

All opinions are empty of inherent existence

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Session 1

So we have a bit of time together to try to explore a Buddhist understanding of how conflict arises, especially conflict when it moves into its more extreme forms of danger. We live in very troubled times, many many people have appallingly disturbed lives and very little sense of security and we have a chance to try to understand how some of these forces operate and what is a useful way for us to participate in the world so that we reduce the amount of tension and anxiety and perhaps promote a sense of peace.

The organisation we are meeting under is called 'Into the Wild' and we are going to go 'into the wild' because the wildest thing you'll ever encounter is your own mind – we are very strange creatures! Normally we hold ourselves in place with a kind of covering of normality. When we are young our parents spent quite a lot of time socialising us, helping us to find a way to conform and fit in and not appear too difficult or strange to other people. But beneath that, as we find out as soon as we start to meditate, beneath the patina or the veneer of normality, all kinds of strange thoughts feelings and sensations arise as the actuality of our existence.

So what we confront is that we have ideas about who we are, and the people that we know have ideas about who we are, and as long as we can keep some kind of interface between these images and representations we can mediate our way in the social field. But when we start to look at the immediacy of what it means to be ourselves we find that in fact we are very unpredictable, we are very unreliable.

That's something that we will look at through different kinds of meditation and try to see how we can open into the space of the unborn mind, the infinite mind, the mind that's been there from the very beginning, and use that spaciousness as a means of allowing the self-liberation, or the freedom of thoughts to vanish without a trace.

So then, rather than accumulating images about who we are, who other people are, entering into judgement, developing biases, having histories about how we have been hurt or damaged by other people, we can live in the freshness of the moment with the widest access to our own potential. With that we can respond more flexibly and intimately with others. That's the real goal of the practice.

Wisdom is the awakening to the open nature of the mind itself and compassion is being present with and as our energy as it emerges, but with that emergence being in harmony with other people. Usually we try to constrain some of our impulsivity because we are not quite sure what are going to do, we don't quite trust ourselves...and that's because the flow of our experience tends to be grounded in these neurotic patterning or karmic formations, we're not actually deeply at home in ourselves. Until we find that home we are stuck with the task of trying to manage how

we are. So this evening will just do some shamatha practice – shamatha basically means abiding in stillness – and we do that by selective attention.

One of the functions of selective attention is to remind ourselves that we really have a choice. When our behaviour and our reactivity to our patterns of thoughts and feelings are coming very quickly...it is as if we have no choice, we just do whatever we do. So we talk in an habitual way, we hang out with the same sort of people, we read the same kinds of books and so on. In this way we are confirming patterns, so to be involved with that pattern seems automatic and necessary and...'just who we are.'

When we take a simple conscious object for our attention – such as the sensation of the breath coming and going in and out of our nostrils – we are privileging the simple over the complicated. We are privileging a focus of attention which is not exciting, which is not, of itself, full of hooks for further thoughts and elaborations and memories and feelings. Rather, we are allowing ourselves to return again and again to the simple and we are encouraging ourselves to have the sense that to be simple is a very good antidote to being complicated. Most of the time we are caught up in patterns of thinking and feeling which we don't need to be in... but it's very difficult for us to get out because we try to extricate ourselves from them by struggling with ourselves...

It's very difficult to think yourself out of thinking. We all know what it's like to be a bit worried and anxious and your mind goes round and round. You can think on and on but the thinking never comes to an end because thinking is one of the primary fuels of our ego identity; we think ourselves into existence. Our sense of a personal identity is the patterning of our thoughts.

We can all give an account of ourselves. When we come here we meet people from different backgrounds and we introduce ourselves in various ways...we are telling them a story about who we are, and they hear that story and share some of their story. So we go into the construction of images of each other. These are conceptual elaborations...and that's what we're used to. If someone remembers something about us we feel confirmed as being a person...'Ah... you remember me!'

What do they remember? – that we met at some other place, at some other time, and did something different – yet somehow that's validating for me. So when we sit to meditate we are doing it through the vehicle, at first anyway, of our anxious ego.

The ego, our individual sense of self, seeks confirmation. So when we decide to focus our attention simply on the flow of the breath we are gradually giving it a thinner and thinner diet. At first we go after many different thoughts...and that confirms us because we are used to doing that...but as you increasingly can focus your mind the ego is getting less food. It starts to go into a little bit of a coma and doesn't trouble you so much and then you're just aware of the breath going in and out and in and out.

Nothing very elaborate, nothing stimulating...so why should we bother doing this? Because it's peaceful! And when you have a little bit of that peace from the meditation, although it is an artificial construct – because you're opening yourself to that through the intentional practice of the meditation – what you start to see is that you are habituated or even addicted to involvement with thoughts...'I am thought production!'

Sometimes I seem to be the intentional agent – the one that is doing the thinking, and sometimes I seem to be almost a kind of plastic formation, like a piece of clay, upon which the different thoughts and feelings are exerting their pressure and I'm taking on the shape of the current factors moving in my mind. But if I'm still?...oh!

Since I have the possibility of being still maybe I don't have to be so busy with these thoughts? And in fact maybe being busy with the thoughts is not how I am but it is an artificial means of sustaining the illusion of who I am, which is acting as the screen to the actuality of who I am. That is to say I can't experience the openness of my own being because I'm always caught up in seeing myself refracted through certain lenses or images.

And that's what our life is, as it goes on moment by moment, day by day – thoughts feelings sensations, liking, not liking, hopes fears, happy sad, an endless flux of content of experience and the ego says 'I am the experienter!'... 'Who is this happening for?' 'Me!'

So when we calm our mind and give ourselves a focus we start to be able to see that the flow of experience is something which shows itself without having to require an additional illuminating focus... That is to say we don't need to tell ourselves what is going on.... what is going on is just what is going on.

And as we get more into that experience we start to see the habit of commentary on ourselves is pretty deeply ingrained – that we run this extra little review of how we are doing... doing well, doing badly, regretting some things, wishing we'd done more.

So there's the simplicity of the manifesting moment... and then there's this kind of wrapper or extra dimension which fleshes it out and give more body and sensation to what is occurring... but maybe it's not necessary; who is all this mental activity serving?

This is one of the things we will start to look at, because what we can see in the world is that when people become agitated and move towards acts of violence they are carried away by an idea... people kill because of ideas... that's why they kill... because 'I know you are the enemy; I know who you are'... That's a very dangerous place to be in – when somebody knows who you are.

You can have children, you can live with someone for many many years, but it's quite difficult to say who they are. You might know some things about them... but luckily children, as they get older, get better and better at hiding things from their parents. This which puts into question the omnipotent fantasy of 'the great Mama'!

We are separate people; we hardly know who we are... so how are we going to know who other people are? Oh-oh! But when we know who someone is – that they are like that, that they belong to that group – especially if we can do a one-liner, then that simple definition becomes a death sentence. 'Because you are like that, because I can know who you are, I am clear that you have to die, because your existence is an abomination.' – 'I am like this and you... are like that!'

The whole function of meditation is to deconstruct, to gently open out these factors of constitution – the ways in which we elaborate and create for ourselves a sense of certainty about who the other is and certainty about who we are. By looking at our minds we can start to see that such construction is very very deceptive. Nothing is established by thoughts because thoughts are always dissolving... they are always dissolving... they last just a very short time.

So we'll do some simple practice now. Sit in a comfortable way, letting your skeleton carry your weight, so that your breath can move easily. With this kind of practice we sit with the chin slightly down, our tongue is on hard upper pallet just resting gently. The breath is moving easily through the nostrils and our gaze is down the line of the nose. The eyes aren't closed but we are not staring at anything... there's a kind of gentle focus. For this kind of practice we usually have our arms in our lap making a little circle of stable energy around us. The shoulders are relaxed and dropped and we develop a simple intention – 'I am going to keep my attention on the flow of my breath, that's what I'm going to do.... nothing else.'

Then, whenever we find that our mind wanders off, whatever its caught up in – sensations, memories, hopes – it doesn't matter... as soon as you recognise that it has wandered off... just very gently bring your attention back. We don't enquire where we went to, or why we went there... all we are doing is simply coming back in the most gentle way, back onto the focus of the breath. Any questions about the form of that practice? Okay so we do that together for a while.

There's an old saying that the devil finds work for idle hands to do and you see that with this kind of meditation... if you forget to keep the focus on your breath you will be carried hither and thither in all kind of directions. So what does this tell us about the nature of the mind?

Our conscious mind is like a glass tube and there's always something flowing through this glass tube. When you focus your attention it is as if you fill this glass tube just with the presence of the breath and when you lose that conscious focus the glass tube is immediately filled up with something else – some other stream of thoughts or sensations is flowing through it. There is always something happening... there is no end to experience because that's what we are... we are experience and the ground of experience...and the mind doesn't stop.

So this kind of meditation, which is for simplifying the content of the mind, is something which is useful as a diagnostic method. We're not trying to stop all our thoughts. If you were able to stop all your thoughts for an extended period of time you would become like a stone... there is no advantage to your anyone else in being in that state. But if you start to see 'I am a flow of experience' and when I say 'I am a flow of experience' it's 'I am...whatever happens to be flowing through me at the time'.

Sometimes I feel I'm happy or I'm sad or I'm hungry or thirsty or tired or bored or excited...there's always something which is arising and it appears to be me. I didn't make it happen, I didn't intend it to happen but it's as if, as long as it is appearing in this transparent tube, in that moment it is the content of me and therefore it is me. So I am the random contents of my mind!

Now if you put that in your CV you would never get a job! We have to pretend that we are something much more reliable and predictable. That's the organisational focus that we have – that's what we call our identity, our persona, how we present ourselves – but underneath that there is this ever-moving stream of potential.

In our daily life we are protected against the eruptions of these by the fixation of our activity. If you're at work and you have things to do – the link between subject and object, between you and your work project, gives you a kind of protective shield against that distraction. But when you have a bit more time, maybe sitting on the train, you find your mind wandering here and there.

The wanderingness of the mind is actually the mind's quality. The focusing on the mind onto a computer or getting a work project done – that's completely artificial – that's how you pay your rent, it doesn't really lead to a meaningful existence. But the happenstance of this endless movement of the mind, in our culture, becomes something we hardly can attend to....because it seems to be undermining or making insecure the maintenance of our sense of self. It's that we have to fashion an identity, and then maintain that identity under pressure, so that we can become knowable to other people.

The pressure in our particular culture for maintaining a stable formation of our social or presentational self is very great, it's very great...and it's necessary to maintain life. If you're a parent with kids you have to be reasonably predictable because you are the object of their attachment...and you need to be able to prepare the food on time and get them to school on time and give them a bath and so on...You have to be able to keep the rhythm of life flowing and that there's a kind of beat, that you're on the pulse.

Of course that is dynamic – a beat, a rhythm, is a movement in time. It's not that we are stable as 'something' but by having the capacity for rhythmic attunement we bring ourselves together in patterns of formation which, through their repetition, create for other people the illusion that we are 'someone'...that we are, we exist, 'I am me!'.

Now who I am, I don't know. We can say something about ourselves...we can tell our name and where we were born, or what we like to eat and so on and so forth...but none of us know what the content of our mind is going to be in five minutes time or even in one minutes time. Something will happen and that will be me. 'I am something that happens for me'...now that is weird! That is really wild and yet it is how it is.

So part of the function of the meditation practice is, by maintaining this stable focus on the breath, to have a sense that the continuity of myself is not established by the object. The breath is not in the least interesting, it is just a very subtle sensation at the nostrils, but this is all – if you really get into it – this is all that is holding you in place. This is all that you are...just an attention on a very simple object.

Then you get distracted and suddenly your sphere of attention is filled with other things, with memories, hearing sounds outside, maybe being aware of somebody's body moving and so on – there is a lot going on. So I can be very simple, I can be very complicated. The mind can focus on just one tiny thing or it can be panoramic.

When we go outside in this beautiful countryside there are vast trees each with hundreds of thousands of leaves on them and, in one instant, all of that is there. We can see hundreds of trees at once each with a hundred thousand leaves and we get the whole shebang. We don't build it up bit by bit we get everything at once. How big is the mind?!... and then we are just focused on the breath. So is the mind big or small?...either or!...Do we have to decide either or?

The more we attend to how we are, rather than telling ourselves who we are, we get the chance to be shown the actuality of our existence. But as long as we are caught up in a self-defining narrative, in maintaining a sense of who we are in order to present it to other people, we won't be able to see the dissolving of the structures of our self.

'But I don't want to dissolve! I want to be me!' But you are the one who is dissolving. It doesn't end... if you lose one...you get another! This is the basis of our lives... we breathe in breathe out. We haven't just the one breath...it is a pulsation of breath, a pulsation of the heartbeat, the movement of energy through the nervous system, hormonal communication. Our body is a dynamic system... our mind is a dynamic system...the world is a dynamic system. Everything is moving together but, inside that, we have a notion of stasis, of fixity –'I am me'. This puts us in bad faith with the actuality of our existence...because we have the fantasy 'I'm in charge of my life, I know what I want to do, I'm gonna make it happen!'...and it doesn't work out like that very often.

We see that economically, politically, in terms of whether there's going to be a third runway in Heathrow airport. Nobody can make up their mind for anything and the roads are full of potholes... and we are going to show the world that Great Britain is great! These are all ideas and fantasies, the actuality is a fairly rundown country. But you won't get elected if you say that. Telling the truth makes you unpopular. Telling yourself the truth about yourself makes you upset... so it's better to tell yourself lies...'You're doing great Mrs May, we're all behind you! – stabbing you in the back!

Here we start to see that we have a narrative formation of our sense of self which we maintain in the face of the evidence that it is not true. That whatever we say about ourselves is true from time to time under certain circumstances but it cannot be true all the time because we are creatures of interacting and interaction.

Who we are with affects how we feel, it affects what we can say. We are not one thing, we are not preformed...that's why our mind is moving. There are many different Buddhist systems, many different ways of interpreting, but from the point of view of dzogchen the movement of the mind is the radiance of our own awareness. Just as the sun is up in the sky and rays of light spread out from it, seemingly effortlessly, bringing the light and heat that keeps our planet going...so our awareness itself is effulgent, it gives out light. It is the source of all that we experience because everything we encounter is our own experience.

We will unpack this more over the next few days... but when we're not present in the moment of the arising of experience, when we try to catch it and turn it into a series of solid events – reliable, predictable, so that we know where we are – that very solidification creates a huge amount of confusion because it's not how it is.

That in a nutshell is the Buddhist understanding of Samsara...that if you think you can get hold, get a grasp on this reality, this thingness of the world, you are in a state of confusion. And out of confusion, the delusion, the misinterpretation, you have lots of suffering...because your plan, your image of how things are, doesn't fit with what's arising.

So if we want to live fresh and in the moment we have to let go of our ideas about how it is going to be. But since our ego-self is composed out of the orientation that comes from our sense of

who we are that's a tricky business. We have to trust that our relaxed openness is more truthful and fundamentally more reliable than our anxious arousal.

We all know how to artificially present ourselves to other people – to tidy things up if someone is coming to visit you, to put on a good impression. You have an interview every year to keep your job so you cook yourself up to show an image...but it is an image. We we are all suckers...we buy into the images presented by other people but we also buy into the images that we present of ourselves.

Meditation creates a situation whereby you can allow the gradual softening and dissolving of the glue that is keeping the mask pinned to your face. So that as your mask starts to come off you can feel the freshness of your original face, the face you've had from the very beginning, the primordial face of your own unborn awareness. And through that your potentiality then shines out and you find that you are many many people.

Nobody is just one thing. We are multiple and we have always been multiple but we disguise this to ourselves by trying to be one thing – by having fixed identifiable formations to our self.

When we do the practice we find that we can't maintain the focus on our breath very easily and the mind wanders off. From one point of view that means we should try harder but from the deeper point of view of meditation that's your mind...your mind is wandering...that is to say it's not your possession.

When you are small, two years of age and so on, you're developing more and more capacity for control of your sensory motor functioning. You're learning to stand up and walk in a straight line, you're learning to control the muscles required for speaking, you are learning to control the sphincter muscles for urination and defaecation, you're learning to hold yourself together and keep yourself in shape – to normalise yourself so that you become socially acceptable. That has its particular level of function.

What we do in meditation is to go in the other direction. We are not so concerned with normalisation, we are wanting to see how am I when I don't make myself artificial? Who am I before I think about who I am? Who are you before I interpret who you are to myself? So we have two orders of mental experience – the immediate moment, which is always just whatever is now... and then just behind that we have the wrapper department – in which we take the experience and we wrap it in a conceptual elaboration. We make an interpretation which is usually one which pertains to our familiar sense of self.

We have a selective attention to what's arising; we make use of the factors which confirm 'I am who I think I am' and we discount the rest. So we wander through the world quite blind to the many, many opportunities that are there, So many potentials in the world in terms of ways of dress, music, foodstuffs, all kinds of things...but we have our little path through the forest. We know that there are many berries we shouldn't eat. Granny told us once upon a time... we've forgotten which ones she said so we'd better not eat very many...and so our life becomes very narrow. But that narrowness is comforting because it's me; who would I be if I wasn't me...I wouldn't know.

How could I live if I didn't know who I was? Well you have been living imagining that you are someone who you're not.. which would be worse! At least if you know you been bull-shitting yourself you can drop that, and then you find 'oh, actually I have been living quite responsive way. I have actually been responding to circumstances, I have actually been in the flow of life.' This is how it has been.

So I'm not doing anything artificial, what I'm starting to do is to stop the over-layering of the unnecessary interpretation. And now I can start to trust spontaneity, improvisation, the fact that I emerge with other people. That when we meet people we don't know what to say...but we look at them and we say something. Something happens, something always happens if we let it happen.

When we're socially anxious we don't let it happen...our anxiety makes us tense up and we interrupt the flow of connectivity. We don't have to try to connect, we are always already

connected. The function of the meditation practice is to dissolve, on and on and on, dissolving and dissolving the frozen patterns or neurotic patterns of reification and solidification whereby we stabilise our sense of the world.

The world is not stable. At this time, economically and politically, we are in a period of great change but when we look back in history it has always been a period of great change. War is normal for human beings – invasions, famines, all kinds of disasters, have been part of the human experience. So what is arising now is just a different form of the same old trouble.

As the Buddha said there are two main forms of suffering getting what you don't want and not getting what you do want. That expresses itself it generation by generation in new formations but the basic tilt is the same. We are frustrated because we have an idea of what would be good for us and it's not fulfilled and we feel upset when we get things that we don't know what to do with. 'Somehow my life is changed because people around me are sick and I have to look after them, or I lose my job, or my good boss leaves and i've now got a horrible boss'...things happen to us which alter the affective tone, the emotional tone of our existence. 'My life is not what it was'... but when has it ever been stable? Since we were born it has been a process of movement.

The Buddha's basic teaching is impermanence – all phenomena, all compounded things, are impermanent. Our bodies change moment by moment through breathing, through the flow of the blood. We are hungry so we eat...then we need to shit and piss, we are tired so we sleep then we wake up...life is going on all the time...what is stable in this?

So how can we live with the actuality of the world without retreating into the deluded, the false elaborations of conceptual interpretation? This is really the problem...and it relates to the issue of conflict and war because people get into conflicts through ideas – an idea of 'myself'.

Now in Britain we have this the nonsensical situation of Brexit, because there is an idea that Europeans steal things from Britain.

Britain has the noble history of being the greatest stealer nation in the world. We've ripped off people in every continent; we are the greatest thieves alive, that's why we are called Great – Great Thieving Britain. This is obvious, it's written in all the schoolbooks, this is what we did. But now we think 'They're taking stuff from us, that's not fair, people shouldn't do that.' 'We should win all the time because we are Great Britain!' Win some lose some?... 'I don't want to lose, I want to win! We're going at show these Europeans! We can tell them how it's gonna be!'

It is so pathetic and outrageous as a way of speaking. It goes in the face of our increasing sense of the interdependence of world economies and the necessity of living in a peaceful way together.

Why is it so difficult?...because we are stuck with an idea – being 'Great Britain' – and once you have an inflated idea you don't want to give it up. 'Our place in the world'...but everything arises due to causes and circumstances.

What was great is now dust...at school we read this poem Ozymandias... statues collapse. You look at Egypt – you see what was once constructed there with thousands of slaves, these huge pyramids, huge sculptures...it turns to dust.

Eventually everything turns to dust... and for sure the great British economy will turn to dust and people will be very poor and they'll wonder why? And partly it will be because we couldn't get rid of the idea that we are great.

Instead of being great we should consider being humble and grateful...and have gratitude and acknowledgement of what we get from other people. The world is exchange and the best form of exchange is mutual reciprocity in which both parties are happy rather than the fantasy of dominance.

So we can see, day by day, when you get stuck with an inflated notion of who you are the world becomes very difficult. If you're bigger than you are, you clunk and bang into everything around you...you lose the flexibility, the possibility of finding a place.

But what is my place in the world? You don't have one, each day you find a new place. Each day the value of the pound goes up and down on the international exchange markets, the value of peanuts goes up and down on the international exchanges. Everything is tradable and because it's tradable it does not have a fixed value. The price of gold, silver, copper, whatever it is...it goes up and down...It's an open market, that's how it is...pulsating and impermanent.

The status of a country is just like that too, our place will be the place that opens up for us. And if we can take our place, we will have a place... but if you insist on having a place and say 'fuck off you bastards' you probably get a very small place at the back of the queue! Increasingly of course European politicians are saying 'you don't decide, we'll decide'. 'If you are out then it's up to us.' Do we want to hear that? No, because we are...What are we?...Deluded!

So politics is very important because politics is simply a big stage on which the fantasy of the ego is shown. It's just like a movie screen...you blow up the small image in the projector room. All that Brexit is...is what we are – caught up in images of ourselves that we don't want to change and then finding it very difficult to re-situate ourselves day by day, moment by moment, in the changing world.

So going back to this basic meditation...in Tibetan it's called shiné, which means to stay or abide or to dwell peacefully, not causing trouble, not being a bit like this, and a bit like that, and a bit like anything else...you're just watching the breath.

You're not doing anything, you're not making anything, you're not producing anything, you're simply being with what is. The breath goes in and out...this is our life. If it stops we're in bad nick...breath is moving...our attention is on the breath.

It's peaceful because that's all that's happening... we are at home with what is happening, and all the rest – the little thoughts come in, the memories, and so on – this is some additional confectionery, this is some elaboration which carries us off. We don't need that, we could just be simple and peaceful but we get distracted. Okay...so if the focus is on the discipline of maintaining focused attention then we have to come back to the breath again and again. There is an advantage in that because it lets us see that many possibilities of our existence arise moment by moment and they only become actualised when we give ourselves to them.

We already know that. Maybe you are reading a book and you're quite into it and you think 'ooh, i need to have a pee' but you can go back into reading the book. By focusing your attention into the book you are able to manage the messages that are coming from your bladder. You can do this because when you have focused attention this becomes figural and the other impending sensations move into the background.

We are always having this figure/environment pulsation moving...and that's what's happening with this practice. What's becoming figural is simply the breath and the rest recedes into the background but when we give attention to it, it becomes figural. Anything can become figural if you give it attention...attention is birth. In the Zen tradition they say when the mind moves the ten thousand things arise. This means that the world comes into existence when you attend to it... when you don't attend to it is not there.

We have all had the experience of being a bit preoccupied – maybe a bit worried or depressed. You go for a walk and you come back home... you haven't seen anything! You were there... walking down the road...many many things were happening around you but you were caught up in these labyrinthine movements of your mind. So the sensory stimuli which were actually impacting you didn't register because you were pre-occupied. On another day you're not preoccupied, you're open, you're fresh, you're available, and you really enjoy the walk... and you see so many things.

This is our experience...we know our life is like this. So this is how we are – whatever we give our attention to is our existence and when we don't attend to something it's not in our existence.

Poor people who live in countries where there are extreme political regimes might have to join a particular party in order to survive. They're having to put themselves into an artificial formation to

show the powers, the government forces, that they are one of them, that they belong. We are lucky, we don't have to do that...but instead of being caught by the government's desire we are caught by our own desires and so we, through our selective attention, create images of who we are.

So again, the function of the meditation as we'll see in these next few days is to start to see more...to start to allow more of life into our life so that we can work with the richness of experience. Not by controlling it and shrinking it, not by being merged into it, not by trying to edit it and repel it, but just by being open and allowing it to be present as the basis. Then within that we find that we have a spontaneous movement within the field of experience, which of course we always share with other people. Life is going on in a much lighter easier way because we're not starting from inside ourselves...'what will I say? what will I do?'...that's a terrible place to begin from!

We already in it, there is no threshold between you and the world. We are always already in the world, of the world, as the world, and so we are part of it...so we just get on with being part of it.

But the ego-formation, in ignoring this openness of the unborn mind, takes up its position in ourself... and then in this castle of ourself we are sort of safe but also quite frightened... 'How will I be?' 'Have I made myself the wrong way?' 'If only I'd made different choices in life I might have been happier... Why did I break up with Mary?... Come back please!' What a life!

We are in a beautiful country setting here, there are many places to walk...you can walk up slopes, down steps and so on. We have opportunities – in the morning at eight o'clock there will be different kinds of exercise that will be described in a minute... we have eating together, then we will be here together. In all of these experiences we of course have the opportunity to do our familiar interpretation of what is going on...to tell ourselves what is happening...but in the buddhist tradition of vipassana we attempt to allow experience to show itself free of our interpretation.

So when you're outside you're looking at different flowers, you're feeling maybe it's getting a bit colder... without coming to a conclusion about what your experience is, try to stay open to what that is...is it a tightening of the muscles? do you feel a shiver?Before you start elaborating and coming to some conclusion... stay with the how of life – how is this presenting?

The same if you're eating and you're sitting next to people...some people are easy to talk to, some people you may find you don't have anything to say. You don't need to come to any conclusion about that or feel uncomfortable, as a social formation you can just stay with the sensation of 'I don't find any connection'. What is that? How does that present itself?

The key thing is to be curious about the immediacy of the presentation, or the revelation of our experience, without framing it into our habitual categories of understanding. Allow the raw immediate freshness of experience to arise...and be with that, simply be with it. We'll look more tomorrow at how one can work more deeply with that.

Session 2. Friday Morning

Good morning we have a nice day ahead of us. The focus will be on looking at the nature of our mind, the difference between clarity and confusion, and what some of the consequences of remaining in confusion are – both for ourselves and for other people.

I'll present this from the point of dzogchen which is a non-dual teaching found within Tibetan buddhism. It's not a belief system, it's not dogmatic system, it's not about wrapping yourself in a set of ideas or concepts...rather it's a view which seeks to illuminate the transparency of many of the beliefs that we hold so that we can see their illusory nature.

The only kind of orienting requirement is that we have some faith – not faith in anything in particular, but faith that openness is more true, more true for ourselves, than closure. That it's better to be open to what is occurring than to wrap ourselves in protective positions. This path will put into question the kind of protective positions we adopt.

We're here, and we know that we are here because we experience being here. We look around... we see colours, shapes, we hear sounds...our life is lived through the senses. Often we have the sense that we live inside ourselves looking out through our sense organs at a world which is 'other'. But we couldn't exist without that world and in fact it is the boundary between self and other which is the source of a great many of our problems because it's fundamentally a lie... and I shall set out the traditional teachings which reveal that.

So the basis of our existence is what is called the primordial ground. This ground is pure from the very beginning, that is to say it's not been touched by anything else. I can touch my nose because I believe that my hand and my nose are not the same thing...we touch the world...we stand in relation to things. But the primordial ground is not a thing, it's that which is there before the process of reification of the mental fabrication of entities begins.

We live in a world of conceptual elaboration and we're always thinking and interpreting and defining and determining. Before that miasma work began, before we started to cloud the world with the steam of our own false creativity, there was just simplicity. This simplicity is the ever-open ground and it is awareness – that we're just aware. When we are aware...without doing anything, everything's here. When you open your eyes the world is here...then you start to tell the world what it is...you start to interpret it and so on, but before the mind moves it's not that there's nothing at all – there is the potential from which everything arises.

So this ground is our mind inseparable from space and it'll become clearer what the meaning of 'mind' is here. Mind is very contested term – in fact all language is pretty uncertain and unreliable, words carry so many associations and meanings and ideas. So we're going to work towards the edge of language and see if we can be present, free of the necessity of relying on language and concepts to make sense.

This is the burden that we have – that we are continually making sense of what is going on. This is an activity, it doesn't stop, it's endless. If we didn't do that everything would be meaningless, or so we believe, and yet this primordial open ground is intrinsically meaningful. It is, if you like, the ultimate value of...calm, open, lucid.

This is made available to us when we resist the temptation to fall into the waterfall of our continuous conceptualisations. When we walk in the in the park here we see many different kinds of trees and it's quite difficult not to comment...we think something is beautiful or we see that one tree is old, or young, or we see that things have been cut...we exist as a dialogue in relation to what is occurring.

We participate through our offering of our understandings and interpretations. But the ground of our being, the basis that was there from the very beginning, is peaceful, it doesn't do anything. It is open, empty, and quite other than whatever we might imagine it to be...it's not something that we can apprehend through our thoughts. So to find ourselves in the innate, the intrinsic, openness of the mind...it's not that we have to banish thought, but we have to stop misusing thought. Thought is a form of energetic communication that helps us to participate in the world with others. If you couldn't think it would be very difficult to have any kind of access to the communication that links us all altogether...but thought can't illuminate its own ground. Thought arises as the display or the radiance of this open ground.

So how is the ground? According to the tradition it's naked, which means it's not covered by anything. Now we, as people in our ordinary conscious selves, are very covered. We are covered by messages that we hold about ourselves, we have beliefs from our family, from our schooling, from our culture, and we remain within these wrappers of identification.

As the years go by we accumulate more and more history, more and more movements of hopes and fears, more and more internal contradictions – where we realise that we've been moving in

one direction and then we regret it, or we have to change so that we move in another direction. Which of these is that is the truth of our lives?

We are multiple and yet we want to be singular. The ego is always trying for simplicity and eternity...both of which are impossible for it. The ego is complicated because, as we were looking last night, it feasts on whatever is arising, it seeks nourishment wherever it can find it.

But awareness itself is not obscure, it's not covered. It's also fresh...which means each moment is new – which is the truth of our lives.

Of course we have memories and a great capacity for intellectualising, for cognitive enquiry, but this comes after the fact of sensory experience. Some of you will know this from doing hill running. If you're running down a hill, or on a mountain bike going down a hill, or skiing very fast, you have no time to think – if you think you'll get in trouble – but if you trust the immediacy of your sensory connection with the environment you can find a way through. So that's a that's a very simple illumination for us of the fact that we can have quite a vital, immediate existence before the arrival of thought. Thought comes after the event – very quickly after the event – but after the event, and as I say it wraps it, it interprets it...covers it over. So our experience of the world is not fresh because we believe that we have to rely on knowledge from the past as the basis for proceeding into the future.

But what is this past? The the past is already gone...so we are always importing ideas which are out of date to lead us towards the future. When these various economic crashes occurred people couldn't believe they were happening, they couldn't understand that the banks could fail; people can't believe that we are in the midst of an ecological crisis. The facts are there, there is lots of information that is there, but it's denied because the edifice of the past – the constructs that we have about how things are – delude us about how they actually are.

That is to say the ego, in its search for eternity, seeks a 'timeless unchanging now' – 'But this is Britain, Britain is always the same!'...standing up for British values...as if there was some eternal structure that we could all live quite happily inside!

Of course Britain is a construct. Moment by moment all the people in Britain are creating Britishness... we are 'Britishing'. Britishness is a verb, it's an active verb, if you don't do it it's not there...But you have to do something, so if you decide Britain's shit then you can go to the south of Spain and then you do 'Malaga-ing' ... because we are always somewhere, doing something. We are creating our existence by the way in which we tell ourselves the story about what is going on.

So when we read in the text that the mind is naked and fresh it means it's not covered over by the accretions of the past. We don't need to rely on the knowledge that we've accumulated through school and life in order to tell us what is occurring, what is occurring is already occurring...it's occurring prior to the story. So the issue here is why do we need to tell ourselves a story when it's already here? Who is being served by the story?

The traditional example for the mind is the mirror. A mirror shows many many things but the one thing that the mirror can't show is itself; the mirror shows itself through showing the other. When you look in the mirror you see reflections...you can see reflection of your face, you could see a reflection of the building, of the vast sky and trees and nature outside...the mirror is not fussed about what it shows, it's just a site of showing. This is our awareness – it just shows.

In the course of our lives we had many many different kinds of experiences arising. We've known that they were occurring by the primacy of our awareness which just reveals 'this is here', 'this is here', 'this is here'... then we try to make sense of it... but before that 'it's just there'. Often we don't like what is occurring but that it is a value judgement which is coming after the fact that something is there. There is a facticity to the immediacy of life – this is the phenomena themselves showing how they are – the topology of our existence prior to the interpretation.

So the reflections in the mirror are in the mirror, intimately in the mirror, but they are not the mirror. All the thoughts feelings memories hopes and fears that we've had have been the flow of our

experience...out of which we have constructed notions of ourselves through our selectivity – I like this I don't like that – and then they vanished. None of the experiences that we've had, either of the other or of ourselves, has continued; experiences don't last very long. When we look back, as we get older, we see more and more is gone. When it was here it seemed to be absolutely here 'it's me!' 'this is it!' and then it's gone...it's vanished...and when it's vanished, it's really vanished.

So the freshness of the mind shows us again and again the illusory nature of experience. Illusion doesn't mean that there's nothing there, it means there's something...which is appearance...but devoid of an internal essence or basic self substance.

When you see a rainbow in the sky, or when you see the reflection of the full moon on a pond, or when you hear an echo, there is an experience. You hear an echo, you see a rainbow, but you can't catch a rainbow, it's insubstantial.

Now we clearly think we can catch 'things' – I can pick up my watch, I've got hold of something, but what is the something? Well, it's a watch. So then we have the basic question...Is the 'watchness' of the watch in the watch? I say 'it's a watch' and that feels completely correct to me because I have learnt that it is a watch, and watch is a word in my mother tongue. If I was born with another language I would call it something else, so even the name that it's called by is not intrinsic. The concept of it is also not intrinsic...it is extrinsic, it is external to what is in my hand but projected again and again by us into the object so we feel that we are taking hold of a watch. I'm taking hold of pieces of metal and glass with a leather strap. How it functions for me depends on my capacity to interpret it. You remember as a child having to learn to tell the time. The watch doesn't tell the time...you tell the time on the basis of the watch, the watch doesn't do very much except go round and round and round.

This is very simple but also very important because what we usually do when we say 'This is a watch... look at the watch and it will tell you the time' is we cut ourselves off from the world around us so that we live in the sense that the world is full of inherently meaningful objects and we are just some kind of bystander, some observer. 'There's all the shit going on all the time... and it's all a bit much...and we don't really know what it means...and Oh my god, it's overwhelming! just overwhelming! all this stuff.' But what is this stuff? From the buddhist point of view there is no stuff, absolutely no stuff at all, everything is an illusion. That is to say... if I don't think 'watch', if I don't tell the watch what time the watch is telling me it is, there is no time.

Don't exile the mind from the world. When you have a dead world and a living mind then you live in the desert, in an abandoned field of desolation. Actually the world is vibrant and alive and we are ceaselessly coming into being in the co-emergence with whatever is going on... everything is the mind...there are no dead fixed objects at all. The world is called into being by the movement of our minds. Subject and object are ceaselessly dancing together and they dance within the arena of awareness.

Clearly part of us is participative. We move through our body, through our voice, through our concepts, our memories and so on... this is the same quality of movement as the trees moving in the breeze, as the waves on the top of the ocean, as cars driving down the hill, birds in the sky. There is movement and the movement is occurring in a space...the space is the space of awareness. The movement sometimes appears like the object, sometimes appears like the subject. When we identify as the subject and hold ourselves apart from the world of the object, this tear or this rivenness, that separates us out causes us then to exist in the state of confusion because we're having to work out what it is that's going on.

So when we look at this image of the mirror, the mirror itself doesn't do anything, the mirror just shows. The movement of the world is revealed in the mirror. The mirror is not improved by having a beautiful reflection and it's not diminished by having what we might take to be an ugly reflection or a challenging reflection. The mirror is quite neutral to what arises within it; if you practice some meditation hopefully you can see the resonance of that. When we sit in the practice we open to whatever is arising and we seek not to privilege what we take to be a good thought or an affirmative ego-syntonic thought – one that seems to tell us that we are who we are – and we try not to abandon or reject thoughts which we don't want to have in our mind. By just allowing the mind itself to show itself, the anxiety of the ego-formation starts to relax.

So the basic ground is always open and in the dzogchen tradition they say although there is just one ground there are two paths. One path is to recognise the ground...and through that to see that everything that arises is the radiance or the direct emergence of the qualities of the ground. That is to say, moment by moment we are the play of the unborn spacious awareness. Or we don't see the ground, we forget the openness of the ground, and in that forgetfulness we find ourselves as 'I me myself' 'I am me' 'Who am I – well i'm me!' There's a kind of irreducible facticity to me being me – this is the quality of ignorance. That in forgetting that I am dynamic and emergent I'm now taking onto myself the burden of being something... and as soon as I become something I find myself in a world of somethings... and there's a lot of somethings...there's an awful lot of things out there.

So now I'm quite a small little something...how am I going to survive? Then we have selectivity.

So in the tradition the first moment is the arising of *dagpo chigpo* which means the singular I. There's just a moment of 'Oh...me'. What is that? It's a transient flicker, it's just there and then gone; like spume on the top of the wave, it dissolves back into the ocean. But when it's grasped at it's as if it becomes something. What is grasped? That's the energy of the grasper. Who is the grasper? The quality of finding something to grasp.

So you have almost a solipsistic...a kind of miasma...a kind of self-deluding cycle where I am grasping at myself.

Self and other are transient; we know this about our lives...we're not the same shape as we had when we were born. Since we got up this morning we've had thousands of different thoughts, our bodies have gone through so many different postures and gestures, so many breaths have come in... some easy breaths some disturbed breaths... and so on. Nothing is the same now as it was when we woke up. We are change.. and yet 'I'm me'...but you're change! 'No, but i'm me... I admit I am changing'. 'I' am changing'... so the change is somehow a kind of validation of the fact that I'm me...I've been through a lot of changes.' 'This year's been pretty challenging!'

We are turning emptiness into substance. We're turning the fresh luminous gold quality of each moment into the shit of something solid stable and enduring. This is the reverse alchemy of the ego...it is not really to be recommended!...because with this ignorance we are trapped into me being inside, and you being outside.

We see this when we look at insects, the birds, or the animals...they have the same structure – a sense of separation from the environment...and we'll look a little bit at buddhist cosmology later.

So here I am.. and there you are...'Who are you? Who are you?'... you're already here for me. We are living in this display of what's here, but it's not enough... 'Who are you? Tell me something about yourself?' 'Why?' 'Because I want to know something about you'. Does 'aboutness' show the person?

When the we had the unification in Germany there was a lot of opening up of the Stasi police files and people could learn what was written in their file about them...is that them?

If you go into a hospital you get lots of notes written about you. Do they reveal the real truth of you or how your liver is functioning? or whether your gallbladder is in a bad way? Is that you is? Is the story about you – the story of you – you?

This is where meditation comes in, because as long as we are wrapped in the development of the storylines about ourselves – storylines which of course we are very careful to edit according to the circumstances that we tell the story in – as long as we are immersed in that, can we find the one who is telling the story?

The one who is telling the story is, in fact, another strand in the story. I, me, myself, the subject, am someone that I tell myself that I am.

This is like a conjurer's trick, this is a strange double move in which I'm filling myself with the thoughts about who I am...so that I can say 'well this is who I am'. We are an empty pot that fills

itself, like a mountain stream bubbling up from underneath, except we're just looking at the shimmering surface and forgetting that it's emergent, its dynamic.

So as the first moment of separation or solidification around a self occurs there's then this other stuff. So we hold ourselves apart and we hold onto the idea that there's two. This is the birth of duality and in India all the deeper meditative traditions are concerned with the question of non-duality. Non-duality doesn't mean that there is not two and therefore there is only one – non-duality stands between one and two. We can't reduce the world to just one thing because there are many different things... and we can't say there are many different things because they all have the same nature. So non-duality is the meeting point of emptiness and the richness of the display of our experience. Because our mind is empty we are able to see many many different things; because the mirror is empty, because it has no self-substance, because the mirror has nothing in and of itself to show you...it shows something else... it shows whatever is occurring.

So when we look into ourselves we see 'oh, where is the essence of me?' The essence of me seems to be whatever I'm on about at the moment – anything will do as long as it's me – and I'm pretty good at making anything me 'cos that's what it is to be a 'me'.

So the non-me is 'me' when I call it 'me'...oh...and how do I do that?

I do that again and again by being actually empty. Empty doesn't mean nothing at all...empty means not already filled with something else...it is the spaciousness of the mind – what's often referred to as the unborn nature. 'Unborn' means if the baby, before they could do scans and look a bit at the foetus, before the baby came out of the mother's body you didn't know what it was.

The unborn mind is something which hasn't come into existence, you can't get a handle on it, it's not a thing. Out of the unborn nature arises the ceaseless flow of experience but the unborn nature, in not being born, has no graspable qualities.

Because it's un-graspable you can say infinite; infinite means it has no limit. When you, as will look later in the meditation, when you look for your mind you can't find anything because the mind is not a thing. Therefore there is no top or bottom, no sides, no past no future...the mind is beyond our conceptualisation and yet it's who we are. We are not something we can grasp, we are the open source within which the flow of experience arises.

This non-duality of emptiness and appearance is covered for us when we grasp at being 'somebody inside my body looking out at other people and the walls and the ceiling and so on'. What we call 'other people' is exactly what we call 'other people'. Who are other people if we don't call them 'other people'? They're not people...the 'peopleness' of people begins with thinking they're people!

In the humanistic realm people are very worried that people are in danger when they are disrespected, when they're called cockroaches and rats and so on, because that's often the disparaging language that leads up to genocide. So we think 'well it's really important to respect that people are people.' That's a concept, it's an ethical concept but it is a concept, it is a construct. When I look out at you what I see is shape and colour...I imagine 'people'... I don't see people – I think people.

You might think you're seeing me and that's correct.. you think you're seeing me. What you are seeing is somebody waving their arms around in front of you and making sounds and you are interpreting the sounds. If you don't know English you wouldn't know what I was saying; it is your knowledge of English that makes me comprehensible. So you are part of the birth of me – I am co-emergent with you, I'm not a self-existing little island. By how you open yourselves to me or keep yourself at a distance from me I am revealed in certain ways for you. Each person here will get their own version of me because I am coming into creation through your participation. That is an amazing thing...there's no fixed entities out there.

When you go for breakfast there's a buffet and you make choices. Some people are drawn more to one thing to eat, some people are drawn towards another... that's how the world comes to them.

You decide which table to sit at or whether you're going to sit outside...you find yourself creating the world which you inhabit. It is not as if the world is 'there as it is' before you participate, your participation is the birthing of the world. This is what it means if you read the traditional text when it says there are the three times – past present and future – and then there is the time of immediacy, the timeless time within which everything is occurring all at once. This is the time of the mirror – it's immediate, direct, its unfolding. The three times arise when you start conceptualising... 'Oh James was talking about this yesterday'...we link somethings together, we make patterns.

We're making the pattern in the moment, and in the moment you think 'oh, James talked about that yesterday' you are creating a construct, you are creating your experience in the moment. It appears as if you're thinking about the past but there is no past, the past is gone. So when you remember the past you yourself are in the centre, co-emergent – the co-creator, the co-creator of the world.

This is why in the dzogchen tradition we say 'we take refuge in the mind'; the mind is our refuge. When we see what the mind is...the mind is the mother, or the ground, or the basis for everything which occurs, and within that we are vital and alive moment by moment. This is the deathless awareness – if nothing is born, nothing dies – there is just this moment, and this moment, and this moment, pulsing on and on and on through our lives.

If we are here it is always fresh but if we are woven into this matrix, the interpretive matrix of the three times – thinking about the past, worrying about the future, trying to work out how we should be in relation to our situation – life starts to get quite solid. Then we have these big questions 'what shall I do with my life?' 'how will I live?'

As we get a bit older we start to think 'is this all there is? Maybe I should do something really important?' 'Why?... Why do you want to do anything important?' 'Well, it's better than doing nothing!' 'Is it...?' 'It's all up to me! I have to carry the burden of my existence... I am an adult now, I have to stand on my own two feet.' 'Why?' ...Non-duality would indicate you're part of the world.

When we meet people we speak with them, that's what we do. It is the presence of people that brings about speaking. So I'm speaking because you're here, I'm not sitting in this room at two o'clock in the morning talking away...this is this is how our world is – we unfold together. So when our awareness of the ever-open ground is lost we find ourselves in this self-construct. Then of course, in order to make sense of all the stuff that we then start to encounter we do more and more naming, more and more interpreting, and as we do that the world becomes more complex.

But we also become more complex because we see that at different times in our lives we have different opinions...and so we start to realise that we are inconsistent, that we have ambivalence. That we are in fact multiple, that we are many different people.

That doesn't sound too good...it starts to take you into the terrain of mental health where the European enlightenment notion of the unitary subject is very much privileged – you should know who you are. Someone is having a bit of a turn and the doctor arrives and says 'Can you tell me your name?' 'Do you know what day it is?' so we have to give a coherent account of who we are. If we are coherent, if our story rings true, then we are who we say we are.

That is the level of identity which is required for functioning in the world, that's what will get you through a border if they question the picture in your passport. You have to be able to give a narrative which somehow allows your document to 'ring true' about you. So we have ever more elaboration of the sense of self.

From the buddhist point of view this then gives rise to the development of karma. Karma is a way of describing the nature of the energetic formation which is our life. If we are in touch with the open ground, experience is occurring second by second, second by second and we are aware of the movement...the dynamic movement which is absolutely impactful, absolutely the unique specificity of each moment – no moment is precisely the same as any other moment – and it's ungraspable because there's nothing solid there to hold onto.

Life is energy, it is the movement of energy, and we also are the movement of energy. But once you start seeing yourself as an entity, an individual apart from others, then on the basis of that we formulate intentions. Intentions towards the environment, towards other people, 'I want to do this' 'I want to do that' 'I want to steal something from you' 'I want to give something to you'. We have kind behaviours moving towards other people, we have unkind behaviours moving towards other people.

When we formulate a desire and then carry it through and then are satisfied with the outcome of that action – we think 'I'm glad I did that' – then not only do you have the formation of the immediate result of your action which is out there in the world (and you may be rewarded by other people or punished by other people...arrested by the police...depending on what the formation of the consequence of your action was)...but what we have is that, in moving towards making that action, our energy takes on the particular shaping. If you're going to cheat someone else there's a kind of awareness of that person – that you want to lie to them or steal something from them. It is not a very relaxed feeling and that vibratory quality or density of arousal becomes a quality of our subjectivity which manifests at a later time. So even if you get away with the action, even if you steal something and nobody finds out that you've done it, the resonance of the action continues.

That's the real meaning of karma...that it is a patterning of the potential of our manifestation so that at a later time we find ourselves trapped in this particular constrained formation. And this goes on and on and on and on and on from one life to another.

You might think 'Well why should I believe that there are many lives, maybe when we die we're just dead.' Well, when we look at the mind itself, as we will be doing later today, we see that we can't find any substance. This very emptiness or ungraspability – the fact that our mind, our awareness, is beyond appropriation – means we don't establish any beginning to it and we can't find any end to it...it is just here. And the 'just hereness' of the infinite mind is present now and before and after and for ever, because it's not a thing. It is not like a car engine where you have to keep filling up the tank with petrol, it is not running on any fuel, it is 'the given'...it's just there. That's why it's called the primordial ground, it is just what there is.

What we experience in terms of ourselves and our lives and our jobs and our families...these are all constructs. If you don't keep that show on the road it's gonna stop. You have to work at maintaining relationships, you have to work at maintaining your job or your professional identity, because you're shaping yourself according to a particular template 'how to be a good parent' 'how to be a good partner' and so on...you're trying to work out 'what shaping of myself can find an interface with the shapings of the other people I encounter?'

But the mind itself has no shape and so, when we die, this mind itself is always there. Various kinds of experience arise and we'll look later at the six bardos – which are an account of the different kinds of experiences which can arise for us – but these are all revelations on the stage of the open mind itself.

The ego is like an old-fashioned repertory drama company and awareness is like the open stage. The repertory company actors, in those days, used to memorise ten, twenty, different plays and they would travel around. One night they be doing this play and then the next night they'd be doing that play. They come to a new town...here's a stage.. they strut their stuff...they pack up their props and off they go. This is what we are doing all the time with 'the show must go on' – we're recreating the drama of our life through our repetition compulsion. But in order for the the show to be revealed at all you have to have a stage. The stage is an empty space, the empty space is the mind itself, and this empty space doesn't change.

So karma, whatever dimension we find ourselves in – whether it's in the human body, an animal body, an insect body – the same thing is occurring. There is a sense of a subject and an object, there's the sense of winning and losing, of being eaten and trying to eat somebody else, caught up in a chain of survival as the ego, in its separation from the world, is having to manipulate resources in order to survive.

All of these dramas are empty, they're all empty. They seem so important because we make them important. If you remember falling in love for the first time...and the desperation and the intense feelings and all of that...'Ooo!...Ooh!'...then after a while, 'what was that all about?'

We get caught up in things, that's the very nature of the ego – through the intensity of giving ourselves into the world the world starts to shine for us...it shines as long as we keep pumping our life energy into it.

So in the course of our lives many things had been shiny for us... as long as our love-light was shining on the object. After a while, like a lighthouse lamp turning round and round, the period of our illuminating that person, or that job, or that occupation, vanishes. Something else is illuminated, something else is illuminated. It seems so important... 'I have to leave you. You know I love you, I will always love you, but I have to go!' 'But why?' 'Well, she is so special!' 'Am I not special?' 'Yes you are special, but she is so special...'because the lighthouse lamp is turning. Wow!..

That's what happens in people's lives – something seems stable and reliable and just all I need... and then it's not – because it wasn't the object, it was never the object, it was the object plus us. An object plus us is a linking which arises due to causes and conditions. Some people have the causes and conditions to fall in love at sixteen and stay together for their whole life, other people don't, other people have much more varied relational histories. Some people find out what they want to do as work very early in their life and they train and they carry it all the way through and for other people, still when they are thirty or forty, they're not sure what they should be doing – it doesn't feel quite right. This has to do with the quality of the balancing of our attention onto the object field...do we find something that rings true for us?

What does it mean 'to ring true'?... We feel fulfilled, full – filled, we are able to fill ourselves with that object...for a while. Then that person dies or vanishes, or we lose our job, there's redundancy, all sorts of changes occur. We thought 'this was my life', we thought that this bond was going to last for ever because in this situation I really feel like me...being here makes me feel really alive...and that it's gone.

So my life wasn't in me...it was in the in the link...it was where subject and object come together, because subject and object are always connected. But when we have a sense of ourselves as an individual, an indivisible individual, 'I am singular', 'I, me, myself all alone' now I want to hang on to you because I experienced that I have a lack and you can fulfil my lack...'and now that I've found you I'm never going to let you go'. The words of romantic songs are quite terrifying from a buddhist point of view...'I built my world around you.'...this is the stalker's charter.

Actually our lives are unstable. Why are they unstable? Because, as the sweet Buddha said, all compounded things are impermanent...they just are impermanent. It is not a punishment, is not our fault, we're not to blame, if we tried harder we couldn't have made it any different. It just is what it is... everything is unstable.

Now that sounds bad when you want it to be stable. You could put it in a different language and you can say all experience is dynamic, all experience is interdependent, all experience is co-emergent. That sounds better doesn't it...? We'll buy that one!... We are part of an unfolding world of change – this is what it is. But inside that we want it to be stable...or at least we want the good bits to be stable and we want the bad bits to be impermanent, so we are always trying to hedge our bets to see if we can make it work.

So this is the basic view in dzogchen...it's that all the work which is done by the ego in trying to stabilise the unstable is unhelpful. it doesn't mean that we are living in a polarity of order and chaos and unless we hold it together with strong government, strong leadership... Madam Chaos is leading us towards disaster with her belief in strong judgement. This is dreadful...you cannot stabilise a changing world; what you can do is make alliances with goodhearted people who might help you stay afloat in the stormy seas that are coming...but we're going off on our little boat all by ourselves. Nice ?!

So the ego, in its isolation, seeks dominance – 'If I'm not in control, I will be controlled' – but the middle way, the buddhist teachings, says you you never going to be in control but neither are you helplessly controlled. What we have to do is to collaborate and work with circumstances. We are participative; it's not a done deal, it's not all just happening to us and we are some kind of passive sap...neither are we the dominant agents that can live life on our own terms...but in the middle we find ourselves moment by moment in a changing world, and if we are alive and present and connected, we have the optimal opportunity of feeling the full interface of potential and moving with that, responding to that.

So that is the the basis of the path, it's to find ourselves present in the ever-open ground... and in order to do that we have to enter into a new relationship with our thoughts. Rather than relying on thoughts as a vehicle for truth about ourselves, that our thoughts can tell us who we really are, we start to see that thoughts are relational. Thoughts tell us about the quality of connectivity between the various moving features of the world. If we want to find out who we really are, what we have to do is to be present with ourselves as we are...so that being is able to reveal itself. You won't find it by telling yourself who you are but by being here, present and open, and then we find...oh... this is the continuing feature.

When we listen to our thoughts they seem to tell us something definite about ourselves... and then they vanish. Same with our feelings...we feel sad or happy and it seems like an absolute truth and then something else happens and they shift and they're gone. So we start to realise 'if I take refuge in my thoughts feelings memories and plans i'm being led astray.'

These are tools of relatedness, these are not indications of ontological status – that is to say they don't show you the profundity of your being but they show you the patterning of your relational energy. These are a very different qualities; relational energy is always changing, our present awareness is always calm and open and available.

So when we do the practice this is what we are doing – we're seeking just to be present with the changing movement. Here again the image of the mirror is can be quite helpful – the mirror is able to show reflections by its emptiness. When the mirror is full of reflections, it's full of reflections because it is emptiness. That is to say there is no contradiction between the empty nature of the mirror and the fact that it's full of reflections. You won't find the mirror by extracting the reflections from it; you won't find the mirror if you put a sheet over it so that there's no light coming to it...it will be reflecting darkness but you won't see the darkness.

So it's not that thoughts are the enemy and you have to get rid of them – thoughts are inseparable from awareness, feelings are inseparable from awareness; doubts, self-hatred, misery, confusion, these are all inseparable from awareness – they are simply moments of transient experience that are arising and passing.

When you look from the outside in you think 'I don't want to feel like this.' 'I don't want this to be happening for me'...then of course we are trapped in the desire to manipulate the objects of our experience to make them come in the patterns we like, and then we're busy busy busy forever. But if we can just relax and see the transient nature...this too will pass, this too will pass.. Good things will pass even if we want to hang onto them, bad things will pass even if we want to get rid of them quicker...everything goes. Accepting how things are is the door to the self-liberation of all phenomena...everything goes free by itself.

Time is a great cleanser, it's the great dohiwallah, it's the great washer-man.. it's cleaning everything out all the time. Time itself is vajrasattva – everything is purified through impermanence.

So when we sit in the meditation practice it's not about trying to correct things, or to make the patterns of experience that feel validating to our sense of self, but rather we want to relax and open and allow our experience to be as it is...happy or sad, sleepy, depressed, enthusiastic... whatever that mode is, be present precisely with what is happening.

Awareness is different from subject-object consciousness. In an ordinary sense I'm sitting here in my body looking at you...so I am observing you...and I'm observing you over a gap. If you were

right on the end of my nose I wouldn't be able to see you, it's because we are separate that I can see you. So this is the kind of clarity that you get from duality – 'now I can think about what's going on because I have enough space to think.' 'Give me time to think!' So we want time and space, and it's by separating ourselves that the shaping of the situation is revealed by my separation from it – 'Now I understand! Now I can see what it's like!'

This is what we're used to – this is our observing-self, and it's a useful function, but this is not at all what is meant by a non-dual awareness. The mirror doesn't stand in relation to the reflection, the reflection is in the mirror.

Our thoughts and feelings are in our awareness, they are emerging in awareness, they fill the space of awareness...so we don't want to stand apart from them. Awareness is present at the very point of the arising of what is occurring; if you see the point of that, it makes meditation very easy. However, if you keep looking, as it were internally in a dialogic mode – that you're observing what is happening for you – you're simply maintaining the discourse of duality.

But we relax...and everything is happening, everything is happening; not interrupting the flow of experience but being present with it. That's not the same as being merged in experience – we're not confluent, we're not being carried along in the river of experience – neither are we standing, as it were, on the riverbank observing it...but we are the ground within which there is the unfolding of experience.

Some people find that easy to get a handle on, other people find it more difficult. However it is for you, that is how it is for you. Nobody can make it different...we all have our own luck. The key thing is 'it is as it is' and, if we stay with how it is, quickly or gradually that will become clear.

So that's the practice. We could do a little bit of the practice now and then we'll have a break. So we sit in a comfortable way...let your spine hold your weight. With this practice our gaze is slightly elevated, the eyes are open. Some people may find that very difficult in which case you can close your eyes, but generally we do the practice with our gaze open because we're not wanting to confirm any barrier between inside and outside. Whatever is occurring is the field of experience. Sensation may arise in the body, there may be feelings, but there's also people moving, there are sounds...all of this arises at once. This is the un-split, the non-dual field of experience, so we're sitting with that.

So we just can just begin very simply...relax into the out breath...here we are...and stay with the movement of existence through the space of awareness.

Okay. So usually we would do that practice for quite a short period of time. It's not something that you want to struggle at because you're not trying to make it happen, you simply want to observe. Whenever you find yourself seemingly established in a position, seemingly settled in something which you take to be 'I me myself' 'this is where I am' – whether it's a sensation in your body, or a repeated thought – don't do anything with that, just stay present and allow it to show what it is.

If it's truly the truth of yourself it will endure. If it's a thought, a feeling, a sensation, a memory, it will arise with its intensity, with its seemingly self-proving validation, and then it will vanish... and if it's vanishing how true is it? It's more like a caress, a seeming confirmation 'oh this is me, this is me' but then it's gone. Moment by moment – one night stand, one night stand, one night stand – this lover doesn't hang around! So this is the transience of the content of the mind.

The mind itself is stable and it's not a thing; it doesn't appear. We cannot experience our mind... we are the awareness which reveals the flow of experience...a flow which sometimes looks like object and sometimes looks like subject. So again and again we gently enter into the practice and stay open.

Session 3

What I was saying before would indicate that we are lost where we are. When we feel lost we want to get to someplace better, and so we keep moving – in that sense we are all refugees. The whole of samsara is a situation of refugees, we seek refuge, we seek protection, we seek identity. You can find identity through many different activities – you can find identity through your body, through your speech, through your mind, through your activities of various kinds. But when we see the nature of impermanence we see that all the various refuges that we take some comfort from are impermanent. Parents grow old and die, families can fall apart, jobs are lost, health can be undermined, what is it that we can cling to?

In the traditional buddhist texts they talk about wandering in samsara. We think we are strong and clear and intentional – that we are trying to go from here to there, but 'there' is always a thought in our mind. When we arrive 'there' it's never going to be quite be what we thought it would be. We're wandering... where shall I be? who shall I be? how shall I be? These are the questions which necessarily have to arise if we are identified with the flow of energy because energy is always shifting and swirling and unfolding into new patterns. There is no refuge in energy as energy; the refuge, the true refuge, lies in the ground.

Of course traditional buddhist practice begins with the taking of refuge... we take refuge in the Buddha, dharma and sangha. Then in the tantric tradition in guru deva and dakini; then in the three modes of the buddhas' being – the dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, nirmanakaya. There are many approaches to refuge...but as long as I take refuge in something which is other than me it's like taking refuge in my watch. My watch can be lost or stolen; it's not a reliable refuge because although I attach myself to it, that seeming security is held in place by the movement of different factors.

We have the factors of association which bring us into contact with situations, we have the factors of maintenance and we have the factors of destruction or dissolution, and none of us know when these factors are going to arrive. We don't know when we are going to be sick... some babies die in the womb, some at birth, some in youthful accidents, some people live to be a hundred...none of us know when we are going to die.

So if you want to take refuge in the body you can spend a lot of time and attention maintaining your body but eventually it will dissolve. It could dissolve very quickly, it could dissolve due to some drunken driver zooming at you on the wrong side of the road. No matter how much care you take the fact is we are surrounded by careless people...we are the priority for very very few people in the world...so their obsessions can easily give us a sideswipe.

So what shall I take refuge in? You can take refuge in a meditation practice but sooner or later you forget to do it or you get distracted by something else. Good intentions don't go so very far... not because we are bad people but because everything is impermanent. The idea that 'if I make a decision I'm going to carry it through' is very heroic. Certainly in the tantric tradition of buddhism there is a lot of stress on the samaya, on vows, but that's a heroic mode and the notion of the hero is inseparable from tragedy.

Samsara is tragic because in samsara we die...it is in the the nature of a tragedy that the hero dies! So we're all gonna die...and we are heroic in our own lives trying to achieve things, make good things happen; but circumstances arise, we make mistakes and things go wrong. A lot of that is based, not on the fact that we are unlucky or that we're blind or stupid in terms of the circumstances, but we haven't allowed ourselves to see the hubris, the narcissistic inflation of imagining that we can be in charge, that we can be in control.

We're not in control, we work with the circumstances and we're working with circumstances of which we see rather a small percentage. Many factors are operating on our lives that we don't understand, we just don't understand. So some people are interested in astrology...there are many factors about whether the sun is going to have some sudden eruptions and that can affect our health...there are so many factors that we don't normally consider which are moving across the the formation of our life circumstances.

What shall I take refuge in? Maybe there's a better place somewhere else... 'Somewhere over the rainbow, way up high, there's a land that I dreamt of, once in a lullaby!' It's always somewhere else...it's always jam tomorrow! So how do you get jam today? By staying right here and being present...that's where the real jam is.

So the idea of the journey, the hero's journey, from the point of dzogchen, is not very wise. If you want to go from A to B that's because you imagine that B will be better than A. Fair enough, that may be true, but first of all you have to know where is A? If I'm at A where is A?... 'I'm me. I'm not happy being me, I wanna be a better kind of me!' Why are you unhappy about 'being me'? What is it about you that you don't like? 'Well, I'm like this, i'm like that...' All the time? 'No, some of the time. I can't bear it when I'm like that!'...I can't bear it when I see that I have certain patterns I don't like. So I'm persecuted by myself!..that's weird. How can you be persecuted by yourself?...you are how you are. 'But I don't like it!' Well then don't be it. 'But I can't help it.'

Ah! So the cause of your suffering is the fantasy of mastery – that you should be in charge of your life. Who is the actual experiencer of your experience? I am!...but I is constantly filling with different thoughts and feelings, I is unstable and unreliable because in fact I is an experience. I experience this building, I experience the warmth of the day, I experience your presence in your various modalities, this is my experience. But I'm also experiencing myself...I experience my body, my thoughts, my feelings...I am something I experience.

So who is the one who is the experiencer of the ego-self which claims to be the experiencer? This is the central question for meditation. Because as long as I conceptualise it that 'I am the experiencer' this is obvious...we don't need to enquire into that because 'I am what I am...It's happening to me, it's my fucking experience! You want to fight about it?' The logic of Glasgow! 'My experience!' It seems self-evident...'My life is for me; it is happening to me, it's me'... and yet the next moment something else is happening. Who is the me to whom it is occurring?

This is where we can start to see that our ego-self is niched inside awareness, it's a subset of awareness. In the traditional example the sun is like awareness, it's the universal illuminator and it provides illumination by rays of light coming out. The ego is like a ray of light – it's an energetic formation, and it takes on different aspects because as the ray of light comes from the sun it hits the prism of circumstances and refracts into the patterning of the colouration of our own individual existence. All the factors of our life are just like colours of light – they manifest – that is to say, there is something to see, there is some experience, but you can't find any substances.

The source of the ego is awareness, there is no other source, there is just one ground...but the ego is the denial of the one ground in the defensive positioning 'I am what I am' 'I am an individual' 'I am apart' 'I stand alone' 'I have my experience'. My experience is something experienced by...? Well, from the inside of the ego's confusion the answer to that is always 'experienced by me.' That seems obvious, that seems absolutely lucid...to say 'I am my experiencer'. 'I experience my pain. You don't experience my pain, I experience my pain... it belongs to me.' Being the experiencer is an intimate relationship with what is occurring but if we look...what is this experience, this subjectivity, constituted out of? I have feelings and sensations, these are revealing themselves to me. How do I know that I am having that experience? Well, I know that I'm having that experience.

So in the general buddhist tradition we have these two main kinds of meditation – we have shamatha and vipassana. Shamatha means calming ourselves through developing the capacity for sustained attention as we were doing yesterday. In the general practice of vipassana we then take that sustained attention and we use it to scan through the body...going down and then up, many of you will have done that kind of practice. As we do that the very subtle forms of emergent experience arise and then we see how we can catch these and put them in a wrapper.

So you are going down and in your shoulder you feel a something...what is it...a twinge. Then how will you describe it? 'Well, I have a bit of a pain in my shoulder.' So once you get to 'I have a bit of a pain in my shoulder' you've got something which is quite communicable to other people. We understand what somebody is saying if they say that and we say 'oh you need a massage or some cream' or something. But what did we actually first encounter? What was that emergent moment...there's some hazy feeling. Maybe sometimes it feels quite sharp and biting as you scan

down, as you come back up it feels a bit different, maybe it feels like a dry burning, and then it has another flavour and another flavour. So some unsettling of the nerve is manifesting in very uncooked forms but we can't do much with them, we can't really get a handle on them until we cook them. So we cook this nascent experience into 'I have a pain in my shoulder' and now we're in business...now we've got something which confirms 'I am suffering from my shoulder'.

And that's what is happening...that is the work that the ego does – it's a chef that adds its own ingredients into what is there. It covers the raw fresh taste and provides you with a familiar tone which you can recognise 'Oh this is my experience', but if we just stay with what is immediately arising, what is it? It's transient, it's nebulous, there's something, but you can't really catch it with your thought. You've got to stick the thought onto it and then you catch it...what you catch is the thought that you stuck onto the immediate sensation. The immediate sensation is transitory and elusive, it slips away.

The more we enter into meditation we see this is occurring all the time...that what we call a thought or a memory is already vanishing, its already slipping away...like suddenly seeing a trout breaking the surface in a pond and then it's vanished and what's left is the ripples. You can hardly believe that you saw the fish 'oh, oh'...but the ripples are there so we chase the ripples... and that's what we doing with our conceptual elaboration when we never actually catch the moment of the fish.

So we're cooking, we're elaborating, and that's what the ego is doing. The ego is actually catching itself; the ego is the prism through which the fresh radiant light refracts into patterning which seem to confirm the true existence of the ego.

In the practice we relax and stay open – whatever comes comes – whether we like what's there or we don't like what's there, doesn't matter. Who is the one that does the liking?...that is also a thought. So a thought arises, then a secondary commentarial thought arises – 'I hate it when my mind is like this' or 'I don't want anyone to know what I'm thinking of' – that thought also vanishes. But it appears that the first thought, which was sort of like the subject, is turned into an object by the second thought... because now 'I'm thinking about my thought' and the very structuring of that 'reflecting upon' claims a particular quality of identity and subjectivity for the commentarial thought.

'I don't like the shape of my ears'... so now I've got 'my ears' and 'I don't like the shape of them.' But they're your ears, why would you not like the shape of your ears? 'I would prefer to have someone else's ears!'...in that way we can chop ourselves up into pieces.

We know very well what it's like to stand in relation to ourselves, to dislike bits of ourselves or like bits of ourselves. This is because the ego's formation is dialogic, that is to say it's a dialogue, it's a communication. Normally in a dialogue you have a subject and an object and then it flips over – if you are having a mutual conversation you have a speaker and a listener and then the listener becomes the speaker and the speaker becomes the listener and you get an endless looping of communication. So the ego talks and thinks itself into experience by communicating with other aspects of experience as if they were the object. Does that make sense? Both of these aspects are what is arising in your mind and neither remains. The sensation vanishes, the thought 'I have a pain in my shoulder vanishes'...but what that formation 'I have a pain in my shoulder' does is it kind of confirms the place of the self.

There is actually no 'place of the self' but we can claim it. Like when you get on the train and you sit in a seat, it's your seat. Before you sat down it wasn't your seat but it becomes your seat by the very act of sitting down. You've got a ticket that lets you ride on the train but if you haven't got an identified seat you just sit in any seat, you are entitled to sit in any seat, which then becomes your seat. How does it become your seat? Because you kiss it with your ass! Your ass claims the seat. Just in the same way you grab onto the thought that's arising your mind by sitting in it.

'I've got a pain in my shoulder'...we claim the territory!. The thought was public, the thought was just trucking along, passing through the mind. We've now held onto something, and it appears to

be something, so I could go back to it again and again...'It's my seat', 'it's my thought' but the entitlement to that claim is grounded simply in assertion.

As the great French anarchist Proudhon said 'property is theft', there is the 'common weal' within which we appropriate and identify things. The time of the enclosures in England was dreadful for goodhearted people, a time where what was shared was suddenly stolen. People who had power said 'No it's mine...you can't go there' and it became theirs simply by the assertion 'If you resist we will call the policemen, who we pay, and they will beat you up.' So we have these sensitive souls like John Clare being pushed into madness because of this...because how could it be that the common becomes the private?

This is exactly what happens in our mind all the time... where the thought, the appropriative thought of 'I', closes down the free interaction of whatever's occurring and creates these complexes, these formations of self-identity, which of course necessarily involve exclusion. Once the poor villagers couldn't take their two sheep onto the common land for grazing they become pushed into the background, they become day-labourers because they couldn't sustain themselves.

In the same way there are many many potentials that we all have which never become realised because we over-cathect, we over-merge, into certain familiar patterns. We are the limiters of our existence, we are our own prisoners, our own jailers. We live in these times, problematic as they are, where we have unbelievable amounts of personal freedom and yet we still find ourselves conditioned by our fears and anxieties and worries about what other people think of us. These are the 'mind forged manacles' that William Blake writes of...we do this to ourselves.

So the more we see the nature of thought the more we see the manacles are made of transient thoughts. There's nothing binding me but a thought that has already vanished, a fear that has already vanished...'Oh, what will they think?' That thought is gone but when the fearful thought arises there is a retraction, which is like a condensation, and that retraction separates us off from the environment that we are operating in.

That's why very challenging if you work in psychotherapy with children because children are so often encountering environments that don't allow them to have the expansive freedom of their existence and they retract back in. They will retract in relation to blame but also in relation to praise because the free flow of experience is inhibited by commentary. It doesn't need a commentary on top; commentary is an unnecessary added ingredient. It makes it cheaper for the manufacturer to put all these little E-substances in your food and the ego, as the producer of ego-identity, puts in lots of little unnecessary ingredients as the ceaseless self-commentary.

So the purpose of this is to understand 'oh, there is no solidity to myself'...the middle way...that doesn't mean that I don't exist at all, because I'm here...there is an undeniable facticity to each of our existences. We're breathing in and out, experience is arising and passing – this is undeniable, and yet how could we fully define who we are because everything we say about ourselves is never the whole story.

We exist in the state of lack and excess. Because of our feeling of lack we want more and so we set about devouring the world to get more kinds of experience...and yet we are already in a state of excess because how could we ever tell anyone who we are?...there's always more to say. People write their autobiography and then there's another volume and another volume. People come for therapy – they're going to come for just six sessions and then six years later they're still blethering on about something. There's no end to it because of the basic fact that when you talk about yourself you are creating yourself. We're not a pot – it's not that, by talking, you get a ladle and kind of shovel out whatever is in the pot and then...'that's it, I'm done, finished!' The more you talk, the more there is of you to talk about! And so samsara goes on as the process of explanation, commentary, definition, enquiry...

All of these things, which seem to be good and are valued human qualities, are actually ways of weaving a veil over the unborn ground because, in all the cultures of the world, the unborn ground is not the main dish, it's not the main concern...what we are generally concerned with is social formation. That is to say, do we find a place in the world? Do other people respect us? Do we

manage to pay the rent?... and so on. We are concerned with the interface of our energetic structure with the energetic structures of the world around us, and because that field is ever shifting there is always something to do... but underneath that there is the openness.

So before we set out on journeys going from A to B, the key thing is 'where is A?' 'where am I now?' What does it mean to be present in the moment? ...a thought arises, or a feeling, or a sensation. I know it's happening because it's happening for me... so who is the one who is there? That's not a question inviting a cognition or a conceptual answer. I'm here...if I'm really here I shouldn't have to think about where I am because I'm here. What's blocking the hereness of here from showing itself? Here I am.

So when we do the practice we're just sitting... experience is coming and going... if we are not tracking it and getting involved in editing, and and choosing some and discarding others... if we are not being active we are just being the site of display. The awareness is illuminating what is arising, and through relaxing again and again we are the awareness which shows what is occurring, and some of what is occurring seems to be our subject-self some appears to be the object formation and we are not involved...they just keep moving on.

The Tibetan word that translates yoga is *naljor* – *nal* means relaxed and at ease and *jorwa* means to join, it means to enter into relaxation. Relaxation is very important because samsara is effort. Karma means activity, karma is the engine which drives samsara, the root of which is ignoring the stable ground. So more energy, more effort, simply keeps the wheel of repeated existence going on and on...less is more. Doing less...and less...and less...and then you find it's all given to you. This is the sadness of the ego – it's that by our very desperation, by our feeling of lack and the need to get stuff, we blind ourselves to the fact that it's all there.

In the dzogchen tradition we have two terms which describe this. The first is *kadag* or primordial purity – which is the mind itself, the open empty mind and then, inseparable from that, is *lhundrup* which is the instant presence or the immediate revelation of everything. Just as the the empty mirror is constantly filling with reflections the empty open purity of the mind is constantly filling with experience. It's not being done by someone, there isn't a little factory inside ourselves pumping it out, it's a given. So the given which is the openness, offers the gift of everything immediately completely all at once, and within that we move as the gifting – we are gifting ourselves into situations – but the given is given, we don't have to make it.

So the anxiety of the ego is the anxiety of being alienated from the givenness of being and therefore stuck in the endless effort of thinking and generating itself into existence – an existence which cannot be stable because it's constructing itself out of the flow. That's why we do the meditation in the way we do because there are many many different kinds of meditation, many meditations which are concerned with altering the patternings of energy. Through visualising mandalas, reciting mantras and so on you create more sense of the transparency of appearance...changing one form into another very quickly and so on... But in dzogchen we are concerned firstly with opening to the ground...when the ground becomes clear everything becomes clear.

When the dzogchen teachings first came into the human dimension, according to the tradition, they were presented in a direct form from this buddha who is in the painting behind me – Kunto Zangpo – and he conveyed it directly to Vajrasattva, this figure of indestructible presence, who then conveyed it symbolically to Garab Dorje who then manifested in our world and presented the teachings in human language... which was the third level of the transmission... and he presented it in these famous three statements. The first statement is to directly see your own face; the technical term for this is *Ngö-tro* which sometimes is translated as direct introduction or pointing out.

I can point to the ceiling, I can point to the spot lamps which are hanging from the metal bar on the ceiling – i'm pointing something out – but you can't point out the mind because the mind isn't a thing. So is not really a pointing out, it is to bring into being the presence of an experience that we can offer ourselves into.

What we need we already have so why don't we get it?...because we're getting something else. If we stop getting something else we'll get it by not getting it because it can't be got... it's already here. You can't lose your mind, you can't gain your mind, you can't sell it or buy it, nobody can give you your own mind...you have your mind. Your mind is here but you don't see it because you disregard it by regarding something else.

So the first stage is to relax into the openness of ever-present awareness. How do we do that? We each do it our own way. There is no method that anyone can show you how to do it because you are tied in knots and you can untie your own knots and when someone else tells you how to untie your knot what they're saying is 'if your knot was my knot I could help you untie it'... but your knot is your knot so you have to do it by yourself.

But how will I do it?...well first of all look at the knot. We sit in the practice and we see how we get lost. Getting lost is very helpful because most of the time we don't know that we're getting lost, but when we think 'blimey, i'm off again' 'I'm like a drunken rabbit going here, going there, all over the place...how come?'

This is me...my mind is moving all over the place. Okay, so then we just allow it to move. If you want to allow it to move you have to give it space to move, stop correcting it, then the movement of the mind is free to roam and you are becoming more spacious by allowing the freedom of the mind to be itself. You become the mind through not controlling the energy of the mind.

Awareness doesn't control anything. The mirror doesn't control what arises in the mirror, it doesn't have border guards, it doesn't have police, there's no visa on the mirror – the mirror is open, the mind is open, whatever comes comes. It's the ego that wants to be the border guard that likes this kind of thought, not that kind of thought. The ego is the name we give to selectivity – to trying to defend an image, an idea – the ego is an idea.

All our lives we're concerned with ideas. You go to school and you get nothing but ideas – ideas of mathematics, geography, physical exercise and so on. We learn to shift all the ideas around and make patterns but the ground of the idea is awareness. Awareness is the revealer of the radiance of the mind which manifests as ideas. The ideas aren't bad but they need to have refuge.

The ego is an orphan...it's not really an orphan but it lives as if it is an orphan, and it becomes like a street child. Kids who live on the street become very suspicious of adults because adults want to come and fuck them and do bad things to them. So street kids are very wary... they wanna get the money, they wanna get the food, but they don't want you to do bad things. The ego's like that, hedging its bets...'I'm sleeping on the street; nobody is protecting me no one is looking out for me.' Where is your home? 'I don't have a fucking home...leave me alone. Go away!' ...That's a little bit how we are.

So how do you settle into being at home? You have to let go of the defensiveness, you have to trust that it will be okay 'if I don't protect myself I'll be safe'. That's a big ask...better to do what I know what to do – get back into the thoughts, manipulate them – now I feel better. And then after half an hour the meditation comes to an end...I was just doing more of the same, and more of the same, and more of the same. 'Oh! that's what Samsara means...more of the same! This could go on for ever...there's no end to thought production, to being caught up in feelings, to liking and not liking. But how can I let it just be there, what will happen to me?

Well that depends on who you are. The ego, in the body, is a car going very quickly towards a wall, we are gonna crash; this body has built-in obsolescence – death is coming. Identification with my body, my possessions, my family, my knowledge, my career, my memories...all of this binds us both into the seemingly successful construction of the self and, simultaneously, it binds us into the vulnerability of the fragility of this self-construct.

What we're taking refuge in is not a real refuge at all, it's what we've been taught is okay...but it's going to collapse.

Here is our mind, pure from the very beginning, but somehow the thoughts are more interesting – because we know what to do with the thought. If you've been using heroin for twenty years

you've had manly many complicated experiences. You've experienced all sorts of qualities of heroin, you've had all kind of hassles trying to get stuff off the GP, you've learnt how to score wherever you go...you know a lot about being a junkie. After twenty years of doing that you don't know very much about ordinary life. So you could stay in the world that you're skilled in... but you're not doing very well, and you've not got many veins left...or you could try to do something new. But you're aged forty and you haven't a clue so you have a dip in self-esteem, so you relapse. Well why wouldn't you relapse, because you're going back to what you know.

We know this from rehab programs, lots of people relapse because the devil you know... at least you know that devil. With the devil you don't know you're going to feel inferior to other people, and stupid, and what are you going to tell them about what you've been doing in the last twenty years... and to be reliable and to get a job on time is a lot hassle, better just to gouch out..

So that's what it's like with thoughts. We're addicted to thoughts, feelings, sensations, we don't have to look for a dealer, the dealer is in ourselves. You can always get a hit whenever you want... wake up in the middle of the night to have a pee, thoughts are there, whack it in...you can top yourself up at any time, supply is always available and no one's going to arrest you. So if we stay in this addiction to thoughts, we bind ourselves into these self-constructions. Letting go of that... means letting go of it.

It's one thing to talk of letting go of thoughts and feelings...but when you see that your sense of who you are, your ego-identity, is intimately bound into these thoughts and feelings – that they are not a sort of 'add-on', an optional extra, but are actually the matrix that is holding the ego in place.–.real meditation does bring about an existential crisis...because we're not who we think we are.

When thinking stops we find out who we are but it's not who we think we are, it is unknown....and that is trust, that is faith – to let go.

On one level it's very easy because you're just opening to what's already there, but the one who is opening to it has to allow themselves to be other than who they thought they were. That's the difficulty...for some people that's quite easy to work with and for others it is extremely challenging. It has to do with the amount of anxiety that you carry in yourself; that anxiety is embedded in the energetic structure of the body – whether the prana has free-flow from the small *nadi* to the big *nadi*, then to the side channels and into the *avaduti*...or not.

Because if you're very tense in yourself, if your breathing is not very easy, even though you're trying to relax through the mind, the lack of flow of energy in the body – which is also the vehicle for the thoughts feelings and sensations – means that it's very difficult to deeply relax. Real relaxing is quite hard, it's not something that you can just decide – 'Now i'll relax' – because you have to allow yourself. Relaxing means releasing – releasing fixation on the object formation which can also be very subtle – these object formations which are allowing the subtle forms of the subject to hold on. It's almost as if you had a shipwreck and you hang onto any bit of flotsam that you find on the surface of the water, you just grab on to whatever you can.

Energetically we grab onto things. We can be meditating and suddenly you're concerned with some little sensation in your body or some memory; that is the *prana* starting to turn around a point. At the points where these energy channels are meeting – they're like a little crossroad – you get little whirlpools set up. So every time you get into a thought-fixation instead of the energy flowing freely and relaxing into the central channel, which is emptiness itself, it's just goes into little whirl and then back off into another channel and another channel.

So relaxation is the key thing and in the morning here we have the yoga and we have the contact improvisation and both of these are methods of allowing energy to find new pathways. For as long as you reverberate in the same fixed pathways, although you may think you're getting clear, that's just a thought.

We need to work with the breath, with the body, and relax and trust, relax and trust...let it be. Being Is...so let being be; not doing. But it's not that I am consciously doing the doing...we have many subconscious or automatic reaction-formations which arise. These arise through the body,

through the breath, through fixations on what other people are doing or what they might be thinking about.

So the real path of meditation is very simple. It's getting to know how you don't relax, getting to know how you tie yourself in knots...and not then trying to untie it but to stop tying it. If you stop tying it it will untie because it's we ourselves, by our fixation of energy onto these points, who bring about the tying of the knot. Does that makes sense?

We know what it's like to become a bit obsessive, to be caught up in something, and you find yourself mulling things over. Somehow we we know that worrying doesn't bring any solution – most problems can be solved in five minutes. 'Should I do this or that?' Well, write down the options...now what are you going do? 'Well i'll do that' Right, then tear up the paper! Because if you keep thinking it over, and thinking it over, and thinking about it, it will just unravel and unravel and unravel.

If you want to make a decision make a decision; if you don't want to make a decision, if you want to torture yourself, go ahead it's free! It's one way to pass the time. Decisions are quite simple, most of the situations in life are not all that complicated...it's our enjoyment – there's a kind of libidinous gratification in the intoxication that comes with worry. Worry is a kind of sexual substitute but it's non-orgasmic and it's very slow!

How do we release that? Each person has to see for themselves 'how how do I give myself into fusion with the arising object?' because this 'giving myself' is simply the quality of attention. As we looked yesterday evening attention causes an empowerment of the transient formation. If you don't give it the life energy of your attention it will simply pass easily; by bringing your attention simply into space there is release – space has no intention.

Okay, so we'll do a bit more practice... and whenever you find yourself wandering off bring your attention back to open spaciousness. If that appears to be very difficult then you can bring your attention to the breath, and then from the breath just relax into being more spacious. To be with what is...is what is already occurring, this is the most important point. When when the texts say 'the mind is pure from the very beginning' it means you don't have to improve it, there there is no intrinsic problem, the problem is extrinsic in terms of the secondary reaction, the commentary you make.

So when we open it's already here, we simply have to align ourselves to what is. We mis-align ourselves with what is when we get caught up, so if you get caught up...simply relax. You can release a long slow out-breath if that helps...and we're just here with what is.

Okay...we've heard the a lot of words and I would suggest we could do something different. We can go outside, there are many trees and leaves and things growing. You can just simply find a quiet place and have something of nature in front of you. Relax into the out-breath and receive what is there...don't tell the tree what it is, don't interpret it, don't free-associate according to it... simply receive the tree – the colour, the shape – and whenever you find your mind going into a construction, adding additional information onto it, relax into the out-breath and receive through your senses what is there.

Most of the time we are projecting onto the world – we are creating the world as a reflection of our own interest. So the more we can relax this and we see the shimmering vibrancy of the world it also allows us to relax. That even when we do nothing the glory is here in front of us, it's not all up to us.

Then you start to find that the clarity of the revelation all around you is also a refuge, but it's not a refuge away from yourself, it's a refuge because it returns you to your openness. So whether you look at one little leaf, or at the bark of a tree, whatever it is, just give yourself time to receive and receive and receive, and that actually the tree doesn't need your comment or your interpretation... that part of all that work that you traditionally do doesn't improve the tree in any way...and simply hides you from the tree and the tree from you. Enjoy the beauty of the world!

Session 4

Okay so I'll say a bit more about the nature of duality and then we can do some more practice outside.

This morning we were looking at the nature of awareness and how it is infinitely open... whereas the ego is an energy formation arising within the field of awareness and it is always in a situation of closure because it's seeking to protect a particular identity.

The stream of experience is ceaseless, there is always something going on – this is revealed through the clarity of awareness. However once this first ego-formation arises it's as if it creates a division in the always unified field of experience; there's self and other, I and you, and this basic duality then sets up a whole stream of polarities. So you have a splitting into the whole which of course doesn't actually split the whole – it's an illusory formation – it's like a dream formation arising within the infinite safety of the open ground which is who we are.

We emerge as a stream of experiences which will continue until we die... and then a new kind of experience will arise... and then a new kind of experience... and so on; the stream of experience is ceaseless. If we realise it's inseparable from the open ground then that's regarded as liberation, if we don't find it inseparable from the ground, if we're forgetful of the ground, then we are in this process of control and management.

As a separate person, 'I me myself', I'm in the process of trying to make sense of what's going on in the world – I'm thinking 'what category does it fit into'?...and we generate these organising categories on the basis of mutual exclusion. So we have polarities like high and low – if something is high it's not low, if something's sweet it's not sour, if something's good it's not bad. It's often difficult to say what something is, or how you would establish the goodness of what you take to be good. It's much easier to use the law of exclusion and say 'well it's not bad'. It's easier to say 'I'm not a woman' that's definite, 'I'm not a woman'. If I say 'I'm a man' that's more problematic because quite difficult to know what it is to be a man.

So a lot of the fragmentation that we experience in the world is a very quick but rather stupid way of establishing the separation of categories. It's only when you've got categories that you can stick things into the categories and most of our work of evaluation, of our identification, is on the basis of categories – the whole sort of nosological enquiry.

For example, every year you get more and more indications of new kinds of psychiatric disorders. The diagnostic manual of the American Psychiatric Association produces its manuals and they get bigger and bigger and bigger and the more titles you have of a disorder, the more signs and symptoms that you have to identify whether people fit into that, the more easily you can mop up the population who seem a bit disturbed. 'You are suffering from this disorder.' Now that only make sense if you've got a disorder...and it's this disorder and not that disorder because these disorders are structurally mutually exclusive. Now we have clarity, but of course they overlap so now we don't have so much clarity.

So having made the false clarity of separating out little patterns of symptoms you can then stack them up, layer after layer like a pancake stack, and once you've got that you've got a lot of stuff... you've got a lot of depth and therefore truth to your diagnosis.

These categorisations go on all the time – a category depends on a fragmentation of the objects in the field. We have different kinds of trees, we've got oak trees and beech trees and so on... and then among the oak trees we've got young oak trees and old oak trees. We've got oak trees which have not lost any branches and oak trees that have lost a lot of branches...oak trees that are growing quite straight and will provide good planks and oak trees that are all over the place and go for firewood. So according to your interests and categories you can divide up the the items of the world.

From the buddhist point of view this all stems from the basic notion that subject is not object, object is not subject. Self definition – 'I am not you, you are not me' – and as soon as you can set up this definition by exclusion there is a simplicity which comes into the world.

Psychoanalysis, through Melanie Klein, has taken up the notion of splitting as a defence, it's a defence against the confusion that comes from the unpredictability of the object you encounter. According to her notion the child encounters complexity in their sense of the mother because they're getting milk from the mother's body and they experience this as a kind of theft; there is an expectation that there will be retaliation from the mother and this sets up the notion of a bad mother. So you've got a good mother who is giving you milk and a bad mother who is likely to respond so then you have a splitting, paranoid schizoid splitting. You have the paranoid fear of the bad mother and in order to protect that you have this splitting. So now, as it were, you have a good breast and a bad breast...This is embedded in the body of one woman – your mother, but it it helps to sort out the melange, this mixture of feelings which are arising in relation to dependency.

Then later you find a way of working through, of containing the tension between these polarities – what she called the depressive position. It's depressive because you cannot have the elation of having something being a hundred percent good or a hundred percent bad...mixture creates a kind of confusion in the mind.

That's a western modern way of looking at some of these issues, especially that we use splitting of the complex in order to produce a pseudo-clarity; everything which arises...arises from the ground.

To see the objects in this world we apply our our capacity within the semiotic web – the web of signifiers. So we say 'these are the walls' 'this is the ceiling'... we might then say 'this is a strange kind of ceiling' because they've angled the wood in strange ways according to the particular notions of Steiner architecture. It's reassuring for Steinerites and disconcerting for non-Steinerites!

So there we've got categories which come up very easily. Then we can we've a wall that's a bit pink – pink going into purple – and there's movements of the colours, movements of the shapes.

What does all this mean? What do our signs indicate? Well they indicate different things. I can say 'the wall is not the ceiling' 'the ceiling is not the floor' 'the blue is not the red'. By calling something red I can identify it as being different from blue. So our signs, our linguistic signs, seem to be indicating a direct correlation between the word and the object that seems to be described by the word. When I say 'piano' we see that there is a piano in the room and so you know 'he is referring to this piano'. Signs indicate the true presence of discrete objects – a piano is not a chair, a chair is not a glass of water... now we all know that the world makes sense!

From the buddhist point of view all signs indicate the presence of emptiness – red emptiness, blue emptiness, piano emptiness, ceiling emptiness...these are all simply varieties of emptiness. The sign doesn't point to a true phenomenon which has its own internal precise definition – it is devoid of essence and substance but there is the undeniable facticity that you can't drink a piano.

The piano presents itself as a particular formation – that is to say shape and colour. You can engage with it, you can hit it and some noises will come out, and so on. That is to say when the energy formation I call 'myself' and the energy formation I call 'the piano' come come in contact some new formations can arise from that. Whether they're harmonious or not will depend on whether I know how to play the piano or not.

So you have the arising of streams of energy... energy as knowledge, energy as developed skill, energy depending on whether the piano has been tuned, the heat of the day, whether people are in the mood to hear the piano or not...all of these factors come together and manifest. The factors are manifesting in the production of the sound...the sound is vanishing note by note. Every stage of that is a process of unfolding of the interaction of patterns of energy; not one truly existing entity has been established in any way...

However when we rely on signs and signifiers it is 'as if' there is a piano... and pianos are not people. We know what a person is, we know what a piano is, they're not the same. These are oppositional categories, mutually exclusive categories.

But when we try to find out – well, what is a person? Is a person their skin? We look at people, we see their skin, or we could simply peel the skin off people – we could flay them alive and throw away the other bits chop it up for dog food...that's possible! So we want to say 'we are skin stuffed with other things'. Could we take the bits out, chop them up and stick them back in again? No...the skin has to be filled with things in the right order all functioning together.

Okay so that's what a body is – it's the interaction of parts, it's harmonisation of energy structures. Sooner or later we get sick, sometimes the sicknesses lead us to death...eventually they will lead us to death. These are cases where the energy patterns are moving towards dissolution – entropy arises in the harmonic structure and you get dissipation of the maintenance energy that keeps your heart going at the right rhythm, your liver doing whatever it should be doing, and gradually or suddenly there is a decline.

These are descriptions of processes – we don't need to assume that there is a 'fixed thing'. If we say 'the liver' well, unless you are going into a butcher shop, the meaning of the liver is part of the body. The liver has meaning through its function of being connected to many vessels bringing substances into it so it is a bit like a road. If you just had one road in the middle of nowhere it would be a bit strange, roads connect with other roads. The heart, the lungs, the liver, the kidneys, these are all like roads or pathways, these are movements...where is the substance?

There is the appearance... it's undeniable that the kidneys are not the same as the liver... but these are sites of particular transactions, of exchanges. Exchanges are happening on the biochemical level, happening on the fluid acceptance/ retention/ discharge level, these are all processes which are flowing...where is the person?

Person is a name which we ascribe to an incredibly complex site of interactive processes. We give someone a name, we say 'hello, oh it's you, I remember you' as if that was somehow saying there is an enduring solid basis to the person we are seeing. There are certain similarities which are continuing for a while but we cannot know that the person who we recognise has very much actually recognisable inside them from the person we saw maybe a year ago. Many many things have happened to them. The last conversation we had they may have been caught up in worrying about someone dying, that person may well be dead. They got the inheritance... you've got a Rolls-Royce parked in the car park, you're all right then! The dear departed was in fact quite rich.

We don't know what these stories are, we're just remembering one little vignette and we've tagged that onto the person as if now we've got some important bit of information 'about' the person; which of course, as we looked before, is about our idea of the person. Does our idea ever actually touch the person?

When i say that the back wall, or the wall that I see at the back, is blue...As I wonder, what blue is that? It's not Prussian blue, it's not cobalt blue, it's a particular kind of light blue...I'm adding concepts to the wall. The blueness of the wall...if I open to it...will be inexpressible. Everything is inexpressible when you receive it with the sky-like mind, it's only when you go out to greet it and grab it and chop it up and stick it in your categorical compartmentalisation that you start to be able to apprehend the world.

So this is the central point... what you apprehend is your own thought coming back at you. Thought is a boomerang – it goes ...whew..whirr...whew... comes back – it never actually got there. When you speak about the world you speak about your experience, so what does this mean in terms of polarities?

One basic polarity is friend and enemy... like me, not like me... comforting to me, discomfoting to me... making me feel at ease and not making me feel at ease. 'I want to be close to the people who make me feel I'm okay; I don't want to be close to people who make me feel upset or inferior or confused'... that's fairly normal.

So I'm looking at the world...in terms of myself. My starting point for engagement with the world is what I like and what I don't like. So instead of giving an open welcome to the world I'm selecting on the basis of my notion of self-maintenance and self-development. That's kind of fragile, there's a kind of vulnerability in that. People could take away what I want! How will I protect myself?

Somebody who takes away the things that I want to hang onto is my enemy. I don't want them to be my enemy so I want my claim to my terrain to be upheld. I don't want someone else to dominate my claim. So fifteen years ago it was very common to see cars with little stickers that said 'Free Tibet'. You won't see many stickers like that nowadays because... gone! Tibet is now clearly an integral part of China and is not gonna pop back out again; the Chinese swallowed it like a great demon coming down from the sky. The Chinese say 'Tibet is part of China'; Tibetans say 'bugger off, we are independent'. But power wins and so you have a re-naming; so many villages in Tibet are being renamed and the Tibetan language is being transformed. Very often Tibetan is not available at secondary school level and in primary schools, increasingly, the Tibetan people are having to learn Chinese...Tibetan existence and culture is being wiped away.

That's not uncommon, that's very often what the victors do. When free public education was first introduced nationally in Britain, when it was taken into Scotland, in the outer islands where people regularly spoke in Gaelic they weren't allowed to speak Gaelic in the the classroom. Moreover the kids weren't allowed allowed to speak it in the playground either and they would get beaten for speaking their own mother tongue because they had to learn English in order to be educated.

So the colonial power of incorporating the other into what you value as the 'true standard way of being' is very very powerful. 'Resistance is impossible, we know what's best for you'. Here you can see how polarities – good/bad, right/wrong, and especially from that inclusion and exclusion, are very powerful for opening pathways of survival or non-survival. Only by proving that I'm somebody who is entitled to belong am I going to be safe.

That was the whole thing in the Thatcherite period wasn't it... are they one of us.. one of us? Are you with me?...this is the basic logic. When I was at school doing my Highers, the Scottish equivalent of A-levels, my physics teacher on the first day of term said 'the principle in this class is very simple – either you're with me or you are against me, if you are against me you're dead!'... like that... Too fucking right... big leather belt...Whack! Okay, Might is Right, Might is Right...

A lot of the politics of the world are like that. That's why war is very tempting for many countries – 'I can force you to do what I want because your freedom makes my life more difficult. In fact your freedom is an insult to me. Because i'm the Boss, I say how it's going to be, and you don't wanna do what I say. You're disrespecting me!' That certainly was the structure of Scottish education when I was a boy – that there was an implacable line of authority, and resistance is then seen as something awful.

We see exactly that in Turkey at the moment – that if you resist the desire of the dictator president you're in big trouble...and they're building more and more prisons. Fit in or fuck off!... and that was that the logic in Soviet Russia as well with all the gulag's, with the concentration camps under Nazi Germany... so many situations are like that. War arises when how I see you cannot be included in my categories of the respectable or the normal or the admirable or the desired for. If you are other than the trajectory of my desire then you are an enemy or an obstacle and, if I have the power, I can annihilate you. This is not something new in the history of the world, it's happened endless times in human relatedness.

It's not that some people are bad or some people are particularly cruel so that we could say 'we are not like that, we never do that'. The histories of most countries include periods of domination and control. Peaceful countries like Sweden had most of Finland as a colony for a long time. Every country has got little moves of domination and subjugation...to get natural resources, because of a sense of entitlement, because of a fear of counter-invasion, because of a feeling of having a superior culture and that the other is the barbarian and has to be kept down. So the danger which exists for human beings is primarily driven by an idea.

Certainly that can be applied to animals. We define the status of animals and domesticate them, keep them as pets, feed them what we want to feed them, put ropes around their neck and tug

them when we want to go for a walk and so on. We dominate and control, and that domination and control seems natural to us. 'I love my dog'... that's why I keep it on a little leather thing round its neck and I pull it. It needs to shit where I want it to shit. This is a remarkable thing to do...but I do this because I love it. I'm training my dog, that's why I shout at it...SIT!

We clearly do this in extreme forms with factory farming and all the rest of it. We think 'animal welfare' and we have inspectors that go to the big farms to say 'we have some concern about the way you're de-beaking'... not that you are de-beaking, that's all right, we've agreed that, but its how you go about de-beaking.' 'I think there are probably better ways to castrate pigs...'

Once you're in the paradigms of control all kinds of nastinesses can be enacted because they make sense...because you have a category that says this is a valid way of behaving.

So when you have a slip into dictatorships in countries, you have arresting the troublemakers. The key thing nowadays of course is to call a troublemaker a terrorist. Who is creating the terror? Well most people are slightly in terror of a dictatorship, especially of whimsical dictatorship, and it would appear that when somebody elevates themselves to the place of the dictator they do indeed become whimsical...because who's going to confront them, whose going to say 'Hey you can't do that'. And so people like Stalin became extremely fanciful in how they behave – anybody can be the enemy. Once somebody is in that situation 'why wouldn't I go along with the great leader? I'm going to stay alive, I'm gonna get money, i'm going to get access to alcohol, to girls and all the rest of it.' So you have a huge movement of cronyism.

All of these moves are very easily understandable if you think that there is a division between being inside and outside and if you're inside you're safe and if you're outside you're not. Which side would you be on? 'But it's not ethical it's not good!' Do you want to die? 'I'd rather die' Okay, well we'll shoot you, that can be arranged.

But the percentage of people who really want to stand up to a dictatorship tends to be quite small. Because, of course, the first thing that dictatorships do is they set up torture rooms in cities where you can hear the screams. Screaming is very good for dictators, putting fear into people, putting terror into them. It is indeed the dictatorships which are terrorising and the people who stand against it are called terrorists and are actually, from another point of view, freedom fighters.

As you all know very well, the key thing that happens when there is a coup or a military takeover is they grab the radio station and the TV station and they start pumping out the new dogma. Control of information means you control how you define situations. This is what we all study at school in '1984' and 'Animal Farm' and so on, and from the Buddhist point of view this is embedded fundamentally in ignorance. That we're all, even if we are goodhearted people who strive for common welfare, we're all embedded in the basic dualistic structure which can easily slip into the application of terrifying categorisations on other people.

When the British were in Tasmania they were shooting the local people until they were all exterminated. Same in Australia...shooting an aborigine wasn't seen as being a criminal offence. The destruction of the native populations in North America...these are sad fact that we all know. Who did these things?...Goodhearted people.

This is what we can't understand – how can somebody be loving and kind to their own family and do ghastly things to other people?...because of compartmentalisation.

Psychological compartmentalisation or cognitive dissonance – being able to hold conflicting interpretations and categories in your head without feeling the disturbing friction that comes about by their contradiction – is how we've managed to enact all sorts of ghastlinesses in the world. Because if we took a holistic vision we would have to bring the conflicted parts together and see that we were being self-deceitful, that we were full of hypocrisy, that we are up to something...that we are being wilfully blind to the enactment of our own shadow.

Splitting on the object means good people bad people, friends and enemies, and it's always paralleled by splitting on the subject. I fragment myself into what I do at work in the torture chamber and what I do at the weekend playing with my kids. I can be cruel to these people

because they deserve my cruelty. I'm not a cruel person I only do it because we have to do it... because if these people aren't controlled my own children would be in danger. It is out of love for my children that I do these things that I do this.

The logic of these things is not too complicated, you can see how you can weave stories of false signification very easily. We justify on the basis of holding certain things sacred and the corollary then naturally arises – other things are not sacred.

So there is a reason why the view of non-duality is said to be the basis of ethics – when you're in duality ethics is very difficult.

'I am willing to help you because you need my help'... there's all kind of payoffs embedded in that – 'I don't have to help you because you're somebody else, but I'm willing to help you because it makes me feel better, or I can get paid to do it, or other people are going to admire me because I do it'. There's always some deal or trade-off between subject and object when they're truly apart.

But when we see the one ground out of which everything arises...when we see, through the meditation practice, that what I take to be 'I me myself' and what I take to be 'you' has exactly the same nature...both are devoid of essence and substance and both are experiences arising at the same time in the field of my awareness. I see your face, I feel my knees. The feeling of my knees is something arising for me, your face is something arising for me, they have exactly the same status – everything is experience.

Now if everything is experience, and all these experiences are empty, how can we say that one person is truly my friend and therefore to be protected and some other person is truly my enemy and should be demeaned or destroyed? There is no basis for that. The basis of attacking some and protecting others is on the idea of difference – 'There are real categories – good and bad – and some people belong in the good category and other people belong the bad category.' This is mental activity... this is conceptual elaboration... we are creating these categories. We may feel that we are describing things which are out there in the world but we are inventing them through our definitions. We call the fragments of the world into being by the very fragmentary language, fragmenting language, that we apply to them.

We know that when the trouble happened some years ago between the Tutsi and Hutu there were these terrible messages that were coming out on the radio denouncing one group as being less than human. Once that's allowed to be the case it becomes clear 'these are enemies to our happiness. These people, because they are rats and dogs and cockroaches, they are out to get us. They are a contamination just by their presence... destroying them is a public health activity.'

It's very simple logic, once you describe somebody as being demonic or subhuman, or as an enemy of the state, as an inferior species, you can go towards destruction. We can see how that logic leads into war again and again, arising because we become convinced that people are our enemies.

'The Russians are our enemies!'...Well quite a lot of Russians died in the Second World War, twenty million of them, that's a lot of people who died. They died fighting the Nazis. If they hadn't fought the Nazis and defeated them in Eastern Europe then the British and American invasion from the west wouldn't have happened, it would have been impossible. We had the Yalta conference... Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin, sitting together and then suddenly Russia's transformed into an enemy. As the Buddha said 'friends become enemies, enemies become friends.'

So whenever we're going into lockdown thought about someone...'I fucking hate you, I hate you!'... this is not the truth. We don't walk up to strangers and say we hate them... we say to people that we love that we hate them, because we've got close enough to know that actually they're not who we thought they were. I hate you because I know what you're like. If I didn't know what you're like I might love you...and in fact I did love you when I didn't know what you are like!

So proximity brings out lots and lots of conflicts and difficulties because we feel frustrated. We develop an idea of the other person and we fall in love with them. So we become very generous, very openhearted... 'come as you are everything about you is perfect' and then gradually the

welcome gets smaller. The door starts to close, the frame is getting more tight...' There's just a few things about you that I'm starting to find annoying!

We've all been through these kind of experiences. We realise that the mood of love, the mood of openness, is a very beautiful thing. That's why falling in love is so delicious, it reminds us of our potential to be open. But we close down when we realise the other person isn't who we thought they were, they don't fit the template that we had constructed in our mind for evaluating them. Then we sacrifice the person for the idea...'I don't think you're really who am looking for. I'm sorry...better luck next time. I'm sure there's someone out there that will be just right for you.' In that way madness arises because you then think that to compromise would be a violence to yourself...'I've got to stand firm...'I've got to find what I need in this life. I'm sure you'll understand. It's not that I dislike you but you're not what I'm looking for.'

People say these things frequently...the mental category is coming in and the person doesn't fit the category. The category must be right and so the person is dispensed with. That can be done through killing them or abandoning them, walking out the middle of the night, in the middle of a fight.

How do these things occur? because we had hopes and fears. 'I hoped that you would be perfect, now that I fear that you're not.' How could anybody be perfect? What would it mean for a person to be perfect? 'I thought you would make me happy.' Why would another person make us happy? They are what they are, they are not us...they will have their particular quirks and foibles and we will have to adapt in order to accommodate that. 'But I'm looking for someone to make my life better, surely I don't have to change just so that you seem better, come on!'

We've all experienced the formation of mental rigidity and this of course is the nature of ignorance; if we have a flow of experience it's like water. We sit in the meditation, we see thoughts feelings and sensations are tumbling on tumbling on... and suddenly they freeze. When you have ice you have stasis, you have something which seems to be there, and reliable, and to have a shape. It's more dangerous – it's more graspable, you can get a handle on – but it's more dangerous. If you've got some water and you hit it with your hand it's not dangerous but if you break a sheet of ice the fragments can cut your hand, ice has sharp edges...the fragmented world is going to have a bit of revenge against us.

So whenever we freeze a situation, when we come to a definition or a conclusion about who another person is, or how another country is, or another make of car is, whatever it would be... when we come to a final judgement we've frozen the situation. We've made a claim to definite knowledge, absolute knowledge, and that's very dangerous because times change, circumstances change...how something felt on Monday is not necessarily how it will feel on Tuesday.

If we fix on someone as they appear on Monday what do we do with how the person is on Tuesday? 'But I thought you were...' 'Yeah, I was...' 'No, but I thought you really were... On Monday you were like this... that's the person I'm looking for! Could you just not be Tuesday please?' But of course we arise as we arise due to many circumstances, we have all kind of factors feeding our moods, our preoccupations. We cannot say 'I will always be like this if this is how you would like me to be.' – it's outwith the power of our control, it's not something you can decide. We don't decide to give ourselves our own shape. It arises hormonally, according to the weather, the full moon, what happens at work, whether the kids are doing their homework... all sorts of things can shift your mood. We are unreliable and other people are unreliable therefore you cannot meaningfully come to a definite conclusion about anyone. Our life is a work in progress. But how would you live like that? How would you be able to say anything definite? Well you wouldn't. Do we need to say anything definite? 'I really love you!' Really?! Really?! Then why didn't you clean the bath when I asked?

Talk is cheap...but these ideas are so seductive – 'I'll always love you.' 'We stand in full solidarity with the United States of America.' Why? Why would you do that? 'We stand shoulder to shoulder.' Why? – stupid! Why would you say 'my country right or wrong' – this is madness... imagine having that tattooed on your arm. We are stupid creatures, that's what buddhism says... the root of our world is ignorance. We are not little angels we are stupid buggers.

This is real...we are stupid. The more intelligent we become the easier it is to deny that we're stupid. But why are we stupid?...because we don't know who we are. We think that we are who we think we are, and so we are trapped endlessly in image formation. And, because image formation is what we pluck out of the stream of whatever is arising, we are unreliable, we are born liars because we don't know how we're going to feel. 'You're so special... today!' 'I love you... today' Isn't that enough? 'No! I want you to always love me.' But who are you going to be?

The marriage ceremony is an exchange of blank cheques...'in sickness and in health'. Not many people want to write blank cheques. They think they do until someone starts writing on the cheque 'this is what you got'. No, no, no, no, no!!...

So what we see here is the hubris of the ego, the inflation of the ego, to imagine its own omniscience – 'I know how I will be' – and omnipotence – 'of course I'll be able to cope with everything!' This is not true, we are deceitful. We're not deceitful because we are bad, we are structurally deceitful because we imagine we see the whole shebang when we only see a part. What we see are a few aspects of the current patterning of energetic display, that's what we get, that's our little slice of the world.

The key thing that we don't see is the ground of our being, moment by moment... that as I speak now these words are arising out of the openness of awareness. I look around, I see you, I find myself saying something, that's how it is. Who is speaking? Space speaks to space. You hear through the spaces in your ear; the space in your mind allows you to receive and think at least a little bit about what I'm saying. So emptiness is speaking to emptiness – the sky is speaking to the sky – nothing is established but patterns are adjusted and shifted.

This is how energy moves with energy but there's no ownership that we need of it because this process is there continuously...it's always happening. So we can rest, open into the ground, and allow the naturally tuning display of intuitive responsiveness; when we see the other we respond to them. Alternatively we can imagine the other and mediate our action towards the other through our image of the other...that way we lose the other. We may however be able to dominate them because our idea of them is more powerful than how they can manifest, this is how traditional patriarchal structures have worked. But even if we open to some sense of the other in the patterning of how they show themselves, we're still facing the question of 'who am I?'

If I'm nice to someone else does that make me a 'nice person'? Can I come to a conclusion about myself?

Why would I need to come to a conclusion about myself?

'Who am I?...I don't know.'

Is that a good thing or a bad thing?

How could you know who you are? How could you know what you are? What indicates that there is some entity that can be described or known? What we can say is how we are....the patterning of the five elements as they arise in this moment, with you, on this day. It will be different another time, it will always be different. 'How can I live with that difference? Surely I need to predict what is going to happen.'...but your prediction is often incorrect.

If we could predict we would put our money on the horses and become rich and never have to work again...but we can't, we don't know how to predict the future. It's that simple... I don't know. 'How will you be?'... 'I don't know'. 'What do you think about me?'...Let's see... 'That doesn't make me feel very safe and secure.' Why would you imagine that I can make you feel safe and secure? '...but...but I want some comfort, I want to feel okay about what's going on. Isn't that sort of allowed, isn't that why we hang out with each other?... that we all huddled together and say 'You're lovely!'...'No, you're lovely!'...'No, you're lovely!!'

Buddhism says to take refuge in the Buddha and the Dharma and the Sangha – which is great if you can meet them. The main thing to take refuge in is your own mind. If you find your own mind, if you find your own unborn awareness, that is a true refuge because that doesn't change, everything else changes.

Since you were born so many things have changed. We can't go back in the past, it's gone... we don't know what the future is going to be, what we have is what's here now...and what is this?

Well again, maybe not the right question... 'What is it?' is how we grasp it... the question is 'how is it?'

'How is it?' means we have to examine the phenomena as they emerge, we have to be present at the point of emergence...and that's what we call awareness.

Awareness is where the field is emerging, the mirror is where the reflections are coming; the reflections aren't anywhere else, they're coming in the mirror. Here they come... this this this... ceaselessly, on and on. Where's it coming from?...ah, it's unfolding, shimmering on the surface of awareness. We are that awareness; the awareness is not personal but it's not impersonal. We are the awareness but we can't grasp it or hold it, it's not a private possession. We don't have it but we are it, but we aren't it, we are it because it's empty.

So again and again going into the meditation practice is a great relief from getting lost and it makes us much safer for other people. It is our certainty, our dogmatism, our definitions, that make us so terrifying – because we mobilise so easily towards the enemy.

I'm personally not at all a fan of sport, I think sport is an abomination. We've got Wimbledon 'our boy... Andy', number one seed... 'Fuck you!' 'You let us down.' 'You let us down...Our hero!' 'Ahh, loved you boy...but what now?'

Hopes and fears, hopes and fears, winning and losing, it's nothing but winning and losing. Who wins? What do they win?... Name and fame. The eight worldly dharmas according to Buddhism – fame and notoriety, gain and loss, winning and losing, reputation and invisibility... these are the worldly concerns. Winning and losing... 'I defeated the other person, in the blazing sun, five long sets, I defeated him!' It's like the Iliad isn't it... 'out on the sand'...heroic!... 'Yes! Yes! we did it! Scored a goal!' 'We put a leather ball in a net, we did it!' This is pure hatred, this is pure hatred in the world, the will to power....and it's invisible, it's invisible. Winning and losing, defeating other people, and at the end the victor stands on the podium and has got the big cup...and the others say 'Well done' – thanks for pissing in my mouth!...but this is publicly acceptable. There's nothing here about real collaboration, the teams collaborate individually in order to try to defeat the other – so this collaboration is in the service of victory.

In the Second World War so many resources were brought together in order to defeat the Nazis. Half of Britain's shipping went to the bottom of the sea, so many people lost their lives and so on. After the war not so much energy went into rebuilding the country. We mobilise for war and death; we mobilise for victory, for power, for invading other people's countries, but we don't really collaborate together in that way. We don't mobilise for creating a fair society where everybody gets safe housing and good education. This is quite amazing isn't it...that the juice of hatred and juice of 'I'll show you'...this seems to be so much stronger than the idea of 'well let's be together and let's make something work'.

So this is something for us really to think about what. What then is hatred? 'I'm going to defeat you. I'm going to show you!' I get quite... 'i'm me and i'm going to fuck you over. Yeah, i'm going to fucking show you!' People do that; they certainly did it when I was growing up, Glasgow was full of aggression. Our playground was nothing but war...fighting, fighting, fighting.

That is the basic rule of duality – mutual exclusion. I haven't a clue who I am, I haven't a clue who I am, i'm a lost soul wandering about...but I know i'm not you and i'm fucking going to show you.

The logic of that is so simple and so straightforward and it happens again again. Our prisons are rife with it – to be in a British prison today is a very terrifying experience because people are defining themselves by exclusion which means threat and danger to the other.

This all arises if you're not settled in yourself, if you don't have a clear sense of just the ground of your own being, moment by moment...a clear sense that we are an energetic emergence which never establishes anything solid. There is nothing to fight for...there is nothing to fight for, there is

nothing worth fighting for...because if you've got some food to eat and a place to sleep life goes on, life goes on.

And that's the absolutely fundamental basis – that if we want to participate with other people and collaborate we have to be grounded in spacious awareness because the ego, by its very nature, by its blindness to its own ground, is living in falsity and will seek always to maintain the illusion of its own identity.

So that's really the dharma sense of why wars occur, why hostility occurs – because you are a threat to me. If you're bigger than me, or stronger than me, happier than me, healthier than me, then somehow I'm diminished. Because I'm existing in relative truth how I feel about myself is not something internal to me, it's how I am in relation to you. So if your life is better, instead of me being able to say 'how lovely for you to be you' in an openhearted way there's a feeling of 'I would rather have these things for me. Why have you got them? What about me? What about me?... It's all about me...so what about me?' 'I'm the boss, I'm the centre, I am the ego.'

It's quite difficult for people to be truly generous and compassionate for a long period of time without... 'what about me?' When I was first working mental health I worked in a big old-fashioned mental hospital out in the countryside. I used to do some clinics in the secure forensic ward where there were quite difficult people and you would see the same pattern repeated again and again. The new junior registered doctor, the trainee psychiatrist would arrive on the ward and go round and shake everyone's hand be very very friendly, talk to people, find out about them. After a couple of weeks there would be not making so much contact, and after a month they would open the door and shoot right through the ward and didn't greet anyone. 'Had enough! They're all fucking mad here! They keep talking at me. I've got a job to do!'

It's in situations like that... and of course these things are true of ourselves... it's in situations like that we see that the idea of generosity, the idea of kindness, is an idea. If you're going to carry it through for a long time, if you dare to take the bodhisattva vow and say 'in this and all my future lies I will work for the benefit of all sentient beings you've got to have a big pot, there's got to be a lot of you to dole out for other people.

What's the biggest pot we have? – Awareness. The ego-pot is always small, the ego will get burnt out, will be troubled, will be self-referential, will start thinking 'I'm giving too much here, what about me. Why does nobody recognise what I do? Why am i not rewarded properly for what I do?'. These are the very inherent sort of thoughts of the ego because it's a self-referential energetic spin. That's all the ego is, it's is just a way of spinning self-referential thoughts to create a self-construct but beneath that, supporting that, is our awareness.

Your awareness is always here, awareness never gets burned out. When you drive around in your car, in your side mirror, image after image after image, thousands, millions, are arising and passing and mirror doesn't get tired, the mirror doesn't tired. The car engine needs petrol, needs oil, you need to check the water, but the mirror never gets tired. So the ego is like the engine but awareness – that's like the mirror.

So if we want to have a peaceful attitude in the world, if we want to be able to accept people as they are and work with their particularities, and have the minimal reactive self-defensive positioning towards them, I think relaxing into the open ground of being again and again is the best path.

Again that's an awful lot of words, so we can maybe go outside now and we'll do a very simple practice which I'll describe. This morning we were sitting with our gaze open into the space in front, this is really just an extension of that. In this practice you sit, if possible on a slope, with the sun behind you. You don't want to be gazing into the sun but you want to have a perspective where you can gaze out into the sky. It's a little bit cloudy today but there's enough spacious expansion. You want to let the gaze open and rest in the sky; you're just sitting in a way that allows the skeleton to carry your weight and relax your gaze into the sky. There's nothing to think of there's nothing to focus on, there's no special breathing to do, but as you open to the sky the mind itself in its openness responds, and so you have 'sky to sky'.

You might feel a little bit spacey doing this but in just staying with nothing at all we find that everything is inside the nothing. The very emptiness of the mind is the potential of the mind that allows the arising of appearance. So relaxing and doing nothing – I don't need to make it happen – allows the falling away of the arousal patterns that fill our mental and emotional space... so that... 'ah... I'm here as nothing' and yet I can get up, I can talk, I can walk...and I'm here as nothing. So that there is no fundamental contradiction between being the many 'somethings' that we can arise as in our interactive behaviour, and being open and empty.

'Somethingness' or this 'particularness' arises from nothingness. These two are inseparable, and this inseparability gives us a freedom because now our connection with others is arising from space. It's not being run through the prism of ego self-concern, it's not part of a limited resource that could burn up, it is the infinity of the mind as the ground of the infinity of relatedness.

So practice very simple, find a place, sun is behind you...you just rest your gaze into the open space. You're breathing in and out in an ordinary way. If thoughts arise just return your attention to the openness of the space and the space will help you to empty. The important thing here is we are not doing it, outside and inside are being aligned. When outside and inside are fully aligned as they always actually are, that is to say when we're not interfering with their always existing alignment, there is no need for any effort and so, effortlessly, we are spacious. The world is our ally, the world is not our enemy. Learning to have the world as your ally gives you the freedom to move easily in all situations.

Session 5

Okay, so we'll focus a bit more on meditation just now. The basic meditation as you can see is quite simple, we simply sit and open ourselves to whatever is coming. As we were looking earlier this afternoon when we come into seeing the world in terms of polarities it sets up an 'either or' matrix. It's very difficult to have 'both and' so we're pulled in one way accepting or adopting something... and then in the other way we're rejecting or abandoning something else. This is because we're trying to find the forms of thoughts and feelings and sensations which are harmonic with our current sense of self.

The key problems which arise in the meditation are the usual problems of sinking and excitement. Sinking is when the mind becomes heavy and tired, we become a bit sleepy and we don't maintain a clear focus. Excitement is when we become a little bit wild, a little bit hungry, and eager to identify with the various experiences that are arising. In either case we are losing the fresh open interface with whatever is coming, we're drawn into a kind of partiality. What we want is an even focused attention which allows whenever comes to come and whatever goes to go. On top of that, problems of meditation come from arriving at some conclusion about ourself. We might think 'oh I'm just sitting here, I can't meditate' or 'I don't know what's going on' or 'what does this mean?' and that the question then brings a sense of 'this is ridiculous' or 'I don't know what I'm doing'. So now a thought is giving you something you can hold onto and in that conclusion it is as if you know the limit of your existence. 'This is how I am, this is what happens for me, what else could I do?'...but of course that is a thought.

The thought or the feeling arises and passes, the thought is not permanent. The problem is when we fuse with the thought and the thought becomes a functional definition of who we are, a functional sense 'this is the limit of my capacity' then it is as if the thought is telling me the truth about myself.

So the error there, as hopefully you can see, is that if you take refuge in your thoughts, if it seems that your thoughts can tell you the truth about your original nature, then you open to the thought and give it too much validity. A thought can give you information about whether you're tired or thirsty, a thought can remind you that you have to get to the post office before it closes, thoughts are connecting you with your body or you with activity in the world. But the thought can't connect you with the ground of your being, with the open ground basic nature. So whenever we come to a

conclusion, whenever the thought-form appears to be expressing the truth of the situation, we're being misled.

In the dzogchen tradition there are many texts that deal with meditation problems and they outline typical thought patterns that meditators get into. For example you might find yourself preoccupied with anger or jealousy and you start to ruminate about some situation in your life and feel the injustice of it and so on. The problem is we've gone into a fusion with the thought so it seems that the thought is telling me the truth about me, that the thought is the mirror showing me myself – but the thought is a reflection in the mirror of awareness. If you're using the thought as the mirror...where is the real mirror? If we are relying on reflections to mirror ourselves then the truth about who I am is whatever the current obsessional pattern is.

'I've been meditating for years why isn't my mind peaceful?'...some kind of weird thought like that could arise; why should your mind become peaceful? 'But it's my mind. I have been doing the practice, I've done it regularly. The practice is supposed to help me so why is my mind not peaceful?' Well, there's a word – 'karma' – and karma says 'in your past lives you been very naughty and that's why you're fucked up today!' So just sitting on your bum once a week is not going to make much difference. We have a lot of turbulence inside us and so if your aim is 'I'm going to control my mind' you may find that that doesn't work.

The path of dzogchen is not about controlling the mind, it's about being open to the mind as it is. Allowing the forms to arise, not merging into them not rejecting them but being open with them. Then the empty nature of the thought, as it vanishes, brings more spaciousness within which you can see the open empty ground of your own being. But whenever we get wrapped into a formulation, a decision, a definition about ourselves, and say 'this is how I am' we've lost the openness. So the gift of the thought, although it's reassuring in its familiar structure, is delusive.

Usually our thoughts are coming with some sort of linguistic organisation...and grammar is very very powerful. In the early stages of Chomskian grammar there was an understanding that meaningless sentences feel meaningful if they abide by classical grammatical rules. This is the the reason we can understand nonsense verse – it feels meaningful although it's nonsensical because the grammar holds it together. So we say 'green cows fly effortlessly underwater' it's meaningless but we can hold it in our mind because the grammatical structure is okay.

The fact that there is a familiar structure allows nonsense to be established and so when a lie arises in your mind like 'I can't meditate' it appears meaningful. What do you mean, you can't meditate? This meditation is called the meditation of non-meditation, it's not something that you do. So if it's not something that you do, how is it that you can't do it? You are not required to do anything. You're just sitting on your bum, your eyes are a bit open, and thoughts and feelings and sounds are coming from outside, all sorts of things are coming and going, and you're just here with what's going on. It's not that you can't do that...it's that you're habituated to doing what is, under these circumstances, describable as distraction. You go into a metacognition, you go into thinking about what is happening, reviewing your experience, evaluating your experience.

Then you've just done another split inside yourself – you've got a critical formation and from that point you look at what what you're doing and thinking 'well it's not good enough' 'I should try harder' or 'I can't do it' or 'other people do it better than me'. All sorts of deluded thoughts arise because it's not about doing it...you can't do this badly because there is nothing to do. The only way it goes badly is when you do something when you shouldn't be doing something.

It's like fidgeting in class 'Just sit!' The teacher is not really bothered whether you're learning anything as long as you don't cause any trouble. Just sit still...sitting still...'what should I do?' You shouldn't do anything. 'What do you mean 'i shouldn't do anything' i've got to do something.' No, don't do anything. 'I'll have to think about that!'

So that is our problem, that is our condition...it's not letting the mind relax its desire to be in charge. That's really what the ego is, as we looked earlier today in some detail; the ego is the commentarial function, it's the meta-narrative, the overarching description that can put a kind of sealant around the the moment so that you seem to have arrived someplace.

So whenever that happens don't try to change it because otherwise you then thinking 'this isn't right, something else should be happening'. As soon as you realise that you are getting enmeshed in a particular kind of thought structure stay with it, that's what's happening. That is the current quality of the content of your mind. Where is this troublesome event happening?... In your mind. What is your mind?...Awareness – so the reflection is already in the mirror. You may say it's a bad sort of reflection, I don't want that sort of reflection, but that's the commentary of the ego that's already jumped out of the picture.

Our goal is to relax into the state of the mirror, into the awareness, and in that state there is no evaluation. We can't say 'I shouldn't be angry or disturbed or upset in any way'... things happen. When they happen they happen that's all...that's all. 'But I don't want my mind to be this way'... that's a problem...but it's already gone. Every thought that seems to be a final judgement about how your mind is is already vanishing, every conclusion that seems to be a full stop final 'that's it I can't do it!' is immediately a comma because something else happens and life tumbles on... it never ends, it never ends. Thoughts do not stabilise anything; the conclusion of thinking doesn't establish something as a fact but when you believe in the thought, when you believe in the feeling, when you feel tired and hopeless and lost...that is duality – the subject is merging into the thought. You don't get out of duality by merging – merging creates a moment of confluence, of one – which then goes back into two.

So you go between one and two...but in between one and two is *advaita*, is non-dual, *nymed*, it's neither one nor two...both together. So the openness of the mind and the thought 'this is a waste of time' are together, they're inseparable. When you look in a mirror you can see a reflection, the reflection shows you the clarity of the mirror – if the mirror is a bright mirror you get a bright reflection. So the clarity of the mirror is revealed through the reflection but the mirror itself is not revealed. If you see something beautiful when you look in the mirror you can't say 'it's a beautiful mirror'...it's a beautiful reflection. Whether the mirror's beautiful or not you won't know because you'll never see it...this is the mind.

Now we, in our ego structure, are used to naming and describing and seemingly apprehending phenomena which are there. So we can say 'I'm tired, I'm hungry, I need to clean my teeth' whatever it would be... we can come to some conclusion about the patterning of our energy. 'I need to wash some clothes and get ready for Monday morning'...we're very used to the sort of formulation – that there are phenomena in the world that we can accurately describe and that accurate description leads us into meaningful action with regard to them, but we can't accurately describe the mind. We say 'it's like the sky' or 'it's like a mirror'... various metaphors and similes are used but you can't show someone the mind itself because it's not a thing that can be shown. So when we have a thought which seems to be a total definition of who we are on a fundamental level – 'I am like this' – that thought is a lie. If the thought is 'currently I'm like this and I soon won't be' that would be fine. 'I'm jealous' for one second...okay, now what?...you wouldn't get upset. 'I'm a horrible person' for three seconds...I can live with that one!...because actually the thought is vanishing through your mind in the moment that it arises.

So the interesting thing here is what is time? Awareness itself is beyond time... it can't be caught in terms of past present and future but the thought sequences that arise, although they are very definitely seemingly in this trajectory of going from the past, into the present, into the future – wasn't here, is here, is no longer here – in the 'is no longer hereness', in the vanishedness of that thought, somehow there is a trace element that seems to say 'but it's true!'

'I'm really selfish. I hate that, I hate that about myself'. 'I'm really selfish' is a kind of thought anybody could have. It seems to be speaking of an eternal truth but of course the thought that describes it is not eternally true because actually, if you mean it, then you're being quite honest. 'I'm a really honest person who's a bit selfish.' Well if you're really honest then being selfish isn't so bad. 'No, i'm really selfish!' 'Oh I see...you're really selfish...and angry!'

Thought needs to link to other thoughts to extend its domain and fill the whole space, but they come and go – this is the self-liberating quality of thoughts and feelings and sensations and memories and so on. I don't to be so busy removing things that are going. If everything which arises goes by itself why am I being busy? Thoughts come by themselves and go by themselves so what's the involvement? We sit...allow whatever is coming to come, allow whatever is going to

go...and that very simplicity allows the actual quality of our existence to reveal itself. But when we go into editing, developing, commenting – that additional activity which seems to be helping us make sense, which seems to be helping us arrive at a conclusion, is itself the creation of a veil of obscuration which cuts us off from what's actually there.

So again the central point is relaxation. Whenever you find yourself caught up in thoughts or decisions or conclusions about yourself or about other people don't try to change them but stay exactly on the point of the arising of the thought or the feeling or the sensation...be there with it. The one who can be with it is awareness, the one who is thinking about it is ego self-consciousness. That's like a litmus test that allows you to really determine whether you're being clear or whether you're calling obscurity clarity. If you're thinking about it, if you're trying to work it out, if you're standing in relation to it, you are extending the domain of duality. If you are just present and allowing it to be there then that's the taste of non-duality.

Now of course the question is 'where is my mind?' Ordinarily we have a sense that my mind is somehow inside me. I'm inside and I look out through my eyes, I listen out through my ears, I smell with my nose, and so on. So I have a sense of locatedness – I am located inside my body and the world is located outside me. The sense consciousnesses function, clearly, through the senses and in the buddhist tradition they say we have eye consciousness, ear consciousness, taste consciousness, and so on. These five sense consciousnesses are organised by mental consciousness which is then informed by the consciousness of the five afflictions of stupidity and anger, desire, jealousy, and pride... and further informed by the ground consciousness which is called the *alaya vijnana*. *Alaya vijnana* means the infinite store of trace memories of past events and potential for future events, as revealed through the lens of dualism.

So these eight consciousnesses operate together to give us the sense of 'I'm sitting here and this is what's happening for me.' These consciousnesses are not self-existing points of illumination these are moments of the revelation of experience. Somebody coughs...we hear the cough, if somebody wasn't coughing you would hear something else. The room is still, there's no particular smell, the window opens and we can smell the evening scent of the flowers outside. The sense of smell, or smell consciousness, arises with the smell...it's not a self-existing illumination.

That is to say our consciousness is the energetic movement of the mind, it is not primordial knowing. If you get these confused it gets very confusing!

The word for consciousness in Tibetan is *nampa shepa* which means to know something, to apprehend a form. *Nampa* means a shape or a formation, *shepa* means to know. So you're knowing something, knowing something – that's duality. I know something – I hear a sound 'Oh that's a dog.' The sound I hear is the first movement of this aural consciousness and then my mental consciousness takes that and cooks it – 'Oh that's a dog.' I hear the barking of a dog, I hear the sound of an aeroplane overhead...so I am telling the sound what it is.

This is the movement of the mind, the energy of the mind, it's not the natural clarity of the mind itself. So what we ordinarily see as our intelligence – our capacity to put things in order, our capacity to activate various heuristic devices – methods of interpretation and explanation – all of these are temporary patterns arising and passing. You read a book, you write a book, page after page of words, and then it's finished; that's it, you have to do something else. You cook, you eat, you have to do the dishes. Life goes on...there's no end, there is no final moment.

When I finished school some of the kids got all their books together and had a big bonfire. They said i'm never reading another book... had enough! They were not thinking of the bonfire of vanities or the third reich they were thinking of the horrible teachers – I don't want it; but of course life doesn't come to an end, you have to read and write. You're in one field and you think this is it – beginning middle end, finished, never again – but life goes on, there is no final end. As we'll look tomorrow – when we look at the stages of the processes of death and rebirth – one state moves into another...but we've already experienced this continuously in the process of our life.

So hopefully we can see more clearly the problem is the conclusion... that we conclude 'this is it' 'this is real' 'this is how it is.' This is the mental movement of solidification...we reify, that is to say we make a 'thing' out of an appearance...we impute into it essence and substance, and then we

rest on that edifice. There is nothing there to rest on but we are into the next moment, we are into the next moment. Where is the foundation, what's it resting on?...

It's resting on movement; movement gives the sense of survival to that which is off-balance. Without movement we would have collapse because there is nothing there, but because it keeps moving it creates that illusion and some of you have seen this very daring demonstration before... i'll do it again at great risk to my life and limb...

For your benefit Ladies and Gentlemen!...am i insured for this?... So here you have someone [James] in a slightly vertical state... you will now observe the change.... [James, in a stationary position, inclines further and further towards the horizontal and at a certain point, before landing flat on his face, he starts to move his feet very quickly. As he runs forward, he regains his original 'slightly vertical' position.] If I didn't move, I would fall down...because I moved I didn't fall down...The mind is moving... that's lesson number one.

So that's exactly how it is...the mind is moving all the time...and it creates the sense of being held in place, so you have a misinterpretation of the dynamic as static. So 'ego', 'I', seems to be something but it's a misinterpretation.

In a famous text from Padmasambhava he said it's like looking into the distance where there's a post in a field, an agricultural kind of post, a fence post, and in the distance you think 'oh, someone is there.' You confuse the post for a person; you have a misinterpretation and that becomes a mental construct. There is no person there...but for you there is 'a person'.

That's all that the ego structure is...and it's one interpretation after another, after another, after another that keeps the whole show on the road. So again and again...dissolving and dissolving. It dissolves by itself; what holds it in place is our commitment that there is something there.

We are doing this; we are the limiters of our self, no one else is doing it to us. Nobody says, certainly not when you're an adult, nobody says you're a small stupid person. You can dress however you like, eat what you like, do whatever you like...you have a lot of freedom...but we take ourselves to be small limited people. We become anxious about things, we think 'what's going to happen' because we are over identified with this formation...we think 'this' is me, and I'm gonna die. I'm getting sick, i'm getting old, what's going to happen to me?'

Well, you're going to die...and what will happen when you die? – Bye bye everything!

But I don't want that to happen!

Huh?...huh?!!!

'Mum i'm not going to have a bath tonight. I don't want to have a bath because you wash my hair. I don't need a bath.' You do need a bath. 'I don't need a bath!' Anyone who's had kids has endlessly had these struggles – You've got to clean your teeth. 'I've done them!' No...let me see...on and on...

This is what we're like...You're going to die. 'I don't want to die!' I mean, you are going to die. 'Why? It's not right. Next door they don't have to die!' But we will die...this, 'me', is on the way out. But is 'this' who we are?

We have a chance to get in the ejector seat – the ejector seat is the ground of being. As long we think... 'This is the totality of my existence. I am defined by my thoughts, feelings, memories, opinions, what other people think of me.'...we are existing as a thought-construct and a thought-construct has no substance to it, it will dissolve. This body will dissolve, that is for sure. What else are we?...We are the mind.

So again and again we have to look at the mind. As many of you know there are five simple questions which are often used to help us to see what the mind is... does the mind have any shape or colour? does the mind have any dimension? is it big or small? does our mind come from someplace? does it stay someplace? does it go someplace?

It is our mind...we should be able to answer these questions.

'My mind? I don't know'...but it's your mind...your mind is the basis of your existence. You can't walk and talk without a mind so what is your mind?... 'It's my mind.

'Is that as far as we're gonna get – 'it's just my mind'...?

But what's your mind like?... 'Oh...it's just what it is!.'

Do we really want to be stupid?... 'Yes please.' ...Do we *really* want to be stupid?

'What is my mind?'...well, you have to look. But how will I look, how will I look for my mind?

Well, you have to be with your mind.

So if you're looking at your thoughts you will find your thoughts, if you're looking at your feelings you'll find your feelings...but if you're hanging out with your mind, your mind will show itself.

That gives us a clue how to do it...when we sit in the practice and thoughts are coming, if we are fascinated by the thoughts...will we see the mind?

'No..oo...oo...oo!

I'm getting somewhere!! Woo Hoo! :)

So what are we focusing our attention on? It's not that thoughts and feelings and so on are bad it's just that we are so easily caught up in them, preoccupied by them, they seem to be meaningful. So it's quite a shift to relax the focus and just be with the mind itself. Be with the openness and then try to get a felt sense of that openness, because you can't find it by looking at it. It's not a thing, it's not an object for the mind – the mind is not an object for the mind – the mind is pure subjectivity.

So we are the awareness...so what is this awareness?...Because it's what we are, that's the enquiry of the practice.

We'll do that now...sitting in the usual way we rest the gaze in the space in front of us. We are just sitting, experience is arising. Who is the one who is experiencing this? Is there a shape or a form? Is it resting some place? You may feel some sensation in your body, you may think 'oh, this is my mind'... stay with that don't jump onto the next thing. If you think 'oh that sensation is the sign of my mind' what happens? Stay with it, just very gently allow the mind to reveal itself as it is.

Okay so whenever you have a chance and whenever it takes your fancy your mind is always with you. Getting to know your mind is the heart of the practice and these five simple questions can be helpful.

Session 7. Questions.

So see if there are any questions arising from what we've covered so far.

Q.Those five question to ask ...what way is the mind? big or small?...do you just ask the question and then abide, and then ask another question or...how do you do that?

A. They're called questions but in a sense they're invitations to attend to something. So it's more like if you went into a perfume shop and you are getting little bits of paper with different scents, and you shake it about and you absorb that...and something comes to mind 'oh, it's like this' or 'like that'. It reminds you of some fruit or vegetable or another perfume. So it's 'what is this?' ... it's almost like we are letting the mind reveal itself.

'How is it?'... 'how is it?'... something's being revealed... so rather than 'what is it' the perfume reveals itself as a 'how' and a 'what'.

We want to stay with the 'how' bit first... so where is my mind? I'm sitting here... things are arising... they wouldn't display themselves if there wasn't an illuminating mind. So it looks as if 'oh, the mind is here'...and then we hear someone moving on the other side of the room and the mind seems to be there. Now did the mind go from here to there?

If it was an object it would go from here to there... but nothing is moving... so when the mind is here it's here but not here. It is not here in the way that my body is here, and I'd have to leap to get somewhere else in the room. So in that way you allow the mind to show you how it is... that it's here without being anywhere. You can't say it's nowhere because it's here, but if you say it's here it's not *just* here, because it's illuminating everything else. In that way we see again and again how our mind is slipping out of the categories whereby we could compare and contrast it with anything else.

The question 'is the mind big or small?' 'does it have a dimension?'...it's similar to experiencing a perfume. Maybe you get caught up in some thought and it appears that the mind is very small and could be trapped – it's like a little butterfly or something – and then the next minute something else is occurring. So in a sense, if you like, these are kind of trick questions because there is no answer to them. We're using the questions to ease ourselves out of the habit of imagining 'I must be able to catch hold of this' 'I must be able to make sense of it'...and yet it's still here. I can't make sense of it but it's here, so I find myself being here with it, as it, and that's then beyond language.

It's like the deconstruction of my habitual positioning – all the methods whereby I would want to determine something...like 'how far is this object from me?' 'is it a big object?' 'is it a small object?' Say some unknown aeroplane comes into British airspace, they're immediately tracking it on radar and if necessary they send up a plane to check out what it is... this is what the mind is doing. It's saying something is entering the territory of the ego...what is it? So as long as you sit with the ego it will adjust itself to try to get a fix on what is occurring and make sense of it according to its habitual categories. If we relax and be present, not from the position of the ego attending to something but allowing it to reveal itself, then the questions show how ungraspable the mind is...and yet it's here.

This is the great mystery of that alluded to in the Heart Sutra – there's form and emptiness, form is emptiness emptiness is form. This doesn't make sense; you can't work this out with your mind.

When you look into forms you could take even a heavy brick and keep hitting it with a hammer. You would see that it breaks down into dust... and then you could further grind down the dust... you can't find any irreducible substance...and yet something is there.

So the emptiness of self-substance doesn't mean there is no appearance.

It's the same with the mind... the fact that the mind is not a thing doesn't mean that it doesn't function. How does it function? It functions as the clarity which illuminates what's going on, and this clarity is wherever we have the sense of something occurring.

So it's by again and again looking...these questions are a kind of encouragement to walk around in the space of the mind and to get more used to the mind as space rather than as a positioned consciousness.

Q You said that it can't be pointed to but sometimes it's described as the practice of turning attention back on itself...looking at one's face without a mirror?

A. Why would one do that? It sounds like the sort of thing that Chinese gymnasts learn to do... turning your awareness back on itself. Awareness is not a thing so how would you turn it around, there's no steering wheel. These are kind of images of someone's experience I don't think they're actually a practice to do. Because you can turn your consciousness around...in the sense that I can think something about myself then, then I can think about thinking about myself in that way.

You could do that ad infinitum...and the more regressions you have the more you get a differentiated view, but awareness itself is not a thing so you point to it by words.

It's like saying 'There is a waterfall. If you want to have a bath walk into the waterfall.' You have to walk into it and be part of the waterfall to get the water. Looking at it and talking about is not going to give that sensation.

Now that's still on the level of duality because now 'I'm in the waterfall.' 'I am experiencing the water tumbling over me.'...but awareness is the illuminator, it's not something you experience. You cannot experience your mind because the mind is the site of experience. What can be experienced is the subjective effect of having more groundedness in openness but that's not the mind itself...the mind itself is ungraspable and yet the one that shows us.

That's why even the Heart Sutra says there is nothing to achieve, there is no gain. It says it very clearly in the last part of the main part of the Heart sutra – there is no achievement – but we are obsessed by achievement, we are obsessed by development...'why would we bother doing it if it's not going to make life better?'

So we remain inside this paradigms of development, of increase – I'm doing this for a purpose. If I put my energy into it, i'll get my energy out of it. We're essentially in a contractual universe of negotiating how to get a gain...'I'll give my attention, so what's the profit margin? I'm going to devote years of my life to this stuff, so what am i going to get out of it.'...and of course there's nothing to get out of it.

So why would you bother doing it to get nothing out of it? Well, if you're thinking 'I only have one life' it's probably a waste of time. If karma's not true and rebirth isn't true...meditation?...well, it's a lovely evening, go for a walk and look at the birds or go down the pub. But if rebirth is true, if the traditional descriptions of samsara are true, when you die you might go to some very unpleasant place...Who is the one who would go to the unpleasant place? Who is the one that transmigrates?

At this moment we've got a body, reasonably healthy, we've got skills, we've got our ability to move around, but this is a temporary arrangement and this will dissolve, and then what will arise?

Well that will be our luck. So who is the one who is aware of the site of arising?...that's when it becomes very important. This is part of the problem which arises if we take just the desire for non-duality out of the field of Indian thought, out of which it came, because it's the way of seeing the liberation from samsara. If there's no samsara you wouldn't need to bother.

So the mind is not something that we can find anywhere as an object but it's present as the substratum out of which everything is occurring. It's both the ground of manifestation and the site of manifestation, and its own energy is the diversity of the forms of manifestation. The mind is all three of these and we will look at that a bit more tomorrow.

So what we are pointing to with the mind is the relation between the forms of the display of the mind, of which there are many many, and the site of the illumination. The mind is the site of illumination so where is that? If something's happening somethings illuminating it...that is our mind...but we can't point to as an object. It is neither subject nor object yet there is neither subject nor object without it.

This clearly goes beyond language, it's beyond comprehension, you can't think your way through to it. So we have to be quite careful in how we describe how we might approach it.

Q. Can you explain what the difference is between consciousness, the mind, and the brain?

A. Well the brain in traditional Asian Buddhist thought is something you can eat in a curry. I mean they don't have a brain science, they don't have computers and ways of reading it and doing scans and all the rest of it. You just think 'this is this a bit of stuff...weird soggy stuff.'...it's also the site of the mandala of the wrathful deities. So in the mandala of the peaceful and wrathful

deities, that we'll look at a bit tomorrow, the wrathful deities are in the mandala in the in the head and the peaceful deities are in the heart.

The brain becomes important in the West because we are living in a materialistic paradigm – that we are made of material and matter is neither created nor destroyed it simply takes on different forms. One form, through evolution, is the development of the brain in all its complexity and because of these amazing interactions inside the brain we have the generation of qualia – the felt sense of experience – and this is what we take to be the mind. But that's not what buddhists believe, that's what western people believe.

So the mind and consciousness... in the traditional Indian texts and Tibetan texts there are many many words in this area and they have a lot of overlapping positions. Generally speaking 'mind' is a term that would cover the mind and its contents but we can separate this out. So there's the mind as the lucidity or the clarity of being aware something is happening, and then you have mind in the sense of what it is that is happening for me. So I could say 'my mind tells me I have some irritation so I'm scratching my head'...but this is a mental event – some sensation is revealed to me and so I respond. Or I suddenly remember 'oh, on Monday I have to do something'...so that's a movement in my mind. Is the mind moving? Well, the mind as awareness – it doesn't move, but the flow of mental formations moves, and one aspect of what is moving is called consciousness.

Just before the break I described these eight consciousnesses, eight ways in which the subject side of what is occurring is organised. So we have subject and object... I sit here and I look at you and I see a shape and colour. You, as is it were, live inside you...so you've got a lot more of you going on than I have. I just have what I see, but you can feel things from the inside and with your memories and thoughts and so on. So your mental consciousness apprehends your physical presence in a way that is different from me...I can see your face but you can't see your face. So your face is public property but your feelings and sensations are private property.

That's one of the reasons why relating to other people is useful – it gives us a more rounded composite sense of ourselves but our consciousness is always a limited description or laying out of the patterning of what is occurring. So consciousness tells us about something; awareness reveals everything, everything.

So in awareness everything comes at once and in consciousness it's built up stage by stage... that is to say you hear something...wrrrrh...and then the mind says 'oh, the noise of a car' and then we might think 'Oh, who's coming?'...we start to elaborate some picture. That's the work of consciousness, that's pattern formation moving inside the field of patterning. Does make sense?

So you look around the room, what you see is patterns. some people are tall, some people are short, some people have this colour of hair or that colour of hair, some people sit very straight some are a bit slumped over at the end of the day – these are patterns or shapes.

In the same way we apprehend inner patterns and shapes through our mental consciousness. Consciousness is the shaping or the formative apprehending of the world...as you take it so you shape it...it's not that something is shaped and then you take it. So the way in which your consciousness is operating will determine what you get.

Some people like music very much, some people like sport very much; if we have activities that we like we take them up in a particular way, we bring them close to us. Someone who doesn't like music very much is thinking 'why have we got this noise? what's that for?' So the same outer form is there, that is to say that the ear consciousness is picking up sound, but the sixth consciousness, the mental consciousness is identifying it as someone singing, and then the seventh consciousness which has these five intense emotional responses. The first is like stupidity – assumption – which holds onto it as strongly real...then aversion, attraction, pride, jealousy... and there are many subsets of each of these...they then weave themselves around and we think 'What the fuck! why are you listening to that listening to that? Hip Hop – fuck off! Why would you bother?...What is that?'

Now that is an affectively ridden response...something about the person's constitution is informing their response. If that was truly telling us about the object everyone would have to have

the same response to the object...this is the important thing...indeterminacy of object is the freedom of the subject. Because if the object was completely defined then if this is 'perfect music' every human being would love it, because it's 'perfect music'.

So it's not that the object is complete in itself. The object is the beginning of an interplay of your subjective formation with the potential of the object formation and as they come together it develops a conclusion... 'I love it!' 'I need to listen to this more' or 'That's rubbish!' This is not about the object, it's the interplay of subject and object...that's what consciousness does – it's an interweaving that is going on all the time.

Awareness is not interweaving anything. So consciousness is participative, awareness is not. Again, if you remember this image of the mirror and the reflection...Because the reflection is in the mirror that's very intimate, it's right inside, it is 'as if' the mirror is involved in the showing of the reflection...but is not touched by it. So it's not that awareness is somewhere else at a safe distance, awareness is right there with everything that is occurring, but it's untouched. That's only going to become clear through doing the practice; you could explain it and explain it but it will never come clear until you just get it.

Q. I have a question about the introduction to the nature of the mind... when the teacher is introducing and the student is recognising...is it about karma, about merit, is it both?

A. There's no way of knowing whether that would happen or not. Someone is trying to spread something out and they do it through their own meditation, through the kind of language they use, using traditional examples. If you do it in an elaborate way you might hold up a peacock feather because in the peacock feather there is a shape that looks like an eye, so we think 'here is an eye' – there is no eye, or you hold up a mirror or a crystal, different kinds of crystals...that may mean something or it may not.

You could say it means something because of a ripening or it could mean something because you grew up in that culture and you learnt about it from your mum. So would that then be the key that opens the door? You will get the key but you can't open the door; you know what it is but it doesn't do the business. How will you get the business?...That would be to do with your participation in it – how you give yourself into the openness.

In order to do that you need a little hope but not too much. You need to be present, not distracted and just be with it again and again. The problem is when you use this heroic language, this very kind of romantic language...you imagine imagine Schiller or Goethe or something up in the mountains and the big eagles flying by...the nature of the mind....it's very Gothic, it really is. It's not like that at all, it's nothing special so the more it gets talked up as being something special... It is just what it is, and it's not far away. So it's always been there, just now you start to see 'oh, this is it'.

Q. You were talking about the security of the primordial ground...that we try to hang onto this ego-construction, but actually the security is here in this... what? Then is my primordial ground the same as your primordial ground, it's all the same ? It's a bit like you're James and i'm not James...

A. That's right...you get the one marked 'Not James'. That is to say it reveals itself, and it will reveal itself as you. Now in the next life you might be born in a very different body in a very different culture and if it revealed itself at that time it would be revealing itself as whoever you were because...well, maybe i should approach this in a different way...

If we return to this notion of the openness...So the openness of the mind has no shape or colour, it has no determining characteristics and yet it is the clarity that shows everything. So the first, the openness of the mind – this un-graspable nature – is called *ngo wo* or the basic actuality, it means your own face. It's the face you had before you were born. It is the ground of existence...of your particular existence...of mine... of everyone's, and that arises as the display of the experiential field immediately...this is the display.

So, the open ground is primordially pure – the open ground, your own primordial face is *ka dag* – pure from the very beginning. The infinite display, which is everything happening at once, this is *lhundrub* – the display of the clarity of the ground, and within that moment by moment you have the movement...the movement of the field which is empty. The empty field shows everything and displays this movement.

So we go up and down these three together. These three, when you awaken to them, are called the three kayas – dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, nirmanakaya.

As you're talking just now your hand is coming up your hand is going down, it's resting on your knee. So moment by moment your existence is posture, gesture, expression on your face, when you speak, your tone of voice, how your breathing is...and that is not self-existing. It's not in some bubble of you, but it's affected by the fact you're looking at me and I'm looking at you and we're talking together. So you're coming into existence with me and I'm coming into existence with you, in the field of disclosure.

Q. So it's almost like the same primordial ground...the same stuff...that were coming in and out of...

A. Exactly, exactly. So in non-duality everyone you see is the radiance of your mind... and we are the movement of the radiance of our mind towards the other, who is not different and yet is different. It's not like gathering lots of farmers milk and putting it in a big machine and homogenising it to some standard level. Each human being has the unique specificity of their embodied being... what they like what they don't like, the gait... I mean we can recognise everyone by their walk, people have an absolutely specific particularity to how they are. At the same time that is a movement within the display of the experience of the mind, the mind which itself is un-graspable. It's empty and open, always full of the radiance of its own display – which is the field of our experience through the senses, and within that there is the particularity of how we are.

So ignorance is when you get trapped in 'I'm me, I'm just me'... and I'm looking around 'who the hell are you?' 'What are you doing here? I'm here!...and I'm alright! Who are you?' That's our normal position – 'Me first!'... 'Oh, are you all you here as well?' and then we become curious about other people.

So we start from inside... 'I'm me'... and then we move towards other people – that's the function of the ego-self in isolation. And because the world is full of people and full of situations you're always running to catch up with all the stuff...all these possibilities...because you are estranged, you're ungrounded, you're alienated, you're a refugee from the primordial ground although you have never left it. You are in the phantom realm of 'I rest in my concepts'...concepts are the basis of my experience. 'Who am I?...' 'Let me think about it.' So we are relying on thoughts as the guarantors of our identity and that's not a good move...as we looked earlier thoughts are fleeting. So that's the big difference...but the ground of everyone is the same, the ground of everyone is the same.

Q-1 You mentioned walking in the forest and having a sense of not knowing what's there...I'm becoming more aware of subtle energies and it scares me. I wonder if I should protect myself...is there anything to protect...is there a practice you would recommend?

A. Ah, well there is a self to defend as long you believe in it. We're vulnerable as long as we are in a nexus of a self that we could be vulnerable.

I think you would probably experience that, being here, there are some people you can communicate quite easily with and other people maybe not so easily. So that is to say we can expand interconnectivity or retreat and it's not that 'I decide to do it' is just the happenstance of how peoples' energy connects. So in a similar way, certainly from the Tibetan point of view this Earth is not a dead place, the earth and everything in it has owners. So there are *sadag*, the owners of the land, and if you walk on the land you pitch your tent up they might not be very happy. So if you are Tibetan you would always ask permission before you did that or before you

build a house. Then under the earth there's the *nagas* who control water and so on and if they get upset according to the traditional knowledge, they give leprosy and many other difficult diseases.

So if you take the view that the earth is alive in a sense it's an encouragement to be sensitive to that. Rather than stomping, as we do, across this dead world with total entitlement because the blessed saints of the past have removed all the snakes and all the scorpions and we've killed off everything else...nobody's gonna bite us, we're the top of the food chain, we're the stompers.

Actually if the world is alive and pulsating and reactive and communicative we should be more delicate, and if we get a feeling 'don't be here' we could maybe apologise or sit for a moment and if it still feels 'don't be here' then maybe it's useful to go. I remember my Tibetan teacher saying how he was going with his teacher to visit some small monastery a little bit away and the teacher started to go on a slow way round the mountain. So he said 'why don't we go the quick path where these people were murdered last week?' His teacher said 'We're going to the monastery because a holy place has blessing; if you go to a place where people were murdered you get a negative blessing'.

You can learn to do practice to work with that negative energy but generally speaking places where difficult bad events have occurred... they have a quality to them. So if you're sensitive and you pick that up it would seem to me to be quite sensible not to go there. It's the same in the streets...I live in London, sometimes I walk down the street and I think 'Oh' and I cross to the other side of the road or turn round and go back...there is something there. There's lots of murders around where I live, there are lots of very unhappy lonely men wandering around; they haven't got anything to lose, so be careful.

Q -2. If you are walking in the dark what would you do if you feel something like a hungry spirit?

A.If I feel self-protective?...Well there's lots of prayers you can do. You can pray to Padmasambhava for protection or Tara. I could imagine a vajra shield around me, there are many different practices. Or you could pray for the well-being of these lost souls who are suffering.... you could do some *tong-len* to bring the pain into yourself, you could shout '*phat*'. You could do a lot of different things but the question would be 'why am I activating an antidotal response, do I need to do that?' That would very much be determined on the mood. I think there's no set of techniques which you could always apply from a menu, it depends whether you feel tired, or whether you're agitated, whether you're grounded and aware...it would depend very much on those factors.

Q-3. Walking in the forest in the dark i'm scared...

A. ...you could take a torch. You could get some paper and write some little prayers or you could get potato and cut some little outline of the Buddha on the potato and press impressions of the Buddha and then wrap them up in bits of plastic and hide them through the forest. So you could make a little sacred path through the forest and then you could skip and...

Q.How can we remain in the non-dual state when we are communicating...because the nature of the language is that it operates in a dualistic world.

A. So if we re-frame that we could say 'Is a non-dual dialogic experience possible?'

A dialogic experience – one in which I am now talking with you. I'm looking at you, i'm thinking about what you said and a response is arising. Who are you? You for me are 'my you'. Whoever you are for you...I don't know and I don't really care. Why don't I care?...because I'll never get there... that's like worrying about who lives on the planet Mars. Whoever you are for you good luck with it. Who you are for me is what I get, and 'you for me' is my experience...'you for you' is not my experience. I cannot experience your experience, I only have my experience. So when I'm talking with you, the you that I'm talking with is 'you for me'. So in that sense there is no divide... but if I then start to think 'yeah, but what are you really thinking?' and now I'm imagining a 'you for me' that may be more 'you for you' than the 'you for me' which i got before.

So in that way you can get layers and layers of complexity...and when I say...all I'll ever get is the 'you for me'...it doesn't mean that that has nothing to do with you. That is 'you as you' showing, what bit of you is revealed to me – that's what I have. Each of us shows aspects of ourselves to other people and other people respond or apprehend these, or build something on it, draw little funny moustaches on it...we can alter other people or we can take it as nakedly as we can.

This is not the annihilation of the other, it is not solipsistic, i'm not just in a world of my own because when I reply to you, I reply to your face and I see around your eyes and your mouth and the way your forehead is creasing, whether what I'm saying is in any way in harmony with what you were intending. I will never know what you were saying 'for you' what I get is what I'm hearing you saying 'for me', that's a great mystery of communication. Somehow within that, if there is an openness, we pick up quite a lot of what's there because it's being revealed through the embodied presence...and that's the un-impeded flow of communication, that would be the non-duality of the conversation.

But if we we're two business people trying to do a deal and I'm a bit suspicious about what you're up to, I've now got a sort of split-screen in my head – one a kind of smiley facade to you while the other thinks 'hang on a minute what's he on about' and that's often the case. So we're not really available towards the other, we're doing second-guessing, doubting, fabricating other scenarios that might be possible, and so my unavailability would be revealed to you and we would have a very thin contact.

And of course a great deal of human meeting is thin but when when we have the opportunity to speak as it were from the belly, or heart-to-heart with the eyes, I think you get much more of a rolling interface and that doesn't split the non-duality. Because also when I'm speaking with you, what I get is the 'me for me' that's speaking but you get the 'me that is speaking to you' so in that sense I don't have the whole shebang either...the completion is in the complete.

The notion that we have that 'I am an individual, an autonomous subject, a monad complete in myself'...I think no school of buddhism would agree with that. So when we speak together... due to dependent co-origination, due to the interaction of how we are, which includes the fact we had little snippets of conversation in the garden and so on...little pathways are set up in which we may feel there is more or less possibility of connectivity and communication. All of these factors arise together and these are movements and patterns of energy. We can doubt them, we can discount them or we can just open to them and allow them to be there.

So I think a conversation, being with others, can be in a non-dual mode or a very dualistic mode.

Q. In thinking everything is projection of my mind I can go into a very cold place, a nihilistic place where nothing really matters.

A. Yes, if the 'you for me' is only my projection then you don't need to be here at all, you are now completely irrelevant and I'm just wanking away. I'm just projecting my image of you and talking to myself onto, or via, the image of you that I've constructed for myself. That is a real danger, and we've probably all experienced schoolteachers and so on who talk to us in that way, who did not interrupt their monologic discourse...that's a very different regime. But if you have a dialogic discourse there are two energy fields as it were, two dynamic polarities.

Now the question would be...these poles, are they grounded in some substance? Is it that I'm at A and you're at B so 'Hello, are you there?' goes from A to B because I'm here...or this an arising and that an arising, and both of these energy patterns are arising together? If that's the case then it's not just projection. I have to receive you in order to respond, if I don't receive you then I'm just talking to myself. When we really receive the other, and we allow ourselves to be touched and moved, we will arise with a new voice in the next sentence. We are reconstituted by the other and that's a very interesting thing because we are made, as it were, of constituents. We have many different potentials and they come together in different patterns with the various people that we talk to when we are here. Each of us is a different person with everyone we speak to and at different times of the day we can be a different person with the same other person that we are talking to.

So we come together through the connectivity – we find ourselves saying something, we find ourselves unable to say something – it's just like that. I don't think that would be purely a projection or a self-serving narcissistic world.

Q. So we have a sound and the sound arises with our awareness of the sound so presumably you arise with my awareness of you; it's not projection, but if I'm not aware you're not there.

A. That's right... that's right. We are the birth of the world, each of us is the luminous centre of the world. When we say 'the world' it means the only world we have access to. We don't have access to anyone else's world but when we connect we have some possibility of some of the flavours of their world meeting our world. It doesn't mean that we are sealed in an isolated bubble but the formations of how other people are...are invitations or not. If somebody doesn't pay any attention to us it's a bit strange because ...how will we be?

When I was a young and hopeful therapist I remember sitting in the room and this patient is talking to, talking to me... well really talking at me, and at me...and at a certain point I got up and turned my chair around and just sat with my back to him.

Everything is circumstantial...there is a zeitgeist, there is a mood, which facilitates what we can do and what we can't do, and I think that's what we have to tune into. That is to say it's a situational permission and the situation is the field; we are field embedded creatures and we ignore that field at our peril.

But what we see that's what happens a lot of the time...we have the Prime Minister saying 'the people of Britain have spoken' 'the will of the people' but it wasn't the will of the people, it was a will of a certain proportion of the people – a not very spectacular proportion above fifty percent. What about the will of the other people? that is all washed away.

So that's the kind of sectarian biased splitting position in which you say 'a part is the whole' because the part is the part which is the 'true part, the real part, the part I want 'cos makes me the P.M.'...that is then the danger.

So what permission do we have to speak and to act? That very much depends on what happens between us, the context we are in at the moment, the wider field that we operate inside.

Qa. Would letting go of self into a sense of other, with faith ...specifically... imaging Amitabha buddha... and fully letting go of everything into Amitabha who is not other than me... none the less it is a thought construct... but letting go into other for there to be unity? Is that valid or is that thought construction deluding oneself into splitting...?

A. No that would be a very valid construction. Certainly tantric buddhism is based entirely on that process – that you dissolve into the deity or the deity dissolves into you and then, with that, you dissolve into emptiness. So you find that your ground, your separated ego-ground, and the open ground of the enlightened form that you are relating to such as Amitabha buddha are not different because you put yourself into them without reservation. It's the reservation or holding back that becomes the problem because then you're in a deal, it's conditional.

Qb. I have to be a deity, in a sense it's fully letting go into something other....even though you are surrendering to other for it to become...

A. Ok, I think if you were keeping it in in that mode, one should perhaps be a little bit suspicious about self-abnegation, self-sacrifice, because there they can be an undercurrent of self-validation in the very act of self-sacrifice. So we may be feeling that we are being self-forgetful and truly for the other but there's often a subtle pay-off that goes with that. This is why, once the understanding of emptiness became established in the Mahayana tradition, there was a lot more freedom to do that dissolving of the self – because it was understood that the ground of it was absolutely nothing. But if one's understanding of emptiness is not clear it may be very difficult to truly forget the self.

Qc. If there is a valid experience of emptiness having a practice of letting go into other to dissolve into emptiness is valid?

A. Yes, and of course it links in some way with the practice that's known as *tong-len*, of giving and receiving. In which you imagine that the centre of your heart is open space of awareness and you invite all the suffering and sorrows of all beings to come and dissolve into it. You can imagine it coming in the form of soot or dangerous objects, and it just dissolves into you and you have no reservation against it...then you imagine, from your heart, an infinite flow of goodness that spreads out all beings. So you take the poison of the world and you give the medicine of the dharma. That's a way of loosening the automatic tilt of self-concern.

Qa. Sky gazing this afternoon...very relaxed, very pleasant...looking at the sky there seemed to be a tiny tiny moment of infinity then immediately anxiety kicked in...was that the ego-grasping...?

A. One of the reasons are why, in the tradition, they give a lot of explanation of the view of how this way of opening can be understood, is that by hearing a lot about it, then thinking about it and reflecting on it yourself, you have it more readily at the tips of your fingers. Because moments of anxiety are likely to arise and moments of confusion, because you're moving out of familiar territory into unfamiliar territory. So what is this is? It's a bit like hearing sounds in the forest... 'what is this?' If you are aware everything is my own mind – my mind is showing itself as anxiety – the anxiety is the display of the radiance of the mind. But if you've got an habitual egoic structure that says anxiety is a sign that something is wrong it's – 'I'm feeling anxious'...'Oh-oh, careful!'

So again it's the first, the very first moment, just on the edge of an interpretation 'what is this that's arising?' If you see it...then this is the field of clarity; everything that arises is the display of clarity – this too is clarity, this too is the mind. But if we shrink back in the movement of the anxiety there's now me having this experience...'Oh my god, what is it?' ...and then it sets off chains of conceptual identification.

It links to what we were looking at this morning because when anxiety arises you can get your claws into it, you can get your teeth into it, it's familiar territory. When you're just relaxed and open there is a flavour or a mood to it, but it's un-graspable. So when something arises that allows your grasping to get hold of it you're right in there because that's the habitual response.

Again and again we relax the habitual response and go back into the space and back into the space, back into the space...because everything is already in the space. It's not that we have to integrate the arising with space, because everything is already integrated with space...what we have to do is not disintegrate it. The arising of the ego is the disintegration, or the separation, or the splitting, and that is an artificial activity. Integration never changes; from the very beginning all arisings have been inseparable from the ground they have no other source.

Qb. So anxiety is just another arising?

A. Another arising, yes. As the texts say again and again 'whatever comes comes whatever goes goes' see this is just the way that the mind shows itself. But when we sit in our ego-self we have all sorts of prejudices - likes and dislikes hopes fears – and once that panoply of interpretives is projected onto what's arising you're back in familiar territory. Okay it's getting a wee bitty late shall we do a brief sitting and then end for the day. This simple practice is also something you can do just as you're going to sleep – allow yourself to fall into sleep in an open state, it helps the dreams to be lighter. And when you wake first thing in the morning, with the first outbreath, just relax into the openness and then allow the movement of your body to move within the openness of the sphere of awareness.

Session 8

Okay, good morning, we can begin with some quiet sitting practice. So as we were doing before, letting the skeleton carry the weight, relax your muscles, let the diaphragm free... and we just relax the gaze into the space about two arms length in front of us. Relax in the out-breath and then stay open with whatever's coming without editing or adjusting.

So yesterday we were looking a bit at the nature of duality and non-duality so, just to briefly recap... Ignorance, which we find described in all the different buddhist texts, is essentially not a fixed moment in time but an ongoing movement of ignoring. What is it that we are ignoring?

We are ignoring the basis out of which we are manifesting moment by moment. When that ground of being, when that spacious dimension from which we unfold, is not revealed to us we find ourselves as 'something' that's grasping at the sense of self. So we end up with a separated isolated notion 'here I am and there you are' and in this duality all the different polarities of good and bad mine and yours arise.

This is also sometimes described in terms of what are called the five poisons, or the five afflictions – the *kleshas*. The first of these is a kind of mental dullness, in Tibetan its called *timug*, which is a kind of sinking dulled feeling. In English it's probably best represented as assumption – that we rest inside our assumption that the world is the way we think it is, we take things for granted, there's lack of questioning. So I'm here...we're sitting in a room together, we're going to be here until tomorrow, then i'll go somewhere else.. da de da... We can all plan the movements of our lives from here to there, what we've done in the past, where we're going.

The storylines are based on the sense that the language we use, the concepts we use, give us an accurate account of how things are. And so we're sitting inside this semiotic web, the interpretive web, and everything makes more or less sense to us. As long as you're wrapped inside this the process of interpretation and judgement continues, but most of the time inside fairly narrow parameters – what will you buy in the shops? when do you have to pay off your bills? and so on... what will you do in the summer?

These are small decisions inside a fairly known world and that continues until we get very sick and then we start to die...then it becomes much more disturbing. But inside the normal frame of reference it's very much business as usual, taking it for granted, so there's a lack of examination.

That has the advantage of being comforting. We kind of reassured that one day leads into another without too much disruption. 'I am what I am, things are what they are.'

On the basis of that, because 'I am what I am', I know what I like and I know what I don't like. So we have desire and aversion we have moving towards the things which seem of value and of interest, and moving away from the things which seem to be harmful or boring or unsettling in some way.

So these are the two main polarities that arise – getting more of what we want and trying to avoid what we don't want – desire and aversion. From these two further afflictions or poisons or darkneses are pride and jealousy. Pride is a further substantial isolation of our sense of self. It is very self-referential, and we feel superior, and we feel that we may be doing well. So pride is essentially the vertical register of attribution of value...'I'm above some people and some people are below me, and as long as there's at least one person below me I'm doing alright!'

So pride is the sense of not quite being at the bottom, and it speaks of something important. It speaks of the vulnerability of our sense of self because our position in the world can go up and down very easily. Politically, economically... in terms of the status of institutions, whether there's funding for your job or not... whether we are valued in a relationship, whether we're respected by our kids or whatever... these 'situatedness' factors go up and down. So pride is a kind of sensitivity to 'where do I fit in on this structure?'

Jealousy is again a movement of the vulnerability of our fixed sense of self because if I start to rest my identity on you and the fact that you like me, and now you like someone else, then I'm going to be deprived of the attention that I need from you.

As we looked yesterday the ego, because it has no content of its own, has to keep filling itself with whatever is available in the situation at the moment. It's very much like the traditional illumination they had in the theatre – limelight – along the front of the stage they had blocks of limestone and a small gas burner. When the gas was burning the lime would heat up and start to emit light but when you cut off the gas the limelight slowly dims down. We're like that... if we get attention from other people, if we think that we are doing okay, if people believe in us, we start to breathe and we feel okay...but what does that mean?

We could say 'Well it's a very kind of self-referential narcissistic position' but it also points to the nature of non-duality – that our existence is not something apart, we're not entirely autonomous and self-defining. We are actually in intercourse with the universe all the time, we're breathing in and out, and if other people approve of us this gives us an entitlement to move in the world. If we feel that other people are very suspicious of who we are then our entitlement gets curtailed, as we see with many people who unfortunately become refugees. They've moved out of a community in which they had a place and are now without validation; they're now having to please other people in order to be tolerated at all and there's a huge amount of vulnerability in that situation 'Why would somebody take care of me?' So jealousy reminds us of the instability of every situation that we are in.

In buddhism they talk of dependent co-origination – on the basis of this that arises – that is to say we as look around the world we can't find any self-existing phenomena. Every thing which is here is here due to causes and circumstances. For example there is a heavy piano in the corner there, it's a piano. We were here yesterday, we saw there was a piano there yesterday, we assume it's the same piano, the piano has a kind of facticity – the enduring nature of the piano being a piano. So the piano seems to be there 'in itself' and this is the perception that we bring to situations. But of course the piano is resting on the floor, and the floor is resting on the beams that support this floor above the floor below. If the floor was not there the piano would fall down, but when we see the piano we don't see the floor. When we look at the people in the room we see people, we don't see 'people and floor' the floor is taken for granted.

So our perceptual orientation is towards identifying isolated phenomena that we can take hold of in some way. We can make a meaningful comment about some 'thing' because we have already established for ourselves the 'somethingness' of that thing. That the piano is a piano – that's obvious – but a piano has to be somewhere and the 'somewhereness' of the piano is inseparable from the piano, it's not an added extra. You could say 'well, we'll take the the piano out of this room, put it downstairs, we could put in the forest...it would still be a piano.' Yes that's true, but it would still be a piano 'somewhere' and the somewhereness and the piano actually are born together, they are inseparable.

So once we start to see that phenomena are always niched in an environment – the phenomena change and the environments change but everything which manifests is in a field of appearance, it's not just by itself...and the field is changing and the individual phenomena are changing – we're in a much more swirling world of the potential for movement and change, and this is what we inhabit. That, from the point of view of movement, if once we see that we are movement and that movement isn't our enemy, movement isn't something that undermines us but movement is our way of participating in a moving world, then impermanence is just...how it is.

But if you create for yourself a notion of stasis or stability then impermanence seems to be the enemy – 'Time is eating away my life. The years are going by, so much of what I could have done I haven't done'. We can feel regrets, confusion... 'what shall I do? I have this rare and precious opportunity....' that arises when we are outside of time; time is flowing in the space of the mind.

When we sit in the meditation thoughts come and go, sensations come and go, appearances arise and pass, and we are there. The unchanging is awareness, everything else is change. When we devote our life to trying to stabilise the changing we will be disappointed and we will be unsuccessful because the moving doesn't stand still.

So the buddhist notion of ignorance is that we ignore the fact that the moving is moving and we blind ourselves to the fact that there is a stillness which doesn't move which is not to be found in movement. The unchanging is awareness; the changing is everything else.

If we start to get the flavour of that then being in the world, having different moods, having hopes and fears, having sadness, having joy... these fluctuations become more delicious. We can have an aesthetic appreciation of the moments of life because we're no longer trying to hold onto particular situations. So when we feel sad we can be sad. If you are sad and you think 'well I don't want to be sad' or 'why do I have to be sad, why not someone else?' and we stand in relation to the sadness, we're still sad but we don't really experience the fullness of sadness. Sadness, grief when someone dies, anxiety if someone's sick or we are sick – these are all experiences – these are each like a colour on a painter's palette; there is something to be seen – they're like a flavour, they're like a taste.

You can be sad, you can be depressed, you can be disappointed, you can be jealous... 'Well I don't want to be'... But you are, so if you are, why don't you enjoy that? 'How could you enjoy it, it's horrible!' It's only horrible if you've already taken a position against it, it's strange, it's different... 'It's not what I want to be. I'm a normal sort of person these are weird things... I don't go there, I'm normal'.

But the more you meditate the more you see that you *are* actually quite strange... and then as you experience more strangeness you can welcome strangeness so that every flavour in the world will be possible. Every flavour is just a flavour, it's here for a while and then it goes; nothing is conclusive, one thing leads into another.

So the more we really see movement... and as we get older we can look back and see the passage of movement. We had many stages in our lives – being children, being adolescents, maybe full of anxiety or full of hope, maybe shining moments dull moments, all sorts of moments have arisen. Very often when we've been in a particular moment it has felt like a kind of trap or a definition or a final statement... 'Oh my God, I fucked up, why I did I do that?' and the condensation, the pulling into oneself, the shrinking in, gives an extra intensity – 'this is terrible!' – and then it's gone. Then we come out of it, then something else happens.

We can see that part of our problem in living in samsara is encapsulation – that when we get wrapped in each moment as if it was a total definition of how we are. If we don't like how it is then we feel trapped, and we then have to try to change it. But if we relax and open each of these pulsing moments is what it is for a while and then it's gone, and then it's gone. We don't have to push it away because it will be going, everything is going. Movement is moving, emotions are moving, thoughts are moving, sensation in the body is moving – this is a river of change flowing and flowing and flowing.

So what am I trying to hold onto?... 'Well I'm me. I'm still me!' Who is the me-ness of me? What is this me-ness of me? or rather 'How is the me-ness of me?'

As I conceptualise an identity and then seek to fill it with ingredients so 'I', the sense of an individual self, is an idea. An idea which is then fleshed out by selective attention and appropriation of elements of the environment.

We know that our body, our own body, our own precious body, is made of the common elements of the world; there's nothing special about our body except its patterning. We each have a particular configuration of our body of our face and so on, so that we are uniquely identifiable, but our body is made of the same stuff as everybody else's. You can see that in terms of western chemistry or you could see it in terms of the play of the five elements, but it is the same ingredients in different formations.

So we each have happiness and sorrow; we win some aspects of life, we lose in other aspects of life... what our life is is a patterning of the shared ingredients of the field. There is a basic commonality which is our ground openness but there is a second-order commonality which is that we are simply patternings of the same kinds of experience... that's why we can more or less understand each other.

So the function of the meditation is always to relax into the unchanging open awareness and, settled in that, to allow the flow of experience to come and go. Whether we like something or not... is that vital – vital in the sense of informing life? What is necessary for the maintenance of my life as me?

Well my life as me, in a sense, is grounded in the construct of me – my self-construct, but then often life arrives in a way that doesn't fit our self-construct. So maybe what's vital is the fact that something is happening; it's the happenstance of what is occurring which is primary... whether I like it or not is secondary. So say you are sitting in the meditation, you find that your mind is quite dull and distracted and you don't really feel here. You're a bit kind of lost, you're sitting being lost, you think 'why would I want to do that?' Now you've already evacuated yourself... you step out of where you are – which is lost – you've made a judgement 'it is not a good thing to be lost' or 'I don't want to be lost' and now you want to try to be somewhere else. Where could be better than being lost? You're just lost, you're sitting here in this room and your mind is a bit foggy, it's just foggy. What is foggy? Well foggy is 'as it shows itself'. 'No! foggy is not very good because the buddha's mind is very shiny and I want to have a shiny mind. I've read it in the books, it's on the menu and that's the dish I ordered... Waiter you brought me the foggy one – No! No! No! No! No!!'

So what is this foggy mind? What is this dullness? What is this confusion or this rapid movement of thoughts – 'I'm disappointed with myself?' I can only be disappointed with myself if I'm standing back from myself. I step back, observe, judge and come to a conclusion – 'how I am is not good, I need to do something different so that I get to be the kind of person I want to be.'

That's a whole series of constructs. Before you go on that long and lengthy journey... what is it to be lost, what is it to be confused? You will only find that out if you allow yourself to be with the confusion but...with clarity! Not merged into the confusion so the time goes by and then we say that's the end...and oh-oh!... and you're kind of really lost. Not stepping back from it and keeping an eye on the lostness with a little kind of accountant in your mind – 'How lost am I?' – because that evaluatory distance also doesn't have much clarity. We are present with the lostness without falling into it and without stepping back from it. This is the middle way – not avoiding or merging but being present with it.

So however the mind is, instead of entering into judgement about it and building up some storyline we're just hospitable, we offer hospitality to ourselves as we are. This is a basic non-violence because when you're disappointed with your mind when you say 'I must try harder' you're on your case, you're not really befriending yourself you're potentially befriending a future self. 'When I get to be a better person then I'll be able to believe in myself but at the moment it's not very good so I must try harder. I must try harder to be somebody who I'm not yet but I will be because I'm going to try hard. If I just stayed the way I was, who would I be?'

Of course you'd be how you are and it's quite helpful to start by being how you are because, if you could really be how you are, you might not need to develop yourself so much. Development, especially in its modernist tilt, is marching ahead at huge speed. The next wave of robotic devices is about to hit the market in the next five years and it's going to transform the economic structure. So many factories are going to be completely altered by the introduction of these developed artificial intelligence machines. Is that a good thing?

Many many people will lose their jobs, many many people will be more and more in contact with machines they have no clue as to how they work. Probably when you were a child most of the things in your house you could understand. You could change the fuse in a plug... now many plugs come completely sealed. In fuse boxes you don't take something out and change the fuse wire any more it's done by professionals somewhere else and you are a mere consumer.

We live in a kind of land of cargo cults, we're like basic tribes people... and from California these ships arrive with these strange goods and we pick them up and stick them on our head...! We are addicted to shiny baubles and we don't know very much about what's going on. Did you know that every message you send is available for other people... 'What! No...but it's my phone... my phone'. We are really wandering in darkness and this will increase more and more.

'But we have to do it!'...this is the world that we are in. If somebody invents it and someone can flog it, we'll have to buy it. This is a propulsive madness in which people will lose the ordinary social interactive ground of their being. As human beings become more and more isolated there seems to be an inevitability in this.

From the Buddhist point of view we can see this is what happens when you start to commodify the subject. 'I am an entity, I am a commodity, I trade myself in the marketplace. There are some people I want to be with because I'm attracted to them and there's other people I don't want to be with as I'm not attracted to them.' So I'm trying to work out what is my market-share as a human being; I am a thing in a world of things. So of course thingness becomes what we are attentive to and the accumulation of things becomes very important.

We can turn anything into a commodity. You can do compassion based cognitive behavioural therapy so that compassion becomes a commodity and you can do a training on it and then you can be a trainer so that you can sell compassion to other people. Anything can be traded in this great marketplace and this all starts from the point 'I exist, I am a thing', if we weren't things we wouldn't need to be trading.

So in the meditation – whatever is arising, if we simply stay with it, open to it, allow it to show itself, it will show firstly that it's impermanent. It will show a particular topology a particular shaping which can evoke affect. You can have chains of movements of the mind, all of which are empty – empty of essence and substance. That is to say they're not self-existing entities but they're chains of dependent co-origination...that chain vanishes and another chain begins, and another chain begins. And these are the sequences of movement... the movement which is the experience of our life. Nothing to grasp, but because it's movement you can participate in it; it's not just about being kind of 'the wallpaper' and everything is moving around and you're just observing it. You're not observing back from a distance, awareness is right at the heart of everything. So the movement of life is us...we are the movement of life and this movement is interactive but it doesn't come to an end.

The problem is in making a conclusion, making a density, isolating a moment and wrapping it in the fact 'it is like this'. It's only like this because of circumstances...the piano needs the floor. Every thing we think of is related to other phenomena, there are no self-existing phenomena.

This basic buddhist idea is enormously helpful for thinking about ecology, for thinking about interpersonal relations, and in particular for observing the mind. Whatever arises in the mind is arising due to causes – sequences of past causation – that we each have particular tendencies and these tendencies unfold as what we get...this is what arises for us. Some people have bright shiny minds, some people have dull minds, some people have fearful minds, some people have not much clarity... it is what it is, it is what it is.

When you live in your body and you're forgetful of your body you're probably quite happy but when you look in the mirror and you think 'Oh my god!' then you're not so happy. So the lived body is pleasurable, the objectified body is terrified. It's exactly the same with the mind – the lived mind is just this...moment by moment by moment, but once you look at it from a distance and evaluate it it becomes clunky and it's inevitably always the wrong shape...so I must do more!

This is why in a buddhist system ninety-nine percent of the practices are about development – they're about going from A to B. Changing this, developing this, stopping that, and it keeps you on the move. 'Must try harder!' 'The signs of success' 'Begin this practice' 'Finish this practice'. 'Ah, now you've finished your *ngondro* can do the *yidam*.'...if you want to. But why would you do it?... Because you have to! If you don't do this, you won't get that.

I think we've heard that story before – if you don't finish your homework you can't go out and play football...if you don't eat your cabbage you can't get the chocolate cake...if you don't finish your *ngondro* you'll never get enlightened. These are tropes, these are stylistic patternings that you find in literature. We are easily seduceable by these stories where someone tells us what to do.

In dzogchen nobody is really telling us what to do except sit and check out who you are. You don't have to become anything different, you don't have to change your lifestyle, you don't have

to wear a funny hat, you don't have to give any membership fee to anything... you're not being asked to belong to any organisation. The key point is to rest in yourself, to be at home in yourself.

Nothing is going to be lost by doing that, nothing is going to be gained, you'll just be more at ease. Ease is not some substance that you can have more or less of but when you settle into your self life will flow more easily.

So the starting point, the ground or the basis, *is* the ground or the basis. What is that? Everything I experience I experience because I've got a mind. That is to say 'mind' is a word we use to describe the clarity or the lucidity of the revelation of the moment. We look out the window we see the slightly dirty opaque glass, so there is a dull light out there. I get a clearer glass and I can see a tree – moment by moment something is happening. It's being revealed in the clarity of the mind. The clarity is the revealer; awareness or rigpa is the illuminator.

So what is that illuminator? Is it a light shining on my life illuminating me, or am I the illuminator? But when I say 'I'...if I start from the assumption that I know who I am – I am a limited person – how could I be the illuminator? That would be hubris; that would be heresy!

So let's not start with the assumption that we know who we are, let's observe...what is this illuminating function, how is it, how does it reveal itself? So that's what the meditation is...it's to think something is happening...that's available because something is revealing the something... so how is this revealer? How is this...? This is me, how am I as the revealer? That's really the heart of the meditation practice and that informs all the experiences that we have in life.

[End of partial transcription]