

---

# *Integration of Dharma: Being With Others*

---

WITH JAMES LOW

Eifel 2-5<sup>th</sup> October 2008

---

*Transcribed by Sarah Allen*

... *“What is more important, relatedness and participation or the maintenance of our own sense of what is important?” If you want to stay connected you will have to be fluid. If you want to be yourself you will have to manage other people, pulling them in and pushing them away. From the point of view of dzogchen, connection and participation is a main point. This means being able to stay present with things in the face of feelings of ‘like’, ‘dislike’ and so on...”*

...*“the ongoing practice of letting go of knots and assumptions so that the free flow of energy continues. That just takes time, it doesn’t take effort. For us time and effort go together, so it takes time to be present with something and release the effort that you want to invest. It is time to drop the habit of being busy and to come to the point where you see that things resolve themselves or liberate by themselves...”*

...*“The practice is about relaxing the gaze from our deep intoxication in the world, from trying to manipulate and control what is going on. We feel anxious that “I should know who I am. I need to become a better person. I need to stop doing certain things. I need to get sorted. Yes, I am going to change myself. I am going to go on a diet. I am going to wear better clothes. I’ll go to sleep early and I’ll drink less. If I do all this then I’ll be better. I’ll even come to retreats with James and I’ll practise meditation and then I’ll be even better. I will be a new enriched person.” It is not like that, for what can you add on to nothing? ...”*

## Contents

---

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Trusting.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The One Who is Looking Through our Eyes is The Buddha .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>The Importance of Attention .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Dzogchen – ‘The Vehicle of the Result’ .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Guru Yoga .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<i>Attend to The Mirror, The One Who Experiences .....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Relax: dissolving identification.....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Space for Everything .....</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Questions and Answers.....</i>	<i>31</i>
<b>The Four Immeasurables .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Exploring the Term ‘Emptiness’ .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<i>The Five Skandhas.....</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Starting To See The Cracks In The Wall.....</i>	<i>43</i>
<i>Form Is Emptiness; Emptiness Is Form .....</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>The Road Determines the Kind of Steps We Take .....</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>The Experience of Emptiness As The Basis of Tantra .....</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>Not Nothing At All.....</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>Questions and Answers.....</i>	<i>53</i>
<b>Wisdom and Compassion – The Two Wings of A Bird.....</b>	<b>56</b>
<i>Questions and Answers.....</i>	<i>59</i>
<b>Seeing Your Own Face .....</b>	<b>60</b>

<i>Pure, Naked and Raw</i> .....	61
<i>Perfect from the Beginning</i> .....	65
<i>Three Dimensions: openness, immediacy, particularity</i> .....	67
<b>Reflecting On Some Traditional Texts</b> .....	<b>70</b>
<i>Chetsangpa: “How the Ground Abides”</i> .....	70
<i>Guru Yoga – Unifying with the lineage</i> .....	73
Thoughts and questions .....	75
<i>Patrul Rinpoche: “Remain without artifice on that which is arising”</i> .....	78
<i>Garab Dorje’s Three Statements That Hit The Point</i> .....	85
<i>Patrul Rinpoche: An Explanation of How Mind Reveals Itself</i> .....	89
<i>Questions and Answers</i> .....	94
<b>Refuge in Relation to Dzogchen</b> .....	<b>96</b>
<i>Why is the Buddha so reliable</i> .....	98
<i>Our Own Mind as the Object of Refuge</i> .....	101
<b>Practice: being with others – what are our blocks?</b> .....	<b>104</b>
<i>The essential part of bringing dzogchen into daily life</i> .....	106

## Introduction

---

We have a little time together to understand more about the view of dzogchen and how to make this part of our everyday experience so that we can manage the various complex interactions of our existence with more simplicity and clarity.

Part of what I would like to do over our time together is explain the different kinds of meditation that you might do. As we are quite a big group we can try to make this as interactive as possible. Part of our work is to observe ourselves, to experience how we are. Therefore you don’t have to do everything that we might do together as a group. If you are going to meditate and you don’t feel like meditating that is absolutely fine, you can lie down and have a little snooze or you can just sit looking out of the window or just get up and go out. That is your freedom and

it is important to take that freedom. However, what I would suggest is that in a situation like that you observe yourself. “What is this?” “What is this not being in the mood?” “Where is it in my belly?” “Where is it in my skin tension?” “What kind of thoughts and feelings are associated with it?”

Many of us have had an education where alignment, fitting in, doing what was expected was stressed. Therefore, we are quite good at conforming and doing what is expected of us. That is to say, our energy links out into the patterns of the world quite easily but that can bring with it a sort of blindness to ourselves. This is an environment where it is important to look at yourself and if you don't feel like it, don't do it but just observe what that is like. It might make you anxious: *“But I want to fit in, I don't want other people to see that I don't want to do this or I can't do this.”* Observing this we then start to see the knots, we start to see the fear and the anxiety which gets us into preoccupation where we are buzzing in stories and we are not here but off in some mental realm.

## Trusting

---

Participation in the world with others, with all the difficulties and confusions that arise, brings with it a clarity of the openness of the ground. This is the basic view or principle of dzogchen. The open, undefined, infinitely ungraspable ground or source of our existence is inseparable from all that is arising including ‘ourselves’ as we move moment-by-moment in situations. Nothing ever happens which leaves this open dimension of awareness.

This means that presence in this state of openness shows itself as ‘I, me, myself’. It is not that if ‘I’ meditate somehow ‘I’ will get an experience of this open state. If you start off from a position where you feel, “I am a limited person and I come here because I want to learn about meditation because I have got lots of problems and I just want to get a bit more relaxed and a bit bigger,” somehow it is all coming from some little tight point inside. This is where many problems in meditation come from: the sense that somehow there is something that ‘I’ have to get because ‘I’ don't have it. In that way we move out rather than being able to receive; there is a hunger because there is a desperation that something is somehow missing.

Right from the beginning the basic principle is always to relax. Buddha-nature has been there from the very beginning; our own shining nature is what is there. Before we were born that is what was there. It is from this nature, like rays coming out from the sun we come into existence. We are the manifestation of this ground nature. In that sense it is not separate from us, we are not separate from it. It is the source and so it is always there, rather than being something that we have to get. Thus, it is important in the meditation to always just trust; trust is the most important thing. Trust means starting to experience how, if you stop doing things, what you need will be there. It means renouncing the fantasy that “It’s all up to me. If I don’t do it, it is not going to happen.” This is a very narrow, ego-centric, self-referential position. Of course, on one level it is true. If we don’t get to work on time we won’t get to work on time. Most of us are not film stars. We don’t have bodyguards and chauffeurs to pick us up when we are drunk at a party and take us home; we ourselves have to take care of ourselves. In that sense it is up to me. I have to get to the airport on time. It is up to me to remember to check that I have got my bus pass before I leave the house otherwise I get to the bus stop and then have to go back. That is to say, ordinary life is up to us. However, the nature of our existence, how its actual dynamic is, is not up to us. That is already there. That is *dzogpa chenpo*: already complete from the beginning.

The basic view of dzogchen is non-duality. There are no fundamental points of separation in the world we inhabit. What appears to be ‘me’ and what appears to be ‘other’ are part of a continuum that is arising. By putting names we can say, “I, me, myself”, “you”, “different people”, but this naming is just like writing on water, like rainbows in the sky. When we say, “I, me, myself,” what is constructed? My body is made of the same things as your body; it is made of the same things as are in this room. We arise, if you like, on a material level with the same ingredients, but in the immediacy of experience we arise together. The sense of self, of ‘I’, is something which comes *after* the experience which is directly there and connected. Of course, we don’t normally have this view. Generally, we have the view of looking out from inside our bodies, taking the skin as a limit to ourselves, and encountering a world which seems to be out there.

In order to overcome this we have to get a kind of break or a holiday from the pre-occupation with the thoughts which create this sense of separation. From the point of view of dzogchen this separation exists on the basis of our belief and identification. We will explore in meditation how to remain present in a state of non-separation, of non-duality, while simultaneously experiencing

the movement of self and other, of subject and object, of all the many kinds of difference that occur. However, these two dimensions or aspects are always happening simultaneously; there is no differentiation between these two. It is not that you have to choose either the turbulent confusion of samsara or the peace, quiet, and stillness of nirvana. In meditation we are entering into a space which, without any effort, holds everything just as it is, so that we have the infinity of non-differentiation offering an absolute and infinite hospitality and welcome to each little kind of manifestation.

In order to do that, to get this complete opening, we have to relax our identification in the details. So often our energy is mobilised towards the particular into a particular project. For example, if we think about the course of our life and reflect back to when we were children, we can see that often we got very concerned about who our friends were at school, or whether we would get to play some game we wanted, or what we would get for Christmas, or how much TV we would be allowed to watch. The mind is always concerned with winning and losing and being on the inside. Then, when we become teenagers it is often very important for us to be able to go to the party, and whether or not we will be able to stay out late, and if we are allowed to wear certain clothes or not. In that way, how we find ourselves is through trying to correct the particular details.

In dzogchen, and more generally in buddhism, this is seen as a path which will always generate energy even in the moment that you seem to arrive some place. For if you are a teenager and you are really pushing your mum to be allowed to stay out late at the party because everyone else in the school is going, a kind of charge is created. If you are not allowed to go, often there is an emotional charge of longing and anger. This is the basis for karma, a kind of over excitation of the system which spills onto the next thing like a kind of over-flow, so that one is always in the process of being involved in other things.

On one level, letting go of that, learning to develop equanimity, involves a degree of renunciation: "Whether I can go or not is the same." But, generally speaking, it's not like that, because too much is at stake: "Me, myself... what will other people think about me?" Developing equanimity in this sense means not constructing a big story on an event, it means allowing, "Oh, if I can't I can't." However, the more we invest ourselves in a project, the more hopes we have, the more difficult it is to come back. However, there is possibility of letting go: if good things happen, good things happen. If bad things happen, bad things happen. This is not just a stoical indifference. It is to see that things are impermanent. "The party on Saturday night that I must go to will last

some hours and then be over.” “The conversation about the party in school the next week will be intense on Monday but by Thursday something else will be talked about.” That is very hard to do but it is a fact – it will pass. In the newspapers today there was a story about a boy of fourteen who killed himself because his girlfriend split up with him. This seems to happen more and more in Britain. We can think fourteen! But, presumably, in his mind he put himself into such a narrow corner there was no way to step back. He put his whole self into, “I need to have this, only this!” And in doing that there is nowhere to go.

### **The One Who is Looking Through our Eyes is The Buddha**

---

The ground of our being is openness, infinite presence, awareness, emptiness. When we look deep inside ourselves we don't find anything and yet here we are manifesting moment-by-moment. This manifestation comes out, impacts the world in definite ways, has vitality and movement, and yet is also ungraspable. The function of the meditation is to be with this movement between these domains or dimensions: the open, ungraspable and nothing, and the 'here', radiant but also ungraspable; the ceaseless movement of nothing, and yet exquisite. All the colours, all the shapes of this room have exactly this nature. Of course, on one level we can track it and say, *“Well, if builders hadn't come in it wouldn't have been shaped in this way. If people didn't learn how to paint thangka paintings, as in the one behind me, it wouldn't be there. Things have been built up bit by bit and they have a history through time.”* This is one particular view. But if you are open, existence is experienced in another way – as 'just this'. There is no history, just the immediacy. Both are happening simultaneously; without effort the world presents itself and it also presents itself as time, so that we see the sequence and development of phenomena.

In the same way, we were born, we grew up a little and went to kindergarten, then to school and so on; we have many different experiences. If somebody asks us who we are we can tell them the history of our lives, the various things we have done and experienced. That seems to be us, it seems to define us. We have our gender, we may have an occupation, we have a particular social class, an accent dependent on which area of our country we are from, and so on, all of which become points of reference. We also have our psychological condition: we may be very confident or shy, we may be relaxed or anxious and tense, or angry or depressed. Thus, we tend to experience ourselves in terms of traits, characteristics and habits. Where do these come from? If

you come to me on a Monday morning when I'm working as a therapist I will tell you it comes from your childhood. If you come to me here, I will tell you in terms of dharma that it comes out of this unborn infinite awareness. Both are true: without the chain of events, cause and effect, dependent co-origination, the patterning of the infinite matrix of events which connects us all, we wouldn't be here together. Due to historical facts buddhism has come to present itself in the west. In Germany some groups formed and developed Kamalashila in another building and then they found this building, and for some reason we are here together today. This has a history but the history is not a straight line, it is contingent upon many complex factors operating together ... and yet being here now in this room... is just this.

As we sit in this room just now, we can hear the humming of water in the pipes of the heating system. We say, "The water in the pipes." However, if you just listen it is 'just this', and, "It is coming from the pipes." That is to say, the two things are happening at the same time. We can organise whatever this 'shhshh' sound is and say, "It is the pressure of water heating up in this metal system," and that is true in the dimension of that particular kind of narrative. However, when you relax and just open to it that is all there is. The whole infinite universe is just that – and then that stops and then something else arises. The ever-fresh nature of awareness, which in the tradition is compared to a mirror, shows whatever form is arising. Moreover, the mirror of the mind is not just showing coloured images like a wall mirror, it shows sounds, tastes, and so on. All the experiences of the senses are revealed as present, the way this sound of the water is ... but you cannot grasp it. There is nothing to say about this sound. It is there and not there. When we look around the room it is the same, but with visual objects, because our culture is very visually dominated, when we see things we easily apply words and use the word to determine what we see.

For example, if you let your gaze move around you see people's clothes. Some people are wearing dark colours and some people are wearing bright colours. If you look at someone's bright colour and then you look at someone darker colour what happens to you? Do you feel different? We wouldn't normally consider this, we would just say, "Oh, that is orange and that is black." Most of the time, because we are in our head in the field of cognition, we spend our time organising our experience in terms of the interpretive categories that we have, which means we stay inside a particular level of experience. But if we start to experience the world from our belly, from our heart, it becomes very different. We start to experience that colours move us; we feel

drawn towards some and retreat from others. We hear one kind of bird song and we feel light and hear another and feel a kind of anxiety. In that way we experience the whole world as a movement and pulsation of doors opening to go forward or retreating.

Of course that is very unsettling, and if you have to be efficient and just get on with your job you cannot bear to spend any time with that. It's just, "On with the job!" In that way you tell the world what it is: "Monday morning, this is what I've got to do." You look in your diary and you just get on with it. This is not wrong in itself – from the point of view of dzogchen nothing is wrong. We just have to see that we are tuning the energy of our existence to a particular magnification and that is what is then revealed to us.

Life is about risk. None of us know what is happening inside our own bodies; all kinds of diseases and conditions can be there. Also externally we don't know what will happen; external circumstances are changing all the time. The question, then, is do we act as if it will be safe? Inside a particular level of magnification will we just keep working away and hope for the best? Or do we allow ourselves to open and really see the world as energy? Money is energy. The financial market is a form of energy; they go up and they go down, and investments come and go. It is just like the wind moving in the sky.

It's the same with our own internal experience. When we look around the room here, we are drawn to some things and not others. What to do with that? Is it better to say, "No, I am going to practice mindfulness. I will give equal attention to everything I encounter." That is a useful thing to try but it is a bit stupid also as you end up like a zombie. Actually, some things are better than others – for you. Some people really like red and some people don't. Some like blue and others don't. The world is not flat; things that we like other people don't like, and things other people like we like we don't like. We are different and difference is part of existence always and forever. The question is can we live completely open with the particularity of our circumstances? Can we stay aware and present, self-liberating all the patterns that come to us?

If you are in the world you will make choices: "I like this, I don't like that." That is our energy going out towards what is in front of us. If I say, "I like figs and I don't like plums," you could say, "Oh, now we have information about James. James likes figs and he doesn't like plums." What does that tell you about James? Can you develop a definition of James defined by that statement? It is a true fact: I eat figs a lot more than I eat plums. However, what does it tell you

about 'me'? It tells you about a kind of patterning but who is the one who eats the fig? Who is the one who says no to the plum? Is that one defined by plums and figs? That is a central question. We tell stories about ourselves and we worry about the stories other people tell about us; we don't want other people to think badly of us. We want to exist in other people's minds in a nice way. But what is it that exists in someone else's mind about 'you'? It is a little image, a storyline: "Oh, yes, Mary, she is like that. She always does that." Is that Mary? No, it is a story. This is absolutely central to the practice of dzogchen: are you a thing? Can you be defined? For if you can be defined you can be caught, someone can have your number.

Generally, when we grow up and go to school, we get marks for our essays and we are told that we are good at this and bad at that, and we start to think, "I am a thing with a particular shape." Because we take on this particular shaping we avoid some things because we think, "I couldn't do that," and we go towards other things because we think, "Oh, I am quite good at that, maybe I can survive if I just do the things that I am good at...this is me."

From the point of view of dzogchen this is the great sorrow of existence; to believe that you are nothing more than the particular patterning of your history. By constantly referring back to your history and to your qualities, thinking, "This is me, this is who I am," that becomes the limit of your sense of existence. Moreover, because it is interpersonally defined it is worked out in your relationships with the world around you; your attention continues out through your senses trying to get the best that you possibly can given the limitations of your situation.

In dzogchen we look through this: who is the one who has accepted, "I am stupid" or "I cannot sing" or "I am lazy" or "I should try harder"... whatever our storyline is? Who is this one? The one who is looking through our eyes is the Buddha. The one who is listening through our ears is the Buddha. But we don't see the Buddha because we just hear the noise, we just see the stuff. Therefore, the practice is about relaxing the gaze from our deep intoxication in the world, from trying to manipulate and control what is going on out of a state of anxiety where we feel that "I should know who I am. I need to become a better person. I need to stop doing the things where I betray myself. I need to get sorted. Yes, I am going to change myself. I am going to go on a diet and I am going to wear better clothes. I'll go to sleep early and I'll drink less – and then I'll be better. And I'll come to Kamilishila and I'll do some dzogchen and then I'll be even better. I will be a new enriched person." It is not like that, for what can you add on to nothing?

The Buddha has explained that this world is like a dream; there is no substantial existence in anything. Whatever system of buddhism you look at, whether it is terms of the five skandhas, emptiness itself or the radiant clear nature of the mind, there is nothing substantial. So when you try to improve yourself what are you adding it into? There is a hole in your bucket and all your life you can put things in your bucket but at the end it is still empty. Something is wrong here. In buddhism this is known as grasping, it is attachment, it is the idea that 'I am a thing' and if I get the 'good things' of life and put them in 'here' and I take the 'bad things' out of here and put them out into you I will be happy. Good for me and bad for you. However this does not work because we can't hang onto anything; everything is impermanent. Good things come and go and bad things come and go. No matter how hard you try you cannot hang onto good things. No matter how hard you try you cannot keep all the bad things away. Things which existed and seemed to be very powerful and wonderful vanish. So what will I build myself on? What solid foundation can I find? Everywhere across the world people are looking for a proper basis for their life. From the point of view of dzogchen this is the nature of ignorance for you cannot find a solid basis for your existence. There is nothing solid.

Space, infinite openness, ceaselessly radiant, endlessly dynamic; this is actually what we encounter. This is how it is, and has always been, moment-by-moment from the very beginning. Unchanging, it is there, we are alive, we are in this room, but it is not solid. This building was once a catholic monastery, a training monastery for sending missionaries out into the underdeveloped world – it is not that anymore. Now it is a buddhist centre and probably it won't be that forever either. Things change; they appear to be one thing and then they become something else.

Thus, impermanence is linked to emptiness. Emptiness is linked to buddha nature and buddha nature is linked to dzogchen as this unborn, infinite perfection of all things. This radiantly displays itself as this ungraspable theatre of experience which we find ourselves participating in. The function of the meditation is to help us just to relax into that so that we are open and more present and more free. These three main aspects of openness, the richness and radiance, and the precise manifestation and participation are what we will continue to explore at over these few days together.

## The Importance of Attention

---

In the different kinds of meditation practices that we do, we are trying to observe how our attention leads us into a connection with a situation which then becomes important. That is to say, what we attend to, whatever it is, becomes shiny due to the energy of our attention. By focusing our attention on one thing we are not focusing it on something else. Thus, on an outer level, if we are focusing our attention on the breath it is not going out into different objects. As soon as it goes out into different objects we are not on the breath. The attention goes from one thing to another to another. The more we observe what it is like to give our full attention to something and not to others we can see that something which could be shiny is not because it won't be invested in.

For example, if you are driving a car your main attention has to be on the road ahead, what other drivers are doing and so on. You might pass something very interesting and you can have a glimpse of it but you cannot turn your head and stare because it's too dangerous. In this way, fear operates with attention to keep you on what needs to be attended to. Something which would normally be invested in, which would turn your head, cannot be done. Therefore, the prohibition here means that one is able to maintain attention to something which is ongoing.

This is very similar in the most basic level of meditation, that of calming the mind. We hold the view that if our mind stays distracted and we go hither and thither with many different objects of attention, caught up in lots of experiences, we will generate a lot of karma. When we die we will leave this world empty handed not having the virtue needed for a better life, and bad things will happen. Therefore, when we do the meditation something is at stake. Our future happiness depends upon our ability not to be distracted. Just as if we are driving the car being distracted can mean death. Thus, fear is also useful at a certain point in meditation, if you understand what the intention of the meditation is.

Recently in neuroscience research they have been observing the way in which the brain operates in order to maintain selective attention. It has been found that it is not in forming an intention and the power of that, as if there is a site of agency and will, that keeps you focused. The main power is in the rejection of the other options. Therefore, it is not that 'I will' but 'I won't'. In rejecting options they become the background and what is left over becomes the foreground, the field. In many ways, this is what we do in the meditation. We have both a conscious focus but in

order to maintain a conscious focus we are dis-identifying, dropping all the other things which could arise. Everything is potentially interesting but we choose one thing, and when we choose that it becomes more important.

A lot of the time the focusing of our energy or the focusing of our attention is driven by our karma. We have various impulsivities, habitual desires, we might have addictive traits and find ourselves doing things again and again because we have been doing them for a long time. If you have smoked cigarettes you know what that's like. You feel you have to have a cigarette. You know the cigarette won't help you and nowadays it says on the packet, 'This will kill you'. But still you need to smoke the cigarette. In the moment the person lights the cigarette all the knowledge they have from the adverts, the information from the doctor, is not attended to. It is out of focus. What is attended to is, "Ah, god this is good!" There is a total identification with the familiar shape. That is to say moment-by-moment our selective attention is contouring the world, not just for this moment, but creating patterns of least resistance so that we are more likely to continue with difficult patterns. That is why the old saying is: "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." What is driving us, as it were, to hell or to the continuation is the habitual forgetting of the good intention through our lock-on, our addiction to what is familiar. You decide not to do something and then you do it. And why did you do it? Often we don't know. "It just happened!" There is a kind of black-out, a moment of vanishing which occurs.

This is well illustrated by a famous Tibetan story about a monk on pilgrimage. He is walking across a vast valley and seeing a huge storm coming he looks for shelter and find a little farmhouse. He comes to the door and an old woman opens it, and she says, "Mmm, monks, I don't like monks very much, you can only stay in here if you do one of three things. Either you have to kill a chicken, sleep with my daughter or you drink some alcohol. The monk replies, "Well, I am a monk and so I cannot sleep with your daughter and I cannot kill a chicken, but there is that storm coming so I will come in I'll have a drink." The next morning he wakes up in bed with the daughter and with the blood of the chicken on his hands. It is not just the alcohol, the external factor, which knocks out his initial decision making, that clarity, but the power of his own internal infections.

Therefore attention is very important. However, from the point of view of dzogchen, because it involves effort, it is always vulnerable and always susceptible to not being maintained. We get tired, we get lazy, we can have self-destructive traits, a kind of death-wish. I work in hospitals

often with people who have very destructive behaviour towards themselves or other people. It is very clear that one of the central maintaining factors to this is a shift in their sense of themselves where they say, "Fuck it I don't care." This 'fuck it' moment is incredibly powerful because it dislodges the balancing or the internal communication in which you can kind of keep an eye on yourself. When you say, "Ah! fuck it!" you abandon yourself into the full force of whatever it is, whether it is getting drunk, going off with a stranger or lying in bed and not going to work. It disrupts or dislocates what you would normally be doing.

There is nothing wrong with good intentions. Generally, in the widest scheme of Tibetan buddhist practice we say lots of prayers, we develop a bodhisattva vow and we want to help all beings. These are wonderful things but they are easy to forget, especially under pressure. The ego that is making the good decision is also an ego that is very easily infected with other trends. The ego is not a steel ball; it is something highly porous. In fact it is a site of manifestation; it doesn't have any internal identification of its own.

Therefore, in dzogchen the focus of our attention is to relax away from this. Instead of centring ourselves in 'this is my intention', 'this is what I am going to do', organising our experience and keeping it going in the right direction, what we want to do is relax so that the ego as the site of our identity, of our activity is just let go of. Instead of being centred, poised, ready to move into action we are just present with whatever is there. In this state we won't be building bridges or hospitals or anything very useful.

We relax and in this state we are open and see what is there. What arises is phenomena, some of which we would normally call subject: I, me, myself; my own thoughts, memories, desires, impulses, and some of which we would normally call object: the other; the phenomena in the room, the sight of other people, and so on. We simply allow whatever is there to be there without entering into judgment, without pulling the things that intrigue us towards us, and without pushing away the things we don't want. We want to relax into the unborn primordial state.

This is a state which is not high up in the sky somewhere else. It is not the possession of great and glorious lama's somewhere else. It is the ground nature, the true nature of all beings. It is always present and has always been present for us but it is not a thing. It is not a thought. It is not a feeling and it is not a sensation. It is not like the normal content of our mind, although it is the

very basis of all our experience. Sometimes we can call this awareness but not awareness in the sense of “I am aware of the colour of your shirt.” It is not a subject to object specific awareness. It is not in that sense transitive, it doesn’t take an object. It is intransitive, it is just aware. In that state of awareness everything is present but you couldn’t say what it was because in order to get into the specifics you shift out of the domain of open awareness into the energy of particularity. But the energy of particularity has nowhere else to come from but this open state.

We will come back to this again over our time together but in very short form these are the three domains or dimensions of our existence: the mind or our presence or awareness which is completely open and naked, without beginning or end. Having no boundaries or inside or outside it is hospitable to everything that occurs including what we normally take to be subject and object. Thirdly, within this we move, speak, talk and so on. These three domains have never been separate but our fixation is on the third one, on our embodiment doing particular precise things. Thus, the key focus in dzogchen is to relax away from the activity that brings us out into business and doing, and just to be present with whatever happens. It is about being present not as ‘yourself’ but as the ground of yourself.

## **Dzogchen – ‘The Vehicle of the Result’**

---

Generally speaking in the Tibetan tradition the different paths are split into two main categories. One is called the vehicles of the cause or the causal vehicles. These are the methods and practices which focus on creating the cause whereby in a future time you may gain enlightenment. It is like saying, “Next year I want to go to the Bahamas for my holiday but if I look in my bank account now I don’t have much money so every month I’m going to put aside some money so that next summer I will find myself on a beautiful island with the waves lapping and a wonderful pina colada in my hand. But if I don’t put my money in the bank every month I won’t get that experience. However, every month here in Germany there are nice things, so if I forget about the Bahamas and I spend the money each month, next summer I will be holidaying in Germany in the rain.” Thus, creating the cause becomes very important and that is the general sutra position concerning the accumulation of merit and wisdom. By performing virtuous actions and by understanding emptiness, by understanding impermanence and the nature of the mind we

build up a basis from which we are able to see something. And if we don't make these accumulations we won't be able to see it.

In many ways this is a very helpful view and for most people who practice dharma it is a central part of their view. It allows us to see that the feelings we have of deficit, of lacking something are indeed true; we do lack something. It is not just a kind of neurosis to feel there is something wrong with us. The Buddha says, "No you are quite right I agree there is something wrong with you, you don't have what you need but luckily I can show you how to get what you need." Thank god for that, now we can scabble to get all these things: we can go on pilgrimage, we can make contributions, we can do many mantras, we can help build a stupa, and through that gradually we can build up the situation that is needed.

This is based on the view that there are two aspects of existence: samsara and nirvana. Samsara, is the domain of cyclical existence, in which every attempt we make to improve our situation – because we are operating without being clear about what is actually going on – leads to more confusion. The harder we try the more confusion we make. On an outer level we can see this in modern industrial capitalist production which has led to many wonderful things: cars, aeroplanes, central heating and so on. However, the production of these things has resulted in the destruction of the natural environment and ongoing pollution. While people were thinking about optimising the efficiency of the factory, for many years they weren't thinking about all the waste materials that were going out into the atmosphere. Thus, inside the blinkered intelligence of, "this is a very good product and I want to make it" there was a kind of other activity going on which was invisible to the people at the time. This is how karma works for us. It is not that people set out to intentionally damage their lives, although self-destructiveness is an aspect of probably all our existences. Mainly we try to be good and we want things to go well, but because we don't have a panoramic vision we pull one or two things and it creates trouble we didn't see. When the fly comes and lands in the spider's web the fly tries to free itself but the more it flaps around the more it gets wrapped in the sticky web which also rings the little bell for the spider – lunch has arrived. This then is part of the situation of karma in samsara.

Nirvana, the second aspect is the other realm where everything is pure and simple and if you get out of samsara and into nirvana problems cease because this kind of complexity no longer exists. Very briefly this is the general view inside which the notions of the two accumulations operates.

The other grouping of teachings is called the 'vehicle of the result'. The path of the result means that we practice 'as if' the result of enlightenment had already been achieved. Particularly, this is tantra and in a certain way dzogchen but I will explain the difference. When you engage in tantric practice, it begins with an initiation where you get permission to enter into the domain of the deity. That can be in terms of a very complex mandala or a very simple practice with just one deity. You then visualise yourself in relation to the god or goddess, fuse with them and then become them. Then it is as if you are them. Part of this practice is what is called the pride or dignity of the god, and so you treat yourself with respect and you see everything else as being in the same mandala. In that way everyone you meet is divine, everything is radiant with light and you are now in nirvana itself.

Tantric practice is a transformational practice. Like an alchemical practice, through the use of the recitation of mantras and so on, it takes the ordinary material of samsara and transforms it into nirvana. Inside its system there are many different aspects. There is the movement between the effortful visualisation of oneself as the deity on the basis of your vows. There is the evocation of the actual deity from the pure land. Then there is the pure form, the wisdom form, which merges into the rupakaya form. Then you get the lock on; you move from 'as if' to 'actual'.

Tantra has many explanations of how to do this, but it is still largely in the house of 'as if'. And if you don't do the practice, if you don't keep the particular vows, the samaya, there will be a break and the door will close and you will not be able to get back into the divine palace anymore. This is why in tantra there are many purification practices and ways of restoring those vows. There are ways of giving yourself the initiation afterwards, dag tuk, putting yourself into that state. This is because it is easy to slip away from that. As we were looking earlier, whenever we focus our attention it is always at the mercy of many other distracting factors.

The view in dzogchen is different. It says that from the very beginning everything has been perfect. There has been no mistake. There is no samsara. Samsara is a form of the natural condition; it is not something apart, something different. The usual brief formulation of this is to say, there is one ground – the natural purity or reality, how things have been from the very beginning – and two paths, one of seeing it and the other of not seeing it. However, whether you see something or not doesn't affect whether it is there; because things are not immediately in our perception doesn't mean that they are not there. In the same way, the ground, the basis of our

existence, when we are not in contact with it, is still functioning all the time. It is what's going on, but we don't think it has anything to do with us.

An example would be this current financial situation. Ordinary people go about their jobs thinking it's nothing to do with them, that it is these big traders in New York and Frankfurt and so on; something is going on somewhere else which will affect them but it won't affect me. However, the world economic system is an integrative system; every part is affected by everything else. The prices that can be set in a local shop in this village are directly impacted by what has happened in the financial crisis in America. Even though the people running the shop here in the village don't know anything, don't want to read the newspapers and have no interest, that lack of attention doesn't stop the webs of connectedness going through to them when the supplier says, "The price of this chocolate cake has gone up." Everything is changing so ignorance is no defence. Ignorance doesn't protect us. It doesn't protect us from bad things and doesn't protect us from good things.

Most of us experience little moments of awakening or possibility in our lives and that can be incredibly reassuring, but we don't know what they are. Someone can say, "Oh, you look really well." "Ah, yes, I have just been on holiday." "Was it the holiday that made you feel well or what happened on the holiday?" "Oh, I wasn't doing very much, I was on the beach, I was looking at the sky, and I saw the waves and it was very peaceful." From a dharma point of view we would say that there was a dropping of some of this busy endless interweaving of distraction and for a moment you were just there with what was there – that was the real holiday.

The potential for that real holiday was there all the time but when you get back into your ordinary life you pack on all the surface froth which seems to be the true nature of the existence – and so you need another holiday. But the holiday was simply returning to what was already there. As long as we think the holiday is an escape from where we are, that there is something wrong with our condition; we have to be effortless in the effort.

Therefore, the point of dzogchen is to relax and be present with what is already there. It is not about creating something, it is not about reconditioning ourselves, making ourselves in a different way, but simply to see what is there. If we do that then we start to see that agency or individual activity, the vitality of the individual, self-autonomous person, I, me, myself, is not wrong. Our ego is not something which has to be destroyed or cut off for awakening to occur. Moreover, we start to see that what it is, is a form of radiance, a radiance which is connected with what it has

always been connected with. And when we see this then there is a settling which is not over-excited.

Prior to experiencing this, what we have is a kind of separation anxiety. We find ourselves cut off from our own ground and so we feel, "It's all up to me." But when we find that ground, our existence is still here as it was, but we are more settled. Instead of being tilted forwards, thinking, "What do I have to do? Where am I going?" we start to feel that there is this wonderful hand behind us in the middle of our back supporting us and so we can lean back. We are then leaning in space, resting in space, and from that, participation in the world becomes more possible.

Therefore, in dzogchen we are not really concerned to realise or understand something, but rather to find ourselves in a state of, to participate in, or to integrate into. For example, if I understand something through hearing it or reading it in a book, I can think, "Oh yes, I understand this, this is now stuck onto me, this becomes part of my world, I have increased myself." However, when we integrate with what has been there we are not pulling the environment towards us, it is not about appropriation or taking something. Rather we find ourselves more at ease in how things have always been.

Integration isn't that *I* integrate the world into *my state*. This is one of the biggest mistakes that happens in dzogchen practice: people learn all the words but they try to operate from the point of view of their individual self. Then instead of there being an opening up, there is a kind of constipation because you are filling yourself with lots of things. Therefore, it is very important to see that integration is relaxing *into* what is there, not pulling what is there into you.

It is we ourselves who are out of balance. When we rebalance we find that we are there but in a very different sense of ourselves. Thus, integration is not creating anything new. We don't go anywhere. We don't go from samsara into nirvana. We don't go from this ordinary identity into some divine mandala in the dharmadhatu. We are simply here present but present as the radiance of this natural state. This means that at all times, under all circumstances integration just continues; whatever you are doing is the energy of the open state, the natural condition, just as it is.

## Guru Yoga

---

The simple way in which we open ourselves to the open state, the natural state is with *guru yoga*. *Guru* here mean the natural state. The real guru is the simple presence of things as they are. Physical gurus manifest in the world simply to communicate what has already been there. One of my gurus, Chatrul Rinpoche, said, *"The guru is like your older brother who is lying in bed with you. You are having a nightmare and he shakes you to waken you up."* When you wake up it is your awakening. Your brother is already awake. He cannot give you his awakening. Everyone gets their own awakening but it is helpful to get someone to give you a bit of a shake. And you wake up in your own bed. You wake up in your own place. You don't wake up somewhere else.

*Yoga* in this sense means non-separation, identification, being one with or not being apart from, or integrating with. Thus, guru yoga means to simply integrate into the state of the teacher which is the state of these three dimensions I mentioned before.

We start by sitting in a relaxed way with our gaze about two arms length ahead in the space in front of us. Let the gaze rest into space. Everything is there but our focus is not on objects but just opened. In that place we imagine, at first, a translucent white letter Aa. You can see this as a white roman capital A or you can see it as the Tibetan letter if you know what it looks like. The sound Aa is seen as a primordial sound. In both the Tibetan and Sanskrit alphabets all the consonants take Aa as their vowel, so it is seen as the most basic sound. It is also the first sound that babies start with. They start with Aa and gradually they make other sounds: Ba Ba, Ma ma, pa pa and it builds up from there. Thus, as an intellectual analysis we can think all the sounds of all the languages are constructs out of Aa. In sounding Aa, the basis of all your thinking and cognitive elaborations is taken down into its most basic and then released.

This Aa is surrounded by a ball of rainbow coloured light. In Tibetan this is called a *tigle* and it looks like the shimmering and translucent bubbles children blow using washing up liquid. This is the presence of all the Buddhas, and so contains all the great masters: Kuntu Zangpo, Garab Dorje, Shri Simha, Dorje Sempa, Padmasambhava, and so on, down through all the lineages. It also includes all the people who have taught us something, because the lineage is all the lineages that there are gathered in that place, all the movements towards opening and awareness. Therefore, it is completely non-sectarian.

Then together we recite this sound Aa three times. We recite it in a slow, open way, and as we do that we drop the tensions of our body, speech, and mind and just relax into being present with this Aa in front of us. The state of the teacher and our own state are inseparable. Then after a short while let that sense of the Aa dissolve and sit in an open state. Then whenever thoughts, feelings or sensations arise just allow whatever comes to come. We are not hoping for good experiences, and are not afraid of bad experiences; just let things come and go.

The one thing we can be sure of is that everything will come and go. When you feel something is very important and you want to remember it or you feel that something is horrible and you don't want it, just relax into the out breath and let it go. One of the false gifts of this world is the idea that salvation lies in thoughts. Thoughts are very tricky. Thoughts tell us that something is the case when it is not the case. Many of the people that I see in my professional work worry a lot. They believe that if they worry or think about something in an anxious and repetitive way sooner or later they will get to the proper result. But this never happens. It is impossible because worry just chases its own tail round and round. The thought is saying, "Keep thinking, keep thinking we are almost there! This is good, this is important, what about that, what about this."

It is the same in the meditation. Thoughts come up saying, "follow me!" Therefore, we have to sit and let the thought go. If you follow the thought you are back where you always have been. Just let the thought go and there is a possibility of something new.

This is a practice that we will do many times in the next few days but we can try it just now.

[Three Aa Practice]

### Attend to The Mirror, The One Who Experiences

---

When we do the practice of the three Aa we relax and open who is doing what? Something is happening and it is happening to me. As soon as we think: "it's happening to me," we have a point around which the experience is occurring; we have stabilised a sense of 'this is me'. Often this occurs in terms of some physical sensation; we feel or sense our back or our head which then becomes a kind of anchor point around which we solidify. If that occurs the instruction is always not to run away from it, not to try to change it but to just stay with it and observe it. You have found the permanent basis of your identity so stay with it...the next thing you know it has gone. What you thought was stable was not stable. But if you act *as if* it is stable it will work for a while!

and then another thing will come up which will work for a while. These points seem to be like stepping stones, or more like logs floating down a big river which you can step across. Each of these logs are in the water, just as each position that arises in our minds is moving in this dynamic flow of the dharmadhatu, the natural condition.

So in the meditation we sit there, something arises and suddenly it seems to become solid and we rest on that. We are in that little world for a while and then it goes. Then we are in another arising for a while and then that goes ... and then we are in another. In that way we get a sequence of arisings that *seem* solid, definite, but in moving across these the experience of the spaciousness within which this movement is occurring becomes invisible.

Thus, the key task in dzogchen is to keep relaxing from the fixation on the object, and to simply attend to the one who is having the experience. For example, if you are sitting and you get caught up in a thought, instead of saying, as you might do with some other kinds of meditation, "Ok, now I have thought this thought and I will come back to the practice," we want to simply stay with, "Who is having this experience? Something is happening, in a sense it is happening for me, so who is this me who is having the experience?" As we look at this level of subjectivity, we find that it is not an entity, not a thing but something open and radiant. It is marked as being empty, there is nothing there to grasp. It has clarity, or light, and it is luminescent; it illuminates things but has no content of itself.

Traditionally the image of the mirror is used again and again in these teachings to illustrate this. A mirror has no content of its own, and shows what is in front of it. In the same way, what we call 'my mind' in its most open aspect is a noetic capacity, a capacity to know or to reveal just like a mirror. However, it is not anything in itself. As we started to look earlier, if we meet someone and they say, "Hello, who are you?" we tell them something about ourselves. We tell them about our work or our mental state or what we like to eat. All of these things are true on an ordinary level but they are also veils or screens which stop us seeing, "Who is the one who is speaking now?" If I say, "I was born in Scotland," that is true but who is the one who is saying that? When we meet and interact together we engage as story tellers. I tell you a story and that sets off some line in your mind and you tell another story and another story, and together we weave a new story, a conversation. But who is the one who is telling the story? Who is the one who is speaking? Who is the one who is listening? That is a presence, an intelligence or awareness that is prior to the words, and the words don't catch it.

We can observe this with ourselves in each moment. For example, if we have a tea-break and we are chatting with people, just relax whilst you are talking about this or that, and who is the one who is speaking? Where do these words come from? We could say, "Well, they are built up from my education, learning grammar at school and so on." That is another storyline so the answer to the question is a story. We have many, many stories to tell. Some of you can tell philosophical stories, sociological stories, personal stories mediated through literature, but stories are movements through space and time, they are sequences of words; they are forms of energy. They are not wrong but they are merely energy, they don't tell the whole truth. There is no final truth that can be manifested in the world. This is the problem with dogma. Dogmatic political views, religious views and so on, always say, "We have found the truth. The truth is established." In buddhism there is a big silence ... we don't know anything. I bletcher away, I talk and I talk but I can never give you what this is. There are people in this group who are maybe very good at mathematics. They could get a black board and teach us some kind of algebra and we would struggle and try to understand and then we would know a bit more about algebra. In that way we are adding something onto ourselves. A lot of dharma is about adding on interesting, beautiful, fascinating things. We can go to a workshop on Tara or Dewachen: in the western direction beyond the path of the sun there is a place called Dewachen. In the middle of that on a beautiful throne is the beautiful Amitabha. We get a beautiful description of lakes, palaces, birds, and the kinds of songs that are in the air. We can learn all of that and then we can get the text and we can read these prayers to Dewachen and can feel very at home in Dewachen. This is nice but it is a story. It is a useful story because it helps to develop our imagination, it helps develop a path of hope which is a good antidote to fear and anxiety around death. There are many benefits but it is a story. What we are concerned with here is not to try to go outside of stories, but to see the very nature of stories as they arise. What is the matrix or the dimension within which stories occur?

Another image that illustrates this is a theatre. In the theatre you have the stage. The stage is well known to the actors: they have their rehearsals on it, when they have the first meeting together they usually sit in chairs in a circle on the stage and read the text together. Then they start to get up and begin to position themselves with the director. The director is also working with the person who will make the props, and so the stage design comes into place. There is the costume-maker who is working with actors in relation to the director. Gradually, everything is coming together, and the more effort that goes into the construction of the story of the play, and the more the actors come into it, the stage itself becomes less and less visible.

At first if you go into a theatre, there is nothing there. There are just a few chairs and it is very big, very empty and cold. Then gradually it comes together. There is a sort of synergy and then, hopefully, on the first night the curtain opens and what do people sitting in the audience see? They see a play. The play is acted on the stage but they don't see the stage. If the play is good they are captured by the interaction, by the words, the gestures, the costumes, the drama, and they don't see the boards of the stage at all. They don't really see the space of the stage because this space has now been turned into a room or a mountainside or a castle. But all of these events are an illusion. There is no drawing room there; there is no castle on the stage. There is simply a space full of bits of cardboard painted and so on, with people pretending to be something they are not. However, we don't pay money to see people pretending to be something they are not; we pay money to see 'a play', so we are willing to fall into that play. The play couldn't happen without the stage. It is the stage that makes the play.

Therefore, in the meditation practice we are awakening to, or shifting our attention towards, that which is being taken for granted, that which has always been there. The stage on which the drama of our lives is set is not just a stage in *our* heads. *Our stage* is a stage shared with all other beings. That is to say, this room and my existence, at this moment, are inseparable. This is all I have got. In theory I live in London but it is *as if* I live in London because at the moment I am here. If some mad person burst in here with a machine gun and killed us all, I wouldn't be going back to London. I am only going to London if this play ends successfully on Sunday afternoon and I get into the theatre of the aeroplane and the horrible theatre of Heathrow airport and then back into London, which is another kind of tragedy.

We take something as real because it is what is there and yet it is not real. In that sense, in tantra, we are acting 'as if' we are divine. In dzogchen we are awakening to the fact that everything is 'as if', just as the Buddha's general teaching – life is an illusion; it is like the reflection of the moon on the water. This is not a reductive, disparaging of phenomena, the world: "Oh, it's just an illusion." We are not saying it is 'just illusion' it is illusion. The illusion and the immediacy of our sensory appreciation are not opposites. The illusion is to take it as too strongly real. Reification, making an entity – a solid, truly, self-existing phenomena – out of the movement of energy, the magical, illusory nature of manifestation is the real problem. If we believe in things too much we don't understand what is going on. For example, commercial companies direct a lot of marketing towards children. Batman is a concept. It started in comics in America and in the

1930's it spread out in various transformations. Each time a new Batman film comes out, it comes with a whole set of things: balloons, tee-shirts, special shoes, bed spreads, all in Batman. Children tend to believe that Batman is very real and so for them the bed spread with Batman on it is very, very important. The mother tries to say very gently, "This is a marketing ploy to make me pay £30 for a bedspread that is worth £10. It is only an illusion but for the child it is not. This is our world: we are just as gullible, just as easily fooled as these children. We believe our story, we fall into the story.

Integration is to be in touch with the emptiness of the stage, the richness of the potential and the precise movement of ourselves as participants, moment-by-moment. Because the ground or the basis of this movement is open and empty our gestures also are open and empty. If we take them too seriously, if get too caught up in them, then we start to vibrate in a way that cuts us off from the ground. We get tense and think, "Oh, my god what am I going to do," and this tensing cuts the breath, puts little knots into all the energy channels in our body, putting us up in our heads with lots of thoughts.

If we relax, "moment-by-moment here I am," the world is with us and we are with the world. That joined flowing is the optimal way to be, which is why in dzogchen it often talks a lot about energy, because if we take up a particular position and make a home identity for ourselves, the world may change. Then we find ourselves out of bounds. For example, many of the patients I work with at the moment are perfectionistic. They want to do their work really well but they work in situations where that is not possible. They set a bench mark, a point of standard which is 'up here' but the company they work for is saying, "Through-put is more important so we put the bench mark 'here'." In that way they always feel an anxiety because they think, "If I am not doing it at my standard I am going to be found out." And I say, "*Listen, you will keep your job if you are kissing your bosses arse – give the people what they want. The boss says, 'do it here' when you try to do it 'here' you go into your office at the weekend, you give ten unpaid hours extra a week – this is neurotic.*" "Yeah, but these standards are important." "*I agree they are important but you are not in the garden of Eden. This is a world of hustling, hustling means surviving in the marketplace*".

This is exactly the Buddha's teaching on impermanence. It is not a beautiful bourgeois environment; we are not taking tea in Berlin in 1850 in very nice china from Dresden. It's not like that. Life is hustling, it is a moving thing. So how do we survive? We have to be in contact with

what is there, because it is the contact with the lived unfolding environment that makes sense. This is why we talk about the bodhisattva as somebody who comes into the world in a form which is necessary for the world. In Tibetan they say, “gang la gang” which means to each according to their need. Instead of the bodhisattva coming in and saying, *“Here is the truth. I know what is right and if you don’t understand it you are stupid,”* the Buddha says, *“I will find a way using everything that I know to make a door for you to come through.”* Traditionally, it is said that the Buddha taught, 84,000 different dharmas, different teachings, which means that he was flexible. But he did not lose himself. The Buddha is like a very wonderful dancer or gymnast who makes incredible movements with their body but always feels the line of gravity so that they don’t lose their balance. Dogmatism and rigidity doesn’t help and just throwing yourself any old way doesn’t help either. It’s about being relaxed and open and, “How shall I be?” Because how we should be depends on the situation.

This is both compassionate, because it is meeting the other person as they are, but it is also in the service of wisdom because to live like that is to open up or deconstruct the fixed sense that you have of yourself. Gradually you find yourself being able to do what the other person requires. Now, if I can become what they need – who am I? Because if I am ‘just me’ that wouldn’t be possible. For example, the old professor of psychiatry at the hospital where I work said that whenever he was interviewing people to work in child psychiatry he would always get down on the floor and play games with them. If he could see they were uncomfortable doing that he would say, “No, no you should deal with adults.” Because if they couldn’t laugh at themselves and be a bit uncomfortable how are they going to be with kids? It is in that way that the more flexibility and freedom we have, in the service of contact, we can stay very grounded because we are grounded in space, in this empty stage, rather than in a fixed vision of who we are.

### Relax: dissolving identification

---

In the ordinary state of affairs we find ourselves in what is described in these traditions as duality. This is a primary separation between ‘self’ and ‘other’ which then feeds into many other kinds of dualities or binary oppositions: good, bad, right wrong, friend, enemy and so on, and these pan out naturally. One of the things about this splitting of ‘self’ and ‘other’ is that it means that we are always moving towards the world when we feel desire or away from it when we feel aversion.

So here we have what are called the three basic poisons: stupidity, desire or attachment, and aversion or anger/hatred. Stupidity is to enter into the state of duality; to see things as concretised and separate entities. As soon as that is established we find ourselves in relational movements: “I like this so I move towards it.” “I don’t like that so I move away from it.” As soon as we separate off from the world we find ourselves identified with this small shape, our own body, and as we get older our own memories and habits and so “I know what I like and I like what I know.” This is how we see seal ourselves in a little circle, and there is a kind of confidence in that; when you go to the shops you know what to buy because you know what you like. There are many other possibilities but you don’t look at them. Maybe if you are having some people around for dinner you have to think, “Ah, maybe I will cook that for them because...” and in that way the other takes us out of this little circle of self – but only so far.

This movement of the maintenance of the stability of the sense of self requires a lot of activity, editing and correcting which is going on all the time. The sense the self is like a garden. Weeds come into it very easily, and plants grow too much and have to be cut back. The soil gets depleted and needs some fertiliser. It is a very busy thing to have an individual self as your primary occupation. However, we are used to doing that activity.

Therefore when we come into the realm of meditation as with the three Aa practice there is nothing for this level of experience to do. We are not required to be in charge, or control, or edit, or do any kind of gardening at all. That can lead to anxiety. It can lead to sleepiness or diffusion or lostness. It can also lead to a heating up and a very active engagement. This is because there is a kind of re-jigging going on. Just as if somebody has worked in the same occupation for forty years and they retire, their identity has become very connected with their activity but on the day they retire they lose permission to go to back into that environment. They can no longer do that. What was their world is now ‘the bank’, ‘the school’, ‘the factory’, whatever the environment is- but it is not theirs anymore. If they go to the door people say, “What are you doing here? You have retired.” At that point it is a question of: “Who am I if I’m not doing that?”

It is in these moments, which are often very painful, people can become depressed. At that point we can recognise, “I have constructed my identity on something that I *thought* was the case but was not the case.” This is because we find ourselves a little bit out of alignment, off kilter. And when we are in this state we look for something to push us back up, to try to rebalance ourselves. That can be a job, a relationship, a particular lifestyle, it can be drinking alcohol every day,

smoking a lot of dope, having an allotment and growing your own vegetables, it could be something that gives you a sense, “This is who I am.” But of course none of these are stable. Everything is impermanent and the environment will eventually change, and then we start to feel we are falling because we have been so used to this prop. This prop, which when we first encountered it seemed wonderful – “I am so happy, you know I wasn’t sure what to do but I got this fantastic job ...” – has rescued us but also built a vulnerability into our system because it has disguised the fact that ‘I am like this’. The real task was to get back to ‘here’, back to the comfortable sense that “this is me.”

This is both a friend and an enemy. It is a friend on the surface because it makes us feel we know who we are, but deeply it is the enemy. Because, of course, as life goes by it gets more and more difficult to do that, to keep trying to rebalance ourselves, because we have all our habits of being out of kilter. So one thing collapses and then we tend to look for another to lean on, and there is always something to be busy about, always something to be preoccupied with – new projects, new excitements. If you think how many relationships you have with things in the world, the objects of your daily use. “If I lost my cap, if I lost my books, if I lost the flat where I live, who would I be? What would happen to me?” The issue about attachment is that it is always a way of rebalancing oneself by being out of balance, by stabilising being off balance. It doesn’t actually rebalance. This doesn’t mean that one shouldn’t participate in the world but it’s how to stay balanced and open to the environment without falling over.

The importance of this in relation to meditation is that we are used to looking for objects to rely on and we are used to being active. Therefore, when the meditation instruction is to relax, don’t get involved with the objects, don’t do anything, we get a kind of double blow against our ordinary tendency, and this often brings up all kinds of feelings of anxiety and stupidity. For example, you might think, “What the hell am I doing?” and then start to say, “Now I will do some mantras...I am doing something...” So it is important in a balanced practice to do a bit of each of these kinds of practice, because if it is too open you can get a bit lost at first.

The goal in dzogchen is always to stay open and fresh, and activity will flow through that. We start to see that a lot of what we do is primarily self-referential, not just on an outer level where we feel, “I want people to like me,” or “I want to make my life easy,” or “I want to feel proud about myself,” but on a more subtle level. There is a kind of feedback loop. If for example we lift up a cup we have information coming back into our intelligence that tells us ‘I am lifting a cup’.

There are feedback loops going on all the time, and what they do is subtly affirm the sense, “I am the one who is doing this,” if it’s active, or, “This is happening to me,” if it’s passive. For example, a little fly goes ‘buzzzz’ and it is annoying ‘me’. The fly is just going ‘buzzzzzz’ but we are not concerned about the fly we are concerned about the fly in relation to us: “This bloody mosquito will maybe bite me! Leave me alone!” In that way we stand in relation to a world which we see as having meaning primarily in what it does for us – if it makes us happy or it makes us sad. We don’t see the world neutrally. We don’t see things as they are; we see things mediated through what does this mean for me.

Thus in meditation again and again we are relaxing and opening, allowing experience to be just as it is without thinking what it means to be me. This is only possible if the one who is experiencing is not the ordinary sense of self.

**Participant:** How do you tell?

**James:** You can tell because the ordinary sense of self is like a water wheel. When the water comes down the mountain and it’s deflected into the water wheel the water wheel turns. The activity happens in your mind; you start to be able to see that something is happening. One of the images that is used in Tibetan is *rang ba* which means falling like itself, like a waterfall – it is just coming. So you sit in the practice and all kinds of weird shit happens: happy thoughts, sad thoughts, sexual thoughts, angry thoughts, bored thoughts. All kind of stuff arises and you just let it happen. But once you start to take up a position with regard to it you become productive, you start editing, and you find yourself back in a state of reaction. Therefore, duality is when subject and object are moving together. When the thought is arising and it is arising for ‘you’, there will be a reaction of some kind, either a moving towards or a moving away.

In these first steps we do this Aa and part of what we are dissolving is the identification with ego formation. The ego is always there; it is a part of our manifestation, but it doesn’t have to be active all of the time. For example, I am sitting here and I have ears but I am not very aware of them. Sometimes my ear gets a bit itchy and I scratch it. If the ear doesn’t say, “hello,” then I ignore it, I take it for granted. It’s the same with different parts of our body. We are sitting here and suddenly our back says, “Hello,” or the knee starts to hurt or the elbow. Things announce themselves and then we become aware of them. When they don’t announce themselves they are ‘just there’. Clearly, what we take to be ‘all of myself’ is experientially not present for us all of the

time. It is the same with the ego. The ego doesn't have to be active all the time. If you don't put your energy into it, it is there as a latent capacity. Then when you come out of the meditation and you are interacting with other people that can be the site through which you enter the world, just as when we eat we pick up the knife and the fork and we use them in a particular way. When we are sitting here we are not anxiously practicing how we do that, because we know how to use a knife and fork. As soon as you go into the kitchen you find a knife and fork, you sit at your place and you pick them up. In the same way, when the situation requires it, the ego dimension can be activated and you find yourself relating in these ways. But it doesn't have to be active all the time.

However, the ego doesn't like to be ignored. We are so used to relying on this aspect of our existence that it claims to be the central point around which everything is turning. But in fact it is just part of what is going on. The ego is like a child of three and a half or four years of age. When you are talking with adults, the child is always pulling you and saying, "What about me? Why don't you play with me, this is boring." In that way the child insists on getting attention in order to validate its existence. This is why you can make problems for yourself in meditation if you say, "The ego is very bad. We need to cut off the ego, destroy it, drop it." Imagine you are sitting there chatting with your friends and you say, "This little child I am going to have adopted as I don't like them anymore." The child is not likely to be very peaceful; in fact the child is likely to get very upset. In the same way, if you tell yourself, "Oh, I have to do an operation on myself and take this damn thing out," it will say, "I am the centre of your world – I give you so many things!" In that way you will increase a desperation. But you are not destroying anything, it is just, "Sweetie, it is your bed time ... it is ok ...see you in the morning. Now I do the meditation, go to sleep." Then after a while, before you like it, the little child has come into your bedroom saying, "Get up, time to play!"

## Space for Everything

---

We use the word integration a lot which means there is space for everything. It's not about right and wrong. When we look at the structure of our ignorance in samsara there is separation and then choices: "good", "bad", "I don't want any of that, I do want more of this". Thus, in the practice we are doing something very different; we are just giving space to everything. If you are giving space to everything you have to allow the energy to rebalance itself.

Again, using an example of a small child, if you have a birthday party, all the other children are invited to the house and they need to be made welcome as well. So the parent has to be kind to these other children, and if their own child becomes envious it becomes very difficult: *“But it’s my party!” “Everybody is welcome, this is a party...”* It’s the same when we sit in the meditation. It is a party. We welcome good thoughts, bad thoughts, thoughts you can be proud of, thoughts you can be ashamed of, clarity, dullness and sinking. Our task is to be the host. However these guests appear our job is to say, “Welcome.” They are not going to stay forever. Every phenomena is impermanent, therefore we let them come in.

In some of the pubs in London they have signs up saying, “No gypsies,” or signs that say, “No people with muddy boots.” Here, the Landlord is saying, “Because I’m the Landlord I don’t want people in my pub in that way.” This is exactly what happens in our mind. We want to be a good host, but we are not sure about some of the visitors: *“Well, I’m not sure about you. Do you fit my little template? No, because if you came in you would disturb my idea of how this should be.”* That is the touch stone, the litmus paper, the real test through which you can see if your mind is relaxed and open or in its ego focus. As soon as you get into pushing and pulling, editing, putting things in a hierarchy, organising, you are caught in the familiar busyness of the mind.

It is important to be able to allow the mind to be busy when it is ok to be busy. That is why when we do this sort of meditation practice we don’t do it for a very long time, otherwise it provokes more reaction. We are wanting to do it slowly, trying to see and just taste relaxed and open and movement, and then we find ourselves getting caught up in positioning again.

## Questions and Answers

---

**Participant:** I have been wondering about whether you can ever move beyond conditioning from our parents. Of course, obviously you can but it’s difficult. How are we supposed to be when we are trying to sit under the waterfall of all these things comes up, and there is a fear that the men in white coats are going to come and carry you away? All those kinds of fears which are so deeply subconscious are likely to arise are they not? I am just thinking about how to deal with that.

**James:** Part of it is being clear that thoughts tell us about the world, they don’t tell us about our own nature. Therefore, it is very appropriate to trust your thoughts about the world. If you behave in a particular way, if you are highly provocative and when people ask you to behave you

don't, you will get into trouble. In the English newspapers recently there was an article reporting on a high-society ball which takes place every year in London. It's called the Barclay Square Ball and used linked to be to the cycle of the debutants coming out and being presented to the queen in the old court system. Everyone was dressed very elegantly and there was a couple who started to have a fight. The lady had been drinking, they started fighting, and they were asked to move out, but outside on the step she continued fighting. Because many rich and famous people go to this ball there were many police, and the police asked her to be quiet. She wouldn't and so they put her on the ground in handcuffs. The next day there were photographs of her in the newspapers of her with her dress up, her tights torn and her bum sticking out. Imagine the next day when saw this photograph of herself in this high society.

She had used alcohol to turn off her thinking function. However, it is quite useful to keep thinking in life, because thinking tells you about the world. If you want to get pissed don't do it at a high society gathering. She had lost that capacity because the alcohol turned it off and she was in a rage with her boyfriend and so on. Thinking tells you about the world. If you are driving a car you need to think. If you are shopping you need to think. If you are taking care of other people you need to think. However, the function of the meditation is to become aware of ourselves, our own presence, the nature of the mind.

**Participant:** we don't know how we are at that point...

**James:** Exactly, so thinking won't help you. Thinking says it will help you. For example, a thought comes up and says, "Aah, this is a very bad thought." In that way one thought has come up and then another thought jumps up and says, "That is a very bad thought." So what? I am not concerned with thought. Thoughts chase each other like children in the play ground; they are only playing, they won't tell you the truth. Children spend hours and hours running around doing something and afterwards you ask them what they were doing and they tell you they were just playing. Thus, you sit and your meditation goes funny and all these thoughts come – afterwards, what were you doing? It's not anything, just playing. You weren't really meditating, you were in a kind of limbo. The whole of samsara and the whole of your life can be spent just with all these thoughts.

The task then is to not look at the thought as if it was going to tell you the truth. Thoughts are not the mirror of the mind. The mind is the mirror of thoughts. However, in our western intellectual

tradition we say, *“Polish your thoughts. A sharp intellect with many thoughts will give an accurate account of the world.”* We talk of reflective thinking: “I need to reflect on it,” which means to bring some high powered thinking to bare on another situation. From a dzogchen point of view this is to completely misunderstand the nature of reflectivity. The mind when it shows itself is not anything at all; the mirror is empty. But when we reflect on something in the western sense we are using reflections in the mind to illuminate other reflections. But the reflections will not show the mirror itself.

If you look in a mirror and you turn it one way you see one image, and if you turn it another way you will see something else. No matter how you turn the mirror you won't see the mirror itself. You will only see reflections. No matter what kind of thoughts you develop or entertain in your mind, all they are showing you is what thoughts are, what kind of thoughts you can entertain: beautiful, ugly and so on. A key point is to recognise that thoughts illuminate thoughts and the world, but they don't illuminate their own source – they are blind to themselves. In order to see the source of thought you have to not rely on thought, because thoughts are primarily dualistic, they check something out: “Oh, I was thinking about what you said yesterday...” They are leap-frogging on top of each other – on and on and on.

Who is the one who is thinking? We will look more into this question later, but when we ask it, there a tendency to always provide an answer which is a thought. It is as if a thought was doing the thinking. Thinking is clearly occurring, as well as feeling, sensation and so on, but the ground of that, the basis of it, is not something you can grasp with thought. You cannot think yourself out of samsara.

There are many holy Tibetan books and in Tibet people studied a lot. However, these books don't take people out of samsara. Thoughts are helpful because they are like gardening tools. Good gardening tools help you to take the weeds out including the root. Developing your thinking is like that but these are tools of activity. They don't show you the nature of the ground itself. On that level chasing thoughts or worrying about thoughts is not going to be helpful.

## The Four Immeasurables

---

*May all sentient beings have happiness and the cause of happiness!*

*May they be free of sorrow and the cause of sorrow!*

*May they never be separated from the happiness free of sorrow!*

*May they abide in the equanimity free of both desire for friends and relatives and hatred towards enemies and strangers.*

People can and do make a lot of money telling others how to be happy. Anyway, being happy is generally not a bad thing. The second line says: *May all beings be separated from suffering and the root of suffering*. Suffering is what makes you sad. Suffering is being limited in some way. Usually when we suffer we shrink; we don't feel open to the world so much. We want to go into ourselves or we go out in a very kind of needy way: "Please save me, rescue me, give me what I need." Both these verses are saying it is not just the happiness and the suffering, but it's also the root of happiness and the root suffering.

What is the root of happiness? On an ordinary level the root of happiness is virtue. If you develop good karma, if you perform positive actions and you help other beings then that quality will gradually accumulate as a way of fuelling an open relaxed heart, a sense of connection with the world and that will bring happiness. If you practice what you might call sin, bad things or non-virtue, if you lie, steal and cheat from people, if you are very selfish and use other people as a means to an end, an object for your own gratification, that will lead to the accumulation of bad karma. That is to say, your actions will have a consequence of encountering internally and externally negative situations. You will feel anxious, worried, bad and so on. There we have the root of happiness and suffering.

The third line says: *May all beings never be separated from the happiness which is free of suffering*. Here it is saying that is not just that we want less suffering and more happiness but that you can actually find a suffering free zone, a way in which all suffering ends and there is only happiness. The first line was about love: *may all beings be happy*. The second line is considered to be about compassion or *nying je*, where *nying* means heart and *je* means noble, together meaning, a noble heart. So in this second line when it says, *may we be free of suffering*, we are saying, "I am not indifferent to you. I am not cutting myself off from you. Your suffering touches

me and moves me.” We are not saying, “Well, that’s your luck.’ Now, in this third line we are concerned with joy, *ga wa*, which means there is a state which is not just momentary happiness but an ongoing joy which is free of any suffering at all.

The fourth line says: *May they abide in the equanimity free of both desire for friends and relatives and hatred towards enemies and strangers.* May all beings have this great equanimity which is free from attachment to happiness or those close to us, and free from aversion to those who are distant to us. In that way, not protecting friends and attacking enemies, but having an equal attitude to everyone. This is to say that our movement towards the world will be determined by a position we establish ourselves in which is beyond reactivity. So even if someone is horrible to us we won’t react negatively to them, we will not retaliate. And even if others are very nice to us we won’t be pulled into that, because if we are very pulled into ‘nice’ we won’t be attending in the other direction. Equanimity means an even handed or panoramic vision, not just in terms of perception but in terms of availability. In London when I am on the escalator I often look at the people coming down the escalator and I recite the Four Immeasurables under my breath towards them. They probably think there is mad man on the stairs and they just want to get to work but I find it very helpful. Here are all these people, I have just come out of the underground where I have been packed together with them and in that experience I didn’t experience so much equanimity. I didn’t really want the person with their elbow in my back and I quite like looking at the pretty girl in the corner. So my attitude was slightly varied, but now on the elevator, because they are passing and I’ll never meet them again, I am quite open and good hearted towards them: “May you all be happy.”

Let us recite this together. It is normally recited in quite a slow even way with a simple rhythm of one-two –one-two all the way through.

THE FOUR IMMEASURABLES

**SEM CHAN THAM CHE DE WA DANG DE WAI GYU DANG DEN PAR GYUR CHIG**  
*sentient all happiness and happiness of cause and have must*  
*beings*

May all sentient beings have happiness and the cause of happiness!

**DUG NGAL DANG DUG NGAL GYI GYU DANG DRAL WAR GYUR CHIG**  
*sorrow and sorrow of cause and separate, they must be*  
*free from*

May they be free of sorrow and the cause of sorrow!

**DUG NGAL ME PAI DE WA DANG MI DRAL WAR GYUR CHIG**  
*sorrow free of happiness and not separate they must*

May they never be separated from the happiness free of sorrow.

**NYE RING CHAG DANG NYI DANG DRAL WAI TANG NYOM LA NAE PAR GYUR CHIG**  
*near far desire dislike, both and free from equanimity, in stay they must*  
*(friends) (enemies) anger impartiality*  
*(relatives) (strangers)*

May they abide in the equanimity free of both desire for friends and relatives and hatred towards enemies and strangers.

*May all sentient beings have happiness and the cause of happiness!*

*May they be free of sorrow and the cause of sorrow!*

*May they never be separated from the happiness free of sorrow!*

*May they abide in the equanimity free of both desire for friends and relatives and hatred towards enemies and strangers.*

These four lines are also known as the *Bramah viharas*. *Brama* means the highest level of gods because they are living on the top of Mount Meru. *Vihara* means a residence, for example a monastery is called a *vihara*. The idea is that if you adopt the view in these lines, it will ensure that you are reborn in the highest realms of *samsara*. This is the view of the gods in that realm where they wish the best for everyone and don't want any suffering, and in these divine realms there is not any suffering except for the last few days before you leave.

If it takes your fancy, this is something you can learn and memorising so that you can sing it while you are driving in the car, and so on. It has some nice thoughts which are refreshing, and its function is to open ourselves out of our own bubbles. You can see in the paintings of various

deities that they always have a rainbow aura and nimbus, but we tend to be in impenetrable bubbles. Each moment we are in one particular state which is sealed, and then we are in another which is sealed. Therefore, the function of this practice is to provide us with the capacity to be in a state and at the same time be connected out.

Here in this room we have an image of Dorje Sempa and he is in a particular position and he is connected out, and that position will change; there are many different practices of Dorje Sempa. That is to say, the form that he shows can change but it is also connected out. When we look at people we see all the shapes and colourations but essentially everything we experience is rainbow light; in this tradition all is seen as built up from the light of the five elements and the five wisdoms. Thus, although we may think we are seeing particular people dressed in particular ways, with their own personality, actually this is the radiant mandala of the dharmadhatu. Everything is the natural radiance of the enlightened state, including the clothes you buy in the market. It is amazing – there is nowhere outside the dharmadhatu. That is the most important thing to keep remembering ... it never ends ... there is no limit. It is our conditioning, the activity of our own minds, that chops the world up into its different bits and pieces. But when we open into this, the natural luminosity is there as the radiance of all things.

Therefore, the primary function of all these practices, bodhisattva vows, aspirations, prayers for happiness in the world, is to be connective, because connection is the ending of non-duality. We can practice the connection on the open level of guru yoga, the three Aa's, or on the more relative level of prayers, aspirations, burning butterlamps for beings, for every time you remember someone they come into a connection with you. There is a story called Peter Pan and in this story there is a little fairy called Tinkerbell. She flies around but gradually her light gets darker and darker and she is on the point of dying and she says, "Nobody believes in fairies anymore." So when they show this in the theatre all the little children shout, "I believe! I believe!" and then she starts to shine more and more. It is like that: if we believe in this connection then the whole world starts to shine for us – it is our connection. However, when we are in ourselves, turning and turning, everything becomes a bit flat. Other people seem a bit distant and we don't know what to say and our shyness seals us in a box.

Just to be open and responsive is very nice but it can also be difficult to do. For example, if you feel very alive and connected it might be very enjoyable to do some jazz dance improvisation but you need to be in your body, feeling fully open to the music, and able to work with other people.

If you are not in the mood for that, if you have learnt how to do a waltz –one-two-three - one-two-three – you can dance in a very structured way because you are just obeying orders. You are still dancing and the dancing is quite nice and will shift your mood, but you are not in a state where you can come in, improvise and have a contactful encounter with someone else.

In the same way here, the idea is to have various kinds of practices which you can do according to your mood and situation. For example, when we lose ourselves into a state of absorption in ideas and thoughts we may find it just too difficult to relax. At that time if you can mobilise your intention towards some good dharma practice it is a useful use of your time. It is for this reason that we learn this prayer. However from another viewpoint it would not open a door to anything because we are still believing: “May *these* sentient beings be happy. It is so terrible that *sentient beings* suffer.”

But who is suffering? We say, “Sentient beings are suffering.” Who are you? “I am a sentient being.” What are you eating? “I am eating an apple.” These are all the same kind of description where the term seems to illuminate something. Obviously, it is very helpful to know “This is an apple” and “This is a sentient being,” but it makes us stupid at the same time because the identification is like a wall. It says: “We know what this is, this is an apple. What more do you want to know?” The term ‘apple’ is like a full stop. ‘Sentient being’ is like a full stop. So what is a sentient being? Do sentient beings exist or not.

## Exploring the Term ‘Emptiness’

---

This text, *The Four Immeasurables* is about compassion and developing warm feelings towards others, but then we have to question who are the others? The Buddha said that all phenomena are an illusion and he gave twelve examples: like a reflection of the moon on water; like a mirage; like the horns on a rabbit; like the child of a barren women, and so on. This is to say, nothing is real. So who are the sentient beings you are going to bring happiness to? This brings us into the area of emptiness.

## The Five Skandhas

---

Emptiness is a central theme throughout all the systems of buddhist teaching and is expressed in different ways. In the theravadin tradition it is expressed mainly through the analysis of the five

skandhas. In the mahayana tradition there is the analysis into the five skandhas and then the deconstruction of them. The five skandhas are seen as the basic building blocks of what it means to be a person or a living thing. Thus, all the complex phenomena that we encounter can be simplified into five basic categories. All the aspects, all the different qualities that anything anywhere has can be seen as simply the meeting together of these five basic qualities.

The first skandha is called *rupa* in Sanskrit and *zug* in Tibetan. This means shape and form. Clearly when we look around this room what we see is colour and form. Secondly, there is *vedana* or in Tibetan *tshor wa*. This means feeling or sensation, which here means positive, negative and neutral: "I like", "I don't like", and "I don't mind". Thus, you look around the room and you see forms of shape and colour, some of the things you quite like, some you don't like, and others you feel indifferent to.

If you like something or you don't like it, it is going to be more real for you. You will probably pay more attention to it, either moving towards it or not. These three qualities clearly link with the three basic poisons. Indifference or 'it's OK' links with stupidity/ignorance because you are still taking the thing as real but there is no affect. Positive and negative feelings, either 'it's good' or 'it's bad', link with attachment/desire and aversion/hatred. We are always allocating these values, usually by projecting them onto the object. We say, *"That is a good apple." This means that "I like that kind of apple. You might not like it but I know that it is a 'good apple'".*

This is the way in which we take our sensation and project onto it a seeming fact that it is giving us true information about the world, rather than experiencing that sensation is relational. That is to say, all we can really say is, *"I like this apple. I like this apple therefore for me it is good."* But to say "I like this apple therefore it is good," you have made a huge leap out; you have now turned the apple, which existed in relation to your mouth at a certain point in time into being something which is 'good in itself'. This is a key point of ignorance: not to live in experience, which is always immediate and direct, but to live in abstractions.

Everything is contextual. My mother loved figs when she was young. As she got older she had a problem with one of her teeth, and the dentist decided it best and easiest to take them all out. This was quite common at that time. So she had all her teeth taken out and had false ones put in. She found as she tried eating figs with false teeth in that all the little seeds went up underneath the plate; she liked the taste of them but their seeds went in her plastic teeth. That is to say,

everything depends on context. These five skandhas are a way of looking at the construction of abstract categories seeing how these *become* the site of truth.

The third skandha is called *sanna* in Sanskrit or *du she* in Tibetan. *She* means to know and *du* means the bringing together of thinking and perception. Thus it is having a sense of what something is. It means that when we encounter something in the world, our opinion and the presence of the object are almost impossible to separate. The *du she*, then, is the way in which we say, “This is a building.” That that is correct, it is a building, but what is actually there, shape and colour, has now become a building. In that way, *du she* is the organisation of sense phenomena into gestalts, into forms which carry meaning.

**Participant:** Is it labelling?

**James:** Yes it is labelling but labelling that we inhabit. It is not just a label that we stick onto, although that is exactly what we are doing, but we *experience* it as identification of something which is already there. Thus, when we use language in this way it looks as if what we are doing is revealing what is there but actually we are constructing what is there. That is the function of *du* in this term, which means to gather together.

The fourth skandha or element is *samskara* or *du jed* in Tibetan. This means, again, the composite of our associations of our constructions which give us a particular set of proclivity, a tendency, a taste for something, so that we approach the world already with an agenda. For example someone maybe interested in cars and watching them race around. I am not interested in cars. I don't drive one and I have no interest in them at all, but some people get very excited about them. That is to say, I don't have in my set of associations a link with motorcars – it leaves me cold, but for many people they buzz. Therefore someone who has an association for that, in becoming aware that there is racing going on, they feel it is really good. However, when they say, “That is really good’ again you get the sense that the goodness is in the object out there. It is revealed to them: “Wow, that car!” but actually it is constructed by the meeting together of the persons frame of reference and the object. When these fit together that is the *du jed*. Therefore, our experience in samsara is of ‘things’ already being there and already having values. However, we are actually the co-creators of this impact according to our own karmic profile, which is why we like different things.

The last element is consciousness, *nam par she pa* in Tibetan. Consciousness here is the aspect of our mental functioning which takes an object. That is to say, we are always conscious of something. I won't go into all the details of this here because there is a lot to discuss, but basically we have five sense consciousnesses and each sense is seen as having its own consciousness. These consciousnesses are then organised by a sixth consciousness. There is then a seventh consciousness which introduces the particular linking of our kind of distorted perception which I will talk a little more about in a minute. The eighth consciousness is a sort of ground consciousness that holds all our karmic tendencies, and not just of us as individuals but of all beings. It is bit like a Jungian archetypal unconscious, a kind of universal cosmic basis.

The seventh consciousness is linked to the five poisons. We have been looking at three of them, stupidity, aversion, desire. The other two are pride and jealousy. These are seen as the five basic poisons which are transformed in the five sections of the mandala into the five wisdoms of the Buddha. However, there are many subsets of these kinds of afflictions, and what they are in ordinary language is moods, colourations or temperatures that arise in us. If you think of aversion or desire or pride or jealousy they are kind of heats and winds, moving factors which distort the clarity of our perception. They can increase it or dull it. Very often if we hate someone we really see them clearly: "I have got my eye on you." Very often if couples start to fight it is amazing how much they memorise about what the other person has done; all the little insults, bad behaviours and tendencies. It has all been stored up because there is a particular kind of intelligence in aversion which sees all the details. Thus this level of consciousness brings into a moment a particular bias which seems to be valid to the person who is inside it.

These eight consciousnesses are seen as being organised around the heart chakra as the eight petals of a lotus which operate together. So as long as our energy is confused, subtle inputs from the eighth consciousness, this bedrock of universal confusion will arise for us. In that way we are always going to have little discolorations come in. Then we have our own afflictive tendencies, we have the information coming in through the senses, and then we have our organising consciousness. This, then, is quite a complex dynamic interweaving that is going on all the time.

These five elements, the five skandhas, operate together which gives us the sense of being this person in this world. I hope you can see from this description how they function to give the sense that there are true separate entities which have qualities inherent in them. What the Buddha explained was that when these factors of construction come together they create the sense that

there is a fixed definite world and we have to operate in different ways. When you see that these five elements are operating together you start to see how it works and you are not so taken in by it.

One of the wonderful things in life is to go to the theatre with small children. They don't know what the theatre is and so when it starts they really believe it's true. For example at Christmas in England we have pantomimes which contain very nice characters and very bad ones. Always, at a certain point you get the nice character saying, "Oh, I think I will sleep here in the forest as it is so beautiful," but behind them is coming the very bad person and all the children are shouting: "Behind you!" and getting upset and jumping up and down. This is what these five skandhas do for us in samsara: we take it as complete real. Therefore, the Buddha's teaching is to say, "Oh, this is a theatre, this is a play." When the play is running you will get caught but luckily we have a pause button: stop and analyse, stop and meditate, develop mindfulness, read the sutras, develop these positive intentions and then every now and then you interrupt the flow of this drama, this movie, this theatre, and you see what is going on: "Oh, I was taken in, I was mesmerised, enchanted...Oh, so that is what it is." Then there is a bit of space –and the space which is revealed in that moment is the beginning of the road into understanding emptiness.

Although this is not the main practice in dzogchen at all, this is a preliminary way of clearing some space. For most of us, if we don't do this clearly, the power of these day-to-day concepts is so strong, they appear to be so real and true in themselves, that they just catch us again and again. We could say that the basic addiction of our existence is that we are addicted to the separation of subject and object. Through that we are addicted to the fantasy that thoughts tell us the truth, and we are addicted to the sense that things are truly existing in themselves.

These addictions cause much more trouble than cocaine or alcohol or self cutting or any of the other forms of addiction because they are invisible. In dharma we are very grateful to the Buddha because he is seen as the great doctor who said, "You are sick." *No, I am fine, you are sick, poor funny old man living under a tree. You gave up everything, you had a palace, chariots, you had everything and now you are sitting under a tree.* "My dear, my lovely, you are sick." And people started to listen and they started to realise, "Oh, god, maybe I really am sick but I don't feel sick."

The understanding of the five skandhas helps us to stop and lets us think: “Is it really the way I think it is? Is this world really important? All the things that I put my time and energy into what do they mean?”

I work in a hospital where we have a little department and try to keep it alive. But the decisions about what should happen in this hospital are made by people far away by people who don't seem to care and don't seem know and increasingly they send down national policies. There is a lot of evidence that the national policies are not helpful; they are very expensive and don't work. This is my 'reality': my life in the hospital is moulded by the interaction of others. This is the experience of many people. We want to put our hearts into our work, we want it to be good but it can't be good. How do we find the middle way there? We can say, “Well, I'm just going to do it anyway!” but it is just throwing money into the river, it is a waste of time, all your hard energy is just turned into nothing. Or do we say, “Fuck it I don't care. I will just come in and take the money.” Then our own heart dies and we are not helping other people.

This is the difficulty for most of us; to find a way to live in a world which is not very balanced or nice. Doing too much is not helpful and doing too little is not helpful. Finding that ceaselessly moving and changing middle way is hard, and the analysis of the five skandhas, and this kind of prayer all help – in particular dzogchen helps a lot. But the world is not stable, it is not reliable, and having the voice of truth doesn't take you very far. What helps is to be light and not to be caught. We are like a big bull in a field that has a ring in its nose so the farmer can tie a rope through it and pull it. Thus our work is to try to take the ring out of our nose. We can do that on many different levels by seeing how we get caught up in things.

### Starting To See The Cracks In The Wall

---

In our usual world we have continuous entities or continuous phenomena and discontinuous experience. For example, some of us have been to this building before. When we come inside we look around and say, “Oh yes, I know this building.” Thus the building itself, the entity called Kamalashila, seems to be continuous through time. But we don't live here, we come here and come back again and so our experience is discontinuous. In the meditation the reverse is the case: experience, open clarity, being present with what is occurring is continuous but what presents itself is changing. Impermanence refers to whatever is arising: thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions – all coming and going. Awareness itself doesn't move. This is the

complete opposite of ordinary experience, because in our ordinary experience thoughts and feelings seem to be changing but they are stabilised by reference to fixed entities outside in the world. Through this practice we also see that external forms which seem very stable and reliable are not so reliable.

The approach into this, generally in mahayana buddhism which is the basis for tantra, mahamudra and in some ways dzogchen, has the orientation of the study of emptiness. So we will look a little now at what this term means. It is a very important term in Tibetan buddhism. Essentially, in relation to what we were just looking at with respect to the five skandhas, it means that all phenomena are empty of inherent self-nature. That is to say, all phenomena are compounded; they are made up of bits and pieces. What we started to look at just now was that they are not made up of just material things.

For example, behind me is a wall. It is quite hard and we imagine that underneath the paint there is plaster or cement and then brick and even stone. Therefore, there is a 'wall' and it has been there for a long time but we can see that materially it is a construct. At some point this was just open fields. Somebody bought the land, dug the foundations and the wall came into place. Thus, the wall is made up of material forms created by a particular socio-political cultural need, that of having a monastery for training missionaries. However, the wall also exists in our mind as a concept. Although 'wall', as a heavy material thing, seems to endure through time our relationship to the 'wall' which is part of our experience of the wall, changes. The impermanence of our mind makes the wall impermanent because there is no wall without our mind. Whether the wall is there or not if we don't know about it how would you know. Any wall that we encounter is the wall in our mind.

For example, if you go to Egypt to see the pyramids you probably will have seen pictures of them before you go. Therefore, you already have 'pyramids' in your head and then you see them. I have never seen them but I have heard that if you see them in the sunset they take on the red coloration of the sun and if you see them in the dawn they have a different colour. They will also be affected by the season. Then you have the question: "What is the true colour of the pyramid?" This is to say, 'the pyramid' cannot be separated from the experience of seeing it, which is an example of the five skandhas operating together. From this point of view there are no objects that are existing in themselves.

We can take this building as another example. The group that got this building were not very wealthy so we can imagine they got it quite cheap. Why would they get it cheap? Because in a village like this who wants a big building like this? What are they going to do with it? It's a bit too ugly to be a hotel. That is how these things happen. If it was very beautiful and the sun was shining here more of the year a large swimming pool could be made in the back garden. It could have a spa and people could come and have lovely massages and so on. But, no, this is a place where you come and sit and wonder what you are doing here. It is this kind of a place because of a particular context. The function of the building is not determined by anything except the interaction of the world around it. It is also not over determined, fixed in that way.

Many things seem completely fixed until they are changed. If you drive from France into Italy and come to the huge tunnels, you couldn't imagine that people could make such a thing. You look at the old roads climbing up the hill and see that someone has knocked a hole right through it. Rocks and mountains that used to symbolise stability, impenetrability are now simply engineering challenges. People can dam rivers and so on. Thus, what appeared to be something in itself is revealed as something else as soon as it engages with the mind, because the mind makes creative transformations. The fact that something is stable is simply that factors have not acted on it yet, or the internal factors holding it together have not yet been released. Therefore, empty of inherent self-nature, the nature of things as they are revealed, is a composite of internal and external factors.

For example, if some people who come to visit this building are buddhist maybe they are quite happy. If they are christians they may be curious or suspicious or full of distaste and dislike. If they have this set of qualities, distaste and dislike, this is because they have a set of assumptions which provides an interpretation which provokes that dislike. They see the shape and the colour and they have a feeling tone which is negative, basis on the selective attention and the associations they have. There is not a self-existing building. There is no true building.

It is much easier to look outside, as we have noticed before, because all our senses go out; our habit of attachment is outward. The Buddha sat under the Bodhi tree and he was with himself which is how he learned something, saw how things truly were. He observed the way in which his world was structured and what he saw was that there was nothing strongly real. It was his intuition about this that caused him to leave the palace in the first place. At a certain point he saw a sick person, an old person, a corpse and that caused him to think, "I am the prince, I will be

the King, all of this is going to be mine but I am also going to die. So calling me a prince doesn't stop me dying. My father the king is also going to die. Just because we call him the King and put him on the throne does not protect him against these things." That was his first feeling that made wonder about how things really were – was there something which was unchanging, undying?

Emptiness, then, is not something abstract. It's what is revealed to us when we start to see the cracks in the wall, when we start to see that things don't quite fit together. For example, you can get these children's building sets, like Lego. You can sit on the carpet with them and build a castle or a space rocket and it is a 'space rocket' because they believe it is a 'space rocket'. But, it is just bits of coloured plastic put together. When they get bored of that they take it apart and build something else. This is the essential way that our world is evolving. Two things are there. One is the potential ingredients and the other is the power of the imagination coupled with the power of identification to concretise the particular reading of the form at that time. By believing that something truly exists it comes to exist for us. Then when you stop believing in it, it has gone.

Therefore, emptiness means all the factors, external and internal which move together to create the patterns of the moments of our experience, are not truly existing substances. They are not entities put together in the way these bits in a child's building toy seem to be. Rather they are pulsations of energy in time: the energy of attention, the energy of sounds that we hear, of smells and taste and so on. Moments are continually coalescing, coming together and then dispersing. Meeting and parting is what's occurring moment-by-moment. In that way we have appearance ... but it is empty.

### Form Is Emptiness; Emptiness Is Form

---

In the famous formulation in the heart sutra it goes through each of the five skandhas and then the eighteen basic building blocks or dhatus –which are the six senses, their objects and their organs – and shows each of them to be empty. It goes onto to say: *Form is emptiness; emptiness is form. Form is no other than emptiness; emptiness is no other than form.*

When we look at something like this bottle of water I have here, clearly I have something in my hand. It is a recognisable item so we could say this is not an illusion, this is here. However, it is here in my hands because my hands picked it up. Before I picked it up it was just there in the background and now it becomes foreground. This is a now a 'thing' which we are all looking at.

But what is this bottle? Probably, nowadays, it is made from recycled glass, the metal cap will also be recycled, as well as the paper. That is to say, things are changed again and again, and for a moment it is here. If we keep the water in the bottle too long it becomes useless. Therefore, its value stays until its used-by date, which will be marked on the bottom. And it is in this bottle here due to being delivered here in a crate. In Germany people buy their drinks in crates. In England we don't do that. You go to the supermarket and buy one or two. There are no shops where you can go and buy a crate of beer or a crate of something. You can see this bottle has little marks around it due to its rolling around in the production factory many times due to it being recycled and used a lot. In England often the glass is broken down and recycled, rather than the bottle itself being used many times over. That is to say, the nature of this bottle is dependent on German culture, the German patterns of how you deal with bottles and the distribution of substances for drinking. The shape of the bottle, the size of it is also a cultural aspect because it has to be standardised due to the crates and so on.

Therefore, the factors which lead to the generation of the bottle and the factors which maintain the bottle are, from a buddhist analysis, inseparable from the bottle itself. It is not that these were causes which having created the bottle are now somewhere else. They are embedded in the very texture of the bottle; you cannot take the cause out of the event. However, when we say 'bottle', because we have many associations with the word, our mind rests easily. We know what a 'bottle' is; we have held them and used them many times. It is then very easy for us to take for granted what we think the object is: "This is what this is. It is a bottle." But in doing that we are putting our meaning and our interpretation into the phenomena in our hand.

Is the bottle-ness of the bottle in the bottle or is it in the mind? It is somewhere in between, a mixing of the two. We have the form which is the colour and the shape and to this we add all our associations, all our possibilities, all our meanings and so on, and when these two come together we have 'the normal' experience of the bottle. What stops us from seeing the emptiness of the phenomena is that we take it for granted that there are qualities that belong to the bottle which are actually projections from ourselves. We are doing this all the time. Part of growing up is learning lots of things, getting information about the world, and that information helps us to know what to do with things in the world. People who don't have that information don't know what to do with these things. That is why if you spend time with children you see that they often get confused or they make mistakes because they don't know. You see them slowly learn and

become more competent and able to do things, and they get a kind of freedom, which is a beautiful thing. However, in knowing more about the object it becomes a knowledge in the person which they can project onto the object: “Oh, I know how that works,” but the object is not showing how it works, it is the knowledge that is in the persons head.

Thus, many of the things that we see as being inherent in the object are not in the object at all. The object is merely a hook for the construction of the culturally shared fantasy: “This is a bottle of water.” As long as people share that fantasy, energy will be put together to make this particular product. If you go to agricultural museums in the countryside you can see all kinds of scythes and curved hooks that people used a hundred years ago. Nobody uses that now. People have tractors and large trimming machines and so on. The curved hooks and seeing the farmer in the field with his scythe has gone. There was no inherent truth to it. It was real, in the sense of something manifesting; it was continuing through time due to certain configurations, and then it was gone.

It is the same with VHS videos. It is quite difficult to buy videos now and new machines tend to have DVD players in them. There is something which has become obsolete in a very short period of time. Many forms of technology are showing that. You can see a particular configuration of knowledge and creative intelligence, the science that goes into the production, the marketing, the desire in the market. People learn how to use it and then something new arrives and the possibility of continuing with that ends. What we see again and again is that very little remains the same.

Emptiness is to see the luminous, radiant quality of what we experience; the fact that things present themselves. We look around the room and we see ‘people’, and these people talk and eat and drink and so on. They are functioning people but they don’t have a fixed real essence. Our body is very fragile, held together due to the interaction of many, many processes. We can easily take a knife to ourselves and very quickly they will blood spurting everywhere and then corpse. This skin is quite thin and there are just these little pipes. Isn’t it amazing that we have lived this long? You can probably remember as a child jumping off walls, climbing trees, riding your bicycle here and there – but somehow we survived. The body is held together but it is fragile; there is a balancing of forces. It doesn’t have an internal, solid core. In the middle of the body is the heart going bum, bum, bum. If it stops moving we are dead. Movement is life, not

solid entity nature. From the moment we are born until we die everything is changing. The foetus unfolds, doing all the amazing things that happen in the womb; life is a ceaseless process.

### The Road Determines the Kind of Steps We Take

---

As we looked earlier we have stories about each other. We might remember aspects about each other's lives and so on but these are movements in time. There is no true essence to anything. The true essence of everything is emptiness. When we don't perceive this we see the forms of the world as self-existing and reliable. We then become attached to them, and through that attachment we build up particular patterns of identity, and when the form changes we feel upset. This is the normal way of proceeding in samsara. When we start to see emptiness we cannot lean on things in such a heavy way, we have to be present with what is happening. When we start to experience people in that way, we realise we have to look at their face and see what it is showing. When we meet them and we say, "How are you?" We have to really mean it, we have to receive how they are and that then determines how we can reply. If you don't see how the other person is, if you take them for granted, you won't have communication.

Communication begins by not knowing anything strongly real about the person. That may sound completely wrong, because clearly it is easier to talk with them than with strangers. But the thing about your friends is, hopefully you give them attention, and it is the quality of that attention that allows them to reveal themselves, because you don't know how they are. Knowing facts about someone doesn't make a conversation; it is the energetic connection.

In that way just by observing ourselves in the world when we stand up, when we sit down, when we go and have a drink, when we go and chat with people or we find we want to be alone, in any state at any time we can just observe 'what is the actual basis of this experience?' Is it something in itself or is it something that reveals itself? You go for lunch and there is a big pot which has soup in it. You take some soup and put it in your bowl. The soup only has meaning when it leaves the bowl in the spoon to go into your mouth. Just to look at the soup would not be very nourishing. Therefore, the soup reveals itself through vanishing, by ceasing to be soup. In the moment that the soup is in your mouth it is being de-souped. One of the offering prayers, on the basis of Vajrasattva says, "...the dharmata, the infinite nature of all phenomena, phenomena as the radiance of emptiness.." The dharmata of the food, and the dharmata of the mouth merge together. This is like the gods coming together in sexual union. Every time you eat some food

there is some other activity going on in your mouth. It is the meeting together of two forces which dissolve: the hunger and the food, subject and object meet in each mouthful. All the time we are transforming the world and we are being altered by the world.

This is happening all the time, when you speak, when you listen, when you walk and so on. For example, when we walk the nature of the path determines how we walk unless you want to fall over. If you are walking down a city street which is flat you can just bop along but if you go on a little path through the countryside you have to look where you are going. Due to the path you may have to lift your hips a bit higher. In that way, how you walk is part of the world. You could say, "I am walking across the country, that is what I am doing," which gives you the sense of 'I' in charge, but actually if you want to walk, the road is walking you, the road is determining the kind of steps you take. It is a co-creation, and that is essentially what emptiness means. It is to see non-duality, the non-separation of subject and object as the ceaseless display of the open potential of emptiness.

### The Experience of Emptiness As The Basis of Tantra

---

In the development of buddhism, out of a reflection on the nature of the five skandhas, the idea of emptiness started to arise. They found that each of these five building blocks was itself empty, and because of that they came to the conclusion that there is no solid, substantial basis to existence, that existence is a dynamic interplay of many different factors. That lead to what could be read as a meta-physical, over-arching description. However, it is actually a very precise experiential description which says that the nature of everything is emptiness.

When we look at the world we can tilt our experience towards the side of manifestation or we can tilt it towards the side of emptiness. For example, in this room we can look at various phenomena and start thinking about what we like and what we don't like, and things can become quite discrete, concrete and separated out. Or, we might relax as we do in the three 'Aa' meditation and become aware that actually if we just open there is a seamless, un-separated experience. If we think about it, we see that there are different people wearing different clothes but actually it is more like looking at one painting with many different colours which are shining but are part of the same thing, so that that the whole lived environment is as one and we are part of that. The basis of that is emptiness. Emptiness is the ground or the basis out of which everything arises.

From this point of view, things are not arising from historical sources as you might see when making the reading of karma or dependent co-origination so that 'on the basis of that event this has arisen' where there are whole sequences of cause and effect. That is also true but that would seem to be true in terms in what is described as relative truth. From that point of view or domain subject and object are seen as separate and cause and effect is a historical movement through time. However, when we see it more precisely, in what is often described as absolute truth or 'things as they are', everything comes at once. It comes at once but not having separate causes and conditions; everything arises out of emptiness moment-by-moment; everything is just the display of emptiness.

This view is the basis of tantra. Thus, if you are doing a tantric visualisation it is usual to begin by visualising in front of you a clear blue sky, or if you are doing it with yourself as a god, in the middle of a clear blue sky. At first there is open sky and that open sky is the nature of emptiness. For when we look at the sky or infinite space there are no boundaries to it, there is no beginning nor end, there is no shape and no colour. Although you say it's blue, it is only blue from a particular position. Out of this blue sky arises the seed letter or maybe some rainbow light, and from that you get the transformation into the deity or the mandala depending on the practice. However, all of these mandalas, all of these gods arise out of emptiness. They are not things, they are not inherently real and they are not true. In that sense they are not internally defined. They arise in relation to the practice. They are not created by the practice but without the practice they would not manifest. The gods represent our own nature. Through the tantric visualisation you come to see that you yourself arise out of emptiness, and at the end of the practice you come into the world as Tara or as Padmasambhava in the form of your ordinary body. "It looks like me but I am actually Tara. My core or my nature is Tara but I look like me." And what is the nature of Tara? Emptiness. Emptiness is the dharmakaya. It is the ground nature out of which the sambhogakaya level, the transformational level, of Tara is existing inside us – that is what we are aware of. This manifests the nirmanakaya form of our ordinary body in which we interact and have a cup of tea with people and so on.

Dzogchen is similar but slightly different and we will look at that a bit later. But it is very important to see how you move from what was originally an abhidharma analysis, a technical analysis, in order to deconstruct or remove the illusion of things being solidly real. This makes sense as long as you are in that mode of analysis but you cannot really be 'in life'. It is through the

superior technique of tantra which allows this to become a living experience. For example, you go into a situation that you are perhaps a bit scared of; maybe you have a job interview or you've had a fight with a friend and have to go to see them to try to work out where you are. You do the mantra and the visualisation, and you are aware of them as having the same nature as the deity. Instead of feeling persecuted by the other, full of hopes and fears, everything is the radiance of Tara. However it arises, in ordinary terms of good or bad, whether you get what you want or not, this is the display of Tara. In relation to the *Four Immeasurables* that we looked at earlier, the fourth level, equanimity, is manifested *through* the identification with the deity who is arising moment-by-moment from emptiness. This is why in mahamudra tradition they talk about *ro chig*, which means 'one taste'. When you see that everything arises from emptiness you see that its basic nature is empty. It can be like 'this' or 'that' but basically it is like a milkshake which is milk with some flavour put in it --but it's milk. There are many different flavours but actually it's milk. That is what *ro chig* is; basically it's empty, that is the main taste, but some flavours are put on top.

### Not Nothing At All

---

The central view of the Buddha is the middle way which means avoiding extremes. Therefore, when we say that everything is like an illusion, it doesn't mean that it's nothing at all, that you can just blow it all away. Things have a nature like an illusion but they have their particular qualities: if you bang your head on a wall it will be sore because the bone of your head and the solidity of the wall will meet together. We need to take their qualities seriously, it's not that you should be able to put your head through a wall like you may imagine a great saint to be able to do. Things do have their qualities.

There is a story from the hindu tradition which illustrates this. It is about Shankaracarya who was a great teacher of the advaita or the non-dual tradition, according to his commentaries on the Upanishads. At that time Shankaracarya was wandering as a sadhu in India. He would go from one royal court to another in order to teach what he believed in, a new formulation of traditional hinduism. He would confront the existing views of the Brahmins and philosophers in each court he visited, and because he was very intelligent and very good at debating he was always victorious. Due to this, many people hated him because this was *their* job and they wanted to protect their own favour with the king.

One time Shankaracarya was in a small town and he went and debated with the Brahmins there. He was victorious and the king said, "You are wonderful and I would like you to be my court philosopher. Clearly these other people do not understand anything." The other Brahmins got very upset about this and the next morning when Shankaracarya was walking towards the court to receive his proper title they let loose an elephant. They had put lots of pepper up its nose and so it was running wildly down the street. Shankaracarya saw the elephant and ran away, and many hours later, very sweaty and tired and covered in dust he arrived back at the palace. The Brahmins say, "Ha! look at this man! He says that everything is an illusion, not real, but when he sees the elephant he runs away!" And Shankaracarya says, "Brothers, the elephant is not real, and running away is not real." We should always remember that things have their particular qualities and there is no test to emptiness because emptiness is in everything – there is no limit." Just because you hit something it doesn't mean it's solid and therefore 'real' and not empty. Emptiness as the ground of everything is not just the ground of these five skandhas but also of the five elements. The earth element has the quality of stability, density, toughness and it resists invasion. When that energy is encountered it shows those qualities but its nature is empty.

### Questions and Answers

---

James invited participants to take some time to speak with a neighbour to see if what was being discussed spoke to their own actual lived experience. Questions and experiences were then shared.

**Participant:** Is there any structure or is structure relational.

**James:** What do you think?

**Participant:** relational

**James:** But presumably relational according to the qualities of the things that are in relation. For example, in having a body there a certain things the body can do but other things it can't do. That is to say, the structure of embodiment comes about through the nature of joints and so on, and that influences how we experience the world. However, it is not a kind of 'from the beginning absolute determinant of things', it is a circumstantial contingent structuring, so in that sense it is relational.

However, the word 'relationship' is quite a difficult one in this context because as we have been discussing there are no things. What do we mean by a relationship? If we say that John and Mary are in a relationship and there is no John-ness to John and no Mary-ness to Mary then what is going on? Of course that is one of the reasons that relationships are very difficult because if we knew exactly who John was and exactly who Mary was they could maybe work it out. But they are being influenced and transformed by lots of things, by their childhood, by the health of their parents, by what happens at work and so on. So when John and Mary come home and meet each other again after the day, they are not the same John and Mary that went out in the morning. Rather, in a sense, each person in particular, but also all phenomena, is a kind of nexus, a meeting point and a distribution point. That is to say, causes are also effects of prior causes, so lots of effects come together and lead to us arising as this. But then because we arise like this we impact the environment in a way that brings about responses to us which then alter how we are. There is a tumbling and moving together. Would that fit with your experience?

The project that many people set themselves to find out who they really are on the level of manifestation is ridiculous because it will never come to an end. That is why in dharma we say the answer does not lie in the object; the answer does not lie in the thought or feeling or the sensation because these will always change. Rather, who is the one who is having the experience? The continuity of presence reveals the discontinuity of the moments of experience. But the false or the pseudo continuity of objects leads us to feel confused about what is going on because actually objects are not continuous. They are only continuous on the level of an abstraction. For example, you buy some apples and potatoes. You keep the potatoes and you think, "Thank god I've got potatoes in the house." Then later you go to get them out of the cupboard and out of the potatoes little eyes are coming, because the potatoes have a life of their own. Just because you bought them it doesn't mean that you control what they are. The potatoes want to get planted and grow and multiply, they don't want to be chopped up and be fried and boiled. You keep the apples and they rot – that is what happens. You have children and they grow up. They like you or they don't like you but anyway they want to go off and have their own life, and so what was your life is now something else. So much of our existence is like that. When we realise this, we see that actually we don't own or possess anything. You have your favourite shirt which you wear a lot and it gets worn out. If you kept it in the draw it wouldn't be much use as a shirt. By the time you decide, "No I really have to wear it," it is ten years later and

you have become a little fatter and the shirt doesn't fit. Life is dynamic movement. Life is only real if you are there. If you are not there you are not getting it.

For example, many years ago when I came back from India, for a brief time I was in London with a friend who wanted to sell some tribal jewellery from Afghanistan and so we went down New Bond Street where there were many jewellers' shops. We were looking in the window of one shop and there were many diamonds necklaces, rings and beautiful things. The sun was shining in the window and so the diamonds were sparkling, and we just stood there drinking in diamonds, and we really got what diamonds are. Now if we had managed to buy one of these necklaces, especially with going back to live in India, we would have had to hide it otherwise it would be stolen. So you take your beautiful diamond necklace, you put it in a box and put the box in a safe in the bank to keep it safe. You are now an *owner* of a diamond necklace but you don't see it and you don't wear it. But in the shop window, it is there and you can look at it for free. That is to say, the experience is what gives you whatever it is – to own things in theory is what?

One of the functions of emptiness, then, is to turn us away from a conceptual relationship with the world, to a direct unmediated relationship with the world. The world is participation. It is being there in the moment, whatever it is, fully present, because that is the most you ever get. Being up in your head and thinking about things can create a seeming continuity, a seeming stability, but actually life is passing by, life is just a stream tumbling along.

**Participant:** If I can stay present with the lighter things it will become easier to stay present with the heavier things?

**James:** Yes. Then it won't just be an idea that all phenomena are impermanent and empty. If you have observed on a day-to-day basis the nature of your experience, you will know just directly that it changes – it always changes. The morning has gone, lunch has gone, the light is changing now, the seasons are changing and so on. If we are in touch with how we are part of the flow of time, that we are not standing on the bank of the river but are in the river with everything else, everything is flowing together, flowing and tumbling and moving together. If we are with this all the time then we see that 'this' is going and 'that' is going; context is changing and 'self' is changing. Who is the one that is aware context is changing, self is changing? That does not change; that is continuous presence. Who is the one who is eating the apple? Who is the one who is walking? Who is the one who is talking? We become aware that there is an arising and

that the arising is a movement in spaciousness. We become more confident and more relaxed that this spaciousness is our nature and that the arisings are temporary. However, as long as we are intoxicated by the movement of subject and object we lose the ground of presence. Later will come on to look at Garab Dorje's instruction on this and it should become clearer.

## **Wisdom and Compassion – The Two Wings of A Bird**

---

In relation to emptiness I will say a little about compassion. In the mahayana tradition wisdom and compassion are seen as moving together like the two wings of a bird. If we have too much emptiness we can become indifferent as if everything is equal. Compassion draws us towards a resonance with the pain of others, but of course, if you go too far to that extreme and become very involved in the pain of others it becomes so real that you lose any spaciousness. Thus, the middle way is wisdom and compassion.

We recognise we can try to help beings, we can do our best for them but fundamentally each person walks alone, each carrying the burden of their own habits, karmic luck and so on. Each person alone on their own meditation cushion can recognise the nature of their mind. You can go to see the highest lamas, you can get initiations and blessings and so on. But nobody can give you your enlightenment, nobody can give you your awakening. Thus, compassion, from that point of view, on a relative level, is to be helpful to others without trying to rescue them, to nurture them and to give them more resources but also to keep them in contact with reality.

Reality is often painful. Our lives may not be the way we want them to be but that is how they are. Compassion is concerned with resourcing us to be with our lives as they are, and not to create some fantasy of "There, there, it will get better". Comfort of this kind is usually not very helpful; it is a pseudo compassion that tries to put a sweetness onto things. But if they are rotten underneath it is better to stay with what is painful. For example, if somebody has a broken heart and you say, "Oh, there are other fish in the sea. There are plenty of women wandering around, don't you worry," that doesn't mean anything. It may be true but it is not the time to say it. The time is "Yes, Life is shit". "Life is shit" is compassionate because you enter into the experience of that person. There is nothing else to say. It is a lonely place to feel abandoned and bereft. If the other person can just be in that state and say, "yeah, that's shit," they are making a connection, and from the dharma point of view compassion is primarily connection.

Wisdom and compassion are similar in that they are both connected: wisdom connects us to the ground of everything and to the emergence of everything, and compassion links us with our heart, to the state of all other beings. Compassion supports wisdom in that it helps us appreciate that we are not alone. When we live in ourselves as ourselves all our egotistical fantasies, which can be hellish or heroic, they can have many different flavours, are very self-referential. But when we reach out and make real contact with someone else we start to realise similarities. Thus, we say as in the prayer we looked at earlier: *“May all sentient beings be happy,”* or as Jesus said, *“If you do this to any of these people you do it to me, because I am not separate from everyone. Don’t make me special, helping the beggar in the street is the same as helping me.”*

What does it mean to help another person? There are many different levels to this. Clearly if somebody is hungry, feeding them is the most important thing. However, the food will be digested and then excreted and then they will become hungry again. Therefore, clearly, helping people to stand on their own two feet and take care of their lives is important. If you want to help people in terms of spiritual awakening should you give them a dharma book? Is that helpful? Maybe, if they are interested. If they are not, it is just another bit of junk and they throw it in the rubbish. How would you help someone see something? The first instance is to model it by showing with your own energetic state that you are relaxed, calm, open and available. That can be felt whatever cognitive structure the person has. The person may say, “I am not interested in any of that. I am tired of it. Years ago I went to a meditation group and it was rubbish and I don’t want anything to do with it!” You can just sit and have a coffee with them and chat but your mood can bring something into the interactive field that allows a reconfiguration.

Compassion is very important but generally speaking we see compassion as secondary, not secondary in importance but secondary in the sense that the basis of compassion is wisdom. Developing compassion can be a way to deepen your wisdom and in that sense they are mutually reinforcing. However, the very basis of compassion is wisdom, seeing emptiness. When you realise that your own nature is not solid, not substantial, you start to see the basis of the suffering of others. You can see that they are self-absorbed, neurotic, that they are turning patterns and procedures around inside themselves again and again, that they themselves are their own enemy, they themselves are the ones who are locking themselves in. As it says in one of the verses of the ***Dharmapada***, an early buddhist text filled with sayings from the Buddha: *“Not father, not mother, not brother, not sister, not friend, not enemy, no-one can help you more than yourself.”*

*Not father, not mother, not brother, not sister, not friend, not enemy, nobody can harm you more than yourself.*” So what does compassion mean? Clearly it cannot mean rescuing people because if we could help people more than they could help themselves that is what we should do. If the real work is about awakening, people have to do that themselves.

Because our world is dynamic, compassion is a gesture of contact. The idea that you could put your arms around someone and rescue them and make them safe forever is an illusion. This is the fairy tale that we tell children, but it’s not like that in real life. One of the things which is very persecutory for carers, people who care for ageing parents or relatives or children with problems, is the idea that they should be nice all of the time. If you are looking after someone with Alzheimer’s it is very annoying and very frustrating and you have to manage your own emotions again and again. The idea that somehow you should be able to produce compassion like producing orange juice by squeezing oranges is insane. I remember one of my therapy tutors said that when people went to him for therapy they paid for his time, and that the love came free or not. He could guarantee he would give fifty minutes a week, but could not guarantee that he’d like them or be able to respond to them. The only thing he could guarantee was something external – internal was the luck of the draw. That was very honest.

Compassion, then, is quite a complex issue. We can do our best, we can develop good intentions but sometimes we click with people and sometimes we don’t. There is a well known buddhist formulation which says that friends become enemies and enemies become friends. The luck, the patterning, in Tibetan it is called *tendrel* which means ‘linking’ or is as a key in a lock that fits. However, we don’t know how long that is going to last for. When we are born in this world we don’t know how long it will be until we die. Some people have long lives but are physically sick, some people have long lives and lose their mind due to Alzheimer’s, some people are very healthy but die when they are five in a car crash. Therefore, from this dharma point of view, of recognising one’s own emptiness, the un-fixed, un-secured dimension, compassion is to stay present with that, which allows us to make a connection in the moment, in each situation, not too strongly and not too weak. It is not that we are the servant of all beings because beings are often lost. It is also that we are not the master of all beings because that would be dangerous as we are often lost too. It is about going back into the practice and going out, going back into the practice and coming out – again and again.

## Questions and Answers

---

Are there any thoughts about that. Does that ring with your own experience in some way?

**Participant:** I have a question about the difference between wisdom and compassion. The question is, when we speak of the mirror which is only showing what is going on, so that the mirror is reflecting bad things and good things, I came to the idea that I can do what I want and then I accept the bad consequences, the karmic consequences. But now it seems to me this mirroring has an inner quality, an ethical quality. I cannot see only the aspect of wisdom but another aspect which is grounded in my heart, of compassion. Must not the heart also have the same ground.

**James:** Indeed..

**Participant continues:** There is for me now, one ground and both aspects are the same thing in different views..

**James:** Absolutely, but I think if the heart is connected with our basic spaciousness, certain coverings around the heart fall off, including sentimentality. Sentimentality is the idea of being nice or of being touched. When the heart is open and the awareness is present, you *feel* the situation as it is and you come into it bringing whatever your resources are. However, niceness and etiquette and all of these formalities are an obscuration to real compassion.

For example, I used to work a lot with troubled adolescents and they were cheated in many ways. In children's homes sometimes they were abused but often they were abandoned because their behaviour was so bad it was very difficult to stay with them. It is very difficult to think how you would help a person in such a situation. However you often hear people who have been in a home when they were younger saying that the most helpful thing they experienced was somebody saying, "Do that again and we will go out in the garden and I will kick your ass. You cannot fuck with me in this way!" When the young person hits the wall of someone being there and saying, "I am real and I exist, and you exist, there are two of us here. I am not your mother and I am not your father I am me," then they become real because someone is real with them.

That is to say, you can abandon people by being too frightened of them or too sweet to them. Instead to say, "Hello I am here, where are you?" is a very compassionate thing to do. But the

heart has to be very courageous to say that. Nowadays in Britain we have a fear culture, so many of the patients are abandoned because nobody wants to tell the truth. If you are worried about the inspectors coming round and accusing you of abusing and shouting at a child, as kids can always make complaints, you are never going to speak. To say to an adult patient: *"You are an arse hole. Look at you, what do you do? You live all your life on benefits and you come to the hospital and you complain about the service you get from me. What have you done for anyone?"* How can you speak to me like that? *"I pay my taxes, you don't pay yours. I am paying for you. I am your therapist and I am telling you, you are an arse hole. Now what? What are you doing with your human life? You are useless...were you born useless?"* No! *"Well get your life together, that is why you are here! Now pay attention."* That is real but who is going to say that unless they are ready to retire. I think it is absolutely real that a connective compassion is absolutely naked. There are many stories of zen masters and yogis in Tibet and their activities which were like that, saying what cannot be said. But by saying it something happens.

## Seeing Your Own Face

---

We have looked a little at how impermanence and emptiness indicate the dynamic nature of our experience. We find ourselves living in a state of flow, where self and other arise together moment-by-moment in a situation which cannot be stabilised by controlling it from the outside because we are inside it. Therefore, the best way to find a way forward is through open participation which requires us to be as present as possible. We also started to look at what gets in the way of this open participation. Generally speaking this is described as attachment, attachment to constructs about who we are so that we have a sense of our identity, a sense of who we are and where we are in the world. This has been constructed through our own efforts and through the influence of people around us, teachers, parents, friends at school, work colleagues and so on. We are constantly getting feedback about who we are and what we do and we become certain that this is indeed our identity.

Most of us respond quite quickly if somebody calls our name as our name seems to define us. In the world everything has a name which signifies a permanent, enduring identity. There is an entity which is there, moving in time and which can be referred to in the same way. For example, here we have Kamalashila. It has been here for some years and it will probably be here for some more years and if we use the word Kamalashila we all know what we are talking about. If we

refer to someone by their name, for example Eva, then we have a sense of who this is, and our own memories and associations about Eva are brought to the surface by the use of that name. This is the ordinary sense of identity that we have in samsara.

However, in the dzogchen tradition there is a practice of coming to see what our true identity is. In Tibetan it is called *ngo tro*. *Ngo* means face or nature and *tro* means to show. This is sometimes this is called pointing out. Of course, we can point out the statue of the Buddha in the hall or we can point out where the door and the fire exit are, and it is very important to know where the door is. Here we are pointing out some-thing. We are used to having things pointed out to us. In school teachers are constantly pointing out how to do something or where you made a mistake. But here, what is being pointed out is not an object. So how would you look at something which is not going to appear to you as an object. This is the central part of this experience: to relax and find oneself in a state of something. That is to say, we can find ourselves in a state of relaxation, in a state of openness, but we can't necessarily say what that is. Words are used but also our meditation practice together is used to give the sense of what this state is.

### Pure, Naked and Raw

---

Some of the language that is used in Tibetan is quite mentalistic. We talk about the nature of the mind, yet this is not mind as a kind of brain function; it is not mind as a set of cognitions whereby one is making sense of things. Mind here means the basic noetic capacity, gnosis in the sense of wisdom or Sophia. It is a capacity of knowledge, the root of being able to know about things, but it is a state which reveals things, the quality of being alive and registering experience. For example, the illuminating capacity of the mirror has to be there prior to something being placed in front of the mirror. If I hold up my hand you won't see your face in it because my hand doesn't have that illuminating capacity, but the mirror does. Its brilliance, its capacity to show, is seen as a symbol or a metaphor for the way in which our presence or our mind or our clarity reveals what is there.

This nature, our own nature has been there from the very beginning. That is to say, it is not built up by particular kinds of practices, it is not brought into being on the basis of cause and effect. It stands outside time. Clearly, if we are connecting here together we are connecting through the English language and we have learnt this language. It wasn't there from the very beginning but is a developed capacity, it arises due to causes and circumstances. But the mind itself is there from

the very beginning. It is described as pure from the very beginning. Pure here means that it is not influenced by anything at all. It does not stand in relation to anything. It is not dependent on anything for its support and it is also not potentially vulnerable to the impact of anything else.

In this ordinary domain of relative truth everything is linked together, everything stands in relation to everything else. Situations which seem very stable, very settled, are somehow suddenly revealed as very vulnerable. The recent economic crisis had economic houses with high reputation which had been running for over a hundred years, employing thousands of people, having access to billions and trillions of dollars, suddenly finding themselves crumbling so that all that is left is the name. A few years earlier this would have been impossible to imagine. The market was rising, the partners in these companies were becoming billionaires; they had yachts and fancy condos in New York and so on. But the structure in which they operated has gone. It is the same for many, many things. If you think of dharma in Tibet, it was there for over a thousand years and then – gone. Situations arise and pass. This is what we experience because each thing is dependent on other things like a house of cards. If the situation was stable it would remain like that. This is what it means to be in relative truth. You have no security because you cannot put a wall around your own existence. The factors which could disturb you are not outside, they are already inside you, just as we each have death inside our body already. The organs which keep us alive, as they become tired are the basic causes of our own death. Death is not some skeleton with a big scythe going to cut us down, it is already moving inside us; life and death are born together.

Thus, when it says that the mind is *kadag* or pure from the very beginning it means that its nature is emptiness. It does not stand in relation to anything. It is infinite, and because it is infinite it is pervasive in all directions and nothing stands in relation to it. Everything that we see, hear, touch, experience is inside this state, and so these are the movements of the energy or the display of *kadag*. But *kadag* is not compromised by them. *Kadag* or natural purity reveals everything, the way the mirror shows everything, but it is not conditioned by the arising just as the mirror is not transformed or changed by the kind of reflection that arises inside it.

**Participant:** could you say that this mind is existent or a concept which is beyond?

**James:** It depends on what existence means for you. If you are trained in buddhist philosophy you'd have to say it is neither existent or non-existent. But in ordinary terms you have it, but you

don't have it like you have a nose. Thus, it exists in you and as you. In Tibetan it is often described as *rangjung*. *Jung wa* means to exist or to become or to arise, and *rang* means self. So it means it is self-existing. But it is not existing in the way a watch exists, so one has to be careful because language is like a colonialist power. Language will actually eat up the world and devour it, so if you are not careful in trying to make sense of these things you find you have destroyed the very thing you catch.

**Participant:** so from the point of view of relative truth it's not...

**James:** ... it's not a thing, no. It is not an entity but it is always there. It is primordial, it is there from the very beginning but it is beyond categorisation. When you start to experience it yourself it is there but what it is? We could say, on a clear day looking into the sky, out in to infinite space, does space exist or not? We can see the sun, the moon, the planets, they seem to exist but does space exist? Space is the situation or the environment within which they manifest but how would you catch the space, what could you say about it? It is undeniably there and yet you cannot really say anything about it. Space is one of the metaphors used to describe this.

Our own nature is also naked. Naked means it is not covered over by anything. We cover our body with clothes and clothes have many functions: they protect against shame, they act as a social signifier of status or function in the world and so on. That is to say, they are a way of communicating something about ourselves to other people. However, the mind is naked. It has no need to announce itself. Whether you are aware of your own nature or not doesn't matter. When you are young you don't have to take much care of your body but as you get older you start to think, "Oh, we are now in the period of preservation," so keeping it together becomes very important. But you don't need to preserve your mind because the mind is not created and it won't be destroyed. The Buddha said on many occasions that all created things will cease. If something has a beginning it will have an end. But awareness itself has no beginning and so it has no end. Because of that it is just present by itself and does not need anything added to it. We say it is empty but it is not empty in the way we sometimes feel empty and might think we need some chocolate; chocolate is the antidote to my feeling of emptiness, whether the emptiness of my stomach or of my heart. But the emptiness of the mind is not that kind of emptiness. It is just open.

So when we sit in the meditation we are just open. When thoughts come and we get pulled towards them, fascinated by them, that is another kind of emptiness. That is the emptiness of desire, of wanting: "If I had that I would be better. This would give me something." The one who is looking for the object is not the mind itself. It is the constellation of energy, the nexus of the movement of identification which we call our ego or 'ourself', and it is always looking for something else because it is built up and its situation is vulnerable.

The mind is also described as being raw; it is not cooked, it is not prepared. It is without any addition to itself. When we cook things we turn, as it were, nature into culture. We add spices, oils and so on. In this state it is just as it is. It has on one level nothing to do. It is indifferent, it doesn't care, and in that sense it is beyond compassion. It is hospitable to everything; because the nature of our mind is infinite it welcomes all things without bias. It is not privileging one aspect or another. It doesn't say good people are welcome and bad people are not. It doesn't say tall people are welcome and short people are not or vice-versa.

This infinite mind is also not stained by anything. If you have a lovely flat with a beautiful white wool carpet and you decide to have a party and choose to offer your guests red wine, you are likely to become a little anxious because after one or two or three glasses of red wine their hands start to move and you are worried about your carpet. That is to say, it is relative, it can be stained by the wine. The mind however is not stained: when a bad thought arises in your mind, who is the one who is anxious? Not awareness, not the mind itself, but an agitation.

If we really can see the unborn nature of the mind, that it has not come into existence as an entity, that it is not a thing, then no matter what thoughts arise we can just let them be as they are. When you find yourself being involved with thoughts, this is energy chasing energy. Energy will always chase energy. It is not that you can stop it happening but when energy chases energy there is a forgetfulness of the environment. Just as when children become very excited when they start playing, banging things and making lots of noise. The parent may say, "Eh, where are you, look there are other people here, be quiet." That is to say, our excitement, the very brilliance of our nature is the nature of ignorance. Ignorance is not caused by some big dark devil coming in and putting a spell over us. Ignorance is to be deluded by the brightness of our own mind, our own creativity, our own capacity to fabricate stories, wonderful worlds of illusion which we then fall in love with and believe are true. What disguises our own nature is the very brilliance of our own nature. It is not a Manichean vision of primary duality between light and dark; it is not

talking about heaven and hell as primary oppositions. This is a non-dual experience in which, as we touched on earlier, there is one ground and two paths.

The one ground is this natural open state out of which come two paths. One is recognising or being present with how things are, the quality of natural integration, and the other path is to be in forgetfulness. Why are we forgetful? Because we are busy with something else – that is all. And what are we busy with? Something we were thinking about. *“Why didn’t do your homework?” “Well, I started doing this drawing and it was very nice.” “Yes, but that is not for tomorrow.” “Yes, but it is very interesting.”* There is nothing wrong with the child doing the drawing but the world says, “Do your homework.” Fascination and absorption is the product of one’s own mind. Children sit in class daydreaming. We say, *“Hey, where are you?” “Just dreaming...thinking about something else.” “Well, don’t think about something else, think about what I’m telling you. I am the teacher, you need to learn this.”* We say the child is distracted but the child is simply mesmerised by their own intelligence. This very creativity is the nature of samsara. What are you attached to? Something which is not truly real. What do you think it is? Something which is truly real. Believing this building is real, that motorcars are real, that apples are real is an act of creativity, an act of the imagination. The imagination is simply to create images which one takes as real, just as we talked earlier about theatre. The mind itself allows all these theatres and the one ground says: *“You can be aware of the stage, you can know this is a theatre or you can fall into the play. If you fall into the play, this is samsara.”*

### Perfect from the Beginning

---

Basically all the practices of dzogchen are learning to work with creativity. Creativity is described as *lhundrup*. *Lhun* means a heap or a mountain and *drup* means to be accomplished or made. Thus it means made instantly; it comes fully formed into life like Botticelli’s Birth of Venus when she rises out of the ocean on a shell. Moment-by-moment our experience is arising in the same way, out of the ocean of samsara in each moment, fully formed without existing in itself. Where has it come from? Out of emptiness. The ground nature *displays* these forms. So when you sit in the meditation many things are arising. If you think “I need to keep my mind calm and clear, these bloody thoughts keep annoying me,” you have not understood the meditation because then you are constantly struggling. Everything is welcome but not so important. A good host is friendly to all the guests. If you over fixate on one guest and you talk to them all evening the other people think, “Why did we bother coming?” The host has to be available. As the host or

hostess you open yourself and let everything come and go. You are connected but not invested. You are with it but not building up something. For when you invest in things you put part of yourself into the object which then becomes the site which is holding you. For example, if you like your friend a lot they become special and seem to hold part of your existence and so you want to hang out with them. If you are in a relationship and it breaks up, it is as if part of you has been torn out because you have put part of yourself into them.

One of the key aspects of buddhism is to learn how to divest, to take back what has been put out. For example, if you are doing tantric meditation practice you visualise a whole mandala and at the end you dissolve it back into nothing. You spend a long making it so it was all there, and then you dissolve it. Or, as with the buddhist monks who travel around the world making large sand mandalas, they spend many days making them and then for a day or so it is open for all to come to see, and then they take it to the river and throw it in...and it's gone. It is only sand; it is we ourselves that make it special – but there is nothing special. There is a zen story about a monk who had been meditating for many years without any success, trying to understand the nature of emptiness. He got very tired so he went to the market and thought, *“Anyway, I will have a good lunch.”* So he went to the butcher and he said, *“Give me your best cut of meat.”* And the butcher said, *“Every cut is the best cut, I am a good butcher!”* And he thought, *“Oh, yeah – it is all the best. If it is all the best what is this, chop, chop, chop, discrimination about?”* It is all the best. Thus, in dzogchen we have the name of the primordial Buddha, Kuntu Zangpo. *Kuntu* means ‘always already’, ‘unchanging’, and *zangpo* means ‘good’. That is, it is always the best or naturally perfected or perfected from the very beginning – there is nothing to be done.

This means that discrimination, knowing that something is good or bad, is true but only true in relation to other things; it is not true in and of itself. It is an opinion, and an opinion is important because it is a gesture that each of us makes about things. We all have political opinions or opinions about sport or cooking or art and so on. These are manifestations of our own individual energy in the world. They reveal something about ourselves but they don't tell us anything very much about the world. We keep thinking that we are in touch with how things are, but no, we just show our relational world. All we have is our particular slice or cut of the world, which is why meeting together and collaborating is very important because then we see someone else has different slice of the world. Therefore, if you are open you can start to see: *“Mmm ... how come I think this is very important and they don't? How come they think that is very important and I*

*don't? Maybe I am making this important, maybe I am doing this to me. It is 'my' opinion, my take, my taste, my mood. It is the quality of my energy that is revealed to me but I am taking it as a fact, as something definite and defined in the world. Because of that I get paralysed because I am giving it too much status, I am investing it with too much reality and importance."*

The more we see, "Oh, this is just my opinion..." then we can start to be more playful – it is just the imagination. This is why in dzogchen they say that from the very beginning there has only existed one letter, Aa. The letter Aa means emptiness. Everything is empty, everything is an illusion, and because it's an illusion it is both there and not there. It is important interactionally but it has no true status.

### Three Dimensions: openness, immediacy, particularity

---

Our nature from the very beginning is open, beyond definition, absolute infinite freedom, beyond being captured by any thought or concept or moment. It offers an infinite hospitality to everything that arises. Thus, we have always in front of us and as us, in this ticle or sphere of experience which includes everything, because there is no duality between subject and object, a presence with others, and there is always incredible richness in that. For when we look around this room we see many different kinds of people, we see different expressions on their faces and so on. The world is not one thing, you cannot homogenise it the way milk is put together; you cannot make it all the same. It is not equal opportunity it is diverse.

This diversity is the richness of what is called the *sambhogakaya*. Sambhogakaya is full of many rainbows and colours. This is why in the paintings of buddhas there is nothing but rainbows. The rainbows just mean that there is a lot going on: the five elements, the five wisdoms – it means you can't nail it down and put it in a box. This realm is revealed through being there; if you are there it is there. If you are not there it is not there – it's just like that. That is the only key you need.

From that state of sitting and being open, we start to move into the world. This is the third dimension. For example, when you are doing the practice, if you are just in the natural state and you find yourself coming out, moving out, in that you are sitting and then your arm moves, where is your arm moving? The question is are you coming out of the meditation or is the state of meditation hospitable enough to welcome the gesture? In getting up and making a cup of tea, having a pea, and then the telephone rings and you start to talk to someone, you are hearing a

sound, there is a reply, and all of this is in the unbroken circle inside the great tige. But of course, if we think, “Oh, the meditation has finished, God I better get on with things,” then there is a disruption; it is you yourself are making these two categories.

Thus, this third dimension is the movement of energy out into the world, and it is always particular. Unless you have very ritualised existence it will always be particular. That is to say, every time you go to make a cup of coffee, although you may do it roughly in the same way, something will be slightly different. You go to put the spoon in the coffee and you suddenly see the spoon is a bit wet, so you get the towel and dry the spoon. Last time the spoon was dry and so you didn't have to do that. The world will influence what we do, and so we cannot know how to be in the world, because we do not know what the world is going to be.

If you are doing a tantric ritual, which is primarily in the house of the sambhogakaya, you can learn when to chant, how to ring the bell and so on, because this is a domain of absolute prediction, every time it can be the same. In fact, in the monastery you get trouble if you don't do it the same because it should be exactly right. However, ordinary life is not like that; ordinary life is interrupted. The trajectory of our desire is interrupted and so we are constantly confronted with the choice: what is more important, relatedness and participation or the maintenance of our own sense of what is important? If you want to stay connected you will have to be fluid. If you want to be yourself you will have to manage other people, pulling them in and pushing them away. From the point of view of dzogchen connection and participation is a main point. This means being able to stay present with things in the face of feelings of like, dislike and so on, because the flow of experience is unbroken. Our being in the world is just tumbling along, this way and that, things are always happening. Again, the Tibetan term for this *rang wa* which means to fall as a waterfall descends; if you go into the countryside and see a big waterfall the water is just tumbling down.

If you work in an office you can have your diary and agenda for the day but the telephone rings and something has gone wrong, perhaps someone has forgotten to do something, and that is how it is. Or you ask someone to do a final bit of work on your project and by the time the finished document comes back, you think, “Fuck, they have written all over it, and I only asked them to do this bit... Aah, now what” – but it is too late – “Oh well...” There, then, is your investment: I know how it had to be. It was mine and they have done something to my work. This happens a lot in life. Is it important? Probably not. What do we own in this life? Do we own our body? Do we

decide if we need to wear glasses or not? Do we decide if the arches in our feet are going to collapse or not? Some people get varicose veins some people don't. Some people get back problems, some people don't. Some people get heart disorders, some not. Do they decide? We don't own our body. You can try to take care of it but stuff is always happening inside and stuff is always happening outside.

These are the three inseparable dimensions of our existence: openness, the immediacy of the richness of experience, and the particularity of energy as it moves in the flow of subject and object moment-by-moment. Thus, the purpose of our meditation practice is in the first case to awaken to the open dimension of our being because it is this which has been hidden from us by the very busyness of our own minds. We are ignorant of it.

This word ignorance can be a bit of an insulting word. If you say to someone, "Oh, you are ignorant," they don't like that very much. But actually it is a functioning term; it means not looking, ignoring. As an activity, it doesn't make you stupid if you are ignoring something because you might be fascinated by something else. For example, you could be busy in the kitchen happily cooking and someone says, "Ah, there is a beautiful sky outside, come and see it," and you say, "No, I am happy doing this, I am happy to ignore that because I am doing this." That is to say, you cannot see everything all the time. So, ignoring in that sense is just the turning of attention.

Therefore, from the point of view of dzogchen samsara is not a bad place, it is not a mistake, it is not a punishment, it is not the result of bad karma, it is what is caused by ignoring one dimension of our experience and over-privileging other dimensions so that they appear to be all that there is. Thus, the function of the meditation is to integrate, or bring together, find ourselves in a state in which these three domains are ceaselessly together and connected. But, of course, moment-by-moment we will be pulsing more towards one than towards another, which is why maintaining some meditation practice is very important so that we relax. But the more confident we are in the capacity to integrate we can do shorter and shorter periods of practice. For example, if you are at work and someone is talking with you in a meeting, you can take thirty seconds and relax into the out breath, and then you are back in the conversation. Then there is space, and there is the intensity of what the person is saying, and you feel all their nervousness and the sense that it is very important, but the hook of mutual agitation is dropped. In contact with the open ground, the spaciousness, you can see that it is important for them, and you can work with them and treat

what they are saying as important but it is not so important for you. They are upset but you don't have to be upset just because they are.

Exhaling is a way of releasing what is building up inside. Again, for example, if you have to be with people who are difficult, it is very important to keep seeing them where they are. Good people develop a lot of empathy and so the heart opens and is like a bridge; it goes out and connects with other people. But all sorts of things can go across the bridge; some people can feel very toxic and it can be like nuclear waste crossing the bridge. Therefore, having that bridge is not necessarily so useful. There is a time to blow up the bridge and just see the person where they are, "Oh, yeah, *you* are having a bad time – that is you, not me." There is a time to build a bridge and connect, because the person is isolated and needs to be welcomed into the world and that is what they really need, but if someone is just wanting to dump their shit on you, blow up the bridge: *"I can see you are having a bad time, what do you want to do about it. I don't want to do anything about your bad time, in fact the main thing I want to do about it is to avoid any contact with it. So if you want contact with me getting out of your bad time would be a good idea. So why don't you go for a walk and when you feel more human come back and we will have a cup of tea."*

It is about finding the middle way. We are not saying, because everything is an illusion, what you feel is irrelevant. We are saying, "What you feel, feels very real for you and if it is overwhelming you. The best thing I can help you to do is to relax and experience this other open dimension of your life which will recontextualise who you are. What has happened is that you have fallen into this one small experience and it seems like that is now all there is."

This, then, is a practice which is not visible in the world; there is nothing external to be seen about it, as it is very subtle and very simple. Because it is simple it is easy to do. Because it is subtle it is easy to miss.

## Reflecting On Some Traditional Texts

---

### Chetsangpa: "How the Ground Abides"

---

What I will now do is read some excerpts, some verses, from a few traditional texts so that you can see what the great teachers have to say. We can do some more meditation practice around

this in order to gain some experience of what is being said. These following verses are from a text called *The Expansive Oral Instruction of the Precious Dharma Master, Chetsangpa Ratna Sri Boddhi*, which can be found in the book ***Simply Being***. In the section of the text where Chetsangpa introduces the nature of the mind, he says of the ground:

*Firstly to consider how the ground abides. The natural condition of one's own mind is primordial, uncontrived and effortlessly arising. It is not made by the meditation of the buddha's and it is not affected by the stupidity of sentient beings. Minds original nature does not depend on causes and conditions. It is void without inherent self-substance and is free of all conceptual elaboration. Conceptual elaboration means thoughts upon thoughts, interpretations and so on. At the beginning, mind itself itself is without source and so is void. In the middle it is without resting place and so is void. At the end it has no destination and so is void. Minds essence cannot be grasped as this or that, and so it is void. It is without form and colour, and so is void. This voidness is not an empty annihilation, for minds natural clarity is pure and all pervading.*

*Mind is itself the maker of all samsara and nirvana. Never changing, it effortlessly arises. Everything possible appears but without inherent self-substance. Mind is profound, precise and beyond all measurement. It may seem to exist but it is actually void due to (the nature of) entities and signs. It may seem not to exist, yet it shows many illusory forms. Mind's original nature is beyond thought and it does not become an object of thought. It is impossible to say what it is like. Beyond thought it is inexpressible. It is not touched by any faults or good qualities whatsoever. Mind's original nature is not obscured by any good or bad karmic conditions. It is not stained by all the impurities of reliance on signs. None of the names of all the phenomena of samsara and nirvana cannot be applied to it.*

This is quite amazing; our own real nature is not a thing, which means we are not a thing. It means we have infinite freedom, that nothing can ever catch us. If you think about your fears, worries and anxieties: *"People won't like me because of this," "I don't like myself because of that," "If only things were better then my life would be better,"* and so on, all these constructions of worry and anxiety that we build up have no basis. When we experience directly this openness, we don't find it as some strong, solid rock. It is not like the gold bars in a Zürich bank. It is not something reliable, in that sense, because there is no one to rely on it. When you relax *into* it you are not standing in relationship to it, and it is infinite, you are infinite. As Namkhai Norbu says

again and again, “Do not limit yourself.” That doesn’t mean to pretend to be better than you are; when he says that he is not speaking to the ego self. The ego often needs to limit itself, but the mind’s nature is not conditioned.

This relates back to the issue of compassion, for if we do something wrong and it upsets someone else, of course it is helpful to apologise –but don’t take it too seriously. “I did that” What we do wrong will have an impact on other people and that should be acknowledged and taken care of, but if you do the second part and say, “Because I did this I know I am a bad person,” that is not helpful. Good things and bad things arise. Lamas do all kinds of nonsense. I don’t know any lama that does not do some funny business. There is plenty of bad gossip around because why would people not make mistakes? This is samsara, a world of turbulence and unpredictability. You can’t get it right because you don’t know what is going to happen. The fact of making mistakes doesn’t make people bad. Mistakes are on the domain of activity. Any good parent should know this: the child does something wrong and you say, “Sweet heart, I love you but when you do that kind of thing you cause trouble, you make me unhappy and you make difficulty for yourself. That is not a good thing to do.” That is to say, you speak to the action and you hold the being. It is the same here: our nature is pure but our activity, because it is in the turbulence of the world, will crash into situations.

The key thing is that the action does not define the source. In the good book it says, *“By their deeds you shall know them.”* People show themselves through their activity; don’t listen to what people say but watch what they do, and then you will find out who they really are. Buddhism would say, *“Yes, but what you will find out is the patterning of their associations, the patterning of their five skandhas, what you won’t find is their real nature.”* When we blame other people and we think they are really like that, all we are doing is further investing energy in a substantial notion of who we think people are – but from the very beginning everyone’s nature is pure. The problem is complex energy: knots in the energetic system in the body, so that people vibrate and get blinkered and full of pre-occupations and behave in bumpy ways that bang into other people. When somebody becomes caught up in something, a worry or an anxiety, their natural energy which could move in space is now concentrated. It is like if you were walking down a street of ordinary houses and you feel there is a bit of a wind. But then you turn the corner onto a street with very high buildings and suddenly it gets very cold because you are now in a wind tunnel, with the wind being forced down the street. When you are in a wind tunnel you know you need to be

in more space. In the same way, if you go solid into someone like that you are going to get hurt, and they will get hurt too.

Again, this doesn't mean that they are bad. From the very beginning their nature is pure but their activity is complex and so you need to be careful. Being careful is part of life. If we think, "*Oh, the mind is open so we can just be open and do as we please, everything is permitted,*" this would be a kind of madness. Thus, awareness is very open but our conduct or our behaviour has to be very precise, because we are moving into a changing world and we cannot rely on a belief that how things were yesterday will apply today. We have to look: how is this? This means to be fresh, to be connected, to be part of the world.

### Guru Yoga – Unifying with the lineage

---

Let us do again the guru yoga practice which is a way unifying ourselves with the lineage and gaining an experience of what we are reflecting on. From Kuntu Zangpo down through many, many yogis and meditators, this lineage has passed down to the present time. Therefore, when we see this white Aa in the rainbow ball in front of us, it represents the state of all these teachers and the natural condition of all beings, and our own natural condition. When we simply relax and open to that, we open ourselves into the same state, which is the luminosity of emptiness.

The Aa is the empty, ungraspable centre, and it is surrounded by rainbow light which is all the possibilities of manifestation. We integrate into that state and then sit relaxed. Thoughts, feelings, sensations and visual perceptions arise will then arise. You may hear something from outside, maybe church bells or cars or people talking – arising and passing. Without trying to make sense of the object or interpret what it is, just very gently allow the arisings to come and go. Whenever you find that your mind goes after an object and you seem to be caught up in it, just remember what we have been looking at earlier: the mind that go towards the object is itself a form of energy, 'I', 'me', 'myself'. We have taken this to be our core identity for a very long time, but it is the display of our core identity, it is not our core identity itself. Thus, when we find ourselves interested in a thought, getting tangled in something, thinking about a sound outside, this is energy moving after energy, this is a reflection chasing reflections. Just relax and let that happen. If you are invested, if energy gets too intense as the subject chasing the object, you will forget the ground. Just relax into the ground and don't interrupt what is going on, and you will be present with it and it will vanish. You will find that the thing you were thinking about has gone

but also the quality of 'this is me thinking about that' that also will go. Then something else occurs – and then something else. Just keep letting that go.

Remember it will always be easier to see your thought than to see yourself. In fact you will never see yourself, at least you will never see yourself the way you see a thought. You can see my hand as it is an object in the world, but the mind is not an object. To be in your own state is just to be there. It like the experience of being in your body when you are just as your body – it is not anything. Maybe you are walking and you find yourself in a very relaxed way or maybe you are gently dancing and there is just your body moving and you are not thinking about it, there is just that body. In that moment you don't have a body, you are your body but you don't know what your body is. That is still a slightly crude example, but it is a similar kind of thing – just be present in this open state, and if you get lost just release a long out breath and relax in that state, open and again continue.

**Question:** Question is not clear but is about how to deal with the body in the meditation. .

**James:** If you body is getting tense or your knees are sore you can move them. With this kind of meditation practice we are not holding ourselves together, we are not trying to stabilise the mind because the mind is not a thing. If you put a cup of tea in your hand and it is almost full you need to stabilise it otherwise it splashes everywhere. In the same way, if you think, "Oh, my god I have got to hold my mind together because it goes everywhere," there is a kind of nervous anxiety in that. The nature of the mind is infinite, so if you are sitting and you need to bend or stretch your leg then do that. Where are you stretching your leg? In your mind. You are not coming out of your mind. The movement of the body is just a movement of energy; the leg moves and then you are sitting there. If it gets very sore you can lie down. What is lying down? Manifest energy is always moving, so there is no correct way to sit. The main thing here is to be aware of your own capacity. If your knees get sore don't force them, just move. If you get into thinking, "Oh, I should be more able to do that," you are back in the realm of management, and here it is not about managing ourselves. It is not about producing anything but allowing yourself to trust this openness which is there from the very beginning. Therefore, it is a very big move away from our normal anxious sense of 'I have to be in control'.

[Period of the three Aa practice]

When we do this practice there is a tendency to find points of reference, a familiar position around which everything becomes connected, like the hub of a wheel so that all the spokes of experience are being linked back to that. For example, a point of reference could be our body. Our body has been our point of reference for a very long time. Indeed the sense of self develops around the felt sense of the body. When children are evolving they work out what is inside and what is outside, they touch themselves a lot and this becomes the site of knowing what is me and what is not me. Therefore in the meditation it is very easy to get into a situation where you feel *“I am meditating. I, my usual self am sitting here meditating. I am doing something, even if I am relaxing. The one who is performing this is my ordinary self located in my body.”* This is a fundamental limit to being able to open.

What we need to examine again and again are these points of reference that we come to. It could be a feeling in our body, it could be a pain, it could be the shape of our body, the sense of breathing, the memories of the body, and so on. Whatever you identify with in the meditation at that moment is always moving around; you cannot find it as a fixed definite entity. But there always seems to be some little site that is claiming that the boss is here, *“Don’t worry I’m in charge. This is mind and I am doing this.”* This is simply a communication, a communication of false information. It is not true. That is not our true nature. That is indeed the site of the functioning of our energy but it is not our true nature. So what it says is both true and not true at the same time. It is true that ‘I am here in the terms of an energetic emergence,’ but it is not true in that ‘this is my nature in terms of the open awareness’.

Whenever we find ourselves identifying with a particular point just stay present with that. Don’t try to change it, just be present and see what happens; you will find that the point moves. If the point was the real, stable, enduring site of yourself it would not shift. It claims to be eternal, but it is circumstantial, contingent, dependent on the moment. It is not anything; it is just like some little voice speaking in a telephone. It is very important to come back to this again and again.

### Thoughts and questions

---

**Participant:** My experience is those points of references are getting subtler. Sometimes it comes to a point where there is a kind of opening, but again I am going into it saying, “Oh, this is opening up.” So it is a very subtle movement and I find it very difficult, so I have to ask myself, “OK, I am again reifying something.”

**James:** That's right. When the commentary comes on: "This is what it is" it is saying "I speak the truth." But it is not speaking the truth it is just an old tape running.

**Same Participant:** and again and again it is falling back into this habit. It is something like a wobbling or opening up and falling back in. Does it get it more stable at some point?

**James:** I think the capacity to not believe the voice gets more stable, but all kinds of stuff arises, all kind of turbulence arises. If we try to be the gardener and remove the thoughts, the work will never end. Just stay with the ground and think, "Oh, this stuff comes and goes." It is about not being seduced by what arises. The thoughts that say, "Oh, this is it" or "This is good or bad" are a kind of metacognition, an over-arching cognition which claims authority but is just an empty signifier, just a word. But if we believe it then something starts to happen. It's like a confidence trickster.

**Participant:** The difficulty is to stay with this movement or ever-changing movement. What I mean is that my feeling is that during practice it is just movement but it is always something pulling back into some reification and it is a very subtle move, it is shifting from the side of openness, or from something being open and more clear, to something which is falling back from emptiness. That is my experience.

**James:** In dzogchen one of the very important ideas in meditation is the idea that we cheat ourselves. This is called *rang tsan* and it is a way in which exactly that happens. A message arises and you believe it. It seems to be true but it is not true, and in that moment you are cheated because it disrupts you and it takes you out. Therefore, what we have to learn is how we cheat ourselves. We cheat ourselves by believing that something is true when it is not true. Experientially, all of these thoughts we see are impermanent; they just arise and they pass by and they have no particular status. But they claim a status and we succumb to it. Of course, we are used to that; our daily life is concerned with believing that the thoughts in our mind are telling us the truth. They do tell us the truth about things in the world: if we see the carpet we can say, "Mainly this big carpet is red." That is a fact and everyone would agree with that. But the thought cannot tell you the truth about your mind. It is just as this text is saying, that the mind is ungraspable, never captured by any naming. Therefore, the name has to be false because the name is saying, "I can name the un-nameable." These thoughts have got your number, they know how to play you. So you need to be a bit more suspicious.

**Participant:** but the trick is letting go and it disappears.

**James:** Yes, because the real truth is emptiness but we want something. So when the thought comes ... it will come like a butterfly and then gone...

**Participant:** ...and awareness itself is equal everywhere, and when we focus on something, whatever, it is attention ... or thought ... what is it?

**James:** Well you can look for yourself. Out of the openness, attention is a form of energy isn't it? It is a connective energy. When you attend to something there is a flow of your life and this becomes what is real; it is the energy arising from awareness which has taken on this form. Now, you can be aware and attentive at the same time, but we are used to forgetting the openness and just going into the attention and then it becomes very solid. For example, if you look in a big art book often they show the picture and then they will have a detail, perhaps showing a curve of a finger or how a jewelled ring or some fabric is done. You look at the detail and it helps you to see the brush strokes, the way the paint is applied and so on, but that little detail has no meaning if it is not in the picture. The detail illuminates something but by itself it is just too much detail. You then see it in the whole picture and think, "Ah" and see how fantastically the whole thing is composed. Therefore, we have to have the detail and the whole picture, but our tendency is always to go into the detail which is why we get lost and confused. We do something and it seems very important but afterwards we think, "What was that? I spent years doing that. Why?" For, in the moment, in the detail, it was completely fascinating. Thus, the practice is about starting to experience that we can be open and precise at the same time. That is the integration of these three dimensions.

**Participant:** Since yesterday I have been wondering what this shamata meditation was for, because that is focusing, and that is taking the detail and resting on the detail and taking it as important. You have said not too much of shamata, but what is shamata for?

**James:** Some people, if they do a lot of shamata, think that they will be able to control distraction. But what we want to use it for is to become aware of distraction so that we become aware of the point where our mind is going off. The key thing is "I am open and then suddenly I am caught up in something." There is a kind of blind hole in the middle where we were in one thing and now

we are in another but how did we get from A to B. Thus, awareness gives us the capacity to attend to the process more precisely and then we start to see, “Oh, that is where I slip.”

At first the vision is panoramic and then it is caught. What is that point of being caught? It is like if we are at the ballet. What we want to do is to see all the dancers moving and to be able to appreciate the qualities at the same time, we may focus on an individual in the group, so that we see the detail in the infinite presentation. In order to do that we have to observe how we first of all see the detail and then we are in it. We are looking at it and it catches it us. It is the same with a thought: you have a thought and that thought leads to another thought and suddenly the thoughts have got you by the nose and you are just going after them.

### Patrul Rinpoche: “Remain without artifice on that which is arising”

---

These following verses are from a text called, *Self-Liberating Understanding* by Patrul Rinpoche, which again you will find in ***Simply Being***:

*...If you yogis and yoginis wish to unmistakably actualise this pure view, remain clear and alert in the state of non-artificial voidness. If the mind stays still, then remain without artifice on that staying. If there is no recollection, then remain on that non-recollection. In brief, remain without artifice on whatever arises in the mind. Do not react, neither encouraging nor inhibiting. For whatever arises, just remain without artifice on that which is arising. Don't hold your mind 'here'; don't seek 'there' after objects. Remain without artifice exactly on the mind of the looker and thinker. Don't hold your own mind 'here'; don't seek 'there' for the object of meditation. Remain without artifice exactly on the mind that is doing the meditation.*

*Your mind is not found by seeking. Mind itself (Sems-Nyid) has been empty from the very beginning. Seeking is not necessary for the seeker is thatness itself (De-Nyid). Remain unwaveringly on the one who is seeking. Understanding or not understanding, true or not true, existing or not existing – no matter what comes just remain without artifice on the one who is thinking. Good or bad, pleasing or dirty, happy or sad, for whatever recollection arises, without accepting or rejecting, just remain without artifice on the one who is doing the recollecting. Desirable or undesirable, for whatever arises just remain without artifice on the arising.*

So we do the guru yoga, the three Aa practice, and when we finish the last Aa we are a little bit open and something arises. Something wasn't there before, and so it is coming, it is presenting itself to us, and we are responding and now attending to that. We can use the example of being at the opera. You are sat down waiting for it to begin and then hear the first bars of the overture, and the whole opera is there ahead of you; it is evoked for you, and you are already there, "Oh!" So in that moment in the meditation, when we are open and a thought arises, in that moment we get caught up in it and that initial thought leads to another thought and another, so that we are now attending to a chain of thoughts following each other. What Patrul Rinpoche is saying here is that in that moment just relax back a little and be on the one who is seeing what is coming, the one who is attending to what is coming. As he says, *'remain unwaveringly on the one who is seeking is'*. Whenever you find your mind being active and moving, be present as that, with that, on that. No proposition is going to define this precisely, but it means don't stand in relation to, don't observe yourself looking, as this the perspectival separation of subject and object. Just immediately be the one who is looking.

As with the traditional image of the mirror, as soon as I put a watch in front of it, the watch reflection appears in the mirror. The mirror does not have to jump out, it does not have to get involved in the mirror. You take the watch away and the mirror is empty of the watch. It is just like that: the thought arises in your mind. Therefore, stay quiet like the mirror, awake and clear and open but not moving. As soon as that movement comes just stay on the bare awareness.

The movement is the energetic response, which we are familiar with doing, which tumbles us into it. We go into the rays of the sun, grounded as the sun, we let the rays go. One thought, the subject thought, will follow the object thought; they will chase each other around for a while and then they will go off. Thoughts come and go like that, on and on and on. Be present, not present far away as in the audience of a play, but present as the stage – present as the mirror. You don't have to do anything. You are not here in your head looking out at this. Everything is there: the wall behind you, the cars in the road, in all directions just like a mandala all is arising at once. You don't have a position. It is defuse and yet immediately here; it is here wherever the action is, and then gone. But if you over-identify into that moment, when it goes you, you think: "Oh, and now I am here and now I have to be there." In that way you hop around like a bunny being very busy.

**Participant:** So the thought in itself is the wakefulness, it's not the content. If you see the nature that is the wakefulness, that is the thing, the perception in itself.

**James:** The thought is the energy of the mind, and the energy of the mind polishes the mirror by itself.

**Participant:** So it is being in this process – not identifying with anything else? It is a recognition of this process?

**James:** Yes, recognition of the three dimensions of our existence as they arise together. Thoughts, feelings and sensations arise and go; they are always coming and going. If you are present with them they will increase your clarity. There is a traditional example for this. In India there is this plant called aconite which is a poison. However, when the peacock eats it the poison makes the colour in its feather shine even more brightly. Thus, they say that the meditator is able to consume poison and become brighter. That is to say, the more you stay present with whatever thought is arising: depressed thoughts, crazy thoughts, murderous thoughts, self-hateful thoughts, beautiful thoughts, sweet charming thoughts, any kind of thoughts, all of these increase your clarity if you don't fall into being involved with them. If we start with a discrimination: "This is a good thought and I want it and this is a bad thought and I don't want it," then we get lost for thoughts have been given too much status.

**Participant:** With perception is the same, we can have perception without thinking?

**James:** Well you can have perception and thinking as well, but thinking is then not the proof of the perception: "Oh what is that, Oh it is a car!" The thought is just one bit of energy tumbling after another. It still has its function as if you didn't have any thoughts life would be very hard.

**Participant:** but the moment you have the perception, like something is happening, you don't name it as such, "This is a car."

**James:** You can name it. Even if the name comes, you let the name come and go. You are not trying to block or change anything. The work in vipassana is to try to not elaborate conceptual structures by using the minimal description possible. What we are doing here is different. By remaining relaxed, let the mind flow freely. We have the example of the waterfall. The waterfall is coming down: thoughts, feelings and sensations ... and then it has gone. Some of the time it looks terrible, but just let it carry on and it will be gone. One of the bases for mental problems is that people say, "It is intolerable." They become a bit depressed and they think themselves more

and more into it by saying: *"It shouldn't be the case. I cannot bear this. Can you get rid of this?"* In doing that what is arising is invested with more energy.

However the mind is let it be. This means being present; not turned away, not holding back but present. This is why the image of the mirror is used again and again. If in front of the mirror you take a little baby and you cut its throat, the mirror won't break. If a completely perverse thought arises in your mind and you think: "Oh god!" Who is the one that says that? The mirror of the mind is not frightened. It is your ego that is frightened. It is saying that it does not want to be the kind of person that has these kinds of thoughts. But if you just allow the thought to be there it will just go, and the likelihood of you ever doing that action will be diminished because you have allowed it to come and go. The more you get into an anxiety it starts to cook and it is more likely to become the case.

As Patrul Rinpoche says, *"Understanding or not understanding, true or not true, existing or not existing, no matter what comes, just remain without artifice on the one who is thinking. Artifice here means being artificial. Don't do anything at all. Just stay present as presence, just being with whatever is occurring. Good or bad, pleasing or dirty, happy or sad, for whatever recollection arises, without accepting or rejecting just remain without artifice on the one who is doing the recollecting. Desirable or undesirable, for whatever arises, just remain without artifice on the arising."*

Again, this means trusting that the mirror doesn't need to work. The reflection arises effortlessly, easily, immediately, and then it goes. As soon as you become busy you are not in the state of the mirror. Therefore, whenever you find yourself being busy, relax into the out breath, or if you are practicing on your own go back and do the three Aa. However, a key thing to remember is that it is not about the will. It is not about effort. This is why, generally, we say to do this practice for a short period of time. If you are practicing it on your own at home you might do it for two minutes and then just relax and look around the room. Then do it again for two minutes, and keep doing that. It is not about the power of your meditation practice. It is about relaxing and experiencing the unborn givenness of the natural condition. This is the central point. It is not something which is created. It is not something which you can make happen. Thus, if you meditate for long periods of time where you are getting tired and you are pushing yourself, you are closing the door, not opening it.

**Participant:** It becomes artificial not because it is a problem of the energy of being busier or slower, it is more when you are falling out of awareness that it is getting artificial?

**James:** Yes that is right. As soon as you are out of awareness you are being busy and so the nature of our mind is to create things. As I was addressing earlier there is nothing wrong with our creativity if we recognise that it is open and empty and is the reflection in the mirror. But when we fall into it, it takes on a life of its own and we forget that this is a theatre and we take it as real.

**Participant:** Is it right to say that awareness confuses itself with what it is thinking?

**James:** Well, I think traditionally a lama would say that awareness is never confused. The confusion is the quality of what is arising, and if you believe in it then you become confused. When you go to an old fashioned cinema the curtain opens and you see a white screen. The light is projected and you believe in what is shown to you. What is shown to you is always an illusion; there is only light playing on a white screen. The white screen is always a white screen. When the red colour is on it, it looks red and when the murderer's knife is on it, it looks horrible, and when the very handsome actor appears looking very marvellous and inspiring, it is nice, but it is always a white screen. Obviously, you would not enjoy the film if you kept thinking of the white screen. So part of the work is to give up the movie of samsara, and to think that a white screen is better.

**Participant:** but in a certain way it doesn't seem different – awareness and movement.

**James:** Yes, they are inseparable from the very beginning. However, if you tilt, so to speak, towards the movement and you fall into it, you will lose the stillness. But the stillness and the movement are always there, just as the stage is always there and the dancers are moving. When the dancers are moving you are not looking at the stage. If the stage was moving the dancers would have a very hard time; it is because the stage is stable that the dancers can move. The thoughts are moving in the space of the mind.

**Participant:** And would you ever be aware of all, or is it accepting also falling out of awareness.

**James:** That is going to happen for sure. The thing then is not to be so worried for there is one ground and two paths, but these two paths are spiralling inside the one ground. Often in the tantric tradition they often talk about unborn. That is to say, nothing has truly been born; we are all inside the womb of the great mother. There are no truly existing things therefore a mistake is

not some big hiatus where we can think, "Oh, my god I have blown it!" It is just, "Oh, that is a movement," and as soon as you recognise it you are back with the presence.

In dzogchen we are talking about being present with whatever arises, which means sometimes being depressed, sometimes being confused and so on. If you look in various magazines for retreats all the lamas are endless smiling as if it was their job to be happy twenty four hours of the day. I would be very suspicious of people who never got angry or depressed or sad, because to be in the world with other people is to be disturbed and touched. Why would you not feel these things? The point is to not be limited by whatever arises in the mind. This is difficult if you have constructed an idea that the Buddha is always smiling, generous, compassionate and kind, especially if you are in retreat doing meditation and you find that for quite a long time you are in a terrible mood of despair and hopelessness with thoughts of: "What is the point? I am stupid, I cannot meditate." These thoughts come again and again like big waves crashing on a beach. You just have to say, "OK, this is how my mind is."

This is illustrated well by the famous song and event for Milarepa in the red rock cave when he has many demons coming. They are persecuting him and he cannot meditate, and every time he sits down he sees these demons which disturb him and give him pains in his body. He tries everything he knows to keep them away and he goes into deep despair and eventually he says: "Ok, you are here." And as soon as he says that they become peaceful. There is also the story of sleeping beauty. When she is born her father, the King, arranges a great feast and he invites everyone except a particular witch because she is very bad. But she comes anyway and puts a curse on them, and because of that there is a lot of trouble.

That is to say, the basis of dzogchen is that you have to invite everyone. This means you invite your shadow, everything in your unconscious, you invite everything in the world, all the demons, and all the ghosts. To all the most horrible things you say, "Come too." Then when these things arise in the meditation you don't say, "Because these things are arising in my mind this is a sign that I cannot meditate." When the thought arises that says you are stupid and wasting your time, that you will never get anywhere with this ... it is just a thought. If you believe it, it has got you.

Further on in this text by Patrul Rinpoche he gives an explanation of the mind's activity: *From the very beginning mind itself has been free of substance. When it is looked for nothing is seen and thus it is empty. Yet, it is not empty for it is radiant awareness. The inseparability of awareness*

*and emptiness is pervasive just like the sky. Although you try to keep the mind steady it cannot be fixed for it goes everywhere directly. And although you do not try to hold it, it returns to its own place. Although it is without hands and feet it is always moving. Although you send it away it won't go, but returns to its own place. It has no eye yet is aware of everything. The appearances of awareness become empty. The nature of the mind is said to be nothing yet although it is nothing perceptions and experiences occur. It does not exist because it becomes empty. It does not, not exist because perceptions and experiences manifest. The clarity of the union of appearance and emptiness radiates out. The clear and empty natural mode has radiant self-expression with the five wisdoms spreading fully.*

This is really what we have just been talking about. What he is really describing here is indestructibility. No matter how chaotic and crazy your mind becomes, no matter how much turbulence it is filled with, the clarity of the mind itself is not destroyed because the turbulence was its clarity. This is one of the things which is very difficult for us to understand, that depression is clarity, foggy meditation is clarity, manic excitement with many different thoughts is also clarity. When we say clarity, it is not clarity in our ordinary sense where we think of it as calm and clear. Clarity is when you recognise that all of these phenomena are the energy of the ground. They have no other place to come from but your mind itself. Thus, if you feel persecuted by the thoughts that arise in your mind, you are persecuting yourself by not recognising that this is your own thought. This thought has no separate status as it is not coming from somewhere else.

The key thing is to continue with the practice. Through the practice various problems arise and then you learn how to manage the problems. When we are beginning to the experience the nature of our own existence is not usually something very bright and shiny. The presentation of this experience, this understanding, can be done with a lot of formality. In the Nyingmapa system it also done as a kind of initiation with hats and bells and so on, but if we make something very sacred it separates it off from ordinary life. The essential thing is that this nature has been there from the very beginning and so it is very ordinary. It is available all the time and so is very ordinary, not something very special. If you make it something special it is more difficult to access.

Also because it is ordinary there is nothing to grasp onto in it, so a lot of the time when you do the practice, it is as if you are going nowhere. Of course, you are going nowhere because it is not

about that sort of progression, it is about the ongoing practice of letting go of knots and assumptions so that the free flow of energy continues. That just takes time, it doesn't take effort. But usually for us time and effort go together, so it takes time to be present with something and release the effort that you want to invest. It is time to drop the habit of being busy and to come to the point where you see that things resolve themselves or liberate by themselves.

## Garab Dorje's Three Statements That Hit The Point

---

We will now look a little at this basic teaching of Garab Dorje. He was the first teacher to bring the dzogchen teachings into the human domain. His story is that when he was about to dissolve his body into light he rose up into the sky and out of the midst of cluster of rainbow light he gave a very brief teaching. This teaching is referred to by many commentators throughout the centuries in Tibet, and the most popular or read version of this is *The Three Statements That Hit The Point*, or *The Three essential Statements* by Patrul Rinpoche. It now has many translations in English and German.

### The first point

Garab Dorje made these three points and they are very straight forward. The first is simply a direct introduction to one's own nature. The introduction is direct, and in a sense that introduction can only be done by yourself. Whoever gives you the instruction gives you a method of meeting yourself. However, since your own nature is not a thing, it is not like introducing people at a party: "Hello John, here is Fred." There are not two things to be introduced. The introduction here is through our practice together to create the feeling in which we get more of that experience. However, the essential point is to be able to hear the teaching and to take it into the moment when you are sitting and keep opening whatever comes, whatever points there are for tying knots. From that it means really feeling, having the experience of "Oh, yes my mind is like a mirror, something is always happening."

Just now we are sitting here in this room. Just before some of you were sat having a cup of tea, and before that some of you were doing movement or out for a walk, and so on. These are all experiences that you had which have now gone. Now you are having this experience – and then this experience will be gone. It does not remain. You can have a memory of it but the memory of it is not the remaining of that experience – it has actually gone. The impermanence of all

phenomena is their self-liberation. That is to say, they arise and they go by themselves. You don't have to push this morning away, this morning went by itself. Lunchtime went by itself. What is happening just now will go by itself. This is a daily experience. At the end of the day when you go to bed, you can just remember that today has gone. When you wake up in the morning sleep has gone. Everything moment-by-moment is showing me movement. A key problem is that when we enter into judgement on things, we fix them and create blocks so that we don't experience the flow.

Thus, the first teaching of Garab Dorje is to recognise the openness which is inseparable from the movement; the stability of the openness and the ever changing nature of the movement. This we can see. It is manifest all the time. For example, we are here but we are not the same as we were before lunch; the person we were before lunch has changed. There is a continuity but the continuity is primarily in the capacity of our presence to be here, which includes how we are in this moment, including our perception of what is around us. Then that changes, and it changes again and again. The content is always changing but the awareness is not changing.

This is the central point of the introduction: not to look for stability in the flow of experience. There is nothing reliable in the flow of experience. The only thing which is reliable is the open awareness, the presence which is ungraspable. If it is ungraspable you won't be able to grasp it, so if you are looking for a solid, concrete experience and then you think, "Mmm, now I know what that is," that thought has already gone.

Open awareness is always there. It is available but it doesn't exist, otherwise there would be no space for anything else. It is not that you awaken to this openness and it is always around you, like if someone were to give you a necklace to wear so that wearing it gave you the feeling of it being so precious and reminds you of your beloved. You don't have openness as an ongoing thing as it is not a thing. It is a dimension of being which is there but it never revealed as itself as something. So when you start to look don't be disappointed, you are not going to find a big shiny thing. It is not like that.

What you will find is that the flow of experience becomes easier. That is the main proof that you have more presence. What blocks presence is the fixation on sense experience so that whenever a sense experience arises instead of letting it go we tend to make a judgement which then leads to all kinds of conceptual activity. For example, we hear a noise and we like it or we don't like it.

This morning the bells were ringing here. I don't particularly like these bells but then later a little band went down the road with a banner which I found quite nice. "This is good and that is bad" is the nature of judgement which is occurring all the time. The less we judge things and we just accept them as they are without organising them, without making sense of them, we will feel their energetic quality which is always self-liberating.

### The second point

Garab Dorje's next point is not to remain in doubt. When difficulties and problems arise we shouldn't go after them. When doubts and attractions and confusions arise he says, "Don't remain in doubt. Find the confidence or the certainty of returning into the practice."

Our tendency when we get problems is to think about them because that is what we have learnt is the best way of dealing with them. From this point of view this is not the thing to do. The thing to do is to go into the practice. In the practice we become more loose, and when we are more loose we are able to respond into the situation. Of course when you practice, many interesting ideas arise in your mind. Then you are then faced with this choice: "*Here is a delicious precious thought. Should I write it down? Should I interrupt my meditation because I don't want to forget this? Or should I let it go?*" How many thoughts have you already had in this life? These thoughts always go – that is their nature. Thoughts illuminate a little bit, but the possibility of staying open, not seduced by the thought, and experiencing the real presence of this awareness is less rare than being involved in thoughts. Therefore, at this choice point it is better to choose the presence. Just remain present and the thought goes.

*"Oh, if only I had remembered that thought. What was I trying to think about?"* The subject is looking for the answer in the object, but who is the subject? Who is that? The instruction that we looked at this morning from Patrul Rinpoche was to stay with the one who is having the experience – to stay with the looker. Thus, when you want to go looking after a thought, when you think that is very interesting, it is very important to remember who is the one who is thinking that. Stay there ... the object will pass but you will be fresh and alive. It is that freshness that is the taste of this open dimension. That is much more precious than the thought – thoughts are everywhere. In your house you probably have many books, books you have not read. How many more ideas do you need? The thing about ideas is that they come and go. They are fascinating but they do not remain. It is presence that remains.

This second point, don't remain in doubt, means don't rely on arisings as if they will give the answer. Don't go looking to do more analysis or more inspection or more finding out. If you trust the practice you just come back to it again and again. Of course in order to be with other people or to do your job you will probably have to read and learn things and speak to people, so we are obviously going to be involved in concepts. The question is what do we think the concept is doing? Is the concept going to give us the answer or is the concept a tool for moving in the world? That is the big difference. However, from this point of view, something arises, what is it? It is sound. The fact that you like it or don't like it will not take you to freedom. What liberates us is allowing the thought to liberate itself. We don't need to stick something onto it, saying, *"This is very good, let's keep that. This is very bad let's get rid of it."* This is what makes the problem. This is the ego's job of being very busy in the midst of this trouble.

Thus, when Garab Dorje is saying this you need to be very clear about it: you need to not stay in confusion. It is about trusting that the practice of allowing the natural liberation of phenomena is more helpful, more important, more reliable, more natural than all the busy work of editing, sorting and attributing value.

### The third point

The third factor is to abide in the confidence of liberation. This means the ongoing liberation of arisings coming and going. When you look in the mirror you are surprised to see that there are no rainbows surrounding your head. When you walk down the street you are surprised that strangers are not suddenly bowing and offering you flowers. "What kind of buddhahood is this? This is not what I imagined." When you arrive at the airport you stand in a long queue of people and somehow you are not invited to the VIP lounge. This is ordinary liberation; it is invisible to everyone. The main thing is to make sure it is not invisible to you. This is why he says, *"You have to have confidence in it, that this is the real teaching of all the Buddhas."* There are now many books translated into German and English describing dzogchen. They are full of the words of teachers and lamas from different lineages, at different times in Tibet, all saying the same thing.

Openness is invisible. It is not going to announce itself into the world. Relaxation which allows the liberation of thoughts, feelings and sensations, and so on, is also invisible. The movement also, which arises from this, is finely tuned to the environment. It is delicate, it contacts people, but it does not leave a big impact – it is also invisible. This is an invisible enlightenment. It

doesn't need to be announced with thrones and trumpets, but it is very reliable. If you stay present in this it is the essence of all the teachings.

Very often it says the essence of the madhyamika philosophy, which is the central concern of the Gelugpa school, and its realisation through tantra, is inherent in this state. The essence of Mahamudra is in this state. Dzogchen, it is in this state. There is no teaching higher than this. You will find people saying this again and again.

However, it is difficult to do this, because to be in the world, to be with other people, brings us out into connection in which judgement arises. Now, the task here is how to be in the world using language, being influenced by events without making strong judgements? For example, if you taste a glass of wine and it's a bit thin, a bit sour and you don't like it then that would be an accurate judgement. If the wine is not very good, it is not very good. The judgement is accurate but the issue with judgement is the power that can go with it, and how strongly that is felt. It would be stupid to not know it wasn't pleasant. So, it is not pleasant and you stay with that. You don't have to make a big thing of it. You can drink an unpleasant wine and you can just observe. Maybe you go to someone's house and they give you some wine and it is not so nice, but they seem to like it. This is just the experience of drinking an unpleasant wine, it is not poisonous. You can feel the tightening in your throat and a loss of pleasure. That is what it is and it arises and passes. You don't go home and say, "God, I went to their house and you know what they served, it was terrible!" You then carry away with you this terrible feeling that some violence has been done to 'me'. Therefore, it is about not taking things too seriously, not to over invest: "It is fine however it is." This is not to say that somehow everything is neutral and the same. It is the same on the level of self-liberating, but everything has its own qualities which have their impact, otherwise we wouldn't know anything. Drinking bad wine, having some pain, having headaches; these are all experiences you can learn to stay with and integrate into the practice. If we say, because I have got a headache I can't do the practice, this is to not understanding practice.

### [Patrul Rinpoche: An Explanation of How Mind Reveals Itself](#)

---

Patrul Rinpoche, Nuden Dorje and the various masters, whose texts are translated in this book *Simply Being*, point out that the main problems in practice are where people experience a limit. That is to say, some experience or arising is felt to be so powerful, so difficult, or so confusing that it feels impossible to make it part of the practice. There is the thought of having to wait until it is

over before the practice can continue. But the instruction again and again is to relax and open and be with that state. If you feel angry or confused just be with it and recognise, “Oh, this is my experience, this is my life.”

Most of us are a bit of a mess. We struggle just to hold our lives together. Therefore it is important to recognise that what you think is meditation, “I will be calm and clear and unruffled”, is not meditation. Meditation is being present with our life as it is, and ‘our life as it is’ is likely to be disturbed, confused, full of sadness and anxieties. Our life has not turned out the way we thought it would, we are not quite sure how to do things, and the years go by and we think, “My god, I should have learnt how to do these things by now. I am still at the same state as I was a long time ago.” This is our existence and this is what we have got. If we cannot live with our existence, if we always think we have got the wrong life, this is a very good way of making sure you are born again and again. Thus, part of the practice is just to think: “This is me. This is how it is.” If we hate ourselves how will we accept ourselves. If we accept ourselves then there is the possibility of that self-liberating. Then we realise that this aspect of ourselves, which seems horrible and we don’t want anyone to know about, just goes. Furthermore, this nice bit of ourselves, which we’d like everybody to see, also goes. They both go so what is the point of being worried about the bad and trying to keep the good.

Again, in the meditation practice the deep instruction is, as much as you can, be present with yourself as you are. Of course, if you are very agitated and you cannot focus at all, maybe you could have a shower, or could go for a walk in the park, or you could put on some music and dance and by letting your energy express itself you may find that you have a bit more space. With each of these activities you can bring presence into it. You can be present in the shower. You can be present walking in the park. You can be present as you dance. It all depends on how much you can relax, and how much you can tolerate yourself as you are.

Most of us, when we were young, had a lot of instruction that we should be in particular ways. Maybe we were forced to do things we didn’t like; maybe we were blocked from doing things that we did want to do. Therefore, we have learnt how to control ourselves, how to put up with things which aren’t so good, and to squeeze ourselves into the shape of the world, often feeling that unless we please other people there won’t be a place for us in the world. This is a big poison, for the teaching here is saying that however the mind is we should open and accept it.

Going back to the text of Patrul Rinpoche that we were looking at earlier, in the section entitled, “In order to develop certainty, an explanation of how mind reveal itself” he writes many examples of how the mind reveals itself and offers advices. They are very lovely but I won’t read them all as there are so many. He says: *Sometimes no ideas come to the minds of great meditators. Your mind is vacant and empty. When that happens stay clearly on the mind itself without doing anything artificial.* So you sit there like a drunk pig and just stay with that. As long as you are hoping for something else, or expecting yourself to be somewhere else you won’t be where you are.

He then continues: *Sometimes the mind is very dark and vacant and you are not able to clear it. When that happens sharpen your awareness and remain exactly on that.* Sharpen your awareness here doesn’t mean shift a focus onto something else. The traditional example here is of pulling a hair out of butter. Very delicately you just pull the hair which has got trapped in the butter. If you pull the hair too tight the hair may break, and if it is too soft you get butter on your fingers and you won’t catch it. So when the mind is very dark and it’s like you are falling asleep where it is all going a bit hazy, relax into the out breath so there is a little more space and stay with that – hazy and dark in the space. The space welcomes the hazy and dark and in that moment you subtly have your presence with whatever is there.

He then goes on to say: *Sometimes the mind is very sad. When that happens brighten up, relax and sit happily at peace.* Again, this is not like telling yourself a joke or something like that. ‘Very sad’ means that you are sinking into the mood, and if you are caught up in a mood you won’t have any clarity at all. So the brightening up simply means to, again, breathe in and out a bit strongly, perhaps looking around the room and seeing the colours. Then you are a bit fresh; you are still sad but now you have a sense of your embodiment. Then you can do the three Aa’s and just sit with that. There is now some vitality and the vitality and the sadness have a little interface, and you sit like that.

In another example he says: *Sometimes the mind rests only for an instant as subtle thoughts come and go. When that happens bring the mind into relaxed attentiveness and remain there.* Again just breathe out so that you are a bit more present, letting things come and go. For what happens is that every time that we get involved with a thought, this distraction has an energetic depletion that goes with it so that you get a bit drained. Thus, don’t get lost in that, just come back into yourself.

He says: *Sometimes many difficult ideas flood in and out and cannot be still for even an instant. When that happens relax the body, relax the mind, and in that state gently control your distraction while still giving the mind room to move.* Therefore, not too tight and not too loose. If lots of thoughts are coming and you just go with them you will be all over the place, you will get over extended. If you try to control it too tightly you will compress your own awareness and you will also either flatten the thoughts or provoke more reaction. Therefore, breathe, maybe get up and do some stretches. The thoughts are there but you have got a little space. It starts as the space between, but the more you get into the practice it is the space of infinity which encompasses everything, and then the thoughts can move this way and that and you don't mind.

Sometimes when people meditate in this way, they start to fear that they are going mad because their mind is not the way it normally is. If they have taken drugs in the past it might remind them of that kind of experience, where they might feel, "Oh, my god this is the edge of sanity, what is this? How can I still be 'me' if my mind is like this?" Generally speaking meditation will not make you mad. What can make you mad is anything which is very tightening, for example, doing a lot of pranayama, forcing your mind and really trying to push through. The energy of that can make you quite crazy. However, if you are very relaxed and very tolerant then you see, "Oh, sometimes the mind is like this and sometimes it is like that." What you are doing in that moment is moving from a very personal experience of existence to a more impersonal experience. Rather than saying 'my mind', we say 'the mind', or 'presence', or 'awareness'.

Thus, we enter into a state of awareness or presence and many things arise. If we thought, "This is my mind," then immediately we have a discrimination, "I don't want this, I do want that." However, if it is just public, if it is just open, then it is like that. The more you practice like this, the more you can be tolerant of other people. However other people are, you will see how they are but you don't need to go under the power of how they are. You can simply be tolerant. The particular positioning of everyone we meet is simply an invitation for us to be flexible. If someone is very hot, angry and aggressive how shall we be with that? If they are depressed and slow how will we be with that? If they are very narcissistic and inflated and self-intoxicated how will we be with that? How can energy find a way of being with every different kind of person? That is an impersonal quality. When we have more awareness, it is our awareness but it is not ours. That is to say, it is happening for us, we are ourselves having this experience. But it is not self-referential,

it is not self-reflexive, it is not validating ourself – it is ourself. That is a very different kind of position.

Patrul Rinpoche gives a few more of these examples but then he says: *All these ways that the mind reveals itself, arise for beginners who have not clearly understood their own natural condition. Those who have clear understanding have no basis for such things to arise.* It is not that we will be *endlessly* fire-fighting whatever is occurring. From the dharma point of view, for many, many lives we have been primarily intoxicated by thoughts, feelings and experiences. This, then, is the tilt of our mind, this is what we are likely to be caught up in. Therefore, at first, this is what we should expect to be caught up in, as this movement is easily going to leak out all the time. However, what he is saying is not to worry about that – this is normal. Just keep relaxing and opening, and gradually the urge to be involved diminishes. For the more you see directly impermanence, the more you experience the self-liberation of arisings. Why would you get so involved with them? What is there to be excited about?

Of course one of the difficulties is that habitual thoughts, when they arrive, appear as if for the first time. This is one of the central factors in any kind of neurosis. For example, some people may have a negative thought that they are stupid. When that thought arises it seems completely true and powerful; it seems to convey fresh and real information. But they have been going around the block with it for a long time. They may even have had some therapy and come to realise that it is a habitual thought. However, the clarity of knowing the status of the thought as just a loop that goes round and round is not very powerful, and the intensity of the thought catches them so that again and again they succumb to these thoughts which collapse them like putting a pin in a balloon – you just lose your ‘umf’ when these things come.

This is similar to what happens in the meditation. We have these habitual tendencies of fusing with ideas; they come and they capture us. We have to come to see, *“Oh, this is just something that happens, it is not telling the truth about who I am. It just tells me it is telling me the truth about who I am.”* This is a central point: our minds cheat us. We cannot trust these thoughts in our mind. Any thought that tells you what your nature is, is going to cheat you. All the masters and all the texts say, “Thoughts cannot describe this state.”

One last advice from Patrul Rinpoche: *With your mind merged inseparably in the state of clarity, its own place is realised undistractedly. Then when spontaneous clarity arises from the state of*

*emptiness as the natural mode, your own mind is inseparable from the Buddha.* What he is saying is that at the moment we have to do practice and there is an artificiality in sitting and doing these three Aa's. The attempt is to relax into the natural state but all that we take to be normal and usual and natural is in fact artificial. What we are doing is using the artificial to find a way through to the natural, through what appears to be natural but is actually artificial. We have to try again and again but the more we do that the more the natural state becomes more present for us, and we are more present in that natural state. Gradually they are completely merged, and in that state clarity self-liberates automatically. For all of us practice is a transitional period where we are moving from one dimension to another dimension, and that is why it is a bit of a bumpy ride. Often when we meditate we can feel hopeless, useless and disheartened. That is because whenever we open ourselves to new learning there is a kind of dip in confidence and competence. We have gone from something we know how to do well, hustling in samsara, to moving into another realm that we don't know so much of. Thus, there is a kind of disruption, and that is what we have to deal with.

## Questions and Answers

---

**Participant:** Regarding guru yoga, you said something like, guru yoga in essence is being in the natural state, and if you begin with some kind of guru yoga it is something more artificial. So it is something like a gradual experience of getting more and more glimpses or experiences of this primordial state. And in essence, if I understand you rightly, every time I experience primordial it is guru yoga, and all this is names and so on, but in essence it is like this?

**James:** Yes, but there is a difference here. For example, this building is made of bricks. When they were building the walls, it was one brick and then another and then another so that it is gradually built up. Sustained effort through time built the wall. Similarly, in many of these Tibetan paths called lam rim (stages of the path) you build things up pretty much like that. In dzogchen we talk about instant presence and immediacy, but clearly, it is a bit difficult. Here, it is more like you are cleaning the windows. The glass is clean underneath the dirt, so what you are doing is taking the dirt off the glass. In order to do that, you have to make some effort for the cleanness, the clarity, of the glass to be revealed. But no matter how much you clean the glass you won't make it clearer for the glass is always clear; that is the natural capacity of the glass. The main thing is that we are not making effort to construct something. Rather we are making effort to help reveal what is there; so we are dropping away all the encumbrances and hindrances.

**Same participant:** it is something much more easy – it is just there and I am getting used to it – I don't have to follow a certain pattern of behaviour to practice guru yoga. Of course there are certain patterns for me, you and everybody else but it is something to get used to, in a certain way. It is nothing special...

**James:** On that level, yes, it is nothing special. It is exactly as you say: each of us has to find out the particular pattern of our conditioning. This is why in this system we don't say that everybody has to do a hundred thousand prostrations or that everybody has to do a particular practice, for we are not standard issue. We can say that we are all sentient beings and we all have the five poisons and therefore we have to do purification practices. Some Tibetan systems are very much like that. However, that is very general, that is like joining the army: "Now you are just a squaddie. March up and down, do as you are told and wear the uniform. What is your number?" However, in this system we are concerned with the precise way that we ourselves are tied in knots. Thus, it is central to do the practice and then to try to describe the kind of problems we encounter and talk about how to deal with them. This is why some of these texts are very useful, for Patrul Rinpoche is saying that these are the kinds of problems that many people came to him and told him about. Therefore, he says, "When this happens you can try that."

There is one central method but that method reveals lots of problems, so we can then apply a method to the problem as there are many different methods. This is different from doing a tantric practice where you do the ngondro preliminaries, as these are general methods for general problems. However, we are interested in our specific problems, for we are tied by our specific knots. For example, when we meet together we experience that each other's energy is very different. Some people are very out and some are very in. If you are very shy, the kind of problems that will arise in meditation are likely to be very different to those who are very manic. If you are in your body there are some kinds of problems, and if you are not in your body there are other kinds of problems. Everyone will get problems.

The main thing is to become interested in the particular patterning of your problems and struggle to find a way to describe that. Then apply the antidote to the problem. However, it is not really an antidote as it is not about taking it away but finding a way of incorporating that situation into the open dimension. As Patrul Rinpoche was saying, if your mind is very lively and frisky just give yourself a little bit of calming so that you are there with it, and then be present with it. That is a good bit of advice. He is not saying that when your mind is very frisky that you should stop that,

or that you should do a lot of prostrations. He is not saying that you should remember all your faults and sins and the dangers of being born in hell, to think of the people suffering there. Then when you feel suitably depressed and humble, then you should continue with the practice. Some teachers would say that is what you should do. However, he is saying to us to, *“Be friends with yourself. Collaborate with yourself. Don’t work oppositionally with yourself.”* Often we act on ourselves as if we are the enemy, thinking that it is only by beating ourselves up or distorting ourselves that we can get to the right place.

However, this is about being kind and gentle and thinking, *“How am I?” You sit in the meditation: “Oh, this is how I am – pretty weird, pretty strange. This is how I am. So how will I be with this weirdness?”* There is no point in trying to change it into something else. Most important in therapy is that the patient feels accepted by the therapist. The welcome is everything. If you can welcome people of any age, really welcome them, then you can have some ways of interacting. If the heart-felt welcome is there then you are working with something. If the welcome is narrow you are not really getting into the work. It is exactly the same with dzogchen. You have to be willing to accept yourself. It is the acceptance that allows whatever it is that is arising to be less important. As long as we are running away from difficult things they will be strengthened, so as long as you can face it and see what it is you will find that it liberates itself.

## Refuge in Relation to Dzogchen

---

I will say a little about refuge in relation to dzogchen. We need a refuge when we are unprotected, when we are in danger of getting lost somehow. If we don’t have any protection, at that time we feel very unsafe. For example, when political refugees, fleeing persecution in their own country, arrive in a western country, the police are often very suspicious why they are there and presume they are economic migrants. It is very uncertain as to whether they will get any refuge or not. We see that compassion in the world is quite a thin thing: the suffering of others is very easy to discount. When we ourselves are suffering it seems very real and very important, but when we hear about other people’s sufferings it feels more in the distance. Therefore, finding a refuge in this world can be difficult as it depends on causes and circumstances.

For example, when the Chinese came into Tibet many Tibetans went into India. India was incredibly generous in offering hospitality to the Tibetans at a cost of a lot of political difficulties

with the Chinese and quite a lot of expense for themselves and so on. Examples like this don't always happen, but they tend to happen more in countries with hospitality. Again, for example, when the Russians went into Afghanistan about three million Afghans went into Pakistan and lived in camps in tents given to them by the Pakistani army. Imagine if three million people were to arrive from Somalia into one of the western countries. It would be very difficult: "No we cannot cope!" In Pakistan they didn't have very much but they could cope. Therefore, giving refuge is also an attitude of hospitality. In many cultures the idea is that the guest is God, the guest comes first. In the eastern countries where buddhism has developed there is also the sense that the Buddha is the host or that Padmasambhava is the host. If you pray to Padmasambhava there is no doubt that he will help you because he is available and receptive. It is not a chance thing dependent on mood or virtue, it is automatic. If you ask you will get, for there is no blocking of that possibility. Jesus, in the bible, says: "Today I have set before you an open door. Let no man close it." That is a very important idea; that the path to salvation is not really closed by anyone but ourselves – it is always available.

When we take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha we are giving ourselves an orientation, a sense that even if we feel alone, desolate and hopeless, and not able to find any personal meaning in our lives, there is a whole field of meaning available. If we connect with that it is like a life raft which we can hold onto until something more alive comes back to us. Just as the seasons are changing here and we are coming into autumn where the world gets colder, the leaves fall from the trees, and it's more difficult for the farmer to grow things in the field, so in our lives we enter periods of winter from time-to-time. It is not always summer and supportive and happy. Therefore, one of the functions of refuge is to stabilise our orientation through these seasons of our mood so that our practice can continue on an even basis.

Taking refuge is saying: "I will rely on you." That offers us the chance to reflect on what it is that we usually rely on. We can rely on external functions to provide meaning and purpose in our lives: some people inherit wealth, some great beauty, some have very attractive personalities, some have a lot of intelligence. These qualities can be a refuge because they become a currency, a way of negotiating interactions with the world. We can also take refuge in particular pursuits: being ambitious at work, struggling to get ahead, to get a promotion, or to make more money. We can also use social status as a refuge. We can use pastimes as a refuge: playing a sport or developing a garden. We can have substances as a refuge: cannabis, alcohol and so on. There are

many ways in which we can find something which will give us a sense of purpose. That can include being a good person, being available, being self-sacrificing. There are always people that need help, so if you become a helper you can give meaning to your life through seeing the impact of your actions on the other person, seeing that you improve their situation. That feedback gives you the affirmation that you are a good person. So that is a kind of refuge as well.

However, all of these refuges depend on causes and circumstances and are therefore very fragile. When I was in the first year of university some of us formed together as a group of friends and we did many things. During summer time we all went off and did different things and came back in the Autumn for the second year. One of the girls had been working in a pub and after work late one night, feeling tired she drove home and fell asleep at the wheel. It was the time before safety belts, and her car went into a tree and her face went through the windscreen. So the person who came back to the second year was very different from the girl who was there in the first. She used to be a confident young woman who was very beautiful, and the person who came back was a very frightened, anxious person with a very cut up face with lots of scarring. One second of falling asleep led to her whole world being transformed, because for the rest of her life she was going to appear in front of other people in a way that would give them a bit of a shock. Before when she appeared to other people they would move towards her because of her beauty. We can build up an identity on the basis of qualities but we have to look around and see what stable basis they have. When its set of causes and conditions vanishes it has gone.

### Why is the Buddha so reliable

---

So why is the Buddha reliable? We believe that the Buddha achieved something. We can read the teachings of the Buddha and all the accounts of the Buddha indicate that he awoke to something of real value. What he taught, the Dharma, seems to be helpful. When you read it, it seems to relate to our own lives. The word Dharma itself also refers to things as they are, and his teachings do seem to take us in that direction. The Sangha refers to the group of beings who continue in that practice. And if we look at the example of the two monks who are in these buildings here, they are very impressive. They are very calm, very sweet, very welcoming and thoughtful, and that is very inspiring. This gives the sense that there is a wider vision of the world and even if our own view can become narrow and blinkered, the wider view is always there.

By taking refuge, then, we remind ourselves not to fall into our anxious preoccupations, our habitual patterns but to think that there is something to do. Taking refuge is essentially saying that there is a meaning to life, that life is not just happenstance. Although the basic principle of dependent co-origination says that 'on the basis of this arising that will arise' so that we have these complex movements of factors – energy vectors interacting with each other giving rise to experience and all the complexity – life is not just random. There is a possibility of seeing through.

As the Buddha said in the first teaching there is suffering, or the nature of our difficult interactive experience. This suffering has a cause which he explains. He says that this suffering can end and he offers methods for bringing about its ending. That means that whatever state we are in it can be attended to. But if in our life we fixed into a situation, we think this is my luck in this life, this is all there is, then there comes to be a kind of seal around our existence, and our hope is not very high. Many people now have lost a religious orientation. Life is simply a period between life and death, and at death everything will end. In between there is a desire to enjoy life as much as possible, and then with increasing anxiety as old age comes on we worry about who will look after us, what will happen to us and so on. In that way life has no purpose: we don't know why we are here and we wander around trying to get the best we can ... and then it is over ... and it doesn't really matter. We look back and we think, *"Oh, yes, evolution shows us that it is all just random and chance. There were all these people before and they have all gone, and I am here and I'll go too. If I have some kids a bit of me might go on, and that is that."* But this seems to me exactly the devil's doctrine because it is very disheartening. It is also one of the main driving forces of consumerist capitalism. Darwinian evolutionary theory takes over psychology; it moves in every direction. It is like one of those huge machines used in the Amazon forests that moves through the forests, hits the trees and cuts them into logs so they can be loaded onto the back of a lorry. It devours everything in its site. It is scientific reductionism in its worst form and whether it is exactly scientific or not is open to question. It says that everything is material, material and luck; that these two forces move together. Then what? Let's see what happens. Or, let's try to conquer this uncertainty by the 'will to power'. Thus, Nietzsche meets Darwin, and there is a nightmare.

Dharma is saying something very different. It is saying that there is a purpose to existence. When we exist in the state that we are in, because of our preoccupation with all the details, we don't

see the wider picture. But if we start to relax and open and focus our minds and not be so involved in daily busyness we start to see, "Oh yes something can happen." Dharma also speaks of the universe as a moral place, that karma is grounded into actions having consequences, and the consequences reveal themselves in the flavour tone of experience: happy or sad. Therefore, it does matter what you do. You may be able to lie and cheat and get away with things in this life, and you may feel that you are very successful but when you die your energy moves into a new environment. The Buddha said if you want to know about your past lives look at your present body. If you want to look at your future body look at your present behaviour. Thus, how we behave is going to determine what we experience in the future. That means it is important what we do. It is important to practice good things rather than bad things. Even if we feel lost, despairing, insignificant, unloved and confused we are still performing actions, and these actions will have their consequences. Thus, karma can be a very helpful notion for it is saying, a bit like this poor friend of mine when she was driving the car, whether you like it or not you are in the driving seat of your own existence. You may feel like a passenger, you may feel that life is happening to you, but from the karmic point of view you are always the driver. It means that you have to be in your life moment-by-moment. How you speak, how you move, whether you are thoughtful, whether you are selfish – it is you doing these things.

The Buddha taught 84,000 dharmas, many different methods, for helping people to be present in the moment of their existence. For what we always have is the view from 'here', we are always just where we are so that what we experience is just this. Therefore, if we are not clear about who we are, if we are not in our body, if we don't listen when we speak, if we are not aware of our energy and how it manifests in our voice, if we are not attentive to our mental processes, if we don't start to understand how mental processes operate, seeing that they can be both helpful and deceptive then we won't have any sense of where we are.

A lot of what we have been doing in these past few days is getting more sense of how to attend to ourselves so that we are present moment-by-moment as we come into being with the other. That is always going to be complex as it requires us to participate in a world that is moving and changing. But refuge is saying that there are ways of understanding, of awaking which help the complexity to be manageable in an easy way. This is what dzogchen is really concerned with. The more you can relax and open, this hospitality welcomes whatever is going on. If you have a very narrow structure then you feel that new things are an attack on what you have got. For example,

at breakfast I was talking with some people about our experience in different dharma centres. When we come to this place the monks usually do their practice in here in the morning but when we are here they do their practice in another room. They say, 'welcome', and their welcome here is so big that they disturb their lives for us. They don't say, "We are holy monks, we are the resident people here and you need to fit around us." This is very different isn't it? It is such a sweetness, such a thoughtfulness. Although the kind of practice we do is slightly different from theirs, they feel, "Ah, this is ok," they are flexible. That is a sign of them being present and connected. In the other system, although the people are very nice, they have a formality: "Oh, you are not in our lineage. We are not quite sure what you do." They never ask what it is; they just say they don't quite know. Living with the structure of a rule book in some ways is very simplifying but it carries with it an implicit violence to the other. It means that the welcome is diminished. However, if our refuge is in awareness, in presence, then it is not going to be in ritual structures, in organisational identities, in personal possessions so much. If you build your house out of things you control, then the other is always a threat to that control. But if you start to ground yourself in an open presence there is much more flexibility.

### Our Own Mind as the Object of Refuge

---

In the Tibetan tradition there are many kinds of refuge. We start with the Buddha, his teachings and the group that follow him. Then we take refuge in the guru, the tantric teacher who gives the transmissions of the practice, in the meditational deities, the yiddams, in the dakinis who are the energising forces who bring inspiration, and linked with that you can sometimes take refuge in the dharma protectors. Then we also take refuge in the three aspects of the Buddha's nature: the dharmakaya, sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya. However, particularly in dzogchen the object of refuge is our own mind, our own nature. This is the true refuge. For as long as you are taking refuge in something external to yourself it can be lost; the bridge that you make, the connection, can be attacked in some way. But if you are present in yourself nobody can steal that from you.

In dzogchen we talk of the Three Vajras, the three indestructible aspects of our existence, the body, speech and mind. Clearly our body is changing all the time and it is not indestructible in the way that some very powerful steel is almost indestructible or a diamond. But it is indestructible in the sense that when you are present in openness your body is something which is manifesting in a direct relationship with your presence, and so the lived continuity of yourself is never broken.

However, most of the time, as we have touched on before, we have 'bits of our body'. For example we may not be aware of our shoulders and then suddenly we get a bit of a pain and our shoulder comes back. That is to say, our bodies pulse in and out of existence as more or less of them come to our awareness. The continuity of our body is an abstract concept for most of us because we are not actually embodied; we don't feel the vitality of our body all day long – we vanish. You may be reading a book or you are at your computer screen and you are completely in it. And then, you get a back ache... and there is your back. Previously, when you were in the activity and it was going well you didn't have a back.

However, through the practice we can become more and more just a ceaseless and seamless movement of open presence, the radiance of the environmental potential and just this precise movement. Last night it was very lovely for me watching people dancing. There were incredible shapes and colours, so much humour and connection. It was very beautiful. There was a sense of the freedom of connection. By not interrupting ourselves with anxiety or self-consciousness the body just finds new ways of being. It brings a lot more connection with people as they dance and so you start to see the whole field is interacting and moving together. That is an image of our own existence – we are moving with the world all the time.

If our own mind is the refuge in dzogchen, an important central question is: where are we in ourselves? We have many different aspects to ourselves: we can call them sub-personalities, self-states or schemas, and when we are identified with these part-aspects and we are strongly inside one of them, then the view from 'here' is the view from that state, which could be anger or irritation or confusion. We can use the example of the stage lighting at a theatre when the lights flood onto the stage. There is a central box with a white light and a disk with coloured filters which turns around to give a different colourations. This is similar to our experience: the central light of our consciousness illuminates different aspects of ourselves, and when one aspect is the site of our being, of where we are when we move into the world, we will have a particular colouration.

For example, if you are in a very irritable mood what you see is a hot, red aspect of the world. You become pernickety, very attentive to detail and easily disturbed by things not being right. Then you are in another mood and you feel more gentle, more at ease and all is fine. So in that sense, if our capacity for movement and richness of response to the world is in the service of

connection, that is one thing, but if we have retreated into a position and over-invested it with identity then we meet the world in our limitation – that is then all we get.

When we do the three Aa practice what we are doing again and again is finding where we are in ourselves. When you sit and you find yourself caught up in something, for the period of time you are caught up in that, that is your 'here'. That is the place where you are, and what you are experiencing is the view from that place. Then that releases a bit and there is a bit more space and you get the view from there. Then the next thing arises and you are in that, and you get the view from there. Thus, our vision, or our experience of the world is like walking in the Himalayas; full of valleys, ups and downs. Each step we take we get a new perspective which we often get caught up in, over identified with. Thus, we shift from one state to another due to the impact of the environment and our internal factors, and we have a very bumpy ride. Although there is the continuity of the presence, which is like the white light shining through, because the filter is turning very quickly, the colouration is very different and very changeable, and if we are only in touch with the colouration we have a sense of disorientation. Then we are at that main crossroads: either we try to control the object in order to stabilise the situation, or relax into the state of presence and allow these various moods and colours to come and go. This is the central thing we have been focusing on in the last two days.

**Question:** Is this the way of the Buddhas also? I used to have an idea that the Buddha was perhaps someone who integrated very fast but perhaps for the Buddha these things don't arise, as the teachings say.

**James:** It depends what kind of Buddha it is. There are the pratika buddhas who live by themselves in state of awareness and don't communicate very much with other people, and don't have much disturbance. But if you take the Bodhisattva vow seriously you are connected with other people, and if you are connected with other people you are going to be disturbed. If you look at the Dalai Lama's face sometimes it looks so sad; he is not exactly sitting on top of a mountain very peaceful and calm. Awareness is peaceful and continuous but the response to others will show all sorts of movements. So if you say, "Oh, yes I should finish all these disturbing qualities in yourself," that is one thing, but if you stay open the disturbing qualities of others will be present for you. To be touched and moved is to allow this motility, this dynamic nature to arise. Thus, the development of compassion is an increasing ability to come out and respond in

different ways to different people, but not to be conditioned by that. In a sense it is about the movement towards absolute or infinite generosity.

### **Practice: being with others – what are our blocks?**

---

One of the things we were thinking about is what happens to our meditation practice when we come to interact with other people. Therefore, I suggest we could try a different kind of practice. In this practice you sit opposite each other in pairs. Initially the distance between you is about a meter and a half. Then you can do the three Aa practice or just sit and relax into the out-breath, relaxing and opening. So at first, just as you would in the three Aa meditation, you are very open, sat with the presence of the other person so that the person is part of the whole context. Then gradually become more aware of the specificity to this person, the particular shape of their face and how they are. Then relax back into the out-breath so you are more spacious again, and then let it come back into the precision. Just experience and observe what arises for you as you become aware of the particularity of the person, and of the person just as part of the experiential field. After a while, if you like, you can start to move a bit closer until you can really see the persons face. From the state of openness just allow yourself to feel this person; look into their eyes from this state of openness – what is that? Then gradually become more aware of them as a specific person and see what that feels like.

I would suggest to do this for fifteen minutes and then take five minutes to talk about it in your pairs. Then we will come back into the group.

[Practice and discussion in pairs]

*James invites the group to share their experience*

**Participant:** My first thought was this is the most frightening meditation experience but it got better. Normally I am quite good of letting go, of breathing out, but at first I thought it was nearly impossible to let go because there was this presence of the other person. But gradually it went into something wider and quite relaxed but at first it was very unusual. It was like the other person was so concrete...

**James:** Maybe it is a little bit like two people meeting who are going to have sex. It helps if both people take their clothes off. If one person has their clothes on and the other doesn't it is not so easy. So as you both get more naked and open you get into something different.

**Same participant:** yes, and it was a process this ten or fifteen minutes...but at first it was very unusual and then it slowly, slowly developed into something very different and very nice.

**Participant:** For me I noticed I had to leave aside at the beginning, the other times when I have done breathing or different practices. I saw him but...it wasn't really a lot of thoughts... but these things came in between. When I noticed that this was happening it was like my heart was not really open ... I realised I was not really with this person, not open to this person here. There were these flashes of things coming in ... holding myself back and not being present or honest with my partner. Then when I noticed I could open my heart to that – just be open to that – and then I saw him quite different then...

**Participant:** At first I was anxious that the other could see something in my eyes that I wanted to hide. So it was not very pure from the very beginning. But then I got more relaxed and more with relaxation. It changed from this looking at how is the other to looking more in the eyes. And this connection more in the eyes felt more relaxed. Also the head seemed to change like the perception relaxes and I am not fixating on the head so it is changing – it could be a total other head.

**Participant:** My experiences were interesting because I started to look, to focus my view on the person in front of me, and then the change in the far [...] [question unclear on audio ]

**James:** Did you notice any changes in your body

**Participant:** Yes I felt panic at first, and then I felt tension in my legs and in my body. I noticed my breath was not always regular – but not all the time – there were also moments when I relaxed.

\*\*\*

This is a kind of practice you can do with a friend from time to time. It is quite useful if you do it a lot because you become aware of the sense of the energetic circle that can be built up. It is done in tantric yoga, particularly in sexual yoga. It is not particularly about the meeting of the genitals, it is much more about the energetic channel that is moving out of the eyes into the eyes, through

the heart, and back through the person; you can build up energy in that way. There are many possibilities, but for our purposes here it is really about exploring what happens when we meet people; it can show us something about our invitation.

For example, if we have a kind of anxiety or a feeling of wanting to hide, then the space of welcome in ourselves is diminished because we have a lot of furniture in the room. Therefore, when we invite the person into our room, there is not so much freedom for them to move around. This practice, then, is diagnostically quite useful in helping us check how we block ourselves; what is our fear of being seen? That shows us the place from 'here' which in that that moment is not this open, naked spaciousness because that is naked and there is nothing to hide. However, when we are in these neurotic fears, anxieties, doubts and shames, there is a lot more busyness. Furthermore, if we imagine that is the quality of energy we are bringing to our interactions every day, we feel that we are quite open but actually we have got quite a closed hand. Therefore, our hope for generosity is inhibited by our fear and anxiety.

It also points to the fact, as you say, that we don't believe we are one with Kuntu Zangpo. We don't feel pure from the very beginning but feel a bit small and stupid, or embarrassed and anxious. Therefore, it is helpful to start to observe what that does to us, that it actually is the prison of existence, is that which keeps us in knots. Through going back again and again into the out breath, expanding more and more, you can start to work your way through that.

### The essential part of bringing dzogchen into daily life

---

Clearly, people are not all good in how they manifest and we know that from ourselves. We have various points of closure and confusion. The non-dual practice is about being aware of one's own limitations and aware of the limitations of others, and working with that. The essential point is workability, to try to integrate a limitation into its own ground so that it is not conditioning.

For example, at work you may have a colleague who is not very pleasant. They may be pleasant to others but not so to you. That is what you have to work with. You have to see how they function and observe how you function in relation to them, and then you have to think, "What is the most important thing?" You may feel that it is their fault and this may seem completely true to you. Is this truth helpful? Generally what you need at work is collaboration; that is what you are there for. Therefore, very often, you have to relax your sense of the 'truth' and work towards

the bridge, the communication, so that you get in step with that person. That means observing your resistance to doing that: “Why should I? They are a fucking arse hole, why should I do it? Why is it always me?” You took the bodhisattva vow – so this is it. If you take the bodhisattva vow it is always you, it is always your responsibility. That is what you promised, that is what you said: “I will help all sentient beings.”

When we say “I want to help this person” we have to think what that means. Then we have to look at ourselves and see: “What is my desire?” If we are trying to impose our desire on them we are not really helping them. We have to be aware of their desire and take that as seriously as we take our own – so we take in account their welfare and our welfare. Given that, we cannot see the whole picture as they are also seeing part of the picture. Thus, if we drop our antipathy, our negative rejection towards them, we start to be able to see that there is some truth in what they say. In doing that we lower the tension between us and they then may be able to see that there is some truth in what we say. And then you get some possibility of working together.

However, this requires really knowing the kind of knots that we have. Therefore, when you are doing the three Aa meditation and you feel you are not making much progress, that you are just stewing in your own juice with the same kind of thoughts coming again and again, don't despair. For at least that gives you a chance to really observe what your neurotic pattern is, what the motifs are, what are the image patterns of your fantasies? What are the points where you close down? What are the things you get excited about? The more you know this, the more you can really think, “This is what is being activated in this moment.” For non-duality means managing oneself in relation to other, and managing the other in relation to oneself. For both arise at the same time; they are part of the same field and so we have to hold both in mind. Which mind? Not this private little mind but this open relaxed spacious mind – so relaxing into the out breath and think, on the most outer level, “This is a work-team and the work team need to collaborate.” This person in front of you has been appointed so they are in role and whatever you feel about them is irrelevant, your job is to work with them. Your emotional judgement is getting in the way of the connectedness, so that is a really central thing: *“Why am I closing the situation down? What benefit is there in protecting my little castle? For, actually, life is moving on and it is moving on in connection. So if I am not connected I am creating a blind spot for myself, I am saying, “I don't want to look there, I don't want to know about it.”* Ok, fine, but now you don't

know about it, so what are they doing? And, of course, your paranoid fantasy about what they're doing is probably not going to be the same as what they are actually doing.

Therefore, this meditation, although it is about relaxation and openness, is not impractical. It helps us to be very precisely connected to the world so that as we become aware of how we tie ourselves in knots we can think, "What do I need to support myself?" Maybe we need to do more yoga or tai chi, change our diet, learn something new, put more time aside for practice, or spend more time with friends, chill out, just be relaxed and easy; you need to look at your own constellation and work that out. Through working with yourself you also get the sense of how you might work with others. Just as with small children, you have to ease them into going in the right direction. If you give them too clear an instruction what you do is you set up a closed system: "What you have to do is this," and "Yes", "No", "I will" and "I won't". The skill is about helping them to be in the place where there need to be. It is the same with ourselves: by being friendly and aware of our structure, we gently bring ourselves to the place that we need to be. Being harsh and getting angry with ourselves, because we have habits that we can't overcome, is not likely to solve the problem. The main thing is tenderness, accepting the limit but knowing that limitations are not a final definition of who we are. Limits in fact are interesting as they contain a lot of information, and by attending to them we can find a way forward.

That is the essential part of bringing dzogchen into daily life. It is relaxing into the openness, experiencing the whole field of subject and object, and then being very precise and delicate as you move with others to achieve what needs to be achieved. And as we looked earlier, that delicacy doesn't mean soft, soft, soft, it means not unnecessary. Sometimes you may need to be very rough with someone, very determined, but just exactly to the point. If you take a walnut and you hit it to open it, if you hit it too hard all you do is get the nut smashed in with the shell, and if you don't hit it hard enough it won't open. It is always about the right force in the right place. That requires knowing 'who is the one who is acting' and 'what is the situation which is being acted on'. And that is not determined by the map in your head.

A lot of life is about building up maps so that things operate automatically, like setting up a computer programme so that everything works according to the map and it just does its job. We also operate in that way, and some systems of meditation are like that. However, in dzogchen we take the maps away. That is why it is always naked and open. We can have many resources to hand, have many things we can bring in, but we will never know in advance what to do. That is a

fact. Therefore, it is about learning how to live in that state, which means 'I don't know' is a great part of our existence. From the point of view of dzogchen that is a sign of wisdom, for it is the mind that wants to know, it is our cognitive capacity that is always mapping and setting things out, trying to plan and move into the future. But we cannot know.

Presence and knowledge are not the same. Being present is aware but not aware of anything in particular, whereas ordinary knowledge is always knowing about something, even when it is not there. It is an abstraction which claims domination over the momentary arising. Whereas, in dzogchen we stay in a state of presence, which reveals the actual nature of the arising moment.

The advantage of this kind of practice is integrating ordinary experience into it. We can be in the shops, our jobs, doing cooking and so on, and every now and then we pause into the out-breath and just be present and open in the situation, seeing the colours and the shapes. From that we move into a more precise perception, a bit like we were doing when we did the meditation of sitting face-to-face. The more we practice this and we can take this into our daily life then, although you don't have so much time to sit and practice, you can bring the practice into all the time you have – and that is at the heart of the work.