixed time retreats in places which are designed for them.

In some way identifying what structures we need for ourselves given our own individual particular lives is very important because if meditation works it's going to change us. And if it's going to change us then we need to see it as something very powerful and so we need to treat it with some respect. Otherwise we can think well it won't maybe change anything; it's just something that we do from time to time. That's okay. Buddhism exists in most countries primarily as a socio-cultural phenomena and it's certainly not a sin to just sit about and talk about Buddhism but it's not going to change very much in your life. You are just changing the particular cultural signifiers that you respond to.

[The process of ignoring](#)

So to link this with the cause of suffering, the root cause is this ignoring of one's own real nature. It's often named as 'ignorance' but that's to set it up as if it were a kind of constant state, as if were somehow *in* ignorance, in the way one can be *in* Germany. But ignorance isn't like that at all. Ignorance is an ongoing process of ignoring moment to moment the reality of what's arising. It is an intentional activity. It's not a conscious intention "I will make myself more ignorant" but having entered into this experience of ignoring one's own real nature there is an intention set up in the new kind of perception which carries it forward. That's very similar to the way Merleau-Ponty uses the term "intention" in his "phenomenology of perception". It's a way of thinking about things that is already embedded in our modern European thought. It is a little similar to the way the term "ego-defence" is used in psychoanalytic thinking. Ego defences are not like the walls of a castle - a fixed wall that keep things out. The ego defences are much more like somebody doing aikido with someone else and taking up a state of awareness and moving with them to make sure they don't get put off balance.

This ignoring is going on all the time, in a way acting to protect the self since if the ignoring process were to stop then the one doing the ignoring would have to redefine or experience themselves in a different way. Ordinarily when we live in the world we don't let passersby stick sharp things into us but if we go to a doctor and the doctor says, "Now I will give you an injection" then I know that this needle going to my arm will hurt me but I know that this person, the doctor, is on my side, is acting for me. That's quite a mature sophisticated thing to be able to do. I can remember as a child going to the dentist and not liking it at all. So when the drill came into my mouth, this big thing ...Rrrr... I didn't like that at all. My mother would tell me that it was to help me but it didn't feel at all helpful. So it was very very difficult to sit there with my mouth open when I wanted to close my mouth. I didn't like this drill inside my mouth. There's obviously a natural logic in that: something horrible is happening and you don't want it to happen.

I think in meditation something quite similar can go on. On a conscious level you might want to do the meditation practice, but there's another aspect of consciousness that doesn't want to do the meditation, because if you really do the meditation, then that other aspect of consciousness will be put into question. And when it's put into question it fears that it's going to have to dissolve. Then what will happen to it? This is really where we can start to experience the process of ignoring as it continues moment by moment in our lives. It's not like the Christian idea of the fall from the Garden of Eden—that there was one break or lesion in the flow of time whereby what happened after the moment of eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, or even a movement towards that knowledge, displaced a particular integration. When that action was taken by these great ancestors, all those who come on subsequently are subject to the curse of that moment and it's impossible to return to the previous state.

Ignoring is much more like walking around with a pair of spectacles on. Somebody who has got used to wearing sunglasses feel a bit dazzled by the light, if they take them off and it is a bright day. There is an impulse to put them back on because then you feel better. This process of ignoring is like constantly maintaining these sunglasses. Ignoring is essentially the movement into dualised perception: that I am a subject looking out into a world of objects outside. Moment by moment thoughts are arising on the inside, which I identify as "my thoughts" and experiences are arising on the outside, which I experience through "my senses". That's normally how we would have a sense of the world. In order to maintain this sense of the world we have a lot of thoughts. When something new arises and occurs in our lives we start to have thoughts about it. We incorporate that new sensation or that new bit of information by weaving it into the texture of our thoughts. This busy-

ness of the mind in construing what is happening in the world means that there is very little space for anything else to happen.

We can go back to the example of the mirror but take it up in a different way. When you go up to look at a mirror and you look inside it you see yourself. You see your own face. Usually when you look at a mirror you see what's in the mirror, the content of the mirror, the image that's being reflected in it. You don't often really see the mirror itself because the images that arise in it are quite familiar and one gets into thinking about them. So it's the way the mirror gets filled with these images that makes it difficult to see the mirror.

Our consciousness is very busy having thoughts and feelings and judgements and assessments, and the world of perceptions that it's interacting with are, from this point of view, the images in the mirror. And of course we are very interested in the phenomena of the world and in our own thoughts. We are very fascinated by them. They keep changing and we also want to know what they are.

So the idea that meaning exists, or meaning is constellated or generated through the interaction of subject and object in terms of controlling phenomena, is one we're quite familiar with. It's certainly an idea in modern critical theory, in the theory of language: that we live in language, that language is the limit of our experience. So we are naming subjective experience and objective experience and are caught up in a web of language that we share with others. Our perceptions are reaffirmed by other people understanding what we say. So in a sense we are very busy all the time creating our world.

We are very busy effortfully creating our world

We effortfully construct reality. But it's a somewhat fantastical reality. Now this effortful energy is filling the space. In that process of creating meaning we are actually ignoring the meaning that is actually inherent in the space. This is the key shifting point in Buddhist philosophy and meditation practice where there is one level of meaning. It's often described as a net of illusion, or Indra's Net, because a net, through the linking of single threads, creates an illusion that something is actually there. If you look at a fishing net it is more space than threads but it's the threads that we get involved with because it's the threads that order the space. It's the same with our conceptual process: that through the threads of language we link together the various disconnected phenomena that are arising and construe a shape which we take to be meaningful.

So there is this tension between the intoxication with arisings, and this intoxication has been from the moment we've been born, indeed from the time when we're in our mother's womb, these meanings have been important. You know as soon as the child's born we start speaking to it. We speak to it in the womb. And then it learns "mama", "papa", naming and objectification, "this is a significant person." So as we grow up, through our education, through our use of language, through being with other people it's constantly being affirmed to us that this division of subject and object and the reified, the concretised reality of separate objects is actually real, that that is how things are.

So we grow up naturally experiencing meaning as being embedded in this texture of language and the naming of discrete objects. We become very sophisticated at using language and having a sense of who other people are, and how we should describe our experience. So you might have one friend who you know if I say to them "Oh I feel a bit sad today" they will be quite a bit interested. But if you

were to say to that same friend “Oh I’ve had some really good news” they might not be so interested. One learns what sort of opening gambit you can make to different kinds of people to hold their interest, because if we can get other people’s interest on us that helps us to feel real.

We develop a repertoire, a range of ways of construing and describing our reality, which we use with different people. What’s important is to get the attention of the other onto ourselves with the sense that the other person understands what we are talking about, what we’re about in our lives. Otherwise we might just be talking nonsense, we might not mean anything and then our sense of our movement of our lives would start to unravel. And that’s really what we call madness, when you fall out of the texture of language, when you cannot describe your experience to someone else and have it understood. Can you get a sense now of how this busy-ness and this use of language and this building up of constructs has a real purpose? It creates meaning for a very uncertain wobbly ego that’s frightened of being wiped out.

It’s this very energy of building up meaning, of learning to construe, which is actually the process of ignoring. Ignorance isn’t something other, something up in the sky, it’s what we’re doing just now. If I’m sitting here talking to you imagining that you are out there listening to me then I am in a state of ignorance because we are operating at that level, on this horizontal interactive level, that the assumptions that we make through language are referring to something inherently real.

All the aspects of Buddhist meditation and practice are about cracking through this horizontal enmeshment to open up a gap where there can be, if you like, a vertical alignment. One of the most famous verses to Prajnaparamita as the goddess who represents wisdom, begins in Tibetan “Ma sam djö mé” “Ma” means “speech”. “Sam” means “thought”. “Djö” is “expression” and “me” is the negative. Essentially what this is saying is that wisdom itself is beyond speech thought and expression. But this means that in order to enter into the realm of wisdom we have to leave behind speech thought and expression.

This is very radical. However we do know that the Buddha spoke because there are lots of books that are written-down versions of all the things he said. It’s not that when people have an understanding, or get some insight, that they sort of go dumb, that they can’t speak any more. But rather their relationship with language changes. Language becomes manifest as just another aspect of phenomena which are ceaselessly arising in this open mirror-like state of wisdom.

So it’s very much that the way suffering arises is that we are born into this world of suffering because we find ourselves through the process of becoming enmeshed in it. And the cause of that suffering is the intoxication with the busyness of filling the space rather than relaxing into it.

[Going for the gap: an exercise to do walking down the street](#)

The fourth point that the Buddha made about the way out of suffering are all the methods that can be used to cut across this horizontal enmeshment, to waken people up, to realise the gaps inside the texture of the world. Now this might all seem very solid and a bit difficult to get a handle on but I think it’s very important because it’s the view, or it’s the way in which one understands how the world is constellated, how the world comes into being and is held in place. It’s not as if ignorance is the enemy who lives over there in some other country. We are ignoring all the time. Therefore there is no other place to do the work of ceasing ignoring than in one’s own perception moment by

moment. All the aspects of Buddhism are ways of doing that work. If one doesn't understand that, then why would one be doing meditation in the first place?

Yes, you *can* also use meditation as a way of supporting yourself in your ordinary life. You might have problems in a relationship or stress at work, and then doing some meditation can help to calm you down and give you more a sense of hope than the possibility of change, but on that level one's really just readjusting the pattern of horizontal interaction.

Essentially what one has to do is to go for the gap. And one can support oneself in doing that both through study, contemplation and meditation. Contemplation is different from meditation. Contemplation is working on this level of horizontal, of the interaction of subject and object, whereas meditation is trying to give oneself more sense of vertical alignment.

What I would suggest is that we would take up a few topics to contemplate, and then for those who would like to, we can take a walk outside into the street and reflect on these concepts as we're experiencing the world around us.

Impermanence would be the first thing to think about. As you walk along the street you'll see there are houses built at different periods. Some show more damage to the external structure than others. So you can see the disintegrating effect of time and also the transitoriness of architectural fashion. It's the same in looking at motor cars. The same looking up at the sky and seeing how the colours are changing as we move into the evening. You might hear some birds singing in a way that they wouldn't in the middle of the day. So there's lots of ways in which one can enquire into the world through this frame of impermanence. What is changing here? As you walk along is there anything that has stayed the same? If you see any children you might remember how it was for you when you were a child walking along the street. Was that different when you were a small child? Did the pavement look different? Were you interested in different sorts of things? So the shape of the world when you are small may actually be quite different. Not just because you are small, but because different things interested. So one can take up these sort of thoughts and reflect on them which is a way of putting into question the familiarity of the environment that we live in. In language we work with assumption and prediction. But by thinking about impermanence we can put some of these assumptions and predictions into question.

Suffering is the second thing to contemplate: thinking about the lives of the people whom you pass on the street, if they have any sufferings. See what might be written in their faces. Be aware of the history of this city, what things have happened that brought suffering to the people living here. And then also thinking about what are the ways in which people here seem to try to protect themselves against suffering? Like in passing shop window, looking at all the things that people buy. Why are all these things there? What's the purpose of this object patterning and accumulation?

So maybe taking up that idea of attachment, the way in which people obviously bring together different things to give themselves a sense of identity and meaning. In coming into a flat you can see in the kitchen and other rooms that people have put things together in a way which will be meaningful to them. So you might wonder, "I wouldn't like to have that in my house, but they've got that in their house, isn't that strange? Why would somebody want that?"

I think that's a very deep question. Usually we just take it up on the level of taste or individual variety but somebody is actually building up their world with these things. That is their familiar territory. There is a lot invested in that little putting together of objects. Maybe some of you have been

involved with relatives or friends who have died and you've had to sort out their house and were amazed at all the things that somebody had built their world into. So then we can start to apply that to ourselves: thinking about the kind of clothes we wear and all the sense of identity that we construct through various choices in interaction in the world. What is it that we're trying to create? What's it all about?

This kind of contemplation softens us up a bit. It's a bit like in a boxing match: rounds one, two, three, four, with someone getting knocked about a bit. Later, when you go into the meditation, that's like the knock-out, knocking the ego right out. So long as one is caught up in the interaction in the world and really finding that a very interesting fascinated place, in the sense of building up meaning, then one is really quite rigid and tight inside. It's through this kind of enquiry and contemplation that one is carrying out a phenomenological examination of one's ego-structure, and getting to know one's ego in a new way.

We're going to have a break now until six.

[Break]

The basis for ethics

Now I want us to return to the topic of ethics and set out the basis for it. We will start with the idea of judgement because in the theravadan system, judgement is very important. We have to remember that from the Tibetan point of view all the various forms of Buddhism that exist, exist for a purpose even although they are often referred to as being higher levels and lower levels. This usually has to do with the complexity of the practice, the nature of the view, so that in general the ideas that are focused on dualistic interaction are not so good whereas a non-dual focus is very very good. That then becomes the frame against which the various methods of practising the dharma are arranged, in the Tibetan tradition. However the dharma was taught by the Buddha with the specific intention of offering different pathways to people who had different individual starting points.

In our life we pay a lot of attention to what other people do and our desire is to impress other people, to not be rejected by them and to find ways of fitting in. Part of the socialisation process of children is that they should learn to fit in with the demands and wishes of others. Then having fitted into the family system one goes to school and learns to fit into the school system and then one goes to work and learns how to fit into work. Were we to allow ourselves to really experience what we feel about things then it might be impossible to remain in situations, so on a very small level there is deceit written into a great deal of social interaction. We survive that deceit by deceiving ourselves as well. So it is often very difficult to know what we want because we get so used to fitting into other peoples' desire. How on earth can you work out what your own desire is, especially since the situation is impermanent and always changing hence you have to struggle with making some sense of the order of things?

Working out what we really want, and in particular what will actually be helpful to us, is really quite hard. Can you trust your intuition? Will you be led astray? If you were growing up in a small village in a Buddhist culture you wouldn't have so many of these problems because the frame of the understanding of how the dharma is practised would be fixed by the local culture. But for us many different teachers arrive, each teaching the dharma from different points of view.

One can have a wide range of ways into this area. One can take the formal presentation of systems as a guide so we may hear that dzogchen is a very high kind of teaching and so it would make sense to get this very high and special kind of teaching. But if you are not able to grasp the principle of dzogchen then it's not very help to you. The aspects of the buddhadharma that may really connect with you and click with you, may be quite different from dzogchen but if you are working with a structure that says dzogchen is the best, then anything else you do, will not be the best. So you can see how that could be very confusing.

I think what is most important for us is to get to know ourselves to that we can then know what we need. That's very hard because we might not be able to trust ourselves, or feel that we can trust our own judgement. But on the other hand if you only trust formal systems then you can become a slave to trying to fit into something where you just don't fit at the moment.

In the Nyingmapa tradition they describe nine yanas or nine vehicles or ways of moving into the textures of the dharma. It can be helpful to know something about all nine because, just as in the morning for your breakfast you might want a bit of bread and some coffee, in the evening you might want to eat something a bit more substantial. Traditional texts say that the Buddha taught eight-four thousand kinds of dharma. And that's a somewhat conventional number, but it indicates that he taught, he presented his ideas, in various ways in order to help different people with different personalities, different intellectual capacities, get into the real essence of what he was about.

We have to remember that the dharma is always a method. Why do you need a method? Usually you have some notion of something that you want to do or you want to achieve. Say you want to make a cup of tea, you can go into the forest and chop down a tree and prepare a little fire and do all of that, or you can press a little button on your kettle. If you've got no button then it's useful to have a forest to go into. And even if you've got a button it might be good for your health to sometimes walk into the forest. But the whole purpose would be to have a cup of tea. If you went into the forest to cut down the wood to make the cup of tea and you got really fascinated with what was going on in the forest and start to wander about in it and decided that instead of chopping down the trees you would link them together and make a little hut to spend the whole summer in, then you would have forgotten all about the cup of tea and taken on a whole new lifestyle.

So, in Buddhism the thing that one is trying to do or make is an end to suffering. There are many ways to bring this about, but one needs to remember what one's trying to do. As I was saying before we had the break, suffering and ignorance are not something out there that somehow comes and gets us, ignoring and suffering, being involved in it, is what we are involved in all the time. So putting an end to it means taking up the position of trying to shift what we're about, all the time.

That is why having a range of methods to interrupt this involvement with the ongoing production of our suffering is very useful. I think we need to allow ourselves to think that all the aspects of the dharma are useful. No one thing is better than any other. To have the idea that one thing is better than another is completely against the spirit of the dharma. To imagine that being Nyingmapa is better than being Gelugpa is silly. To imagine that wrathful deities are better than peaceful deities is silly. We need to know this so that we are free to do the kinds of practice that will help us get into the position where we can stop harming ourselves and stop harming other people.

[Gap while the tape is being changed]

Buddhist idea of sin

...So with that thought, I'll say a little bit about the idea of sin. In Tibetan the word that would sum up the idea of sin is "digpa". Digpa is related to poison and in particular to the poison from a scorpion, just as when a scorpion bites you and some poison goes into your system, that disrupts your sense of relaxation and well-being. In a similar way when we behave in a way which disrupts the world, which affects other people badly, which disturbs our own minds, then it's as if we have put some poison into the system of our calm well-being.

In general if we are going to meditate then whatever kind of meditation we do, it's better to be able to start with a reasonably calm mind, especially if you are a beginner in meditation. So you want to have a calm mind in order to meditate. Think of the mental attitude that you can get into if you are doing something that's wrong. Is that calm? Imagine if you are telling lies to someone, how do you feel at that moment? Do you think that your sense of subject-object separation is increased at that point? Has anyone any ideas about that? If you imagine you are doing something, I don't know, stealing something, or telling a lie to someone, or deceiving someone in some way, does your sense of the reality of the situation increase? Any one got any ideas?

A room of saints!

Question: What do you mean by the sense of reality increases?

James: For example in London I have a travel pass which is good for two zones, but in London there are many different zones. If I am using the two zones pass to go to another part of the university then that is in zone five. Then when I get to this little station usually there is no one on duty so I walk through with my two zone ticket. But then I am a thief because I am stealing something from the public transport system, but nobody's there to check out whether I should do it or not. I then have a dilemma: should I go to the machine, buy the correct ticket and leave the ticket in an office even though there is nobody there? My own experience would be that I would feel guilty. I would be wondering if there was somebody looking at me. I might save one pound to get through the door, but I would be carrying a lot of tension and worry and fear with me. That's what I mean.

It might be possible to think that all thoughts that arise are the true form of Padmasambhava! But I think we all know what bullshit is and we have to know when we are cheating ourselves. So in order to be aware of ordinary morality one has to be able to have judgements, one has to know what is good and what is bad. From an ultimate point of view one may really work at dissolving these categories. In order to dissolve these categories you have to be aware of the reality of the categories first.

There are two basic ideas. The first is that we should not harm other people. The second is that, if possible, we should try to help them. In general it can be easier to know when you hurt someone than when you help them. If we take up this idea of rules, that will help us not to harm other people.

There is a basic list of ten wrong conducts or sins or impure conducts, they are described in various ways, and are agreed throughout all the Buddhist traditions in the different countries. So there are three sins of the body, four of speech, three of mind. The sins of the body are killing, taking what is not given and sexual misconduct.

Killing is usually described in three ways. There's killing on the basis of anger, and on the basis of desire and on the basis of stupidity. So, you might feel that you want to eat a piece of steak. You have to take a knife and go and cut the throat of a cow. At that moment when you look at the cow with its big eyes, you visualise steak and you perform a sort of transformation. Clearly your desire for the steak is more than your concern for the cow's existence. You can also kill someone in order to steal from them. If you are a farmer you kill insects all the time because your desire makes you blind to a particular order of manifesting reality.

Then we can kill out of anger where there's a sense that someone else's existence is causing you annoyance or interruption to the way in which you want things to be. In India you might burn an incense which kills mosquitoes because you get angry if they bite you. Or you might stab someone if they attack you, because your attachment to your body is intense and when you experience that beloved body under attack you feel an impulse to destroy the one who is attacking you. Of course we may be lucky and it may be our karma that protects us from being in the critical situation where that response may be evoked from us. That certainly doesn't mean that we're without the basis to respond in such a way.

The example usually given for killing out of stupidity is animal sacrifice, where you imagine that it is important to placate the kind of gods who would be interested in drinking the blood of dying animals.

Secondly, taking what is not given. That sounds a little different from stealing because a great deal of our lives we are taking things that are not given. On its most subtle level we are taking things all the time; we are making use of the environment in an exploitative ways which seems to be heading towards its destruction. We make use of water resources without thinking of the implications. We make use of forests, chopping them down so that the land starts to move and become unstable. Again, these actions can be performed out of desire, anger and stupidity. We may take things out of anger as a way of punishing other people, stealing from them in order to achieve some sense of revenge. We may steal things with violence. We may steal with desire, in a subtle way. And we may even steal while not knowing really whether they actually belong to anyone.

The third issue of the body is sexual misconduct, which is defined in different texts in different ways. Basically it means having sexual relations with someone in a way that doesn't respect them; doesn't respect them because you have no concern for that particular individual, so that you're not concerned about their involvement or pleasure. Or it may be that you would wish to hurt them. Or it may be that they belong to a category of being with whom it is not acceptable to have a sexual relationship. For example attempting to have sex with a monk or a nun or with a child or with a corpse. There is also restriction according to time and place. In general it's not considered suitable to have sex when the moon is full, or in front of an altar, or near a monastery.

Cultural conventions and sexual misconduct

With issues like that we might have wonder whether it is just cultural notions about sexual activity coming into play. But in general, unless one's practising a particular kind of sexual yoga, most sexual activity is clearly samsaric in its intention because it's concerned with one's own pleasure as oneself. It doesn't help to transform subject-object perception, or at least is probably not the reason one is getting into it. An altar represents the potential or the possibility of entering into another mode of being and by consistently being respectful towards an altar, one helps to have it as a place in which

one's own positive projections can be embedded which is also why incense, candles and things like that are offered.

Although the statues are made out of metal, usually inside them there will be what's called a "tsung", pieces of paper on which mantras are inscribed. *Tsung* comes from a verb which means, "to hold" and what it's designed to hold, is the actual real presence of the Buddha. So when you offer a lamp you want to imagine that somehow the Buddha is actually receiving it; that the statue is not simply there as a representation of something that exists somewhere else, it is the actual presence. So would you feel happy having sex in a room with a real Buddha watching you? Probably not. It's for that reason, because the idea is that the tangkhas and the paintings and the statues really *are* the living presence of the deities they represent, that you shouldn't have sex in front of them. The paintings have a very useful little veil that you can drop down as a kind of Victorian compromise and that's important. Think of how Tibetans, especially nomads, often lived all together in the one room. So this kind of adaption was made, to have a kind of cupboard, usually with a glass front and then you could pull a curtain down over the front.

I think with these things, for us there is a double issue, I mean we live in this symbolically depleted world, we don't have such a strong sense of the reality of these phenomena and that means that we may feel we have a freedom to either take it up or not take it up. The problem then is that it can simply be our ego that is deciding when we do things and when we don't do things. Then when we go the other extreme and follow all the rules, then we become some kind of pseudo-Tibetan. So we have to find a way in the middle and that is very difficult to do.

Just on a final point on sexual misconduct. It's also said that you shouldn't have sex on full moon days or on new moon days. That has to do with a cosmological notion that these days are particularly potent. So inside a system of belief, if you take up that belief that full-moon days are particularly special kind of day, and that any religious practice done on that day counts for one hundred times more than done on another day, then it would make sense to also avoid any misconduct on those days.

Next, in terms of speech there are four main problems: lying, disharmonious speech, rough speech, and idle talk. Again there are many subdivisions of these. Basically, to lie is to say something which isn't true. What is described as very great lying is to pretend that you have some kind of power of insight or understanding that you don't have. Now of course the dharma is very open to this kind of thing because we don't have a sort of insight-detector that you can use to find out if a teacher is enlightened or not! And because *you're* not enlightened you don't know whether someone else is enlightened. So what's truth and what's fantasy in that whole cultural presentation of hierarchy is probably rather uncertain.

Disharmonious speech means speech that's designed to stir up and upset other people. One of the worst crimes of the dharma is seen to be anything that causes disruption in the sangha. So it's very important for us to know what is fact and what is fantasy or opinion. Because so often we hear something somebody says this and we think "Oh that's the case. Oh such and such is a great lama. Oh such and such does this" You don't know whether it's true or not but you just repeat it because it seems the sort of thing that people say. In general, truth requires some sort of enquiry, some kind of examination. If we are not prepared to make the effort which that sort of enquiry demands, then we have to rely on other people, and if they are lying then we, by repeating their words, will be lying too.

Rough speech is the kind of speech where one stirs up people through speaking aggressively. For example when the police interrogate someone they use rough speech since if they can disrupt the person's emotional state then they are more likely to get the true story. We use rough speech whenever we get into arguments with other people and we find ways of putting them down, insulting them, undermining them.

And the fourth error or speech is idle talk in which one's just talking for the sake of talking. Gossiping. And I think we can link that back to what I was saying before the break about the whole idea of this horizontal interactive sort of matrix of thoughts, feelings and words which maintains the ongoing presence of samsara. When we meet our friends we say "Hi, how are you? How's things? How's your mother?" All of these things that we say make the person feel welcome; we're showing that we've remembered things about their life, that we are interested in them. Of course on one level that's a very nice and helpful thing to do, since it makes the person feel good, but it's also being in collusion with them in this whole matrix of the maintenance of samsara. So although it may appear a rather unimportant thing, it actually has quite a profound affect because it keeps us woven into the belief that language is talking about things that can actually be understood, rather than there being a gap.

When you meet someone for the first time you don't know very much about them so the first thing do is to try and find out something you have in common, a shared interest or experience that you can talk about. When you find that, then you really get quite excited and you really get into having a good conversation. You convince each other about the meaningful continuity of samsara. But it might have been better if you had actually stayed there in that moment of awkward embarrassment, not knowing what to say, because there would be just someone looking at you and you looking at them. However these gaps, or possibilities of something different occurring, are usually something we avoid...

The three faults of the mind are ill-will, avarice, and wrong-views. Ill-will means having the mental attitude of wishing harm to someone. That ill-will can be grounded in an actual experience of the person or in projected identification or prejudice about the person. Revenge feuds can run down from generation to generation to generation, with a stereotyping of the other that does not get transformed by fresh information. The same thing may happen in terms of someone that you know personally; maybe you cheated me, or stole something from me twenty years ago, but still at the back of my mind I think, "I don't trust you. I'll get back at you one day."

Avarice is having a connection with someone through a desire or longing for their possessions. One is very concerned with them and tries to pull them towards oneself. One can also have avarice towards oneself, that is to say a special intoxication with one's own possessions.

[Gap while the tape is being changed]

Having wrong views is the third and final sin. Wrong views are worldly wrong views, when you hold something to be true even when you know it isn't. For example I don't like the idea that my body has got lots of blood in it. I don't like it very much when I give blood and I look at this syringe with all this blood filling it up and it can make me feel a bit odd. Then it feels much easier for me to see my body as Padmasambhava's body of light, than with all this blood and weird stuff in it! So there's a way there in which I have a real scientific knowledge about my body, but I don't really want to stay in touch with that because it has certain implications. However, more importantly, wrong views refer

to not accepting the fact of impermanence. Further, that all things are empty of any inherent concrete individual self-nature.

Calming down our behaviour of body, speech and mind

Now with these ideas of what is wrong one can start to calm down one's behaviour of the body, calm down one's behaviour of speech and sort out the ways in which one goes about thinking about one's experience. The system of meditation which goes particularly with this is first of all calming meditation - shamatha, shyiné. By putting one's activity in the world onto a calmer, clearer basis by following general moral principles or guidelines, one has less mental disturbance. Reciprocally, the more one calms one's mind in meditation the more one is able to observe the points at which one enters into the kind of behaviour that you don't want to do any more.

In shamatha we start off with a focus, either on an external object which can be either a small round pebble, or in the tradition, a little disc of mud which can be painted in different colours and stuck on a stick that you would look at, or a simple statue of the Buddha, or a letter of the Tibetan alphabet, usually the basic letter "A". You would take one of these objects and keep a close focus on them—usually you are looking at this with open eyes. If you are using the Tibetan letter than can also be visualised. If your visualisation isn't very clear it makes more sense to have it externally available. One can also do this practice by monitoring one's breath. By being aware of the breath coming in and out over the nostrils or the upper lip.

It doesn't really matter which method you use, the basic principle is that you want to be able to set up a very clear simple focus of your attention. Then as you try to maintain your attention on this focus, your attention will wander. Your attention will wander after thoughts, feelings, memories, physical sensations, external noises...

Whenever the attention strays, then as soon as you recognise that you're caught up in something else, you gently bring your attention back to the focus. You don't have to attack yourself or feel guilty or beat yourself up in any way since if you do that, all you are doing is elaborating more thought, another kind of distraction. By keeping the mind focused in this way, you start to be able to maintain a situation where you have the object you are keeping your attention on, *and* these thoughts and feelings are arising, but they are passing through like clouds passing through the sky. You are still working inside the dualistic paradigm; there is still *you* observing *something*, but the whole scale of busy-ness is being scaled down until there are just these two points, one point being the external object, and the other point being the subject consciousness that is honing into it very precisely.

The link of shamatha and morality is two-fold. Firstly what you start to be aware of is what is most seductive to your mind, because you start being tricked and you go off into particular thought patterns. As a thought arises, without being aware of it, you enter into it, into an identification with the thought. It's as if in that moment you have no choice, you are just taken over by it. But clearly if you are living your life in the world, and you are so susceptible to getting caught up in thoughts, then it is very difficult to conduct a moral existence. By doing this meditation practice what one is doing is helping oneself to be more aware of the triggers as they arise. You become more aware of the moment of the arising of the trigger that would take you into a habitual response, and you become able to not follow that trigger, but to keep back on the straight-forward focus.

The second way in which shamatha is linked with morality is that by doing this calming meditation for a period of time you will actually feel calmer. There will be less free-floating wired up energy available to jump out and hook into the world. So, feeling more calm in oneself, one is not so hungry to get things from the outside world and one is not so irritated when the outside world impinges.

Shall we have a fifteen minute break now and then come back and do some sitting together?

[Break]

For our purposes today it's probably best if we focus on the breath. So sit in a way that feels comfortable for you, in particular check out how your spine is. By raising and lowering your shoulders and moving them around, you can get a sense of whether the weight of your body is being carried by the bone structure or by the muscles. If you are being held in position through tension in your muscles, then after a while you are going to get sore. Neither is there any point to force yourself into a position which you are not used to, otherwise again you will provoke some pain in your joints.

Okay So sitting comfortable and relaxed it's probably easiest at first if you close your eyes and then gently allow the attention to focus on the breath. We'll do this for about fifteen minutes....

[Mediation]

Question: about thoughts. Even if one looks calm on the outside one may feel as if one is sitting on a lunging horse, trying to control and guide it with reins. This is an example used by Freud.

James: Yes, the mind is very busy. This is the first thing. In itself this is not something wrong, but the way in which the thoughts arise is a bit chaotic. This example of a horse pulling you is a very good one. The goal is not to wipe out thoughts. Thoughts are not the enemy. We *are* our thoughts, but we are also not *just* our thoughts. If you think that your thoughts are your enemy then you become even more divided against yourself. [

Question: Thoughts are not my enemy but I get carried away by them and lose my awareness and attention.

James: What's the connection between you and your thoughts?

Question: I can follow my thoughts but to do this I need my mental activity to come back to take the attention back to the breath. How much of my rational mind can I use to do this?

James: You need as much as you need. If you haven't been doing the meditation for long or are having difficulty with it, then you need to make use of the thinking structured thought to bring yourself back to this point. I think then it is maybe better for you to try to take an external focus, for example a white pebble and place it about two and a half metres away from you. If your eyes are open you'll be more awake and so it will be easier to come back on that. A traditional example is that the object that we focus on is like a peg and our mind is like a goat. If the goat wanders around it will eat up the whole field so what you do is you put a rope round its neck you tie this to the peg.

In practising within the Tibetan tradition this wouldn't be one's only practice, since one also wants to make use of the richness and the energy of thoughts. But I think it is very helpful for all of us when we look at the way our mind, our attention, gets pulled by these thoughts. That's a powerful thing, which we have probably all experienced. When we think about our ordinary, life interacting with other people, we probably imagine that we are somewhat rational, that we think about how we want to be and make plans and try to implement them. But then when we actually see the process of our mental functioning at work, we can see how really we are at the mercy of these processes of connection of the thinker and the thought.

So that's the way that karma is maintained. That's really what karma is. Karma is a habit from the past which as it arises hooks us into it so that we continue to bring it into the future.

In tantra when we are practising with visualisations and trying to recognise that whatever is arising has the nature of deity, then it's a much more tolerant view of mental arisings. We'll do some of that kind of meditation tomorrow. It can be a bit like someone who is a heavy drinker, who has one or two or even three bottles of wine a day. They think that "I like wine, it's very nice. Plus it's good for me. I like it and I can stop drinking whenever I want. So why should I stop?"

Our thoughts are a bit like that. We keep drinking these thoughts and they are very interesting and somehow we feel in control of them. We sort of keep our lives together, managing the whole complex business of living in the 1990's¹. But it's because we are in such an intimate enlightenment with our thoughts and feelings that when they start to move, we move. When we move, they move. Somehow we cue each other in so very easily that there seems to be no dissonance between the two. Sometimes it's quite useful to use this meditation to see who's really in control. The bottle usually wins!

In tantra the approach is very different. By saying that whatever happens, whatever arises is okay you take away the struggle. If you experience this kind of mind-observing meditation that we've just been doing as being a bit like the struggle between the superego and the ego—between a principle of the law if you like, of certain directive notions, and something that's much more wobbly—then of course that struggle between superego and ego produces guilt, despair, blame, all of that painful material. But if you kick out the superego so that the ego can do just whatever it wants, then you get rid of the basis for guilt and anxiety but the task for the ego is to then be much more sensitively attuned to what's going on. For many of us that kind of maturity is difficult, and that's the shadow danger in practising tantra. If you give yourself permission that everything is okay, then unless you already have some deep sensitivity about ethical values and being in the world with other people—that is to say unless to some extent you embody wisdom and compassion in some way—you can easily get lost.

That is why the nyingmapa way of practising, using all the different yantras, is good because you come at the question of how to be in the world with others from many different positions, and you can get a bit more sense of where you might be being devious and manipulative and false to yourself. This way of practising belongs in what's called 'the way of the cause'. Rather, than use the word 'way'. A better word is 'vehicle' since it is a transporting machine. And it's a cause, because through this kind of meditation one is trying to diminish the negative traits that one has and provide the basis for

¹ This talk was given in 1994

clarity that will help one develop one's positive traits. Tantra, in contrast, belongs in 'the vehicle of the result' through which one practises with the image or the deep belief that you have already reached the goal.

Working as a psychotherapist, patients very often imagine that I have a perfectly worked out life, and part of their work can be to struggle with that fantasy. But were I to believe their fantasy about me then I would be lost! So that's why I go to supervision, to have somebody, tell me about my mistakes! So if you like, when all the great tantric yogis go back and do a bit of this basic shamatha practice of observing the breath, then it is a bit like a self-supervision.

Any other thoughts?

Question: What can be the result of perfecting this practice?

James: The rebirth result of that is to be reborn in highest formless realms. In the buddhist tradition they say that the hindu god Shiva, for example, is a great master of shyné and that he lives in that state. The thing is the more you do this, the less thoughts disturb you so that eventually it becomes possible to maintain a one-pointed attention for a very long period of time, traditionally said to be hundreds of thousands of years at a time. As we do it we get disturbed by thoughts, feelings, pains in our bodies... which re-open this dualistic sense but by calming that down, one gets to a point where one is not disturbed by the body any more, hence the form of rebirth that it takes is just to be a pure consciousness with no body attached to it. Then when the karma of it is exhausted you fall down from this and come back into a body because the basic structure is a basic dualistic one of subject-object.

Question: When I do this practice I notice that my senses are enhanced, I feel I can smell more things, see better...

James: The more you limit your distraction and mental experience the more focused you are, and so the senses become more alive. That's not a mistake; that increases the pleasure of being in the world. Let your senses rest fully open and aware and just stay in that openness without getting caught up in the content of what's coming through. The more we are in our senses in a simple open way, the more *sensitive* we are to how other people are. When we are caught up in our own repetitive patterns of thinking we are turning in on ourselves all the time.

Calming that busy-ness in our own mind helps us to come out into the world and be attentive to the needs of other people and that in turn opens the basis for compassion. Rather than projecting onto other people what we imagine they're about, we are actually fresh and alert in the world and able to see a little bit more.

Okay shall we sit again....

[Sitting]

It's normal at the end of any sessions of practice or teaching or reflection on the dharma to have the intention to share out any resultant benefits. So without doing it in a ritualistic way, let's just sit for a minute and have a sense of all the suffering that exists in samsara, and, whatever benefits have been developed here, we will open and share with all those who suffer and are in distress.

[Sunday morning]

We take refuge to protect ourselves from the unavailability of suffering

The path in the dharma begins with the taking of refuge. By refuge we mean that we have a place to go to when we feel lost. Refugees are people who have had to leave their own land and who wander about looking for somewhere safe. Now we may all feel quite safe in the place where we live. We can have houses, jobs, relationships, friends, and through that we can have a sense of security. But this security is impermanent and the things that we rely on to create and maintain our sense of identity are rather fragile. Relationships break up, children grow up and leave home, our health starts to fail, we lose our job, and all the security that we thought we had, somehow seems to vanish.

Rather than just waiting for these difficult and painful events to happen the dharma encourages us to use our intelligence to reflect on the situation of other people and see that our own state is not so different. By looking at other people we can see that we too will grow old and die. By reflecting on the connections that we have with other people, we can break out of the bubble of our own individual life. That's why at the very beginning of the dharma there are four basic reflections. Reflection on impermanence, on the nature of karma, on the inevitability of suffering, and the nature of rebirth in samsara. It's by reflecting on these things that we create a sense of shock running through the complacency that we might have about our situation because so often when terrible things happen to us, it feels as if they were an accident. Then we go into a state of shock whenever we get some terrible news and we are not very able to deal with it.

Is Buddhism basically a pessimistic view of life? Certainly in the first stage of the Buddhist view, the Buddha said very clearly "life is suffering". That doesn't mean that he was encouraging us to have more and more suffering, but rather that when suffering comes, we shouldn't be surprised. If I come to Germany I shouldn't be surprised that people speak German. Likewise if I am born in samsara, I shouldn't be surprised that I have a lot of suffering. It's in the nature of the situation, it's not a mistake. It's on that point of recognising that the feeling tone of being born in samsara, in this human dimension, is essentially suffering, that one has to reflect on one's attitude to pleasure. If, as the Buddha said, the basic nature of our experience is suffering, then when we get caught up in dualistic subject-object interaction, we should really pay attention to that and not pretend that it is not the case.

This idea from the Buddha that everything is suffering is more like a scientific hypothesis than a dogmatic statement that we are required to believe. In science one seeks to develop a hypothesis and set up experimental situation in which you can prove or disprove your hypothesis. A good scientific experiment is one that can be repeated; that's one of the ways of proving whether a scientific experiment is valid or not - that it can be repeated by other people under the same conditions and bring about the same result. When the Buddha Shakyamuni was dying, he said "These are the results of my enquiry, check them out for yourself. Look into them and see if they are true." That's why it's important when we are thinking about suffering and impermanence not to just take it as a dogmatic belief, but as a point of enquiry. It is on the basis of understanding directly for ourselves the Buddha's notion that all things are impermanent and that all things are suffering, that one then needs to have some refuge.

Otherwise we become like small children who say “I’m going out to play now, mummy” And the mother says “Look it’s starting to snow, it’s very cold, put on your coat.” And the child says “I don’t feel cold, I’m very warm” And Mama says “Well that’s because you’re in the house when you go outside you’ll be cold.” And the child says “I know I won’t be cold.” So they go out just with a T-shirt on. And then they get cold and they have to come back and everybody gets disturbed. So this enquiry into the nature of suffering and impermanence is important because it gives one a valid cognition, a cognition that you can prove to yourself again and again. You’re not believing it just because somebody said it, but because you can actually prove “Yes, this is how things are”.

Having different raincoats, different ways of taking refuge

We may be warm and cosy inside our house or in our present situation, but sooner or later the snow’s going to fall. That’s why we need a coat, and that coat is the dharma. That’s why one goes to refuge, to find a way of having a wardrobe with different kinds of coats to put on as the weather changes. So we take refuge in order to protect ourselves, or to find a way to protect ourselves, from suffering. But as with a coat, it only keeps you warm if you put it on. If you are out in the snow and your coat is hanging in the cupboard then it won’t do you much good. Just to get some initiation and be empowered to do a practice doesn’t help you if you never actually *do* the practice. Just as it becomes natural for us to put on the right clothes according to the weather, we have to become so at home in the dharma that we do the practice automatically so that it is integrated into our ordinary life and gives us protection. The protection is not like going into a house when it’s raining, because then you become a prisoner of the house and frightened of the rain. If you have an idea that “Well, if it’s raining outside then, because it’s raining, I’ve got to stay in the house and then I’ll be safe.” I may have found some safety and security, but I’m a prisoner of it.

This is the view that Mahayana Buddhism uses to criticise the view of Theravadan Buddhism. With the idea that samsara is a dangerous place that one wants to get out of, and that one wants to go to nirvana where it’s all very nice, it’s as if you want to get out of the rain and go into a safe warm house. But having got to that nice, safe house, you can’t come back; you can’t do anything except stay there. It’s like when people say “Do you remember that Herr Schmidt? He won the football pools and now he’s gone to live in the Bahamas. That’s why I fill in my coupon every week, because I hope I’ll be lucky like him and go there too.” That view is like if the Buddha got enlightened at one time in the past but we will never get enlightened. In fact he has not even sent us a postcard from his buddha realm but anyway, we are sure that he’s very happy. It’s as if the Buddha is off in some kind of golden retirement home, with nothing to do but sit in his chair and nod sweetly.

From the Mahayana point of view there are other people who haven’t won the pools, who haven’t got out of it samsara and these people also need refuge and protection. Perhaps we have some responsibility to them as well? The idea then develops that the place of safety, of liberation from suffering, is not a place apart, cut off and separate, but rather is a soft moving ability to be at home moving through the world of suffering without being knocked off balance. The protection from suffering is not by removing yourself and being somewhere totally different, but it’s by creating the distance of seeing things in a different way. What then is transformed is one’s experience of suffering and one’s perception of the world. That provides a real refuge and a real protection, since whether one is in samsara or nirvana, one is always at ease.

So taking refuge is not so much a state of dependency on something else, or someone else, rather it’s learning to make use of the tools and resources, the methods of the dharma, in order to

transform one's own situation and become able to help other people. At first we might need to think of taking refuge as if it was going to provide us with a suit of armour so that if someone were to fire an arrow at us it would bounce off the metal and we would be safe. But we also need to take up the idea that it's more like being a Tai chi master and if someone were to fire the arrow at us we would be able very easily to move aside so that the arrow would pass harmlessly by.

When we feel desperate, or upset, or confused it is appropriate to pray to the Buddha for him to come and save us, just like a small child. That's absolutely appropriate depending on our potential at that moment, and how much energy, how much courage we have. There's no shame in being frightened by the terrible things that occur in the world. If we are frightened and we pray to the Buddha then we'll get some help but we also need to be aware of the many other views of refuge. So that when the pressures of our external situation are less and we feel more easy and relaxed, we can take up a more aware understanding of what refuge is. For example in the shamatha meditation that we were practising yesterday then as thoughts arise, you keep a clear focus of your attention and then you get less disturbed by these thoughts.

Practising that meditation is the process of giving yourself refuge from the habitual patterns of karmic thoughts that disturb you. Taking refuge in the Buddha is not simply reciting a verse three times. The real essence of the refuge is to make us aware of all of the methods that have been taught by the Buddha, to learn them and to apply them in one's life so that our own experience is more relaxed, more open, more compassionate. It is through the practice of meditation that we diminish our negative traits, our desire, anger, pride, stupidity. Through diminishing these tendencies we are able to be more present in the world. We are less destructive to ourselves, less harmful to other people.

Buddhism is primarily an ethical view in which responsibility for others can never be abandoned. Having been born into this world of subject and object, one cannot simply liberate 'subject' and leave 'object' to its own devices. Taking refuge means having an awareness of other peoples' suffering because one of the things that we need refuge from is suffering, and the cause of suffering is the attachment that gives us the sense of a self that is separate from other people. Wisdom and compassion are two separate things. In recognising that I suffer because of my attachment to the situation in the world and my desire to control things, I can see that it is perception in which I and the world are born together. From the Mahayana point of view you can't extricate yourself from the world; you can't take yourself out of the world and go elsewhere. What one has to do is to relocate oneself in the world because the flow of arising as it manifests contains both subject and object.

When we read the early texts about Buddha Shakyamuni, after he had gained his enlightenment in Bodhgaya he would walk about and talk to people. Although in some of the texts it describes him as being four metres tall and golden in colour, with all sorts of webbing between his fingers, in the stories that one hears of the Buddha actually coming into a village and teaching people they don't seem to be either horrified or amazed. He was able with his state of insight and awareness just to sit and talk with people. When you see and meet the great Tibetan lamas, people who have spent all their life in meditation, they also sit around and chat to people and drink tea and talk about politics. It's not as if they have become completely separate from the world and different, but they are *in* the world, part of it, and yet somehow able to take up a different view, a different way of being in the world. It's because of this, that they are able to be so helpful. So part of the view of morality is about ordinariness, about being able to make contact with people in various ways since people need different things.

I remember being in Kathmandu and spending some days with Dudjom Rinpoche. I would just sit in his room with him and from time to time he would give me some teaching, but a lot of the time Tibetan people were coming and going, asking him questions or for blessings. They would ask him, "Rinpoche, I am going down to India to sell sweaters in the winter. Should I go to Delhi or Calcutta?" And Dudjom Rinpoche would take out his mala and do some prayers, and think about it, "Calcutta is very good for you." Then the people would go away feeling very happy with that. I used to think, "Oh but I've come to see Dudjom Rinpoche to learn all about dzogchen I'm not concerned about sweaters!" I was thinking, "These people are very stupid. Why don't they want to know about dzogchen?" I was obviously caught up in my own fantasies. Dudjom Rinpoche, however, was completely open and equal and respectful to everyone who came to see him. He wasn't saying, "Dzogchen is high, pullovers are low". Whatever people asked of him he tried to respond in a way that would be helpful to them. He didn't need to show off or impose his judgements on other people. Now I think is the real essence of morality and compassion in Buddhism. There's a phrase in Tibetan "gang la gang dul" and it indicates that one should respond to each person according to their particular situation, that we all have our own particular situation, own particular karmic habit, and life experiences. This precise context that we exist as, is absolutely important because it determines our capacity for entering into the dharma. And this is the thing that determines what will be most useful to us in the practice of the dharma.

This is why, if we are really going to take refuge and not simply recite formal verses, we have to enquire into our own situation. The problem is that when you enquire into your own situation, things start to get messy since there is a lot of confusion. If you are doing something external, you're merely aligning yourself with what's already established in the world and that is more straightforward. For example, if you start to do tantric practice, in the Tibetan tradition it is normal to do ngöndro practice wherein the first stage is to recite a refuge prayer a hundred thousand times, and with each recitation to make one full length prostration. But the essence of taking refuge is to open one's heart, to shift one's position vis á vis the world and the reliance that you place on your ego. And at the end of doing a hundred thousand prostrations, one might proudly feel, "Ah, now I'm really a Buddhist since I've finished my prostrations!" So all that happens is that the ego gets another little story to wrap around itself. It's exactly that attitude that is the enemy of the dharma. Chögyam Trungpa gives a very nice analysis of this problem in his book "Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism" which is certainly a very helpful book to read.

As I was trying to say yesterday, the key problem is when we try to maintain a sense of permanence and security over our ability to stabilise the territory that we live in. So taking refuge means an admission that I am helpless, that I can't do it all on my own. I need to be open to somebody else. That's the first stage of really unpacking the ego. I cannot do it. My existence demands that I rely on other people. Because of that I have to be open to the world. I cannot live in a separate life-bubble. To be alive is to be connected with other people. My fate is inextricably bound up with the lives of others.

Culturally that is an idea which is slipping away in Western Europe. For many years now we have placed an enormous value and emphasis on individual autonomy. A lot of western psychology is about developing independence and a sense of autonomy, whereas Buddhist philosophy is concerned with inter-dependence. Buddhism has the idea of "prajitit samapada", of the dependent origination of phenomena, that each level of manifestation is dependent on a preceding level. For example in the paintings of "the wheel of life" each image or stage is dependent for its arising on

what precedes it. This is a story, not just of an individual moving through this cycle, but of a consciousness or a mind in interaction. We get so used to thinking of ourselves as separate independent individuals that it's easy to forget that we are with other people. Even if we were to go and live in a cave meditating for a year, other people would be with us, because we have internalised our mothers, fathers, friends, schoolteachers, brothers, sisters... The way we speak, the way we sit, all of that has been influenced by the environment in which we grew up. We are penetrated by the world. When we speak and try to explain to someone what we feel about ourselves, or what we feel about them, and ask "Why don't you understand me? Why don't you listen to what I'm saying?" we are speaking with a language that we learnt from someone else.

It is very important, that we cannot become individual, separate, safe, apart from the other. The other permeates self. Self and other arise together. It's not that compassion, or a sense of responsiveness to other people, is a choice.

Sometimes the reading is that Buddha Shakyamuni gets enlightened and teaches and then dies and goes off somewhere else. Then there is another level of pratikabuddhas who get enlightened but don't speak, so they are hanging around somewhere but don't say very much. A sort of strong silent type. Then comes in the mahayana hero, of course this is a story written by mahayana people so they tell the story their own way, who says "Ah, I could get enlightened and go off to paradise on my own, but no, I will not. I will stay here for you." You can see how there is some kind of gain in that attitude but I think it is artificial, because philosophically there is no way not to choose compassion.

The very nature of reality has compassion absolutely written into it. It's not as if you can gain this state of dharmakaya, this state of open awareness, and then refuse to manifest in some way because it's not an ego choice; it's simply that openness is responsive. The responsiveness written in. In exactly the same way as the world comes through us, we exist in the world, we are enworlded through our history, through language, through our interaction. So when we are more open, the world is again in us, but we are open into the world.

So in taking refuge it's not that one is retreating from the world, rather that one is finding a way of not being distracted by the world.

Developing bodhicitta

Linked with taking refuge we have the idea of developing bodhicitta. The word bodhicitta means "enlightened mind" or "open aware mind" and this word, bodhicitta, is used to refer to the intention to help other beings. And it's usually thought of in three ways.

There is the bodhicitta that is developed by thinking about sentient beings, which means that you remember that in all your past lives when you were born you had a mother who took care of you, and when you were small and helpless your mother did many things to protect you and keep you safe. In fact maybe she had no money and you were starving and she had to steal and rob or become a prostitute. Through her desire to help you, she committed sins and because of these sins she is now suffering. How could it be possible for you to become comfortable and at ease with yourself when these wonderful mothers who have done so much for you are now suffering because of their love for you?

This kind of reflection is somewhat difficult in the West when so many people have ambivalent relationships towards their own mothers. But even so, no matter what one thinks about one's own mother, if you imagine when you were a very small baby, at least at that time usually there is some real love and care and attention. There are many themes written into this. One is dependence. At one time we were dependent on these other people and now they are dependent on us. It's as if we have accumulated all these debts; we owe something to all these people. We can't just leave. We are obligated. In fact these people are *our* people. For example if you are a Serbian muslim and I am a Croatian christian, then if I recognise that you are my mother, it is very difficult to then see you as the enemy. So what this doctrine is saying, is that there is a level of connectedness so profound that it is deeper than any of the surface contradictions and antagonisms that we might experience in this life.

This is again building in the notion that you don't have a choice. Because as long as compassion is a choice and you are wondering, "Should I help this person, should I not help this person" then the ego is in control, busy calculating "What is the gain if I'm nice to them? Maybe they'll be nice to me later. Or maybe I can have sex with them, or maybe this or that..." All sorts of wheeler-dealer attitudes can be set up.

But by taking up this idea that all beings have been our mothers and that we owe a debt of obligation to them, there is no choice. We *must* respond. And I think that this is enormously important because it just lets one relax into it. You just belong. It reminds me of how, when the national anthem used to be played in the cinema, everybody would stand up; it was just automatic, because it represented a sense of belonging. Now maybe it is appropriate to have some ambivalence about national anthems, but nonetheless in principle when one has a sense of belonging, one knows what to do. And so if we do have this clear sense that all sentient beings have been our mother, then the sense of responding to that becomes very much easier.

I hope you can see how in that too wisdom and compassion are merged together. It's a mind-boggling thought to think of all sentient beings as having been one's mother. So many beings in the world and with that web of connection, then how many past lives must there have been. And in these past lives maybe I was a dog or an ant or a frog... I've no idea what shape I was, if I had a name, how long I lived, what I ate? So I'm completely ignorant about all these times when I was around. I was building up karma which now I have no memory of, yet I am at its mercy. Reflect on that in some detail, allowing ourselves to use our imagination. Maybe you're sitting and you see a little fly going by and you think "I wonder what our connection is? Where was I?" Doing this it puts a lot of questions into the texture of the world.

Perhaps it's not so important that people know who they were in their past lives, or how many lives they've been this or that, because once you know something definite, you stop questioning. What's much more important is that we start to question, "Who was I? How could I have been?" Through that, that our own sense of present self-identity gets opened up. The sense that I, James, have that I was born in Scotland, that I lived this kind of life, and I know who I am—that's a very clear story which gives me some sense of identity. But if I start thinking about my connection to all these other beings, then it gets a bit unravelled, it's just so huge.

This kind of vast visualisation and reflection is taken up in the Mahayana as a way of bringing together both compassion and emptiness. You see it represented in the system of visualisation in Samantabhadra's offering prayer where you imagine on every speck of sand that there is on the banks of the Ganges—which means millions and millions and millions of little grains of sand—on

each of these there is one buddha surrounded by as many bodhisattvas as there are grains of sand in the River Ganges. Plus there are also as many of your own self as there are grains of sand. And then each of your selves is offering up to each of these buddhas and bodhisattvas as many offerings as there are grains of sand in the Ganges. And all these buddhas and bodhisattvas are sending down rays of rainbow light, as many as there are grains of sand in the Ganges. Trying to imagine that is very very disorientating, which is its purpose, to open up this sense of self. Because the ego cannot do that kind of visualisation, you have got to let go; you have got to go into it and then a kind of de-centred awareness starts to arise.

Then through thinking about all the mothers one's had in one's previous lives one can do a similar thing, integrating this opening of wisdom, softening the mind so that it becomes vast, with the idea of connectedness and compassion and responsiveness. In all these practices of the dharma there is a profound meaning. They are not just something to do because it is a good thing to do.

Okay maybe we'll have a break now

[Break]

The wheel of life: how we are all connected

If you don't know the wheel of life you might want to go and have a look at the picture of it on the wall here. I can say something about it as you look at it, if you want to do that. It is like a map of the world. The big person holding the central circle in place is Yama, the Lord of Death. He represents the fact that all things will die; all things will pass away. Inside his hands and feet there is a circle, the circle inside which we are all revolving. It has three levels.

In the centre there is a pig, a cock, and a snake. The pig represents stupidity, the snake, anger and the cock, desire. These three are chasing each other around, biting each other's tails. This is like the core of the circle. This is what is driving around in our heart all the time as we move between stupidity, anger and desire. Then outside that there are six sections. At the top there is the god realm. The god realm has different levels, but basically people live there a very long happy life without much trouble. The cause of being born in that realm is supposed to be pride. The suffering in the god realm is that having lived there in great pleasure for many thousands of years, seven days before your karma is finished the flower garlands around your neck start to rot and your body, which always smelled of beautiful perfume before, now starts to stink. So in this realm of great beauty you are suddenly something really horrible and everyone backs away from you. They say that in these seven days you experience more pain and suffering than you would have in a thousand years in the hells.

Below them there are the demi-gods or asuras. The cause of being born there is envy. Growing up through this asura realm there is a wonderful tree. The trunk is rising up through their territory but the top of the tree fruits in the god realm. So when the fruit is ripe, the gods eat it. The asuras think "Hey, that's our fruit you are eating!" and they get really angry. So they put on all their weapons and their horses and they charge into battle against the gods. However for the gods, getting hit by an arrow, feels like being tickled by a flower. But if a god then fires an arrow at an asura it really hurts. And so the more envious the asuras become, and the more angry they become, the more hurt they become. Some of us may be familiar with this experience in our own life.

The next level is the human realm, the causes of which are said to be primarily a mixture of desire and pride. The nature of suffering in the human realm is birth, old age, sickness and death.

Then the animal realm, the one below the human. The cause of being born as an animal is stupidity. The suffering of animals is that they don't understand very much and they are completely at the mercy of their instincts. Most animals live in a state of fear that they'll be attacked. Even if you watch little sparrows eating breadcrumbs, you see how anxiously they look around and how ready they are to fly off.

On the next level down are the hungry ghosts. The cause of being born there is usually considered to be avarice. In that realm the beings have very big bellies, and very narrow throats. They also have the difficulty that whenever they put food or drink into their mouth it turns into something horrible. They will see something that looks rather nice, but when they start to put it into their mouth it turns into pus, blood or boiling lead. So they're always hungry, always greedy for the world, but as soon as they start to get hold of it, it turns out to be unpleasant.

Finally we have the hells. They are usually described as eight hot hells, eight cold hells and two intermediate hells. The cause of being born in the hells is anger. The suffering of the hells is that when you're in pain nobody hears you. It's a profound sense of isolation and betrayal, with no sense of time. You've no idea how long it's going to last and the pain is total. Even when you get your arms cut off, not only does your body hurt, but your arm that is cut off and is lying on the floor, it hurts as well. There are all kinds of drawings of hell beings being boiled alive, and cut in pieces and all of that sort of stuff.

Now we might think that this is just a symbolic depiction of some psychological truth, but from the traditional Buddhist point of view, rebirth is absolutely vital as an understanding. Because when we die we will move from the human realm, probably to another realm, and we will live there for a while and then go to yet another realm. After you die, where you go is determined by the nature of the karma that is manifesting in the moment. Karma means, in this context, the ripening of the consequences of a previous action. The basic rule is that bad actions give rise to bad consequences; good actions give rise to good consequences. I think what you can see from that is that what's being suggested here is a profoundly moral universe. In Europe you often hear people asking, "Why do people suffer? If God existed, why would God let people suffer? If God is good, why would he bring suffering into the world?"

Buddhism has a completely different view of this. There is no great God, creator or organiser of the world. There is no God who is going to punish us or reward us. The reward and punishment comes from the fulfilment of the consequences of our own actions. This is very important when we think about the bad things that other people have done to us. If other people have attacked us, or killed us, or been cruel to us, without doubt the people who did these things to us will suffer the consequences of their action. Nobody escapes from the consequences of their actions. So we don't need to continue being angry with them. We don't need to think of revenge, or going out to punish them.

In Britain at the moment there is some discussion about war criminals, men now in their eighties who were responsible for atrocities in Dachau and Auschwitz and places like that. People are saying "This is very terrible. These people have never been punished. Look how much others suffered. They

should suffer as well.” From a Buddhist point of view what these people are concerned with is the rule of law, the notion that somehow justice has to be brought to bear on the situation and if you don’t bring these people to court, don’t try them and punish them they will somehow have escaped. But from a Buddhist point of view it is a completely different world because we would see that these people will definitely suffer the consequences of their action. They may escape an immediate punishment in terms of an effect for their action in their particular time and space, but their actions have a consequence and that consequence will manifest again in a particular kind of rebirth and experience. I think that this is very important because it means that we don’t need to think about revenge. Reality itself provides the consequences.

The reason that I wanted to tell you about this wheel of life is because it explains this sense of being entrapped and revolving in a circle from life to life to life. The outer circle describes the process, the psychological process that maintains our involvement in these six realms. The starting point of that psychological process is ignorance or ignoring. It’s because the world is like that that we have to do meditation. It’s not some kind of arbitrary choice or something to add on to life but the meditation is an enquiry into the roots of the driving power that keeps us revolving in this state of endless suffering. You can see that as we revolve in each of these realms, we are in connection with other people, which is why the view in the Mahayana is always and consistently about *all* sentient beings. One is not seeking liberation or happiness just for one’s own group, one’s own nationality, or family, or religion or whatever, but for *everyone*.

In order to become enlightened or free from suffering people don’t have to become buddhists. They don’t have to believe in the Buddha. The Buddha doesn’t own reality. You can, by recognising the nature of emptiness and the way the mind functions, gain some relaxation and relief from pain. By reflecting on our embeddedness in this circle, and our connection with all sentient beings, we shift the focus from our immediate life from all our everyday concerns—where we’ll go for our summer holidays and all of that—to a much vaster vision. Studying these things and reflecting on them softens our focus on ego-concerns and makes us more attentive to how other people live.

Okay so we’ll break here and start again at two and we’ll do more practice this afternoon. I would invite you to take up this thought of impermanence and change, into the lunch break. Observe as you are moving about eating, the whole process of things changing and your mood changing, how your mouth changes with food. Be in contact with change and impermanence...

[Sunday afternoon]

Tantra: Doing transformation practice whilst still encountering other people’s judgements of us

Our theme is ethics and morality in Buddhism and we are coming now into the domain of tantra.

One of the main limiting factors in our lives, apart from all our own traits, are the expectations of other people. For example, you may find that you want to practise the dharma, but your parents or your partner or other people think you are silly and so you come into conflict with them. From what I have said so far we can maybe understand why people might feel this. One of the things that makes us feel comfortable and at ease with life is having a sense of being able to predict the future, but if the people who know us, start to notice that we are changing then the person that we are for them

is vanishing. They experience our changing as if it were an attack on their sense of the security and predictability of the world. Not having any understanding of impermanence and change, they feel that we are forcing something onto them and so, quite understandably, they might feel confused, angry or betrayed.

That certainly doesn't mean that they are wrong; nor does it mean that we are right. However a change is occurring, an intentional change from our side, which is causing distress to others. There's something of a paradox here - the practice of the dharma, which is designed to remove suffering, is actually creating suffering. But if we think of Buddha Shakyamuni, when he was Prince Siddhartha, leaving the palace in the middle of the night so that his wife and small baby woke up the next morning to find him gone, not knowing where he'd gone. Or when we think of Milarepa meditating in his cave and then coming down and seeing the dried up remains of his mother who had died all on her own. Or if we think of the traditional story of Guru Rinpoche, how he had killed a baby in order to be able to leave the land of his adopted father Indrabhuti. We can see that it's quite in the tradition for parents, friends and associates to be distressed when somebody starts to practise the dharma.

This is certainly not to say that causing such suffering to people is a good thing but somehow, bringing about changes in our own lives does mean disrupting the fantasies that other people have about us. We need to be aware of that and take care not to cause too much distress. Traditionally it's recommended that if you want to practise the dharma you should leave your homeland, leave all your friends and associates and go to a place where no-one knows even your name. Otherwise you have to live with a great deal of conflicted loyalties. Should you go on a retreat at Christmas or go and have Christmas lunch with your parents? Which loyalty should you privilege?

The traditional texts point out that if you stay in your homeland, friends will want you to help plough their fields, and build their houses; the family will want you fight enemies and you will constantly be tempted to go back into the attitudes of an ordinary worldly life. Now we probably don't want to become monks and nuns, nor do we have the freedom and opportunity to go and live like yogis in caves in the mountains, but we do need to think about creating a space for ourselves in which we can experience ourselves and the world in a different way.

Sometimes that might mean allowing yourself to behave in a way which may disturb other people, without justifying it or explaining it to the other people, because logic and reasonability are a very big entrapping force. When we are trying to move out of this constraining matrix of language into a fresh new experience, to have to account for that experience back in through language in familiar terms, is difficult.

So, in a general sense, creating difference will cause pain. Now, when we come into the realm of tantra we are concerned with the transformation of ordinary perception into more open perception. This transformation is not achieved by manipulating the external forms of the world. One's not trying to set up some kind of illusion, rather one is trying to shift perception in its core which is in the root of awareness. So by transforming our perception, the way in which we enter into relationship with the world, our experience of the world and of ourselves is transformed. This is why in the tantric tradition we meditate on deities. These gods are not gods to be worshipped in the Judeo-Christian sense. These gods are a method. They exist in the world in order to help us to be transformed. These deities are manifestations of awareness which make themselves available for others to make use of. It's as if the open awareness, that is the root of these manifesting divine forms, offers the divine forms as something that one can settle into and find a way back.

Yesterday I was talking about these two dimensions - this horizontal interactive dimension maintained through language, and a vertical point of integration into awareness. The deities, some of whom we can see depicted around this room are points of meeting between the vertical frame in which there is an effulgence out of open emptiness onto the level of the interaction of the senses.

Here we are caught up in our world of busy senses, thinking, feeling, being very busy. Every action provokes a reaction. So just by moving in order to stay alive we provoke the environment to reaffirm to us the meaning of our existence. And it happens so quickly and it seems to be so effortlessly meaningful, that why should we think about it? So there's a question about how we can do the transformation within the busy-ness of thinking, rather than within the samatha calming meditation? This is where these deities come in, because the deity exists on the cusp of samsara and nirvana. We are caught on the busy-ness of samsaric interaction. Through gaining the initiation into the deity and through meditating in identification with the deity we are shifted from our centrality in samsara onto the very edge of samsara and nirvana.

Through practice we become more able to let go of our ordinary identification of ourselves with our own personal history. Taking on more and more a sense of our identification with this effulgence, this radiant being, we are able more easily to dissolve back in to the root open awareness. Then we arise out of this state of openness with our own radiance manifesting in a form that is recognisable to the people who know us in our ordinary form. But because our own experience is of being totally identified with this radiant effulgence, we are not feeling empty or depressed or lonely or hungry; we are not greedy for the interactions of the world, and so we feel satisfied. With that satisfaction one is not making excessive demands on the people one meets.

This would be the basis for tantric morality. Because one's not off-centre, one's not out of balance— not feeling desire to get extra things to make oneself feel better, happier, more important, not feeling anger because there are difficulties you want to get rid of give to other people—then one is able simply to respond to people according to their need.

I'll give you an example, even though it doesn't exactly fit. In Lhasa, in Tibet, it was very common for people of the upper classes, when they were invited to go to dinner at someone else's house, to have a full meal before they went. So then they would arrive at the house of their hosts who would have prepared huge tables laden with the most delicious delicacies and they would say "No, thank you. No, No. I could not eat anything, I am quite full" And they wouldn't just be pretending, since they would already have had a full stomach. So there they were in this realm of beautiful wonderful food without any desire. In the bizarre dynamics of their upper class bourgeois society that was seen as a very elegant thing to do.

That is a somewhat crude example, but if you imagine that when we do the meditation, when we come out of the meditation, in a sense our spiritual belly is full, so we are not so hungry for the world. It's not that one's filled in the way of being self-satisfied, rather it's because we are not having to project onto the world a need for a permanent self-identity, that as our situation changes we don't feel so upset. If good things come we can enjoy them, and if they stop coming, well that's interesting too. One is able to be interested because one's not caught up in the projection that "My life has been damaged because these good things aren't continuing". If very bad things happen one's not overcome and distraught, since one has not been entering into interaction with the world with the assumption that one's identity should be maintained.

In this way when a new experience is coming one is experiencing this new experience arising with a subjective perception of it from the same open dimension. This is absolutely important. In the tantric mandala – the mandala when you actually do the visualisation – there's a state of open spaciousness. In this spaciousness a letter of the Sanskrit alphabet arises, which transforms itself into the mandala palace. The deity then manifests inside the palace. All around the central deity the other deities appear. But the context is there before the deity appears, just as we are born as babies into a world that already exists before we do. As babies we fit into the environment, the family situation that we are born into. The root of the mandala palace and the root of the deity is the same. It's emptiness.

So from this same ground, open awareness, appearances arise. Some of these appearances can be construed as objective, some can be construed as subjective. But the construing function which decides whether something is subjective or objective is also arising from this open dimension of awareness. The central point of purification in tantra is the recognition that the ground of all manifestation is this open dimension of awareness.

It's on this point that we can recognise the conflict that I was referring to yesterday between the sense of a self-identificatory subject who knows who one is, and the potential for an open awareness. The awareness that we have we normally call "I myself". If we enquire into this we find that it's simply a self-referencing function. All the things that I identify as "I" or "me" move through changes. Since I was born all the cells in my body have changed. My thoughts have been changing continuously, my feelings... I don't even look the same, like when I was a new-born baby, yet I can look at a photograph of myself when I was a small child and say "That's me". So what's the "me" that's identified in the photograph, when it doesn't look like me? What we have is an identificatory focus which is layered over things that may or may not be the case.

For example if you were to look at a historical atlas of Germany, you would see that the boundaries of this nation state have been changing enormously over the last thousand years. And many of the wars that Germany has been involved in have been fought on the basis of the real Germany. We hear now that Serbians from the former Yugoslavia want to link up with Russia to form a great Serbian real state, the real nation of the Serbs. But this has no identity, apart for the name which is imposed on territory that can be said to be Serbian. If you believe enough in Serbia, this name alone can be important enough to stick on the world and co-erce the world into conforming to your fantasy vision. Because I love Serbia and because Serbia is important I might go on to feel entitled to kill people that get in the way of Serbia, because Serbia is very important. We can see these political ways of thinking all around the world. This is not really different from the way that self-referencing operates in the ego, where you have this name "I" which you can impose on any territory that arises, and say "This is me. This is mine." And we can see how the whole meaning of our life can rest in one tiny thing when we say, "It's mine."

On Friday I was travelling on the train in England, sitting near a mother with two small children about six and five. She went to the little snack bar on the train and brought them back something to eat. And she bought one can of Coca Cola and one can of Fanta. She put them on the table and the smaller child grabbed the Coca Cola. His sister then tried to take the Coca Cola and the smaller child said "It's mine!" and pushed his sister's head on the window. She started to cry and the mother got very angry with the little boy and he said, "But IT'S MINE. IT'S MINE!.." It was as if the whole potential of that child's existence had sunk down into this one can of Coca Cola and that if this can

was taken away, he would be destroyed. Five minutes before there had been no Coca Cola, no identification with Coca Cola. Then this thing that just didn't exist in his world, came into his world and become the totality of his world. This is how this self-referencing function goes on all the time in relationship to our thoughts and feelings.

You may have got a sense of that yesterday when we were doing the shamatha meditation, of how there is a kind of ownership of thoughts as they arise. Instead of just letting the thought go by, one gets into it and involved and builds up some new story. Rather than just by trying to wipe out this self-referencing function, tantra works by giving it a whole new object to identify with. Instead of feeding the ego these substantial things like jobs, relationships, promotion, holidays, food, whatever... what one gives to the "I" is a whole new identity. And if you look at the Tibetan tangkhas you can see that it is a pretty fancy kind of identity! You might get eleven heads, or big wings, or a huge palace, or a golden body... all sorts of very nice rich, joyful things, beautiful goddesses! One makes use of the desire for attachment and for identification by giving it a different kind of object. So that by identifying with the deity, by building up the identification more and more, by reciting the mantra of deity, one becomes somebody else.

Now I think it's not unfair to say that this is what actors also do. In order to take on a character an actor lets go of his ordinary sense of who he is. The ability to let go of your own identity and take on someone else's identity is saying something about the stability of your own identity in the first place, so we have to be careful when we do this kind of practice that we don't enter into some kind of chaotic disorientation. That's why it's very important if you are going to do this kind of meditation to understand the basic principles that underpin it. As I said a short while ago, all the deities that are meditated upon are method. We make use of them in order to achieve this insight into the destabilisation of the self-referencing function, so that our sense of self, rather than always coming back to our flesh and blood embodied existence, is able to take up a wider range of identifications.

Through the identification that we have with our own body we pull the world into us and push away the bits of the world we don't like, because this body that we live in is very vulnerable. It can die very easily. All sorts of diseases, accidents can come and wipe it out. Because it is such an unstable basis, it's not surprising that we feel very protective towards it. However it is not our real identity. It's a temporary form that manifests due to the particular dimensions of the karma that is operating at the moment. So by meditating on these deities, one is able to loosen the anxious identification around a temporary flesh and blood body and be able to take on a wider range of identifications.

On the basis of *this, that* arises

So where did the deities come from? In essence they all come from emptiness. What then is emptiness? Emptiness is empty. That is to say, when we look into any particular form that manifests and try to identify exactly what it is by breaking it down to get some basic root elements, we don't find anything.

For example take my watch. There is a leather handle with some thread stitching and bit of funny metal here, I don't know what it is. Cheap stuff. Then there is a steel back, a gold-plated front and many different things inside it. So many many sources spread out through the world come to meet together in this one phenomenon. All sorts of connections and busy-nesses of different people have contributed to one particular phenomenon. So historically, as it were, this contains a connection to all these different sources inside it. It seems to be hanging here as in independent thing, as an object

that exists in itself. But it's also resting inside a whole socio-economic cultural system. That is to say, it is a manifestation of a very complex field of forces and activities. It cannot be separated from these. This watch is part of modern capitalism. You can't take it out. It is embedded in the world we live in.

Ecology has heightened our awareness of the interpenetration, the interdependence, of things. Ecological thinking is very old in Buddhism, this idea that on the basis of this, that arises, on the basis of that, the next thing arises. So this watch, although it appears to be existing as a separate thing, is actually a manifestation of a meeting point of all these various forces. We need to be aware of that all the time. Things don't just pop out, they are embedded in whole productive systems. When we become aware of that we can see that things don't exist forever, they exist dependent on particular causes. Everything that manifests is the affect of some previous cause and becomes a cause for some future effect. So this sense of interconnectedness is an important way of putting our minds towards the idea of emptiness.

What I am suggesting is that there is not a separate watch here, there's isn't a particular watchness of the watch, but what I call a watch is a composite of all sorts of forces which have come through the past to meet in this one point. It's resting on the apex of this built-up point, and after a while, because it is composite, because it has come together as the meeting point of various causes, it will start to fall apart. It's got a battery in it that will run down, for a start. If we were to take the watch apart and take out all the particular pieces we would then have maybe a hundred different little bits. If we were then to take the smallest piece that was in the watch, maybe some tiny little metal point, and put that into an electro-microscope, it would look quite big. Then we could start chopping it up. And if we had the technology we might be able to get it right down to a molecule. Then we could identify a particular atom in that molecule...

Form and emptiness: abhidharma's infinite regress

Abhidharma performed this kind of analysis, where there is an idea that whatever manifests is built up of a few basic atoms. These atoms were called 'dharmas' and they were believed to be the basic building blocks for all existence. There was even some debate about how many different kinds of basic dharmas there were. A popular number was fifty-two. Then in the madhyamika period, just before the time of Christ, it was pointed out that if you have basic atoms, for them to build up anything, they have to be juxtaposed. So if we imagine that if this was one atom and this is another atom then we need quite a lot of atoms to make up one little thing. Even three in a row is not very much. So an atom is very very small and you need to have a lot of them.

Now if I am this little atom here, I feel I am unique, I am completely apart, I am entire in myself. I am a building block of the universe. There is nothing smaller or more basic than me. But then I look to the right and say "hello little building block" and then I look to the left and say "hello little building block" and by looking to the right and to the left I realise I have got a right and I have got a left. So a big dagger of reality comes down and splits me in the middle! You can't be a basic building block and still have a right and a left. Then you would have three things going on there, two sides and a middle. If one point is going to exist between two other points then it has a connection with these two other points and so it has extension in space. If it has extension in space, it can be divided. You then take the process ad infinitum, infinite regress... This conclusion of early buddhist philosophy obviously has a lot of research evidence now in nuclear physics.

So what there is, is this sense of infinite regress, of division of particle into particle into particle until there is no substance left there at all. Nevertheless what one uses is a very complex nomenclature which creates the appearance of something being there, yet when you look into the substance you can't find anything that's there.

So when you look into the essential structure and try to find something to hang on to, it just crumbles. We apply the name "basic dharma" but we can't actually find the substance that it's referring to. And so what's there? When you look into things and try to find a substance, there seems to be nothing there. And yet it's undeniable that things manifest, because here we are. So we're here and yet if we look right down into our essence, we couldn't find anything existing in truth.

A great deal of Buddhist philosophy and meditation practice hinges around exactly this phenomena: that we see things, we live in a world of appearances which are definitely real on the level of appearance - it's not as if the world is just nothing at all - but when you enquire into things and really try to find the essence of them, you just can't find anything. Buddhism here is setting out a middle way between materialism and idealism. And it's this sense – that when one looks into things one can't find anything – that is one meaning, or one way, in which we can take up the idea of emptiness. So that what is appearing is the appearance of emptiness.

Like the example I gave yesterday with the mirror, when you look into the mirror and see your own face, it is not as if you are inside the mirror looking out. You are not *in* the mirror, and yet there is an appearance in the mirror. And it's that sense – that there is nobody in the mirror, that the mirror is empty of any forms, and yet that the mirror is full of images and appearances. We live in this world of appearances, but the appearances are devoid of any self-substance. Nevertheless, I believe that I am James. So if I am James, if I really believe that I am James, and then I meditate that I am Padmasambhava, then if I really believe that I am James I can only be playing at being Padma Sambhava! But if I really believe that I am Padmasambhava, I might be psychotic and go in a mental home. So what it is, is that awareness – the basic nature of my mind, my ability to be aware – can identify itself as James (with all sorts of reasons) and as Padmasambhava or as Tara or as whoever, (also with all sorts of reasons). It's not that I am really James or that I'm really Padmasambhava. The mind manifests in manifold ways and these can include James, Tara, Padma Sambhava... This is the way that manifestation occurs.

However since one is very addicted to the notion that one is oneself, then as a method it is very helpful to meditate on the deity by strongly believing that one has become the deity. It's a method, that's all.

[Break]

Tantra: Doing a transformation practice yet still passing judgements on externals

I started this afternoon with this idea of the difficulty of transforming yourself if you have to also meet the judgements of other people. Now when we do this tantric practice and we dissolve into the deity and we dissolve into space and then we come out at the end of the meditation identified with the deity, having the perception that everything external is the form of the deity, that is to say is form and emptiness. It is appearance, but it is pure, without concrete self-substance; it's the radiance of the deity.

So, because everything has this appearance and nature of the deity, form and emptiness, then whatever forms occur, they are okay as they are. Therefore however other people are is okay. One is not having a pre-existing agenda of how other people should be, a fixed set of judgements and this opens us up to being generous in our permission to other people to be as they are.

Our experience has shown us that most of the time when we are in the world with other people there is a very subtle kind of social cueing, social modification, often through body language, about how we should behave. Having survived this long in our lives we have all learned a range of ways of identifying appropriate and inappropriate social behaviour. But when we are practising this tantric method of identification with the deity, then because we are caught up in the awareness of our meditation – perhaps with a mantra running through our head and trying to stay relaxed and open – we are putting less of the desire and energy into the world that we would otherwise expend trying to pull people into fixed social relationships to us. To put it in another language, there is less unconscious desire.

Not letting anxiety close things down

This, I would suggest, is an act of great morality since it is very ethical to offer people more space in which to experience themselves. Of course it can also be quite disconcerting for people, because if they get a sense that the other person doesn't have a particular demand, is not working in the same set of social assumptions as they are, then they feel rather uncertain about what to do. There is an anxiety of not knowing what to do. The most common thing we try to do with anxiety is to try to contain it, for example by providing a structure of rules in daily life. It's the same for people when they start to come into contact with Tibetan Buddhism; they work out what the rules are. So people learn that they should stand when a lama enters the room, they should be quiet and polite and bow their head a little bit. They learn all sorts of things like making prostrations, not pointing their feet at people, how to hand something to a lama – all sorts of things. You learn some lines of the puja and then when the puja starts, you don't feel anxious because you can say the lines without even reading the book any more; you have this expert knowledge and feel secure again in knowing who you are and what you should do.

But there is a particular kind of stupidity built into that kind of knowledge because mainly we learn more from exploring our anxiety than from exploring our certainty. When we come into the situation where we don't know what to do, a deeper level of ourselves is revealed. We get in touch with a raw quality of the ego that wants to know how to maintain its survival by fitting in, by not being isolated by not being condemned. We have that raw survival quality of "My God, what am I going to do?" Actually there's a lot that we can learn if we can just stay open to that anxiety.

When you do tantric visualisation, at one point the deity comes to the top of your head and dissolves into your body, and you dissolve into that and you go out into light. There is an anxiety embedded in that process. If the ego just dissolves at that point, then it just loses its identity and so feels very anxious – it wants to maintain the territory. By learning how to manage anxiety, without closing it down but by being able to enquire into it and to deepen it so that it reveals something, is absolutely primary.

Through the practice of tantric meditation, through being more relaxed and open oneself, one offers a spaciousness to other people in which they can have that experience of not quite knowing what's going on. So it's situated between blindly obeying the rules and being in a delinquent avoidance of

any rules, but it is a way in which one can help people to really deeply question their lives. Through the relaxed trust of one's own openness, hopefully in their moment of anxiety they can see that there is something else involved, and not just the return to rules.

So the systems that I was talking of before, about the identification of these ten sinful actions, there you have a rule-based system in which, by following pre-ordained rules, you know what's right and what's wrong. However in tantra one is working with something quite different, one is working with this relaxed open responsiveness which is not trying to coerce the universe, which is not trying to coerce the space around us but rather, to respond to it. It is based on deep respect because one is visualising not only that one is oneself the deity, but also that the whole world is divine. One is not saying "I'm wonderful and everyone else is shit" Neither is one saying that "Everyone else is wonderful but me, I'm a useless human being." Here everyone and everything appears in this divine play, this beautiful, open, spacious effulgence. So, that's the basis for an ethical 'being with others' in this system.

Question: Is there not a danger if you do this that you forget about pollution, about all the violence and everything? You are kind of pretending, or trying, to see everything as beautiful when it isn't really. So this is sort of cheating oneself.

James: If it is pretending. It's trying to see that even pollution is beautiful. The big problem that we have here is with language. Beautiful says "If this is beautiful, then that is ugly" What I was just trying to say is that everything is divine. It's a whole shift in the aesthetic framework. Because we are used to working in a world of dualistic perceptions saying "I like this, I don't like that. This is good, that is bad." With the tantra point of view everything has the same taste.

However it is also said that one's view, that is to say one's wisdom view, one's wisdom should be as vast as the sky, but one's compassion should be as sharp as the point of a needle. So while you try to maintain this view of openness, and you practise to maintain this view of openness, of course if you see somebody doing something horrendous you intervene.

Question: I have a problem here, because if this is a divine person torturing another divine person, is this all the play of divinity?

James: Life's not like that. You know if you actually do the practice and your eyes are actually open in the world, you respond. It's not that you can sit back and think, "Is it right to do this? Is it wrong to do this?" You respond appropriately because you allow yourself to be involved in the situation. It's like if you play jazz, you can't wait and think, "What's he doing now?" you're in there dodoodleddoodledooddoodoo and everything is moving together. Tantra is really a world of jazz, in contrast to the theravadan system which is like the world of the orchestra where you have a conductor and a score, and you have to do it in time.

Actually, your question is a very important one, but we don't really have the time to do it justice today. However, I think the way you would have to take it is through the idea of the two truths, of relative and absolute truth, because it is through understanding the relationship between these two truths that you can get a bit more clarity. Perhaps we can do that another time.

Shall we take a break there about fifteen minutes and then we'll come back and ..

[Break]

Why we do tantric practice

In this session we will move towards doing a simplified form of a visualisation but first, I want to explain the structure of such a practice to you. Once the structure of the practice is clear to you, when you understand the structure of the practice, then you can also practise in very elaborate ways but if you don't understand the structure or the essence of the practice, then the practice is merely a method for generating merit. Now, there is nothing at all wrong with gathering merit, but if you are gathering merit when you think you are developing wisdom, then you are going to be disappointed!

The doorway into wisdom is emptiness. Emptiness is not just a word; it is an actual experience. Not just a momentary experience but also a whole shift in the way one experiences becoming in the world with others. So, as our main theme has been about morality, and morality is grounded in the relationship between self and other, of not harming others and if possible helping them. We try not to harm people by following rules which inhibit our own negative tendencies. We try to develop means of helping others by doing practices that increase our warmth and our compassion and our consideration for others.

This can be done by formal alignment with prescribed practice, which is to practise on the relative truth level of developing one's subjectivity through constraining it and developing according to fixed patterns. Moreover, that practice can be deepened to become more spontaneous and more natural, more responsive, by merging with emptiness, since for as long as the practice is generated from a sense of an individual self trying not to harm others and trying to help others, then what one is doing is trying to transcend a state of duality by actually reaffirming it's basic structure!

By doing a practice of creation and dissolution, one is able to integrate manifestation - the way in which oneself and the world are manifesting all the time - with a direct insight into the ground nature out of which they manifest. This insight transforms the basis of being with others out of the subject-object dichotomy into a spontaneous reaction from a state of spacious awareness. This is the purpose of doing tantric practice, so that manifestation in all its richness and possibilities is fully integrated with emptiness. You see that it is from this integration of form and emptiness that wisdom and compassion operate in an integrated way.

But for many many lifetimes we have been caught up in a system of thinking about things. We have a sense of self, a sense of other, and the relationship between them. These three wheels or circles keep spiralling round and round generating more of the same and one needs to cut through that, to make a gap in that, in order to practise tantra. Tantra points to the sense of continuity between samsara and nirvana. It's a shift between the continuity of our thoughts, one thought after another, after another, building up the sense of a continuity of sense of an individual self. And it's transforming that into the direct awareness of the continuity between ground openness and the continuous flow of manifestation.

So in the practice one starts with a sense of the deity. There are many ways of practice but this is just to point to the most basic structure. Here you are, and there in front of you, about the level of the top of your head, slightly in front of you is the divine form. This can be in the form male, female, androgynous, wings, flames, many, many different forms. The principle thing is that this deity is the

presence of form and emptiness. When you look at the deity it's glowing present, but it's translucent. It's clearly there, but when you look into it there is nothing there in truth. And there you are sitting here, clearly here, but somehow quite substantial. So two people are there. One of them is not there, and one of them is very very there! So what we want to do is get a bit off there being there without being there, and get rid of some of our being here and very very here.

No need to fear that by dissolving into the deity we are going to vanish, because the deity's there. But through the dissolving, one can gain some of the lightness of spirit and the free flowing movement of the deity, letting go of a fragile attachment to a sense of self. This deity represents all that's very important and special and true. This deity represents the three kayas of the Buddha. It doesn't represent it in some symbolic way, but is the actual manifestation of it. This is not an abstract idea; here it is right in front of you! So at this point, having developed some sense of the presence of the deity, one usually recites some prayers or says the mantra of the deity in order to strengthen the connection. The kind of distractedness that one experiences in the mind when starting to do shamatha or shyiné meditation is focused through concentration on the deity into a one-pointed attention.

All the energy that one has is pulled into a single straight line. Without even thinking about it, all the channels in the body are straightened out and the knots are untied because the whole of one's being, the whole of one's focus, is being increasingly pulled into this very clear attentive alignment to the presence, which is the presence of nothingness. Then, having recited the mantra for a while and having had this intense feeling so that all one's attention is focused on this one point, the deity moves over to the top of one's head. Then from the top of his head to the bottom of its feet, it dissolves into a point in its heart and comes down through the crown of your head, dissolving into *your* heart.

At that point your own body dissolves into light and then down into this point of light, which is the deity, and you dissolve into the deity. So you have a double penetration; the deity penetrates into your body, and then your body dissolves into the point of light of the deity. Finally this point just dissolves like watching a small cloud in the mountains just trickling out into space. If you watch mist in the morning in a valley as it just dissolves into space. It seems to be there and then it's just open. It's like that.

Then one just relaxes in that state of openness. So there has been this moment of very very intense concentration, reciting the mantra, using one's energy, using one's faith, fully mobilising one's energy, bringing this into oneself, and then relaxing. The key thing is that one is not doing this as "thinking about it" but that it is an actual experience. Ideas about ideas about ideas will not help us in the world. What really transforms something is an actual experience.

And the important thing is to *want* the experience. "Hey Buddha you have all these good things, come and give them to me. You promised you'd give them to me. You want to give it to me. I want to get it from you." It's a wonderful partnership and of course it's very sexual as well. The flavour of sex and sensuality runs all through it. There's an æsthetic interest, a sense of fascination, of beauty, of colour of form, of music, dancing. All of this richness and flavour is enlivening the visualisation and one is seduced, entranced. Then that concentrated energy is brought in... through... in in in... and then dissolved.

[Stay faithful to emptiness: she's your bride, your husband](#)

In this state of open relaxation, thoughts, feelings, sensations will arise. All one has to do is stay relaxed. You've just married emptiness. All of these beautiful little thoughts are coming along to tempt you but it's not very good to go off and have sex with someone else when you have just got married! So you have to stay faithful to emptiness. She's your bride, or your husband.

Remaining open and satisfied and allowing this state of support is very important. Since we have been caught up in the seduction of thoughts for many many lifetimes, they are very tempting to us, being such familiar territory. But now in our practice we are entering into a new territory, which is hard, so we need to be committed to this new place where we're going. So, thoughts arise, and they seem to be different, they seem to be other, but the more you relax and you stay open in emptiness then the more you become aware that the thoughts are arising in that state.

Normally it is as if we are looking down a narrow tunnel with things running across it. They seem to be going from A to B. But when we relax into this state of openness we see that things are arising in the openness and going back into the openness. This is the fundamental point that we have to understand. This is the point at which samsara and nirvana are unified. This is the experience of awareness which is called rigpa, in which form and emptiness are fully merged.

So by always relaxing and relaxing and relaxing—by not chasing after future thoughts waiting anxiously for them to come, by not being intrigued by a thought that's just gone and chasing after it to find out more about it—but just relaxed and happy in this new spaciousness, allowing these phenomena to arise and pass, arise and pass. Gradually the arising of the phenomena reveals itself as 'here you are back in this room'. This is not a mistake. This is not the end of the meditation. This is just a new form of manifestation. Whatever manifests is just manifesting in this one open radiant glow. In this way we integrate the meditation of absorption and the state of rich variety and movement that comes after it.

Then the whole of one's life is spent on trying to bring these two points together. Because when these states of profound meditation and openness and the rich display of movement are merged, that's what we call being enlightened in one lifetime.

So, this is the basic structure of tantric deity visualisation practice. We do the meditation because we want to get that experience. The meditation is taught in order to help you get that experience. It's not merely something to pass the time between birth and death. Nor is it something put on for show in a monastery, in order to attract donations. It's not something that you should be doing out of a sense of obligation, because once upon a time you took an initiation from a lama and you said you'd do it...

If you marry someone you may be committed to having sex with them even when you don't love them any more. That's certainly how the Christian marriage vow used to be interpreted. But there's not much pleasure in it. Doing tantric practice because you have taken a vow could be quite similar to this. If you do the practice grudgingly out of a sense of obligation it's not very likely that you'll be open to this kind of awareness; you are just going through the motions. Another way of saying "going through the motions" is to say "wandering through samsara endlessly".

This is why at the beginning of a practice we usually thin about suffering in samsara, about impermanence and how difficult life is—all the things we have been thinking about this weekend. There is a *real* reason why we do the practice. We want to escape suffering; we want to be more relaxed open and clear and we want to be able to help people. These are three pretty reasonable

reasons, but we don't have so much time since we all lead busy lives; we're often tired and distracted and other things happen. If you've had initiations then it might be worth thinking about how many hours of real practice you've done since you got the initiations. Probably not very many. But think of all the hours you spend watching TV, going to the movies or gossiping with friends. Probably quite a lot.

So when we come to do the practice it's a very thin door that we have in a very busy enmeshing of our ordinary lives. If we then do the practice out of a sense of obligation or when we're too tired, or distracted because we'd rather be doing something else, then it's probably not going to have much power to transform us. That is why in the traditional texts it says "Pray with the hair on your head standing up and all the little hairs in your pores of your skin, tingling." One has a real desire "I want it." Here we are using desire to dissolve desire. Using desire to dissolve the binary opposition of duality.

Om Ah Hung practice

Since many of you have never had any initiations and are not familiar with any deity practices, we'll do something simple, yet which is also traditional. So, sit in a relaxed comfortable way. I'll talk you through the practice and then we'll do it together.

In front of you in a clear blue sky there is a presence. If you are familiar with practising on a deity then you can visualise the deity you are familiar with. If you have no such familiarity then you can imagine a small ball of white light. It's a ball of light, light that you can see through, so it's there and not there at the same time. You want to believe that this ball represents the wisdom and compassion of all the Buddhas. As you are looking at it we'll all recite together "Om Ah Hung". "Om Ah Hung" is the essence of all mantra. "Om" represents the Buddhas body. "Ah" represents the Buddha's speech and "Hung" represents the Buddha's mind. By saying "Om Ah Hung" you are saying all mantras. It's a very useful shorthand version and if you ever have a lot of mantras to say but you don't have time to do them all, or you have even forgotten some of them, then you can say "Om Ah Hung" and it's okay.

So we have this deity or this ball of light in front of us and we are saying "Om Ah Hung, Om Ah Hung, Om Ah Hung, Om Ah Hung" As we are doing this we imagine that from the heart of the deity or from the centre of the ball of light, rays of three coloured light are coming out. They are coming out all at the same time. White light is dissolving in the forehead. Red light in your throat and blue light into your heart. This light coming in purifies all the sins and obscurations of body speech and mind and fills our bodies with light, dissolving all the sense of heavy embodied existence that we have, so that we get this sense of having this light body.

Then we'll stop reciting "Om Ah Hung" and at that point we imagine this ball of light or this deity coming to the top of our head, then dissolving down and coming through the top of our head into our heart. And then our body just turns into our heart. It is just dissolving right in. We already have this sense that our body is full of light and all the light just pours into this ball in the heart. One needs to be quite attentive in this process because you are wanting to bring all your attention into this one point, into this ball of white light. That is all there is. You have no more sense of the rest of your body, just the point of white light. Then this point just dissolves like the mist.

We'll then sit in this relaxed openness until we're back in the room. Okay? So just make sure that you're sitting quite comfortably. We will start with this sense of this place and then we'll start together, reciting Om Ah Hung

[Practice]

Once you have done this practice a few times and gotten used to it, you can do the whole thing in a few minutes. The important thing is to find a couple of times a week when you can practise for, say half-an-hour. If you are with people who might be disturbed by what you are doing or not like what you are doing, then you don't need to say the mantra out loud. The main thing is to intensify the sense of the presence of this form. For some people visualisation is very easy and for some people it is very difficult. If it difficult for you, don't worry too much about that; the main thing is to focus on your feeling of the actual presence of this moment of enlightenment, this possibility of enlightenment, and then going into this meditation, spend as much time as you can in this state of open awareness. Once you have got that embedded as your basic attitude, then keeping this recollection that everything that is arising is arising in this openness, you can simply return yourself to it by doing this practice very quickly.

Coming out of the meditation into the world, into this sense of openness, one responds to people in terms of what one feels to be their need. The purpose of this kind of meditation is to make one feel more connected in the world – not as a dualistic connection of subject onto object – but through the direct experience that here we are all in a room, connected. Connectedness is just a part of how it is. The meditation supports us in the depth and in the responsiveness of actually being in touch with one another. Compassion reveals itself in all sorts of very subtle ways as a sensitivity to the actual state of others. This kind of meditation should increase our phenomenological awareness, not spaced out but rather, spaced in.

So, thank you for inviting me to Frankfurt. Go well, and I hope you will continue with this kind of practice and think about the things we've been talking about.

[Dedication]