
Discovering the Natural State

Session one

*Using refuge and meditation on the
breath to discover the natural state*

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Excerpts

“...The Buddha’s teachings are radical, disturbing—they turn our world upside-down and shift the basis of who we think we are. Everything that we know, everything that we’re connected with is still here, but we start to see it differently. If we focus on the difference we will feel disturbed, which is why reflecting on impermanence is an important preparatory practice, for the more we see impermanence as the natural state of affairs, the more we see that relying on phenomena to provide a true refuge is not wise...”



“...There is continuity, but it is a continuity of change. Since we were children everything has changed in our lives. Our thoughts and feelings have changed so often, the shapes of our bodies have changed, the kinds of activities we do have changed. So what is the continuity of our identity? It is some sort of felt sense of ‘here-I-am’, but here I am as what? As this in the morning, and as that in the afternoon ... The content of ‘what I am’ and ‘how I am’ is changing, changing, and changing...”



“...Recognising the empty nature of everything including ourselves is wisdom, for it frees us from false attribution and allows us to experience what is occurring without involvement, attachment or bias. Experiencing form as inseparable from emptiness is compassion for we see how sentient beings mis-take illusory forms to be substantial entities and through this generate great suffering for themselves.



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



“...The root of who we are is awareness inseparable from emptiness, and this is the basis for the flow of our experience all the time. If we can settle into this awareness, we will find that it is more reliable than any friend. Whenever you look for your mind, it will be there. But you won’t find it as any-thing. All the friends whom you find as some-thing will come and go. As the Buddha said, “Friends become enemies, and enemies become friends”. We can go through life telling ourselves stories about how the world is in order to make our world feel safe but this is merely to fall asleep in illusion. The only unchanging refuge is our own nature...”



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

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[Recite refuge prayer]

Over the next two days we will look at the nature of the mind, and we will do this through different kinds of explanation, and some sitting practice together. This idea of the nature of the mind belongs in a particular direction in Buddhist philosophy, in Buddhist history. Primarily an interest in the nature of the mind arises in what's called yogacara philosophy. I won't get too much into talking about the complexities of the history of these views, but I just want to set out first of all two basic positions about looking into our experience of being alive in the world, and then relate that to the methods of meditation and then we'll do some of the meditation together.

Taking refuge

We began by reciting four lines of Tibetan language and which say, "From this time in all my lives I take refuge in the Buddha, the dharma and the sangha in order to gain enlightenment". Then we say that, "All the good things that we have accumulated in the past, all the positive energy and insight we will dedicate that for the enlightenment of all beings." We take refuge because of the idea that very often our experience of the world is one of suffering, and we want to minimise suffering for ourselves. The Buddha says that suffering arises from attachment; it's because we get involved with things we take them to be strongly real, then we try to hang onto the things that make us happy and push away the things that make us unhappy. But because of the nature of impermanence we cannot always hang onto the things that we like, and we can't always push away the things that we don't like. Therefore there's developed this tradition of taking refuge in the Buddha, the dharma and the sangha.

By relying on the Buddha's understanding, which he taught as the dharma and which one is supported in trying to understand through the presence of the sangha, one is able to open up a gap between the ordinary attachment and involvement with worldly things, that one has to find a bit more space, some room to move around in and see new aspects to situations. Like a small child trying to tie its shoelaces for itself, we try to make ourselves happy, but again and again the more we try, the knots don't come out, we become angry and frustrated. The more proud we become, the more determined we are to do it by ourselves, the more angry and frustrated we can become. So refuge is a moment where we can relax our pride, recognise that we are not able to do what we would like to be able to do, and rely on the eyes and the hands of someone else to guide us to a more efficient way of getting our needs met.

Just as it helps the child to recognise that its not in a rivalrous conflict with its mother or father when they help it to tie its laces, but that the mother or the father are on the child's own side in being able to open up something new for the child, if we can collaborate with the ideas of the Buddha dharma without trying to get into a 'oh, I was right all along', feeling somehow put down, insulted because somebody knows a bit more than us, this collaboration brings us very quickly to a new understanding. Once the mother has taught the child to tie its own shoelaces it would be a very strange mother who would expect the child to tie her own shoe laces. So the Buddha doesn't need us to tie his shoes. What is very important is to practice the dharma, it's not so important to be a Buddhist, because a Buddhist is somebody who is committed to a kind of perverse relationship of 'you tie my shoelaces Buddha, you tie my shoe laces', and it's a reciprocal confusion about fabricating a social identity rather than becoming open and happy. Because once the child is able to tie its own shoelaces we hope it doesn't develop as a shoe fetishist, but is able to go outside and play. The purpose of Enlightenment is to be able to play all the time.

In taking refuge we are using the Buddha to make an intervention back onto ourselves. Usually when children go to school they find that the teacher wants them to do things they don't want to do, so they feel as if they are under the power of the teacher. But the teacher is actually the servant of the students. The teacher is paid to be in service of providing an education for children, that is to help children grow up and be more open to the world and find more possibilities in the world.

There is a double move or a kind of paradox in this, that in order to find more freedom, we perhaps have to constrain ourselves as a method of realising something that will open up more freedom. If one simply goes into the box of dharma practice and then thinks 'Oh, this could be quite a comfortable little box, I will stay in this box for ever,' then one is actually in a perverse relationship with the dharma. As the Buddha said in his very famous example, that in order to get across the river you need to make use of a boat, when you get to the other side of the river, it would be ridiculous to carry the boat on your shoulders in case you came to another river. We are concerned in the dharma to go across the river or the flowing tide of our own habitual patterns, the river of our karma, which is to say the forces and pressures that take us into habitual repeated responses to the world, and get to the other shore where we can experience something different.

So taking refuge, we have to remember, is a method and we take it in order to achieve more openness in our lives. Devotion is also a method. One of the most seductive things in Buddhism is to go to a delightful gathering of friendly Tibetan people and the Lama arrives and everybody smiles and it's very nice, and everybody feels this is something very beautiful in the world; we don't normally get that in the shopping market. But this nice quality can lead us to just wanting to hang out with the Lamas. In India and Nepal, everywhere where there are Lamas there are tea shops full of people gossiping about the Lamas and how wonderful they are or how hellish they are. This is not a very useful way of practising the dharma. It is like the crazy conversations that people have about new cars.

The admiration of the good qualities of others does have one use though, in that it helps us to overcome our own envy, but in general it is not a very useful way to spend time. Buddhism is not about worshipping the Buddha, because the Buddha is great and wonderful. In Buddhism worshipping the Buddha or the deities that we meditate on is a method whereby we can recognise something about ourselves. Believing that the Buddha is enlightened, being inspired by the enlightenment of the Buddha, learning more about the good qualities of the Buddha, is not a

practice for the purpose of making the Buddha more important, it is a practice for helping us to make use of the Buddha to recognise something about ourselves.

This is very important when we come on shortly to talk more about meditation, because if you make the Buddha very real and very strong, what you are doing is establishing something which is radically something other than yourself, but still inside a dualistic frame. Again the understanding of the nature of the Buddha is a method for helping us to understand more about our nature. Particularly when we go to focus on the nature of the mind, we are focusing on a radical shift from ordinary subject-object perception of me inside my body looking out through my sense at the world, towards an understanding of the nature of awareness.

The cause of suffering is attachment. To be attached means there have to be two things. There has to be one thing and another thing and one thing then gets attached to or involved with or locked on something else. In terms of suffering there has to be somebody who suffers, so there is a subject experiences certain things, feelings, emotions, memories, thoughts, in relationship to the arising of objects, objects which may be experienced as external, or internal. But between the subject that is looking out at the world and what is in the world there is a flow or a stream of thoughts, memories, and associations. Very often we are not aware of the almost subconscious flow of thoughts, feelings and memories which help to organise and focus our moment by moment experience of the world.

Usually because we are very active in the world we don't see so much this underlying flow of thoughts and feelings. It's hidden from us because somehow we have enough of a focus on the world to have a sense of continuity. We know often walking along the street, or riding a bicycle, or driving a car, we are somewhere else. Somehow our body gets us from here to there without an accident, but we are not really there as we are travelling. We are off in our thoughts and dreams, thinking about something else.

Is that an experience you can recognise? Something you've experienced? Yes. So in fact if you are out driving on your car, you are surrounded by zombies who are completely spaced out and not in their bodies. So each motorcar is something from the land of the living dead. This is why we say that Buddha is awakened, because he is no longer a zombie. But it is quite scary to wake up because when you realise everyone else is a zombie you can get quite scared. In order not to be overcome by fear, that's why we have to develop compassion in the great hope that everyone will stop being a zombie. Because this status of being a distracted zombie has some advantages.

When we watch the news on TV and see reports from disaster and war zones if we were to allow ourselves to be in touch with what that means, may be we would be moved to action, but since it's on television, and we've got lots of other things to be getting on with like going to bed, or cooking or putting the children to bed, it's easier to be a zombie.

In order to survive in this world of horror that we live in, all the time we are making ourselves blind and deaf. This is how we survive. That makes it very difficult when we start to meditate, because when we meditate we are trying to take off these veils and be more present, but then it means that we have to confront the world. That means that the sensitivity that we have to suffering arises and becomes more intense for us. In the first stages of meditation, we are attempting to calm our mind, so that we are more in touch with things as they are in themselves, in a very simple way.

But this simplicity generates problems of its own, so we also need to have a second stage of meditation. I want to practice meditation in order to become more aware. As I practice this meditation and become more aware the sense get more and more filled up with things, many of the unpleasant and so I become filled up and filled up and filled up. As I become filled up and filled up, I start going all over the place, and there's a terrible mess going to be there, unless I can find a bowl to hold this mess.

This is very important because this is the point where the teachings of emptiness come. Because emptiness takes us from being one small limited vessel into a recognition that the self, what we experience as ourselves, is not some point enclosed inside this flesh and blood body, but is a moment of awareness that arises as infinite. And in that infinite awareness we have the context and we have this embodied being as well, so that myself and the world together become the revelation or the self disclosure of this natural state of openness.

[Gap while the tape is changed]

... the kind of mediation approach that is used in both mahamudra and dzogchen to gain a more direct understanding of the nature of awareness, which is without any limitation. In the course of doing that I'll say a little bit about the philosophical analysis that gives some support to these different views.

The first kind of meditation is called shamatha or in Tibetan shiné. Shiné means staying peacefully, abiding, not moving, in a calm manner. A lot of the time we don't know that our mind is busy, because we are caught up in the busy-ness of the mind, and here we have the demonstrator of the business of the mind. Thank you. As with her, if you can go with your busy-ness and you don't feel any frustration, then you can be very happy. But it is probably predictable that some boredom will creep in after a while, and then either she will fall asleep or she will get more desperate to run around and make herself excited, because the mind likes that excitement. Children particularly are very good at showing us how thoughts take us into action without really thinking about it.

As adults we try to structure our world so that we will not encounter circumstances which will control us. We like to have control over our own lives, which basically means that we are able to allow our thoughts to move us wherever we want to go. It is often only if we become sick or something happens to us that we can't move about as much that we become aware of the tension between our mental and emotional life, and our active being in the world. In this mediation what we are trying to do is intentionally set up a situation where we frustrate our impulse to move, so that we can become more aware of the patterns and energy which is moving inside our mind all the time, which is the experience that we have of our mind.

Freud's method and meditation's method

One of the things that has arisen, or that comes through Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis is an altered view of the nature of the self. These ideas had been hovering around of course, but Freud's formulation was running across the 19th century view of a conscious, rational, mature self that could act on the world to create strong pleasurable sensations and maintain these for future generations from birth to death. That's the modernist enterprise - to use rational human intelligence to get rid of disease, suffering, stupidity and create a world fit for heroes.

Just very briefly – Freud made use of four main approaches. He started with hypnosis. Then he moved on to dream analysis, then he developed the technique of free association, and leading into an analysis of transference and counter-transference. What is interesting about these four things is that they put into question the sense that I know who I am. If I can be hypnotised and made to do something else, ah! how come I am doing these things I've been hypnotised to do? When I look at my dreams what an amazing thing comes out of my head. Where do I go when I sleep? In free association I find myself talking all of these strange things, and in the transference I am talking to someone, I think I am talking to this person, but I'm talking to them as if they were my mother, my father, somebody from my childhood. So clearly I am not seeing the world at all clearly. I am locked up in something rather strange.

The reason I have mentioned this is because meditation is very similar. All Buddhist meditations are designed to shift our view of ourselves away from being somebody who can, by developing their qualities, gain mastery over the world, onto the world, towards an experience of being in the world, part of the world, connected in a very profound and mysterious way with the process of world revelation.

The difference is that in a psychoanalytic situation you have one person lying on a couch who can be free associating or getting very spaced out, and you have some other person trying to listen very carefully and trying to order it, so that you have chaos and order held in two separate positions and gradually brought together by interpretation. In Buddhist meditation practice, this same kind of separation, initial separation of order and chaos, is done intra-psychically, we do it inside our own mind. We are the clear point, observing and separating ourselves from the chaotic movement of our mind.

At first we are trying to establish a point of clarity, so that the one who is, as it were, in the analyst's position is able to be clear, and yet this force of chaos, the movement of our own thoughts, feelings and sensations is coming up again and again. So we are feeling this kind of pulse, this river and movement coming towards us, but we want to keep our attention clear and focused. But of course at first it is very difficult to keep that and we keep falling into the river and being carried downstream, and we come out of the meditation thinking God what happened to me, and we try to climb onto the bank again, to try to find a place to be the stable one on the bank observing the flow of the river, but then we tumble in, we tumble in.

In many ways all the different systems of Buddhist meditation are an exploration of the relationship between order and chaos. For beginners it is very important to be able to establish a sense of order and direction and volition, so that one is not just thrown hither and thither. But chaos is no the enemy. Chaos is something we have to live with, because the whole world is transforming in a way that is beyond our control.

Over the next two days we will look at how we can establish a point of clarity, a focus for analysis and order, and when we have that in place, that focused attention, then we start to relax it and start to see that chaos and spontaneous movement is actually our friend rather than our enemy. So we start with order and chaos polarised, as if they were in a hostile relationship, and then with some confidence in the ability to return to that order, we then relax it into a sense of openness and generosity towards the world, and in that way we experience the chaotic nature of becoming as the aspect of revelation of Buddha nature.

[Break]

Shiné meditation using the letter 'Aa'

Shiné is a mind-calming meditation. In general the best way to be calm is not to be disturbed. The best way not to be disturbed is not to be where disturbing things are going on. That's why in the Indian tradition they have *ashrams*. An ashram is a place meaning "away from disturbance". Their idea is that you go to a place which is quiet, which is away from the busy situation of village life, or town life, and there the number of variables, the number of distractions is restricted because you are putting yourself apart from life.

We can't do that in our lives. We are probably committed to jobs or family situations, where in order to be alive and to be in our lives, we have to face disturbance all the time. But what we can do is, every now and then, go into a situation where we can restrict the number of variables, the number of things which can come at us, particularly from the outside; making sure, maybe, to disconnect the phone, or take the receiver off; let people know if you have a time when you want to do practice; be clear enough in yourself so you don't answer the door bell if someone rings it; wait until the kids are asleep if you have children; that kind of situation, so that you predict in advance what disturbances might come and try to make some screen around you.

In that way you restrict the things that are coming from outside into you, but you also have to try to restrict the number of things inside you that are jumping out onto the world. The more chaotic your lifestyle is, the more causes of disturbances and uncertainty, the more you're likely to have thoughts in yourself jumping out into the world, thinking oh God, I forgot to do that, I forgot to do this. So the more you have plugged into the world in a complex way, as you settle down to meditation, you're likely to have memories of things you haven't done. So that's again a good reminder of thinking about how you can actually simplify your ordinary everyday life.

In modern culture there is a great focus on excitement. People want to lead very often exciting lives. Very often advertisements on television for cars or new products are showing that if you buy this car you can have an exciting lifestyle; you can drive very fast, you get very quick, you get to be with very beautiful, handsome people. There's a whole focus that life should be full of a continuous stream of interesting positive and stimulating situations.

We may well have a lot more excitement in our lives than we can actually cope with. Subject going out to object in a hungry needy way, and object trained to come to us. We want our friend who'll phone us up and we phone them and all these networks of excitement and disturbance, which help to keep the mind moving out into the world manipulating and controlling events, in order to produce a sense of I know who I am and I'm safe and I'll never be too bored and I'll never be too lonely, and I'll never be too anxious, because I can manipulate the subject-object relationship to achieve that.

The first stage of moving towards a mind calming meditation is to do a kind of review of how one is in one's life and think what's the purpose of all this stimulus and excitement. Is it serving a defensive purpose that is actually going to get in the way of my practice of meditation? Then when we come to the meditation itself what we are trying to do is find a focus that we can fix the mind onto; a simple

reliable unwavering focus, so that by focusing the attention onto that object, we will be able to protect ourselves from the temptations of being drawn towards other interesting objects or rushing away from them.

There are various ways of doing this. One of the earliest ways was to make a small clay disk, a circle about this high, painted, you could paint it in different colours, and stick it on a piece of wood, and stick it in the ground in front of you about 1.5 metres away. One can also take a small stone. It is better if the stone is not very interesting, may be a small rounded grey pebble a couple of centimetres high. If the object you choose is too interesting it may well provoke all sorts of thoughts in itself, so you want it enough to be able just to keep the focus for your attention. But one can also use a small statue of the Buddha, maybe a little bit bigger, about 4 centimetres high, something like that, and focus on that. There it is thought that the positive feelings that you might have about the Buddha and maybe even the respectful feelings that might carry an edge of shame to them if you were to show disrespect to the Buddha would act as a support for focusing the attention on this image.

And again one can see how one is using here faith and devotion as a support to practice. In the end of things it doesn't matter whether you like the Buddha or not, that's kind of irrelevant, what is important is that you get some clarity about the nature of your mind. So if you believe in the Buddha you can mobilise your faith in the Buddha as a means of supporting your mind.

As a child I was taught that "The Lord our God is a jealous God" and if you do things he doesn't like he'll come out of the sky and punish you. For whatever reason, the Buddha doesn't do that. It could be that he has too much wisdom, or he is too busy being compassionate, or he's blissed out in some joyful state, but anyway if you don't like the Buddha, he's not bothered.

A difference between Christian and Buddhist viewpoints

This is a very big difference between a Christian viewpoint—which you could say is a general European viewpoint since it so deeply permeates this culture—and the Buddhist viewpoint. According to Buddhism, we experience the consequences of our actions out of the very nature of action and reaction, that is to say, through karma. If I behave in a bad way a negative reaction will arise simply out of that fact. There's nobody who needs to punish me, the punishment arises as a natural consequence of that action. That's why this word method is so very important. In the Christian tradition you pray to God to do something for you. In the Buddhist tradition you make use of the Buddha in meditation so that you will realise something. It's a very different relationship.

So, the Buddha is somebody who is always prepared to put the other first, and in order to put the other first, it means being of service, which means wanting to be used by others. In the meditations we will do later, we make use of the visualised forms of the Buddha. The Buddhas make these forms available; we make use of them. That's a method, but it's a method that should be imbued with gratitude. Their generous compassion, when it meets our open and aware gratitude, these two forces merging together become a point where our narrow, selfish sense of self starts to be dissolved, and we can move into a merger with our own Buddha nature via, by means of, the expressed manifest form of the Buddha which is their compassion.

That's a bit of a detour but it arises from the use of a small Buddha image as a focus for attention. We want a, we're making use of that form to anchor our mind. A fourth form that is often used is a

Tibetan letter 'Aa'. 'Aa' is the root vowel of the Tibetan alphabet; all the consonants operate through the vowel 'Aa', and 'Aa' is seen as being the most basic sound. When we listen to babies, they usually start with an 'Aa' sound, and they vary on that - "mama", "papa", there's usually a plosive that goes onto the 'Aa'. This root, this 'Aa', and everything as a variation on 'Aa', is seen as being the kind of linking thread, like a thread on a "mala", on the Rosary, so all the beads of the world are circulating around this 'Aa'. It also represents emptiness, that we'll talk of a bit more later. Emptiness being seen as the basic open dimension, the ground nature of the world and of mind, the root of everything, so that this one letter 'Aa' represents the most profound insight into the nature of reality and that's also used as a focus for attention.

These are four ways of having an object outside yourself. Usually, as I said before, the object is about 1.5 metres in front of you. That depends on the light, the time of the year. If it's very hot you should keep it slightly further away from you. If it's cold you can have it a bit closer. The closer it is, the more intense your focus. If you're practising in a very hot country you don't want to get the mind too focused and too tight, otherwise you get a bit overheated. So today we need it right up here.

Another way that we can practice more tomorrow is to visualise this letter 'Aa' and to use it as a visualised phenomena. That's more difficult, because you already have to be able to visualise a bit clearly, and you are then focusing subject mind on object mind if you like, because the visualisation is created by your mind and your own perception, so you are focusing mind onto mind. That's more difficult, so at first it's probably not too useful a thing to do, but we'll practise the technique tomorrow anyway.

In general when you are meditating, and particularly if you are looking at something outside yourself, but in general, you want to make sure that your skeleton, your bones are supporting your flesh. If you are sitting with a bad posture, then what is happening is that your muscles are having to hold your flesh in place, so you are building up muscle tension as you're sitting. You know if you just relax and shake your shoulders and you can find if you move them around, and you move you back, you get a sense of when your spine locks and holds your weight. If you relax your spine and hold you can feel the weight hanging down. Very often when we sit, our body is getting tight because our muscles are having to hold us in place, so it's very important that you practice for yourself finding a place, particularly like with the weight of the head. The head is quite heavy, so if you've got your head at a bad angle the muscles in your neck are going to be tight because they'll be holding it up, so you want to have the head, if possible, resting on the spinal column. That's very important, and then have the arms relaxed, with the elbows slightly out, in front of you, so that they're in your lap, just resting very gently, so that the weight of your arms can be resting on your thighs.

The chin we want pointing slightly down. Not really tucked in but just slightly lowered. The eyes also slightly looking down, so that if you're going to be looking at a stone thing you want it slightly, if it's going to be out there and your gaze is going down, then you fix it at a height so that whatever object you're looking at, if it's a external object you want to be just gazing at it very gently, not staring, and not with you eyes wandering around it, but just gently gazing. The mouth should be slightly open, and the tip of your tongue should be touching your upper palate - the palatal ridge just behind your teeth. If you keep your mouth open with your tongue down, your mouth will get dry. But this way you are keeping more of the moisture in your mouth.

Then with your legs, traditionally it says you should have, sit in the lotus posture, which means putting your ankles up on the opposite side. The advantage of doing that is that it locks the body.

When you've got your spine in, when you lock your legs like that you won't move. You can move also. It's very nice to swim like this. You can roll. [It's the most comfortable way of sitting]. It's the most comfortable for those for whom it is comfortable. Of course in Asian society people are brought up always sitting cross-legged, so the muscles are relaxed and the joints are more opened. I think we need to take these things very seriously, I think in my experience, for many Western people it's impossible to sit that way certainly for very long, and it creates a great deal of pain.

Creating pain is not part of the Buddha dharma. It is very important that we don't turn relative factors into absolute factors. By that I mean saying to sit this way or to look this way to have long hair or short hair, to be a monk or nun or a lay person, to drink alcohol all the time, or to never drink alcohol - to turn these kind of relative moments into an absolute thing - everybody should sit this way, this is the best way of sitting, if you don't sit this way you're no good - Buddhism is full of this kind of nonsense, and it's really an attack on people being in touch with themselves. What is most important is that you learn to practise on a level and in a way that helps you to go the next kilometre. When you get there you see what is the next thing and you go the next kilometre. So you do it bit by bit, building up, focusing on where you are. Because if you try to do something and then you can't do it, then it is very easy to think well I'm a bad person, I'm a stupid person, it's not my karma in this life to have good knees. It's a kind of madness.

What is important is the principle, which is to find a way of sitting comfortably so that the sensations of your body, your thoughts, your feelings and your memories, don't interrupt the practice of meditation too much. That's the main thing. If you have to move to be more comfortable, then just move. Don't make a big thing about it. Feeling enormous pain in your knees or your back, and not being able to move because you think it is a bad thing to do or because you are worried that other people will think you don't know how to meditate is nonsense.

The method that we will practice now, is focusing on the breath. In order to focus on the breath we want to try to be aware of our breath going in and out over the top of our upper nostril. If at first when you sit down to do this it's not very strong for you, then intensify your breathing until you get a sensation up there, until you've got the sense of it, and then just let your attention focus on the sensation of the breath going out and the breath returning. You may find that between these two points, there's no sensation at all, but then you just wait with the attention focused and the breath will return - or you are dead.

You want to be breathing from your belly, from the diaphragm, not upper chest breathing. If you breathe from your upper chest you are going to get too much oxygen rapidly into your system and it will make you a bit too excited. You want slow steady breaths coming from your diaphragm, so your belly should be moving out. You put your hand right on your belly, and you should feel it moving in and out slightly. You know how it feels as though you are tensing muscles almost behind you know, then you're breathing in a very intentional way up here and the air mainly circulates in the top part of the lungs. We want to be breathing in the other way, just from very deep down.

Breathing is an automatic natural process, so that ideally we're relaxed, locked into our skeleton and this movement is just going on very easily through our diaphragm, in and out. We don't need to make any effort; we don't need to intentionally do it in any way. It's just an automatic process weaving us in and out in our connectedness with the world, the breath of the world coming into us, going out again. We are just watching this point of connectedness between what we call ourselves and what we call the world.

The task is very simple. Keep your full focused attention on this point where the breath is moving in and out. That's the only thing you have to do. You don't have to think. You don't have to worry. You don't have any kind of particular sensations of anything else. Just very simple. This is all. Then of course other thoughts, feelings, worries, concerns, will come crowding in, and sometimes you get caught up in these and travel into all sorts of places. As soon as you have recognised that that has happened, you just gently bring back your attention this absolutely simple process of the breath going in and out. It is not at all complicated.

We have a simple practice, but we have very complicated minds. So we want to try and stay with the simple practice, and let the complicated mind just drop. Just let it vanish. We will sit together and do this practice for about ten or fifteen minutes, and then we have a break until about 8 o'clock, and then when we come back we will do a lot more of this practice, and discuss it together and take up questions about this practice, and more about why we do it, and what difficulties there might be. But we will just sit together now. Make sure that you have a comfortable seat.

Now we have already talked of five different ways in which you can use an object to help you focus the mind. If you have got five different ways to do it, which way should you do it? While you're trying to work out which way to do it, you lose all your calm and you become very anxious; may be I'm doing it the wrong way. This is a very important question in the Buddha dharma, because if you see the Buddha as a parent, and ourselves as children and the Buddha as a good parent who will give you what you need, then you might be happy just to be a little child, and every day is Christmas.

But if we think, well the Buddha is always good. Whatever the Buddha gives is good, but I have to decide which of the good things the Buddha is giving me is the best one, then I have a problem. Because if I don't have that one, then am I then saying that is not a good one? Now it is quite difficult to work out what is good and bad if you imagine you are a small child and your good papa or your good mama has given you an infinite range of good things. The parent-child metaphor has problems. It can make us feel very safe to have a perfect person, or a good person to idealise, but unless we are living with that perfect person all the time and can turn to them for perfect advice, we are nonetheless going to have to make decisions. If we have set up the model that the Buddha is all-good and we are all-bad and stupid, then we will be unable to make any decisions.

Some people in their presentation of the dharma set up a system which is similar to military discipline: *"I know the name of the General. General Rinpoche lives in India somewhere. I have been sent here as a Major of the General to keep discipline in the rank. Our regiment has a rule book, and I am here, authorised by General Rinpoche in India to teach you our rule book, and if you follow our rule book you will join our regiment, and our General will lead us up hill and downhill into the happy land of Enlightenment. It is the duty of a dharma private to follow rules; to obey orders. It is not the duty of a dharma private soldier to ask questions. Don't you know there is a war on? Samsara and nirvana are moving towards a final apocalyptic battle. Only those who have the protection of General Rinpoche in India will be able to survive. In these bad times dangerous people, who call themselves also General Rinpoche have also established regiments, and are trying to recruit soldiers, and if you are not careful, if you do not put your fingers in your ears, you will hear the magic word of their rule book, and then you will have two rule books in your head, and then how will you know which is the right and wrong rule book? Because as an ordinary private dharma soldier you must not think. Because thinking leads to thoughts, and thoughts make you disturbed, so if you want a calm mind, don't have any thoughts, just follow the General. It's very clear."*

This is madness. Absolute madness. We know with our own children that if we want them to grow up and have happy lives in this complex world, we cannot protect them from complexity. If you have a child and you give it a very tight rule book in your family, this is what you have to do when you eat, this is how you have to make your bed, this is what you have to do, as soon as they leave your house, they encounter other family cultures which are very different and they can't cope, they go crazy because they don't know how to behave with people who are different. One of the big tasks of the future is how can we live with difference? How can we respect difference? Whether it is people of different races, different genders, different religious beliefs, different ages, different intelligence, how can we live in a world where we respect and give a place to other people who are not the same

Clearly we need thoughts to survive. We cannot live in this world without thoughts, so we need to find a way of using the dharma to help us think without being confused by thoughts. Thoughts are not our enemy. Thoughts are part of the richness of the becoming of the Buddha nature. One of the purposes of doing shiné meditation, which we are just going to do more of now, is that by focusing on the breath, or on this external object, and learning not to be so distracted by thoughts and feelings that are arising, one opens up as it were a space between, almost if you did it in a spatial sense, there's my breath here, there's my attention running towards my breath, and there's all this stuff coming at it. If I'm able to hold this line clearly, gradually there's some kind of space that opens up, and with that space I can see more clearly what I want to move into, what thoughts are useful and what thoughts aren't. If all the time we're being swamped by thoughts, it's difficult to discriminate between good thoughts and bad thoughts, thoughts that are generated out of ignorance and thoughts that are generated out of compassion. So the prime thing is to open up a space where thinking actually becomes possible, rather than just reacting at the mercy of thought.

So we'll practice more now with the breath, but I'd encourage you also to practice, try out for yourself, some of these other methods we talked of. Just see which ones work for you, and also see what circumstances they work best for you in. In general if you are feeling tired, say if you're going to practice at the end of the day and you've been out working or whatever and you're quite disturbed, I think it's often easier if you practice with an object outside yourself, so that your eyes are open and you're looking at it. Because that gap can help to keep you a bit focused. If you're feeling a bit more fresh, maybe you've got a train journey to go on, you could just, say, close your eyes and do this focused on the breath. It depends very much on your state and your situation.

The more methods that you know and the more you know about your own state, then you can fit the method to you - which is exactly what the Buddha's intention was, is exactly as our state changes through the twenty four hours of the day, through the menstrual cycle, through the seasons of the year, through all sorts of things, we can adapt the dharma methods for us, because the Buddha taught it for us. We are not there as the servants of the dharma, the dharma is there to serve us. If we get that relationship wrong we become very confused.

So we sit now, well supported in our bodies. Make sure you are feeling relaxed. So we sit keeping the attention on the breath and if you find that you stray away, just recognise it gently and bring your mind back. Don't get into feeling guilty, worried or blaming yourself. Just very gently let the attention settle back on the breath. It should be very gentle. you want to develop a very very tender relationship with yourself.

[Practice]

Question about boredom

Take a moment to see what you get out of all that, and also what seems to be difficult, and where you get distracted.

[Question: When we discussed about shiné, there was a point about boredom and we thought about maybe boredom was a necessary part of shiné meditation, and can also be very useful. That was what we wondered about - if it can serve some purpose maybe?]

What purpose do you think it can serve?

[We thought first of all one thing we thought about was trivial things, and then other things happen which then seem even more interesting if one gets used to the boredom, it's important to get used to the boredom so you see things different. Also to develop detachment.]

James: So you are saying that the advantage of being bored is that when you scratch your nose it seems very fascinating? One of the things about our identity is that it is developed inside a subject-object interaction. When we see newborn babies very clearly they are engaged in some kind of relationship with the world. We know with modern monitoring techniques that babies in the womb that babies are very attuned to the mother's emotional state, to music coming from outside, to the mother's eating patterns. Right from the very beginning life is interactive.

In Buddhist psychology they say that all of these subject-object interactions carry with them a feeling tone. Feeling tones come in three kinds - positive, negative, and neutral. Boredom is a kind of neutral negative. It's on the cusp. It's not precisely anything, but it's a sort of mild frustration. If you have a positive experience you want to pull it towards you and have more of it. If you have a very negative experience you want to push it away. But with boredom you're sort of stuck with something that doesn't really move and you don't quite know what to do. But there is still somebody being bored. So boredom is like a very low-level object interaction, that keeps subjects still constellated inside its same frame of identity. I'm happy, I'm sad. I'm bored. The self-referencing function, the identification of this subject as me, having a history is maintained in quiet periods by having that object.

You know on computer screens how you have these things that if you're not working a particular programme you get a bouncing ball or you get things flying across it - screen savers - to stop the screen burning - boredom is a bit like that. The computer's not off, it's not a very interesting programme it's just flying toasters or whatever it is. You couldn't watch that for a thousand years. The function of boredom is exactly to maintain the conscious, knowing subject in its own place of identity. Although it seems to be the object as nothing, it's actually constantly activating the subject as something. Because boredom soon transforms into something more intense, like anger or frustration or maybe interest in something else, something arises and suddenly you're interested, so it's just holding the game in place, until something more fascinating moves through. It also, on a low level, serves to generate a kind of energy that will erupt into something else. That is all maintaining the subject-object frame, which we will talk about more tomorrow morning.

If things like boredom arise, the thing is to intensify your attention back on the breath, because boredom is a feeling tone that covers over the breath, so that you lose the freshness of a sharply focused attention. So it's almost like in a car where you have a clutch that you take to change gear,

when you've got the focus on your breath, the focus of attention is on the breath but you're kind of bored with it, the boredom is like the clutch coming into operation and soon your attention is going to shift off into some thought, because if the breath is becoming filled with affect, you're going to lose it. So just relax and return the attention in a clean form back onto the breath.

What use do we make of teachers: Where shall I go, Rinpoche, to sell my sweaters?

[Question: I am finding the whole thing very interesting, very nice. My question is, when you said we have to rely on, make our own decision, make our own choice, rely on our own wisdom to make a choice then how do we treat the lamas, because so many times we ask them, 'What shall I do with my job?', or 'What shall I learn?', or we ask them for many kinds of advice. How we keep with this?]

James: How should you live your life? Who knows? How would someone else know how you should live your life? I remember spending a day in Kathmandu with Dudjom Rinpoche and I had gone there especially to see him. He asked me to come very early in the morning and he gave me some initiations and things, and then I was just sitting with him throughout the day. Many people were coming, Tibetans, all the day long, long queues of them, and they were asking – 'This winter I will go to sell sweaters, should I go to Calcutta or Delhi?' 'Delhi is very good.' It was like this constantly, so here's this great meditation master, and all they want to know is where they should sell sweaters. Now if you are a poor refugee and you need money and you have a family that's maybe the most important question for you, but did Dudjom Rinpoche really know where they should sell sweaters? What did he know about the temperature in Calcutta or Delhi? Did he know a cold spell was coming to Calcutta so sweaters would be very popular, it would be very good to go there?

We know that capitalism is a very uncertain economic principle, companies go bankrupt all the time, business people are often anxious, and they look to various things to take away their anxiety. Some use alcohol, some use sex, some use playing golf, and some probably use lamas. You know I have a big deal to do, please do a Tara puja for me, so the blessing will make sure this happens. Now these are fine, they are all different ways of dealing with anxiety, but for people who are meditators, our main task is to manage our own anxiety. Nobody can suck anxiety out of you, like a vacuum cleaner.

Learning to make choices and live with choices means that we have to face the fact that when we encounter the world, the world is not one simple thing. It is complicated. As long as I think I am one point and I am confronting this range of choices: if I choose that, I can't choose that; but now I've got that, may be that's better; Oh God; so I go back here to try to get that and ..but I've left that ... And many people's lives are spent in that way.

Then we hope, please Big Papa God, tell me what to do, then I'll feel safe. Like these children here today; the little girl running around having a lot of fun, she falls down, she bangs herself, she cries, then mama picks her up, then she feels better. Mama takes the pain away, mama gives her a hug and a kiss, then she feels better, and then she gets back on in her crazy life. The mother is there - a pain, anxiety and confusion extractor, and many of us in adult life, we seek adult extractors.

But if somebody comes into the dharma, particularly the mahayana dharma and takes the bodhisattva vow, no longer can we look for a vacuum cleaner because we are the vacuum cleaner. I promise to extract all these horrible things from all sentient beings into me. And I can take them into me because I am empty. But I cannot really get into an understanding of emptiness if, as soon as I get anxious, I look for my papa. So you have a whole lineage of everybody's got a papa and a papa

and a papa, to make them feel better. So where is the original Buddha? Running around looking for his papa!

To get enlightened is to recognise there is no mama and no papa. You are on your own, but you are not on your own, because you are not a separate thing, because awareness is not an entity. There is no subject constrained in subject-object interaction, as something. Now we will never move out of that tightness into relaxed open freedom if we think someone will make it safe.

When we look at faith and devotion and see how that is part of the practice, then to believe that I have a papa Buddha who will save me is very important. This is the paradox. Through the meditation dissolving into the papa Buddha and merging with the papa Buddha, so that we experience together this state of emptiness, that's the way the papa Buddha saves me, by taking me into that shared state of dharmakaya openness where there is no anxiety. That's where the Buddha is the method.

At the end of your practice, just let whatever occurs come and go. If you find yourself getting locked into a particular position, it is because the attention has slipped from the state of the mirror into identification with the reflection. When you get lost, you're lost where you are. Where should you go to find where you are? You don't need to go anywhere. Wherever you go, you are in the right place because every reflection has the same ground, which is the infinite dharmadhatu.

So no matter how lost you seem to get, even if you become very despairing and think *"I can't meditate, this never works for me"*, these confused, self-hating thoughts are themselves inseparable from the state of the mirror.

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