

# The View and Practice of Trekcho

## Practising Skilful Means: Upaya

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#### Day Three

James Low

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Transcribed by Vera Neuroth

Edited by Barbara Terris

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### Excerpts

*... In the beginning the motivation is very important, but in the centre, the most important thing is to recognise the emptiness of everything you do. And if it's empty – and staying open to the emptiness is hard – making it overcomplicated is probably not going to help. So keeping it simple is the main focus...*

*... Samantabhadra, the founding Buddha or Adibuddha of dzogchen – the first, the primal, the forever-there-Buddha – is traditionally dark blue in colour. Dark blue represents the colour of the sky just before dawn, when the darkness has vanished but it's not yet a bright clear light. It is the potential of illumination...*

*... You have the possibility to relax into your own nature, or to distract yourself. These are the two possibilities. There is samsaric distraction – running around, making money, causing trouble and so on – and there is nirvanic distraction – doing lots of holy practices, accumulating a big altar and so on. If you have a big altar you have a lot of bowls to clean every day. If you don't clean the bowls you feel guilty. However if you have to clean the bowls, then you have something to do: 'Now I'm cleaning the bowls for the Buddha!' 'Hm... Does the Buddha like clean bowls?' No, we do these things for us. So what do we get from doing these things? We generate a sense of meaning and value and competency, that we 'know what to do'. We know how to do mudra, we know the right tune for each prayer... You see the danger. You can get lost in dharma just as easily as you can get lost in making money ...*

*... Thoughts follow thoughts, follow thoughts, each thought setting off another In thogal practices they describe this continuous process of experience as lug gu gyud, or dorje lug-gu gyud. Lug or lug-gu means sheep and gyud means a chain. You know how you can see a whole series of sheep going one after another along a little path on the hillside? Sheep follow, follow, follow... Likewise we have these thoughts that follow, follow, follow... If you recognise that the thought, in the moment that it arises, is nothing at all, then you won't put extra valency into it. This is why the instruction always is not to enter into judgement because to do this creates duality. However the thought hasn't come from ignorance. The particular teaching of dzogchen is this: the thought, 'I don't want this thought!' is itself arising from the mind. The negative thought comes from the mind, the judgemental thought comes from the mind. Stay with the mind itself. Patrul Rinpoche, Nuden Dorje and other meditation teachers always say, "Stay on the thought as it arises; stay on whatever is arising." ...*

## HOW DIFFERENT DHARMA VIEWS FIT TOGETHER

The central focus of what we are doing is around *trekcho*, an aspect of dzogchen; and yesterday we did some exercises connected with that. I want to begin this morning by looking again at how the view of the different styles of dharma practice fit together, and in particular looking at the issue of skilful means, or *upaya*.

### *First turning of the wheel: three marks of conditioned existence*

In the Buddha's first turning of the wheel of dharma, he sets out the nature of suffering, which is later developed as the 'three marks of conditioned existence.' They are: suffering *dhukka*; the absence of inherent self-nature, *anatta*; and impermanence, *anicca*. These are neither theoretical nor cultural concepts. Everybody here has some familiarity with suffering. Suffering is described as having two aspects. There is ordinary pain and the difficulties that arise in life; this sort of suffering is impermanent and is not usually particularly important.

*Dhukka* refers to the other suffering which is the mental representation of our suffering. An event happens, the event is painful, for example your boss shouts angrily at you. It may last a short time but if we develop it and create a mental representation, then the narrative line of that can last a very long time. It's the mental picture, which is returned to again and again, that becomes the point of internal conflict and torment. It acts as a veil between ourselves and the next moment so that we see the next encounter through this structure of 'He is angry with me' and so on. That may be true, but if you want to work well with your boss and are filled with a negative feeling, it will be difficult to perform well. So that's really what suffering means. It's the way in which we continue the negative feeling of a situation after it has gone.

*Anicca*, impermanence, likewise, is not a theory. We see it everywhere, particularly at this beautiful time of the year we see the leaves changing colour, we see mushrooms popping up in the forest, we see all the tired insects at the end of the summer crawling to find a place to maybe sleep a bit for the winter... We look in the mirror and we see our face getting older. We sit to eat with a full plate, then it is half eaten, and at the end it is empty. This is continuous, all the time. Everything is changing. This is just what is here.

It is the same with *anatta*, the absence of inherent self-nature. Inherent self-nature is described in terms of *atman*, a Sanskrit word which is translated as a 'self', or in more modern language we might say an 'identity'. We see an identity out there in the world and we react to the identity that we see as if there were a substantial entity which was its basis. In the earliest teachings, this was particularly formulated around the idea of the person; so you have what's called *pudgala anatman drishti*, the view of the absence of inherent self-nature in persons. This is understood through the analysis of the five *skandhas*, the five components which make up our personality. We've already touched on these. Later this analysis is taken into the study of the dharmas, or the basic constituents out of which these five *skandhas* arise, and they also are seen to be empty of inherent self-nature.

Now we come to that through a teaching – because we don't learn about it at school and it may not arise in our own mind automatically – and we may then take up a kind of analysis which we apply. That can make it seem that the understanding that we get is marked in a chain of cause and effect: because I had these teachings, because they interested me, because I studied more, because I did the analysis, I now see that there is an absence of inherent self-nature...

This can make it appear as if this is what in modern sociology would be called a ‘cultural practice’, so that we have a sub-group in the society who happened to take up this kind of mental activity and they generate this kind of epiphenomenon, the notion that there is an absence of inherent self-nature in phenomena. Other people follow different cultural practices such as piercing and tattooing and so on and they have a different appreciation of the world. It’s just a choice. This would be a wrong understanding. The absence of inherent self-nature is there. The reason we don’t see it, is because we are stupid. The analysis is there, not to create the absence of inherent self-nature, but to remove the stupidity that hides the absence of inherent self-nature from ourselves.

So when you see it in that way, then you come into the resistance, that we don’t *want* there to be an absence of inherent self-nature. We *want* things to be truly real. We want something reliable to hang on to – whether it’s our job, or our passport, or our pension plan, whatever it is. We don’t want it to vanish. We act on the basis of the assumption that things are reliable and we don’t want to be proven wrong. However when we look into the absence of inherent self-nature, that is essentially what we are doing. We are seeing that the our assumption that things stay the same is not the case.

For example, when I was younger, I did certain activities that I don’t do now. Nowadays I don’t run home from work, get out my football, go out into the street and kick it about with my friends. Why would I do that? However when I was seven I would run home after school and do exactly that. Certain features of the world, certain aspects of the potential of the phenomenological field, came into the foreground and became figural for us due to the causes and circumstances of being of a certain age, a certain gender and so on. Then, as we move through the stages of our development, things which were once centre go into the background and something else replaces them in the centre. When we look at ourselves we can see how we have changed through time. The body has changed, the way we think has changed, the way we speak has changed, the gestures we make with our body, and so on – all of this has changed.

There is no substantial reality to our embodied being. What there is, is a *manifest showing*, which takes the form of bones which can be broken, teeth which can fall out of the jaw, snot which can run out of the nose, and so on. There is an undeniable facticity to embodiment, but that doesn’t mean that there is a true essence, an entitative ground nature which is generating this manifestation. That is the analysis that you find in the theravada tradition, in the mahayana tradition, in the tantric tradition, in dzogchen and in mahamudra.

### ***Second turning of the wheel***

Then, in the second turning of the wheel of dharma, which occurred in Rajagriha – modern Rajgir in Bihar – Buddha emphasised the emptiness or lack of true existence of both self and phenomena using a further tripartite notion of how the world is structured. The three factors are called *tseṅma mepa*, *monpa mepa* and *migpa mepa* in Tibetan.

#### **Without signs: tseṅma mepa**

*Tseṅma mepa* མཚན་མེད་པ་ means ‘signless’; it is without *lakshan*, without qualities or characteristics that can be held on to. In modern language ‘without signs’ describes how the actuality of our existence is not captured by the semiotic web, by linguistic interpretation.

When we look around this room our experience of it is mediated through signs. We have signs for the differentiation of gender, age, size, health, colours, functions... Some of the people coming here will see things to which they have no sign to apply. They may have no precise signs which fit exactly but there are useful general signifiers, such as 'buddhist'. We may not know precisely what something is, but anyway, it's buddhist. Or, '*It's very nice*'. That is also a sign, a kind of categorisation.

The sign economy is linked to nosology, is linked to categorisation and organisation. That is to say, if you practise something like *vipassana* and you release and release and release the elaborated conceptual interpretation, you encounter a world beyond language which cannot be appropriated. This is fine, as long as you don't have to *do* anything. However, to *do* something is to enter into the world of signs, so the important thing is to be able to integrate emptiness and signs. 'Sign-less' doesn't mean that signs are a bad thing that you should peel off. Rather it means that when you use language, when you say, 'This is red' or, 'I like the shade of red in your shirt', or whatever – we know what we are doing. We are playing a game. We are entering into a language game that allows us to share constructs of meaning, the essential function of which is to alter the patterning of energy. By 'energy' is meant the vibration of the immediacy of our experience. At any moment, something is occurring; it comes and it goes, which is to say that it's dynamic. It's not a substance.

If we really start to see this, we realise that what we get is always an empty signifier. That's all we ever get in life. For example, I have a pen in my hand. I have got a pen. What is a pen? Well, not all pens have a black body and a chrome end to them so it is this kind of pen. How do I know that this is a pen? Because I am able to put this object into the category of 'pen', or apply the sign of 'pen' onto this object; it goes in two directions. Once I know that this is a pen, I know what to do with it. So the concept of the pen, or the sign of the pen, organises my relationship towards this object.

This object could be used for many different things. For example, you could unscrew it and take the end off and do an emergency tracheotomy on someone. You could use it as a straw. You could stab someone with it. There are many things that you could do with this but because we have fixed the sign of 'pen' onto it, these other potential usages are not normally going to be associated around it.

That is to say, this object stays in place. It remains situated inside the field of functioning by the definition of the sign. Does that make sense? That's what signs do – they organise the particular potential of an object. All objects have many more potentials than are revealed through the common usage of signs, which is why, in western culture, we have a privileged class of people. They are called 'artists'. Artists are people who are allowed to use things in a way which breaches the notion of the sign. Think of Marcel Duchamp and the urinal. He buys a urinal, sings it and puts it in an art gallery and people go, "*Wow! What is that?! 'How can that be art?'*" Artists take the frame of the boundary, of the standard interpretation, and move it across and that becomes suddenly surprising. Damien Hirst takes a skull and puts diamonds in it and makes a lot of money. Why? Because people want there to be *something*. There has to be something new. Modernism requires this. Capitalist economies require this. It's commodification, that is to say, the production of seeming entities with value. If you have enough status, you can make something have increased value simply by putting your name on it. If a painting is attributed to Picasso, it's worth less money than if it has a little scrawl at the bottom – because if he put his name on it, it's the real thing and worth a lot more money. So signs are very, very important. In some of the exercises we used yesterday we were talking about the nature of the imagination. We imagine the world through the use of signs.

We encourage children to believe that signs and actual objects are the same thing. Let's say you have a book for small children with a nice little painting of the countryside. Then you say, "*Look, there is the field, all the green grass... oh... and there are the little lambs, they are bouncing, bumpa, bumpa, bumpa...- Oh no! There is a big dog – woof, woof! The lambs don't like that.*" People talk to small children like that. When you look at the page, there is no dog there, there is no lamb there – there is just shape and colour. What the adult is doing, is putting a sign onto the shape and colour and then the child learns that you call this a lamb and you call this a dog. Through the power of representation – the re-presentation of the sign onto the shape and the colour, as if this was the revelation of an entitative substance, existing in itself – through this they become able to manipulate the sign-economy of the world.

So, in the second turning of the wheel of dharma, Buddha is warning us to be careful of these signs! Recognise that a sign is something you use, that it is a meaning-making method, but that it doesn't point to self-existing meanings.

### ***Tantric ideas start to develop here***

This is where you see the beginnings of the direction of tantra, because tantra and dzogchen are entirely about participation. That is to say, the field of arising and the experiencer of the field of arising are always in intercourse. There is a continuous, or you could say a sexual, encounter between the subject and the object, giving rise to the immediacy of the birth of the new experience, and the new experience, and the new experience...

To say that the actuality of the world is devoid of signs is to say that signs signify the function of signification. They don't signify real objects. Or, to put it in the language of Wittgenstein, "*language speaks to language*". Language is a world of language. Language doesn't pertain to the real world. Some of you here speak German. In German you don't say the same things as in English. Why not? Because it's a different language-game. When you are born into a language, into your mother-tongue, you start to get the confidence that when these sounds come out of your mouth, other people will understand you. It's an amazing thing, how when you are with toddlers, all these words, some nonsense words, come out of their mouths. They are building up this world and they are enjoying it so much and then when the words come out of their mouth, other people listen. So now they have a hook whereby they can grab people.

This is the first experience of power in the world: you can manipulate people through the use of signifiers. That is to say, language is communication. If you can keep it on that level, then it's very helpful but when you start to believe that language is a definition of real entities, then you have a problem. So this is the main point in Buddha's second turning of the wheel of dharma.

### ***Without hope: monpa mepa***

The second factor is called *monpa mepa* [མོན་པ་མེད་པ།], which means 'without hope' or 'without aspiration'. That doesn't sound too good but by 'hope' is meant 'predictability', the notion of the continuity of existence. Such hope of predictability becomes a way of relying on mental representation, projected through time, as if it were something real. Let's say, for example, that you formulate a plan. You might decide you are going to go and live in another country, or you are going to move town. This is a hope. Whether this will be realised or not depends on many different factors. It often depends on money, on work opportunities, on visas, on health; there are many, many factors,

which arise moment by moment in the experiential field. So when we develop a hope, we are again putting out a trajectory, a line of organisation across the unpredictable variety of potential manifesting symptoms or signs which can arise.

Why should we not do that? Well, it's not that you shouldn't do it but that you have to realise what you are doing. You have to realise that you are seeking to create a mental image of your existence. I already have an existence. If I look at my own existence, it's a little bit shapeless. When you get up in the morning, even if your diary is well organised and your day carefully planned, you never know exactly how it's going to be. If you are a teacher you don't know how many students are going to turn up, nor what kind of mood they are going to be in. You don't know whether they have done their homework or not and you don't even know how *you* are going to be. Maybe on your way to work another driver cut across you and you come into the class still angry from this. That's your mood. So, although you had planned to be doing something at 9 am, *who* will be doing it and in what situation will it be happening, – that we don't know.

So when we can't even know the future one inch in front of our big toe and one second into the future, to have this *monpa* we have to realise what it means. It's an aspiration; it's a way of bringing the mind into the unfolding field of experience, which means it *has* to be dynamic and it *has* to be open.

Buddhism speaks of 'the middle way', not too loose, not too tight. If you have *no* hope, if you have no plans at all, then it's a little bit chaotic. If the plans get too tight and inflexible, then this tightness creates a pressure which inserts the notion of hopes and fears, failure and success and this can get difficult. So the middle way involves aspiration, but aspiration as a gesture of our energy into the field of energy.

The Buddha said that suffering is not getting what we want and getting what we don't want and the question is always, "*How do we integrate suffering into our world?*" Do we take suffering as a sign that something is wrong and therefore that we should leave? Or do we take suffering as a sign that we need to develop ourselves more, relax and open and integrate these circumstances? This is always the challenge. To cut and run, to insert control, is easy in some ways, at least in theory, but the real path is to integrate whatever occurs – with all its difficulties.

So the absence of hope or aspiration means not to be collapsed in the face of the non-fulfilment of these hopes, but to act in the manner of the possibility of this being realised through creative adaptation to the field. That is to say, in simple language, you have to hang loose. You have to stay flexible. Rigidity is bad news. This is just a fact, isn't it? Flexibility, responsiveness, is very important. You can see that with the images that we have of these various deities. On the pillar in front of me there is an appliqué of Padma Sambhava and he is sitting with his right foot out, a posture that Tara and Chenrezig also display. It means that he is ready to get up. He is ready for action. If he was sitting in the lotus position with the feet locked, then he is in meditation and is very stable. But with his right foot extended, he is ready to move.

This is the real *nirmanakaya* manifestation. When we come into the world, we have to respond to circumstances. Sometimes we can exert some degree of control; at other times we have to let circumstances develop the shaping of how our existence is going to be. If you bring in the agenda of hope and fear, success and failure, then you are likely to feel attacked as an individual, "*I'm not*

*getting what I want, 'I know what I need.' 'I can't bear it when it's like this!'* But maybe you don't know yourself; maybe this is just a self-construct that is a habitual formation and it's actually the limit of your potential. Your potential is always much greater than the narrative – the neurotic, historically developed narrative – of who you are. In that way we are the main attackers of ourselves. We are the ones who steal our own freedom through the strong assertion of the definition of ourselves.

### **Without object: migpa mepa**

The third factor that he talks of is *migpa mepa* [དམིགས་པ་མེད་པ་], which means 'object-less'. *Migpa* [དམིགས་པ་] means 'to perceive an object'. When you perceive an object, the object that you perceive brings you, the subject, into formation as a particular kind of shape.

In the mahayana tradition, wisdom is unpacked through the teachings on emptiness and the first elaboration of the Heart Sutra and so on. Prajnaparamita literature, including The Diamond Sutra and The Diamond Cutting Sutra, says that the bodhisattva, who wants to help beings, is not a bodhisattva. This may sound a very strange thing to say. A bodhisattva is somebody who works for the liberation of all beings, but if they want to help beings, they are not a bodhisattva. How come? Because there are no beings to be saved. That is to say – although the buddhist teachings begin with suffering, if you take other people's suffering too seriously, you will get into big problems. If you set out to rescue people, if you see that people have weakness and vulnerability, you become part of the problem. All human beings have a tendency to be lazy and to betray their own potential so whenever you rescue people, you really are harming them. This is a basic fact.

That is why when we take the bodhisattva vow, *"May I bring all beings to enlightenment"*, we have to look into what is the basis of enlightenment? It is something they already have. It is not like *"May I bring all beings to the Costa Brava, because it's very nice there!"* Essentially, to bring all beings to enlightenment means to bring them to themselves. How do you come to yourself? By starting to know yourself. If somebody is playing victim then they are developing the fantasy of dependency: the way to make myself safe is to get someone else to do my work for me. But if you play pathetic and blackmail other people with your emotional confusion and so on, you will never get independence. Much of the work I do in the hospital is around this theme, working with people who have been mental health patients for years and years and years and who spend all their energies trying to get money and free housing from the state, getting special this and special that... But they are not *doing* anything. That is why when the state takes on protecting people who don't need protection, it actually makes them weak and vulnerable. Then when these people reach older age they have *nothing*. They have developed no qualities, they have nothing at all. This is a real problem for them.

We become stronger through exercise. The mind becomes stronger through engaging with the problems of existence. So if we are taking a bodhisattva vow to help all beings, we must have developed some qualities and we develop our qualities through difficulty. That is why rescuing is not the thing to be done.

### **Three kinds of compassion**

How then does this link into *migpa mepa*, the absence of object? Through compassion. The mahayana tradition describes three kinds of compassion. There is **the compassion of aspiration**, as in the lines of the prayer, *"May I bring all beings to enlightenment."* This is said to be like planning to go



on a journey and is compassion which takes sentient beings as its object, *semchen la migpai nyinje* [སེམས་ཅན་ལ་དམིགས་པའི་སྣོན་རྗེ་].

The second kind of compassion is actually doing the practice, and is said to be like going on the **actual journey**. When you do your prayers or your meditation you might visualise all sentient beings around you, or you might radiate out light to them, or you might dedicate the merit. This is compassion which takes dharma practice as its object, *cho la migpai nyinje* [ཚོས་ལ་དམིགས་པའི་སྣོན་རྗེ་].

The third form of compassion is **the compassion which has no object**. And here is the link to the *Vajracchedika*, The Diamond Cutter Sutra. If you consider that there are beings to be saved, then you are engaged in reification and have turned these into real people with real problems, which have to be removed, so this is very solid. This third kind of compassion is called compassion which does not take an object, *migpa mepai nyinje* [དམིགས་པ་མེད་པའི་སྣོན་རྗེ་]. From the very beginning, everything has been impermanent and without inherent self-nature. There *are* no beings to be saved – and yet, of course, there are.

What is to be saved is the ending of the intoxication with the illusion that there is a problem which has to be solved. There *is* no problem. Earlier we were thinking about the absence of inherent self-nature in ourselves; it's not that we are struggling to establish the absence of inherent self-nature in ourselves because that has always been there. That is a fact. It is hidden from us by our own self-concept, by the elaborated fantasy of identity which we have constructed with a lot of time and energy and often with money as well. We have created our own obscuration. It is the maintenance of the obscuration which hides the actuality. It's not that you have to develop something which is not there – you simply have to stop doing the obscuring activity which hides what is there. That's the fundamental point.

If you understand that, then you see that all the dharma practices are about deconstruction. They are about stopping being intoxicated with activities which have to be done.

So who then is going to save all sentient beings? I am. How am I going to do it? I don't know, but I want to do it. Okay. So, first of all we have to work out who is going to save beings. Then, who are the beings to be saved and third, how are they to be saved. So, who is going to save beings is a buddha established in the *dharmakaya*, *sambhogakaya* and *nirmanakaya*. *Dharmakaya* means understanding that your mind is emptiness and space inseparable. *Sambhogakaya* is the natural clarity arising from this understanding of emptiness and space, and *nirmanakaya* is the moment by moment participative engagement in the illusory field of becoming. That is to say: there is nobody going to do the saving.

Who then are the beings to be saved? They are two arms, two legs, a nose; or they have little wings, or they are going, “*Wau! wau! wau!*” down in the hell realms, we haven't counted all the people here... These beings – what are they made of? When you look at someone you see their face; they have got holes in various places and some holes go up and some holes go down. We are people with spaces inside us! Then you might think, ‘Oh well, at least there are bones, but then you crack open the bones and see that they have got some space inside. But bones are also full of all this gooey stuff, so then you get a microscope and you look and you see the cells and inside the cells there is some space. There is space, there is space, there is space...

In the beginning there is space, and something moves in space. What? Energy. Energy moves in space and creates everything. Buddhists understood this a long time ago. Energy moving in space. So the beings whom we are going to free are energy moving in space, not recognising that they are energy moving in space because they believe that they are a substantial person with substantial problems that need to be helped.

How then do we help them? If you try to help them by helping solve their substantial problem, you confirm the paradigm of ignorance that they are living in. So the work of the buddha is deconstructive. It is to help liberate people from the illusion that they are trapped in. And how do they do that? There are many different methods. Some of the methods are like a parent to a child; some are like a magician, using illusion to dissolve illusion. There are many different dharma methods, but they have to be precise in relation to the person – the very same person who doesn't exist. That's at the heart of it.

The buddha doesn't exist, the person to be saved doesn't exist, and the methods employed don't exist. When we say, 'doesn't exist', it doesn't mean that nothing happens. You could say it's neither existing nor non-existing. Something occurs, which is a movement through time and space and this is *anicca*, this is impermanence. The impermanence of the subject, of the object, and of the connection between them.

### **The compassion of not reinforcing people's identity**

So this third level of compassion – the compassion that doesn't take an object – means to help beings without helping them. Now, how do you do that? In the tantric system it's done through visualisation. You imagine yourself praying to Padma Sambhava, Padma Sambhava dissolving in you, and the whole world arising as the mandala of Padma Sambhava. When you get up from the practice you look around – everyone you see is a form of Padma Sambhava and everything you hear is mantra.

So, on Monday morning I will be sitting in my consulting room, somebody will come in and tell me about their terrible weekend. Padma Sambhava is talking a lot on Monday mornings! This is how it is. And the mind, every thought which arises, is the mind of Padma Sambhava. Dzogchen says not to make any distinction between good and bad. So a patient is telling me a very tight knotted story, lots of words pour out, maybe tears come out the eyes. If I think, *"Oh my God, this is not a very happy person!"* or *"Poor thing, this is really serious!"*, then I am making it serious.

What does it mean to not be a happy person? Probably we have all been unhappy at some time. We know what it is: It's something which lasts for a while. If you can find somebody to take your suffering seriously, then you set up a little drama. We all want our suffering to be taken seriously but it's not helpful. With children we do sometimes have to show concern for their suffering, but with adults, the key way to help them is by not taking their suffering seriously and helping them see that the suffering is a trope, a neurotic formation inside which there is a patterning of experience. To do this you need first to notice when their suffering is expressed as a communication which seeks to elicit confirmation: *"I am telling you my sad story so that you will know that I am having a bad time. And you should help me not have a bad time."*

How do we help someone not have a bad time? Change the object, change the subject, deconstruct the subject and object. These are the three possibilities. If you say, *"Oh, well, I'll make a phone-call to the social worker and let's see if we can get you re-housed."* then you change the object. If you speak

to the subject, saying, *"I think when you feel like this, perhaps this is bringing some echo of how it was when you were a child with your mother, because she was like that!"* then you are attempting to change the subject, who might respond, *"My goodness me, I hadn't thought of that! Now I understand why I am like this!"* They are empowered to think about their life in a different way. However for us as Buddhists, the key point is the relation between the two. How do we deconstruct the glue which says, *"This is real. I see that this is real. Let's do something real about this real problem"*? Because this glue is what is called samsara.

Even if you are being very helpful, the basic structure of samsara is that of real people with real problems. However the first teaching of the Buddha says, *"It's not like that! It's absolutely not like that."* Buddha taught the truth of suffering and that it has an origin. The origin is in the misconstruing of the situation. So the issue is how the person stands in relation to their own suffering. If we confirm to them that their suffering is real, we are not helping them stand in relation to the suffering. A psychoanalytic interpretation linking the present back to childhood can be useful in that it opens a triangulated space, a space in which some new understanding can arise. But if a person is just *in* their suffering, there is no space for understanding.

So this is a different kind of compassion. This is a compassion which is not taking problems seriously. That is very, very important – not to take problems seriously. Often we feel insulted when other people don't take our problems seriously. We think,

*– You don't care for me at all. You are not interested in what I'm saying! Can't you see I'm really upset?*

*– 'Okay, you are really upset. Why should I be upset that you are upset?*

*–What?*

*–When you go to the toilet and have a shit, do I have to come in and look at it?*

*– OK, but if you cared about me... I'm trying to show you what my suffering is like . Can't you see?*

*– Yes, I can see. I can see that you are upset.*

If you speak like that to someone you are likely to get slapped, because they want you to be impacted. They want to get through to you. *If you understand me, if you care about me, you are going to feel upset because I am upset. Let's double the trouble!*

This is why when you see a lama doing their work, they have a lot of space. They sit on their throne, people come in, people tell them all these sad stories, they are just looking, *"Oh, yes. A le. These things happen. Take these pills. Pray to Tara. Good bye. Safe journey."* They don't get involved. Buddhism has the social structure which says that the blessing of the lama is helpful, and this is very important, because it means that the lama is allowed to make a radical intervention. He can say in effect, *"If you want to be helped, pray to Tara. Don't bend my ear. Me being upset that you are upset – what good is that going to do? The fact that you are upset is saying something about you. Don't spread your shit out into the world."*

We live in a very narcissistic culture where everybody's distress has a social caché; it becomes a currency and we have to rush in and do something. As soon as there is an earthquake, you get counsellors and therapists flying out to do trauma work with people...

*–Oh, my God! How did you feel when that happened?'*

*–I felt bloody awful! How do you think I felt?'*

*—Oh dear, that is so terrible, that you felt so awful. I am right here with you in your suffering!*

*—No, you are not. My house has fallen down! MY house – not your house! Give me your house!*

Dharma is saying something very different.

### **Dignity, not idiot compassion**

Idiot compassion, as C R Lama used to refer to it, is indulging in vibrating at other people's distress. Real compassion – *nyingje* རྟོག་རྗེ་ in Tibetan, is made up of the honorific word for 'heart' or 'mind' (*nying*), and *je* which means 'noble' – means to have a noble mind. A noble mind is a mind with dignity. When people become caught up in their suffering they lose their dignity. They become helpless and useless and want to be saved.

The real way to help people is to bring them back to their dignity. So if you encourage somebody to be a victim, dependent, useless and hopeless, this is really insulting the basis of their existence, running counter to the teaching on 'the compassion which has no object'.

What then is dignity? Dignity is the free movement of energy of the *dharmakaya*. That is to say, when the open potential of the heart and the open potential of the experiential field are able to interact without mediation through our self-reflective and self-reflexive, self-cherishing and egoistic concerns we have a spontaneous meeting with the other person. But when we are caught up in a narrative of ourselves and we want other people to engage in *our* world, this is an attack on ourselves. It is also an attack on the other since people lose themselves through absorption in the story of suffering.

I grew up in Scotland and in the year of 1745 the armies of Scotland were defeated by the English army which consisted largely of German soldiers, since the English King at the time came from Hanover. The Scots felt that defeat very keenly and even nowadays, our response to a loss or defeat is often *"Poor me! We were robbed!"* You hear that exactly when a Scottish football team loses a match. This is the national belief of Scotland – we were robbed! Soon in September 2014 Scotland will be voting on whether they want independence and that will be really interesting because if that happens, we will no longer be able to blame other people when things go wrong for us. Blaming other people is a very old story and it is hard to let it go. Why? Because it's very juicy. Feeling betrayed, let down and cheated gives us a very powerful self-identity. We can run this for a long time. *"It's not fair!"* It is completely not fair, but what dharma allows us to understand are the dynamics of not-fairness. And the first thing dharma says is, *"It's due to karma. If you get bad things, it's your fault. Don't blame anyone else."*

This is very hard. This is very, very hard.

*—I'm unhappy!*

*—Yes, okay, you're unhappy.*

*—Yes, because they don't do this for me.*

*—Why don't they do that for you?*

*—They are not very nice to me.*

*—Why are they not very nice to you?*

*—I don't know.*

*—Well, let me tell you: In a previous life you were a pig, and when you were a pig you were very fond of eating apples. And you used to push through the fence and go into farmer Giles' farm and eat his apples. And now, because of this, you have no friends.*

That may sound like a very stupid story, but in some ways it's actually much more helpful to think that now I am getting the consequences of my actions in the past. It means that it's in the palm of *my* hand to change this. I can recognise that *I* messed myself up, that *my* bad actions have an immediate negative consequence for other people now, as well as a long-term negative consequence for my future manifestation, and so *I* have to take care! Rather than blaming other people and trying to get other people to do what we want, we have to realise that *this* is my situation. *I* have this particular neurotic constellation; I am narcissistic, or I'm self-indulgent, or I'm very angry or very selfish...hyper-sensitive, very prone to depression – whatever it is. This is *my* situation. And rather than feeling that other people need to behave in a special way around me, because I can't bear it, *I* have to do something about it.

Tibetans have a saying, "It's easier to cover your own feet with leather than to try to cover the whole road." To cover the whole road with leather is a lot of work but if you put some leather on your own feet then you can walk even on bumpy ground. So, self-responsibility is the first thing. Accepting that this is my situation and *I* am going to have to learn to manage my delinquent tendencies. Whatever my relationships with people, *I* am implicated in them. Of course *they* do something; but what they do is in the palm of *their* hand. If I leave other people to get on with *their* responsibility and look at what is in *my* own hand, then we come back to dignity and power.

### ***Emptiness is central to hinayana and mahayana***

The three signs, *mtsan*, which I have been describing, point to the danger of reliance on conceptualisation; we have a real problem with conceptual elaboration. We take a small moment and we run many, many signs around it, manufacture hopes and plans and intentions and then seek to impose them by taking the situation as substantial. All of this is an illusion and an entrapment.

The nature of emptiness is the central point in both hinayana and mahayana views. Impermanence means empty. It means, something is here – and then it's gone. If it were real, it would endure through time. Because it doesn't endure, it's clearly not real. It's just a transient phenomenon, moment by moment by moment. It's, 'just a jiffy'.

In the early buddhist meditation and analysis they would identify a period of the manifestation of thought as short as one sixtieth of a second, called *santi* in Sanskrit - finger-snap, finger-snap, finger-snap... We grasp even this short flash and make it into a package. Even the revelation of such pixel-like moments are patterned and patterned and patterned... and if we stay with that, the question then is, "*How will we not be overwhelmed?*"

Always we are at this crossroad: either opening to this overwhelming amount of stuff, or editing it. Stuff? If it's 'stuff' I have to work out what that stuff *is* and this involves a lot of thinking. So the first thing I do is edit it. I ignore ninety percent of what's there and focus on the stuff that I know. Then I organise the stuff that I know into patterns that are familiar to me. This is our normal way of conceptualisation.

However buddhism goes the other way; the organising factor is the clarity of the mind, is pre-conceptual clarity. Without making sense of what is going on, you open to the sense of what is

immediately there. This is the vital heart of the practice, and the one who makes sense of what is immediately there is emptiness.

The mind has been empty from the very beginning. When we recognise that the mind is like mist, completely ungraspable – our mind is here, but whenever you think you’ve got it, it passes through your fingers – there is no way to come to a certain definition about the mind. And yet, we are here! Here we are. We are here as an awareness. Whatever we take our body to be, our voice, is changing, changing... The contents of the mind, in terms of thoughts, feelings and sensations, are also changing and changing, yet the natural clarity of the continuity of pure presence is there. But it’s not something you can ‘get’.

This is the basis of dzogchen practice. If you recognise the *kadag*, the natural purity of the mind, everything is in that.

### **Leave well alone: don't apply any antidote**

The Americans have a phrase, ‘If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.’ In England they say, ‘Leave well alone.’ It means that if something is okay, it’s fine and just leave it. We human beings find that very difficult in everyday life as well as in dharma.

In the foundational moment of the dzogchen tradition, when Garab Dorje was leaving this earth, he rose up into the sky and from inside a mass of rainbow light gave his final instruction, the famous three statements. He said, *“First of all, awaken to your own nature.”*, meaning, taste or become who you are. Nowadays we refer to ‘being introduced to your own nature’, or ‘finding yourself’. Then he says, *“When you have that experience, stay with that experience. Don’t go looking for anything else; don’t start to analyse it or have a theory about it. Don’t do anything with it, just keep it simple.”* The third statement is, *“Continue in that way. Don’t go looking for anything better. Just relax and abide in your own natural condition. Don’t elaborate it, don’t do anything with it.”*

These are three statements and when you write them down in Tibetan you can write them in a single line. In Tibet there were many many books and of these, many were destroyed by the Chinese. Nevertheless many were also brought out reprinted. You can find thousands of books on dzogchen. So how come we go from three short pithy little sentences to tens of thousands of books? Because people like conceptual elaboration! People just don’t leave well alone.

I was lucky that my main teacher, C R Lama, didn’t like to talk very much, so he always said everything in a very simple way. And he said, *“Emptiness, space, awareness. This is enough. You’ll see the nature of your own mind, this is not very difficult. This is what you do.”* He gave me the instructions and said, *“Now don’t get lost.”* There is nothing more than that.

We know that in the dzogchen tradition there are many, many practices – we were doing some of them yesterday. Why do people have all these practices? Because it was a good idea at the time. Somebody had a meditation problem and they decided to do something about it. Why?

In the instruction that I got from my teacher, which I have included in *‘Simply Being’*<sup>1</sup>, it says very clearly, *“Whenever you have a problem in meditation, don’t apply any antidote; stay with the situation.”* It says it again and again and again in many different ways because we are so stupid and

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<sup>1</sup> *Simply Being: Texts in the Dzogchen Tradition*. 3 ed. [CPI Antony Rowe, November 2010]

we don't understand: 'Don't put your hand in the fire!' 'Don't put your hand in the fire!!' We always want to do something. Why? Because we just want to do something. Control your breathing! *Kumbhaka! Pranayama!* Okay, now I feel better. Of course you feel better, because you went from something bad to something good. Oh! Bad is not the same as good? Hm! This is called 'duality'. Hm... You have gone from one kind of shit-heap into another kind of shit-heap, except this one tastes like chocolate. That's the only difference. This is very, very important because the fantasy of control will condemn you to samsara.

You can learn many different methods for controlling the nature of your experience. These are designed, not to *shift* the experience, but to give you the *experience* of shifting the experience. That's all. Once you taste that one or two times, you don't need to keep doing it. You realise that *this* was an experience and *that* was an experience and *this* is the experience of changing experience. Basically that's all you need to know.

Wherever you are, it's simply an event which is transient. If something horrible is happening – don't push it away. If something good is happening – don't try to hang on to it. This is the teaching that you'll find from all the masters. Dudjom Rinpoche explained this many times, Dilgo Khyentse explained it many times. Many, many teachings like this. But if you get into manipulation, every time you are walking down the street and you see an ambulance going by, you will recite, "OM MANI PADME HUNG, OM MANI PADME HUNG..." But why? Why? Before the ambulance came on the street, other people were coming near you, they have messed-up lives, why don't you do OM MANI PADME HUNG for them? Oh, but somebody is sick! We do something special for them!

In the Tibetan tradition they have mantras for everything. They have mantras for the fire, they have mantras for lighting a new fire, they have mantras for making beer, they have mantras for protecting the beer from going off. They have mantras for finding lost sheep and they have different mantras for finding lost cows! This is a fact. When I was first learning Tibetan, I went on a pilgrimage to Bodhgaya and I bought many, many books, because the Tibetans had these little stalls selling such books. I brought them back to my teacher – "*Look what I've got!*" – and he says, "*Yes, but you don't have any sheep, so...?!*"

What does this mean? It means that human beings are endlessly creative. If you realise that this creation is simply the play of the mind, you don't have to *not* do these things, but you have to do them as the movement of energy, which is empty. The danger for us is that we start to believe that these things are strongly real. In terms of practice, you need one tantric practice, one deity. You pray to the deity, you dissolve with the deity, you go into emptiness and you arise from that with the clarity. One is enough.

Tibetans say of themselves, "*In India, people do one practice and get enlightened. In Tibet we do a hundred practices and nobody gets enlightened.*" They have this saying. Because they have so much stuff, and it's all valuable! So what will you do?

Nowadays in England there are TV programmes about people whom we call 'hoarders'. These are people who can never let go of anything. Sometimes when you open their front door, it's such a mass of newspapers that they have to get down on their hands and knees and crawl through a tunnel to get into the room and then it's full of old bicycles and all sort of junk. People ask them why they keep all this stuff? "*Well, it could come in useful one day!*" Yeah, I got this initiation from Ding-Dong

Rinpoche and it was incredible! I know I haven't done the practice for ten years, but, you know, one day I'm going to have the time and then I'll do it because it's really important!

Actually what it means is that ten years ago you said to Ding-Dong Rinpoche, *"I will do this."* And you've never done it – so you've cheated Ding-Dong Rinpoche, you've cheated yourself, but you still want to continue with the fantasy that you won't cheat yourself. If you are going to do it, you do it. If you are not going to do it, you don't do it. If it's hard to do one mantra every day, don't ask for ten. *"Ah, but this one is special...!"*

### Even the dharma can be a distraction

The teaching tells us that the object is empty and the subject is empty. This is so important to understand! The answer doesn't lie in the object. It really doesn't.

*–I need to get this special blessing! I need this special initiation!*

*–Why?*

*–Because it will help me.*

*–What will it help you to do? It will help you to feel you've got something.*

*–Poor, lonely person, I don't have anything. I have a big lack. What do I lack? I lack my own nature.*

*–How are you going to get it?*

*–Well, I'm going to see this lama and he'll give it to me.*

*–Where does he get it from? It's your nature! Maybe he stole it from you...*

You see the logic of these things? This is human creativity.

Your mind is there. You have the possibility to relax into your own nature, or to distract yourself. These are the two possibilities. There is samsaric distraction – running around, making money, causing trouble and so on – and there is nirvanic distraction – doing lots of holy practices, accumulating a big altar and so on. If you have a big altar you have a lot of bowls to clean every day. Then if you don't clean the bowls you feel guilty. If you've got to clean the bowls, then you have something to do: *'Now I'm cleaning the bowls for the Buddha!'* Hm... the Buddha likes clean bowls? The Buddha is a really good housewife. Maybe he is a German Buddha? In his right hand he is holding a vacuum cleaner... We do these things for us. So what do we get from doing these things? We generate a sense of meaning and value and competency, that we 'know what to do'. We know how to do *mudra*, we know right tune for each prayer...

You see the danger. You can get lost in dharma just as easily as you can get lost in making money.

In the beginning the motivation is very important, but in the centre, the most important thing is to recognise the emptiness of everything you do. And if it's empty – and staying open to the emptiness is hard – making it overcomplicated is probably not going to help. So keeping it simple is the main focus.

Garab Dorje says we should first, recognise who we are, or *be* who we are. Then, having got that, don't mix it up with our own thoughts. Then, just continue like that. That's enough, it's enough.

*"Yes, but what about ... what about...?"* The danger there, as we looked at yesterday, is that something arises inside us and we feel a lack: *'I need something. I, the subject, need an object.'* If you are meditating, that is the moment where you recognise that you've blown it. Stay on the one who



has the lack. The lack is the energy of the mind. The mind is the ground which gives rise to samsara and nirvana.

The fact that the mind is open doesn't mean it only makes roses. It also makes nettles. It makes weeds. If you look at the weed, the weed grows from the pure ground. If you look at the rose, it also grows from the pure ground. The main thing is the ground. So when your mind gets disturbed and troubled, when you feel lonely and sad, don't look for the object to shift your mood. Don't look for a special method; stay with whatever is arising in the mind. Be present *with* that situation and you will see that the ground that the thought is arising from, and the ground that the subject – which is the consciousness aware of the thought – is arising from, are both forms of energy. You then are the ground itself. You are the awareness of the ground.

So the presence of the ground and the arising of subject and object configurations are not two different things. Subject/object interplay is the formation of samsara arising from the ground. There is only one ground. When you recognise that the subject/object formation is the energy of the ground, it's called nirvana. It's called liberation. So the key thing is to recognise the ground, not to look for better objects.

[Break]

### **Projection: tantra uses it, dzogchen doesn't**

One way to keep things safe is to put them in a bank vault. If you put something in a box it will remain safe, for a while. However there is a story about the Nizam of Hyderabad, who at one time was the wealthiest man in the world. He had many, many pearls and some were stored away in a closed up room. Pearls need to have some fresh air around them. One day the door to the room was opened it was discovered that they had all crumbled into dust. So this is something to think about.

One of the ways that we keep aspects of our self safe is to project them. Parents, for example, may project what they themselves want into their children, sacrificing themselves so that their children can enjoy. We can also project the goodness of our self into the buddha. We can imagine that we are very ordinary, very small, and that the buddha is very good. Buddha is very special and I am not very good. Then we can pray, *"Please look after me, please save me."* On an outer level that's a very typical practice.

In tantra, the dynamic between this projective force and the stuckness of one's own situation becomes the dynamic for liberation. You increase the force of the projection by saying very many prayers, by praising the Buddha, Padma Sambhava, Tara, *"You are wonderful, you are the best, you are this, you are that, you have feathers coming out of the top of your head which means you save all beings, you have lovely big earrings which means you pull the beings out of hell..."* and so on. You inspire yourself with all the symbolic descriptions which are indicating that this deity is fantastic. You then merge with the fantastic. Having projected all the potential of the good into the object, the subject and the object merge together and dissolve in non-duality. This is the helpful way of deconstructing the splitting dynamic of projection.

Dzogchen however does not make use of projection, since projection is always linked with splitting. You can't have projection without splitting and splitting means duality so it's going to cause trouble. The basic instruction then is that there is no buddha but your own mind. If you look for the buddha

somewhere else, you are going to get into difficulty. Saying, *“The Buddha is your own mind”* is not referring to the contents of your thoughts *per se*, to how you conceptualise yourself. But if you want to find the buddha, which is your own mind, you have to find your own mind. You have to be in relation to the actuality of presence.

So your presence is here, moment by moment, otherwise you wouldn't have any experience. But this presence, as we looked at before, is like the mirror, which shows itself through the reflection. So when you are walking around full of thoughts and memories, hopes and fears and so on, it may look as if the content of the mind at that moment *is* the experience itself, but it's only part of it – just as when you look in the mirror you see the reflection, whereas actually you are experiencing the clarity of the mirror, manifesting as the reflection. Without the clarity of the mirror you wouldn't have the reflection.

In the same way the presence of your mind *is* what allows you to be depressed, what allows you to be anxious, what allows you to be confused. It's not that you have to remove the anxiety and the confusion and the habitual negative thoughts in order to realise the clarity of the mind – but depression is *itself* the radiance of the buddha nature. Now that sounds very strange, because usually we say that depression, anxiety and confusion are the qualities of samsara however what we want is to get to nirvana where everything is beautiful and shiny and open.

This is one way of thinking about it and is a method which appeals to many people because it fits in with the common metaphor of 'a spiritual journey'. We are going from here to there; we are going to Jerusalem, to the Holy Land. Jewish people are very intelligent; they have the saying, *“Next year in Jerusalem.”* It means, 'not today but next year'. Of course when they got to Jerusalem, they got trouble. Bombs going off all the time so better to imagine that we'll get there next year! The 'Messiah' means 'the yet to come'. This means you can believe in the Messiah since projection into somewhere else-ness is often the way we hold an idea together. Because we want to believe that there is a 'good-good-good' and a 'bad-bad-bad'. This is duality.

Dzogchen says that there is one ground and two paths. Samsara and nirvana arise from the same situation. How is this possible? How can the bad come from the same place as the good? Well, because good and bad are an illusion, are illusory forms. In the sky we see dark rain-clouds, we see storms and lightning and we see rainbows and sunshine; all of these are possible inside the great space of being. The mind as infinity has no centre or circumference. We cannot say it's located anywhere and yet infinity is our nature. If something is infinite, it has no limit. If it has no limit, there is nothing coming from outside. All of samsara and nirvana arises in your own mind.

If we say that my mind is my brain, my brain is in the bone-box of my head, my head is linked to my body and so on – if we take such a materialistic reading we start with the notion of limitation. And something which is limited cannot become infinite. Not possible. Dzogchen teaching, which is grounded in meditation experience, says, *“Don't insult yourself. Never imagine that you are an ordinary being wandering in samsara.”*

### **Dzogchen is not interested in ignorance**

The unique aspect of dzogchen, and where it differs from buddhism in general, is that it's not interested in ignorance. It doesn't have a big theory of ignorance. Tantra has a lot of explanations about ignorance, where it came from and so on, but dzogchen says that what we call ignorance is just

another transitory phenomenon arising in the mind. And the ground of it is the mind itself. Otherwise we would always have the problem that the mind was here, then ignorance came and caught it, and then we had samsara. So where did ignorance come from? Was ignorance inside the mind before it came out? Is it like some latent disease which started to manifest? We know that people have conditions like that. Where did ignorance come from? It comes from the mind.

How could the good mind give rise to something bad? Now, this is the troubled thought of somebody who has never changed babies' nappies. Babies are very nice, but they also pooh a lot. And the pooh of the baby is kind of stinky. But it's also your own baby's pooh. So you have one pooh, but you can take it in two directions; you can say, *"Oh, my sweetie, never mind!"* or you can say, *"Oh, yuck..."* It's like that. You can say, *"Lovely babies but stinky pooh"* or *"It's all one package"*.

Ignorance is luminosity. Look at your own mind. What do we mean by ignorance? Ignorance means getting lost, not understanding. We sit in the meditation, we do the 'AA'... Maybe it's clear for a little bit, then thoughts or feelings come and we go wandering off inside them. Why do we do that? Because we are not focused; because we are not relaxed, because we are not aware. *"If only my meditation were better I wouldn't be doing that."* This is the view of duality. Better not to go in that direction.

Whatever arises in the mind, stay with what is arising in the mind, stay present with it and it will go free by itself. If you stand in relation to what's arising in your mind and move between these two polarities of fusion and getting lost, of merging and then distancing, of desire and then aversion... such two pulsations keep us moving, moving, moving. And of course they confirm the idea that there is something wrong with me! That I am not able to do this properly and that I have to try harder.

Such interpretations are completely constructed out of signs, out of *tsen*. *"This thought is bad! Who says the thought is bad? I say the thought is bad. I am the measure of all things! I know how my mind should be! I shouldn't have thoughts like this! I want to be a good person. It's terrible to have this. I hate this ghastly meditation!"* People get very disturbed because this is their mind and they don't want their mind to be that way. They want a better quality of mind!

You can't have it. You have what you have. Our life is how it is. We might think, *"Oh, if only I had decided to do that a long time ago..."* or *"If only I had met this person when I was younger..."* or if only, if only... 'If only' doesn't help; you have what you have. Whether it works or doesn't work, it's like that. So, what is it?

You are sitting; a thought comes. Who does the thought come to? *"I don't like this thought."* It comes to the one who doesn't like the thought. *"Hm... I like this thought."* It comes to the one who likes the thought. The thought is being received by someone; that is to say, the thought comes as an object through the subject which is a consciousness which has a valency of feeling. The feeling tone is either positive, or negative, or neutral.

The receptor of the thought, the one who takes up the thought, who stands in reactivity to the thought is another thought. Thought follows thought follows thought. Some thoughts look like the object, some thoughts look like the subject. What we call consciousness in its precise manifestation moment by moment is a thought-patterning.

For example, now I'm suddenly conscious of the microphones in front of me. Before I wasn't thinking of them, I wasn't even looking at them but for some reason my gaze went down and I suddenly see them. Oh! So now I'm conscious of them. Who is conscious of them? I am. Who is the I who is conscious of them? The one that's talking about being conscious of them. That is to say, the subjective thought-construct, the self-formation is standing in relation to the object-formation. But there is also a sphere of awareness within which that's happening, because when the consciousness of the microphones vanishes, something else arises.

Where does it arise into? Into the field of clarity. What is this field of clarity? It's ungraspable. Stay with the field of clarity; stay with the one who is present with the experience without entering into judgement about the experience. Let's take an example. We have some pain. Someone else asks us how we feel. *"I feel bad."* *"Oh, that's terrible that you feel bad."* Such sympathy is also nice, but both the pain and the sympathy are transient movements in time and space. They establish nothing. The pain is transient, the conceptualisation of the pain is transient, the expression of that conceptualisation is transient and the other person's response is transient. They are energetic dynamic formations devoid of substance, revealed through presence. In this state, if you stay present, the fact that a pain-formation is arising is harmless. It still feels, *"Ow!"* Something is there, but it doesn't contaminate you because you are not resting in a narrow defined self-concept which wants to reject having pain because *"I don't like having pain!"* So, again, the more you define yourself as something, the more you have to try and edit the arising, the emergent field of experience, in relation to your self-concept.

Of course that doesn't mean that you can just say, *"Whatever comes, comes."* This is the big slogan for dzogchen, *"Whatever comes, comes"*, but when you walk across the road you don't want to be hit by a car. So it means: whatever comes, comes – but...! Being careful crossing the road also comes, because if it doesn't come, you are dead!

Making choices also comes in the field of emergence. It's not passive, since then you would be a subject willing to be battered by experience and it would be a somewhat masochistic position. It's not that. 'Whatever comes, comes' is the experience of awareness. But awareness is inseparable from the energy of awareness, so you have *rigpa*, awareness, and *rigpai tsel* [རིག་པའི་རྩལ་], the energy of awareness, which is constantly emerging into the field of experience. So whether we are talking or walking or sitting or eating, this is the unfolding energy of awareness. It is inseparable from the ground. It's not a thing, and it arises, as the texts say, like the rays of light from the sun. Tibetans are not interested in thermodynamics and the nature of the sun's actual situation; they are just saying, *"This is a big ball in the sky, it never changes and it's always giving out light."*

So the sun doesn't change; so it's like awareness, and coming out of it are rays of heat and light, illuminating the sky. This is the ceaseless flow of the energy of awareness. Everything is the energy of awareness. Everything is experience. There is nowhere else for anything to come from. So when you have a thought, such as *"I don't like that other thought!"* this is a thought about a thought. Where did these two thoughts come from? They came from the same ground.

When I was a child I fought with my brother all the time – for years and years and years. Two brothers, two children, born from the same mother. My mother used to look at us fighting and say, *"I don't understand why you are always fighting!"*, because we were both her children. Maybe it was the fact that we were both her children that caused us to fight all the time!

In the same way the great earth-mother, *Prajnaparamita*, the mother of all the buddhas, gives rise to a lot of children, but these children don't always like each other. So when you sit in the meditation and say, *"I like this; I don't like that"* – this is the play of the children of the mind. This is the energy of awareness showing the form of competition, rivalry, editing and so on. Why is it like that? That's a very good question. When I used to ask my teacher C R Lama questions like that he would say, *"Well, when you get to Zangdopalri and meet Padma Sambhava, then that can be your first question."* Which is to say, *"Keep quiet and don't bother me with your nonsense."*

Buddha told a story to illustrate this. Somebody is walking in the forest when suddenly an arrow comes and strikes them in the arm. Should they examine the arrow to see if the wood or the feathers can help them identify which tribe the archer belongs to? Or try to work out from which direction the arrow was shot? Buddha said, no. The first thing to do is take the arrow out of their arm.

There is a time for curiosity and there is a time just to be very simple. Our main thing is to observe how our mind is, and not be looking, *"Why? Why? Why is it like this?"* Rather, look at *how* is it and where does it come from? If we ask the wrong question it will take us into an endless sequence of explanations and conceptual elaboration. Look for the 'how' – *how* does this happen? It arises out of emptiness and it goes back into emptiness. This is how it shows itself. One thought leads to a thought about the thought, and then another thought... it appears that they have a commentarial form. One is commenting on the other and the other – building up a composite picture. Yet each of them is devoid of inherent self-nature. None of them is real. Each is the radiance of the mind.

When you look in the mirror or maybe turn it around, you see many different reflections arising; some reflections you like, some reflections you don't like. What is the status of what you see? Only reflections. The reflection is empty. You can't take a reflection out of a mirror since it has no self-substance. You say, *"Ugh, that's horrible!"* or *"Oh! That's beautiful!"* These are reflections. There is no substance in the reflection to hold the identification 'beautiful' or 'ugly'. Beautiful and ugly is the co-creation of the affective quality or the aesthetic moment of the revelation of that reflection. Things are illuminated by the quality of our participation and this participation is itself the radiance of awareness.

Here's what to do. Let's say you have a thought like, *"My children are awful, I wish they'd never been born."* That thought came maybe because you were tired or the children were annoying you or whatever. For some reason you had a moment of antipathy. Next you feel guilty or ashamed, *"How could I have a thought like that? That's terrible!"* What is the horror in the first thought? *"I am the parent, these are my children, I love them. Because I love them I shouldn't have thoughts like that!"* My image of myself as a good parent means that I should never hate my children. I should never think, *"They've spoiled my life, ruined my body, taken all my money, stolen my freedom"* since these are terrible thoughts to have about my poor little children. You have had a negative experience and then you try to antidote it with a positive experience – because it's terrible that that negative thought was there at all! It somehow poisoned me, because I want to be loving and kind and open-hearted. Where did this negative thought come from? It comes from the mind – it doesn't come from anywhere else. What status does it have? It's a reflection. It's like a reflection in a mirror. It has no quality. What gives it its valency is the next thought.

'I want my children to die.' A thought. 'I want the bells to stop.' A thought. 'I'll go and shoot the priest.' A thought. There is nothing wrong with the thought; it's a thought. But then we have the reaction to

the thought *'It's terrible!'* The thought in itself was neutral; it's just something arising. It's just a thought. But we take the thought as if it were a showing of our real nature: because I have that kind of a thought I am a bad person. I don't want to be the kind of person who has that kind of thought.

That is to say: the big problem in meditation is that we believe that the thought is arising from the ego, that the thought is an indication of the ego, that the thoughts that we have are a kind of x-ray of our soul. *"Because I'm having thoughts like that, it shows that I am a bad person" or "I don't know how to meditate"* or I'm selfish or greedy or cruel or whatever it would be. So the thought, *'I want my children to die'*, which is transient, has already gone. This is gone! The reaction to it starts to build up some kind of fear and there is a condensation: I don't want to be like that! This is terrible! So there is a retraction and in that retraction you have more of a definition. This is the kind of thing that happens for most of us all the time. The habit of reification means that we block the natural process of self-liberation. No, that's a wrong expression. You can't block self-liberation, because the thought *'I want my children to die'* has already gone; it's self-liberated, it's just gone. But we hang on to it, *"It must mean something; this horrible thought is telling me something about myself. Why do I have thoughts like this? I hope nobody can read my mind..."* This is why people immediately get anxious if I tell them that I work as a psychotherapist. *"Oh my God, you can see up my nose!"*

### My teacher told me...

When I met my teacher C R Lama, the very first thing he told me was, *"The buddha is not a nice man."* This is incredibly helpful. The buddha is not a nice man. The buddha is the unborn *dharmakaya*, the Buddha is the open space, the *dharmadhatu*, the buddha is not a thing, it's not a person, it's not nice, it's not not-nice, it's not anything. It is emptiness; the radiance of emptiness – like the clear blue sky. You read this in the texts again and again and again, "clear blue sky", open, luminous expansion within which manifestation is occurring. *"But I don't want these thoughts in my mind!"* Who says that? A thought-sequence. So one thought evokes or calls into being another set of thoughts. And each of these thoughts sets off another and another and another... You get this concatenation, this linked chaining of patterning – this is how our life evolves.

### Stay on the thought: *lug gu gyud*

In *thogal* [ཐོག་ལོག་ལྟུང་] practices they describe this continuous process of experience as *lug gu gyud*, or *dorje lug-gu gyud*. *Lug* [ལུག་] or *lug-gu* [ལུག་གུ་] means sheep and *gyud* [རྒྱུད་] means a chain. You know how you can see a whole series of sheep going one after another along a little track on the hillside? Sheep follow, follow, follow... Likewise we have these thoughts that follow, follow, follow... and they leave tracks. If you recognise that the thought, in the moment that it arises, is nothing at all, then you won't put extra valency into it. This is why the instruction is always, *"Don't enter into judgement!"* Don't sit there, separated from your own experience, saying, *"Bad! Good! I don't want the bad! I do want the good!"* If you do that, you sit in the split; you are inhabiting duality and you are creating duality. Who is doing that? A thought.

However the thought hasn't come from ignorance. This is the particular teaching of dzogchen. The thought, *'I don't want this thought!'* is itself arising from the mind. The negative thought comes from the mind, the judgemental thought comes from the mind – stay with the mind itself. Patrul Rinpoche, Nuden Dorje and other meditation teachers always say, *"Stay on the thought as it arises; stay on whatever is arising."* In Tibetan, this is *thog-tu* [ཐོག་ཏུ་] and it means to stay with it, but stay with it,

not on top looking down, not in a positional way, but stay as the presence within which the thought is arising. Again, the middle way. Don't merge into the thought, don't separate yourself from the thought.

It's not like the kind of body-scanning that you might do in the early stages of *vipassana*, where you take your attention through the body and you attend to what is occurring thereby having a very simple internal dialogic relation – what attention reveals and how it's commented on. It's not like that. It's that in the clear blue sky suddenly an aeroplane is going through it. Suddenly some clouds are blown by the wind across the sky. Suddenly the clouds are raining. Then there is a thunderstorm. Then there is a rainbow. We sit in the practice; many things are arising and passing.

The mind itself, our mind, is the *dharmakaya*; it's like space. The quality of the *dharmakaya* is that it reveals the *sambhogakaya*. *Sambhoga* means enjoyment. That is to say, everything arises in this mind. The *dharmakaya* is the source of everything and it's omnivorous. It's not vegan, it doesn't have any allergies; it eats everything! So it also eats shit.

Therefore when you sit in the meditation and you have a 'negative thought', as you call it, and you say, "*I am not going to eat this! I don't want anything to do with this!*" this is the proof to yourself that you are not in an open state. As soon as you enter into judgement you have lost the ground of your being. The ground of being, the *dharmadhatu*, is infinite like the sky, it has no prejudice. When prejudice arises – liking, not liking – this is thought judging thought. Like me fighting with my brother. "*Why does he always get to do that? It should be my turn! Give me that!*" Thoughts are competing for space, they are competing for validity. "*Me first!*" – "*No, it's my turn!*" This thought, then that thought, then that thought...

### **Let go and you are there, let go and you are there...**

The key thing is again and again, to relax, release, open. Let go and you are there. Let go and you are there... This is the profound paradox, which, as I was trying to show earlier, is from the theravada teaching, the mahayana teaching, the tantric teaching and the dzogchen teaching. They all say the same thing: It's by holding on, by attachment to bringing the five *skandhas* into the sense of being a person, by pulling together patterns of thoughts and saying they are 'good' or 'bad' – this desire to be the shaper or the house-builder, as described in the *Dharmapada*, – this desire is itself the energy of the *dharmakaya*!

This is the most important thing to understand in the practice: the ground, the openness of the mind, gives rise to both samsara and nirvana. They are not two separate things. So when samsaric formation arises in the mind, don't be disturbed, don't try to turn samsara into nirvana by developing better quality of thoughts, by suddenly saying some mantras to purify your mind. Stay with the thought as it arises, on the point of the arising of the thought. The thought will dissolve back into the space it has come from, like in summertime you can sometimes see these small, fluffy white clouds that just come out and then you just watch them dissolving back in the sky; coming out, dissolving back in the sky...

Thought's coming; you stay with it. Oh! It's open... and you open. The openness is now – something else is coming in, going out... In that moment the mind is spacious like the sky; you are not in a fixed ego-position looking at what is happening.

### Dharmakaya, sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya: how they link

There you have the link between the *dharmakaya* and the *sambhogakaya*. The *sambhogakaya* clarity shows everything. Everything that arises in the *sambhogakaya* is grounded in the *dharmakaya*. Within that richness of the field we have the experience of self and other. I am here, I look around, I see different people's faces and so on; and we have different relations with different people in the room; we speak to some people in some ways and to other people in other ways. It's just like that, it's our karmic connection, whatever.

We come into being in relation to the other, within the field of clarity. This is participation. The energy which arises as 'me' is arising from the ground and participating with the energy that arises as 'you' which is arising from the ground. So the one ground arises as the immediacy of the field within which each of us is, if you like, the centre of the world – although there is no centre. But it's as if it is arising out of us, because each of us experiences as if from our heart the emergence of this field, within which we meet other people. What we can transact with other people or not is dependent on our energy formation. Some people can be very close together, other people not so close. To get into a judgement about this is not helpful, to observe the differentiation of movements of energy which don't establish anything.

This is called the *nirmanakaya*. Because the *nirmanakaya* means both to be available and to be helpful. The main thing is to be available. We are available, but if there is no connection, then there is nothing to be done. It's just like that. With some people we have an immediacy of connection; we are just 'in' something – for a while. Then maybe not. With some people that may last a long time, but each moment of that is a showing, is a revealing *inside* the clarity of the openness. So the openness, the clarity and the participation are inseparable. And the moments of the participation are always arising and dissolving.

When you hold on to them there is a forgetfulness of the ground. If you grasp – like now I am grasping a pen – I have the pen but I lose the potential of my hand. If I want the potential of my hand I can't hold the pen. So we have to know that you go into the particularity of the moment. There is nothing wrong with that, but then it goes and you come back to your hand. This is what the texts mean when they talk about being 'fresh', being relaxed and open and fresh. However if I have the idea that actually I'm a writer, I was born to have a pen in my hand, then all the other potential of this is lost. The limitation of my potential is self-determined, in saying, "*I am a writer.*"

*Nirmanakaya* is 'field-relatedness' which is to say, you call me into being in a particular way. Therefore how I am with you is caused by you as much as by me. This is the liberation from the self which comes through participative clarity. Because if you sit *in* yourself, then your own karmic formation or your personality, your likes and dislikes, become the limit of what you can do. Whereas when you are thoughtful of the other, it takes you out. A common experience of this for people is when they become a parent and have to get up in the middle of the night to do things for a small child. Before that, they never did that. Now they do; they do that because the other calls them to be other than who they think they are. The sameness of 'themselves' is disrupted. "*I don't want to do that, but I have to.*" The 'I don't want to' is the enclosure or the self-formation. 'But I have to.' And so you get a movement out of that.

This is why, in the dzogchen tradition, the *dharmakaya* is relatively easy, the *sambhogakaya* is more difficult and the *nirmanakaya* is very difficult. In the *nirmanakaya* we are in the world with other



people and we've got to keep being fresh. Building up strong thought-pictures about other people is very tempting and also very harmful. It's very difficult not to do it. Somebody says something that hurts you and you think, "*Oh! I don't trust you very much now. Let me sit in that thought, 'I don't trust you.' I felt different yesterday, but today I am not so sure that I trust you anymore...*" You sit in that thought. You can get trapped by a thought.

The thing about a thought is that you can hold it like a pen whereas openness you can't hold. Openness is very scary. I'm open. Now what? I'm just open. I can't know how I am going to be if I'm open, because how I am going to be will depend on the people that I'm open with. That is to say: I am available to become co-emergent with the field. Predictability, total control, mastery, planning – this all has to be held very lightly, very softly. It's not that you become entirely plastic and you are moulded by the other, but you come into being in relation to the field. This is the important thing.

### *Seeing yourself through the other*

I remember years ago I was in a training in Gestalt-therapy. It was in a big institute and there were two rooms, with maybe sixty people in each room. There was a couple who came from America, called Erving and Miriam Polster. They were, I don't know, maybe seventy at the time. It was incredible, because over these two days, each of them took one of the rooms, one day each, and was working with a big group. As they went round – the group was in a circle and they went and worked with each person – they would go towards the person and as they would walk from one person to the other, their body would change. Their tone of voice would change. The gaze in their eye would change. Because they would find a way of meeting that individual. Because there were a lot of people they worked with each person maybe only for ten minutes, but each person got a very precisely, perfectly cooked, dainty little meal that fitted their palate perfectly. And you could see them swallowing it and licking their lips. It was so exquisitely beautiful...

These were people who had really learned to be flexible, to be available and flexible and to be for the other. All that they had was for the other, but not on their terms – on the terms of the other. So cooking themselves for the other was not a diminution of themselves, since they had realised the most important thing which is that it's the qualities of the *other* that allow me to see who *I* am. If I am always relating to myself I just see the same old image whereas other people show us to ourselves. We can't see ourselves without the other. This is something very beautiful.

So in this path, being with other people in a flexible and responsive way allows us to see our own neurotic structures, our own habitual patterns of limitation. Then we realise that when I am self-referential, I abandon the other. In being true to myself I'm not available to the other. However in being true to my *ground* I *am* available to the other. That is to say: when I relax and open and manifest from my own ground I return to myself through my availability to the other but when I stay true to myself, to my own set of assumptions and predictions and likes and dislikes, I'm not true to the other, and I am also betraying myself.

So these notions of *dharmakaya*, *sambhogakaya* and *nirmanakaya* are very practical, they help us in the sitting meditation, but also in the interactions that arise when we come out of the meditation. Clearly the key thing is to understand the *dharmakaya*. *Dharmakaya* is not something 'high'. It's not special, it's not esoteric; it's the actuality of our mind as it is moment by moment.

## TREKCHO PRACTICE OF THE THREE SKIES

The style of practice that we have been looking at is called *trekcho* [ཐལ་སྐྱོད་] cutting and it gives instructions on maintaining the presence of 'the three skies'.

The first sky is the outer external sky, which is the space that we see all around us. This becomes invisible to us when we fixate on the substantial reality of the things that we see which is why we have spent a lot of time over these last days looking at the illusory nature of what appears to us. When we look out and we see the walls, the people and so on, we have to recognise again and again that this is our own creation. Our own mind is involved in the elaboration of the image of what we see. Everything we see is like a cloud or a rainbow forming in the sky.

The second sky is the sky of the channels, particularly the channel which is running from the heart through the eyes. It's said to be like the horn of a wild ox meaning that it is quite sharp at the point when it comes out from the heart. It's two and they come out through the eyes. That is to say that the awareness relates to the world from the space of the heart into the external space through this space of the channel. This is different from the pathways of conceptualisation and we'll come on to that a little bit later. Of course we normally have the idea that light is coming *in* through the eyes, but we also have the experience in dreams of, if you like, visionary light appearing. Of course when we think of the relationship between perception and conceptualisation, the light that is outside, if you don't conceptualise it, is just about nothing at all. It's just colour. When you conceptualise it, it starts to take on its form. So it's actually *the light of the mind* which creates the ten thousand things. They are not self-existing out there by themselves. So this is part of what it means by 'the light', but it also means 'visionary light', and we'll explore that a little bit later.

Then the third sky is the sky of the heart. There are lots of elaborate descriptions about the nature of the heart: that there is a sun and a moon throne and an eight-cornered enclosure that it's in, relating to the petals of the lotus in the heart-chakra but in particular it means that the space of the heart, which is the space of presence, is infinite like the sky. Ungraspable like the sky. And rich in the potential to manifest like the sky.

So the linking of these three skies is that in any situation we are without agenda. This agenda-less openness connects out into the situation there, through this empty pathway, the pipe that extends out into the distance and this connects with the space outside. Now this is very different from our usual way where we are inside ourselves and we are thinking about something that we see out there. We are in a kind of information-processing mode. This is a description of how to engage in the immediacy of the situation.

So when we sit in the practice and we are looking for the mind, the more confidence that you have that the mind is not a thing which can be grasped, the more we live in a state of wonder or amazement at this inconceivable, beyond conceptualisation, richness, fecundity, generosity of the ground source which reveals everything.

Everything we see is related to the mind. If we bring a dog into this room it doesn't see the room the same way as us. A frog doesn't see the same way as us. The flies that come in the window in the summertime, the wasps and the bees – they don't see this room. We are convinced that this room is as it is because of the happenstance of having this kind of a body. Elephants, giraffes don't see it this

way. If we were to flood the room and let in salmon and cod and other fish, they wouldn't see the room in the same way. This room exists in relation to us. It is not self-existing. This is the most fundamental fact. Therefore, what we see is our vision. And different people here will have different views.

If we invited a representative of the Taliban to this Buddhist centre as a special guest-lecturer and we asked him, *"Please give us your advice on how we should live!"*, he would say, *"Well, blow up this evil place for a start! This is the house of Shaitan; this is the devil's house. What are all these statues? We have already destroyed many statues like these up in Bamian."* Because that's what he would see. If you are a muslim fundamentalist, you would see these buddhist statues as something terrible, leading people astray, a doorway into hell. However if you are a buddhist, you think it is the doorway into enlightenment. This is your particular vision. Is it leading to hell or to heaven? Who knows? Because we are always trapped inside our own vision.

On the level of vision you go from one vision to another vision, to another. You may believe in communism, or democracy, or anarchism, but anyway we are always believing in *something*. Some people believe in one kind of music, then they shift to believe in another kind of music. All our lives we are caught up in a bubble of a belief, an ideogram of representations, which encapsulates our world for that moment – and then it's gone. So as each world vanishes, we find another one, and another one.

If we want to recognise the nature of our vision, we have to see the space of the heart, since the vision arises from the space of the heart. Then you recognise that the vision is empty so its form doesn't matter – you recognise that it's an illusory formation. 'Buddhism' is an illusory formation. Buddhism is not 'true' and christianity is not 'untrue'. The point is not that it is operating in a scheme of right and wrong. Buddhism is pointing us in the direction of seeing that which is neither right nor wrong, which is the ground of our own experience.

This is why linking the experience of the outer sky to the sky of the heart is absolutely vital. And the pathway of this channel which is extending from the heart through the eyes as an empty pathway, unimpeded, unobscured, is vital as well. So when these three skies meet, you have a non-conceptual appreciation of the world. That is to say, although concepts may be involved, they are seen as the energy of the ground. They are not relied on in themselves.

Tibetan texts are often very confusing because they may say *'mi tog pa'* or *'tog pa me'* both of which mean 'without thought'. It doesn't mean that there are no thoughts at all; it means that thought is not being used as a basis of identity. In our ordinary life we are resting on one thought, resting on another, resting on another.

If you see thoughts as a problem, then the goal of your meditation is to gain a state where you have no thoughts. But if you have no thoughts, then you paralyse yourself, because you cut off the energy of awareness!

Going right back to the mahayana sutras there are two main aspects which are brought together: 'unborn' and 'unceasing'. The mind itself, the *dharmakaya*, is unborn. That is to say, it has never been born as a thing. In the twelve examples of the nature of illusion, one example is the child of a barren woman. If a woman is not able to have children, the phenomena of the world are her children. That is to say, everything exists as something which has never been born. If it has never been born, this

means it has never come out of the womb. The womb in traditional symbolism is linked with emptiness.

'Unborn' means empty, open like the sky, but simultaneously its nature is unceasing. So it's not 'empty-empty' as in nothing at all, a kind of dead emptiness, where there is just peace, tranquillity. In some of the conceptualisations it says that nirvana is peace, meaning that nothing is happening. Like blowing out the lamp, nothing at all. No disturbance. But no disturbance also is half, because the mind is always showing, or the nature is always showing something. To have a mind without any activity is a kind of meaningless proposition.

It's not the fact that the thoughts and sensations and feelings exist or manifest that is the problem. The problem is what we do with them. If you recognise them as energy, they are not a problem. So when we sit in the meditation and we become aware of thought after thought after thought... and sometimes you might feel like screaming, "*Shut the fuck up! Just shut up!*" Because it's terrible. You know, if you do a long retreat and you are stuck in a little room with your own mind, it's very horrible for most people. Because there is just this endless stuff, and stuff, and stuff... aahh! And you can't control it. And this is a very, very helpful awakening: that the mind is beyond control. This doesn't mean it's *out of* control, it's *beyond* control. That is to say, you have to make friends with it.

### **Milarepa and the demons**

In this famous Tibetan story about Milarepa, when he is in the Cave of the Red Rock, he is trying to do his meditation practice but every day the demons are coming and disturbing him and he is ill at ease in his body, and then is forgetting the words he has to say and he is just troubled by all these forces around him. He does more and more practices, more strong practices to try to control the demons. And he has no success. So after months of doing this, when he is really exhausted and is on the point of giving up – he finally thinks, 'Well, I'm living in this cave and the demons are living in the cave too so maybe we should find a way to live together.' And as soon as he does that and he puts an arm around the demons, he starts to be able to integrate them as manifestations of the shared ground. Then everything becomes easy, because he is not struggling against his self. He is not going into opposition. He is not fusing with them, but neither is he going into opposition; he is finding the middle way which is to say, 'There is space enough for everything.' Because everything is the movement inside space.

That's a very helpful story. So when we sit in the meditation, it's not about trying to turn off thoughts and feelings. It's about allowing thoughts and feelings to be what they are, which is the energy of the mind, which is unceasing. By recognising that it is what it is, what it presents itself as is integrated with what it is.

### **'As is' and 'as if'**

To help unpack this we can think of the difference between 'as is' and 'as if'. Maybe as a child your parents made little shadows on the wall, using their hands and fingers, and told you a story perhaps about a rabbit or a deer walking along...? The 'as is' is a shadow, the shadow of the light onto the hand. The 'as if' is when we recognise, "*Oh! It's a deer! Look, it's got two little horns...*" In fact it's not a deer at all, it's a shadow. That is 'as if'; it's an interpretation which is put on to the basic ingredient of the shadow. This is the realm of *vipassana* meditation; you take the raw ingredients, you put them together, you cook the cake and then you deconstruct the cake and you see the raw ingredients.

You start to see the relationship between the deer and the fact that it's actually a shadow; and that the shadow is resting on the hand and the light and the wall. These three things are operating.

To say that the mind has no top or bottom, no beginning and no end is not a theory or proposition; it is what we can see directly. We look at our mind – ungraspable, we can't find this anywhere, nothing is outside it, everything is within it. What is this? Well, maybe it's a bunch of illegal immigrants! Maybe the problem is that we don't have enough border-control, because we have all of this stuff. How are we going to sort it out? This is where we get confused. As soon as you think that what's in your mind is 'stuff', you are then standing in relation to the stuff.

This is the mind itself. Everything that arises is the energy of your own mind. So you don't have to do anything with it. It will go free by itself.

***Three basic principles: appearance and emptiness; clarity and emptiness; awareness and emptiness.***

We are going round and round the same terrain from different points of view, examining the same three basic principles. Because the mind is open it gives rise to many things. Whatever it is that arises, vanishes by itself. Thus we have appearance and emptiness, clarity and emptiness, awareness and emptiness. When we talk of awareness or clarity or appearance, these are words used to describe the nature of our experience from these three different points of view; they are not three different things, they are all empty.

As we look around this room, relaxing the interpretive matrix, there is nothing. It's a very bright kind of nothing, but it's nothing in the sense that if you don't put out your concepts to create and grasp, you will have nothing to hold on to. It's nothing. It's just light. The light is the radiance of the mind. When thoughts are taken as giving shape to this light, then we seem to have *something*, but this something vanishes.

This is the sequence that we do in the practice again and again and again. We relax and open. We do this with our eyes open because we want to allow the return to the link between the pipe that's coming from the heart through the eyes. Normally our conceptualisation, according to the tradition, is running through two different pipes. It's described in different ways in different texts, but it can be described as coming through the two main side-channels or from the lungs, rising up and going through our nostrils.

Our ordinary consciousness is developed through the relationship of this kind of movement; the movement of conceptualisation. That is to say, mental energy or consciousness as the vehicle of experiencing things has a different pathway from the immediacy of non-dual perception. You may have noticed that when you ask somebody a question, they may reply, "*Oh, hang on a minute.*" and close their eyes in order to think better. That's because we go *into* ourselves in order to do that.

In this practice however we have our eyes open because what is out there and what is inside is the same. That is to say, what is out there is what is revealed. It shows itself in its immediacy. 'Non-conceptual' means that it's not interpreted. It is what it is.

So when we put our fingers on the wall to make a shape, even before we apply the word 'shadow', there is an immediacy. Something which was not there is now there because between the light and the wall, the hand has appeared as dependent co-origination generating this appearance which we

call the shadow. But we call it a shadow before we even see that something is there. It shows itself. All you need to know about it is there. Ah! It's there! What is it?

When we say, "*What is it?*" we are adding value. We are not revealing value. From the point of view of dzogchen, this is vital to understand – that when you think *about* something, you do something to it. You add value, but you subtract value at the same time. That is to say, you don't allow it to reveal itself because you start to tell it what it is. So you move from the visionary to the conceptual. Does that make sense?

For example, you are out in the hills running fast down a steep path, going from stone to stone to stone. Your foot lands on a stone and starts to wobble. Immediately your whole posture is changing; you are re-balancing, without being able to think, because it's very, very quick. You are re-placing yourself in order to continue. Or if you are windsurfing. There is no time to think when you rebalance, it comes as a direct relationship in which the wind and the board and the wave and the balance, the body is all of a piece. It's what athletes refer to as 'being in the zone', it's a state of non-dual alliance which allows the spontaneity of experience to manifest. I imagine we have all had some experience like that?

This is talking about something very similar. It's saying that there is an intelligence, or a clarity, which is operating with the immediacy, the facticity, of what is shown. Had you paused to ask yourself, "*What will I do?*" when you were running down the hill or windsurfing then you would have interrupted the non-dual integrated flow of connectivity or energy that was occurring. You would have displaced yourself into an abstraction, which would then be applied after the fact. But it's too late then; you would have missed the moment. You have got to be on the point, on the point, on the point...This is absolutely how it is.

It's exactly the same in meditation. Once you start to try to make sense of your experience, you are into another realm of experience. It's not a *wrong* experience – it's just a different *kind* of experience. It is mediated or indirect experience, whereas what we are aiming for is direct experience.

Let's take an example from cooking. If you are used to eating food with a lot of garlic or salt or chilli, but for some reason then have to eat plain white rice and steamed vegetables, the food will not be very tasty. You will be yearning for the stimulus that comes from these intense flavours of the garlic and salt and chilli. This is our situation. We are addicted to conceptualisation and when somebody has an addiction, whether it's to tobacco or alcohol or any other kind of activity, they find themselves returning to that activity because it seems to prove something. So if you are looking for a conceptual proof, you go back to the familiar because it generates a sense of belonging and competence and ease of being.

This is why meditation has to be done again and again. Because we are in the process of getting used to what is actually there, which happens only when we allow ourselves to let go of the fantasy that we have projected onto what is there. That is to say, we have been living in the realm of the 'as if' projected onto the 'as is' and so when we see the 'as is', it doesn't have enough taste for us. We want to sprinkle on the chilli powder! We add some more concepts. "*Ah! So that's what it is! Now I understand!*"

When we say, "*Now I understand!*" – this is the beginning of being stupid. To understand means to stand *under* something. If you stand under something, whether it's a bridge or an umbrella, it keeps

the rain off your head. That is to say: You don't have a direct relationship with the rain any more. Normally you wouldn't want to have a direct relationship with the rain because you see it as the enemy. In the same way, once you rely on the conceptualisation, you will not have a direct relationship.

You see this in the familiar gestalt-psychology drawing where you get the outline of two profiles – first of all you look and you see maybe two silhouettes, and then you look a little bit and then suddenly you see a candlestick. And then when you see the candlestick you try to find the faces again but they are not there. Then you relax a bit and now you get the two faces again but you've lost the candlestick. And so it flips in and out. Both are there because they are only interpretations.

In the same way, when we see the immediacy of the presentation, the 'as is', is like just the bare shape on the wall and the 'as if' is *also* there as a potential. Both can be together, but when they go together, because of our fixation or identification with, or investment in, the 'as if' dominates. Once you put the chilli powder on the plain rice you taste the chilli, you don't taste the rice. The stronger flavour, that is to say, the flavour that your tongue is seeking out and is used to, dominates what is there. Rice, plain boiled rice, has a flavour but you won't get it with a mouth full of chilli. Once you fall into your conceptual elaboration pattern, that's what you get. You go for more of it because that's what you know how to do. We know this from our meditation; we sit and again and again and we get caught up in thoughts.

So we are returned to these three points of Garab Dorje. Firstly, open to the nature of the mind. Secondly, don't put it into doubt, which is to say, don't look up your old recipe-book and decide, 'Well, maybe a little bit more salt would help.' It doesn't need salt, it doesn't need pepper, it doesn't need more boiling or roasting or cooking. It doesn't need anything. It is what it is, as it is. Thirdly, remain in this way with confidence.

This image of sky to sky is, I think, very helpful. Nowadays in the western world we think our mind is up in our head. Asian cultures still generally believe that *citta*, the mind, is here in the heart. It's centred in the middle of this construction (our body) and this source or radiant awareness releases the illumination of the world. The illumination of the world allows us to participate in the world.

When a baby is born it looks with its big eyes and it's already entering into some kind of non-verbal dialogue with the environment around. Gradually, as it comes into language and builds up a capacity for conceptualisation, showing more intentionality in the way it starts to work with the different people who are around it. It offers different kinds of expressions to different people. There is a cueing-in for reward and gain and comfort and so on. This is a learned operation, a constructive process. The baby is manifesting into the world in an attempt to maintain connection with the world which guarantees its survival. Babies don't do very well on their own. If you put a baby on the ground for a few hours, when you come back it might be dead. It's not safe there alone. Rats can come out and attack the baby, dogs can bite the baby; the baby has no protection at all. Birds can come from the sky and peck its eyes out. They are helpless.

Clearly then just to be open like this is not very helpful. As Chogyam Trungpa wrote in one of his books, if the purpose of meditation was simply to be open, then you would need to have special buddha hospitals where, as soon as people got enlightened, they would go and sit in a bed all day

long and have someone come and feed them and wipe their ass because they are just so open. Openness then, as openness, is not very useful.

What we want is the integration of manifestation and openness, of stillness and movement. We come round to this again and again. The mind is unborn; that means it's open, it's empty, it has no agenda and it's unceasing. Formations are constantly occurring. These two have to be integrated. We, in samsara, are on the side of manifestation; we know a lot about manifestation. Many of us here spend our time in communication with other people, so we know all kinds of ways of linking and connecting. What we don't know so much is stillness and in particular seeing that movement arises from the stillness; that the sound arises from the silence. It doesn't arise *out of* the silence; it arises *in and through* the silence.

The movement of the mind is within the mind because the mind is space. The mind is not something inside yourself which is why the text says that in the heart there is a sky. When you sit in the meditation and you look for your mind, you don't find anything. So the mind is ungraspable. But we are here. We are alive, we are alert, we are fresh. So the 'hereness' of ourselves presents itself: Here I am! Here I am! Here! But I look and it's not here, *here!* It's open and it's present – it's present as something which can't be caught. This is the sky in the heart. This manifests out through these channels, the immediacy of what we perceive now in the space which is outside. So we can now bring the integration of these spaces into the meditation practice.

[Meditation using the three AAs]

Generally speaking with this kind of practice it's probably more helpful not to do it for long at first. Of course you can build it up through time, but in a sense we are doing something somewhat counterintuitive because we also have to reflect on what it means to say 'relax' or 'let go'?

Who is this instruction being given to? For example if you have a small child and they are not sleeping very well, you might sing them a lullaby. First of all you might tell them a story and hopefully they get a bit sleepy and then you might sing to them in some way. The purpose of doing that is to encourage them to let go of their anxious agitation, their desire to stay up, their concern with what's happened in the day and just to be lulled, to be eased, into letting go so that they can fall asleep.

Now, what does it mean to fall asleep? It's not an active thing; it's a kind of passive thing. In a sense you do it, you fall asleep, but you do it by not doing it. That can be a way of thinking about what we are doing here. When we say to ourselves, 'We are just going to relax the tension into this three 'AA' sound.', we release the tension not by doing something but by allowing that release, allowing yourself to collapse in some way.

So who is going to be aware? It's trusting that, as the artificial light, which is the light of the activity of consciousness, goes down and you enter into a kind of darkness, this is the darkness before the dawn rather than the eternal darkness. Otherwise it would be very frightening. Samantabhadra, the founding buddha or adibuddha of dzogchen – the first, the primal, the forever-there-buddha – is traditionally dark blue in colour. Dark blue represents the colour of the sky just before dawn, when the darkness has vanished but it's not yet a bright clear light. It is the potential of illumination. When you turn off the light of conscious intentional control – being busy, actively doing things – you enter a state of passivity and waiting and it can be easy to then feel sleepy.



## *Dreams and dream yoga*

Normally when we fall asleep we may dream and we may not remember it, but then next thing it's the morning; or we get up in the middle of the night and have a pee or something. But when we were asleep, we were asleep and there is very little recollection. This is why in the Tibetan tradition they developed a lot of different forms of dream yoga, designed to help us to be aware that there is a light which arises in the mind independent of external illumination. When you are in bed, reading a book, then when you close the book and switch off the light, the room goes dark, you get sleepy and you fall asleep. The external source of the light has gone, but in the dream something is arising. You find yourself walking down the street or doing something. So where does that light come from?

This is the light of the mind and this is why this dream-state is considered to be very important, because it gives us the basis for having a sense that the mind shows patterns which are immediately meaningful. Of course in a dream things are happening but not in a very well defined way. If you are in the habit of keeping a dream diary and writing your dreams in the morning, you will be aware that you are already starting to edit. It's very difficult to give a representation of a dream. Because of course, dreams are three-dimensional, multi-coloured, with all sorts of things happening in them. When you write your account of the dream experience, it's very edited and flattened down.

When you are in a dream, the clarity which is there is quite strong. If you want to have more experience of your dreams, one way to do this is to fall asleep relaxed and doing our three 'AA' practice and then, as you feel yourself relaxing and getting closer to the sleep, maintain the state of the openness but just bring your focus of attention to the point of the pineal gland where you imagine a small ball of white light. Just rest in the open space. The bedroom light is off, you are lying in a dark space, but now you have this white light. As you fall asleep this gradually becomes a way of finding yourself in the dream. There are other techniques one can employ but for us, the function is simply to recognise that the mind produces vision independent of external light.

As the light of rational thought, of conceptual elaboration, of interpretation, goes down, we become aware of this different light. As with the example I gave before that plain boiled rice doesn't taste as intense as a preparation spiced up with garlic and chilli, so this light of the mind is not bright, it's like the colour of Samantabhadra. Sometimes in texts you may read about 'clear light' and you imagine there is some big arc lamp or shining brightly down. *"Ah! Now I see it very clearly!"* You might get a temporary vision like that, but generally speaking it's a bit shady.

We sit in that state and things are moving, and they are indistinct. Why are they indistinct? Well, what is the function that brings about distinction? It's organisation, it's conceptual elaboration. We bring things into focus by adding concepts to them. Consider an old school photo. There are people in the class and you are trying to remember their name. *"Oh yes, he was good at football. Oh that one, yes, he always wore short trousers... Aha, there is my old chum, wearing his glasses."* You start to remember, as you bring general memories, it brings out the name that goes on to the person and that in turn evokes further memories. So in that way we are bringing shaping through the application of thought. If you don't do that, the picture stays a bit hazy; you recognise something, but you don't quite know what it is.

This again is very important. In the first stage of the practice we have to allow ourselves not to know. Because the not-knowing on the basis of being free of cognition is the beginning of being able to know on the basis of the primal natural light. If you keep retreating onto the conceptual elaboration

as the only basis for knowing, you stay inside dualistic conceptual knowing. At first you may feel a bit stupid and tempted to put on a familiar light. This is why getting trapped in the flow of thoughts is very tempting since it seems much more meaningful than just sitting in an open way. You are sitting... nothing much is happening, it's a bit hazy... the light is not very bright... *"Blooming hell, it's Saturday night! What am I doing?! There must be more to life than this!"* So you add the chilli. But if you don't add the chilli...

### **Question about the dreamlike quality**

**Question:** What does dzogchen say about the dreamlike quality of what we are experiencing right now?

**James:** It would say exactly that – it's a dreamlike quality and one has to resist making sense of it. In the dream you are in something that you don't understand – and yet it's going on. So not to understand is not the end of existence. That's a key point. It's a bit like running down the hill – you don't understand what you have to do with your feet, but you are doing it, participating in what is there.

It's like some of the group sessions I run in the hospital. Many people don't speak in the group and sit trying to work out, 'What do I have to say?' but then by the time they have worked something out, the conversation has moved on, so they end up feeling cut off and stupid. Gradually they come to appreciate that if they don't catch the moment, some other bugger is going to take the speaking spot, and so they start to speak, and they stumble into it. They start to listen and they hear other people stumble. That stumbling and fumbling and tumbling is what life is. It's not very clear.

So dreamlike is exactly that: we have to act without knowing what the outcome would be. We are always entering into an emergent field and therefore we can alienate ourselves from that vital moment by the demand that we can put in our mind, as we've touched on before. Not to make a mistake. In particular we can torture ourselves with retrospective clarity. This is a very dangerous thing.

*—You know, if only I knew then what I know now!*

*—Well, it will never, ever be possible to know two years ago what you know now; it's just impossible.*

*—But I wouldn't have done it! Why didn't I know then?*

*—Because it was two years ago and you were living in that context.*

*—But I made a terrible decision, I've ruined my life, I've made other people unhappy, why did I do it?'*

*—Well, you acted in good faith according to the information you had at that time.*

*—But it didn't go well!*

That's how life is. But again and again people torture themselves by imagining that you can have the clarity that is achieved *after* the event *before* the event. It's not possible. This is one of the dangers of the European enlightenment and the privileging of rational intelligence. This is an intelligence which relies on analysis, but analysis is not in the moment. In the moment you have to act.

Family therapy is often done with a team, so the family is in a room, maybe four, five, six people with perhaps one therapist. The other therapists are behind a one-way glass screen, or maybe with a video camera, and in the ear of the therapist in the room there is a discreet speaker. The therapist is with the family when they get a message from the team, *"Tell the eight year old boy to shut up."* The

therapist thinks, “*I can’t do that!*” Why can’t the therapist do that? Because they are caught up in the dynamic of the family. And so nobody tells that boy to shut up. Again the team says, “*Tell that boy to shut up.*” This time the therapist says, “*You need to shut up and let your father speak.*” The boy is suddenly very shocked – nobody has ever said that to him. This is really very helpful to understand, because they say that within even one session, or even half a session, of being in the family matrix, the therapist is completely inducted into it. So much so that become part of the family and start having the thoughts which parallel into the family pattern of thought. And so they become useless. This is why a lot of therapy is not very helpful, since part of our social survival is our malleability, our plasticity, that allows us to merge in. We actually do need a team of people on the outside seeing the dynamic and saying, “*Interrupt it. Interrupt it!*” That’s the only thing that’s going to make a change – not going along with it. Collusion is always a big problem.

So sitting in meditation, is incredibly difficult. At least if you are sitting in the room having a conversation with someone, you’ve got a sense of perspective. But when it’s happening in your own head, these thoughts coming from all directions, it’s very easy to merge into them. The dreamlike quality of experience means that we are indeed trapped in this unfolding.

To work with the dreamlike nature of the unfolding of experience, the key point is to see what is the ground of the experience. Both as it represents itself as the object and as it comes as a subject. Subject and object arise from the ground of the unborn *dharmakaya*. They have nowhere else to come from. Therefore there is nothing to be gained by making sense of them. They don’t need *extra* illumination; they *are* the luminosity of the ground.

Now, if in your dreamlike flow of experience you are having a bad day and you feel tired and depressed and hopeless, this is the energy of the *dharmakaya*. It doesn’t *feel* like that. It feels like a problem to be solved by you perhaps speaking differently. But actually, of course, if you stay in that state with this feeling, you see that this feeling liberates itself. Then when you have contact in an actual interactive way with another person who made you feel depressed, you can allow them to self-liberate as well. That is to say, you needn’t take them so seriously!! In this way you really are working directly in the moment with the dreamlike state. But if you try to extrapolate yourself from the situation and go up into this helicopter of rational thought – hovering above the situation, calling in conceptual abstractions from other situations, developing your model, your map, your plan of how to behave – it may be supportive, but in the moment – we just speak. That’s the whole thing. We speak. We don’t know what we are going to speak or do – we speak.

Many European philosophers have explored this extensively, for example Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Husserl. Again and again they point to the fact that embodied being means that you reveal yourself to yourself in the moment of the enactment of that which you do not know. That is to say, we show ourselves without knowing what we are going to show. I think dzogchen is pointing to something very, very similar: that we cannot be in charge of things.

However, being buddhists, we have got to find a buddhist middle way. It’s not *out of* control, it’s not *under* my control, but being present *in* it. Again, it’s a bit like windsurfing, you are not absolutely in control because there is the wave, there is the wind, there may be other people in the sea, but you are moving with that. Or, walking through a busy city street, there are a lot of people and you are finding your way. Your way involves not bumping into other people, but nobody could say in advance

what their way is going to be down the street, because nobody knows when somebody will suddenly cut across them.

So, finding your way means that with each step the topology of what's arising – the actual immediate shaping of the phenomenological field – is revealed in the same moment as you reveal yourself by your participation in it. This is really what the dreamlike state is. I think that's very much like what a dream is, isn't it? It's just sort of unfolding. You can't rely on conceptual thought to make sense of it.

In my work in the hospital and in my clinic I see again and again how many people believe that worrying will save them. They believe that worrying is a useful application of mental activity. However all the evidence is that worry produces nothing but more worry. Worry is a non-effective pseudo-problem-solving activity. If you want to solve a problem, you take a piece of paper and a pen, you write down the problem, you then write down three options and you choose one. That's it! There is nothing much more than that.

That is why dzogchen instructions always say, 'Stay on the thought that is arising.' Even if you get lost in one thought, as soon as you become aware of something else emerging in the field, open yourself to it, don't hold back from it, open yourself to it – not merging into it, you are just with it and that returns you into the moment of the unfolding. The dreamlike state is exactly the cusp of the wave. The wave shows itself in its death, moment by moment; you have the self-liberation of whatever is arising.

Just try resting on that point, which is nowhere. Of course you can only rest on that point if you have no weight. And you can only have no weight if you experience awareness, which is not full of conceptual thought as distinct from consciousness which is always heavy, since it is carrying the burden of our thoughts, hopes and fears and so on.

### *Question about how to behave in the world with others*

**James:** The real task in the practice, as we've been indicating in so many ways, is integration. That is to say, whatever is happening, is already part of the liberated field. Often it doesn't feel like that, because we take up a position in relation to it. And of course in our ordinary lives there are certain established social choreographies, rhythms and patterns of interaction which have to be followed. For example in a work environment, people need to turn up on time and work reasonably hard and not leave a mess for other people to clear up. That's what we call reasonable, respectful social functioning.

If someone doesn't behave in that way, then we need to respond to it. On what basis? This has a lot to do with timing. We often think, 'Well, let's give them a chance. Maybe they'll change. Maybe they'll do better.' We don't want to come in too strongly. But if you do that, two things happen. First you go into a collusion with their bad behaviour, since you are going along with it and adjusting and adapting to how they are. Secondly, by the time you do speak to them, you've probably built up quite an energetic emotional response to them. In other words you are probably pretty pissed off, and so whatever comment you make is likely to have an extra charge. If they come in to work and do the same thing which you have been unhappy about for a long time but have said nothing about, and you then suddenly challenge them very strongly, they are likely to be quite shocked. This would indicate that one should respond quickly.

## First thought best thought

Tibetans say that the first thought is the best thought. We tend not see it that way. We like to think things through, *"I'll get back to you on that"*, we say. *"Look before you leap."* There is a fear of impulsivity, which is why it's important that when we observe ourselves, we learn to discern the difference between an impulse and a spontaneous action. Is the impulse the reactivation of a pattern, which is already established in yourself. Being irritated at other people's behaviour is something that we probably all entertain in various ways but different kinds of things will set us off. Some people get very irritated if they are on a quiet train journey and someone is talking loudly on a mobile phone. Other people get irritated at people dropping litter in the street and so on. Sometimes we have a sense that 'This should not happen.' You could call that a superego formation. There is the activity, there is my reaction to it, and there is the law. And the law is on my side, because according to the law, what they do is wrong! Unfortunately, I don't have a sheriff's badge and a gun... How can they do that? The answer to that question is always very easy: they can do it because they do it. That's what happens. People do these things. Who's going to stop them?

In London on the underground, lots of people nowadays put their feet on the seats. There are signs up saying, *"Please do not put your feet on the seats."* but who is going to arrest the person? Nobody. So these are empty signs. This is 'the death of the father'. The father has been dying for quite a long time now, and 'the death of the father' is very significant, because, as Nietzsche wrote, when you have the death of god, you have a lot of confusion arising. If you take away the keystone, which locks all the other stones in place, the arch collapses. So if you take out the meta-signifier, which is the existence of god, which has held European civilisation in place for well over a thousand years, then everything starts to crumble a little bit. Well, why should I? Why not? Everything is up for grabs. You do as you like. Nobody can tell you off. This is an enormous sense of freedom, but it also means there will be many different notions about how we should live, how we should behave and so on...

So to come back to an earlier question, *"On what basis do I challenge someone else's behaviour?"* What you can say is, *"I find that I don't like it when you do that."* That's all you are really entitled to say. They might reply, *"Well, I'm not very concerned with what you like and what you don't like."* Then you have a sense of, *"Okay, so it's that kind of a person."*

To imagine that by finding a magic word to stop someone else in their tracks and make them a good person, according to your frame of reference, then you are probably wrong. We have prisons and many of the people in our prisons have been imprisoned before. They see the police as people to avoid, if possible. They have no fear of the police. When you lose your fear – what then is going to hold you in place? If you are not afraid of what will happen when you die, if you are not afraid of being caught, then your freedom will tend to be perverse.

What is the purpose of speaking? If I get irritated, then I fill up with my own stuff, which I want to put on to the other person. Most people don't want to be vomited on. So they will resist it. Therefore try to speak before you are full of vomit, even though it feels like righteous vomit to you.

From that point of view, the spontaneous, immediate response is better than one that's been cooking for a long time. However if you are going to act quickly you have to discern whether you are just doing a number. Somebody was telling me this week that they were in a small café with a friend, talking with a friend, when the friend suddenly got up saying, *"I can't bear this any longer"* and went to a table nearby and said to two women, *"You have to speak quietly or move somewhere else"*

*because I can't bear the noise you make!" "Well", I said to the patient, 'your friend was very lucky they didn't hit her.'* The women got up and moved away. This woman was saying, *"I can't bear this!"* This wasn't the first time in her life she had had this experience. She had a wound on her body, which was being reactivated by a situation and she responded from that, but in quite an aggressive way, which bore no relation to these people. She didn't give them any polite warning. She was right on their case.

So this is one of the advantages of meditation: it gives us a chance to observe our habitual mental formations. What are *my* obsessions? What are the things that get to *me*? Because if I know that, then I can observe whether or not as I am arising into communication with another person, I am riding on top of a pre-packaged set of assumptions. If I am doing that, then what I do is likely to be inappropriate. That's what I would suggest to you under those circumstances.

Being spontaneous is not the spontaneity of the individual as an individual, but it's the spontaneity of the connection of the field, the spontaneity arises through the coming-together of the emergent field. It means a deconstruction of the sense of individual agency. As long as we feel that it's all up to me, then it's going to be hard.

In my work as a therapist I see people; they come into the room; I sit down; they sit down; I look at them; they look at me; they don't say anything; I don't say anything and then after some time, they say

*–Are you not going to say anything?*

*– What should I say?*

*– Well, I've come here for help. Are you not going to help me?*

*– How will I help you?*

Then they get very angry with me. Because they think it's *my* job to do the work. But I don't know what to work on, because they haven't shown me what the problem is. This is very important, isn't it? In order to work together, to collaborate, there has to be a sense of how you engage. Which means that both people have to show themselves. So when you find yourself getting into a situation where it's all arising out of yourself, it gets very difficult. Now, of course we can't collaborate with everyone. If possible in life, we should try not to hang out with people we can't collaborate with. That's the best thing to do.

### Connections

Tibetans have a word, *tendrel* [རྟེན་འབྲེལ་], which means a connection. *Drelwa* [འབྲེལ་བ་] means to join and *ten* [རྟེན་] means a support. It means that there is a basis for connectivity. They would say that if there is no *tendrel*, if there is no basis for us getting together into something, we shouldn't even try. Why would you bother? The world is full of people. If somebody needs a doctor or a lama or a this or a that, go to somebody you feel a connection with. The nature of connection is very, very important.

Over the years I have worked with many different translators. With some translators it's very easy; you are relaxed, you trust them and it's a lyrical flowing between you. With other people it's quite difficult. With some translators I say only a few words at a time. Building up a long sentence phrase by phrase is quite an interesting challenge for me, especially when my mind is racing ahead. Then they ask, *"What was that you said? Can you repeat it?"* I don't remember what I said because I'm already thinking ahead. So in a sense I can't really work with that person.

It is important not to operate on the basis that everything should be fine and that everybody should try hard and that we can find a way. We may *not* find a way. What is the basis is that there is a connection. Usually that connection shows itself very immediately. Even if the basis is very good, even if there is huge potential when people meet together, it still has to be developed by care and attention, because the seeds of destruction are in everything. All of us are going to die. Things can survive, if people take care of them. If they don't take care of them, they won't survive. Even though a good ground may be there, it has to be developed. However if a bad ground is there and even though you put a lot of development into it, you are not likely to get a good outcome. If you want to say 'yes', you have to be willing to say 'no'. You can't say 'yes' to everything.

### **The buddha is not a nice man**

Idiot compassion doesn't mean being nice. I told you what C R Lama said: *"The buddha is not a nice man."* He might be helpful, he might be useful, he might be very aware and present, but he is not necessarily nice. Nice is nothing very useful. The social formation of 'nice' is very similar to olive oil. It allows people to slither and distort themselves and sign up to situations when actually they should have said 'no'. Because they wanted to be nice: *"I don't like to upset other people's feelings."* How stupid is that? That means that other people's feelings – other people who actually are messed up and confused – are now going to determine the limits of your existence. To what end? What is the purpose of that? *"Well, I don't like to upset people..."*

Think of dependent co-origination, the chain of cause and effect. If you say 'yes' to a situation that's not valid, you are going to make a lot of problems for everyone, for yourself, for the other person and so on. This is why – and I've seen this with many Tibetan lamas – somebody comes and says,

*—Oh, Rinpoche, I want to study with you...*

The lama looks at them, asks a few questions and then says,

*—I don't think this is the right place for you. You should go somewhere else. No, you are not for me.*

*—Oh? But Rinpoche, I have so much respect for you and really want to...*

*—Why? Why do you want to be with me?*

*—Because... because everybody says you are this and that...*

*—There is a lama everyone says is very excellent on the other side of the hill. Go there.*

If it's not there, it's not there.

When we take the bodhisattva vow and say, *"I will work to help all sentient beings."* It means that I need to develop a capacity to do what I can with certain people at certain times. It doesn't mean that there is a one-size-fits-all. It really doesn't. We can waste a lot of energy in life trying to make situations work that can not work. To do that is really unhelpful. Maybe I told some of you this before. I had lived in India for a long time and when I came back I was trying to get some work. I managed to get into a training for drama therapy and on the basis of that I later trained as an art therapist and did other trainings. I applied for lots and lots of jobs. I remember going for an interview at a centre for people with physical and mental handicaps. After talking with the panel one of them said to me, *"James, I don't really think you want to wipe someone's bum."* ... I thought, *"You are right. I don't want to do that..."* It was really, really helpful, a very helpful thing to say to me. Yes, I wanted a job and I had a fantasy to help people, but they said, *"This is what is required. You don't fit here. We can tell. This is not for you."* So – it's like that. It's very helpful not to give people the sense that there is a possibility of something, when there isn't. Instead of using all your energy to make something

work that doesn't work, that energy could be used to make something that could really work, work. However you have to be very skilful if you are going to say 'no'.

Perhaps it sounds to you as if what I've been saying for the last half hour is self-indulgent nonsense, but it's exactly the notion of the *nirmanakaya*, how it comes into the world. The traditional description of *nirmanakaya* says that if there are people who need a bridge to cross a river, the *nirmanakaya* manifests as a bridge. If there are people crossing the desert and it's very hot, the *nirmanakaya* manifests as a tree. It means it manifests according to the need of the actual situation. You begin with the actual situation, with a reading of the actual situation. This means you are condemned to your limited capacity to give an accurate reading of the actual situation. That's what we are condemned to. We see 'through a glass darkly.' We don't see as clearly as we would like to, and yet we cannot avoid acting. Yes, we are going to make mistakes, but if you wait until you get to a level where you don't make mistakes, you will never act. That is a problematic of our lived situation.

[End of Day Three]