

NGONDRO 3

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Ordinarily, in everything that we do in the world, when we are successful, when we are unsuccessful, when we are happy, when we are sad, every experience, every action that we do, is an affirmation of the reality which is the fantasy arising from ignorance

You have to face an existential fear and go through it in order to trust that the openness of emptiness is sufficient unto the day

The meditation or the contemplation of experience it is like a screw driver, and you are gradually loosening the screws that bolt your life into place

A good practice is like a good friend, it's like somebody who reveals more and more qualities and more and more richness the longer you know them.

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Saturday

THE TWO TRUTHS

A particular focus I'd like to start with is some discussion of the two truths and this idea about there being two levels or two modalities of truth, how that relates to the practice of tantra and the practice of dzogchen.

One of the things we all share to a certain extent is an ordinary perception of the world. If we were to look around this room and discuss what we have in it we would probably have a fairly common opinion about the nature of most things that we see; the colours, the shapes, the significance of them. There is a lot of buddhist writing which provides a critique of this ordinary perception, which is basically on the question of can we see what we see without an attachment which in some way alters the natural quality of what it is that we are seeing? Because if we go back to the most basic ideas from Buddha Shakyamuni, attachment is seen as being the cause of suffering.

WILLINGLY WE SURRENDER THE POSSIBILITY OF FREEDOM IN ORDER TO BE ENSLAVED AGAIN

This world is presented as an experience which continues, repeats itself and intensifies itself because of our attachment to ourselves and to others. Buddha's teaching is that if we free ourselves from this attachment then we gain liberation. In some of the ways of depicting this, particularly in the theravadan tradition, it's as if this world that we inhabit is somehow inextricably bound up with attachment, so that the only way that you can get free of this attachment is to leave this world and go somewhere else. That's because this world that we are experiencing is seen as being generated from attachment. When you get rid of this attachment this world ceases to exist for you. You have a different experience.

That's very much the idea that, at the end of Buddha Shakyamuni's life he gained this mahaparinirvana, a total and complete enlightenment, and in that moment he had no more attachment to the phenomena that were occurring, and so he was freed from this place.

This is quite an important point because in tantra and dzogchen there's a very different reading of what is going on, but this point is really saying that this world is created from attachment and is the expression of attachment, that everything that one is involved with here is just imbued with the nature of attachment.

It is a bit like when somebody commits a crime and they are caught, and as soon as they are caught by the police, the guilt that they have—the fact that they committed that crime—takes them into places where they are identified almost entirely in terms of being a 'guilty' person. The person becomes a criminal because of the court system. They stay in the prison for as long as the sentence lasts, the sentence being determined by the nature of the offence they have committed. Then, when the time given in the original sentence has been worked out, the person is freed and they become an ordinary citizen again. But while

they are in the prison they have a particular kind of experience which marks them out as being different from other people, people on the outside of the prison. There is a particular mood or quality of dread or depression or abandonment that lurks in such institutions.

And in a similar way in this world, part of what is called samsara—endless cycling, moving around in different realms but all having essentially the same nature—it is as if one is in a prison.

The difference is that we have been imprisoned for such a long time that we forget that there is any state outside the prison. We spend a lot of our time trying to improve our conditions in the prison. We want to get a little radio in our room; maybe we can do some trading in cigarettes and get some power through that. Us doing this doesn't actually change the nature of imprisonment.

We know sociologically that people who have spent much of their life in prison find it very, very difficult when they come out. Often people like that, certainly in England, will commit small crimes in order to go back to prison, because prison is the world that they know.

This is probably an experience we all have in meditation; that at the end of the practice there is a particular way in which we choose to go back into prison again. We may be doing a meditation that calms our mind, or we may be dissolving with the deity and there is some more spaciousness, more openness, but then a friend calls, or we want to eat something, and then we go to watch television and suddenly we are very, very excited by the nature of the prison, and we don't even realise that it is a prison because it is quite nice, actually. This is really where the concept of attachment is very useful for thinking about the process whereby we willingly surrender the possibility of freedom in order to be enslaved again.

ATTACHMENT AND HABITS

The root cause of attachment is said to be ignorance. Some of you may be very familiar with what I am going to describe now, but I think it is always useful to go back over this because it really is the essential point of the Buddha's teaching and of all the dharma practice that we do.

Now the ignorance, or rather in its more dynamic form, ignoring, is quite a difficult term, certainly in English. It carries the connotation, the sense, of not knowing something. So we are ignorant if we don't know who the Prime Minister is or the economic structure of the country; we are ignorant of all sorts of things. Ignorant is something that children around the ages of seven, certainly in England, take up as an insult to each other: "*You're ignorant,*" is a very strong way of putting someone down, because children recognise that ourselves knowing things is not very wise.

So much of our lives gets directed by this search for knowledge, whether it is formal knowledge going through school or learning how to smoke cigarettes, or learning how to kiss people, or all the different pieces of knowledge people learn

as they grow up. We often get interested in the things that other people know that we don't know, and we feel, *"If I get that knowledge then I'll be more complete. If I take my kind of empty ignorance and fill up that space with knowledge, if I get enough knowledge, then I will have a total knowledge"*.

It is an idea you can certainly find in buddhism: the idea that the Buddha is omniscient, that he knows absolutely everything. You could ask him a question about anything and with his mind which goes in all directions and all times, he would just pluck out the correct information and give it to you, as if the world was a big quiz show and the Buddha was the person who always won because he knew the answer to everything.

But in many ways this view is a sign of ignorance itself, because it is posited, grounded, in a view of appropriation: that there are things out there which I can have; people, food, objects, knowledge, experiences—All these mental experiences are being treated in a materialistic way as if they were something that we can 'have'. We can say the Buddha has all these qualities; and the Buddha has all this knowledge of everything; and it is by the accumulation through rebirth after rebirth of good karma and good qualities that someone progresses from being an ordinary person to being a buddha.

This view is set out in terms of 'the two accumulations'; the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom. The word in Tibetan, *tsog*, has the idea of bringing lots of things together, so you just sort of trawl through the world and get these spiritual experiences, and meditation instructions, and initiations, and you bring it all together and make this wonderful package, and this wonderful package is you, as you become a buddha. So that is the project of building a buddha.

But of course the Buddha said that everything that is created, everything that is constructed, is impermanent. Then you have a problem because then maybe buddhahood is impermanent too, and if it is impermanent then why go to all the effort of trying to get there if it is just going to vanish after a while? This is a very important point to really think about and when we study the dharma we have to think for ourselves what are the implications of these views or these beliefs. After all, we are putting our precious life, our precious hours and days, into the study and practice of these ideas.

So, if we return to this basic idea of ignorance, what is it that we are ignorant of? It is not facts, it is not information that we don't know, but it is not knowing, in the sense of not recognising, what is going on. It's an existential phenomenological ignorance. That is to say, that it is in the process of being and becoming, which we are inextricably caught up in, that we don't know what is 'going on'; and knowing about what is 'going on' won't really help us to know in the 'going on' the becoming of what is 'going on'.

Say for example, somebody has a collapsed posture; they sit in a collapsed way, or they walk a bit... It might be quite useful for that person to see themselves on a video as they are sitting and walking, they might get a shock, *"My god, I didn't think I was doing that. I'll have to do this"*. And that knowledge of what it looks like

when they are slumped over is very useful because if they remember that image of how they would like to be, sitting up straight, and wake themselves up, so that they do that, that knowledge which they have, that image which they are holding inside, is acting as an antidote to the collapsed way of sitting and walking that they have become used to. And that is very useful.

However, if the person does go beyond having an internal image of how they should be, with the actual fact of always being how they shouldn't be, then they live a contradiction and they probably feel guilty and bad and continue the protestant tradition of guilt. So what is important is that the recognition of right-sitting becomes incorporated as the way of being for the person, so that the image of how they could be, or should be, and the experience of how they are, merge together. And at that point the person does not have any particular knowledge of how they are walking and sitting, because they are just doing it in the way that doesn't cost them any trouble. So they have gone from an unconscious slob-like behaviour through a very conscious, conflicted, effort into a more spontaneous, but unconscious, way of being.

It is that quality of at-one-ment of absolute free expression inside a less contradictory and problematic mode that is really what we don't recognise in ignorance.

It's as if, in our being at the moment, we are like someone who is sitting very badly. We are off-balance, and that being off balance is bringing about pressure on the muscles, so that gradually our spine will get sore and we'll feel pain. That distortion is caused for us by attachment, that we are (as it were), pulled out of shape, we are distorted, in the way in which we are in the world and with others, by being attached to particular views or attitudes—wanting to be rich, wanting to be famous, wanting to be young forever, wanting the biggest piece of everything, wanting not to have the biggest piece of everything.

And then the dharma methods are, (as it were), video images of ourselves when we get some instruction which shows us the possibility of how it might be to be straight, and then we see how out of shape we are. We see how the Buddha is relaxed, open, not afraid, and then we see how warped and twisted our own lives are, because we are trying to please people or we are frightened of hurting people.

So the dharma does two things. Firstly it shows how we suffer, the reasons why we suffer, the particular ways we are off balance through stupidity, anger, desire, jealousy, pride. The second thing it does is open up a huge conflict, a huge battle, because in studying the dharma we are no longer unconscious of the reasons for our suffering and that conflict is intensified the more we focus our attachment onto the possibility of becoming enlightened, the possibility of becoming like the Buddha. We then feel the pull between that attachment and the attachment to our old habits, which of course, manifest in us in a very unconscious way.

That is the conflict which is explored and gets established in the idea of the Buddha leaving this domain, leaving samsara and going to nirvana, going somewhere else, where he will leave all the troubles and difficulties behind.

Clearly, avoidance of a troubling object is a very good way of not being troubled. If you don't like wasps, then in summertime you might want to keep your windows closed, but then you don't get the nice fresh air. If one sets up that there is another place, a better place far away from this, then whatever is around here, where we are, is something that we miss out on.

But if we stick just with this image of the body for a moment. If somebody has been walking and sitting very badly, what they don't do is go to the hospital and get another body. In most countries euthanasia is a crime, and we would probably be quite shocked if we went to our doctor because we had a pain in our back and he said, "*We can give you an injection and the funeral service costs four hundred marks*". Rather we want to get rid of that pain and have the pleasure of being back fully in ourselves. What one is trying to do is get rid of the sickness, and when the sickness is gone, health just reveals itself.

In this view, which is generally the view in mahayana buddhism, tantric buddhism, what one is trying to do is not go somewhere else to a good place, but to be able to relax the tensions which are generated through attachment, so that one's being in the world with others is easy and pleasurable.

When we look at small babies and they are kind of looking around and you play with them a bit, their bodies move very easily, they don't seem to carry too much muscle tension, but psychiatric hospitals are full of people who can't relax. We may recognise that we have problems in relaxing, and we may listen to particular types of music, or even do kind of guided fantasies, relaxing the muscles in different parts of our body, and then we feel much better. But in a sense if you do these things like tensing your muscles and then relaxing, what you actually do is tense your muscles, and then you stop tensing your muscles. You can't relax your muscles really. How would you relax your muscles? So the model there is one of not doing something to create something else, but rather learning not to do the things which create the tensions and the stress.

PARADOXICAL POINT OF UNIFICATION OF THE TWO TRUTHS

Now the dharma... Buddhism has many different methods, many different ways of doing things, but these methods of doing things are essentially de-constructive moves rather than constructive moves. Also these deconstructive methods are framed in the language of construction, so that one may pray "*May become a buddha*", or "*May I get enlightenment*" or "*May I gain the five wisdoms.*"

Clearly much of our emotional life is strongly invested in a dualistic appropriative attitude towards the world, so it is very important to mobilise our emotions, our desires—to get something good and get rid of something bad—in order for us to be engaged with the practice, so that we can practise the dharma as if we were mainly trying to get rid of bad things and get good things. But the thing is, we

have to remember at the same time that this is simply a method of mobilising energy.

By losing everything, by giving up everything, by turning something into nothing, one has the experience that there is really nothing to get. Getting nothing is a very, very important part of buddhist practice. Getting an experience of emptiness is very important—but also completely impossible, because you can't get it. What one needs to do is mobilise and channel the desire to get nothing as if it were something, in order to dissolve all the somethings into nothing. Even the desirer of something is revealed as nothing. That's the principle which underpins the Short Rigdzin practice you just did, and it's also the paradoxical point of the unification of the two truths, relative truth and absolute truth.

ATTACHMENT IS A RELATIONSHIP

Attachment is a relationship. For there to be a relationship there have to be two or more things involved, you can't just have one thing as a relationship. I think it is fair to say that in our ordinary experience we exist as a subject, knowing objects. Sometimes when we are with people we have the experience of a real inter-subjectivity, when the kind of boundary of our own sense of self relaxes a bit and we find ourselves in an open flow with someone else. In that openness with the other to the other, it is as if whatever is occurring is occurring by itself.

On the most ordinary level, if you are relaxing with some friends and you are talking with your friends, you are just talking easily and the words are just coming, It is not as if you are inside yourself thinking of what you are going to say—you are just speaking. If it is a friendly conversation and you are relaxed and at ease with the other people, in a sense it doesn't matter too much what you talk about. There's just a flow of conversation.

But at other times we're involved in more competitive types of conversation. This could be motivated by an erotic interest, or an interest of pride, or an interest of anger, but we might be thinking, "*This is what I want to say*", we might even be rehearsing some thoughts in our head of what we want to say. When the other person is speaking we are not paying a full attention to them because we are already running another possible move in the conversation, to push that person out or win them over.

In that sort of conversation one has less sense of the living subjectivity to the other and more sense of them as an object to be moved nearer to oneself or further away from oneself, or to be controlled in some way.

SUBJECT AND OBJECT

When we have this subject-object interaction, what is established again and again is that being a subject in the world, being a self as it were, inside looking out, one cannot escape issues of power, because the basis of our being in the world is very fragile. Our bodies can be killed very easily, our feelings can be hurt very easily, our ego, or our sense of self, can be crushed very easily, so we are often engaged in a movement out of ourselves when things look good, and back

into ourselves when things look bad. We live pretty much like little rabbits, with a little hole ready to run back into. So we probably know how to blank off emotions, and to delude ourselves with fantasies or our own interpretation of situations, all sorts of ego-defences because fundamentally, from the point of view of being a subject in a world of objects, we cannot be at home in the world, because when the world is existing as something other than oneself, one also has the sense that the world is not particularly interested in one. Like Rhett Butler said, *“Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn.”*

At this moment, in the hospitals in Frankfurt and round here, people are dying. We don't get terribly alarmed and think, *“My God, a human being is dying”*, and all run over there and try and make them not die. Basically it does not really bother us if two people die this afternoon or three people die this afternoon in a Frankfurt hospital. We don't work there, we don't know these people—live, die, it doesn't really matter. When somebody dies it is not as if there is a huge earthquake or volcanoes erupt or rainbows erupt through the sky.

Of course buddhism is full of these stories of these things happening around the births and deaths of great lamas and yogis, but basically we enter into the world making a small ripple, and you know a few people are involved and interested, and when we die it is just the same, just another little ripple that is there for a while, and then it is done.

ALIENATION

Often in the course of our life we don't feel quite connected with things. We walk down the street, we see other people, we don't know them, we walk past them. We are somehow in a corridor of our own concern. I think that—certainly in modern European thought—there are many claims that the increasing alienation that many people seem to feel is directly connected with the increasing focus on being an individual self, that the more one strives for autonomy, the more one is also striving for a separation of oneself from the environment in which one has one's autonomy.

Now we can link this with the buddhist idea of ignorance and attachment because ignorance—which is a non-recognition of the nature of one's being and becoming— means that something is going on that one does not understand. One tries to understand what is going on.

Ignorance is not just like a big blank hole, it is a very active dynamic state of being, to which we try to give meaning; we try to make sense of things. But all of that effort to make meaning and to make sense, is ignorance, from the buddhist point of view.

And I think that we can see, now that we live in more multicultural societies, that people who come to live in our countries bring their own cultures with them, bring their own ideas with them, and they make sense of the world in often radically different ways from the way that we make sense of them. Making meaning and making sense is not a problem for most of us. We can do it in all sorts of ways. We know so many things and we can keep moving the information around,

making connections and inventing new things, whether we are painters or writers or teachers or parents or whatever, because what we experience is this enormous creativity of our minds, an enormous richness of potential and possibility.

COMPUTERS

And yet somehow all this creativity and invention doesn't really solve the problem of suffering. If you watch the news on television, or read the newspaper, you will find that they are full of horror stories and traumas just as if you read the newspapers of a hundred years ago. People imagined that computers would solve so many tasks and give people a lot of free time, but they also create all sorts of problems. They can create problems of back strain, eye strain, finger, repetitive muscle problems. When we use a computer, although the computer was programmed by a human being it can feel as if we are being controlled by the computer instead. If you don't follow the right rule then it won't do what you want it to do.

One's sense of freedom and possibility is constrained by dancing to the tunes of rules that are established by somebody else. The experience—or rather the illusion—of freedom is being generated inside a structure of manipulation and control.

Now, of course, it is not that computers are bad in themselves. One would not want to destroy all computers and burn all books, as if we could do a massive phylogenetic regression to living in stone caves when we would be happy again in some way!

These manifestations of creativity need to be understood in two different ways. On the ordinary, or the level of conventional truth, things like computers are functionally helpful, but structurally harmful. They are structurally harmful because, as I've already indicated, they keep us moving primarily in the idea of: I-as-a-subject make use of the computer to increase my control over the world to get more of what I want. It sets up further the separation of myself from the world. I am acting on the world in order to get what I want; I am making use of the world.

The structure of culture that we live in says that if we are all very intelligent and work very, very hard we will be able to have enough machines and properly run agriculture and properly run education and medicine so that every citizen will have a happy and fulfilling life.

Partly it may be that many developments are motivated by selfishness and greed, however from a buddhist point of view I think it is more radically the fact that the whole paradigm, the operational way of thinking and experiencing the world, is fundamentally flawed.

IGNORANCE IS A PROCESS

We experience ourselves as a self inside a body, looking out through these water-bubble-eyes at what goes on in the world. This is the area marked out by

conventional truth, because it is clearly our ordinary truth *that “I am James. I came in an aeroplane from London. I am sitting in a room looking out my eyes, and seeing you.”* That is the reality: you have come from different places and you are sitting here looking at the ceiling, or at your feet or at me or whatever you’re looking at. When you look at your feet or the wall it’s not as if you are your feet or the wall. you have the experience of looking.

This is what the Buddha says is the experience of ignorance—the actual experiencing of being here, being a person; looking out at other things and wondering what they are; being interested in some things and not interested in other things. That is ignorance.

That is the process of ignoring because ignorance is a process, it doesn’t start in time, but it is constant, it’s all the time. Everything that we do inside that process has the nature of ignorance and has the outcome of ignorance. The nature of ignorance is not to understand or not to be in contact with what’s really going on. The consequence of that is to imagine that something is going on which is not really going on.

Let’s say for example you meet somebody and they are very, very friendly towards you and they seem very interested in you, and you start to think that *“This person really likes me. Maybe I can have a relationship with this person. Maybe I’ll spend my whole life living with this person.”* But then some other people come to join you and you see that this person is friendly to everyone. And that’s just what they are—they are a friendly, sociable person, and their friendliness to you didn’t mean what you thought it meant.

But you have there a point at which you can recognise a discontinuity between your fantasy and the reality, and so the fantasy that *“This person thinks I am very, very special”* is dissolved on the experience of *“This person treats everyone as if they are very, very special.”*

But say, for example, you only ever met this person on your own, and you met them from time-to-time, you might never have your fantasy contradicted, and you might go on day-dreaming, and *“Oh I wonder if they’re thinking of me the way I’m thinking of them?...”* but being a shy kind of person you wouldn’t want to check it out. Once you really get into the fantasy, then you start to edit out any moments of reality that might disturb the fantasy.

This is pretty much, from the buddhist point of view, what happens to us in this world. We have a fantasy that what’s going on is all very real, very substantial. I have the fantasy that I am living in my body looking out and you’ve got a similar fantasy and we get on very well because we’ve got shared fantasies, and because we all share the same fantasy we don’t really come across much contradiction.

We may have some experiences, walking in nature, during sex, doing some drugs, where something else happens that doesn’t seem quite as if ‘I am in here looking out’; but we probably forget these moments or think that they are special or weird and not normal.

KARMA

Because of this ignorance that has been going on in many, many past lives we have acted to create certain dispositions in ourselves—we have taken up particular positions to things which create a tendency or a disposition in ourselves which repeats. That's what's called karma.

It's because of our karma or our particular disposition that we are born in a human body. That is to say, from the buddhist point of view, before we are born, before the moment of conception, we already have taken up an attitude or a disposition which particularly suits us to having the experience of living in a human body.

That is to say, we are already inducted into the fantasy before the moment of conception occurs, and then, when we are born out of our mothers' belly, we are born among people who share the same fantasy. As we grow up, our mothers in particular probably teach us to speak or help us in the process of language acquisition. We learn to read. We learn to use the things of the world and this knowledge and understanding is usually brought to us with a great deal of loving kindness by people who want us to have this knowledge because they think it is very good for us.

So the socialisation process—which is essential if we are going to survive in the world—is also a socialisation into the shared group fantasy of *"I am a separate subject looking out into a world of separate objects."* Our language is, of course, structured in a way that supports this fantasy, because languages usually are quite materialistic in their structure and they seek to install definite causal relationships between objects. The fantasy of dualism—generated out of ignorance, which is an ongoing process reinforced by attachment—is all-pervasive.

This is our world. This is what we know. And all the methods that are taught in buddhism, taught by the Buddha, are methods of putting this fantasy into question, of trying to interrupt it in various ways for a period of time so that a different sort of experience can arise.

DUALISM & ENERGY

It's very hard to change it. And it's hard because the fantasy's embedded in ourselves and in our world. A lot of the traditional presentations of the dharma, of buddhism, speak primarily of an individual's effort to change that situation. This is the case because we cannot change dualism by working on the outside.

Imagine if we could have a huge, huge nuclear bomb and a spaceship and we were able to go on our own in a spaceship off the earth and drop this nuclear bomb on the earth to kill everyone. We might get rid of all the other people, so there would be no 'other' to create a duality with myself. But that wouldn't be enlightenment because one would still be in a relationship with oneself. You'd be there in your spaceship thinking, *"Oh, my god, what a terrible thing I have just done?"* or *"Hey! That's really good what I've just done. Look at that glow down there. I've killed the lot of them! There's only me now!"*

Because we exist for ourselves as a subject in conversation with ourselves, the experience of dualism is not only when I am here in the room, looking out there. We probably all know, when we try to sit and meditate we are in relationship with ourselves. We are distracting ourselves, confusing ourselves, exciting ourselves... So dualism is the focus. It's a kind of sparking point, a sort of positive-negative movement which generates energy right at the very core of our being. We know ourselves as a thought, as a representation, and we spend a lot of our energy manipulating the world and editing our thought in order to maintain a particular kind of self- image.

So having gone through, having had this karmic disposition before we were born and going through the socialisation process and living with other people, there is more and more affirmation of the reality and value of the internal dialogue which maintains this dualistic perception, which is why meditation is so very important. Ordinarily, in everything that we do in the world, when we are successful, when we are unsuccessful, when we are happy, when we are sad, every experience, every action that we do, is an affirmation of the reality which is the fantasy, arising from ignorance.¹

Lunch break

QUESTIONS

James: In the lunch break did anyone see anything that reminded them that this world is a fantasy? Or did you see anything that reminded you that this world is very real!

Questioner: Wiener Schnitzel!

James: Very solid. You had the dualistic experience! And I think that that's normally the case that we get a lot of affirmations of the main fantasy of reality which underpins our world.

Questioner: Why is necessary when we are all buddhas that we have to make this dualistic experience?

James: Because of ignorance.

Questioner: But it's not our own nature?

IGNORANCE AND DUALISM

James: No ignorance just comes, there is a particular moment where ignorance first arises, and it's both a historical moment and it is an endlessly repeated moment, because looking back, one can say that samsara, or this dualistic vision which is the basis for suffering, starts at the moment when the first identification of an 'I' as separate from the other occurs.

¹ Tape changes here

Every time that we act on the basis of that assumption—that there is a self and another with the sense that these two are essential opposite or different—then in that moment of perception, in that attitude, we are embodying the original moment of ignorance.

In some ways it is a bit like if you have a small child and you are may be going shopping in a big store, and the child wanders off—you are looking at something, and the child wanders off. Often, for a moment the child feels quite confident and happy and they may see things that fascinate and interest them. But if this small child was wandering around like that, at a certain point, it will look around for its mother or father to show them what interests it, and at that moment there's: "*Where are they?*" There is an anxiety, there's a sense that the ease of being is suddenly disrupted by hah! And that tension builds up as the child looks around desperately, and probably starts crying, and then other people come and say, "*What's the matter?*" and because these people are strangers the child gets more anxious. And then, if the mother or the father arrives again, the child, on seeing the mother or the father's face recognises a point of recognition and starts to relax.

So there is a sense in which—just as the child can feel completely at one with the parent figure in a kind of merged in that moment—we also at one time had a sense of just simply being in the world, there wasn't a disruption.

Then there is this sense of dislocation which occurs and on the basis of that, we become very anxious and we go looking. Through that anxiety, our sense of comfort and ease in being ourselves has been lost, so we then go on looking for something that will replace our sense of comfort and ease. We do that by the things I was talking about before the lunch break, by being very busy in the world trying to get things.

I think we know that kind of thing from western developmental psychology, on a simpler level. When somebody has a lot of deprivation in childhood, they feel ill at ease and anxious, and may well seek to fill that gap with drink, with food, with relationships of a crazy kind; with something to make them feel completed by adding something on, because there's a piece of them that is missing.

We know that this can work for a while. Sometimes people will be bulimic for years, or get into alcohol or heroin for years; but it doesn't really work, because it is not as if there is something out in the world which, when added on, will make us complete, because this thing is not 'me'. By trying to make it 'me' I only have the illusion that it is 'me' for a while. Yet we return to it, because our focus is already through a dualistic perception.

We think we can relax if we get this good thing, if only I get this friend, if only this person falls in love with me, if only I get this job, if only I buy this... The reason it doesn't work is because I don't fully relax.

When I'm depending on something else, sooner or later it can leave me. The bond that we have is impermanent. We can see that when we see the

excitement of a new relationship, a new job, a new possession, new clothes, new car or something.

We also see it as we move towards death. Our relationship to our body is as if the body was the thing that completed our mind. That is one of the reasons there is so much reflection and meditation in buddhism on death, on looking into the primary identification we make with something, as if was us, when really it is not us.

With this notion of ignorance, what is then happening is that we are using thoughts and ways of creating substances in the world, we are using a dualistic perception, to both create the gap between self and other and then to try to work out which of the others that are out there, if brought in juxtaposition with myself, will complete me.

So that for example, on the level of personality, when we just went for lunch, some people will order vegetarian food, they will have a sense that *"I am a vegetarian, I don't want the meat because if I eat the meat I couldn't be a vegetarian."* There are certain objects which exist in the world which if you bring them close to you will contradict your sense of yourself. So you want to get rid of these objects and you want to find the good objects which will confirm you: *"Mmmm, these are very good vegetables, ugh, that's meat doesn't look very nice!"* Then you feel stronger that what you are really makes sense and you set up selections in the world to affirm you in that sense.

So our sense of self or self-image is something that we need to develop all the time, by bringing forward the things that support it and pushing away the things that would undermine it.

The same process is true whether we are engaged in what might be called a healthy or positive movement or whether we are in a negative or destructive movement. For example, the person that is into self-cutting or into binge-eating, into under-eating or overeating, that is the self-identity that the person has, and the more they do that activity the more they are affirming who they are.

Many self-destructive behaviours mark the body. These marks are not just an incidental side effect. These are a staking-out of a definite identity, in which one's damaged body shows one who one is.

A REALITY WHICH ISN'T RECOGNISED AND A FANTASY WHICH IS RECOGNISED

Now, to get back more directly to your question.

All of these movements—from the first moment of ignorance through to these repeated patterns of self-affirmation in an 'I-am-me-and-this-is-the-world' movement—are predicated on the original mistake.

And the mistake or the fantasy has no substance either because the original nature of the mind, or the real nature of the mind, or 'the world as it is' is always

there. Our ability to recognise this is also always there. That's what is called buddha nature.

So you have a reality which isn't recognised and a fantasy which is recognised. In terms of the fantasy that is recognised, there is a felt sense that the fantasy is reality and the reality is a fantasy, just another fantasy among the many that people have.

RELAXING, NOT CREATING

That's why, to return to my first remarks, it's not so much about creating enlightenment or creating buddhahood or building up something, it's much more relaxing, so that the belief in the fantasy of a dualistic world of separated objects, that fantasy, can dissolve back into its original ground. Rather than having a horizontal distribution of separated isolated phenomena which are in contradistinction to each other, one instead has (as it were) a vertical integration of the recognition of all that manifests as being simply the display of the open dimension of awareness.

MIRROR-LIKE

When you look in a mirror you see yourself, and you might be cleaning your teeth or putting on your lipstick or something. You're looking and you see yourself and you see you're doing that. We take the image in the mirror as us, when it's actually simply something on the surface of a mirror, but we see the image as if it was real.

Now, because it's simply a reflection, it's simply an image, it doesn't mean that it's not real in the sense of it not being there at all, but what is there is not a substance. You can't grab the image in the mirror. This is exactly the way the world is. It is as if the mind were a mirror and everything is revealing itself like an image in that mirror. The mirror is a metaphor for the mind.

The moment that we are able to recognise that all that arises is like a reflection in a mirror; then we recognise the radiance of the mirror-quality of our own mind, which is the awakening to buddha-nature. But when we don't recognise that then we are seeing something which is really just an empty reflection, not a thing-in-itself, but which we see as being a thing-in-itself, and through the perception that this is a thing-in-itself we have the corresponding experience that I am-a-thing-in-myself. There are two things interacting, and that's how the dualistic movement arises and repeats itself.

That's really the essence of what attachment is. It's not so much *that "I've got a watch and I like my watch,"* since to be attached to a particular watch is a second-order attachment, if you like, predicated or held in place by a first-order attachment to the fact of there being a self who exists in a world of objects, like watches.

And all the attachments that we have in the world—liking some people, not liking others, liking winter, liking summer—whatever particular ways we put our energy,

all of these are second-order attachments grounded on the primary attachment, which is attachment to the dualistic vision of discrete subject and object.

And so it's on that point that there is really no difference between ordinary human beings and buddhas. It's simply the case of awareness, or the moment of perception of whether one recognises experience as an absolutely present effulgence, a radiance of the open dimension of being, or whether one sees these as discrete objects out there and 'I' am existing in relationship to them, with the quality of my being determined by the particular patterns that I make.

HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL

That's why when we do a meditation—like the one you began with today with the visualisation of Guru Rinpoche, and then at a certain point you have the deity coming and dissolving into you—one is attempting to transform the usual fragmentation of the world into what I am calling a horizontal plane of discrete separate objects. Bringing it into a unified moment of vertical alignment.

You can see on the wall here is a photograph of the Bouddhanath Stupa just outside Kathmandu in Nepal. And here above the altar is a big thangka of a mandala and the mandala is done as a kind of architectural cross-section. It actually represents a three-dimensional building. The mandala image is representing the integration of these vertical and horizontal movements.

The central place in the mandala usually deals with the transformation of ignorance. Then the movements in the four directions deal with the transformation of anger, desire, jealousy and pride into an appropriate wisdom because as long as we are operating from the point-of-view of ignorance or stupidity in the middle, we are splitting the world.

If there's a subject and object then there will be objects that I like and I want to have them; and that would be the focus of desire or appropriation or bringing the good things into me. Similarly, we have anger or aversion: there are things in the world I don't like so I am pushing them away. With pride I set myself up as more important than other people; and with jealousy and envy I am worried that someone else is more important than me.

DESIRE (FIVE POISONS)

So I think in that way you can see how these five poisons are all predicated on, based on, the idea of a self-other, subject-object division. Without that division these five poisons just don't exist. I won't go into all the details of the five poisons today but just very briefly about desire or attachment. The Tibetan word for this is *död chag* and it has this idea: *Död pa* means to kind of want things, to desire them; it has the sense of longing. *Chag pa* means to be attached, in the way a shellfish gets attached to a rock.

Now, when I am not caught up in particular longings—you know, particularly the longing that *"I am incomplete, I am somehow hollowed-out and if I can only get this one thing that I want and put it into my hollow, then I'll be rounded,"* that's the

longing part of the attachment. When once I've got this thing in my hollow I want to keep it there, that's the attachment part, because if I lose it then I will feel depleted again.

If one moves out of that then something else happens. Then, you develop a wisdom that's called *So so tog pa'i yeshe* which means a kind of wisdom or attention to the world which is able to be interested and fascinated by the details of everything, so that one's not looking for something. One's not going out in a hungry way into the world to get the particular special thing that will complete me. Rather there is the possibility of being interested and fascinated in everything that is there.

That kind of awareness introduces pleasure, and it's a pleasure free of anxiety, since often the things that give us pleasure also make us guilty. If they don't make us guilty they make us feel anxious because they may not last. So we have to keep changing objects to try to find the patterning of changed objects that will complete us as we move through the day.

Our attachment often has a ritualistic quality to it. For some people, when they get up in the morning they have to have a cup of tea or they have to have a cup of coffee. It has to be made in a particular way, and the smell of the particular brand of coffee you like—it reminds you of the reality of your own being because it's a return to a familiar place.

The familiar experience stands in the place of a small child with a teddy bear, who needs the teddy bear to fall asleep at night. By having the teddy bear it knows who it is because the experience of falling asleep with the teddy bear is repeated. But of course if the teddy is not there then the baby can't fall asleep, and if we don't get exactly the right kind of coffee or if somebody cooks the food the wrong way or if somebody does something for us but not just how we like it this can completely blows the whole thing for people who are rigid so that it is spoiled. And if one can't do that then there's unhappiness.

ENJOYING WHATEVER OCCURS

Whereas, if one is not looking to objects to complete oneself, then one is free simply to enjoy whatever occurs because one's not then experiencing the world as a series of entities with a content, or a function, which can be of use to us, but simply as a momentary display of pure aesthetic pleasure. So that's why, in this practice, if you are meditating on Guru Rinpoche and you are reciting the mantra, you might be visualising rays of light coming from Guru Rinpoche and dissolving in your body. These rays of light also go out and touch everything in the six realms, the whole of samsara in every possible place where there are fixed subject and object patterns. Then rainbow-light dissolves into these objects and softens them, revealing their own nature as luminescent. So, the objects of the world, the harsh edges of them, the harsh differences between these objects, are softened because they are now all imbued with the rainbow-light quality of the five wisdoms emanating from Guru Rinpoche's heart.

DISSOLVING

At a certain point (In Tibetan, you can do the visualisation in different ways, but in the standard way, it is at a certain point), the guru comes to the top of one's head and starts to dissolve. Remember, of course, that the guru's body which one has been visualising is a light body, a display of luminous colour without any hard solid self-substance. Then, the guru's body dissolves from the top down and the bottom up to form a small ball of light. The ball then goes down through the top of your head into your heart, and then one's own body starts to dissolve into that ball of light.

MERCURY METAPHOR

A traditional example is that it's like a small drop of mercury. I don't know if you've ever played with mercury—if you shake it about it rolls, and its edges always curve round; if you pour mercury out it tends to pull back and get this very rounded edge. It is round in that way, we sort of round ourselves down into this ball. We just dissolve down into this small ball of light, and then this ball just dissolves down into a point, a tiny, tiny point, and then out into this sense of open spaciousness.

WE SEE FORM—A CONTENT IS IMPUTED

Now, in the restaurant today, this little child had a balloon and was blowing up the balloon and then letting it out. When you let the air out it collapses because the balloon has nothing inside it. Now, if somebody was to try to squeeze me flat, if they squeezed hard enough then probably my heart and my lungs would pop out of my mouth or something, because I'm full of things, I'm not like a balloon. I mean that is our ordinary sense: we have things inside us, so what you see when you look at me is a form, but you also see with eyes that know there is content to the form. When you look at someone you know that there is something in their head, whether you think of it as brains or blood, or whatever it is. It is not just an empty bowl.

This is very, very important because when we are looking at someone we are seeing a form. That is what we see, and we are imagining content behind the form. Now, the content exists as a mental content rather than as a perceived content, so that when I look at you I imagine you have got a heart going bom bom bom inside you, but I can't see it, so your heart exists for me as a mental phenomenon.

The only way I can really know that you have a heart is to take a scalpel and open you up, at which point the heart would no longer be a content, it would be form, because I would then be seeing the surface of the heart moving. But, of course, by saying "the surface of the heart" I am implying that there is a content in the heart, that I see the pericardium, the skin around the outside of the heart, but I don't actually see into the heart. So I may have read a textbook or dissected a heart in the past, and I know there are auricles and ventricles and all different bits of the heart, but I don't actually see them. This is a very important point.

What I am trying to suggest here is that we only ever see form, we never see content, because whatever we see is a form, and the content is always imputed. This is probably why we can operate with visual images, like a photograph of a stupa, or a painting of a deity. When we look at it, it is as if we are seeing somebody there. In fact all we are seeing are lines on paper. We bring these together into a form and the form carries with it the absolutely automatic assumption that it has a content inherent in it, hovering just behind the surface.

So this brings us back to the balloon and the dissolving of our body in the meditation. We are used to making a false assumption that a particular sign, which is itself a form, a momentary manifestation, represents or stands in the place of, a particular content. So that, when I look at my body I see my arm, I can see my legs. (I'll never see my back. I'd need to use a mirror, but I still couldn't see it directly.) I can have different sensations inside my body which I may take to signify muscle tension or indigestion or tiredness or a bruise or something like that. I have an attachment to the knowledge, the culturally-supported knowledge, that inside my body I have a heart, I have lungs, I have blood going up and down, I have a metabolic structure, I have a brain which has all sorts of complex processes going on in it.

So what I do is construct the fantasy of contents of my body on the basis of shared cultural fantasies signified through language, books, education and all the rest of it. And I install this fantasy of a content in the place of the form of my simple perception.

DISSOLVING DUALISTIC SEPARATION OF FORM AND CONTENT

So now Guru Rinpoche is dissolved into this ball of light, and gone down into my heart and my body has begun to dissolve in. What is being dissolved is not just my body but the whole system of dualistic representations which are held in place by the separation of form and content, by the imagination that there is always a content hovering behind the form. So my body dissolves down into this ball of light and then the point of light vanishes into space.

SENSATION: BACK IN BUSINESS!

At that point of course, some thought or sensation arises. So there is a sensation, it is a somatic sort of sensation, a bodily sort of sensation. That is to say, I have had this kind of sensation before. And notice the language: "*I've had this kind of sensation before*", and on the basis of having had this sensation before, I now can recognise what this sensation is.

So there is a sensation and then there's a thought: my knee is hurting. So here we are, dissolved into this ultimate state of dharmakaya, and what happens? I get a sore bloody knee! It is like waiting for months and months to get an audience with the Dalai Lama, and then just as you can go in you need to go and have a pee, and you miss your chance.

So this is absolutely vital because this is really the point where we return to the familiarity of samsara—because there is a sensation. And the sensation, what is

it? The main thing we have to do is not to know what it is because if you know what it is then you have a knower and a known. And what we know about ourselves is that we always like to know a lot, that's what makes the ego feel safe. So if you know what is happening is that you have got a sore knee, then you also need to know that your knee is not just hovering in space, it is attached to your leg, connected to your bum, your back of your head and you are back in business—an ordinary human being.

PURE ATTENTION

What one has to do at that point is to relax or dissolve the fantasy of thinking you know what is going on, so that instead of telling the sensation what it is (“You are a pain in my knee.”), one is interested in what it is. And in order to be interested in what something is, we have to give it our attention. Through that attention there is the possibility that the object can reveal itself to us.

If you just give that sensation pure attention it will reveal itself as something that will simply pass away. And when another sensation arises and you give it the same kind of attention you see that it reveals the same kind of thing: it reveals itself as form without a content. As a form which is the radiance of the open empty dimension of mind. But it can only reveal itself as being that if we don't tell it what it is.

In buddhist terms, that moment of revelation is the revelation of the three kayas of integrated buddhahood. There are all sorts of technical names you can put on it, but mainly it is the revelation of just the simple perfection of the world.

IGNORANCE IS KNOWING THINGS

That can only come about if we don't know. Because we have to remember that ignorance is not not-knowing things. Ignorance in buddhist terms is knowing things. That is what ignorance is—because knowledge is always projective, because knowledge is focusing us towards looking for something, seeing something that is there, seeing the content that is implicit in the form.

Just as in the hospital where I work, in the department of psychiatry, a lot of energy is put into diagnosis. People are given a good reputation if, after an hour of talking to someone, they can diagnose them, they can put all sorts of labels onto them and through that labelling predict what this person is likely to do and what sort of medication would be likely to help them. The doctors get very puzzled if they can't diagnose someone. In some ways it is interesting, but it is interesting as a challenge, because you have to work very hard then to get the diagnosis, and then—“*Ah! Now I understand!*” And then when the diagnosis is in place, the anxiety of everyone diminishes, because you know where you are. And you know what to do.

This is exactly what we do all the time in our world. We diagnose what we see by identifying for ourselves latent or inherent contents, when actually all we see is form. So we see through things to find out what they really are.

THERE IS NO DEPTH. THER IS ONLY EMPTINESS WITH A SHINY SURFACE

This is exactly what we do not do in the practice of tantra. Tantra is superficial. 'Superficial' in English is quite an insulting word. People don't like to be superficial, we say it is good to have depth, but buddhism says exactly the opposite. There is no depth; there is only emptiness with a shiny surface.

This is very important because the world doesn't stop. The world is the process of becoming, the revelation of aesthetic moments. And that is what the practice of tantra is trying to do, reveal the beauty and wonder and fulfilment of the surface reality of things. 'Surface' in the sense of the mirror surface. Everything is there, nothing is wiped out, we are not killing off the world; we are more alive because we are in the presence of the display of the world which is the surface. That's how we see it because it is on the surface!

That is why there is nothing hidden. There is no big secret to be revealed. The only secret is really that there is no secret. This is really what the Tibetan word *dzogchen* means. It means something like 'a great completion' or 'a great perfection'. Things are just perfect. And the deities that are on the front of Simply Being², the blue and the white figure, Samantabhadra and Samantabhadri, both these names mean 'Always Good'. Good not in the sense of opposed to bad, but in the sense of rich, complete, fulfilling wonderful, amazing,

AWAKEN OUR DEAD EYES; VISUALISATION

This is the way the world is, that whatever is arising is amazing. It is complete in the moment of its revelation on the surface, there is nothing behind that has to be dug out or found, or it is just what it is. This is one of the reasons why these Tibetan thangkas and altar implements are so ornate, so richly decorated, because they are trying to bring the attention to the eyes, they are trying to awaken our dead eyes, our eyes which have become the agents of knowledge and power, to awaken these dead eyes to the living eyes of beauty.

That is why we do that kind of visualising meditation, which is to play with light, because all we have in this world of objects is light and sensation. We are part of the world as sensuous beings, it is our senses which embed us in the world, and it is very often our thoughts, when we do not experience our thoughts as aesthetic sensations (which they really are), when the thoughts appear to be the master of the situation, it creates the gap in which the thought becomes the master of the world, the identifier and divider of subject and object.

So in the dissolving part of the meditation, when one is just allowing thoughts to come and go, one is trying to experience thoughts in their aesthetic form as a pure shining radiance, rather than as tools for controlling this split world of subject and object.

² Simply Being: Texts in the Dzogchen Tradition (Vajra Press, 1998) ISBN: 0953284506. Also available in French and German.

ATTACHMENT AND CONVENTIONAL TRUTH

I think what's important is to get some sense of attachment as it operates in your own life, particularly as it relates to the two truths. The conventional truth refers to our perception of the world in its ordinary frame of real objects, perceived by an ordinary person; absolute truth refers to the truth or the experience or the understanding of the infinite revelation of the becoming to itself, which is often described in terms of the three kayas. We might look at that tomorrow.

But the particular thing is that in terms of the conventional truth one's attachment is to something particular. For example, this watch was given to me by some people after I had done something for them, so it's not just a watch but it holds a sentimental attachment to people who were engaged in an activity that I supported. In a sense my attachment to the watch also stands for attachment to these people and my memories of what we did together.

So the positive side to that attachment is that putting on the watch in the morning sometimes, I'll just remember these people and think how good they are, and that they are working hard. These were psychotherapy students and they are doing things for other people, so there's a kind of sense of being involved with people who are doing something of value. But you can see how that sort of feeling is very much that sort of horizontal movement. It has me moving out connecting to particular people in the world, to real people, with lives that I know about, so it's knowing across a distance.

The negative side of it would be that if I lost the watch I would be sad, because I would feel somehow some of my connection with these people, or that period of time, would have been lost. So the watch is invested with meaning. That is to say it carries a content for me which it wouldn't carry for other people. And that content or that investment is a mental production. It is not inscribed in the watch or anything, this is just a watch.

That would be attachment inside conventional truth. Its function is that it both binds me into the world, as a person among people, plus it also makes me happy if it is working well, vulnerable if it is not working well.

Now what I would invite you to do is to take a few minutes and reflect for yourself about points of that kind of attachment that are important for you. So it could be an attachment to particular kinds of behaviour, like having a bath on a particular night of the week with candles and the bath oil you have to put in—some people live very ritualistic lives. Or it could be a particular object where you might travel an extra distance to go to a particular shop to buy that special brand that makes you feel good.

Whatever it is, I invite you to reflect on that and then to talk about it in pairs, to make sure you've got a clear idea of how this word is being used. In particular think about what are the advantages and disadvantages of these kinds of attachments, because there will always be advantages.

Break

That's something to keep examining for yourself, different ways in which you get attached. And if you think of your own life history I think you can find that the objects that you've been attached to have changed enormously. In fact, without the attachment to the nipple we would not survive, and when we get weaned of that we get attached to all sorts of things throughout our lives. A lot of dharma practice is substituting attachment to the dharma for attachment to other things.

ATTACHMENTS WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

At the beginning of *Simply Being* there is a translation of a ngöndro commentary by a man called Chetsangpa. He says all sorts of interesting things about attachment, in particular, the importance of shifting our environment in order to change attachment. So that if somebody is living in a village where they know everyone and everybody knows them, then there is a huge pool of shared knowledge, shared prediction, shared expectation. And given that we have limited amounts of time, it is often difficult to develop a new attachment because it means giving up an old attachment.

For example, there may be a family attachment where you go and have Sunday lunch with your parents, or your children come and have lunch with you. You might decide that you want to do your meditation on a Sunday, and don't want to be disturbed. Now you are a buddhist, and the dharma is very interesting and that's where you want to put your energy, which is what you're getting attached to. When you phone your mother to say, "*I'm not coming for Sunday lunch*", she asks "*Why not? Isn't it important that you come for lunch any more? Do we not matter in your life?*" She says this because you are disrupting a system which has a kind of balance. Through that eating together, people know that they are important to each other and their attachment and social identity which is embedded in that attachment is being reaffirmed.

It may even be, to somebody who is used to you being in a particular way in your life, that developing an interest in the dharma is seen as something aberrant, maybe something selfish. Friends or relatives might be worried that you are joining some peculiar sect, where people commit suicide, murder even.

So there's potentially a real contradiction here, between an activity which in itself we might think of as good, for example practising meditation, and the effect that this has on other people. To disappoint them, to upset them, to make them feel rejected is something we might think of as bad.

So Chetsangpa was recommending, on that basis, that it is helpful to go and live where nobody knows your name, so that you won't have to manage all the various dependencies and attachments and projections that people have on you, and which you have on them.

Attachment from the heart always changes behaviour. If we really do get involved in buddhism—think its ideas make sense, feel that other buddhists seem to be reasonable people behaving ethically, friendly and helpful—that increasing

involvement will change our behaviour too. There is a particular paradox here in that, people like friends and parents, would probably say, trying to help us, that what we need to be is be the kind of person they want us to be.

Now from the dharma point of view, what helps people is to stop having our ordinary relationship with them, and learning to think about them in a very different way. We can imagine (for example) our parents and our friends as beings who are wandering in samsara, who are driven by karma, who are mad and intoxicated by the five poisons. So you go to visit a friend, and they say, *“Look I’ve got this new CD player. What do you think?”* And you say, *“This is a manifestation of the poison of attachment and desire”*. Anyway, you think that this box is full of elaborate electronic material, but it is empty. Clearly we cannot talk in that way. But then, if we follow the social conventions and say, *“Oh that looks great, and can we hear some music? And that’s a really great sound,”* we are just being nice, being friendly. We are being seduced by them into the view that subject and object are real.

And this is really, really important, because there is a price for practising the dharma. It is not that we have to make sacrifices and be martyrs, but we do need to face the consequences of our actions. If we choose to spend a lot of our time pleasing our friends, dealing with enemies, getting control in the world, being liked by the people we want to be liked by, then we won’t have very much time to actually practice the dharma. Part of the dharma is to take up and to live in the world through this radical critique of questioning and enquiry into the nature of attachment. In order to break through the seductive and all-enveloping fantasy, which we have talked of earlier today, one often has to act and speak and think in ways which mark oneself out as being different.

USING THE DHARMA TO BE BETTER

One can use the dharma as a way of simply increasing the quality of one’s life. If I get very angry, I may do some shi-né or some quietening meditation in order to calm myself down. If I am being very selfish, I may do some meditation on being more open to other people. There is nothing wrong with these two practices but they are rather narrow, because they are ways of improving our life, without transforming it. It is still operating from the model that I have some kind of hole or deficit in my life and if I add on these qualities I will be more rounded or more complete.

There is nothing wrong with doing that, indeed we all need to do it, and hopefully we do try to become more kind, more generous, more loving towards people but, in being kind towards beings, we are still operating on the basis of there’s somebody over there and I need to be kind to them. I’m still operating across the gap from one subject to another subject, from a subject to an object. So, (if you like) what one is doing is improving the content of one’s experience, so that you are replacing bad, selfish thoughts with good compassionate thoughts so that, after practising the dharma in this way for ten or fifteen years or so, I hope everyone would be able to say, *“Yes, I am a better person now, I don’t get so angry, I don’t do this so much, it has softened me in some way”*.

You can see how that is located inside the structure of conventional truth, of ordinary truth, of relative truth, because you are still dealing with the notion of a form with content. For example, here you have the cup and it has got something inside it. We can pour out this stuff and pour in some other stuff. We can pour out the bad things and fill it up with the good things. Get rid of anger and jealousy and put in passion, love, calmness.

EFFECTING A STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION

But the real transformation comes about when we radically rethink the nature of the cup. That is when we move from trying to improve ourselves into effecting a structural transformation. That's the level when one moves from relative truth to absolute truth. The absolute truth is seeing things as they are, as they reveal themselves, without ignoring, without structuring it in terms of subject-object differentiation.

So attachment at that point is the more subtle attachment I was mentioning earlier, in which I become more subtly aware that when I want to help someone, that desire to help is caught up, or generated by, a sense of *'I have got something they haven't got, so I will take the good thing in me and give it to them and put the good thing into them'*.

When that sort of thought arises, one does not sit in that thought and take it to be real; one doesn't use a thought like that to make sense of what is going on. Rather, one allows this sort of thought to dissolve back into the openness of the mind. In this way one is not operating from an intentionality generated by the gap between subject and object, but rather one is responding spontaneously within the flow of becoming. This is very, very important, and of course it is very tricky too, you know. We are going to lose this again and again in our meditation, but it is really the point that we need to try for.

This is what is central in the practice of meditation, so that once you have done the dissolving part of the meditation, you go down in the ball and into this open spaciousness.

ALLOWING THOUGHTS, FEELINGS TO DO IT FOR THEMSELVES

The task is to allow whatever arises to dissolve back into its source, so it's 'allow'. 'Allow' does not mean to do anything. Allow means to let the other do something, so that the thoughts and the feelings do it for themselves. Thoughts arise and pass by themselves, as do feelings and sensations. This is why basic shi-né, focusing on the breath, calming our mind down is very important because it helps us to have a slower flow of thoughts, in which we can begin to observe how thoughts arise and pass away.

So when thoughts arise during meditation which may seem to have a good content, such as *"Oh, it's my brother's birthday,"* and you might think *"Ah! I want to phone him up,"* or send him a card, do something to make him happy. From this point of view of meditation, there is nothing more important than allowing that thought to go by without leaving any trace. Because if you are thinking about your

brother with the intention of sending him a card to make him happy, then you are taking up your brother as somebody that, if you give them what you want, they will happy. You are going into a collusion or complicity with that structural delusion or belief.

STRUCTURAL DELUSION

And what appears to be an act of kindness is actually a murderous attack on the possibility of your brother's enlightenment—which you may actually want, if you have got a bit of sibling rivalry!

It is very important to understand exactly why this is so. It is quite a complicated idea and yet it is actually, at heart, very simple. If my brother is my brother whom I know and about whom I can predict, then he is an object in samsara that can be predicted and manipulated. By existing in that way he is the basis for my further confusion and wandering in samsara. By knowing that a birthday card is important for him, I affirm his separate reality and in affirming his separate reality, I affirm my separate reality.

That is why it says in the *Sutra of Eight Thousand Verses from the Prajnaparamita* that a bodhisattva who has the intention to help a sentient being is not a bodhisattva. If I perceive a sentient being who has to be saved, through my perception of them as a sentient being I am restricting their possibility of experiencing themselves in a different way.

Just as, if we go to see people who are authority figures in our lives, the power of their expectation about who we are, often induces a regressive movement in ourselves, so that we have to fulfil their desires. A familiar example that we've used before is about going to see your parents at Christmas. When you go through that front door, you immediately lose some years. It doesn't get rid of the wrinkles, but it just makes you feel very small, because of the power of that person that you will be a certain kind of person. You may want to say, "*No, I have changed. I am now this kind of person*", but they experience this as an attack on their predictive world, which is part of their sense of identity.

If we go back to what we started with today, about this whole fantasy that we all live in, everyone we meet, every social interaction we have, just walking down the street and seeing advertising posters, all of that social cultural milieu that we are embedded in, carries an implicit demand: be a separate human being.

In order to alter this nexus of meaning, this generation of meaning, from the subject-object point of view, one has to be able to relax and to dissolve and let go of the incredible urge to construct the world according to the template which is karmically embedded in the environment.

The radically different thing about buddhism is the movement through the understanding of emptiness—through the understanding that the mind itself is not an entity—into the absolute truth in which the gift that we give to ourselves and to other people is the gift of nothing at all; the gift of the falling away of assertion of statement and assumption, the falling away of any belief, into the direct moment

of the open aesthetic perception of the world as it becomes itself, with us as part of it.

It is not the construction of a new self through the Buddha or through Jesus or anyone else, but it is the falling away of false constructions to reveal nothing at all, but a nothing that is radiant, and displays everything as its self-display and not as something as such. And this is really really important, because if you understand these points clearly, meditation has some real basis and purpose to it, because you know why you are doing what you do. And this is why when you've done the dissolving and thoughts and feelings arise, it is so important to let all these thoughts and feelings dissolve and move on.

In this blue book, *Simply Being* there is a chapter by Nuden Dorje on dzogchen meditation and a short chapter by Patrul Rinpoche on meditation practice, and they give many very useful hints on how to let go of thoughts as they arise.

Because we live in a world where by transforming a good helpful thought into some action in the world we can make a profit, we get some money, we get fame, we get whatever it is, so clearly it makes sense for us to give up having bad troubling thoughts and have lots of good thoughts that will make us happy and bring about good results in the world. But this view, which is a relative truth view, must be integrated with absolute truth, which says: 'One must not make any discrimination between good thoughts and bad thoughts, between good people and bad people. One must simply allow reality to manifest and dissolve in its own untrammelled play. We must abandon forever the role of God.'

RESTING EVERY DAY, NOT JUST ON THE SEVENTH DAY

You might remember at the beginning of Genesis when there is the description of the creation of the world, things are put in place by God, things are named by God, and having been named and put in place, God is satisfied he knows what is what and that it is fine. Having worked for six days putting everything into place he then rests on the seventh.

This is not the view of dzogchen: where genesis starts with the waters, the chaotic waters, and on the waters God inscribes a particular kind of ordering, and having named and labelled and tied everything up in its proper place he then has a rest.

The dzogchen view is that we need on the first day, the second day, the third day, the fourth day, the fifth day, the sixth day, the seventh day, to rest, and that we don't order and control and structure and label and name the revelation of the world to itself. What we do is relax and enjoy.

TRUSTING THAT THE OPENNESS OF EMPTINESS IS SUFFICIENT UNTO THE DAY

This is very, very important because this is where tantra and the dzogchen radically drift off from other readings of the world, the structuring and cognition that we are used to in the west, as well as from the main principles of ordinary

dualistic buddhism. The figures on the front of *Simply Being* (Samantabhadra and Samantabhadri) who are always good, this is what they represents—a moment in which there is a perfection, which is not made perfect, it is innate.

This is really quite radical, because if you really take this up and you try to practise this in your own meditation, you will come up against the anxiety of *'I am likely to make a mistake, I am not a good person, I must get it right'*, all the pressures that you have gathered in this life and in many previous lives, of feeling as a subject in a dangerous world. *'If I make a mistake, something awful will happen.'* You have to face an existential fear and go through it in order to trust that the openness of emptiness is sufficient unto the day.

It is in that profound taking of refuge in the natural perfection of the open dimension of mind that one relinquishes the burden of carrying responsibility for the whole of universe on the point of one's own ego, and hands the burden back into the world of which one is part.

Sunday

BEING DISTRACTED IN MEDITATION

The world is full of so many things which stimulate us and return our attention to familiar ways in which we set up our constructions. So unless we are able to relax our minds, and not be stimulated by the hooks that we see—both internally in terms of our mental habits and externally in terms of familiar phenomena—then we will easily just return to the same place. So the development of concentration is very important.

The other thing that is important to explore this morning is the nature of our own attachment, because when you're practising shi-né, the instruction is to focus your attachment on your breath. So that one is saying: the most important thing, the only important thing, is to allow my attention to gently focus on my breath. Yet somehow, again and again, I am finding that my attention is being diverted to these thoughts, to these feelings, to these sensations.

This isn't happening by magic. This shifting of the attention from the breath to something else is happening because in that moment we are more attached to that something else than to the breath. So every now and then it is useful (in a sense) to stop the focus of attention on the breath and just to reflect, to move from a meditation to a contemplation, to thinking about what is it that gets me hooked in this way? And try to understand the process of that attachment.

For example you are driving your car, you're on holiday, you're driving your car along a nice country road, and you see these beautiful views. But if you are the person driving the car you have to be more attached to the road than to the view, otherwise you would crash. But every now and then you might want to stop the car and look at the sunset, at the way the colours are, the shades in the valley. I think that for most people driving a car, they would know that it is too dangerous to really focus their attention on the scenery rather than on the road, and that

attachment to the scenery—no matter how beautiful it was, no matter how spectacular—was actually in that moment deadly.

DRIVING ALONG THE BUDDHA ROAD LOOKING AT THE SCENERY

Now similarly, in meditation, we are driving down this road to buddhahood in our beautiful little cars that we keep polishing every day in meditation—in driving down this road to enlightenment there are these other shining lights and beautiful things around us which we have been trained all our life to know are very, very important—but we have very little experience of meditation and very little affirmation from others about keeping on this buddha road. Then it could make sense of course to get out of the car and to look around a lot, and of course, that is what we do.

But what we have to try to be aware of is that every time that we get distracted, we go potentially off the road, If we don't practice very much and we are frequently distracted, then we don't know the difference between being on the road and off the road.

If we are serious about pursuing this road towards greater attention, then it is very important that we know that these distractions are dangerous, that they can kill us. So that there is a quality, although one is trying to practice a relaxed calm mind, one needs to keep an awareness of the dangers of not doing this. Because meditation is not simply a way of simply passing time and making us feel a bit more calm, but it is a method of bringing about very profound transformations in the way in which we experience ourselves in the world with others.

So we are trying to keep our clear focused attention on the breath as this road towards calm clarity, not being distracted, but we also want to stop every now and then and reflect on what is the process by which we get distracted so that we recognise for ourselves the triggers and the ways in which we get drawn off the course, off the road, without even being aware of it. That is a very important exploration to make in this calm practice of shi-né.

SITTING PRACTICE: INSTRUCTIONS

So if we practice this together for about twenty minutes and if you find that your body is getting sore, then do just move and make your body comfortable. Then settle back down again. You need to make some experiments so that you find what is a comfortable way for you to sit.

Make sure that your spine is supporting your body. When the spine is supporting the body, then the rib cage is held back and the belly is relaxed. And you want to be able to be breathing from the belly, from the diaphragm, not doing effortful upper-chest breathing.

DIFFERENT OBJECTS

Some of you may know that there are other ways of developing this focused attention. Sometimes people look at candle flames, or at a crystal... In buddhism

there are certain kinds of objects that are used more frequently. In the very early days, people made little disks out of clay and put them on a stick in front of them and looked at these disks of clay. That's not used so much now, but what is used quite a lot is a small pebble, usually a round one or sort of egg shaped, but with smooth edges, no corners or sharp edges. So you might like to try that, if you're out walking somewhere and you find some small stone, you can bring it home and sit down with it about one and a half metres away from you.

The distance depends on you. If you have it too far away, you might get distracted, because there are more things that you can see in your visual field. If you have it too close it can become a bit hypnotic. So again, you should experiment for yourself what sort of distance. You want to put it on the table about this height, without too many other distracting things around it. You want it not too low because you want your chin slightly down and your eyes just gently focused.

Keep your mouth slightly open and your tongue up against your pallet. The tip of your tongue just resting on you upper palatal ridge behind the gums. You have to try that out for yourself. At first you might find that that causes quite a collection of saliva in your mouth so that you have to swallow. Check a way that is reasonable for you.

So then you're just gently allowing your attention to rest on this stone and if it gets distracted you just bring it back in the same way as you would with your breath. If you are very tired, or you're very anxious, or worried, or wound up it is probably more useful to use an external object rather than your breath.

The advantages of focusing on your breath is that it is always with you and you can do it anywhere without anyone knowing what you are doing. So if you are sitting on the train or plane or anywhere you can always do some shi-né.

Another method would be to use a small statue of the Buddha. Maybe about this height—3 centimetres or so. You would want it with just a simple outline. You can get these very cheap, simple brass ones. The advantage of using a statue like the Buddha is that one is thinking, "*Well, the Buddha is a very good person, the Buddha has all these qualities,*" and so the respect or the love or devotion that you might feel for the Buddha acts a reinforcement of the attachment onto the object that you are using as the hook for your attention.

'A'

Then another way is to focus on the Tibetan letter 'A'. We can draw one. Okay, so it looks like this, and you can do it either as a black or preferably a dark blue, a sort of dark indigo blue against a white background, and you could cut a little circle around it. The letter would be about this big but you can make the line a little more intense. Or else you could do it as white on a blue background. You could draw it in pencil and paint around it in dark blue or more like pigeon shell blue.

Then you set this up in the same way, on a little stick or something a bit like this and then you are sitting looking at it, focusing attention. This is the focus that is used the most in the dzogchen tradition because the letter 'A' is the basic vowel in the Tibetan alphabet and all the consonants take 'A' as their vowel. I don't know what it is like in German, but in English different consonants take different vowels.

'A' is said to be the mother. All sounds are seen as a variation on 'A'. The very first sounds that babies often make are around 'A' in some way. And small children's words for their parents are usually some variation on 'A'—Mama, Papa, Baba... Even if you have a group of people who have never done anything, if you ask them to just make a sound they often do 'A'. Often when people are dying or in pain they go 'A'. It is a most basic sound.

And so 'A', as the mother or the source of everything, stands for emptiness. By focusing on this letter 'A' one is practising attachment to nothingness. Having practised for a while with a written letter like that, one then moves on to visualising it. One would start by visualising a clear blue sky. And then in this there arises the letter "A", and one focuses on keeping one's attention on this white letter "A", and when you have stabilised your attention on the white letter 'A' then you start to let the 'A' to dissolve back into the clear blue sky, and then bringing it back.

So you have the play of this letter appearing in and out of the clear blue sky. The clear blue sky is also the symbolic representation of emptiness, and in the dzogchen tradition visualisation and meditation practice is very often done with the eyes open, so that one would be sitting relaxed and one would focus one's attention.

Say you were in this room, you have your eyes open and you focus in the space in the middle of things. You are aware of the room, but the room is a bit like with this bowl of mercury or quicksilver we talked of yesterday. It sort of takes on a softer aspect and it is like being inside the bubble which children blow with soap. Being inside that, and the colours are just like a shining circle, and one has this open spaciousness in the middle. Inside that space one has the sense of this bluish sky, but this is hovering inside the room, and in the middle of this comes this white letter 'A', and so you are visualising in the room. The visualisation is in the world.

Instead of closing your eyes and cutting yourself off and not wanting to be disturbed by the world you are bringing your meditation into the world. Because the view from dzogchen is not to be frightened by the world and not to be particularly interested in the world either but just to have a kind of open relaxed awareness of it. Being aware that what we experience as our world is an experience, and not the experience of something.

Like yesterday when we were talking about form and content, what one is experiencing is the presencing of the world or the dharmadatu or enlightenment. There are many different ways of describing it but it is the experience itself. What we have is what we see. And so the world is, from this point of view, an aesthetic

revelation and that is why it is very important to do this visualisation in the world among the phenomena of the world, because they are existing as different forms of the same revelation.

FRAMING AN IMAGE

It is not that the attempt at visualisation is an attempt to get into nirvana whilst the world, or the room that you are sitting in, is the direct presence of nirvana. For example, if you go into an art gallery and you look at a painting, the painting in most galleries will be in a frame and the frame both focuses the attention onto the image and also serves to cut off an attention to what is around the image.

You may have a particular interest, say in Gauguin, so you are walking in the gallery and you spot a Gauguin. So you walk more quickly in that direction and you stand in front of this Gauguin, and it is very nice. *“Oh that’s great,”* but the art gallery (in a sense) is also art. It has been designed by an architect, and hopefully built with some kind of sensitivity and awareness, but often, if we have our focus of attention on the painting, on the visual art, we are not so aware of the art in the building. In fact, you could say that good museum architecture is architecture which doesn’t disrupt or intrude the eye of the spectator when they are focusing on a particular image. But if we step back we can see that both the painting and the architecture of the gallery are part of the same cultural interest in the arts.

So, in the same way, if we are doing our meditation or if we have a room where we have a little shrine like this in it, then it is as if we have our house as a kind of ordinary space or a profane space, and then we have a little corner where we have a painting or a statue or whatever, and this is our sacred space, this is where the Buddha dwells.

Of course, on one level that is true because, hopefully, when you go near your altar you sit there and you do your practice, then the images there on the altar help you to disconnect from your worldly concerns and confusions and help you to focus a bit more clearly. However, from the point of view of dzogchen, the altar is one form of manifestation and your room is one form of manifestation and your unpaid bills are another form of manifestation—all manifestations of the same enlightened nature. Any difference between them is created by your own judgement. So the practice of meditation is designed to reduce that kind of discriminating judgement that sets up some things as very, very, good and puts down others as very, very bad.

That’s why, in doing this focussing practice using the white letter ‘A’ in a clear blue sky, we will do it in the room and during the visualising be aware, of me, of sitting here, of the door, of the thangkas of other peoples’ heads ... There us no *[sentence lost as the tape is changed]*

INSIDE THIS SHINING BUBBLE OF LIGHT

I’m not saying, *“Oh, these are ordinary people and this is the holy letter ‘A’”*, but by the focus on the letter ‘A’ and the opening that that brings, there is an

inclusion of all that's arising, into the same understanding of the revelation of the openness, which is also with me as well. It's not that I am over here looking at that, but I am also aware inside of my head, in the feeling of my body—it's the other wall of this bubble of light, so that everything is the revelation inside this shining bubble of light which is located in an open vastness of many, many different balls of coloured light.

When we look at paintings like these and we see round the head this nimbus of light, and round the bodies a sphere of rainbow-coloured light, this is not simply a symbolic representation of the wisdom or the divine qualities of these beings. It also represents that we are always existing in these balls of light. The world exists for us as light. Even if our eyesight isn't very good we still have dreams which are full of light because so much of processing of reality is as light.

But, as we were looking yesterday, what happens is that our attachment and our judgement transform the world of light into a world of heaviness. Why? Because we name and label appearances as if they had an intrinsic content which is solid and heavy and real.

Okay. So you could see if you've any questions about that and then you could just make a copy of this little letter 'A'. Then we can do some practice with our eyes open. Just before we practise this a bit I'll just say a little bit more about the different intentions. Although all these different methods would be called '*shi-né*' (*Shi* means 'peaceful' or 'calm' and *né* means 'to stay', so it means staying peacefully.)—the way that we often practise by focusing on the breath, not being distracted by thoughts, coming back to the breath—is a focus, as I was saying earlier with the example of the car, on thought, feelings, sensations as being potentially dangerous.

This is the general view in the theravadin or hinayana approach, in which we live in samsara which is a dangerous place and we have to try not to be seduced or goaded, forced, into responding to the things of the world, but we want to somehow seal ourselves off inside this focused attention.

MEDITATING SKY TO SKY

Now, when we practise from the point of view of dzogchen with this letter 'A' in a blue sky, in the world as we experience it, we are doing something rather different. What we are doing is opening up ourselves to an openness that is there and we are trying to have the experience of a focused attention from a vastness here, to a vastness there. It's often described as meditating sky to sky. What we are experiencing is opening and vast like the sky and we, the experiencer, are open and vast like the sky.

So it's not as if we are taking up the place of anything being dangerous or maybe knocking us off course. We are relaxing into this infinity of awareness where there is no course to stick to, and there is no person to be knocked off that course.

The key thing is to have some degree of experience of emptiness, to get more fully into this relaxed open state; because as long as we are operating from the basis of a consciousness inside ourselves looking out at the world, then indeed the world truly is dangerous. At that point, practising according to the first method of focusing on the breath and developing our focused attention is very, very important.

In order to practise more easily and more openly into this experience of sky to sky, we need to have a recognition both of the emptiness of all phenomena, including ourselves, and of the luminous, radiant quality of our own mind. Getting this experience is very, very important.

One important way of getting this is to receive from great masters an initiation, and in particular what's called a *ngo tro* [Tib. *ngo sprod kyi gdampa*]; an introduction to oneself or to the nature of one's mind, in the dzogchen tradition. So I think if you feel that you really want this, then it's important to go and find out who these lamas are that can do this and get it before they all die.

Questioner: What about the preliminaries for it? Some teachers they say you must have finished your ngöndro and then maybe it is possible to get this initiation.

James: Yes, some teachers say that, but not all. If your teacher says that to you then you do your ngöndro!

Questioner: Can the same teacher tell to different of his students, like to one student he says you make this ngöndro and to other not?

James: Absolutely. Because different people have different capacities and different karmic attitudes and so we all get something different in this life.

So through that transmission one can get a potentiation and energising of one's ability to realise something. I mean we live in a time of extreme individualism and I think people often have the thought or the question, "*If I have a buddha-nature, why don't I just recognise it and make myself happy?*"

INTERDEPENDENCE

But absolutely central to a buddhist point-of-view is the fact that we live with other people. The twin concepts of wisdom and compassion ceaselessly return us to the fact that we and others are not so different, and yet we are different. We are not so different in that we are all part of this ongoing revelation of the buddha-nature, but we are different inasmuch as we understand things in different ways. We need to get things from other people, and we also need to give things to other people. So that the path to enlightenment is an interactive, interdependent path.

In the tantric tradition in particular there is an enormous attention to lineage. For example when Shakyamuni Buddha died, one story is that he was in Assam and he was given some rotten pork, so he ate this and he got very sick and he died.

Somebody said to him, *“This is a bit crazy. You are the Buddha. How come you are dying of a rotten dinner?”* And the Buddha said *“I don’t have to die. I have attained the immortal state. But people are so attached to the idea that they will live forever, that they are not aware of impermanence and death, and so I show the passing away of my body in order to instruct people in the nature of impermanence.”*

And then later, Padma Sambhava, after he had left Uddiyana and was travelling around in India, he went to see many, many gurus and somebody asked him, *“How come when you are born enlightened you need to go and see all these gurus?”* He said *“Well, I don’t really need to see these people, but I go to see gurus in order to show other people that going to see gurus is a good idea.”*

This could be the sort of narcissistic justifications that politicians make throughout the world! But I think we can also see, especially from this example of Guru Rinpoche, that what people need to recognise is dependence. But this is dependence in the sense of interdependence, which we talked of a little bit one time before when I was here; in terms of the wheel of life with the twelve nidanas on the outside.

Interdependence is very different from attachment because in our ordinary attachments, through our attachment to objects, and particular ways of behaving, and aspects of ourselves, we create for ourselves a fairly stable sense of identity. That’s what we are trying to do. We are trying to work out who we are and how we should live and what we should do. And as we looked yesterday, that basic tension between subject and object leads us into the manipulation of the world through the five poisons. Therefore we want to be dependent on the things that make us feel good and we want to be independent from the things that make us feel bad. But this is a view of myself as a separate monad, something isolated yearning for completeness unto myself, living in a world of other separate monads.

OUR WHOLE BEING IS ABOUT CONNECTEDNESS IN THE WORLD

Now, when it comes to tantric lineage and initiation and taking refuge and belonging, all of these are ways of awakening us to the fact of our interdependence in the world. We live in the world as part of the world and we grow and develop because of the kindness of others. Our view at the moment in the West is, *“Yes, when we are small we need to be dependent on our parents, but then when we grow up we become independent. We go through a separation crisis, we leave home, and we make our own lives and then we are autonomous adults.”*

But this is not the view in the dharma because our dependency on others continues. Dependency, or rather what it really is, is connectedness, is not wrong. It’s not that we should be able to cut off our connections and live like an island in the world, but rather we need to recognise that our whole being is about connectedness in the world. We’re connected to the people who made our clothes. We’re connected to the people ringing these church bells outside. We are sitting on carpets or seats and these have been made by people in different

parts of the world. All the people who have been involved in all of these processes are connected through that activity with us. This interconnectedness is not something to be frightened of, that we might lose ourselves in it or we won't know who we are if we are so enmeshed in all of these different lines of connection.

Rather that we can rejoice in connectedness because it is at that point that the bodhisattva vow becomes easy. Instead of having to struggle to overcome our selfishness and be available for others, we find that because we feel connected with others, it's easy to be available to them, to do things with them. Since connectedness is the nature of the world, how can we not be connected?

But again, we live in a time when our social philosophy confuses us, so from this point of view, going to teachers for initiations or help is no more special really than going to the shop to buy some potatoes. We should have respect for everyone. Respect for teachers and respect for bus drivers. People live in the world and do their best and they get lost and confused. Some people are less lost and confused, and we need to be aware of that and be able to make use of that, but that doesn't mean that they are essentially better. Everything has the same essence, which is empty.

So if you think that your guru is better than your butcher, then you're wrong. If you think that the Karmapa is better than a torturer you're wrong. Holding to the view that the Karmapa is better than a torturer is to support the view of dualism; that one thing is essentially better than another. In doing that you condemn the Karmapa to endless suffering because the Karmapa has to be reborn in order to liberate all sentient beings, and the more you believe that the Karmapa is special because he can liberate all sentient beings, the more you resist the understanding, which is itself liberation, and therefore you condemn him to be reborn to save you.

QUESTIONS

Questioner: When I am the aspect of the others and the others are an aspect of me, how come must the dzogchen master awaken something in me, because also this is an aspect of me?

James: Yes, because it is an aspect of you, that it how it can be awakened. He doesn't put it into you: he awakens it. If you put a fruit in the sun it will ripen. The ripeness of the fruit belongs to the fruit.

Questioner: Why does somebody else have to do it and why you cannot bring it about yourself?

James: Because this is the way the world is. That is why there is a difference between masturbation and having sex with someone. When you have sex with someone else then all sorts of things are in play. If you have sex with yourself, it is also interesting but it has a depleted quality, because the other opens up some greater sense of oneself.

I think it is a problem that in our culture we have such a stress on individualism and doing it for yourself. What the dharma is saying is that this open dimension of being or emptiness is the root of all phenomena. It is often referred to as *kun zhi*, the ground of everything. And if I am thinking that I am in here and I should be able to do it for myself, then I may need to be thinking: *“Well, you are out there. You do it for yourself, and I’ll do it for myself.”* But if I accept that you and I are arising in the same sphere— that if you give me some transmission, it is not as if you are giving me the transmission, you to me—but in the transmission I wake up to the fact that there isn’t such a difference between you and me.

So, if I could link this back to your question—and unfortunately you weren’t here yesterday when we were talking about the two truths and the relations between relative truth and absolute truth. Clearly on a relative truth level, an ordinary level in terms of being helpful to people, the Karmapa can give you things that the butcher can’t. (The butcher can also give you things that the Karmapa can’t.)

But if you are focused on the dharma, maybe it is more important to receive something from the Karmapa, and that is why we would think: *“You big boy up there, give something to me and fill me up and make me better.”* So a lot of the language that is used, particularly in initiations and in tantric practices like in this short practice here, are: *“You are a powerful person, I am a stupid person. You make me strong and better.”*

The reason that the practice is structured like this is that we have a long history in ourselves of attachment, of dependence, of being needy and of longing for somebody to make it better for us. Tantra has been described as a method of using the five poisons as the path, so one uses all one’s longing and desire to bring about this moment of intense faith and focused attention on the deity. But then ...

[words lost in a change of tape] ... when the deity comes and dissolves into you.

At that point you move from the domain of relative truth into the domain of absolute truth, because you move from a dualistic perception into a non-dualistic experience. So the guru as the ‘good other’, and the self as the ‘bad, needy other’, these two points merge together like water poured into water, and at that point there is just one taste, which is the openness of mind itself. In that way I use the other to recognise myself.

So I always have to do it, because it is my enlightenment. But I don’t do it on my own. I do it in relation to the other. So I need the other to give me mine, or I need the other as the place where I recognise myself. This is what Milarepa was referring to when said, *“When I understood my guru, I understood my mind.”*

It is not as if we go into our meditation and it is all dissolved, and it is open, and it is this wonderful thing. Then when we have to open our eyes and it is all spoilt, because the world is all fucked-up and there are these other people out there and they distract me, and they annoy me. In fact I would be enlightened if it wasn’t for you guys! In fact it is your fault that I am not enlightened! That’s even better!

I mean, in some ways the notion of having to go elsewhere to nirvana, to keep it safe, is like going into the kitchen and getting a nice cake and hiding it away and eating the whole thing yourself. Enlightenment or openness ...

Questioner: This is a male fantasy. This kind of going to the kitchen and eating these things all by yourself, it is a pure male fantasy.

James: Bulimia is a woman's disease.

Questioner: Women make the cake and can offer it, and I hear this is a beautiful cake like yesterday's, if you remember?

James: Where are we?

So, enlightenment is the recognition of our connectedness with others. This is absolutely important.

THE THREE KAYAS

We come now to the three kayas which I said I wanted to say something about. I will do it briefly because we must do some more practice.

The moment of experiencing one's mind as infinite, an open expanse in which all sorts of sensations are arising—including the sensation of being oneself—is called dharmakaya. Now this state has a propensity, a gesturing towards radiance, towards giving out; so it is not as if having suffered a lot in samsara you now relax, like you lock the front door and stay in bed for the weekend. Rather, it is that this state of relaxation and openness innately, and of itself, moves out.

Sometimes you see Chenrezig sitting, not with his feet up like that but with one foot down, like Tara there. Sitting with the feet up is an indication of being in a kind of meditatively complete state where all the energy is just contained, but in the gesture of putting a foot out, it is like a movement out into the world, like how Tara is ready to get up and move forward to do things for others. This kind of radiance, this movement out is called the sambhogakaya.

This movement gives rise to being in the world, available for doing things with and for others, which is called the nirmanakaya. We have to remember that with this understanding of the dharmakaya—like when we come out of our meditation and we have that moment in which the world and ourselves are just arising together, very fresh, very easy—at that moment, it is no big deal being in the world with other people because it is at that point that everything that you perceive is the expression of this state of openness, and at that moment there would be no difference between Karmapa and a butcher, because everything that you perceive is recognised as simply the effortless display of this open dimension, which is why it is possible to be open and responsive to everyone.

FROM OPENNESS, THROUGH RADIANCE, INTO MANIFESTATION

Now what is very important, I think, is that in the higher tantric and dzogchen reading of this, the process or flow of these three things, (In dzogchen they use a different language but we will just keep it simple for today.) this flow out from openness through radiance and into manifestation happens automatically. It is not an effort. You don't have to think: *"Here I am, up safe in my house. Oh! Looking out of the window, there's a beggar in the street. I'll go down from my nice, warm house and give some food to this beggar because I am a good, kind generous person."* It is not at all like that. It is simply the flow of being.

Questioner: How you can this experience of this natural flow? How you can give it a place in your life, and how you can keep it? Be aware of it?

James: By not losing it! Once you get it, the main problem is not to lose it. I mean, I would hope that later we would do some weekends just on dzogchen practice itself and we can look then much more on the methods. But I said this just now, because I think it is really important, that we do recognise that connectedness is an absolute given in this way of thinking about the world, it is not an optional extra. It is not something that we choose to do because we are nice people.

The world reveals itself as our engagement with others. If we have an understanding of openness, our engagement with others is the revelation of this integrated being. If we don't have that recognition then we are just one person among many, fighting and struggling to survive and get our needs met.

We went into a spiral here at the point of initiation and meeting these teachers when I was talking about the importance of the direct experience of this awareness of openness. So, through initiation and this introduction to oneself, what the teacher does is they come out of their meditation in their state of openness in which they include you in their natural sphere of openness, and you are also trying for that. So both of you are trying to be open and relax, and there's some possibility of meeting in that. It is though recognising the identity with the teacher that one recognises one's own identity, because identity is the same.

The second way is through practising the dissolving practice which we have in the small puja. The third way is to practise general relaxation through shi-né. Usually it won't directly give the experience, but it will help us to be more available when the possibility of the experience arises, so that when we visualise this 'A' in the sky we are open, and it is open, and we stay in that state of openness. We are predisposing ourselves to getting a real recognition.

AWARENESS OF IMPERMANENCE

We also need to do other things to help us, particularly living in this culture which in its movement, is at cross-purposes to the dharma. So it very important to keep an awareness of impermanence all the time. When you are walking down the street, when you are eating food, when you go to the toilet, at all times you can

reflect on the impermanence of every experience. Pleasurable things are impermanent, painful things are impermanent.

The meditation or the contemplation of experience it is like a screw driver, and you are gradually loosening the screws that bolt your life into place. Through enquiring into impermanence you will also confront more clearly your own attachment—the way in which you want to believe that things are permanent or fixable, or that you can secure some safety in the world—so you really feel the emotional tension there.

All dharma practice in some way is a movement towards this central point of recognition. Every dharma practice of whatever kind is a way of thinking about how the world is not the way we imagine it to be. Even lighting butter lamps or lighting incense, on one level this is an offering to get something, but the butter lamp burns out, the incense burns down.

PRACTICE WITH 'A'

Okay, so now we will practice with this 'A'. You want to be sitting comfortably, and you want to have your head nicely relaxed, your eyes slightly raised, so you are looking up at an angle of about fifteen degrees. And you want to be looking into the space in the middle of the room in front of you. It might be easier if you are looking at a wall in front of you rather than a window.

Have a very soft focus in whatever is in front of you, a wall or whatever. Have a very soft focus on that. You want to focus in the space that is between you and the other thing. So it is a soft looking.

And then, in looking in that space you just imagine that it is filling with this light clear blue sky, in the centre of which is this white letter 'A'. And if it is not very clear or if you don't see it at all, don't struggle with it. Just keep this image and return to it. The idea is that here in this space there is a white 'A'.

Break

DHARMA: DUTIES AND DEMANDS

Usually we come into the dharma because we want something. We want some help or we want some idea about how we should live, or we want to find some way of removing sorrow from our life. But then immediately you find out that there are lots of things that you have to do. There is meditation that you should try to do every day if possible. There are teachings to go to that involve giving up evenings or weekends. There are books to read, which have to be bought. Reading takes up time and gives you lots of confusing questions and makes you feel stupid.

So there are already lots of demands coming from the dharma in terms of duties but I hope that by understanding a bit more clearly what the structure of the dharma practice is, it becomes clearer why one should do these things, that it is

not just because some big person says you should do them, but there's a real reason embedded in the logic of it.

But there is a further demand that hovers around that I want to talk about just briefly. Again, it has to do with our social situation at this particular time. It has to do with the way in which people meet together here to practise and to support each other. Some people live nearby and can come regularly. Other people live further away or have other groups that they also attend.

AWARENESS & RESPECT FOR EACH OTHER

Nonetheless, the way in which we meet together for weekends like this is very important because in practising the dharma we attempt to embody wisdom and compassion. There are two main aspects to this, and one is awareness and one is respect. I think with our awareness we can see the tasks that have to be done, and we can also see who does the tasks. And thirdly we can see how we might avoid doing some of the tasks that have to be done!

Respect it is more complicated in some ways because we need to respect our own need to be taken care of and to be looked after. That is to say, we have to respect our own neediness because that is a definite part of our existence but we also need to respect other people in an awareness of the things they do and the way their actions support us and help us. We also need to respect our own potential to go beyond limits that we sometimes set ourselves.

I personally don't think that at this time it is very useful to have a dharma structure centred around too many rules or formal requirements. I think it is more useful to structure activity and behaviour around an awareness which is attentive. But that is a higher activity. That is more difficult than just obeying orders or following rules. However I think it is really essential.

All that I am saying is, I suppose, that in order for these meetings to take place and the other activities of this centre, people put a lot of time and effort in and it is important that that is recognised, whether that is formally acknowledged or not. People need to be aware of what goes on, because things don't just fall out of the sky.

Through an awareness of this and a respect for each others' role in it, one can develop an attention to interconnectedness, and to this real recognition that we don't live apart but that our lives are deeply influenced, profoundly shaped, by the ways in which we relate to other people. Developing a sangha, a grouping of people interested in the dharma, developing that on the basis of awareness and respect, is a very profound dharma practice in itself.

Certainly there is scope here for people to participate as much as they want. There are always lots of things that need to be done, posting things, printing things, all sorts of activities. If they are shared they are easier to do but they also help in terms of bonding people and having a sense of common identity and working towards a common purpose. In a culture in which there is so little

affirming buddhist practice and buddhist identity I, personally, think that is very important.

A GOOD PRACTICE IS LIKE A GOOD FRIEND

Now we will do this short Rigdzin practice together. A good practice is to do it frequently but particularly with the dissolving, because in that you have the essence of all the other things we have been talking about. There are many, many practices in Tibetan buddhism, but perhaps it is more useful to do one or two simple practices over many years, learning them very thoroughly with a lot of study and reflection, so that the meaning of the practice reveals itself more and more.

A good practice is like a good friend, it's like somebody who reveals more and more qualities and more and more richness the longer you know them. The different commentaries and the different ways of understanding the practice can all be placed around a practice such as this. In particular, we will want quite soon to go into more dzogchen discussions about the nature of the mind and how we practice with that; how it can be integrated with a practice like this.

Of course if you don't feel any particular connection with this practice you can do any other long or short practice in connection with the different views and different discussions. But a practice that uses faith and devotion to energise us and to focus attention down into a point where we get into contact with the nature of the mind is very, very precious.

I have given some comments already on refuge and bodhicitta but I think it would be helpful, if you are interested, to attempt to read the first five chapters of this book³ if possible. The dzogchen parts are quite simple and straightforward and they are focused on practice, which I think should be our central theme.

COUNCIL OF LHASA

I just want to say a little bit about the nature of compassion in relation to what we've been talking about and then see if there are any questions about the whole weekend.

One of the key points in the history of buddhism in Tibet is what is known as the Council of Lhasa This was a debate that was held between Indian scholars and Chinese scholars in a debate that was convened by the king at the time. The Indian group was represented by Kamalashila who was the principle disciple of Shantarakshita who had, through the king, invited Padma Sambhava to Tibet. The Chinese were represented by a monk called Hoshang Mahayana. It's a very important debate because it set out these two different positions.

The Indian position started in relative truth and moved towards the absolute truth. Kamalashila's position was: first of all, you need to stop doing bad things,

³ Simply Being: Texts in the Dzogchen Tradition (Vajra Press, 1998) ISBN: 0953284506. Also available in French and German.

practise doing good things, and through that the mind will become more calm. Through that one can practise meditation and through that one can gain an understanding of emptiness and so gain enlightenment.

The Chinese position from Hoshang Mahayana was that since the nature of the mind has always been enlightened, and recognising the nature of the mind is the basis for enlightenment, the most important thing is to focus on understanding the nature of the mind without worrying whether your thoughts are good or bad, because in that moment of recognition, all thoughts would be freed.

What happened was that the Indian position won. Tibetan buddhism has largely favoured that view of gradual movement towards enlightenment through the stages ever since. What's very important in this practice, particularly through the nyingma system of dzogchen, is to integrate these understandings of relative and absolute truth.

That is to say, we need to live in the world in a proper way, upholding proper behaviour, doing things like speaking the truth, not stealing, not hurting people, practising as much as possible to act in what would be generally be seen as a good way, rather than a bad way. But at the same time we have to make some effortful practice, because there is some effort in keeping our lives on the straight track. We make this effortful practice, in the manner of a dream.

There's clearly a contradiction there, and it's something which only becomes meaningful when we realise it a bit in our practice. When you look at these longer tantric pujas you find that they have a kind of wave motion: *"I'm an ordinary person praying to the god. Then the god dissolves into me. Now I am this open awareness. Now I am this splendid divine figure. Now I am a small frightened bad person—please save me!"* This kind of practice gives a very beautiful sense of the flow in which, in different moments, one takes up a different point of view. One doesn't attempt to homogenise everything, to turn it all into one basic thing, just to make it all the same, but rather to have the freedom to take up different positions, to experience different ways of viewing the world. The underlying basic view in all of these views, is that one is doing it as if in a dream, or in the manner of sky to sky.

OPEN MIND: ATTENTIVE BEHAVIOUR

Dzogchen does not say that it is only recognising the nature of mind that is doing practise. What I am going to do is to stay relaxed, stay open, be in touch with the world as revelation, and at the same time be very attentive that my behaviour is helpful to other people. This is the integration of the two truths, the relative and absolute truth.

And it's often said that one's wisdom should be as vast as the sky, but one's compassion should be as precise as the point of a needle. So compassion means not trying to force other people to be other than they are, but being accepting and being open to people as they are in their limitation. Rather than offering other people rules and orders and instructions about how they could improve

themselves what we try to offer is the experience of being with us in our openness.

It's easy enough to tell other people what they should do, and we also know that that's a great basis for hypocrisy. It's much more difficult to make a commitment all the time to be relaxed and open and able to respond according to the situation of the other, and responding with the gift of openness and emptiness, rather than some other way of tightening them up.

When I was saying earlier that, from the absolute point of view, there is no difference between Karmapa and a butcher, this doesn't mean that you should try to be a butcher just as much as you should try to be like Karmapa. On a relative level there are a lot more problems for butchers than there are for Karmapa. But that may not be true—we don't know! On a relative level, clearly it is important to do good and be helpful; but to practise in a relative way without any absolute understanding of openness and emptiness will simply be to construct a good, good world which eventually, because it's impermanent, will collapse.

What we need to be sensitive to, is ourselves. No matter what teachings you can get from other people, or how much help you can get from your friends or whatever, in the end you are the one person who lives with you twenty-four hours a day. And much better than any rules and regulations and instructions is to develop an awareness whereby you can start to trust your own sensitivity in the world.

So we have to get to know ourselves and to know when it's most important to do dissolving meditation and try just to stay open; and when it's important really to struggle not to fuck up our lives because we are being pulled in some bad or unhelpful direction. That sensitivity and respect for ourselves, that compassion for ourselves, opens us up to be more compassionate and attentive and respectful to others.

QUESTIONS

Questioner: We stay aware that everything is impermanent. At the same time we are conscious that out of empty space all this arises and again dissolves. And always there is something new, but also always looking like the old thing. So then how we understand that there is impermanence? Because the process of impermanence is permanent.

James: You mean the impermanence of impermanence?

Questioner: There is always the potential which itself creates all this too.

James: That's true. So the impermanence of impermanence is emptiness, because emptiness doesn't change. But the emptiness of emptiness is its display. Although we can get some kind of intellectual understanding of the sort of paradoxical relationship between the two, really it goes beyond language. In the experience it's different. Is that OK?

Questioner: There is relative and absolute truth and I read in some buddhist texts that whatever thought arises it has the nature of the emptiness. Each thought is a manifestation of the emptiness. Also then a bad thought arises, dissolves again and you just let it pass by.

But also there are very bad thoughts, violent thoughts where you want to beat someone or whatever. Then you have to cut these thoughts immediately so that you don't do the action. And also it is said that even thoughts have some karmic consequences. Then if a very bad thought comes then maybe it is better just immediately to cut it so that you do not face the consequences, or create any consequences of this thought. So what to do? And whatever you teach this weekend is also related to this practice. You say, "*Handle it according to here, handle it according to there. Be sensitive.*" What is necessary?

James: Mmm. The best option generally for people who are meditators is to be able to observe the arising and passing of thoughts. This is the way in which we dissolve the karma from the past.

If you remember, I am sure I've done it here, these four stages of karma, remember this? The basis, the intention, the carrying out the action, and the acceptance of the consequence of the action—the acceptance of the fulfilment of the action. The basis is always a subject-object perception. So I'm here and you're there, and you're real to me. Then for whatever reason I hate you. So then I have an intention: "*I'm going to kill you.*" And because I am a very bad person I am going to stab you to death with this holy implement. And grind it in the brain! Bad people do these things. It happens every day.

So, if the first thing is arising as a thought, then in the thought that arises: "*I hate you.*" I am sitting in my meditation thinking, "*That fucking guy...*" so in that moment that's a strong thought, isn't it? It's a thought that's very intense with subject-object division. "*I hate you.*" If you hate someone, the thoughts that you have about them, they're sort of vibrating they're so full of energy, you're so energised that it's very easy to jump into action from that, yeah?

For that thought to be arising in my mind, this is stimulated by some previous action—right? This is the fruit of my karma to have such a terrible thought. Now if I react to that thought which is arising from a past karma, if I take it as real and act on it, then it takes me into making more karma in the world. So I decide I am not going to do that because I want to be a good boy. But I want to be a good boy and I'm having a bad thought. So what will I do? This bad thought is spoiling my good mind. Ugh! So I want to push it away. When I push it away, what do I do? Because there is now me and something I don't like. That is the moment where we create a dualistic perception.

So from the point of view of relative truth it's a good thing to say, "*No I'm not going to have these thoughts,*" and then bring your mind back to your meditation or take up your mantra: "*I want to love all beings.*" That's not a bad thing to do but it is inside a relative truth perception of anti-doting something which is seen as bad and dangerous. It creates karma to do that. Whereas, if you were able to sit with this thought arising without being seduced by your own fantasy, "*This is a*

horrible thought. I shouldn't have this thought!" then that thought can arise and pass away. And then there is no karma in that because it wasn't your thought. Exactly because you don't own the thought!

Questioner: I think it's really a matter of practising these things and then you get an understanding.

James: But it's not just the practice, you have to understand the view, because if a thought arises in your mind it's only your thought if you make it your thought. The thought only troubles us if we have already accepted that it is our thought. There's already a subject-object perception of the thought as it arises.

Questioner: When I just try to subdue a bad thought it kind of pops up from some other side and then it will just increase more and more. Suddenly they are all there and it's much more difficult to deal with them.

James: Clearly the best thing to do is to be able to dissolve thoughts without attachment but that's very difficult. So it's important to have some other things to do. If you work in the circus and walk on this high wire it makes sense to have a safety net because you might be very proud thinking, "*I never fall off.*" *But* if you do fall off then you make a mess not just for yourself but for everyone else. It's quite traumatic to watch someone killing themselves in front of you.

So in making the bodhisattva vow we also make a promise not to cause too many horrors for other people.

That's what I mean by being sensitive. We need to know when we are in a situation when we have enough calmness and ability to dissolve the thought and, when we are not able to do that, when we need to apply something else, like a mantra, like walking out of the room, like going away for the weekend, anything to cool the situation down. These are also very important.

[*End*]