
Devotion and Faith

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Rinpoche often used the image of a ring and a hook. He frequently said that it was important to develop a strong ring of faith so that the hook of the guru's blessing and compassion could catch that ring. The transmission – for the life, the living life of the lineage to continue – has to occur through devotion.

*When we develop devotion, we are big **and** we are small. We are small because we feel full of respect and faith and can become childlike, undefended and open; and we are big because we are reassured and trust that our lives are going in the right way. Our energy can relax and open to embrace what is occurring.*

Value is revealed through relationship. When you have devotion to the objects of the dharma and the heart opens, then you see with the eye of the heart, and the eye of the heart sees things that the mind, the brain, cannot see. It is for this reason that devotion is very important. It's not some primitive, or outer, practice for ordinary simple people. It's the highest practice of yogis.

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We meet here again, some of us. We have today, tomorrow and Sunday morning to look at some aspects of meditation practice, particularly the function of devotion in meditation. We'll look at this in different ways according to the different styles of practice we find in Tibetan buddhism.

Maybe just to arrive we can do some quiet sitting practice. Just settle your body and check out how you're breathing—it's very important that the breath is coming easily with the work of the diaphragm. If you can stabilise a deep, slow, even breath that will help to focus your mind. Then we focus our attention either on the flow of the breath going in and out of the nostrils or on some external object. The body is stable and unmoving; the breath, which represents speech, is stable and deep; and the mind is focussed. So, we use the intention to keep our *attention* on the object we have chosen as a way of resisting the temptations of distraction.

If you find yourself becoming distracted, becoming caught up in many different thoughts that arise then just very gently bring your attention back to the focussed object that you had decided on. There is nothing wrong with being distracted. Thoughts are very interesting; without being a bit distracted, you would not be able to chat with your friends. That is on an outer level. On a more profound level, all experiences are the radiance of the dharmakaya. From the point of view of dzogchen we try not to discriminate saying this is good, that is bad, but here, for the purposes of *this* kind of meditation, we are deciding to do one thing and not another, and therefore if distraction occurs, we simply release ourselves from it and return to the object of fixation. Okay, so we sit quietly for a while...

This kind of practice is used in all the schools of Tibetan buddhism to calm the mind and to create the capacity to have the mind resting open and stable, no matter what arises. Sometimes it's very difficult to do because our mind seems to be dark and heavy or full of disturbing thoughts, and so, in order to support ourselves in doing the practice, we take refuge in the Buddha, the dharma and the sangha. In the hinayana system, the Buddha is the historical buddha, Shakyamuni; the dharma is what he taught, including this kind of meditation practice; and the sangha are those who have been doing this practice and transmitting it to others.

So we use our respect for the Buddha and our trust in the Buddha's teachings to support us while doing something which is actually quite difficult to do, and doesn't bring an immediate result. That is to say, we use our faith or trust as a support for enduring a delayed gratification rather than the immediate gratification of whatever thoughts are arising. The path of learning meditation and learning to calm and focus the mind is, for most people, a long path. We might say that meditation is the central feature of the Buddha's teachings and that the other teachings are all designed as a support to make it more easy to enter into meditation and to sustain energy during the practice of meditation. This is especially important if the kind of meditation you are doing has a neutral object like the breath or a mark on the floor or a plain pebble. A neutral object has the advantage that it doesn't arouse many emotions and so its very nature helps us to calm our mind.

On the other hand, neutral objects get boring quite quickly which is why, in the practice of tantra, we make use of objects which are *not* boring. For example we might have, as the focus of our attention, Padma Sambhava.

Devotion and faith

There are many interesting stories about Padma Sambhava and he certainly *looks* interesting. So, you can imagine that there's the possibility of a real relationship with Padma Sambhava who is, if you like, an enriched object, an object full of many different qualities which has a kind of gravitational pull that supports the focussing of attention.

For those of us who were fortunate enough to meet Chhimed Rigdzin Rinpoche, he was a person who was endlessly fascinating. He was always doing something new, showing some new form, creating some kind of excitement around him, and he was also very beautiful. So just to gaze at his face was a very supportive and warm line for attention. That quality of being able to hold attention and to be able to sustain and encourage the students' heart longing and heart gesture is very important for practice. Because when we can believe in the object, we, as a subject, start to feel safe.

For example a small child who has a good relation with his parents will feel at ease and reassured and able to be flowing in their own sense of self when these parents are around them. Trusting in the parents allows the child to feel that the whole world itself is safe. And of course, when we become teenagers, we often start to doubt our parents a great deal and to put them into question, and that's also a time that the world becomes less safe. As teenagers, we struggle to make sense of the world whereas when you play with children who are about four or five, they are just *in* the world; they do not have to make sense of it, they are freely participating in it.

One of the functions of devotion in the tantric path is to help us feel safe in the world. When we do Padma Sambhava practice, we begin by praying to Padma Sambhava, reminding ourselves of the power and importance of his presence. Then through the mantra recitation and the visualisation we link ourselves with Padma Sambhava,; we transform ourselves into Padma Sambhava, and use the relation with him to send rays of light to transform the world. We then move into our ordinary experience with the sense that it has been fully transformed into the mandala of Padma Sambhava. That is to say, we have the confidence to know that whatever we encounter is the presence of Padma Sambhava.

Just as the presence of the mother makes the world safe for the small child, we enter into the practice where we remember the teaching of Padma Sambhava from the Seven Chapter Prayer where he says, whatever you see, whether it's good or bad, this is the body of Padma Sambhava. Whatever you hear, sweet words, bad words, this is all the voice of Padma Sambhava. Whatever thoughts and feelings arise in your own experience whether they are happy or sad, this is the energy of the mind of Padma Sambhava. So we don't need to be disturbed by these moment-by-moment experiences because we can contain them within the world of Padma Sambhava.

Of course, this is only really going to work if Padma Sambhava is meaningful to you. For some people who live in America and who like to have American flags in their garden, the idea that America will bring democracy to Iraq is a wonderful idea. But for other of us, who don't have faith in America, the idea that America is bringing democracy to Iraq is terrifying, because faith can be a way of removing doubts.

In buddhism we say not to doubt the teacher is the great path to wisdom, and one of the titles of the Buddha is the Victorious One. One of the titles of George Bush is Commander-in-Chief. But it would be a sign of the *absence* of wisdom to have faith in George Bush. So it's very important to recognise when you can allow your mind to become a little stupid to just have faith and trust without examining; and when you should keep your mind very sharp and full of doubts and questions.

Devotion and Padma Sambhava

Samsara arises for us because we have faith in the wrong kind of objects. Padma Sambhava, like the other great deities, emerges out of emptiness and is inseparable from emptiness. Padma Sambhava exists in the state of on-going realisation of his inseparability from emptiness. In the Seven Line Prayer we say: KHYE KYI JE SU DAG DRUB KYI. We want to become like you, we want to follow in your footsteps. Which means that we also want to recognise that moment-by-moment every aspect of our being is inseparable from emptiness. But ignorance, the force which keeps us wandering in

samsara, is the power of believing in ourselves to be truly existing, to be existing in ourselves. It is because Padma Sambhava recognises he is emptiness that he is able to show everything. It is because we believe that we are our own particular self that we can show very little. We become attached to our personalities, our health, our possessions and so on, and through that we create an identity which is small and fragile.

Part of devotion is to give us a bridge whereby we can leave this restricted world of our self-identity, and through that move towards a state of realisation of our own real nature. We use our faith in Padma Sambhava as a transitional method of helping us to understand our own nature, transforming ourselves through the hospitality of his being. Devotion allows us to feel that something powerful outside ourselves is connected with us, so that we don't have to rely just on our own qualities but can feel ourselves to be supported and enriched by the qualities of, for example, Padma Sambhava. There is the sense that, through the practice of Padma Sambhava, imagining rays of light coming from him into ourselves, we can purify our limitations and gain access to his good qualities.

Moreover the connection with Padma Sambhava helps to interrupt our fixation with ourselves. That is to say, you might be worried about your job, your family, your relationship. Clearly, these things are very important. But if we become preoccupied with them, if we become filled up inside with worries and anxieties and fill our mind with these thoughts and reflections, going back again and again, this tends to have two limiting effects.

One effect is to give us the sense: 'I have to sort things out', 'It's up to me', so we feel a bit cut off from things around us and rather weighed down and burdened by our life. The second thing is that it gives us the sense that our situation is very serious; that we are real and our problems are real, and this tension between subject and object creates a vibration of anxiety.

Anxiety is one of the root qualities of ignorance, while the state of openness, or awareness or enlightenment is a state of ease; a state in which, although all sorts of things arise, some of them pleasant, some unpleasant, there is no loss of the experience of their immediate self-liberation. When we start worrying, when we start running things around in our heads, we act against the nature of the universe which is impermanent. By pulling the events back again and again into our mind, we create a kind of false permanence in them, and the permanence of our problems reinforces the sense of the permanence of our self. According to buddhist tradition anxious over-involvement is an experience that has been happening for us for a very long time life after life, so we're going to slip back into that habit very easily.

Recollection of the meditational deities or of one's teacher, can come like a breath of fresh air, like a cooling evening breeze on a hot day that seems to enliven us and allow new, fresh possibilities for us. Thus, in a very important way, the door to ourselves is through the other. It is through our relationship with the Buddha, dharma, and sangha, the guru, the gods, the dakinis and all the various aspects of the rich field of Tibetan buddhism that we find ourselves being able to see more of ourselves. If you just try to examine yourself without any help, it's very likely that you get lost.

You can't [think](#) yourself out of samsara

Nowadays, people like to be independent and so they want to resource themselves, by themselves. For example, there are tens of thousands of self-help books, but trying to do it by a book for yourself is very difficult because we don't exist just as a set of ideas, we exist in our embodied being. We exist as an energetic resonance in the world, with others. An important function of the lineage, the presence of the teacher or the meditational experience of Padma Sambhava is to provide an encounter with a liberating energetic field. Through our practice, we build up a resonance with the radiance of openness, which brings about the transformation of our existence. If we try to just do

self-help, we are likely to keep trying to add things on to ourselves, to mechanically adjust ourselves in some way, as if we were a child's game of Lego.

But our actual embodied being is not like that. We are not constructs, not things or problems requiring puzzling out. We are part of a universe which is constantly changing and flowing; flowing with the energy which is inseparable from the dharmadhatu. So, gaining enlightenment is not a question of solving some kind of problem, you can't think yourself out of samsara. The path is awakening to the actuality of your own existence as it truly is, moment by moment. In order to *do* that, we have to be in relation with others, not because we don't have the potential inside ourselves, but because our being is inseparable from the being of others.

In Tibetan buddhist texts, the term 'non-duality' is used a great deal, it has many areas of reference, but particularly it means that there is no real separation between self and other. This doesn't mean that we're all sort of mixed together, or fused together in some kind of soup, and it doesn't mean that if you awaken to non-duality you will be invaded by other people, or you will become some omnipotent world dictator. Just like when you walk down the road, your right foot goes forward, then your left foot goes forward, then your right foot goes forward. The rhythm of walking means one, then the other, then one, then the other. We breathe out and we breathe in. We speak and others listen, then they speak and we listen. When you see this through the lens of separation, of duality, it looks like A is speaking and B is listening. But actually, unless A is mad, they wouldn't be speaking unless B was listening. That is to say, speaking and listening arise together. The whole thing arises together.

This is the nature of the dharmadhatu. The dharmadhatu is the realm of all possible experience. This is not something mystical and far away but it is actually the ground and the stage on which everything is manifesting, moment-by-moment, and in this, each of us is both a subject and an object. While we experience ourselves as a subject talking, we are also the object for the other person's gaze.

In that way, we can't separate the subject and the object. Ignorance is the illusion of the separation of the subject and the object, and to awaken from that illusion is to find oneself at ease in the flow of participation. The loneliness of the ego's isolation dissolves, and one can find oneself at home, wherever one is.

Okay, maybe we take a little break, come back, and continue.

Finding a way to inhabit your life

Maybe when we are younger, we had the thought, "*What will I do with my life?*" and developed various ideas and fantasies. Then, after a while, we *have* a life and we want to get out of our life because the life we found is not the life we thought we would have! But of course that given-ness of the situation is very important, because when you can start to accept that your life is something which is already in existence, rather than a horizontal possibility, then you have to find a way to inhabit it, and that's something which meditation can be very helpful for.

In our time, economically and culturally, we have a lot of freedom to reinvent ourselves, to live life on our terms. This is not necessarily very helpful because we encounter two aspects of manifestation. Sometimes there is space that we can move into and fall in our own way; but sometimes space seems full and is coming towards us constricting our possibilities. From the point of view of dzogchen these are two qualities of energy. Part of the path of liberation is to learn to be at home in both modes rather than thinking, "*What I want is freedom, and my freedom means I should never be trapped somewhere.*"

So, being at home is about finding oneself as the experiencer of a wide range of experiences. One aspect of experience is to be caught up in ourselves, to be thinking about ourselves, worried about ourselves, worried about whether we waste our lives, and so on. If we can simply experience this as an arising form, as a flow of energy, then without having to block it or push it away, we will be in touch with that particular quality of our experience without being conditioned by it.

It is inevitable, as we get older, that our bodies change; but also our emotions change. Things which before were very interesting now seem rather dull and *un*interesting. This is enormously helpful. Because it shows us very strongly: we are not who we think we are. The images and stories of ourselves that we build up through the years have no more truth or validity to them than the sort of clothes we used to wear ten years ago. They are a function. Maybe, when you were eighteen, you were really into music and you wanted to go to lots of concerts and then after a while, all of these things get a bit boring. You might still continue to do them but without the kind of manic hope that they contain the answer to life's question.

In the middle of life, we're in life. When we're young adults we're trying to get into life and then as we get older we feel we are leaving life. The relative and contingent nature of each of these ways of viewing offers the possibility of seeing that everything is an illusion. It doesn't mean that things shouldn't exist; it doesn't mean that they *don't* exist. What it means is that there is nothing graspable, not even the things which seem to carry for us ultimate value.

And I think this is the direct proof, in ourselves, of the Buddha's teaching. When you're young and you fall in love with someone, it's very common to have the feeling you could *die* for love, you'd give up the whole of your existence for the sake of this one person. And then, after a while, it doesn't quite seem like that anymore. You may end up hating the person, you may feel betrayed by them, you might become bored with them, so how could this person, who once had so much value for you, now seem to be losing their value? Better not to take ourselves too seriously.

In the summertime there are many delicious fruits, strawberries, raspberries, cherries, and they're so delicious when they are perfectly ripe but if you keep them for one day longer, you start to see the mould. Everything has its own time.

Be a friend to yourself

Part of our experience in living, is to find ourselves always in new situations and being surprised: "*I didn't think I would be like this.*" This is why self-knowledge is useless. Because if you know yourself you build up some kind of portfolio in yourself, some kind of sense of who you are and what you like and what you do. Much better to be a friend to yourself, to be tolerant to yourself and allow yourself to become as you are going to become. Because what we become is, probably more than due to causes and circumstances *outside* ourselves than to what we feel is our own intention.

The central teaching in dzogchen is to stay present with whatever arises, however it is. So, hopes and fears, and expectations, and memories, all act as a kind of a cloud or a haze, over the immediacy of what is being revealed moment-by-moment. C.R. Lama very often said that the best practitioners of dharma are stupid because their minds are not busy all the time. They don't have a sense of mastery, or feel that they can be in charge, and so they just do the practice. You can be too smart for your own good. You can be ahead of yourself. And if we find ourselves in that situation we have to slow down and just be with ourselves, be *as* ourselves. Which means, listening to how we are. If we attend to ourselves we will find a lot of direct instruction, out of our own embodiment, about how we should live our lives.

Any other thoughts or questions or things you'd like to raise just now?

Being at ease

Question: We are conscious, and we are trying to control people, and sometimes the other people around are trying to control us. Sometimes I'm trying just to relax and doing nothing, but somehow the others are pushing on me. What is your opinion about it?

James: Usually, in Tibet, when yogis were practising just being at ease, they were living in the mountains in caves far away from people! *[laughter]* Being at ease is difficult. Human beings everywhere like to interfere rather than respect what is there. For example, in Sarnath in India, where the Buddha gave his first teaching, there is a small Jain temple, which some of you may have visited. On the walls of this temple there are paintings of the great teacher of the Jain religion for this time, called Mahavira. One of the paintings shows him in his meditation in the forest, and somebody has come along and has taken up a burning coal from the fire and put it on top of his head. Tormenting yogis was an easy pastime!

So, we have to think: this world is full of the five poisons. There is a lot of stupidity, aversion, desire, jealousy, pride. So how do we stay open when people behave towards us in a way which is difficult? One way is to try and take the other person's position into our practice.

You can do that on many different levels. You can think: *"What is arising now is the mirror of my bad karma. This difficulty I am experiencing from others, is generated out of my own past actions"* Rather than thinking of the faults of the other person you can use the painful experience as a basis for reflections on your own misdeeds, your own mental confusions, and maybe doing some Dorje Sempa practice, which is a practice for separating one's true nature from the obscurations which have covered it.

Another way would be to examine that the root of distress is one's own attachment which is manifesting in terms of the intensity of these two aspects: *"This is happening for me, and I don't like it."* So, if it's possible—and it's difficult, but if it's possible—you can use that as an opportunity to stay present with this central question, 'Who is the one who is having this experience?' If you can, in that moment examine yourself, you will *see* the dynamic way that you construct yourself.

For example, first of all, probably, my pride is hurt that this is happening at all: 'This shouldn't be happening to me. I'm a good person! I practise the dharma!' Then, the second one is: 'I don't like what you're doing to me' so there's the aversion. Both of these are strengthening the stupidity which is the basic sense: 'I exist as something apart from the world.' Often it's as if we can't quite believe that it is happening because it feels like a mistake. Something has gone wrong for this to be happening. To accept it as normal would be to give up the illusion about where we are.

But, we are in samsara. Shit happens all the time. If children can be bombed in Beirut then we also can get some crap on our face. This returns us to the Buddha's first teaching on the noble truth of suffering, and maybe it's helpful for us to think, *'Well, if suffering is what happens here, why are we always so surprised when we start to suffer.'* And actually, maybe suffering has to be made normal. That doesn't mean that we have to collapse and passively accept what is given but rather to stay with the basic dzogchen idea: *whatever comes, comes; whatever goes, goes.* Which is to say that many things will arrive for us that we don't want; many things will pass away that we would prefer to hang onto. Our likes and dislikes are not in charge of what happens.

How the five skandhas create our universe

And so, from the point-of-view of the practice, we want to shift the balance of our identity from the five skandhas or heaps, to a state of awareness. Because, as the Buddha Shakyamuni explained, our ordinary identity is built up of these five heaps, or five groupings: form, feeling, perception,

conditioning and consciousness—the collective basis of our action and reaction. This identity has no true essence to it but it is an appearance created by the way that these five aspects are brought together in any particular moment.

For example, if we look at some of these Tibetan paintings on the wall, if we know a bit about them, we can recognise who they depict, so we might say, *“Oh, that’s Padma Sambhava!”* but actually we see what we call colours on a piece of cloth and we apply our knowledge to the patterns we identify and so co-construct the experience of a painting of Padma Sambhava.

The painting doesn’t exist in itself. It comes into existence in the moment of its appreciation by a consciousness which has some capacity to read it. In the same way, when we meet people, or when we experience ourselves, we create stories, readings, interpretations of what’s going on, on the basis of these five skandhas. So we have form, the appearance of colour and shape. We have feeling-tone which is positive, negative or neutral. We have perception: the identification of particular events arising via our senses. We have the organising factors of our own predispositions, and we have the consciousness of each of our five senses plus the organising mental consciousness.

Moment-by-moment, these dynamic factors move together creating different patterns. So we meet someone and we say, *“Oh, you look good! Have you been on holiday?”* because the colour of their face, the health of their posture looks different from how we saw them before. What this points to is the fact that any situation we are in, can be analysed down into its constituent particles. This helps us to see that what appears to be there, existing in itself, is actually contingent, arising from causes and conditions. Say, for example, somebody insults us and we become upset. That is happening because in this particular life you are born as a human being. If, next life, you are born as a cow, a frog, or a snail, insults won’t be so important. We can do an experiment. We can go outside and say very, very rude things to insects, and see what they do!

Part of it is to see: *“Oh, the reason I am responding to this situation in this way is because of the particular selection of my habits which is arising just now.”* We have this particular human body, due to the particular pattern of karmic consequences that are currently arising. After a while we will die and, according to the tradition, we will be reborn somewhere else. The likelihood of being born with a human body is very small. In a very brief way, the answer to your question is to practise staying open to the situation but increasing your clarity, to reveal the illusory nature of the experience.

The key point is: we suffer because we get caught. Who is the one who gets caught? To feel, *“Oh, I’m caught, and I’m hurt, and I don’t like it,”* is exactly the loss of clarity. So, who is having this experience?

Radical emptiness

The view of buddhism is really very, very radical. It’s not ‘radical’ in the sense of an extreme political grouping. The word ‘radical’ in English is linked to the idea of a root. What is our root? Emptiness. When we root ourselves in emptiness, every aspect of our existence is radical. Emptiness never change: it’s the same in summer and winter. It’s the same when we’re old as when we’re young because summer and winter, youth and age are all aspects of emptiness. But when we root ourselves in our ego-identity, in this narrative, this story of who we are and what we do and what we like and what we don’t like, this root is very shallow and always finds itself in thin soil. Our daily worldly concerns are a false refuge which cannot sustain our true growth because they obscure what’s actually going on!

Just as the alcoholic thinks that vodka is what is keeping him alive, when in fact it’s killing him, we believe that identification with the stories that we tell ourselves about ourselves is protecting us and

helping us find a fulfilling existence. Actually these stories are disguising who we really are from ourselves. The central teaching of the Buddha is the middle way. There is nothing wrong with vodka. A little vodka is fine, and a little ignorance is pretty healthy too, in the sense that in order to be part of this world, to connect with other people, to fulfil the bodhisattva vow, you have to enter into the drama of existence *as if it were real*.

So it's not that we have to pretend that we don't exist, but rather to recognise that we exist in the manner of a dream, and other beings, and this building and the whole of Poland... Everything is ungraspable. We constantly try to consolidate events by describing them — but the description inevitably lacks the vitality of the ungraspable thing itself. For example, you could write an account of your favourite coffee, write a fully phenomenological account of drinking a cup of coffee, and then, in the morning, for breakfast, instead of having a cup of coffee, read your account of drinking a cup of coffee and see if it has the same impact! It's very good to have the coffee but also the account. The account can never capture the coffee, but we do tell stories. So the account is not a substitute for the experience, they are different *kinds* of experience.

In the same way, the more we practise relaxing into openness, the more we become aware of how often we are quite small, quite diminished, lost, confused, angry, irritated. Without trying to correct oneself, we can just be tolerant of these ways in which we manifest. And in that way, the openness will be able to welcome whatever arises, whether it arises as subject or as object.

Difficult situations are often more useful than easy situations

The actual lived fact is that how we are as a subject is changing moment-by-moment. Representations in our minds create a false sense of continuity. So, when I arrived here today, I thought, *"Oh! It's so nice to be back here! It looks pretty much the same as last year."* But of course, it's actually different. The trees are different, the grass is a different shape, many, many things—that is to say, what is *actually* there—is different, but is similar enough that I can put onto it my old story, *"Oh, I recognise this place, it's the same."*

Although our goal is to relax and be at ease, awakening in that state also involves a lot of work. Mainly the work of ceaselessly unknitting our tendency to build up pictures, interpretations, structures, understandings, responses, and so on. Being here, and being together with people who are familiar, this is a very good chance to investigate this for yourself. Some of you know quite a lot of people quite well. And other people—maybe some people are here for the first time—you don't know them well. So, you can experience the difference between talking with somebody who you know well and somebody you don't know. When you are looking at somebody's face and you don't know them — and you're asking a question and trying to find some way to make some kind of connection — that state, although it can be a bit uncomfortable, is very open. But if you're chatting with somebody you know *well*, although it's very easy, it's actually quite closed. Because you have lots of assumptions about them and you know roughly how to get into a groove with them. So, again, from the point-of-view of dharma practice, difficult situations are often much more useful than easy situations.

Being at ease in the manner of dzogchen

When we talk of being at ease, in a state of openness, this is not the same as being at ease with friends. It's not being at ease because things are familiar but being at ease because the state of openness is the ground from which responses ceaselessly arise. The openness is like a mirror, and situations and our responses are like reflections in the mirror: they are inseparable and yet different. The openness of the mirror never changes, but the reflections in the mirror are always changing, as existence reveals itself as movement.

To be at ease in the manner of dzogchen is to be at ease under all circumstances. That's why it often says in the prayers: "*May our problems become the path. May obstacles be the path.*" Our task is to be as at home with obstacles and difficulties as with good times. Of course, pleasure and pain don't taste the same, but trying to have only pleasure and never have any pain, is a method—a very good method—of increasing pain and suffering. Being open to experiences means avoiding strongly categorising them as 'this is very good' or 'this makes me happy' or 'this is horrible, I don't like it, it makes me unhappy'.

Patrul Rinpoche in his commentary on the *Three Statements of Garab Dorje* says that the yogi develops his meditation by destroying it. Don't develop meditation like a kind of duvet to wrap around yourself to make you feel warm and safe, but develop your practice as an absolutely naked openness, a nakedness that needs no covering; a nakedness that can *have* no covering.

The Garden of Eden and samsara

The story which is developed from the version in Genesis about the Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve is perhaps helpful here. There was the idea that on a particular tree there was a fruit, a fruit of knowledge, a particular way of understanding, and it was forbidden to them. God says to Adam and Eve, "*This is a nice place. Just hang out, have a good time. Chill. Nothing to do.*" They're in a world where all they have to do is participate but they're drawn towards this tree, to the apple, to the fruit of this tree, and in biting into it they have access to a particular kind of knowledge; a knowledge of good and evil, that is to say, a knowledge of dualistic categories, from which, all later sufferings arise because this knowledge was placing them apart from the world they were inhabiting. As a consequence God sends them out of the Garden of Eden into a place where they are never quite at home.

This story has some parallels with the buddhist account of how we entered samsara. When ignorance arises in the mind, non-dual manifestation is taken as real and separate, and the web of illusion begins. Grasping at the notion of an individual self comes into existence and we find ourselves wandering in the realms of samsara, engaging in many activities. These activities generate constructs of the world and also elaborate as constructs in ourselves, through which we feel we are responsible for ourselves and we have to privilege ourselves by having more pleasure than pain. This condemns us to always being busy, and this busyness, which seems to be the answer, as in my earlier example of the vodka drinker, is actually the cause of distress.

We will look at this in more detail tomorrow and do more practice to really get a direct understanding of it. The essential thing is to be able to see the difference between the aspect of ourselves that is open and unchanging and the aspect of ourselves that is always moving. Ignorance, in the buddhist sense, is to imagine that the aspect which is always moving is actually not moving. Understanding the difference opens up the possibility to relax in the face of movement, not being afraid of being contaminated by movement.

This is difficult to do. Because when bad thoughts arise in your mind—maybe cruel, angry thoughts—it is difficult to hold the middle way. Usually we tend to either merge with the thought and indulge it for a while, or we try to reject it and say, "*But I'm not like that!*" Allowing whatever is there to be there, is really only possible if you understand that the real nature cannot be contaminated. Our real nature is not a construct; it has no beginning or end. It can't be stained, or obscured, or diminished. Recognising this, realising it directly in the meditation, resolves ignorance into its own ground of openness and from that relaxed spaciousness everything can be let go off.

Until then we identify with limiting thoughts such as: "*But I am a good person! Because I'm a good person, people should like me. I don't know why I'm so unhappy. So many bad things happen to me.*" Identification with these self-referential thoughts, these little oceans of self-pity, is the illusion

that blinds us to the fact that our own nature, what we actually are, is not a thing, not an object. We are naturally free.

Okay, maybe we end there for today.

Energetic connection with the lineage

According to the tradition there are many difficulties that can arise when we listen to teachings. In Tibet it was very common for explanations to go on for many days, weeks and months. There are many details that require discussion, and hearing the explanation from one who has studied and practised helps to strengthen our link to the lineage. The teaching involves not just the semantic content but also the energetic connection with the lineage. The content is traditional and authentic but the actual moment of teaching should arise in a fresh way, opening the relation between the ground and the manifestation. In order to benefit from this living experience it is important to be as present as you can.

The Three Pot Faults: listening difficulties

Traditionally, the main difficulties with listening are organised as the three pot faults. The first pot fault is to be like an upturned pot, not to have any space in yourself to hear what is being said. This can often happen if we are full of something. We might be full of a particular kind of emotion. We could be full of an emotion about our personal life, about interactions with the sangha group, we can be full of worries, and cares and anxieties, we can be full of boredom, thinking, *“This is a waste of time, I know this already.”* Of course, many of the dharma teachings, we do know. But if we then take up the position: *‘I know this! Therefore I will be a gatekeeper to what is coming towards me,’* then we listen from the position of the individual ego. Really, when we listen we should try to listen from as calm and open a place in ourselves as we can. Otherwise, when we listen from the point-of-view of the ego, we tend to add things on to our existing self rather than changing. We think, *“Oh, this is useful, I can use that,”* and while this can be helpful, because we are extending our capacity to respond to situations, we are also reaffirming: ***I am the centre of my world.*** So, one should try to listen with open ears, open mind and open heart.

The second pot fault is that we listen like a pot with a hole in it so that although we hear many things, they rapidly drain out of us and we forget what we listened to. This is a problem of attention and memory. Usually it arises because we don't have a sense of how to hold what we hear. When it's described that we should listen in an ***open*** way, that's not just like water flowing through, but also open in a way which is vast enough to contain whatever is heard.

So, in order to re-member – to re-call something back into mind – we have to allow ourselves to be in contact with it. This means hearing the teaching as it is; free of our projections, our assumptions, our attachments. So the practice of listening to the dharma is also a way of being present in the midst of an experience, observing how you ***lose*** yourself, and then bringing yourself back into the present. The more we respect what we hear, the more faith and devotion we have, the more we can value what is being presented and this helps to increase retention and diminish distraction.

The third pot fault is to be like a pot which has already has stale old food in it. New freshly cooked food, put in the pot would become spoiled by the old food. This raises the question—and it's a very important question for Western people studying the dharma—*“What do we do with the existing knowledge that we have?”* We all have our life experience, we have the knowledge we learned in school, we might have had a christian education, we might have studied some philosophy, other religions, psychology, and so on. That is to say, we have the basis for lots of different thoughts about the meaning of life; why things happen, and so on. What to do with all of this?

From the point-of-view of dzogchen, you don't have to try to forget what you already know but you can simply recognise its contingent and illusory nature. So the fact that you might know what Hegel said about the nature of being is very interesting, but quite irrelevant when we are just being present with the tradition of Tibetan buddhism. You don't have to make it bad and try and push it out of your mind, but if you hold what you know in one hand and try to hold the dharma in the other, then you take yourself back to schooldays when you had to write these essays: *compare and contrast*. That's not what we're doing. Here, we want to give ourselves a nice refreshing shower in the flow of the dharma! You're on holiday, you don't have to write an essay! You can just bathe yourself in the dharma.

So that means, everything that we have, we can just leave it as it is. Where is it? It is already in space. Just don't mix everything up.

We are not machines requiring programming or correction. We are part of the universal flow and when we trust, life is easier. If we have the question, 'What was your favourite food when you were a child?' the answer can arise very easily. Where does it come from? It comes out of the spaciousness of the mind. You don't have to keep reminding yourself about your childhood events for them to be available. That way, space is like a great storehouse, described as the '*alaya vijana*', a sort of ground-holding environment in which everything that has ever occurred is present. Trusting the emptiness of that means that we don't hold onto it tightly. That, in turn, releases more connection with all that we have learned, so that our mind can flow more easily.

This would indicate that we should just allow the mind to empty itself. This won't make you stupid because it's not a dull emptiness but a confident openness. When the texts say the self-liberation of phenomena leaves no trace this means there is no conditioning by events. We are not building up a picture to define our lives, rather we let go so that new momentary configurations can arise. We don't forget what has occurred, we are just not defined and aligned by it.

Shiné: the attendant waits on the ruler

Reflecting on these three pot faults, we can perhaps see the importance of calming (shiné) practice, of focussing the mind in a calm, clear way. When we adopt an object for our focussed attention we give ourselves a simple task to focus on. This is increasing our power to attend. In English, attending is linked with the function of the servant. To be an attendant is not to be the king or the leader but it's to be the one who follows, who *waits on* what is happening. So we decide that the object of our attention, the flow of our breath over our lip, or some external object, this is the king and we are the attendant. We have to make sure that the king or the queen doesn't have to wait for anything. Nothing is more important than this royal figure.

To practise this kind of meditation is to practise humility. Here we sit, wonderful, educated, intelligent, interesting people. When we meet together we have so many things to talk about, we have so many interesting thoughts in our head but now we decide that the most interesting thing is just watching the breath going in and out, in and out. This is completely to re-adjust your sense of values. We move from 'me first' to 'me last'. What comes first is the breath.

So you can see I hope from that, that this is also a basis for the practice of compassion. We can't be compassionate towards others unless we let them come first, unless we attend to what they want. To help others is not to be full of ideas of how *we* might help them but rather to see what is the actual condition of the other and how can we move towards that. This, again, involves the humility of the place of the servant. So there are many advantages in this simple kind of meditation.

Okay, so now we settle the body, letting the spine carry our weight and letting the breath move freely with the diaphragm. We chose our object of attention with the firm intention: 'I will make this object the centre of my world. *I will give it more status than anything else.*' And then we rest our full attention on it. If the mind wanders at all, just very gently bring it back.

[Practice]

Taking refuge is a powerful antidote to the habit of enthusiasm, followed by distraction

One of the themes that we'll be looking at will be devotion and faith and this is, of course, very powerfully present in the practice of refuge. When we take refuge, we start from a position that we are lost and in need of help. So, we say for example, to the Buddha and the dharma and the sangha (the best assembly), we go for refuge until enlightenment is gained. According to the Tibetan tradition, the hinayana system is to take refuge for just one life, the present life but in the mahayana system we take refuge in this and in all our future lives until enlightenment is gained.

This links with the notion of developing a vast intention. At the heart of the mahayana tradition is the notion of overcoming a sense of oneself as a limited person. That is to say, it focusses more on our potential than on how we experience ourselves on a day-to-day basis. We're concerned with our buddha-nature, our potential for awakening. And so, when we say, "*In this and all my future lives I take refuge in the Buddha*" and so on, it means that the intention formed is so clear and so strong that it will not allow us to deviate from it. The ground of the intention transcends the ego.

When we look at our own lives and think back to when we were fifteen or sixteen and remember the kind of thoughts and intentions we had about our lives we are likely to find that our lives have become rather different. This is very normal on an ordinary ego level, the ideas we have about what we want or who we are going to be, don't last very long. We have various enthusiasms about things which feel very important and real, but then something else happens, and we find our life moving in another direction.

Taking refuge is a powerful antidote to that habit of enthusiasm followed by distraction. It is saying, no matter what happens, no matter what external factors there are, whether life is good or bad, whether I am happy or sad, I will maintain this view as an on-going orientation, not just for now, but for ever. To take refuge in the Buddha means to believe that someone has been able to see through the obscurations that blind us to what is there. The Buddha's awakening under the bodhi tree is a revelation. Something which was hidden to him before, was now revealed to him. The scales dropped from his eyes and his buddha-eye opened and he saw things freshly, as if for the first time. Because of the freshness of that vision, he was able to see that other people's gaze is not clear and through the transmission of the dharma, the Buddha provided pathways for people to see more clearly.

An essential part of taking refuge is to realise you can't trust yourself. Taking refuge in Buddha, dharma and sangha, and the guru, and so on, this is not like taking out an insurance policy. The insurance company gives us a kind of refuge if a tragedy were to come into our life. But from a buddhist point of view, the tragedy is already in our life. Ignorance has already occurred. The accident has *already* happened. We are lost, we are confused and we don't really know what we are doing.

We take refuge in the Buddha, *against* ourselves

We take refuge in the Buddha, *against* ourselves. The demons are not somebody else coming to attack us but the fact that we attack ourselves. And not only that, while we attack ourselves we believe that we are taking care of ourselves. This is a very subtle kind of demon. We think that in

order to make ourselves happy we need to provide ourselves with many good things in the world. We think that the objects of our daily use are the basis of our happiness.

Now, clearly there is a difference between pleasure and pain. If you eat some food that is delicious, this will taste better than eating food which is not good. In that ordinary way of proceeding, our happiness is dependent on the quality of the objects around us. We take refuge in objects, so that we, the subject, will feel safe, happy, and secure and so on.

For example, you might fall in love with someone. When you are with them, you feel very happy. Some quality of yourself is awakened and you feel more alive than you would otherwise. You might feel, *'I was born to be with this person, all my life I have been waiting for them. The meaning of my life is to be with them.'* Tolstoy is very good at describing this kind of experience. Of course, romantic feelings, erotic feelings, feeling of warmth from the heart towards another are a very important part of our human condition. It is not that these things are wrong or we should avoid them, although in the hinayana tradition, which is a path of renunciation, they would say that a romantic or erotic attachment is simply a cause of turbulence and so it's better to protect yourself by taking the vows of a monk or nun.

However, from our tantric position, we see these as energies that arise in the world. If we can experience what happens to us when we come into these situations and see them as impermanent movements that reveal our own ever-shifting, changing nature, then they can be truly helpful. But if we imagine that another person will somehow be a stable feature in our life, many difficulties are created. Some people have the luck to be with a partner for all of their life. Sometimes they have a very unhappy relationship but they have the luck to stay together! Sometimes they are happy together for a long time, but this is quite rare. Some people have the luck to be happy together for a short period of time but then, wanting that short period of time to last longer, they create causes of suffering afterwards. If you stay with someone for a long time they will also change.

Often one partner has fallen in love with a person on the basis of a particular patterning in their partner, then when the partner changes they become unhappy, saying, *"But you are no longer the person I fell in love with! Why have you started to drink so much? Why don't you want to go to work anymore?"* or *"Why do you want to do this buddhist practice all the time? You would rather meditate than have sex with me. What's gone wrong?"* In that way, change can be very difficult. Clearly, all phenomena are impermanent; they change and move according to circumstances.

Part of relating to other people is the tolerance, the acceptance that they will, each day, present themselves as a new person to you. We can, of course, support ourselves in doing this when we see all forms as the form of Padma Sambhava: appearance and emptiness. Allowing the people around us to change, supports us to be fresh ourselves.

Why is Padma Sambhava reliable?: Nature of the three kayas

We often feel uncertain inside. We want something to rely on. If we rely on the three jewels and the teachings of the lineage, we have something stable. As it says in the first prayer that we read when we do practices like the Big Rigdzin: KYAB NAE LU ME KON CHOG RIN PO CHE. This precious refuge will not cheat us. Why does the guru not cheat us? Why is Padma Sambhava reliable? Because he has the nature of the three kayas.

The *dharmakaya* is emptiness, openness, the ungraspability of the presence of the natural state. This never changes, is never an object which can be seen and grasped. At all times and in all places it is the same. And so it is completely reliable.

The *sambhogakaya* is the quality of the immediacy of all manifestation. It's described as *lhun drub*, as the way in which all the richness, all the potential, all the possibilities are there without being

artificially constructed. This has the quality of clarity. That is to say it's not full of problems to be solved, it's not something you have to work at making sense of, it is just immediate. This is like the quality of the reflection in the mirror. As soon as something is in front of the mirror, the reflection is there.

The third aspect is the *nirmanakaya*, which is the effortless display of energy participating in the world for the benefit of others. This energy is not located in limited ego-function but flows directly from the dharmakaya and the sambhogakaya. It has the same nature of openness and emptiness. And although the form of the *nirmanakaya* changes according to circumstances, it is unchanging in that its ground is this ceaseless connection, integration, with openness.

However, we ourselves and all other beings are unreliable no matter how good-hearted we try to be. The basis of our ordinary, human identity is self-concern, me-first. We are also caught up in the complexities of our lives. We have family responsibilities, work responsibilities. If we fall in love with someone, we may feel our heart is very open to them but actually our lives are not very available. Our time is already dedicated to many different activities. So the heart may feel completely open but our being in the world is already tied in knots and given over to others. One of the things that people often say when they are in a relationship is, *"But what about me? I know you're very busy, I know you love your work but — what about me? Yup, we do have time together....but I want more. If I had more, I would be more happy. It's because I love you that I want to change your life. And if you were to awaken to the fact of how good I am, then you could just be with me all the time and then we would be completely happy!"*

Relationships: The answer does not lie in the object

But the real teaching of the Buddha is: ***the answer does not lie in the object***. If you meet a human being and you get very close to them, you can spend all night, kissing them, and cuddling them, and having sex with them but in the morning, you have to get up and you go to work, or whatever, and you leave them. You might remember them from time-to-time but then you think, *"Oh, I have to concentrate on my work."*

Now, when we do the practice with Padma Sambhava or any of the meditation deities, it's different. We start by praising Padma Sambhava, by admiring his good qualities; we make elaborate visualisation; we invite Padma Sambhava to arrive; we recite the mantra and receive the blessing, the purification; we receive the initiation through the OM AH HUNG, and then the guru dissolves into us and we dissolve into the guru. We go into the state of the complete openness of the dharmakaya. In this state, many forms and so on, manifest (This is the quality of the sambhogakaya), then we do the tsog and eat some food in the manner of the *nirmanakaya*. Then we get up and we walk about, and everything we see, and everything we hear is the guru, all our own thoughts are the mind of the guru. We are not standing in relation to an object. We are not remembering somebody else. We are being truly ourselves through the non-dual inseparability of our nature and that of Padma Sambhava.

This is why taking refuge is more helpful than putting all your energy into relationships with other people. That clearly doesn't mean you shouldn't be related to other people. But if you look for something from others that they can't give you will be endlessly frustrated. Experiencing ourselves being with someone else with all the emotions that that brings up, love, hate, jealousy, pride, can be merely the turbulence of a human life lived with passion. We are likely to be lifted up and cast down without much clarity. However, all of this is also incredibly useful for practice, for it shows how we manifest in this realm. We have human bodies, we are going to have sexual attractions and so on. Not to lose the refuge means, on a profound level, not to lose the view of the practice. So if we find ourselves over-invested in another person, wanting more from them than they can give, feeling sad and upset if they're not there, developing all kind of fantasies about how life might be, the key thing

to recognise is: this is my mind. *I am creating this by my identification, involvement, attachment.* It's not only the great novelists and film-makers who can imagine all sorts of things, but I myself, and Dostoevsky! All these stories I can imagine about how it will be and what will happen.

A karmic movie is running in our head, starring the five poisons

We are persecuted by the creativity of our own mind. If you recognise it, the ground of this creativity is the dharmakaya. Everything that arises from this is presenting itself, manifesting but without inherent self-nature.

Manifestation arises in the manner of a dream, like the reflections of the moon on water—it is there but not real. It's like going to the cinema. If we can recognise this is what is happening: a karmic movie is running in our head, starring the five poisons. The nature of the five poisons is the five wisdoms, the difference between these two possibilities is whether we see the ground of emptiness or not. So if we run a story of love and longing in ourselves, if we fall into it, it will start grinding us and make us sad and upset and confused.

But if we can relax a little bit and just think, *"Oh, this is how my karma manifests. There are many hooks here to hold me but if I just relax...!"* then you can experience directly in your own mind the nature of attachment, the nature of anger, pride, jealousy.

In terms of the five poisons, the first one to recognise is *ti mug* (gti.mug.) which is mental dullness or stupidity. This is the quality of belief in entities, taking things as strongly real. This displays itself as the felt sense, *"This is my story, and I don't like it!"* To release it, we have to experience: *"This is a story which is arising for me."* It is something arising for me, it is the immediacy of my experience, but it is not telling me about me. 'I love him.' Who loves him? Who is the one who is doing the loving? 'Meeee, because that's why I cry, because I love him.'

This is stupid. The one who does the loving is the integration of the open dimension of mind and the arising of energy; energy which arises as subject and object. That is to say, stupidity, or *timug*, is linked to *dag zin* (bdag 'dzin), to grasping at an inherent self, which is the point where we separate self and other. *"But I don't want to separate self and other! I love him! If only he was with me, we would never be separated again!"* This is stupidity's method of trying to solve the problem of duality.

Yab-yum: subject and object arise together

From the point of view of non-duality, subject and object always arise together. This is why, in some of the thangkas we see the deities in the form of yab-yum, of male and female joined together. From the very beginning, subject and object have been inseparable, they are always moving in an elaborate dance of revealing many, many different modes. Subject is never apart from object, but subject has very little power to control what sort of object arises.

In buddhism, we believe that what arises for us is generated by our karma, not by our will to power. It is an illusion to think we can live life on our own terms. The purification of stupidity is called *dharmadhatu wisdom*. The wisdom of the dharmadhatu means the state of awareness, the state of presence, in which one directly recognises the spaciousness of one's own being as inseparable from the ground of all phenomena.

When we recognise this, everything that is occurring, ourselves and others, is moving together. It's not that I am living here inside my skin-bag, centred in myself, looking out at you, but that there is no centre, no personal inner world, just ceaseless movement within an infinity of space. The Tibetan word *kyil khor* (dkyil 'khor) for mandala unpacks as *kyil wa*, a spinning point, and *khor*, a circle. The idea of a mandala is it has really no centre and no circumference. Another term for a mandala is *zhal*

ye khang (zhal yas khang) which means an immeasurable, or infinite, house; a manifestation which forever eludes incorporation in our organising concepts of limited, predictable entities.

So here, of course, we sit in our individual bodies, and we have the experience of other people around us. To recognise the real nature is to see these two manifesting at the same time from the same ground.

Awareness itself, the mind itself, has no top or bottom, back or front but it manifests as energy. This energy arises through us, through the centre of our body as a channel with branches coming off it from just below the navel, and *chakras* at various points. This energy gives rise to our various kinds of experience, because moment-by-moment everything is dynamic. Our bones are dynamic, our blood is dynamic, our brains are dynamic, our endocrine system is dynamic. There is nothing fixed and static in the human body.

This movement which is occurring all the time appears to be centred in us and indeed the quality of its movement gives us the sense of being ourselves. The sense of the continuity of our existence, has the equality of something *showing* itself, again and again. Our self is always different and yet appears to be the same. When ignorance arises, we grasp at this energy and see it as the proof of our concrete, reliable, sense of self. Then, from that position, we tend to see other people as isolated entities, concrete and self-existing.

(Not) taking refuge in lovers and relationships

Then, wandering in the world, by chance we meet a person and think, *“Oh, this is the real, separate, concrete entity that I need to be with. There is something unique and special about them, and I need to be with them.”* It is true, all beings are not the same. We can't be with everyone we meet. It's very rare energetically to find someone we can be fully open with. But when we meet a person like that and we experience the resonance and all the joy and fulfilment that it brings, there are always these two possibilities: the first, the dharma possibility, is to stay present in the moment and experience that quality as something immediate, radiant and ungraspable. It will last as long as it lasts. While it's there, the best thing to do is to be with it. If you're with someone always planning about the future, then when the person leaves, you will be sad because when they were there, you weren't with them.

In England, there are many women over the age of thirty-five, looking for a man to have babies with, and. Men who are available can be completely terrified of these women because they have a clear sense, 'You don't want *me*, you just want to have babies!' 'No, no, but I want *you* to have babies with.' There is a lot of pressure because the man feels oppressed that he is going to be constrained in his existence, which is true. And part of this is because, when the woman wants to have a baby she wants something reliable and secure. But people are *not* very secure. There is often a lot of tension in that situation.

How to inhabit that area, of living in the world, with the necessity of feeding and clothing children and making a domestic life, within a sense of awareness? We work from the fundamental point of the non-duality or non-difference of samsara and nirvana. All that appears as worldly forms is actually immediately the quality of emptiness. So at the heart of every situation is the need to be *living in the manner of a dream* — not investing the momentary arisings which you call your 'self' as something solidly real, not over-investing the momentary, transforming apparitions we call 'object', as something essentially real.

Seeing the Five Poisons and the Five Wisdoms in our relationships

By practising in this way, desire then becomes a heightened sensitivity to the actual presence of the other person. This is the wisdom, in Tibetan called *so so tog pa'i ye she* (Tib. so sor rtog pa'i ye shes)

which means a wisdom or a quality of presence which sees things precisely as they are. So, when you really love someone and you become very aware of the smell of their hair, the colour of their eyes, the quality of their skin on various parts of their body. You become awakened to the shining, radiant way in which the world reveals itself. The quality of the object, the other person, is that they have awakened this sensitivity in you.

The key thing to recognise is, 'Ah! This is the quality of my mind, open and empty from the very beginning.' This attention, this sensitivity, this quality of really seeing what is there, doesn't belong just with this one person whom I love, but I can take this to the whole universe, I can treat the whole world as the beloved, being in my senses and fully responsive to what is occurring.

In the same way, maybe you've been a bit lonely and sad and you meet someone and you feel loved for a while, and then they leave and then you feel very sad again, but in the moment when you were loved if you were able to be loved and you felt the confirmation of the quality and value of your existence — if you stay with that feeling, 'I am valuable. I am lovable' and you take that out into the world and think, 'Well, there is no difference between me and others.' then we can see *all* beings are lovable, all beings have value.

In Tibetan this is called *nyam nyi ye she* [Tib. mnyam nyid ye shes], the awareness, or presence, of the equality or evenness of all phenomena, of all beings. In that way, pride is transformed into a pride in the whole of existence. Thus one can experience how what can be limiting, is also a path of liberation.

In the same way, with jealousy, when we become unhappy that someone else is getting what we want, if we can release ourselves from this thought "What about me?" to think that the good thing or the happiness is now being experienced by someone else, then we can focus on that part of the **Seven-part practice** called *je su'i rang wa* [Tib. rjes su yi rang ba] which rejoices in the good fortune of others. And in that way, by loosening up the intensity of our self-referential neediness, we can experience everything in the world as it functions. In Tibetan this is called *cha drub ye she* [Tib. bya grub ye shes] which is the wisdom or presence which accomplishes all things. That is to say, that we see ourselves as being in a world where many different things are going on, where there are many different causal factors, and by relaxing and being more spacious, we see the broader picture, the wider movement of forces, rather than being stuck in our self-concern.

The fifth of the poisons is anger or irritation, which of course, often arises in relationships. Here — although we're talking about love relationships — the same applies to any kind of object which can be used as a kind of false refuge; where we fantasize that something will be reliable in a way that, by its very nature, it cannot be. So, if we love someone and we get close to them, when they do things that we don't like, we feel irritated by them and might think, "*I hate you!*" Love and hate go very closely together. So how can it be that someone I love is now someone I hate? We say love is blind. Very often when we fall in love we enter into a fantasy in which we imagine the person to be rather better than they are, and then we have a rather rude awakening to the fact of the limitations of the other. If we are able to see the person as they are and to learn to accept these limitations, then the relationship becomes viable. But often we want to hold onto our image of how we thought the person was, because that's what we really fell in love with, our fantasy of how we *felt* they were, and then we feel angry that we are being cheated because this person refuses to be the one that we know they really are!

The purification of anger is called *me long ye she* [Tib. Me long ye shes] or mirror-like wisdom. Anger is seen as being like a mirror because it sees things very clearly. We see the person as they are. Seeing them as they are, if we can also simultaneously see our projections onto them for what they are, then we can see that the fault lies in ourselves, that we didn't see them clearly from the beginning.

So often people say, “*But I thought I could trust you!*” But **why**? This is a sentient being wandering in samsara. Everybody wants to be loved, so they will present themselves a little bit polished. For those of you who have been in India, you know that when you go to the market to buy some fruit, the person selling them shows you the shiny ripe ones but tries to slip some bad ones in your bag. It’s not a good idea to be naïve in an Indian market, and it’s not a good idea to be naïve in the market of love, or in life.

So finding a real refuge allows us to participate in life as it is. Understanding emptiness, starting to live in the manner of emptiness, will not stop you having an ordinary life, falling in love, raising children, having a job, and so on. It’s something which you can integrate with your ordinary existence. You don’t have to renounce samsara and push it away. You couldn’t do that anyway, but what we can do is try to switch the light on and see how we cheat ourselves because we don’t want the world to be the way it is. Becoming an adult practitioner of dharma means to work with things as they are.

Okay, shall we take a half-hour break there?

Faith and emptiness

Now we will look at faith in relation to emptiness. Faith is very important because faith means trusting beyond the limit of your knowledge — it involves a kind of leap. Of course, through study of the dharma, through understanding the ideas, you can develop a basis, an intellectual basis, for having faith. You can see why it would be reasonable to have such a faith but nonetheless, faith involves entering into something that one doesn’t know.

Knowledge as support of Knowledge as mastery

It’s very important, I think, to separate two aspects of knowledge. There is knowledge, or information, as a **support** — knowledge which feeds *into* a situation but where the situation itself is decided by the quality of being present in it, and working with it.

For example, you might decide to cook a meal according to a recipe you find in a book. The book will decide the ingredients you need, but when you go to the market you encounter specific tomatoes, a specific chicken, a specific onion. You take these specific ingredients home and you prepare them according to the recipe, and you can maybe trust that the recipe is a good one, but you might also want to taste it. Because you know that people you are cooking for like more or less salt or more or less herbs, and so on. So, in that way, the skill and the long experience of the cook who has written the recipe is a support for you living in the embodied knowledge of who you are cooking for. But **you** have to make the decision about what is the correct, finished product.

It would be a foolish egoism not to rely on recipes. The world is full of very useful information. Many people know many things and they can provide us with tools; but according to the Buddha’s teaching on karma, we are responsible for our own actions. Even if the tools are reliable, **we** are the ones who must be present in the moment. And that presence is not just a presence in oneself but it’s a presence, **as** oneself, in the environment. This means that one is always responding.

The other way of approaching information is to store it into oneself, so that one increases one’s own confidence to a point of **mastery**. It’s of course very important to be competent at things that you do, maybe like driving a car or using a computer. If we take the example of driving a car, we could say that a good driver is one who doesn’t make mistakes. But in driving a car, there are many other kind of drivers who you will meet. Some of these drivers are crazy. So, a good driver is one who doesn’t have an accident when in the presence of crazy drivers. That is to say, the quality is

relational rather than inherent. The blind side of mastery is to imagine that one has arrived at a place where one can just be oneself without having to adapt to the circumstances.

Faith however, is about participating into situations that we don't know, and so is not just a quality of a *beginner* but one necessary at every stage of existence, for we never know what's going to happen. Sometimes we have an intuition that something is going to happen but the precise form of events is determined by more than one can plan for. Therefore part of our proceeding is to walk lightly in the world. To have faith that we will be able to respond to the situation, linked with a very precise attention to the details of this situation, and not relying too much on predictions about how it should be or how *we* should be.

Who is the Buddha? Views of the different yantras.

Buddha When we take refuge and we develop our faith in the Buddha, who is the Buddha? At first, we can say the Buddha is somebody who lived a long time ago and who had particular experiences and started what we call buddhism, and we can see statues or paintings of the Buddha, like that one on the wall over there, and after while we can recognise the form and can say, : *"Oh, this is the Buddha."*

Then, if some new people come here to this little gumpa, we can say, *"Oh, this is the Buddha,"* and tell them some little story about that. But is *that* the Buddha? The Buddha died a long time ago. From the point-of-view of theravadin practice he has gone into nirvana. He has changed his address. All we can do is go on pilgrimage in India, to the places where he last lived. So is the Buddha really gone? No forwarding address? This is the theravadin belief. This is a belief that having attained *mahaparinirvana*, 'the blowing out of the lamp', there is only peace.

This is not the mahayana view, so immediately we have not just one buddhism but buddhisms. According to the mahayana belief the Buddha has been living from beginningless time in the palace of Tushita, and from that realm he sent down an emanation who in the manner of a dream performed the twelve acts of a Buddha, and he did that without leaving Tushita. So this is better for us because if we want to know where the Buddha is, we know he is in Tushita. So we can pray to Buddha, *"You who live in Tushita, please do something for us."*

In the tantric tradition, we believe that the Buddha showed many different practices, taught many different teachings, for example *kalachakra* and so on, and these teachings connect us directly with the buddhas. When we receive initiation into the mandala of the particular deity, not only do we know *where* that buddha is, but we have a method of making a relationship. The function of the initiation is to create something like a telephone connection with the buddha realm. By doing the mantra, you dial the number again and again and again, and eventually you get through to the Buddha Telephone Exchange, and then you have a little chat. Often the line is not very good so you can hardly hear what the Buddha is saying, so then you have to dial some more!

In this kind of practice we have faith that through this connection and *through* the practice the living presence of the Buddha becomes available to us, not as an abstract idea, not as a historical fact, but as a communication and a relationship which is transformative of our own nature.

So, to review: in the theravadin sense, we have faith that the Buddha existed, that he taught the dharma, that he was enlightened, and that's the basis for our faith. By practising the dharma he taught, we hope to gain some benefit and purify our natures, and maybe, one day, realise the state of an *arhat*, one who has overcome restrictions

On the level of the mahayana, we believe that the Buddha manifested and showed the gaining of enlightenment in the manner of a dream, and that he transmitted the teachings of emptiness. So we bow profoundly to the Buddha out of respect, and that respect manifests in our devoted, disciplined

practice of his teachings. This would be the system, for example, in a chan or a zen monastery where the practice is to realise the emptiness taught by the Buddha, particularly in the *Heart Sutra*, and through that recognition of emptiness to awaken to one's buddha nature. There is the sense that the Buddha himself is gone but he is present in the teaching and through relating to the teaching by clear practice you can find your own buddha-nature. By this, one can experience that the Buddha has never left.

When we practise according to tantra, we believe that the Buddha is immediately present. In the beginning of our practice, we say the first prayer KYAB NAE LU ME ... and then we recite the *Seven-line Prayer* three times. The first time as a description, the second time as an evocation, an awakening and a welcoming, and the third time with the sense that Padma Sambhava is actually present and is sending rays of light to us and is in communication with us. This is not an abstract theory, but through the intensity of faith, faith in the power of the initiation to give the connection, faith in the maintenance of the vows following the initiation and faith in the practice, we come into a direct experience.

Ritual practice and mudras

Which is why doing the ritual practices is very important. When I come here, I don't usually do the ritual practices with you because our time is very short and perhaps giving some explanation is more useful, but the practices themselves are very, very powerful and very helpful. To have the practice as a tool in one's life, as a vehicle for one's organisation of daily existence is very, very helpful. These kinds of ritual practices are called *trin lae* (phrin las). *Trin lae* means activity, in particular, enlightening or enlightened activity.

We are very active beings. We don't stop even for a moment. The ordinary Tibetan word for sentient beings is *dro wa* which means going, a moving person. Through the practice, the conditioning activity of samsara is transformed into the liberating activity of nirvana.

Tantra works to transform the energy of samsara and make it a method for the realisation of nirvana. It's not trying to renounce activity but to transform it as it operates. So, when we do the ritual practice, we do many hand gestures or mudras and these gestures, which we repeat again and again, are ways of showing the body in movement. The idea of mudras is that they demonstrate a dharma intention through the body. In the traditions of Indian dance, mudras are frequently used, as they are in Indonesian temple dancing and in Nepali temple dancing. The use of mudras in a puja, is related to the tradition of dance as narrative. These are ways of the body inhabiting space in an intentional manner, using shape and rhythm to influence the field of emergence.

Ignorance is also in the body

Often we think of ignorance as a kind of mental experience, a lack of knowledge, a cognitive defect, but ignorance is very much in the body as well. The bodies that we have are very wonderful and very beautiful. They have an enormous capacity for lyrical flow. Recently, I was looking at a program on the television, of Sylvie Guillem, who's a very wonderful ballet dancer, and she was dancing with two men, rolling across their backs, and it was like a wave of the sea or wonderful clouds in the sky. She is able to dance in this way, not just because she has a very disciplined dancer's body but because she carries, in her heart, the spirit of dance. That is to say, she had the experience of life as gesture and movement, of fall and return, of the pulsation which is ceaseless.

It is very helpful to watch dancing because then you can see how dull and stupid your own body is. We walk heavily across the world, clump, clump, clump, we fall down and slump into a chair, hang with a very bad posture, and this then extends to how we eat, *slurp, slurp, slurp*, so we live in a body of assumption, a body of habit. One that is internally determined rather than as an integrated aspect of our communicative participation. This is a quality of ignorance. We don't take refuge in the

body. The body has a spine. The spine is the most beautiful thing... When we attack our spine, when we insult our spine, we destabilise the basis for our existence in the world. I spend most of my life sitting down, talking with people, and often in chairs in the hospital that are not very good, so I become very aware of how my spine can start to lock, and it's very clear to me that the more my spine is locked and I am moving in a rigid way, the narrower my experience of the world becomes. Maintaining the flexibility of the spine is very important because then it will support you in your sitting meditation practice. That means that the weight of the body can be hanging on the skeleton, means the muscles can relax and the breath will move more easily.

When we don't do that, we feed in to the body as ignorance. The body becomes dull, our breath is diminished, the subtle channels moving through the body become knotted and our gestures become very habitual, we stand in the same way, we make the same movements. This is to restrict and diminish our incredible capacity to move in many different ways. One of the great benefits of having children is that they make you get down on the ground again. To look after small children is a very physical experience, it brings you back into the body.

Part of faith is to examine: *how do I live in ways which restrict my potential?* And to look into the dharma, to see that learning some mudras is not particularly about whether you can make the mudra the right way, or not, but it is to come into a sense of the body as movement, as lyrical movement.

C R Lama and the body

You could see that with C.R. Lama. He was very beautiful in the movement of his body. He had a very clear and powerful aesthetic sensibility. He would wear, often, very strange clothes. Somebody would give him some funny, orange-coloured thing. I remember in Wales, he used to wear a woman's peach nylon negligée. He looked very beautiful because he was completely at home in himself, he wasn't thinking, *"Oh, what do people think of me from the outside,"* he was just at home in, *"Oh, I like this!"*

One of the qualities of presence in embodiment is freedom from anxiety. Anxiety in the body manifests from the inside-out and from the outside-in. If we don't like our body, if we feel it's the wrong shape, then we exist in relationship to it rather than being present as it. So, when we do physical practices like prostrations and so on, these are ways of helping us come back into a very immediate sense of the body as movement, the body as expression. The body is not a thing, so when we have the experience I have a body and turn it into a thing which is to be manipulated, then we worry about the body this is a way of being ignorant. However, you can *be* your body and you can have an awareness of its aches and pains and whatever, but integrate that into your presence. If you understand the central principle of this then every activity can be your yoga.

If you start to adopt the presence of the body as the energy of the dharmakaya, that your body is indeed inseparable from Padma Sambhava's body, then you should treat it with respect. Eat good food, don't abuse your body, and experience your body as radiance.

When we look at these paintings of Padma Sambhava there is a sense of his occupying his space, of being aligned in himself and open to the world. It is the essence of dance that the line of form should be clean. When you look at the great classical ballet-dancers, they have exquisite line, each aspect of the total movement is harmonious, integrated, creating a synergy of expression. They are not crossed, they are not doubled on themselves, so that they remain in communication with the audience. If you watch ballet then you can see the difference between a dancer who is technically good and a dancer who is really available. If there is too much connection to the body as something to be organised, and the technical skill is based on turning of the attention into the self, then it doesn't flow openly out to the other.

You could see that with C.R. Lama. Even in a wheelchair he was completely centred and very available. So you don't have to have physically a dancer's body, you don't even have to be particularly healthy but it's a way of not abandoning yourself to either contraction or extension.

After initiation, your body is the body of Padma Sambhava. Living as Padma Sambhava means to live with dignity and grace, and from these qualities of grounded-ness, the enjoyment of the richness of the presence of one's experience moving out towards the other, flows easily¹.

When we chant we use many different melodies. We explore the quality of our resonance, our communicative connection, the inseparability of subject and object, through many different tonal variations. So, if we are singing to invite the gods to come, we might do it in a very sweet voice, and if we are doing the practice for the protectors, then we use a more robust tone. The structure of the practice, because it has intentionality of focus, is helping us to see how different situations call on us to manifest in different ways. Don't be just one thing, don't limit yourself.

Being available for others: the four activities

How you are, how you manifest can be manifold. How we truly are is emptiness, the rest is movement.

When we take initiation and we take up the practice, particularly on the basis of the bodhisattva vow, we commit ourselves to be available and to work for the benefit of others. To be available for others is to attend to their needs and to light their way according to the steps they take. In the beginning stages of tantra, we practise the first two activities pacifying and increasing, helping to ensure that difficult circumstances decrease in force, and working to develop the increase of positive factors. This is to give people what they want.

Then, as we develop clarity, we can begin to give them what they need by employing inspiring awe and destruction. To be awesome is to be present as a person who, through the richness and the intensity of their being, can influence people directly. C.R. Lama exemplified this. One of his names, his *terton* name, was Zilnon Lingpa; Zilnon means controlling through radiance. It means the brightness and power of how he would immediately control other people. Those who knew him could see that he would do that very easily.

The fourth activity of destroying means to be able to disrupt inharmonious energies, to disrupt them in a way that reveals their ground of emptiness. This is impossible if you don't live in emptiness yourself. As long as you experience yourself as a solid person, being aggressive or violent or destructive towards other people is only harmful. When you start to see the co-emergence of all things as the radiance of the dharmadhatu, then intentional movement in that sphere with strong energy can shift a pattern without harm.

Where do I belong? Practice is my true country

In the practice of tantra our mind has many activities. There are many visualisations, there is a lot to remember, and in the course of doing the **Big Rigdzin** practice, our mind experiences many different moods. As you go through the practice you become very small, then you become very big, you become very powerful, you become very fragile. Recognising this, being present with this, you can really see the nature of your mind.

If I am all of these, what am I really? You could try to make a very big sandwich out of it. You could say, "*I am this and this and this and this and this.*" but that will give you indigestion. Actually we are

¹ See ***Being Guru Rinpoche: A Commentary on Nuden Dorje's Terma Vidyadhara Guru Sadhana***. James Low (Trafford, 2006) ISBN: 978-1412084079

none of these and we all of these. Some people have a resistance to entering into tantric practice, they feel, *"Oh, this belongs to another culture, it has nothing to do with me."* But then we have the question, *"Well, who are you?"* Are you Polish? What is Polish? Are the people who live in the north of Poland the same as the people in the south of Poland? Are you the best kind of Polish person? Maybe some people are not *really* Polish — but they have a Polish passport! So, if you say, *"I am Polish,"* does this mean anything at all?

If you think, *"Well, I am a man,"* *"I am a woman,"* what does this mean? If you think, *"I am a man,"* you look around, you see there are all sorts of other men, you think, *"Oh, I'm not like them!"* Well, if I'm not like them and they are men, what does it mean to be a man? So, in that way, we can see that the categories of identity which we create for ourselves and we inhabit, are not very clear, not very well defined. So, because I am Polish, and maybe I had a catholic education, does that mean I shouldn't practise this foreign thing? We establish our identity by excluding everything else. And this makes the identity we establish is merely relative, without true inherent definition.

If the practice helps me find out who I really am, then in fact it is my true country, maybe the mandala of Padma Sambhava is really where I belong. But that might sound very foreign and strange and that is where faith is very important. You have to check out whether the people who talk about these things seem completely mad or strange. Is this some strange sect, some kind of narrow grouping that wants to control you? I don't think buddhism is a sect, because the price of entry is not your identity, but the illusions that you have about your identity.

When we identify ourselves with the deity and say the mantra and we do all the visualisations, we are intentionally re-cultivating our mind. Like a garden that has been full of weeds for a long time we are clearing out these old assumptions and habits and we are planting very beautiful flowers. And especially as we get a bit older, this is very, very nice because as you get older the body gets a bit fat and heavy but now, in an instant, we can become sixteen years of age, sitting on a lotus flower, dressed in wonderful clothes, no need for plastic surgery! Very nice.

Who we think we are, is built up from habit and assumption. These habits are driven by the circumstances of life and by old karmic tendencies. So much of who we are has arrived for us without us making a conscious choice about it. When we are small, we do what big people tell us. We get sent to the local school. We don't choose very much, and then later we make choices but they're within the very restricted frame of reference we're already caught in. Taking refuge is the possibility of really making an intentional decision about identity, and particularly in relation to tantra, it's to take on a new identity with an understanding of the importance of this, as a means of removing the obscurations of ignorance, and so it is fundamentally an act of freedom.

Butterlamp practice

This evening at eight o'clock there will be a practice for the butterlamps. There are also lamps that were burned earlier which need to be cleaned and the morning lamps to be lit. The practice of burning butterlamps is very strong in this lineage. It's used in conjunction with a prayer written by C.R. Lama, a very wonderful prayer which gives an explanation of how to transform one's own identity. If you've never participated with butterlamps it's a very good thing to do and you can continue to practice at home with just one lamp.

One of the functions of these lamps that was very strong for Rinpoche was the idea that it promotes peace and harmony in the world. Clearly, we live in a time when there is a lot of conflict. The powerful forces of the three core poisons easily give rise to war, as they are doing now, in the Middle East. The practice of burning lamps, making visualisations and offering them to all the buddhas, and then dedicating the merit is a good way of trying to participate in world peace.

The practice of butterlamps is also a very physical practice. One takes the lamp and makes the wick, inserts the wick, fills the melted butter. Then they have to be lit. They burn down and become empty and then they have to be cleaned out and polished ready for the next time. And in that process, you can reflect on impermanence. You can recite the practices of Dorje Sempa while you clean the butterlamps, and link to other practices.

It also helps to see how good deeds – the offering of lamps – gives rise to the dross of the soot. It is important to remember that the world we are living in is a world where everything is mixed. In order to build this temple, many insects were killed. Little worms got cut in half. That's what happens. It's very difficult in this world to do a simple good action that is good from the beginning to the middle to the end, so when we see the soot that comes from burning the lamp it also reminds us of the complexity of our existence, and how we should be very careful of simple solutions.

In relation to meditation, on the most profound level, everything is very simple. Everything is very direct but as we manifest in the world, movement becomes very complicated. In buddhism people spend a lot of time practising in order to gain enlightenment one day, as if it's going to be the final point. But from the point of view of dzogchen, the real work begins once we have the experience of some spaciousness. It's through being in the world with others, having all the complex interactions that go on, that we get a sense of how our narrowness, our neurosis, our rigidity blocks us in relation to what is there.

It's very difficult to know what is right and what is wrong and that's why there is no buddhist fundamentalism. Buddhism is not evangelical; it is not dogmatic. It's very difficult for us to tell other people what they should do because abstract formulations of right and wrong don't fit into the lived complexity of an actual situation. Our practice is a practice of awareness, which means you have to be there in order to respond. You can't work it out theoretically.

A Dzogchen practice

Now we will focus on a simple dzogchen practice which is based on the idea of our nature being uncontaminated. As we looked briefly yesterday, *the mind is like a mirror*. The mirror itself is always empty. Because the mirror doesn't have anything inside itself, it is able to show the reflections that arise in it. For example, if we look in this room we see it is laid out in a particular way, so if we were to decide that the most important thing to do is immediately a big circledance, we would have many problems because we would all hold hands and move around and bang into the tables and fall over. This room is not made for circledancing. Something with furniture in it is not available for everything. The mirror has no furniture in it, it's a completely open space so it welcomes everything.

Our mind is like this mirror. It has no furniture in it but we are used to experiencing ourselves as being like a room with plenty of furniture in it. We have our familiar thoughts that we return to. We have a sense of fixity to our body, to our memories, for they are like comfortable chairs we are used to sitting in. However, the difference between the furniture in our mind and the furniture in this room is that thoughts, feelings, memories, sensations are very quick to display their impermanence. Mental phenomena don't last long, so the thought returns. Each time it returns it is there, just fresh in itself. When we grasp at the returning thought as if it was the same as the previous thought it resembles, this grasping confirms the substantial nature of the furniture. When we stay with the freshness of the arising of the thought it comes, and it goes, comes and goes. Memory comes and goes. A sensation that feels like my shoulder or my head, if you stay with it, it's gone. You stay with it, it's gone. But if *it* stays with *us* it convinces us that it is enduring.

The practice is very simple. We just sit, relaxed, as we are. We let our gaze rest in the space in front of us. This space is empty, it doesn't have anything in it, it's inseparable from infinite space. And just

very quietly, we breathe out into this space. We don't need to make any sound, we just do it in a very simple way, just breathing out deeply three times, release the furniture, release the identification, the pre-occupation, and then we just stay with whatever is there.

If you stay present you will see everything is moving. When you are grasping and building up pictures many things seem to be the same. Stay fully present in the moment without chasing after the past or looking into the future. We sit like this for some time.

In terms of the practice, sit very relaxed, gaze is open. All of these thoughts — good, bad, right, wrong — just breathe them out, and sit for some time. Just allow things to be as they are. That includes everything on the object side and the subject side. You may have strange feelings, thoughts, sensations and you might feel bored, or stupid, or that it seems meaningless. It's very important just to sit, open to all of these experiences because we each have a strong history of trying to impose order. We are used to living life on our own terms, of making our own meaning, and when we relax into this state, we're letting go of that. Many things that arise are *not* meaningful for us. But, as in the offering prayer in the **Big Rigdzin** practice — when we say that we offer this food that we are going to take, free of any ideas of clear or dirty — in the same way we offer hospitality, we offer space, to whatever thoughts and experiences that arise, whether they seem useful or not useful, meaningful or not meaningful.

The prayer of Rigdzin Godem in the **Big Rigdzin** practice begins JIG TEN NANG WA, "*I know worldly appearances are illusory*". The prayer explains that the mind is not made by good thoughts, good activities, and it's not destroyed or obscured or contaminated by bad thoughts. But we feel that our ego is made by good thoughts, because we want to be good people. And when we have bad thoughts, or difficult thoughts, or confusion, or nothing at all, we often feel undermined, or destroyed, or contaminated. This is a sign that we have fallen into attachment to that which is arising, as if it was an x-ray of ourselves, a photo of ourselves. This is the view of samsara.

From the very beginning the mind is empty. The things that arise in the mind don't show the mind itself, they just show what is arising and passing. If you confuse the two together, you get a lot of pain. Relax into the unchanging freshness of the mind, and let everything that arises go free by itself. This is something we can practise now, in the future, always...

Question about dualism

Are there any questions about that before we begin?

Question: Patrul Rinpoche in one of his texts said that practitioners on the tantric path have only two choices, one is pure dimension and realisation and the other is going to hell. Could you explain a little bit about it?

James: It's not exactly linked with the practice! From the point of view of dzogchen there is no difference between hell and the pure dimension.

Just very briefly. In what is now Iran there arose the tradition of the followers of Mani who developed a very strong dualistic view of the separation of good and bad, sky and earth, and so on. This kind of thinking is pervasive both culturally as it spread out from Iran; and structurally as it is the way the mind functions when not in presence. Within one level of understanding, which is the ordinary, general level of understanding, if there is 'up' there has to be 'down', if there is 'left' there has to be 'right', if there is 'hot' there has to be 'cold'. If you're not in *nirvana* then you're in *samsara*.

From the point of view of non-duality this is not true, but as long as we are trapped in duality it *is* true, and, generally speaking, the higher you aim the further you can fall. Rather than terrifying

oneself through thinking about hells, one should perhaps see it as a strong sign that something is at stake. Life is short, confusion is always available. The supportive factors are very fragile. If Rinpoche was still alive, life would be very different for us. Rinpoche is gone. This is like a cold wind. This cold wind can blow everything away.

Therefore we have to hold very strongly, very clearly, in a very determined way to the teaching, to the samaya. If we don't do that then the winds of karma will set us blowing hither and thither. But also, when you come into the tantric tradition you make relationship with many kind of beings and some of these beings are not so nice. If you like, they may punish you a little bit, but sometimes the main issue is the loss of the good.

James' hitchhiking

When I was young I used to hitchhike a lot and often I would be hitchhiking in the middle of the night and it would be quite cold, and then a big truck would be coming and it would drive by. As it went by it created a big wind, making me even more cold! So, imagine you are on this road to enlightenment, hitchhiking. Here comes the big Buddha truck but the truck driver can see *no samaya* on your forehead, so he accelerates a bit and aims his wheels for the puddle so, as this buddha-chance goes by, you're soaked, you're very cold, and you're all alone. This is why Kalu Rinpoche said, "Accumulate good karma." Get your ticket for the train, for the plane, don't just try hitchhiking. You buy your ticket by daily practice, keeping your vows, and so on.

The four kinds of faith

Faith of longing

Traditionally, one of the ways that we support ourselves is by faith. In the Tibetan tradition there are many discussions of the importance of faith and different systems of categorising it. But frequently, four kinds of faith are talked of. The first is called *doe pai dae pa* [Tib. 'dod pa'i dad pa] which means the faith of longing or desire. This is the kind of faith that arises when you feel that the Buddha or Padma Sambhava or the teacher has some good qualities, and you would like to have these qualities. It is a desire to be like them, to have what they have. It is also feeling a desire to be *with* them, so it's a kind of leaning forward, a moving towards the other. For example, in the **Big Rigdzin** practice we have these verses build around the refrain, *lama khyen no*. *Khyeno* means 'to know about'; it means "Lama, know about me," which also implies, "Lama, care for me." So, it's an expression of faith: "*I need you to attend to me, I need your gaze upon me, I need not to be separated from you.*"

This kind of faith is like the faith of *bhakti* in the hindu tradition. 'Bhakti devotion' means to make God the centre of your life, to live in constant ecstatic remembrance and evocation. The intensity of devotion unifies the transcendent and immanent modes of God.

The idea of devotion as something that takes you out of yourself, is found in many religions. In the Tibetan tradition they say you should pray so that the hairs on your body stand up, and that tears fall from your eyes. You can pray until you become unconscious, because when we pray we put our hands together in front of our heart and bring our energy together in the centre of our being. When you pray with intensity, the separated energy of the body comes together in the heart. The separation of the lunar and solar energy, of the mother and father energy, all the polarities which create the structure of our ordinary identity, collapse into the heart.

It is very helpful, especially in a place like this, to go off by yourself into the forest and really pray from the heart to (Chimed Rigdzin) Rinpoche and Padma Sambhava, saying the Seven-line Prayer especially, again and again and again. Feel like a small child who has lost its mother. Feel yourself like a person dying, about to be blown away by the winds of karma. ***Without you I am nothing. What can I do without you? You are worth more to me than the whole world.*** With that we develop one-

pointed attention to the object of our prayer, and continue and continue until the whole world falls away, and there is only the force of this prayer. This is a very strong tradition from C.R. Lama; it's one he practised and encouraged us to do a lot in India.

This morning we were looking a bit at romantic love. One version of the history of romantic love in Europe is that when the crusaders went to the Middle East they came across the sufi songs where God was addressed as 'The Beloved', the unattainable one who was yet so very near. When they returned to Europe, this motif fed into the troubadour tradition in the south of France, which developed into the courtly tradition of love where the young knights and squires would compose beautiful poetry to the wife of the lord of the manor. Because she was married to the boss, she was the absolutely unattainable woman, and so all the feelings of passion and longing could be expressed. Then, gradually, that tradition spread out into the culture and became our strong romantic tradition which is now pervasive in Europe and America. So what was originally the love of god, becomes the love an ordinary human being.

When we pray to Padma Sambhava we can take all our longing, our yearning for companionship, for safety, for fulfilment, and address them to one who is *truly* worthy. So when troubles come, when difficulties arise, we should pray to Padma Sambhava. Since the Tibetans had to flee Tibet, more and more Tibetan people are praying to Padma Sambhava because in times of difficulty and times of stress, Padma Sambhava is seen as the true refuge of the Tibetan people. And we also, when our lives are very difficult, should say these prayers.

Clear faith

The second kind of faith is called *dang wai dae pa* [Tib. dang ba'i dad pa] or clear faith, the faith which clarifies. This is a kind of faith which develops on the basis of study, or the experience of the teacher, where you have accumulated some knowledge, some experience and you reflect on it, and you can see by testing it through time, that it is reliable, is good. This is faith grounded in the evidence of your own study and experience. This is why, when we hear dharma teachings, we should always try to bring them into the world, to apply to our life situation, to see whether they really help us or not. Then, if we do that, then we can see, *"Oh, yes. This method really works. It makes a difference to me; it makes me stronger, and clearer, so that I am not so lost in my life."*

Open-hearted faith

The third kind of confidence is called *yi che ki dae pa* [Tib. yid ches pa'i dad pa] which means big mind, or open-hearted faith, and this is the kind of faith that makes us feel open to the situation; 'I trust this situation.' With this kind of faith, we don't find obstacles in front of us, we're not doubtful, we're not checking things out any more. We're willing to participate to become part of whatever is happening. Rinpoche always used to say he liked most people, but he didn't like people with broken hands. By that he meant people who always: *"Oh, I'd like to, but..."* and would find some excuse to go backwards. He liked people to go forwards, to go into dharma, to be hungry for dharma, to be greedy for dharma; people who could see what needs to be done and who would do it.

With open-hearted faith, one finds oneself getting involved in things. Of course, in the beginning-stages of dharma, particularly when you are studying, it's very important to be a bit suspicious. You should check things out, like new teachers, or kinds of teaching, you should examine them, examine them through time to see whether they are reliable, whether they bring something of value and not just some fancy intoxication. But once you have tasted for yourself and seen that this is indeed reliable, at that point you should open yourself to be committed without restriction, without having to think about it too much and just be *for* the practice, *for* the engagement.

Irreversible faith

The fourth kind of faith is called *chir mi dog pae dae pa* [Tib. *phyir mi ldog pa'i dad pa*], which means irreversible faith. This is the faith, which proves itself moment by moment, and so has no reason ever to retreat. For example, with the teaching of cause and effect, when you really understand the nature of karma and you live with it moment by moment – or when you really understand the nature of impermanence and you live with it moment by moment – then in every situation, the understanding of cause and effect and impermanence is with you, as you participate in the experience. Through cause and effect you become careful not to take any situation as self-existing because every situation becomes a cause of another situation. What appears to be simple and something just in itself, has consequences and ramifications which you didn't know about.

This means that things are never what they appear to be. Life is not in your control. Remembering this, you undermine, or deconstruct, or release, the false confidence of mastery. Understanding impermanence means you do not invest yourself too strongly in situations but allow the situation to evolve. Sometimes holding back is very important. If you know that situations are impermanent, the faith in that means if bad times come, you don't worry about them because they will not last for ever; if good times come, you don't become too excited because they also will pass. Keeping the mind relaxed and even, you can start to experience the one-taste of all phenomena, the taste of emptiness. However they arise, they are just like reflections in the mirror.

In that way, having faith in the teaching, seeing how it illuminates and calms, gives you a faith which will never change because it brings you closer and closer into actuality as it is. Faith then is something to seek to develop. If we have doubts, we should try to have these doubts answered by studying the dharma or by asking questions to our teacher. Once we take refuge in the dharma, we should think, "*Oh, this is the object of my refuge. As the object of my refuge, it is something which I should rely on.*" How can I rely on something, if I don't trust it?

You might remember learning to ride a bicycle. You have to have faith in the possibility that the bicycle will stay up. If you start to turn the wheels and then become anxious and doubtful, you stop peddling, and then the bicycle will start to fall over. So, faith means being able to go beyond the feelings that arise in the moment. This is the very heart of the buddhist teaching, which says, '*Don't be conditioned by momentary experience.*'

'Self-liberation' means having faith in impermanence

When we exist in terms of the six consciousnesses, we are always in reactivity to whatever object is arising. We hear sound when some sound-causing event and our ear-consciousness arise together. We taste something when some taste-object and our taste-consciousness come in contact. These pulsations of experience go on moment-by-moment without cease. These things will never cease. To be alive is to be engaged in the flow of experience; but when that experience is organised by the felt sense '*this is happening to me*', then our sense of who we are, is conditioned by what is arising.

So, it's hot outside; we feel hot, feel sleepy. When these situations arise, we tend to identify with them. Our bodily consciousness is providing the information: '*there is heat*'. If you develop this as the sense: '*I am hot*', then the one who is hot is '*me*'. As soon as this receptor of the experience is there, it immediately evokes the associations which go with that, with an associated sense of liking or not liking. In that way, we enter more into the experience, we feel ourselves to *be* the experience, That is the nature of conditioning; because we are impacted and shaped by what is occurring, so we go towards the next moment already with this particular furniture filling our room. We are not fresh.

In Tibetan this is called *rang gyu* [Tib. *Rang rgyud*] which means the stream, or the continuity, of the individual and it develops according to the principle of dependent co-origination. This concept is central in theravadin and also in some schools of mahayana buddhism. It is exemplified by the wheel of life which is often painted on the entry walls of Tibetan *gompas*. It illustrates how the cycle of birth and death is maintained, essentially: *on the basis of this, that arises*. Thus, we might think, "*On*

the basis of the sun, I become hot. On the basis of being hot, I become tired. On the basis of being tired, I become irritable. So it's the summer time, and I'm having some holiday time, and I feel pissed off!" Each stage is putting some furniture, and instead of being open, moment by moment, we stack up the furniture until we can hardly move.

In dzogchen we are concerned with self-liberation, which means to have faith in impermanence. Because all things are impermanent, they will go by themselves. Last night at midnight, we didn't have to bang gongs and drums to make yesterday go. The clock says midnight, and that day's gone. It doesn't make any objection, you don't have to call the police, Friday went, Saturday appeared. This is the Buddha's teaching of impermanence. Everything will go by itself. So, you don't have to anxiously mobilise yourself to change yourself.

It's not that you have to *try* to change, it's that you should *stop blocking* the process of change. Grasping and attachment makes us inhibit what is the natural process of self-liberation. When some things go, we are sad that they have gone. When some things go, we are happy that they have gone. Whether we are happy or sad, it doesn't stop things going. Remembering that your feelings are not the master of the universe – that your feelings are part of the flow of how things are but not the determinants of how things are – then just stay, moment-by-moment, with each experience, and you will see it vanish.

How the Three Statements of Garab Dorje apply to faith

In Garab Dorje's *Three Statements*, the first one is to see your own face, to recognise your own nature. This means to stop looking at the mask of the assumptions, beliefs and stories you have about yourself; to relax and open and be with whatever is there. What is there is your own nature. So, without covering it over with your familiar stories, just be present with it. We can look at this in more detail later.

The second statement of Garab Dorje is to not stay with old assumptions, not to remain in doubt, not to rely on thoughts *about* situations, but to return again and again to be present with situations. This is like irreversible faith.

The third statement of Garab Dorje, which is to continue in the same way, means not to be distracted by other possibilities. Once you have found gold, stop looking for silver. Part of that is to maintain the full faith, the full commitment, not as a longing, not as an idea, but as an immediate experience that how you are is exactly integrated into things as they are. So, on the deep level of dzogchen, faith means to trust your experience. When you do the practice, outer life will confirm your practice to you if you stay with it. But if you believe what the world says about itself you will get lost.

The 'real thing'

In England, the advertising says, "*Coca-Cola, it's the real thing!*" so, if Coca-Cola is the *real* thing, who is going to say what the nature of reality is according to dzogchen? In the traditional teachings it said that Padma Sambhava, when he left Tibet, mounted on a magical horse and flew straight to Zangdopalri. Zangdopalri is a palace on the island of Nayab Ling or Jambudvipa, and in this land, which was formerly a happy land, the country had been taken over by demons. Padma Sambhava went there to take on the form of a demon in order to rule them as their king.

This is very skilful of Padma Sambhava, because in that country there is a king who was a demon and is now an enlightened person but looks in the form of the demon king. But we have a demon in the form of a stupid man who looks like the President of the United States of America. These things are very important because George Bush is a war-monger and a lying, cheating and dangerous person. He is a demon. These are bad times. We should have no illusion. Yet to many people the demon

looks like a good man. And the demon keeps saying, *"We know what the world is all about. We know what is truth. We know democracy. We have good things and we will give them to other people. We are good, the other people are bad."* So, in a world like this it's very difficult to find any support for your own practice, and the more capitalist, consumerism comes into Poland, the more demonic forms will arise.

Before, people were happy if they had a little bit of land on the edge of the town, and they could go out at the weekend and grow some flowers, and maybe some vegetables, and drink some beer and vodka together, and were completely happy!

Translator: Really?

James: Oh yes! I'm very romantic. At least, I don't live in this country! [laughter] We have to dream about something.

In the past life was physically hard, and that brought its own conflicts. Yet there was at least a bit of perspective, there was have time to look, to be in touch with the simple cause and effect activities of baking, knitting, and repairing everyday tools. But as life speeds up, a huge amount of new complexity arrives and distraction becomes a way of life. That's why we should always remember the basic teaching about the eighteen blessings and opportunities of the precious human birth: to be healthy in our body; to be collected in our mind; to live at a time where we come in contact with the Buddha's teachings; and to have the opportunity to practise them. This is very rare.

Faith is a method of directing our energy: "Don't leave this life empty-handed."

These four kinds of faith are very, very important. Because faith is a method of directing our energy. There are many, many interesting distractions. Looking at something on the television which seems holy and inspiring can be a mesmerising distraction. Its explicit content might seem valid and uplifting, however it is beguiling, leading us towards fantasy rather than presence. There are so many buddhist books published now. Which ones will you read? When will you ever read them? So many lamas come to the West, so many possibilities of teaching and initiation and different kinds of practice. ...

This is why it's very important to see the essential heart of the teaching and to have faith in Garab Dorje. Garab Dorje is the point where the dzogchen teachings come into the world. We feel that his statements are a pure transmission of the heart of the teaching, and what he says is very straightforward. *"Really look and see how it is. Look again and again until you have no doubts. Don't get lost by imagining there's anything better than this."* That and other dharma teachings can help and support your key practice, but if you lose the sense of that direction then you will be chasing one thing, then chasing another, then chasing another, and you will never know what is the 'real thing'. C.R. Lama again and again was saying to people, *"Don't leave this life empty-handed. Don't waste your time. Value yourself. Do the practice. Believe in Padma Sambhava."*

Initiation and faith

Initiations can be done in a very brief, concentrated way or a very elaborated way, but the essential points are contained in the four aspects which are present in the **Big Rigdzin practice**, that is: the purification of the body; the purification of speech; the purification of mind; and then the purification of all three together. Through the purification we come to recognise what is the real nature of our existence.

In the tantric tradition this is done through identification with the deity. For each of us the initiation provides the possibility to not be who we are in our *ordinary* sense of who we are, but to be reborn,

or to recognise, that we are in fact Padma Sambhava – and that one aspect of Padma Sambhava is the form that we experience as our usual self. All other forms in the world are also the forms of Padma Sambhava.

So the principle of the initiation is that through faith in the teacher, one believes that the teacher brings the real presence of Padma Sambhava and that, for example, through being touched on the head with a statue, through holding or kissing the mala, through hearing the instruction, through seeing the crystals, and so on, one has a direct connection with the body, speech and mind of the deity. This is the basis for all subsequent practice. At first we start almost entirely fused with our ordinary sense of identity and relate to the practice and the teacher in terms of getting a blessing, but as we develop faith and confidence we come to experience that indeed we are truly Padma Sambhava.

By doing the practice of Padma Sambhava we have a very direct means of recognising that the infinite potential of the sambhogakaya forms can show as many different particular forms; and that these particular forms are only one small aspect of who we are. This level of manifestation is called the nirmanakaya and nirmanakaya is explained as being linked to the root '*nirmita*' which indicates sparks coming out from a fire.

A fire has a huge potential of many, many things and little sparks come out every now and then. The spark is an aspect of the fire, but it doesn't define the fire, or in any way limit the potential of the fire. So, if you over-identify with your current form, you are likely to become forgetful of the great potential out of which it manifests. I think we are aware of this. If you go into a situation where you experience a kind of social anxiety or shyness, where you feel examined by others, perhaps for a job interview, you might lose yourself. You might lose your voice, not give a proper account of your skills because you've somehow collapsed. So, we have the experience of becoming less than who we are. Some of us might have experienced states of depression or obsessions, states of anxiety, maybe even states of madness and deep disturbance. These are not there all the time, but they are very useful because when you are in that state you lose the rest of yourself.

Central concern in tantra and dzogchen: infinity of the potential of our buddha-nature

A central concern in tantra and dzogchen is the infinity of the potential of our buddha-nature. On an ordinary level, we talk about the teaching of karma and the possibilities of being reborn in the six realms. We can be born in hell realms, hungry ghost realms, animal realms, human, jealous gods and god realms. Each of these is an experience of the imagination. This world we exist in just now, this room we are sitting in, is something which we imagine, that is to say, it exists as images which arise in the mind. These images we share with the other people in the room. We are a group of people who have linked, or karmically-linked imaginations, and that's why we have this experience.

The mind is an illusory factory producing only illusion

Dzogchen describes the basis of manifestation as being sound, light, rays of light, and shows how the quality of the five elements manifests from them. Light itself you cannot grasp. Sound you cannot grasp. What we experience is an illusion. That is to say, our belief that it is solidly real is not the case. When we awaken to the fact that it's illusion, it doesn't vanish the way a dream vanishes but rather it shows itself in the form of the deities that we have in the meditation. This is why the text says '*Everything has the form of Padma Sambhava which is appearance and emptiness.*' Ignorance or delusion is to imagine a reality of entities, while illusion shows the creativity of the ever-open ground manifesting as the non-duality of form and emptiness.

Thus the function of the four initiations is to remove the grasping which creates the false sense of substantial reality so that we can open to identification with Padma Sambhava and through that recognise that everything is the mandala of Padma Sambhava.

Some people say dzogchen and tantra are very different, some people say they are not so different. You can look for yourself, and try to understand. From the point of view of dzogchen, from the very beginning the mind has been completely pure. There has been no basis for any obscuration at all, no matter what experiences have appeared, there has been nothing to be covered over and nothing to do the covering. This mind is always fresh, always open. If you look for your mind, you won't find anything, and yet the activity of the mind is ceaseless. You cannot stop the work of the mind but when you look for the worker you don't find anyone. The mind is an illusory factory producing only illusion. This purity of the mind, which is known as *ka dag* cannot change because there is nothing in the mind which can be made dirty. In order to make something dirty you would have to bring it in contact with something else, and there is no basis for this to occur.

When we look in the meditation for our mind we can't find anything with any shape. It has no top or bottom, no back or front, it has no limit. If it has no limit, it has no edge. Having no edge, there is nothing outside it. With nothing outside it, what could come from anywhere else to make it dirty? Everything which arises is non-dual with the mind itself, therefore the mind is pure. This is the teaching of Padma Sambhava.

So when we do the practice together the important thing is to look again and again: Where is my mind? What does it rest on? What is its basis? If you find anything, look at it again. Whenever you come to a conclusion, look at it again. Don't believe at first what you see. In particular, if you come to any conclusion, check it out. For this we use the practice of Phat! If something is real, if it's truly there, if it is really self-existing it won't be destroyed by saying *Phat!* But if something is a thought or a feeling or a sensation, because it's an impermanent manifestation, if you say "*Phat!*" it will vanish. So, again and again, we want to look at our mind.

How to look at your mind? Don't look like a hunter! Don't try to catch your mind. If you do that you will only catch flies and mosquitoes. The mind is there, wait, and it will reveal itself. When you look in a busy way, the energy of your looking creates more thoughts, feelings and sensations and you disturb yourself. The mind itself is busy enough.

Three Aa practice

Now we will do some practice on this and integrate it with the Three Aa practice. We sit in a relaxed way with our gaze open into the space in front of us. Together we recite Aa three times. Aa is the sound of emptiness. As we make this sound all our preoccupations or tensions in the body, all grasping and holding, is dissolved back into its ground of emptiness. We then relax into a state of openness, allowing whatever comes to come. From that state, gently just observe, "*Oh, experience is arising. That is to say, I am not dead; I am aware something is going on. Who is the one who is having this experience? It is occurring for me. Where is this me? What size is the one who has the experience? What shape? What do I rest on?*" Just stay very gentle, very close to yourself, very open, observing very clearly what is occurring.

It's very helpful to do again and again. It's useful not to do it for long periods of time at first because it's not a practice to force or strain in any way. We will take a break for food soon but after food, you can sit outside and do more of that practice or join in the practice that will be here in the shrine room. When you go to sleep at night, you can go to sleep in that meditation. Relax into the openness and just be with what is occurring, with attention every now and then to "*Who is the one who is having this experience?*" This is the doorway into the practice of dzogchen.

Seeing the nature of our own mind

The difference between practising dzogchen and not practising dzogchen is whether we have some experience of a state which is not grounded in conceptions. In therapy settings, they sometimes use a one-way screen. You stand on one side of the screen which is set into a wall and look into the next

room where the therapy is going on, but the people in that room just see a mirrored surface, so they don't know about, or forget about, the supervisory team on the other side. We have a kind of funny mirror-screen like that in our mind. If you have the experience of openness, you can look through and see the nature of thoughts as they arise, but if you are on the other side, if you are immersed in the thought. If you are relying on the thought, when you try to look you just see a reflection of the thought.

Thoughts cannot see the nature of the mind because the nature of the mind is not something that can be seen. You can see this building, you can see your hands. In a particular way, you can see your thoughts, you can see your feelings, you can have a direct sense of them, but you can't see your own face directly because our eyes are looking out, they are not looking in. This is used as an image in dzogchen teachings. They say to see your real nature is to see your own face directly; but if you sit present in your body with the sense of your face, your face will reveal itself to you from the inside out. You can **feel** your face. It's very present, it's very alive but it's not anything you can grasp. It's not like looking at your hand.

In the same way, seeing the nature of the mind is like a feeling-tone quality, it presents itself to you as something you didn't expect it to be like. It's not like anything else, yet it's not separate from everything else. This is a very important practice, especially in a place like this which has been blessed by Rinpoche, and energised by the practice of many people. It is very useful to practise this again and again.

Devotion and transmission

Okay, we continue looking more at the idea of devotion. In the Tibetan tradition, they differentiate the lineage of words and the lineage of realisation. You can have many different kinds of explanation – and that gives an intellectual understanding – but it's important also to meet with people who have some realisation of the practice, so that the practice is alive in them. Then you have a living transmission, an energetic transmission, a relational transmission. This is not something abstract or theoretical. This is something that can be experienced, and many people experienced that in relation to C.R. Lama.

Rinpoche would use the image of a ring and a hook. He frequently said that it was important to develop a strong ring of faith so that the hook of the guru's blessing and compassion could catch that ring. The transmission – for the life, the living life of the lineage to continue – has to occur through devotion. To be devoted to something means to be able to privilege it, to give it one-pointed attention, to have the object of devotion with you at all times. In the Tibetan tradition, we carry the teacher either in their own form or in the form of Padma Sambhava with us at all times, in our heart or on the top of our head, and we pray, as in the ***Big Rigdzin***, that in this and in all our future lives, may we live near the teacher; may we never cease from seeing their face.

Confidence in the teacher

This is why it is important to check out the qualities of the teacher. There are many texts describing the qualities of a good teacher. In one of the texts translated with Rinpoche, a text by Chetsangpa, it describes three main aspects. It says that when the teacher is young they should study a lot and understand many different aspects of the teaching. In the middle period they should do a lot of practice and finally they should help beings with compassion.

It's really important to be clear whether the teacher knows something or not, so you can bring doubts and enquiry into the situation in the early stages. Padma Sambhava has also predicted that in this time many false teachers will arise, introducing their own ideas into the dharma, falsely claiming to discover *terma* and so on. Part of inspecting the teacher is based on respect for yourself. Our time

is limited; life is short. If we waste our time, we can't get it back from anywhere. So, really looking carefully is important.

Doubt is a barrier between you and your object of devotion

Then, once you have some confidence, it is important to stop entertaining doubt. At first, your doubt may be very useful. It may be saying there is indeed some problem in this person, there are some difficulties, and therefore I should be careful. However, once you are clear that the person doesn't have these problems, the doubts that arise are a reflection – or an indication -- of your own confusion, your own neuroses. That is why it says, again and again, in the text: if you find yourself doubting the teacher, then you should pray for purification. Do Vajrasattva practice, and so on, and recognise that the faults which you see in the teacher, are the movement of your own mind.

Doubt acts as a barrier. It comes between you and the object of devotion. When we doubt we are both big and small. We are small because we feel insecure and unsettled, but we are also big because we feel we have some accurate knowledge of the state of the other.

Whereas when we develop devotion, we are big and small in a different way. We are small because we feel full of respect and faith and can become childlike, undefended and open; and we are big because we are reassured and trust that our lives are going in the right way. Our energy can relax and open to embrace what is occurring.

However, teachers are often complex with many strands to their lives. We might see many contradictions in them and aspects that seem limited or unhelpful. This is the challenge to disrupt our familiar categories. The fact that we can't integrate all that is going on, is a sign of our limitation and lack of direct experience of the ground of all manifestation. Integration, not form, is the key for it is integration that alone makes the difference between an awakened teacher and an ordinary person.

Story of the dog's tooth

There is the famous story of a merchant who lived in Tibet and went down to India regularly. Every summer, when the snow melted on the pass, he would go down into India for trade and bring goods back to Tibet to sell. He would ask his mother, *"Can I bring you something back from India?"* She said, *"No, I'm old, I don't need anything."* He said, *"But I could bring you some gold and some beautiful jewellery."* She said, *"Oh, if I was young I would love these things, but now that I'm old what would I do with them? Because I am old, I need to think of my death and I want to practise the dharma. But there is one thing, if you can find it, that would make me very happy. If you find a relic of the Buddha and you bring that here then that will make my journey in the next life much easier."*

So the merchant said he would look for a relic. When he got to India it was very hot, very nice and he saw many exciting things. He spent his time travelling around looking for items to trade and eating and drinking. At the end of his travel, he was very satisfied with what he had traded and he came back home and showed his mother his wonderful items. She asked him, *"But did you find a relic?"* and he said *"Oh, no. I'm sorry, I forgot."*

Next year when he was going down to India they had the same conversation and again he said he would look for something but again he forgot. Then the third year as he was coming back and reached the top of the hill looking down into the valley where his mother's house was he suddenly remembered that he hadn't got the relic.

He was so angry with himself that he was kicking the ground and he lashed out at a pile of bones. It was the skeleton of a dog. Then he saw that there were some teeth left in the jaw-bone, so he

removed a dog's tooth and wrapped it in some very fine silk that he had purchased in India. He set off down the hill and saw a village boy looking after some goats so he told him to run ahead and prepare a proper welcome because he was bringing a relic of the Buddha. All the villagers assembled, and the local monk blew his conch shell. His mother came out to meet him, tears flowing from her eyes. Everybody was prostrating to the holy object.

His mother took the relic home and put it on the shrine and asked the local goldsmith to make a special covering, and everyday she made many offerings and prostrations. The son felt very guilty inside, he felt it was so terrible to have cheated his own mother. The following year when he was going down to India, he decided, *"Oh, this time I must really look for a relic!"* But this time, although he was sincerely looking, he couldn't find any relic. So he came back towards his village, crossed over the pass, and was walking down the valley. Suddenly he could see beautiful rainbows hanging over the village. So he walked down with a quicker pace and he came to his house which was surrounded by many people. He pushed his way through the crowd and his mother was sitting there, again with tears running from her eyes, and beautiful light was streaming out of this shrine of the Buddha's tooth. This is the story of devotion. Even a dog's tooth will give out light if you have faith.

Now, we believe that the paintings and statues and *tormas* in our temple are very important. When we come into the hall we make prostrations to them and to Rinpoche's throne. But if some local farmers come in here and looked at this, they are likely to think, *"What is this nonsense? Why do people build a place like this in our village?"* Value is revealed through relationship. When you have devotion to the objects of the dharma and the heart opens, then you see with the eye of the heart, and the eye of the heart sees things that the mind, the brain, cannot see. It's for this reason that devotion is very important. It's not some primitive, or outer, practice for ordinary people. It's the highest practice of yogis.

Milarepa says, *"When I understood my teacher, Marpa, I understood my own mind."* Through his devotion to Marpa, he was able to overcome many obstacles. Clearly, when we read the biography of Milarepa, we can see that he had a very hard time. He had many opportunities to think, *"Marpa is very cruel, he is very unkind, I will leave him and get a better teacher."* But when thoughts like that arose in his mind, his devotion was stronger, and he felt, *"Without Marpa, I will die,"* so he returned back to a place which, for him, was full of difficulty. This quality of not reacting on the basis of his ego-self, not taking his own suffering as a proof of the value of the object, allowed him to separate from his self-concern into a state of awareness.

Buddha's wisdom eye sees that everything is the form of emptiness

When I was translating a text with Rinpoche I pointed out to him that there was some difference or inconsistency between the account given in this text and another that we had worked on. He said to me, *"Why are you investigating the work of the Buddha? Are you from the CIA.?"* Then I could become very small again! In that way, it's very important to understand that in the past the great saints and yogis have understood many, many things we don't understand at all. And to remember that, in buddhism, human beings are not the highest level of possibility. Buddhism and humanism are not the same at all. Buddhism is not a modernist kind of vision indicating that we are moving forward to some great future, transcending all the problems of the past.

Rather it says that illusion and confusion are pervasive, and that from time to time in this dark, dark world of samsara, some stars appear in the sky. By studying and reflecting on the words of the wise we can develop faith in what they say, and this will illuminate our hearts. But in order to do that we have to understand that their gaze, their Buddha eye sees much more than ours. Our eyes make us blind, our ears make us deaf. With our eyes we see what we like and what we don't like; we see things in terms of good and bad. We divide the world into what is mine and what is not mine. With

our ears we hear especially the words that please us and we don't want to hear the things we don't like.

This is just what Padma Sambhava describes in the verses towards the end of the **Big Rigdzin** practice. This is why we have to trust the wisdom eye of the great yogis and saints of the past, because the wisdom eye, the Buddha's eye, sees immediately that everything is the form of emptiness. It sees that moment by moment, everything is arising out of the ground of emptiness, has the same nature, and is perfectly equal in that nature.

We don't have these ideas ourselves. Without meeting with the dharma I don't think we would have these ideas. It's only due to the kindness of all the great teachers in the lineage that these ideas exist for us in our world. When I was at school, nobody said these things to me. When I went to the cinema, I didn't see any film showing me these things. When I read novels I didn't hear any explanation of these things. And when I went to bed with sweet ladies, none of them whispered in my ear the nature of the mind. It was only when I met lamas in the Tibetan tradition that I could start to see something about how the world is.

It's for that reason that it says in the introductory teachings that the dharma is very, very rare. That's why these great lamas are called 'Rinpoche'. Rinpoche means precious. Precious things are precious because you don't find them everywhere. And that's why people travel long distances to come here, because the opportunity to practice and study is not available in every street in Poland.

Deciding on the discipline of devotion

So, having taken refuge, having decided that the path of the dharma is the path for our life, it's very important to maintain our faith and devotion. If we start to take the dharma for granted, so that it seems very familiar, without any effort, our mind is full of nonsense and distraction. Maintaining faith and devotion requires discipline. It requires saying 'No' to many other opportunities that arise, and in order to say 'No' we have to be clear that the dharma is valuable enough to give us what we are looking for so that we say 'No' to other things with a happy heart.

Buddhism, and in particular tantra and dzogchen, are paths of feeling. This is to say, this is not some abstract theory, it's not some set of cognitions. It is not an intellectual exercise. It is a path for participation with the fullness of our being, with our body, speech and mind, and if we practise in this way, we'll get the true benefit.

When I was studying with Rinpoche in India, he often used to say, *"This is not Tibet. You are not a Tibetan. Studying the dharma is not a job. Nobody's going to pay you for this."* He said, *"If you lived in Tibet, you know enough now that you could just go 'ting-a-ling' and people would put food on the table, but when you go back to your country nobody will pay you for this stuff! So there is no worldly advantage at all, for you, in doing dharma. You should decide that you want this as a path of **liberation**, or go home and get a nice job and a house and a car and enjoy your life."*

And this is the case for all of us. We have to think, *"Why do we do this?"* We might think, *"Oh, we do it because we believe in it."* But if we believe in it, why is it that sometimes our energy falls away and we become bored and distracted and we're just going through the motions? If we find this is happening, then we should pray to Padma Sambhava, saying the **Seven-line Prayer** again and again. Don't spend the rest of your life in some vague connection with the dharma. moving towards death, leaving this life empty-handed. Then you would look back and think, *"Oh, I could have done so much more practice! When I was doing the practice, I could have been more sincere! But somehow, I found my distraction more interesting than the practice."*

May obstacles become the path!

In the tradition, as you know if you read the **Big Rigdzin**, there is a lot of detail about obstacles and obscurations, and this is often put in the language of demons. Demons are forces which get in the way of our dharma practice. Many texts state that the articles and the experiences which **bind** ordinary people are the **path** for yogis, so the first thing we have to do is a kind of audit, look at our life and see what kind of demons come to us. Demons don't always come with flames around them and very ugly faces, they can come in very sweet forms! They can come in the form of laziness, of having a nice sofa to lie on and watch the television; anything which takes us into states of avoidance.

Recognising how we get lost, what is our particular pattern for temptations, we can then turn and face them and seek to find a way for these demons to become our path. In our **Khordong Chod** it says: "*May obstacles become the path.*" So, if laziness is something which takes you away from the dharma then you need to explore and understand the nature of laziness. If fear is what takes you away from the dharma, then you have to go and explore fear. If desire is the thing, or jealousy, whatever it is – don't try to push it away but explore it. Find out what this is and how it functions as something which comes between you and your practice.

It is vital not to expect your path to be easy, particularly when we practise dzogchen and focus on integrating all phenomena into the sphere of our awareness. Our path is to recognise that the patterns that can operate as obstacles and demons, have as their **own** ground, the dharmadhatu. If we remain in that state, they will be self-liberating but the first thing is to wake up enough to see **how** we get caught. The problem with many of these obscurations is they are so close to us – we are so familiar with them – that we take them to be ourselves, so they exist in a blind spot, in a shadow area within us. That's why being part of a sangha is very helpful, because maybe in the sangha group, you can find someone whom you trust and who knows you a bit, and you can ask them: "*What do you see me doing? How do you see me getting lost?*"

Some people talk a lot and they don't quite know what they are doing. Some people are very shy and sit on the outside of events. For them it's so normal, that they don't see it as an interruption to the flow of their energy. If we, who meet together to practise and want to develop ourselves, if we can't trust each other and rely on each other to give us helpful feedback, helpful insight into what we do, then who else are we going to trust?

Ngo wo, rang zhin ,thug je

The traditional language, the technical terms of dzogchen talk about the mind a great deal, but in translating these terms into European languages we have some difficulty because for us 'mind' indicates usually something a bit separate from the body and something concerned with thought production. So it is perhaps more helpful to speak of the three modes of our existence, or sometimes translated as the 'three dimensions of being'.

In Tibetan this is called *ngo wo, rang zhin* and *thug je* [Tib. Ngo bo, rang bzhin and thugs rje] . *Ngo wo* is that which is there without any alteration. For example in the prayer to Padma Sambhava that we use a lot, '*Ma cho tro tral ...*'², *ma cho* means 'uncontrived'. It means nobody has done anything to this. It is not artificial; it's not created by art; it's not created by intention; it's not the product of anything. It's not produced **by** anything and it also doesn't produce anything. Yet it is also the ground of everything. How can it be both not producing anything and be the ground of everything? Because everything that arises from this state, a state of openness, unlimited in all directions, is empty of any inherent self-nature.

² (ma bchos spros bral bla ma chos kyi sku ...)

Again, we have the example of the mirror. The mirror has nothing inside it and yet from the mirror, in the mirror, endless, infinite varieties of reflections can appear. They are able to appear in the mirror because they are only reflections. The reflection is there but is not there as *something*. So this nature, which is *our* nature, is what we can realise through meditation. This nature is described as 'naked'. Naked means uncovered. When we experience our thoughts, feelings, sensations, memories and so on, if we form an attachment, if we identify with them, then the direct presence of this natural openness is obscured. It seems to be covered up, but it is never covered up because it is always naked.

In the same way, our bodies are always naked. We wear many different kinds of clothes but the body itself is naked. The body's freshness, the skin, is always there just as itself. Underneath our clothes, we are naked. The nakedness doesn't go away, it is not revealed, but it is not somehow hidden somewhere else. In the same way we have many thoughts, feelings and so on, these are like clothes. They are present in the mind but the actual nakedness of the mind is the basis for wearing these clothes. If you were to take off your clothes and cover your body in Superglue and then put your clothes back on, your clothes wouldn't come off. To change your appearance you would have to put other clothes on top of your clothes. And then your clothes would look very strange because you'd have layer upon layer upon layer of clothes. It is our nakedness that *allows* us to wear clothes. In the same way it is the nakedness of the mind that permits the arising of many different thoughts.

The mind is also described as 'fresh'. Fresh means 'not old'; means 'not existing before'. Although it is unchanging and always the same, it is always fresh. It is fresh because it bears no marks. When we see little children running around they have the most gorgeous skin, shiny and bright and fresh. Then we look at ourselves in the mirror – particularly the morning after drinking some red wine – and our skin is not looking so fresh!

This is because our bodies carry traces. We are marked by experience. In terms of our manifestation, we exist in a world of things impacting with other things. But our mind's nature – the nature of our being, what is present when we relax openly – is something which is unmarked, unconditioned. That is to say, good thoughts don't make it any better, bad thoughts don't make it any worse. Good thoughts and bad thoughts don't touch this nature. Nothing touches this nature, because it is not an object. You cannot find your mind. You cannot *lose* your mind. You cannot develop it. You can't buy it anywhere. It is something completely different from anything else. This state of openness is revealed when we let go of all the things that we normally identify with.

Relaxing our attachment

All the many styles of dharma practices can be seen as a kind of preparation, or preliminary, for trusting relaxation and ease in this natural experience. Through developing compassion, through developing generosity, courage, discipline and so on, we separate ourselves from the dull habits which make us take our substantial existence as the defining basis of who we are. Again and again, through purification, through practices like the *Big Rigdzin*, through shamatha and vipassana, through many different methods, we relax our grasping, we relax our attachment, so that we can come to recognise what is there. The Buddha's teaching shows again and again: *Suffering arises from attachment*. Attachment is a quality of ignorance. Attachment is not just to outer things like a watch. I can be attached to my watch, my possession.

Attachment also means identification. When I identify myself as 'me', and there is a quality of belonging, of filling that notion, that is attachment. So, in order to recognise one's nature, to see one's own face face-to-face, nakedly, directly, we have to relax attachment and let go of the things that we rely on.

Praying with full faith

The particular teaching of C.R. Lama was that you should pray one-pointedly to Padma Sambhava. If you pray with full faith, without any doubt, all the energy systems of the body will meet in the heart, your mind will become empty and in that moment you can recognise your own nature,

There are so many different practices that one can do, but many, many great yogis have said, again and again that *“devotion from the heart is the quickest path to understanding your nature.”* Because when we pray from the heart everything falls away. The falling away of phenomena means there is nothing left. When nothing is left, all there is, is that which is there which is not a thing to fall away.

Relax into that moment and experience what this is like. It’s not like anything else. If you start with many assumptions about who you are, you will fill the space. If you try to make sense of the experience, if you try to organise it into your familiar categories, you will lose the experience.

We just relax into the space, not knowing anything, not clinging to anything, trusting profoundly that this is how it is. From this state, but never escaping from this state, is *rang zhin* which is our nature as manifestation, as potentiality, which is the state of the reflection in the mirror. The quality of *rang zhin* is clarity. This clarity is the immediacy of everything which presents itself. You don’t have to pull thoughts into your mind, you don’t have to construct what is your experience — it is immediately here.

This is described as *lhun drup*. *Lhun drup* means effortlessly present, present by itself. The reflection arises in the mirror, immediately. If you wanted to get an artist to paint your face that would take a long time because he would look at your face then look at the canvas and, gradually, bit-by-bit build up a representation of how you look. And the artist would be introducing their own response, their own aesthetic take on how you are. But the mirror shows directly what is happening; it very useful because it’s not based on sensation, it’s not based on interpretation. This is why, in ballet schools, they always have a wall of mirrors. Although from the inside of your body you may feel you are balanced and aligned, but when you look in the mirror you see that you are off balance. The reflection immediately shows you what is there. In the same way, out of this openness of the mind, there’s not just empty emptiness — things are occurring.

The first state, the nature, is without any limit. Therefore, whatever occurs can only come from that nature. So, you might be sitting in meditation and a thought arises and you suddenly think, *“Oh, God! I have to do that. I must remember,”* and you have the sense, *“Oh, I am thinking about this, but I am doing the meditation just now. Once the meditation is over I am going to do that.”* There we have the arising of a dualistic structure where we tell ourselves that we stand apart from experience as somebody who has experiences. But this whole thought, including the felt sense of me as a person who is having thoughts — where is this coming from? It can only come from this open ground nature. If you see that you can *really* relax because you see, *“Oh, I, in my body, in my sense of myself, I am a reflection in the mirror, and I come into being with my world. I’m not standing apart, I’m not sitting alone. Here I am, as part of this, and without any solidity. I exist as movement in this state of clarity.”*

What we call ‘I-me-myself’ is the *energy* of the clarity, which is the potentiality of the mirror. Then, from this state, we come more precisely into being in the world with others. This world is an on-going revelation, changing moment by moment, in which we participate. This level is called *thug je* [Tib. thugs rje] which indicates a kind of participation, a belonging within, and an acting which is always dynamic. So, it’s not that ‘I am acting’ as if there was an ‘I’ separate from the action but the sense of ‘I’ is also an action, also a movement. So, we have infinite stillness, the unchanging nature, within which infinite possibility arises, and then with that, the precise movement of our moment to moment being in the world with others. This is the basic view of dzogchen and this is what we seek to manifest through the practice.

Okay. So we do some of the practice now. [Practice]

Questions

Question: *How to meditate if we have to work physically, for example, and we are tired, or we have to be busy all day long?*

James: Clearly, if you're working physically, you have to be very precise and careful. Particularly if you are driving a vehicle or using sharp tools or painting something. Being fully present in the moment means not going after the past, not going into the future. So again and again, through the course of the day, the practice is to bring ourselves most fully into the moment. This is not the same as being mindful of oneself as one does things. We are not keeping an eye on ourselves, or observing ourselves. Rather, we are fully present, into the moment, in our activity, with this unbroken line of these three aspects of our existence. So, when we are speaking, we try to experience the speech as flowing out of emptiness. When we are walking, the body is moving in space, and this is the revelation of gestures which are ungraspable.

In that way, each situation in the world will evoke or bring to mind dharma understanding.

Question: *And what to do if we work more on conceptual level, if we have to create something and our mind is more involved in the process of thinking and conceptualisation and so on?*

James: This kind of activity is very prone to the problem of pride because when we create something it can give us a sense of specialness, or being unique. *"I have made this. Only I could make it. This is an experience of myself."* This is, of course, an idea very much encouraged in European romanticism and the cult of the genius. But when we look in the meditation, when we see how the mind is, moment by moment it is ceaselessly producing things. The most creative force in the world is emptiness. The more empty we can be, the more creative we are. So, the fact that *I feel 'I am empty'* and *I feel 'I am creative'* gets in the way of both,; being there and yet nothing special.

Buddhist teaching points out how things arise, interactively, due to causes and conditions but at the same time, simultaneously, out of emptiness. So the main thing is to relax and open and allow the work to come out. If you are over-invested in your work, that will create a difficulty in terms of communication with other people. The more that our activity is just in the world as part of the world, other people can take it and make what they will with it.

A key aspect of the practice is to see that the flow of thought is ceaseless, that these thoughts are both yours and not yours. That is to say, what appears to be uniquely personal is simultaneously impersonal.

The essence of all the practice is to realise that the one who is performing the activity, the one who is yourself, is no-one. We are not a thing. In the mahayana tradition they have a description of different kinds of compassion: the one formulated as the intention to go on a journey — *May I help all sentient beings!*. Then we have the compassion operating as one who is already on that journey where, through doing our practice, we generate merit which we share with others and bring benefit directly to them. Then there is a third kind of compassion which is called 'compassion without an object'. This arises when the subject, the object, and the relation between them, are all perfectly integrated in emptiness, so compassion is pervasive. Remembering the openness, the emptiness, the unborn nature that you are, is the greatest kindness you can do to yourself. Remembering this of others is the greatest kindness we can do for them, because then our movement with others is very light and very tender and very subtly attuned.

Rinpoche's greatest gift

Patrul Rinpoche said *"My teacher realised these things directly, but I have only the words and I repeat them like an empty bell."* One of the markers of a healthy tradition is that there is a lot of humility. We go wrong when people have an inflated sense of themselves, and decide to become a teacher without being told to by their own teacher.

In the West, we learn a lot through books, through publicly available information, and nowadays with the internet you can access so much stuff. You can chop and change it and repackage it and sell it as your own. So, when people behave in that way, their understanding is likely to be wrong; they want to say something to other people without having done very much disciplined study themselves. On the other hand, you also have people whose practice is not very good but they think it's good and then they want to share that with other people. This is why the protection in the tradition is that people would not teach until they were formally empowered to teach, and instructed to teach.

All of us are subject to the influence of the five poisons, and so we need to be very careful about what is our motivation. Some people teach because they want to become famous; they have pride as their primary focus. Some people teach because it's a career move, to bring money. The main thing is for each of us to look at ourselves, and to understand the five poisons, and then to look *out* and not be naïve and stupid; to check people out, seeing how the five poisons operate in that person. It is a fact that wrong things and false things are going to happen, so each person has to take care.

Many people go into the dharma because they are looking for someone to take care of them and make their life safe. Of course that's *one* aspect of dharma practice and the power of refuge is great. But a lot of the time you have to have your eyes wide open and really check out what's going on. In the Tibetan tradition there is no central inquiry office where you get a validation about who is a proper teacher and who is not. People learn by listening to the gossip who is good and who is bad. Sometimes people feel it might be better if there was a central authority that could go around and check teachers out.

The story that Tibetans tell in relation to this is a story from the time of the first buddhist king, Songtsen Gampo. When he converted to buddhism, due to the influence of his two buddhist wives, one Chinese and one Nepali, he decided that it was clearly unfair and improper that some people should be very rich and other people to have almost nothing. So he gathered all the wealth of the country together and put it into equal portions and gave it to each family. Then after a year, he found that inequality had come back. So he did it again, and again after a year the inequality had returned. So he did it a third time. (In Tibetan everything happens three times!) Finally he realised, *"Oh, the Buddha's teaching of karma is true."* Some people have the karma to be healthy, others don't. Some people have the karma to be beautiful, others don't. Some have the karma to be rich, some don't. Some people have the karma to find a good dharma teacher, some don't.

And no matter how you organise a system, people who have the karma to be cheated and people who have the karma to be cheating will meet together, and fall in love. ..

Rinpoche's great gift was to demonstrate the integration of being relaxed whilst still taking care!