
The natural freedom of the mind

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Excerpt:

...Have confidence in the vajra nature of the mind, that whatever happens will not harm me if I am awareness. If however I am my ego formation then there are many things which can upset me. This is the fulcrum, this is the balancing point, which we need to find and in finding it, relax back into the openness...

...That is why it is important to understand that the view of dzogchen is different. Dzogchen operates from the view the view that what is arising cannot contaminate the mirror. The mind, as the infinite, offers hospitality to everything yet without being touched by anything. This is the meaning of non-duality. It's not that there are two different things. It's not that there is just one thing, but that there is the inseparability of these two, which are not one. What is arising in the mind and the mind itself are inseparable but there are not the same. What is inside the mind, the content of the mind is moving and changing. However the mind itself is not moving or changing. Yet the mind and the content of the mind are inseparable. This is the key point...

Day 1. Session 1

As many of you will know, the story of Buddhism began when a young man in North India, called Siddhartha, had some experiences which disturbed his sense of how things were. He had lived a very protected life, having all his needs met immediately and being surrounded by healthy beautiful people. One day, however, he ventured outside his palace compound he saw a sick person, an old person and a corpse, a dead person. This was a big shock for him. It caused him to put into question the assumptions that he had about what life was all about: 'If other people can get old and sick and die then this will happen to me too but so far nothing I have experienced has shown me that life has its troubles and sufferings.' Another day he sees a wandering holy man and decides that perhaps he too should follow that path because that person is looking for truth. This he does until finally he awakens to his own actual situation.

In this way Buddhism begins with a disruption of assumptions. Had Prince Siddhartha not had these experiences and had not been disturbed by them; his life would have gone by on pleasures until he died. He had wealthy parents who created a whole private world for him to grow up in and tried to protect and seal him inside a set of self-fulfilling assumptions about life. I doubt that any of us have grown up with parents so wealthy that they could give us a whole private world to live in. So we have been faced with a range of experiences in our lives that have challenged some of our assumptions. Luckily we have an editing suite inside our head. We edit the film of our life in order to show a particular kind of continuity of our sense of self. In other words, we are electively blind. We ignore many things that could be shocking. We know that climate change is coming, but we don't get upset about it, not really. In my mind I know many things but they have no consequences on my actions. If I were to take such knowledge seriously and bring it into myself then everything would change. I would have fear. I would be outraged at government decisions. Life is easier with anaesthesia and this is what Buddhism begins with: a young man, Siddhartha, fights against the culturally induced anaesthesia of his family situation. His direct experience shifts everything.

Shamatha

The first simple practice we do is called 'shamatha'. We focus our attention on the breath or on some simple external object like a mark on a wooden floor. We rest our attention on that, returning to it whenever we get distracted.

The function of this is to detoxify the addictive quality of thinking, feeling and sensing. Somebody who smokes regularly will have the experience of opening the cigarette packet, putting the cigarette in his mouth and lighting it without even being conscious of doing this. It is so automatic. Something is happening but it is as if nothing is happening because the person is so used to that happening. This merging into the experience so that what one is blind to what one is doing is something we may also recognize in others of our own external behaviours, for example in relation to food, or the internet. Many things can capture our time and our energy without us hardly being aware of it. Whenever a thought is coming out in the meditation, we try to allow it to be just there, as if it were in our peripheral vision. The thought is a possibility; we could be part of it and through that make it part of us, or it can be allowed just to go away. What we find in the meditation is that even when we try to focus, for example on the flow of the breath, we get lost. We suddenly become aware that our mind has wandered off somewhere else. This should be quite alarming since we refer to 'my mind' but I have no control over it and the thoughts it thinks. Controlling the body is easier than controlling the mind. Resisting the temptation to identify with passing thoughts, feelings and sensations is difficult. It happens without our awareness. Thoughts don't arrive with an invitation to join them or not. We don't chose, we just find that we have wandered into distraction.

There are two important things in this. One is that we need to increase our clarity. That means increasing our calm so that we can see things before they quite arrive. In the past when a castle was preparing for an attack, the people would go out and cut down all the bushes and trees around so that they could see where their enemies were coming from. The equivalent for us meditators is to simplify our lives, not live with too much excitement where little secret thoughts might hide under cover of the over-busy movement of the mind.

The second is that I need to examine the fantasy that I am in charge of my life, that I am the boss, when I cannot even manage not to get lost in my daydreams. If I get lost, who is losing me? I become aware of being lost after the fact of being lost. To see myself as the agent, as the one who makes things happen in my life, is a deluding narrative. If I accept that life is happening to me, rather than that I am making it happen, then there are two questions: 'What is life and what is me?' Once we start to attend we find that life is a process of experience, of transient patternings of energy. Because of the patterning a sense of repetition appears, which allows us to take the patternings as enduring. However the pattern itself is repeating: it's not something that is there all the time.

Who is the one who is here? I develop attention; I am attentive and yet I'm not, because I got lost. I may have the sense that I can stand apart from the world and make choices but when I start to meditate I see I have no choice. I have already bought the thought without examining it. That's not something you would do when shopping in a supermarket. There you probably read the packaging to find out if the product is fresh and good for you. My mind is an excellent thought factory producing the highest quality of thinking, or so I believe. But when I meditate I find some weird construction. Something has gone wrong in the quality control department of the mind factory.

Meditation is done not only to achieve a calmer mind but to open up to the possibility of seeing what we are up to, of observing the actual process whereby we move from a degree of clarity to a degree of enmeshed confusion. The thing about calm is that it allows more subtle expressions to be recognised early. If you go to countryside and stand or sit where it's quiet and still, then you start to hear small insects which you wouldn't hear if they were in a garden in the city. In the city we get used to a lot of background noise and in order to deal with that we dull our sensibility so as not to be disturbed. One of the functions of meditation is to re-sensitise ourselves so that we pick up the very subtle traces of past thoughts and the very subtle beginnings of future thoughts. This allows us to separate off thoughts' temptation that they can offer us true meaning if we just follow them. Why is it tempting? Because all of us are looking for meaning in life; all of us have a sense of lack, a sense that something is missing. What is missing? It could be anything.

Yesterday on the bus coming here from the airport there was a mother with two small children. The children had been sharing a little container of juice. The process of sharing this was not very easily managed but once it was emptied the container was nothing at all. It was one of these thin metal, kinds of container; I don't really know how to describe them. The boy discovered that he could blow down the straw and make it go big and small, big and small like a balloon. His little sister's hand kept going out to grab it. When the juice was finished she had no further interest in it but now ..., now I need that. Lack suddenly was disclosed to her and the more pleasure her brother had in blowing this up and down, the greater her lack and need became. When we look around in life we see many such situations. Lack is a free-floating signifier that can lock on to anything which arises. If only I get that object then I would be completed, especially if someone else has it. I feel that something is missing in me and that I have now identified what it is.

In the Western tradition the idea of this is represented by Plato in *The Symposium*, where he expresses the idea that originally human beings were both male and female but were punished for some reasons by being divided into two parts, one male and one female. That is why now we may find ourselves looking for our missing half. Incompletion arises as a punishment. The Christian view is exactly the same. Once we were living in the realm of God, but we were cast out of the Garden of Eden, and keep longing to return. On the basis of that, religions can sell all kinds of interesting goods. Rock bands sell tee-shirts and hats and many such souvenirs; church is selling exactly the same. From the Buddhist point of view, we ask the question, 'What is it that is missing?' Is it an object which is out there? Is it some qualities of the subject? If I had more compassion, if I were more generous, if I were more thoughtful, would I then be a complete human being?

From the point of view of meditation in order for me to be complete the only thing I have to find is myself. However we might think, 'Well I already have myself.' Of course we already have many ideas about ourselves and can tell many stories about ourselves but as we get older and look back we see we had a lot of selves and at the different stages of life we define ourselves in very different ways. Perhaps what I take myself to be is not me because if it were truly me it wouldn't change. Perhaps what I take to be myself is a situation or a manifestation, a construct co-created with the factors around me. That is to say, we can only be ourselves with the permission of the people around us. If somebody is a teacher then he/she has to have a situation in which he/she teaches. It's unlikely that teachers build their own school by their own hands, that they interview themselves for the job and so on. Whatever we say about ourselves is constructed out of situational factors, not intrinsic factors. Is there then any intrinsic truth or basis for our own sense of our existence?

The real goal of meditation is to awaken to the one who is here, not indirectly through telling ourselves stories about who we are, but through being present in the moment of the arising of experience. We do not get intoxicated by experience and neither do we hold ourselves back as cool distant observers. We allow the non-duality of fresh present awareness and the unfolding of the manifold existences that we encounter. We can begin with some basic calming of the mind in order to loosen up our attachment.

Sitting in a comfortable way, let your spine carry the weight of the body so that the muscles are very free and relaxed. You can sit with your hands on your knees or folded in front of you. For this practice the chin is slightly down, the tongue is resting on the palate behind the front teeth, the eyes are slightly opened gazing down the line of the nose, shoulders are back and dropped, and the breath is moving easily, a little through the mouth but mainly through the nose. Sit in full lotus posture if that's easy but it's not necessary. Then simply track the movement of the breath as you feel it on the nostrils. This is not something to think about, you're just being with your sensory manifestation. Whenever you find your attention wandering of and you get caught up in something, then very gently bring it back to the focus.

[Practice]

Another useful function of this simple practice is that it's a kind of diagnostic. It reveals that have certain faults and failings. So what to do? Maybe I think I could do better, I see room for improvement. Maybe then I should try harder. Maybe I am not in such a good place and it would be better if I were somewhere else. Yes, I should make use of the holy Dharma in order to get somewhere else! The Nyingmapa system has nine yantras, nine vehicles, nine methods for traveling. And the mahayana system as 5 stages and 10 paths. As you move through them you probably get a sense of progress, a sense of accomplishment. That's one way of orienting oneself: there is a long way to go, the great heroes are already there, we however are walking pretty slowly and unfortunately death is going to meet us before we arrive at our destination. Better

luck next life, hopefully. The dzogchen tradition says: *'Oh, so you have problems? Who has problems?'* This is much quicker. When we focus your attention on being present, on being aware, we become aware of distraction. Distraction means being moved from where we are. There is a traction, a pulling, whereby we get distorted: *'Ah, something to do. This is good I like something to do. From this day on I will always do my best to resist distraction. Even if I am not going on a big journey I can still be a hero. So I'm going to struggle with distraction. If I want to defeat my enemy, I have to find my enemy. I'll look at my mind, and whenever there's a dangerous thought I'll get my gun out and shoot it.'* But before you can pull the trigger it's gone. This feeling, that seems to catch us, that we're going to be in a struggle, is gone. It's very difficult then to be a hero! Thoughts, feelings and sensations go free by themselves.

This is the deep basis of all dzogchen paths, and it's a strange path because it's a path to being here. It doesn't involve going anywhere else. What goes somewhere else is the illusory journey of thoughts and feelings and sensations. Our awareness never moves. Everything else is moving. Experience is always moving, but without awareness there is no experience. Movement and stillness are inseparable. Movement is not the enemy. The problem is the forgetfulness of stillness in the moment of movement. The nature of the mind is space. Clouds move in the sky but the sky is not contaminated by the clouds. Clouds are merely one of the ways that sky shows its potential – white clouds, dark clouds, storms, rainbows, clear blue open space...

What then do I have to do? I don't have to do anything. How do I do that? That's how we get lost, trying to do something that can't be done.

One of the very interesting things which CR Lama points out in *Oeuvres Choisies de C. R. Lama* is the irrelevance of human knowledge. This is not an ego inflation statement. This is ego deflation. You are redundant because your activity, of which you are so proud, has caused nothing but trouble: *'I want to be special and I want to do things and I want people to see what I do and then I want them to like me.'* The ego inserts itself like a cuckoo in the nest. But what is the ego? The ego is excess, a whirlpool, a swirl of energetic formation. This is what we have to see.

All what we have to do really is to observe ourselves in the process of being ourselves; to look, rather than to act, because when we see, the need for action is less and less. We see that we are dynamic, that we are born and die again and again and again, that what I take myself to be is exactly a taking, a theft out of the undivided field of experience, that I roll a little circle around certain aspects of myself and say that this is what I am but then in the next moment I say that I am something else, and then something else...

The most reliable thing about us is our unreliability. This is the impermanent nature of the mind. So you can see there is a crossroad here. You may decide, *'Ah, I'm going to be reliable. I'm not going to be like one these lost people wandering in samsara. I will know what I think, and I say what I think and I will be clear.'* But this is impossible; impossible because the mind is open. We refer to 'my' mind as if it were 'my' possession, but we appear within our mind. The ego is niched in the mind. Yet we act and behave as if the mind were niched inside the ego. This is what is called a category confusion.

'I' will never be solved because 'I' arise in relation to others. So how could 'I' ever know how 'I' should be? I can only know how it might be useful to behave in a certain situation but I can't know in advance what the situation is going to be. That is to say, we are more when we are less. The less able we are to define who we are, the more we can allow our potential to arise as required into the situation. This is the functional meaning of non-duality. It means that by not holding yourself apart as something separate, by being a participant, the spontaneity of movement will arise as part of the field and will be intrinsically harmonious.

If, however, you start from a position of separation, that there is 'you' and there is 'me', and I have to work out what to do in advance, then a whole sequence of adjustments is required. I may

say something with a particular intention but then you may react to it in a way that I didn't expect. So now I have to say, 'Well I know I said that but I didn't really mean that, what I meant was...' There is no end to this and so nothing we say is complete or clean. *Dzogpa chenpo* means 'the great accomplishment', meaning that from the very beginning everything has been whole; every part is a participant part, not a part held apart, and by trusting the wholeness of the situation, less pre-planned activity is required. We find ourselves just moving in connectivity.

The focus of dzogchen practice is to open to the awareness which is already present and to allow the freshness of the arising of manifestation through the body, speech and mind. Gradually we have less and less interference from the habitual formations that we have acquired and adopted as who we are.

So it's time now for a cup of tea!

Session 2

Most teachings I have received are within the Nyingma tradition, which are lineages in two forms, open lineage and treasure lineage. The open lineage comes from Buddha Sakyamuni and from other early Buddhas and has been passed on from generation to generation. The treasure lineage comes from Padmasambhava who taught in Tibet during the 8th and 9th centuries. These teachings were hidden, some in the earth, some in water, some in the sky. They were later revealed by so-called 'tertons' who were the reincarnations of his early students in Tibet. The accounts say that he was not born in a human way but manifested in a middle of a lake on a big lotus in the form of an eight year old boy. He had little beads of sweat on his face, fresh like early morning dewdrops. Completely fresh and not interfered with in any manufacture.

The outer lineages are transmitted by someone to you and then there is the inner direct lineage of your own awareness. The function of the outer lineage is to awaken the inner lineage. The function of the teacher is to be a site of recognition of yourself.

They are many things in Buddhism that you can learn. There are hundreds of thousands of books, hundred of thousands of different meditation practices and so on. You can learn about them. But knowing *about* something is not the same as inhabiting it. To inhabit something is to make it your own, by massaging it into yourself so that you become the living embodiment of it. Knowing *about* things is like stitching patches onto yourself since, in fact, what they do is displace you from yourself because everything is coming back to you through something you have heard or read.

That is why it is very important to learn how to transform what appears as objective knowledge into subjective experience. The central question is how do I find myself? I am here, I am hidden from myself by myself and because I am hiding myself from myself who will I ask to stop doing this? In the tradition we speak of the guru. Guru essentially means yourself. The guru is not somebody else. The guru is the generosity of the world manifesting as the way of returning you to you. The guru can be visualised as Padmasambhava, or in his/her physical form, or as Tara or as any of the tantric forms. In the dzogchen tradition we usually visualise as forms of light. In the tantric system we work with idealisation: the guru is perfect, I am not perfect. By praying to the guru with great faith I come into connection with the teacher. We might then visualise rays of lights coming from the teacher purifying all the limitations and imperfections of body, speech and mind until you are full of light. The guru in front of you is in a form of light and comes to the top of your head and dissolving into a ball of light, which comes into your heart. Then your body, which is full of light, dissolves into that ball of light. The only thing which exists is one ball of red white and blue light which becomes smaller and smaller and smaller until it vanishes in space. In this spacious open state you are inseparable from the mind

of the guru. Gradually thoughts, feelings, sensations arise again. However now everything you see is the form of the guru, appearance and emptiness; everything you hear is mantra, sound and emptiness; all thoughts and mental experience is the mind of the guru. You continue in that understanding.

When a thought arises in the mind, such as 'President Trump is an arsehole', is this really the mind of the guru? Why would an enlightened mind of all the Buddhas give rise to such a thought? When I would put such a question to CR Lama he would say, 'When you meet the Buddha ask him, don't ask me.' Then you see how we make a judgement and then we judge the judgement. Thought is chasing thought, round and round and round.

This is the mind of the Buddha but it is not what we have read on the packet. When we visited Buddhist temples we saw shiny statues of the Buddha, clean butter lamps, everything beautiful and bright. If people were talking it was about important serious things and not the sort of nonsense that goes on in my mind! It's a bit like going to a famous restaurant which has a very good chef but unfortunately on the night I go the chef is away and the apprentice is cooking. I didn't get the real Buddha mind; I got the apprentice's. Maybe that's why I have all these silly thoughts. If I was really enlightened, my mind would be shining rainbows, filled with beautiful thoughts and spreading love to all beings. If I told my holy guru that I only have thoughts like this he would said, 'I'm glad you are able to tell the Buddha who he is. Now you know what the Buddha is like.'

However we don't know what the Buddha's like. This is the difficulty of being with things just as they are, since we already have so many thoughts about how they *should* be. We have our map; then we visit the territory but, hey, the territory doesn't fit the map. Now we have two choices: either to change the map or to ignore the territory. When we are attached to our map, we close the eyes and enter dreamland.

Everything is the mind of the Buddha. *'You mean when the Russian are bombing the innocent people in Syria, this is the mind of the Buddha? Surely the Buddha is good and that is bad.'* Thinking like this is not meditation practice; it is being an amateur lawyer. If it is this it can't be that. This is good, this is bad; they are not the same.

This is the way duality manifests, firstly subject and object and then good and bad, mine and yours, sacred-profane, enlightened-not enlightened. All these many dualities manifest. We say this is good, we say that is bad. When the Russian troops went back to Russia many of them were invited to the Kremlin. They were greeted with fanfares of trumpets, and President Putin pinned medals on the heroic soldiers who had been fighting for Russia. People in Chechnya or Ukraine may think the soldiers had been barbaric killers but for Russians they had been noble. Who is good? Who is bad? On the basis of opinions we kill people. All the wars in the world are created by opinions. We take an idea, blow on it three times and think we have turned it into the truth.

Judgement is something we have to exercise with care, especially in the practice of meditation. We have to see the difference between two aspects. One, we can call discernment, which means the accurate perception of what is there. Discernment has a relational quality. It's very nice to go to the perfume area of a big department store where they wave little perfumed strips under your nose. The different strands in the perfume start to reveal themselves. With the first one the nose is fresh and you smell many things. When you get further down with the bottles, the echoes of the first smells are starting to wend their way into each fresh new perfume and you end up comparing and contrasting your experience rather than being open to it.

These ordinary life experiences are very helpful because they show how easy it is for us to slip into building structures of interpretation which appear to be illuminating, but are actually

obscuring. If we want the freshness of the situation we need to have a clean nose. We clear the palate between each course of a meal but how do we do this with the mind? Thoughts wed themselves together into patterns very quickly. The key freshener is emptiness. Emptiness means that whatever is being experienced and the experiencer of the experience are not things, are not separate items, but are appearances. Something appears to the eyes, to the ears, to the memory.

Appearance is impactful; it has its quality which is revealed in the moment but there is no internal definition to it. It arises due to causes and circumstances, then its impact diminishes and it vanishes leaving space for something else. Oh springtime, the winter is over, happiness. Then the clouds will come again. Something was there and then it's not. The fact that it's there means it's not nothing at all, there is something which is nothing, as is set up very clearly in the *Heart Sutra*. We have an emotional resonance, a cognitive resonance but there is nothing to grasp. Perhaps you chat with someone and they tell you a sad story. The mood of pathos fills you. Then that too shifts.

Emptiness is the basic space of potential, both the source of what arises and the space within which everything arises. It is the ground, which is inseparable from whatever arises. Thoughts don't leap out of the mind like a fish leaping out of water; thoughts are in the mind. This room is in the mind.

Experience is the movement of the mind and as such it is impactful and ungraspable. We arise with it but we can't get it, hence the freshness of our existence. In Sanskrit this is called *sahaj*. *Sahaj* is the spontaneous co-emergence of subject and object. In Tibetan it is called *lhan chig kyepa* means there are not two things but there is not one thing; it is the non-dual integrated arising. Appearance is inseparable from emptiness. It doesn't mean that appearance is dissolved into emptiness and becomes empty but that ungraspability shows many different forms of itself.

So what happens when you go into judgements? I don't like this tasteless tomato! What am I talking about? About my idea of tomatoes. This particular tomato has been recruited into my campaign against tasteless tomatoes. I have the idea of the proper tomato and I have this poor specimen on my plate, this betrayer of tomato-ness! You have cheated me. I approach the tomato through my idea. Do I actually taste the tomato? I tasted it in terms of what I thought it should be. I am not fresh and open to the tomato. I am assessing whether it fits my template? My map comes first; the world comes after. This is what is meant in Buddhism by judgement: our relation with what is arising is mediated through our own mental constructs. In Sanskrit these mental constructs are called *samskaras*. They are composite in themselves and they are also compositional in that they gather and shape more factors. It's very important to observe how much energy goes into creating our judgements about the world.

I myself have not been appointed government tomato inspector, so my distress at having this tomato in front of me changes nothing except my mood. It's the same with a lot of our judgements. We are small powerless people, and though we may become angry or upset about something, nothing changes. Nothing changes except that we have upset ourselves.

I am upsetting myself. What does that mean? 'I' - ego self as a set of ideas- is being disturbed by the development of other ideas. Idea is chasing idea; thought is chasing thought. There is always something to complain about. Always. When we were walking here this morning, somebody came up to beg from a woman who was walking just in front of us. She waved him away and was quite disturbed by his presence. She began to tell us all the faults of this man, that he had a mobile phone and yet was begging, and so on. The moment had passed but she was now

thinking that it was not right, that people shouldn't do that. If people behaved properly, life would be better. All this may be true but it's not going to happen.

What we see here is the bed for omnipotent ego formations. *"If I were in charge, I would not make the world that way. How come these incompetent people are in power? Don't they know how to behave?"* This is irrelevant. Nobody cares. But we care. Why? Because we are talking and thinking ourselves into existence. Just as the dog going down the street pisses on the lamps to mark its territory so we put our judgements on the world to say: I exist. These judgements are actually self-referential, they are confirming to me the validity of my self-position. They are part of the on-going process of the construction of the individual sense of self. And they are activity. If you want it to stop you just have to not do it.

"I need to do it. If I didn't do it who will I be?" Well you can't know until you stop doing it. *"But I'm already me. You want me to give up my Me Land passport and to become a citizen of Buddha Land? No, I want to have dual citizenship. I want to be 'me' and also be enlightened. Who knows, maybe if I stop being 'me' the Buddha won't give me a passport. What then?"* This is why they always say faith is very important.

The encouragement here is just to start to observing how busy you are in generating your particular take on the world. It's not about trying to stop the thought production. The first thing is to see how much busy movement is in our life.

The ego is a commentarial function. It's always giving its opinion, running a narrative, creating patterns of importance. From the point of view of the ego this is vital because this is how it confirms its existence. From the point of view of open awareness this is very sad since you are hiding your own actuality from yourself; it is our own activity, which blinds us to the openness of being. There is no devil doing it, no force of evil. It's not being done by anything from the past. You might say that it's due to karma but we had a lot of karma, inexhaustible karma. How can I ever be sure that I am free of this? This is another illusion.

In this very moment, the stale is available because of the fresh. The freshness is the host of the stale. In therapy I have patients who come and say I hate myself. Then I ask them: What have you done this morning. Oh I got up, I didn't want to get up, I made breakfast, I didn't want to make breakfast. They are showing that are very sophisticated in smearing shit over everything. Life smells of shit because they put shit on it. But if one gets close to the details of the life, usually there is something that manages to avoid the shit. When you walked down your street past people's gardens, did you notice that the buds are starting to come out on the branches? Did you find some fresh moment in which the person has been touched? They were touched because the world came to them. The depressive factory, which is pumping out hopelessness and uselessness on to everything and on to themselves, that engine was stopped for a moment because they were touched and moved. We all have that kind of experience. Suddenly you see a little robin hopping about and you're touched. "Oh!" and that "Oh!" is very nice, something came in, "Oh!" comes out. The mind is empty. Just some kind of soft gentle surprise. This is on a very general level. This is an indication that the freshness is always there. It's not something you have to get from somewhere else or is the reward of doing a lot of practices.

The freshness is the ground of our experience always present, always generous. However when we are caught up in our thought production it becomes invisible to us. The practice is to open to freshness. When we go out of here into the street, there are cars, there are people. We have a lot of capacity to tell the world what it is, which means that we then have a stale world, a world constructed in our own image. Just relax and allow the shapes of the cars, the shapes of the people to come to you. Be undefended, receptive. Then the world starts to feel very different. In that way we realise that the hunger of the ego to go and get what it needs is ridiculous. We are

living in a land of plenty; there is beauty everywhere and yet we are hungry. Everything is Padmasambhava so why do we say, *'Not this, I want that.'*?

Session 3

The first statement of Garab Dorje

These *Three statements of Garab Dorje* begin with what may be called an introduction. Sometimes it's translated as 'pointing out'. I can point out where the clock is. There is something that can be pointed out but the mind cannot be pointed out because it's not a thing. So before we even begin to consider what Garab Dorje said we have to be clear about the nature of knowledge.

Knowledge is generally based on the accumulation of bits of information. Somebody is deemed to be knowledgeable if they have accumulated a lot of information and can present it in way that are comprehensible to other people. Some things you can know but some things you can't. The 20th century European philosopher Wittgenstein wrote about the distinction between telling and showing. Many things can be said, can be described, but some things can only be shown. A traditional Tibetan example of this is if somebody doesn't know what sweetness is, you could use thousands and thousands of words to try to describe sweetness and they can memorise all these words but they still wouldn't know what is sweetness. If, however, you take a spoonful of honey and put it on their tongue they immediately would know what is sweet. Now that they know what sweetness is you could ask them to tell you what it is, but they also would find it impossible.

When we talk about pointing out the mind or describing the nature of the mind, it's important to take the words in a very light way. They are metaphorical, they allude to things that evoke something but they cannot precisely describe what it is. They are an invitation to put yourself in the way of something which is already there. To put yourself in the way of your mind is to get out of the way of yourself, that is to say, to get yourself out of the way. It means relax, open and be with what is here.

The mind is described as being naked, not covered. Earlier this morning we were exploring how although we think we perceive external objects just as they are, we are actually projecting our knowledge on to that appearance. In our ordinary life we rely on such mental activity to make our world function. We are glad when a thought comes that we have to pay a bill: "Oh, I forgot to do that. I'd better to do it now." The thought arises as a kind of illumination. It is the light which guides most of our actions, the light of conceptual elaboration. The more thoughts we have, the more sophisticated thoughts are our thoughts, the more we can illuminate our life. It is difficult to recognise that this practice of illumination is itself obscuring.

If you go out on a dark night gradually your eyes adapt and there is usually a little starlight so that you get some sense of what's there. Maybe a friend arrives and says, *'Don't worry I have this torch.'* They put on the torch; there is a very bright beam and some of the world is suddenly illuminated. However what is not illuminated is still in darkness. It's the same with conceptual illumination — it doesn't deal with the problem of darkness; it creates a pseudo illumination. As long as the torch battery is working, or with a pump torch, as long as you keep pumping, the light will be there. As long as you keep thinking, the light of the cognitive illumination will continue to radiate for you. However this is a light that arises due to causes and circumstances. It's not self-existing. It can be influenced by all sorts of things for example health issues. In order to find ourselves we need to have an illumination which is not that of concepts.

In paintings of the primordial Buddha Kuntuzangpo he is dark blue in colour. This dark blue is the colour of the sky at the very first moment of the dawn. It's just a couple of shades up from

black. Out of not knowing comes light. Not knowing means letting go of the reliance of thoughts. This means, for example, when we get a bit confused in our practice, perhaps not sure what we are doing or why, then we can think about it. We might wonder if we would be better of reciting mantras since at least then we would know what to do. However thinking this way is a very dangerous friend from the Dzogchen point of view because you have to not feel like you. *'If I don't feel like me who then will I feel like?'* Feel like anything. The mind is just empty. Nothing. Stuff is happening but it's not me. Leave it alone. So when thoughts and feelings arise in the mind they can be experienced but if you try to incorporate them into your sense of self, this becomes a problem. We arrive with nothing, we play, and we leave with nothing. The playing is playing in emptiness.

The nothingness of the dark gives rise to Buddha Kuntuzangpo, in Sanskrit Samantabhadra. It is the radiance of the mind showing itself. It's not an illumination which brings some things into the foreground and leaves other things in the background but is the very soft light of early dawn, which lightens everything. I find it very beautiful to be up early on a summer morning, out in the country, and seeing the first light. Everything is just as it is in its own place. This is the light of the mind of Samantabhadra. It's not a busy light it's not doing things and making things. It's a light that we can be. When we open to the dawn we are part of that experience. When the mind is quiet and the world is quiet there is wholeness.

So what is my mind? From the very beginning our mind is here. Without a mind we wouldn't be able to think or walk or move, the mind is the illuminator. It illuminates everything. We turn our head and everything in the room is illuminated just as it is. It's not selective. In the tradition it's often compared to a mirror. The mirror shows whatever is placed in front of it. The mirror is not selective. It's not composing any image, it's a simple showing, a showing which didn't invite, doesn't hold on and doesn't push away. It just allows. If you drive here in your car, the mirror has shown thousands of images. The image arises and passes, arises and passes. Each image, each reflection is in the mirror but they are not stacking up like layers of lasagne. Each image is there and then gone. The image is present and yet empty in the mind, which is also present yet empty. The reflection is in the mirror, it's not added on to the mirror, but you can't take a reflection out of the mirror. Nor can you say the reflection *is* the mirror because the mirror is not defined by the particular image which is being reflected at that moment. Similarly our mind is opened and empty. Moment by moment we have sensations, feelings, thoughts, memories, hopes, and fears arising and passing. They are us, they are in us, and then they are gone.

That we are some thing is undeniable and yet is not fully true. It is true of the context. So if I tell you that I feel a bit tired, this grammatical construction is a little bit generous, it's a little bit infinite. The sentence really should be: 'I feel a bit tired just now after having eaten a large lunch in a warm room.' As the temperature in the room cools, as my digestion changes, I will no longer feel like this. Each moment a situation is true but not intrinsically true.

The emptiness of the mind allows the emergence of the patterning of situations. What arises is true experientially but not essentially, just as the reflection in the mirror is there, is undeniable, and yet has no self-substance. There is no essence to the reflection. A traditional example is full moon light. You may see the reflection of the moon in a pond. If the night is calm and the water is unruffled then you can see the moon very clearly. It is as if the moon is in the water. *'It's the moon! Look at the moon!'* It's not the moon, but it appears to be the moon. I look at my face in the mirror and know it's me, it's not you. Something is there but there is no truth, or reality, or substance to it. It is the illusory nature of phenomena, which is both the consequence of, and the guarantor of, the emptiness of the mind. If the mind were a solid substance, a piece of clay, a piece of wood, of metal you could make lots of things from it, but not everything. If you took a piece of the wall here, you could draw and paint on it, put many different colours on it and after a while it would just become a mess and any further mark that you made wouldn't make

much difference. What you would have is the building up of marks. The wall seems to support accumulation. But a mirror doesn't offer accumulation. As the next arrives the first has gone. We observe this in our mind, the impermanence of all phenomena revealed through the arising and passing of whatever is happening.

If we're looking for our mind we have to look in a way, which is different from how we look for other things. If you're looking for an object, you'll surely find an object. Why? Because all objects are created by mind. If you think of your mind as an object then you can imagine that your mind is anything whatsoever. You can imagine that it is the echo of god's love. You can imagine that it is your brain produced by DNA. You can imagine that it is cursed by demons. You can imagine all sorts of things. This is your freedom. Your imagination wants to give you what it is however mind is not something to be got. How will I get something, which can't be got? We are here, we have a mind, we *are* a mind and we don't need to get what we already have. You are here, your mind is present. How to be your mind? But you *are* your mind.

The real question is how not to be the one who doesn't know how to find their mind. Your mind is hidden by the mind's own mental construction. Thoughts don't hide the mind by standing between me and the mind. If I am looking in a mirror to try to see my reflection how will I find that reflection? If I put my hand in front of my face the reflection of my face will be hidden by the reflection of my hand. Something has been interposed between me and my own mind. I have to remove this as if it's an obscuration. I want to find my mind.

As CR Lama once explained, a dog has a tail. The dog and the tail belong together. The most important thing here is to realise that the dog wags the tail. If the tail wagged the dog it would look strange! So I have to find my mind. I, the dog, seem to have lost my mind. If you are thinking/looking in this way you will never find your mind. Why? Because you are looking in the wrong way. The dog wags the tail: when the mind moves, the ten thousands things appear.

I am the movement of my mind. The mind comes first. It shows the interplay, the eternal dance of subject and object. In our normal way of conceptualizing, *I* am a permanent fixture that has experiences. Experiences come and go but *I am* always here. I can remember being five years of age. I can remember my first bicycle. I have had so many experiences since then. This is the view of duality. *I* am the enjoying subject and I have had experiences out of which I can create more stories. But who is this 'I' talking of itself? Everything I say about 'me' is arising and passing.

The impermanent flow, the ever-changing flow, of the unfolding energy of the mind shows itself as subject and object. Every subject exists with object. You don't have a subject without anything going on. Subject and object is a *pas de deux*, it's not a solo. The subject side in the *pas de deux* of dualistic experiences, is me. I'm here but I am the tail of the dog. That's a central thing. Where is the dog? You may think, '*I am going to work everything out, I am going to find my mind*', but the ego is big and powerful and the mind is a little lost sheep wandering on the hill. This is what makes meditation very difficult —you're starting with false axioms and the axioms determine the progress of your understanding.

When the text says that the mind is naked, what could it be recovered by? The perception of subject and object. However I rely on the perception of subject and object to help me know what is going on. So this requires a radical shift. Enlightenment is not gained by more thinking or by better thinking, it's not a conceptual creation; it is the direct revelation of how it is. I am going to meditate by letting go of myself — by allowing all that I take to be myself to be what it actually is, which is part of the flow of experiences. That is to say, 'I' am an experience not the experiencer; 'I' experience 'myself'. I experience myself talking with you, looking around at different people.

In that moment I can see that 'I', as energetic formation, is something arising and passing. So who is experiencing myself as an experience? That's what we want to find.

When we do the meditation, the simplest way is just to sit in a comfortable way and relax into the outbreath. We do it with a gaze slightly opened, looking into the space in front of us. That is because we don't want to create the sense of going into oneself; we're just here. What's here is me and everything. Here I am; thoughts, feelings, sensations are all going on. There is an urge to identify with certain aspects of what is arising as me. I may become a little bit aware of some tension in my legs, *'Oh my legs are bit sore.'* This is a construction but it seems to be something about me. Let it go. Whatever occurs let it go.

The letting go is not effortful, because everything goes by itself anyway. It's the holding on which is effortful. So we're just sitting, a sunny afternoon, time is going by, nothing is gained, nothing is lost. Where, how and with whom is this occurring? If I don't tell myself a story about who is the experiencer, experience is occurring, therefore there is an experiencer. If you want to find the experiencer be at the point of experience. For example, a little sensation suddenly arose here in my forehead. If that is the main thing that is manifesting, then because it's there, awareness is there also. We find the mind at the point of experience, since there is no experience without mind.

Again and again, do not merge into the experience and be part of it, do not stand apart from it and try to examine it, but be the very field of awareness within which experience is arising and passing. You then start to see that what you take to be object arises and passes, and what you take to be subject arises and passes. This is the showing, or the display of the energy, of the creativity of the mind.

However it is not the mind itself. Without the mind it wouldn't appear but however it is doesn't define the mind. Just as with a mirror you wouldn't have a reflection without the mirror yet the particular details of the reflection don't define the actual nature of the mirror. We are not blocking the flow of experience, we are not trying to capture any of it, we're just staying present in the very moment of the unfolding of space and time.

Don't push away thoughts you think are negative, don't try to hang on to thoughts which are positive, just relax into the open presence which is your awareness. Allow the energy formation, which is the self-referential ego, to relax into its own ground of spaciousness.

We will try this for a while.

[Practice]

With this kind of meditation you don't do it for long at first. It's not a matter of making effort; it's not a matter of struggling, rather again and again gently find yourself where experience is. It's just a matter of practice. For some people it's quite easy, for others it's more difficult, but it's neither a race nor a competition; it's about being fully at home in yourself. All the familiar thoughts and feelings and behaviours that you have can continue to arise. There is nothing particular to renounce, nothing to develop except this singular point of identification.

For example, if I say I am talking, the comment 'I am talking' is like a friendly accompaniment to the fact of talking. They are running together. But if I just tilt it slightly away 'I am talking', then that little gap gives me the sense of evaluating what I am doing so that instead of it being a process description, it is a sort of review from 'central command' evaluating how I'm doing and also giving me the chance to have a feeling of importance.

So what we are doing in our practice, is a very subtle rebalancing so that we are as close to our experience as possible, without falling in — not merged in it, not apart from it, but present with it. The mirror is present with the reflection. The mirror is not doing anything to the reflection, not defending itself against the reflection, or rearranging it, or trying to get rid of it. So if you are sitting and you feel a bit heavy, if a thought comes — “I don’t know what I am doing, this is not meditation” — just sit with that. Sit not believing it, not disbelieving it, sit where the experience on a manifestation is. The mind is there because the mind is the show-er of the experience.

It is not the semantic content of the thought which is important. This is a shift in our criteria because in our hunger for meaning we want to get good thoughts that give some value and get rid of bad thoughts which seem to devalue us. Here all thoughts have the same status. They are just reflections. Their main function for us in meditation is to show us how to be present with our mind. Ignorance, the beginning of samsara, is the identification with the thought. Who identifies with the thought? The thought of 'I'. Samsara is thought chasing thought, thought building thought. There is nothing wrong with thought. But thought in its self-intoxication has a blindness or ingratitude. Without the mirror there is no reflection. When you look in a mirror, the reflections seem to come out and you never see the mirror; you just see the reflection. The reflections fill up in the mirror in a way that hides the mirror itself.

We all know the story of Cinderella. Poor girl, her mother dies, father remarries with a woman who already has two daughters, big daughters, strong daughters, self-admiring daughters. And the daughter of the father is moved down into the kitchen. All day long she is cleaning, repairing, being the servant. She is the daughter of the house but she is usurped. In the story there is a magical transformation, which allows Cinderella to be returned to her true status. So it is in the story of our lives; awareness is like Cinderella. All day long showing nice images, showing nice images, the images are preening themselves and they take up all the space. We think that the thoughts and feelings and memories are who I am. But this is dependent on the mirror. The tail is dependent on the dog. Without the mind, none of these experiences would arrive but in the moment of forgetfulness of the mirror thoughts become self-cherishing and self-absorbed. Samsara is an ungrateful child. The mother is there. The child and the mother are never separated. The child is continuously dependent on the mother but the child says, 'I exist, I'm me, I have always just been myself.' The child doesn't remember coming out of the mother's body. The child says, 'As long as I can remember I've been me.' The mother is thinking, 'Oh Oh, I have a different memory.'

So, awareness is open to everything but our ego self is constructing this narrative of self-existence and self-validation. It's not that the ego has to be transformed; it simply has to recognize its own ground — that the ego is the radiance of the mind and is not the mind itself, although it is a part of what is going on. If a small part clings to be the whole story something is wrong, because it's clinging too much while standing on very narrow ground.

In the practice we relax, and open, again and again, and in that way we merge into the ground. We are the ground, we waken to be the ground, and then we directly experience all that we take to be our subjectivity continuing to move in the space of the mind.

Earlier I described the tantric method of doing this. Meditating on the image of the guru, the yidam, meditation on deity, receiving the four lights of initiation and then dissolving into and through the deity into emptiness. It's exactly the same thing. That which appears to be separate is re-grounded in a ground that it has never left. We are going to turn to this practice again and I'll explain more and we can see if they are any questions. Then we can look at problems that can arise in meditation.

The first two chapters of *Collected Works of CR Lama* present a very condensed description of the tantric and dzogchen paths, showing the particular interest or orientation of each style. I would recommend the book to you since if one doesn't know why one does what one does, then one ends up with only a very general notion such as 'because it's Buddhism it must be good'.

The Buddhism we need is the Buddhism that we can use. Dzogchen practice does not work if you are tired, exhausted and feeling low. Tantric practice is better at this time. If you're upset and confused you can put your hands together and pray, 'Big mama, big papa, please save me.' You call the mama Tara, you call the papa Padmasambhava, and this is the best practice because it fits the quality of your energy. You may feel small and desperate and you want to hang on to something, so rather than phoning your friend in the middle of the night and giving them a hard time, then pray! And dissolve into the deity! At other times when you are more relaxed and at home in yourself, you can do dzogchen direct sitting practice.

What this means is that you have to respect yourself. You have to find the dignity of your own embodied existence and work with that. If you feel depressed and hopeless for some reason, rather than seeing this is something shameful or difficult, the question is what will you do with this. In the kitchen you realise you only have some old bread and some onions ... dumplings! You have to know how to cook and cooking depends not on the recipe book but on the ingredients. You can have twenty recipe books with lovely bright pictures but if you don't have much food in the kitchen, that's going to limit what you can cook.

So be friendly with yourself, be kind towards yourself, respectful of yourself. However you are, think how you would like to collaborate with this patterning of energy. If the body is tired you shouldn't do vigorous exercises. We have to listen to our capacity because if we are against ourselves, if we are driving ourselves, how can we awaken to a state of integration and collaboration? From this point of view, no matter what state we find ourselves in, however we are, we can work with that.

Session 4

It's a paradox. When we are chasing something we are usually disappointed and when we open to having nothing we find we have everything. Desiring something is not bad or wrong, it's just that it is hyper-focused. Try it now. If you focus your gaze directly in front of you, you get a particular kind of experience. Then if you relax your gaze a peripheral vision opens and you have a completely different experience. Your wide room is always here but when we have this fixated vision, we don't see it. It hasn't vanished or gone somewhere else. When we let go of the fixation on something by not wishing for anything in particular, we find everything becomes available. Then having access to everything by being relaxed and open, the sense of lack, the sense of something missing, starts to dissolve. What could be more than this?

What makes this small is comparing it with that. When you have just this, this is this. It is what it is, this is it. Satisfaction and contentment are revealed through being open and empty, accessible to everything. We are not blocking or editing our receptivity. We are available in that we can manifest different aspects of ourselves according to the situation.

In the tradition they refer to this in terms of 'the three kayas', or the three modes of the Buddha's existence. The first is the Dharmakaya, which is the mind of the Buddha inseparable from open space. Because it is without limit in any direction, everything is already within it and so it has no lack. Then without effort, the clarity of the spaciousness reveals itself. Returning to this image of the mirror, when you look into the mirror to find the mirror-ness of the mirror, you can't find anything. The mirror however shows itself through its clarity of revealing reflections of whatever is placed in front of it.

In the same way, since our mind is empty it has hospitality for everything. Its shining quality, or illuminating quality of clarity, is the display of the field of experience. It doesn't have to do anything to display this. In the traditional example the mind is like the sun in the sky; it's bright in itself and it sends up rays. These rays fill the sky, which is the clarity, and when they hit the earth, it is in the form of focused light and heat. Within this open clarity of our mind we find ourselves walking and talking and speaking. This arises situationally.

For example, where we are now in this Buddhist setting, and at this time of retreat, we find ourselves talking to people in ways that we might not talk if we were at work. The setting allows and supports particular kinds of conversations. It's not that we make a decision to talk in this way but that by being in touch with the environment we find that particular words come out of our mouth. In the tradition this field is referred to as the sambhogakaya, the enjoyment or the aesthetic appreciation quality of the clarity of the field. It is often linked to the idea of pure buddhalands, like Buddha Amitabha's Western paradise. Our world, right here in this room, right now at this moment, is also a buddha field.

Within that the nirmanakaya, the movement of the energy of the Buddha as a compassionate expression, just arises. Something occurs. We find ourselves being part of something in a particular way. Talking is occurring without a talker, movement is occurring without a mover. It's not that there is some little person, some homunculus inside us who is pushing out our words or our movements but rather when we are self-forgetful, that's when we do being ourselves better. When I don't know that I'm doing me, I do me better. The nirmanakaya radiates out through the shared field of connectivity. When we retreat into anxiety about ourselves, this creates a threshold in front of us that we have to step over to go out into the world. This dualistic splitting generates a feeling of self-consciousness and a process of artificiality. How will I be, how should I be in order to be okay with other people? What are they thinking about me? Many unanswerable questions are generated by anxiety. In response to these questions, the anxious person formulates rituals and obsessional behaviours as a way of trying to regulate the uncertainty of existence. The problem is not, however, the unpredictability of the world, but it is our alienation from the non-dual field of experience from which we ourselves cut ourselves off.

You can try this as an experiment, go into a café or a bar and hold in mind the thought, 'Everyone is looking at me and they don't like me.' Stay for about half an hour looking around and checking if people are looking at you. You will not feel very relax. Who is creating the lack of relaxation? You yourself. You're bringing in a particular reading to the situation, you say, 'I am an object, which can be judged and evaluated by other people.' I am at the mercy of the thoughts others have about me. People are shy, embarrassed, and ashamed; this kind of apprehension of the world is very normal. A whole feeling of insecurity and paranoia is generated from the basic supposition, the basic proposition that 'I am an object'. I am a thing. And therefore I can be defined. I can be caught. But when we are relaxed and open, we can't be caught. Even if somebody expresses a critical opinion of us, we can just say welcome to your mind that's you, it's not me. In that paradoxical way, being open is being protected whereas being defensively closed is an energetic provocation for more grief and worry and anxiety.

This is quite normal in our functioning in the world. Allowing the world to manifest through us without interfering involves a trust, a trust that we are part of what is going on. This is not a proposition of belief. It's not a dogma that you have to adopt in some way. It is something that you can experience directly through the meditation.

So we will do a little bit more meditation now.

We want to explore precisely for ourselves 'Am I an object?' 'Is my mind a thing?'

What are the qualities of things? They are located. Beside me there is a wooden box, this box is on my left-hand side. The box is smaller than me, it has a colour, it has a shape which I can define and it has a beginning and an end. I can see that it was made because I can see various marks made by nails and I can imagine that after some time it will be destroyed. It's something located in time and space. just as the cup of water is, and just as I am. I came out of my mother's body, now the years are going by and I'm getting old and tired, and ahead of me is sickness, and death. The arch of my life is past midday. In that sense my life has a shape, there is a beginning, a middle and there will be an end. If I tell the story of my life I may say " Oh I was born there, I went to school there, I went to university there, then I was there, then there, then there", we all do this. Here, here, here, we are always somewhere. We are always someone, somewhere. This is the thingness of our individual sense of self.

Five questions to the mind

When we start to look at the mind, in the tradition we look at five questions. Because we want to see, is the mind a thing like all the other seeming things in the world.

1. Does the mind have a shape? Is it round or square, triangular?
2. Does it have a colour?
3. Does it have a size, is it bigger than the body, is it bigger than the house, is it smaller than the body, smaller than inside the brain?

Then there are three linked questions.

4. Where does the mind rest, at this moment, at each and every moment where is the mind?
5. Does the mind ever leave; does it go away some place? We know that thoughts arise, and stay, and go as do feelings, and sensations, and buses.

So with all these questions we are asking ourselves whether the mind is in the same family as all other phenomena. Or is it different? What we are looking for is not just an idea about it, but we're looking for direct experience. We can see with small babies how they are interested in their mouth and when they start to develop the teeth, they're chewing on the fingers. Then at a certain moment "Ouch!" they have the experience of 'this is my finger!' This is not theory. "Ouch!" is direct experience. So that's what we want. We don't want an idea about an idea about an idea because they always vanish. So in questioning our mind we want to directly taste "Oh it is this!" It is direct experience that opens up a new vista. 'Ideas about' belong in one paradigm. Direct experience opens up another.

As we start this questions we will start by sitting in a relaxed way, releasing tensions through a long slow outbreath. Then we just sit present with what ever is occurring. Gently allow these questions to arise. We want the questioning to be very soft and gentle, not an invasive active questioning but more a passive receptive questioning. See if you can, just by your own availability, allow yourself to see how your mind is. With these five questions, just very gently illuminating the area of exploration.

[Practice]

These questions are the great friends of meditators. Through our general education we have gathered a lot of information about how we are. People have told us what the body is, what the brain is, what hearing is, what liking is and so on and we can use this knowledge to organise our own sensory experience. It's normal in Western cultures to think that mind is in the brain and the brain is in the skull. We are educated to think that there is a material basis for the mind, that it arises due to causes and conditions and that it will vanish due to causes and conditions. That is

to say, the mind is just like everything else. We have that support and holding that kind of view supports you in the idea that something is coming into your mind and something is going out of your mind. Where was it before it came into your mind? Where is the bordercrossing from no-mind to mind? We are sitting here; we may hear a car on the road outside. Of course we don't hear a car in the road outside, we hear a sound and we interpret on the basis of our knowledge and habit formations that there is a car outside on the road. In school we learned about sound vibrating through the air, coming into the ear and setting up vibrations which the brain then interprets. That is a stream of thoughts. This is a very important crossroad because if the thoughts are right, I am a diminished being in a diminished world and buddha-nature is just a daydream. Or are these thoughts illusory constructs that offer us modes of interpretation, which mean again further thought construction. If we don't push them away, if we don't merge into them, what is here?

When a sound arises, the immediacy of it is in our mind. Where is our mind? Where the sound is? Does my mind move from here to where the cup falls over? (*A cup had just fallen over*) As soon as the cup is falling, it's as if my mind is apprehending or revealing this experience. Going from here to there is a temporal spatial notion starting with the assumption "I am here". But the immediacy of the sound has been there before I'd left here. The being-here-ness is an interpretation.

Does a mind have a shape? What do we find? The mind seems to be able to open up. In this room the limit of what we can see is the walls. If we go out of the city or up onto a city roof the whole sky is revealed. Our direct feeling is that we have immediate access to that whole vista. The world shows itself in and as the field of experience. If we keep looking we notice that sometimes the mind looks big and sometimes it looks very small. It's like when I look in a shaving mirror and my face is quite close to the mirror, it's quite small. But if I take the mirror out into the street, the whole sky can be in the mirror. So when the reflection of my face is there, this mirror seems quite small but how then can all the houses in the street, and the sky and the trees all be inside the mirror? How is this possible? The mirror offers a hospitality which makes it appear big or small according to the reflection which arises. In the same way, if you're reading a book and you focus into it, this is all there is. This small sphere of attention is the field of experience. At other times everything is there, huge, vast, experienced.

If the mind were a thing, it would have a fixed shape however it now seems that the mind doesn't have a shape but its quality is that it can appear to *show* us shape. It's like how the sky looks so big on a beautiful summer's day and then on a grey autumn day when the clouds are low, the sky looks quite small. The sky has not become small but it appears small because that is the limit of our experience. The experience of the small grey sky is located within the vast sky.

It is like how on a difficult day you might think, 'Oh my God, I can't cope, it's all too much.' but then on another day you feel much better. We are neither small nor big but some days we appear to be big and open, and other days we appear to be small and closed. This is the quality, or the shape, which arises inside the openness of the mind. The mind itself is neither big nor small but the patterns of manifestations of mood, feeling, sensation, memory, intention, demand, all the many factors that can flow through us, give a shape to our sense of our self and the world.

Where does the mind come from? Has ever be a time without the mind? If it's coming from somewhere, where would it come from? Where would it come true if it's coming from somewhere else? 'It comes from there to here, so I'm here and my mind came from there to me.' 'But if I'm here, who is the one that is here when my mind is somewhere else?' You can go off somewhere in a daydream and suddenly come back and say, 'Oh sorry, I was daydreaming, I wasn't here.' That is to say. you had slipped out from your familiar construction of 'this is me

here in this body' and you had gone off into a daydream. However you hadn't actually gone anywhere else, since your body is still here.

The mind itself, does it go somewhere? Thoughts can go. Let's all try to remember something that happened to us between the ages of five and ten. Just take a moment and see what comes to mind. (*Silence*) Do you have some memories? Did you all remember something? Sitting here, did you go back into the past? Or did the past come to you? Did you open some little locked box and take out the past? It can feel as if we can be right back in that situation yet we didn't go anywhere. I go to the past; the past comes to me. These memories are thoughts' patterns; they manifest in the space of awareness. Do they come from outside the space of awareness into awareness? Do they then go out and go somewhere else? Nowadays we have to recycle all our rubbish. Is there a similar big recycling factory for thoughts and feelings?

We could speculate on this forever. To have a thought about a thought about a thought... it's quite easy. You might think that rabbits have a lot of babies but our mind is much more sexually active! Endless thought production is possible.

Regarding the question, where is the mind, it is clear that trying to address the question through thoughts, through thinking about it, is not the way. That's why when an answer is formulated in a conceptual manner we have to be a bit suspicious. If a member of the Mafia were to come to a police station and say, 'Officer, the murder that occurred last night, that was committed by the other Mafia family.' then the police would rightly be suspicious. In the same way, the Buddha has said very clearly that immersion in conceptual elaboration is deceitful. That is why it is not very wise to rely on our thoughts to give us a true answer.

We investigate by allowing the unfolding of experience again and again. When you're sitting in meditation, many different kind of experience arise. Maybe happy, sad, busy, confused, all kinds are arising. You are here; this is what is occurring in and as the content of the mind.

What kind of container could allow such a perfect fitting with whatever arose? The containers you have in your house — maybe in the kitchen you have different jars and cups and boxes to store rice and spices and so on — each has a particular volume and when you put the product into the container, it takes its shape from the shape of the container. Think about the variety of experiences that you have, the various moods you have, what is the container? Seems to be a perfect fit! This is what is happening, this is what's happening, this is what's happening...

Maybe you know the story of Procrustes. It's an ancient Greek story about a man who lived in the centre of a long valley. From time to time travellers would walk along the valley. In the evenings Procrustes would sit outside and if he saw a lone traveller he'd welcomed him into his house. *'It's a long way to the next village'* he'd tell them, *'so you are welcome to sleep here.'* He would cook them a nice meal and then show them their bed. It was a big stone bed with a straw mattress. *'However the rule of this house is that you have to fit the bed precisely'*, he would then add. If the person was too short he would rack them, stretch them out so that they fitted the bed precisely. If they were too tall he would cut their feet off until they were just the right length. It is another notion of what can happen when the map is more important than the territory, when you try to squeeze the world to fit your mental shape.

When you got up this morning you had no idea of all the things that would happen today. You have experienced all kinds of feelings throughout the day. Imagine you were on a little boat out in the bay pitching up and down on the waves. After a couple of hours you might feel as if you're going to vomit. That's because the boat is moving and the person on the boat is moving, but the mind, when it is present, the mind doesn't move. The ideas move, the memories move, the sensations move. When you get caught up in an idea, *you* move. Somebody gives you some

information you say, *'Oh shit, that can't be possible'*, and so you get moved about; you get tired from all that agitation. By the end of the day you go to bed exhausted, telling people to shut up, to go away, to leave you alone since you just want to go to bed and sleep.

We get moved but mind doesn't move. This is the thing. The mind, without moving, fits everything. The mind is beyond thoughts, inexpressible. It's not a thing, it's not like anything else. You can talk about it forever but that won't really help, since it will just give you more and more mental furniture. The main thing is to get a sense about the definition. There are now many books including the book, ***Simply Being*** that I wrote some years ago, which set out the view and understanding very clearly as far as words can go. Each of us has to take these words, take these ideas, and massage them into ourselves.

So there is me, there is the idea or instruction, and there is the practice. A triangle. Me, what I have to do, and what I am doing in the practice. However this has introduced artificiality since I now have something towards which I should be going: now I have to remember at a certain point in the meditation that there are these questions I should take up and examine. But that's not how we do it. It's not like that. We take these questions and hold them, wherever we are, whatever we are doing, and just let them be part of our experience.

By massaging these questions into the texture of our being, they arise easily and we just stay with them. It is as if the question is asking the question, not me. Then it becomes much easier because our mind is always here. Mind is the awareness, the revealer of all experience. The more we allow these questions to be normal, the more they can be. Sitting on the bus, waiting in a café, with a friend, at work, when life is easy, when life is hard. If experience is arising the mind is there, so how is the mind? Since we were born, we have had many experiences. This is undeniable. Many of these experiences we have felt 'this is me'. And then they have gone. What has always been present is the experiencing, the awareness.

We are so stupid; we spend so much time trying to get a handle on a thought as if the thought were telling the truth. We disregard the fact that thought always leaves. Awareness — which is always there, every day, every moment of every day — we don't explore at all. This is quite remarkable.

What we are doing now in the practice is relaxing into the spaciousness of the mind and allowing it to show itself. Since space can only really reveal itself to space, one kind of instruction or suggestion we find in the traditional texts is that we should meditate "sky to sky". That is to say, when we are opening to ourselves, we are like the sky and what we open to is also like the sky — two spaces within which shapes and forms and colours and memories are moving. Actually these are not two spaces, they're really only one space. The more we practice, the more obvious this is. Within this, all movements are without any substance, like how on a summer's day, if a beam of sunlight comes into our room, we see lots of dust moving around in that beam of light. In the same way when we relax and open all kinds of stuff is moving around in the mind. None of it is very important since the main thing is the space. When we're clear that the mind is space, then everything which appears is the manifestation of the space, devoid of substance and yet there. Emptiness and clarity inseparable.

When the meditation finishes and we start to engage with the world, we find ourself moment by moment in a precise form. It's not as if we were in a meditation and then came out of the meditation into another world. It is more like the meditation being like the sea on a calm day, deep and with a surface shimmering in the sunlight. When the wind blows a little bit the surface of the sea starts to move. What is moving? The water of the sea. Waves are not separate from the ocean. Waves are how the ocean shows its motility, its capacity for movement. Waves are arising as the expression of the movability of the mind.

We do our practice, we stand up, and then something happens. We find yourself feeling a certain way, perhaps a bit anxious, or proud, or shy or whatever. This is a manifesting wave of our experience. It is a shaping of the unshapeable. We can't catch a wave; it does have a shape but it's an ungraspable shape. In the same way, whether we feel happy or sad, bright and intelligent or dull and stupid, all these are also moments of manifestation, manifestations of the energy embedded in the clarity, which is itself embedded in the spaciousness.

So that is the basic view of Dzogchen. The meditation practice is not very complicated however there are many difficulties to be overcome because of our habit formations. Over time many techniques have been developed, which operate as antidotes, and it's possible to teach Dzogchen in that way, using these many techniques.

My own main teacher, C.R Lama, would always say to stay with the most simple point, one which is highlighted by the great masters. That point is:

- the mind is always here,
- be present with and as the mind,
- don't follow after past thoughts,
- don't wait expectantly for future thoughts,
- don't try to hang on to what you like and push away what you don't like,
- rest in open spaciousness.

Do this and the dynamic nature of experience will show the self-liberating nature of the mind. Like a snake untying itself the mind will move free. When you become free your mind is like an empty house — if the thief of habitual formation breaks in, it finds nothing to attach itself to.

So this is the practice.

Maybe now we could take a little stretching break and when we come back we will do some practice and that will be the end for the day.

Session 5

Guru Yoga practice

We will continue doing the same practice, but now we will do the first part through guru yoga. As I said earlier, guru means the teacher, but it also refers to the buddha mind as well as to our own mind.

When established in a sense of duality, we feel that we are in here and other people, the world, is out there. So, *I* pray to the guru. But as we have been discussing earlier, wherever I am, the world is. *I* come with the world. The world is as much me as my embodied self. In fact, I see the world more clearly than I see my body. From the point of view of Dzogchen, the mind sometimes looks primarily like object and sometimes looks primarily like subject. What we are trying to do in the meditation is dissolve the restricted idea that I sit inside my skin bag, that I am separate from the world around me.

The practice to do this is as follows. In the space in front of us we imagine a white letter A about two arms' length away. The letter A could be a Roman capital letter or a Tibetan letter if you know what it looks like. In the Sanskrit and Tibetan alphabets all consonants take the vowel A. A is said to be the primordial sound with all other sounds arising as a variation on it. A is seen as the basis of all sounds and therefore of all worlds, and therefore of all conceptual

constructions, and therefore of all the varieties of samsara. A is also the essence of the Prajnaparamita teachings. There is a very extensive version of the Prajnaparamita in a hundred thousand verses; there are many shorter versions such as the Heart Sutra, there is a four lines verse in praise of Prajnaparamita, then the essential mantra of the Heart Sutra until finally it is all reduced to just the letter A. AAA, is a sound which is empty, which doesn't really signify very much, is not defined very much, and so in that sense it is open and empty. Yet, because it is the basis of all the other sounds, it expresses a rich potential.

Emptiness is nothing which is everything. So when we visualise this letter A, this is the presence of the awareness of all the Buddhas, the wisdom that understands the empty nature which is the ground of everything, and which manifests the wisdom of understanding emptiness, the empty nature of all phenomena.

We can imagine that this letter condenses all the awareness of all the Buddhas and that it is surrounded by white, red, blue, yellow and green light representing, in the tradition, the five poisons and the five wisdoms. The five poisons are stupidity or assumption, desire, aversion, jealousy and pride.

The five wisdoms are their purification or transformation. Stupidity/assumption transforms to the wisdom of the dharmadhatu, that is to say, the natural openness of the mind, and which includes all phenomena, all dharmas. The purification of desire is the wisdom of discernment, which sees each thing precisely as it is. The purification of anger is the mirror-like wisdom. The purification of jealousy is the wisdom, which accomplishes everything. The purification of pride is the wisdom of equality, that all things are equal in their emptiness.

Dzogchen texts often say that there is one ground and two paths. The ground is the openness of the mind itself. One path is the path of being aware of this, being present in and as this. The other path, the path of ignoring the ground and fabricating illusory forms, is the generation of samsara. So these texts are saying that confusion and awakening have the same ground, that they are not two separate families coming from two different places. When we are present in this state of A, all the potential of samsara and nirvana is revealed. We rest in an open way and together we will make the sound of A three times. As we make this sound we are releasing all the tensions of our body, our voice and our mind. We simply open to A, the symbol of the mind of the Buddha. After we've made the sound, after a few seconds, this A in front of us dissolves into light and into space, and we just sit in openness as we were doing before.

Then, when you can, when it seems right, gently bring up these five questions we've been looking at.

[Practice]

So that brings us to the end of our study together today. However we can take the practice of it into the evening, into whatever we're doing. Continue without judging, simply observing and allowing our own existence to show itself, without making it artificial.

We will meet to practise again this evening for those who wish and tomorrow we start again at nine.

Day 2. Session 6

Direct experience of concepts signs and signifiers

What we were looking at yesterday is the first statement of Garab Dorje, namely to open oneself to the truth of our own being. So when we sit in the practice, we become increasingly aware of the movement of the mind. Our mind is like the sky and our experiences are like different kinds of clouds moving through it. Sometimes the clouds seem to pervade the whole sky, and when that happens we may even forget that the sky is there, and that it is the generosity hospitality of the sky that allows the clouds to be there. When that happens we sit and just allow the movement of experience until we are clear that the mind itself doesn't move but that everything else is moving.

Now of course when we look around the room, we may think that we were here yesterday and that it is still the same room. But is it? We have to get really clear about this. Most of us don't have a fantastic visual memory and so we rely on concepts, on signs and signifiers. Because nothing looks radically different in the room (for example) we take it that it is the same. But the sky is slightly different, the amount of light coming in through the windows is slightly different, day-by-day the sun is moving toward its southern point and so the illumination is slightly different. What we see is the illumination, which is different. What we imagine, what we think, is that it's the same room. Conceptually the room is the same. Phenomenologically it is different.

This is the radical point of difference. If you rely on the thought, the thought standardizes phenomena and so the signifier seems to stand in a very accurate relation to the signified. We had idea of the room; this is a concept, a verbal sign. The concept 'this room' determines what we see. So 'this room' becomes a grammatical expression, 'this room' becomes like the seal or the guarantee of this room. We can identify what's going on; we know what's going on. And because we can know that it is the same room, the actual differences seem irrelevant.

So this is what we were looking at yesterday when we spoke about privileging the map over the territory. Because we believe in the map and because the statements of the map can be repeated again and again, they give a sense of continuity of the sameness of the room. It seems to indicate that there is permanence to the room, that the room has a substantial reality since there is an essence to it; it is this particular room.

However the room arises due to causes and conditions. Some of us were here yesterday evening enjoying delicious food and wine and cake. We were in the same room but it was a different room. The mood was different. The room showed itself in a different way. We had electric light not this light coming in through the plastic domes; we were sitting on chairs last night, not on the floor, and so the room was revealed to us from a different position. We are here together now; it's reasonable to say that we are here together in the same room, in the same room as concept. Each person here is sitting in a unique place and so from each unique vantage point we all have our own room. The room as revealed to me: this is what you actually get. Plus we also have the idea of the room.

The actuality of your own embodied experience can be ignored and the concept of the room privileged. For example, if I go the theatre and get a ticket that places me behind a pillar, then although I am engaged in the performance I don't see quite as much as a person a few seats along. Yes I was at the theatre, yes it was a wonderful play but we see different things. The people at the front pay more money to sit there rather than sit at the back. This is for a reason. They have a different experience. Somehow in the theatre we can understand that but in ordinary life we don't; we ignore it.

One of the functions of meditation practice is to bring us back to the immediacy of our lived experience. Because the conceptual world creates the illusion of permanence it makes the finite seem infinite. We're here in this room, and in fact some of us were in this room two years ago, so we can imagine that it is the same place two years later. I may feel that it's the same room but

for someone who has been here regularly over these two years they will have a whole sequence of memories which I have no sense of. His version of the room will be different from mine. So if we get clear about this then it will be very helpful: the room as experience is always uniquely personal. (The room is just an example, the same applies to anything.)

The world revealed through linguistic signifiers appears shared in a way that is delusory. It creates a social conventional field in which, by the exchange of shared signifiers, we appear to be inhabiting something that has continuity. When we see that the finite is finite in space and time then it becomes clear that it is unreliable. It is therefore not a true refuge. It is something to be worked with in its dynamic revealing, in its showing, but it's not infinite.

What is infinite? Infinite is the mind itself. When something is finite it has a shape, it has delimitation, a shape in time – a beginning and an end – and a shape in space – what is outside and inside, what is on the left, on the right and so on. These formations are part of our communication in and with the environment. We are always communicating. Our nature is expressive and connective and communicative. The gift of ourselves, of our availability, needs to find a reception in the other person. Similarly we are hospitable to other people's gift of themselves towards us. When we experience this it helps us see that the duality of self and other, of inside and outside, is an illusion. However when we experience on a daily basis the alienation of urban life, then isolation and individualism is reinforced. We can easily get into an isolating definition about what things are.

The second statement of Garab Dorje

The second statement of Garab Dorje, a founding voice in the lineage of Dzogchen, is to become clear that this is how it is. To not remain in doubt. This is not a cognitive decision. Rather, by staying present I see that my awareness is always open whereas thoughts and feelings and sensations are changeable and have different qualities.

Sometimes I feel expansive, sometimes I feel contracted. Although *I* can feel quite small I'm aware that *I* feel small because my feeling smallness is within my ever-open awareness. The very dark cloud, the huge thunderstorm which might be quite frightening, is in the ever-open sky. Our feeling of being trapped and lost and stupid, feeling that everything is a waste of time, even this kind of contorted twisting situation that we might experience, is within the openness of our mind. We are open and we are small at the same time. The openness is infinite with no limit of time and space. This condensed and disturbed state of mind is finite and it passes, but while it's there it's me.

As Hamlet said, "there's the rub": if I think something is awful and that I need to do something to change it, then by thinking this way I split myself. I have introduced an 'I' who is sitting in judgement on the arising experience. 'I' now have to control and alter 'my' experience. However this internal splitting is always vulnerable to the arising of new unwanted experiences and so any path which attempts to manage the contents of the mind is a path without end. It won't lead to peace because, as we looked yesterday, the contents of my mind are not mine. If somebody says something upsetting to us, we become upset. This upset comes to us. We didn't choose it but now we are stuck with it. "*You've upset me, why did you do that?*" On it goes, on and on.

From the dzogchen point of view, no matter how our mind is, remain open and relax without judging, without engaging, without trying to change things, without hanging on to the bits we like, and trying to get rid of the bits we don't like. This is the essential difference between dzogchen practice and the other schools in Tibetan Buddhism. By resting and relaxing into the infinity of awareness itself, the finite forms which arise and pass are free to come and go as they

do. When a form arises, when a mood arises and we think we can't bear it, that we don't want to be like this, we had invested too much significant in this particular form....

I can remember when I was small, being with my mum in a town centre and needing to have a pee. My mum took me to the edge of the pavement saying, "Just go between the parked cars and have a pee there." But no, everyone will see! That's what I felt however you have to do that... In moments like that, very condensed, you feel such shame or embarrassment that it's as if they are tattooed across your heart. You feel that everyone knows what you have done and this finite moment becomes infinite, becomes eternal and paralysing. This becomes a kind of fault line in our energetic system which can collapse under pressure. Such splitting and fragmentation continues in life and we become avoidant. In order to protect ourselves we mark out some territory where we feel safe, with the knowledge there are certain things that are just impossible for us. *"I wouldn't be me if I did that." "If that happens to me I don't know what I would do."* We restrict ourselves.

From the point of view of dzogchen this is incredibly sad since these situations which seem so terrible and so painful are actually transient. We always have the choice, what is our fundamental or based sense of being. I still have many scars on my knees from my childhood... falling out of trees, falling off my bicycle and so on. Most of us have some marks some place where something happened. Our ego, like the body, gets scars. Sometimes the scar doesn't heal very well and you get sensitive raw nerve-endings. Sometimes the nerve-endings get knocked off and the nerve is dull and dead.

It is the same for our ego. We can be hyper-sensitive about some things and completely insensitive about other things. Small children get upset about situations and don't yet have the capacity to soothe themselves. The mother then has to soothe the child and makes the world feel safe for them. Gradually children learn to be better at self-soothing.

A traditional Tibetan example is that of the mother and son. The mother is our original nature, this infinite awareness there from the very beginning, and the child is the way in which our energetic expression seems to have broken free and have a life on its own. When the mother and child meet the mother contains the child and the child relaxes. Left alone, however, the child cannot soothe themselves. The son is the agitation of our ego state, full of hopes and fears. By relaxing and opening into what is always present, into our awareness, we are able to allow all the forms of agitation to self-soothe, or in the language of dzogchen, to self-liberate. Experiences then go by without any trace. Our ego tends to vibrate with the resonance of many past experiences.

Awareness however has no such resonance, which is why it's described as being naked and fresh. It's naked because it's not covered over by accumulations of past experiences or assumptions about future experiences. And it's fresh because it's always open and available to the next moment. Something is important and then it's gone. The fact that it's gone doesn't make it not important.

Very often when people are in a partnership and one goes away, the other phones and asks, *"Oh, do you miss me?"* If the first person responds, *"Why should I miss you? I'm here, you are there. Your life is there, my life is here, good luck!"* then this is not likely to induce a romantic feeling. *"Of course I miss you baby, I think of you all the time..."* this is what we want. The ego is wanting the reassurance that it is important that other people remember us and think of us with love and affection and so on. Energetically we are trying to weave these strands of connectivity that provide a kind of reassurance: *"Only you can save me."* But all human beings are going to die, our moods are unpredictable, and we don't always feel affectionate. Not a very perfect investment.

This is why Dharma says that our own actual being, which is always here, is the best refuge — not someone else, even if they do seem very special. Special is nice for a while, and in the Tibetan tradition the guru is referred to as *Rinpoche*, which means costly, rare, and precious. If you lose something rare and precious then it is very difficult to replace it. You can't just go in to Lidl, to the third shelf at the back and find another one. You might be better off putting your faith in apples since if you find a worm in your apple you can get another apple very easily. *"Ah, but the special, the rare, is so important."* Maybe not. What is really precious is what is there all the time, is always available, which is our own nature. As in the traditional Tibetan example of the farmer who goes out on the hill looking for his lost cow, while it is actually at home in the barn all time, we go looking here, there and everywhere in samsara for something to fill us, something to make us feel better. But we don't look at our own mind.

This is the second point of Garab Dorje: keep looking and looking until you taste directly and then be clear that that is enough.

What makes us think that there is something else, is a thought.

The third statement of Garab Dorje

This takes us to the third point or statement of Garab Dorje, which is to continue in this way. It means to stay with the integration of all experiences in the openness of awareness. This doesn't mean 'continue to be a Buddhist'. The practice is not about becoming a Buddhist or continuing to be a Buddhist. 'Buddhist' is a temporary structure to help you awaken to your own nature or your own being. To be a Buddhist and have a membership card is not different from being a butcher in that both function as an identity. Of course you might say being a butcher and killing animals is not a good thing to do but 'a butcher' gives somebody a sense of who they are and a function in the world. Being 'a Buddhist' can also give you that. Both sorts of identities are constructs.

All constructs, all compounded things, are impermanent. If you take refuge in the finite you will always be cheated because the finite is unreliable. If, however, you take refuge in the infinite, it will be always reliable. In the tradition they use the word '*vajra*'. *Vajra*, or *dorje* in Tibetan, means indestructible, something that can never be broken. We look at the sky; many things happen in the sky, nuclear explosions, stars, aeroplanes, pollution... They hang over with the molecules for a while and they gradually descend. The sky itself is not destroyed; the finite in the sky, the finite in the infinite is there patterning for a while and then causes and circumstances, the force of gravity, the movements of the winds, dissolve these patterns.

This is the fundamental basis of contentment or satisfaction. In Tibetan it's referred to as *Simpa* and it means 'this is enough'. With this, I don't need anything more; I don't need to get agitated at these expressions which arise. Because we've all been alive for a while and have had many experiences, good and bad, in our lives we know that each has its own flavour and that it passes. *Simpa* is about enjoyment. Bitter, sour, these are tastes. If everything were sugar it would be a strange world. So although we might say we don't like bitter and sour, that they are not our favourite tastes, they are important in cooking since they provide a counterpoint that highlights certain other flavours. Likewise we can see that all sorts of feelings, such as sadness, hopelessness, anger, jealousy and bitterness, are flavours. It does not mean that I am a bad person for feeling such things. I have a friend who drinks lemon juice first thing every morning. This would not be my choice, but it's a taste, that's all. Just a taste. Jealousy is a taste, hatred is a taste. If you taste the taste, you know what it is. If you merge into it you may become jealous or unhappy or violent or self destructive but if you just taste it, then you know, *"Oh, I'm jealous. This is what jealous is like. This is what it does to my body, what it does to my breathing, what it does to the patterning of my thoughts. It's like this; it's just a pattern of experience, arising*

due to circumstances, and passing due to circumstances." But if I split myself and say, *"I am jealous, I don't want to be jealous, it's wrong to be jealous."*, then I'm back with management. I may not be able to stop being jealous but I don't want anyone to know that I'm jealous so I paint on a forced smile and pretend. *"No I don't mind that they have gone off with a new lover. Life is like that."* Thinking like that we don't allow experience to be experience. Experience is a cloud; it's not a solid truth, not an x-ray of our soul; it's just something that is passing.

This is the great liberation of dzogchen, that we are open to everything because we know that no experience defines our infinite nature, our infinite being, and that there is no duality between the openness of the mind and what arises in the mind. Paradoxically, I can now be jealous! I can be fully jealous and upset since 'jealous' is not defining who I am. I don't have to pretend in anyway or modulate my expression; I can just be what I am because I am only like this for the moment and after the moment something else will be there. And after, something else. And life will go on. And then I will die. And all the things that were so important in this life will be gone. What is continuous is the infinite because it doesn't get ended.

So, awareness is the absolute central focus. Again and again we have to observe how we cheat ourselves, where we confuse subjectivity with awareness.

For example, I am talking just now. This is an energetic patterning; I'm aware that I am talking and I have two aspects to the awareness. I have the grasping aspect of awareness and the open aspect of awareness. The grasping aspect is not really awareness at all; it's a pattern of energy which expresses itself as if it were the ground-clarity of being. Generally we translate this as *consciousness*. In Tibetan it is called *nampar shepa*. *Nampar* means 'fully' or 'completely' or 'totally' and it also refers to a kind of shaping, to a kind of graspability. So, I know that I am talking. I am conscious of talking, that is to say, I can hold on to the mental idea that I am the one who is talking and this appropriation, this taking hold of the experience, creates the illusory sense that it is a self-existing thing, something in itself, which I can then evaluate.

I may say that I'm talking too much, or that it's not very clear what I say, or that this is okay. Consciousness is the basis for all these judgements and modifications and improvements that I make. My subjectivity feels both free –I am what I am- and a bit self-conscious, a bit self-anxious. Am I doing okay? What do you think of how I am? So, consciousness is the aspect of knowing which takes itself to be positioning. It seems to be located somewhere. Often we see it as located inside our body. Somebody may say something to us and we reply, *"Oh, I have to think about that."* and we close down a little bit to go into this thinking capacity. This may occur in a meditation when we look for the mind and ask ourselves, where is this mind. We find some sort of location. Some sort of sensations arise within us and we say, *"Oh yes, my mind is in my head."* This is a great advantage for us. It keeps us inside the paradigm that we are used to, and in that we make a definite statement: *"My mind is in my head. I'm not stupid I know where I am."* The proposition, the statement, seems to guarantee the truth of something but that thought is already vanishing. Where is its truth? Where is its power? It comes and it goes. It can't be infinite or eternal because it's evanescent. That is to say, consciousness is engaged with the shaping of mental moments. We are always conscious of something. Consciousness takes an object. It involves a self-recollection which is isolating and supports a reflexive self-commentary.

This is very important because it is how we talk ourselves into existence. Our ego is generated by, and exists in, the continuous production of self-narrative. As soon as a new mother shows the baby to her friends they start covering it in words. *"Oh the cute little boy, oh so sweet, doesn't he look just like his dad?"* Words and words. The baby comes a person through the gradual absorption of these words. The words move around inside this child's body and gradually start coming out of its mouth. Now this is a proper person. Now the child can take, *"Don't do that"* or *"You are a good boy."* and so on. It's like making a little cake. We comment on

the behaviour of the child, "You're doing well. It's a wonderful drawing. Be careful. Look where you're going." The child internalises these linguistic messages and starts becoming self-regulating.

This is the function of consciousness. Consciousness helps us to get a handle on the world by meaning and shaping, and a handle on ourselves by meaning and shaping. This goes on throughout our lives. It is not the same as awareness. One term for awareness in Tibetan is *yeshe*. *Ye* means 'from the very beginning', which actually means 'without ever having had any beginning', that is to say, infinite. *Shepa* means 'to know'. It doesn't mean knowing things, it's more the clarity, or the revelatory quality, of being. 'Being' in this context does not mean being this or that; 'being' here doesn't refer to a defining essence of any kind. 'Being' means 'the givenness', 'the just here-ness' of awareness itself. It means it's not something. It's very difficult to describe in language because all our language is about grasping and shaping and making.

The fact that the sky is just there is like the fact that the mind is just here. It's not created by mental activity. It's not improved by good deeds. It's not destroyed by bad deeds. What is improved or harmed is the patterning of energy. Wisdom is awakening to this unborn quality of presence. Compassion is the movement of the energy, which arises ceaselessly in the field of awareness since when you awaken to your own ground, you don't need to be self-corrected. You can relax and trust you are okay. Therefore the energy is for the other. Without driving it by making a vow or a conscious intention, we awaken to the very simple fact that we are participants in the field of the environment. The environment is not something other than me, which I enter or don't enter. I am en-worlded. It's like how in tantra they say that you are always already in the mandala. When we look at our body and we see how our senses are, our senses are for the other. We see others, we hear others, our arms can go out to others. That is to say, the very shape of our body is participative. Our activity is part of the world, for the world.

When we imagine that we are just ourselves, then the orientation is very different because we then think of advantage and disadvantage, what is good for me, what is bad for me. We are pulling in the things we like and we are pushing out the things we don't like. And the central point of reference is 'me'. But of course through the meditation we have examined what is this 'me'? 'Me' is always changing and it's changing in relation to you. So there isn't any essence of me inside me. The expression on your face affects how I am. We have this experience. Sometimes we are centred in the other person because there is no real centre. It moves around. It's an ever-shifting movement of the field of energy.

The paradox, from this point of view, is that the less hard you try, the more wisdom and compassion are available. This is the view of dzogchen. It's not the view of tantra or general mahayana Buddhism. They have a different view, a different meditation and a different kind of behaviour. This dzogchen way of practice perhaps suits some people more than others due to their habits and interests. It's not a case of right or wrong, better or worse. However, if you can see the nature of awareness and *be* that nature of awareness, then many problems cease.

Okay we will take a short break now.

Session 7

Problems that may arise in meditation

Three chapters in *Simply Being* deal with meditation problems, two of them were written by Patrul Rinpoche and one by Nuden Dorje, of whom CR Lama was an incarnation. It can be useful to read these traditional presentations and see how they say the same thing again and again. They

give many different examples of problems that people can have and only one answer is given to every problem, which is very nice since it makes life very simple. Typically they say, *"Oh, some 'great meditators' are upset and crying because for many years they have practised meditation without getting any result. They feel depressed and hopeless. In your practice don't try to change the depression and hopelessness. Stay present with the depression and hopelessness and observe the one who is experiencing."*

This observer is not a 'me' looking at something; it's to observe it from inside, to be the one who is experiencing it. In Tibetan they use the term *thog tu* which means stay on the one. Awareness is there. Now, in this room. If I think along the lines of, *"Oh, I'm sitting in the wrong place. I'll just get up and move to somewhere else because if this place is not right. I can go to another place that feels better."* then it can get tricky to find awareness since awareness is everywhere and yet nowhere. It's not like how later today I have to go to the airport so I travel from the town to the airport. We all know this, going from here to there. Awareness is not like that; you don't reach it, get to it, find it. And yet it's everywhere.

That's why if you go looking to find it as 'something', you get lost. You will never find it as something since it's not a thing or a place, you can't say that here is awareness and there is not awareness. Everywhere is awareness. Whatever is happening, be there, be right with whatever is happening.

For example, we are all now in Geneva. Is this the real Geneva? If we go to the town hall of Geneva, and sit on the front step, will we be more in Geneva? Which place in Geneva is the most "genevoise"? Everywhere is Geneva, so you can't actually find Geneva because everything is Geneva when you're in here. In the same way, everything is the mind. There isn't a better bit somewhere and a less good bit somewhere else. Here, in this room, this is how Geneva is showing itself. When we go out into the street, that is another aspect of Geneva. As we travel around we have thousands and thousands of tastes of Geneva. We might ask, *"But what is the true taste of Geneva?"* That's an illusion; every taste of Geneva is Geneva. The tourist department of Geneva may be publicizing some aspects of Geneva and not others. Probably they won't be publishing the crime statistics for Geneva because they are painting their particular picture of Geneva as a nice place to visit. The police however are very happy to publish the crime statistics because the police always want more money so they can do more things. All this is Geneva. When you take a particular view, when you have an agenda, then you have highlighted something as the foreground and other things go into the background. This is another way to understand the difference between the ego and awareness. The ego takes a particular view and wants to maintain its story about what is going on. Awareness says that it's all Geneva.

So whatever is arising in the mind, whether your ego says it's good or bad, want's more of it or less of it, just be open to what is there. Do you see that it is exactly on this point that all we have talked comes together. Have confidence in the vajra nature of the mind — whatever happens will not harm me if I am awareness however if I am my ego formation then there are many things which can upset me. This is the fulcrum, this is the balancing point, which we need to find and in finding it, relax back into the openness. The ego is a formation. It says that it tells the truth but it is unreliable. What it says may be true on Monday and not true on Tuesday.

So when sitting in meditation, we relax, and we open. Perhaps our mind feels dull. Perhaps we feel not quite present. No matter. The instruction is just stay open into being not quite here, into sitting like a cow in a field. The clarity of the mind is illuminating the dullness of the content of the mind. When the mirror is showing something very ugly, when the reflection is ugly, or dirty, or horrible colours, or mountains of dog shit, it shows that. We look at the reflection, we say, *"Oh."* The reason we see the reflection is because of the clarity of the mirror. The clarity of the mirror is not improved by the reflection being a bright shiny one.

This is the central point to see — that even when our mind feels dull and stupid, or agitated and excited, or if we are full of blaming other people with long boring narratives about all their faults, or if we're full of self pity — whatever small minded-shapings arise in our mind, we're only aware of them because of our awareness. Awareness is clear; it is the clarity of the mind that shows this horrible little aspect of ourself.

So, don't fall into merging with the transient content of the mind nor stand apart from it in judgement. Don't try changing the mind's content; be present as the clarity that illuminates what's there.

This is easy to say but difficult to do. Tibetan say that it's like pulling a hair out of butter. In Tibet people made their own butter. They would have a little wooden churn and would move the thick milk around until gradually the butter separated out. Traditionally this was the work of women and women had long hair. Sometimes a hair got into the churn and was moved about as the butter formed. When the butter was taken out and a butter-pat put it in a bowl, you could see how the hair swirled through the butter. In pulling it out care had to be taken lest it snapped within the butter. Pull hard but not too hard. Likewise in meditation, we are trying to find that balance point where we are present with what is arising, and are not falling into it, nor holding back too far away from it. A 'being with' which is not a 'being apart from'. Here again the image of the mirror is very helpful: the reflection is in the mirror, is very intimate, but it doesn't contaminate the mirror.

When a feeling is inside my mind, it feels as if it is really me. However if we take up antipathy and negative feeling towards it and want to get rid of these thoughts and feelings then this is where many problems in meditation arise. We may think that since our mind is full of obscuration we can't do any meditation and we need to do purification, apply an antidote. We may decide to burn lots of butter lamps or go on a long pilgrimage or do lots and lots of Vajrasattva mantras. *"Otherwise how can I make progress when my mind is like this?"* Well from the point of view of dzogchen, adopting these antidotes is unhelpful. Why? Because they confirm the true force and reality of the obscuration. I have decided that this is a real problem and that *I* have to do something about it. Subject-verb-object, we are back with a dualistic structure.

Of course the ego now feels better because it feels it is no longer at the mercy of the horrible contents of my mind. It's like the TV adverts for indigestion powders or toilet cleaners. *"Thanks to Mister Muscle my toilet is now shining clean. Germs, you have no power in this house. Me and Mister Dorje Sempa, obscurations get out! You bugs and germs all thought I was just a helpless ordinary person but with Mister Dorje Sempa I can do everything!"* Applying antidotes is a reasonable practice; it's not wrong or bad but it is a practice performed from the point of view of the ego.

That is why it is important to understand that the view of dzogchen is different. Dzogchen operates from the view the view that what is arising cannot contaminate the mirror. The mind, as the infinite, offers hospitality to everything yet without being touched by anything. This is the meaning of non-duality. It's not that there are two different things. It's not that there is just one thing, but that there is the inseparability of these two, which are not one. What is arising in the mind and the mind itself are inseparable but there are not the same. What is inside the mind, the content of the mind is moving and changing. However the mind itself is not moving or changing. Yet the mind and the content of the mind are inseparable. This is the key point.

If we stay with the mind itself, the impermanent contents of the mind go free by themselves. The ego's effort is not required. C.R Lama's text¹ says on several occasions that human knowledge is not necessary, is not required. It means that we don't need to develop highly intelligent thoughts nor do we need to have a great knowledge of Dharma.

What we *do* need is to trust that our own awareness is pure from the very beginning, which is the first instruction of Garb Dorje. Open up and be present with who you have been from the very beginning. Whatever different kinds of experience arise and pass, stay present with the clarity that though the content moves, the mind doesn't move. The third statement of Garab Dorje is that we should continue in that way since nothing is lacking and everything is fine, just perfect as it is. This is the meaning of dzogpachenpo.

Let's say you have been meditating for ten years or twenty years, yet when you sit to meditate your mind is crazy: *"This is a stupid mind, I can't meditate. I must have the wrong meditation method. My mind shouldn't be like this. I read the brochure, I sent off my order and Meditation Central Control delivered the wrong meditation. My mind should be shining."* This is the sort of logic we learnt in primary school. Then when we went up into secondary school, we learnt contradiction. We read plays, we read poems and we saw that there were different opinions. But in primary school everything was just bright shiny colours. Why shouldn't our mind have trouble? If we say we want to take the bodhisattva vows and be open to other people then we shouldn't be surprised when the neighbours are strange. It's like that. We may do *tonglen* practice, giving out good positive feelings to others and inviting their troubles into us. We may practice equanimity, making no differentiation between friends and enemies so now why be surprised when we have a lot of shit in your mind?

In English we have a term 'nimby' which means 'not in my back yard'. Let's say a new care centre or hostel is being planned for alcoholics or people with mental health problems, then the locals usually object, saying that it is a really good service to have but not here, not in my neighbourhood, not in my back yard. If everything which arises is Padmasambhava, if everything is the radiance of the mind, how can I then say that I only want bright shiny bits in my mind. How can I say that everything has the same nature yet I want to have a menu? I want to choose the bits that make me feel good?

So here we can see how the ego, or our personal sense of subjectivity, contaminates our availability to the openness of awareness. We probably all have this fantasy that people should be exceptionally kind or generous if they have been doing practice for a long time whereas actually the key thing is whether whatever is arising is integrated in awareness. Is like illusion, like a mirage, a rainbow, something which is there but there is no essence.

Stories about the eighty-four mahasiddhas and other great Indian yogis of the past often describe strange and unusual things they did. Strange now and strange then. They often lived on the edge of society doing activities which were regarded as dirty or very low status. In the tantric system there are the three white offerings of sugar, milk and yogurt. There are other categories of offerings which include meat, urine and faeces. Why would you offer 'caca' to the Buddha? Caca is disgusting. The view that caca is disgusting is connected with the human situation. If we were to carry out some research and interview a thousand flies I think they would all agree that, *'No, caca is wonderful.'* The flies might even say, *"Listen we eat and we look at the internet and we know that in India people shit everywhere. Our cousins over there are happy all the time but here in Geneva they always put caca in the toilets and flush it away. So, sadly it's really hard to find good human caca in Geneva, these days."* For us caca is disgusting but for the

¹ "The Meditation and recitation on Vajrasattva" in *Simply being*, pp. 49-60. (ARP, 2010. ISBN 978907571015)

flies, yum yum, it's delicious. Faeces are not intrinsically disgusting but when we live with the fixation that we are the centre of the world, and that our criteria for evaluation is the truth, then we say 'good, bad, right, wrong'. That is why these different kinds of offerings are made to the Buddha. To help us understand impartiality, understand that everything has the same taste of emptiness. There is nothing essentially bad or harmful in these substances. Situationally they may not be delicious for us but that judgement arises due to causes and conditions, the particular nature of our human embodiment. Again and again we come back to recognising that our strong judgement, our sense that we know the truth about what is here, is in fact only an opinion, a point of view generated by the point from which we view it. If we are looking from the point of view of the ego, at what I like, and at what I don't like, then we will have a very strong view of what is good and what is bad.

However when we are sitting in meditation we open to however our mind is. Whenever we feel disappointed, frustrated, or blocked, we should take this as a sign not that something should be done, nor a sign that we should be doing something else, but simply note that we are looking from the point of view of the ego and that the ego is just doing its ego job, which is to say, offering a biased reading.

What to do then is to simply relax in the outbreath and be aware that this position of judgements is just another temporary construction, just another pattern of energy moving through the mind. We do this again and again in a session and it becomes easier and easier to recognize how we cheat ourselves, how we grasp on to some floating debris rather than learning to swim. Swimming in the ocean of the mind is very nice because it's dynamic but if you're clinging to a bit of wood from the boat then you are at the mercy of all the waves.

What these great masters point out is *'Don't be misled into taking the current pattern of the content of the mind as being a revelation of a fundamental truth about yourself. Don't be defined by what is arising.'*

This links back to what we discussed yesterday at the very beginning. We looked at the nature of identity and at how our identity is a process of generating composite formations. This process is in the house of compassion, with our identity as a social function. At work, for example, whatever role we have allows us to do some things and not others, to go into some rooms but not others, to talk in certain ways, with some people but not with others. Identity and role are part of the choreography of social existence, of interaction; they are not a definition of who we are. The more we see that, the more we see, *"Oh this is the theatre of the mind. Due to causes and circumstances we can speak in a particular way and then due to other causes and circumstances we can't."* It's just like that; it's not intrinsic.

So in the meditation, very simple, we relax and open and stay present with whatever is occurring. This is exactly the meditation that Buddha Shakyamuni was doing when he was sitting under the bodhi tree. Many things were moving around him, different maras, different tempting or terrifying demons, and he is not reacting.

'Not reacting' is not like trying to be brave when you are in the dentist's chair. It's not an act of will or courage. It's just — things don't get to you. It's like in paintings of the Buddha at the moment of enlightenment when maras are painted drawing back their bow and arrow, and as the arrow shoots towards the Buddha it turns into a flower and falls to the ground. The arrow is not dangerous because it doesn't arrive. The reflection in the mirror doesn't touch the mirror. This is the great mystery of existence — that we both are and are not the content of our mind. Ignorance and attachment over-fixates on the content of the mind and we take it to be ourselves. With the dissolving of ignorance we recognize the ground basis, awareness, rigpa, within which the content of the mind is moving.

This is enough. There are many other kinds of meditation and many are dedicated to transforming energy. Praying or doing pujas to Tara or Chenrezi will develop kindness and softness. Meditating on Dorje Drollo, will develop strong energy and force. These are designed to increase the repertoire of moves that you can make in your interaction in the world and so they can be useful. The key thing, however, is to be open to your own ground nature, to the mind itself.

So again and again we simply return to this practice. Whatever is occurring, we just enter into the practice and stay with it. Without hopes or fears. Without selective attention. Without any notion of going somewhere. We are just present in this moment as it is. Undefined and hospitable. This is the heart of Samantabhadra, the great founding Buddha of the lineage.

We will now do a last meditation together. We will start again with the three As. You might want to take up these five questions again: where does the mind come from, where does it stay, where does it go, what colour and shape is it, and what size or dimension is it.

[Practice]

"Whatever merit arises from our study and practice together we dedicate it to the benefit of all beings. We imagine rays of lights spreading out from our heart going in all directions, making contact with all the many kinds of beings."

GE WA DI YI NYUR DU DAG
UGYAN LAMA DRUB GYUR NAE
DRO WA CHI KYANG MALUPA
DE YI SA LA GOE PAR SHOG

Now our brief period of time together has come to an end. I would like to thank Manon for the translation and Dom for the hospitality of this place, and all those who participated in the organisation. I would also like to thank all of us for together giving such focussed attention to this area of enquiry. It's not easy to sustain focussed attention for all these hours, especially when many technical terms are involved, and we are talking about topics on the very edge of language. However the good feeling generated by everyone's participation makes my job much easier. So thank you for that.