

NGÖNDRO 4

James Low

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**Commentary On The Text Of The Preliminary Practice From The
Vidyadhara Guru Sadhana**

According To The Tradition Of Khordong Monastery

Mandala Offerings, Seven-Branch Prayer, Dorje Sempa

In this kind of practice, we offer beyond what we are able to bear

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INTRODUCTION

Let's begin by doing some quiet sitting. Then we'll do some sitting with reflection, contemplation, and I will give instructions for that.

ATTACHMENT AND IMPERMANENCE

This weekend we'll be looking at generosity and the practice of giving as well as attachment and the nature of purification. And so first, as a kind of preparation for that, I suggest we just sit in this meditative mode and contemplate our attachment to the things that feel close to us, that we feel involved with.

We might focus on three things: possessions—things that we own, houses cars, books, stereo systems, whatever it is we feel attached to. The second is relationships—both people we feel close to and people where we have an intensity of the relationship through hate or envy. The third area is our own body—whatever it is we are attached to in it; we might be worried about our heart, or our hearing, or our eyes, or any part of our body that we get concerned about and attached to, and also about our whole body, about ageing and death.

We'll take about twenty minutes, just going through this series, and getting in touch with the attachment. Then in a second stage, thinking of the attachment in terms of impermanence. So that if, for example, we are thinking about our body, our body has been very young and healthy and now it gets older. Every body, all the bodies we ever seen in our life, will be involved in the same process. So maybe think of yourself when you were young, or if you've got photographs of when you were younger, and think of that image of yourself and how you are now.

Be aware of how everything changes; everything is impermanent, there is nothing that we can hang on to.

If you find you are getting lost in this then just bring your attention back to the breath. Then take up again one of these topics to contemplate. So you want you get into the attachment, feel the attachment, analyse it so that you understand that it is resting inside this nature of impermanence.

Make sure that you are sitting so that you feel comfortable and properly supported.

[After the practice]

Are there any thoughts or questions arising from that?

Questioner: If we find a certain dharma practice helpful and we cling to it at times when we are really down, is this also attachment?

James: It is attachment, but it could also be called skilful means, in terms of the two levels of relative and absolute truth. We have talked about this briefly before. In terms of relative truth it's very important to be attached to one's practice and to use that attachment as a basis for discipline. But from the point of view of absolute truth there is nothing there to be attached to and so the attachment itself, unless it's also examined in terms of absolute truth, could become problematic.

THE OFFERING MANDALA

Developing from this attachment is the ngöndro preliminary practice of making offerings, usually called *mandala* offerings. On the edge of the altar here, this towered thing with rice on it, you have a base and then three levels and then a little crown thing on the top. This is an offering mandala, and it's different from a meditation mandala which is the kind exactly above it, in the *thangka*. [*gestures*]

The idea of a mandala means gathering or bringing together. It's an assembly. Basically it means a circle. Now, in the offering mandala, we are imagining that we are bringing together everything that exists, everything that we might ever be attached to, and we bring these things together with the intention of offering them to the Buddha. So in this particular practice, which comes after refuge and bodhicitta, we are still visualising in front of ourselves, Guru Rinpoche surrounded by bodhisattvas, dharma books and all the yogis of the lineage. You can see this in a simple form in the picture in the front of the long Rigdzin text.

So, having taking refuge in these beings, we use their power as a way of making a commitment to act for the benefit of sentient beings. We offer whatever we can to please the Buddha, to please Guru Rinpoche. Now if I were, say a very greedy person who likes drinking champagne, knowing that Annemarie [*a person present in the room*] never drinks champagne, if I offer her, if I open a bottle of champagne and say, "*Let us drink this good champagne,*" then maybe it's not so generous. I'm just using her as an excuse to drink the whole bottle myself.

So given that we believe that the Buddha and Guru Rinpoche and all these great beings have passed beyond attachment and desire, if we are offering things to them, maybe we are just doing the same thing, because we are making an offering to someone who doesn't really need it or want it. So why do we do it?

Firstly because we do it on our own terms, because offering things to people is a way of showing respect. It shows that somehow we want to value this person by giving them something that we value. So it's a way of expressing that we are pleased with Padma Sambhava, with the buddhas, that we feel joy in their presence, and that our hearts open to them, that we want to give them the best.

OFFERING BEYOND WHAT IS COMFORTABLE

But also in this kind of practice of offering, we offer beyond what we are able to bear. We offer beyond the point where it's still comfortable to offer, so that by the very process of making the offering we come more directly into contact with our own attachment. In offering everything, we become aware of just how much we are attached to some particular things.

I'll just say a little bit about the first line of this offering and then maybe we'll have a brief tea-break. It says: *Na mo chi nang sang wai mandal kod de bul* which means: I offer this assembly of outer, inner and secret things which I have gathered here.

OUTER OFFERING

Now, the outer, inner and secret are ways of describing the relationship that we have with the world. 'Outer' in this context means the things which are just out there—given—in the world. It means countries, borders, oceans, stars, sky, the sun, the moon, the physical world. This physical world can feel quite distant from us in the sense that we may not really care or know about parts of it. If, let's say, South America vanished today it might not really bother some of us because we have never been there anyway.

So many things in the world don't really touch us, so we can be very generous with them! We can say, *"I offer Argentina to the Buddha."* I could offer the street that I live on because I am only on the street for a few minutes in the day. But then, if I think of offering my flat, it's more difficult.

So you can see that even in just talking about the world, there's a kind of emotional intensity that builds up as the thing, that single offering, gets closer to ourselves. In this first part, one is visualising offering the whole world. In particular one might visualise one's home town, or where one's staying now, and one's own house, especially the things one's very attached to inside it.

Now, from the Tibetan point of view, for the tantric point of view, offering something mentally in the imagination is seen as real as offering it physically. The important thing about our relations to our possessions, is our attachment to them. For example, I have many books and I am very attached to them. But I have so many books that I never read them, so it's not really the book itself because some of the books will be on the shelf for five years and I don't need to look at them. They are just there. They are like the wallpaper, but if somebody wants to borrow one of the books, my attachment jumps up and I become very interested in that book!

The attachment is clearly a mental quality. It doesn't have to do with object as such, but it has to do with our relationship with the object, and that is not embedded in the object. It is embedded in subject, in the nature of the way we think and feel about object.

That is why when we do this practice we want to imagine as clearly as possible, with as much affect as possible, getting in touch with our actual attachment to these things and then have the sense of offering them. We need to really encounter our attachment—that which makes us want to pull back from offering.

INNER OFFERING

The inner things are the people that we are related to. These are friends, family, parents, children, colleagues, people that one has some kind of emotional involvement with. More generally it is all sentient beings. The relationship is not necessarily to the whole person or to the whole being, but it could be to a part of the being.

For example, I am not particularly attached to cows but I am quite interested in beefsteak. Another example, when my son doesn't do his homework and then makes a mess in his exams, I become attached to him in a particular way. He becomes more visible when he contradicts my attachment to how I think he should be. And I think we also know that in relationships we can often take people for granted. Then if we notice that they are becoming interested in someone else, we become jealous and suddenly we become aware of our attachment. Before, we didn't bother but now, because someone else might get in, suddenly our attachment reveals itself.

That's why it's very important in thinking about people that we are attached to, to really get in touch with the nature of relationship. So that this kind of attitude, this sort of awareness goes with us all the time. That we start to monitor how it is that we are editing the world and making some things more important than others.

Okay, shall we take a short break there?

SECRET MANDALA

Then, this *sang wai mandal*, the secret mandala, means our own body. 'Secret' is a question of distance. On the outer level there are, for example, many refugees nowadays in the world, people who have lost their country. It's not the same, it's probably not as good, and there's a lot of loss involved, but anyway, there's another country where they can go and live. They have to learn the language, but somehow they can survive.

On the inner level if we, for example, lose our parents, we can't get new parents very easily. It's difficult to get real parents. We may become attached to people who are helpful to us, maybe school teachers, or good boss at work, as if they were our parents. That is similar to what is called 'transference' in psychotherapy. Although we may not be able to replace brothers and sisters, parents and children, we can usually find some other people whom we can behave towards as if they were the same.

When we come to this secret level, the innermost one, we can't really get another body. We can do little bits of replacement, but there's always a problem with that. Nowadays my hair is really falling out (*Why are you laughing? I am glad to offer my hair for your amusement!*) so if it all goes I could get a wig made and stick it on, and I could become very attached to this little wig. Every time the wind was blowing I would become very anxiously attached, wondering if it would blow off.

It's the same with people who get plastic surgery to get their face lifted, to get the wrinkles out. After a while it starts to collapse. Or have bags of silicon to put in their breasts to make them look young again. Very often our attachment to our body is an attachment to an image of the body as it used to be or we would like it to be. Attachment to the body needn't be a pleasant or a happy thing. One might diet all the time, vomiting and using laxatives because, again, one is attached to a particular idea of the shape one's body should be. Hating one's body is also a very powerful way of being attached to it.

So around our body, we have an attachment to the shape of the body, to the health of the body, and we are often playing with that all the time. We take medicines, we always think, "*I should have more exercise, I should stop eating this food,*" and we act on the world to maintain our body in a particular way. Remember, when the practice talks about 'body', this is a body which is full of consciousnesses. It is not meaning 'body' in the current European sense of a physical body of meat etc with a mind in it. The body and consciousnesses are not seen as separate here.

MEMORIES SUSTAIN A SENSE OF SELF

One attachment we have is an attachment to our memories as a means of maintaining our sense of self. We can see this in degenerative diseases of dementia such as Alzheimer's. One of the most terrible things about it is that a person loses memory, loses an ability to think of things, but also knows that they've lost it. The person knows that they are no longer themselves. That is clearly a strange thing to say '*They know that they are no longer themselves*', when they are still alive and they are themselves, but if we are not able to attach ourselves to the image of ourselves, we don't know who we are because our ordinary sense of personal identity is based on a dialogic relationship between ourself and our self-image. That is to say, I know who I am because I have an ongoing relationship between myself and my self-story. I can tell you who I am by telling you the story about myself that I also tell to myself to tell me who I am. So in a sense I exist for myself as a story, albeit a story I'm very attached to.

I may meet someone I haven't seen for many years and they may start to tell me about how I used to be. Maybe I don't want to hear this because now I have a different self-story that I want to tell, and they want to put this old chapter in it, a chapter I have edited out. "*Shhh! don't tell anyone this very bad story.*"

This is one of the terrible things that one can experience— one of the sufferings of old age and sickness—that you get put in the position where you are the patient and then someone else takes over ownership of your story. Or people have mental problems or suffer physical handicaps; they are often in the power of carers who “know what is best for them”. Someone might say about them, *“Oh, he doesn’t like to eat this sort of stuff. We’ll give him that instead.”* Probably all of us can remember in childhood feeling powerless in the face of parents who “knew” what we needed to do and “knew” what was best for us.

But now we are grown up and we take more power in our lives. We are more responsible, and usually we try not to let anyone tell us what we want. We want to stand up for ourselves and say, *“No, this is how I like it. This is how I want it to be.”* This power that we have can lead us to think that this is a real part of us. *“This is who I am.”*

But if we get very sick, or if we are lucky enough to live long enough to become old, then we will find that it changes; that we lose that power and that again we come under the power of others. So in making this offering of the body we are also offering our ego, our sense of ourself, our sense of self-identity.

OFFERING THE RICE MANDALA

Here we have a three-tier rice mandala, made from thirty-seven little piles of rice, and built up stage-by-stage. There is a traditional visualisation that accompanies it. One hundred-thousand times you build up these thirty-seven piles of rice, piling it all up, and then wiping it all off, and then piling it all up again. The rice mandala is built up on the visualisation of the world according to ancient Indian cosmology. Indian cosmology, which is shared by the Tibetans, is a cosmology of grouping things into order. It exists as an ideal description of the universe.

In the centre of the world there is a huge mountain, Mount Meru. This mountain is very high, about three hundred and eighty thousand kilometres high. The reason that we have day and night is that night occurs when the sun goes behind the mountain and day comes when the sun comes to the front of the mountain. Located in the cardinal directions around this central mountain there are four main continents, each with two subcontinents and it’s considered that we are living in the southern main continent of Jambudvipa. So that, in offering these thirty-seven piles of rice, one is offering Mount Meru, the four large continents, the eight small continents, the oceans, and many other things.

IDEAL COSMOLOGY

Sometimes Jambudvipa looks like just India, Pakistan, that area. But again, this is an ideal cosmology which doesn’t relate very well at all to our world, as we know it through modern geography. Now, Tibetan people don’t know very

much about geography so they don't feel a contradiction between their ideal cosmology and the world they see. Whereas it may be more difficult for us because we probably have a sense that the world is actually round, that Mount Meru has never been seen, doesn't exist. Therefore to offer one hundred thousand times a world that you don't believe in is maybe not the most helpful meditation practice.

Two things may help us with this. One is that I think it is helpful to read a little bit about this cosmology. There is an account of it in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*¹, and in other texts. You get details in many ngöndro commentaries. Apart from the historical interest, it's quite nice to know about these things. It will help you to understand the correlations with other texts later, such as the way in which this ordered pattern of a central unit with the movement in four directions is the same structural pattern as for meditation mandalas. There [*gestures*] in the photograph of Swayambhunath Stupa in Nepal, you can see a similar central focus and four-directional movement.

FLAT OR ROUND?

Nowadays we live in a world which is very chaotic and confusing, a world of many, many different voices, where we have to balance many different descriptions of the world. The certainties of the medieval Tibetan world-view are something that we can't get back to. So we have to take up an extra responsibility in studying the dharma; of working out how the dharma helps us to live with complexity, rather than dharma as a way of imposing naïve simplicity on complexity.

The answer to these things won't come from Tibetans, certainly not in the next twenty years. For them to integrate a modern scientific understanding of the world into their existing world-view is going to be a huge cultural challenge.

The two main points in this are firstly to really get in touch with the emotional quality of attachment which we have to these various levels of manifestation in the world. Then, being in touch with that attachment, to use that as a basis for making offerings. By offering up our attachment to Padma Sambhava we engage in a very profound act of generosity and also start to purify this grasping basis of the self.

The second point is that we have to confront the fact that the world exists for us in a complex, random way which is difficult to organise in a system of simple clarity, other than by enormous contortions. That when we confront a difference between the ideal and our reality—the ideal that the world is flat with a huge mountain in the middle, with the reality that the world is actually round—and that there are no major countries in the world where buddhism is still strongly established— and that as human beings our situation is very,

¹ *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, Gampopa: translated Herbert V. Guenther. Shambhala, 1959

very vulnerable given the ecological crisis— then we can see that we are in a very different ball-game from the simplicity and certainty of the medieval Tibetan model. The simplicity and the predictability of this traditional cosmological reading is something which is actually denied to us because of the scientific ‘reality’ we have grown up in.

When I was first doing these mandala offerings twenty years ago, I got into thinking, “*Oh, the earth is really flat,*” although I had studied physics and goodness knows what. I thought, “*Now I am a buddhist, the earth must be flat.*” Absolutely nuts! But anyway it made sense in terms of the text. So in this way, taking refuge in the manner of a small child, the Buddha, my big daddy, has said that the world is flat, and if my big daddy says it’s flat, it’s flat.

This doesn’t take us very far unless we can stay at home and have a big papa look after us. But we don’t have the Buddha in that form in the world today. We will have to ourselves do the difficult work of integrating the buddhadharma into our lives. And the reassuring myths embedded in antique cosmologies are a fantasy which will get in the way of us being in touch with our day to day reality, which is the only reality we have.

I think it’s interesting that this practice comes just after the refuge and bodhicitta because it does mean that we have to take refuge in a slightly more adult and thoughtful way than might be possible if we were just a villager in Tibet. We have to question how the dharma fits into our world and not just wrap it round us like a small child with a security blanket, sucking on our thumb and falling asleep.

Hovering around in the dharma is this fantasy that someone is going to come and take away all our troubles. In some ways there is some truth in that, there’s a lot of blessing and power and magic moments in the dharma but we also have to struggle and engage just the way Buddha Shakyamuni had to, under that tree. That’s why he made what buddhists call the ‘bhumisparsa mudra’, and said, “*Earth, be my witness. I will not move from here. I am resolute. I am determined.*” I think that’s really at the heart of what we’re about here.

SEVEN-BRANCH PRACTICE

Now, we continue with the offerings and we are starting on the third line where it starts *chag tsal*. What you have in the next three lines is a seven-branch practice. This is a very interesting practice. Apart from refuge and bodhicitta, this is probably the most widely and commonly practised that there is in Tibetan Buddhism. All the four sects use this kind of practice. There are short forms of it like this one here, and very long forms. One of the long forms, which is held to be the original form of it, is a prayer that is supposed to have been originally said by the bodhisattva, Samantabhadra.

BODHISATTVA SAMANTABHADRA'S VOW

The bodhisattva Samantabhadra is not much thought of or worshipped in Tibetan buddhism. The bodhisattva called Samantabhadra is different from Samantabhadra who is on the cover of *Simply Being*², who is Samantabhadra as Adibuddha, as the original Buddha, representing the buddha-nature present in all beings.

The bodhisattva Samantabhadra was very much written about in the early mahayana sutras of the Buddha, and he became very popular in China where he is depicted sitting on a white elephant. The story is that this bodhisattva wanted to make many, many offerings to the Buddha. In the early days there was the idea of what was called the '*original vow of the bodhisattva*'. Nowadays when we take the bodhisattva vow we usually do it by repeating a verse that the teacher says to us. In reciting that verse, where we say that we intend to gain enlightenment in order to help all sentient beings, we, in our turn, are making this bodhisattva vow.

But in the early days before this was formalised, ritualised, those great beings, the original bodhisattvas, would have arising out of themselves a strong desire to help all sentient beings which became formulated for them as a precise intention.

It's common to hear children saying, "*When I grow up I want to drive a train,*" "*When I grow up I want to be a doctor,*" or something like that. Sometimes that intention is a very powerful support for the child to make extra effort. Someone told me recently that when she was four she was taken to the ballet, and saw ballet dancing for the first time, and she decided "*I want to be a dancer.*" She then went to dance classes twice a week, and she remembers that although it was hard, it was what she wanted to do, so she never found it a problem. Now, when this woman was dancing, she probably gave a lot of pleasure to other people watching but in a sense that was a kind of a side effect from her original intention which was: "*I want to be a dancer. That's what I want to do.*" Because that was a desire for 'me'.

These early bodhisattvas however took up a vow: "*I will become enlightened in order to help other beings, and when I am enlightened this is what I will be able to do for others.*" As I said to you before, Amitabha, when he was a bodhisattva, made this vow: "*When I am enlightened I am going to have a buddha realm and the way into this buddha realm will be for someone simply to call on my name.*" He was prepared to do a huge amount of work himself for many, many, many lifetimes, so that as a result he could create a place which people could enter very, very easily. By relying on his effort, on the generosity of his spirit, other people would be able to gain enlightenment more easily.

² *Simply being: texts in the dzogchen tradition*. James Low. (Wisdom Books, 1998). Available in French and German.

Similarly with bodhisattva Samantabhadra. He made a vow that he wanted to develop a method of practice whereby somebody following it, would generate enormous amounts of merit and wisdom very, very quickly. So, he developed this mandala offering method whereby he imagined in front of himself many, many, many buddhas—buddhas filling the whole sky. Traditionally it is said, *'As many buddhas as there are grains of sand in the River Ganges'*. Each of these buddhas is visualised very, very clearly. Each is surrounded by as many bodhisattvas as there are grains of sand in the River Ganges. So that's out there, this huge, massive, moving concourse of colours, people, circles, juxtapositions, a vast teeming universal market of buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Then, on his side, he said, *"I want to have as many bodies as there are grains of sand in the River Ganges, and each of my bodies will be offering to the buddhas as many offerings and beautiful things as there are grains of sand in the River Ganges"*.

So there's this totally cosmic vision of these endless movements. I've mentioned this before, but it's very important to get the feel of this, this huge concourse. And remember that it's not just in front, it's in all directions; it's filling above, below, back, front, left, right, in all directions. So these offerings as rays of light and as actually visualised objects, are going out in all directions, crossing each other, going up, down...

There is so much that is being offered to so many holy people that a huge amount of merit or positive intention is generated from this. And at the same time there is such a complexity, such a richness, that you couldn't hold it all together with your ordinary ego, so you have to just relax this controlling ego and open to the æsthetic vision of this infinity. That in itself generates a wisdom which transcends self and other, inside and outside, and all the other fantasies of dualistic vision.

So this was the method of making offerings which bodhisattva Samantabhadra developed. It is believed that if one practises in this way, it can be a sufficient cause for gaining enlightenment.

We have to remember again that this is an imaginal offering, it's not actual solid substances that one is offering, but it is the fruit of the imagination, it is the richness of the creativity of mind which dissolves reificatory divisions into this light, fluid, ever-opening responsiveness, and that is the movement of the three *kayas*. So these three verses are a distillation of what is said as one is visualising this enormous display of lights and colours.

So maybe we could just try a little bit to do this kind of visualisation. It's not the same as trying to visualise Padma Sambhava and getting a shape clearly in front of you. It's much more about opening, and then opening, and opening, and opening.

Let's try that...

OFFERING MEDITATION

Just imagine you are sitting, and all around you is this vast open blue sky, you could imagine you are sitting on top of a mountain somewhere. A mountain that goes through the clouds and all around is this clear blue sky. And there are buddhas and buddhas and buddhas and buddhas, infinite numbers of buddhas, male buddhas and female buddhas, all over the place, above you and below you, you can't get away from them.

So it's not that you have to struggle to see them clearly, but just getting the feeling of it, as if you were a child in this vast toy shop, and everywhere you look there are these incredible wonderful toys, "Oh yes!" more, more, more... So if we imagine it as a toy, here we've got one buddha, it's like a Cindy doll, and each Barbie doll has with her party dress, her holiday dress, her little pony for going out, she has her make-up tray, all the little things that little Barbies need, endlessly mushrooming, and that's like the bodhisattvas. So there is this sense of the central figures surrounded by more and more and more, all of this radiant and shining in all directions.

As you are imagining this you imagine that you also have an infinite number of bodies and each one of them has this incredible infinity of buddhas and bodhisattvas all around it, that if any space was to open up in the universe it would be filled with buddhas, bodhisattvas and yourself. It's like a transcendental multiple personality, and each of your bodies is sending out these rays of light, and beautiful offerings, diamonds, jewels, Porsches, bottles of champagne, Genghis Khan dinners! Keep making it bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger...

BUDDHA FAMILIES: THREE AND FIVE

This is a web of infinite connectedness very similar to 'Indra's net'. Indra's net is something I mentioned before here. This is a concern, particularly in the early mahayana sutras where they are moving away from there being just one buddha in our historical period, with five or seven historical buddhas for the whole *kalpa*, to an idea of infinite numbers of Buddhas. This is because they are working with the idea of the buddhas of the ten directions: north, south, east, west, above and below, and the four points in between the four cardinal directions. What it is really meaning is that buddhas are everywhere.

In the early days you had this idea of there being three main bodhisattvas and three main buddhas. The buddhas in the three main families are of the vajra family, the lotus family and the buddha family. The buddha family deals with the purification of ignorance and stupidity; the vajra family with the purification of anger and aversion; and the padma (lotus) family deals with the purification of attachment and desire. Later was added the karma (activity) family and the ratna (jewel) family. These five buddha families are represented in mandala form where you have got four families, the outer families, around the central buddha family.

HOW THE EPITHET 'BUDDHA' CHANGES WITH MAHAYANA AND TANTRA

It is at this point that the term 'Buddha' shifts from being a term which is used to honour a historical person who has achieved enlightenment to a term which represents a moment of structural understanding, a structural openness, inside the framework of being. This is very, very important in terms of tantra because tantra is all about buddhas representing aspects of the mind, aspects of reality, rather than 'Buddhas' as historical personages.

Notwithstanding that, in the initiation texts of all the deities you will usually find a historical account of how this deity first manifested. This too is very important because this is the point when three things are present: a manifestation in the world; a structural principle; plus a basic openness or enlightenment. These three are later elaborated as the three kayas.

So there you can see how historical buddhism is integrated with mahayana's structural interest in buddhas as principles, or as transformations of aspects of samsara into nirvana. That fusion is the root of tantra, which is the dynamic integration of the three levels. Not only are we visualising here the buddhas of the ten directions, but the buddhas of the three times, of the past, present and future. Now this may seem a bit abstract, but it's not really so abstract, it's essential for understanding what tantra is about.

So how can we visualise the buddhas of the future when the buddhas of the future don't exist yet? Also the buddhas of the past, where do they exist? Even the buddhas of the present, where do they exist?

Let's say you imagine someone like the Karmapa as a buddha, where is Karmapa? *"Oh, he's in Bhutan."* *"Where is Bhutan?"* *"Go up north some way and then turn right and go along, two days and then get off and go on a donkey.... Yes?"* Now this might mean something, and this might be a way that you could get to Tsurphu, but what it is, is words and ideas.

Wherever Karmapa exists he exists in the realm of words and ideas. Even if the Karmapa was in this room—say the Karmapa was sitting right up here—and we ask the question *"Where is the Karmapa?"* *"Oh, here is the Karmapa!"* So where is 'here'? Here's some place near 'there'. Or 'I'm here' and 'he's there'.

The buddha Karmapa is existing in relationship to myself as a concept, so if the Karmapa was sitting up here and we said *"This is the Karmapa"* we would be not seeing the Karmapa, we would be seeing our own idealising fantasy that created a real entity, and in that way pulled the Karmapa out of nirvana and into samsara. If the Karmapa was really here, and we just opened to the Karmapa, we might think *"Wow!"* and that moment *"Wow!"* he wouldn't be there, I wouldn't be here, just...

THE SPACE IN WHICH EVERYTHING IS IMMEDIATELY PRESENT

So there is no past, present and future, no ten directions, there is simply the space in which everything is immediately present.

This idea that the buddhas of the past, present and future are present together in a time which is out with the past, the present and future, is a way of attacking, or subverting, or deconstructing our desire to create linear patterns of causality. I'm using a kind of critical language to try and unpack an idea, and I'm doing it through words (which at the same time paradoxically strengthens words.)

But it was a really important thing that happened in this mahayana sutra period—which was the real essence, or the beginnings, of tantra. What was it? It was the use of the creative imagination, as for example, when we visualise the bodhisattva Samantabhadra in the midst of all these bodies of buddhas, bodhisattvas and rays of light. And when we are actually engaging in it, we are opening and opening and opening our experience in a very direct aesthetic way which cuts through all the 'It's here', 'It's up', 'It's down.' ... We just push right beyond that into a state of openness, beyond what the ordinary dualistic ego can construct. We have to just go beyond it and be in the spontaneous display.

KYIL KHOR, SPIRALLING INWARDS AND OUTWARDS

The Tibetan word for mandala '*kyil kor*' [Tib. *dkyil 'khor*] has an idea of *kyil* which is a circling or spiralling, spiralling into the centre, or spiralling out, you could do it both ways. '*Kor wa*' is encompassing this, in some way.

Spiralling inwards is like when we do the dissolving meditation and the deity comes down into this ball in our heart and we go into the ball and the ball goes out into light. This is a movement of the infinity of the world down into one point and into nothing. It's a bit like in an orgasm, where there's sensation that just comes more and comes out, and there's a kind of pulsing in and out of sensation.

Spiralling out is in opposition to the movement in a dissolving meditation. In this offering mandala meditation we are doing now, with the visualisation of the bodhisattva Samantabhadra, the movement is to make the visualisation bigger and bigger and bigger, and it just gets so big that you can't contain it any more—and so the ego dissolves.

You may have experienced something of these two movements, say in nature. In the summer time you are lying in the grass and you see a tiny little bug crawling around, or a tiny little wild orchid, and you just look at it, and you look more and more into it and the whole world shrinks down into this tiny little thing which is full of meaning. Or else you might be in the Alps or the Himalayas or walking along a beach and there's just this infinite row upon row of mountains and clouds and valleys and you just get bigger and bigger and

you just dissolve out, out of your body, into this moving thing, and maybe if there is an eagle going across the sky, and you're just lost... Lost.

So we can have something of the flavour of these experiences through our being in nature, but we can have it more precisely through the practice of meditation, of moving towards infinity either through expansion, or precise focusing contraction down to one point.

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE BUDDHA CHANGING OVER TIME

Let's look a little bit more at the theme of the historical Buddha in these five dhyana buddhas. Here is a photograph of a little clay reproduction which is from Sarnath in India where the Buddha taught for the first time. Now this statue is supposed to look the way the Buddha looked. That's what people believe, that the Buddha actually looked like this.

At first, in the time of the Buddha there was no representation of the Buddha at all. For three or four hundred years after the death of the Buddha there were still no direct images of the Buddha. He was represented by symbols. For example, his birth was often shown by seven steps, seven lotus flowers, because it was said that when the Buddha came out of his mother's belly, he took seven steps and said, *"This is my last life."* His enlightenment was shown by a tree because Buddha gained enlightenment under a bodhi tree. His first teaching was shown by a circle the 'dharma *chakra*', the wheel of the dharma which keeps turning and revolving. So it's interesting that before we get a pictorial representation of the Buddha, we get the symbolic one.

MUDRAS

Then, when direct representations of the Buddha do begin to appear, it is with minor variations such as the way he is sitting, and these again have a symbolic value. For example, this statue has the Buddha's hands in front of him with his right hand held up, palm outwards, and his left hand inwards like this, so he's got his thumb and middle fingers together pointing at each other, as if he's making a point. This is the symbol of the Buddha teaching³, and this is shown on this statue which is the representation from Sarnath where the Buddha taught for the first time. When you have the Buddha, when he's sitting like this, except he has one hand in his lap like that and the other hand over his knees, palm down, touching the ground underneath him that is representing him just before the moment of enlightenment.⁴ Here he is, here's the bodhi tree, and he's touching the ground. He makes a vow, and he says *"As the earth is my witness, I will not move from this spot until I gain enlightenment."*

³ Image found later using the internet

http://what-buddha-said.net/images/Buddha_Images/Buddha.Sarnath.perfect.jpg

⁴ Image found later using the internet

<http://www.art-and-archaeology.com/india/ratna/ra12.html>

Then you have also the Buddha with his hand out in an open way welcoming people, which are seen as a gesture for removing fear, where he offers freedom for fear.⁵ We also have the Buddha with his hands in his lap as in meditation. There are five main mudras which are derived from this. Each of these five mudras is taken up later by one of the five meditation buddhas, the dhyani buddhas.

So the historical events or moments in the Buddha Shakyamuni's, life which symbolise something in his movement towards enlightenment, are later extracted to become a symbol of the principles of enlightenment. Historical moments are transformed into representation of principles.

You can see there is movement from an original hinayana or theravadan view of the actual historical Buddha, through the mahayana development of the sense of buddhas in their different families, towards the tantric idea of a dynamic three kayas, actively at work in the world all the time.

TWO 'ORIGINAL BUDDHAS': WHY IS KUNTUZANGPO NAKED AND DORJE CHANG ORNAMENTED?

One final thing on this. Once you have established the five families, and the five families are seen as working together and of basically equal status, you then have the question of *'Where do they come from? What is the origin of this?'* It is a bit similar to the early christian questions around the nature of the trinity.

In the kagyupa lineage and also in the sakya and gelug lineages, the original buddha, or the source of enlightenment, or the representation of basic innate buddhahood in all beings, comes to be represented by Dorje Chang. Over there [gestures] is a thangka where you see a blue figure with his arms crossed. This is Dorje Chang.

Another figure we can see here [gestures] is Kuntuzangpo. He is dressed with the head-dress of a buddha, and he is completely naked, he doesn't even have earrings. His partner Kuntuzangmo, who also has slit ears but no earrings, is similarly completely naked and unadorned. In the nyingma tradition this is original buddhahood—just fresh, open, and free of all complexity.

This is in contrast to the other three traditions where the 'original buddha', Dorje Chang, is usually dressed with the thirteen ornaments of a bodhisattva, holding a vajra and a bell crossed in front of him representing wisdom and compassion. Dorje Chang's colour is blue representing the dharmakaya, the ornaments and the vajra and bell represent the sambhogakaya, and he radiates out as the possibility of nirmanakaya.

⁵ Image found later using the internet

http://www.pratyeka.org/longmen/158-5862_img_thm.jpg

These two forms represent the tension between two ideas. One is that buddhahood is innate, buddhahood is there from the very beginning, and that what one does is waken up to it, and that the wakening up is simply tearing off the covers of ignorance. This is very much the view of nyingma dzogchen. The other idea is that buddhahood or enlightenment is the result of a great deal of meditation and good actions performed for lifetime after lifetime after lifetime, and that although all beings have this basic buddha nature, if they don't work on it, nothing will happen.

MORE ON MUDRAS

Just a very brief linking comment about mudras, you may have seen lamas doing these various kinds of movements with their hands, and which you too can learn.

This system is a part of the notion of enlightenment by imitation. If you think of classical art education, until very recently most art academies, drawing and painting academies in Europe were based on copying great works from previous centuries, Greek or Roman sculptures, or famous works of art. In the sense that somebody has shown the proper way to do it, and by copying you also learn how to do it.

When Felix was giving me a lift from the airport today we were talking about food and he was telling me about how in Japanese cooking a lot of the styles of preparation are two or three hundred years old and they haven't been changed in that period. So, having established a very excellent way to do something, one tries then to be a very perfect exponent of that excellent way of doing something. That's what's seen as mastery.

There's a famous book of christian spiritual meditation by Thomas à Kempis called the *Imitation of Christ*. What Thomas à Kempis tries to set out, is that these are the things that Christ did, and these are the ways that he did them. We should then try to copy that. We don't need to find our own way; we need to follow Christ's particular way. That's a view which has been radically challenged, in the last century particularly. We get very much caught up in trying to be original, being inventive, and thinking that the new will be better than the old. The old is identified with a system that is not good for some political or social or æsthetic reasons. For example in the Chinese cultural revolution, buddhist and taoist temples were seen as epitomising, as truly representing, all that was most corrupt in society, all that was most feudal and exploitative and therefore it was seen as a very good thing to destroy them, including even the most beautiful artefacts, with this idea of wiping out the past so that you can start completely fresh.

I think this is very interesting for us because, say if I think "*Now I get lost in the world because I act on the basis of my karma.*" then the more I become aware of this through my meditation and through observing my actions, the more I start to think I can't trust myself.

So maybe I might take refuge in the dharma and I think *“Now I am going to trust the Buddha. I’m going to do what the Buddha did.”* If you were in a culture like Tibet then you might become a monk or a nun. *“I’ll leave my home and I’ll devote myself twenty-four hours a day to spiritual practice. And whenever I am not sure what to do I shall try to copy the actions of those who are following the path of the Buddha.”* So the Buddha is my inspiration; the dharma he taught is my teacher; and the sangha are my examples. By trying to copy that and to be in that family, to belong in that way, and become more like them, then I have something to rely on which I can believe is higher and better and clearer and purer than my own karmically-obscured vision. This is very much the traditional view.

INTO ALIGNMENT WITH THE DEITY

Now, since the Buddha made these five actions at the different times of his life—touching the ground, teaching, offering protection from fear, meditating and so on—if we incorporate these actions into the way that we sit, then we will be putting our body into the way of the Buddha and that will then result in our getting closer to him.

We believe that round the heart of the deities and the buddhas there is a mantra which is spinning, and the mantra is like the distillation or the essence of their particular form of manifestation and the meaning and value that they have in the world, so by reciting the mantra, we bring our energy and our breathing and our intention in to alignment with the deity.

The third thing is the meditation. By doing meditation, calming my mind down, not getting so caught up in thoughts, being more open to this basic awareness, through this meditation, or samadhi, my mind merges towards the state of the buddha. So through using mudra (this physical gesture), mantra (the recitation and visualisation of the letters), and samadhi (this profound state of meditation), I move towards an absolutely total identification with the pure form of the buddha.

It’s something that we’ll come back to again but for now, I will very briefly say how in the dzogchen view one is doing something different. Instead of trying to come to enlightenment by transforming oneself into a buddha, by becoming like or metaphorically ‘as if’ I were a buddha, one tries to cut off the root of both being an ordinary being and being a buddha. If one was to think of it in artistic terms, it would be more like a gesture, like a Chinese or Japanese rapid painting, or in some ways like spontaneous abstract painters.

The spontaneity of, say, a Jackson Pollack involves a kind of ego-indulgence, of being drunk, being emotionally charged-up, having an energy that thrusts itself onto the canvas, but is full of himself. Whereas in the Chinese and Japanese traditions there is a lot of training and attention to detail, mixed with attention to relaxation, breathing and freedom, so that the body is relaxed, but it’s a very refined spirit that moves through, not a crude, passionate one [...]⁶

Yesterday I went to a small exhibition of prints by Keta Kohlwitz and there was a little statement from her saying that she was not a passionate person, rather that she always thought for a long, long time before she started to work. Then, when she did start to work, she worked very quickly and directly. I think that is very much in that kind of a spirit.

We will stop here now and tomorrow and we'll go on to the Dorje Sempa.

NEXT DAY

THE SEVEN-BRANCH PRACTICE

Now we go onto these three lines which are the seven-branch practice. Starting with the first line, '*Chag tsal*'. '*Chag*' means hands and '*Tsal*' is this gesture. *Chag tsal* represents paying homage. It's a respectful gesture, like in India when people greet each other and say, "*Namaste*", bowing slightly. I think throughout Asia people do that sort of gesture. It's a way of bowing to the Buddha or taking refuge in the Buddha, showing our respect. So this is the first of the seven: that we show respect, that we pay homage to the Buddha.

Then, the second one is represented by the next two words '*chöpa bulwa*' which means to give offerings, and again this is an extension of showing respect, that we want to give nice things, we want to please the other, we want to show that they are special, so we are saying, "*We offer this to the Buddha, may this generate merit.*"

This is a merit with a double facet. Giving is innately good, giving is good in itself, and also if you are giving to something that is good, then the goodness of the object that you give to informs the quality of the action. It's a bit like the story in the Bible when Christ is at this supper and Mary Magdalene comes along with her special pot of perfume which she puts on Christ's feet. Other people are saying, "*No, no, this is a waste of money,*" and Christ responds, "*This is a very wonderful gesture to give like this, to honour the moment and to give me this attention. This has benefit for you.*"

MERIT: THE POWER OF THE OBJECT

Now, this is not a democratic message because it is saying that the qualities of the object which the gifts are given to, determines the value of the giving. It follows from this that it is more useful to give offerings to a high lama or a yogi in a cave than it is to give things to a beggar. We, with our socio-political history, probably find that a bit difficult to accept. But whether we agree with it or not, I think it's important to understand the principle which is, that if it's the qualities of the object that determine the merit or the value of the giving, then giving to the Buddha will produce a great deal of merit. So it creates merit and it is a merit which is available to you. You can make use of this merit.

Merit in this buddhist sense is a concept which isn't really a European one. It's a bit similar to medieval christian ideas where, for example, if you built a small chapel to Our Lady then when you die she will be aware of this and there will be a kind of intercession directly from her because you have made a connection with her in this life. The merit then is a way of paying for, or enabling, a transaction in the difficult movement from life through death into the afterlife. But in that kind of image it is somehow that Mary holds this for you. It's a bit like in an old feudal country where if you offer something to the king, the king remembers you've made the offering, and then may reward you later, giving you some lands or something like that.

In these transactions merit is like the basic currency of a spiritual economy. Clearly, if you have a thousand deutschmarks and you want to invest them you can invest them in a country which has a secure rate of return, where you can invest it in a high interest investment or a low interest investment. Similarly we have a spiritual capitalist system here where you have your ordinary work, but not only just your work of this life, but your karmic work from your last lives. You might have been born in a wealthy family that gives you lots of resources, so you use this resource that you have from this life or another, which exists now for you as money or property or whatever, which you can spend or you can invest. So you have the economic cycle of karma, and you have the economic cycle of merit.

Let's say I've got five hundred marks. I can buy a goat, cut its throat and eat it. So now I have transferred these five hundred marks into an animal which I am now using for my own purposes and which generates some immediate pleasure as well as some karma. Alternatively I could use the five hundred marks to buy a thangka to put on an altar and use it as a support for my meditation. I could use it to pay for butter lamps to offer to the Buddha. An action like that, like making an offering to the Buddha is good, so this counts as good karma. Just as buying the goat to kill it is bad karma. Each action, good or bad, has some potential to move me up and down in my next lives.

But there's also a sense that making an offering to the Buddha generates this other quality of merit or '*punya*' [Sanskrit], '*sonam*' [Tibetan], which is sort of nebulous, it's invisible, but it has a spiritual value, inasmuch as I can invest it in my spiritual development, not simply getting a higher rebirth inside samsara, but as part of the ticket to enlightenment. This takes me into a separate economic cycle altogether.

Just as until fifty years ago not many people had an old age pension and many poor peasants and working people had to work until the day they died because they would earn a bit of money every week, but they would have to spend it all on food, rent, on children, on clothes. They would have nothing left over. This is like the karmic cycle of earning, spending, earning and again spending that just goes on driving us on in the six realms.

Nowadays, because the economy goes better, people can earn some money and have some left over, even at the end of the week's expenses. Some might spend that excess on anything, on pleasure, and then it's gone. Others

might invest it in a pension plan. If they invest a lot in the pension plan then maybe they can give up work a bit early, and retire. This investment then takes the person out of one kind of economic cycle into another. This is very much what this idea of merit is. It's a long term investment that will pay dividends for a good period of time.

From this worldly example we might see that there is a very pragmatic reason, a very practical reason, for making offerings to the Buddha. It is not just out of respect, but also because it pays a good dividend. *[Aside: This is what Margaret Thatcher's done for me!]*

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

Question: Is it also possible in buddhism to lose the merit?

James: Yes. You can lose it through pride or attachment. It really depends on your motivation. So if somebody thought like, *"When I am a buddha I will have a very big palace and it will be very, very nice. It will have a jacuzzi with lots of dakinis dancing around. Hey, I'll get the Rolling Stones in, I'll have my very own cocaine plantation as well"* then that thought would be a way to lose merit.

Question: His question was more like what he read from the New Testament that whenever you meet a beggar, you give him a mark and then you forget all about it. Otherwise whatever thought you have in connection with this very generous deed will destroy the deed.

James: Exactly the same in buddhism. In buddhism they talk of the three cycles. You must have the emptiness of the three cycles, *kor sum tong pa*. [Tib. 'khor gsum stong pa]

Question: If I know already that giving is merit, but put it out because of my motivation to gain merit, to get something back, what is the merit there?

James: If we go back to the earlier example of a girl who sees a ballet dancer, and tries very hard and becomes a successful ballet dancer herself. She has got what she wanted for herself. But if you work very hard and you do all these meditation practices and you make all these things in order to become a buddha, you are become a buddha for *others*, not for yourself. To be a buddha is always to be at the service of others.

Question: Most things you do, you do for others. You share your faith, or your problems...

James: Yet if I do it to please the other, because I want the other to be pleased with me, then there is no merit. But if I do it to please the other because I want the other to be happy, then there *is* merit. Merit has to be, as you said, 'going out'. Like when in the Bible Christ says, *"Cast your bread upon the waters"*. This idea is a very good example because you put your bread out. Mostly we want to get our bread back. We want to invest it. We

want to invest it in our account with our name, and then we go there and we bring it back. Here we don't put our bread in the kitchen to keep it safe, we put it out, and anybody can take it. The water can take it away, or the water can bring it back. We don't know. We trust the flow...

NEXT DAY

We are now on page six of the text. Hopefully everybody can share a copy of this. We're on line three at the moment. And we've looked at the first part of the line *chag tsal wa* which is bowing, paying respect to the buddhas and we've almost completed the second of these seven parts, the *chö bul*, making offerings. As I said yesterday, the seven stages of this practice are to be found in all the buddhist traditions in Tibet and then practised on a daily basis by most people involved in dharma.

I'll just say a few more things about making offerings. The offerings that we make are all the things in the world that are beautiful and attractive. You can elaborate this practice in many ways. One way is to include the six 'offering goddesses'. These goddesses offer whatever is pleasing to the six senses, there is one goddess for each sense. So they offer delicious food for the taste, music for the ears, perfumes and incense for the nose, beautiful soft silk clothes for the body. For the eyes they offer objects of beauty as well as their own beauty. For the mind they usually carry a book which will stimulate the mind. When we are making these offerings and we are visualising them we want to do it with as much sense of beauty and sensuous enjoyment as possible.

ATTACHMENT: SUBJECT AND OBJECT

Yesterday we started by thinking about attachment, and it might seem that there is a bit of a contradiction between trying not to be attached to the world and the things in it, whilst at the same time offering these beautiful and wonderful and interesting things to the buddhas. It's very important in mahayana and tantric practice to be aware of the dangers of attachment, but the dangers of attachment as something that destroys the possibility of a true aesthetic openness.

From the hinayana point of view, (just to recap very briefly), it's considered that the world is a very dangerous place. The things inside it, if they are interesting for us, can pull us into a situation where we get caught up and trapped. The method is to cultivate a fear of the world, a hatred even of the world, turning one's back on it and vowing not to be involved with all the temptations that are around. In the mahayana one is attempting to develop an appreciation for what is positive and beneficial in the world and to develop these two strands of wisdom and compassion, understanding the nature of emptiness, and compassion. These give the ability to go outside one's own desire and respond to others.

So we are still dealing with this question of attachment, which—remember?—is getting locked onto something. Locking on to thinking ‘this object is real, and I want it.’

We can deconstruct attachment in different ways. Deconstructing attachment on the object, hinayana is saying “*Here is this bell, it’s a nice bell, and I want to have this bell, so what I’m going to do is make a vow never to be involved with bells again, and turn my back on them.*” This is a kind of purification on the object: the object is bad and if we remove the object then it won’t disturb us.

There is a Tibetan saying that it’s easier to cover our own feet with leather than to try to cover the whole road. If we try to remove all the difficult objects in the world, then we have to be busy all the time, and eventually just put a paper bag over our own head and flush ourselves down the toilet! Sometimes in a monastery I’ve seen signs saying ‘*Women should be careful how they dress so as not to disturb the monks.*’ So these poor monks have to be protected from the world otherwise they lose all their vows. I am not mocking this, but pointing out how, as a way of protecting ourselves from the world, it is not very efficient.

From the mahayana point of view, the way one deals with the question of attachment is to understand the emptiness of whatever it is that one is becoming attached to so that in the moment when your eye is drawn towards something it is drawn towards into an appreciation of the empty display of whatever it is that you focused on. And so, when we make these offerings, part of making the offerings in a mahayana style, is to be in touch with the emptiness of whatever it is that we are offering at the time that we offer it, and through that way of not being attached to the objects that we offer, we have a lighter feeling about them. We feel more happy, more playful because the loss is not so great for us, and we believe that the buddhas and bodhisattvas too, in receiving these things, are able to enjoy them without becoming attached to them. We can see in the thangkas, for example in this one up here with Chenrezig, he’s holding this beautiful mala in his hand, he’s got a flower, he’s got a jewel between his other two hands, he’s dressed in these lovely silk robes with lots of jewellery, and yet he is sitting in this open way, being available, so this ornamentation is not something narrow and tightening, it’s just a rich display.

MAINTAIN THE ATTITUDE OF NON-ATTACHMENT

But if we return to this hinayana idea, or the idea that you can purify things on the object—by removing objects, removing them completely—then you don’t have to do any more work because the world is safe. However, if we are going to do the purification on subject, in ourselves, in our awareness, then we actually take on board for ourselves a constant struggle to be aware. On one level purification on the subject is much easier, because one’s not having to spend a lot of time shifting the world and setting new rules, but it does mean that, in order to maintain the attitude of non-attachment, one has to be

very aware, moment-by-moment, of what is happening in one's way of dealing with thought, with perceptions, with all the five skandhas.

For example if we go out to lunch to this restaurant and people are sitting and talking together, it is very easy to lose any awareness and just get caught up in having an ordinary lunch. If we were in a zen monastery eating we would have one simple bowl; we would chant before eating and someone would read a sutra while we were eating. We would eat in silence, eating with meditation, having a lot more support. But in the practice of tantra it's very much up to us to take responsibility to bring the practice into life. It is for us, by studying the dharma, by doing practice on our own, to make sure that we can support ourselves in situations like restaurants, like work. Making sure we keep this sense of awareness of the emptiness of things, of the dynamic display of things, which transforms them and yet lets us continue as if life was just as usual.

You can make a little corner in your house and set up a little shrine in as beautiful way as you can, every day putting at least some flowers or burning a candle, and you can do the offerings with the seven bowls, something to create a place where there is a beautiful offering, but also a place where you can think about the nature of beauty and attachment. Because what we want to do is to be able to love the world, to be very open to taking pleasure in the world, to enjoy whatever occurs in the world, without distorting our relationship with the world by a heavy attachment.

TIME AND ATTACHMENT

Yesterday I talked of the relationship of the three times and the nature of time in the dharma a little bit. It's exactly on this point because attachment becomes heavy for us and we can get sad about losses that we have from times past: *"Oh, where is that person?" "Oh, where is that thing?"* Or, times future: *"I hope nobody breaks into my house. I hope nobody steals this now I've got this wonderful thing. I want to hang on as long as I am alive to this thing."*

Both these pressures pull us out of being in the present moment. Clearly we need to plan ahead for holidays, we need to buy in shopping by thinking about what we're going to eat tomorrow and the day after. I mean, clearly we live in time and we have to attend to that, but one is attempting, as much as possible, to be clearly focused and open to the present moment as much as we can be. Then these thoughts of planning for the future, of memories of the past, can come and pass through it, but pass inside this openness to the present, so that we are grounded and focused in the present. The past and the future are flipping across this, rather than us nervously moving past-future-past-future, with the present just a little bubble.

It's being present in the moment, open to the world, that lets us stay with this presentation of the world as the display of the three kayas, which is really the state of mind in which we can offer whatever it is that occurs, to all the buddhas.

When we are practising offerings there are really these two stages. The first of becoming aware of the things that one's attached to and dissolving that attachment. The second stage is when we are able to make offerings as the free movement of the display of the three kayas. We are no longer struggling not to be attached, but we are enjoying the richness of the display of the world inside the state of the mirror, as a reflection, as an unborn experience.

CONFESSING

Next, on the line, it says "*Nye shag*". "*Nyepa*" means faults or errors. And "*shagpa*" means to confess. This verb "*shagpa*" has this idea of setting things out, of making them public. Don't get lost in the process of shame, hiding things because you don't want to be exposed. Now in terms of these "*nyepa*" or "faults" in our blue book ⁷ Chetsangpa lists many faults - faults of speech, of the body, of the mind, great faults, small faults, black faults, white faults, all sorts of different kinds of faults and errors - from page nine to page sixteen. Many ways to feel bad about yourself!

However one feature of a list like that is that it is also a public list, a general list. Therefore we can assume that we are not the only people in the world who are doing these things. But very often we feel very bad when we have done something wrong and we feel ashamed of other people knowing this because we feel, just then, that all these other people are very good people and we are the only bad person in the world.

For monks and nuns there is a tradition of making confession usually once a month. That's particular for breaches of their monastic vow. But for lay people there hasn't really been a system of confession as we have say in the Catholic church, of going to a priest.

TALKING IN PAIRS

Later, this afternoon we'll go on to the Dorje Sempa section but maybe it would be useful now just to get in touch with some of these feelings of badness, feelings of being sinful. You could talk in pairs. No need to give specific details, but just get in touch with the sense of how you might feel cut off from other people by having this feeling of badness.

Both wisdom and compassion have the idea of openness, of being available. However inside us we may have some thoughts or feelings that are very, very bad, then if someone comes close to us we worry that they maybe will see that. So we retreat or we try to hide that bit of ourselves which then remains knotted, always blocking our ability to be open and fresh.

From the relative truth point of view, we want to be able to recognise and take responsibility for the things we've done and so feel in an open relationship to our own history, to our own actions. Through that improved communication

⁷ *Simply being: texts in the dzogchen tradition*. James Low. (Wisdom Books, 1998)

inside ourselves, we make a determination never to do that sort of action again because we recognise just how damaging it is both for ourselves and for other people. We may have hurt other people, plus damaged our relationship with them afterwards because we felt frightened or ashamed. On the relative truth level, shame and guilt are very important and are very helpful for getting us to change our behaviour.

However from the point of view of the absolute truth, or the understanding through emptiness, guilt and shame are a powerful way of showing us how little we understand about emptiness. Because whatever occurs has the nature of emptiness. We make a discrimination saying, *“This is a wonderful thing. I feel so proud I did this. This is very terrible thing. I feel so ashamed I did that.”* In that way we are turning those thoughts and actions into something solid when in fact they have been unborn from the very beginning.

So if you maybe take just a few minutes to sit by yourself thinking about things that you regret having done in your life, things that you feel guilty about, ashamed about, and what effect that kind of feeling, that kind of memory, has on you. Then you can talk about it with a partner in whatever detail you feel like doing. That’s up to you. In particular, try to see what sort of effect this sort of feeling has on wisdom and compassion as you try to develop them. OK...

[Any thoughts or questions on this part?]

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

..⁸. *Questioner*: If I can see these feelings of faults or sins as empty then maybe it is not a problem but how can I do this when they feel so real?

James: Firstly, if we feel we’ve done something terrible, which haunts us or torments us, or even just lots of little things, then the first thing we have to do is make some purification of that. Now it might feel as if me, and the bad things I have done, are locked together. It feels like *“Me - I am a shit! Oh God why did I do it?”* So it’s completely in me. The first step is to become conscious of this. Then I need to confess it, We will do that later when we do the Dorje Sempa practice, and we’ll have some discussion around that. In particular we need to apologise to the people whom we have hurt. This is the first stage of compassion, which is to recognise that other people are real, other people can suffer just like me, and things which I do can hurt other people.

Being very in touch with our own guilt can mean that we use the other person to beat ourselves up. For example we might see it where one person in a couple hurts the other, and then says *“I am such a bastard I shouldn’t have done this. Oh, I’ve really hurt you... Oh, I’m so bad...”* They are just using the

⁸ Tape four side two

other person to hit themselves. The other person isn't really there for them. So we need to recognise the other person as real, focussing our attention on the pain that the other person has. Then our remorse, our sadness at what we have done is going outwards, rather than just coming back to punch ourselves.

When the other becomes more real for us, then we can remember that because of karma, the other person is also implicated somehow in whatever bad thing has happened. Don't use this as an excuse for yourself. The meaning is not: *"It is because of your karma, I punched you. So it's your fault. I'm innocent. I'm just doing it because of your karma!"* There may even be a kind of omnipotence in the midst of our guilt, where I think *"Me, I am the only bad person in the world and I have done all these bad things all by myself."*

By relaxing that, by seeing that other people are also involved, by seeing that most of the bad things we do arise in relationship to other things, we can then be more open to the fact that we are at play in the world and that it's a difficult world full of temptations. Along with that, we can then start to understand how these things arise in dependent origination, not just out of me. We may think: *"I am bad therefore I do bad things. I do bad things therefore I am bad."* but this is a kind of false logic.

EMPTINESS IS NEVER AN EXCUSE

More understanding of dependent origination lets us have more of a sense of the lack of inherent self-nature in the things we and other people are doing. Through that we get more sense of the emptiness of self and other and through that we can ... we have to open it up and loosen it. But of course when you start at first, very tight. You can't imagine it would be emptiness because where you are feels very tight. So purify, reflect, open, understand, and take it back into the meditation. Then there is a bit more flavour of emptiness. Emptiness is never to be used as an excuse. It has to be a real awareness, but not an excuse.

James: Any other thoughts or questions?

Questioner: I meet someone today and they seem one way. I meet them tomorrow and they seem another way. Each time I meet them they seem different. I too feel differently towards them. Is this person a real person or is it only just my interpretation of the person? What has emptiness to do with this? Can I ever find out what the person is really like or should I simply say 'the person is empty'?

COMPASSION IS RECOGNISING THE OTHER PERSON, AS OTHER

James: A lot of the bad things that we do in life are because of the way we see things. Now we see things according to our karma, which includes also our experiences that we developed early on in our life. This is part of our stupidity. Because of this stupidity we don't have the wisdom of seeing things

as they are and so we are not able to act compassionately towards others. Our desire is usually to use the other person as a means of removing something from ourselves, or as a means of giving something to ourselves.

For example, I feel lonely and I fall in love with someone and I want them to be nice and make me never feel lonely again. Then I become angry because I find even when I am with them I still feel lonely. So I think *"They have failed me. What's the fucking use of being with this person? Crazy!"* I don't know why I am angry with the person because it's not very conscious. They don't know why I am angry with them. They're saying *"Why are you always angry with me?"* I say *"You are always are hassling me. Just shut up and..."* And so it goes on with neither of us understanding how we are we using each other in this way. We don't actually see the other person as they are, because if we were to see them as they are, hear them as they are, then they wouldn't fit in with our desire.

Meditation let's us recognise more of the habitual patterns we have. In doing shi-né meditation, one may see what kind of repeated thoughts one has, and then become aware, in an interpersonal situation, of this pattern of thoughts arising again. Then we might recognise *"You look like that to me because I am looking at you to make you that way. I'm not seeing you. I'm looking and I'm seeing what I look for, not seeing what is there."* Through our meditation we can recognise the pattern of our stupidity and try to dissolve it.

This then opens a space for compassion, which is always recognition of the other as other. Recognise that we don't know who the other is, and since we do need to attend to them, it follows that I must change myself to fit the other, rather than telling myself a false story about the other so that I can feel comfortable with them. That's really what compassion is. It's to turn that around.

When we accept that all sentient beings suffer and we take their suffering seriously, then we become committed to not hurting others. This forces us to change our behaviour. So when we do this Bodhisattva vow and we include all sentient beings in our practice, always trying to have a vast vision, the effort is to try to make people more real for us. We try to turn ourselves into the position of the servant of all beings. This means that we are prepared to dissolve our desires into emptiness in order to offer a space for other people's desire, which we can then help to satisfy.

That is why it is often said that the Buddha is like a wish-fulfilling jewel. It's because the Buddha can take on whatever form you need. He is not saying *"To come close to me you must be this form, you must be this shape. You get enlightenment through becoming what I want you to be."* He's saying *"No I will be what you need me to be, so that you can find out more about yourself!"* That's very radical...

BREAK

REJOICING IN THE HAPPINESS OF OTHERS

We're now at the end of this third line "*je rang*" And this is short for "*jesu rangwa*" which means to rejoice in the happiness of others. "*Jesu*" means "going after" and "*rangwa*" means kind of "in alignment with, no contradiction with". So it has the idea that when someone does something that is good I put myself fully behind that without feeling any envy, any jealousy, any strong emotion that would knock me out of balance with that.

This operates on two levels. One is to overcome envy and jealousy and to make us more aware of what others are doing. The second level, the more absolute level, is to pull us out of ourselves, to make the experience of another, our own experience.

For example if I heard that in London at Christmas some people set up a charity to feed homeless people and to open up an empty factory to give them a place to stay. So then I feel that this is a wonderful thing to do. I'm very glad that people are doing that. I intensify that by thinking "*May all homeless people find refuge, may all people who are hungry be fed.*" I am using a particular situation as a way of opening up and generalising for all sentient beings. In that way, through my identification with their positive action, I too am generating merit as well. In this way we can intensify and increase whatever good things are occurring in the world so that they are spreading out more and more.

However I might hear about this project and think "*Oh God, I should do something for these people too.*" I might even think "*God, there are so many charities. Everybody's making demands on me. I can't bear it.*" So this original good action brings up in me negative feelings of guilt and I end up in anger thinking "*I wish they'd all just fuck off and go away! I don't care.*" Maybe this is a sequence that happens more and more in the world. It can seem that there are so many demands for help, that we feel so powerless in the face of them. Instead of being able to rejoice and celebrate this individual action, it's just all feels too much. Now, the action of another, an original positive action, has evoked something in us which gets in the way of us supporting this positive action.

So this practice of rejoicing is seen as very important. We consciously develop positive thoughts around the actions of others, both as a way both of intensifying the merit of what they have achieved, and of contradicting our own personal karma.

Requesting the buddhas to teach

The start of the next line it says "*Chö sung*". "*Chö sung*" means teach the dharma, speak the dharma. Here it's a short form for requesting the Buddha to teach the dharma. Because although the buddhas have compassion and wisdom, their teaching of the dharma is dependent upon desire in others.

... I gave this example, in relation to this dharma teaching, because although in a sense it's the Buddha's wish and desire, duty if you like, to teach the dharma, nonetheless we have to have respect and to request this to happen....

⁹... so when lamas come to give initiations or whatever, of course they have some wish to help people. They probably also have some desire for their lineage to continue—there may be all sorts of personal desires in that too—but nonetheless I think that the tradition of us requesting is very important. We need to recognise that giving teaching is not an automatic thing. It is not just coming because all the volition is from that side.

We ourselves have to try to work out what is our desire, what it is that we want. Why? Because then, with the meeting of these two streams, the desire of one person to teach, and the desire of other people to study, then you have something quite profound and powerful. But it has first to come from desire. So, when we say these two words, compressed into them is this whole attitude *"I want to receive the dharma. I want to learn about the dharma. Please help me to learn something. Please help me to grow and be more profound in wisdom and compassion."*

PLEASE REMAIN: IMPORTANCE OF OUR DESIRE

The next two words "*Kur shup*" means "please remain", "please stay in your body", "show us", "be available". Historically this addressed to Buddha Shakyamuni, *"Please stay in this world system. Don't just vanish into mahaparinirvana. Don't just go away, but remain available to us."*

It's also our request to make the teaching available, to make teachers available in the world. Think of how in the twentieth century the buddha dharma has vanished from so many countries where it used to be available. So we make this request: *"May this continue. Please remain in your body. Please don't abandon us, because our work is not finished, we need support, we need help."*

And again it is marking the dharma out as a human activity; as a human activity, embedded in the social relationship. It comes back to the same idea that we don't just come to the dharma like thieves to get something and take it away. We rather enter into the dharma, take up a place inside of the dharma, which takes us into a network of human connections with other people, with all the difficulties that that brings, but also with all the richness.

We make commitments to be with other people to support other people. Part of that is requesting that teachers be available to other people, that they don't just come in for a week and vanish for ever, but that they actually somehow make a commitment.

⁹ Tape five side one

What it is again stressing is the importance of desire. If you want it, you have to say you want it. Did you know it's by expressing our desires that we become clear about them? If we just have inside our head "maybe..." but if we say "*I really want this*" then we are committing ourselves to time, to energy, to all our intellectual resources, our emotional resources, to try to make something happen. It brings it into the world.

DEDICATING

And then we go on to the seventh branch of this practice "*Gye wa yong lang wo*" which means "*I dedicate all this virtue to all beings.*" So it means that whatever virtue has been generated by this activity I share it out, I share it with all beings. At the beginning of all mahayana practices we are thinking of all sentient beings when we recite the Bodhisattva vow, or affirm our intention to help beings. During the practice we should be including all beings in our meditation, either by visualising them, or by thinking about them, or by sending rays of light to them. Finally at the end we dedicate all the merit and value that has arisen from the act.

Thinking about fantasy and reality which we were talking about a little bit yesterday. Someone might well say: "*If we give ten deutschmarks to everyone in Germany that would be something, that would be real. However if we are just going to sit there and say all this merit, which we don't even know exists anyway, and which we're going to give it to all beings and that doing this is a very good thing... What is all this? It's just a game!*" How can we think about this question?

WORKING ON THE SUBJECT

Buddhism is always more concerned with subjective reality than with objective reality because it's attempting, through working on the subject—through understanding the nature of the subject—to re-conceive and understand in a different way, the nature of the object. The more free we are in our own conceptualisation, the more the object world out there changes. Then subject and object appear as arising together and eventually, as the play of emptiness.

So by dedicating merit to all beings, what I'm saying is that by shifting my understanding of the relationship between myself and others, this has an affect of transforming my own limited sense of self, of making me more open. That then lets me perceive other people in a more fresh direct way, and opens a way forward. It's not a naïve bit of magical thinking, whereby just saying some words will somehow end conflicts in Africa or stop children being murdered in Bolivia. Rather, it is a way of transforming my perception of the world so that I become more available to really bringing effective change in the world.

PLEASE GIVE US!

So now, having made these offerings in this mandala phrase we now want to focus the benefits on it. We come to the last line on this page "*chog dang tun mong göng du deng dir sol*", which means "Please give us!" Remember we are reciting this a hundred thousand times in front of this image of Guru Rinpoche in the centre with the refuge around him. We are saying, having offered all these things, the result that we want from this is that "*I and all sentient beings, who are displayed all around me, this vast group of people, please give us this attainment of enlightenment and the ability to be effective towards others!*"

So we are asking for wisdom and compassion which is just a more precise way of focusing this on emptiness. Because I am not trying to get anything substantial to take away with me, but I am just sharing it out and saying "*All I want out of this is to be more open, more relaxed, less tight and grasping.*"

If one is doing this practice in the ngöndro, you want to recite it as many times as possible with the visualisation that I described yesterday of many many buddhas and many many beings. When you've done that, you recite this final line and when you come it, the '*tsog shing*', the refuge tree, the visualisation of Guru Rinpoche and all the deities and all the dharma books and everything around him, all dissolve into rainbow light.

This stream of rainbow light flows into yourself and you dissolve into that as it purifies all your sins and your obscurations, all the negativity of the past. So one has that state of all of this dissolving inwards and completely purifying you. Being purified you then move into the next part of the meditation which is Dorje Sempa which we will do in the afternoon.

Questioner: When you spoke before you described visualising all these buddhas and bodhisattvas. So why does Guru Rinpoche come into the picture now?

James: What I was describing there was the system that had been developed by this bodhisattva, Samantabhadra. When we use this ngöndro practice, we would see Guru Rinpoche there instead. It was just that this was the structure of the meditation.

We'll break for lunch in just a few minutes, but before we do that I think it would be useful to...¹⁰ ... in front of us, is Guru Rinpoche. If you can imagine more than that, if you can imagine the dharma books behind him, bodhisattvas to the right of him, lineage deities on the other side, you can make it as elaborate as you want... Otherwise just a simple Guru Rinpoche and we are imagining making these offerings and saying this to Guru Rinpoche.

¹⁰ Change of tape

So we'll just say this page three times very slowly. Then we'll go on at the end of that to do the one line on page seven and just imagine the rays of light coming and dissolving into you and of purification occurring. And then from that we'll go out to lunch. Very simple.

BREAK

Chapter four of *Simply Being* has quite a detailed commentary on Dorje Sempa and I would encourage you to have a look at that because it also gives a translation of the long mantra, or *darani*. Reading that chapter will explain most things. What we will do today is just go through some of the basic principles.

SMOOTHING THE BUMPS

Why do things stick to us? One reason is because we have hooks sticking out of us. Another reason is because we have holes sticking into us. Our desires are like hooks on the outside of our body, grabbing things from the world. And our fears and anxieties and depressions are like holes inside us where the world comes into us. If you look at the thangka there of Chenrezig you see that he is surrounded by this blue egg and there are no hooks and no holes in the egg. May all sentient beings become an egg!

I think it is a very interesting idea to be smooth. What can make people interesting are their bumps. Both their sexual bumps and the bumps of their personality. Bumps are about how we have intercourse. We bump into each other in a particular way. So if we have no bumps then we have no intercourse. And there is a particular way in which this smoothing out, this easing over of these hooks and holes, makes it far easier to move smoothly and easily through the world.

The buddha's being, the being through the three kayas, is described in Tibetan as being "*dagpa mepa*", "without interruption". So if you imagine a river flowing down a mountain, where there are boulders and there are little places where it's cut holes in the side, so the river is moving between bumps and hollowed out areas. And this leads to a great deal of turbulence, of movement in the water. Once the river comes down into the plain it is flowing much more easily and the banks are usually less indented, and there are not so many big stones inside. It has cleared a way forward.

DORJE SEMPA

And the practice of Dorje Sempa is to attempt to turn us into this smooth, even-flowing river by calming our energy so that we can move easily and effortlessly in an ethical direction.

When there is an aggressor or a criminal the criminal is reaching out on the world to do something. And the victim is having something done onto them. So the criminal is going out and victim is shrinking back in. These are not two separate things. If we feel frightened and afraid and we don't like ourselves

and we look anxious, that will attract people who are ready to go out and take things and do things. Through this practice of Dorje Sempa we are both purifying the rough tendencies in ourselves that go out like hooks to grab things from the world: the greediness that makes us thieves and makes us cheat other people; the anger that makes us violent and aggressive and controlling. By purifying all this energy that goes out, we calm down, we become more clear and we have less impulse to rush out on the world making a mark.

In addition, we are also filling ourselves up with this purifying light so that all the collapsed, frightened, depressed anxious bits of ourselves fill out and we become rounded, we become complete in ourselves so that we no longer attract the controlling, demonic, violent qualities in others to beat us up, to exploit us sexually, financially, whatever. So in that way, we move into a way of being which is at ease with the world, which is relaxed and complete and able to respond to the actual needs of others, rather than misreading the needs of others as an excuse for us to exploit them, or to be exploited by them. It's not ethical to allow others to exploit us and it's also not ethical to exploit others.

It's very important that we develop a relationship with ourselves and with the buddhas, through the taking of refuge and through this kind of meditation that helps us to stay in a balance. We are not getting bigger or more aggressive than we need to be, and we're not getting more small and frightened. But we take up a shape in the world which embodies both wisdom and compassion.

We are probably all aware here of different ways in which we allow other people to exploit us. A very common way is to feel *"I'm not good enough. No one would really like me, as me. I want people to like me so I have to do extra things to please them. But even when I do all these extra things for other people, they don't seem to recognise it."* Then we may feel a bit angry with them and sad. Other times we might get in a bad temper and just say *"Fuck you, I'm not doing it!"* And then the other people are upset because they don't expect us to say that. Then we feel guilty that they are now upset with us and so we go back to feeling a bad person and they're not sure whether they want to be with us or not. So we're back to the beginning again where we were thinking *"Oh God no one will like me now so I'd better do a lot of good things to please them."* And this is a very common way of passing your life, in which you never really feel of value in yourself, nor are properly recognised by other people for what you do.

Buddha said that we should enquire into things and examine them and not believe them in a naïve way. But there are some things which we can't get a sense of immediately. We have to take them on trust. The idea of a buddha-nature is like this. The idea that all sentient beings have a buddha-nature or the potential to become a buddha—an enlightened person free of suffering.

If we believe that all beings have a buddha nature then on a relative level we need to develop respect for other beings because whenever we encounter another being we are actually encountering a potential buddha. And so when

we don't respect other people, when we act to exploit them, we are acting as if they had no buddha-nature; we are acting as if they were just some pile of shit that we could do whatever we wanted with. But we are also acting in a way that is an attack on our own buddha-nature because we are saying it's more important for me to exploit this person for a short term gain—financially, sexually, whatever it is—rather than to realise my own real nature, which the Buddha has said is the source of ending happiness.

You have a similar pattern when you are the one who is exploited. If you don't stand up for yourself, if you let other people cheat you, abuse you, in a way you are then not respecting your own buddha-nature. You are dealing with yourself as if *"I am a worthless person, it doesn't matter if people cheat me. It doesn't matter if people have sex with me without caring about me..."* One is acting as if one was just a piece of rubbish...

¹¹...and we can do that kind of attack on ourselves even without others. We can do it by drinking too much, by doing drugs, by getting into anorexia, bulimia, by playing all kinds of funny games on ourselves, by looking in the mirror and thinking *"Oh I should look different from this"* or by being envious of other people, by thinking *"Oh If only I had this degree or if only could do that, then I would be a worthwhile person."*

Bad actions, or sin, require a relationship, usually self to other, or other to self. But our own sense of self is not just a monistic thing, it's not just something as one in itself, we exist as a self in a dialogic relation. We create ourselves through a dialogue with ourselves. And so, we can be cruel to ourselves. We probably all have experiences of denying things to ourselves or making ourselves do things that we didn't want to do to fit in with some voice learnt from our parents or somewhere else.

These hooks or indentations in ourselves are not just created by past karma or by interactions with other people in our lives. We ourselves are actively grinding holes in ourselves by hating ourselves, which makes the world rush in. We can get so full of fury inside *"I hate them I hate them I don't know why he's said that to me. URRRGH!"* This anger builds up and then the next person we meet SSSSHHHH! it shoots out on to them, although it really belongs to someone else.

In English we have a *phrase "to nurse a wound"* which means to cook it up: not to heal it like a nurse from the outside, but to keep it going so that it never heals. And we may have little stories like that running in our lives. *"Oh if only I hadn't blown that relationship. Oh if only I had done that, this, whatever..."* Some sadness happens to us and we go back to this story about ourselves. By doing that, we go back into this well of despair, rather than being fresh to move into the next moment.

In doing this Dorje Sempa practice we are trying to purify all the actual bad things and sins that we have done in many, many lifetimes in the past. Most

¹¹Tape change. Tape five side two

of us have no memory or understanding of past lives at all. There is no actual way of proving whether there are past lives or not. So whether there are past lives or not, in a sense it doesn't really matter, because we can use this as a way of developing an understanding about ourselves now.

Reflecting that I have had many past lives, gives me a place to think about all the possibilities of evil, of cruelty, of selfishness, of jealousy that I have in myself. Whatever someone has done in this world, I also could do that given the circumstances. I also could kill people and steal things. So whether we try to develop compassion by thinking of wicked people in this world, we can also think "*I too could be someone like that*" and through that identification, develop sympathy with them.

IDENTIFICATION AND EMPATHY

It allows us to shift our self-identification out of this narrow bubble that we have of ourselves, this knowledge that we have of ourselves. It allows us to become more aware of the infinity of the possibility of our becoming. Because it's through this sort of identification that we can have empathy with those people who do terrible things.

All the sins, all the bad things that people do are because of these five poisons. Stupidity, anger, desire, jealousy and pride. We also have these five poisons. Making this identification with all the terrible things that we might have done—and imagining as we do the Dorje Sempa practice, that all around us are all sentient beings who have also done these things—we open our hearts to the whole range of possibility of human behaviour, without excluding anybody. There is nobody who has been so evil or cruel that they must be excluded.

And this inclusion through identification opens the way for developing genuine compassion towards all beings, since the root of the five poisons is wisdom itself. What we are trying to do in the Dorje Sempa practice is both to recognise and identify with other beings, and to bring our awareness into this realisation, this profound understanding of emptiness, so that we can then have an open, all-inclusive compassion which will not reject any beings, for any reason.

So we want to be in touch with this possibility of our own corruption and evil, and then bring that into relationship with Dorje Sempa, who here represents the absolute purity of our own being. Dorje Sempa is like a mirror against which we can see through the layers of dirt and evil that we've piled around ourselves. See our own nature revealed very clearly and directly. By using his purity, we recognise our purity, and the purity of all beings.

DORJE SEMPA AND TANTRA

Once we have that clear understanding then it's easier to go onto the tantric idea that all form is the buddha's body, all sound is the buddha's mantra, and

all thoughts are the buddha's thoughts. We have been working to clear away our heavy, grasping, guilty, fearful thoughts and replacing them with an open identification.

This is why Dorje Sempa appears in the ngöndro as part of the preliminary or preparation practice for tantra. It's not that you can't do tantra or even dzogchen without it, but it does help to focus on this point of how you might sabotage yourself later. If you really believe in purity, if you've really engaged with all the points where you *think* "I am a very bad person. I hate myself." or "You are a very bad person. I hate you." that kind of tension—if you've got in touch with it through doing this Dorje Sempa practice and purified it—then when that thought arises later it's much easier to relax it and let go of it, because it doesn't have a hook in your own psyche.

What I would suggest we do now is just have a five minute break just to freshen up. Then I'll do through the rest of this text and show you how we do this. By then it will be about four o'clock at which point I will have to leave because I have to get a flight back. But we could maybe have a ten or fifteen minute break and then people could do the short Rigdzin practice together. That might be a nice thing since there are so many people...

BREAK

DISCUSSION ON WHAT TO PREPARE FOR THE NEXT RETREAT [NGÖNDRO 5]

... OK, what I would suggest is that if you can, read this chapter on Dorje Sempa before we meet again in January. Also everyone should get a copy of these pages from page one to page sixteen from the front of this book. Some people already have bits and pieces of it. You need to work out what pages you need.

OK. What I am suggesting we do in January is if people have tried this Dorje Sempa practice, and this other practice, then if you have any questions from that, we can clarify them. If you also read from page forty-seven to page fifty-two in *Simply Being*. These pages forty-seven to fifty-two deal with the nature of the guru and the qualities of the guru. This can be a big problem. So if we've read this first, it gives a very traditional presentation and then we can look at what this actually means in terms of practising in the West and practising tantra.

Right. Now back with Dorje Sempa.

VISUALISATION AND PRACTICE OF DORJE SEMPA

It starts with this letter "Hri". And "Hri" is here evocative and it brings our attention towards the five wisdoms which are represented in the letter "Hri". It's a way of focusing the mind.

So it says “on the top of my head” and it means particularly the fontanel, where these cranial plates are meeting, on the top of that. If you are sitting meditating and are looking slightly down, in this style of Vairocana, then you have a straight line coming up through the heart which comes out through the top of the head.

Above us there is this lotus seat. On top of that is a moon disc and then there’s a mass of rainbows. He’s called Guru Dorje Sempa or Lama Dorje Sempa. He is white in colour and he has a bell in his left hand and a *vajra* in the right hand. His left hand, holding the bell, is resting on his left thigh. So the bell is resting. The right hand is holding the *vajra* usually one point on the middle of the palm of his hand, and the other fingers round it. It is not the kind of ringing this bell on the thangka up here. [*Gestures*] It’s not kind of radiating out this way, it’s into himself. He’s relaxed and just relaxed in himself. In the next line, the third line, it describes how he is wearing these ornaments of the Sambhogakaya. These are, you can see there, [*gestures*] earrings, tiara, upper armbands, lower armbands, anklets and a long necklace doing down. And then on top of this, are silk robes that go over the side. In his heart there is a moon disc and on the moon disc there is the letter “*Hung*”. You can see, if you are trying to visualise it, at the end of line three, there is in Tibetan writing a letter “*Hung*”.

And now this letter “*Hung*” is turned around to that it’s pointing out the way, so that it’s looking as if it were this side round. If visualisation is very difficult for you, don’t despair. You can just imagine a little white ball. You don’t have to make these things very complicated; it’s always the principle that’s important rather than the form.

Round this “*hung*” there are the hundred letters of the mantra revolving. How it’s usually done is this. If this is the “*Hung*” you imagine that it’s starting down here, and it’s coming out as a spiral, going round this and going in back through the top. So it’s a bit like a garden pump system for a little fountain, except the water’s going down here and then spiralling back up. Clockwise. The mantra is moving round this. You see the letters rising up. So you don’t want to make that too complicated, but the basic idea is a sense of this movement.

Each of these hundred syllables represents a deity. They represent the forty-two peaceful and fifty eight wrathful deities. I’m sure there are pictures of these available. They are also contained incidentally in this Tibetan book here on the altar which is the *Kar Ling Shi Tro* text. So if you’ve read the Tibetan Book of the Dead you’ll get a description of these peaceful and wrathful deities there. And these are the deities that are supposed to arise as a vision when you die. Their essence is Dorje Sempa. So if you practise Dorje Sempa it’s also seen as making a very good connection for the time of death.

So in doing the Dorje Sempa practice you have the condensed purification essence of these peaceful and wrathful deities. No matter how rough or cruel you may feel you are, how much of a demon you may feel you are, Dorje

Sempa has the essence of all the most wrathful deities, so they can certainly deal with your little murderous tendencies.

So Dorje Sempa, in his heart is this *Hung* and round it is this mantra going. As the mantra goes, is revolving, drops of *dutsi* are falling from the *Hung* and from the mantra letters like drops of sap from a tree. This word “*dud tsi*” meaning essence of elixir is very interesting word. Because the first part “*dud*” means “demon”, it’s the Tibetan word for Mara, the demons who were tempting the Buddha Shakyamuni, at the time of his enlightenment. And the second part ‘*tsi*’ means “essence”. So it’s the essence of all demons.

If you squeeze demons very, very hard, what comes out is the buddha-nature. Usually we think that if somebody is a very nasty person their essence will be horrible, but from this dharma point of view the essence of everything is emptiness. We have to keep remembering that. The essence of the torturer is not evil, it’s not the devil, it’s the buddha-nature. And the same for us. No matter how bad we think we are, this badness is only a covering over this essential buddha-nature which is open, empty and compassionate.

OK now all of this *dutsi*, this juice, is falling and filling up Dorje Sempa’s body. And then it starts to drip out. It says he has his foot out like this and it drops out of the tip of his big toe like this. In other texts it says it comes out of his penis. And in other texts, more sweet texts, it says it just flows through his body in a mystical way. Anyway, this pure stuff is flowing out of his body and is coming through this hole in the top of your head, down and filling your body...

¹²...Now it’s quite useful to imagine at first that your body is full of very dirty water, of pus, of shit and all kinds of dark, evil things. So as this pure substance is coming through the top of your head it’s pushing out all this dark stuff which is coming out of your anus in the form of snakes, scorpions, worms and coal black fluid. And you can imagine that beneath you a crack in the earth and all of this descends right to the centre of the earth. In some of the texts is also describes how there is a demon there with his mouth open, drinking all this stuff down, and so it vanishes. That’s the main part of the visualisation. All the negativity is going from you out of your body, and you are becoming filled with this pure white fluid which transforms all the heavy material substance of your body into light.

At the top of the next page it says “*May my nature be blessed by Dorje Sempa.*” And this is very very important because what it’s saying is that my nature and the nature of Dorje Sempa are the same. Now the main thing to know about Dorje Sempa is that his nature is emptiness and compassion. That is his nature. Now if I believe this, then that is my nature too. My nature is wisdom and compassion. My nature is no longer James Low, born in Scotland, who did this and that and that. My nature is no longer a construction out of my personal history.

¹² Tape six side one

It is a very important moment to radically think that whatever I think myself to be, my ordinary identification with myself, this too is an illusion which provides the hooks for the actions which create more karma. By recognising my nature as Dorje Sempa's I start to dissolve the basis for producing karmic action which leads to sin and unhappiness. So the purification's on two levels. On an outer level it has to do with out negativity, all the sins we've accumulated, with the five poisons and so forth, and on a more subtle level, it has to do with subject-object grasping, with the very subtle levels of attachment which take us into a solid dualistic vision, the very beginning of samsara itself.

So we say these verses once, and then we go on to say the long mantra as many times as possible. If you are just doing this practice quickly then do it this way. Try to recite the mantra at least seven times, but anyway three times if you can. So I'll just read it through once so you get some connection with the sound of it. [We have all initiation? Everyone got it?] Oh that's very good. We should read it anyway.

....

The last bit "*Ah Hung Phat*" is used in some traditions and not in others.

Then very briefly this final part. This last verse you say usually three times. These four lines, "*Om samaya, ah samaya, hung samaya, benza samaya, guru samaya*" is making '*samaya*'. *Samaya* means a "bond, a commitment" and one makes it to the body, speech and mind, to the three kaya, and fourth one, this indestructible commitment "*I fully identify myself in this nature of the three kayas, wisdom and compassion, and not in my own old identity.*" In *Simply Being* you will find it in the chapter on Dorje Sempa practice where there's a detailed description of what the mantra means.

And then this verse here, this three lines, just saying "*for myself and all beings, all the sins, bad things, faults, mistakes accumulated in all our past lives, may these be purified now by you Dorje Sempa.*" Then comes the short mantra "*Om benza satva hung ah*" You can do that as many times as you like, but again, usually a minimum of seven times.

At the beginning it is more important to get the sense of the real understanding of the text than trying to do a whole lot of numbers. In the end numbers won't save you. Up in some buddhist heaven there isn't somebody with a little pocket calculator tapping out the numbers and writing it in the *akashic* records. What is really important is that we get into the spirit of this practice and use it as a place to transform our sense of ourselves as being small, corrupted, worthless human beings, into this sense that we have absolute value, arriving from something totally given, the buddha-nature. And on the basis of that we can purify any faults we have made. This is the place of absolute forgiveness. Nothing we have done damns us. We are all able to enter enlightenment.

So this is three pages long to do. It doesn't take very much time. If you really get into it, you will get a definite benefit from it. Also, if you want to, you can add it on to the Short Rigdzin practice.

We now need to do a dedication of merit for this. We have an intention that we study this well, and that it may bring some real benefit for us and for all beings.

End.