

The View and Practice of Trekcho

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Day Two

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Excerpts

...We have to believe that practice is worth doing. When we do practice, we usually get distracted and the mind wanders off in different directions. In order to come back to the practice, we have to believe that it is more important than the distraction. Realisation in practice is not dependent on our intellectual acuity but on what we do in the practice. We put ourselves in the way of something. Again and again you put yourself in the way of something. Like an ornithologist looking out for a rare bird... Day after day, he goes into the forest; he has some idea where this bird might be – and he waits. If he falls asleep, maybe the bird will come and shit on his head then fly away again so he can't fall asleep. He's got to be there. However if he is too restless, looking around for the bird, the distraction is going to also drive the bird away. So you have to be present with hope but without too much desire. That is to say, you have to have a soft hope. You have to have a trust: It will occur. It will reveal itself, because it is my natural condition.

...What is the mind itself? The mind and the contents of the mind are not things to be put on different shelves. When you have mind, you have the content of the mind. Whatever thoughts and feelings you have are not a problem. They are not something to be got rid of. They are how the mind shows itself.

...Speaking is the house of compassion. Speaking is relational. We speak in order to communicate with others and try to be a bit helpful. But speaking cannot reveal wisdom. Wisdom is revealed in silence; in profound absorption, in profound attention, profound opening to natural awareness. This gives rise to certain experiences which may be conveyed to other people, but of course as we try to convey them, we realise that it's never expressed quite right, so sometimes it's better to be in silence. Wittgenstein said, "Concerning the things about which we can't speak, it's better to be silent." This is very good advice.

... All buddhist cultures seem to have developed a huge aesthetic sensibility. As reliance on conceptualisation falls away, beauty then becomes very important. For example, if you go walking in Himalayan valleys, you see little stupas and they are placed in the most exquisite points. You could imagine Cézanne or Monet had been wandering there and had given some advice, "No, no, over to the left a bit, higher up a little ..." – because it's just the perfect place. The feng shui is exquisite.

REFUGE

We will begin with this practice of taking refuge; we do the refuge with the body and the voice and the mind. So with the body we put our hands together in front of our heart; when you do that, you make an energetic circle that runs through the heart and it's a way of unifying the energy in the body. We bring ourselves together, because we are often very dispersed out into the world. Of course this is also used as a normal greeting in India, so it's a way of honouring the other person. It's also a way of showing that you are not going to attack the other person, because your hands are now bound together.

With our voice we recite in a slow, open way, rectifying the balance between sound and meaning. Usually when we are speaking, or when we are listening to someone else, the focus of our attention is on the meaning being conveyed but when we are reciting in this way we are trying to hear sound as sound. We are trying to see that sound is open and ungraspable and yet on it and through, it we integrate meaning, since we are using words which have a meaning. But the sound comes first. So this is a very useful practice in our daily life when we are talking to other people. Here in our throat we have a vibratory system which takes the wind, which belongs to the world. We breathe in then as we breathe out, the air is set in motion and it takes on these sound qualities which are shaped by the mouth and in this way we offer the basis for interpretation by the other person. If the other person doesn't have access to the interpretive matrix, if they don't understand our language, then they are not going to know what's going on. So the primacy of sound is vital. Again, it's a way of lessening or softening our over-reliance on conception, on intellectual interpretation, on the cognitive function – that the cognitive function comes *after* the direct experience of the unfolding of our existence. This is one of the reasons for reciting in this way.

With the mind, we focus it. You can focus it in various ways. You can focus it into the meaning of the words – here we recite it in Tibetan and so it can take a while to learn the meanings of these words – but more particularly the intention is twofold. The first two lines say, *“I am going to take refuge now and in all my future lives in the buddha, the dharma and the sangha.”* This means that I'm taking up an orientation. I'm taking up a trajectory of intention, a direction for my existence. This is what I am about. This is the fundamental bias or direction for my existence. The second two lines express the bodhisattva vow, saying that on the basis of generosity, the virtue of sharing and giving, and of all the other virtues – which means the six or ten *paramitas*, the transcendent virtues of generosity, morality, patience, diligence, mental stability, wise discernment and so on – by developing these many virtues I will develop the qualities which are required to help other beings.

So, for myself I'm taking refuge which gives me an orientation, and for others I'm going to develop the qualities necessary to help them. When we take refuge in the buddha, we take refuge in the buddha nature. The buddha nature is the quality of the mind which is emptiness. It is the lucidity, the clarity, which is there prior to conceptual interpretation. This is essentially the *dharmakaya*, the mind of all the buddhas and it is the true nature of our own mind.

When we take refuge in the dharma, the dharma is the teaching which spreads out into the world. It's a communication. When we study buddhist books or attend buddhist teachings, we are engaged in a dialogue of some kind; we are communicating and building up a sense of connection. This is the

function of the *sambhogakaya*, the radiance of the buddha's mind or the way the buddha compassionately manifests – a pure reality, like a pure buddha-land or a mandala. So when we are taking refuge in the dharma, we bring into our mind and our body and our voice a clarity of not relying on the habitual formations of our own thought.

When we take refuge in the sangha, which is the group of practitioners of dharma, this represents the *nirmanakaya*, which is the way the buddha manifests into the world. It is how we come into our embodiment with our body, our voice and our mind, how we are with others. So being with other people involves an attention to how the other person is. Sangha essentially means 'meeting'. Sangha in Hindi, and in Sanskrit also, means 'a coming together', a joining together of various forces. So when we meet other people, we join with them.

In north India they have the great *sangam* which is at Allahabad, where the Ganga and the Yamuna, two sacred rivers of India, meet together. At the point where these rivers meet, there is a third secret river which arises under the water and is called the Sarasvati. Sarasvati is the goddess of wisdom in the hindu tradition. It is like that in our existence, if we are open to the other person and we attempt to connect with them as they are, then some third unifying quality seems to arise, which is the co-emergence. So instead of having to work out how the other person is and how therefore we should speak to them, when we have two polarities that we are trying to unite, by holding the two together at the same time, simultaneously, you have the co-emergence. You *find* yourself saying.

Sangha is the possibility of starting to trust immediacy and spontaneity as true ethics. Now for most of us this is very radical. When we are children our parents tell us to be careful and look before we rush into things. But in the dzogchen tradition too much thinking is seen as poisonous. And it's a possibility that immediacy, an immediacy which is not mediated through the ego's habitual preoccupations and therefore is not an impulsivity is just flowing through us as part of the interactive field and that this is the basis of the *nirmanakaya*, which is the manifestation of the buddha in the world. The buddhas don't have to think what they are going to do; they find themselves in the right place. So in that sense it's a bit like jazz improvisation, in which only by forgetfulness of one's own position, of one's own intention, can there be a co-emergence of the movement together. When you stay inside your own agenda, your own notion of what has to be done or what should be done, you are going to interrupt that possibility.

Of course this requires a great deal of trust. This requires that I'm not going to prepare in advance. I'm going to allow it to happen – which is very naked, it's very exposed. What will happen if I arrive and nothing will be there? Many people have anxiety dreams in which they find themselves walking down a street with a naked body and they think, "*Oh no! I've not got any clothes on, I'm naked!*" In English we talk about re-covery and in mental health systems they speak of people re-covering after a breakdown. What do they do? They cover themselves up again. Maybe the reason they had the breakdown was because they were so covered up! Authenticity is very dangerous; because authenticity means that I have to trust that I will find myself being okay. Which does not mean of course that I will get it right in the formal sense. However if we make a move and it's a *mis*-take, that is to say I've taken it the wrong way, then we trust the possibility of the next moment, which is that I can take it again! Life as an unfolding process means there is always another chance. There is always another chance.

Buddhism's problem with attachment is that we enter into a judgement about the situation and come to a concretisation, a final evaluation, *"Ah! I did something really wrong; this is terrible!"* We put the full stop in at that point and we freeze it, *"This is a really bad thing; I did a bad thing, therefore I am a bad person."* With this heavy conclusion you start to collapse inside. And if you collapse inside, how are you going to be able to come back the next moment? So it's not that you shouldn't apologise if you make a mistake, but we have to work into the next moment and the next moment. If we keep importing the problem from the past into the current situation, it will always become very heavy. Which is why in life the more we can be alert in the moment, be connective and adjust when we make mistakes, then when we say 'the wrong thing', do 'the wrong thing', then the next moment can be a new beginning, and a new beginning, and a new beginning...

This is the basis of trust – not that things will be perfect in a formal sense of *"I will never cause trouble to anyone else, I will always make happy the people with whom I am connected."* That would be impossible. But what we *can* do is avoid building up mental pictures of ourselves and other people, so that we don't go down the path of thinking, *"Oh, you broke your promise before and now I know I can't trust you again."* or *"Oh, I tried that once and I couldn't do it so I won't try again."* and so on. Such very solid, substantial statements freeze the world.

Dzogchen is about relaxing, keeping relaxing, about a new beginning, and a new beginning. Each moment is experienced as exactly fresh, unless you import the past into it. As a non-dual approach to meditation and to life, dzogchen is concerned with the immediacy of the present moment and trying to step out of this weaving between the past, the present, and the future. Of course this is very hard, because we have a lot of tendencies to develop a strong story.

Essentially the sangha or the *nirmanakaya* means to be available, and to be available, and to be available... To be available in *this* moment in an open way means that the last moment has to be gone. You can't have the last moment and this moment together if you want this moment to be open. If I pick up my pen, then immediately my hand is imprisoned; it's imprisoned by the pen. The freedom of the hand to do the many things a hand can do, is limited as soon as it has something in it. It's the same with the mind; we get in a bad mood, we get distracted, we become caught up and confused with anger, pride, jealousy, and so on. These are pre-occupations. That is to say: we are occupied; we are filled up before this moment. And when you do that, how will you be open? You cannot offer hospitality to the world in the moment if you are carrying the past. So this is something quite radical because usually we are saying that my safety, my security, is dependent on bringing the knowledge from the past into the present moment and applying it in order to manage and control a situation. To bring about the outcome which is the one that I desire.

So there you have the trajectory that the line of development of the ego's intention is editing out many possibilities, and it's also functioning as a set of clothing that covers us in our assumptions and so is quite comforting. If you take this off, you have to trust. In the christian tradition one prays, *"Give us this day our daily bread."* Not, *"Give us tomorrow's bread as well"*, but give us today's bread. May we have what we need, now. Not the accumulation, because each day is new, each moment is fresh. Capital accumulation is highly problematic in many ways. The richest people in the world, what do they do with billions of resources? They have to move them around and get other people involved. Excess is very difficult since you cannot have excess without having lack. The two always go together,

and when you have lack, you have disturbance, the disturbance of hunger. When you have excess, you have disturbance, the disturbance of resources moving around in any direction. In the papers in London last week there was a report of two Russians who were in a night-club in London and they had a competition that started at midnight to see who could build up the biggest bar bill. And one of them managed to achieve a bill of £65,000 in two hours! This is the problem of excess. If you have excess, you have to do nonsense with it. Just nonsense. And if you have lack, then you have a problem too.

That's why the buddha said that if you want to practise the dharma, it's best to be in the middle. If you are very poor, you are born with a lot of hunger and you feel you've missed out. There is a lot of envy, other people have this and other people have that. This empty hunger can be a displacement from settling in yourself, because you always need more, you always need some special deal to make up for the lack of the past. This is difficult. If you are very rich, you are used to getting everything very easily which means that the hard work required to do the practice becomes difficult. Whereas if you are in the middle you have enough pleasure to know that you can make use of pleasure, but you have enough pain to know that you need to be careful.

So we can now recite together, slowly. In front of yourself you can visualise the buddha surrounded by dharma-books, surrounded by many monks and nuns if you like; or you can just imagine a clear open blue space within which there are many rainbow-lights moving around, because this is the radiance of the five elements, the five wisdoms, the pure forms of the buddha.

སངས་རྒྱལ་ཚེས་དང་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་མཚོག་རྣམས་ལ།

SANG GYE CHO DANG TSOG KYI CHO NAM LA
Buddha dharma and sangha of supreme (plural) to
assembly best

To the Buddha, Dharma and Assembly of the excellent

བྱང་ཆུབ་བར་དུ་བདག་ནི་སྐྱབས་སུ་མཆེ།

JANG CHUB BAR DU DAG NI KYAB SU CHI
enlightenment until I refuge for go

I go for refuge until enlightenment is gained.

བདག་གིས་སྤྱིན་སོགས་བསྐྱིས་པའི་བསོད་ནམས་ཀྱིས།

DAG GI JIN SOG GYI PAI SO NAM KYI
I doing generosity other perfections doing, practicing virtue through

Through the virtue of practicing generosity and the other perfections

འགྲོ་ལ་ཕན་སྱིར་སངས་རྒྱལ་འགྲུབ་པར་ཤོག།

DRO LA PHEN CHIR SANG GYE DRUB PAR SHO
all beings to benefit in order to buddha accomplish may it happen

May I attain buddhahood for the benefit of all beings

I go for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Assembly of the excellent

Until enlightenment is gained.

Through the virtue of practicing generosity and the other perfections

May I attain buddhahood for the benefit of all beings.

Trekcho is cutting, but not cutting away

So now we will start to look at dzogchen and we are going to focus particularly on the aspect of it known as *trekcho*. *Trekcho* which means ‘cutting’ or ‘cutting through’ or ‘deeply cutting’. It means to cut away the identification with patterns of interpretation so that the immediacy and the simplicity of what is arising can be revealed to us. When the subject and the object come together – and they function in our experience as the experience of real entities – this is an active, or a performative, or a dynamic moment. Something is coming into being. It’s coming into showing itself in a particular way. It is not there in a self-existent manner.

In *trekcho* we are always cutting things. However we are not cutting them *away*. It’s not that we are saying that samsara is like some terrible growth in the body that a surgeon has to cut out. Samsara is not something to be removed. It’s something which has to be allowed to have its own actuality. That is to say, the ego’s job is to interfere, to cause trouble, to fiddle about with things and not leave them alone.

You know how sometimes we get in a bad mood, something has happened to upset us? We go on and on about it. We come back to it again and again even though we know this doesn’t improve anything, but somehow we feel a need to say, *“This shouldn’t have happened.”* Lots of things *shouldn’t* happen, but they *do* happen.

So actuality means staying with what *actually* happens and observing what that means. When something happens, it arises and it passes. Always. There is not one thing that has ever arisen and then stayed there forever. Impossible.

Language is changing, particular forms and usages of language. Many languages used to have high forms, polite forms, for speaking with people from a high social status. These have tended to wash away with the increasing democratisation. There are changes in spelling; changes in script in German, for example, to make it simpler and easier of access. French language too; people are always trying to change it, to make it more easy and then the big Académie Française protests and says, *“No, you are insulting Voltaire, we must return to the proper grammar.”* But nobody understands grammar any longer; nobody is confident to write anything in French because they are bound to make mistakes, it’s very difficult...

So in that way we can see that the things we take for granted don’t exist. Taking something for granted, taking it as if it truly exists, is the big mistake. However the way we free ourselves from that is to attend to the actuality of the moment of the event. To be with the event as it reveals itself and then vanishes. When we see the vanishing of the event, then you have ‘cutting through’. The ‘cutting through’ is not something that we, the ego-agent, have to do. We simply put ourselves *in the way of* seeing that it is happening.

For example if you had an old-fashioned 8 mm. home-camera system, you could run a little movie of people on holiday, and you get taken in. You see the children running around on the beach and having a good time. Then you can slow it down and see it frame by frame by frame. It is the speed at which this celluloid is running through the point of the illuminating lamp which creates the illusion of continuous action. It is an illusion. There *is* no continuous action. What you have is a series of separate frames. We even have little books which you flip to some action, running down the stairs or whatever. You just flip the pages and you see it actually seeming to happen. This is an illusion.

And this is again where we have to consider our intelligence. We are very smart. We are very well trained; we all had years and years and years of education. Which means we are quick. We are quick to turn the pages. Which means we are quick 'to get it', to get something, to apply our interpretation. When you are a small child and you're having to learn spelling, it's usually quite a painful process, because most languages have some degree of irregularity in spellings whether it's with verbs or nouns. And so children have some tears coming out of their eyes, because they don't understand, *'But why is it like this?'* And the big people say, *"I don't know. It just is."* – *"But it's stupid!"* – *"Hm, maybe, but anyway, if you spell it the other way you'll get in trouble at school."* At that point the child can see something about the spelling but the big person is saying, *"Don't see that! If you see that it's a bad way of spelling, you'll be in trouble. You have to pretend that an irregular spelling makes sense. Then you will get a good mark in school."* In this way being stupid is the basis for intelligence. Being intelligent is the basis for stupidity. It's a real paradox in life, isn't it?

Massage the dharma into ourselves and massage ourselves into the dharma

In *trekcho* we start by looking at the immediacy of our experience and seeing how it's constructed. As a basic preliminary we engage in the investigation of the nature of our mind. Many of you have done this practice before; it's something which is very, very important to do until you get a definite taste or a real experience because there is no point in just having a lot of dzogchen theory. This is not about theory; theory is unhelpful. It may be a pleasant hobby – buying a lot buddhist books to read, sitting in a café talking about who said this and why they said that – but it's not very useful. Maybe you could get a job in a university but generally speaking it will cause you more trouble.

We have to massage the dharma into ourselves and also massage ourselves into the dharma so that this way of viewing reveals itself. This is not the same as learning something artificial. For example, you might decide, 'I am going to learn Italian.' So you massage Italian into yourself by listening to some tapes or reading grammar books or going to a class, and then maybe you go on holiday to Italy and you keep trying to practise speaking Italian and so you try to massage yourself into conversations with Italians, in a café or in the market. The language then goes in two directions and gradually you become more and more competent at speaking Italian. This is something artificial. This is learning, which is useful, but it's adding something on. It's again covering up, or extending the range of, your manifest possibility.

What we are concerned to do here is to see: what is the basis out of which we manifest? What is our own mind? We have many ideas about who we are, we have many ideas about our identity, the purpose of our lives, how we want to live, where we want to live, who we want to live with, and so on. All of these are constructs. If we are lucky we will be able to bring many of these hopes or patterns into fulfilment; if we are unlucky it will collapse. Because these are constructions. The

question is, “*Who is the constructor?*” Who, in the language of the *Dharmapada*, is the builder of the house? What is the mind itself, which reveals to us the various ways in which we construct our self-identity? In this we are not looking at the content of the mind, we are not being fascinated by the semantic content of our thoughts, the intensity or diversity of the tonality of our feelings, the nature of our sensation as hot, cold, pleasant, unpleasant, and so on; we are not entering into an evaluation of what’s there, but rather we are observing the process of being present.

Now – you can observe your hand. You can put your hand out in front of you and you can look and you see fingers and a thumb. We know how to do this. We know how to observe a motorcar. When you are going to cross the road you see a car coming down the road and you become quite good at working out the speed that the car is going at, and whether you can get across the road before the car comes, or whether you have to wait. This is a very important survival skill. We are involved in evaluation. So there is an observation of some *thing*.

But here we are observing the one who is observing. So we are looking for the self-luminosity of the mind itself. That is to say, ‘The only way to see your mind is to *be* your mind in the moment of its own self-luminous clarity.’ So if you go looking for your mind as if it’s an object, what you will find is always thoughts, feelings and sensations. Any conclusion you come to will always be made out of thoughts, feelings and sensations, because they exist in our mind in the form of objects. This is the content of our mind, the stuff which is there, in the moment, passing through and then gone.

We know how to do this. We are very, very deeply trained in how to do this. Not only that, but when we do that activity of thought-construction, we create value which can then be released out of our mouth, or through our pen, or fingers on a keyboard – and that value can be taken into the world and exchanged for money or status or some form of relatedness. The mind itself is not a commodity, though. You can’t trade it. It has no market-value at all. Being present and aware doesn’t buy a bag of beans. Being able to blah-blah-blah about the dharma at least gets me my airfare paid. It’s like that, isn’t it? You get something for words, for just being present. Maybe somebody puts, you know, 10 Pfennig in a little bowl in front of me... It’s very important to see that.

One of the difficulties, but also dangers, in letting go of our fixation on the content of the mind is that we drop out of social currency. What we call ‘society’ is an endless field of interactions of value creation on the basis of transactions of particular commodities. So, if you want to do a particular kind of job, usually you have to get a certificate. You might be very, very experienced and skilled in doing something, but if you don’t have the right piece of paper you may not have access to doing that job. There are plenty of people who get a piece of paper that lets them be a psychotherapist, but I wouldn’t trust them. But they have a piece of paper. And there are other people who are very soft, very attuned, who are *there*, – but they don’t have a piece of paper. A piece of paper doesn’t really guarantee anything except that you get a job. That is to say, we live in a transactional world and the currency is thought constructions, assumptions, patterns of identification and so on. These prove to other people that I have a value which is useful to you. And if you make use of this value, that will be helpful – be helpful to me and be helpful to you. “*Fair exchange is no robbery*”, we say and if there is a fair exchange of value, then both people feel satisfied. So we have to be aware when we practise meditation that we are going to leave that economy of constructed value and see what is there when we let go of construction.

Tibetan has many words that get translated, in English, as 'natural' or 'nature'. 'Nature' is a problematic word, in English anyway. Many people would say that there is no 'nature'. Everything is a concept. Nature outside – the trees and so on – these trees were planted by people, by a forestry business. Then a big truck arrives, men get out and – ssssss, ssssss, ssssss – and they cut it all down; they put it on the back of their truck, they take it away and they sell it for money. These trees are there because of human intention and not there out of 'nature'. In this whole world nowadays, there is almost no 'nature' left, because human beings need to run around interfering with everything.

So, the 'natural state', what is that? It means something uncontaminated by human thought. Human thought is not necessary. What do human beings do with their thought? They develop all kinds of plans – plans to build big dams, plans to save the world, plans to invade other countries, plans to feed the poor and so on. We are constantly intervening and changing. So much foreign aid has gone into Africa and yet so many African economies still don't work very well. Why is that? Because it's very difficult to help other people. Yes, it's very easy to come up with an idea of *how* you will help other people, but when you try to implement it, the plan doesn't quite fit what is actually there. Why? Because people lie and cheat. *"We go there to help the people."* But the people in the government take a lot of the money and put it in their pocket and put it in Zurich. Why do they do that? Because they can! Because they can. *"But they shouldn't do it! Couldn't we just tell them – please, don't do that!"* No, because they are powerful people and if you are a powerful person, what do you need to have? You need to have a big house, you need to have a big car, you need to have some armed guards of course. So in order to have that, you have to have money. And your children need to go to school in Europe. Of course. It would be shameful if they didn't. How can you be the president and have your children go to the local school? It's impossible.

You can see the logic of how signifiers are endlessly weaving themselves together in this semiotic web – one thing leads to another, to another, to another, to another.

There is no end to samsara but neither is there a beginning

Buddhist texts say, *"There is no end to samsara."* and dzogchen texts say, *"Samsara has never begun."* It's exactly the same idea. No end to samsara means that if you stay on the level of complexity, one thing will always go on and interact with another and another and the picture will get more and more complicated. To say, *"Samsara has never begun"*, means that if you stay with the simplicity of the natural state, all of this energy is simply patterns arising and passing, which establish nothing at all. These two things are both true. They are simultaneously true. This is the nature of non-duality.

So in *trekcho*, 'cutting' means to allow the natural liberation of phenomena. We do this by cutting away the habit that we have of having to make sense, of having to make value. The ego, as the nexus in ourselves of the tendency to generate meaning, has to be put into question. We are very, very busy. Why are we so busy? What is the nature of the necessity for busyness?

When I was at university in Edinburgh, because I was not very devoted to my study, I used to wander around in the library and I used to go up to the fourth floor in the library where the archives and rare books were stored. It was completely desolate, nobody was ever there. There were thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands of books on christian theology, because Edinburgh used to be a big training place for missionaries. I would walk up and down these stacks, looking at these dusty

books. It was a cemetery of passion. People had written these sermons, these explanations of the love of Jesus Christ and so on... and now it's gone. But at the time that they were writing, a hundred and fifty years ago, this was a live currency. This could get you a job, it could get you food, it could get you a position. It was a social transaction – inside the metaphor of that time. Now churches are closing and not many people want to become preachers, or become ordained in the Catholic Church. So this is an example of how whole constructions come into being and then close down. When you are inside them, they seem meaningful. But what was the point?

Well, it had meaning for those who believed in it. This is why when we examine our own mind, we are essentially examining our belief system. This includes our belief that we are entitled to be respected. Why should anyone respect us? Why shouldn't people kill us? What is our value? This is a very important question in life. Many people are murdered in many countries all across the world because of how they are identified. That identification at one time may have meant friendship, inclusion and being part of something but when the political situation changes, the same identification can be a death-warrant; if you belong to that group you will be killed.

This is what we have to look at, to see the contingent, the relative, the interactive nature of meaning. As long as we sit inside the belief that our own construction of our self and other people is true, then it's very difficult to make any progress. We are all very sensitive; people say things which upset us and then we become defensive. This is very normal, but of course it's very difficult to step out of that, because we feel, *"This shouldn't happen! Other people shouldn't make us feel bad. If other people were more careful we wouldn't feel bad."* That is a fair enough kind of belief, but life doesn't happen like that. Always people will say things which hurt us. It is just inevitable.

So, pain is very important in buddhism, because pain tells you that something has run across your sense of entitlement. We get hurt and upset because the shape that we want to have about who we are and our importance in the world and our value has been put into question by someone else's behaviour. We can go into emotional reactivity or we can start to wonder, *"Why would I ever imagine that somebody would always be thinking that my particular construction is the main thing which is occurring in the world at any one time?"* This is what we encounter in meditation.

When you sit with your own mind you are not interacting with other people. You are experiencing the factors out of which you construct your sense of self, and as long as that process of self-construction seems valid and important, and indeed *vital* to your continued existence, it will be very difficult to realise its illusory nature. So that's what we are concerned with in the practice of *trekcho*.

GURU YOGA USING THE LETTER A

So the first thing we do is some meditation and we will do it through the general guru-yoga system. Guru-yoga means identification with the pure nature. We can do this in the space in front of us. About two arms' length just hovering in space we imagine a white letter Tibetan letter "ཨ" or you can imagine a capital "A" – surrounded with rainbow light, five-coloured light which represents the five wisdoms. If you can't visualise clearly it doesn't matter, just open yourself into the space, because space itself is the primordial ground of purification. Since it is the basis out of which everything arises and into which everything vanishes – the great space of existence.

Imagine that this letter “ॐ” embodies all the values and all the qualities of all the buddhas and then we make the sound of “Aa” three times and as we do that, we bring together all our energy into this empty sound of “Aa” and in making the sound we release the tensions in our body, in our voice, in our mind and open into integration with space. We sit with this letter “ॐ” for a few seconds, then it dissolves and we are just resting in space. What we call our body is here; what we call the room is here, because our eyes are open. We are not staring at particular things, we are not entering into thoughts and conceptions about what is there, we are just being present with the entire field of experience.

Being present is not being present as myself, thinking about what is going on, but it’s just allowing the thoughts and feelings and sensations to arise, and the colours and the shapes and the noises – maybe you see other people’s bodies moving and so on – just staying open and open and open. The nature of the mind is open receptivity. The traditional image is the mirror – the mirror is always open, it shows what is there. So we sit in this mirror-like state, allowing whatever is occurring. Then, after some time, just very gently have a look or try to catch where the mind is resting. Is it resting on something? Does it rest on some aspect of your body, is there a sensation which feels like you? Some people might feel it in their head or in their heart or in their shoulder. Does it seem outside, does it seem inside...?

Whenever you come to a conclusion about this, whenever you seem to have some definite sense of where the mind is, just stay with that and see what happens. If your conclusion vanishes, maybe it’s not how it really is. If, when you see something, it is continuous because it is the actuality of the situation, then maybe it’s true. So just again and again observe: what is the mind? We all have a mind, we are here, but this is the mind not as the process of conceptualisation, which is the movement of the energy of the mind, but the mind as the basic awareness which reveals the movement of the energy of the mind and all the forms which arise from it, whether they are outer or inner.

[Meditation]

How the mind is like the mirror

This is a very fundamental practice that we return to again and again and if we really engage with it, it can show us something very important. For example – when you came into this room, especially perhaps on the first day, you were looking around at the different mats and wondering where you might sit. You might notice the altar and the thrones and various things. It’s very unlikely that when you came into the room you saw the space. The eye is caught by the functionality of aspects of the room as they relate to one’s own interest or desire. The room actually is the space, within which all of these functions are possible. Without the space, these things wouldn’t be there – there wouldn’t be mats and altars and thrones and flowers. But the space is ignored because of our fixation on the stuff which is in the room.

In the same way with the mirror – when we look in the mirror, we notice the reflection, we don’t see the mirror; the mirror itself is invisible but shows itself through the reflection. In the same way, when you sit in the meditation and you look for the mind, what you see is the thought, the feeling and the sensation. It’s not wrong, it’s not bad, you don’t want to get rid of that – they are there because of

the mind. This is what the mind shows itself as, which is why in the dzogchen tradition we don't try to improve the mind, we don't try to develop the mind, we don't try to get rid of bad thoughts and replace them with good thoughts – we simply enter into the state of hospitality which is the nature of the mind and stay present with whatever is arising in it.

The mind itself is not a thing that you get. Just as you look in the mirror and you “get” the reflection; you see the reflection of your own face or the room behind you. You can get that, you can say something about it – but what can you say about the mirror? There is nothing to say about it. It doesn't show itself. You can say something about the frame of the mirror or the surface of the mirror, that it needs cleaning; or even the back of the mirror, if it's an old silver mirror, that it's fading away, but the “mirrorness” of the mirror, the actual mirror, is not something that you can articulate anything about. And the mind is exactly the same.

If you go looking for the mind as if it's a thing, you will get the mind, but the bit of the mind that you will get is the energy of the mind which is the manifestation that shows itself as thoughts, feelings and sensations. This is not the wrong thing to get – it's how you get it, because if you see that when you get a thought you get the presence which reveals the thought. The presence is you in the moment that you are present with the thought. But you are not present as *anything* – you are present as the thought.

In the moment that a reflection arises in the mirror, the reflection fills the mirror. There isn't a mirror apart from the reflection. The reflection and the mirror are non-dual; they are not two separate things. So we are pervaded by, we are filled with, our experience as it arises in the moment, just as this quality of energy called '*dang*' It refers to how if you take a crystal ball and you put it on some red cloth, it will look a bit red; if you put it on a blue cloth it looks a bit blue. The crystal ball is translucent, that is to say light passes through it and it takes on the colouration of its environment. Likewise when you are sitting in the practice, sometimes your mind is clear, sometimes your mind is foggy, sometimes the mind's excited, sometimes you have old boring thoughts, sometimes you think, *“I don't know what I'm doing, I don't know what meditation is, I don't know why I'm here.”* Many different thoughts can arise; this is what you've got.

This is the reflection in the mirror. It's not that you need to get rid of this and get another kind of thought. Every thought that you get, whether it seems good or bad, simply has the status of the reflection in the mirror, or like a mirage, or a rainbow in the sky. The main thing is to see that this is manifesting because there is a presence, or an awareness, which shows it. This presence is not something standing in relation. I'm sitting here in this room and I look out and I see you. I see you across the distance between us, because my perception of you is based on my eye being able to see you. For some people I see the whole face, for other people I see only half the face because someone else's head is in front of them. That's the view that I have from here. *I am observing you.* I am observing my hand... I am observing the glass of water...

If you look like that in the meditation you will get nothing so the thing to do is see whatever is arising without identifying with any particular arising as being the subject. That is to say, subject and object forms arise together, but presence is neither subject nor object. This is very important.

Awareness is not individual subjectivity; it's not an aspect of your personality. It is the clarity which shows the entire field – the field of subject and object. So the mind sometimes looks like a subject and sometimes it looks like an object. It is neither a subject nor an object but it can look like that, just as the mirror can show many different things. However if you grasp at the content of the mind as being the mind itself, you get deluded. If you try to get rid of the content of the mind in order to find the mind itself, then also you get deluded because the content of the mind and the mind are always together.

That is why in some meditation practices they try to slow down the level of thought until there is no thought at all. What's the point of that? No thought at all? You can't say 'hello', you can't say 'good-bye'. You can't say anything. It's useless, because we live in the world with other people. If you want to connect with other people, you have to say something. Who is the one who says something? *I* say something. What is the nature of 'I'? Open space.

The open space is not a personal possession of 'I', it's not something I *have*, like a pen or a watch. Awareness is first. This is why in the tradition they always have these words that refer to 'primordial'. In Tibetan they say *kadag* or *ka*, which means 'from the very beginning'. It means that awareness is there before the content of awareness. The mirror is there before the reflection. The potential of the mirror is not dependent on the arising of the reflection. So, your mind itself is just open. And this openness shows itself as subject and object.

If you are in the cinema and it's a good film, you are not sitting in your seat looking at the movie. You are *in* the movie. Right? You are *in* the movie. The object *is* the subject. Whereas if it's a terrible movie, you are sitting in your seat thinking, "*Why did I waste the money?*" Because you have no connection you are returned into yourself. So we don't want to merge in the object; neither do we want to stand apart. Boredom or distaste separates us from the object and fascination binds us into the object. These are the two extremes. The middle way is the mirror, which reveals the subject and the object as they interact. Whether it's boring or exciting, good or bad – these are temporary formations. The other and the self arise together.

In the zen tradition, they often say, 'When the mind moves, the ten thousand things arise.' It means that when subjectivity comes into being, everything in the world appears, because these are the interpretations of the mind. In the same way, when we engage in the particularity of our self, then we have liking and not liking and so on. It's just like that. We have to allow the space of these possibilities, but our experience is the field. Each of us is sitting here with the sense of being in our skin-bag, with the sense of having our individual existence, but what do we see? We can't look up our own nostril. We can't look into our own ear. What we see is other people. Other people are our experience. You are my world. You are what I get. We always get something which is not us. Always. This is it. The object, the other, and the self arise together. They are not two separate things. It's not that *I* see *you*. No, *I* experience *I*, and *I* experience *you*. The 'I' which is me, myself, my experience in my body and the 'I' which is awareness look similar but individual consciousness and awareness are not the same. Individual consciousness is self-referential; it always has a feedback-loop confirming that I am the one who is the owner or possessor of the experience.

Awareness has no ownership. Like the mirror it just shows. This is the fundamental nature of the enquiry that we return to again and again: to relax and open into the state of awareness which

doesn't block consciousness, which doesn't block any object, but allows them to arise and pass. When you get caught up in something, the one who gets caught is consciousness; is ego. Ego or consciousness is the energy of the mind.

Energy wraps itself around energy and makes new patterns. The mind itself never gets involved. That's why it is said, 'pure from the very beginning.'

OK, so now we will have a break and when we come back we can start to look at some fundamental points.

[Break]

TULKU TSORLO'S TREKCHO COMMENTARY: VIMALAMITRA'S SEVEN FUNDAMENTAL POINTS

We will start now to look at some of the basic ideas of *trekcho* as presented in the teaching notes to a commentary written by Tulku Tsorlo, who was the main teacher of my teacher, Chhimed Rigdzin. It brings together many traditional readings of this aspect of 'cutting' or 'cutting through'. He begins his introduction by looking at seven points which are set out by Vimalamitra. Vimalamitra was one of the early dzogchen masters, who brought together many writings and wrote many instructions on dzogchen which are still studied and practised in Tibet today. So I will go through these seven basic points because they give an orientation to this path.

We have to remember when we are reading this, that the presentation of these ideas is intentional. He is wanting to bring about an orientation in the minds of the people who study this so that they should be able to go into the path. So – whatever is said is not 'true'. This is the fundamental basis of buddhism: that the actual situation cannot be spoken. The *prajnaparamita*, the transcendent wisdom, cannot be said, it cannot be expressed in any way. Whatever we say is an approximation, and these approximations will always be influenced by particular belief systems that might include rivalry with other schools. For example some teachers of dzogchen spend a lot of time pointing out that nobody else teaches the pure dzogchen, that everything else is a bit suspicious, but trust me... Other people teach through more analysis of the links and relationships across. The intention is the same – to orient your mind towards the path – but the style of teaching represents the particular personalities of these teachers, whether they are more located in the family of anger, in the family of pride, in the family of jealousy and so on. If you recognise the nature of your infection, it can become an *inflection*, that is to say: it can be a tilt or a turn which is not so poisonous. If you don't recognise it, it can take you into a lot of dogmatic conflict and in the history of Tibetan buddhism there has certainly been a lot of fighting between different interest groups.

When we read these texts and study them – especially when we are doing it at several steps removed through our European languages which involves a lot of transposition of technical terms with the de-contextualisation of kinds of meaning – we have a difficulty. We want to use the words to open our heart – because if the heart doesn't open, we don't get much progress – but at the same time we need to have a clear head to think about the problematics of this transfer of knowledge. Knowledge *about* something. The actual state is not something that you can know, it's non-cognitive or precognitive; it's, if you like, a quality of being. Of course the word 'being' is highly problematic in

European languages. Being can be seen as something essentially poisonous and many writers say that we have to go beyond metaphysics and ontology into the field of ethics. They say that ethics is first philosophy or that ethics is the ground, and the primordial otherness of the face of the other is the only basis for proceeding in life. However, what we are confronted with, moment by moment, is the fact that we exist.

In Buddhism there is a lot of critique – Nagarjuna would say that there is neither existence nor non-existence. Who said that? Nagarjuna said it. How do we know Nagarjuna said it? Because at one time, living in India, he existed and he wrote it. So for him to say, *“There is no existence”* is manifestly nonsense. He existed, but he didn’t exist as *Nagarjuna*. Nagarjuna is a name applied to the existence of... – of what? Of that particular illusory phantom form. Now you can say an illusion doesn’t really exist. But of course neither does it not exist. But it *does* exist.

When you go to the cinema and you see a movie, it’s not real. Especially if you look at a cartoon all the characters have been drawn in a studio and they don’t exist; you can’t find these creatures, Donald Duck and so on, You can’t find them anywhere. But they exist. They exist because we give credence to them. That’s one level of existence. That is to say, we build up an image and we talk about them *as if* they existed.

But here, I’m using the word ‘existence’ to mean the basic facticity of the presencing of ourselves, moment by moment. It’s an undeniable fact that we are alive, whatever we call that. You can put it into the language of knowledge, but that often obscures a lot of the rich complexity of our experience because if you say ‘knowledge’, then of course you want to have *pure* knowledge.

In the Greek tradition from Plato and Socrates – in particular with Plato – this is a huge idea: that you can find a way to arrive at a pure knowledge. You know Plato’s image of the cave? We are trapped in a cave, we look at shadows on the wall and on the basis of this we imagine all sorts of existences, but we don’t see it directly. It also says in the Bible, *“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.”* We will see directly. So what would that mean? In zen they talk about ‘seeing your original face’ but that face and the seeing of it is a state of existence, or experience, or being.

It is very difficult to put this into words and as we hear it and as we think we get something, we have to hold it very lightly and take it almost like a kind of hypothesis. It’s a way of illuminating something and then I can take up another orientation and it illuminates something else. However there is a problematic in that undefinedness, in that you can miss out on the power of deep faith and orientation.

Point 1: With a soft hope, put yourself in place

In Vimalamitra’s first point no distinction is made between an intelligent mind and a dull mind. If we have extraordinary devotion to the lama and the teaching and if we have diligence and unwavering dedication to the path, then even although we may be intellectually dull, we can still realise the view. This is very nice, because we are not all very bright!

What it says is that you have to do it for a long time and you have to do it with devotion. That is to say, you have to believe it’s worth doing and believe that the practice itself is more important than the distraction. When we sit to do practice, we usually get distracted and the mind wanders off in

different directions. In order to come back to the practice, we have to believe that it is more important than the distraction. Distraction is something that we *do* know how to do. We *do* know how to get into our thoughts and feelings and so on. So Vimalamitra is saying that realisation in practice is not dependent on our intellectual acuity – on a sharpness of mind that lets us analyse phenomena – rather it is about what we *do* in the practice.

We put ourselves in the way of something. Again and again you put yourself in the way of something. Like an ornithologist looking for a rare bird... Day after day he goes into the forest; he has some idea where this bird might be – and he waits. If he falls asleep, maybe the bird will come and shit on his head and fly away again, so he can't fall asleep. He's got to be there. But if he is too restless looking around for the bird, that distraction is going to drive the bird away.

So you have to be present with hope but without too much desire. That is to say, you have to have a *soft hope*. You have to have a trust: it *will* occur. It *will* reveal itself, because it is my natural condition. It is what is there. The clouds of obscuration will clear. And they will clear if I don't keep thickening the clouds by my own participation in them.

Sometimes meditation is very clear and we get some insight and some understanding and sometimes that vanishes. It is not a linear progression. We are not going from stage to stage to stage. Rather what happens is that we experience moments that are clear, moments that are not clear, moments of excitement, moments of dullness and all of this has to be allowed.

The answer doesn't lie in the content of the mind. This is the central point, because when we are intelligent, we are looking for a particular kind of clarity that will let us announce, '*Ah, now I get it! I get something!*' But there is nothing to get. So essentially it's a falling away, and the falling away means putting yourself in the way of the falling away, if that makes sense. So it means that when he says it's important to have devotion to the lama and the teachings, it means just to trust that the teaching is saying something about your own condition. Reading about your condition is not the same as tasting it. If somebody doesn't know what 'sweet' is, you can tell them lots and lots of words about 'sweet', but it won't convey it. You will have to put some honey or sugar on their tongue and then they get the experience. So it's about the experience, but an experience you have to open yourself to.

To allow the honey to come onto your tongue you have to open your mouth; you have to open your mind to the possibility of this coming. But just opening yourself and sitting and waiting – it won't happen.

Somebody started some therapy with me and in the middle of the second session she said,

—I don't think we are making any progress. What to do? I still feel very bad.

—Why would you not feel very bad if you have been feeling bad for thirty years?

—Yes, but aren't you going to help me?

—Maybe I can help you have patience to have more suffering for more time and not be so troubled by it. That might be as good as it gets. It might not change.

So here we can see all the traditional buddhist values that you might have studied already in Shantideva's writings or in the *Heart Sutra*, or in the paramitas. All of these qualities, all the qualities set out in the *Abhidharma*, are essential here. They are not highlighted, but these are the background

qualities that allow us to be there for the long haul, the long journey of patiently awaiting – not as a demand, not as a sense of ‘I am going to find out how to do this’, but as a kind of passive acceptance which is not pathetic. It’s not collapsing, it’s not a sadness, just a relaxed openness. Not leaping into the future, not leaping into the past.

For Tulku Tsorlo this is the first fundamental point from Vimalamitra.

Point 2: Beyond language, beyond any need for focused activity

The second point is that words are not necessary for the attainment of buddha. We realise the true meaning directly without depending upon a single word. This is in contrast to other views and approaches which depend on an elaboration of the view. That is to say, *“We are not trying to go from here to there.”*

So, on Sunday I go from here to the airport. If I stay here, I won’t get on an aeroplane. Aeroplanes are not available in this village. So I have to go from here to there. Just as we might think that now I am in samsara and I want to go to nirvana but nirvana is somewhere else, it’s not here. What he is saying is that this kind of conceptualisation, which easily brings in the images of development, of improvement and of achievement, is not necessary.

Now, this will sound like a contradiction to what I just said before. But the key thing is how we balance ourselves or position ourselves in relation to that. Not relying on words means not setting up a big mental image which you then try to align yourself with. For example, in tantra the practices generally require a text and the text can be several hundred pages long, with many different visualisations, descriptions of the deity and their mandala palace, the things to be offered, the confessions of faults and so on. These ritual practices in Tibetan are called *buddha* which means ‘activity’. That is to say, there is something to do and if you do it regularly and in a focused way it will bring about a development of your energetic structure which will give you certain powers and facilities including, hopefully, the capacity to relax and open.

But dzogchen is not talking about doing something because the mind is not made. We haven’t lost our original nature, so we don’t have to find the original nature. We might say, *“I’m not in touch with my original nature, I have to find it.”* but of course this is the problem – because you cannot find your original nature. You cannot get enlightened. Stupid people wandering in samsara never get enlightened. The only beings who get enlightened are buddhas. Obvious! So if you are a stupid person wandering in samsara, all you can do is stop wandering in samsara. That’s the key point.

If you try to improve yourself, then you are starting with something and you want to build on it. You are building an edifice. But the ground of the edifice is emptiness. It’s *anatta*, there is no inherent self-nature, this is void, no substance is there, nothing to grasp. So what do you build up when you develop? You build up mental pictures. You build up energetic patterns. You become better at doing *mudras*, at making *tormas*, at chanting and so on. These are all things that you can develop, but the mind itself is not something that can be developed. It’s there from the very beginning.

So when it says, *“It is beyond words”*, it means that it is beyond the necessity for focused activity, for gainful employment, for intentionality. When we recite the bodhisattva vow we make an intention that we will help other people. We give our life a shape, a trajectory moving into the future; this is

something that I want to do. Why do we want to do this? Because it seems a good thing to do. If somebody asks, *“Would you like to be compassionate or would you like to be selfish?”* publicly you have to say you want to be compassionate. Whereas it might in fact be a very selfish thing to say you want to be compassionate. We want to be good. Being good is something we believe we can do. We can always try harder.

So when Vimalamitra says that it is beyond language, this means that it is outwith the semiotic web. It means that we are no longer working inside this matrix of association which language opens up. We are entering into a domain of silence. And in silence many things can be understood which can never be understood through language.

Point 3: Don't enter into preference or judgement

The third fundamental point is having no preference for either positive or negative karma. There is no reliance on causal processes, abandoning negative action and cultivating positive action. Enlightenment is intrinsic within and it arises spontaneously.

Now, within the frame of general buddhism, this is very challenging. It is saying that good action is not better than bad action. But for what purpose? Clearly, in the house of compassion, in the field of benefiting others, in communication, in connection with other people, compassionate action is very wise. Working hard to help others – that's important. If you want to help others you have to develop good qualities. However you might want to help someone as a means of gaining their trust so that later you could rob them. This is what confidence tricksters do. They convince other people that they are trustworthy, thereby maybe getting access to their bank account details or to their house and then they take everything. In this scenario the intention was negative but the activity, at first anyway, seemed positive.

We would say that this is not a good thing to do. Not good in terms of what? Not good in terms of the feelings of the other person. At first the person was happy because they thought, *“Now somebody really wants to help me. Oh, I feel so good!”* Then after a while they think, *“Oh, that person cheated me, they took all my money and now I feel very sad.”* So they were happy, happy, happy, and now they are sad, sad, sad. This is the way of samsara and the trickster has simply become a causal force inside that movement.

What is happiness? An event. What is sadness? An event. This might sound like bullshit, because actually when we feel sad it's not a kind of optional extra. It's not like choosing a side dish of chips or a salad. There is a big difference between being sad. Which we don't like, and being happy, which we do like. So being happy is better than being sad.

But for meditators this is a big danger because both happiness and sadness arise, they are both transient phenomena, and they both pass. People who practise meditation enter into a world which is upside down from ordinary life. In seeing the equality or the illusory nature of all phenomena, we see that the ascription of good and bad is indeed merely that: we ascribe it. We write these values onto the arising moment on the basis of the transient feeling-tones which arise for us. We don't have to do that.

So he is saying that in this path of dzogchen, bad actions and good actions are the same, that we shouldn't make any discrimination between them. You have to hear this very clearly. He is talking about meditation; he is talking about, if you like, the house of wisdom, of understanding your own nature. He is not talking about being in the world with others, he is talking about being itself. So if you want to understand your own nature, then if you notice that you are constantly editing and interacting with your thoughts in meditation in order to make a nice profile and avoid a negative profile, this activity in itself will block you opening to the actual nature of good and bad thoughts being an illusion. They have no substance to them at all. There is no essential goodness in a good thought.

'I want to help all sentient beings.' *'I want to kill all sentient beings.'* These are grammatical structures. Why would I want to kill all sentient beings? *'This is terrible! It's not terrible.'* Both are sentences. *'I love Mickey Mouse.'* This is a sentence. *'When did you last see Mickey?'* *'I saw him in the comics this morning.'* *'Ah. How is he doing?'* *'Oh, he is quite happy today.'* It's like that. We fall into this illusion of taking something which is not real to be real.

Inside our human domain we are very concerned with happiness and sadness as a human situation. So good and bad, right and wrong become very important to us. But in terms of the buddha mind, it's like the sky, it's completely open. Whether there are clouds in the sky or no clouds in the sky – the openness of the sky is the same. It's the very openness of the sky which allows the clouds to come into it. Then they go out of it. We like it when we see the sun shining in the window. We think, *"Oh, it's a nice day now. The clouds are going away."* Then we feel a bit happier. But whether there are clouds or no clouds, the sky is the same. Our relationship to the qualities that we receive from the sky, that is to say, the sunshine or the lack of sunshine, this impacts us and so we go up and down in hopes and fears. But the sky itself is uninfluenced, like the mirror is not influenced.

So this important practice is about cutting away the identification with the obscuration that blinds us to our own basic nature. It's about realising your own nature or your own face, and from that point of view there is no difference between good and bad thoughts. It doesn't mean that when you get up and walk about on your two legs, that there is no difference, because actions have results. Incorporating activity in the world with others into the unborn nature is very finessed; it's a very fine kind of activity, and we'll look at that a bit later. But for now, we are trying to understand the third point and it is an important one because sometimes when we sit in meditation we are very aware of not liking how we are. We enter into a negative relationship with what we take to be a negative thought about ourselves, that the thought or the content of the mind is defining who we are. This is the essential point: that identity is dependent on the patterning of thoughts, and therefore the quality of the thoughts that arise determines the pattern.

The buddha nature is not the same as identity. Being in the world with others involves a degree of identity. We hope that if we have to go into a hospital to have surgery, that our surgeon is not a sadist. We hope that the surgeon is really on our side. We have to believe that, otherwise we wouldn't let them cut a hole in our body. So we want people to have a good intention. That's obvious. But in the meditation that is irrelevant.

So if you have thoughts in your mind which are perverse in terms of conventional morality it's about offering space to these thoughts, letting them come and go. Not entering into reactivity with the

transient content of the mind. The more we do that, the function of the ego as the editor of the content of the mind starts to decline. But of course at first it's a big difficulty. There is a parallel in Freudian psychoanalysis, where the path is through free association. What Freud found out was that as soon as you try to encourage the patient to follow the stream of their associations or thoughts, just to say whatever comes to mind, there is a lot of resistance. The resistance is based on inner prohibitions – on being somebody who could have such a thought or say such a thing – and external prohibitions – *“I am not allowed to say this thing to other people, because what will they make of me?”* Overcoming that resistance is very hard, so that people can think, *“I want to make love to my mother”* and the analyst says, *“Oh, yes. Interesting. Mmm.”* So what does this mean? Ah, Oedipus complex, papa, papa – it's not so terrible. But for the person it's a terrible thing as they agonise, *“How could that be the case? How could I want to do such a thing?”*

The sense of self is challenged when it's brought into relationship with some of these mental contents which are discordant, which are disharmonious with our ego-ideal, with our sense of who we would like to be. Of course this is why meditation is often very painful and hard work. As we release and relax, we are allowing more and more of the content of our mind to arise and according to the tradition this is not just the content of what we remember in *this* life; it's contents linked to karma from previous lives, but also linked to this deep ground-consciousness, the *alaya*, the storehouse consciousness or the basic ground consciousness, which is impersonal. A bit like Jung's notion of a collective unconscious. It's not the same, but it's saying that what I call 'my mind' doesn't have a clear wall around it. Not only am I influenced by what comes in through my senses, by what people say to me, but I also have these antennae on the top of my head; I pick up things that are moving in the ether. There is a kind of Zeitgeist formation which informs us and we find ourselves moving in that way.

Why is that? Because there seems to be a time for ripening. So many times things arise in our mind that don't make us very happy and so this point is fundamental. It is saying not to enter into judgement about yourself or others. Stay open to whatever is occurring, give space, give equal hospitality, to whatever arises. This immediately starts to deconstruct the five *skandhas*; because it means the evaluation that comes with consciousness has no function. It means that the next level, the *samskaras*, the associations, the habitual formations also have no function. Then perception, interpretation also has no function. Feeling good, bad or indifferent also has no function. All you have is the immediate facticity of form. Something is arising; it has shape and colour, smell and taste. Just the raw presentation – and then it's gone. So this is quite similar to what happens in *vipassana* meditation, where you try to allow the presenting of experience in its most simple form, without conceptual elaboration.

Point 4: Don't make a distinction between positive and negative action

The fourth fundamental point is to make no distinction between virtuous action and negative action. We are not engaged in a goal-oriented path of striving. Nor do we depend on the purification of negative karma through effort. This is similar to the third point but the fourth point is more concerned with our activity in the world. What does this mean?

A lot of our interaction with others are constellated around a narcissistic fear that the other person will not like us and will reject us. So we constitute ourselves in a form which we think the other

person will like. Then I will see in your face that you like me and that will make me feel okay. But if I see in your face that you don't like me, then I start to wobble, and think, *'Oh goodness, what have I done wrong?'*

We see ourselves as a puppet of the situation. It's as if coming out of our heart we had millions and millions of little strings and when we walk down the street we give a string to each person we meet and we say, *"Oh, just pull it any time, I don't mind."* It's like that. We are incredibly reactive to what other people appear to think of us, and of course a lot of this is our fantasy projection.

This fourth point is telling us to stay with the immediacy of our behaviour in the situation. It's not that we become so lacking in discernment that we don't know the difference between a helpful and an unhelpful action. It's that we don't become artificial through trying to present ourselves as somebody that we are not. That we don't transact with the world through a facade, through a social persona behind which we have a whole secret life. Because such a division of what you show and what you are, is poisonous; it's clearly a very profound form of duality. Our existence is what it is. We have to live with how it impacts others. Sometimes it works well, sometimes it works badly. But it is what it is.

If you set up an image of yourself and you try to achieve that, it's usually because there is an implicit contract in your mind which says, *"Unless I please you, my world will not be safe."* That is to say, the ground of my being is dialogic, it's dependent on your acceptance.

A Scottish psychoanalyst called Ronald Fairbairn developed a very interesting notion around this. He said that the small baby or infant, when it starts to see that there are problems occurring in relation to the environment particularly in relation to the mother, has two choices: either the mother is bad or the child is bad. If the mother is bad, the world has ended, because what are you going to do with a bad mother? So he says that a very common adaptation is that the child keeps the mother as good and develops the notion that in order to be good enough to be connected with the good mother – which is what the mother really is – he has to become another kind of person. So they develop an ego-ideal and then work hard to strive to be the child who can be acceptable and pleasing to the mother.

This is a very interesting idea, because it speaks a lot to the structure of how anxious we are as human beings. For as long as we live in duality, as long as the individual ego-self is separated off, we are necessarily anxious about what other people think of us. We want to keep our good name. Tibetan culture is a shame-based society, a bit like Japanese culture. In these cultures it is really very important not to shame someone, because you get a very strong reaction. In Japan there were traditions of killing oneself because it becomes impossible to go on living once you are shamed. There is nowhere to go.

Now most of us have experienced shame in our childhood, and we know that we close down and want to cut off from what is there. Of course we want to avoid that kind of situation and we usually do it by learning various methods of social attunement. How to fit in, how to be a bit invisible, how not to be picked on, how not to stand out. In order to do that, we shrink ourselves a bit. We don't live the full spontaneity of our existence, because if we did that, we would make mistakes and people would gossip about us. Therefore I should keep myself in a box. This is very normal.

All of this is very relevant to meditation because it's concerned with identity, with the self-construct, with the patterning of these five *skandhas*, or five constituents of the individual notion of self, which we constantly try to maintain in patterns which harmonise with the vibration or the rhythm of any given environment. A very tricky thing to learn.

Children have to learn that when they go to school. In the playground they run around and shout and when they go into the class-room they sit still. Why? Why should you do that? Why shouldn't you shout in the class-room? Oh – you'll get in trouble. If you want to shout, do it in the playground. So they learn to turn on the shouty-shouty bit of self and then, when they go into the class-room, the turn on the 'sit still and listen to the teacher' bit.

This is social adaptation and it is very useful but it's also completely artificial. It's the choreography of social belonging and it is all about anxiety. When buddhism talks about ignorance as the basis of samsara, by ignorance is meant ignoring the natural state of the open, empty givenness of awareness. When you are not in touch with what is there, you are in touch with something else. You are in touch with an illusion. You are imagining something which is not the case, and that makes you anxious.

In traditional Indian cosmology we are living in the continent of Jampudvipa. There are other continents and in some of these other continents it says that the beings who live there, live for twelve-thousand years exactly. So they know exactly when they are going to die. It's not like that for us. We don't know. This insecurity is a given of our human situation and it's not resolved by trying to improve it.

So, when we want to be good people, we have to ask what is our motive? Often our motive is a manipulation of the environment to reassure us about the validity of our own ego-identity and that is what Vimalamitra is pointing to. When he is saying that there is no differentiation between good and bad action, he is not saying that you behave like a pig, running around, eating anything that's put in front of it. It's not about being crude. It's about observing the anxious, egocentric, self-referential and self-cherishing uncertainty which informs the various choices that we make moment by moment. Through this we can come to see that a lot of the time we are in what Sartre would call. 'bad faith'. We lie about ourselves because we want to be better than we are but we are too lazy to try and make ourselves better. However what dzogchen would say is that you will never be better! It doesn't get better. Bad things always happen. That's what happens.

When the Chinese came into Tibet, they tortured good people. People did that, out of hatred, out of viciousness. Why would they do that? Those lamas were good! Maybe good to our way of thinking, but not good to the communists. Especially not to the Red Guards, because the Red Guards had another vision. They saw these people as obscurantists, as controlling and manipulating ordinary peasants who worked in the field. They saw them as the enemies of the people, just mouths and bellies and nothing useful. Who is the good guy? Who is the bad guy? Were the Red Guards right to destroy these Tibetan monasteries? Was it all a big mistake? From one point of view, yes. From another point of view, no. Having cleared away the monasteries in Tibet, now there are railways and hotels and supermarkets. Excellent, if you like to travel on the railway. Excellent, if you like to shop in a supermarket. Why shouldn't the Tibetan people have railways and supermarkets? *"Oh, but I always wanted to visit Lhasa. In the old days they had these beautiful houses and it was so incredible...I've*

seen these old films, I wish I could have been there then.” Because it would have been a nice holiday. I would be going on a holiday from my petit-bourgeois life in western Europe where I have railways and supermarkets and central heating. *“But it’s nice to see how people lived in the old days, it’s really cute; and I’ve taken lots of photos...”*

So, who is the good guy? This is what’s very difficult. What he is saying here, again and again, is to be sensitive to the situation. Don’t enter into heavy dogmatic knowledge that you know what is good and what is bad, because due to cause and effect, due to dependent co-origination, the patterning of arising is always complicated. This dependent co-arising, the *paticca samuppada*, is a very profound understanding: on the basis of this, that arises.

So, on the basis of British people pushing into China to sell opium that was grown in India and demanding that the Chinese authorities allow more trade, western ideas started to come into China. Then we had Sun Yat-sen who got a Europeanised education and became interested in communist thinking. Because of Sun Yat-sen we have the movement which developed into later into that led by Mao Zedong. Out of that we have the long march and all these whole stories. This is arising on the basis of that, that arises on the basis of this, that arises...

On the basis of this, that arises – this whole concatenation, these whole chains of interactive movement which give rise to the world we experience. At any moment you can freeze a frame, you can cut out a section and you can start to analyse it, good, bad, right, wrong. But when you see this whole unfolding picture, it is so complicated. That’s what he is addressing here. He is not saying that you just do whatever you like. Rather, he is saying, stay open to the ground, out of which manifestation is occurring. Stay with the non-duality of self and other and in that precise moment you act. You act without evaluating in advance whether it will be good and bad, because you trust the unique specificity of the moment having its own logic or its own pattern.

Point 5: Do not rely on mental analysis

The fifth fundamental point is not to rely on mental analysis. We realise directly the view, that is the natural clarity, without relying upon a conceptual ground and path. We sit with our own mind. We don’t have to have a theory about the mind before we do this. We are here, we have some notion of what the word ‘mind’ refers to – it refers to a capacity to be aware. One aspect of that is that we are aware that we have thoughts. Sometimes we lose the awareness into the thought, getting caught up in the thought, but we can be aware of something going on. I am aware that I’m talking and that my hand is waving around in the air and so on... These things are revealed to me as momentary arisings in the field of awareness.

What is this awareness? You don’t need any theory of it. Of course in the tradition we have what’s called *ngotro*, an introduction to the nature of the mind. The mind is empty, it’s naked, it’s raw, it’s fresh. Sounds like a salad! What do you do with ideas? Unless you look at your own mind, they don’t help you in any way. So you look in your own mind and you think, *“Oh, the same old shitty thoughts coming again and again and again... It’s not fresh! Hm! If my mind is fresh then these old boring thoughts are not my mind! Uff! Thank goodness for that!”* So the word can be useful like a little wedge that helps you to disconnect or get a bit of space, but what does ‘fresh’ actually mean? ‘Fresh’ is ungraspable. ‘Naked’, what does that mean? It’s not covered. Not covered in what? In all this stuff.

Okay, so these thoughts are coming. In fact even if somebody says something about the mind, it's not very useful. The main thing is that, sitting on the meditation mat, we look again and again through being present with our experience. Experience is arising; we are not distracted into trying to observe from a distance what's there. We are not distracted into merging with what is there, but we are present with whatever is arising in the moment. The question then is, and we ask it very gently and softly, *"Who is the one who is present?"*

We are not asking it in the way of, *"What can we say about this?"* If somebody suddenly came into the room, we could look around and ask, *"Who is there?"* *"Oh, it's John. John has come into the room."* As soon as we see John's face we know that this is John. That's all we need to know. We see John. There is John. What is coming into the mind? This is a thought, this is a feeling, this is a sensation. That's reasonably easy.

What is the mind itself? *"Oh, it's this."* *"What is this?"* *"We can't say".* *"But what it is – oh!"* *"It's this!"* This is what is meant here. It's not about analysing what you get. It's about going back again and again and again so that you see the inseparability of awareness from the contents of awareness. The mind and the contents of the mind are not things to be put on different shelves. When you have mind, you have the content of the mind. Thoughts and feelings are not a problem. They are not something to be got rid of; they are how the mind shows itself.

So – what is the mind? We have to look again and again. Where do we look? We look *at* the thought, we look *at* the feeling, *at* the sensation. But when I say *'we look at it'* it's not looking at it like something there. It's looking at it by being present with it. So we are sitting in the practice – something is occurring – and we are there. What are we there as? We are aware. What is this awareness? It's not consciousness making sense of something, interpreting it, telling a narrative, a cognitive analysis of it – it's just registering, or showing. The way the mirror shows the reflection of what's inside it, awareness shows the content.

But the awareness is not a thing; you can't pull it out from the thought. You can pull attention out from the thought. If you keep getting caught up in thoughts, you can gently grasp your attention and bring it back. In Tibetan this is called *drenpa*, which means like a memory or recollection. In Pali or in Sanskrit it's like *sati*. *Sati* is the basis for the modern notion of mindfulness. When you are mindful, it means you have a recollection, a re-collecting of yourself, moment by moment, in the face of the tendency to merge in whatever is occurring. So the *Satipatthana Sutra* is describing how, through attention to the body and the breath and so on, again and again there is the risk of being caught up and merged in what is going on, but you call yourself back to where you always have been. It's not as if you go from Bonn to Cologne. You are not going from one place to another. You are not going from distraction to attention, but attention is the means whereby the non-duality of straying and being settled is revealed.

So, what he is saying is, *"Don't rely on words. Don't rely on concepts. Concepts will lead you to more concepts, will lead you to more words."* So later when we do more meditation, hopefully this will be helpful, because what we want to avoid is giving a commentary about our situation. We want to avoid telling a story about what is going on, a story which is simply a way of appropriating the raw, fresh moment and putting it into categories which have been established beforehand. That's why

words are dangerous It's not that you can't talk about it, but you need to be able to observe what is the function of speaking.

Speaking, generally, is the house of compassion. Speaking is relational. We speak in order to communicate with other people and try to be a bit helpful. But speaking cannot reveal wisdom. Wisdom is revealed in silence; in profound absorption, in profound attention, profound opening to natural awareness. This gives rise to certain experiences which may be conveyed to other people, but of course as we try to convey them, we realise that it's never expressed quite right, so sometimes it's better to be in silence. Wittgenstein said that concerning the things about which we can't speak, it's better to be silent.¹ This is very good advice.

If so, what is the point of all this dharma teaching? Well, partly it's because we are all word junkies!

Point 6: It will show itself directly

The sixth fundamental point is to resolve the view through the senses. We have the absolute view – 'absolute' is maybe not the right word – let's say 'the infinite view', and that view is introduced to us as the object of direct meditation. This is not actually very different from many of the forms of *vipassana*. Indeed, *vipassana*, which in Tibetan is called *lhagthong*, is used as a technical term in the field of dzogchen.

To illustrate this: we are sitting in this room just now and, as we have looked at before, you look around and you see many things – but you don't. What you *actually* see is shape and colour. You *interpret* many things by the application of your cognition. As you start to relax the necessity of organising experience in terms of these cognitions, what you have is pure perception. You have the immediacy of the actuality of what is revealed through the senses; which is colours, shapes, smells, taste. 'What is this smell?' 'Oh, it's like lavender.' That's a concept. If you just take your finger and run it down your arm – whooo! This is a nice feeling...whooo ooo ... Sensation! What is that? It's completely ungraspable. Something is arising and passing and we don't know what it is. We can't say anything about it. This is the world of the buddhas. It's completely direct and you can't say anything about it and there is no need to say anything about it; it's complete in itself.

Now you might think, "Oh, but surely dogs and cows have this! They are just in their senses, looking around, big eyes..." No, because here the space of the heart, the *dharmadhatu*, unified with *vidya* or awareness, *rigpa* – this shining clarity reveals itself through what is perceived. That is to say, *vision is the truth of the buddha nature*.

Now this may be a troubling idea because we tend to imagine that we have a mind and the mind makes sense of things. What this is saying is that *what you see is your own mind*. That's very radical. It is saying that *the object is the subject*. Wow! The object is the subject.

When you see the face of the buddha, or balls of coloured light, *tigles* moving, or rainbow snatches or you hear particular kinds of sound – this is the announcing of enlightenment. You might think that this is just a huge Tibetan cultural construct and that no other culture in the world has ever come up

¹ "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." („Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen.“)

with these strange ideas. Maybe. But it points to something very fundamental. It points to the fact that *when we sit in the practice and the mind goes quiet – there is nothing. And there is something.* There is nothing, because we are not giving the names and giving the identities and having thoughts about what is there. And yet there is some *thing* – in English we have to say ‘thing’ – there is a manifestation, there is an arising, and it’s here.

This is appearance and emptiness. Something is appearing, but it’s empty. It’s ungraspable, but it’s also undeniable. It’s undeniable that there is a basic facticity to manifestation – the manifestation is the radiance of the mind and the radiance of the mind is the Buddha. This is the *sambhogakaya*. *So enlightenment shows itself as the radiance of the world. The world is your own buddha-mind.*

“But what about motorcars? You mean to tell me that if I am not careful and I cross the road, my buddha-mind in the form of a car is going to kill me? This is not really the kind of buddha-mind I want. I want the buddha-mind that would take care of me and give me chocolate and champagne.” You can’t find an answer to this by thinking. That’s why Vimalamitra says, *“It will be revealed. It will show itself directly when we put ourselves in the way of non-conceptual experience.”* If you try to have conceptualisation as a kind of meta-analysis, sitting on top of the mountain as the ultimate judge, as the one who can work out what’s what, all you have is samsara. That is the problem.

That is why destabilising or de-centering conceptualisation as the proof of validity is quite a struggle, particularly for very educated people. What this is saying is that direct sensory experience, the immediacy which is before thought – this is the very proof. It reveals itself. Generally speaking, all buddhist cultures have developed a huge aesthetic sensibility, because as reliance on conceptualisation falls away, beauty becomes very important.

For example up in the Himalayas, if you go walking in these valleys, you see little stupas and they are placed in the most exquisite points. You could imagine Cézanne or Monet had been wandering there and had given some advice – *“No, no, over to the left a bit...”* – because it’s just the perfect place. The feng shui is just exquisite. It’s a world in which the inside and the outside are not separated and so the feeling-tone and the expression on to the environment is one uninterrupted cycle. And that’s very important. What he is describing here is the possibility of opening ourselves in a way that, if you like, re-balances the world by seeing that essential point.

Point 7: The three kayas appear in vision on the path

The seventh fundamental point is that the three kayas appear in vision on the path. The three kayas are the dharmakaya, the buddha’s mind, the sambhogakaya, the clarity or the radiance of the buddha’s speech, and the nirmanakaya, the manifestation of energy as it manifests in the world, or the buddha’s compassion. These are not three separate things. So we will say more about the nature of vision.

These three aspects of the buddha appear in vision along the path and so we actually secure the everlasting, spontaneously arising, pure presence in the field of experiential luminous primordial purity.

‘Primordial purity’ means that the mind is not a thing; it’s not an entity. You can’t catch it as something. It is infinite and empty. Here I am holding a piece of paper with some writing on it. As

soon as we put finite writing on the paper the potential of the paper is limited. The other side of the paper doesn't have any writing on it so it has a lot more possibility. As soon as you make a mark, you close down the potential of the situation. So primordial purity means that the mind itself, as an infinity of awareness, has no borders. It has no sides, no top, no bottom, it's not capture-able inside any concept, it's not good or bad, it's not blue or red or green. It has no qualities through which it could be appropriated and therefore it is undefiled. If something is infinite, it has no limit. If it has no limit, it means that whatever else is occurring is already occurring inside it. This is the fundamental point.

If you go to the shops, even in a small village like this, you will see things on the shelf that had been imported from other countries. They have been imported because you don't have these kinds of things growing in Germany or you don't have them at the price that people are wanting to pay and so on. They have come from somewhere else to here, because the nature of the German agricultural system means these kinds of fruits cannot be grown here on an economic basis and therefore it's cheaper to import them. The limitation of the German ecology, climate and so on leads to importation, according to the desire of people to eat kiwifruit and so on. A limit to Germany, a finite Germany, therefore things come from outside Germany. That's pretty obvious. But imagine Germany was infinite. There is only Germany. If you want kiwifruit, you get it from the hot part of Germany. You don't go to the cold part. *"No, no, they don't have kiwifruit in the cold bit, but in the hot bit – yes, of course, we have millions of kiwifruits. Here, have a handful! Go on, they are free."*

If there is no limit, everything is inside it. It's very important to have this sense. It means that in the meditation we are aware that everything is in the mind. We don't do it with our eyes closed, sitting inside ourselves and then opening our eyes, *"Oh no, the room is still here! I thought I was enlightened, but I'm still stuck in Germany, what am I going to do?"* We do it with the eyes open; we are aware, but the awareness is infinite. Everything is in the mind. The room is in the mind. The mind is not in the brain, in the bone, in the skin, in the room. The mind is infinite. The room is in the mind. Germany is in the mind. In whose mind? In my mind. Not in your mind. Yes, I know you've got a German passport, but it's in *my* mind. It's in everybody's mind.

Each person's mind is the centre of an infinite world. Everything is given to us. It sounds like nonsense, but this is what you come to appreciate through the practice. The immediacy of the world *is* our mind. It's not something coming from outside, through our eyes into our brain. Our mind is neither outside nor inside; and what we call subject and object arise together into the same sphere.

So this is the basic introduction to some of the propositions of dzogchen and we'll continue with more meditation practice in the afternoon.

[Break]

KHORDE RUSHEN EXERCISES TO SEPARATE US FROM SAMBARA AND NIRVANA

Now we will do some exercises called *khorde rushen* in Tibetan which means separating yourself from both samsara and nirvana, or dissolving samsara and nirvana, or clearly defining what samsara and nirvana are so that you free yourself from them.

Samsara here is seen in terms of the six realms; These six realms are the hell realms, eight hot and eight cold hells and two indeterminate. Birth in these realms, or manifesting in these realms – because you don't get born into them, you just suddenly find yourself in them – is seen as the manifestation of karma arising from anger.

Then you have the hungry ghost or *preta* realm, manifesting from the energy of envy, in which you are constantly in a state of lack, of hunger, of necessity, but whenever you try to consume something, solid or liquid, it turns into molten metal in your mouth and this you can never be satisfied.

Then there is the animal realm. There are many different kinds of animals. Some are trapped in fields, taken to the market and slaughtered; some are castrated with knives; fish in the sea suffer all kinds of pollution and mutation nowadays due to the toxins in the sea. Animals are trapped in what we call the food-chain, where the small creatures are eaten by the bigger and the bigger and the bigger, with the ultimate predators being human beings. The life of many animals is one of intense fear and anxiety. When you see small birds, like sparrows, eating something, they are in a state of complete paranoia, looking around to see who is going to attack them. So even while they are trying to get sustenance, they are frightened of being killed. This realm of the animals is seen as the manifestation of stupidity.

Then we have the human realm, which is seen as the manifestation of both pride and stupidity, or sometimes of pride and desire. We know what human beings are like – quite predatory, quite exploitative, deceitful, selfish, and so on. Very concerned to take care of themselves and especially skilled in the use of language to create all kind of mischief.

Then we have the jealous gods, or the demigods, that is those who have some power. They are forceful in their bodily presence. The demigods, the *asuras* live in a state of rivalry with the gods, who live in peaceful paradise situations. So the *asuras* always imagine that they should be up on the top. In their realm grows a tree with very beautiful fruit, but the tree fruits and flowers in the god realm, so the gods effortlessly get the fruit from the tree whose roots are in the *asura realm*. The *asuras* are always really pissed off and engage the gods in battle. When the gods cut off the arm of an *asura*, the arm is hurting and the body is hurting as well but if an *asura* cuts off a god's arm, he just picks it up and puts it back on again. So it's better to be a god! The *asura* realm is the fruition of jealousy.

Then you have the god realms – the gods of form and the formless gods, in many different strata which are seen as structured on top of Mount Meru. This is seen as the fruition of the karma arising from pride. In these realms everything is very beautiful and wonderful and easy for a long period of time. Then when the karma that gives rise to this vision or this fantasy finishes, the gods fall out of heaven and have to wander somewhere else. But just before they leave that realm, their fine clothes become stained and start to smell, the flower garlands around their necks rot, so everybody can see that they are dirty and unclean and they step back from them – so they go alone and in fear, leaving the place that they knew very well.

So whether you see these as symbolic or you imagine that these are actual places, according to the tradition this is the nature of the world that we live in: that we move from one realm to another, to another, because we are caught up in experience. We don't usually put our experience into question – we take it for granted that we are human beings and that this is who we are. When we see the cows

in the field we don't imagine that in another life we could be like a cow. We think we are human beings and maybe we don't believe there is anything after our death, nor that we came from anywhere before our birth.

This view of samsara is to put that into question and say that no, actually there is an endless chain of possibilities and what you have at the moment is just one transitory formation, which can be followed by many other transitory formations. So using the image that we were looking at earlier about roles, now we are *en-rolled* as being human beings. When we die, we don't know what role we will take on. We have lived in this theatre of human beings as if it were our true situation, as if this were a definition of our infinite capacity. But it's just a brief moment in our formation.

When this situation dissolves, other causal factors can arise and take us to be reborn somewhere else. We are blown hither and thither like a leaf in the wind, separated from the people we know, separated from the situations we know. When we die all our knowledge vanishes with us, according to the tradition. Think of how sometimes you waken up in the morning a bit confused and you take a little time to come back into yourself and relocate yourself according to your knowledge of your life, what you have to do, and so on. Well, when you leave this life, it's like a great amnesia. All the reference points that you have vanish. So how will you know who you are, what you are, where you should go? This is truly frightening and is a view shared in buddhism and hinduism. The other idea, 'Oh, when I die, I'm dead and nobody can know anything about death and it's just wipe-out' could be consoling and maybe it's true. We don't have definite proof. But maybe it's not true. And if it's not true, and we find that there is a propulsion that takes us forward – because if we look back, all through our life we've had many different kinds of propulsions, which have taken us from one state to another, to another – then as these states move forward, we can end up anywhere.

So, the purpose of these *khorda rushen* practices is to look at our body, voice and mind in relation to these six realms of samsara and also to nirvana.

Exercise 1: Using your body, experience each of the six realms and nirvana

In terms of the body, this is a practice usually done outside. Here you can just walk down the path and out into the fields or the forest, where you have plenty of space. With your body you are imagining that you are in a hell realm. So in the hot hell realms, everything is burning all around you; it's very frightening. Your body is being pierced by hot iron bars. In the cold hells, the body is freezing and chattering. There is no end to this complete turbulence; day and night, day and night it's always the same, the same, the same... There is no escape. Even in the intermediate hells, when you try to escape, there are creatures that terrify you and as you try to climb a tree to escape from them, all the branches are covered in sharp leaves which cut your flesh. There is nowhere to escape to. What we do is we let our body move into the shapes that are connected with that. Then we do the same for this hungry ghost realm. Endless hunger and need; running, looking, looking, but – terror! As soon as we get what we feel we need, it turns into something we don't need. So we have this endless reversal, like in a nightmare; you think you are running down a passage into safety and suddenly it turns into a new horror. You imagine that through your body. The same with the animal realms – fish, birds, insects, all these creepy-crawly creatures under the earth and so on – just let your body go in that kind of way. Then humans, different kinds of human experience; the demigods, and then the god realms.

The purpose of doing this is to experience through the body the many possibilities that you have of your energetic manifestation. Because as long as you stay in the familiar choreography of your habitual bodily movements, it creates the continuity for the support that gives your personality a sense of *'this is who I am'*. Most of us do the same kind of things all the time. Even if you go to a dance or yoga class or something like that, you do it once a week and it's something that your body knows how to do. You know how to sit in the office or work on the computer. So your body has established these particular kinds of relations – now I'm cleaning my teeth, now I'm cooking, now I'm having a shower...

All of these activities reinforce the sense of who you are. So by bringing these other movements into the body and doing it with full imaginal identification – *'This is how it really is.'* – really imagining what it's like to be a snake, slithering in the grass; imagine what it's like to be a little frog, leaping about; imagine what it's like to be a butterfly... *"Oh! This is a possibility! This is possible – this is possible. This exists as a possibility."*

Why is this still possible for me? Because the factors of creation have operated. Our parents had sex and we were conceived and then we were carried to term in our mother's womb. Then we were born, and we didn't die at birth and we didn't die in infancy. So these are the factors of causation for our existence. The factors of maintenance are operating at the moment and the factors of destruction haven't yet arrived. We could be sitting here with a lot of cholesterol inside the little narrow passageways in our body. A blood-clot could be waiting just ready to pop up into the brain. Maybe some of you will leave here in an ambulance – we don't know. Maybe little cancers crawl in, little cells are getting bored with being good... *"Hey! Let's have a party! Let's turn into somebody else! Hey!"* That's what they do, they mutate. They are not who you think they are. They want to have fun. When you get cancer, the cells are just putting on a fancy dress. That's what they do. They say, *"I'm bored being me. I want to be somebody else."* *"But what about me?"* That's what they do. And so they become somebody else and in the process of becoming somebody else, they kill you. Because they are not concerned about you.

The second aspect of this is to imagine your body in the form of nirvana, which means in the form of the peaceful and the wrathful gods. So like Tara, or Chenrezig, or Dorje Phurba, you imagine yourself maybe soft and flowing and very gentle, beaming and smiling, blessing everyone, full of radiant happiness; or something very rough and angry or something very dancing and wild and full of sexual energy. Whatever ways you manifest, don't interrupt your own experience, even if you don't know very much about these deities. You have seen some images and from that you get some imagination, because it's all about whatever bits of construct you have latent in yourself. We are trying to bring these out, so that you directly experience it.

Then we do the same for speech. You go back through the different realms of samsara and make the sounds that you associate with them. Imagine that your body is plunged into a vat of boiling metal. What noises would you make? *"Oh! Oh! Help!"* Maybe not, maybe something terrifying, maybe you are screaming and squelching. Then you are an animal. What is that like? You are going into the abattoir, *"moo, moo"*, then you see someone going to shoot you, *"Uaah! Uaah!"* Whatever sounds come out, let them come out. Just let these come out – because these are inside us. By making these sounds you go into the identification.

What you are working with here is to collapse the boundary that you have between 'me' as an educated, intelligent human being and these other possible forms of existence. And they are not so far away. There is not much holding us in place. Think of what is happening in Syria at the moment. People who once had jobs, who had houses, who had families – now they are refugees. Separated from the children. Watching members of their family being murdered. Having lost everything, they have nothing. They have lost their dignity, they are living in a camp; they are shitting in a pit whereas before they had a private toilet. Now they have to shit in a public place and people are looking at them. How does that feel? These people are humiliated. They lose what they have. And what had seemed there, merged into their existence, is suddenly gone. This happened in Europe too, less than a hundred years ago. We had huge wars that wiped away many people's existence. The fantasy that our world will continue to be safe is very unreliable. We never know what strange factors will happen in another country that will suddenly release this madness through our world.

So we let out the sounds of the different realms and we then go on to make the sounds of nirvana, of the pure meditational deities; the sweet sounds, like of Chenrezig ... or of these more wrathful deities, "*Hung! Hung! Phat!*", roaring, shouting. Noises which tear the structure of the world apart. Just imagine you surrounded by flames, blood is flowing out of your mouth, you have huge fangs and you are devouring all the poisons of the universe. You are an unimpeded force, an implacable force, nothing can prevent you – this is the force of Dorje Phurba; he destroys everything in sight. Everything is emptiness.

So in this state – how do you feel? Whaaa...! You have the posture, and you are making the sound. So you do this for some time; and you keep doing it and keep doing it until you have exhausted it.

Then you go on to the next thing, which is the mental state. Sit and experience what it would be like to have the mental experience of being in a hell realm; the mental experience of being in all these different realms. What kind of thoughts are likely to arise? What kind of moods, what kind of feelings? What kind of sensation? Try to feel it very particularly inside you, and so on through the different realms.

The same way try to imagine the experience of being a peaceful deity – the spaciousness, the calm, the lack of disturbance – completely at ease. Mantras flowing out of your mouth; mind free of conceptual thought. Imagine yourself as a wrathful deity – a lot of energy flowing. The wrathful deities have nine different dance movements – they are stomping, they are roaring, they are tearing... What goes on in that kind of mind? Completely unimpeded movement of energy; no shame, no blame, no fear – just the free flow, and it's perfect.

In that way, we use our imagination to enter into the experience of each of these realms, and to do it as fully as possible, so that we fully have the sense that these are not something over there, out there, belonging to someone else. When you walk on a path in the forest you can see these little beetles and we can imagine ourselves into the life of the beetle. We can imagine what it's like to be a bird or a tiger or a snake. We can imagine a god. Why? Because you imagine *this*. '*This*' is what we imagine. Some of us will enter into states that we can't imagine at this moment in time and that we wouldn't want to imagine.

Now that I am getting older I have quite a lot of friends who are getting sick or who have diseases which are now ripening. Conditions like lupus where gradually the body starts to get more painful; conditions in which the central nervous system starts to collapse; paralysis, multiple sclerosis; people who were healthy, who were artists, who were successful – now they are in a wheelchair. That person, twenty years ago, could not imagine that they were going to be in a wheelchair... And of course, when they *are* in a wheelchair, they are in a wheelchair and furious. Because they imagine, *“I shouldn’t be in a wheelchair!”*

What we call acceptance is an imaginal gesture. To accept your situation as it is, is to be able to imagine yourself into your situation and stop imagining something else about your situation. That’s really what acceptance is. This is what is arising for the moment. And every time I imagine that *“Maybe it will get better”* or that *“It shouldn’t be like this”*, this imagination adds another level of grief.

For our purposes here, we are starting to get into this mood. This is a practice, so when you have the possibility, go into a quieter place and fully go into the experience. It often helps to begin as we did earlier, by sitting quietly, and doing the three ‘A’ practice. You are opening to the space and then from that space you allow these different manifestations to arise.

So you do it: body of the six realms and then the divine/nirvana forms; speech – six realms and divine/nirvana forms; mind – six realms and divine/nirvana forms; and then we meet back here. Okay?

[Practice]

Remarks on Khorde Rushen practice

So this practice you were doing is something you can do again and again when you have more free time out in nature. It is often the case that when we get anxious and come into a situation where we don’t feel at ease, we tend to withdraw and become a bit rigid and silent because we don’t see a doorway out. Then, when we relax, we find that it’s quite possible to communicate with other people. So this practice is very much the same thing. Anything which traps us into a limitation is not only cutting us off from the field of our experience, but is cutting us off from our potential, because our potential and the field of experience are the same thing. Why is it that some people find it difficult, for example, to talk with children? They say, *“Hm, I don’t know what to say. I don’t know what to do.”* And then they look inside themselves to try to find out what to do. But clearly, of course, the main thing is to smile at the kids and you say, *“What are you going to do this afternoon?”* and they will start to tell you and you get into something.

That is to say: we lose the environment when we imagine that the answer lies in ourselves, because when we look into ourselves to find the answer, we are looking in the wrong place. It’s by imagining the potential of the situation that we evoke in ourselves the response which links us into the environment. So by doing this *rushen* practices again and again, you can see that all the six realms of samsara and all the divine forms are there already inside you. When you get an initiation into a tantric practice and the deity is described, what are you told? This deity has two arms and one head, or maybe ten arms and fifteen heads – many, many different combinations. As soon as you hear the words, you can imagine fifteen heads. How are they organised? It’s like when you invite people for

dinner, how do you put them round the table? You get a picture in your head. So these heads are all in place and it's like that – you imagine that. Somebody imagined it once and that's where these practices came from. They come from the imagination. Everything is the imagination, whether it's in science, or engineering, or spiritual practice. It's imagined.

So – it's a good practice to do.

Exercise 2: Falling into ease, naldu wabpa

Now we do a very simple practice, which is called *naldu wabpa* (ནལ་དུ་སྦྱོར་པ་) in Tibetan, which simply means to relax. *Nal* is like in *naljor*, the Tibetan word for yoga, and it simply means relaxed, or at ease, and *wabpa* means to fall or to rest.

So we rest the body in a relaxed posture; you let the body just fall at ease. You are not holding yourself rigid, you are not trying to structure anything, but you are just at ease in your body. Sometimes you can do it lying down or you can do it sitting up, but it's about just being at ease in yourself, not straining to produce something, not doing anything artificial.

The relaxation of the voice is silence which means that the impulse to speak is silenced. So if you are doing this practice on your own and you find yourself moving towards speech, whose first form is like the many thoughts in the mind, just recite a long, slow letter 'Aa', the sound of 'Aa', and then into the silence.

For the mind it says, just be like an exhausted person. You are completely tired. All you want to do is just – 'Ah... *Just leave me alone.*' Like a cow in a field. Not a thought in your head, not trying to achieve anything, just – you give up. If we had a television, we could put it on and... That's what many people do at the end of the day when they are tired. But now we don't put on the television, just – nothing.

This form of relaxation is very important in the tradition, because although we have to do our dharma practices and do our work so on but it's also important to really experience giving up. Giving up effort, and realising that life goes on if you are not active. Often we imagine that we have very big shoulders and we carry many weights and responsibilities on top of them and that if we didn't do it, it wouldn't happen and so we have to be very responsible and so on – This is true in a certain domain but if it becomes the governing image or metaphor of our existence, then we are on this wheel, turning and turning and turning...

So we just sit for some time – just sit in a relaxed way, in silence, just the mind – empty. Not trying to achieve anything. Just – Oh!

[Practice]

Giving up is very important, because if you have the capacity to give up then you also have the capacity to see whether a situation is workable or not. Many people stay in work situations, in relational situations, in family situations for much too long. There is a certain point at which one can say, '*This doesn't work*'. But you can only know that it doesn't work if you are able to stop working.

Because if you always imagine that you could try harder or you could do a bit more, then this mobilisation will set off yet another chain of involved activity.

Letting go and giving up don't sound very good. Giving up sounds like failure. *"Giving up trying – I mean, that sounds terrible! We've got to try – surely something can be done!"* Well, something can always be done, but very often it's a mess. Often we do things that shouldn't be done, because we want to do something. And the reason we want to do something is because it's an affirmation of our identity. So allowing something *not* to be done is very different. Why should we do that?

Letting go, doing less, is sometimes much more effective than doing more. The particular orientation of dzogchen is a kind of aesthetic receptivity. Receptivity is not exactly active and not exactly passive. The mirror, when it shows a reflection, is not just passive, because it's the clarity of the mirror that shows the reflection, but it's not active either in the sense of editing the image and making it appear in a particular way.

So relaxing and allowing ourselves to *do* nothing is also the way of experiencing ourselves as *being* nothing; and if you see directly that you continue to exist when you don't do anything, then you have a new starting point to think about, *"What shall I do?"* But if you are already doing *something*, you start from engaged activity. In English we have a saying, *"If you want something done, ask a busy person."* It's like that – if you are a busy person, then you'll do more and more, because you are busy. People who are going slow – they often don't get so engaged.

Of course people have their own rhythms, but here it's about being able to see whether something is useful or not. We can put a lot of energy into a situation to try to make it work. But what's the actual potential? Is something going to survive or not? If it's a garden, what's the quality of the soil, how many stones are in the soil, is there a lot of clay, do I have rheumatism, do I have a sore back, do I like digging in the rain? No, okay, so I don't need a garden. It's a nice idea, but it's a lot of work. The idea gets people into taking on something, which then, in its actuality, is not so good. So this is a big function of relaxation. It helps as a general point of revision of the necessity of many of the activities that we have. Because there is always a reason to be doing things.

When I was in India I did a lot of prostrations and after I had finished them I went to see C R Lama, because I'd been doing them up in the mountains. I told him that I had finished them now.

—Oh yes, and how do you feel?

—I feel very tired.

—Oh, yes, and what's happening in your mind?

—I'm too tired to think.

—Aha, that's okay then.

And then he explained that the main purpose of doing prostrations is to get tired. That's the main function. Because if you get very tired, then you think less and if you think less, then you can get more success in your meditation. But of course they don't tell you that before you start!

Many of us have experienced that. You go out for a long walk in the country, and at the end you feel very tired, but you also feel very open, because the exhaustion allows a non-connection. What the exhaustion does is bring the energy from the side channels into the main channels and then it into the central channel. You go walking and walking and walking until lifting your legs gets harder and

harder and the mind is empty... nothing. In many situations in life you can experience how that exhaustion or deep relaxation of letting go opens a path to non-conceptual experience. The advantage of this is that it shows us that the non-conceptual experience is not a construct, because it's through the exhaustion and the relaxation and the letting go, through the falling away of constructive activity, that the actuality, the underlying ground of non-conceptual awareness, is revealed.

Exercise 3: Body in the shape of vajra

Some of you will know this. We have to stand up to do it; it's not something to do if you are not feeling very well. You are going to make the body into the shape of a *vajra*. So you have to be on your feet, rocking on the toes and you bring the soles of your feet together as much as possible. It's very easy to fall over when you do this; and then you put your hands up so that your body is like in the shape of a *vajra*. Hold this posture as long as possible, until the pain is excruciating.

[Practice]

At first it's not a good thing to do for long because it's a stress position. And I don't know if you notice, but the mind becomes very empty when you do it. There is no thinking involved after a while. Again, it's an energiser to bring the energy into the central channel. You can do it with a visualisation or sense of the symbolism: the head and the two hands like this represent the potential of the human situation, called in Tibetan *ngowo rangzhin thugje*. It means the ground nature or the open potential, the clarity arising from that potential and our energetic manifestation moment by moment. The lower part, the legs coming in onto the feet, the three aspects of that represent the three *kayas*, the ripened buddha nature; and the middle point around the belly represents the integration of natural purity and spontaneous manifestation.

After a while, if you do it for a long time, the body will start to vibrate and you might start to feel a bit dizzy. The instruction is just to stay with that as the mind becomes more and more and more opened and emptied. This vibration is coming about by the residual movement of the energy into the central channels, so that there is less and less control over the structure.

These kinds of practices are helpful to do, because they allow us to immediately engage in experience without having to think. You don't have to say any prayers, or have any analysis or any intention. Just quietly, in a space where nobody is going to interrupt you, you take up that posture and you just hold it. All you are doing is breathing out; you are not trying to control your breathing. Sometimes it may be more rapid, more slow. Just let the body be in its own state.

Question: Would you do that before sitting meditation?

James: You could do but it's essentially a disorienting practice, so it would depend on the kind of meditation you were doing. If you did that before the relaxation, that could be useful, because that's about just letting go. But if you were doing a practice where you were focusing, then it wouldn't be too helpful because this practice is designed to disrupt the habitual patterns of our attention through a kind of radical dispersal into nothing. Whereas *shamatha* and *vipassana* are disrupting habitual patterns of attention by giving a kind of better or purer focus for the attention.

Gaining an experience

With all of these things you have to look at your own situation and see what works for you. All of these practices are just, as it were, suggestions; how we can embody them depends on our own particular situation. We are using the practice to gain an experience, that's the whole function of it. We are not doing it to become physically stronger, we are not doing it to achieve a particular outcome, but rather we want to be present in the experience as it manifests due to the particular activity.

So, for example, when we were out in the forest and we were making these sounds or these body postures, or you are imagining what it's like to be an insect, or a bird – when you are *in* that, there is a particular kind of experience. When you go from one animal to another – you imagine being maybe a wild pig in the forest, and then you imagine you are a deer – it's completely different, isn't it? Completely different. So there is the experience. *This* is arising, fully *this*; and then *this* is arising, and then *this* is arising; which is why the instruction is to go seamlessly from one to another, to another, to another. Each of these is a complete world which we inhabit – and then we are out of; we inhabit and then we are out of...

And this is what's going on all the time in our existence, except we are not so conscious of it. We are sitting in this room, we have this world; then we go out, maybe we go and have a pee or we go in to eat some food, we start to talk to someone, you enter into that little world. And you are right in there. And then something else happens and you are in that world. And it's seamless.

And that's why attachment is so difficult to deal with. Because the transition across these different spheres – we don't notice, there is no cusp; it's like a completely spliced movie, it's just flowing. So what's then really important is not to try to go up and get an overview so that you can keep your eye on the whole pattern, because that would be to take yourself out of it, but rather to be fully present *in* each experience and taste the sensational quality of the experience. Oh! This comes. And then you see – what does this do? What happens to your breathing if you are a deer?

When I was out in the forest, I was a little mouse for a while; it's very interesting to be a mouse, because you are moving around and then you come to a fallen tree and then it's, "*Crikey! How will I get over this?*" Suddenly the world is very, very big. It's quite frightening to be a mouse; you don't know what's around you. Very kind of dodgy kind of feeling. And then you are like a deer and you've got these nice long legs and you can leap over the branches – oh! hello! It's completely different. The breathing changes, skin tension changes – oh! We enter into a world, we are of a world; we enter into a world, we are out of a world.

Question: Sometimes we have to make a decision, say to have an operation or not, and one expert says "*Yes, go for it*" and the other expert counsels caution. How do we decide?

James: That's the problem in life, isn't it: how will I know what is the right decision? The fact is that you can't know. You have to decide and then you have to deal with the consequences. Regarding the decision to have an operation or not, you can decide yes or no. But what decision will lead to the best outcome, that you can't know in advance because that's not in the palm of your hand. Once you decide something, then you have to be engaged in what's going on, but in the end

we are stepping into a future which has not arrived. We may model 'my happy future' but whether we will be able to inhabit that or not depends on many different factors.

Generally speaking, in the Tibetan tradition, they would say that the first intention is the best one since it is the one that's closest to your intuition. Once you start to think about it and gather more and more information, without probably really understanding what all this information means – that's a good way to get a modern head-ache, I think.

Exercise 4: Sealing

So, a practice we will do now is called 'sealing' or 'gya pa' གྱེ་པ།, which means to seal. Firstly the body is sealed into its own ground. We do this by reciting 'HUNG' on the out-breath, a long, slow 'HUNG' on the out-breath. You don't visualise anything, you just go into this sound of 'HUNG', allow it to spread out and allow the sound of it to fill your body.

[Practice]

Exercise 5: Semdzin practice using a blue HUNG [1]

Semdzin are a group of practices for establishing the insubstantiality of our body and the whole world.

The particular quality that is said to belong to HUNG is that it's a very empty sound, but it's also very energising. In the Tibetan tradition it's the symbol of the mind of all the buddhas. We use the experience of energy to give us the sense of the interpenetration of phenomena.

So, we sit comfortably and say HUNG in a strong but short way. We say HUNG-HUNG-HUNG-HUNG and imagine that from inside our body small, dark-blue HUNGS are spreading out. If you know what a HUNG looks like in the Tibetan script, then you can use that, but otherwise you can just imagine a small ball of blue light that's issuing from your body. And this ball of blue light, or blue HUNGS – goes out and passes through everything it meets, showing the insubstantiality.

It passes through other people who are around you, through the walls, out of the walls into the town, through the church, through all the houses – it's passing through everything. So HUNG after HUNG after HUNG is spreading out, until the whole universe is just completely dissolved into empty radiance. Its insubstantiality, its light-quality is revealed through the passage of HUNG through it. Then you imagine that all these HUNGS are gathering back into your body, one after another. Now you send out thousands and thousands of HUNGS, so now your body is filling with thousands and thousands of HUNGS; every space, every cell of the body is filled with HUNG and you are continuing to make this sound... This body itself is nothing but the radiant energy of HUNG, which is the sound of the mind of all the buddhas. As is everything in the environment. Everything is just the bright, brilliant, shining reverberation of the mind of the buddha.

Stay in this situation: no need for any conceptual thought. Just allow this sound to keep coming out of you, spreading out, coming back. Keep going with the pulsation of the spreading out and coming back, until you are deeply convinced that there is nothing substantial in the world. Everything is just energy and the pure form of energy is passing through all of these structures because all the structures that we encounter, whether it's our own body or whether everything else around us, are

held in place by our own cognition. *We* tell the world what it is. *We* tell ourselves that this is my body and this is how it is. But in this practice we enter into the non-conceptual energy of HUNG and open that space up.

We will do this for about ten minutes. Again, keep the mouth open a little bit and just keep the power coming; you can do it quietly or with some volume. It may be helpful to move between the two. Don't strain your throat; you want the sound to be arising and passing through the throat without tension.

[Practice]

According to the tradition you should continue to do this until you are completely clear that the whole world, including yourself, is just like a rainbow. We do this HUNG; we put it through the air, so that the whole world that we are sitting on dissolves and we are just this body in space, filling up with HUNGS. Then it becomes empty, and there is just this empty, translucent form, floating in space, same as with everything else.

The more you do it and you get into that state, at the end, when you are just sitting, often the mind is very empty. This is called the *nyam* མཉམས, or meditation experience, of *mitogpa* མི་རྟོག་པ།, the absence of thought. Also there is a clarity, everything is just immediately available to us; and this is the *nyam*, or meditation experience, of the translucent clarity of all phenomena. Often the body is tingling and alive, in an ungraspable way. This is *dewa* བདེ་བ་ or sensation, or pleasure. We see that our existence is the movement of these three things. Something is here, without thinking, and it's ungraspable sensation. There is a pleasure, but you can't hang on to it in any way and it's completely clear. You have the clarity of emptiness – and it's nothing at all. Like if you listen to this sound now...

[The chiming of nearby church bells can be heard.]

So if you open to the sound and don't appropriate it in a conceptual manner – if you don't think, *“Oh, that is the sound of the church bell. The church is at the bottom of the hill”, or, “It's seven o'clock on a Friday night and they are ringing the bell to bring people to a church service”,* or something like that, if you don't wrap any conceptual elaboration around it – this is something incredible. Just this pulsation – dong, dong, dong... Where does it come from? It comes from space... Dong, dong, dong...

You tell the story, *'It comes from the church'*. It comes from the church *for you*. All the time we put our interpretive matrix onto phenomena and through that we give ourselves the sense that there is a meaning in the world which we can understand. We ascribe meaning; we give it to the situation. But if you just stay with the openness, then through the practice there is another kind of meaning which arises, the immediacy of the sensation of sound arising from emptiness.

In the buddhist tradition this is called the 'absolute truth' or *dondam*, དོན་དམ།. It's the immediacy, uninterpreted facticity, about which you cannot say anything. It just *is*.

Question: So could you say that at the end it all boils down to pure sense-perception?

James: Well, you could say that as long as you are clear about whose senses they are. Because if you think, *"It's my senses"*, then you are going back to I, me, myself and the one who is looking through my senses. However the instructions are that we should meditate 'sky to sky'. Our mind is like the sky and what is in front of us is like the sky and the sky is passing through these open eyes, through these open ears. The space of the heart is infinite, the space of experience is infinite. So, yes, it's through the senses, but not as in 'my senses'. For as long as we make this egoistical, grasping interpretation of the senses as 'my experience', we've already cooked it in a particular way.

Question: What I mean is more like: if I taste something, there is the immediacy of the very first little taste and then I ought to stay with that, without the overlay of describing it as nice, or not nice or like this or like that. And so with all my senses. If a thought arises, it just arises and I don't go into the story. Is this what is meant by 'pure perception'?

James: Yes, because the one who is having that pure perception is not the ego that's relying on consciousness as its means of identification. Perception free of consciousness is the perception of awareness, which is different. It is immediately meaningful, *dondam*, although you can't say what it is. Once you start to say what it is, you enter into another kind of meaning, which is not wrong, but which is a parallel world.

Question: So does this then mean that everything is enlightened? Enlightened form, enlightened sound...?

James: It arises from the ground of openness. When we hear this sound, certainly I am aware of 'oing, oing, oing'... Then, if I don't say, *"It's the church bell"*, there is just *"oing, oing, oing"*... Where it's coming from I don't know. *"Oing, oing, oing, oing"*... just this, *"oing, oing"*... If you stay open without adding *"What is that?"* – there is no question of *"What is it?"* – it is *"oing, oing, oing"*. That's what it is. It doesn't go any further than *"oing"*. So, pure *"oing"*.

Question: This morning you said it was not the content.

James: Yes, it's not the content, because in the moment of that arising, this is arising in space. What remains is the space of awareness where this 'oing' is passing through it. Like when we do the HUNG, the purpose of the HUNG is that on one level the body is nothing but empty radiant space; outside is radiant space and then, when you stop the recitation, these very, very subtle contents are there. Like these meditation experiences, they are important to have, but they are a kind of cul-de-sac, a side-track. You don't grasp onto them, telling yourself, *'I have arrived someplace!'*, but you just *be* with them and their empty nature reveals itself.

It's not that you arrive where you get something, but the different qualities of what is arising as the content gives us the sense of the indeterminacy of the one who is the experiencer. The more you define the object, the more you define the subject. So when I say, *"Oh, that's the sound of the church bell!"*, the one who knows it's the sound of the church bell is me, with my education and my knowledge of this village. I know it's a church and it often has bells that sound like that. So the definition of the sound as on the church is also defining me. If we don't put that object-definition on there, the subject-definition doesn't go on either.

This indeterminacy or ungraspability allows the content to be there, but it's not the content that a subject *has* in terms of the appropriation of an object. It's just some transient phenomenon moving through. It's appearance and emptiness, like it is described in the Heart Sutra.

Exercise 6: Semdzin practice using a blue HUNG [2]

The purpose of this practice is to give the experience of the illusory nature of all that we encounter.

Imagine out of our heart are dark blue HUNGS. This time the HUNG that manifest out of your body is the size of whatever object it's going to hit. If you are sitting looking at a pillar that you want it to pass through, it's that size. If you want it to pass through some person sitting in the room, then it will be whatever size they are. If it's going to go through a flower vase or a glass, it will be exactly that size. The HUNG is exactly the same profile as whatever it's hitting and it goes right through it. As it goes through the object, it takes away any substantial nature that you might imagine is in it.

It's like a really thorough spring-cleaning, which doesn't take out dirt, but takes out the substantial inherent self-nature that we impute and leaves the shining luminous clarity of appearance and emptiness.

If you know the shape of the Tibetan letter HUNG, use that. Otherwise just imagine coming out of you small balls of blue light, which expand or contract to fit whatever size. We do the HUNG short and rapid, because this is a propulsive-impulsive driving this through, unimpeded through what's in the room, what's outside, the trees, the cars, whatever you imagine, your home town – everything in the whole world. Through the floor, through the ceiling, until everything is completely cleaned out and is just radiant presence – the presence of the unborn *dharmadhatu*.

This HUNG practice is something you can continue to do when you have time and are in a good place to do it. You can continue doing it, particularly sending out all of these HUNGS until you get the sense that the whole world is just this shining presence of shape and colour. Then bring all the HUNGS back into your body, dissolving your own substantiality again and again, so that you are an empty luminous form in a field of empty luminous forms.

This is a good basis for then going into open meditation practice. We will do that for some time and then, when we bring that to an end, we will go straight into the three 'AA' practice.

Exercise 7: Sleeping

One thing you can try tonight, as you are falling asleep, just go into the state of relaxation, relaxing the body, just really letting the muscles collapse, not holding a posture, be aware of the absolute silence, you are not making any sound nor its inner echo of thought, and the mind just – ah...! The day is over. And in that state you can fall asleep into openness.

Okay? Have a good evening.

[End of Day Two]