

# BUDDHISM AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

**James Low**

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**Prepared and previously made available as a pamphlet by Theo Kierdorf**

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## **Saturday afternoon**

This afternoon I will start to open up some of the issues that I think are around between the buddhist idea of what it means to be a human being including how to develop one's own potential, and some of the ideas that are coming from various systems of psychotherapy. And in order to do that, we can do a little bit of sitting-meditation together and reflect on our own experiences. So although this is quite a large group, I think, if we can have it as inter-active and involved as possible, that's a useful way to proceed.

The way I will talk is not in the style of traditional Dharma-teachings, not with the voice of the authority of some tradition, but more to open up the possibilities of finding ways into understanding something about our own experience.

And in that spirit, I think it's very important that you're comfortable. So if you feel that you're not sitting very comfortably or if you want to get up and stand at any point, then please do that. If we turn this into a very serious and solid meeting, then I think that becomes distracting from the real purpose which is to try to engage and to understand something for yourself.

### **A LITTLE BIT ABOUT MYSELF**

First, maybe I should say a little bit about myself. My name is James Low. I work in London and in other places as a psychotherapist, both from a psychoanalytical tradition, but also doing systemic family therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy and humanistic integrative therapy, involving dance and movement and creative arts. And before I started my study and practice in that area, about 12 years ago, I lived in India for about 13-14 years, studying Tibetan Buddhism. And in that study of Tibetan Buddhism, I studied with many different teachers, mainly in the Nyingma-tradition, but also with Sakyapa-, Gelugpa- and Kagyupa-teachers.

My own perspective is very much one of seeing the possibilities that are available in the world as a richness that we can start to taste and enjoy, and that the possibilities in the different traditions, Buddhist and psychotherapeutic, are ones we can make use of.

Most of the ways that start to evolve, that we human beings develop for understanding our condition, start to become structured with a certain kind of rigidity, a certain kind of predictability. This has many advantages, because it provides us with a sense of security and direction. And gradually these systems develop a lot of facts, a lot of ideas, a lot of history, which becomes a knowledge that you can learn, so that by learning these things you then feel you've got a lot of stuff, and you know a lot of things. And that can make you feel quite good. And it's also the currency of the world – so you can use it to get power and status and money and sex and all sorts of things.

But there's often a price to pay for that kind of solidifying security. And that price is often the ability to think freely for oneself, to actually be able to enquire into the situation as it occurs.

### **THE STORY OF BUDDHA SAKYAMUNI**

And we can relate that back to the story of Buddha Sakyamuni, the historical Buddha of our period. He was born into a royal family in the north of India, and at the time of his birth the court-astrologer made a prediction that either he would be a great world-emperor, a great king, or he would be a great spiritual teacher.

His father, who was the king, wanted a son who would continue the empire and develop it more and more. So he wanted to make very sure that his son became interested only in kingly things and not in spiritual matters. So around the royal palace he built this huge garden where the young prince could go and play – he had his horses and chariots, and he was able to indulge himself, but in a very protected, safe environment. And so he grew up as a young prince and learnt all the arts of war, and got married, and had a small baby, and then one day he was riding outside this safe compound, and he saw some things which disturbed him. He saw a sick person, and then he saw an old person, who was looking very tired and weary, and then he saw a corpse, a dead body.

And this really got him thinking – ‘My life is so easy, so nice, I have this situation, in which whatever I want I can have. I seem to have absolute power. And yet there seems to be some other reality to life, and maybe that applies to me too.’ So he started to think: ‘Will I also grow old? Will I also get sick? Will I die?’

These thoughts really got through to him, they kind of got under his skin, and they were scratching at him inside, so that he couldn't sleep, and he couldn't rest. He felt he had to make some deeper enquiry into how it is that life, no matter how you try to protect it, somehow falls into decay. And so in the traditional account of the story, in the middle of a night he got up, and with his faithful servant they padded the hooves of his horse, and they crept out of the royal compound and vanished.

He travelled some hundreds of miles away to a river in the middle of what's now Bihar and started to practice there, practicing meditation with some yogis, some Hindu teachers, who were there.

He spends quite some years practicing in this place. And through this practice he gradually developed an understanding, that when he looked outside into the world, everything that he could see, everything that he could hear, everything that he could taste, all the experiences of the senses were impermanent. There was nothing that endured, nothing outside that was reliable to cling to. And similarly, when he was in his meditation, being aware of his breath, being aware of the subtle movements inside the body, being aware of his thoughts and emotions, all of these things too were constantly changing and moving.

And he came to the conclusion, that all the problems experienced in the world are because we try to construct a permanent reality, a secure system in a world which is absolutely impermanent and prone to change.

We can take up the story again a bit later, but, I think, the key-point from this has to be, that whatever we construct is impermanent, is flawed and will some day tumble into dust. And this is true of all schools of psychotherapy and all schools of Buddhism as well. They are impermanent.

### **THE TRUE DHARMA IS NOT THE DHARMA THAT CAN BE EXPRESSED IN WORDS**

In our confusion and lostness in the modern world we often want to find a secure refuge, and we can go to the Dharma or go to some system of therapy or some system of belief to give us some kind of refuge. But I think we do have to remember that whatever support and sense of direction that we can develop through going to Dharma-centres, going on pilgrimages, doing particular kinds of practice, these things in themselves are constructed and exist in a world of impermanence. And if we rely on them too strongly, it's very easy to get pulled into dogmatic position-taking; knowing that your view is right and the view of other people is wrong; making insider-groups that exclude outsiders and all the usual dualistic perversity, that pervades our modern life.

And this view is taken up in many traditional texts. One example would be this very common statement, that the finger that points at the moon is not the moon itself. Another way of thinking about it is that the real Dharma, or the true Dharma, is not the Dharma that can be expressed in words. And we have to learn somehow to live with that paradox.

So in the Dharma it's very easy to get initiations and learn many different practices and turn these into a kind of padding, to make a very cosy little house for oneself where one feels safe and warm because one knows what to do. And the same is certainly very true in terms of psychotherapy.

Groups exist in a state of permanent war with each other I don't know how it is in Germany, but in Britain various psychotherapy training groups exist in a state of permanent war with each other. So that we know that all the bad things belong to the other people and all the good things belong to ourselves. As I'm a member of many different therapy-training places, I have a terrible problem (laughter) because there's always a pressure to take sides, to take a fixed position and concretise that position and make it stronger, more secure, more safe.

### **PUTTING INTO QUESTION**

Now I would suggest that in their different ways both the Dharma and, in particular, psychoanalytic therapy, attack this position. Both are subversive. They seek to put the status of the subject, the status of the person into question. It is our ordinary experience that we live in a world where we can easily construct an interpersonal identity for ourselves. We do this by finding friends who will confirm to us who we are, and we in return confirm to them who they are. So, I've got my group of friends, and I'm happy with them, and then outside there's all these other people whom I don't really want to know, because in order to get to know them I would have to change my sense of myself.

So, from an egocentric point of view, the more I know about who I am, (the kind of foods I like to eat, the kind of movies I like to see, the kind of places I want to go for my holidays), the more I am cutting a very narrow path through the world and am becoming blind to all the other options.

And this blindness in our time in particular is extremely dangerous because it blocks our capacity to respond to the other with an open heart. Instead of having a compassion that really attends to the other's need we want to predict what the other should need.

In Buddhism this is taken up with the idea of balancing wisdom and compassion, and that the more wisdom one has, the more understanding one has, then the more one is able to act out and be available to other people.

But we need to think really about what this word wisdom means. Because if you see wisdom as an accumulation of knowledge and a massing of particular kinds of information then it becomes a tool for controlling other people, for putting them into their place, for educating them, turning them into one's own image in some way. By this one adopts a position similar in function to that of many psychoanalysts in the nineteen-twenties who believed that if only everybody could have a full analysis, then their minds would be free of all trouble, and then all the problems in the world would end. This is like the belief that, if only everybody would realize the great merits of becoming Buddhist and having faith in the Buddha, then all their problems would cease, and the world would be instantly enlightened. From this dogmatic conviction there arises great pressure to align oneself with a pre-established position.

This fits in very well with our western Judeo-Christian line, which is a lineage of revelation, in which the lone hero, who is usually a man, goes off into the desert or the mountains and

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comes back with the truth, and then uses various controlling and manipulative techniques, making other people feel bad if they don't agree with his truth.

### **HOW TO COLLABORATE WHILST MAINTAINING AN OPEN FRESH VISION?**

Of course any institution is going to have a movement in that direction. I think we know this from political, financial, educational movements in the West. We find the story being repeated again and again. Which doesn't mean to say that one shouldn't join with other people, form practice-groups, work together with other people, but there's a particular way of trying, while collaborating and working together and having shared beliefs, to maintain the freshness of an open vision that lets one think about what one is actually up to.

When the historical Buddha Sakyamuni died, his last words are reported as being, *'I have pointed the way. You have to enquire for yourself to find the truth.'* And I think it's this combination that is very important, that something is indicated, something is pointed out, a useful direction, and it's very helpful to follow that, but one has to follow it with open eyes, not closed eyes, not in a safe cocoon, imagining that some good papa is going to take care of you. If anyone here has found such a papa, please, tell me, (*laughter*) I have been looking for a long time.

### **KEEPING UP THE UMBRELLA OF REFUGE**

My own sense of the Dharma is that it's a bit like an umbrella. When we take refuge in the umbrella it will protect us, but if you want the umbrella to keep the rain off you have to keep holding it up. So that one has to participate, and participate not just with obedience and alignment, but with an inquiry into the truth of one's own existence.

Our culture increasingly focuses on substituting the image for the experience – through information-technology, television, general literacy. It's very seductive to become involved in reading books or seeing a movie and imagining that somehow something real has been constructed there. One feels that one has actually had the experience of being in America or in India just by seeing it on television – it's as if one was there.

And similarly one can take up the words of the Dharma, and indeed in therapy one can learn the vocabulary of the therapist and then imagine that by knowing these words one actually has got hold of something.

### **HOW MIND SEEKS TO REPLY ON LANGUAGE**

But the task is really to understand the nature of representation, to understand the way in which the mind seeks to rely on language, to rely on the endless flow of thought, to create a world that appears to be real but is actually lacking in substance.

So my intention would be, today and tomorrow, to take up this theme and to explore these issues in more detail, how one can identify and maintain a state of awareness that allows one to open up a way through the smoothing over, the blockaging that occurs through language and through reliance on conventional belief. Because as long as we rely on representation we are moving in the world of control and power, which is very reassuring, because when we learn the rules of that game, we can reaffirm to ourselves that we know who we are.

But there are certain consequences if we do that, and perhaps the most important one is that the world becomes boring. Because one already knows in a sense what the future will be, as one is constructing one's own future out of one's past, – this is the way in which karma

works. And all the vibrant freshness of the world, all the richness that we live in all the time becomes closed down because we have some kind of shape in ourselves that we are trying to project onto the world whether this is a projection of our early family-experience or a projection of some Dharma-practice, that we should see the world as a mandala, or something like that.

So maybe we could see if there's any questions or responses that you'd like to make to this, and then we can start to do a little bit of meditation practice together and talk a bit more together about what the nature of our experience is.

You may have come here with some particular desire or some particular hope. So you also can talk about that, and we can see what's possible to do with it.

## Questions & Responses:

### BEING TAKEN OVER BY RITUAL AND STRUCTURE

*Questioner:* What do you think is the role of the ritual? In the Tibetan tradition rituals seem to be very important.

*James:* Ritual exists on the cusp of both worlds. One of the things C. R. Lama, my own teacher, said was that he thought that it was very good in Tibet that they had so many monasteries with so many monks doing practice all day long because that made sure that these men were not out raping and murdering and stealing.

In a typical Tibetan monastery, on any day, monks would be in the temple reading through texts. You have a daily-reading text, and you have a protector's text. It's probably five to six hundred pages to read. And that takes quite a few hours. Because it takes such a lot of time and there are so many other things to do in life people tend to read them very quickly, so that all the visualization that's required to go with the pages doesn't get done. So the people who have sacrificed so much to become full-time religious practitioners spent their time misbehaving by not doing the practice properly.

I'm not saying this in order to kind of make a cheap joke about these people. They try very hard. I think where I'm pointing at is that this is a very typical example of the way the structure takes us over, and that we get set so many tasks that by the time we've fulfilled all the obligations of our initiations, we've got to do so many mantras, and do this, that and the other, you don't speak to your kids any more. You don't invite your friends around for dinner, and then you become inhuman, and then you think, '*O my God, I would better be human again.*' – So you do these things, and you break all your vows. You get caught between pressures so that rather than becoming more relaxed, more open, more responsive, you become more rigid, frightened and anxious.

The ritual is fine if it's your desire. If it's your hearts desire it makes sense. If it's somebody else's desire then you simply become a slave. You feel you have to do this, and if you don't do it, because it was a very big vow to a very big lama, then you would go to hell. But, you know, we don't need Tibetan lamas to put us into hell. We've got Martin Luther – we've got so many European people who are quite happy to put us there as well.

### KNOW YOUR OWN DESIRE

And I think it's the same question in psychotherapy. What is your desire? Most of us never know our own desire. Because when we were very small, people were pushing their desire into us, and we are impregnated, our minds have been raped so many times. We are full of



these little babies of other people's desire that squeeze us out like huge cuckoos of the mother's wanting and the father's wanting, kkkkk! And our own little self retreats very, very far away.

*Questioner:* You mentioned reading as a form of ritual, and I would like to know what Buddhism says concerning religious dancing and music and which ways of dealing with these activities are there now.

*Response:*

### **MUSIC, DANCE AND CEMETERIES**

I think, historically music and dance started in Buddhism in the cemetery, when yogis would meet together in India in order to discuss their own religious experiences, their spiritual experiences. These gatherings were called ganacakra, and gana indicates food and richness and wealth and pleasure and enjoyment, a gathering, and a chakra is a circle. So basically it's a party. These yogis were practicing in the forest, maybe, or in the desert under a tree, and every now and then, maybe on the full moon night, they would gather in the cemetery, and they would bring some village alcohol with them, maybe some rice wine or palm wine, they would get a bit drunk, and then they would start to sing about what they had achieved in the meditation, about the bliss that was flowing through them, or the visions they had had, and they would share that and dance and sing.

Now that lineage has almost vanished in Tibet. Usually gatherings nowadays are quite formal, and everybody is wearing big heavy robes and is looking very important. So it's not so easy to relax and have fun.

### **OUTSIDERS, FREE EXPRESSION AND CONNECTEDNESS**

Tantra began on the fringes of society, among outsider groups, untouchables, washer people. Very low cast Indian people were in the early days very much involved in Tantra. And by Tantra I mean the approach of Buddhism, but there is also Hindu- and Jain-Tantra. Tantra means continuity, connection, which is a major concern for those on the outside. Whether being rejected by the social world or rejecting the world there was an impetus to find a deep level of connectedness. The theory and practice of Tantra is concerned with experiencing all phenomena as the play of unborn energy, energy that manifests without reification.

So Tantra is concerned with using one's energy and presence, and the richness of the senses, all the richness of being alive. Instead of seeing that as a problem, instead of seeing that as a way of getting lost in the world, one fully expresses all that one is feeling, at the same time maintaining a full awareness of what is going on. This action is not blocked by anxious thinking such as, *'O, my God, if I get drunk or if I get involved with lust or anger then I'm going to loose myself.'* It's saying, no, by the expression of this, in the state of awareness, you can intensify your understanding and also not use it in a cruel and manipulative way, because you would be so full of the pleasure of that free expression that it won't be harmful to others. Although the spirit of Tantra continues, the free expression was gradually curtailed by institutionalisation in the monasteries of Tibet.

It's not quite the same thing, but, certainly in Britain, the development of Gestalt-psychotherapy is in some ways similar. Very often in the sixties Gestalt-therapists were very free. They liked to dance, they liked to move; they were very much into expressing themselves. But now, in the late eighties and in the nineties, we have a national registration body of psychotherapist. So Gestalt-therapists now have to do a long training, and write many

essays, and fit themselves into the structure of the demand of the other. Starting from a free expressing position gradually that gets more and more contracted in order to find a place in the world. Starting at the edge one starts to sniff out, *'O, there are more goodies in the middle! I want to belong. I don't want to be a wild crazy person. I want to have a bourgeois existence. And so, in order to do that, I'll tighten up a bit because maybe then I get a Porsche.'* And that's happening there.

## **GURU AS CHOREOGRAPHER**

To bring this around to your question: When this yogis' dancing tradition came into Tibet it was developed and became formalized as those who were dancing would do so as an aspect of their own visualization of the deity. Thus one would visualize oneself in the middle of the practice as maybe Dorje Tröllo, as a particular deity, and then dance particular steps.

And eventually each sect would have its own lamas who would have visions of how the dance should go, and then the young people would learn the vision of the steps so that you had a Guru as choreographer. And of course the texts then started to talk about the fact that if you are visualizing yourself with gods inside you, because the gods are inside you, if you move suddenly, the gods all shake. Now you should be very respectful to the gods. Therefore singing and dancing came to be seen as not a good thing to do for meditators, because if you have a Guru on top of your head, and you start to bogey, then he's going to get a crazy time, and that's not very polite!

The tradition of temple dancing was originally a secret tradition that would take place inside the temple with the doors closed. The only people who would be present would be people who actually had the initiation and who would be meditating. So everybody would be doing the same meditation practice, and at a certain point those who were dressed in the form of the deities would get up and dance, and everyone would be doing the mantras of the deity. So there was an incredible intensification of the emotion.

But a few hundred years ago some monasteries started having the dances outside in the courtyard of the monastery, and the village people who were after all the sponsors came to watch this. And they came with a lot of devotion.

But now if you go to see Lama dancing in Nepal half the crowd are people with video cameras, and it's turned into perhaps something of a charade.

I think it's very important to understand the principle of this. It's not to mock the Dharma, but it's to try to understand the principles that inform human behaviour: that we tend to make things solid, we tend to pull ourselves into tight boxes, to turn the free flow of experiencing into a marketable, appropriat-able commodity. Western culture is founded on reification, and so these tendencies in the culture of the Dharma are intensified with its arrival in the west.

So a major question for us, as people interested in the Dharma, is how can we stay open to its freeing, subversive quality without trying to re-establish ego-control? And especially, how can we stay open over a long period of time.

## **WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR HOPES ARE DISAPPOINTED**

I think it's very similar to when you meet someone and you start a relationship with them. When you fall in love there's a lot of energy, and it seems very easy, it seems wonderful. *'This is going to last forever. This is perfection.'* And then gradually the faults that the other person naturally has, start to come to light, and we can get quite despondent.

And it's the same with the practice of psychotherapy, where one can start with a great hope, that this therapist will really understand me and help me to really change my life, and then after a year one starts to feel very lost and confused.

And there are similar patterns in the Dharma, that for the first three or four years it all seems very hopeful, and every time you meet these great teachers, they all seem to know so much, and you can feel very safe and secure, and it's as if, if you follow them, you will know what's going on.

But then gradually you hear some gossip, or some stories or you get betrayed, or you get confused, and it's different. The dream collapses and you lose energy, and meditation practice fades away. So there is the question, how to imbed a kind of stamina that will take one right through this life and through all one's lives, of being open? I think for that you need a big stomach. You need to be able to eat the rich fruit of the Dharma, but also be able to digest the shit. Because this is samsara. We don't get nirvana here, you know. It's complex, and it's messy. So I think one needs to be sceptical, but not cynical.

Perhaps it would be useful to do a little simple sitting together for some time. – Has everybody here done some kind of just simple sitting meditation? Is anybody not at all clear about that? – Then in your own style, whether with your eyes open or closed...

## After the break

Let's maybe see now if there are any questions, and then I go on to take up some Buddhist notions of the nature of wisdom and compassion, looking at emptiness and the two truths.

*Questioner:* Did I understand right that you said that we are living in samsara now?

*Response:* Yes. *(Laughter)* We're also living in nirvana, but we haven't got the right key for the door.

*Questioner:* I see a big difference between Buddhism and therapy, because in Buddhism there are wholesome and unwholesome things, and in therapy not. How do you deal with this difference?

*Response:* I don't personally know of any system of therapy that has no idea of some behaviours or thoughts or emotions as being unwholesome. Perhaps you could say something more.

*Questioner:* For example there is the following difference: in therapy self-consciousness is good, reassurance is good, being able to set limits is good, and all these things in Buddhism are not so good.

*Response:* I think that's a very important point. And it depends on the view that one has. When we talk about Buddhism, we talk about it as an 'ism' – like 'capitalism' –, as if it were a substantial thing, when in fact it's a wide range of responses from somebody who is very relaxed and open to particular situations. Traditionally it's said that there are eighty-four thousand kinds of Dharma – basically that just means very, very many. And they developed through the Buddha in his response to particular people and particular situations.

## RESPONSE NOT REVELATION

He talked in response to others. And I think this is enormously important, that it is not a revelation, it's not that the Buddha got some big thing inside him, and then was all the time

trying to squeeze it out or put it out to other people. He doesn't have the truth and then gives little bits to different people. It's that he is open and responds to people in their situation.

There's a story that when the Buddha died he was surrounded by all his monks, and they were all weeping because they were very sad that he had died. But one monk was laughing. So one of the other monks said: *'Why are you laughing? This is very bad. Don't you know the Buddha has died?'* And the other said: *'Yes, I know the Buddha has died. Because the Buddha has died he won't be making any more rules for monks to follow. So our vows are fixed.'* Because when the Buddha would be sitting some place, and someone would come up who wasn't a Buddhist, maybe a Jain, and he would say, *'Hey, Buddha, do you know, I saw your monks today, and they were eating meat'*, then the Buddha was thinking, oh, that's very bad. And then he would call all the monks together and say: *'From now on you don't eat meat, except if it's put into your bowl. You can't ask for anything like that.'*

## Vows

This is very important. Each monks' vow arose and out of, and was established in response to, a particular situation. And partly the response on one level was that the Buddha wanted his understanding to be accepted. He was having to do politics with the local cultural environment. That's the reality.

These eighty-four thousand different kinds of teachings are categorized in different ways. But the simplest way of thinking of them, for our purposes, is the tripartite division, where you have the Hinayana or Theravadan view, the general Mahayana view, and the Tantric view. These different views are necessary because we all have our own karmic capacity.

We each have our own ability to engage with the possibilities of freedom and responsiveness. So it may be very appropriate for someone to be very attentive in the world, very watchful, and for another person it may be more helpful to be very relaxed and spontaneous.

There is a traditional example of these three views which I'll tell you about now, and I'll do it from the male gender point of view which of course is the traditional Buddhist view. So if – from the man's point of view – you're walking down the street, and you see a very beautiful woman – and of course, Buddhism doesn't have a particularly clear thinking about homosexuality, so it always imagines that the man would be heterosexual – so a heterosexual man, walking down the street, sees this beautiful woman. If he is following the Hinayana path he thinks, *'O my God, this looks exciting. I better not have any of that excitement, because then my head is going to go all swirly, and then, you know, I'll have sexy dreams and then all my vows will be broken.'*

Therefore he may look at the ground and then start to think, *'This is a bag of puss coming towards me. If only I could see just below this beautiful skin I will see all this flesh and blood and everything. And if I was to come close and wanted to kiss these lips with all this rrrgh!'* (Laughter)

And this is because the view – certainly in the Tibetan presentation of it; other lineages may have a different view – the Tibetan view is that the Hinayana position is that we live in samsara, which is a very dangerous place, a place full of the possibility of attachment. And so one has to be very, very careful. The world is your enemy, and you have to be very careful not to be caught by your enemy; otherwise you will suffer a great deal. So it is a [paranoid](#) vision.

From the next level, the Mahayana view, again this heterosexual male would be thinking, *'Oh, here is my mother coming'*. (Laughter) And being a good Buddhist he will have a very positive feeling about his mother; he will remember that this person has been his mother in past lives. When this person was his mother, when he was very small she would wipe his bum, she would feed him, she would do all these things to take care of him when he was weak and helpless. So in his heart he would feel enormous compassion, and this enormous compassion would remove any nasty taint of erotic movement in his loins. And this view is taken up because from the Mahayana point of view, as one has had many, many previous lives in samsara, in each of these lives one has had a mother. Therefore the view is that all sentient being, whether they are human or animal, gods or in the hell-realms, all human beings have at one time been one's own mother, so that no one is a stranger to you. You have an absolute link to every person you ever meet. And it's a link that is imbedded in gratitude, that one meets the other, one meets the other person from the point of view of gratitude and respect for what they have already done to us. So one lives in a world of responsibility.

And this respect is embodied in the bodhisattva-vow which is a deep commitment in oneself that in this life and in all one's future lives one will make the primary focus of one's attention the helping of other people, helping them not to become one's own desire, but to become themselves, to find themselves. So in meeting this woman and recognizing that she has been one's mother one evokes in one's mind the intention to help this person to realize their full potential because this person has been doing many good things.

But one also believes, when this woman was my mother, maybe she had no money, and when she had no money she would go out and steal to put food in my mouth. Maybe people came to attack me when I was very small, and she defended me, and in defending me she hit these other people and hurt them. So that in order to protect me, her dear child, she committed sins, and because of these sins she is suffering in samsara. Therefore I have a double responsibility to help this person. And that completely evaporates any thought of appropriating this person or turning them into something that I will make use of.

Now from the third point of view, from the point of view of Tantra or Vajrayana, one would perceive this woman coming towards one as a beautiful goddess, and that everything that was erotic and exciting about her was the display of the innate bliss-potential of every human being. So one would rejoice in whatever warm feelings were stirred up. But this sense of joy and responsiveness is imbedded in an awareness of emptiness because as the goddess the woman in this situation has this shining radiant presence, but it is the presence of nothing at all. There is nothing to grasp or get hold of. There is nobody to own or manipulate or control, to turn into one's own object. It's an open moment of responsiveness. This is because the practice and the view of Tantra or Vajrayana starts from the understanding or the direct experience of emptiness.

And in many ways this is quite a complex idea, and we certainly can't address it all in just five minutes. But I will quickly open up one way into thinking about it, and we can come back to that later.

### **SEALED BY THE WORD**

A very traditional way into thinking about this is to take up some object. The traditional example is the chariot, and this is located in an early text called the Milindaphana Sutra. The basic idea is, there is a king who wants to understand the idea of emptiness, and the Buddhist monk says to him: *'King, is this your chariot?'* He answers, *'Yes, this is my chariot.'* So the Monk then says to the king, *'Ask your servants to take off the wheels and take off all the pieces and lay them out.'* So all these pieces of wood are then laid out on the ground, and the priest says to the king, *'Where is your chariot?'* – *'I don't have any chariot any more.'*

*These are just pieces of wood.* So then the monk says, *‘Have the chariot reassembled. – Do you have a chariot now?’* And the king says, *‘Yes’.* – *‘So where has the chariot come from? What has been added to these pieces of wood to make them into a chariot?’* – Nothing has been added, except the concept of *‘chariot’*.

So the word, the idea, the experience that there is something there which is a chariot, that can be held in place as a chariot, exists as a concept. It doesn't exist in the things themselves but in their juxtaposition held together, sealed by the word.

So in looking at the chariot, there is actually an absence of *‘chariot-ness’* in the chariot. The presence of the *‘chariot-ness’* of the chariot is the word. But all the time when we have the idea of *‘that chariot there’*, we come into it.

I don't know if you have in Germany this drawing, sort of Gestalt-drawing – it's like two faces, and it turns into a candle stick holder. Do you know that? Suddenly a new image jumps into



focus and seems to be very real. The ego, the sense of self that we have, wants to live in a stable world. The ego needs to have power to control the world. Therefore it wants to be able to locate objects as particular discrete things.

Back to this chariot: The absence of an essence of *‘chariot-ness’* in this juxtaposition of pieces of wood means that there is no essential chariot there. So there is a challenge to ego sense of control, the ground slips from under its feet, the word is not made flesh, but flesh and word, object and subject are put into question.

### THINKING ABOUT EMPTINESS

This is the intellectual way into thinking about emptiness: that there is an absence where we had imagined that there is a presence. So intellectually the way into this is to make an ongoing critique of whatever phenomena are arising by unpacking them, by deconstructing them, to reveal that there is no substantial essence there.

In a more direct meditational way you can get a direct experience of emptiness when you visualize a deity in front of yourself, or you can visualize a ball of light. We could do this together tomorrow. You visualize this ball of light coming to the top of your head and dissolving down into your heart, and then your own body dissolving down into light, down into light, down to a tiny dot of light, and that dot dissolves, and there is just openness.

In that state of openness at first of course many thoughts arise, many feelings arise, and they very rapidly run together, and you construct new worlds, you construct new sensations, and you build yourself up, and bang, you're out of your meditation and doing something. But gradually, by doing more practice, one learns to relax into that state of openness, so that thoughts and feelings arise and pass, just like waves rippling across the top of an ocean, and one stays in a free, accepting state because one is not identifying with anything that can either be improved or attacked by anything that arises.

And then, with the depth of that experience, one goes out into the world and experiences the phenomena that are arising in the world as simply the play of energy manifesting as phenomena in this vast spaciousness.

So it's not as if when one is meditating inside it's all very vast, and then you open your eyes, and bang, you hit a solid world. Rather the world is gradually being experienced as light, as luminous, as shimmering, like images in a dream.

### **LIGHTNESS OF BEING**

And so it's in this state that the yogi, walking down the road, sees the beautiful woman and is able to appreciate the beauty without being trapped, because there is a direct understanding that there is nobody there to appropriate. This is the luminous presence of emptiness. No phenomena ever arise which are substantial in themselves. There are no real objects anywhere, not outside in the world and not inside in oneself. There is simply this flowing liquid movement of co-emergent becoming.

And that leads a long way back to your question. Because with this third view nothing is forbidden and nothing is prohibited, and so the Dharma from that point of view wouldn't be saying, *'You shouldn't do this'* or *'You shouldn't do that'*. But by staying in the state of open awareness one is responding in a light way. Sin is prevented because of one's lightness of being. If there is nothing out there to grab, why would you be nasty? Why would you be murderous? Why would you abuse? Because one is already full in oneself of the radiance of being.

So the first view, the Hinayana view, if you like, is concerned with morality, with the nature of law, that rules are set up which establish what is a good thing and what is a bad thing. And that's very helpful if we are lost and confused and we keep making mistakes. Some voice from outside, a super-ego voice, a holy-father voice, some kind of voice says, *'Hey, stop it! This is right, that is wrong!'* And that can be very useful.

### **ETHICS OF RESPONSE AS DISTINCT FROM A MORALITY OF PRESCRIPTION**

And when one moves more into the Mahayana, the second one, and Vajrayana or Tantra the third, I think, one moves more into the area of ethics. I don't know if that's different in German, but it is an ethics of response as opposed to a morality of prescription. Morality or what is right and what is wrong is no longer being imposed from outside. That has to arise in the moment of responsiveness to the other, to the particular situation, and it requires a much higher level of awareness.

Of course when you get into the area of Tantra it's very easy to cheat yourself and thereby to cheat other people. And I think that marks up a basic principle of ethics: that the greater the freedom of being that one allows oneself, the greater is the responsibility.

This is imbedded in the notion of wisdom and compassion, because with wisdom we look into our own nature and the nature of phenomena as they arise, and we try to remove the skin of preconceptions of ideas that we impose on the world and attempt to be open to the experience of being in the world. The more we see, the more we are called upon to respond to others. And that's enormously challenging. Where I live in London there are many homeless and alcoholic people. There is always a real question of why don't I take care of this people.

### **THE OTHER IS LIKE A THERMOMETER THAT LETS US READ THE TEMPERATURE OF OUR OWN SOUL**

I think that is an ongoing question always: When we see the face of the other and we actually allow ourselves to see someone else in the limitation and the misery of their life, what blocks us from responding? The other is like a thermometer that lets us read the

temperature of our own soul. When we block off and look the other way, when we remain caught up in our own thoughts – what we need to buy from the shops, who we have to meet, what we have to do – we remain enclosed in the bubble of ourselves, of our own world, of our security and don't allow the demand of the needs of the other to break into that.

We may attempt to be good people, and we may do things, we may give money to charities, we may even help to run a soup-kitchen. But very often these activities are run on our own terms, in our time, where we also are affirmed in our goodness and our potency and responsibility.

### **ASANGA'S STORY**

There is a famous Tibetan story of the Indian scholar and yogi Asanga. It's quite a long story, so I tell it in a condensed form. Asanga spent many years in caves, meditating. After he had spent about ten years in a cave, he was feeling he had no result at all; nothing good was happening for him, he thought, 'This is a waste of time.'

So he is walking along, and he sees this man up on top of a hill with a small spoon, digging into the earth and putting the earth into a box. Asanga asks: '*What are you doing?*' And the man answers: '*Can you see down there that house that's in the shadow? I live in that house, and this hill blocks the sun. So I'm going to remove the hill so that I get some sun on my house.*' So Asanga thinks, '*Goodness, if he can do that, I better go on back and meditate.*'

So he goes back to his cave and has another ten years.

And again he goes out after ten years because he thinks, '*No, I really should stop this – it's not my luck, not in this life.*' And walking along he sees a man with a block of iron who is rubbing it with a piece of cotton wool. Asanga asks the man: '*What are you doing?*' And the man says, '*You see my shirt? That's torn here. I'm making a needle, so I can repair it.*' And Asanga thinks, '*Right, if these people can do that, I'm going back to the cave.*'

And off he goes.

Another ten years in the cave, and he is really not getting anywhere. So he thinks, 'I've had it. I'm finished.' And as he walks along the road, he sees a dog that's sort of limping a little bit and looks as if in pain. Asanga goes up to the dog and looks, and the dog is whining and whimpering. Then Asanga sees that the animal has got a wound in its back, and in that wound there are lots of maggots. He thinks, '*I've got to take these maggots out of this wound, because that's what's hurting this poor dog.*' So Asanga picks up a twig, a small piece of wood, and he goes to dig the maggots out. Then he thinks, '*Oh, but if I do that, then maybe I'll hurt the maggots, and they also will suffer. I'll try to just pick them up with my fingers.*' But when he tries to do that, he gets frightened that he's going to squeeze the maggots. Now he is really confused and doesn't know what to do.

And then he thinks, '*I know, if I put out my tongue, because my tongue is very soft maybe the maggot can come on my tongue.*' So he closes his eyes, puts out his tongue, and he just feels the maggot. And as he feels it, he opens his eyes, and there, in front of him, is Maitreya Buddha.

### **PRIVILEGING THE OTHER CF. PRIVILEGING THE MODEL**

I think this story is very important, because in the first two parts of the story, when he goes out and sees the person digging on the hill and then the guy rubbing the iron, he has an inspiration which is very much about himself. '*If they can work hard, I can work hard.*' So he



is inspired to do something. But it's a self-reflexive inspiration, solipsistic. But in the third case, with the dog and the maggots, he is completely surrendering to the needs of the other. He is no longer trying to arrange things on his own terms. He makes a gesture out of himself, forgetting himself and putting the other first. This is perhaps the essence of compassion: that it privileges the other. It means that we are open to respond as the servant to the other's need.

And I think that this is a view that's vital in the realm of psychotherapy as well. Because if the therapist puts the model first, the particular model by which they practice their therapy, then they are acting in the name of healing the other, but very much on the terms of something which exists outside the frame of the other. And of course if we are therapists we have many professional limits – a fifty minute hour, how much money has to be paid – which keep us in control. So essentially the patient enters my territory to be healed on my terms. And this is probably why psychotherapy induces such great regression to childhood states – because this is our experience when we are children. We live our lives on the terms that our parents dictate to us.

But by developing wisdom which is the understanding of the openness and the luminous quality of being, the lack of substance in oneself and in the other, one can develop more ability to respond in an open way, without trying to control or manipulate or predict what the outcome will be. That is to say, one surrenders any attempt to establish a territory of control.

So the development of wisdom and compassion together is absolutely vital, and traditionally the image is given that they are like the two wings of a bird, and you have to have both in order to fly.

#### **ENLIGHTENMENT MEANS RESPONSIBILITY**

Enlightenment means responsibility. In the Tantric tradition it's said that having gone through all these endless millions of years of profound practice one gets to the point of total enlightenment. So it's as if you've won an Oscar. You're up there, you know, like in Hollywood. You're up there on the stage at this moment of enlightenment, and all the Buddhas of the ten directions and the three times gather around you, and they each have a little pot of water in their hand – which is traditional for giving initiations in the Indian system. And they all come up and pour water on your head at the same time. So there's a lot of Buddhas and a lot of water – you really get a bath. This initiation is called *Osel chenpo gi wongkur*, the 'Initiation of Great Light'. So here you are, you have made it, you're finally in the best company. You're one of the Buddhas.

And then they give you the bill. They tell you what your responsibilities are: From now on, forever and ever and ever you have to be completely available to anybody who asks anything from you at any time. So just when you think you're safe – it's gone. (*Laughter*)

It's really in that point, you get a symbolic representation of this unification, that the more open one is, the more one has to carry. But of course it's not such a burden to carry it because what you're carrying is the burden of lightening people's burdens, and these burdens in themselves are empty.

One of my gurus said that the function of the guru is like an older brother who is lying in bed with you. And when you're being tormented in a nightmare the elder brother finds a way to shake you and waken you up so that you're not lost in this tormenting dream any more. It's not that the guru is giving you something outside yourself; he's awakening you up to yourself. So whatever means are necessary to help that person wake up are the means that have to be used; it depends on the specificity of that particular person.

Maybe we could take few questions now.

## Questions and responses

*Questioner:* Is it necessary to be enlightened to be able to help other people? My guru has said once, *'I don't teach charity, I teach sharing.'*

*Response:* Well, it depends. If you're going to share something, then you give part of yourself. But if part of yourself is fucked up, then what you give is a fucked up gift – which may be nice, because very often other people want us to be fucked up. We fall in love with each other because of our pathologies. *(Laughter)*

More seriously, the question is whether this is leading to something. Does it lead to enlightenment?

We have to begin where we are, but how to do it with some scepticism? I think mainly what I've been trying to say this afternoon is that one has to always observe oneself while acting, be aware of what one's doing, and not simply believe that because somebody else has told us, it's a good thing, that it is necessarily a good thing.

In the Hinayana-teaching one of the first things the Buddha said, is, *'The first rule is not to harm others. The second is to try to help people.'* But the first one comes first. So the clearer we are about not harming people, if we just manage that, then we've done pretty well. Helping people on top is extra.

*Questioner:* So should one stop trying to help others if one is not sure about being able to live up to these principles?

*Response:* Maybe the most important thing is to let other people tell you what they want and then see if you can help them with what they want, whereas if you start from the idea to help someone, you've already taken up a position where *'I have knowledge', 'I have power', 'I have strength', 'I can do'* – and that makes us maybe blind and stupid.

But of course most people have very low self-esteem. They don't like themselves very much. They are not very confident. Therefore most people can't tell you what they want, and so that space then gets filled by somebody who is trying to be helpful. And in trying to help that person you further make them retreat into being a passive recipient. So maybe the first gift is to give people space to find themselves a bit.

This is a big problem in psychiatry where it is very difficult to give patients the space to find out what they want. Psychiatry is the realm of control. It's not primarily about helping people to find themselves. For example, if I decide tonight that I've had enough of life, and I want to kill myself, I can do that. But if I'm in the psychiatric ward, if a nurse sees me trying to kill myself, they'll stop me doing it. There I'm all the time in a place where people are observing. The task of psychiatry is to help people get back to normal. The task of the Dharma and of psychotherapy is to put what is normal into question.

If one starts practicing mindfulness, looking after one's own acts, and one tries to get aware of the motivation behind certain behaviours – for example if I notice that my humbleness is really anxiety or something like that – and when one comes then to a point where one thinks, my God, I'm full of paranoia and fears, and I'm really living in a box, and I'm not able to get out of it, what to do then? Then you should get up and go for a walk. *(Laughter)*

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## TWO MAIN FAULTS OF MEDITATION

That's the traditional teaching, and it's written in many meditation books. In meditation there are two main faults. One is called 'sinking', like if you go swimming after lunch, and you're tired, and you just feel to sink; and the other, godpa, means 'wild' or 'a lot is coming up'. Either our mind is going to a kind of sinking foggy haze, or we go into a wild crazy distraction. So if you find yourself becoming anxious and distracted you should simplify yourself, go for a walk, look at some flowers, do something very simple, get up and make a cup of tea, and then go back to sitting, rather than coerce yourself. Because otherwise you're driving against something, which will increase your anxiety.

If you try to control the mind, the mind will get more crazy. If you try to be nice to your mind and respond to it and try to understand what your mind is doing, your mind will tell you things. And if we treat our mind with that open gentle respect it will also lead into treating other people with open, gentle respect. Because why should we be kind to other people and not kind to ourselves? That would be crazy.

When we start to meditate we become aware of all these thoughts and feelings that are going on all the time that we've never been aware of because we've been so busy out in the world. Then if we've got a desire or a feeling, or we believe that our mind should be calm, then all these thoughts and feelings become our enemies. Then we can force ourselves very hard to try to control ourselves. We create a war-situation in which I'm divided against myself, and I can only win this war by exerting total control.

Now we can see what's happening with America in Somalia. When they try to exert total control, it starts to fall apart. If they were a little bit gentle and responsive there would be space for everyone. They don't have the power to control it. But because there is a desire that we will control these people we get into a tight situation. And if you turn that view on yourself you get the same splitting off, forming two camps and then banging each other endlessly.

So the most important thing is to be on your own side rather than being divided against yourself. Because if you're on your own side then you're moving in the direction of your becoming. And there is openness and a generosity involved in that. If you're divided against yourself that conflict will be projected into the world, and you'll experience it back.

Perhaps we can come to an end here. I suggest that we sit just for a couple of minutes and allow ourselves to reflect that if there has been any benefit in our meeting together here, then we would want to open that benefit out and share it in the world; that whatever we get, we can give out in some way. So however you would do that, whether you have a ritualistic way of doing it or just through visualizing light or whatever, just have a sense of being open.

## Saturday evening

Welcome back, and welcome to people who weren't here before. I'll try to bring it together so that you have a sense of what we are looking at.

Our main theme is the nature of wisdom and compassion and how that relates to the practice of being human, which is essentially the practice of therapy. And I would like to develop this a bit by taking up the idea of the two truths.

## THE TWO TRUTHS

There are two different histories of the development of Buddhism. In one history during the time of Sakyamuni Buddha he essentially taught all the various practices that there are. That's the traditional view.

And then there is the more historical view in which one looks at the internal contradictions of the development of the teaching and the teachers who are represented with historical dates, and one sees that there is a gradual evolution based on certain dialectical contradictions.

According to the traditional representation the notion of there being two different truths, or two different levels of truth, or two different ways of conceptualizing the experience that we have in both samsara and nirvana. This was developed in what's called the Second Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma, at Rajgir.

From a more Western historical point of view you would see this bifurcation of views of reality developing after the time of Nagarjuna. This is the Nagarjuna who is attributed with the writing of the *Madhyamika-Karikas*, which was probably the third or fourth century A.D. We will look at it from the traditional Tibetan reading.

However I think it is important to remember that all of these stories are, in essence, simply stories. These are ways of helping us to make sense of some of the experiences that we have. To end up arguing whether it happened at this time or at that time and who really did it essentially doesn't matter. If it's helpful then it is because it is something that's helpful to you.

After Buddha Sakyamuni had gained his insight into the nature of suffering and gained Nirvana under the bodhi-tree in Bodhgaya he decided that he wouldn't say anything to anyone about it. It wasn't because he didn't want to, but he just thought, *'Well, once you start telling people about these things they get all sorts of funny ideas and it turns out the wrong way.'*

So he spent several days in Bodhgaya outside what's now the Mahabodhi Temple, walking up and down, thinking, *'What do I do now that I'm enlightened?'* And he was rescued from this existential dilemma by the arrival of Brahma and all the gods who came and showered flowers all over him and said, *'Please, you must teach us this wonderful thing you've got.'* So the Buddha said, 'O.K.', and set off and walked from Bodhgaya to Sarnath which is just outside Benares.

## THE FIRST TURNING OF THE WHEEL OF THE DHARMA

There, in a little forest with many deer running around, he taught the first few people, or he gave them some sense of what he had understood. And what he taught then is called The First Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma. On the front of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, above the first line of the roof, you'll see a wheel depicted with two deer looking at it. That represents the first time when the Buddha's teaching was presented in this particular period of time (kalpa).

In this first turning what he taught was the fact of suffering – that was the first truth, that suffering exists and is all-pervading; and the second truth, that suffering has a cause; and the third truth, that in some way one can understand the cause of this suffering, that it is comprehensible; and fourthly that one can find a way out of that suffering. And that's the basic approach from the Hinayana view that I talked of earlier in the afternoon. It starts essentially with suffering. And that suffering which is of all sorts, physical, mental, emotional, that this suffering is not simply there because that's the way things are, but it is actually

grounded in particular causes which can be understood. Basically this suffering arises because we become attached to things – to people, to objects, to our own bodies, to life itself, as if they were something permanent and enduring that we could cling to.

This of course has many implications, if you think of it, about how we are with people, in terms of just being good friends to people or being in relationships with people or working therapeutically with people. Very often we see that they suffer because they get caught up in something, because something rather mundane and ordinary and basically very simple becomes enormously important to them. And one sees this perhaps most obviously in obsessive compulsive disorders where the person becomes very attached to a particular notion.

## PATIENTS AND HOSPITALS

For example a patient of mine when she is driving her car has to do mathematical calculations based on the number plates of the cars in front of her. She believes that the safety of her journey is dependant on particular combinations of numbers occurring. So she is attached in herself to some particular order or patterning in the world which she then has to try to coerce and manipulate the world into fitting into in order to feel safe.

But of course such paterings of numbers are random, and so a great deal of anxiety is generated through exactly the desire to control the situation and to set it up to operate in a particular way. And we're probably aware of this in our own lives in various ways. We might feel that someone we love or are involved in, if they died or left us we would be somehow impaired, or our life would become meaningless. Or we may feel that there are particular aspects of ourselves, that if we lost them, we would cease to know ourselves, we would cease to really exist.

For example for a while I was working in a general hospital, and in this hospital, I don't know why, but very often in the main corridor there were people in wheel-chairs who had just had amputations. So as I was going for my lunch I would see people coming towards me with their amputated limp sticking out, and I would often be quite shocked and thinking, *'My God, how would my life be if this was to happen to me. Would I still be the same person?'* Because so many of the ways in which I think about myself are that I can run around and be very busy and be independent. And I don't like it if I have to be dependent on people too much. This is probably very defensive, but anyway, it's what makes me feel safe. So if I had my leg cut off, and then I had to have people lift me out of this and maybe put me onto the toilet and wipe my bum, I'm thinking – you know, this would be too much.

This of course is one of the great sufferings of old age; that when we lose our independence, we have again to go to the mercy of other people's kindness. Whereas the sense of self, which we have built up through an attachment to having particular qualities, is undermined, as these qualities start to vanish, as our eyesight fails, our hearing fails... I'm sure, you could all think in your own lives of things that you're particularly fearful of happening – things happening to your own body that would in some way really interrupt your sense of continuity of being.

So it's this sense of attachment to a self-identification, involving a definite place in the world, definite interpersonal skills or social competences which allows us to survive with dignity, this attachment is a great source of pain because we can't maintain it always.

And I think we can link that back to that point from this afternoon about Sakyamuni Buddha's father trying to protect him from seeing these dangerous sights in the world, the difficulties of the human condition. In many ways that's what our culture tries to do for us. It tries to

remove the mentally ill, the physically handicapped, the mentally handicapped, and for a long period of time they were put into huge hospitals, they were kept far away, so we could imagine that everybody is the same as us, healthy, free and making lots of money. And if only we could find out who make us anxious, and if we could gather them up and seclude them discretely without feeling too guilty, we might well try to do that, as has been done before.

But, thank goodness, we don't have that power, and we are endlessly confronted with images of our own death and destruction. So in terms of these four stages of suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the path to the cessation of suffering, a very important step towards ending suffering for ourselves is to undermine the force of attachment that we feel both to our own body and to the world around us by meditating or reflecting on the impermanence of all phenomena.

### REINCARNATION AND KARMA

And this brings us to the question of reincarnation, because in the traditional Buddhist view reincarnation is a very simple straightforward idea: that we have been in samsara, revolving through states of confusion for a very long time. Because our thinking is confused and we don't understand situations very well, we make situations appear very real and solid and so generate a great deal of karma out of that.

And karma, I think, we can see as operating both as process and as content. For example, if I do a cruel act, say I murder someone, then the general understanding of that is that I will receive some punishment – usually it's thought of in terms of being reborn in a hell or being in a place where I will also suffer pain and anguish. So there seemed to be a straightforward correlation between good actions giving rise to good results, and bad actions giving rise to bad results.

But perhaps more basic than this is the nature of the process that keeps karma coming. And this is that it operates on the basis that there is a subject perceiving real objects and acting as if the relationship between them was somehow true. *'I am going to do this to you.'* So if there isn't a perception of an 'I' and of a 'you' then the basis that is required for creating karma doesn't exist. And every time I act on the basis of there being an I who is going to do something to you, I strengthen in myself the belief that there really is an I in here doing something to a you out there. And so this becomes the basis for the ongoing continuity, the unexamined assumption that there is a real internal subject operating on a real external object.

It's not as if we operate on some kind of Big Bang theory, that once upon a time long, long ago, there was some sudden moment of ignorance, and it's all due to that, and that we're simply somehow at the mercy of the fall-out of that terrible cosmic event. That would be to make a reading that was somehow paralleling the Christian notion of original sin, and that's not the Buddhist view. It's much more that every single interaction that we have, which is operating on the basis of me in here acting on you out there, is in that very moment affirming for the present what has been experienced in the past, and making sure that that perception will return to inform the next moment of experience.

And that's very nice because it means that the history of our own future – because the three times are running across – is in the palm of our own hand; it's not dependant on something long, long ago.

## **CHILDHOOD TRAUMA**

And of course that sort of metaphorical relationship has lots of resonances around issues in psychotherapy. Are childhood traumas really continuing and directive simply out of their intensity as some kind of deep-rooted shock-wave that keeps echoing through? Or is it because of the intensity of their effect they have had to be surrounded by lots of defensive cladding, as if they were an out-of-date nuclear reactor, and all the therapist can somehow try to do is to shorten the half-life of this appalling destructive force.

Rather, I think, one can see that these early childhood traumas create particular patterns of interpersonal response, and that these patterns of interpersonal response are also introjected, taken inside as a self-to-self-reaction, so that we continue an internal dialogue with ourselves with one part of that dialogue being the voice of the oppressive other. So that although the external oppressor, the one who may have raped or tortured or beaten us in some way, although they have vanished, their effect continues because we have actually internalized that position and continue to act towards ourselves from that place.

This is often a key-point in therapy, when a patient can recognize that they are not simply a victim, that they are also an oppressor in their own right, both an oppressor to themselves and to other people. Because there is then a kind of owning not just a passive receptive experience but also an active engaged experience.

And it's because of this active oppressing force in ourselves that we continue to generate suffering for ourselves. As in the classic cycle, where a woman who has a partner who beats her, manages after many years of struggle to get rid of this partner. She then meets a very, very nice sweet charming man, who is very gentle, and within a year he too is beating her.

This is certainly something I see again and again in my clinical work, and it's often very troubling. How can it be that human beings are so stupid? That having been tortured in one situation you go back to the same place to be hurt again, in exactly the same way.

## **OBJECTS OF ATTACHMENT, GOOD OR BAD, ARE EMPTY**

I think it is because of the operation of attachment, in a Buddhist sense, and also in a psychodynamic-developmental sense, that attachment is not only towards good objects but also towards bad objects. We are so desperate to have a sense of who we are that it's quite affirming to actually have a repetitive pattern that is secure because of its repetition, even although its extremely painful.

Therefore a very important factor both in psychotherapy and in Buddhist practice is to enquire into the nature of the self that is creating this web of pseudo-security around it through attachment to a repetitive pattern. And it's when one looks into impermanence that one starts to see that the objects that one becomes attached to actually are changing all the time. But because of our attachment to one particular aspect of the situation we become blind to the changes as they occur.

## **MELANIE KLEIN**

Thus, to go back to the example of the battered woman, if she's supported in therapy she can actually start to see slowly, slowly how the nice guy turns into the monster. But that's very painful, because then the nice guy and the monster have to be linked in some way. And in order to do that successfully one has to give up attachment to the idea that there actually exists somewhere a nice guy who'll take care of you. Because that's very painful, one tries not to do it, but instead splits the good bits, as if they existed, in one complete cycle, and the

bad bits, as if they existed, in another complete cycle. And if you know the work of Melanie Klein you can see how this ties in with her ideas of the paranoid-schizoid position and the depressive position.

I mean, we're dealing with human beings, and the ways in which we behave are actually quite understandable. It's not that some of us are born on Mars and some of us on Venus and we all have very confused and very different habits. The patterns of how we respond in the world are fairly straightforward.

As the Buddha said, *'Human beings want to have pleasure and don't want to have pain. But again and again they find themselves doing the things that bring pain and avoiding the things that bring pleasure.'* To act in a straightforward way demands an enormous amount of honesty with oneself, which means letting go of fantasies – the fantasy that we are somehow special, the fantasy that someone will care for us and take away all our pains and suffering.

And in the Dharma this approach is taken up in the first truth, which is suffering. We suffer. This is where it starts. The nature of this human existence is suffering. And we can either try to adopt particular kinds of defensive behaviours to protect ourselves from that suffering, which is the normal sort of strategy we adopt, or we can start to examine, *'Why do we suffer? What's the origin of suffering?'* – which was the line that the Buddha was suggesting.

## THE SECOND TURNING OF THE WHEEL

So we will move a little bit now on to The Second Turning of the Wheel. After the Buddha had taught the truth about suffering and established around him an assemblage of monks and developed particular monks' and nuns' vows - essentially setting out clear patterns of normative behaviour which if followed would keep one clear of difficult situations – which as we discussed in the afternoon is based on the idea that the world is a dangerous place, full of things that have to be avoided – he then went to Rajgir in Bihar, and, on top of a mountain there, started to teach another view of the world. This is very nice for those of us who don't want to be monks or nuns.

In this view he set out the basic understanding of the nature of emptiness, again repeating this understanding of impermanence, but taking impermanence further by examining the basic moment of the arising of the perception of phenomena. And essentially in doing this, what the Buddha suggests is that we constitute ourselves as a sort of scientific laboratory. By establishing a clear frame, by having a particular time and place and setting for meditation we exclude a vast number of variables, so that we can then take up one by one the various hypotheses that we run our lives by, and check out whether they are actually true or not.

For example one hypothesis I might have is that I exist. This is a very useful hypothesis because it means that most of the things that I say become meaningful to myself. For example if I say my name is James and I usually live in London, that makes sense because there is somebody who exists, somebody that I can point to when I say 'I'.

Now if there is no 'I' then there's just these words bubbling around, and they don't refer to anything, and I might be getting a bit psychotic – or somebody is getting psychotic. But if I don't exist, it's not even me who is psychotic. And this can feel very dangerous.

So this is obviously a very important hypothesis to explore. There's a lot hanging on it. And when one enquires – as one must, I think, in order to make any progress in meditation – into the hypothesis 'I exist', the Buddhist teachings are actually quite helpful, because the Buddha points out the danger of nihilism. That if I don't exist, I may be plunged into a



depressive confusion in which there is nothing at all, the kind of musing that was very common in the 1890s and that informs the speculative line of thinking through Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

What the Buddha was suggesting is that between the notion of true existence, that things exist solidly in truth, and the idea, that things don't exist at all, there is a middle way. Because just to come to a kind of intellectual or philosophical conclusion that nothing exists – well, you open your eyes and look around: something there! God knows what it is, but anyway something is here. I mean, here we are. Are you there? (laughter) So something's going on. And I think that the nature of the line of enquiry that the Buddha adopts here is very different from the one of the end of the last century.

In reading that kind of Western philosophy it seems to me anyway that a great deal is motivated by hatred, hatred of self and hatred of the world. And certainly in Vienna in the 1890s suicide was a very common occurrence among young male intellectuals. As if an accurate perception of the horror of things, of suffering, was so unbearable, that the only option was death. So that by killing the one who suffers one kills suffering; by attacking the subject one forces a separation, a freedom from object. But this is to ignore the way in which subject and object always appear together.

So in making this inquiry one has to then hang on to the sense that somebody is doing the inquiring. Not hang on to it in an attached, dependent sense, but with the awareness that something is in play here. So starting with the practice of calming the breath, of shamata, using the breath or using some visualized object outside to create a state of calmness in oneself, so that there is just a very open and clear perspective in which thoughts are coming somewhat slower, one has a steadier frame in which to examine the link between the mind, or the thinker, and the thought. One then wants to develop a more precise perception of vipassana or really trying to see things very clearly. What is the nature of this arising?

### **WHO AM I?**

So one takes up this question of '*What is the self? Who am I? Who is the one who is observing the thought?*' Every time there is either a sense of self or a thought that is perceived, one tries to jump on top of it and look down.

This is very difficult. For most of us who have bad karma it takes many years to even get the beginning of a sense of what this might mean. But it's very important to try to do, because basically it's the point at which you confront the internal dialogic nature of self-experience.

Normally even when one is trying to meditate one has a sense of that there is a meditator and something that's been meditated on. Would that be a sense you might have?

So as long as there is this internal split, basic duality exists internally so that it doesn't matter how long you sit without moving and with your eyes closed, you're still maintaining the basis of samsara, which is dualistic perception, because you're carrying on an internal state of subject-object, which is the underlying current out of which being in the world is distorted. The low level ongoing internal dialogue supports the observing self which is always watching what I'm doing. And not only watching, but judging. '*O no! I shouldn't ...*' Do you recognise this? It's the outside-adjustment/inside-adjustment, the same game that's been carried on since the beginning of samsara. We project the attitudes maintained in internal dialogue, and we introject the attitudes experienced in external subject/object interaction.

And this brings us back to this earlier point about the nature of the two truths, of relative and absolute truth: As long as one's internal self-to-self-relationship and one's external self-to-

other-relationship is grounded in this dualistic perception, one is locating oneself in the realm of relative truth. And this of course is the view of most developmental psychological theories, as in the work of Daniel Stern, or in the concepts of the Object Relations school – as those of you who are familiar with these views will recognize.

### **ABSOLUTE TRUTH**

Absolute truth, being the experience – in a sense – of getting close to what the Buddha's experience is, is that point in which there is a complete alignment in being, that one is no longer split in oneself, carrying on a two-party-conversation, but one is simply an ever-present, ever-flowing expression of being, a being which is open and vast and coming out in a point, but not a point that splits off into two separate things which then move like on a damaru, but are just an endless flow. That's why it's the movement from a totalising-system, in which things are constructed by being juxtaposed, into a system of infinity.

In the traditional system of looking at the ten bodhisattva-stages this transition occurs up to the seventh bodhisattva-level of relative truth. On entering the eighth stage one gets to a point where regression, movement back onto that polarized dualistic perception becomes – or is said to become – almost impossible.

Now most of our lives will probably be spent in this realm of relative truth, of existing as a subject in a world of objects so that we are echoing off each other all the time, so that we're responding to things as if they are actually solidly real.

And we're responding with the perception that we ourselves are really quite real. And with that our own desires, anger, jealousy, envy, also seem pretty real.

So one might start off making a gesture towards another person that is actually grounded in some kind of generosity. But from this particular perspective, as long as the perception has *been 'I am going to do something for you' or 'I am making a gesture towards you'*, the basic frame is one of dualistic perception. And of course this perception may be unconscious. The contradiction between the two positions of self and other will produce a solidity, reification with a consequent entropy that will drag us down into heavier desires like wanting some pay-off for what I have done.

I would imagine that's an experience you are familiar with. I remember when I used to teach Tibetan language, and I would be teaching through a text, an interesting philosophical text, sometimes I would really get a very exciting idea, an idea that was very exciting for me. But I wouldn't want to tell the other people. Because it was my thought. I was going to hang on to it. So although it was my job to teach these people and I was happy to teach them, at a certain point I couldn't do that any more. I had to hang on to something for me because I got a bit tired of being generous. I wanted something for me. That may be something you're also familiar with?

In terms of thinking about therapeutic practice, or even just of being a person with another person, these ideas of relative truth and absolute truth are not just abstract conceptualizations. They are actually a frame of reference which helps us to make sense of why an initial good intention gets lost because there is a particular situation. It's like when you have an elastic band, and you pull it, it will develop more and more pressure and will want to pull back into a shape. So the more I try to be good – I'm a selfish nasty person, so I'm going to try to be good –, I pull myself out, like an elastic band – hhhhhhhhhhhh – but then poingggggggg! I come back to being a shit.

Maybe we could do a little bit more quiet sitting together and then take up some questions or thoughts or reflections that you have on some of this.

## Break

Now I would suggest that you talk with your neighbour for five minutes and see what you made of what we've been talking about here. And if there's any questions you would like to ask, and you find it difficult to ask a question then maybe get your neighbour to help you ask that question.

If we then take maybe twenty minutes of questions and then do together a guided meditation with visualization that will give a more intense experience of how to try to bring together this internal dichotomy, and then take up any further questions. O.K? So any questions?

## Questions & Responses

*Questioner:* Which therapeutic school do you belong to? And how do you manage to bring Buddhism and therapy together on a practical level?

*Response:*

### STYLES OF THERAPY

I think I said a little earlier that today in my working week I work sometimes as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist, sometimes as a group-analyst, sometimes as a cognitive behavioural therapist, sometimes as a creative arts therapist, and sometimes as a family therapist. Now I have to say that the reason I work in these different ways is because I work in different places. Therefore my style of therapy is dictated probably more by the institution than by the nature of the client problem. And it's really only in my private practice that I am more free to develop the particular model that interests me.

There was an English psychoanalyst who died a few years ago, called Wilfred Bion who said that the analyst should enter the session without hope, memory or desire. And if you do some Buddhist practice, I think it helps to enter in that state where one is simply open to whatever is going to come.

So for me, on a practical level, between patients I try to do a simple meditation to bring a bit of space into myself, to do a kind of wiping out the impressions of that patient and make myself a bit fresh to see the next patient. And as a kind of ongoing self-supervision through the session I can move into a reflexive awareness about what my own desire is, what my agenda is, in order to have more of an open situation in which the presence of the other person is available as something to which I can respond.

### STRENGTHENING THE EGO CF. UNDERMINING THE EGO

I'm not quite sure why, but I very rarely do any meditation practice with patients unless they suffer from anxiety, and then I would do simple breathing. Because a great deal of work in therapy is to help people strengthen their ego and become more able to survive in the world, I think to use meditation techniques which are designed in a sense to do the opposite, to undermine the ego and make it more difficult for the person to survive in the world in the ordinary sense, is problematic. We need to always beware of imposing our desire on the other. Evangelism has no place in Dharma or in therapy.

## REINCARNATION

There was a line of thought that I didn't quite complete before, when I started to talk about the nature of reincarnation. The thing about reincarnation is that there is a sense of an infinite past – this vast number of lives, one after another after another, and then moving into the future on and on and on. This is a huge open expanse of time. And I think this is absolutely vital because it's not whether or not one believes that people are reborn in particular places or with particular qualities, or whether some lamas who claim to be incarnations or reincarnations really are these things. I don't think that's the important thing. These are merely the play of representations within relative truth.

It seems to me what's important is the relationship with time: whether time is seen as a finite substance, a limited commodity – like the pay that one maybe gets at the end of the month, and if you blow it all at once, you don't get any more; so there's a kind of anxiety attached to time – or whether time is experienced as an infinite resource. In some ways Heidegger in his book Being and Time is gesturing in the same direction. He takes up the idea that being and time are in some sense synonymous, because time is something that we are – we are in time, time is a quality of being rather than a limit to it. Time is not something that we get or which we have a subject-object-relationship to. Time is in a sense of the essence, although there is no essence. Time is of the existence, because we exist in time. We cannot separate ourselves from it.

It is this general orientation towards being as infinity that is absolutely vital to the Buddhist understanding. Because the real danger is to turn Buddhism into simply a way of improving the quality of one's present life: Because I'm busy and get stressed out of work I'll do a little bit of calming meditation to make myself more relaxed, so I can enjoy the weekend. Or if I want to have a little cottage in the countryside so I can enjoy myself I'll do some wealth-god practice in order to get the money to get a second house. These things aren't wrong in themselves, they are just very dualistic, very samsaric, primitive magic, and there is lots of other systems that one can make use of in order to operate them.

But the meditation view of Buddhism is grounded in this notion of the infinity of time, and because of that the infinity of being. And it's because of the absolute nature of being, because it is inexpressible without beginning or end, that when one has a direct experience of that, then the boxing in, the shaping of the subject-object-division that's sustained by language, starts to really be put into question and begins to dissolve.

## DHARMA IS SUBVERSIVE

That is to say, the Dharma practice is fundamentally subversive of a world constructed out of representations. The post modern deconstructive readings of texts that come through Derrida are in a sense second order opening because they deal with trying to unpack language within the text of language itself. This certainly opens a gap, a space for new unfoldings and infoldings, but it is a project that remains within the constraints of relative truth.

Whereas by taking up this view of infinity and bringing it into the exact moment of present being, one deconstructs the matrix within which language is moving, and language itself becomes empty, open and generous.

## PROBLEMATIC OF TAKING DHARMA INTO THERAPY AND VICE VERSA

And this really points towards certain problematic of taking Dharma into therapy – which is a long way back to your question. But this basic orientation of the Dharma is helpful to

examine the function of psychotherapy. When people come into therapy they usually have some problem of disjunction between their system of representations and the system of representations operating in the world around them or in their family or work context. And it's this disjunction that they actually want a finite reconciliation with.

So there is a question of whether the therapy should be about helping to create a better 'fit' with the world or whether it might open up something radical, something fresh. It seems to me that exactly the same question occurs when people come towards the Buddha-dharma.

When the Buddha taught the Dharma of emptiness for the first time people became very frightened of this. And so the teaching of the Dharma was described as *'the lion's roar of the Buddha'*. When the lion roars in the forest all the other animals get frightened and become very quiet. So when the Buddha taught this incredible idea about the emptiness of all things, the openness of the nature of being, people were very frightened.

And this points towards a certain ethical problematic. Because if this doctrine was very frightening for these great Hindu-yogis then if one in a subtle way introduces ideas of emptiness into a therapeutic practice without the patient being aware of the nature of the situation that's being set up then one may well be guilty of a kind of abuse, a covert evangelism that has more to do with one's own desire.

*Questioner:* The difference between our situation today and the situation in the culture of Buddha's time to me seems to be that at that time one could give a kind of refuge to the more simple people. It was then possible to say, *'You can pray, you can take refuge to something bigger than you, to some kind of religion'*, whereas a therapist today can't do this, because otherwise he is a kind of missionary.

*Response:* I think it's fine to be a missionary, but you have to call yourself a missionary and not a psychotherapist.

### **DON'T BE A MISSIONARY, BE THE MESSAGE**

My master said: *'Don't be a missionary, be the message. And if you can't be the message, then you should not try to.'*

I think it's a very interesting comment because as far as I know none of the psychotherapy trainings in Britain would suggest that their fully qualified members are better human beings than people walking up and down in the street outside.

Religious language deals with hierarchies which tend towards a kind of solutionisation – that if you're saved you go to heaven, and if you're a bad person you go to hell. You know where you are in this very simply calibrated system of existence.

### **HIERARCHIES CF. EQUAL VALUE**

And it was directly a defence against the perverse applications of that, that therapy came in as a democratizing force, working on certain assumptions, such as the idea that we're all born equal, and can develop by focusing on our experience just as it is.

*Questioner:* I think this is also called 'enlightenment', in the eighteenth century.

*Response:* Indeed. And this is where Buddhism has a certain value to offer in this idea of these two levels of truth. Because from the absolute level of truth everything is of absolutely equal value. Everything is simply the pure radiance of being. But from the relative truth value

there are of course various ways in which representations can be allocated hierarchical positions. And it's undeniable that somebody who is a drunken murderer is of less value to society than somebody who is a trained surgeon – in relative terms; in absolute terms they're not, but in relative terms they would be. It is not that discriminations are wrong; it's that discriminations are empty. So one can have as many discriminations as one likes as long as one knows that they are empty and not real. Discrimination and judgement are inherent in language, in the field of representations. It's not a matter of wiping out thought and language and becoming a silent Buddha, but of integrating the richness of manifestation in the open dimension of being.

*Questioner:* So don't you believe that there is a hierarchy of beings? For example that there are beings that are emanations of Buddhas, and those ordinary beings can really ask these emanations for help? Because for me this is a fact.

*Response:* That view is fine, but that is a view of relative truth. That's a teaching of the path. From the point of view of Tantra, samsara and nirvana are co-emergent, that is to say, they exist together at all times. So the enlightened state is not somewhere far away. It's actually here, but we don't see it. And the purpose of all the Buddhas is to help us.

If we live in a Buddha-centred world, where we simply pray to the Buddha, we make the Buddha very important and ourselves not very important. And if we do that we simply increase dualism, because the Buddha is good, and we are bad. That of course on a relative level is true, because we don't have the powers of the Buddha. But if we act into that difference, making it a structural fact, we affirm the dissociation of samsara and nirvana.

*Questioner:* For me the experience is that the calling upon these Buddhas is the experience of stepping out of this strict dualism of *'I'm bad, and they are good'*.

*Response:* Yes, it is. It's a method. The Buddhas offer themselves as a method. When you become a Buddha you don't exist any more in the sense that we have our ego-based existence. You sacrifice yourself to become pure method for other people. You become an endless responsiveness to whoever needs it.

That's why the Buddhas are really nice; because they don't want anything. They're completely filled. We are the ones who want something. So of course when we pray to them they come, and not only that they come but they dissolve into us without any remainder. Whereas if I try to dissolve into the Buddha, there is always a bit of me left over.

## **ON NOT MEDITATING WITH THERAPY PATIENTS**

*Questioner:* Are any difficulties about doing meditation with a patient, only on the side of the patient, within his problem of neurosis, his conflict? Or are the difficulties also on the side of the institution? Do some authorities have problems if you try to do this?

*Response:* Certainly there can be problems with the institution. But the main problem is the manipulation of power and control. The first step usually into the Dharma is when somebody hears a little bit about Buddhism and maybe comes to some situations and then decides to take refuge. That is to say they make a conscious adult decision, *'I put it on my tongue, it tastes good. I want more of this. I want to have a genuine everyday connection with this.'* But it's an adult decision that the person makes.

If you slip that in covertly in therapy that's perverse. There are all kind of other religions that sneak that into therapy, particularly in America, and I think Buddhism should avoid that kind of abuse.

*Questioner:* So you favour a strict border between meditation and therapy?

*Response:* Yes. This raises again another kind of ethical issue that, I suppose, touches our meeting here.

Traditionally in Buddhist countries, if somebody is going to speak about the Dharma, people invite them to come, and they come, and they speak, and then afterwards people maybe give them some food or some money, depending on what they have or what they want.

#### **PAYING FOR DHARMA AND PAYING FOR THERAPY**

The way these things are structured in the West is that you set up a weekend, and it's set up with a fee, and people pay in advance to come in the door, to hear something, and they might like it or they might not like it. Somebody pays money, comes in and hears this and decides, *'My god, that was a lot of rubbish!'* That's very bad, isn't it? That can be exploitation, but it's done somehow in the name of the Dharma. And there is an ethical issue in how that's structured. Somehow the tradition has become that these events are organized this way in the West. But I think for myself that this is not very good because it takes away the individual choice to respond.

Now therapy, as it's structured in the West, is very clearly a financial contract. *'I will see you for a fifty minute hour. This is my fee. Do you want to pay the fee or not?'* You make an adult decision. Once you're inside the system you can regress as much as you want, as long as you keep paying. You can be five years old, but you have to take out your cheque-book at the end. That's the rule, and it's a contracted adult legal relationship.

Dharma-relationships should not be of that order. But there is an increasing pressure in the West because of efficiency and all the rest of it, to set them up in that way. I think that's an ethical issue that is important for everybody involved to be concerned about and to reflect and think if there are perhaps better ways to structure that.

*Questioner:* I no longer see any connection between Buddhism and therapy. But is it not that in the beginning you go to therapy, and that's nothing to do with Buddhism, and when you have done this and have recognized your traumas – which is the reason for therapy – and you have lived them through again so that you don't have to repeat them for the rest of your life, then perhaps later on Buddhism comes in with the aspect of letting go of attachments? Can you see it this way?

*Response:* That would certainly be my sense, that many of us have been very wounded by life and are not quite human, if you like. But you have to be in a sense fully human to enter into the Dharma. So it's a state of repair, of reparation that one can have through therapy, to address some of the things that come up in thinking about Dharma practice.

But for example when you first do, say, calming meditation focused on the breath, at that time you may have all sorts of troubling thoughts which you had blanked out in your mind, and they start to come up, and you're troubled by something. That might be a very good time to take these to therapy and work them through rather than trying to solve them through Dharma practice. Because for many of us our ordinary life is very busy, we don't have much time to do practice on our own. We don't have time to make it strong enough to be a containing force.

Whereas in a therapeutic relationship somebody is there, acting on your behalf to create a containing environment to help you to work it through. If you are in a village in Tibet, it's very calm, very peaceful, and you have a bit more time to do it. In a city like here in Berlin, maybe not.

### **BODHISATTVA VOW**

If one is following the Tibetan tradition it's normal practice to take refuge and to take bodhisattva vows at the same time. But the bodhisattva vow is a huge commitment. It is not like falling in love with someone and saying, *'I'll live with you until I stop loving you.'* It is to say, *'From now on in all my future lives I will be available for other people.'* This is an outrageous thing to say! If somebody presented themselves in a psychiatric clinic saying that, they could be detained. That's the kind of thing a psychotic person says. *'I'm Jesus Christ, and I'm here to save the world, and today at midday I'm going to hold up my hands, and all the suffering in the world is going to end!'* Somebody would come up behind them with a syringe, and shhhhhht! their suffering is ended for a while (*laughter*). But we say when we make this vow, *'Not only today, but always, out of my heart, I will love everyone.'* – You know, this is mad!

So we need to be careful that we don't make that statement out of an immediate intoxication, because the bodhisattva vow is very profound. It's said that when you make that bodhisattva vow somehow all beings in the six realms hear it, because you have made a fundamental commitment – the kind of commitment that you make when you have a baby. Even if I hate you, when you're a teenager, if you call me 'Dad', I'm there for you. – I have two teenage sons, and I don't like it, and I find it very difficult because sometimes I hate these boys. But when they call me 'Dad' then I'm dad, you know. And that's hard. If all the sentient beings I've made a promise to help come and shout to me I'm going to be quite frightened. (*laughter*)

So I think to enter the Dharma really is a very adult, mature thing that one needs to take very seriously. It's not a game. And if one is wobbly and uncertain it's really important to discuss with colleagues, with friends, and be honest and open. To pretend and to make this kind of commitment is stupid. It's really crazy.

In talking about ourselves we may well find that our motivation in the Dharma is rather complex. For example it is very common to be placatory, to want to please others out of guilt, hopelessness or fear. So one might think, *'I feel bad. No one will like me. Therefore I have to please other people. Therefore I'll do all these very good things, and then people will like me.'* To have that as a basis for a bodhisattva vow would be tragic.

Now we'll come to an end here with some meditation. We just meditate very gently, and I'll just outline the procedure for doing the essence of a visualization dissolving. We can do this together.

If you feel that you wouldn't like to do it, please, don't do it. If you think that it wouldn't be very helpful to do it, please, don't do it. But be just very gentle if you would like to go with this visualization. Then we go into that and sit very quietly, and whenever you feel you're ready to leave, then you just move out in that mode.

### **Sunday morning**

Good morning.



It's normal when thinking to do some practice, or entering into a formal Buddhist attitude, that one starts by taking refuge and, in the Mahayana tradition, connecting with the bodhisattva commitment. Of course as there are people here from different traditions it becomes difficult to know what we could say together, because normally it's said in a ritual way, reciting particular words.

So I think rather than start by learning some new phrase, we can just sit quietly for a couple of minutes and reflect on one's own connection with the Buddha-Dharma and the intention to understand more about ourselves in order to be more available to help other beings. The connection with the Dharma in terms of taking refuge is not essentially a formal or ritualistic one. The words don't make the connection. What makes the connection is a shift in one's own orientation towards one's life.

So if we just sit for a minute....

This morning I want to talk a bit about Buddhist psychology and then make some links with western psychology and the practice of therapy. I will also talk about how we can link Buddhist psychology to our own practice. So we'll also do some practice in the middle of that. This may help us stay in touch with ourselves and try to use some of the thinking, some of the theory, some of the conceptualization, to make sense of the difficulties and problems that arise in our own practice.

Hopefully we can let the theory, the ideas, the teaching of the Buddha-Dharma become personally meaningful, not just as a simple body of ideas, but as something that actually illuminates the complexity of our own existence.

## **TRIPITAKA**

The teachings of the Buddha – Buddha Sakyamuni – are traditionally classified into three groupings, called 'three baskets' – the Tripitaka. And these three baskets are Sutra, Abhidharma and Vinaya.

## **SUTRA**

In the Sutras very often you have accounts of the Buddha meeting monks, meeting villagers, meeting different kinds of people, and speaking with them. They ask him a question, and he replies in some way. It's a fairly [dialogic](#) narrative. So they make a reporting of some actual teaching that the Buddha has given, usually in his own words. And that links a little bit with what I was saying yesterday about responsiveness. Because there are many different Sutras, and the Sutras take up the same sort of themes, but in different ways, according to the particular needs of the person who was being addressed.

Then we have the Abhidharma; but I'll come to that last, although it's usually placed second. We will first deal with the Vinaya, the rules of morality.

## **VINAYA**

The Vinaya-teaching set out basic principles of good and bad, right and wrong, on the basis of an understanding of karma. I'll say just very briefly something about karma.

## **KARMA – FOUR STAGES**

Karma is a four stage process. The first is the ground or the situation. That means that there is a subject perceiving an object. That's to say there is a dualistic perception. The second

stage is a thought or an orientation, the third stage is an enactment, and the fourth stage is the perception of the enactment, in full agreement with it.

For example here is a bowl. Now, I can see, this is a bowl. Can everybody see that this is a bowl? So if you can see that this is a bowl you have the basis for karma. Because there is you, seeing a bowl – subject and object in operation. So we all can enter into some karmic relationship on the basis of this bowl. This is the first stage.

The second stage is to have a particular thought or intention regarding the bowl. – I don't have a bowl like this, and it might be quite nice for me to have a bowl; it would be very useful. So I might start to think, *'I could steal this bowl.'* Or I could somehow cheat the people here into giving me this bowl. Therefore I would start to develop some thoughts around the nature of this bowl.

On the basis of these thoughts I find that as I'm approaching Berlin airport I have this in my bag. I have somehow managed to steal this bowl. In this way I have enacted the third stage. I have managed to put my intention into action on the object that I have perceived.

At that point I think, *'Hey, this is really good. I'm very glad that I have stolen this bowl. It will be very useful to me, and this is a good thing that I have done.'* That's the fourth stage in which one recognizes the nature of the thing one has enacted and takes up a position of full agreement with it.

If all of these four things are in place then I have the full impact of the negative karma of stealing.

It would be the same with a positive action. Maybe for example I see a beggar in the road – that's the first stage. I see another object – I'm inside the world of duality.) I think that person has no food – second stage. Third stage: I give that man fifty marks. And then I think, *'Hey, that's good, I hope he has a good meal.'* So then I have all four stages for a positive karma.

Now the impact of both these kinds of actions is lessened if one has fewer of these stages in place. So that, say for example, I get to the airport, and I find I have stolen this bowl, and I think, *'This is a very bad thing to have done. This is very shameful. I came to Berlin for some Dharma purpose, and now I find I have stolen something. This is very bad.'* And I put it in a box, and I send it back. Then that would be to recognize at the fourth stage, and to contradict that by a guilty feeling, and a movement of reparation, of trying to repair the damage done.

Or I might have had the recognition in the third stage. Just as I'm about to put the bowl in my bag I might think, *'Hey, I shouldn't do this. This is crazy. What am I doing? I can buy one of these things.'* So at that point, on the third stage of the enactment, there is recognition, and I put the bowl back in its place.

Or, in the second stage, when I start to think about the bowl, and I find that my thoughts are returning to the bowl again and again, and it's becoming the obsessive object of my desire, I can try to change that pattern of thinking. Now I can do that in different ways.

One way is to remember that when I was a small boy, my mother would say, *'James, don't steal things. It's very bad to steal things, and if you steal things, God won't like you, and your papa won't like you, and your mama won't like you. So are you going to steal things?'* – *'No, mama.'* – So I might remember that. That is to say, there is the introjection, the internalization of a parental controlling voice that sets up to the voice of the law against which it becomes very difficult to act.

This is the point of operation of all the monastic vows and all the vows of commitment that we make. They are ways of embedding in the mind particular fixed readings or fixed interpretations of situations so that as soon as one moves towards that situation, alarm bells start to ring, and you remember, *'Oh, oh, I shouldn't do this. I have promised not to do it. It's bad to do it.'*

In the Hinayana literature they often described the Buddha as calm, cool, pacified. So it's as if due to keeping his perfect monks' vows he has installed thermostats all through his mind like in a central heating system, so that as soon as the temperature starts to rise in terms of becoming angry about something or envious or full of desire, bells ring, and the Buddha knows, *'Aha, I'm a monk!'*

We can see how this is embedded in the way children are taught about things, how they are rewarded and punished. Through our social interaction and the education of children we embed these little controls inside people. And very often people come into therapy because the way in which the thermostat has been adjusted is serving the purposes of a super-ego of an internalized parental voice and not the needs of the adult ego of the individual. Therefore the task becomes to re-calibrate, to re-mark the temperature controls of one's own emotional life in response to the world one is in.

If we now go back to the first stage in the production of karma, which is the perception of subject and object, this relates back to what I was saying yesterday about the internal dialogue. As long as we are maintaining this bifurcation, this split of perception by our ongoing internal dialogue and our having it represented to ourselves in terms of our interaction in the world, we continue the sense of 'me here and you out there', and so there is a dialogue or a dualistic relationship between them.

### **DONALD WINNICOTT**

The English psychoanalyst, Donald Winnicott pointed out that you never find a baby on its own. He famously said, *'There is no such thing as a baby, there is a baby and someone.'* A baby doesn't exist. Why? Because what you have is mother-baby. They exist as a unit. This is very important because I think there is a similar thing with the self.

### **SUBJECT AND OBJECT ARISE TOGETHER**

People often say, *'I want to find myself.'* Or: *'I want to know who I really am.'* But the self exists in the world. There is no self without another. Subject and object arise together. To find yourself is to find yourself in a place, in relationship to other people. The resolution of this problem, of the basis of karma, is somehow to have a sense of awareness, of openness to occurrence, but not as a self that is in a mutually determining relationship with objects.

To imagine that you can find yourself and be somehow sealed in this self-perfection so that other people don't disturb you is rather a strange idea. But in a sense it's the Hinayana notion of the Buddha's Mahaparinirvana, his total enlightenment.

### **BYE BYE BUDDHA**

In that system of understanding, the Buddha slowly calming himself, calming himself, extinguishing all his attachment and involvement in the world, gradually blew out the candle of self. He ceased to exist. He entered into nirvana in a state separated from samsara. And he made it. He entered into this other realm, went far away. Bye bye, Buddha. In that way he acts as a kind of inspiration that we also can, by trying very, very hard, one day vanish.

But whether or not vanishing is particularly worthwhile, I don't know, because there's a certain problematic in that. To vanish means that you cease to have any connection. It's

saying, subject and object are very difficult and dangerous. Subject doesn't really have any power over objects. So as subject goes away and away and away... at a certain point object is left there, samsara is left there, and *'Hey, I'm in nirvana! I have no objects any more. I just have this blissful open consciousness, undefiled, unchanging, very calm, very pure, and nothing much is happening.'*

So the Buddha is in nirvana, we are in samsara, and there's a big gap in the middle. And this gap is very problematic in a philosophical sense. Because if these two poles are really separate, then what's in the middle? The thing in the middle must be touching both of them! If it's touching both of them, it's connecting them. If it's connecting them then the positive and the negative force of the two are going to wipe each other out in some way.

In that way the Buddha's enlightenment is always going to be put into question because of the presence of a samsara that he can't escape from. There are interesting resonances between this problematic and Melanie Klein's theory of the struggle to move from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive position. It's very fortunate that this critique has been taken up by Buddhist philosophers in the past. It's a very important thing, because it's the basis for the Mahayana understanding of the nature of samsara and nirvana, which has to do with the dynamic regulation of this linking of subject and object, again which is the underpinning of karma.

And this is very important, because if we understand clearly the operation of these four stages of karma then we can really have a dynamic, ongoing means of understanding our own relationship with other people and how we tie ourselves in knots, how we limit our options and become cramped.

#### **SUBJECT AND OBJECT: EXAMPLE OF A BOWL**

From the Mahayana point of view, when one looks into one's own mind, when one sits in meditation and takes up the question, *'Who is doing the meditation? What is the nature of the self that is doing this meditation?'* One looks and looks and looks one doesn't find anybody doing it, there is a process of awareness, or 'awaring', being more and more aware. But you cannot identify any particular attributes of that subject. That is to say, there is no essential self. There is the existence or the presenting of subjectivity, but one cannot define a particular essence or hard core to it.

And we have the same when we consider external objects such as this bowl. When we look at it we can say, *'This is a bowl.'* I speak English, so I say 'bowl' – in German you say something else. Now this is a bowl, but it also makes a sound. It's not really a bowl that you would put anything in. It's actually some kind of gong or bell. But in English we call it a 'bowl'.

So we can start to see that there are various things there. There are different words that we apply to the object. There are different functions that the object can have. There is a weight to the object. It has visual qualities, it has a sort of dull, metallic taste, probably some kind of smell – but I've got a cold just now. It has many kinds of qualities.

But normally in the course of our busy lives we don't spend a lot of time analyzing the quality nature and various nomenclatures of an object like this. We simply say, *'This is a bowl. This is the kind of thing that people in the East make to go ding.'* And so, when we know the name of something, when we can locate something, it just sits in that place. It ceases to be very interesting.

This morning I was playing with a little girl, and the father was saying that this little girl gets excited whenever she finds something new. But when she knows about something, she's not

interested any more. And this is our normal human way of being in the world: we get excited by new things, new relationships, new objects. This is why capitalism is so successful. Something new seems to come into existence as a fully formed object (like a new kind of computer or something like that), and we take a particular line through time, seeing that object as existing complete in itself in this moment of time. Then, in the next moment, some new object presents itself, and we go into that object.

And I think we have to link this propensity that we have, to cut moments of time, we have to link this to what we were talking about yesterday on the nature of infinity: if we look at this bowl through the dimension of time, this bowl has not always been here. I mean, at the moment it's located in this room, and it comes up in my hand, and it goes down. And the nature and quality of our experience of the bowl at the moment depends a bit on whether I pick it up and do things with it or put it down and leave it there. If it's down there, your eye may catch it, but generally not. But if I hold it up and say something about it, it changes, it becomes maybe more significant. It becomes an object of your interest. So the bowl is existing inside a system of representations. That is to say, we have many thoughts and connections around an object like this by which we make sense of it. This bowl came from a house in Berlin to this place here, and it presumably came from a shop to that house, and it presumably came from some place – it's got Chinese writing on it, I think – so it probably came from China or Japan to that shop in Berlin, to that person's house, to this place here. And in China it got made in a factory, and it went to an exporter, and to be made in the factory they had to get the raw metal, and the raw metal had to be dug out of the ground, and the raw metal, when it was in the ground, had a whole history.

So this bowl now cannot be isolated from that history. And twenty years from now, we don't know what will happen. The owner may have become a Muslim, and they may be using it as water container to wash their feet, or anything could have happened to this bowl.

So when we see the bowl just as a bowl, we take a particular cross-section through its whole trajectory in time. And this perception that we take of it is informed by our own cultural representations about who we are. Meeting here in a Buddhist place, we have some Buddhist thoughts about the use of this – maybe associations with temples. If this was maybe – I don't know – fifty, sixty years ago, in your grand-parents time, they might have bought such a bowl as tourists in the East, and they would say, *'Oh, look at this wonderful thing that they have in China.'* And it wouldn't have any practical connection. They might have put some flowers in it.

So one way into understanding this relationship of subject and object is to maintain in one's mind the understanding that all the phenomena that we see are existing in time and have a particular movement, and they are changed in the places they take up due to the juxtaposition with other objects.

### **KANT AND HEGEL**

And of course this kind of enquiry is not new in western philosophy. Kant spent a great deal of his writing considering the nature of the thing in itself. And that's also taken up by Hegel. And Kant in Critique of Pure Reason, he says, that you cannot find, you can never find the thing-in-itself, 'Ding an sich' You cannot find the bowl in itself, because the real bowl, the essence of the bowl, exists as a pure object, which cannot exist in the world. It's a noumenal presence, not a phenomenal one.

### **ABHIDHARMA**

There is a similar sort of discussion that happens in the third of the three baskets that we started with, the Abhidharma. The Abhidharma developed as both a kind of logical analysis of the nature of phenomena, through an intellectual critique of the way they manifest, and as

a phenomenological account of experiences in meditation. In this early Buddhist analysis, which in many ways is similar to Hindu analysis that was going on at the same time, something like this bowl would be seen as the temporary representation of a particular configuration of the five elements – earth, water, fire, air and space. These five elements would be seen as being basic, irreducible essences which due to the particular way they meet and work with each other create the physical manifestation of everything that we perceive.

*.....I'll talk for a little bit more; then we'll have some questions, and then we'll have some tea at about twelve o'clock. So this won't go on forever – it's also impermanent.....*

## **Break**

### **CATEGORISING BY BREAKING THINGS DOWN**

In the history of our western science we have very similar developments with the identification of ninety-two elements - then extended with artificially laboratory derived elements – in which people try to find out the elementary substances, the irreducible essences which are the basic building blocks of the phenomenal world.

A similar kind of analysis down into basic elements went on in psychology through meditation. Various categories of mental experiences were identified as being basic irreducible elements.

Abhidharma itself means sort of 'basic Dharma', or 'essential Dharma'. The Abhidharma literature, which is vast, deals with various forms of categories of these basic elements. And these representations sometimes are seen as being samskaras, as particular forms of associations or connections, and they are different numbers, sometimes 49, sometimes 54. Different texts and different writers at different times gave different numbers of categories. Various Buddhist sects even developed through conflicts over how many different categories there were.

### **FIVE SKANDHAS**

The kind of categories that you're perhaps most familiar with are the basic five categories of the five skandhas: form, feeling, perception, association and consciousness. Using these five categories, when someone is meditating, they locate and understand what it is that's occurring inside the field of mental experience, so that, no matter whatever is occurring for them, they know what it is, because, *'Oh, this is a moment of consciousness, this is a feeling. What is it? It's a feeling.'* So instead of getting caught up in the particularities of the situation, one identifies them back into their general category. And in that we gain some distance.

Some of you may have some experience in the Theravadan tradition of Vipassana meditation, where having calmed the mind, you then allow yourself to be aware of whatever is arising in the mind, and as it arises, you label it. For example you might be feeling some kind of terrible pain in your back, and you say, 'pain'. And then after that you might suddenly feel quite happy – and you say, 'emotion'. So as each thing arises, instead of becoming caught up in it, you label it and thereby have some distance. You maintain a control without getting involved. Essentially what one is doing is re-educating the spontaneous or automatic response that one has to a situation by putting a different name in there.

## RECOGNISING A PATTERN

And this of course is one of the main techniques that are used in modern psychotherapy, whether it's called reframing or whatever. When you help somebody to recognise a pattern that they are caught up in, instead of being caught up in the pattern, they recognise, *'Oh, now I'm getting caught up in that pattern'*, then they have a name or a representation which they insert between themselves and the spontaneous response to the situation. So when then telephone rings, and your mother is asking, *'What are you doing with your life? Has this new relationship worked out? And why are you involved with that person anyway?'*, then instead of being all involved in this and maybe becoming very anxious about getting angry and feeling, *'Oh, this is too much! She'll never understand my life'*, you are able through therapy to think, *'Aha, this is the parental controlling voice. She's trapped in her own stuff. I can't help her, but anyway I'll just be nice and have a sweet conversation.'*

One is able to recognize a repeated response, and by giving it a name and a label one can recognize it, before one is caught up in it. So this is a kind of manipulative reconstructive ordering of mental experience in relationship to the presenting of an external object.

To link this back to the first stage of karmic production, all of these techniques which are used in this stage of the Hinayana representation of the Abhidharma are a means of trying to get more control in the immediate subject/object-perception that occurs all the time.

## WHY WE DO MEDITATION

It may feel that what I've been talking about is a bit technical, but I think it's very important, because it explains the reason why we do meditation. We don't do meditation just to feel good or calm but because it's a way of actually trying to undermine the way in which the psyche, our mental field of representation, has become structured due to misunderstandings of the falsely perceived true essence of phenomena, both self and other. That kind of analytical examination of the nature and status of mental functioning forms the basis of the Buddhist understanding of self and other in the world.

It is then taken up in a different way in the Mahayana-tradition, where there is a critique in terms of emptiness – which links back to what I was saying yesterday about the chariot. Through the analysis in the Madhyamika-Karikas and the continuing tradition through both the Prasangika and the Yogacara views, there is a critique of phenomena as existing in truth, these essential phenomena, the five skandhas, and the various kinds of samskaras.

The Hinayana critique of ordinary perception is that there is an absence of inherent self-nature in people and in objects such as that bowl we were speaking about before. By an examination of these phenomena, (for example myself), I start to see that what I experience as 'me', as James, is composed of different things.

There is form, and this form has both colour and shape – that's the first of the five skandhas. Then there is feeling – sometimes as happy feeling, sometimes as sad feeling, sometimes as indifferent middle feeling. Then there is a whole range of sort of perceptions/sensations which have various different numerical categories. In that way I can take any event in my life and break it down by examining it through these categories. Okay? So I'm taking the sort of automatic sense of myself, and through examination of the moment to moment presentation of myself I re-organize that information in terms of these explicitly defined Buddhist categories.

*...Five minutes more to tea. I just want to round off this bit of the presentation...*

## **HINAYANA: THE INTERPLAY OF BASIC IRREDUCIBLE ELEMENTS CONSTITUTES PHENOMENAL REALITY**

That leaves us then with a field in which there are these external categories, these presentations of the basic elements; the five elements outside, earth, water, fire, air, space, and inside as my psychosomatic being there are these five skandhas. So the five skandhas and the five elements are meeting together, and it's the interplay of these basic irreducible elements which constitute phenomenal reality in the Hinayana critique. So there is no self, there is no me, there is no I, the totality of my being, there is simply the interplay of these forces.

## **MAHAYANA CRITIQUE**

And this is criticized from the Mahayana in two ways: one is through philosophical analysis, and one is through meditation practice. – We do the philosophy in five minutes, and then do some meditation afterwards.

Now if we take the notion of basic elements, these elements in order to meet together, to create the structures of perception that we experience as being present as a continuum, they must be juxtaposed in ways that have some degree of continuity, some degree of connectedness. You got an element here or a point instant of the element – so the world is made up of this (snapping fingers) endless series of things, moving together.

Now, this (snapping fingers) and this (snapping fingers) have a gap in between them. But if we have one point instant of an element, say an element of form, followed by another element of form, and these are happening very quickly, in order to build up the sense-perception that we have, that here is a bowl, what we have here is the very rapid display of moments of experience which are seen as being essentially separate. But because of the speed and repetition of their coming together, plus from our subject-receptor's side - the traditional predisposition that we have to perceive this as a self-existing bowl...

You get a bit of a sense of it if you think of some of these American movies, where there is a car-chase down a big highway, maybe through San Francisco, and it's rush-hour, and there's all these cars moving together, all in the same line, and each car is like a moment to moment representation in a huge stream of them, all pulsing in the same direction. And because these atoms are very, very small, so there is not just one level of stream, there are endless streams all the time streaming through. Here we are as just this endless pulsing stream of these minute representations. So if this is one of these atoms or one of these tiny basic elements, then the next one is coming just behind it.

So although they are separate and seemingly autonomous and irreducible absolute essences, yet somehow in their juxtaposition they are in relationship. And because they're in relationship, if particle A is going first, then particle B is coming behind it, with particle C behind it in the same stream. So we have particle B located between A and C, looking forward towards A and back towards C. That means it's got a front and a back. So if it's then stuck in the middle, and it's got a front and a back, you could take a razor and slice it down the middle.

Of course if the front and the back were exactly the same, it wouldn't exist at all. It would occupy no space. And then there would be no element there to become a building block for existence. So if it's occupying space, it has a front and a back, and if it has a front and a back it can be split, and then you have two, and then you can proceed with that ad infinitum, forever, and the whole argument of basic elements collapses. That's the basic critique of the nature of essences, and that argument can be applied to external essences and internal



essences. And so what one has is this infinite irreducible sense of things that are pulsing but don't appear to be anything.

### **HEISENBERG'S UNCERTAINTY PRINCIPLE**

And of course this has endless resonances with some of the explorations in modern physics, for example Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, that when you try to locate something, it cannot be found, and yet when you're not trying to locate it as an entity, it takes up the place as if it was something that was there.

I think this Mahayana critique is very important. But it really only will affect us as individuals, as Buddhist practitioners, if we enter into the argument in the first place and try to understand the Hinayana position of basic building blocks. Otherwise this is a critique of a point of view that we never held in the first place, and then it doesn't mean anything to us.

### **LOOSEN THE CONNECTION**

So although one's interest may be primarily in terms of meditation practice and trying to get some direct positive result in one's own life, I think to study this Buddhist philosophy-view is very important, because the rational, the meaning of the Tantric meditations and then Dzogchen meditations, is located exactly in these arguments of philosophy. And by being able to enter into this critique one starts to loosen the connection between the habitual perception of subject and object, which is the basis for the first stage of making karma. So in that way this philosophy is also helping one to not be caught up in the patterns which endlessly reproduce samsaric dualistic experience.

Shall we take a break now, and then we can take some questions, and do some practice after that.

### **Break**

Let's see if there are any questions or points you want to raise, and then we'll go on to talk a bit about practice and do a bit of practice.

### **Questions and Responses**

*Questioner:* Is it right to say that the basic Dzogchen ideas are already in the Mahayana view?

*Response:* Yes.

*Questioner:* What distinguishes the Tantric view concerning this theme of substantial existence of irreducible elements of reality?

*Response:* The Mahayana doctrine is split in two parts, what's called Paramitayana and Tantrayana. They hold the same philosophical view. The difference lies in the nature of the practice.

The Hinayana path and the Paramitayana-Mahayana both belong to the path of the cause. That is to say, that the approach that they take in their practice is to try to create the right causal situations which will lead ultimately to the fruition of the realization of Buddhahood and the beginning of compassionate action.

## VIEW OF TANTRA

The view of Tantra is to practice as if one had already achieved the result. This is known as the Vehicle of the Result. Here the approach to practice is to start from the assumption that you have already arrived at the place where you are going to go, and keep trying to stay there, although you keep losing it. And that's also the approach of Dzogchen.

So, for example, before I was coming here to Berlin, I was in London. Then I was on the plane. Now in the plane I could be thinking, *'London, London, London, leaving London, leaving London, hope I get to Berlin.'* Or I could be on the plane thinking, *'I'm in Berlin, I'm in Berlin, I'm in Berlin – I'm almost in Berlin, yes, now I'm almost in Berlin...'* So I could have a London-focus, or I could have a Berlin-focus, because I'm in the middle between them. So if I remain London-focused, I'm thinking *'Berlin is a long way off, and gosh, this plane is taking a long time!'* And the place that I'm going to arrive at seems very different from the place where I am, because I'm London-focused. And when I arrive in Berlin I might feel a bit confused, because my mind is still in London. I'm not quite sure how to make sense of Berlin, because somehow I'm in a London-frame. So to really be in Berlin might be difficult, because somehow I think, *'Well, actually I'm a Londoner.'*

This is very much the approach of the Hinayana path and Paramitayana-Mahayana, where one is a sentient being wandering in samsara and trying to attain buddhahood, but one always has to think of one's faults, one's limitations, one's problems, and one hopes, *'One day, one day, one day... I get to be a Buddha. But, really, I'm just an ordinary sentient being. So I shouldn't be too proud.'*

But if I've been Berlin-focused all through my journey, then arriving in Berlin seems right. *'Hey, here I am, because I've arrived in the place that was the object of my desire.'* Instead of thinking about leaving samsara one is focused on arriving home in Nirvana. Instead of thinking about renouncing samsara and all that one has to give up and all the dangers that one faces, one has a much more positive, affirmative association with the fullness of being, with enlightenment.

## MRS PADMA SAMBHAVA: IDENTIFICATION WITH THE DEITY

That's why the essence of the Tantric practice is the point of identification with the deity. Because by merging into the full identification with the deity one recognizes one's own true nature. It's not that one has to become Chenrezig if one's meditating on Chenrezig, or become Padmasambhava.

I don't know if it's the same in Germany, but in England it used to be traditional, when a woman married, that she would take her husband's name, and some women would take also the husband's Christian name. So they would become Mrs. John Smith. From the point of view of practice, our intention should be to become Mrs. Chenrezig, or Mrs. Padmasambhava (*laughter*), I think in our feminist world we don't need to do that. We can be ourselves, and we use the deity to understand something about ourselves.

It's a new self that is somewhere caught up and freed and liberated by the movement, the play between being me, James Low, and being Guru Rinpoche. And in the movement of identification / disidentification there's a gap that opens up, in which there's more presence of whatever it is that I am. But that of course cannot be represented in language, because it's beyond any thought or representation.

## PROBLEM- OR SOLUTION- FOCUSED PSYCHOTHERAPY

So there are real implications for practice from the point of view of philosophy that one takes up. And of course this again has similarities with therapy, because a great deal of psychotherapy is problem-focused. The psychotherapist is very interested in the patient's pathology, in what's wrong with them, how the problems arose, how the problems manifest, what the consequences of them are. And there's a lot of mileage in that, although in a sense it takes one back to levels of limitation and confusion.

But one can also take a line of inquiry into the nature of health, into the nature of possibility, being primarily interested in solutions, in what the person is doing that is different, that is new, that's fresh, that's opening up some possibilities. And there certainly seems to be some research-evidence that in family therapy to have a solution focus brings about quicker and longer lasting change than to have a problem focus.

If you think of a small child that's learning to walk, they start to crawl on the ground, and then they start to stand up, and they sway, and they fall down, and again they get up, but the really important thing is that they get up again. It's as if perhaps genetically or somehow developmentally the small baby is programmed to want to stand up. There's something inherent in being human that makes you want to walk on two legs. And the adults involved also have that feeling. They also want to hold the baby's hand and help it to wobble on its legs, because they think, *'This is a good thing to do. Stand on your legs! Hey, this is good; you have more freedom when you do this.'* And when the baby falls down, you don't get very angry with the baby and say, *'This is ridiculous, you're a total failure.'* You help the baby to get up again and turn it into a game.

## INITIATION AND STANDING ON OUR BUDDHA-LEGS

And this is very much the view in Tantra, that after having had the initiation, which is the kind of recognition of another set of legs that one can stand on, instead of standing on one's human legs, you can stand on your Buddha-legs. And the guru gives you a strong connection with these Buddha-legs through the initiation. At first we feel good with the confidence of the deity. *'Hey, I got my new Buddha-legs!'* But then: *'Oh, they're a little bit wobbly, and I am going to fall over.'* So everyday I have to do some prayers, *'Oh, make my legs stronger, make my legs stronger!'* (laughter) And of course the structure of tantric practice should be supporting one in having the confidence to practice standing on these legs.

However, as in most developmental systems, there's always some slippage back into the authoritarian parental voice. That is to say, there are many rules and prohibitions which are imbedded in the practice that says, *'If you do this then you'll have great benefits, but if you don't do this then terrible punishments will happen to you, and you'll be reborn in hell, and life will be very, very difficult.'*

Now in the west there are many ideas about educational development, and it may well be that fear can help some children to learn some subjects, for example mathematics. Learning mathematics is not a particularly natural thing to do, and so some external pressure may be required to make up for the deficit of desire of connectedness. And certainly in the English educational system there is a lot of evidence that many children are leaving school not able to read and write. So many people now say it would be better to bring back more authoritarian discipline, and that would help to structure their learning. The question of discipline has to be thought about quite seriously.

However learning to walk is very natural. It's not the same as learning to write German grammar or learning mathematics. So frightening people in the process of learning some-

thing that's very natural would seem a bit silly. If a child is anxious and starts to wet the bed, to shout at it is not very helpful. Generally what seems to be helpful is a warm supportive confidence that the child will be able not to wet the bed; that control over these sphincter-muscles can be obtained if there's a relaxed confidence.

### **DEVELOPING BUDDHA-ORGANS**

And I think it's a very similar attitude that one needs in the practice of Tantra, that one has these basic developing Buddha-organs, if you like, or Buddha-qualities, but some times one loses the thread, loses the way of connectedness which Tantra helps develop.

If, when you lose it, you feel very guilty and bad, that can simply be a way of affirming to yourself the strength of the loss, a reminder to reconnect quickly. But you might become problem-focused and be very interested in your own guilt and error, forgetting about the practice and instead concentrating on the dualising habit of self-criticism. So it's very important that in the practice we have a confidence that our connection with this open liberated view of ourselves can be maintained. Confidence that when we have a slippage – when we forget to do the practice, or when doing the practice becomes very difficult – we don't go into a negative authoritarian punishing voice, but we simply gently remind ourselves, *'Hey, my life is better than this. There's more happening for me than I think'*, and bring ourselves gently back to this positive understanding of the nature of existence.

The key point is to relax into the certainty, the confidence of the indestructible vajra nature that pervades all phenomena. And so nothing is excluded, nothing is pushed out into samsara or nirvana, split off in despair or protection. Otherwise we are taking up a position as if we were outside ourselves, being critical on top of ourselves, talking to ourselves as if we were an object, and in that way increasing the distance between ourselves and the desired state.

### **POINT OF ENTRY INTO TANTRA IS EMOTIONAL**

I think the real meditational experience, of visualizing ourselves as Tara or Vajra Dakini or whoever, is an emotional one. By this I mean if we allow ourselves really to feel our own open expanse of enlightened nature, tears will come to our eyes. How amazing! Often I might treat myself as if I'm shit; I might feel very bad about myself; hate myself, grind myself down into the dirt. And yet here is this possibility of being. Why do I torture myself, when really I can be open and shining? Why?

That's really, I think, the point of entry into Tantra, not the formal process of getting an initiation and then doing mantras every day because you feel you have to, as if it's an obligation to somebody else. Rather it's about allowing yourself to have a direct experience of the openness and beauty of your own being. Because to be on one's own side, to be one's own friend, to love oneself, is a basis for integration, for taking this internal dialogue and collapsing it, so that one is just open, open in the world, not held in some internal tension, but just open and relaxed and able to respond. That is the basis for all the tantric practices.

### **OPEN AND EMPTY**

That's what the practice is trying to do: to bring about and deepen this experience of being completely open. And I'm using this word 'open' in the same sense as one would use 'empty'. Because 'open' and 'empty' are the same thing. Because when we are open, then whatever arises from this side is just arising. Whatever is arising on that side is arising. So there is an open field in which phenomena are arising in an unbroken link. It's not that I'm

closed in here, and you're out there, and somehow we talk across a gap, but just reality is doing itself. The world is 'enworlding' itself in this moment, and I'm present and aware of it.

And it's by maintaining this state that one undermines the whole production of Karma, because when you are open and relaxed and responsive you have completely undermined the first of these four stages which is to maintain the subject/object-division. So being in the state of fusion with the deity is the actual moment-by-moment-unpacking of the force that regenerates samsara.

*Okay. If we just do some quiet sitting. Then after lunch we could do some practice together with some prayers and mantra recitation, and do a more elaborate visualization.*

## **Sunday afternoon**

### **HAS PSYCHOTHERAPY ANYTHING TO SAY ABOUT FAITH AND DEVOTION?**

This afternoon we'll try to bring things round to some kind of clarification after we've travelled over many different territories. And we'll do this through taking up the question of devotion and faith, what is the role of faith in Buddhist practice, and whether there is anything that western psychotherapy can illuminate about some of the distortions that can arise when faith comes into the picture. So I'll talk a little bit about this, and then I'll go through a very important, but quite straightforward prayer in the Nyingma tradition, and then we can make some use of that in practicing together and to try to have the experience of what the tantric integration of subject and object is all about.

To return to a theme that I was talking about yesterday, about the nature of the deity towards which one has faith. In pictures of Tibetan gods like this one here – I don't know if you can see it, but you probably all have seen similar things – here we have Guru Rinpoche, sitting quite comfortably, wrapped in many clothes, yet somehow with a naked woman in his lap. – I'm not quite sure how he does it. – And this is the object of this main visualization here.

### **IMPORTANCE OF TANTRIC VIEW WHEN WE VISUALISE**

When we look at paintings like this, or you see a statue, then you have a sense that this is a form which is similar to other forms. It's a representation of something. And so it's natural to be pulled into a way of relating to this representation in the way we relate to other representations.

But as we were discussing before lunch, to do that would be to pull this divine or hopefully divine object into the sphere of ordinary representation. So one meets a critical point as to whether we in our territory of subject/object-reification - the ongoing movement of making the world solid around us--use that samsaric quality to pull the deity, this open dimension, into our own world of reification. If we do that then we turn nirvana into samsara and just get more of the same.

The crucial point is to be able to make use of this appearance to cut through the ordinary move towards the dualistic controlling knowledge and to subvert the subject's desire for power and domination.

Yet again we hit another problematic, because in order not to pull the form into the sameness of our ordinary perception, the form has to be different –, but if we make it too different, then there is no point of connection with our ordinary world. Then we are caught in the Hinayana notion of the separation of samsara and nirvana. So the view that one adopts while taking up a tantric practice of visualization is of absolute importance.

## LIKE A MIRAGE, A DREAM, A REFLECTION OF MOON IN WATER

In the traditional teaching it says that the appearance of the deity is like a mirage or like an image in a dream or like the reflection of the moon on water. That is to say, it's very clearly there, one can see all the details quite clearly outlined. And yet there is nothing to grasp hold of, so that one has the existence or the presence without any essence. So there is nothing behind this, there is no true Guru Rinpoche elsewhere. There is simply this 'presencing'. All one has is the presence of the openness of the awareness that is Guru Rinpoche. That open awareness is nothing in itself, it's nothing that can be found or located or ascribed particular qualities. So there is something very vibrant, very present, and yet it's not substantial.

I think that if one has that understanding very clearly imbedded then it prevents lots of problems arising later. And the same would go for any of the deities that one was visualizing. We say 'deity' because in some way these are gods, but really they are symbolic representations of a moment of open awareness. So they are signs moving in the field of our ordinary representation which have the power to disrupt, to subvert the integrity of the ordinary field of representation. And this is absolutely important: that one does the practice in order to get something. One doesn't pray to these gods – let's call them gods – because one is frightened that they are going to punish one, but one prays to them in order to make use of their potency to shift the limitations that one experiences in one's ongoing being in the world. That is to say, what is being privileged, what is being set up as of primary importance is one's own desire for openness and responsiveness. Because at the basis of everything is one's own Buddha-nature, one's own natural, innate open awareness. If you didn't have this basic Buddha-nature you couldn't buy it anywhere, you couldn't steal it from anyone, you couldn't make it out of anything else. It's reality's gift to you, because you are part of reality.

And because of this the function of the deity is to waken one up to one's own essential nature. Having awakened themselves to this nature, the Buddhas no longer hang on to any sense of individual self, they make themselves available as a form for waking up other people. So that in praying to these deities and trying to make more connection with them there's a meeting of two streams of desire: I pray because I want to know who I am, and the Buddha responds because he wants me to know who I am – or the Buddha responds because she wants me to know who I am. Whether we conceptualize this in terms of gender or age or whatever has to be primarily a function of our own conception, not of the qualities of this open state.

## CHOOSING A GOOD TRAVELLING COMPANION; YIDDAM

And if anyone thinks of taking initiations or starting on practices it's very important to think first of all, *'Do I actually want to do this? Do I feel any connection with this person?'* It's a bit like you might meet somebody who has a very nice body, and you want to have sex, but if you don't enjoy talking with them and being with them, it will be quite difficult to maintain a relationship. So in taking up the practice, which is going to involve a great deal of emotional investment and this deity becoming personally important to you, it's very important that you have a sense that this is an object of your true desire, that you have a sense that this symbolic representation can open you up and take you further.

Were the deity to be simply the manifestation of someone else's desire – if the Guru says, *'Oh, this is a good idea for you to do this practice'*, and you don't really feel like doing that practice, and you agree to do it because you think you should please the Guru, then you may well have problems after a while. Or you may think, *'Oh, this Guru is very great and very enlightened, and whatever this Guru chooses to give me, I'll be very grateful to get it.'* And you may be lucky. That may be true for you.

But it may also be that you become like a teenager who starts to follow a rock-group. You start to buy all their records, and you go to all the concerts, and then you buy the T-shirts and a special watch, and you have the complete collection of everything that this group has produced, and your bedroom is covered with all the posters, and then you meet someone and fall in love, and they come to you bedroom and they see all the stuff (laughter), and they say, '*This is crazy!*' And you look into their eyes, and you say, '*Hey, I want you!*' And then next morning you take down all the posters, you sell all your records, and you throw out the T-shirts. (laughter)

It's easy to get an idealistic intoxication in the presence of a charismatic person. But that energy is not enough to take you from here to total enlightenment. It's a long, slow journey. So one needs to look for a good, comfortable travelling companion. Someone who will both be comfortable and reassuring, kind and loving, exciting, challenging, and maybe sometimes rather angry, because you don't want to fall asleep. I think it is very, very important, that one looks very carefully before making commitments. Otherwise your commitment is worth nothing, and practicing the Dharma simply becomes a way of accumulating more sin and unvirtue.

Not sin and unvirtue because somebody else is saying that, but because you feel it in yourself. You feel hopeless and worthless, because every time you start to feel devotion towards something you know it won't last, and you start to mistrust your own capacity to love.

#### **FINDING A GURU OR A PSYCHOTHERAPIST**

These deities are often depicted in the midst of a clear blue sky, there's a lot of space all around, and they're floating in this vast open sky, resting barely on nothing at all. But unless we are very, very lucky, such a figure is not likely to somehow float in through our window. We are much more likely to enter into a connected relationship with this deity through the presence of a human being, a guru - at this time in the Tibetan tradition almost all gurus are male. So the nature of the guru is a subject of absolute importance, if you want to practice on the tantric path.

And the problem of finding a guru is very similar to the problem of finding a psychotherapist. Psychotherapists will tell you all about the training they have done and the diplomas they have. Gurus will be presented, wrapped in all sorts of titles, with stories about the lineages they hold, and which masters they trained under, and whose incarnation they are.

On the general level these things are obviously important. They signify something. And of course they exist as it were objectively, they exist in the world, and so they seem somehow to be true because they continue to exist, and nobody seems to challenge them. And then, set against that, one has one's own subjective experience. One meets the person, and one has some thoughts about whether this person is reasonable or not.

One of the helpful things that Sigmund Freud spelled out was the nature of the idealizing and the negative transference. That is to say that we project, we identify in the world around us certain qualities that we perceive as belonging to the particular people we are engaged with, and we're sure that these qualities belong to this person, when in fact they belong to some internal image which has been developed in our own childhood. Thus we transfer from our past experience an image that we are sure exists now in/as the external object. And usually we don't recognize that we are doing this. It's an unconscious phenomenon. So we get caught up in something. And in psychotherapy some use is made of this in order to help the person to understand more about the patterning of early childhood experience.

Now if you link this with the Buddhist notion of the vast ocean of karmic representations just waiting for manifestation, karma that has been accumulated in many, many past lives, then you have a very complex reality indeed. So that when you meet a guru or a teacher of any kind, and you have some positive feeling about them, it's difficult to know, whether that feeling is been generated by a true recognition of the qualities that that person has, or due simply to the constellation, the evocation of an unconscious fantasy in which one is self-seducing.

### **CHALLENGING**

Therefore it's very important, when you meet a teacher, to really challenge them, to make sure that (a) they are able to survive your challenge, (b) that you feel comfortable challenging them, and (c) that they seem to really be able to respond to the challenge, intellectually, emotionally and in terms of the integrated quality of their being.

I don't know if you have the same issue here in Germany, but in Britain people tend to be very polite. So for example two people meet together, and they start to get kind of interested in each other, and the night gets later and later, and somehow, two o'clock in the morning, they are in the same room, and their clothes are starting to be taken off. And maybe both people are thinking about condoms. He is thinking, *'Maybe I should wear a condom, but I don't know if she would like me to wear a condom.'* And she is thinking, *'I don't know if I can ask him to wear a condom.'* These are internal conversations. And because it seems perhaps a little bit intimate to talk about things like condoms, one just has sex. And then one's left with some worries and doubts, and one is thinking: *'She's so beautiful. She couldn't possibly have Aids.'*

And one could have a similar situation with a guru – both sexually and in more general psychological terms. Because unless one actually engages with the person, using language to open up communication, one doesn't know what nasty viruses and poisons are moving around under the surface. They may have a very sweet smiling face in public, but be quite cruel and malicious in private. As I suggested before, in order to enter into and practice the Dharma one needs to locate in oneself an adult position, a place of personal responsibility.

We already know that this is samsara, a realm of great suffering. We know that the course of being here is ignorance, confusion and attachment. And so it might make sense to imagine that most of the people we meet will be afflicted by ignorance, confusion and attachment. But sometimes the burden of that awareness is just intolerable.

### **POSITIVE TRANSFERENCE**

One wants to believe that somebody has got it made, somebody has understood something. Like this we fall prey to the stupidity of projecting the idealizing fantasy. But we are doing that, and we are responsible if we do that. We can't blame the guru afterwards. Because we have openly entered into that relationship. Therefore I think it's extremely important to become aware of the nature of projection, the idealizing fantasy, the nature of the phenomenon generally known in psychoanalysis as transference. We should really challenge again and again any hopes that we start to develop in ourselves about another.

### **CHIMED RIGDZIN LAMA MEETS PADMASAMBHAVA**

Chimed Rigdzin Lama often said to me that if he was to meet Padmasambhava, the first thing he would do was to hit him. Why? Because if it's the real Padmasambhava, he's got a light-body, he wouldn't mind. And he might even be pleased that he had at least one disciple



who was able to think for himself. And if it wasn't the real Padmasambhava he'd run away pretty damned quick. *(laughter)* So in that way he, C R Lama, would be safe.

Naivety is not a good basis for entering the Dharma. But that doesn't mean that one can't have faith or hope or trust. But it has to have a mature, seasoned-quality, with a little bit of scepticism, to add some spice.

Maybe there are some thoughts or questions arising from that?

## Questions and Responses

*Questioner:* Would you say that in some way it is useful to look for somebody like a teacher or a therapist who can help you on the way?

*Response:* Yes.

### OPEN-EYED FAITH

*Questioner:* Then the big question is what to do, how to find somebody who is really trustworthy.

*Response:* My own thinking would be that there may be difficulties and one helps oneself by recognizing any difficulties, rather than by trying to pretend that the situation is simple and easy.

Therefore one needs to both enquire into the qualities of the people that one is going to engage with, whether they are therapists or teachers or whatever, whilst at the same time having a heart that is open and able to engage, and to engage in a full way that is similar to faith, but is an open-eyed faith.

You have to remember that the Buddha typified his view as the middle way. And the middle way means that one is aware of extremes and doesn't pursue them. So that one doesn't go into being extremely enthusiastic and just intoxicated and lost, but at the same time one doesn't go into the other sort of extremism of a paranoid fear and thinking, *'Well, I can't rely on anyone. I have to do it all by myself.'* One needs to engage with the Dharma to benefit oneself and to benefit others, but we have to take responsibility ourselves for the nature of our engagement and not hand the responsibility for our lives over to someone else. If you do that, then you set yourself up for abuse.

One of the first things that my main teacher, Chhimed Rigdzin, said to me was that there is no enlightenment-injection. There is no kind of Buddha-substance that you can get hold of and just jag it into your arm and space out. In engaging with the Dharma one moves into a play in which all one's own limitations, confusions, false understandings come to the surface.

### HOW A PATIENT SEES THE ANALYST

Now in the theory of psychoanalysis the frame of the analytic endeavour is held in place by the analyst who usually keeps quite a withdrawn, withholding, quiet position. Analysts don't talk about their own life, they are simply there as a listening and analyzing presence for the material of the patient. Freud in his early conceptualization had the idea that when the analyst starts to respond to the patient in an involved way it's a sign that the analyst's own analysis has not been completed. Then the analyst should go back and have more analysis in order to completely clarify their understanding about their own nature, and so to arrive at

the point of being a fully analyzed analyst, at which point you would have no more negative projections inside you.

But gradually, particularly during the 1940's and 1950's, there arose an understanding that this is not the case; that even although you've been an analyst for many years, you still have your own internal psychological life that gets into the process of being a therapist. That means that one never will find an analyst who in that sense is completely pure or completely clean. They are always to a certain extent consciously and unconsciously caught up in their own stuff. And this would be the fact as recognized from the analytical point of view.

However, from the point of view of the patient it is important to believe that the analyst really is clear and understands what the patient is talking about, so that there's at least some clarity as to what the task of the therapy is. Thus the patient may feel lost yet is able to believe that the analyst is not lost in the same way.

### HOW A DISCIPLE SEES THE GURU

We have similar problem in terms of Buddha-Dharma, because there you have the teacher who, as I was saying before lunch, if they're working from the tantric point of view, are themselves engaged in 'a practice of the result'. They are trying to experience the world as if from the position of the Buddha. However they may not have attained full buddhahood. So there may be a gap between their aspiration and their actual attainment.

However for them to function symbolically as a guru in the tantric tradition they have to be available to be perceived by their students as if they were fully enlightened. Milarepa said, *'When I realized my guru was a buddha, that's the day I realized the nature of my mind.'* But we have to listen to what is actually said in that statement. He says, *'When I realized...'* When Milarepa realized that Marpa was a buddha, Milarepa realized that Milarepa was a buddha. That doesn't necessarily mean that Marpa was a buddha. When I realized that my darling, my honey, my sweetheart, was the most beautiful woman in the world, that didn't necessarily make her objectively the most beautiful woman in the world.

So there is something which has an enormously powerful subjective importance which is undeniable. But it doesn't necessarily cut a true representational field into the world.

So really it's very, very complicated. As long as we have confusion we will have confused perceptions. And if we have confused perceptions we will never know if what we perceive as true and real is actually true and real. We just won't know.

### BACK TO SUFFERING

And this takes us back to the first of the four truths, suffering. We just don't know. But one of the things that we do know is that we don't like suffering. So if not knowing means suffering it may well be that we'll try to trick ourselves into pretending that we know something.

Learning to endure and to survive uncertainty is a very important experience in psychotherapy. And it's the same in Buddhist practice. When people first start to practice meditation they very often want to know what the nature of their experience is. So they go to the teacher and tell him about all their meditational experiences in great detail and at great length, and they say, *'What does this mean? Where am I? What have I achieved?'*

Basically what they have achieved is a new object for their dualistic fantasy. But as with all subjective dualistic fantasies, they want it to be important. And part of the way of moving out of that is to have to stay for many years with a wide variety of experiences occurring without

ever really knowing what they mean, because if you make them mean something you turn them back into symbolic dualised representation.

Now a clear, important focus that we can have from the Dharma, one thing that is certain, is the nature of emptiness. Emptiness is the one thing which is undeniable and which endures, which is present at all times and in all places. And it's very, very important that one practices meditation until one has a clear sense of this open/empty dimension. Otherwise one is in the sphere of relative truth and would only experience the manufacture of dualistic representation. Until one has understood emptiness there is only relative truth.

That's why it is a struggle at first, because if we are in dualistic representation then we will experience the deity as a dualistic representation. We have no choice! We are caught up in it. So we are attempting to perceive in a way that we are actually not able to perceive. And that's very hard. There is a tension in there. And that's why it's so easy to get lost. So it's very important to be awake, to be alert and to really examine what is the nature of this experience that we are having.

### **VISUALISING THE DEITY**

So with this deity or representation one has the image of the deity as a shining presence in the clear blue sky. This creation, this development is based on having a connection through an initiation into the particular system, and as an act of faith. Then by meditating on this deity, reciting the prayer or the mantra that particularly evokes the deity, one starts to have a sense of the presence, the power of this open empty image. And then with the sense of the shining luminous quality of this deity and the rays of light coming from the deity into oneself, the tightness and rigidity of one's own ordinary sense of being a separate solid person is gradually dissolved, so that what one starts to experience is an open luminous field of light in which there are two images moving in a state of relationship.

And remember, we are praying to this deity as a tactical intervention, because we want something.

We're not simply placating these big important people because that's what convention demands. If the Queen of England was to come into this room now, I would stand up! You might sit down, but I would have to stand up because I'm programmed as a British person to stand up if the Queen comes into the room! I'm helpless in that! (*laughter*)

I think for many people, if they have a Christian background, they also have many kinds of automatic responses to that. If they're praying they have a particular set of representations, a way of making sense of who God is, or who Mary is. There is some particular frame through which the experience is understood.

### **PRAY: PLEASE COME HERE AND GIVE ME MYSELF**

So we need to try to take up a different position here: *'I'm praying to this deity because I want something.'* Now what I want from this deity is myself. So essentially we say, *'Hallo, Guru Rinpoche, please come here and give me myself.'* But in giving me myself they don't give me anything at all. What they give me is nothing, nothing-ness, openness, which is myself. So in giving me myself they take myself away.

So at the end of that meditation – *and we'll have a tea break very soon and then come back and actually engage in the meditation* – the deity comes to the top of your head, and then from the soles of their feet and the top of your head they dissolve down and down into a ball of light which then descends through the crown of your head straight down into your heart,

and then your own body dissolves into light, and then everything just dissolves into light which fades into this open blue expanse.

### **FAITH FOCUSES YOUR ENTIRE ATTENTION**

Faith is very important when you're praying. Why? Because when you have faith and devotion then you are focusing your entire attention, your entire awareness on this one figure in front of you. The whole world, all your thoughts, all your worries about relationships, money, family, what you're going to do tomorrow, all are collapsed as you intensify and intensify your fixation on this particular shape. Faith is the way of gathering all the dispersed energy that one normally has flowing out in different thoughts and feelings. All the complex desires and fears that run in different directions, the ways in which we contradict ourselves and are at war with ourselves, all of this energy is pulled together and focused on one point.

Meditation texts say a lot about 'One pointed faith', bringing everything into one point. That means that all the potential that you have in yourself for dualistic positions, all the different forms of self and other, all these possibilities are squeezed together, brought together in this real intense faith and devotion. *'There is just me, and there is just you, and I love you, and I want you, and I need you, and come and save me.'* So it's like sex. It's coming very, very close into one point of incredible intensification, so that at the end of the meditation, when the deity comes to the top of your head, there is a very simple basic presence of self and other. And then other is dissolving into self, and self is dissolving into other and light and emptiness. And the primary polarity of self and other is dissolved into a moment of openness.

### **THAT ONE MOMENT**

That's why we do the meditation. That is the purpose of doing meditation: to get that one moment. And sometimes it is very difficult to remember that, especially if we are doing these long Tibetan practices where we spend hours reading a text with millions of words and then bang!, we go through that part of the meditation without even being aware of it. – That's the spiritual equivalent of premature ejaculation, and it doesn't bring any pleasure to anyone.

So it's very important at that point of dissolving to just try and remain in that state, and of course we have to say 'try to remain', which already sets it up as if there was a dualistic operation – but that's not the case. It's a bit like if you're learning to ride a bicycle. It's very wobbly at first, and then gradually you have a sense of balance. So in the meditation in this state of openness thoughts arise, and there is a tendency to start to relate to the thought as if it was a real separate object. At that point one simply needs to just relax and move back into the openness.

So you have a moment of intense effort in praying, really mobilizing all your energy, and then you relax, just as you would in an orgasm. Just allow everything to relax, open and vast. You don't need to control anything, just let go, and if you start to come back in control, relax.

The second really important point is that after a while the phenomena of the world start to re-present themselves again very powerfully. And at that point people often think, *'Oh, the meditation is over. I've stopped meditating. I'd better have a cup of tea.'* That's the point at which one makes the difference between nirvana and samsara. One cuts off the state of openness by putting a border on it and saying *'The meditation is ended; now I'm an ordinary person again, back into life.'* The task is to take this quality of openness and make it the basis of the world one enters. So that, if you like, samsara enters into nirvana, and samsara is constantly dissolving itself in the nirvana of one's own endless openness. It's very, very easy to start conceptualizing and thinking about things, and in that way create a solid

differentiated world. And of course that happens automatically, because that's our karmic impulse, that's where we feel at home – in samsara.

So we allow ourselves to stay open in this clear way, and as phenomena arise, allowing their luminous presence to reveal itself so that they become simply like rainbows moving through this open sky of our perception. And if we start to get lost we can simply close our eyes, go back into the state of openness, and then take it out into the world again. So it is always possible to simply relax into basic openness.

And at that time there are various ways of supporting oneself: One can use a representational system, with the idea that all forms that arise are like the body of the deity, all sounds are like mantra. But again, that's an example of applying Abhidharma 'category recognition' which I was talking about before lunch. To take a form of experience, and working out what it is by placing it inside a category, may be quite helpful, but it's also a way of distancing oneself from the immediacy of dissolving back into the openness.

What I hope is from this brief overview of the essence of the Tantric practice, you have a sense that what's called into play here is not a relationship of dependence. The last thing that Guru Rinpoche would want would be to gather around him a bunch of unmindful clones. What would he do with slaves? So we don't have to be slaves. Our every aspect is an aspect of the natural manifestation of the open potential of enlightenment. An inquiring sceptical mind is also enlightened. We don't become enlightened by switching off all our thoughts but by shifting the relationship which we have with the manifestation of thought.

Okay, I think we have a tea break now, and then we will take up this prayer and go through it and do some practice together.

## Break

What I do now is give a very brief run through the Seven-Line-Prayer. There is not time to go into the details of this prayer, and so we will go across the surface of the meaning.

### SEVEN-LINE-PRAYER

This prayer, in the Nyingma tradition, is probably the most important prayer. It focuses on Guru Rinpoche who was born in the north-west of India and when he grew up, travelled around India and then went to Tibet, where he was successful in introducing the Tantric doctrines.

This prayer was actually sung before he was born, because in the north-west of India, in this land of Ugyen, or Uddiyana, there was a king, an old king, a blind old king, called Indrabhuti. And he had no son. So he was thinking, *'I'm the king, I'm very old, I'm very blind, there are many problems in the kingdom, and I have no son. So everything is going to fall apart.'* The local priests, although he paid them to perform many pujas and many ceremonies, were not successful in bringing him a son or stilling any of the problems in the kingdom. But it is recounted that a dakini arrived and taught this prayer to the priests, who then prayed with such devotion to Guru Rinpoche that he came to the kingdom, from the heart of Amitabha Buddha.

In the heart of Amitabha Buddha there is the letter Hri – a Sanskrit letter – and rays of light came out from this letter, coming down into the middle of a lake, called Danakosha Lake, in this country of Uddiyana. From out of this came a lotus, a huge lotus blossom with petals of

five colours. Then from Amitabha's heart came a small vajra – you may have seen this symbol before; it's the thing that Guru Rinpoche holds in his right hand. It's a metal, usually five-pointed, kind of small sceptre. When it hit the lotus, this vajra transformed into the form of Guru Rinpoche in the form of an eight year old boy, sweetly smiling, with little beads of sweat on his forehead.

### **FRESH LIKE A LETTUCE**

These beads of sweat weren't because he was anxious or having a panic attack at this sudden responsibility, but they were because of the absolute freshness of the quality of his being. He was just freshly unwrapped, like a lettuce.

And this quality of freshness is very important, because the mind's real nature is always fresh, it's always new, it's always alive and responsive. But it gets layered over and covered. So this way of presenting was very important. Remember, he is appearing to this king, who is a blind old man, tired out, exhausted, not at all fresh. And the king is overjoyed when he hears that this child has arrived, and adopts him as his son.

When he becomes a teenager, Guru Rinpoche decides he wants to leave home. He finds it rather difficult to think of becoming a king, settling down and holding all these responsibilities. So he sets up various situations which result in him being banished from the kingdom and being sent to live in Chittavan cemetery near Bodhgaya. There he meets the yogini called in Tibetan Lae-Kyi-Wangmo-Che, and in Sanskrit Karma Indrani Dakini. She takes him on her tongue and swallows him. He passes right through her body and exits from her vagina. However as he passed through her heart, he obtained all the necessary initiations from her.

After that he travels around India, going to different cemeteries, doing different kinds of practice. And at a certain point he is invited to go to Tibet by a monk called Santarakshita.

Santarakshita had been invited himself from India to Tibet by the king Trisong Detsen, because Trisong Detsen wanted to continue the work of his predecessor Songtsen Gampo in establishing Tibet as a Buddhist country. And in order to do this he wanted to establish a big temple at Samye. The temple was planned under Santarakshita's direction, and every day the workmen would build up the walls, but every night the local gods would come and pull the walls back down again. So there was a negative energy that was acting against the positive intention. We could see this as a national representation of some of the inner conflicts which people have referred to in questions earlier today.

Santarakshita decides he is not powerful enough to deal with these local forces and therefore invites Guru Rinpoche to come to Tibet and take care of them. So Guru Rinpoche goes to Nepal and does some practice there and then goes into Tibet. He travels around Tibet, putting his footprints and handprints on various rocks and lakes and in the sky in various places and in that way seals the demons and the local deities and forces them into a contract, to become servants of the Dharma, to work in harmony with the Dharma rather than against it.

### **THERE'S A PLACE FOR EVERYONE**

This is very important, I think. Certainly in my understanding, when Christian missionaries were travelling in various parts of the world, whenever they encountered local religions, they usually would try to defeat these religions; not only to defeat them, but to wipe them out. They were operating with an either/or frame of reference. *'Either you're with us, or you're against us, and if you're against us, we will destroy you.'* However from the Buddhist point of

view this wouldn't be necessary, because the nature of the mind is very vast. The nature of reality is very vast, and there is a place for everyone, god or demon.

The task was not to humiliate or kill these local gods and demons, but to help them to take a more realistic understanding of their own position in a changed world, so that they could also continue and maintain their territories and have their prayers said and be attended to, but in a slightly shifted focus.

This is a very important principle for our time, when we are encountering Buddhism from our culture. A real question shared, I think, by many of us here is, *"How much of myself, of my world, do I have to give up in order to have some clear relationship with the Dharma?"* This example with Guru Rinpoche illustrates, I think, how almost anything can be used to support and enhance one's position in the Dharma.

### **TERMAS REFRESH**

Anyway, Guru Rinpoche stayed in Tibet for a number of years, and during that time he gave many initiations and many teachings to various groups of people. He had an inner group of twenty-five principle disciples, and to these people he gave special teachings which were then hidden in various places in Tibet. With these particular disciples he made a connection, so that in future time when they were reborn they would be able to remember where the treasure was hidden and re-discover it and then present this teaching into the world. This is the basis for the Nyingma-tradition of treasure-doctrines or Termas, which are discovered from time to time and brought out to introduce a new edge,— not a new view, rather a re-awakened, a freshened view.

Many different things could be said about these Termas, but an important thing for us, I think, as people who are followers of the Nyingmapa, is the importance of Guru Rinpoche whose presence is never simply a historical one, something that happened a long time ago, but rather that he is ever-present.

After some years Guru Rinpoche left Tibet. He went flying on a magic horse in the south-west direction to the island, where the Rakshasas, a particular kind of demon, were living. There are various ideas about where this island is. It may be Sri Lanka, it may be somewhere else. Anyway, on this island there's a big mountain, the Copper Coloured Mountain, and on the top of this there is a palace. And when Guru Rinpoche arrived, he went into the body of the king of the demons and occupied it. He 'squatted' the king's body, so that it's really Guru Rinpoche yet he now looks like a demon. Therefore the demons go on thinking, *'This is our king.'* But somehow the king changes things every now and then. And life gets a little bit easier for the demons.

Which again is a very good symbolic example of how one can deal with people in the world. We don't have to impose our will on them and try to mould them into our desire, but we can enter into their world and then gradually, through a dialogue, on their terms, in their language, start to open things up a little bit. So Guru Rinpoche didn't die. Guru Rinpoche is still alive. This is the Nyingma-view.

### **GURU RINPOCHE'S PROMISE**

Guru Rinpoche made a promise, that every day, at sunrise and at sunset, he would come to visit those who pray to him. He would come on the rays of the rising sun and the setting sun. Working with light, purification can be achieved and there are various practices that deal with working with natural light.

So this prayer which recurs again and again in the life of Guru Rinpoche – he is prayed to again and again with this prayer – this prayer is an essential focus for evoking the presence of this spiritual force. And as I was saying before the break, this force is evoked not in order that we become devoted followers, but in order that we understand and recognize something about ourselves.

Guru Rinpoche, when he makes his promise to come every morning and every evening, is doing that not simply so that he can check out which of his followers is really paying attention to him, and then collect some kind of membership fee. But he comes radiant and shining on the rays of the sun, with his glorious body of light, in order to dissolve into our body, so that our body can dissolve into a body of light, so that we can recognize the open dimension of being. That's why he comes.

Often when people pray to Guru Rinpoche, they invite him to come, *'Please come, please come'*, and bang drums, and do all sorts of puja and read all kind of things for him to come, and then just when he is coming and he is really arriving and he's got to the top of their head, they think, *'Oh, I better hurry up through this puja and read the next page'*, Then he's going to wonder what on earth is going on. He's going to think, *'You invite me for the party, but I only get to do the dishes!'*

When we do a puja, and we offer some food and desirable things to Guru Rinpoche, he doesn't come as a hungry beggar who needs to eat this. The reason we offer food to the Buddha is so we can eat it afterwards; so that by having this blessing of the food come inside us we get some purification. It's very similar to the Catholic mass. The purpose and the function of all of these endeavours is to create this moment, this understanding, this timeless, endless moment of openness and realization. So every stage of when you do longer pujas, every stage of the puja is a movement in and around and towards the central focus of understanding, dissolving, opening, understanding, dissolving, opening... It's like an endless movement of waves. Waves rising out of the ocean, going into the ocean, out of the ocean, into the ocean... manifesting, dissolving, manifesting, dissolving...

So in this prayer, which is to evoke the form of Guru Rinpoche, one imagines Guru Rinpoche in front of one, dressed with his many robes and his big hat – you may have seen pictures of Guru Rinpoche? If you haven't seen a picture of Guru Rinpoche imagine any divine form that you like. Because Guru Rinpoche is the essence of all deities. You can see Tara as Guru Rinpoche, You can see your guru as Guru Rinpoche, any form that you like you can see as Guru Rinpoche, because the essence of Guru Rinpoche is light, and the essence of all manifestation is light. To imagine that something is not Guru Rinpoche is not to understand the nature of the luminous quality of being.

So one is visualizing him in front of oneself, and one then takes up this prayer. So I'll just say it once, and then we'll find out who knows which tunes, because there are many different tunes for reciting this. So the words are:

HUNG, UR GYEN YUL GYI NUB JANG TSHAM

PE MA GE SAR DONG PO LA

YAM TSHEN CHOG GI NGOE DRUB NYE

PE MA JUNG NAE ZHE SU DRAG

KHOR DU KHAN DRO MANG POE KOR



KHYE KYI JE SU DAG DRUB KYI

JIN GYI LAB CHIR SHEG SU SOL

GURU PEMA SIDDHI HUNG

Hung is an evocation. 'Hung' means *'Wake up, come on, guru! Come here. Do something for me.'*

I won't go through the meaning line by line, but you can read the text, and it tells you pretty much what it is. It's saying:

*'Guru Rinpoche, you are very great, you are very powerful. I love you very much. Come here and do something for me. You've got everything. Give some of it to me. But the main thing that you've got is that you know who you are, I want to know who I am. Come here, tell me who I am.'*

While reciting this, it's important to visualize as clearly as we can this presence of light in front of us. And as you're saying this, allow yourself to feel this radiant presence. If you can't visualize very clearly, it doesn't matter, but just allow yourself to have the sense of this ball of light that's open with light and flowing towards you. The rays of light dissolving into your body, removing all limits, all sins, all tightness, anything that you feel guilty or bad about, so that your own body is filling with light.

This body of light has no self-substance in it. There's no little Guru Rinpoche inside there, thinking about you and thinking how he can make a profit out of you. So despite all the things we were saying earlier this is one pure object towards which one can have an open-hearted, childlike devotion. Because its nature is openness, emptiness and light.

Pray according to your own desire, your own knowledge and your own feeling. The traditional approach is that one should pray like a child, yearning for its mother. One should pray with devotion, so that the hairs on your body stand up and tingle, so that tears come to your eyes, so that your body shakes, because this is the object of absolute longing.

This is yourself, Guru Rinpoche is a representation of yourself and by him coming and fully dissolving into you, you will recognize who you are. So he gives you the greatest gift, which is your own self. Just as a small child, if it loses its mother, becomes desperate, and runs around and around, looking for its mother, and when it can't find that mother, it loses itself. It gets hysterical and lost. Then when it finds its mother, it feels this relief, because in finding its mother it finds itself.

Now in that example the self and the mother remain separate. But in this case we long to find ourselves, we don't know who we are, because we don't understand our own nature, we wander in samsara, creating all the false thoughts that give us so much suffering. If only we could really understand who and what we are. Now we have this chance, through praying to Guru Rinpoche and dissolving into the state of openness, to recognize it. So this is of such great importance. It's not an empty ritual, something that we do because we are Buddhists. It's the very essence and core of understanding the purpose of our life.

It is also the beginning of great compassion, because the more we open to this state, the more responsive we can be, the more we can be available to others. So this is very special.

## **VISUALISE AND PRAY**

With this feeling and with this visualization we can now recite this prayer quite a few times. Then we'll stop the recitation. The moment we stop the recitation, allow your sense of this light, of this figure, depending on how clearly you visualize it, to move across to the top of your head, and as described before, dissolve down into your heart. Your whole body is already full of light. The light dissolves out into space. And then you stay in that openness as long as you can. Gradually thoughts, feelings will come back in. Just be open to the arising of these thoughts, without trying to push them away, without trying to edit things, just allow the openness and the manifestation to move together.

If you feel that you don't want to do this practice, you don't have to. Then you could just sit, doing a quiet breathing, monitoring meditation or whatever else you would like to do. Traditionally we pray with our hands held like this, in front of the heart, because it's a way of unifying the energy that's moving around through the heart; it makes the heart open. You don't need to think of anyone else. You just allow yourself to go as intensively as you can into this visualization and then the dissolving.

(practice)

So that's a practice you might like to do. It's quite simple. You don't need any particular things in order to do it. It doesn't take so very long to do, but it can be very useful.

I would like to thank Robert for all his work in translating. It's been very helpful. I have very much enjoyed meeting you and being with you on these two days. Thank you.