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# *Depth and Light*

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*James Low*

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*Transcribed by John Imes*

*Edited by Barbara Terris*

## Excerpts

*... Like a fulcrum point, we are constantly rebalancing ourselves to the point of contact with the other. You change and I change. How will we make contact in the next moment? We can't know until that arrives. This is depth and light, zabgye in Tibetan. Depth is the emptiness, the openness, the ungraspable nature of the revealing moment. Light is how it shows itself. We are touched and moved, and we respond. That gesture, like a wave, goes back in the ocean, and something else happens, and something else happens...*

*...It's not about blocking thoughts or feelings or sensations. These are all the shimmering surface of the clarity of our mind, a clarity which is not based on the appearance of something knowable or analysable. Appearance is passing; experience is passing. Like lightning flashing in the sky, like a rainbow, there's nothing to get. When we stop trying to get, it gives itself.*

*...Awakening is not about going from here to somewhere else; it's about being here now and opening to what is. It is like opening to a beautiful sunset over the ocean—all that's required is that you're not distracted. You see the ball of the sun gradually sinking over the rippling horizon. You start to feel the breeze as the sun comes down. The breeze comes in, onto your face. You will get the whole thing; it's given to you, but you have to be there, not distracted, not on your mobile phone, not taking a selfie of yourself in front of the sun. This is what meditation is: being open to what is.*

*...If you see a small child wandering in the park, you keep an eye on it, and sooner or later the mother turns up: "Oh my goodness! There you are. Where on earth did you wander off to?" If you want to find the mother, all you need to do is just wait by the child. The mother is the mind itself. Thoughts, feelings and sensations—these are the children. Don't split them into two separate things.*

*...How do we receive a gift? When you were a child perhaps an aunt sent you a present, but when you opened it up you didn't like it. Then your mother said, "Oh, now you have to write her a little note now, thanking her." and you are thinking, "Why do I need to thank her for a present I don't want?!" Khadag is the given. It is there from the very beginning. It's always there, always already there. Emptiness is the gift of how it is. "But it's not what I thought it would be!" Who am I - the ego - to be judging the buddha-nature? Why should I think that my thoughts are reliable?*

*...Each of us can help the world by being more tolerant. When we're tolerant we realise that the bad dissolves, the good dissolves, and the solidity of our own definition of what is reasonable or what is unreasonable has no secure basis.*

*When stupidity relaxes its autointoxication and there is a space in which its basis is revealed, that recognition of the basis shows the forms of stupidity to be the radiance of wisdom.*

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## Refuge

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Since we got up this morning, we've all been taking in many things, in our toothbrush, in our cup of coffee... We rely on many different things. Dzogchen is not about finding new things in which to take refuge but about learning how *not* to take refuge. Samsara is created out of grasping, holding on to things, holding on to our status in the world, our occupation, our health and so on. Once we understand this, we see the relation between subject and object and that the ego is an identity formation, which is to say that it is creating meaning. Samsara is effort. Nirvana, however, is peaceful and the term means 'no effort'. We, poor lost slaves, are so used to making effort that it is normal for us. When we make effort, we create ourselves, and this further commits us to the maintenance of our sense of who we are.

In dzogchen we take refuge in the mind itself. I can take refuge in my watch if I want to know the time. This is a dualistic refuge. *I* stand in relation to my watch and use the watch for a function, which is meaningful to me. We do this also in how we present ourselves to other people. That is to say, we take refuge in the image we have of ourselves. We hope that other people will hold in their mind some positive image of us, because we live in this eternal feedback looping.

From the point of view of dharma, subject and object are born together. They are inseparable. That is why there can be no stability in samsara since things happen, and when they happen, they get to us. As things happen, we happen; and as we happen, things happen. Hence no stability.

We are like a small pond; at first when it starts to rain there is a still surface but then when the drops start to hit the surface of the pond from each point of contact, a little rippling circle spreads out. Then each ripple meets other ripples, and you have increasing complexity, because when the ripples come together they interact and energise each other. We are like these ripples. We look at other people as if they are clearly defined entities. I am me and you are you whereas in fact we are labile, moving, changing, touched and influenced.

This morning as I came out of the front door, I was feeling quite expansive. The door opened, I stepped out, and then I realised, "*Fuck! It's raining.*" So then, like a tortoise, my head drew down a little bit. It's like that. A feeling was rising in me, and then it meets the rain. This is our existence, moment by moment, endlessly tumbling on, like the ripples on the pond.

It's all complex and we can't be present with everything, so we simplify. We do this by editing. There are many things that we ignore and this gives us the chance of stabilising our sense of what is going on. To pull some things into the foreground and push other things into the background is normal. We do this according to the necessity of situations and our own tendencies and predilections. In that way, the world is like an umbrella. The umbrella will protect you but only if you hold it up. Yes, you can have the simplicity of knowing what is going on, but only if you actively edit the world. In fact, this activity is so normal for us that we're not even aware that we're doing it.

In order to practise dzogchen, however, we have to be aware of all this effort, aware that we live in a state of arousal, ready to mobilise. Why mobilise? For protection. The fact that other people also want to protect themselves is a danger to us. When it's raining and people put up

their umbrellas, each individual's umbrella is for their own protection however the structure of the umbrella is to have spokes with sharp spikes at the end. So the fact that you are protecting yourself from the rain means that I am now worried lest you poke me in the eye.

Mrs Merkel says, *"Let's welcome in the refugees."* Other people say, *"Why? What's in it for me?"* Can we transcend this self-interest? Often not. The ego is like a rubber band. We can stretch it so far but then, *Tak!* [hands snap together] *"Hey, what about me?"*

This is why in buddhism compassion is inseparable from emptiness—because from the point of view of our self-referential nexus, our ego, to be generous is effortful, and effort costs us. If a cafe starts to offer free coffee to everyone it will need a sponsor otherwise it will go bankrupt. When we do buddhist practice, we ask, *"Buddha, dharma, sangha, be my sponsor. With your blessing, may I become bigger and more generous than I feel just now."* The danger with this is that if you later forget your refuge, you may retract this request and just think, *"What about me?"* The false refuge normally functioning is the sense that we are a fixed, knowable self.

In dzogchen, we take refuge in our own mind and so we have to be clear about the difference between the mind and the contents of the mind. When the mind is offering hospitality to a thought or a feeling, it feels as if that thought or feeling *is* us. I am holding a glass of water and 'glass of water' becomes a kind of compounded noun for what I'm holding. Clearly, there is glass and there is water, but when we say 'glass of water' the whole thing comes together. Not only is the water in the glass, but the water seems to define the glass. The glass retains the potential, however, to be free of water and filled with orange juice. When it's 'a glass of water', it's 'a glass of water'. When we are angry, we're angry; when we're jealous, we're jealous. This is very important to see.

### Why attachment and renunciation are important in buddhism

There is self and there is other. That's very straightforward. The other is there: I am here. I have a choice; I can let go of the other. When the feeling or the thought arises, however, it doesn't arise as an object; it arises as me. I remember a long time ago in India knowing an American guy, a very sweet man, who became a monk. He did it in a very nice traditional way, giving away all his possessions. But then the next day I remember him going into a café in Boudhanath—we were in Nepal—and asking if someone could buy him a coffee! He offered to exchange his watch for the cup of coffee and indeed these two things may be easy to identify and exchange. The desire for a good cup of coffee, however, is more difficult to locate. It's doesn't come from the outside, knocking on the door. It pervades us, the way grey thin clouds are pervading the sky today.

Non-attachment is only slightly diminished by renunciation. This is because there are only so many things that you can renounce: you can't renounce the contents of your own mind. You may, with very diligent shamatha practice, be able to calm the mind but then you become unable to function in the world. To be in the world means to be available, and to be available for others is to be available to be inhabited by the thought formations, the feeling formations, that promote connectivity.

Dzogchen speaks of integration. It is a term, which is easily misunderstood. We are not integrating—we are being integrated. For as long as the ego is doing the integration, it's a case of the tail wagging the dog. Integration happens to us.

Tibetan buddhism is a very complex arena, being a melange of the simple purity of the dharma and the complex sociology of Tibetan culture. In this room today we can choose to sit wherever we find a comfortable place. In Tibet, however, people would be very careful to sit according to their status. Status and power go together. In Tibetan buddhism, dharma has power, but it also has dharma protectors since there are bad forces that will attack the dharma. The more power you have the more you are aware that others can usurp your power. This is a structure. C.R. Lama was very opposed to the idea of using a structure of power. He used to say, *"If ordinary people have sex in the bushes, everybody looks. Whenever a yogi has sex in the middle of the road, nobody sees."* What he meant was that our job is to be invisible.

Once I was with him in a cafe in Calcutta. This was at a time when he liked to drink coffee. *"Two coffees"*, he said to the waiter who replied in Tibetan, *"Special coffee?"* Rinpoche then started shouting at the waiter *"I say coffee!! Coffee!! Nothing is special! Just give me a coffee!"*

It's very much like that. Nothing is special. If you read the **Heart Sutra**, everything is empty. What is the most important thing about anything? It's emptiness. Emptiness is the definition of all things.

The qualities that things have are like flowers in the sky, like rainbows. If you take these ornamentations to be the essence of the thing, then on the basis of interpretation, the world is fragmented into millions of different separate objects.

When we take refuge, we relax the effort of the mind; we allow the energy of the mind—rigpa itself, the energy, which creates all the phenomena of the world—to relax. Central to this is the question: 'Why do I do what I do? What is the basis for my manifestation into the world?' Well, a lot of what we do is simply habitual, and the function is to reassure us about the continuity of our definable ego-self. If we didn't do these things, who would we be?

This is the basis of renunciation: I am not who you think I am, and I am not who I think I am. 'I am' is prior to thought.

'Being' is a difficult concept in western philosophy and also in madhyamika philosophy where being is often identified with existence itself. You then get a critique not to take things as truly existing. But we have the sense that we are here, and in that sense being is how we refer to presence: we are here. What are we here as? That will depend. It may depend on your bladder, on your knees, on whatever else you think you should be doing, if you need to put more money in the parking meter... This is very important. The space of being fills itself with particular contents.

What status do these thoughts have? It's impossible to practise *thogal* unless you understand the status of the thoughts through which we create the seeming solidity of the world.

When we believe in something, it becomes very true for us. The fact that it may not be true for other people doesn't necessarily interfere with our felt sense. A person with obsessive-compulsive disorder may check many times that their door is locked. Somebody else might tell

them, *"Listen, of course the door is closed,"* but they still have to check for themselves. My 'not-sureness' is closer to me than your confirmation that the door is closed.

This is why it's very difficult to help other people, because ignorance and confusion is a vital ingredient to ourselves. Releasing that identification, that merging, that fusion, is very important. Falsity is always possible and getting lost is very easy. In this urge of falsity is the longing for identity. To have a sense that all phenomena are empty and that I also am empty is a little bit too abstract for most of us.

That is why we have created the methods of tantra. Tantra gives us a new identity. We start with a sense that our identity is real, but problematic. So we go to the holy lama and say, *"Oh Rinpoche, I have heard you are a master of illusion. I have heard that you are the great forger."* A forger is someone who makes false documents. *"Rinpoche, please give me a false passport. I want to be Tara. Can you change my photo a little bit?"* Then, because you know you are going to have to pass through the Great Customs in the Sky, you need to practise being Tara, because Great Customs have a big torch and they shine it in your eyes, *"Are you really who you say you are? Are you really Tara?!"* [Frantically:] *"OM TARE TUTTARE TURE..."* After a while, are you Tara or are you who you were before?

Tara and your ordinary self work together to introduce you to the ground of your being, which is emptiness.

Going from something to nothing directly is quite difficult because these little tendrils coming out of us, wanting to grasp on, will grasp anything. Tantra has a great focus on faith. If you don't believe in the practice, it's not going to work. You fake it to make it. *"Through this practice, I will become somebody else."* Like an actor getting in a role, you remember your lines again and again and again. You go from the point of being this ordinary self, to being this special being, to being nothing, to being in the mandala. As Padmasambhava said in four famous verses in the **Leudunma**, *"Everything which appears is the form of the guru's body: appearance and emptiness."*

When we imagine Tara or Padmasambhava or whatever other deity, we are imagining a form that is made of light. We, in taking the four initiations, have the light coming into our body, purifying it, so that our body too is light. Then the light of the guru's body, or the deity's body, and our body merge together and shrink down to a small point, a *tigle*, which then dissolves into emptiness. Then from that, everything arises as appearance and emptiness. When we see form, it is emptiness, but we don't see emptiness. What we see is the reflection of our own cognition. We look around a room and we think, *'This is a woman, this is a man, this is the ceiling, this is the floor.'* We do this to reassure ourselves that we know what they are. This is very dangerous.

## Human knowledge not required

Recently we brought out this little book, **C.R. Lama's collected writings**. The first two chapters are about the history of dharma and the essential point of dzogchen teaching and in them he writes several times, *"This requires no human knowledge."*

Remember when you were at school and learning to write with a pencil, doing spelling and little sums, was your best friend then not your rubber? It could make bad things go away.

However we now have a problem because the very thing that we should be rubbing away we think is good. Every time teacher says, “*Oh, very good! Now you understand.*” the Buddha is weeping. There is a lot of human knowledge and what does this human knowledge do? It generates the false sense of being able to identify phenomena by applying names and concepts.

Here is a watch. When we were young, we had to learn how to tell the time. That is a convention. For whatever reason, historically, in our culture, we decided to divide a day into twenty-four hours. The daytime has twelve hours and so has the night. We learn as children that when the big hand is at the top and the small hand is at the top, it means twelve o'clock. You can even get special clocks for small children, so that if they wake early in the morning, they are told that they can't get out of bed until the big hand is pointing there and the small hand is there. Mama doesn't want to wake up too early. On the basis of Mama wanting to have a bit more sleep, the child is being told a story.

So human knowledge is the elaboration of interpretation. A favourite short verse of CR Lama begins, ‘*MA CHOE TROE TRAL LA MA CHO KYI KU...*’ ‘*Ma Choe*’ means ‘not artificial’. ‘*Choe*’ means a creation, as in ‘I am making something; I am adding something’. Art involves artifice, that is to say, it is made. Generally, When we say ‘artificial’, it doesn't sound too good, but art is also very nice and we value the skill of artists and artisans. From the point of view of dzogchen, however, all of this human intelligence is not necessary, which doesn't mean it's wrong or bad, but that it has been hijacked.

A scalpel is designed so that a surgeon can make a clean incision and do something helpful. A serial killer who uses a knife has learned what a knife can do. Both may even start to enjoy using them because in fact, it's like being a composer. The composer knows what the violins do, what the drums do, what the clarinet does. The conductor has a little stick; the killer has a knife. We would normally consider this to be perverse. Most of us find the arms industry perverse in finding new ways to kill people. There is good thinking and bad thinking on the relative level, but each is still an evaluation within the dualistic system of signs.

The difference in dzogchen is we're looking at the *ground* of thought. When we relax into the open ground of the mind, all thoughts, feelings and sensations are the energy of the mind. On that level, they are all intrinsically ethical.

## Ethics of experience

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The founding buddha of the lineage is Kuntuzangpo, Samantabhadra, whose name means ‘everything is good, all is good’. ‘Good’ because it is the display of emptiness within the field of emptiness. Straying from that, we become perverse, taking this light—this flowing energy which is also ourselves—and turning it into a means of self-empowerment. Seeking control over our environment, we go in search of mastery. In samsara we can be busy with so many activities. It is not the activity, which is wrong but rather that the field of interpretation, which gives rise to our sense of the meaning of the activity, is delusional.

When we do shamatha meditation here we are not doing it to quieten the mind and have fewer thoughts. Thoughts, feelings and sensations are not a problem in dzogchen, even though some forms of dharma see them as obstacles.



Some prayers say, *“May we be free of obstacles”* but others, with a so-called ‘higher’ view, say, *“May the obstacles be the path.”* So what kind of path is this? This is the path that goes nowhere. Going somewhere is very important.

—*Come, let us go on a journey together!*

—*Okay, that’s nice. Will we get ice cream?*

—*Come, let us sit and not do anything, ever.*

—*But I’ll get bored. I want something to happen. Other people get to go out and play. I want to. I want to. If I had that, I would be happy. I need that to make me happy.*

When you hear this inner whining child, then you know you’re lost. Your need for more indicates that your activity is in the service for the ego. All that is involved in any of these activities could be in the service of the other. It’s not the service of the other *over* the service of yourself, since that would be another form of duality; it’s the benefit of the field. We will look at this in more detail later but for now, the key thing is to start to recognise that, *‘I am lost. I don’t know actually what is going on. I don’t know what to do with my life. I don’t even know why I do what I do.’* But that kind of thought is very scary, so I pretend that it’s okay. Better to not know, *‘Who am I?’*

So dzogchen is about questions, not answers. And many of the questions don’t have an answer, or rather, not an answer that can be spoken.

## Studying ignorance

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The thing about our education and our cultural formations is that we are all good talkers. We can explain what is going on. We can justify, but *‘Who am I?’* we can’t say.

*Khadag* practices, the vital ground in dzogchen, are about questions and the enemy of the question is the quick answer. We have so very many answers to give to each and every dharma question. These answers of ours pull the freedom-oriented potential of the question back into the mire of samsara. *“I follow Tibetan buddhism. I follow the Nyingmapa school of Tibetan buddhism. I follow Lama Dingdong. Lama Dingdong is the hundredth incarnation of Guru Chungchung. Here is a picture of Guru Chungchung. If you pray to him, you will get many benefits.”* Now we know where we are! A lot of dharma is like this, and it’s very attractive however dharma then becomes just a simulacrum, a doppelgänger, for ordinary samsaric ideas. What should be the door of freedom becomes a mirror in which you just see more of your own reflection.

Buddhism says that samsara is grounded in ignorance. Beneath all this elaboration of our knowledge, our appreciation of Mozart and so on, is ignorance. We’re in a room, and there is one door. The way we got into this room is through ignorance. That’s what it says over the door: *“Do you want to be ignorant?”* I feel a bit insulted by this because of course what I want is knowledge! So I go around the room, tapping the walls—where is the door of knowledge? By now I have got more and more knowledge, but somehow this knowledge doesn’t open any door. Every now and then I come to the door *“Do you want to be ignorant?”* but where is the door *“Do you want to have knowledge?”*

The door of knowledge is through ignorance, through not knowing, through becoming a bit stupid.

If you look in buddhist magazines or websites and see publicity about buddhist teachers, they don't say, "This is the Great Kartoffel"<sup>1</sup>. [*Laughter*] Dorje Dummkopf Chenpo<sup>2</sup>, a smiling radiant man who has mastered this and that and who will give you this and that initiation. Once you get this, then what do you do with it? What does it open?

We are the students of ignorance. If we understand how we are ignorant then we understand the ongoing state of ignoring. When we walk around in the town, we are paying attention to lots of different things, we are having thoughts about things, about how people drive, or the rain, or when will the shops close and so on. What are we ignoring when we do that? Who is the thinker of the thought? Where does the thought come from? We study a little mahamudra or dzogchen, and we come across these questions. We might think they are very important and write them down in a special notebook, which we keep safe on the shelf. Finding out how you ignore what is already here, involves *being here*, not going anywhere else, not adding anything else. We have to take our normally divergent, free-associating, multi-tasking, distracted consciousness and gather it in to focus on the question.

If we are going to take refuge in our own mind, then that means finding out what the mind is— not *telling* the mind what it is. When we are telling our mind what it is, when we are developing our story of personal identity, we are further denying the ignorance out of which speak in elaborating these illusory formations. So it is very important to start to look at the key concepts through which we define ourselves and see how much supportive power they actually have.

If we say, "I am a woman" or "I am a man", what does this indicate? Does it give us some clear definition of identity? Well, it does tell us which toilet to go into, but it is also the beginning of a whole series of options, of endless choice-points. As we observe this we can become aware of how we are constructing myself! In a simple activity like shopping for clothes we can see how we construct ourselves: *"I couldn't wear that. Other people wear it, but I couldn't wear it. I wouldn't be me if I were wearing that."* This questioning, this inquiring is available everywhere, all the time.

The Buddha said on many occasions that all compounded things are impermanent. This is why we are always busy; what we create starts to collapse, and as it is collapsing, the space opens for something else. You do some cooking, and then the next day you look in the fridge. *"Oh! Nothing there. I'll have to go to the shops. What will I eat?"* How will I decide what to eat? You might think, *"I will only eat German food because I have to support the German economy."* You might think, *"I won't eat dates from Saudi Arabia because I don't support the Wahhabi branch of Islam."* Then you can see how you are creating or constructing yourself. Why are you doing it? Why is it important? Does it matter? It matters to me because I am located within the semiotic web. 'Semiotic' means the web of signifiers, of interpretation. Inside this web, the meaning of one thing is related to everything else. So due to dependent co-origination, due to the network of causes and circumstances in which I am located due to my age, gender, nationality, education and so on, the world is revealed.

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<sup>1</sup> Great Potato

<sup>2</sup> Great Vajra Fool

The key point here is to try to shift from reliance on the signifier—*‘I am this shade of lipstick; this is the shade that suits me best’*—to seeing whatever we engage with as being a gesture of connectivity.

### *Lhundrub: the field*

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The reason we have to make these choices in the field of options again and again is because we are energy; we are not fixed entities. We are forming, deforming and reforming, on and on and on. This field of experience is called, in Tibetan, *lhundrup*; ‘*Lhun*’ means the radiance, the *rangzhin*, the showing of the radiant energy of the mind itself. This is everything; it’s me and it’s you. When we say ‘me’ and ‘you’ we’re already in arithmetic—one and one are two—but the more we relax the interpretation, we see that the field arises undivided.

By attending to the field, our energy is evoked, sometimes restricted, sometimes invited forward. Then we have the harmonisation or, if you like, the integration of active and passive. This is what is indicated in images of deities in *yabyum*, in male and female forms conjoined.

Due to the particularities of iconography in buddhist statues and paintings, the male is usually bigger than the female, and very often in this world, men’s bodies are bigger than women’s. In terms of the symbolism, the female is much bigger than the male, because wisdom, as space, is passive-receptive. Passive-receptive doesn’t mean powerless. A mirror is passive-receptive, but it’s also active because it is showing reflection, but without effort. The mind itself is showing all the time, but it’s not having to squeeze its resources out, like we squeeze toothpaste from a tube. Mind doesn’t have a limited capacity and there is no end to the showing.

So you can start to observe, moment by moment, as you interact with other people, how you come into formation and how the free pulsation of your energy is restricted by particular thoughts. These thoughts are self-referential; they interrupt the flow of relatedness. When you observe this, you observe the beginning of samsara. When duality arises in the mind, subject and object split, and subject goes into itself to try to work out what to do. What it needs to do, as part of the field, is *be* part of the field; then you’re part of it.

Self-consciousness, anxiety, and desire to be in control—we have many such methods of retraction and condensation through which we go into ourselves, into our memories, off into the future—and we’re just not here.

Maybe you think that you don’t know what to say or what to do but it is not about knowing. Of course you will get it wrong sometime. This is the International Realm of Fuck-up where nobody gets it right. ‘Right’ and ‘wrong’ are unhelpful frames of interpretation. Guilt and worry are highly self-referential, indicating a fantasy of omniscience and omnipotence that ‘I shouldn’t get it wrong.’ Statues of wrathful tantric deities often stand atop a prostrate Shiva Mahadev. He represents the big ego, the one sitting on top of Mount Kailash in charge of everything, the one who will destroy the world because just he’s in a bad mood. Buddha says, “*Ah, ah, ah. Sweetie, don’t take it all so seriously.*” That is all very important since *we* are the big ego, and in that spiral of self-reference, we become lost. Nobody can save us from the fact that we are here, and that

it's our life. Moment by moment: *Where are we? Who are we? How are we?* This is grown-up time—no mama, no papa. We stand where we are.

We will have a break now and look at *khadag* and *lhundrup* after the break.

[Break]

### Dzogpa, finished, ended

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Dzogchen means 'the great completion' or in some sense, 'the great ending'. When something is completed and ended, there's nothing more to be done. It is what it is and needs no alteration or improvement.

C.R. Lama used to explain dzogchen as like when a person gets divorced, next they lose their house, then they lose their money, then they become very sick, and next they are lying in the gutter, dying. This is 'dzogpa', finished, kaput. Nothing more is going to happen.

This is a very nice example because it indicates that the enemy is hope. Hope is the imagination. We imagine something other than what is here, and then our intention is mobilised towards realising our hope, making our dreams come true. That tilting forward busies you into interaction of subject and object.

So really dzogchen is saying whatever you have or whatever occurs for you is enough; don't try to change this into something else. Of course this is a meditation instruction for those relaxing into the open presence of awareness. With awareness, activity arises in the manner of a dream and the consequences of actions also arise in the manner of a dream. Whereas when we identify with our self-referential ego-position the choices that we make are invested with hopes and fears and we are not indifferent to outcome.

What is natural and what is artificial? One person might feel that they need botox to continue being who they naturally are but another person might consider using botox to be artificial. That is to say, 'natural' can be a very misleading term since we all are creatures of culture. In fact what looks natural may be artificial. 'Nature' comes from the Latin root, 'having been born', which means having a beginning, coming into existence. In dzogchen we refer to the natural state of the mind, but actually mind has no beginning, so it's not 'natural' in the sense of 'having been born'. This shows the difficulty of finding the right terms to translate the dzogchen meanings.

What is natural is the world, is the display of manifestation, which is arising and passing all the time. Everything that you can describe, everything you can hold, everything you experience through your senses is arising and passing.

Garab Dorje, the first human teacher of dzogchen famously taught that the essential thing is to see how it is; then to be clear that this is how it is; and thirdly, not to imagine that it's something else.

This first is called *ngotro* in Tibetan and means 'pointing out'. This pointing out is not very complicated; all that's required is that you see what is pointed to. If you go for a walk in the park with a child who's three and a half, four years of age, they're likely to stop: "*Oh! Look at this!*"

Then the parent says, *“Oh, it’s a caterpillar.”* Essentially, they’re saying to the child, *“If we name it, we don’t have to keep on looking at it, because I’m in a hurry.”* *“No, but Mommy look! Because look how it’s doing, oo oo. If we lie on the grass, then we can move like the caterpillar.”*

There the child is the perfect guru. The child is desperately trying to say, *“If you look, it’s amazing!”*—and it will stop you in this busyness of your life. But once you say, *“It’s a caterpillar,”* life moves on and instead of walking in this amazing place, you’re walking in the labyrinth of your own mind.

Being able to see our mind is khadag, primordial purity. This purity is beyond pure and impure. This is very different from Nietzsche’s ‘beyond good and evil’. It’s not a transcendence of a dialectical form, but understanding the impossibility of the truth of any dialogic formation.”

The purity of the mind indicates that there is nothing present except the clarity that there is nothing present. This clarity is the natural luminosity of the empty space of the mind—the non-duality of the dharmadhatu and vidya, (*chöying* and *rigpa* in Tibetan). There are not two things, merely the presence of the mystery that our presence is a groundless presence, and yet here we are!

For example, sitting here, we each have some sensation in our body. We both are our body—the manifestation of our subjectivity—and our body can also seem to us to be an object. In vipassana meditation, as we develop focused attention and mindfulness, we can scan our attention through our body and identify the transient moments of sensation which are occurring. We can also conceptualise these moments and construct a seemingly stable edifice that we take to be our body, the basis of our enduring sense of self.

We are used to the sense that we can know certain things about ourselves. We can know things about our body, about how we speak and about the contents and qualities of our mind. This is our normal way of knowing. However with this approach to knowing, we will never know our mind directly because the mind itself is a subject that can never be an object. When we grasp at our mind or know something about it we are always referring to the contents of the mind and not to the mind as awareness.

The immediacy of experience, the felt quality of our subjectivity, is undeniable in its presence yet is also never itself an object. When we turn the mind into an object, that is to say, when we think or say for example, *“My mind is very heavy with despair”* or *“I can’t think straight today”* we are talking about an image or representation of what we take our mind to be. These patterning of representations are always impermanent, arising and passing as moments in the stream of thoughts and feelings. Our mind is full of representations yet itself is unrepresentable. It is the very openness of the mind that allows it to display so many ideas, images and representations. When we take the pattern of representations with which we construct our self-identity to be who we truly are then we hide the mind with a screen of its own manifestations.

## Purity of the mind

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Primordial purity of the mind means that it has never been contaminated. It is not contaminated now and it will never be contaminated. What is contamination? We know in many parts of the world people don’t have good drinking water, due to a variety of causes. The water,

which was once pure, has now become impure, because something got mixed with it. One thing stands in relation to another. You need at least two things for there to be contamination. One thing cannot contaminate itself.

This purity of the mind is often represented by a small ball, called 'tiple' in Tibetan. This *tiple* has no fixed size; it's the smallest possible form and it's the largest possible form. It encompasses everything, and yet you can't find it anywhere as some-thing. Because the mind is empty of substance, it can't be defined.

Space itself has no limitation nor does it belong to anybody. In modern times we understand that the sky, the lower form of space, is said to belong. Countries have 'air-space'. Recently Turkey shot down a Russian plane and said this was because, "*It came into our air-space and we warned you not to do it.*" When you look up in the sky you don't see any national divisions. This is an abstract categorisation that's fixed into maps and the basis of that, at a certain point an aeroplane crosses an invisible line and it is likely to blown up.

The great anarchist slogan is 'Property is theft'. This is because the world doesn't belong to anyone in particular, but due to the blessing of the arising of lawyers, everything has become own-able. When something can be owned, it can be set apart from the thing just next to it. If you have a garden, and you have a fence around your garden, the fencepost goes down maybe half a metre. One metre down, the earth is completely the same under all the gardens, but if the tree growing on your side of the garden stretches over into my garden, I can cut off the branch. The branch belongs to you though and I may be asked to return it to you. This is in English law, anyway. In that way, the definition of something as mine gives me a sense as to whether there is intrusion or not, whether something is being defiled or spoiled. Because of lawyers I am entitled to say how this is going to be.

This is the narcissistic 'will to power'. As the Rolling Stones sang, "*I am going to say how it's going to be; you are going to give your love to me.*" My terms. My garden. My shoes. My life. My wife. You don't look at other men. I am going to put a veil over you, because you are a very precious commodity. This is how contamination works. Once something is separated off and owned it has a boundary around it and boundaries have to be protected.

*"Greece and Italy are failing to keep out immigrants! These people shouldn't be in Europe; we should be here. We belong here, but they don't. Let's build a long wall right across Macedonia to keep them out. If the Greeks or the Italians want them, they can have them but we don't want them. If we let them in here, what will become of us? Germany won't be German anymore; Britain will be changed too and we don't want change. We believe in permanence."* You can see the fear that arises: 'we will be contaminated'. Blood and soil, it's an old story, something to defend.

### [Khadag: purity of the mind uncontaminated by conceptualising](#)

*Khadag*, however, is pointing in a very different direction; it points towards the mind itself.

That is to say, our mind, our awareness, our being here, is both empty and full. Full because we have thoughts, feelings and sensations. When we take these contents of the mind to be central and definitive of who we are, then this particular patterning of ourselves as we encounter

the environment gives rise to sensations and feelings such as ‘we like’, and ‘we don’t like’. We feel a lack, a vulnerability. We feel anxious about being overwhelmed, and so we become aggressive; we push the other away.

Thinking about the three root poisons, the first is mental darkness and refers to reification, to making things strongly real. It is predicated on the splitting of subject and object. Once I have my own individual territory, however, there is a vulnerability. Having got it, I could lose it so now I have to hang on to it. And who will take it away? Ah, now I have an enemy too. I don’t really feel complete though and I feel that I need more. There are two reasons for this. One is impermanence; experience cannot be held. You drink a nice coffee, it’s a wonderful flavour, and then it’s gone! The residual flavour in the mouth is not the same as that initial hot intensity, and gradually the trace flavour also dissolves. Experience is beyond appropriation.

Appropriation means getting a handle on something, so when we get something, what are we getting? We get cognitions. We get mental constructions. We get ideas. *“Mmm, that was such a good coffee!”* What is that? That was a sentence. You can’t pour a sentence or a thought into a cup and drink it. It is as if it’s present with me, but it’s cheating. On a cold night, when you don’t have a scarf, you can visualise a scarf: *“Oh, this scarf is so warm; I feel so warm,”* and you feel warmer for a while. You’re warm because you’re imagining warm, you’re making warm by imagining warm.

The key point here is to see that in the world we normally inhabit, everything is contaminate-able. The ordinary, dualistic, interactive present is contaminated by duality. What we grasp is an abstraction. If you say to someone, *“I love you,”* the ‘you’ that you love is an idea, because actually we don’t know very much about the other person. Even if you live with someone, you don’t see them all the time. You don’t know what they’re thinking; you don’t know the sensations in their body. They go out and they come back, and they tell you a story about what they did. A story is a story, even if it’s an honest story. Even if it’s an honest story, it’s not what actually happened. That’s what we hold on to. *“Listen: last year, you told me da da da da da. I haven’t forgotten.”* That’s what we hold on to; we hold on to a concept, an idea, an abstraction; the moment is gone.

It is very important to understand this because this is what is meant by *‘khadag’*: the natural purity of the mind is pure because of the self-liberation of all phenomena. Tibetans say, *‘Chi shar rang drol,’* ‘whatever arises, goes away by itself’. It goes away by itself; you don’t have to push it out. The coffee went. If you had kept the coffee in the cup, it would be cold by now cold. It was an espresso coffee so why would you want to drink it cold? You can’t keep it. You participate with the coffee at the time of participation. By participating with the coffee, you get the coffee—but you don’t get anything. The coffee itself vanishes. There is a time for coffee to come and a time for coffee to go.

This is how it is; this is our experience. Experience is transitory. Reliance on concepts merely creates the illusion of permanence.

This links us with the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus. He says you can never step into the same river twice. For buddhists this is a very profound saying. If you stay attached to

believing in the name of the river, you can say, “*I’ve bathed in this river before,*” which is to say, “*I have bathed in the name of this river many times before.*” That’s possible because names as abstractions seem to have this pseudo-eternity. The actual water in the river is flowing; each second you’re in it, the water is changing.

Phenomena, the presenting actuality, is primary; interpretation is secondary. *Khadag* means the purity of the mind which is uncontaminated by conceptualisation. Concepts cannot catch the nature of the mind. You can listen to many instructions on dzogchen, but they cannot say how the mind is. Hopefully however the words operate as a kind of massage, so that by relaxing the tense restrictions which maintain the seemingly seamless flow of thought-construction, you start to just be open. We have always been open.

This is a glass of water. This is a glass that happens to have water in it. Two different ways to describe the same thing. When our conceptualisation is ‘this is a glass of water’ then the water-glass combination seems to be one thing. When our conceptualisation is, ‘this is a glass which happens to have water in it’, the glass is not inherently or intrinsically a glass of water. The fact that water is in the glass gives an added definition to what is in my hand. When we bind the concept of water into the glass, it becomes a water-glass. The infinite potential of this object in my hand is reduced. We could use the top part of the glass to cut out biscuits. If you were in a leaky boat you could use the glass to bail out. There’s no limit to the potential of the glass; the limit is the restriction of our imagination. Even to call it a ‘glass’ is to draw attention to a certain feature of it. We don’t need to think of glass, but once you think of glass you start to think, what can you do with glass?

This is form. In the buddhist way of thinking, form means shape or colour. When you see the glass in terms of its form, you start to imagine all kind of possibilities. That is to say, when we recognise *this is a glass*, this appears to be the recognition of a meaning that is inherent in the object. *A glass is a glass is a glass*—if you believe. If you don’t believe, it is maybe something else. If you give this glass to a child of ten months, it will bang it on the table, and that will be a cause of pleasure for the child and anxiety for the parent because the adult is holding the idea of the glass whereas the child is not. What is the glass-ness of the glass? Maybe it’s a projection? Everything in the world can be redefined, and it frequently is.

Okay. So now the mind has been constructed—in our mind—as being a thing like every other thing, but the mind itself—*rigpa*, awareness, the mind which is *khadag* or primordial purity—is not a thing. You can’t find it in order to stick some label onto it. It is everywhere; it’s always present, otherwise we wouldn’t have any experience because the mind, like the mirror, shows what is there. What we experience is always the revelation of the mind. When we look for the mind, we get the reflection. When you look for your mind, you get the ideas, the memories, sensations, hopes, fears and so on.

### [Is it a bird? Is it a plane?](#)

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What is the mind itself? It’s not a statement. It’s not a definition. It’s not a thing.



In many religious traditions, one is careful about saying the name of God, because God likes to be anonymous. Yes, God created the world, but then at the finale, he nipped off somewhere else and said, *“No, I wasn’t there; it’s nothing to do with me.”* Nowadays we pray to God in Heaven, where he sits on a throne with Jesus Christ at his right side and Mary at his left side. He also has a special dove hovering above his head. You can learn a lot of things about Heaven, who all is there, where they are and what it is like. It’s the same with Guru Rinpoche’s heaven, Zangdopalri and Amitabha Buddha’s heaven, Dewachen. All ideal real estate. *“Yes, sir. We have some very nice properties there. Can I interest you in them? For a mere one hundred thousand repetitions, you will be ensured a small enclosure with its own garden.”*

These are projections, responses to our anxiety, to our wanting to know what will happen. The more you observe yourself, the more you see the anxiety of the ego. Like a drowning swimmer, we catch on to whatever floats by. When I travel in the London Underground, I have to struggle not to read the adverts. Words! Oh, what do they say? I don’t want to go to the cinema. I don’t want to buy anything. I don’t need anything, but I do need words.

The words are not giving me a way to something else; the words are giving me my self. The wheels of my mind are turning, moving in this world of constructed meaning. Letting go of that is how we open ourselves to *khadag*.

### It is what it is

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As it says in many of the texts, you can’t lose your mind, you can’t gain your mind; you can’t buy it, you can’t sell it. It’s not a commodity. It’s not a thing among things. What we need is already here, and it’s hidden from us by our own activity. Effort doesn’t help, because effort is about lack and about construction; it’s about the agency of the ego. Letting go. It is what it is.

It’s very difficult to accept how it is when you’re already judging how it is. For example, when you were a child perhaps an aunt sent you a present, but when you opened it up you didn’t like it. Then your mother said, *“Oh, now you have to write her a little note now, thanking her.”* and you are thinking, *“Why do I need to thank her for a present I don’t want?!”* How to receive a gift? *Khadag* is the given. It is there from the very beginning. It’s always there, always already there. Emptiness is the gift of how it is. *“But it’s not what I thought it would be!”* Who am I - the ego - to be judging the buddha-nature? Why should I think that my thoughts are reliable?

Perhaps in the course of our lives we have made some mistakes. Perhaps we have got lost and confused. Afterwards we might think, *“Wow, I didn’t... I, I didn’t see that coming.”* Hmm, maybe I’m not so smart. When I say, *“But my mind should be something else,”* and you merge with that thought, then you separate from what is arising, and you enter into judgment about it, trying to push away the thoughts you don’t like, trying to hang on to the thoughts you do like.

Sometimes when we practise, the mind is very dull. At other times it is agitated and excited. Sometimes we go off in stories. That is what is arising. When we think *“I don’t like it,”* or *“It shouldn’t be this way,”* then this is a thought commenting on a thought. *Khadag*, however, means untouched by thought.

The local Berlin bus will not take you to London. You can make many journeys on the local Berlin buses and indeed they are very nice buses, but they won't take you to London. Thoughts will take you to thoughts. Jump on a thought and reliably it will take you to another thought—it will not take you to the mind itself. If you want to find the mind itself, be present at the vanishing point of thought. That is a difficult point to find. Because these thoughts are very regular. The key point is that the mind, from the very beginning, is naked; it's not covered by anything. When the ego looks for the mind, it finds many obscurations between it and its so-called 'true nature'. In Tibetan, they say this is like the farmer who goes looking for the cow on the hill when the cow is safely in the byre. If you go looking in the wrong place, you can be looking for a long, long time but you will not find it.

*Who is the one having the thought?* Experience is occurring. *Who is the experiencer?* This question is central, and we have to allow the question to open and become the soft quality of our attention to what is occurring. The danger is for us that a thought arises that says, '*I am the thinker.*' The space of inquiry is filled with an answer and a solution. The space of not-knowing is not allowed to be there long enough for profound knowing, or rather being to appear. It's like when you were at school you learned what you could do in the playground and that you can't do the same in the classroom. It's not that what you do in the playground is wrong; it's that it doesn't belong in the classroom.

Similarly, when we meditate, thoughts are not so very important. When we're interacting with other people, yes, thoughts are very important, but in meditation, our focus is on '*Who is the one who is here?*'

This term *the given* is not ideal, but certainly in English there's a big, big difficulty in translating technical terms of dzogchen. It means, 'it's just by itself'. In Tibetan, they use the term '*rangjung*'—self-existing or self-validating, not created by anything else. The given doesn't need gifts. The mind in its fertility, in its creativity, is always giving gifts. All kinds of experiences arise; they give themselves. We don't need to hang on to them. Gifting never stops, and the given needs no gift.

In the traditional formulation in Tibetan, they say, '*Ke wa me pa gag pa me pa.*' '*Ke wa me pa*' means unborn. '*Gag pa me pa*' means never-ceasing, not ever blocked.

Unceasing is this flow of experience—perceptions, colours, shapes, hopes and fears, desires, all kinds of stuff—ceaseless; it never ends. This is life, but the unborn, this is emptiness itself and the mind is inseparable from this. The mind is like the sky; the sky just *is*; it's the given. Many things move through the sky. Clouds offer themselves to the openness of the sky. The space of the sky receives the cloud, but the sky doesn't hang on to the cloud. When the wind blows, the cloud moves. The sky is open, not trying to hang on to the clouds.

We, however, try to hang on to particular thoughts or ideas or constructions. This is the litmus test, this is the real fulcrum point for meditation: to see, do we tilt into believing the thought, the meaning that the thought gives, the constructed thought, or do we trust the given?

## Relaxing emotional investment

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To use the language of mahayana buddhism, this is relative truth and absolute truth. Relative truth is categorised in two parts: pure and impure relative truth. Impure relative truth is where you see phenomena; you take them to be existing; and you have an affective relationship to them. There is affect, an emotional and intensified reaction to something, which is taken as existing in itself.

Linked to this we have the idea of the two obscurations. The obscuration of the afflictions, or contaminating emotions—stupidity anger, desire, jealousy, pride and so on. That is what is operating in impure truth; there is the strong, intense feeling tone reaction to what appears to be there. The second obscuration is the obscuration of the cognisables, of that which can be thought about and known. In particular, this refers to taking the thought, or the name, as equivalent to the actuality of the object. So I have a thought, such as ‘this is a glass’, and I am telling this object what it is. Having put that name into and onto the glass, I now address the glass in terms of my own projection.

*—I don't know why anyone made you!*

*—Why were you born? Eh? Speak to me!*

We have to remember this is not a philosophy; this is *us*, this is what we do. Our practice is relaxing the emotional investment, and then the glass becomes something neutral, just there. It's just there, as the glass. This is called ‘pure relative truth’.

One way that we do this in mahayana is by saying that all sentient beings have been my mother in a past life. They have done very kind things for me and I have an obligation to them. This person may annoy me now, but when they were my mother, they fed me, cleaned me, clothed me and did many things for me. In relation to the kindness they have offered me in the past, any momentary irritation now is irrelevant.

We are trying to move from bias and prejudice—‘my friend’, ‘my enemy’ and so on—to equanimity:

*“May all beings be happy, and may they be happy just because they are. Not because they deserve it, not because I like them, but just because they are. They have not earned it, they may not even deserve it; it's not the fruit of their good karma. In any case, may they be happy! May all fucking arseholes be happy! May all torturers be happy! May all vicious, cruel beings be happy!”*

*—But why should bad people get as much happiness as the good kind people?*

*—That's a very good question.*

*—It's not fair; I've tried really, really hard to be good. It's not fair.*

*—It's like this due to causes and conditions.*

*—But I have studied and learned the game-plan of the world, like learning to play poker.*

Beings get enlightened because of their buddha-nature. Dzogchen, mahayana and tantra each take a slightly different focus in this regard. Mahayana talks about the accumulation of merit and wisdom. Kalu Rinpoche used to say that if you want to go on a journey, you can walk, and everyone can do that. If you want to go on the train, you can do that but it will cost you some money. If you want to go on a plane, that's faster but it will cost you even more. Tantra is like the plane. If you don't have a good accumulation of merit and wisdom, you won't be able to get on

the tantra plane. This is what is meant by the colophon often found on traditional texts. It reads something like, “*This text is preserved for those great beings with highest karma. Don’t let it fall in the hands of the bad guys.*” Unfortunately, the bad guys also have buddha-nature and no matter what bad things they do, they can’t destroy their buddha-nature. The way to get enlightened is awakening to your buddha-nature. We already have the plane ticket, we just don’t know where the airport is.

This is the big difference. If you see this, then you realise relative truth.

*Khadag*, the primordial purity, is the given, it’s just here; it’s present all the time, everywhere. It’s not created by our virtuous deeds, it’s not spoiled by our negative deeds. The content of the mind is created by other thoughts, other feelings, and so we can expand, we can contract, we have all kinds of experiences—these are interactive and relative—but the ground nature out of which they arise is unconditioned.

An example given in many dzogchen texts is a piece of coal. You can wash it every day for hours, for years, but it won’t turn into chalk. It’s either coal or it isn’t. In the same way, our awakening arises on the possibility of the awakened, which is already within us.

Awakening is not about going from here to somewhere else; it’s about being here now and really opening to what this is. Opening to what this is, is like opening to a beautiful sunset over the ocean—all that’s required is that you’re not distracted. You see the ball of the sun gradually sinking over the rippling horizon. You start to feel the breeze that comes as the sun comes down. The breeze comes in, onto your face. You will get the whole thing; it’s given to you, but you have to be there, not distracted, not on your mobile phone, not taking a selfie of yourself in front of the sun. This is what meditation is: being open to what is.

Now it’s time to eat. So, we’ll have a break and after lunch we can do some meditation.

## Ngowo and rangzhin: the face and its complexion

In terms of the practice, there are three aspects of our situation. We have the basic actuality, or the given-ness, *ngowo* in Tibetan. Some people translate ‘*ngowo*’ as essence but the word ‘essence’ in English can be problematic. For example we refer to essential oils, which are a distillation, but *ngowo* is not a distillation. *Ngowo* actually is the word for ‘face’ and in a sense, although we can move our face around creating different expressions, our face is a kind of given, it’s just the way we look.

*Ngowo* is our mind at rest, not doing anything, not even moving. It’s like the mirror. You can never see a mirror, because the mirror is always showing something that it’s not. When you look in the mirror, what you see are reflections. When you look in your mind you don’t see your mind, you see thoughts, sensations, feelings, memories and so on. The fact that you can’t see your mind doesn’t mean it’s not there; it is showing itself through the presence of these experiences.

You can't experience your mind; it's a state of being. Not being this or that, but just open being, pure being. This mind, having no top no bottom no sides, is not located anywhere, yet it shows itself ceaselessly. It shows itself as clarity. By 'clarity' is meant an illuminating power and what it illuminates is itself. Self-luminous.

In Tibetan this is called *rangzhin*, a term which refers to the complexion of the face. Through looking at somebody's face and experiencing their complexion, you read something about them. Are they healthy or sick, are they tired, or sad or happy? The potential, the richness, the display of the empty given-ness of the mind shows itself as the complexion, which is our field of experience.

The mind reveals the field. On one level, we experience ourselves living inside our skin-bag, looking out of our eyes, listening out of our ears. But if we relax a little and don't interpret, when I see you, I see me, because you are my experience. In that moment of perception, there is no separation between subject and object. As we look around this room, here we are, Saturday afternoon, alive, seeing many different things. How do I know that I'm alive? Because something is happening. Happening for me. What is happening for me? *You* are happening for me; you are my experience. My experience is you. This is what is meant by 'non-duality'.

When I was at lunch, sitting at the table talking with a few people, a kind of shaping occurred around the topics. We find ourselves called into being, or showing ourselves, by the mood of what is going on. On one level we can say that we're having a conversation with some people and words are passing between us but we're also, together, collectively, creating a mood. A mood in which things can be said, more or less. What is occurring is generated by the participation of the people conversing together. For each person, it's 'my' experience; but it's my experience, given to me by what's occurring. This subject and object movement is not two different things.

To use a traditional example, there is the ocean and there are the waves. We use two terms 'ocean' and 'waves'. What's the difference between ocean and waves? Well, the waves show themselves on the surface. When I try to look down I don't see down into the ocean. The ocean I don't see, and the waves I do see. So what are the waves made of? The ocean. The waves are made of the ocean. The ocean is the wave, and the wave is the ocean; but the wave rises up and seems to be something.

The water of the wave has no absolute separation from the water of the ocean. It is one but not the same. This also is a meaning of 'non-duality'. Non-duality means not only one thing nor many different things.

The wave and the ocean are the same and different, but the difference doesn't destroy the same. The difference is a variation on the same. It is a difference devoid of contradiction. The wave is not stealing something from the ocean. When the wave crashes back onto the ocean, the ocean is not getting angry and telling it to come back! Whether the water is in the depth or on the surface, the quality is the same.

This is the example given for *rangzhin*, the radiance of the mind, the openness of our mind without any limit. Because it has no limit, it has no inside or outside. If there is no outside, there is

no other so whatever is occurring is not coming from somewhere else. The richness of the experiential field is the mind.

You may start taking photographs of the waves and comparing one wave with another. You may have a table covered with different photographs and you say, *“Well, these ones here look similar, but I don’t know where that other one fits in.”* Then we could do the same in this room here and say, *“Well, there’s people with black hair; now they should all go in that corner, and people with blonde hair, go in that other corner. Oh, but some people with blonde hair are tall and some are short... So tall blond people go in that corner, and small blond people go in that corner.”*

In the given-ness of the emergence of experience—here we are—there is diversity without separation.

Once you get into naming and labelling and conceptualising and making associations, then you start to have separation. If you take a handful of water from the sea and look at it for a bit and then pour it back into the ocean, the seeming separation was only situational.

In the same way, when we grasp at a thought or a feeling and make a construction around it, it is as if we have got hold of something. [Pointing at the flowers in front of him:] These are very nice flowers. Something is there, and I have a feeling-tone response. The flowers are in the vase; the vase is on the floor; the floor connects all the people sitting in the room. It is part of the room. We can appreciate the belongingness of the flowers; or we can take them up with our mind and see if we know all the botanical Latin names for them or what would be the best environment for them, and so on.

This second aspect, *rangzhin*, the showing or display, is the undivided field that is full of diversity.

When we look and we see people and we see them as individuals, this is a kind of optical illusion, because our focusing of our attention on one person involves the allowing of the rest in the room to fade back. You can observe this for yourself quite easily. If you just open your gaze to the side of your eyes, to your peripheral vision, you can really see right around the room. You see everything, but you don’t see anything. It’s a kind of panoramic or inclusive gaze. Then you alter these optical muscles, and you bring the focus back; then you’re focusing. In that moment, something becomes more present and something else is receding.

Now, if I’m looking at one person, it is as if the room vanishes; it is ‘as if’. The room hasn’t actually vanished. It is less present for me, but it is still present. This is happening all the time, as we focus in on something and then expand out. Things become enriched by the quality of our attention, and then they become more ghostlike and opaque as we start to think, *“Oh yeah, lot’s of people.”* When we start to focus on someone in particular, usually we’re looking for something. *“Oh, have I met you before? What is your name?”* Some truth hidden someplace: will it come back to me?

From the point of view of the practice, clarity is what it is. What do we get by knowing someone’s name? What does it add to the experience? You see someone, the angle of their

head, the texture of their eyes—whether they're in soft focus or not. You get a sense of their breathing. This is the simple clarity of the mind.

### Thugje: participation

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Now we have the third aspect, which in Tibetan is called *thugje*. Normally *thugje* means 'compassion' and in the dzogchen tradition it is sometimes translated as 'energy'. Nowadays I often translate it as 'participation'.

For example here in this field together, here in this room in the Kamalashila Institute, due to some stimulus, due to some wind blowing, we find ourselves sitting in a particular way, talking in a particular way and so on. By seeing you, I speak; my speaking is for you, but also my speaking is *from* you. That's amazing. The words come out of us from the invitation of the other. It's not all up to me; I'm not in a bubble. We are working together, albeit with different roles, at this particular time. Your receptivity is my participation. That's why I'm looking around all the time, looking at people's faces: *Where are you? How are you?*

This third aspect, the energy or the expression or the participation, is a field factor. My speaking is the field moving. Your listening is the field moving. Your attention is not some passive nothing-at-all-ness; it is an active presence-ing, a participation which generates a mood and a swirling of a being-in-it-together-ness, which is very important.

Why would we be lonely? When are we ever cut off from other people? If we are available, what shall we do with other people's availability? *"But they're not available in the way I want them to be available, so I can't participate the way I like to participate. You see, my problem is that I am a wonderful actor, but I always get the most shit audiences."* It's not like that; the audience comes first. The others dictates what can be done. Things can be said or not said according to the mood. A comedian learns to trust the room. Because if he's learned a joke and he wants to tell the joke but it's not the right place, then he has a problem. People don't laugh, and he loses the audience. What this means is we are never on the outside; we are never separate or apart or alone.

The infinite spaciousness of the mind gives rise to this field of experience within which our participation is moving. If we simply trust the openness, the display and the participation—these three are inseparable—this is awakening according to the dzogchen tradition.

### Short sitting practice

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So now let's sit in a simple way. On one level, it doesn't matter how you sit, but if you sit with your skeleton supporting you, it makes it a little easier because you have less additional sensation. Gaze is open into the space in front of you, without staring at something. We're just here, present. Stuff happens. You may see people's bodies moving a bit. You might hear noises from outside. You're aware of the warmth of the room. Thoughts and feelings arises, sensations in the body. Each of these phenomena is perfectly entitled to be here. They are not illegal

immigrants. They have a valid pass and we allow them to pass through. They're not looking for a permanent place to stay; they're not looking for citizenship. They come, and they go.

Who is the one who is sitting? From moment to moment, you find identification. You might have a sense that you are your head, or that you are some movement inside your head. Or you become aware of your shoulders and your body. Whatever kind of identification comes, don't push it away, don't merge with it, just allow it to be there. If a thought arises, '*I don't know what I'm doing. What is this for? I am bored.*', don't merge into the thought and don't try to push it away either. Offer hospitality, and the guest will stay for a bit and go. The less engaged, the easier the guest goes. Once you start mobilising into some kind of reactivity, little hooks go into the thought-form, and you have investment and reactivity and so on.

So, without doing anything ritualistic or artificial, we just sit, gaze open, and allow existence to arise and pass, the lips slightly open and the tongue turned up on the palate.

*[Period of meditation.]*

Some of you are familiar with practicing this way and you can do it for longer. When you are new to it, just practise in the same way but for shorter periods.

### *Lhundrup: arriving all at once*

The practice is both still and dynamic. The more we relax our participative energy, the more the energy of the field is free to come and go. This arising is referred to as *lhundrup*. *Lhundrup* is not inside or outside; it's everything that's occurring, the entire field of experience. *Lhun* means a heap, and *drup* means to make or shape or bring together and so it indicates *arriving all at once*.

Are we to focus on experience or focus on interpretation?

If we focus on interpretation there are a lot of things to say about what's in this room. There are photographs, statues, people, different kinds of clothing, hairstyles and so on. When you get into that interpretation or analysis, you move towards a pseudo-stasis, the seeming presence of things that you can hold on to.

*Lhundrup* indicates that it's always full; there's always something happening. If you're at the seashore looking out to sea there is a seamless movement of the waves. It's not like one wave arises followed by another separate wave. Nor do the waves come to an end. It's not like 'waving' is arising out of the sea in many different forms. This is the meaning of *lhundrup*. What is appearing is experience—experience emerging from, or the showing of, the luminous emptiness of the mind.

Over the years the dzogchen tradition has been elaborated with different stages, different kinds of practice and so on. Dzogchen may be organised in different ways but basically there is *trekchod* and *thogal*.

### *Trekchod: cutting loose from what?*



*Trekchod* means cutting, cutting free, cutting loose. Cutting loose from what? Cutting loose from my sense of myself and my sense of other which is composed or constructed upon a reliance on interpretive tools: *“I am attached to certain memories and ideas, and the arising of this patterning of mobilisation and volition gives me my exclusive topology. I am interested in certain things; and they become more real for me, and other things become less real.”* This is what has to be cut.

*Trekchod* means not falling into the arising movement of grasping, not accumulating reliance.

The Bible speaks of not building your house on sand. When you come into experience, everything is sand flowing. You can't hold on to it. In fact you don't need to hold on to it, but you see also that you can't build anything on it. *“Because I feel like this today, tomorrow I am going to...”* How I feel tomorrow is not available today. I can't build on tomorrow. We might feel, *“Tomorrow I'm going to enjoy going to the theatre.”* but then tomorrow comes and, *“I am so tired. I don't actually want to go to the theatre. Why on earth did I buy the ticket?”* The person who bought the ticket and the person who now has a ticket to go to the theatre are not the same person.

This is what the Buddha's first teaching about suffering means: we are not who we think we are.

Even though we may think that we have 'found ourself'—perhaps through therapy—we are not a fixed thing and to be so would be terrible. We find ourselves opening and closing, responding and not responding... We are fluctuating.

### *Lhundrup: what is happening*

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If this is the case, then what is happening? This is the central question for *lhundrup*. *Lhundrup* is what is happening, it's the situation; it's this particular shape. It's like this, and then it's gone, and then it's something else.

What you have is the exquisite taste of this moment, which will never be repeated. You can't hold it, but you can taste it; you can be there. You don't need a memory to go with you, you don't need a selfie to remind you, but there is an energising enrichment, which is the trust.

- *It will be fine. It's Kuntuzangpo. It's okay.*
- *Are you sure? Is this really how you want to live?*
- *As if you have a choice!*

Consumerist capitalism may provide you with mangoes in the middle of winter, but you don't have a choice between summer happiness and winter sorrow. It doesn't come in packages. Health doesn't come in a package. Some people have genetic tendencies toward a particular kind of illness; some people have astrological susceptibilities towards certain accidents and so on.

Does it matter? We are here—if we are here! If we're not here, where are we? If we're here, we're here and then we die. Then something else happens—or not; you can believe or not believe. There are the bardos, first this one and then that one...

You can buy *The Rough Guide to Tibet*. ‘Rough Guide’—it’s a brand name—but you can also get a *Rough Guide to Tibetan Death*. It’s a guidebook. The guidebook is not written by people who went there and came back. If I buy my Rough Guide to Berlin, the book says, “*I hope you enjoy this book. I’ve never actually been to Berlin so send me a postcard and let me know if anything is not accurate.*” This book is a work of the imagination.

What we have is here and now. The past is gone; the future hasn’t come. Here and now is *lhundrup*.

Translators working with Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche refer to it as ‘instant presence’, which is, in a sense, presence in the instant. This is present and I am present. I present myself to this, and this presents itself to me. This co-presence-ing or co-emergence is *lhundrup*.

### Thögal: direct experience of energy

*Lhundrup* is the basis of *thogal*.

*Thögal* is working with experience, working with what is occurring. Light, sound, taste, smell. The texts write a lot about sound and light, but all the other senses are there as well. What we see here in the room is light. The eye is connected with light. What we think in the room is ‘people’ and ‘things’—men, women, tall, short, sitting on chairs, sitting on the floor...

*Thögal* begins when you can see without instantly interpreting. *Thögal* is the direct revealing of the energy of the world, unmediated by our interpretation. This is why in the tradition they say first you have to be clear about *khadag*. That is to say, to experience the emptiness of the field, to see how our own thoughts elaborate the details at which we then grasp. It’s seeing without elaboration, without interpretation.

**Question:** But how will I know what I’m seeing?

**James:** What you’re seeing is the radiance of the mind, the light that arises out of the mind itself, out of the *dharmakaya*. Because it is light, you start to be able to work with the light, because there is appearance without internal essence or substance. Mind puts the substance and the essence into the object, into the people. We see someone and we think, “*They are nice. I like this person. I’m attracted to this person. I want to spend time with this person.*” Or we see someone and we think, “*Mmm, they’re a bit weird. I’m not sure I want to spend any time with them.*” This is our normal way of operating in the world. We generate a charge, a valency on the object: ‘Because I like you, you are nice.’ The projection appears to be imbedded in the other.

You can see here the difficulty of practising *thogal*: because we see *people*. The Buddha, right from his very earliest teachings on the five *skandhas*, the five heaps, has said there are no people. This is called *pudgala anatma drishti*, the absence of inherent self-nature in persons. *Pudgala* means ‘sentient beings’ or, in particular, ‘persons’. The five skandhas of form, feeling, interpretive perception, associations and consciousness operate together to generate the illusion of a self-existing person.

Seeing people in terms of the five *skandhas* is a means for making an analysis which puts into question our habitual assumption. However such an analysis is that even if it's accurate, it happens after the immediacy of the moment. For example, I look at you and I see you as a person. Then I may think, "*No, this is my mind at work*", but already I have been caught by the illusion that you are the person whom I take you to be.

## One ground displaying two paths

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C.R. Lama very often said words to the effect that "*The buddhadharma has one taste. In Nyingmapa we have nine different vehicles, but they are not in contradiction; they all go in the same direction. If you understand the five skandhas, it is easier to understand emptiness. If you understand emptiness, it is easier to understand tantric transformation. If you understand tantric transformation, it is easier to understand khadag.*" That is because they all point to the same thing, that the mind is chief. The mind creates samsara; the mind creates nirvana.

That is what is meant when dzogchen teachers say that there is one ground and two paths. The one ground is infinite spacious emptiness. Within this or out of this, but never escaping this, manifests appearance. This appearance displays itself as subject and object, like two waves in the ocean. We may call one 'subject' and call the other 'object' but both are water. It is only conventionally and situationally that one is subject and the other is object, rolling on and on and on. This is the display or the play, the *rolpa*, the *lila*, of emptiness itself.

Once you see that, then the ground and what arises from the ground are inseparable, but if you get caught up in thoughts about this and thoughts about that and '*me in here*' and '*you out there*', then the ground is forgotten, and then where are you?

Well, you are exactly where you should be—here and now! Because there's nowhere else to be. You think you're somewhere else, but you're here.

Chatral Rinpoche was very kind to me when I was younger. Several times he gave this same example to me, since I was always asking him, "Why am I here?" and "What is samsara?", and so on. He said, "*It's like two brothers, and they're lying in bed. One brother is awake, the other brother is asleep. The sleeping brother is having a nightmare. The awake brother says, 'Oh, wake up, wake up!' When the sleeping brother wakes up, where is he? He is where he's always been: in his bed, safe, with his brother.*" In our nightmare, in our mental activity, in our construction, we are not here. But we are always here.

Although many methods have been developed in dzogchen, in the lineage from C.R. Lama we are not involved with technical methods and that is because when you apply a technique, you are introducing a sense of agency. [James scratches his head:] '*I am scratching my head.*' '*I am the one who is scratching my head.*' '*I am sitting here.*' Grammatically, they not so different, but very different. "*I can scratch my head.*" "*I find myself sitting here.*" How do you sit here? For the schoolteacher with the class of five-year-old children, who says, "Now sit still!" They look at each other and giggle, and if you giggle, you wriggle. But if this teacher starts to tell a story, the children are very peaceful and find themselves sitting still.

When you're doing things as the agent, even if they're dharma-oriented and harmonious, they are structurally a separation of subject and object. It's not that one shouldn't do these techniques—and sometime we can do some of these practices, like *rushen* and others—but when you do them, you get different kinds of experiences. And we have already had many kinds of experience. The problem is not experience; the problem is being the experienter.

*"Oh, if only I get this special initiation; if only I get this special teaching..."* This is fantasyland, Disneyland.

## Who is doing the doing?

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Dharma say very clearly that you can't lose your mind and you can't find your mind either. You can't buy it or sell it. It is intrinsic. We are here, having experience, so who is the experienter? The experienter, without effort, is the mirror. The reflection is *in* the mirror. As the reflection fills the mirror, does the mirror feel invaded? Does the mirror say, *"Watch out! Let me get to sleep. You keep moving over on my side; you get back on your own side!"*? No, the mirror is much more generous than that. The mirror says, *"Take the whole bed! Move, stretch, snore, fuck, whatever, I don't mind."*

The mirror is space; the mind is space. The experienter is space and so it has infinite hospitality, without judgment. Its welcome is unconditional.

Tantric practice is not like that. Tantric practice is very conditional. You have to sit in the right way, make the right mudras, make the right tormas, and do this, do that. It's very, very precise. It's a choreography like a ballet.

So we have to decide: 'Is this okay? How would it be better? What is lacking? What is too much? How will I know? I will have to evaluate.'

Who then is the evaluator? The evaluator is someone you experience. The evaluator is cuckoo. The cuckoo is lazy. He doesn't have his own nest. He goes into someone else's nest and says, *"I belong here."* The nest is very big; it is the *dharmadhatu*. The cuckoo likes a lot of space. Or like a child setting out all of her dolls—*"No, you sit there, and you have to tell her to do that!"*—we try to organise everything. All of this busyness in our mind.

Who is the organiser? Who is the boss, who is the controller? In Tibetan they call it the '*che pa po*', the one who is doing the doing, the doer. This is the energy of the mind; it is not the mind itself: *"I am the boss; there is no higher authority than me. This is how it has to be done."* It's very, very cunning. In the bad old days, if you got pulled in to the police station, they would put you in a chair in front of the desk. The investigator would be sitting on the other side, with a lamp beside them dazzling your eyes. The lamp is not illuminating their beautiful face; the lamp is directed at your eyes. They are in the dark. They are the all-seeing unseen one. They are the Stasi. This is the basis of the police: *"We see you; you don't see us."* *"You are accountable to me; I am not accountable to you. Would you like to make a complaint against me? You're very welcome. May I offer you ten years with us?"* Very scary. Very, very scary.

Now look at your own investigator. Like a dog pissing on a lamppost, your mind knows everything, but you never catch it, it slips away. When the wall in Berlin came down, where did all the secret police go? At the end of the war, where did all the Gestapo go? This is the special skill of the investigator. Slipping away.

This is why looking for your own mind is very difficult. When you look for your mind as if it's a quality of the ego, you are trying to catch the investigator, the judge but you never can catch the judge. The judge is always ahead of you; they have twenty passports.

Be clear, this is not a theory, a story; this is an instruction on the meditation. Because when we sit with our own mind, then we encounter the bit of us that wants to name and judge and move things around. In the dharma there are so many paths of development for changing and softening and educating this judge, but they take a very long time.

That is not what we're doing. As soon as you find yourself getting caught up in judgment and evaluation, don't investigate the judge. Relax into the presence, or relax into being present as the experiencer.

The judge is the energy of the experiencer that has gone into a self-referential loop. It is an imaginal construct but we love the creations of the mind, and when we enter in to that, you can do it, we can judge. A child of four, playing with dolls, will have one doll talking to the other the way the mother talks to them. *"Oh no! You're all dirty again! I have to clean you all day long!"* Yes, it sounds very amusing—the mother's voice, the father's voice is coming out of the child. Because we learn through mimicry what was the other becomes the self. The small child is showing that she can be many different people, and one of them is the judge. It sounds like a true voice of the child, but it's an echo-voice. In the same way when we get into evaluating the world, putting names and labels onto the world, it is a mimetic echo-voice. It doesn't speak the truth; it creates a world in which we can believe.

This is our prison-guard: the fact that we manifest two pulsating modes, like a damaru<sup>3</sup>. We are the cheater and the cheated. We create illusions that captivate other people, and we create illusions that captivate ourselves.

So, observing our mind, observing how we solidify the world and divide it up into hierarchies of value, this is our place at the centre of samsara.

Okay, we will take a break now for twenty minutes.

*[Break]*

## **Zabgye: depth and light**

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Our topic for this weekend is '**Depth and Light**'. This is a reference to the Tibetan term 'zabgye'. 'Zab' means 'depth' and 'gye' means 'to expand'. Zab refers to *khadag*; it is the depth

<sup>3</sup> A two-sided drum which is turned sharply so that the clapper hits alternate sides.

of the infinite space of the *dharmadhatu*. Dharmadhatu means ‘the space of the dharmas’. *Dhatu* in this usage is like an openness.

As we’ve looked already, everything has to be somewhere. When we look around this room we see the wall in front of us. The wall is in space, and beyond the wall there is another room or the space outside. Emptiness means there is no real barrier. Everything is within emptiness. All phenomena are located, because everything has something in front of it or behind it, above it, or below it and so on. This location-ing, or locate-ability of phenomena weaves them into the web of signifiers, because every dharma is in conversation or interaction with other dharmas.

The dharmadhatu is the space within which dharmas occur. ‘Dharma’ here means ‘phenomena’, phenomena inseparable from the dharmadhatu. So, the dharmadhatu is a space which is filled with that which is not different from itself and yet shows difference.

‘Depth’ refers the unimpeded openness of the mind, which includes whatever is occurring.

We have other very famous terms such as *‘longchen’*, which also refer to great space or depth. The name of the famous 14<sup>th</sup> century Nyingma teacher, Longchen Rabjam, means exactly *‘zabgye’*. *‘Rabjam’* means expansive, filling everything.

Depth is the immediate inclusion of everything. It means that our mind can encompass everything and yet we cannot find the bottom of it or the top or the sides. So this depth really indicates that it is ‘immeasurable’, that it cannot be summed up. We can’t come to any conclusion about it.

What does this mean? When we sit in the meditation practice and lots of things are occurring. In and of themselves none of these things is a limit but they do have an impact. Remember Dodge ‘Ems? The bumper cars that you get in fairgrounds? You get in and you drive around and you whack into other cars and try to avoid them whacking into you. This is our world. We bump into each other, and bumping gives rise to new dharmas and new dharmas and new dharmas. New formations arise all the time; we never get to the end of them.

Dharmas don’t displace space; they don’t cause any trouble for space. When we sit in our mediation practice and we become irritated with our mind or confused or disappointed that we can’t maintain clarity or whatever, this is not the hospitality of the dharmadhatu; this is the consequence of locating ourselves in a particular place: *‘Because I am like this, I don’t want that.’*

Whenever we find ourselves getting into judgment, getting into hopes and fears, we return to the question, *‘Who is the experiencer?’* This is not a question formulated as a cognitive inquiry such as when you hear a knock at the door and you wonder who it is. When you go to the door to open it then your question is answered and you see who it is. That’s not very complicated. So who is the experiencer?

‘Here’ is the experience. *[James indicates a place.]* The experiencer has to be somewhere nearby. The experience is like the door—knock, knock, knock. So, be present with the experience and you find yourself present as the experiencer.

In the tradition this is always described as like the mirror and the reflection. The mirror shows the reflection both is itself and is not itself.

When you have an experience—maybe you are sitting and a thought arises, perhaps about going back to work on Monday, or whatever—the thought catches you for a little bit. This is happening; it's showing. If it weren't showing, it wouldn't be here. It's showing. Someone sees what's showing. 'I' see what is showing. So who is the 'I' who is the experiencer?

We need to un-elaborate the 'I'. Don't tell a story describing the 'I' because if you start to tell a story about the one who is seeing it, you're just wrapped it into a narrative. We have to learn how to do this just by practising.

Again and again, we go off but wherever we get lost, that's exactly just where we are. If you are at the point of getting lost, then you are not lost; you are here. *"But I shouldn't be here; I should be there!"* That's a thought. If you're here, here is the only place to be. This is *dzogpa chenpo*—complete as this. It doesn't need anything added; it doesn't need anything corrected.

### It is empty but how it appears is as different

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The reflection in the mirror can be clear or it can be hazy and there is no difference between being clear and being hazy—if you're clear!

What does that mean? It means that the potential of the mirror is the same whether the light is on or off, whether the mirror is steamed up or not. If you go in a dark room, you don't see anything in the mirror. It doesn't mean the mirror is not a mirror. If you light a small candle, the room is still gloomy and what is in the mirror is a little bit shady, hazy. Then you put on the main light and now the reflection is very bright. Has the mirror been improved? Is the bright reflection better than the hazy shady one?

It is what it is. This is so completely important. It is empty; *how it appears is as different*.

Tibetan language has lots of ways of talking about this difference. For example there are the two terms '*ji ta wa khyen pa'i yeshe*' and '*ji nye pa khyen pa'i yeshe*'. The first refers to 'the intrinsic knowing of the clear understanding of how things are'. The second refers to 'the intrinsic knowing of the clear understanding of how things appear'. It is not a case of either/or. '*Ji nye pa*' has the sense of measurement, of evaluation. For example, I can see that the people over there are further away from me than the people sitting next to me. That's an evaluation. I'm able to have some sense of distance and relative proportions and location. You couldn't function in the world if you couldn't do that. If you drive a car, you have to work out where this car is in relation to other vehicles moving fast. In Tibetan they speak of something in terms of 'how it appears to be'. That is to say, what you measure, what you evaluate, is *appearance*.

How it is, is empty. How it appears is whatever that particular shaping is. Neither has essence nor substance. Looking around this room we see different people's faces and bodies and postures and we get some sense of their age or their health or their lifestyle. We need to be able to interpret what we see in order to interact with people. This is a momentary permission. If somebody looks a bit sad to us, they look a bit sad, *now*. Maybe they are not sad, maybe they

are sad, but if tomorrow we say to them, *“I hope you are feeling happier today. You looked so sad yesterday,”* we have imputed, projected, an essence into them.

Appearance means, ‘just this appearance’. Because it has no internal definition to it, it is not telling you about something inside. Everything is showing the energy of the dharmakaya. As far as we know, the dharmakaya is not tired, it doesn’t have greasy hair, it didn’t forget to clean its teeth, it’s not sad. People look the way they look. It’s just like that—for now.

Emptiness and appearance: it doesn’t presume, it doesn’t assume. I give you your freedom to be you, and I give myself my freedom to be me. I am not going to diagnose you. I have big psychotherapy books at home for the diagnosis of many conditions. In order to make use of such books, we identify signs and symptoms, which has us looking at people in a particular way: ‘How can I elicit from you information which will fit into the packaging of what the books say is your condition?’ None of this is necessary. The person shows themselves. What are you going to do with it? Either you respond, you engage, or you don’t—and that moment has gone, and then there’s another moment. You look back: *“Hey, now you’re smiling. Why the fuck are you smiling? Do you want to trick me? I’m reading in my textbook about depression and now here you are smiling!”*

Waves on the ocean; they’re unreliable. We are unreliable. How beautiful. What a freedom to be unreliable! We do not and cannot fit into the maps in other people’s heads.

My need to understand you can be formulated as a violence towards you since to be open to you, to be truly interested in you, would take me out of me. When I make sense of you by pulling you into my template of interpretation, I am consolidating my own sense of myself as somebody who knows what’s going on.

Like a fulcrum point, we are constantly rebalancing ourselves to the point of contact with the other. You change and I change. How will we make contact in the next moment? We can’t know until that arrives. This is depth and light, *zabgye* in Tibetan. Depth is the emptiness, the openness, the ungraspable nature of the revealing moment. Light is how it shows itself. We are touched and moved, and we respond. That gesture, like a wave, goes back in the ocean, and something else happens, and something else happens...

Did we do the right thing? It is impossible to know, because it would depend on our vantage point and our criteria for evaluation. That doesn’t mean that we are delinquent or self-indulgent or impulsive. What it means is that instead of having internal traffic lights—the prohibitions and encouragements that we internalised in our childhood—what we have is the other person; that they show us where they are in this moment.

The face of the other guides us. It doesn’t require technical, specialised knowledge. It requires availability, which is the quality of emptiness.

## Potatoes and people

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There are many different kinds of potatoes. If you are boiling them, they need different amounts of boiling. If you boil some of them for twenty minutes you get soup. If you boil others for



twenty minutes they are still hard. Saying, “*I know how to cook potatoes.*” is an abstraction. The actual requirement is to look at the potato and every now and then stick a fork into it and see how it’s doing. That is to say, you have to make a relationship with the potato even as you’re boiling it.

The thing about the potato is important. If you look, it will show you how it’s getting on. You don’t need to look up books to learn how to cook potatoes.

It’s the same with people; people will show you. If you get it wrong, they may show you a bit more. Why am I telling you this? Because it is important we have the confidence and encouragement to let go of this huge amount of knowledge that we carry around. It may give us predictions and methods of testing things, but it is all very burdensome.

Thangkas of Garab Dorje show him painted with a very lovely, young face. This is because what he is showing us is very innocent: if you want to find out how you are, look at how you are. If you are still not sure, keep looking until you are sure. Once you’re sure, then don’t waste your time thinking about other things. You don’t need a PhD to apply this; you need a willingness to keep looking.

The experience is here; who is the experiencer? It’s not being hidden by any force other than our own ability to attend without being distracted. The radiance of the mind is arising as all kind of phenomena—some seem like outside, some seem like inside. Experience is arising. We are aware of the experience. This is undeniable. Who or what or how is the one who is aware? This is who we are; so how are we?

Come back again and again and again to being present in the presence of the mind itself.

Now we will carry this into doing some more meditation practice.

*[Meditation practice]*

## **A thief in an empty house**

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To briefly recap, with that practice, we experience again and again that whatever is arising goes free by itself. Trusting this, there is less and less need for involvement. In terms of awareness, thoughts don’t bring any benefit, nor do they do any harm.

In the traditional example, we relax in the state of being like an empty house. The less we identify with the content of the mind, the fewer precious possessions that we have. When new thoughts and feelings arise, they’re like a thief in an empty house. So, subject has less interest in object, and object has less power to fascinate subject.

We are turning again and again to this point of being directly present in experience: observing as being with. Not observing across a distance, not looking at something else, at something, which is other than you, but being the presence that reveals and illuminates every transient arising.

The emptiness of the mind shows itself through its own clarity. Just as the mirror itself is ungraspable and unattainable and shows itself only through its reflection, similarly the mind itself is ungraspable and shows itself in the illuminating clarity of its own presence.

It's not about blocking thoughts or feelings or sensations; these are all the shimmering surface of the clarity of our mind. This clarity is not itself an appearance, it is not something which is knowable or analysable. Appearance is passing; experience is passing. Like lightning flashing in the sky, like a rainbow, there's nothing to get. When we stop trying to get, everything is given to us.

Whether the mind is peaceful or agitated, whether there are many thoughts or few thoughts, just stay present on the point of the arising of the thought. How do we do that? The actuality of our mind is presence and this presence cannot be located somewhere for in fact it is this present which illuminates everywhere by being present with it. This is not like a searchlight illuminating a distant object; the mind has no location and yet is always precisely here precisely now. If you locate your mind as being something somewhere you are identified with a thought and then another thought will arrive and you will identify with that. This is how we wander in samsara.

We were talking earlier about panoramic vision. By being present, but uncommitted, we're open to everything which is occurring, wherever it occurs. This means that again and again we release the feeling tone, although it feels very true for me— *'I am here; the thought is there. The thought is coming at me; I'm going towards the thought.'*—and is our ordinary way of conceptualising the movement of thoughts and feeling across time and space.

Awareness is everywhere; it's not inside or outside. For the purposes of some meditation practices, you may visualise it as located in the heart, but it's not 'a thing'. It doesn't have a shape or a form. It doesn't have a colour. It doesn't have any kind of dimension. Again and again, we need to return to being with our mind so our mind can show us what it is.

## **If you want to find the mother, wait with the child**

What could be more important than this? If you forget where your keys are, you get upset. If you forget where your mind is, have you ever really been bothered?

Why should you be bothered since, if you think your mind is a thought, you've got a lot of other thoughts so just have another thought! Our mind is the basis of our existence. It is who we are. It is how we are, but we can only be it by being with it. This does not mean that thoughts and feelings and so on are bad.

If you see a small child wandering in the park, you keep an eye on it, and sooner or later the mother arrives: *"Oh my goodness! There you are. Where on earth did you wander off to?"* If you want to find the mother, all you need to do is just wait by the child.

The mother is the mind itself. Thoughts, feelings and sensations—these are the children. Don't split them into two separate things.

*"But my mind's so full of stuff, I don't know what's going on."*

Stay precisely present on the point of confusion. How do we do that? We just are; we are here. We are here. 'Here' is where we are; 'there' is where we go to. If we're not 'here', we've gone 'there'. No one came and dragged us there. The one who goes from 'here' to 'there' is a thought. The mind is already everywhere without ever moving. So by being 'here', you're in the right place.

Gradually you get a sense of what it means to be present. It's not an idea, it's not an experience and it's not a thought either.

The example is a mirror, open and empty. We are full of stuff. We are full of stuff because we are open and empty. There is no contradiction between the two. Whatever is in your mind, whatever you get preoccupied by, this is only possible because of the space of the mind. So don't go looking for the mind as if it were somewhere else.

If experience is arising, the mind is here and because the mind is here, more experience arises. This is the inseparability of *khadag* and *lhundrup*. Everything you see, feel or touch—all the various modes of experience—are inseparable from ground emptiness.

[Day 2]

## Consciousness and awareness

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In our practice we address the sense that our mind is inside our body. 'I am inside, you are outside' feels completely normal, and is reaffirmed everyday in many ways in all the different interactions we have with other people. The basis of this is thinking, "I am a person and you also are a person." Buddhism, however, is a critique of the notion of the person. What we see outside is our experience.

If I take myself to be an individual, separated from you, then you have your own life and I don't know what your life is so a hesitancy is built into our existence: "How shall I behave with you?"

Yesterday we were examining what is the nature of our own mind—that the mind is empty, in the sense that it is not based on a solid, substantial thing. The mind is open spaciousness and the self-display of that spaciousness. In its openness, it is without bias having no prejudice or tendency, inside, outside, upside or downside.

The aspect of our being which becomes aware of this is awareness. Awareness means the illuminating capacity of the mind. This is not like a torch. On a dark night, if you have a torch, you can see clearly that the light has a source from which it is spreading out. The radiance of the mind is like the first light of the dawn. Before the sun comes over the horizon, the light spreads out over the sky. There is the sense of it being everywhere.

This is a very strange idea, because when we think of our ordinary sense of our mind, we think of our consciousness and the thing about consciousness is that it has a self-referential looping inside it. For example, you might have been cooking something, and you come out of the

kitchen, and then suddenly you say to the person with you, “*Oh, there’s something burning. Do you smell that?*” You are both aware of a smell, and also that you are smelling it. So consciousness points in two directions at once. It makes us aware of something but also gives us the sense that we are the one who is aware of the something.

Consciousness operates as the strengthening factor to the sense of an individual self. In Tibetan, the word for consciousness is *nampar shepa*. *Nampar* means kind of shaping or a form, something which can be apprehended. *Shepa* means ‘to know’. It gives the sense that our consciousness apprehends that which can be apprehended.

Awareness, on the other hand, shows or reveals that which can’t be apprehended.

The traditional example used for this is a mirage. You can never apprehend a mirage. It’s like the horizon—you never get there. You see it, but you can’t get it. Since we are very good at cheating ourselves we say, “*Oh, it’s a mirage.*” By naming it as a mirage, it is as if you’ve got it, as if you have apprehended it. We give confirmation to our wonderful intelligent self through being able to apply a name, which we can then grab, as if grasping the name we would somehow grasp the object. This is the basis of our samsaric consciousness: that we grasp because we are able to create that which is graspable.

This is operating on the basis of the most primitive form of magic because the idea in magic is that once you find the idea of something, by getting the name, you get hold of it. Thus each of the deities has a seed syllable, and this seed syllable gives you access to the life of the deity. Mantra has the seed syllable inside it, and through that you have the connection with the deity and the power to evoke them. This is how we normally function in the world.

Tantra can take the dualistic samsaric model and transform it because the seed syllable arises out of emptiness. On that level, it’s operating inside consciousness. “*I am making something happen.*” We say some words and we imagine, for example, that there is a net of vajras all around. We are making this happen. What is happening? We are imagining something that we then believe to be true. This is what we do all the time. We imagine that we are in this building. This building reveals itself to us as images. This process has several stages: we see light; the light forms as images; the images are given names; we grab hold of the names; we manipulate it. “*I am here in the Bodhicharya Buddhist Centre in Berlin.*” That’s a nice conclusion. Now we know where we are because we trust the words. Words give us more security than just experiencing light.

We transform light into apprehendable substances, and then we have to reverse that by practising meditation to transform the apprehendable substances back into light! This is how our consciousness – getting hold of something – is the method by which we solidify our experience.

This is often called ‘karmic vision’. That is to say, according to the particular causal forces that give us a human birth, we have access to a particular domain of construction. The very shape of our body and the capacity of our sense organs predispose us to certain kinds of experience. Most animals live with their nose first. Going on four legs, sniffing. Pigs have a very strong and sensitive nose. They are able to dig up the earth and also sniff out where something tasty is. That is to say, they occupy a world that is different from ours. It is very difficult to image what it would be like to be a bird or a pig, because our brain usually is not privileging smell very

much; we privilege sight and sound much more. Animals like moles don't see very much but they have incredible sensitivity of nose.

From the buddhist point of view, we would say they also have a structure of consciousness. That is to say they become aware of something – something of danger or something of advantage. They are moving in the world, seeking advantage, trying to avoid danger, just as we are. Choices are being made according to the particular perception of the environment. By looking at animals we can see the relative nature of our perception.

On the basis of the functioning capacity of our sense organs, we participate in the world. The functioning of these sense organs, however, is very fragile.

### Transient ways of participation

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For many years I have met every month or so with a few therapist friends. At the beginning we would always meet in a nice restaurant and have a good meal, but now we meet in the consulting room of one of the members of our little group. Why? Because now that he's older he doesn't hear very well and has to wear a hearing aid but if he's in a restaurant with a lot of noise coming from different directions, he gets very distracted. Without having made any conscious decision to change, he now finds the idea of a eating in a restaurant, which used to be a pleasure, is now unpleasant.

As we get older, many of us need to use glasses for reading. If we forget our glasses, then we are helpless. I have my book, but I have these stupid eyes that can't read my book. All this is due to causes and conditions. What we take to be ourselves is not self-existing; it is relative, dependent on conditions.

This sort of reflection is available twenty-four hours a day. When you're walking down the street, you see small children running around, not quite in control of their body; you see babies in prams, they can't walk, they can't talk; you see old people walking along slowly and stiffly. Observing all this we can realise that our *body is very transient, is without essence, and depends on factors which I can't control.*

Subject to all such influences we are dynamic, we are moving, and it is important again and again to be aware that I am energy, I am movement, I am change. I try to hide this fact from myself by delusional narrative and I ignore the actuality of change in order to preserve the illusion of a stable image. The maintenance of the image, however, does take a lot of effort.

All this is relevant in terms of dzogchen. When we look around this hall we see people, statues, paintings and so on. This thing on the wall above me, it is as if it is truly a painting. We all know it's a painting. You would be stupid if you didn't know it was a painting. Of course, we are stupid because we know it's a painting. We stupefy ourselves by knowing 'it's a painting'. That is to say, this is a dulling clarity. Having recognised this is a painting, a set of balancing assumptions arises, and these assumptions become like an invisible wall. If it's a painting, it's a painting. So then we ask what kind of painting is it? Who is in the painting? There's nobody in the painting; it's just dabs of colour. Whoever is in the painting is in your mind. You could take a stranger and show them this painting and ask, "*Who this is.*" and they might say that they did not know. They might not know, but we know. When we know, we say, "*Oh, this is the Buddha.*" This

is not the Buddha; this is a lie, and it's a lie that makes us feel proud. The Buddha is not in the painting; the Buddha is in your mind. If the Buddha were really there, everybody would know, because it would be showing itself in an undeniable certitude.

When you look at this painting, this thangka of Shakyamuni Buddha, what you see is your mind. This is a very simple example, but if you take this and use it everywhere you go, you will see that self-existing objects are an illusion.

## The mind and its furniture

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This is the underlying meaning of *thogal*. *Thogal* is not merely a set of practices that you can learn and which some lamas like Namkhai Norbu teach. To see the nature of primordial purity in relation to experience, that is already *thogal*. This is your mind—I am your mind, everything is your mind. That does not mean that everything is your ego, your consciousness, your self. We are not describing some idealistic philosophy that tells us that everything is just an idea in our mind. We have discussed before how, when we refer to 'my mind', most of the time what we mean is actually 'the furniture in my mind'.

When you rent an unfurnished flat you put your own furniture inside and you make the flat comfortably 'yours'. When you have to move out, you take your furniture with you. The space was never yours; the space was just there and you had access to the space.

It is the same with the mind. The space of the mind is not 'ours'. It is ours if we inhabit it, but it's not ours as a possession. With furniture we can have some kind of possession. Our thoughts, feelings, memories and so on belong to us. They are the unique particularities of our located existence.

This is why understanding the empty nature of the mind—primordial purity, *khadag*—is the necessary basis of *thogal*.

In the meditation we sit and we look. Various things appear. These are revealed through the movement of our mind. When this movement of the mind is linked with its own depth, it is referred to in Tibetan as *rigpai tsal*. It is the energy of awareness revealing itself.

When we are not connected with the open spaciousness, the ground of our being, we locate ourselves as being 'myself', and 'myself' is constructed out of the particular aspects of experience which I draw together at any moment. When I look out at the world, I approach it through the filter of my own concerns, and this operates as the eight consciousnesses. These are the five sense consciousnesses, the organising mental consciousness, the consciousness of the emotive colourations, and the ground consciousness. The ground consciousness is the consciousness that can organise the potential of the mind in terms of appropriate-able entities. In the tantric system, these eight consciousnesses are said to be present in the heart chakra in the form of an eight-petalled lotus.

Through this mediation, we become aware of certain factors in the environment. We see that there are, if you like, two parallel worlds. One is unmediated or uncooked, and the other is mediated and cooked, through selective attention, investment of emotional identification and so

on. That is what we touched on yesterday when we talked about the dzogchen notion that there is one ground and two paths.

‘Ground’ means not just the basis and the source but it also refers to the sphere in which everything occurs. When the ground is connected with what arises from the ground, then there is no differentiation or separation and therefore no need for elaboration.

### Examples of verdigris and rust

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Verdigris is given as a traditional example for this. Verdigris is the green patina that appears on aged and weathered copper. According to the Tibetan tradition, the verdigris arises out of the copper. Copper is an orangey-red colour and out of it appears this green patina. This is the copper showing itself; it is one of the modalities of copper. Tibetans also use as an example how orange rust arises out of iron.

When we see the verdigris or the rust as something separate from the iron, then we want to give it a specific name and work out what to do about it. *“How do I get rid of this? It is spoiling the copper.”* We take something that is part of the life of copper and see it as the enemy of copper, because we have the pure idea of what copper actually is and how it should be. Then we go to the hardware shop and ask for some product to protect the copper from verdigris. Of course, a shopkeeper is always happy to satisfy your demand and will sell you something.

Right. We sit in meditation. The verdigris of the mind arises. Where does all this green shit come from? Surely this can’t be me? You go to the holy lama. *“Can you give me a crap-remover? All this bad stuff is coming into my mind.”* Of course, lamas can provide you with many removal methods: *“We have this excellent new Dorje Sempa scrubbing brush. It comes highly recommended...”*

This is how it goes when we see the showing of the mind as being in some way an attack on the mind or at least an attack on our idea of how our mind should be.

Dzogchen, however, is saying that everything is complete and perfect in itself, perfect in the sense of not needing to be changed into anything else. It just is as it is.

So if a jealous thought arises in the mind, it’s there and then it’s gone, one of the many kinds of thoughts that the mind can have. Then the ground and what is manifesting from the ground are not separated. But when you have mediation, when you insert ‘I, me, myself’ like a wedge in between the ground and the manifestation...

*—I don’t want this stuff in my mind. I don’t want to be like this. I want to be kind and generous and helpful, and I’m not. So something’s wrong with me. Can you help me be better?*

*—Better than what?*

*—Better than what I am.*

There, you can cheat yourself very easily, because “better than what I am” is a very dangerous statement. The only useful response is to ask, “But what are you?”

Buddhism has thousands and thousands of methods for making you better than you are and death will come before you have exhausted them all. Between now and your death, if you spend your time trying to improve yourself, you might never find out who you are.

'Better than who I am' means 'I am somebody who has jealous thoughts and I don't want to be somebody who has jealous thoughts.'

Hm... [Speaks each word slowly and distinctly:] 'I... have... jealous... thoughts.' Now we come to a question of grammar. Is the problem in the jealousy? Because that's what it feels like? This horrible jealous thought arises so then you spend a lot of time trying to transform the jealousy. This is the problem of not understanding grammar. 'I' have 'jealous thoughts'. Mmm? [Makes grasping gesture.] Grasping at the jealous thought. The jealous thought arose... and passed. We run after it saying, *"Don't you come back here again!! If I see you again, I will call the police! My mind is private property!"*

It's gone. We are going after the thought, after the 'having' – I 'have' a jealous thought. If the mind is open, the jealous thought comes and goes. The problem then is not, as it were, in the object; it's in the subject and the verb.

When the 'I' is me as a person, me as someone who wants to define who I am, then the fact of the sense of having what I don't want is troublesome to me. Buddha Shakyamuni described two main kinds of suffering: getting what you don't want and not getting what you do want. Here we find ourselves with an idea of who we are, what we need, what we don't need, what we like, what we don't like. As a customer we think that we have a right to choose but maybe this is just stupidity because in making a choice, this is the very place where you insert yourself between the ground and the manifestation!

## The mirror and its reflections

The traditional example is the mirror and the reflection. The mirror is able to show many different kinds of reflections. These reflections come and go, and they don't leave a trace. No reflection can harm the mirror. We need to really understand this. Go home and play in front of the mirror, do lots of different things and see what the mirror does.

This is equanimity, a concept which appears in many buddhist texts. There are many terms for it but basically it means not entering into judgment, not saying this is good, this is bad. The reason why it is safe not to enter into judgment is because the reflection doesn't harm the mirror.

Nowadays there are police in most airports trained to do special identification of people's facial expressions and bodily movements, because they are doing 'Spot the Terrorist'. If they spot a terrorist with a bomb, we say, "Thank you very much." A small bomb wrapped in a package can look like something else yet it's very different so clearly discernment is very important since no-one wants to be blown up. Yes, we are all going to die, but we don't want to die from a bomb, at least not just yet... No reflection harms the mirror, but reflections interact with each other.

For example, if you are looking at yourself in a mirror, and someone pushes in front of you, you lose half your face. You say, "Oy, get out of the way!" The reflection is vulnerable to other reflections. Reflections have no essence. They are contextual, situational, contingent. Life



happens to us. We don't know what events are going to do to us to make us happy or sad, expansive or contracted.

In terms of the mirror, this doesn't matter. In terms of the reflection, it matters a lot. Samsara is the domain of the reflection. Liberation is the integration of the reflection in the mirror, showing the true nature of the reflection.

As it says in the texts again and again, if good things happen, let them happen; if bad things happen, let them happen. Don't be bobbling up and down like a cork on the waves. Good times pass, so why chase after them? Bad times go by themselves, so why worry about them? You can look in all the buddhist books and they say the same thing again and again.

Our awareness is tolerant. Something arises, and then it goes. It doesn't do anything to the mirror, but it can do something to us.

Who are we? We are patterns of thoughts, feelings, memories, sensations and so on. These energy constellations are themselves reflections in the mirror. None of us can stabilise our mood, because we are impacted by what happens. You only have to walk along your street to see some tragic situation. It affects you. How terrible not to be affected! That would mean compassion is impossible. At the same time, everything has the same taste. These are not opposites. Everything having the same taste is not the same as indifference.

## Transforming the five poisons

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### Stupidity

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The tantric mandala, transforming of the five poisons into the five wisdoms, is an example. Generally, in the centre is the purification of stupidity or mental dullness [*timuk*]. Mental dullness is composed of the habit of ignoring the ground, and it does that by preoccupation.

People walking along the street, talking on their mobile phones, are not very aware of other people. They are connected with something far away, and disconnected from what is exactly here. This is the nature of stupidity: we merge into our assumptions and the things that we prioritise, and we take our tunnel vision to be an accurate account of how things are.

This restricted, limited kind of experience is transformed, or revealed, as the dharmadhatu jnana, *cho ying yeshe* – that is to say the wisdom, the intrinsic knowing, of the space within which all dharmas arise. Yesterday we looked at the traditional example of taking a piece of coal, washing it every day for years and years but it still doesn't become chalk. You can't transform a potato into a banana, yet stupidity can be transformed into dharmadhatu wisdom. This is because they have the same nature. The ground or basis or source of the energy that ignores its own ground—the formation of individual identity which I take to be my enduring self—is the open ground which is the mother of all the Buddhas. Ego fixation arises from finding oneself as an orphan, source-less, motherless and so one clings to the sense that one exists as what one believes oneself to be. Stupidity means to not see one's own true actuality by imagining that one is other than one is. This is the perverse power of the imagination.

## Jealousy

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The fifth transformation is of jealousy. Jealousy is the fear that something which I take to be mine, or something that I want, is going to be taken by someone else. It's the dynamic of triangulation. That is to say, it speaks of the vulnerability of whatever we have: that because there is no fixed ground to identity, whatever we take to be ours can be taken from us by causes and circumstances.

Five years ago, life in Syria was very different from now. Due to causes and conditions vortexes of pressure started to operate. Now thousands, millions of people are displaced and their homes destroyed.

When we reflect on impermanence and dependent origination, we see that there is no secure basis to our life, When we fall in love, however, we tell our beloved that we will love them forever. This is a lie, a reassuring lie, but a lie nevertheless. And it is the basis for jealousy because I did think that it was going to stay like that forever.

The transformation of this is the wisdom that can do everything, *ja wa drub pai yeshe*, the wisdom that fulfils or completes activity.

One of the things about jealousy is that it's quite paralysing. There are states of paranoid jealousy, toxic jealousy, where murder is the main result.

## Tantra transforms something into what it already is

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It's like a child having a temper tantrum. Children are very good at doing this in public. "*I don't have to. You can't make me! You're not my mother! Go away!*" Suddenly everybody is looking and wondering, "*What is that woman doing with the child? Maybe we should call the police.*" But this is the mother. The denial of the mother doesn't stop the woman being the mother. It just shows that the child is intoxicated with a kind of rage.

In the same way, we get intoxicated with the idea of 'I, me, myself', that I exist, that I am *me*. Nobody's going to tell *me* what to do. I'm in charge of my life. I'm entitled to live the way that I want. We have a lot of this discourse now in the modern world. Where did we come from? We make our own air; we make our own food; we make our own clothes; we are entirely autonomous and independent. "*I am independent! I don't need anything from anyone.*" This is a temper tantrum. Actually, we are highly dependent, highly interdependent.

Why? Because we are a dharma inside the dharmadhatu. The dharmadhatu is our mother. It's sometimes described as the womb of the great mother, and that's where we are.

'I am me': that is what stupidity is. It is the denial of how it is by pretending it's something else. That's why it can be transformed into *what it is*. To turn a potato into a banana is difficult because a potato isn't a banana, but stupidity can be transformed into wisdom because its basis is the same ground as wisdom has. When stupidity relaxes its autointoxication, and there is a space in which its own basis is revealed, that recognition of the basis shows the forms of stupidity to be the radiance of wisdom.

At the end of the temper tantrum when the child is tired and exhausted, and you ask,

— *Is this really your mother?*

— *Yes.*

— *Do you want to go home with her?*

— *Yes. [shuffle, shuffle, eyes down...]*

So, this is how transformation works in tantra.

## Desire

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Likewise with desire. Desire means making something special and the transformation of desire is into the capacity to appreciate the particularities of whatever appears, *so sor tog pai yeshe* in Tibetan.

With the first wisdom, *chöying yeshe*, we open ourselves to being space and being present in space as this particular form, a dharma in the dharmadhatu, relaxed, contented, satisfied, part of the dharmadhatu.

But then, “*Oh! There are other dharmas too in the dharmadhatu!*” We look at the other dharmas and some we like, some we don’t like. Why? They’re all just dharmas. “*Oh, I like that one because it’s going to give me something.*”

But what do I need? I am contented. We can appreciate the qualities of what appears in the world without trying to get them.

Kuntuzangpo, the founding buddha of the lineage, and his consort Kuntuzangmo are both depicted naked. When you are naked, you have no pockets. It’s obvious. So where are you going to put the things you get? Up your nose? In your ear? Naked means you don’t need them. So in that way, you enjoy without appropriating.

You walk down the street... (Now I’m talking as a man)... you walk down the street and you see a woman in front of you. She has a gorgeous arse. Beautiful! Undoubtedly a princess. Ah, high maintenance. I admire the arse and walk on. Very wise. [*Laughter.*] Getting involved, big headache.

**Woman’s voice:** Men have also nice asses.

**James:** Exactly.

So this is the transformation of desire. It’s not about shutting down or having anaesthesia. It’s about aesthetic enjoyment, which is the meaning of sambhogakaya. Sambhoga means enjoying everything. Enjoying means being present in the moment of the revelation of the rich diversity of the world, and then—gone. Naked, we have no pocket for the future, no pocket for the past.

## Anger

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Anger, or aversion, is putting aside or wanting to destroy the thing that disturbs us and is the dynamic of projection. It is transformed into mirror-like wisdom, *melong tabui yeshe*. The mirror shows things just as they are: A person behaves in whatever way they do. That is their activity. I choose the activity of being annoyed. In London underground, many people put their feet up on the seats. I think that they should not do that. Does my annoyance disturb them? No. Does it disturb me? Yes.

They do what they do. What happens, happens. This is the purification of anger. If I want to change it, I should see very clearly what it is because it all depends on the circumstances. Maybe sometimes I can say something to make someone change their behaviour but a lot of the time it won't. Shaming people in public is no longer likely to bring about behaviour change.

Mirror-like wisdom is seeing the whole context, and then you can work out whether there is something that can be done or not.

## Pride

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Pride is transformed as the wisdom of equality, *nyamnyid yeshe*. Pride says 'I am special'. It's a separation from others and an inflation of one's own importance. One is no longer just a dharma in the dharmadhatu, an appearance of emptiness in the field of display. When we transform into the wisdom of equalness, we see that because everything is empty, all the qualities of everything are also empty. This is because they are attributional, that is to say, we give the qualities to whatever we see.

Some people don't like classical music; some people do like classical music. These are projections, opinions, personal preferences. Music is music; it's just sound and emptiness. What is there to like in it or not like in it? That depends on you. *"No, but you should really hear this. It's good, it's really good."* This is a description of a relationship: I like it, therefore it is good. The first part is okay; the second part is problematic.

'I' am saying that the liking is based on the quality of the object and that, if you just give it a chance, you will like it too. In secret we're thinking, *"And you'd be stupid not to."* This concretisation, this solidification of an opinion, is very dangerous; some people are killed because of the opinions other people have about them.

Equalness doesn't mean homogenisation. Everything is there in its particularity, and yet this particularity establishes nothing. Many different reflections arise in the mirror. Some we like some, others we don't like but all the reflections are equally valid, as reflections. You can't take the reflection out of the mirror. The unique particularity of each reflection is inseparable from the ground emptiness of the mirror. So when we say this is better than that, it's like saying, *"This cloud is much nicer than that one. This is the best cloud."* A cloud is ungraspable, but we still want to compare them.

*—Every time we go to a party you start dancing with other people. Why?*

*—I just like dancing.*

*—I've watched you and you're flirting with them too.*

*—Well, I'm only being friendly.*

*—No you're not. I don't know what you're up to. You're making me anxious. What I used to enjoy about you most was your free spirit, but not any more!*

Movement asks for flexibility and for activity to be carried out, there has to be a workable situation. That is to say, there has to be a connection between the parts. Very often when people meet together, they meet together under the blessing of an idea. Because of that shared idea, it is as if the other person is the one who fits my idea, but sooner or later the contradictions start to manifest. For situations to be workable, first we have to examine: 'How are you? How am I? Is some meeting possible? Is it workable?' To think that we can make everything workable is a huge ego fantasy. Sometimes it is just not possible.

Working with circumstances means that sometimes we have to reverse. One of the pieces of homework that I often give to patients is asking them to park their car without using the reverse gear. In the city when you only have a small space to go into, this is usually impossible. So why imagine we can have a successful relationship with someone if we can't go into reverse? We have to apologise sometimes. We have to step back. We have to let the other win. But why? Because that's how you do it.

This is what is meant by *ja wa drub pai yeshe*, flexibility of movement. It doesn't mean I'm going to turn into some powerful heruka and make everything happen. A fantasy of power is very unhelpful. It's about movement. We are, in any case, moving creatures. *Ja wa drub pai yeshe* is knowing whether your patterns and ways of movement can be harmonised with the situation. Because life works best when there is contentment.

## Meditation techniques

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Before we do more practice, I want to say something about technique.

As I've indicated before and as many of you know, there are many different techniques in dzogchen. If you have the chance to get the transmission for these, then it's very helpful.

Not scratching the itch: that's a main part of the lineage teachings, but there are other styles of practice. The way I practise and communicate is mainly from CR Lama and from Dudjom Rinpoche with a focus on allowing the natural purity of the mind to reveal itself.

In Tibetan there is the term *rang bab*, which means "self-falling". In English we might say "free fall". It means when we sit in the meditation, the mind tumbles along however it does, and the path is non-interference. To say, "*I don't like this. It shouldn't be like this. I could make it better,*" comes easily to us but the basic proposition of dzogchen is that the mind is self-healing.

If you have a condition like eczema, it's very tempting to scratch because it itches, and we believe that if something itches, we should scratch it. If we scratch it, we irritate the nerve endings. We open up the skin, we're likely to get some light infections, and get even more irritation. So, there is an itch: what is the status of the itch? The itch says, "Do something!" Should we believe it? This is a question. Can we believe the content of our own mind? We have impulses and tendencies that call on us to repeat actions. Who am I when I don't act? If my frame of reference is winning-and-losing, it can feel as if not acting is losing, and when I assert myself, I feel more powerful. So I'm going to scratch, and in that moment there is a forgetfulness of the consequence of the scratch.

This is exactly the same issue with meditation technique. We sit in the practice; the mind is tumbling around lot and I think, *“I could make it better.”* What is better? ‘Better’ means the importation of a set of criteria. Different kinds of thoughts, more ‘spiritual’ thoughts, might be more acceptable if I had to talk about them to other people, and that would make me feel better.

The central instruction, however, is not to change anything, that nothing needs to be changed. By not changing, we start to see the equal nature of all that occurs. By changing, we remain committed to our criteria of evaluation.

So, just look. The most important thing is emptiness. Everything is empty; there is nothing to be changed.

When we apply particular techniques, we need to be very clear about why we are applying them. The paradox is that if we do less, we get more, because the mind is self-liberating. Ideas are frequently misleading. The ground nature and the natural clarity of the mind don’t require the ego’s effort. Believing that, we just sit. The mind is showing. It shows us many different things. One of the things it shows is that I am my body. Just by sitting in a relaxed, open way, every nexus of tension – whether it’s in the musculature, the tendons, thoughts, memories – can relax. To make effort to release something brings you into conscious activity, which already puts another little spin on what’s going on.

As Patrul Rinpoche points out in two chapters in ***Simply Being***, it’s very easy for meditators to fixate on particular problems, to feel they’re too depressed to meditate, or too angry, or that their meditation lacks clarity, or that it’s not how it should be. He lists many, many kinds of ailments or meditation problems. For each of these, he gives the same medicine: stay present on the one who is having the experience. If you feel dull and stupid, be there present with dullness and stupidity. By simply being present without interfering, dullness disperses. Simple clarity is available. This he repeats again and again. There’s also a chapter in ***Simply Being*** from Nuden Dorje who also says the same thing.

Perhaps sometimes we have the idea that this isn’t enough, that I need a stronger better method, but then remember that the mind is pure from the very beginning and that it doesn’t need a method to purify it since it’s already pure.

C.R. Lama always said the main thing is to have faith. But why should we trust our own mind since we are lost souls wandering around in the world, messing up lots of things. What this means is when you sit in the meditation practice, and you feel this isn’t right, you hear the echo of ‘everything is pure from the very beginning’.

When we sit and we open, all kind of things are coming. These are the forms of purity; these are the reflections in the mirror. You look in the mirror and you say, *“Yup, that’s me alright.”* Actually no, that’s a reflection.

Similarly a thought arises in the mind, *“I can’t meditate. This is stupid. I’ve wasted a whole fucking weekend now.”* This is just something you are thinking. What does it mean? What actual status does it have? If you get on to a thought, it will take you to where the thought goes. It’s like getting on a bus: if you sit on the bus long enough, it will take you to the bus station. The bus station is full of buses. You get off this bus and you get on another bus. If you get on a thought, it

takes you to the thought station and you get on another thought and spend the whole time going around following these thoughts.

Thoughts are the display of the ground. If we don't awaken to the ground, then we're at the mercy of the pulsation of thoughts and events.

According to this lineage of practice, we sit and open to whatever is there, and open and open and open. Every time we get caught in something, we have the opportunity to see how we close down.

The key point to remember is that the one who is caught by the thought, is himself a thought. The ego is a thought-construction; it arises from the thought of 'I am', 'this is'. Therefore, relying on thoughts leads only into the territory of thoughts.

It's like in Homer's *Odysseus*. When Odysseus is approaching the island where the sirens are, he says to his sailors, "*Stuff this wax in your ears and tie me to firmly to the mast. No matter what I say, keep on rowing in a straight line.*" As they get closer to the island, he begins to hear the sirens calling and under their spell he tries to break free and get his sailors to row near to the island. But they obey his original instruction, and since they can't hear the sirens' seductive calls they keep on rowing in a straight line right past the island.

This is meditation. If we close your ears to thoughts, we're not sensitive. If we follow what we hear, we get lost. So we need the regularity of just staying, just sitting. We feel the tonal quality of the different sort of thoughts that are arising and this is like the purification of desire: we have discernment, we're not stupid, but we have equanimity.

All these thoughts are the same—they look different, but there's no substance to that look; it's just an empty appearance.

If we block thoughts or we try to control them, that is manipulation. If we follow thoughts, we get lost. So we have to find this middle way whereby whatever comes, comes but it doesn't take me with it where it goes.

*[Period of meditation.]*

There are many styles to enter the practice so we can do the most simple form. Just sit and begin, since there is no interruption between the arising and the passing of thought. All thinking is the display of mind. One advantage of this style of practice is it doesn't make a strong switch between being in the practice and being in the rest of our lives. As we get up and move around, it's simply more appearance arising and passing.

The view is that everything which arises and passes is the self-appearance of awareness. In Tibetan this is referred to as *rigpai rang nang*. It's not as if there is a pure world which is then contaminated by foreign and artificial thoughts. Our thoughts and emotions, being critical, disappointed, frustrated, exultant, happy and so on – these are all the mind showing itself. When we seem to have a commentary on what is going on – 'I am talking to myself about this' – it appears as if there is a subject talking to an object part of oneself. Both, however, are the spontaneous appearance or the easy movement of the energy of the mind. 'I like this' is an

energetic formulation. Every formulation is simply a formulation of transient energy. So where is any toxic obscuration?

Remember that the most important and central instruction in meditation is not to go after past thoughts and not to wait expectantly for future thoughts. Don't divide thoughts into good and bad, trying to get more of the good, less of the bad. This is where you have to really practise precisely, because judgments arise. It's not that the judgment is wrong. It's that we enter into the judgment, we merge with the judgment and we believe the judgment.

To have a sense of the wind as cold, this is a judgment. It has no implications; it has no necessary consequence. You could remain cold or decide to put on a sweater or a shawl. When we merge and say, "Oh, I'm cold," then we get a disconnection from the field. That is encapsulation in the feeling tone and leads very easily into the sense that something is making me cold: *'Why is this happening? There is some enemy-form that is doing something to me that I don't like.'* All of that is the natural showing of the mind, complete and perfect from the very beginning.

Conflict, being seemingly divided, is one of the many ways in which the mind shows itself. We can look in the mirror and see some ugly reflection present there. Should we blame the mirror? Should we ask why the mirror why it is showing something ugly? This must be a bad mirror! Likewise my mind has got something in it that I don't like. I must have a bad mind. I need to change my mind. Something is wrong.

Here is the difference between paranoia and metanoia. When we are in paranoia, we start being very suspicious of what is going on, convinced that something bad is going to happen. Metanoia is the process of transformation and change. Something is wrong so do something different. Something seems wrong, and it's gone.

The problem is when we invest the 'gone-wrong' as if it were particularly significant. It doesn't mean that life's events don't touch us and don't move us. When tragedies happen, they have a particular flavour. We feel sad, we feel despair. This is normal; this is part of the human situation. Heartache happens to everyone. The fact that it happens to other people doesn't mean that it's not deep and significant when it happens, because its flavour is deep and significant.

Equalness doesn't mean homogenisation. It's not about ignoring what is happening. Rather, the issue is about identification, taking the current appearance, the formation which is happening at the moment, as being a true message about who I really am. We are always going on the middle way. If we say it is irrelevant, this is a kind of death. If we say it's the end of the world, and it's intolerable because this is all there is, this is a false perception. It is what it is. Sometimes the taste is bitter, sometimes the taste is sweet. Sweet and bitter don't taste the same. Then after some time, the taste transforms.

These are the key points of the meditation practice and of how we live in life – not taking life too seriously and not being over-defined by circumstances.

Don't pretend that circumstances are not happening. We have to work with our circumstances. As the texts say, eat when you need to eat, sleep when you need to sleep, cry when you need to cry, laugh when you need to laugh. If it's the time of crying, there's no need to



pretend you are happy and laugh. Nor does it mean that you have to take on a tragic vision of your existence.

Drawing conclusions is a problem for us. To come to a final definition of a situation—“*things never work out right for me.*”—is false perception. There is good and bad, happiness and sadness. We don't know when they're going to arrive; we don't know when they're going to leave. The mirror-like mind shows everything.

The less we interfere with the patterns, the more we realise that pattern is non-dual. That is to say, the world and myself are not two things. Being part of the world, we respond into the world. We don't have to protect ourselves against the world. Every flavour of life is what it is. It is its own taste, and it is empty of essence and substance. Our fragile ego-self says, “*I don't want the bad; I only want the good.*” So it sets itself in conflict with the actuality of our existence. It fights how things are. This creates a lot of tension.

Of course we do need to participate – but with finesse, with grace, with attention to the potential of the current moment. We are neither the victim nor the controller. We're not in control, but we're also not out of control. We are part of the movement.

So, the purpose of doing the meditation and carrying that awareness into daily life is that by allowing the movement of forces, we may directly see that awareness is indestructible. This is what is meant by *dorje* [in Tibetan] or *vajra* [in Sanskrit].

My awareness is indestructible, but the formations which arise as the flow of experience are always changing. Awareness is stable but ungraspable, and appearance is ever-changing and is also ungraspable.

Ignorance, the root of all suffering according to buddhist teachings, is based on two things: we ignore what is stable, *nepa* in Tibetan, and we attend only to movement, *gyuwa* in Tibetan. We then try to make the moving stable. However the stable and the moving are inseparable. *Nepa* means stable, means empty awareness, and *gyuwa* means all the different movements of samsara and nirvana. These are inseparable, but they're not the same. To expect the moving to be stable will never succeed. We ourselves come into being through forces that we are not in control of.

It can be very helpful to look at politics, because we can see out there the dynamics of your own mind. Whether we inflate ourselves or hate ourselves, whatever position we take up, there's some country out there in the world doing exactly the same. We are all concerned about the conflicts and distress in the world. It's obvious that if the world is to get better, we have to collaborate but we can also see how difficult it is to collaborate.

This is what we try to do in our meditation, collaborate with ourselves, and sometimes that can be difficult but if we want to have peace, we have to learn to allow the conflicting parts of ourselves to have some rapprochement. That's what we're doing when we're sitting. We're allowing everything to be there without taking sides. When enemy countries meet to collaborate at first they find it quite difficult even to be in the same room.

Each of us can help the world by being more tolerant. When we're tolerant we realise that the bad dissolves, the good dissolves, and the solidity of our own definition of what is reasonable or what is unreasonable has no secure basis.

In this short time we've covered many things. If the ideas are helpful to you, massage them into yourself, reflect on them and see how this illuminates the actuality of your own situation.

We now come towards the end so let's just sit for a few minutes.

Sitting with our gaze open, have more sense that we are building, that the building is in the street, that the street is in Berlin, in Germany, in Europe... Open to include all beings, so that whatever benefit there is from our study and practice together is not kept secluded in one small place but opens out to all.

Now we've come to the end.

Good luck to everyone. See what happens in life, maybe we meet again, maybe not – we never know – but it's a pleasure to be here with you now.