

The Heart of Dzogchen

*Record of the Heart-felt Advice of the Dakini
Indestructible Glorious Lamp*

Teaching and commentary by James Low

Eifel retreat, Germany

11 to 14 October 2012

Transcribed by Jo Féat

Lightly edited by Barbara Terris and Lea Pabst

<http://www.simplybeing.co.uk/heartfelt-advice-ayu-khandro/>
<http://eifelaudio.simplybeing.co.uk/2018/02/16/autumn-2012/>

Excerpts

'The natural clarity – the natural light of the mind – is only revealed to us when we stop being busy running around with our torch trying to illuminate what's going on. *'But if I switch off the torch, won't it get very dark?'* We are afraid of the dark, so we better keep the torch on, but then you only ever see what you are used to seeing.'

*

'Non-duality is simply relaxing the focus that says my life begins with myself. I start on the basis of this existence and from me I look out at the world. All we are trying to do is just shift the balance slightly to see that what I call myself and the environment always occur together. They are inseparable. You are always somewhere.'

*

'Awareness is the light of the ground – the energy of the dharmadhatu – or the energy of the basic nature illuminating experience. What is experience? It is the movement of that energy, so the ground and the movement of the energy are inseparable, just as the mirror and the reflection are inseparable.'

*

... If you look back in your life, how many things have you grasped at that you thought would really be the one thing that you need? It doesn't work, and it can't work. Samsara is the environment created by the busyness of always seeking the wrong solution to the problem. Ignorance is the misunderstanding of what the basic problem is: What we lack is to wake up to where we are...

*

...If you have a children's spinning top, and if you keep spinning it, it will keep going round and round. After a while it slows down and wobbles and gets ready to fall over so you spin it some more. If you don't keep spinning it, it will stop spinning and fall over. Duality is the way in which we keep spinning the wheel of samsara. We keep spinning by investing energy into phenomena. That is what stops the experience of the self-liberation, however if you just leave it, it will be what it is and it won't last forever...

*

Thursday 11 October	4
What is there to really rely on?	4
Non-duality: seeing everything as a whole	5
Like a balloon the ego is inflated and deflated	6
Fascination	7
Colour as concept: metaphor of the red cushion	8
Experience is ceaseless and ungraspable	9
Compassion as interconnectivity	11
Opening to that which is open	13
Who is the experiencer of the experience?	15
Emptiness of self allows us to be many different things	16
The field of experience is inseparable from the field of openness	17
Balance in meditation: metaphor of riding a bicycle	18
The space of our mind is filled with ever changing content	19
Being available means having no agenda	20
Allowing oneself to be interrupted is a quality of compassion	21
Friday 12 October	22
Reciting Refuge and Bodhicitta: experiencing sound as emptiness	22
Awareness is always where it needs to be	24
A brief biography of Ayu Khandro	26
The Record of the Heart-felt Advice of the Dakini Indestructible Glorious Lamp	26
The fantasy of 'special' teachers	29
Others impact us	30
There is only experience: our mind is our world	31
Meaning is contextual	33
Getting caught up in karmic winds	35
Space does not stand in relation to anything	38
Our bodies in meditation	38
Be present with the one who is always already present	40
Obscurations self-liberate on this path	41
Energy flows from enlightenment	42
Consciousness cannot become awakened	44
Tonglen: generosity linked to emptiness	53
Saturday 13 October	55
Curiosity can get in the way of our being present	55
Responding fully to the world without having to make sense of things	58
Being blown around by karmic winds	60
Dissolving the need for fantasy	62
Emptiness is the vanishing of situations	63
Where is this continuing self?	65
Presence is the revealer of all movement	68
Clarifying what is meant by a sense of lack	69
Dzogchen is not about applying antidotes in meditation	72
To taste direct experience, let go of the constructs	76
The power of the object lies in the subject	77
What about love?	79
Love and compassion as availability	80
Space is the central point	82
What about loving yourself?	83
Sunday 14 October	87
Assumptions rest in the house of artifice	87
We are not made for conformity	89
Waking up to the nature of the machine	90
Our tendency to disregard space	92

Thursday 11 October

We have some time together to develop some understanding of our own existence and of the nature of the world. We will do this by focusing on a text by Ayu Khandro that we will start working on tomorrow morning. It is a very short, beautiful text by a great female practitioner and we can talk about that later.

Here we are now in the beginning of autumn. We see the colours changing in the trees and the earth is getting a little bit cooler. Summer has gone. Impermanence is the central teaching of the Buddha that runs through every different school and every different kind of practice. Impermanence is the door to emptiness – it's the door to the mind – it's the door to everything. The more we see that not only all the outer phenomena of the world are changing but our own bodies are changing, our breath is changing moment-by-moment, thoughts, feelings and sensations are changing; we start to see that the ordinary basis that we sit on, the ordinary constructs that we take to be reliable, are actually not so reliable. The predictions that we make about the future very often don't come true, so what is there to cling to?

Impermanence is intimately linked with the notion of refuge. Of course, on a general level, we take refuge in the Buddha, the teachings, and the sangha: the assembly of people who are really practising including the great bodhisattvas and so on. But we also need to work out who is the one who is taking the refuge? That is to say, what does it mean for me to be me? What is our own real identity? Is our identity something which is just what we take it to be – the narratives that we say about ourselves – or is identity maybe something different?

What is there to really rely on?

From the point of view of dzogchen, there are many interesting ways of seeing the constructed way in which we create fantasies of identity about who we are, which we can occupy for some time, and then it becomes impossible to occupy them any more because the present becomes the past. The present is always becoming the past, so what shall we rely on? This is the central question in dzogchen because if we rely on something unreliable we will feel betrayed and not feel supported.

It's like if you sit on a chair and one of the legs is not very secure, you always have the feeling that it might collapse. In the same way the constructs that we make in our own lives – the things that we build our lives on – are usually not very well made; they wobble a bit and so we are not quite at ease. Therefore the function of all the teaching and practice is to find the stable basis – the heart of our own existence – so that in fully relaxing into it we open and become available for the broadest possible engagement with whatever is occurring. From the point of view of dzogchen, this is the real inseparability of wisdom and compassion.

Just so that we arrive a little bit we could do some quiet sitting. Just take a simple focus of the movement of the breath at the nostrils or some external mark that you see perhaps on the carpet. You decide that this is what you will focus on, and then if you find your mind has wandered off you just very gently bring it back to that focus. It's a very simple task. Again and again, we return to the object that we have decided on.

[shiné practice]

That kind of practice is called the practice of calming the mind, of resting peacefully. Who is the one who is going to rest peacefully? It is the movement of the mind. Essentially, it's a practice for trying to calm down the intensity and the range of the movement of the mind. There are many different ways of practising within the house of buddhism, but we are focusing here primarily on dzogchen.

Non-duality: seeing everything as a whole

Dzogchen is concerned with non-duality. That is to say there is no radical tear in the universe; there are no fundamental distinctions. There is no real distinction between self and other, subject and object. And neither is there a real separation between appearance and the ground of appearance or the mind, the movement of the mind, and the nature of the mind. These are not separate things because there are no things at all. From the very beginning everything has been completely pure and empty. That is simply a way of saying that when you look to find particular essences which are inherent or given or defining of anything, you can't see them, they are not there.

Each of us here has a name and when people call our name we feel we are being called. The name creates a kind of reference point whereby we can organise aspects of our experience. When we look at the movement of our life day-by-day and moment-by-moment, what we refer to by our name is something which in its actual presenting, in its phenomenology, is always changing. Our moods change, our emotions change, the kind of sensations we feel in our bodies change; not simply internally towards the outside, but in reactivity or interaction with the environment. Because we are part of the environment we can't find any discrete separated off true self that is ours, and yet of course we spend most of our lives exactly trying to find that.

We have the belief that I exist and, therefore, if I find my true existence then I can be happy because then I will definitely know who I am. This leads to a huge amount of activity because whenever we have a solution it doesn't last, and it couldn't last, because the solutions that we come to on the basis of patterns of manifestation are situational: they are embedded in time and place, and time is always moving, and place is always transforming.

You might think you are an energetic person. That might generally be true and then you become sick and you don't feel so energetic. You might think you are very intelligent but then you start to find that you forget things, you are not so interested in the world anymore and your intelligence fades away. You might be very interested in a particular kind of occupation and put a lot of your time and energy into developing it, and then gradually it's not so interesting anymore. These various patterns or configurations out of which we can construct a sense of who I am are very unreliable. This is very understandable from the point of view of dzogchen, because if all phenomena are connected together then there cannot be isolated essences inside this. What we have is a mutually penetrating world.

If we look out just now in this room our eye is taken by particular shapes or colours. We go towards that shape, but that shape is, as it were, coming towards us. If we look at something that is red we have the impact of the colour red. If we look at someone's face that we know from before we get a particular kind of feeling. This is the pulsation of our experience: subject goes to object; object comes to subject. We arise in the moment of our experience through that intercourse.

In the language of tantra we sometimes see these images of gods and goddesses – the divine forms – in sexual union. This sexual union represents the non-duality of subject and object and because these figures are always interconnected, their bodies are penetrating, their breath is cycling in and out of each other's bodies; there is no separation. You see two people and they are connected. That is our normal way of seeing it, but what we are actually seeing is an interconnected system. These

are two parts of one system. They don't have any true separation because how they are is arising through their interconnection. This is exactly the same for all of us all of the time. It is not that these deities are living in some high mystic realm and we have some much more plodding kind of country peasant existence.

Our lives are also incredibly connected and vital all the time, it is just that we sometimes don't recognise it because we are caught up in something else. Moment by moment we breathe out and we breathe in: when you breathe in the world comes into you, and when you breathe out you go into the world. Atoms and molecules of your body go out through your breath into the air to be breathed in by other people, and this is continuously happening.

Therefore, the idea that I exist as a person – as an entity – and I have *my* life and *my* luck and *my* fate and *my* destiny, and I have to take responsibility for *my* self and do what I can, is a kind of story which is both meaningful and meaningless. It is meaningful in that it is a way of organising energy as it manifests in the world, and it's meaningless in the sense that the energy that we are manifesting and organising is not our energy, it's the energy that belongs in the world. We can get up and walk around because there is energy in our body, and that energy comes from the food that we eat and the air that we breathe; it is not *my* energy.

In England, this summer, we had the Olympic Games in which people get to show that they are very special. *'I am the best person in the world at doing this. I can run along a track where there are many little wooden hurdles. I can jump over these and hundreds of thousands of people stand on their feet and cheer! This is wonderful!* This is human life: something which is meaningless becomes meaningful because everybody believes in it.

It's a bit more benign than the Nuremberg rallies but it is not all that different in its form. It's an intoxicated fantasy to create something wonderful for a period of time due to causes and conditions. That person has good DNA and reasonable support in their early years. Their body is functioning okay and they have a team behind them. They get to exercise and practice with a lot of financial support. They win the race, and then it's over. Due to causes and conditions we can find ourselves being successful or not.

Like a balloon the ego is inflated and deflated

On the level of a person we like to be successful. We feel shame if we are not successful. In this way, the ego is like a balloon. You can blow into it and it looks nice and round, or the air comes out and it sinks down and looks rather sad. We all have experiences in our lives. Sometimes we are a little bit bouncy and at other times we don't want anyone to look at us. Why are we like that? Because we are part of the world. A warm supportive wind blows in and we feel happy and lovely, and a cold chill wind blows on us and we feel sad and hopeless.

In this way, by just observing your own history, your own existence and that of the people around you, you can see that there is no true essence in anything. Things are established for a while and then they go. Non-duality means that emptiness and form are inseparable: manifestation and the infinite spacious sphere within which all manifestation occurs are inseparable. Whenever something takes a form, this is the form of emptiness, that is to say you can't stabilise any form.

Now, in Germany, you are very kindly agreeing to support your friends and relations in the southern European nations. Out of your own pockets you are giving the good breast of Germany to feed the poor and hungry. Why? Because it seems like a good idea. Will it be successful? Nobody knows. We try and we hope. This is our human condition – it's called being stupid – we actually don't know. You

know how to make a factory and how to have very good engineers producing wonderful machines. These machines can be exported or turned into systems of production, and through that you make real commodities. These commodities are sold and money is gained. People pay taxes from the money they have gained which goes to the government, and the government gambles it on economic speculation on the future of the Euro. You turn hard work, sweat, and effort into...let's see.

This is the non-duality of hard work and nonsense, and they always go together. Some people are very organised, other people are all over the place, and life is moving between these two. You can't say the good guy is over here and the bad guy is over there, because when we look at ourselves sometimes we are good and sometimes we are bad, sometimes we're disciplined and sometimes we're not. In this way you can't find a true definition of yourself, your country, your occupation or of the weather. Everything moves – the whole world is moving all the time.

This is very important because this movement shows emptiness: it means there's an ungraspability to everything. Therefore, if we are grasping, what we are trying to grasp is ungraspable and that's difficult. It is like when you blow lots of little soap bubbles for a small child and they run around bursting the bubbles; this is our life. Except at least the child knows you have to burst the bubble, whereas we try to hold on to the bubble to build up a life and keep it safe. But our life is not in our hands, like a bubble, it's ready to burst at any time. People suddenly get sick. You can lose your job in this economic climate. Relationships break up or you enter into a new relationship. Many different factors are moving not just out there, but inside what we call ourselves.

Non-duality is simply relaxing the focus that says my life begins with myself. I start on the basis of this existence and from me I look out at the world. All we are trying to do is just shift the balance slightly to see that what I call myself and the environment always occur together. They are inseparable. You are always somewhere.

Each of us began our life inside our mother's body. We were inside a particular world and then when we were born we came out of her womb into a particular place and time. Somebody's arms picked us up and held us, and then we grew up in a particular environment. We were either lying down and sleeping, or being held. Gradually we learnt to crawl, to walk, and we walked somewhere. We are always in a situation; we never exist in ourselves. This is always the case but when we look at objects we often don't see this.

Fascination

We can see that here there is a glass – it's obvious. We see the glass because we are used to seeing a glass. We can all agree that this is a glass. But what you are seeing is a glass in hand; if the hand lets go, the glass doesn't stay, but when you are thinking about the glass the hand becomes invisible. When we look at each other in the room we see people. The fact that we are all sitting on the ground is taken for granted. We don't come in and say *'Hey! This is an amazing floor we have here. How solid it is!'* It is just there. In the same way most of the time our attention is taken by the things that fascinate us. These things seem bright and shiny or even dark and threatening, but we are hooked.

In that way we decontextualise: we take the form out of the field in which it's occurring, and of course when you do that it seems to be something in itself. The glass seems to exist but this glass is always existing somewhere. If I don't want to hold it up all the time I have to put it somewhere, so I put it down on the carpet. The carpet is on the wooden floor, the wooden floor is on the cement, the cement is on the earth and so on. Something is always resting on something.

All that non-duality means is you see everything as a whole. Duality means taking your scissors and cutting lines down the world: self and other, glass and hand. If the glass and the hand are not coming together then the glass and the carpet are coming together. The main shift that we want to see is a really big vision taking everything at once, and then we are back home; we are really in the world. What is this self and what is this world? That is the same question. It is not *'Who am I?'* as some kind of haunted philosopher's question; something that you have to think about for hours and hours and hours. We are already here. We show ourselves through how we are in the world. We can do things to the world, but the world does a lot of things to us.

Colour as concept: metaphor of the red cushion

When we come into this room we see that there are mainly cushions. When you sit down on a cushion you do something different to sitting on a chair; you are using different muscles and a different sense of balance in your body. If you are the first person going out of this room, you come to the door and the door is closed. You can't walk through the door, so you open the door. You take the handle and you press it down and you pull it. The door swings towards you and your body with an elegant glissando moves through. Why is your body doing that? Because of the door. The door made your body move that way. You then go up the stairs. Why do you go up the stairs like that? Because if you don't lift your leg you can't go up the stairs; the stair tells you to do it. This is non-duality. If you stay inside the ego fantasy of 'I' am climbing the stairs – you are not – you are in a beautiful interaction with the environment. You are being en-staired! The stair is coming through you and this is happening all the time.

If you are talking with someone whether you know them or not will influence how you are together. When you meet somebody here for the first time it's a little bit formal, and when you meet somebody who you have met before it's easier. It's not very mysterious. It is just the nature of the joint shaping of self and other as they arise together. The more we see that, we see that there is no fixed essence or entity inside any of these forms. We can start to look at what is the basis of this movement of coming into manifestation, or show, or display, or experience. Where does it come from? Where is it actually staying moment-by-moment? Where does it go to? These are the central questions that we will begin to look at.

We are here in Kamalashila and this place exists for us on many different levels. It exists on the level of perception; we look around and we see colours and shapes. We make sense of these colours and shapes by telling them what they are, so we say this is Kamalashila, and we say that because we've heard that. Other people have told us that this place is called Kamalashila, so then we know what they know and we all know this is Kamalashila. This is a conventional truth as it could have been called something else. There is no innate or inherent or intrinsic Kamalashila-ness in Kamalashila. Due to causes and conditions at a particular time, somebody said we will call it Kamalashila, and that is all. The same goes for all the colours that we see around us because we apply these names.

Most of you are native German speakers, so when you see colour you will be using the language of your mother tongue that you grew up with to describe it. Your own way of relating to these words is redolent with the emotional memories of other experiences of these colours. You are bringing the shaping into the world, but who are you? If we say the cushion is red, we say that because we are turning a wheel of language. When we were very small we couldn't say the cushion was red as it didn't mean anything. Gradually we learn to speak and to say the cushion is red, and then big people smile at us and say, *'Hey! That's wonderful! You are so clever. You know the cushion is red'* and because we got a little pat on the head we kept saying it over and over again! Living inside that we start to think the cushion really is red as if we are simply describing something which is out there.

From the point of view of dzogchen, this is again a kind of stupidity because we are bringing the redness to the red cushion. If you don't apply the name or the concept 'red' what you have is something unspeakable; prior to the concept of red you have a sensory awareness where there is nothing to say. As soon as you apply 'red' you enter into another world. Therefore when we say red we have our scissors out and we are cutting the shape and colour together. But red as a concept is linked with white, blue, green, and yellow and all the other colours, because red by itself doesn't mean anything.

We know it's red because it's not blue: there is a mutual exclusion in the categories that we use to define what things are. When we say the cushion is red we are co-creating the cushion. This is a very simple point but it is very important, because if it is true that without your mind saying the cushion is red there would not be a red cushion, then the cushion-ness of the cushion is not in the cushion; it is not intrinsic.

There is a cat in Kamalashila, and by the look of this cat you might imagine that it quite likes sitting on cushions. If the cat comes into the room and sits on the red cushion, does it know it is sitting on a red cushion? I don't think so. I think we can be pretty sure that the mind of the cat doesn't create what we create. However, we think we are more evolved than a cat and the poor little cat doesn't know it's a red cushion! Maybe the cat knows these stupid people think it's a red cushion!

Experience is ceaseless and ungraspable

Each moment is a new creation. Our interaction with the world – subject and object together – is an intercourse; as in the traditional paintings – the *thangkas* – it looks like a sexual intercourse. When the male energy and the female energy come together they produce fertilisation and something new comes into existence. This is what is happening moment-by-moment. As the energy of the mind meets the energy of the experiential field these two energies create each particular moment of experience. This is a very rapid life cycle. You have conception, gestation, birth, life and death in a second; each moment is suddenly there, fully formed, gone, and then the next. The dynamic nature of this means everything is alive because it is experience.

It is not that we are stumbling around in a world of dead objects, but these objects give themselves to us; they make themselves available for our embrace just as you might embrace somebody you love. When you look at a tree in the Autumn you see the colours and you embrace them. The same with motor cars, with eating a pizza, with anything; subject is going into the object and object is going into the subject. In that moment you have the generation of your experience, and experience is all we have. Experience is here, it's undeniable, but it's ungraspable. You can't get it and hold on to it; if you try to hold on to it all you get is a memory. But a memory is just another kind of experience that is even less graspable than the immediate sensory experience.

The general movement of the practice in dzogchen is to be relaxed and open; fully present in the moment of the arising and passing of experience. Experience is ceaseless, but nothing is created. The traditional formulation of this in the higher tantras is everything is unborn and unceasing. The mind itself as emptiness and the world as emptiness is unborn: nothing has come into true existence. It doesn't have a kind of individual existence and yet the flow of this unborn experience is ceaseless, just like the flow of a river: something is always going on, but it is something which is nothing.

Since you got up this morning so many things have happened. Experiences of different angles of your body as you tie your shoelaces; stretching to get something from a shelf; extension and contraction; interest and boredom; so many different experiences arising and passing and none of them remain. You might say, '*But I am still here, and my body is still here.*' Our body is still here as a

continuous concept. We have the abstract notion that this is my body but the body as experience is changing all the time.

When some people first wake up in the morning their bodies have a lively kind of experience and for others it's a quite slow – taking a while to get back into life kind of experience. You get up and you move around a bit. You might have a shower or a coffee and you come into a different kind of body. When you go out of the front door you are in a busy kind of body relating to many different things. Each of these moments is your body as it is revealed in that context. The abstraction that today my body has been in many different places doing many different things is a storyline; the actuality is different.

In dzogchen we are concerned with the actuality, that which is enacted, which shows itself rather than that which is thought about. Rather than telling ourselves or other people stories about our life, making some interpretation, we relax that extra effort and try to stay open with the freshness of each moment as it arrives. Each moment is sufficient and full in itself. This is the heart of the practice.

In order to stay open we have to find the aspect of ourselves which is open. Our ordinary ego self – our consciousness – the aspect of ourself which makes sense of things, which solves problems, which knows about things – this ego aspect cannot be open. It is not its fault; it shouldn't be blamed. If you shout at an apple because it is not a cabbage that's not very helpful! If you want a cabbage, buy or grow a cabbage, it is not the apple's fault that it is not a cabbage. The ego is not awareness. No amount of shouting at yourself, or doing mantras, or prostrations, or doing anything else, will turn the potato of the ego into the melon of awareness!

That is a main category confusion because you can feel:

'I have to develop myself...I want to change myself... I want to transform myself.'
'Why?'
'I want to be enlightened.'
'But you are not enlightened. You are an ordinary human being and you make a lot of mistakes. You fuck everything up.'
'Yeah, but I want to be enlightened.'
'Well, you can't be enlightened.'
'But that's not fair. The Buddha said we can get enlightened.'
'Who gets enlightened?'
'I don't know. The Buddha is enlightened.'
'Do you think maybe buddhas get enlightened?'
'Yeah...'
'...and you've heard you have buddha nature?'
'Yeah...'
'Maybe your buddha nature gets enlightened, but you don't get enlightened.'
'Oh...'
'But when your buddha nature gets enlightened, your buddha nature will take care of you.'
'Oh...'

That is how it is in dzogchen. If you try to make something which is finite and small infinite, you stretch and stretch and it pops! What this means is you have to know the difference between ego self-referential consciousness and the open nature of awareness. They are not the same but neither are they two different things: neither one thing or another. They are non-dual.

Non-dual is quite a tricky term. It means not one, not two, not many, not just one thing; it means something strange and inseparable but not merged. If you pour water into milk it dilutes a little bit but it still looks white because the water has merged into the milk. The water is not the same as the milk, but they become almost inseparable. Non-duality is not like that. Non-duality means there is no opposition between these forms, and yet they are not the same.

Our ego-self has its qualities and each of us has our own memories and skills that you have developed in your life. Your capacity to speak different languages; to know about how to repair a car tyre, and so on. Each of us has our own particular profile. The topology – the shaping of yourself – has a limit. In this room we will always find some people who know many things that we don't know. The ego cannot be omniscient; it cannot know everything. The ego knows just its own little share; its slice of the big cake. That doesn't mean we are always condemned to being small, rather it's that the ego is an aspect of our existence, it's not the whole of our existence.

Rather than trying to develop the ego we focus on opening to, relaxing into, being at ease with natural presence, awareness, the mind itself – *rigpa*. This doesn't mean that developing qualities is a bad idea. Of course, we can pursue the *paramitas* to develop compassion, generosity, diligence, endurance and so on. These are wonderful qualities, for what? They are qualities of relatedness. The ego is a kind of bridgehead: it is the point of one aspect or base for the bridge that reaches out to connect us with other people.

Compassion as interconnectivity

We manifest in the world in a finite way in our body and we can be more or less available to other people. We can have a little compassion or a lot of compassion. We can be very free and spontaneous or a bit rigid and anxious. These things can be changed because these are qualities of energy and vibration. If you are vibrating in a tight form, that can be relaxed, and you can get a different pulsation. The more rhythms that you have of emotion, conception, and sensation, the more you can relate to different kinds of people. If you are talking to a serious person you can be serious; if you are playing on the floor with a child you can roll around and giggle. These are all the possibilities of compassion.

Compassion is the mind showing itself; the universe showing itself as interconnectivity and dependent co-origination. And the root of that is awareness: the basic presence whereby we are here. We are here as a lucid awareness, that is to say we are the experiencer of what is going on not as a subjective experiencer but a revelatory experiencer, just as the mirror can show whatever is placed in front of it. The mirror is not having to work hard to show the image; it just happens directly and immediately. When we turn our heads in the room, we are immediately aware of what is happening before we think about it, and this is a quality of awareness itself. Awareness is the light of the ground – the energy of the *dharmadhatu* – or the energy of the basic nature illuminating experience. What is experience? It is the movement of that energy, so the ground and the movement of the energy are inseparable, just as the mirror and the reflection are inseparable.

When we find ourselves as it were lost in samsara; when we find ourselves trapped in our habitual thoughts or frustrations or an inability to get rid of our anxieties or depressions, or just not at ease with ourselves; this is the result of being fixated in a dimension of energy. We have taken how we are – this energetic formation of body, voice, mind which is always changing – to be something which is self-existing, and we have cut it off from its root.

If you go into a garden and you cut a flower and put it in a vase of water, it is likely to live for a shorter period of time than if you had left it growing in the garden. When it's growing in the garden

the roots of the plant are in the earth, it's where it belongs; it's being vitalised from the nutrients and moisture coming up through the earth. When you cut it and put it into an artificial environment it starts to die. We are like that. Ignorance in Buddhism means being dislocated from your real environment.

Of course, from the point of view of non-duality no dislocation has ever occurred, and when we start to look at Aya Khandro's text we'll see how she describes this very nicely. But it is as if we are cut off from our roots. We are flowers always on the point of shriveling... never quite satisfied... never quite having enough. We have this sense of lack inside ourselves. This is the very important point where the path to awakening or the path to more samsara lies. When you feel that lack, if you recognise this is the lack of the ground, then you relax and open into presence. But if you experience the lack as being the lack of something then you go out into the world desperately trying to find the thing that will make you complete.

If you look back in your life how many things have you grasped at that you thought would really be the one thing that you need? It doesn't work, and it can't work. Samsara is the environment created by the busyness of always seeking the wrong solution to the problem. Ignorance is the misunderstanding of what the basic problem is: What we lack is to wake up to where we are. But we experience the lack of needing more good things and less bad things, so we always find ourselves in this pulling in and pushing away.

Of course, when you read the meditation texts they talk about this a lot: don't go after what you take to be good thoughts, don't try to push away bad thoughts, don't select; just be with whatever is arising. And if you see equally the nature of everything that's arising, in that very moment you are connected with the ground of your own being. If you don't do that then the very selection which seems to be positive because it is confirming who you are, that very energetic maintenance of yourself actually becomes a source of suffering.

That is the kind of fundamental background of dzogchen practice: to recognise the non-duality of subject and object, of self and world. And to recognise the non-duality of self-world and its own ground, which is the infinite openness or the *dharmadhatu* and the all-pervading radiant clarity of awareness of *rigpa*. *Rigpa*, or our awareness, shows itself as energy which spreads out as the experience of what we take to be subject and object. This is something very practical. It's not mystical, it's not symbolic, it's not spiritual, it's not religious; it is exactly our experience. It is by paying attention moment by moment to how we arise and are organised in the world, that we start to see the dynamic movement of the entire field of experience as being devoid of any real entities and inseparable from ground emptiness.

We'll take a little break now. If you go to make a cup of tea you can observe this for yourself. You walk down the path. You turn right into the canteen. You take a cup from the shelf. You walk down to the end of the room because the cups are at one end of the room and the tea is at the other end of the room, and if you just have the cup without the tea then you are tasting emptiness! In that way the layout and shape of the room makes you walk, and you just observe that again and again. *'I am part of the world. My body is connecting with the world as it is. I do things to the world and the world does things to me.'* Start to experience that ceaseless movement that never stops.

Even at night, when you are sleeping, your body is turning, the mattress is pressed down, the pillow rises up and so on. This ceaseless movement is the basis for starting to see the absence of inherent self-nature, not as a concept but as a direct experience.

[break]

Opening to that which is open

In terms of the practice there are two basic aspects: one is the unlimited welcome of the natural state, whether we call it buddha nature, *rigpa*, or awareness. This state of being, this awareness, this presence, is always open, so there is always a welcome. This welcome is unconditioned; you don't need to have special qualities to be welcomed. The welcome is not based on the qualities of the person but is based on the simple openness of that state of awareness itself.

From our side, we have the question of our availability to be welcomed. Can we put ourselves in the space of opening to that which is opened? Normally, we rely on our intelligence to keep a sense of clarity, meaning, and purpose. We make sense of the world. We work things out. We try to understand what is going on. We formulate and create forms of interpretation to give us an answer or a conclusion about what is going on. You could say that that way of making sense is a way of how we take the world – how we catch it – just as if somebody was throwing you a ball. You could catch it with one or two hands, but when you're catching a ball you close your hand on to the ball. The shape that you are taking is also shaping you and this is our habitual method.

In dzogchen we are wanting to do something different because if you grasp you will become limited, and if you are limited you will not be available to the infinite welcome because you will have already positioned yourself in shape. Therefore, it is how to be available without appropriating or taking what is there, and that involves a kind of trust that whatever arises is okay because we are usually sitting in our judgment. We are thinking some things are good and some things are pretty bad. We don't want the bad and we do want the good, because you feel the quality of your life and the value of your existence will be determined by the kind of experience you have. *'If I have lots of happy experiences, I will be happy and life will be good, and that's what I want. If you put a big plate in front of me with some horrible things and some wonderful things, why would I take the horrible things?'* Does that make sense?

But this is saying don't take either: don't take the wonderful and don't take the horrible. You can sniff a little... you can look... you might just rub your tongue across it, but don't eat it or hold it. You can experience the world directly in an instant through unmediated direct aesthetic appreciation; not blocking or filtering your senses through conceptual interpretation, especially interpretation embedded and grounded in your sense of who you are. You can just see it is like that rather than liking or not liking, because the raw quality of what is there is just what is there. What is there is neither good nor bad; good and bad is what we say about what is there. As soon as we get into naming and putting things into these categories, we start to limit ourselves.

You could understand this in relation to the five *skandhas*. This is the second *skandha*. As soon as you have a form then you have a good, bad, or neutral sensation response to it and that organisation comes in very quickly. What we are wanting to do is to stay with the raw form itself; it is what it is. The more we are available to be with how things are, the loosening of our selection and editing makes us available for the infinite unconditioned welcome. It is our very pre-occupation – our always already busy attitude that we are caught up in stuff – it is the flow of this busyness that makes us unavailable.

It is very obvious. Here we have one human hand holding a glass of water. This hand can do many different things. In holding the glass of water the human hand is imprisoned by the glass because the freedom for the hand to do things is now gone. Freedom returns when the glass of water is put down. It is the same for us. When you are holding onto something you get something but you lose

your freedom, and if you think that what you have got is so special that you would never want to lose it, you will never ever have freedom.

This is why impermanence is very important because all the things you have ever got you have already lost. Life has always been flowing away. There is some erroneous fantasy that we could get the one special thing that would make us happy forever. We are always looking and holding on too tightly to what is there. The main function in the practice is to relax and open and to be tolerant of what is occurring, because the availability that we as an individual self have for the world around us is inseparable from our availability to the ground. The more we are available in general, the more relaxed and open we are, and that openness is the openness of the ground. It is not that you have got two orders of existence: you've got samsara and then you go over into this other realm of nirvana or enlightenment. From the very beginning the ground nature has been the basis of everything that occurs, therefore openness is the openness of the ground.

I am sure we know it. Some of you might have had a nice summer holiday walking along a beach and feeling the wind blowing on you with nothing much to do. There's a kind of ease of being and you think life could be like this all the time and somehow you start to see a little bit more. You are struck by colours and you become fascinated by things. There is both surprise and the freedom to move. This is the quality of the ground, in Tibetan it's called *rigpai tsal*. It means the energy of awareness moves freely as the illumination of whatever is occurring. That lovely relaxed summer feeling is not ordinary dualistic samsara, it is actually the interpreted taste of openness – slightly covered over – but it is nonetheless the taste of openness. And the more open we are, openness starts to be how we are all the time. That openness can't be bought or sold – you can't lose it – all you can do is put yourself in the way of it and make yourself available to it.

If you want to get on a train you must go to a train station, because trains don't go along roads, they go along train tracks. That is not a very difficult idea. *'I want to get on the train, so I will go to where the train is. If I stand at the bus stop and wait for the train, I will be there a long time.'* Where is the train station? It's not where the busy traffic is. If you are standing at the bus stop you see the traffic going by – thoughts, feelings and sensations – vroom... vroom... vroom... there is always something going on. But you want the train, you wait peacefully at the train station, not fascinated by what is going on, and then you find you are there where it is. It is by not doing that you get to be where you need to be, which is where you already are, but where you didn't know that you were because you were busy trying to be where you thought you should be! There are always lots of buses, trucks and cars to be involved in. It is not that the movement of the mind is a problem, it's only a problem if you ask a bus to be a train!

If you ask the movement of the mind to be still, that's ridiculous. Why would you do that? Stillness is there but it's not moving, although all movement is the movement of stillness. The energy of the buddha nature arises effortlessly just as the rays shine out from the sun; it's effulgent sending out this movement of rays all the time. However, if you are caught up in the manipulation of the movement trying to make the movement conform to the patterns that you want it to have, what you have is the dualistic split between the subject and the movement of the environmental field. That is to say, I want to make sure that this task is done the way I want it to be done. There are raw materials out there, and there is a map or an intention in here, and I will apply my map to the raw materials to make things the way they should be.

That works for some things. If you are repairing a car engine or if you are cooking it works very well. You have the ingredients and a recipe, and you follow the recipe and get a nice dish. The problem is with the meaning of our lives – our sense of identity – which is the right recipe? There are many

different recipes in the world: Christian recipes; Buddhist recipes; Communist recipes; Hinayana and Mahayana recipes; drug induced recipes; political recipes. Which one is the right one? There are so many ingredients, how will I put them together? There are so many styles of cooking. Shall I steam it, fry it, or put it in the oven? There is no end to the mental effort of trying to construct a self.

Who is the experienter of the experience?

The heart of the practice is to relax and be with the experienter. We are not trying to control whatever is occurring but whenever there is an experience there is an experienter. That is obvious. Something is happening in your life, for you or to you, and in the moment that that is occurring we want to simply be present with ourselves as the experienter.

This is where dzogchen meditation is very difficult. For example, say we are sitting in the practice and a thought arises and the thought is me. Maybe the thought is *'I am thirsty.'* Before this thought was not in my mind, and now as this thought arises, the form it takes, 'I am thirsty,' offers a hospitality which I accept. The thought shows the form, *'I am thirsty,'* and magically we mould ourselves into that thought; it fits like a glove; it is perfect. Subject and object have fused in that point. The thought as it first came was a thought coming in your mind, but now you are the thought because it is showing the subject form.

A thought can also arise in an object form. You are sitting here and you think it is getting dark outside. Of course, there is something subjective in it, it's an experience I am having, but it seems to be about something which is as it were out there. Both these thoughts: *'I am thirsty'* and *'It's getting dark out there'* are experiences. They arise, they have some impact, and then they're gone. One looks like the object, and the other looks like the subject. Does that make sense? We tend to think *'I am the subject and that is the object.'*

We also know what it is like to be an object. We are an object in the sense of we have to conform to certain situations. For example, when I arrived at the airport in Köln, as I was walking out of the terminal the electric doors wouldn't open. Everybody was walking along and then we were stopped. We became like a kind of object because we didn't know how to open the doors. You go from being a subject who is about to get their passport examined to being a kind of thing, and then the door opens and you go back to being a subject again.

We know from our childhood the experience of being turned into an object through being shamed or humiliated; where you feel somebody has really pinned you down and got your number. You feel frozen and it's terrible. We can be objects. This is very important. Whether experience shows an object form or a subject form it is transient experience.

When you have the thought 'I am thirsty' it looks as if I, me, myself – the one who is thirsty – is the experienter: I am the experienter of my own experience. I am both thirsty, and I know that I am thirsty. I know that I know that I am thirsty...*ad infinitum*...there is an infinite regression of thoughts sitting on the previous thought. All of these are experiences: they are things which arise and go; it tastes like me and it seems to be me and then it's gone. The thought was an experience showing itself as the experienter. Who is the experienter?

This is the heart of the dzogchen meditation practice and we will be doing quite a lot of it in the next few days. This is the place where we get confused and where meditation easily gets lost because we keep thinking that the subjective thought is the actual experienter, but the subjective thought is simply a form of experience.

This is something to really clarify for yourself: *'I am thirsty,' 'I am tired.' 'I am British.'* Or, *'One of the things that I notice about myself is that I am thirsty.'* If you express it in that way you are making a gap, because in a sense you are saying I know that I am thirsty; thirstiness is some quality that at the moment I know pertains to or has something to do with me. Thirstiness could be the subject, *'I'm really thirsty'* or *'I'm thirsty.'* It is when you get that merging into it and fully inhabiting it that it appears to be the truthful taste of yourself, and then you drink some water and it's gone. It was a transient phenomena, that was you, and was not you.

Emptiness of self allows us to be many different things

How is this possible? Because the self is empty. What we call 'I, me, myself' is like a theatre stage. The empty stage can be filled with any kind of drama; with comedy, with tragedy, with any story. You can be happy, sad, despairing, or hopeful. These fill the stage and for a while different characters seem to be able to come on, the plot changes, and some other drama is installed. It is the emptiness of the self that allows you to be many different things. If you really were one of these things you couldn't be something else, so this is why understanding a little bit about emptiness is very important.

'I, me, myself.' Each of these is an empty signifier like a sausage skin, and you can put anything into that sausage skin. In the same way, God is an empty signifier. You can say anything about God. He is not going to reply. You can say, *'God is good. God is an illusion. God is a lie. God is the devil.'* People say different things, don't they? An atheist scientist would say God is a delusion, and a believer would say God is my existence. People can fill God with any kind of meaning they want because there is no definition of God. In the same way 'I' can be filled with anything. 'I' fills up and empties. In some way it's the same with a glass. You can put any kind of liquid in a glass: petrol, paraffin, orange juice, gin, because the glass doesn't have a content of its own; it's a container. 'I' operates in that way.

Therefore, when we find ourselves in the meditation merging into a thought and the thought seems to be us, the glass is filled with water, but the glass and the water are not the same. You tip the glass over and the water flows out, but while the water was in the glass, the glass was full of water. When we say *'I am tired,'* I am only tired situationally, conditionally, for a while. When causes and circumstances change, *'I am tired'* will be exposed as just a moment in time with no internal truth in itself, just a contingent or relational truth. Contingent means being placed or juxtaposed together.

Again and again, in the meditation, we have to watch not to be seduced by the seeming truth of the first person experience because that is often where we get lost. We are sitting and we might have some clarity and experiences are arising, and then suddenly we have gone off somewhere and we find ourselves in some storyline. This is very interesting. What is that slipping? What is that merging? Nothing has actually merged; it's not that you exist apart from the world. The world is always coming into you. The clouds move through the sky, and sometimes the sky is filled with clouds. We say, *'Oh, where has the blue sky gone?'* and then the wind blows, and the clouds go, and there is a blue sky.

In the same way your own empty nature is always filling with something. What it is filling with is you while you are filled with it, but it's not really you because it is always going. This is the paradox of self-identity: everything that we are, we both are and are not. We are situationally, contingently, tired or hungry or whatever it is, but we are not tired and hungry forever. In the moment it's real, but it is just a cloud filling the sky. The cloud needs the sky to be there. The water needs the glass. The focus of our attention as meditators is: What is the sky? What is the glass? What is this container or sphere? All the images or metaphors don't quite fit because it is beyond speech.

Whenever something arises, don't get pulled into the content even if it feels like you. You also don't have to push the content away because it is not the enemy. Just stay relaxed and open with the arising of the experience, because the experience and the experiencer are always together. You don't have a time lag. '*Something is happening. Oh, my god, what's happening?*' That is the thinker – the interpreter – the cognition that is making sense of what is going on. But if something is happening, even if you don't know what it is, there's an experiencer and an experience. The experiencer has to be there, otherwise there would be nothing.

At first we want to bring our attention, then gradually a more relaxed open presence always on the point of the arising of the experience. Whatever kind of experience it is, we are open to it because the mind itself is not determined by the content of the mind. The sky, the openness of the space, is not determined by the kind of clouds that are filling it. If we fixate and are caught up in the clouds, we won't see the space. We'll be thinking, '*Shit! It's just another grey day. I hate the grey sky. Summer has gone and this is terrible.*' The sky is still open. It's the openness of the sky that is offering hospitality to the grey clouds, but we don't see this because we don't want the grey clouds! In that way, dualistic judgment takes you into an enmeshed reactivity to the content of the mind. And that means there is never the calmness and spaciousness whereby the natural availability of awareness, and the natural welcome of the openness of the ground, or the basic dimension, are seen as inseparable.

The field of experience is inseparable from the field of openness

Meditation, here, is not a kind of rehearsal for anything else. Every time we practice we are right at the centre of the universe. This is our existence and there ain't nothing more than this! The presence of your mind – this lucid quality – is here. Are we here? Who is the one who is here? We return to these questions again and again. What is happening? Who is it happening for? It is happening for me. Who am I as the one to whom it is happening? This is a double move: I am both the content and the space.

If you are used to a more tantric formulation of that we have the three *kayas*: the *dharmakaya*, the *sambhogakaya*, and the *nirmanakaya*. The *dharmakaya* is the mind of the Buddha: the infinite spaciousness of awareness inseparable from *dharmadhatu*. *Dharmadhatu* simply means the space within which all dharmas arise: the unborn, infinite spaciousness of awareness.

Inside this infinite mind there is the ceaseless unfolding of the field of experience and this is called the *sambhogakaya*. *Sambhoga* means the body or domain of enjoyment. Moment by moment all the senses are moving in this unimpeded field of smells, sounds, tastes, and sensations. This is the *sambhogakaya* realm within which, magically appearing but never leaving, is the *nirmanakaya*, which is the precise actuality of manifestation moment by moment. Inside this room we are all doing something. We are maybe moving or scratching or yawning or whatever it is, and this is the *nirmanakaya*. Not as shiny as it said on the brochure, but anyway this is how it is! This movement is the non-dual manifestation of the energy of the ground within the ground.

For example, if you read the mahayana account of the life of Shakyamuni Buddha, it says that when he came into the world and showed the twelve stages of a buddha's existence, he didn't really come here at all. He was in the Tushita paradise sitting in a very relaxed way. He manifested this illusory form which appeared in the world, and in the manner of a dream enacted all of these performances.

In the same way, when we are relaxed and inseparable from the field of experience, as we move we have our unique movement but it is inseparable from the field of experience. When you walk up the stairs, you walk according to the stairs. Your movement and the shape of this building are

inseparable. The *nirmanakaya* doesn't come out of the *sambhogakaya* and go somewhere else; it is a movement within the field of experience, and the field of experience is inseparable from the field of openness. Openness or nothing, and the field of experience or everything, and the arising of the *nirmanakaya* are inseparable. Nothing... everything... this thing... and this thing is always in everything, and everything is always in nothing.

This is the integration of the three *kayas* of the Buddha, and this is the fruit of the practice of dzogchen. Wherever you are, whether it is talking or eating or whatever, you are present in the field of experience. You haven't collapsed into an intoxication with what is going on, but this movement is within the field and the field is present and empty. There is nothing to cling to, nothing to grasp, nothing to lose, nothing to get, and yet you are precisely there. This is the function of the practice. You can read all the dzogchen texts and they say the same thing in a slightly different language. Garab Dorje's famous Three Statements, and the teachings of Longchenpa and so on, say exactly this.

Question: Within this context what does the *svabhavikakaya* mean?

James: *Svabhavikakaya* means the integration of the three previous kayas. It is simply saying that these are not three different things. Of course, once you come into language and describe it, you say, '*The Buddha has the three kayas.*' Grammar always fucks things up!

There is a Buddha and he has three kayas. I have four fingers and a thumb, but the Buddha is lucky because he has a *nirmanakaya*, a *sambhogakaya* and a *dharmakaya*. Not just three, but these three are altogether, and that is really all that *svabhavikakaya* means. *Sva* means self and *bhavika* means to manifest: to enter into being. Therefore, the *svabhavikakaya* is the form of the manifestation of being which is all of these three – inseparable.

Balance in meditation: metaphor of riding a bicycle

We will do some simple sitting practice now. Following on from what I was talking about before, when experience is arising it can appear to be on the subject side or on the object side. Therefore, because we usually do the practice in a relaxed way with our gaze open, we hear sounds from outside and we might have the sense of people moving in the room. We are not blocking what is on the outside, and we are not blocking what is on the inside. We are not trying to control what happens.

If you imagine that you are riding a bicycle, staying on a bicycle requires a sense of balance; not too much to one side or to the other. What we are trying to get is a meditative balance; this means that we are not identifying with the subject aspect of the thought or feeling that's arising, nor are we identifying with the object side; but awareness itself is revealing both of these.

This is where we really try to focus on the fact that, tempting as it is, when a subject style thought arises, for example, a feeling of irritation that this is a funny kind of meditation; the balance is: don't merge into it, don't push it away – it is not the enemy – just stay present with that arising and see what happens. It is the same if it looks like an object; don't run after it and try to get it and don't try to push it away.

We stay relaxed and present with whatever is happening whether it looks like me or you or inside or outside. Sometimes we hear the church bells ringing or we hear somebody coming in late; something is happening and we just let it happen. We are not entering into judgment about it, just

give it space to be whatever it is and then it goes. The less investment you put into whatever is arising, the less turn you will have in yourself.

If you remember as a child in a playground you had one of these big metal things that you held on to and ran round until it went faster and faster, and if you tried to grab on to it while it was moving it would pull you over. Thoughts are moving; if you glue yourself to the thought it will move you. Who is the one who is gluing to the thought? Another thought. One thought chases another: one thought looks like the object and one thought looks like the subject. Not entering into this, you can be close to the thought but it will pass by, just as you can stand on the edge of a pavement with the cars going by, but you are safe because they are on the road and you are on the pavement. You are not far away from the cars, but you are not in their path.

We are trying to find that balance, and it's a bit tricky, just as learning to ride a bike is tricky. We tend to become too active because we think we have to keep ourselves safe and that activity actually loses the balance. We can just sit in a relaxed way, letting the bone structure of the skeleton hold our weight so the muscles are relaxed. Release any tension in a long, slow out breath, and then just sit present with whatever is occurring. We will do that for a while.

[sitting practice]

The space of our mind is filled with ever changing content

This is a very straightforward way into the practice. It is usually useful to do it in quite short periods of time, take a break, and then do some more. It differs of course from most kinds of meditation practice in that there is no fixed object of meditation that you can know before you begin; all we are doing is being present with whatever arises. We have no control over whatever arises. We are not trying to visualise or remember something and this can lead to quite a chaotic, ungrounded feeling, because suddenly everything is very open and what is arising could be meaningful or not. You are not editing.

Therefore, the only way to really do that is to become spacious, because if you try to hold it tightly, the potential movement starts to cause agitation. It's similar to wild horses, if you are going to put them in field it has to be a very big field so they can run around. The practice itself is working in different ways. One way is to increase our awareness – our capacity just to be present moment by moment. And it is subtly undoing our sense that the one who is present is me: some kind of fixed ego identity which is moving along through time.

We start to see that awareness is empty, that is to say it's more like the sky than a lighthouse or a torch. You hold a torch in your hand and the light shines out from the torch and illuminates an arc of light in front of it as the light spreads out. The light is moving from the torch to what is illuminated. Whereas, awareness is the field or the dimension within which the luminous quality or the natural showing-ness of what is arising is there. It is not that I am looking at *my* thought, which would be the ordinary, dualistic relational mode of consciousness: I know that there is a thought arising for me. The 'I' in that instance is like the torch that is illuminating what is happening, and the torch is always the same. When we look, the 'I' – the subject side – is also moving, so the subject and the object are arising and passing together and the function that illuminates this is just our being present. The presence is not located anywhere – it's not shining from A to B – it is pervasive.

The traditional image is to say it is like early in the morning before the sun rises above the horizon. You get a soft gradual permeation of the dark with this subtle light. In the light, things are as they are. Once the sun comes over the horizon you see where it is and it casts a shadow as the bright light

hits something. In this illumination there is no shadow. The only way to find this out is to keep going into the practice again and again, and gradually seeing how we fall onto one side or the other. Who is the one who falls? This is the very interesting thing.

You are sitting in the meditation and you go off in a loop of thought. You think, '*Shit! I got lost.*' Who is thinking that? '*Me! I got lost,*' and then that thought has gone. But when the thought arises and there is maybe some emotion with it; it feels like me – I am sure it is me – and then it's gone. This is really disturbing because that's when we see we don't know what the hell is going on! This is a story chasing a story; all these stories are going and yet I am still here. The continuity of our being is not a content; it's not a thing.

For example, this building was not always a Buddhist centre. At one time, it was a training place for Roman Catholic missionaries. You can imagine that at that time the way the room was laid out was completely different. The space of the room is not the same as its content. When the content is in the room it gives a particular quality to it. The room now is the room now, but everything could be taken out of the room and it could be redecorated. Nothing fundamental would have changed but the room would feel very different, and this is what is continuing all the time: the space of the mind is always filled with some content. The mind is ceaseless, there is always some thought, feeling, sound; something is always happening, but it is changing. What is continuous is not an arising, it's not a manifestation, it's not a thought, feeling, sensation, or memory; what continues is space itself – not a dead empty space – but a space which is inseparable from awareness.

This is a radically non-materialistic view. It is not a brain-related reading saying that awareness is an epiphenomena generated by neurophysiology. Whether it is true or not, I don't know that you could ever carry out objective research to prove it. Certainly, from my own experience, what it does do is help to create a bit more fluidity because there is no need to hold onto patterns so much. Patterns become relational because identity is more spacious. If your identity is linked to a pattern like, 'I am this kind of person,' then as 'this kind of person' there will be many environments where you will not feel at ease because you are like this, and there are some other environments where you will feel more at home.

The more we start to loosen patterns by sitting and being present with the whole range of stuff that's going on, we realise that all of these arising forms are like ingredients: they are potentials which could be brought into manifestation if the situation required it. In that sense, the content of the mind is communicative, or in traditional Buddhist language it is compassionate, whereas the mind itself is like wisdom, like space: it has an immediate clarity but no agenda. The non-duality or the inseparability of wisdom and compassion is space and communication occurring together.

Being available means having no agenda

For example, if I apply this on an ordinary daily practical basis when I am sitting in a room with a patient, the more I have a feeling of how they are, the more I can fine tune my way of meeting them. In order to find out how they are, I have to have some way of letting how they are register, so that they mark me or make an imprint. A bit like when you go to the dentist and you have to bite into that waxy stuff and they take an imprint. In the same way, I go a bit waxy; I see how the patient is impacting me.

It is both a going out towards the other which is, if you like, a slightly proactive move, but there is also the passive receptive of being impacted, and that takes a kind of double reading. I see how I am blocked as I move out, and I also see how I am moved as they impact me. In order to do that one has to have no agenda, because if you have an agenda, you are looking for something and you are

already pre-forming as you go towards the other or as they are coming towards you. You are picking some bits and leaving other bits because you have got a game plan. In that way, availability is having no agenda.

If you imagine that you have to be an expert, an expert always has to have an agenda because the expert is about doing something: being able to make things happen and to somehow be in control. But from this point of view there is no point in trying to shape things until you really see what the issue is. In fact, the non-shaping of the event as a radical giving space to how the other person is may in itself be the main means of helping the other person to untie their knots. You are not confirming in a sort of a dialogic double move their pattern with your counter pattern.

This is one way in which the practice of dzogchen can inform how we are: we get more taste and more experience of what is happening, and because we are not threatened or frightened by it we can really let it in and also trust that there will be a spontaneous response. We don't have to plan what we are going to do. There is no need to have a treatment plan because we move into the space of responsiveness; neither too strong and invading, nor too weak and abandoning, but meeting.

Allowing oneself to be interrupted is a quality of compassion

What is meeting the other person is the energy that is arising in the moment, and that energy will have some impact in the meeting, but it's not importing an agenda or a notion from somewhere else. It's not applying some CBT [Cognitive Behavioural Therapy] strategy, or something like that, which is an artificial construct. Generally, we can apply this to the whole of life: receiving more, moving out more easily, and trusting the free movement and responsiveness of what is occurring. I think this is really helpful.

In the field of psychotherapy there are some very interesting moves which link very closely as a model with dzogchen. In the north of Finland, for about the last ten years, the Psychosis Services have been following just one model called 'Open Dialogue.' This model comes from some of the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin. It is a group, family, and a community kind of therapy and it includes all the people who are involved with the identified patient – the one who is seen to have the problem – meeting together and talking. The talking has no purpose; it's not therapeutic or professional talking; it's talking for the sake of being in communication. What they have found is that the percentage of people being hospitalised has gone down by fifty per cent, the medication levels have been drastically reduced, and the suicide levels and associated difficulties are also very much reduced.

I think that is very interesting. What most of us need is a welcome and if there is a welcome, we are likely to become more available. If we don't feel welcome and that everybody has got an agenda, our availability is going to close down because we'll become defensive and then people will interpret our defensiveness as a symptom of something else.

You can apply this in your daily life with whatever you do, whether you work in a shop, or you teach, or if you are raising kids. What unnecessary stuff do you import into the situation? What habitual patterns of interpretation or need or desire do I bring in, in order to reassure myself that I am still me? If I was to stop importing that I might be more naked and more vulnerable. If I felt more vulnerable, I would feel less powerful, therefore I might need to be more attentive to how the other person is, so I might have a closer relation with the other person which might make my world safer. Rather than using a power-based defence against the other, we can trust that meeting is actually the key thing, and that avoiding is often called meeting.

One of the things my patients say again and again, is what is the point of going to see my psychiatrist? Psychiatrists nowadays don't have very much time. They are looking at the computer screen and typing when somebody is talking to them, so nobody is there. They are performing a professional task because they are required to show that they know what they are doing, but in that very professional way of meeting the needs of the patient, they abandon the patient. It is the same with school teachers when they have to have a curriculum that is set by the central government and get through a whole range of stuff. They don't meet the child, because if you met the child, they would stop you in the tracks of your prepared teaching plan.

What this would suggest is that being interrupted is actually the quality of compassion. Compassion is not a top-down gesture of powerful intervention to the other, but it's the willingness to be touched and moved in response to how the being of the other presents themselves. Clearly, this doesn't go in a straight line. In formal terms, it is not efficient and it can't be replicated, so it can't be a package of care or a packaged way of being a human being, but what it does bring is freshness, resilience, and flexibility. Most of all, it gives the non-dual sense of sharing the space with other people. Our existence begins with others; other people are not something added on to our life as an optional extra. Other people *are* our existence, and then the world is very different.

Although the meditation is very simple it can unfold layer after layer of meaning as you do it, because what you are getting closer to is the immediate freshness of your own existence, and this is being itself – being alive. Each new moment offers a new way in which that can express itself. The expressions as we become different in different situations are the creativity or the liveliness or the radiant complexion of being itself. Being itself you never catch – it has no shape or form – but it shows itself ceaselessly in these many different ways.

I think this kind of practice is useful for the project of awakening, of enlightenment – however we might understand that - but also in the practice of daily life. I think this is central. The more we see the integration or the non-duality of self and other, we simultaneously see the non-duality of the self/other movement and the ground, or the dialogic move of becoming and the ground of being. You have a double integration: self and other, and self and other to the ground. All in all it's a damn good thing!

We will take a break now until tomorrow morning.

Friday 12 October

Reciting Refuge and Bodhicitta: experiencing sound as emptiness

Traditionally, in Mahayana Buddhism, we begin by taking refuge and reciting the bodhisattva intention. In the particular tradition of dzogchen, the real focus of refuge is our own nature and this nature is not something far away. Our own nature is here, but as we've been looking, we tend to slip away from it; we get lost. The peculiar thing about getting lost is we get lost where we are. We don't have to go somewhere else to get refuge, the refuge is simply recognising where you are.

When we are reciting this short text, which is very common in all the Tibetan traditions, we do it very slowly so that we have the experience of making the sound. Sound is arising and vanishing. The sound arises from the space of the lungs. The lungs open, fill with air, which is itself ungraspable, and the air moves out through the throat and is set into patterns of vibration which dissolve in the atmosphere.

Sound is the sound of emptiness. Sound doesn't come out of emptiness, sound is always in emptiness, just as form and thoughts are always in emptiness. If we really look at the form or the sound or the taste or the smell, that itself is where we need to be. But if we grasp at these sounds and tastes and smells and try to make sense of them and pull them into our world of interpretation, we are displacing them: we are taking them away from where they are, and taking ourselves away from where we are. The practice here is just to open into the flow of sound. The meaning of the words is important as well, but it's not the main thing.

The sound is the arising and passing of experience that reveals itself through our participation, but is not something that gives us something to take away. We are not making sense. When you make sense of something it's like a child making a sandcastle on the beach: it constructs something which is there for a while and then is washed away. The sandcastle is made up of the child's imagination and the sand. The sand has not really gone anywhere, it's just been dug up out of a hole and piled up, and when the sea comes back in the hole will fill up and the sand will be the same. The child's mind – their curiosity – builds up this particular shape.

In the same way, when we make sense of things, we build up these patterns and they are a kind of displacement. The sand didn't need to be transformed. In making the sandcastle essentially nothing new is made, all that has been added is the imagination. You can't find the imagination, it is just a movement of energy. Therefore, rather than interpreting and building up a particular vision, we try to stay present with whatever is occurring, and in this case it is just making sound and we are just in the sound.

We recite this verse three times.

SANG GYE CHO DANG TSOG KYI CHOG NAM LA

JANG CHUB BAR DU DAG NI KYAB SU CHI

DAG GI JIN SOG GYI PAI SO NAM KYI

DRO LA PHEN CHIR SANG GYE DRUB PAR SHOG

*To the Buddha, Dharma and the best assembly, I go for refuge until enlightenment is gained.
By the merit arising from my generosity and other virtues may I attain buddhahood in order
to benefit all sentient beings.*

When people are riding motorbikes and they come to a bend in the road, the motorbike has to tilt over, and if there is a circular track then the motorcyclist is at an angle most of the time. In the text it talks about the way that we go round and round in samsara just like a motor cycle track; we are always off at an angle; we are not straight. We think we are straight and in fact we are at the right angle for the track, but we are not straight, and this creates one of the problems in the meditation. When we talk about being present it is not the same as observing: it is not like having an observing self or a rational overview of your own mental experience.

For example, we can have a sense of our posture. Each of us is sitting in a particular way, usually slightly off-balance. We can know that our bodies are a bit off-balance. We know when we are speaking with other people if we are maybe speaking too loudly or for too long a time. We can know if our thoughts are getting a bit crazy. We might be walking along the road and we suddenly think,

'Whoa! What am I up to!?' In that sense you can keep an eye on yourself; you can know what you are up to. That is a very useful corrective function. It is very similar to the skill the motorcyclist needs to get the balance right for the angle of the bend: if they go too far over they are going to skid, and if they stay too vertical they are not going to be able to control the bike. We are quite good at making these sorts of adjustments. We have probably had the experience when we get very angry or we get full of desire or we get a bit drunk, that we lose this skill and crash into things a bit more.

But awareness is not an observing self, it is not function, so we have to go back to the traditional example of the mirror. The mirror is not attempting to see something. The mirror has no intention and that is what makes the mirror passive receptive. It doesn't mean nothing is happening because its passive receptive quality allows it to show the reflection, but it is not an active engagement. As soon as we are acting and moving into the world we are up to something – we are doing something – something in particular that expresses our history, our personality, our likes and dislikes and so on; which is why observing ourselves in a calm clear way is very difficult.

To do a kind of psychoanalysis of yourself, to examine what you are up to moment by moment is very difficult because we get caught up in the habitual interpretations which only seem clear because we are used to them. The interpretations seem obvious because it is what we believe, but it is not necessarily an accurate account of what is there.

Awareness is always where it needs to be

In dzogchen, when we are talking of presence it is the just being there-ness of awareness; it is not anywhere in particular. If you get caught up in something when you are sitting, the one who gets caught up in it is the subjective form which is itself an aspect of the energy of the mind, but the mind itself is not caught up in anything. What we don't see, or what we are not in touch with when we get caught up in something, is the simple clarity that reveals what we are caught up in.

To use again a traditional example: the light of the moon is the light of the sun. The moon doesn't have her own light. The moon shines brightly with the light of the sun. But when we see the moon, we say *'Oh! How beautiful the moon is tonight. Look! How bright!'* In the same way, the ego – our own individual intention – seems to have its own light. We seem to be illuminating something, but the illuminatory power of the ego is like that of the moon: it is the clarity or the energy of awareness itself showing in that form. What we want to see is the source. What is the real basis? This is relaxed open awareness itself and within that space of awareness many things arise.

One of the difficulties in trying to set out this view is that the language we use is very flat. The images and the mirrors that we have are two-dimensional. For example, the image of a mirror still gives a sense of a surface whereas awareness has no top or bottom, no sides, and it doesn't come from anywhere and it doesn't stay anywhere; it's always open. It is an openness which doesn't have an anchor or a fixed point and that is very, very, very strange!

Everything we see – apples, oranges, people, cars – everything is somewhere. Our body is always somewhere. Our thoughts or our emotions are always somehow somewhere. Sometimes we feel emotions in our heart; sometimes we feel them in our belly or in our genitals. We feel something is moving and we've got a sense of where it is. Awareness is not anywhere, but it is always where it needs to be. That is why in Tibetan it is sometimes described as *kun kyab*, which means going everywhere or all-pervading: it is not going from one place to another, yet it is always where it needs to be.

Whenever something is occurring it is occurring within the sphere of awareness, and that takes a while to get used to. It is very important to try again and again to get a sense of that, because when we are sitting in the practice we have so many habits and assumptions of positioning ourselves that you can spend a lot of time trying to sort out on the level of subject/object interaction some kind of clarity, but that will always be simply the relative clarity of the observer. The natural clarity – the natural light of the mind – is only revealed to us when we stop being busy running around with our torch trying to illuminate what's going on. *"But if I switch off the torch, won't it get very dark? We are afraid of the dark, so we better keep the torch on, but then you only ever see what you are used to seeing. This is the radical move, which is why we have this idea of relaxing again and again because we can only really relax if we feel safe. Where is the danger?"*

When I was living with my teacher, I had a little room at the back of his house. The room was packed with lots of tin boxes full of paper, and it was very hot, so it had a window with bars on it and I usually kept the shutters open. One day I came back and opened the padlock on the door and went inside, and I saw a snake moving about. I went to see my teacher's wife and asked if she had a long stick as I wanted to get this snake out of the room. My teacher came round and asked me what I was doing, because I was lying on the floor with this stick trying to chivvy the snake out of the corner. I said, *'I am trying to get rid of the snake.'* And he replied, *'The only thing that is dangerous here is you!'* and he walked off! It is like that... it is your own mind which is dangerous. There are many snakes in India but most of them are not at all dangerous. I was making a great song and dance for no reason.

In that way, what is dangerous? Some people find being bored very dangerous; some people find redundancy very dangerous; some people find having nothing to do very dangerous, so they keep themselves busy all the time because it generates a kind of identity: a sense of I know who I am because of what I can do. If we are not doing anything and if, in fact, we have nothing to do, and if further our very doing is the actual problem that can create a kind of anxiety, who will we be if we don't do anything?

But we have to remember that when we are doing things we are like the moon; we are using the light which is not our own. We are purveyors. We are people who set out to transfer, who make available an energy which is not our own. The ego-self is part of the flow of the energy of the world; it's not an entity; it's not a fixed substance; it's not a thing; it's not an essence. It is that releasing of the deeply invested attachment that is the basis of liberation, because then we come into spontaneous free play with circumstances, because there isn't that fixed thing to be protected.

We talk of examples like the mind being like the ocean and experience like the waves on the top, or the mind being like the sky which is always open with all kinds of clouds and rainbows passing through it. When you get a chance to be in nature it is very helpful to look. This morning was very wonderful. The mist came down, the sky was completely grey, and it looked very close to us. Yesterday evening it was open and light blue with little white clouds, and now it's something different; this grey pervasive mistiness was spreading itself through something. Does it displace the openness of the sky or is it being welcomed by the openness of the sky? When the mist comes, does the sky close down, or is the sky always open but we close down because we don't like the grey sky?

You can look for yourself; when you walk through the mist there is no substance to it. The mist and sky have the same nature – they are both empty – one is emptiness with form, and the other is a more formless emptiness. In the same way thoughts arise in the mind but it is like the mist; it fills our mind. We are sitting and we are caught up in something but it's only able to manifest because

there is a space for it to manifest into. The thought fills the space; the space is not lost. The space is non-dual – inseparable from the appearance which is arising in it.

Here we have a glass that is about two-thirds full. When the water was poured into the glass the air which was in the glass was displaced for two-thirds of its volume. Would we agree with that? Was the space displaced? Is space the same as air? Air has a substance to it, but the space has no substance, so the space of the glass is continuous with the presence or absence of whatever content is there whether it's air or water or whisky; whatever it is, it is form in space. This is a central thing because in the realm of duality, which is where we are most of the time, things are either good or bad, yes or no, black or white, and so it's either full or it's empty. If something comes into the space then there is no space because there is just a lot of stuff, and that is how we normally see it. Space itself becomes just another commodity – a thing.

But we have to look for ourselves and see what is the nature of space? We have this famous example from Archimedes and Eureka, when Archimedes gets in the bath and recognises that the mass of his body has displaced its own volume of water as the water flows over the edge of the bath.

A brief biography of Ayu Khandro

We can start to look into this through this text by Ayu Khandro, who died about fifty years ago. There is a short biography which some of you may have read which is a chapter in Tsultrim Allione's book, *Women of Wisdom*. Ayu Khandro had a very interesting life in what we might call Old Tibet, because she spent most of her life in Tibet before it changed. She spent pretty well all her life from her earliest years practising dharma and doing meditation.

She wandered around living in different caves and studying with different teachers, and then in the middle period of her life she decided not to travel anymore. She went back to the area where she had grown up, and the husband who she had divorced in her late teens built a house for her and she stayed in this house for another fifty to sixty years. The house was designed for a Dark Retreat and she lived very happily there doing her meditation practice. Essentially, the focus of the practice was to find the light of the sun: to find the light of the mind which is effulgent rather than reflective.

Namkhai Norbu, who some of you may know, met her when he was young and got some instructions from her including this text. I got this text from Namkhai Norbu, and I translated it with him when I was in his house in Italy a long time ago. The text is very short, but it covers the main aspects of dharma.

Her name is Dorje Paldrönma. This is a Buddhist name that she was given at one point in her life meaning the Indestructible Glorious Lamp. She is described as being a dakini: a female form of wisdom. She gave this very brief heart advice, meaning it is not based on theory or book learning but on the distillation of her life experience.

The Record of the Heart-felt Advice of the Dakini Indestructible Glorious Lamp

It begins with a short verse in her praise and written by Chogyal Namkhai Norbu.

From the primordial purity of infinite hospitality free of artifice

By showing diverse illusory forms she is completely intoxicated

With the elixir of non-duality.

We bow to the supreme dakini, Glorious Lamp.

This means that she has merged her mind in the natural condition that is primordially pure. This is a term that you will find a great deal in dzogchen, and it means from the very beginning there has been no defilement.

Clearly, if you have a piece of white cloth and you get some mud on it, it will become stained. The mud will go into the texture of the cloth and the porous nature of the fibres, and it will be discoloured. If there are certain chemicals in the mud even if you wash it there will be some trace of the stain. This arises because you have two different things: one is the cloth and the other is the earth. When these two come together their oppositional character shows itself in that sign. But as we were just looking at with the glass, space is not in opposition to anything.

When you are sitting in the meditation and what you might call a negative thought or a dull and stupid thought, or an angry or jealous thought, or some kind of bored habitual nonsense arises and you find yourself going around in circles, you might think *'I am so tired of having a mind like this. I don't want this to be me.'* It is almost as if we feel polluted by our own thoughts and a lot of religions take up that point of view. A lot of Christian teaching is in that way, and many general Buddhist teachings talk of the obscurations and how they have to be purified. However, what is this thought damaging? Is it damaging the space of the mind? No. Is the cloud filling the sky damaging the sky? No. It might make life difficult at the airport, because if it's very foggy it slows down the number of planes that can take off and land, so people who are waiting to go on holiday might get pissed off. What is being damaged is their fantasy. *'I want to leave on time! I want to be there! I don't want to be here.'*

Turbulence is being generated because the impact of the fog is having an impact on the person's fantasy. You have two things rubbing together: my fantasy, and what is actually happening, and that is like the cloth and the mud being rubbed together. *'I feel really pissed off! Why does this always happen to me?'* And then you turn to your partner and say, *'I told you we should have left yesterday!'* In that way, we see how we get mixed up in stuff. Who is the one who is being mixed up in it? Our thoughts and our personality. Who we take ourselves to be is a patterning of habitual assumptions, beliefs, and intentions, through which we form ourselves in the moment according to our disposition.

Some people might say, *'Oh well...never mind...lets have another beer,'* so that by the time they get on the plane they are very happy! Other people might get very anxious and keep going to the person at the desk for a flight update:

'We don't know yet.'

'What do you mean you don't know? You are a professional. Can't you phone your manager? Somebody here must know what is going to happen.'

'Well, it's fog. We don't know what will happen with the fog.'

'Why not?! Don't you have some meteorological system in Germany? We are powerless. This is intolerable!'

You can see how agitated people can become.

This is how we manifest our personality. We are like different kinds of instruments tuned in different ways, and we will start to vibrate in the world with different tonal qualities. The level of *kadag*, of

primordial purity, doesn't vibrate at all; it is undefiled, never contaminated, and offers hospitality and is open to everything.

The text is already pointing to awareness being different from consciousness and the personality. This pure state is free of any qualifications, any limitations, and it is inseparable from infinite hospitality. That is how I am translating dharmadhatu, or *chö ying*, which is the space or the infinity within which all phenomena occurs. This space is not something over there, it is our own nature, so when we relax into this open spaciousness, we are able to be more hospitable. We give welcome to everything, but the conscious ego can only give hospitality to a few things. That is why we sometimes find it difficult to understand each other. Somebody is telling you a story from their life, and you are thinking '*What?! How come? Relax...don't worry,*' but for that person this is very real. Each of us has our own unique take on events.

Being free of artifice means there is nothing artificial in it: no activity has been added to it; it is present in its raw form, nothing has been added, nothing has been taken away, it is not edited, it just is. When we read this kind of thing it is very helpful to think, '*Well, am I like that?*' Since I got up this morning what have I been doing with the raw materials of the day? Most of us have done quite a lot of cooking. We've brought our judgments, our interpretations, and our value system on to what is going on. We take the raw materials of the world and incorporate them into the narrative of our familiar sense of who we are, who other people are, and how the world is. When Namkhai Norbu is saying 'without artifice', it is indicating that all that activity is not necessary. There is the possibility of just being open to things as they are.

Then from this state, 'by showing diverse illusory forms', means that Ayu Khandro has a freedom to be different and spontaneous. She can laugh, sing, be happy or be sad. This means it is difficult to get her number because she has a lot of numbers and that's quite nice. If you read her brief biography you can see that when she was young people tried to give her a number. Her parents wanted her to marry, and although she resisted it for some time in the end she married this guy. He was a nice guy and they got on okay, but after a while she said, '*I don't know what I am doing here with you. I think I should be somewhere else.*' He was very sweet and said, '*Yes, I think probably you should,*' so they split in a very nice amicable way.

If you know the story of Machig Labdron, it was a bit more difficult for her. There is this sense of being able to take on the identity that the family and the culture offers me, but is this all there is? There is a kind of choreography in any family and social setting which it is quite difficult to resist. For example, in this village I have often noticed people out brushing the pavement in front of their houses and keeping their gardens very tidy. Clearly, this is important in this village, and if you didn't do that you would get a special kind of identity.

Conformity is very important, it can be like a warm hug; a kind of embrace that lets you think you are normal. People say:

'Hello, how are you?'

'Oh, my children are doing very well.'

'Is that a new car you have?'

'Yes. My husband got promoted, so everybody is very happy'

'There are very good smells coming from your kitchen.'

'It's a recipe my mother gave me.'

These are the ways that people comfort each other by saying their lives are okay. There is nothing wrong with that, except it makes curiosity very difficult, because once you are curious and you start

to look over the hedge beyond the end of the village into the world you encounter new ideas. And if you go to the big city, when you come back you are no longer one of us because you've got some funny ideas. That is the structure of modernity, isn't it? People throw themselves into variety and new possibilities but then there is the anxiety. Who will I be? If I can do everything how can I define myself?

What it is talking about here is that Ayu Khandro has this freedom to show these different forms exactly because there is no home identity. Her identity, or her ground or centre, is not in her personality – her historical structure – but in her open awareness, therefore she can respond to different situations and different people in different ways. And out of this, 'she is completely intoxicated with the elixir of the great joy of non-duality'. That means that she is contented and satisfied; she is filled with the pleasure of being with whatever happens. The great joy of non-duality means whatever comes is okay, it doesn't mean that she has access to some special designer collection of dharma instructions!

The fantasy of 'special' teachers

This is the fantasy that is pervasive in a lot of Tibetan Buddhism: that somewhere there is some teacher who has a special teaching, and if you get this teaching you can be enlightened. When I first got involved in Tibetan Buddhism there was an English guy who had lived in India for a long time and he said, *'You know some lamas have a teaching and if you get this you can be enlightened in one day!'* I asked, *'What is the name of this teacher?'* And he said, *'I don't know, I've just heard about it.'* Everybody's looking for this special thing.

When I met my own teacher, one of the first things he said was that there was no enlightenment injection. That is a different kind of story because special is not the same as ordinary; special and ordinary is a binary opposition: this is the form of duality. Therefore, when we start to see the world in those terms, we are again making a tear. We are saying this is high and good, and this is low and bad, and if only I had more of the rare and precious my life would be completed because the ordinary doesn't really do it. This is very important because it is showing how consciousness is a puppet to the object. If a good experience arises we feel happy, and if what we call a bad experience arises we feel sad. Our life is going up and down like a wave, and in that we are at the centre, so we feel moved around by these winds of circumstance.

When it says that Ayu Khandro is in this non-duality, it doesn't mean that she is eating something that tastes the same all the time like a completely bland diet of cold custard! It means that these movements of joy, sadness, depression and so on, can all be there, but the experiencer is the calm infinite awareness. She is not being tossed around. She can be laughing or crying or sad because somebody tells her a sad story, but in being sad this is a movement of energy arising inseparable from her awareness and she doesn't fall into it, and that is the big difference. Which is why it is an elixir: a kind of magical potion which frees us from that difficulty.

The Tibetan word for elixir is *dutsi*, which means the juice of the demon. When you squeeze the heart of the demon the juice that comes out is the liberating elixir; that is to say, inside all that you take to be negative and frightening there is nothing at all. The liberating elixir is the emptiness of all phenomena, however, we excite ourselves claiming this is wonderful, or we frighten ourselves by saying something is dangerous. Like a cork on the waves we are bobbed up and down.

This is the unique view of dzogchen. Ayu Khandro doesn't have to stop experience. She doesn't have to become a nun and make her life very simple thereby avoiding disturbance, because the disturbance is just passing through, just as all the different kinds of weather pass through the sky

without changing it. She can be open to all these experiences showing these many different aspects, tasting everything, but intoxicated by the non-duality, not by the taste.

The question is: do we move into activity or energy and try to influence the patterning of events, or do we rest in awareness? There is no duality between them. Stillness and movement are not two things, two spheres, or two dimensions. All movement is movement within stillness and is happening in space. We are always going to be moving. We are breathing in and out; we are talking with people; we've got activities which we do at the right time or not; and all of that is happening like a dream within this infinite space.

On the level of manifestation some things are very important. For example, we hope that surgeons take their work very seriously and that they know precisely what to cut and what not to cut; it doesn't mean that what they cut is strongly real, but if the person dies this is so sad. This is the movement of energy and nothing is final within that. On the side of manifestation, how sad that someone has died; on the side of presence, it is just another illusory phenomena. However, if you only go on the side of presence, you can become quite cynical and cold and that would not be helpful. If you are too much on the side of manifestation, you can get wound up all the time and very disturbed. It is integrating these two: holding the non-duality of spaciousness and manifestation. And that is really what it means when it talks about her freedom to show these different forms.

Others impact us

When we talk about getting hooked into situations, somebody will always be hooking us. We are in a world with others and others will always impact us. Our individualistic notion is: *'I am a cosmic egg with my own little world. I know who I am, I know what I like, and I know what I want to happen. I'll just roll my little egg along from birth to death with a nice shell around it! It is really annoying when people are tapping on my shell because from the inside you have to get some glue to repair all the cracks! They keep getting at me!'*

In terms of non-duality, we are part of the same world as other people, and how they are will impact us. The fact that I have this shape means that some people's shapes are easier for me to deal with than other people's shapes. It doesn't mean that the people that I find more difficult are bad people, it's just that my shaping and their shaping don't really go so easily together. When it looks like I am being drawn into something I don't want to be drawn into, that is exactly the point where we 'taste' our own shape. We 'taste' the profile of ourselves: this is what I like; this is what I can cope with; this is where I feel safe, and if that happens I will feel vulnerable. Essentially, what that means is: by being connected to others new experiences arise. *'But I don't want it because it's not what I ordered. I am in charge. It's my life and I can live it on my terms.'* This is a complete fantasy.

We see this clearly with the world economic crisis. They have just had this big meeting of world leaders to think about some way of starting the world economy. China didn't turn up because China is now in a big conflict with Japan. We need China to be involved, but China didn't go because of a few little islands. Why? These few little islands hook the memory of the invasion of Manchuria by the Japanese, and so big stories emerge like a huge summer storm on the basis of two or three tiny islands that nobody is living on; and because of that the Chinese won't sit down to discuss with the other economic powers how the world economy might be corrected. This is how our world operates: what I like or I don't like; who I am going to talk to, and who I'm not going to talk to. We are always bringing these rigidities and fixities of position into play.

From that point of view, as Shantideva says, our enemies are our best friends because they show us where our anger is. Therefore, when other people hook us it's like having an x-ray of our own

sclerosis or rigidity that inhibits us from some contact or rapprochement with the other person. That is very tricky because essentially the only one who can do that is our awareness; it's very hard for the ego to be open and relaxed. There is a limit to what the ego can do, and ego abuse arises when you ask the ego to be more mature than it can be. But we are lucky that we come in contact with the teachings that show us how to relax our fixation on the ego identity, and become more aware of this spacious awareness.

The text starts,

Arrive at the clarity that all that constitutes the realms of becoming, known as samsara, and the peace of liberation, known as nirvana, has just one root – one's own mind.

Ayu Khandro begins by saying that we need to gain the clarity of the direct experience that whatever occurs for us – both the realms of becoming (samsara), and the state of peace or liberation (nirvana) – have just one root, our own mind.

There is only experience: our mind is our world

This is setting out a view which is non-materialist; it is not saying that the world is constituted of matter which exists independently of ourselves, because essentially, we have no way of knowing if that is true or not. What it is saying is that whatever you encounter is an experience.

For example, if you eat an apple you can say the apple is sweet or sharp. There is the immediate experience of your mouth biting into the apple and then you come to some conclusion about the taste of the apple. You might say '*This apple is sweet.*' But 'this apple is sweet' sounds like a statement: a judgement which is out there, but it's revealed to you as an experience. If you just say it to yourself that's maybe a little bit lonely, so hopefully you are saying it to somebody else! They are having an experience of you saying 'this apple is sweet,' and you're having the experience of hearing yourself saying 'this apple is sweet,' and having the sense of this thought running through your mind. After you have said it, it's gone. The fact that you said the apple was sweet doesn't establish anything; the apple was sweet before you tasted it. Whether it is actually sweet or not we don't know, as you may have a mouth that's very sensitive to sugar so not everyone may agree with you.

There is only experience. This building is revealed to us as experience. We don't have access to anything outside of experience and that is very alarming. We have experiences of maps. Many of us here have done a lot of academic study, so we have a lot of information inside us. We can maybe remember the main contents of many different academic papers, philosophical arguments and so on, but all of that is only revealed in the moment of our experience; you suddenly remember something. What we call remembering is something arising with a flavour of familiarity, the possibility of embedding it into a storyline, and then something else is arising. All of samsara is only an experience.

If we remember somebody living where we have come from, maybe they are sick or healthy, they exist for us as an experience. We might say, '*Yes, but I know they are a separate person. I know that they live their own life. If I say they are just my experience surely that's completely omnipotent or some kind of mad fantasy that the whole world is just something conjured up by my mind.*' This means we have to be careful what we mean. When it says 'your own mind' it doesn't mean the structure of your ego, your memories, or your personality; it means the mind itself. The mind itself is open without any limit. Your mind and the mind of other people are exactly the same. The contents

of your mind are different, but the mind itself is always the same; it is simply the space of clarity – the space of awareness.

What you get in this world is what you experience. What could there be that is not our experience? This is something for you to reflect on and really see if this is true or not, because what Ayu Khandro is doing is setting out a series of basic propositions. It is not that you have to believe them – it is not a dogmatic assertion – it is just a kind of suggestion with her saying, *'I think this is how it is. You need to check it out to get the clarity that that is actually the case.'*

For example, if you have a flat, you have a key to the door so you can say this is your flat. But if you are renting the flat there is also the landlord who says it is his flat, therefore both of you have the flat but in different ways. If you stop paying the rent, you won't have your flat anymore. Your flat is dependent on a particular set of circumstances all of which you experience. You might get the offer of a good job or you might want to stay with a friend who lives elsewhere, and so you leave your flat to go to another place. What was an invested space – an environment full of significance – is divested of that feeling and you put it into something else. The lovely homely quality of your flat was not something in the flat, it was in your relation with the flat; it existed as an experience.

You can check for yourself by looking again and again: what do I encounter which is not an experience? One and one is two. If everybody experiences one and one is two then we might say that that is a fact. When we say that is a fact, that is an experience, and if we say it's not a fact then that is another kind of experience; it exists in the mind, it is not outside the mind. This is very important because it means from Ayu Khandro's point of view, from the view of dzogchen, you can't take anything out of your mind. You can certainly at my age start to forget things, so things can go out of your mind, but you can't take things out of the mind itself.

The ego-mind is a fragile construct held in place by all sorts of things including the blood supply to the brain and so on, and that is temporary and transitory. But the mind itself, in experiencing all that is occurring is offering infinite hospitality, which means that things are revealed within the mind and whether things go anywhere else we wouldn't know. Our mind is our world. Therefore, speculating about or having hypotheses about things somewhere else and outside the mind is simply to develop more thoughts which are inside the mind. You cannot escape the mind. We have no access to anything outside of our mind.

You can look something up in a book. You open the book and see that is what is in the book, and it is in your head. You might have a very poor movement from short-term to long-term memory and as soon as you close the book you think, *'Oh shit! What was that?'* But when you open the book again it is in your experience, and then if you put it in your memory you can call up that experience without looking at the book. However, the fact that you have learnt this piece of truth is existing only in the moment when it arises for you.

That is really the point Ayu Khandro is making and it is central to the issue of dzogchen, because in terms of duality we normally experience: I am a thing. I am the inhabitant of this body and my body is in the world. I move towards the world with this body. My body is made up of bones, muscles, blood, organs and so on, and these are things inside me. I have memories, and the world is full of things which I like or dislike. In that way of experiencing, we are saying my body endures even when I am not experiencing it: I have a continuous body which I may or may not attend to. That is our normal, materialistic, dualistic way of thinking.

We wake up in the morning, and we think, *'Oh! Here I am again. Not dead yet. Back in the same old body,'* but that is a thought. Where is the thought? In the mind. You have come to the conclusion that you have the same body but that is a narrative. You believe the narrative and you feel okay. You think *'Whoa! Somebody is adding kilos while I'm sleeping! This is terrible!'* That is another kind of experience!

This is an invitation to really enquire everywhere you go. If you are walking outside and you see an old tree, you can think, *'Hey! This tree has probably been here before I was born. It is big and strong. This tree was here last time I was here.'* You can have many ideas that would try to convince you that the tree is an independent entity existing according to its own dynamic and it is not just in my mind. How do we know that? That is a belief. How can we prove it? Well... what I am going to do is to go home and I am going to phone my friend and ask him if he could kindly look out of the window to confirm if the tree is still in the garden. I am not there, but the tree is still in the garden. However, you are phoning your friend to ask about the tree. Why are you asking about the tree? Because it is in your mind. If it wasn't in your mind you wouldn't phone your friend, and if you didn't phone your friend he wouldn't go and look out of the window and say it is still there. When he looks out the window and he sees the tree, he sees the tree in his mind.

Nothing is outside the mind. Keep checking this, because if you get the definite taste of that it shifts the whole world; it means that there is only experience, and if there is only experience it means either you are here or you are not here. If you are in distraction you are in a kind of eddy: these little whirlpool effects in the water that you sometimes see in a flowing river. Sometimes you get these eddies at the side of the river where there is a small enclosure and the water just goes around and around. You see a whirling leaf that is caught in that eddy. The river is flowing but the leaf is now trapped.

We experience this in the meditation: we are here with everything and then we are just going around like a little leaf. Something happens and we are back in the stream, and then again we are turning around. What is being said here is: whether you are in the stream or turning around this is all experience. Whether you are free of all the phenomena of nirvana or all the phenomena of spaciousness, whether you are in that state or whether you are trapped in some little loop, this is the experience of the mind; it is your own mind, and your own mind means your awareness.

She now goes on to say, how do we find out what that mind is? She says,

If this mind is examined it is found to be without any inherent existence.

The Tibetan term is *denpar ma drubpa* which means it is not validated as having its own truth; it is not true in itself.

Meaning is contextual

If you look at the content of your mind moment by moment, it changes: sensations, colours, memories, feelings. If you try to 'hold' one of these by saying 'this is my mind', 'this is how I am', you find it's not true.

This is why it is sometimes interesting to read biographies and autobiographies, because you see that there is a proposition about someone's life and then there are contradictions. If we are reading a novel, we usually prefer novels where we have a rounded character. That is to say a character who has different aspects which have some slight contradictions, so that you might be surprised that the character who behaved in one way in Chapter One does something different in Chapter Two. This is

how we are: complex and multifaceted. All of these possibilities indicate that the mind cannot be defined as something. If you are many different things, you are not just one thing; you can't get to the truth of it.

Meanings are contextual, and it is very important whether these are outer or inner meanings. In the Bible it says: *and the swords shall be hammered down to make ploughshares for ploughing up the fields*. When somebody has a sword in their hand and they want to kill you, you are horrified, because if you don't have a weapon what can you do? They are going to kill you. The sword has a complete facticity to it, but you can heat it up and hammer it down and make something for ploughing up the earth to plant crops and to feed people. The terrifying reality of the sword was contextual. Due to causes and circumstances this metal has been put together as a sword and now it is something benign. The sword-ness of the sword was not inside the sword, it was according to circumstances.

As an outer example, during the War in Britain, many houses had very nice cast iron fences outside that were cut down and melted to make bombs. In peacetime the metal is used for one thing and in wartime it's used for another. Therefore, when you look at the beautiful shape of the cast iron fence, it is only like that because of circumstances; it is not truly what it appears to be; it appears to be what it appears to be, but that appearance could change because it has no essence.

It is the same with our mind. If you say something about yourself like 'I am a bit lazy,' you are probably not always lazy. You are a bit lazy some of the time. When you say, 'I am a bit lazy' it's both true and false. It is true because it is true some of the time and it's false because it is not the whole story. This mind cannot be established as having a particular value or shape, because sometimes we are angry, sometimes we are sad, and these are experiences arising for us. There is no stability in outer or inner phenomena.

Then she says,

There is not one single sentient being anywhere whose ground or basis is not the buddha nature or the heart of all the sugatas.

[You can see that there is a little numbering system which at the end of the text provides a guide to the topics. Namkhai Norbu organised it in that way for me when we were looking at it.]

Whenever we see a sentient being, whether it's a fly, or a cow, or a human being, or whether we think of the beings in the hell or the god realms; the real basis of any kind of living creature which has a mind is the buddha nature and their contingent basis is karma. Due to causes and circumstances we are born as a human being. Due to other causes and circumstances our lives may open. We might be happy, we might get a good career, we might have a loving situation, or our lives can become very small. We can become delinquent, crazy, blown off course, and this is due to the patterning of energy that arises. But whether our life is good, as is were, or bad, happy, or sad, the basis is always the same: it is the buddha nature. The mind itself is always open and uncontaminated, so that goes back to the primordial purity. What arises in the mind is arising in patterns of mutual influence.

What is important here is that it puts into question our judgment. You might say, '*Oh, she's not a very nice person.*' Maybe for you, under certain circumstances, that person is not very nice, but there are other people who like that person. What you are really describing is how your energy stands in relation to their energy, or in ordinary language how you experience them. Someone else has a

different experience and so from that they formulate a different conclusion. They say '*I don't know why you don't like her. I think she is fine,*' and that indicates that there is no essence in the shaping of people's personality. We show different aspects to different people at different times, and that means that what we show is not our true nature – not our ground or basis. The basis is natural awareness which has no content of its own.

Therefore, when we enter into judgment about people, all we are talking about is patterns of energy. The basic potential of the ground can show good and bad. Good people become bad; bad people become good. Friends become enemies; enemies become friends. Sometimes you really enjoy talking to someone, and then after a while you might think '*I can't bear to see them anymore.*' Why is that? It is because our life is held in place by these movements of energy.

I am sure many of us have had some particular kind of food we've liked and we want to eat again and again and then you don't want to eat it anymore. Isn't that strange? Something which has great value and seemed to express something of yourself you are now no longer interested in, and that is saying that we are undefinable. When we meet human beings, we meet a potential which is manifesting according to certain patterns and we, in our patterning, are co-determinants of what will arise between us, therefore we cannot enter into a judgment.

When people hate themselves and they feel that they can't bear living and they want to kill themselves, the tragedy of that is they are taking an over-concrete reading of a temporarily difficult situation. From the outside we might be able to see many different exits that the person could have, but inside the blinkers of the harsh judgment on themselves this life becomes convergent with death; it's all coming into one point.

What makes our lives function well is when we have a divergent awareness, like it says in the first part: she shows many different forms. Having that freedom to express ourselves in different ways keeps us alive. If you go into one narrow point, in English we say, if you nail your colours to the mast by saying '*I am this,*' then you are a hostage to fortune because events can change and you are trapped because you have said, '*No, this is me.*' And that is where a lot of psychiatric disturbance arises. This point is saying: don't enter into judgment about people. Don't make final conclusions about yourself, about others, or about the world. Stay relaxed and present and work with circumstances, because circumstances are always dynamic, but conclusions can hide the dynamic nature of the situation.

For example, even if somebody gets a terminal illness and the prediction is that they are going to die, there are many different ways to die. You can go with hope, you can die in fear, you can die in rage, or you can die in an abject, collapsed situation; there are always possibilities. We can manifest different aspects of ourselves. But once we look into a particular reading or conclusion it is as if everything gets sealed, and if we become sealed other people will start to give a fixed response to us. This is something we can take into the meditation and observe: how do I freeze my mind? How do I turn water into ice? How do I make these fixed shapes and what is the basis of that? And how can I warm myself so that the ice melts, and I can move back with more pliability and fluidity?

Getting caught up in karmic winds

She goes on to say:

However, due to the circumstances of the movement of the karmic wind arising from mental activity generated by ignorance, these beings are all enveloped by the net of dualism, and so have to wander endlessly in endless samsara.

Everybody has this potential, because our own nature, the ground out of which all our experience arises, is natural clarity. Yet due to the winds of karma and to the particular patterning and distortions of our lives, we waste time. We have some reading of the world which seems very meaningful for a while, and then it's not.

For example, I went to school in Scotland in the fifties and sixties, and it was a time of quite a lot of conservatism after the war, as well as a lot of rules and regulations and discipline. So when I became a teenager in the mid to late sixties I started to think about freedom. I became very interested in politics and I was quite involved with some anarchist groups. I became very interested and spent quite a lot of time using different kinds of substances to make my head go funny! When I look back now I wonder: what was that all about? Here were some years of my life caught up in activities which within its particular frame was meaningful, but later when I came more in contact with the dharma, I thought, *'Oh... that was sad...'*

That is what a karmic wind means: something catches us. It could be something which is in the Zeitgeist like a big wind which is catching many people, or it could be a wind just from our family, or if you are an immigrant from a racial group, or it could also be a wind of your gender. Lots of women got caught up in feminist struggles and that became very important, but in terms of the patterning of energy it doesn't help you to see more about yourself. These karmic winds don't necessarily look bad or negative, they can also look positive, and yet they still captivate us, and so we spend our time whirling in one or another.

It is not to say that any activity is innately or truly bad because everything has the nature of emptiness, but it is just that our time alive is very short. If we are not focusing on recognising our own nature and opening to being in the world with others, then we are caught in some kind of labyrinth or tunnel. And even if every step of the way in that tunnel is virtuous and we are helping people, if we are not recognising *who* is the one who is helping people, and *who* are the ones who I am helping, then the dualistic enclosure carries a friction which generates further karmic winds. That would be the particular Buddhist understanding of this, therefore recognising the power of these karmic winds increases our desire for wisdom and compassion.

Wisdom is to recognise directly in ourselves the spaciousness of our mind through which the winds are blowing; it is not about trying to stop the winds, but just giving space so they don't cause any harm. If the wind is blowing at a hundred and fifty kilometres an hour, three miles up, it is not very dangerous to us, but if the wind is blowing at the same speed on the ground, it is quite dangerous and can take the tiles off roofs and blow cars over. If you have space, the movements of these winds are not such a problem. How we get caught is because we take on a shape. So, for me, as a teenager in a school which focused a lot on exams and regulations, the idea that you could have freedom from structures of control and domination was very nice. My shape got caught by another kind of shape. If I hadn't had that orientation, maybe I wouldn't have been so bothered. But this is what happens in life: a wind strikes us or crumbles us according to our particular shape, and we seek to find a justification for our shape.

For example, I used to read a lot of Herbert Marcuse, a German philosopher from the Frankfurt School, who set out a whole rationale for the limitations of petit bourgeois culture, so that became a very good reason to occupy the university and write slogans on the wall and so on. You begin to see how all these different factors come together. I remember knowing people who decided that injecting heroin was a revolutionary act. We think that this is madness, but inside particular distorted frames of reference it can seem okay.

When you think of world politics, and you see poverty in Africa, so many of these situations are the effect of karmic winds. Due to causes and circumstances we are born in places, and these winds start blowing. Imagine living in the hellish nightmare that has taken over Syria at the present time. There seems to be no limit to the bad things that can happen; nobody seems able to stop it, so it will run for a while and then it will end. Many years ago, the same thing happened in Lebanon. There were all these PLO refugee camps – the Shatila and so on – that were bombarded again and again with innocent people being blown to pieces, and the same happened in the Srebrenica massacre. As human beings we watch disasters happening, and somehow bad things continue to happen. We think we must stop it, but nobody really knows how; it goes on and then it stops; things get better and then they get worse.

From the Buddhist point of view, these are the karmic winds. The fantasy is that if only we were more rational we would be able to plan things and make them happen. We have the United Nations and therefore we should all be able to sit down together and come to a conclusion. However, Russia and China linked together to block intervention in Syria, because Russia supplies weapons to Syria and has a proximate border with Iran, and Iran is a big backer of Syria. Iran is an enemy of America, Russia, and China, and would like America to be undermined. Ayu Khandro is really talking about dependent co-origination – turbulent winds. You can see this every day: read a newspaper, look at the television, see people in the street. This is not a mystical teaching, it is describing exactly the impotence of the ego to correct the situation.

As we have looked before, it is like the story of the Sorcerer's Apprentice. When the magician goes to the market, he says to his apprentice *'I want you to tidy things up,'* so he gives him a broom and a bucket. And after the master has gone the apprentice thinks, *'What is the point of me studying magic if I have to do this all by myself?'* So he opens The Book of Spells and he finds the spell to clean the house. He recites the spell and the bucket gets up. Everything moves around in a turbulent fashion. The broom goes faster and faster, and the glasses and crockery break, because he doesn't know how to stop the spell. This is what happens in the karmic world; we are very good at starting things like invading Afghanistan, but we don't how to stop it.

From the point of view of dzogchen, don't start things if you can't stop them. Why do you feel you have to do something? It is about rectifying the tilt towards activity and engagement which is based on the fantasy of power.

Then she says

The actual situation of the mind, the mind itself, [meaning awareness, not the content of the mind] or the truth (sNying Po) of the primordial ground or basis, bodhicitta, the mind as it is, [these are all terms which can refer just to our basic presence – our awareness] is from the very beginning uninfluenced in any way by the causal force of discriminating between good and bad, and thus is self-existing.

What she is saying here is that your own awareness is present whatever is occurring. When we sit in the meditation, but also in our daily life, we enter into judgment. We say *'I don't want this. I do want that.'* She is saying this movement of liking or not liking does not contaminate or influence or limit the pure buddha nature at all. Whatever is occurring is not being in any way harmed by what is going on, therefore, she says the mind itself is self-existing – it is not a construct.

This setting that we are in here, Kamalashila, is clearly dependent on causes and conditions because it requires maintenance. The institute has employed a gardener, and this requires money. You have

to put down grass seed and redo the gravel path. You have to redecorate the wood because of the wear and tear with the weather. Kamalashila needs money to continue; it is not self-existing. Our bodies need food and drink. We wear different clothes in summer and winter because we need to maintain a balance in our body temperature that is not self-existing, it is brought about by the manipulation of factors in our experiential field. Our personality is like that as well; our feelings of happiness, sadness, tiredness and so on.

Space does not stand in relation to anything

But awareness itself is different: it is not created by any cause, it doesn't have a form which can be attacked by other factors, and is not standing in relation to anything else. As an example, if you go back to the notion of space, in ordinary language we could say that the space of this room is interrupted by the pillars. The pillars support the ceiling and they divide the room. An ordinary way of thinking about it is: the space is interrupted and shaped by the presence of the pillars, therefore it is as if the space has been damaged. *'Oh, I wish they had found a way not to have these pillars and then we would have a beautiful open perspective.'* You could say that the pillars are interrupting and spoiling the space.

Over time architects have discovered all sorts of ways of supporting ceilings over a large area without the need for pillars, because we like the sense of an unimpeded expansion of space. However, this is our aesthetic; this is our feeling about space that says the space is interrupted. Our view, the trajectory of our gaze may be interrupted, but the space itself is not interrupted. Space does not stand in relation to the pillars, volume stands in relation to the pillars, and this is a description of the co-modification of space; but space eludes or escapes all co-modification.

Water can be bought and sold. Fire – the heat element – is very important. A lot of the politics of Europe are about gas and oil supplies, and with air we have wind farms going up everywhere. Some people who live in the country hate wind farms and say that nature is being despoiled. Earth can clearly be shaped and moved around, and we can think that some shapes are beautiful and other shapes are ugly. Water can dissolve earth and put out fire, and wind can increase fire very rapidly, so these elements moving together cause shifts in patterns and conditions; but space is not standing in relation to them.

When Ayu Khandro says the mind is self-existing she is pointing to the fact that the mind is inseparable from space. The image of space is one of the helpful ways of getting a sense of the mind; it doesn't rest on anything, and it's not dependent on anything.

It might be useful just to take a few minutes and talk with a neighbour to see if what we have just been looking at makes sense. Does this seem to be something meaningful in terms of your experience of life?

[sharing]

Our bodies in meditation

I will say something here about the body, because the body is often a big issue in meditation. On one level you can say we each have a body. We can like our bodies or not, and it can sometimes be seen to be a possession, sometimes a burden, and other times an advantage. It can appear to be our prime reference point: the stable point from which we make journeys out into the world and then back again.

But this body is also our ego-body, and the thing about the ego is that it is always naked and hungry. And because it is naked it seeks to have a covering, and because it's hungry it seeks to have some food. The ego wants to give itself a place of protection and the body is a very good home for the ego. We hang on to the sense of the body as something fixed because it seems to give us a basis for our identity.

When we sit in the meditation there are streams of experience occurring and yet there is often a kind of meta-view – a sort of overarching view – that gives us the sense of 'I am my body and this is where I am' and that can occur through a particular sensation. You might feel that you are located in your head or your shoulders or your heart or anywhere else, but there is something that says 'this is where I am.'

Then we have the question: what is this body? If we follow what we were looking at this morning, the body is a flow of experience. We have sensations, emotions and interpretations arising and passing. We might have anxieties about our body or some sense of vitality, all of which is in movement.

When we are sitting in the practice the body is part of the field of experience, but the ego's tendency is to pull the body back as something separated from the field of experience which has a special status. And this is the point where 'I' or 'self' separates from the world: the body is often the point of duality. Because clearly we can each stand up and walk about, and if we are sitting it is as though we are part of this, but when we get up and move out we are part of something else. The environment around us seems to change; what we see and feel and taste changes, but we seem to have this constant point of reference which is our body.

However, when you actually attend to your body as it reveals itself, you find it's always changing. The body as immediacy – the body as what is revealed in our embodiment – is a stream of experience. The body of abstraction, the body of the story we tell about ourselves. I weigh this much, I look like this, I like this and I don't like that. Is this who I am? These stories seem to continue through time, and it is these stories which we can enter into relationship with when we are sitting in the meditation. What is going on is explained to us through the development of another story, often on the basis of, *'Well, I'm still sitting here. Here I am. Everything else may be moving around but I am here,'* and that creates a kind of separation from the field.

The very assertion, 'I am still here,' is of course just another temporary arising, but it's very tempting and tasty because it's providing a little nest in which we can hide for the moment. Again and again, we have to look at who is the one hiding in the thought? The one who is hiding in the thought and the one who can be present with the thought are not two separate phenomena. When our intelligence or our awareness or our presence merges, it takes the form of consciousness. When our attention or awareness or presence relaxes and opens it is the form of rigpa or the primordial nature. They are not two different things.

Consciousness in the Tibetan language is called *nam par she pa*. *She pa* means knowing with a form; knowing something. When we know ourselves as something then we can move around all our bits of information and construct all kinds of shapes and stories. But this *she pa* itself, prior to taking on a shape, knowing prior to knowing something, and knowing itself as something, is just an open revelatory awareness like the mirror. The mirror just shows, and what it shows is in the mirror but is not the mirror. Therefore, the forms that we show – what we take ourselves to be – doesn't define who we are, but if we identify with them, they do define us.

Again, if you say 'I'm tired,' you can say that with a kind of belief, identification, and emotional investment and it becomes who you are; so there you have a consciousness that tells you I know that I am tired. The consciousness has formed itself into that shape of tiredness. But if we stay present with the arising of the feeling of 'I am tired,' it illuminates the passing and sensation of tiredness without itself appearing tired, because awareness is not tired. If you fuse into the thought, then you feel tired and it is exactly the same with the body.

The body is not outside of our awareness, but neither is it something locked inside and cut off from awareness. The body is revealed as part of the flow of experience which is inside our awareness. The body is not a thing; it's a movement of experience. And we know this because generally if the flow of experience is quite nice, we get on with our lives, and then if we wake up and feel a bit sick, we might talk to a friend about it and think we better go and see a doctor. We take the body to the doctor who does some tests and he either says, '*Oh, nothing to worry about,*' or '*I think you need more tests. I'll book you into the hospital.*' Who has been booked into the hospital? You have been booked in with your body, and you now have a body, you have to worry about.

'Doctor, what is going to happen?

'Well, we are going to do this little thing. Don't you worry about it.'

'It's alright for you to say don't worry about it; it's my body not your body. They are going to cut me open! I am me! Leave me alone!'

You get that love/hate relationship with a person who might heal you, but the way they heal you is to harm you. How can that be possible? From this day on all surgeons will be given rubber knives! It would be nice that, wouldn't it? But it wouldn't do much good because you have to cut in. What is the surgeon cutting into? Me – my body. Luckily they put this little thing over your face and you are not there when they are cutting into you, so the surgeon is always cutting someone else which is very kind, and after the operation you come back. Therefore, really investigating your relationship with your body is very helpful.

We have many different bodies. We have a narrative body: the body of stories and memories that we construct. We have an anatomical body. You might have a body of exercise or yoga where you become very aware of balance and line. You might have a body that you worry about if you have a tendency to anorexia or binge eating. You might mark your body by cutting it as a way of using it as a means of bringing a psychological transformation. We have many kinds of bodies, and that is a relation between the subject and the body as object. But the body as experience is always flowing.

Be present with the one who is always already present

Therefore, when we sit in the practice, if we start to concretise our place of focus around a fixed point of the body, we can be sure that this means we are in a dualistic consciousness and its object relationship. When that happens, don't try to change it, simply be present in that point of identification. Being present doesn't mean that you take yourself to be there. Language is a little tricky. We become present by being present with the one who is always present. The ego self or consciousness cannot be present. The ego consciousness is always busy doing something: it is interpreting, making sense of, and elaborating stories.

The one who is present is always already present. You can't make yourself present. What you can do is stop being absent. What is the process of being absent? The process of attachment. That is why it says in the Buddhist texts this base of suffering in samsara is ignorance and attachment. When we have ignorance of this relaxed open state, all we have got is the possibility of getting involved in something. This attachment is a busyness which in its momentum and movement hides the relaxed

natural state. Being present is revealed to us when we stop being busy. What we observe when we sit in the meditation is just how busy we are chasing this and that, and pushing away and falling into things. Without changing that allows the busyness to be busy, and you can be present with the busyness.

If you imagine you are holding a mirror in your hand and you move it rapidly around the room, many reflections are going to be moving through the mirror. The mirror is not busy, but the reflections are very busy. The mirror is showing reflection after reflection, but the mirror is not getting tired, because the mirror is not really doing anything. It is the potentiality of the mirror to show these things, which is like the potentiality of the mind to show many different things, but the potentiality itself doesn't change. The becoming – the change and the being – the staying or stillness – are inseparable. What is required is not to enter into the busyness. You don't have to stop it or change it, and there, at that point, the movement and the stillness are inseparable.

Stillness is not something away from movement; it is not that all thoughts and feelings stop and suddenly there is this ocean of calm. The very movement itself is the energy of the stillness, just as the reflection is the energy of the mirror.

This is why awakening to non-duality is difficult because we want to go from one thing to another. *'I don't want any more bad things. I have had it up to here, so give me this new, wonderful, bright shiny thing. Where do I get it? I am willing to work very hard. What do I do?'* Don't do anything. It is quite difficult because there are so many habits of involvement and agency which seem very important. The more you can loosen the immediate intoxication or immersion in the habitual interpretation of the body, the more you start to experience space. This doesn't mean that the body is a bad thing to be forgotten about; the body as the immediacy of energy doesn't cause any problem. The body as the basis of stories, narratives, hopes, memories, and desires, starts to create problems because it is always the weaving of the duality of consciousness and its object. This part that we have just finished looking at is describing the base, or the source, or the ground.

Obscurations self-liberate on this path

Ayu Khandro continues by using a traditional structure that you see in many texts where she talks about the base, the path, the fruit or the result. She is saying that the base is self-existing – this open dimension of awareness – and now she is going to talk about the path.

It is free of the meditation belonging to the path and thus it is self-liberating.

On the path to enlightenment we must go from ignorance to enlightenment, so we have to purify ourselves. For example, on the wall there is a painting of Dorje Sempa. We can say we have many obscurations and difficulties and we get confused. If we meditate on Dorje Sempa and use his generous power of purification again and again by reciting the long and short mantras, obscurations can be purified. By doing this practice you go from being impure to being pure, and that is the path. But what Ayu Khandro is saying about dzogchen is it is free of this kind of meditation. Why? Because the obscurations themselves are self-liberating.

When you look at your mind, even when you encounter something about yourself that you don't like, maybe some jealousy or laziness; whatever the qualities in yourself that make you tired and a bit dis-spirited, if you just watch the arising of these qualities, they pass. Nobody is jealous or lazy all the time, but when that arises you don't like it and you want to get rid of it. If you stay calm it will go by itself; if you try to push it away your very energy of pushing it away will revitalise it and it will come back. This is the difference between the active paths of meditation which are about trying to

do something and which are essentially concerned with transforming energy, and the path which is inseparable from the ground, which is dzogchen.

In dzogchen we start with the ground, we stay with the ground, and the ground is the path. The open nature of awareness is itself the only path you need because you are not going anywhere; everything is happening in that place. Whereas if you try to go someplace else, you don't actually go anywhere at all, what you have is a movement of energy interacting with energy.

In tantra there are many different deities and forms. You can have statues of twenty-one Taras, and each Tara has her own mantra. You can even get a different initiation for each Tara, because each Tara can do different things: different mudras; different shapes with her hands; she holds different things and she has different colours. In the tradition, this is what we would call Tara as Barbie. Some of you may have been lucky enough to have a Barbie doll collection: Barbie goes to Hollywood; Barbie in high heels; Barbie on the Beach. This is very nice. If you only had one Barbie you would need to have a very active imagination to think of all the things she might do, but when you dress your different Barbies... *'I think Ken is coming over tonight...'* In that way you can rehearse the whole of adult existence! Different Barbies do different things. Different Taras do different things and essentially these are forms of energy. If you are wanting to change energy around then the path of tantra is very useful, as it is concerned with moving energy.

You have wrathful deities and they are concerned with the transformation of anger. If you have a lot of anger; by doing a practice where you have very strong mantras and you visualise yourself surrounded by flames, you imagine that you are destroying the whole world and everything is in flames. You realise you can be incredibly angry and it's helpful, therefore you don't need to be afraid of your anger. But with a clear intention you mobilise the energy of the anger and it becomes virtuous. Anger, jealousy, and desire become compassion. Everything can be compassion.

That is to say, the five poisons stupidity, anger, desire, jealousy, and pride and all their little subdivisions, are all forms of energy. They are all relational; they are dualistic because we are angry with someone. We desire someone or something, or we are jealous about some interpersonal situation. We feel pride in relation to other people. Our stupidity is the sense of being strongly real in a world of other strongly real things. The five poisons are all dualistic. In fact, they are dialogic, because they are based on an inter-relational conversation based on interpretation.

When you pray to Padmasambhava or Tara or Chenrezig, you are seeking to alter the forms of energy that you have. If you find yourself again and again going into a place where you are not feeling very friendly or open to other people, or you are spilling out all over the place and you can't stop talking, or you get very shy and anxious and you are frightened about what other people think about you; all these neurotic positions are limited vibrations of energy. Therefore, the practice of tantra is very useful because you can free your energy and you become more able to do different things.

Energy flows from enlightenment

The essential point is that you recognise energy is energy. Energy doesn't get enlightened; energy flows from enlightenment. You can shift your energy forever, but it won't open the space of the mind. The energy that flows is always within the space of the mind, but it helps if you see the mind itself. Therefore, the movement of energy is a little bit problematic.

In Tibet it was very useful, because if you lost your cow you could go to the lama and he would do a *mo*, a prediction, to try to find the cow. He might dream about it or look in teacups or use his mala.

There are many different ways to get some kind of divination; looking into a mirror, someone breathing on it and so on. You can also have special mantras to help you find lost animals or a mantra for making beer to make sure it doesn't go sour. You can have a mantra for everything because when the beer is going sour that is a particular forming of energy, and if you bring another energy into that – an intervention – it shifts that energy and causes it to be okay.

This is a very good way of being busy. Do any of you need more busyness? Nowadays, you can just go and buy another can of beer. We have a consumerist culture. We are not so tied down as Tibetans, so we don't need these kind of mantras so much. The principle is that if you want to shift energy you can do that, but only if you recognise that energy is energy.

The basis of tantra is emptiness. If you think things are strongly real you can't shift them by energy, because it only works when you really see subject and object are vibratory movements inside the same field which is like a dream. In terms of just this one sentence, Ayu Khandro is saying don't enter into trying to change the forms of energy; be present with each thing as it arises and it will go free by itself; it will change, transform and vanish. This means trusting the Buddha's teaching on impermanence, and it also means whatever comes, comes.

This goes back to the question of whether this is just a passive situation, and in terms of the meditation it is. When my mind is full of nasty thoughts, what is this doing? If I have my self-construct, I feel harmed by this – I wish I wasn't like this – and secondarily to that I might feel shamed. I don't want other people to know that I have thoughts like this. Something horrible is happening and it is me that is the horrible thing, so what will I do? You can see how there is a pressure to cover it up; push it away; pretend it's not happening; try to do something better; remember a prayer or mantra; or try to think of something else. From the dzogchen point of view, just stay with that thought. If you stay with the thought, the thought goes, and what that does is start to dissolve the glue that binds your sense of self with the thought.

Let's say you get filled with a thought of envy: if only I was like that. An envious thought is arising and passing. The content of the envious thought is: *'I want that. Why am I not like that? It's not fair that they get that,'* and then it goes. As it goes it takes itself with it; it sweeps away the mess if you don't glue onto it, but if you glue onto it, it will come back around the corner and hug you! This means seeing that the thought is just a thought. Even though it says it's about you, it is not necessarily about you.

For example, in the tantric tradition when you get an initiation, you get a nice new name and you put this new name on your letterbox. The following morning the karmic postman arrives with a letter for James Low. *Here lives Dorje Boogie Woogie. 'Doesn't James Low live here anymore? I haven't seen any letters before for Dorje Boogie Woogie.'* When these letters come to you and your karmic traces arrive, even though the postman says you have to sign for it, you say *'No hands! The Taliban got me. What can I do?'* If you don't accept it, it goes through. The letter comes to you and you have to pick it up and open it. Who is the one who opens the letter? It is our ego self. This is what attachment is: we want to be involved even if it's unpleasant. This is why although this path of self-liberation sounds nice, it means you don't have to do anything. You do not have to open the letter. *'But it's got my name on it.'* It's a very twitchy feeling, isn't it? That is really what self-liberation is.

Ayu Khandro goes on to say

It is free of the accomplishments of the result and thus is complete from the very beginning.

Clearly if you are developing or building something, something is achieved. When people are building a house, the first thing they do is dig the foundations – the base – then they build the walls and put on the roof and start to improve it inside. Now you have done all your building and accomplished buddhahood – here is the result. The result is sometimes referred to as the three kayas, and everyone says, '*Well done! Bravo! Welcome.*'

The three kayas are the energy of the ground and are available everywhere; it is not a great achievement to get them. The qualities of enlightenment are there from the very beginning. It is not that we are having to accomplish and create the kayas, but they are revealed by the deconstruction of the artifice which hides them. This is a radically different view from most dharma paths.

Most dharma paths are saying we start in a one down position: we are the people with faults, limitations, and problems. We are wandering in samsara and we need to get to the Holy Land. We need to get more qualities to buy the ticket to get inside and then we will be different from now. Dzogchen says there is nothing to get, because the main thing that you need is awareness which is always here. The result is not something that you get by adding on, by developing, or by doing something different. The result is to see what is always there. Therefore, the result and the base is the same.

Let's say, for example, I was in a car accident and I suffered from amnesia. I haven't a clue what is going on. People talk to me and call me James, but I don't recognise this as my name. Gradually, after some time, the brain starts to recover and suddenly I start to remember and it's all there. You could say James is better because James is now James. The forgetfulness of James has vanished and what has been achieved is James being James. It's a good outcome because not being James is not so great, but nothing in particular or new has been added to James remembering he is James. Does that make sense? In the remembrance or recognition of, or the seeing or the being of, this open awareness is always there. That is why in these texts there are so many words which begin with *ye* or *ka*, prefixes which mean original or primordial.

Most activity or effort starts from the sense of this is not good or this is not enough. The basis is insufficient, therefore we have to get extra resources to complete our flawed, cracked, unfulfilled world. Dzogchen says that if you stay with that there is no end to activity. You will always be driven. Look at the natural basis of the mind: it is calm, clear and empty, and this is natural satisfaction. Tibetans used the word *simpa*, meaning contented; if good or bad things are coming it is okay. This is the level of wisdom.

When you are concerned with compassion – your relation with other people and being in the world – of course you need to do something. If you see someone in trouble you help them, it is not about just sitting and thinking that's bad luck for them. You can have activity, but the activity is arising from the calmness. If our activity is driven by a sense that something is terrible or intolerable, then that is a sign that we are identifying with a particular shape in the world, and so we are already off-balance. This is the radical difference between dzogchen and most other systems, although mahamudra and dzogchen are pretty similar around this. The ground is the most fundamental thing.

Consciousness cannot become awakened

Question: Wouldn't you say that there are just some states that are simply more conducive than actually focusing on awareness? For example, let's say you are very agitated or dull, to focus on that is probably what makes us want to be busy and change our energy to be able to see more clearly.

James: That's true. The consciousness becomes clear and then the consciousness wants to attend to the awareness. But awakening is not a matter of being conscious of your natural state, it's a question of *being* your natural state, so whether your consciousness is clear or not doesn't really make a difference because you are always already your natural state.

The radical non-dual is very different; it says it doesn't depend on the stuff. But we feel it does depend on the stuff, so we want the weather to be warmer before we go swimming in the sea. The one who is trying to be aware is the one who will never be aware, and this is hard to see. Consciousness doesn't get enlightened.

When you are a child you want to grow up and so you say, '*When I am big, I am going to...*' but when you become big you are not that child. Children never grow up. Who grows up? Grown-ups grow up – it's obvious. I am getting old but my forty-year-old self – my twenty-year-old self – my ten-year-old self – didn't get old, they just vanished. You don't get old. There is no continuous self that goes from one stage to another. Our existence is discontinuous – chopped up like mince – therefore consciousness cannot become awakened.

The natural clarity of the mind is not improved by good moods or decreased by bad moods, otherwise it would just be a vulnerable construct. The meditation that 'improves or doesn't improve' is the meditation carried out by a conscious experience of relative clarity. The natural clarity of the mind is always the same, which is why Ayu Khandro spent the last sixty years of her life in a very small house most of the time in the dark. Why would somebody think that being in the dark is better than being outside?

When she was young she was running around and had many different boyfriends. She had all kinds of experiences: the sun rising and setting, the winter, the summer, the first beautiful field of wild flowers, the yaks grazing on the hillside. She saw many beautiful wonderful things as well as tragic things. These are subject and object experiences. However, she decided that what she really wanted to see is her own mind, and to see that this mind itself is enough; this is satisfaction. As long as she was caught up in these interactions of subject and object, the turbulence that was created by liking some things and not liking other things became a particular sort of illumination.

For example, nowadays, you can buy a torch that has a handle and you turn it around so it becomes an everlasting torch. Consciousness is like this: you have to turn the handle for it to provide some illumination. But in the dzogchen texts they speak of the natural illumination of the mind, *rang tsal* – natural clarity. This clarity is the quality of emptiness itself. The relative clarity comes because you rub things together just as if you rub your hands together you get heat. When the subject and object rub together you get the flow of experiences which seems quite vital, however, if you want to see the mind itself, then being in the dark is important because you start to have visions and you can see the visions as arising from emptiness. Just as if you do some dream practice you can see that the dream is arising out of emptiness.

Of course, you don't have to do a darkness retreat. When we relax into the practice things are arising in the mind and sometimes we take up these questions: What is the shape of the mind? What is the colour of the mind? Where does it come from? Where does it stay? Where does it go? These are our five best friends. If you really enquire into these questions and you get a definite answer, you can see clearly that the mind is infinite. If the mind is infinite and not identified with anything that arises, then everything arises from, and in, and through the mind.

When you get up in the morning, the day is arising in your mind. The bedroom, the kettle, the smell of coffee is arising in your mind. That is just another way of saying what I was pointing out earlier that everything is experience, so everything is the quality of the mind. When you see that, that is the same result as being in a dark retreat. Everything is experience, and you work with the flow of experience which is the flow of the energy of the mind in all its different patterns. But the base – the mind itself – the openness and the flow of experience – are inseparable like the mirror and the reflection. That is really the goal of the practice.

Clearly, to enter that state it helps if our energy is not too disturbed. The problem is you can spend a lot of time balancing your energy in order to start to look, and then you don't look. You can see that in these big tantric practices that last for many hours or days. There is always a point where the whole mandala dissolves and the central god dissolves into you. There is emptiness, and then a bell is rung. One second of infinite openness, and now we are in ting-a-ling-a-linging! We get to do some offering – *tsog* – and give thanks to the sponsor. This is not really the path of dzogchen or even tantra for the purposes of meditation; this is the ritualised form of devotional worship which often has more of a social function rather than a meditative function. If you want to see what is there, then in the tantric moment when everything dissolves, you want to stay there for as long as you can. If the puja lasts two hours, why not sit in openness for four hours?

You spend all the time going out in the field cutting the grass. You bring the grass home. You feed and milk the cow, and then as soon as you've milked the cow you kick the bucket over! This is madness.

The result is there, complete from the very beginning, and that is a very powerful way of shifting our focus of understanding. If all we need is already here, then it shifts the register of our engagement.

A text like this is something to take very slowly. To sit with each sentence allowing it almost like a kind of massage to loosen you up and shift the situatedness of your being.

Ayu Khandro then says, in relation to the mind itself – our own natural awareness –

It is free of communication by language and thus is beyond the realm of signs.

Although we are talking about this, we are talking *about* it. The state itself cannot be described in language; it will always be elusive. She says it is beyond the realm of signs. Signs here means qualities by which you could grasp something. In Sanskrit, it is *lakshana* and in Tibetan *tsen or tsen nyid*, meaning it is out with the semiotic field. There is no way that knowledge could grasp this, as it is not a thing which you can get or make sense of and that is quite something.

Here is the actuality of our being and what she is saying is you cannot know it as a thing. This is very strange. You can know where you live, you can know your job, you can know your children, you can know your hands; all to a certain extent. If you have a watch you can know how to tell the time. You know how to make a cup of tea. A lot of our sense of identity and agency – the capacity to do things and make them happen – is embedded in these phenomena existing within the realm of signs. That is to say, a great deal of our activity is the manipulation of signs. This is especially true if you work a lot with computers, but when you speak you are manipulating signs, because language is a 'sign' system. Everything we do is mediated through language as it is a particular quality of human beings. Ayu Khandro is saying your own true nature cannot be caught by a sign.

If we go back to the question of how can I know if I am cheating myself, what would be the litmus test? What would be the authentic guarantee-able, replicatable, definitive test of yes or no? It is not like that; it is much more like the experience of being balanced on a bicycle. The balance is there, but it is not there as something you can have, because if in the next moment the bike goes over a bump, you can lose your balance. The balance is dynamic, therefore this state of presence is dynamic; although it never changes it is still dynamic because it is to be maintained with what is newly arising. Just as if you are on a mountain bike; when you go down a hill there are many different bumps and curves and then you hit some mud and the bike starts to slide. You are always taking a kind of antidote activity to bring about a rebalancing of where you are. This example doesn't quite fit, but as the different experiences of thoughts, feelings and so on arise in the mind, you have to be present with each of them as they are, so it is about always being there, but not as thing.

This particular little line from Ayu Khandro is very challenging, because we are addicted to language. Language is like fish swimming in the sea. We swim in language, and so how would we be in a state which is beyond language? Clearly, we want to express our experience.

In Zen Buddhism you get this idea of being beyond signs a lot where they talk of the transmission which is beyond a text, beyond speech, but of course in the Zen tradition there are thousands and thousands of books. And when somebody experiences this state beyond language, the first thing they do is to write a little poem! Why is that? It's because energy flows out of the state of openness. However, what flows out is not the same as the state; it is always a gesture like a painting or a metaphor or a phrase in music. It is evocative: it brings about a flavour of a mood, but not the thing itself. The thing itself is a direct taste which is inexpressible. That is helpful if we are sitting in the meditation and we have experiences that we keep wrapping in language.

This is the function of our consciousness because it is involved in making sense of what is going on; it is still giving our individual ego self an important task. *'I have to make sense of it. I have to give a storyline of what is going on.'* Ayu Khandro is saying this is beyond a story. No matter how many stories you tell, your story will never capture or really show what is there. It is not wrong to tell stories, because stories exist in the house of compassion; they are ways of relating to other beings. But the story is not the path into the house of wisdom because that is beyond stories. Once again, that is quite a helpful little corrective when you are sitting in the thoughts.

Then she says,

It is not accessible to measurement by thought and thus is the great freedom from the intellect.

It means you can't interpret or make sense of this in any way. You can make sense of most things in life. You can know why you are sad, and you can know whether your sadness is appropriate to the situation or not. You can make sense of anxieties; you can see whether they have a rational basis or not. Most things are open to analysis and most analysis operates on the basis of comparing and contrasting: we have definitive measures.

For example, the metre is defined by a metal bar. You can go to the National Registry Office and they have a copy of the original metre that was agreed upon, and everything stands in relation to that proper measurement; it is either the same or very close or very different. In order to do that you have to have the 'real' metre – the one that everyone agrees upon – and then you have what you have made. You put the two together to see if they are the same or different. Here we have the *idea* of the mind, and here we have *the* mind, however you can't compare and contrast them because

you can catch the *idea* of the mind, but you cannot catch *the* mind itself. If the police have a photo of a criminal, that's wonderful, but if they don't catch the criminal then they can't compare the criminal with the photo. Having a photo of the criminal is something to stick on the wall, but it's not very useful.

You can have as many thoughts as you like. You can read endless numbers of Buddhist books. You could learn Sanskrit, Tibetan or Chinese. You could know many things but, fundamentally, they wouldn't help. In fact they are more likely to make it difficult because you develop such a technical language in your head that you keep using your intellectual understanding as the litmus test for the proof of the experience.

If we return to the question of how could I know if I am being cheated? If you buy vegetables in the market and you think the seller's scales are a bit out, you could go to the market police and ask them to check it out. But there is no way of doing this with the mind, which is why it is also described as being *chig po*, which means singular or alone. It is an experience of being which is itself in itself: it doesn't stand in relation to anything else and it is not like anything else. It is not in that sense a representation, it is the thing itself which is so singular – so unique – that you cannot say anything.

This is helpful. It is not like a further description, this is teaching for meditators. It means what you are looking for is the ungraspable, so don't activate your intellect in the period of meditation. If you get a good experience don't try to write it down or catch a thought thinking this is a wonderful insight. The insight may be if you want to write a book or an essay, but the insight is not the thing itself, it's a representation. Nobody can say what the direct experience is, which is why the teaching is done through these images. We say it's like a mirror or like the sky; if it was actually the sky, we would just go outside and look at the sky.

She goes on to say,

It is completely beyond all the elaborations of the eight limiting positions, and thus is the great inseparability of awareness and emptiness.

These eight limiting positions¹ are a traditional Indian categorisation of how one can take up a position or provide a clear definition of what something is. We can say something has a beginning or an end, it is only one thing or it's many different things, it will cease or it will always exist, it came from some place and it's going somewhere else, and we can apply this to pretty well everything in our world.

This building will not last forever. This building came from somewhere else. The bricks and the stones that were used to build this were brought in from other places. The paint that was used has been bought from a shop. Things come into this building and go out of it and these concepts illuminate our world in terms of commodities. They are essentially the description of how you know what something is.

The glass, clearly, has a beginning. It has a historical beginning when people discovered how to make glass. You can imagine that in the Iron Age somebody might have been heating the fire in order to melt the iron ore, and the nature of the sand that they were heating next to it was such that it formed a primitive form of glass. The glass that I am holding came into being according to the

¹ Beginning and ending, nihilism and eternalism, coming and going, unity and diversity

modern technology that produces this thickness of glass quite cheaply, and so on. We can know that a glass like this won't last forever.

Whatever we see is in this category, but the mind itself is not like that. It is just another way of saying all the interpretative mechanisms that you have are useful and are designed for use within the realm of movement; they deal with manifestation and energy. How do you cook a curry? How do you know when rice is cooked? You can have definite knowledge about these things. Some people know how to make shoes, other people know how to manufacture cars. This is very useful knowledge, but it is knowledge about energy and manifestation and these eight categories are very useful in those terms. But in terms of the mind itself, they are useless.

Therefore, don't waste time in meditation trying to work out what is going on, you can't, that is not the point. The meditation is very much about letting go of the usual ways of doing things, and because it is free of these elaborations, she says it is the great inseparability of awareness and emptiness. The link there is that this awareness has no essence in it and so you cannot catch it. Actually, all the phenomena of the world are inseparable from emptiness as well. Everything in this room is appearance and emptiness, so when we apply these eight relative positions or elaborations we begin with reification: we turn appearance into entity. We take it that there is some real object and then having the noun – the thing – we then apply our interpretative adverbs and adjectives to create the elaboration of what it is.

We might say the red of the cushions is brighter than the red of the carpet. Both are red, but one is a brighter red than the other. We are talking about it as if redness was a thing which you could almost weigh on a scale and say one has more redness than the other, but it is not like that at all. We know that redness is an interpretation that comes through our optical nerves, but it exists in our conceptual world as a quality which can be increased or decreased. We deal with it as if it is a commodity. If you see the emptiness of all phenomena, they also pass beyond thought, speech, and expression.

Some of you know this short verse of praise to Prajnaparamita, the goddess or principle who is mother of all the buddhas. It says transcendental wisdom, or the wisdom which goes beyond limitation, is beyond speech, thought, and expression. You can't say it or describe it; it is there but you cannot get it. In the same way there is nothing in this room that you can get; what you get is your relation with what is in this room.

First you take something vibrant, alive, unspeakable, and then you tell it what it is: the carpet is red. You then go on to compare the redness of the carpet to the redness of the cushion. What you are comparing is your own conceptual elaboration, not the thing itself. If you just stay relaxed and open everything is incommensurable: you cannot measure it. And if you can't measure it because it has no essence to hold, you can't say anything about it. Therefore, speech is the creativity of the construction of the world of signs which human beings use in order to stay in connection with each other; sometimes for beneficial outcomes to help people, and sometimes to harm people. Language can go in either way, but it is an illusory construct and no matter how much language you use, it doesn't take you to the thing itself.

Then she says,

Whatever occurs, [that is to say whatever is arising whether it seems like subject or object] it remains [the 'it' here is your own nature – the buddha nature – awareness] happily in the state of unchanging original clarity, and thus is self-liberating in its own place.

We have already looked at this in some detail. Whether good or bad things are arising – happy or sad – whatever interpretations and flavours we have, this doesn't influence the nature of the mind. ***It remains in its original clarity, and thus is self-liberating in its own place.***

If we go back to the image of the mirror, the clarity of the mirror is not changed if something ugly is put in front of it. The mirror has the same clarity to show the beautiful object and the ugly object, because the potential of the mirror to show the object is not determined by the quality of the object. This goes back to the purpose of the Dark Retreat, to find the clarity which is innate or intrinsic or inherent; it is the true quality of the open dimension of awareness and this doesn't change whether the object is exciting or not.

If our life changes and we find some new venture to go into, we feel happy. We feel lots of energy, we feel mobilised, and now we want to do something. This is the energy of the object vitalising the subject. And then sometimes we have to do things we don't want to do, so we delay them, we put them off and we try to avoid them. This is the energy of the negative object making us shrink back. This is relative, situational clarity. What Ayu Khandro is describing is the clarity which just continues through every situation. This is the real thing that we want to relax into, and she says this is self-liberating in its own place. What is self-liberating? Both the ground and the object.

You can say the mirror is self-liberating because the reflection is not glued to it and doesn't change it. The mirror is self-liberating in that it remains fresh even if it has had a million different reflections in it in one hour, and the reflections are self-liberating because they have no hooks; no way of grasping on to the mirror. If the field shifts the reflection vanishes; their presence was only contingent, dependent on causes and circumstances.

From that point of view, the ground and what arises from the ground, or stillness and movement, are both self-liberating.

Question: Staying with this symbol, what does the mirror show in a dark room?

James: It shows the darkness. The mirror's potentiality is to stay open even if what is occurring seems like it is death. We would think that the life of the mirror is that it shows something bright and shiny.

This is a very nice question because when we switch off the light, the mirror is there and all through the night it has a potential to show. And in the morning, as dawn occurs, something gradually starts to appear. You could say that the mirror has no light of its own because it's not showing a bright reflection, but it was showing a dark reflection all night long, so its clarity is willing to show darkness as well. That is the natural clarity. Whereas the relative clarity is wanting the light to be bright, so when you look in the mirror and you can't see your face, you turn up the light.

Response: In another part of the text you said she was looking to be the sun herself, not the reflection in the moon. Is this to bring it together?

James: These are different, because of course the sun is always bright. Rigpa or awareness is often compared to the light, to the sun itself, and the rays of light that come out is *rigpai tsal*, the energy of the light which illuminates and heats the world. This is a metaphor that shows the generosity of awareness.

As the mirror, awareness is the quality supporting the clarity; the potential to show whatever is there. Technically, you get many different descriptions of this. You can say the mirror shows *rolpa* which means play, or in Sanskrit *lila*. It means the ceaseless flow of illusory appearances.

Energy is said to show three different forms. One is *rolpa*: reflections manifest but without any truth. Another is called *dangwa* which means translucency or unobstructedness, and it's compared to a crystal ball, which if it's placed on different colours of cloth shows the coloration because it doesn't block the pervasive quality. It's a bit like the sky that is the quality of the mind that allows whatever is occurring just to completely fill it. Because our mind has no content it can be filled with any kind of content, but when the crystal ball looks red and it is on red cloth, it is not really red.

In the same way, if we get used to the meditation and we feel depressed or anxious, or like me, in the hospital, we feel furious about all the nonsense that happens. I am both very sad about what is happening, and I am not at all sad. Both things are there simultaneously because it doesn't matter at all; it is just an empty game.

And it does matter. The crystal ball shows red, but it isn't red. If you don't show red then you are living in a place that is cut off and sealed from the world. *'It's nothing to do with me. Fuck the lot of them. I don't care.'* But then your world becomes very small. If you open yourself to the world many experiences will come through you, and they are there, but they don't define you. The freedom that then comes with *dangwa* is to be completely vitally alive, but not caught.

The third example is *salwa*: the energy of awareness, which is compared to light coming into a crystal and refracting. You have the diversification; the differentiation of light in the five colours and five elements which comes out and creates the world. It is not that there are three kinds of energy the way we have three kinds of apples. These are all descriptions of what you see when you look from one point of view. They are not things, but they are ways of understanding how we find ourselves.

For example, here we have a statue of the Buddha looking very peaceful. I want to be a Buddhist therefore I should look very peaceful. When I am not very peaceful that is a sign I am a bad Buddhist. But I want to be a good Buddhist. So whenever I feel irritation or anger, I say, *'Now I know what is happening: defilements, obscurations, poisons are suffusing my system like some bacteria. I am feeling sick and being contorted. I must calm myself. I must practise calming the breath, calming the mind. Shamatha...peaceful...now I am a good Buddhist.'* You are a good Buddhist but a pain in the arse! Who wants to sit in a café with you?

Passion is part of our existence. Why is passion dangerous? Because if you get completely trapped in it, like a big wind, it blows you all over the place. But if you can't feel anything, if you can't feel sad when a friend is sick, or if you can't feel happy when a friend falls in love and it looks like a good story, then life would have no taste.

For example, with this *dangwa*, when you get filled with joy or sadness, stay present as the crystal ball. You don't have to block the emotion. You have the confidence that you won't be contaminated by the emotion. Someone looking at your face knows if you are happy or sad and then it's gone. It goes without a trace because you don't need to weave it into a story. Someone might say, *'Oh, but I thought you were a meditator. Why are you upset? Shouldn't you rise above being upset. Aren't you wanting to get to this transcendent plain where everything is just beautiful?'* Trungpa writes about this in one of his books. He wrote if the Buddha was like that, you would have to have special hospitals with a ward for buddhas, because they would be completely incapable of doing anything!

We have to make choices in the world. When we go to get our food later, we will choose what we will eat and how much we will put on our plate. But how can I choose if everything is the same? Everything is the same and everything is different, it all has one taste which is emptiness, but it also tastes different. Especially the soup! *[laughter]* In that sense these teachings are very practical because they are about how to be in the world but not of it; how to participate without being caught. If you hold yourself too far back you don't get anywhere, if you throw yourself into it you are likely to get lost.

All these different images – the mirror and so on – are ways of trying to give a sense of what we mean by balance: not in, not out, just there. They are all just like little supports or ways of remembering. If we taste the soup and it's very salty, that is all.

Response: The cook is in love...

James: ...with salt!

When you taste it, before anything, there is just the taste, and then you enter into a judgment. You like or you don't like the salt. What is the purpose of the judgment? You don't have to block the judgment, but when the judgment arises it's a judgment – an interpretation. Clearly, for the chef, the soup is not too salty. His tongue and my tongue are not the same and that is how the world is. What does it mean? It doesn't mean anything except it's salty. *'But it is too salty...'* Too salty for whom? Not the chef. In that way we can look at what extra am I adding into this because if the soup is wrong it has to be changed in order to be right. There we can see how a strong judgment with a notion of truth takes us into wanting to apply an antidote. But if we just stay with it – the soup is salty – if it's too salty and you can't eat it, there is something else to eat.

'But I wanted the soup.'

'Eat some of the soup.'

*'I don't want **that** soup.'*

'Oh, you want some 'theoretical' soup. We have a big pot of actual soup. If you finish the actual soup, then I will specially cook for you 'theoretical' soup!'

You can apply an antidote or you can also just accept it is salty. Everything is what it is.

What Ayu Khandro is saying is that the self-liberation of the subject and the object – of the ground and the manifestation – all of this self-liberates if you don't put a spin on it.

If you have a children's toy like a spinning top, if you keep spinning it, it will keep going around. After a while it starts to get ready to fall over and you spin it again and again. If you don't keep spinning it, it will stop spinning. Therefore, duality is the way in which we keep spinning the wheel. We keep spinning because we invest energy into phenomena and that is what stops the experience of the self-liberation, but if you just leave it, it will be what it is, and it won't last forever.

The idea that our mind is like a crystal ball even if it is filled with some food we don't particularly like or with some weather that we would prefer not to have, why do we feel it is contaminating us? The one who is contaminated is not the crystal ball. The one who is contaminated is our subjective, interpretive notion. *'But I love the autumn when the sun is shining. You can walk outside and you can see all the colours. It is such a shame. I don't get to the country very often, and I thought this weekend was going to be lovely because last year it was really nice.'* You have an elaboration and that is the one that suffers. But why are we bringing in that elaboration? This is mental activity creating a storm.

The main point of this teaching and the path of the meditation is: don't enter into this thought production. Just stay relaxed and present with whatever is there.

[We have some time for practice now.]

Outside the sky is very clear and you can see many stars. Before, when the sun was shining, we couldn't see the stars. The stars were always there, but they were hidden by the light of the sun. This is the issue; whatever we need is there, but due to causes and conditions we don't see it. Because we are dazzled by the light of the sun, we don't see the stars. In the same way we are dazzled by the commotions of our experience, so we don't recognise the other aspects which are very powerful and yet more subtle. Awareness is not as insistent as consciousness. Consciousness is an energetic form; awareness is not.

If you look around you will see nature is full of examples that show us a healthy way of seeing this relation, and in order to help rebalance this, we have the paths of wisdom and compassion.

Tonglen: generosity linked to emptiness

We can maybe do some *tonglen* practice or exchange practice, which is a way of opening ourselves to other people's problems, but it also means exposing ourselves to other people's joys. Usually there is the sense that we want to protect ourselves from the difficulties of others; we want to hang on to what is good in ourselves. But sometimes we protect ourselves from the happiness of others as well because it makes us feel envious or stupid. You can open out the field of *tonglen*.

Some of us have done this many times before. We do this particular practice standing up. The baseline running through everything is the sound of *Aaa* which we make in a continuous way. *Aaa* is the sound of emptiness which is a quality of wisdom, so establishing wisdom is the base. Everything is empty and on that basis we can offer light, happiness, health to all beings.

If you know some people who are unwell you can imagine rays of light spreading out to them. We do this with an expansive gesture of the hands opening out again and again, and then after some time we shift to a gathering in gesture where we are bringing towards our own heart all the problems and difficulties of all sentient beings. You can imagine this coming to you in the form of dark colours, smoke, pollution, snakes, scorpions; whatever you find difficult and especially things that frighten you.

You let all of that into the middle of your heart, and that is very difficult for the ego to do because we get frightened. We think, *'I don't want to get sick. If they are sick I am very sorry, but why would I want to be sick? Let them have their sorrow and I will be compassionate.'* We like this kind of compassion. This is called compassion with a long spoon! We shorten the spoon and it is coming into us, so all their difficulties are ours.

Why would we do this? The outer level, the Mahayana level, describes this by saying in all our previous lives we have had parents, particularly mothers, who have looked after us and done many kind things for us. This creates a debt of gratitude: we are under an obligation to all sentient beings, even if we have never had anything to do with them in this life. Whenever we engage with them we are under an obligation because we owe them something. We don't go towards other people from a place of entitlement, but rather of gratitude, and therefore helping them is not some beautiful action that we perform, it is just the necessary consequence of our gratitude for all the good they have already done to us. That is a particular Mahayana way of saying that subject and object are

inseparable; it's not that we can choose to be close to other people, but that our lives are already bound inextricably in them.

From the dzogchen point of view, we would say everything arises from the same ground, so there is no real division between them. These are different metaphors of kinds of language. The Mahayana language is in many ways sweeter because it is using more beautiful images that can bring up more warm emotions.

When we link ourselves to the suffering of others, we are simply linking our life to theirs, and our lives are already linked to their lives. Sometimes they suffer, and sometimes we suffer. Why should their suffering not come to us? If we suffer with other people is this unhelpful or helpful? From the point of view of emptiness there is no difference. Therefore, two things are happening. Due to compassion we open to the suffering of all beings, and because of resting in the state of wisdom – of emptiness – we can accept all the suffering without any damage. In English, this is called 'having your cake and eating it,' which a very good thing and very difficult to find in this world. Here you get both, and this is why the integration of wisdom and compassion is very important.

If you were really damaging yourself for the sake of others then you would be in the house of the martyr – the house of the noble sacrifice – and that is always a deal. When it says in the Christian church that Christ died for our sins, this is not a full stop. Christ died for our sins, therefore you should go to church and follow the holy teachings. There is a whole creed that follows from that because the sacrifice is a gesture of power; it makes an impact on the world and it puts in a twist.

What we are trying to do here is something different. We are not making a noble sacrifice. We are taking the suffering which other beings are attached to, and believe to be strongly real, and which they feel persecuted by, and we are dissolving it into emptiness. We are the noble re-cycling centres of the universe! We are the universal dialysis machine. We just keep purifying and purifying. Of course, a dialysis machine has to be cleansed and re-cycling sites have a lot of garbage to take away. But for us it is much easier because it is just dissolving into emptiness because it has always been emptiness. Here you can see the consistent thread that runs through the Buddha's teachings: everything is empty. Appearance and emptiness are inseparable is the teaching of the Heart Sutra, and because of that inseparability we don't have to protect ourselves.

Generosity is linked with emptiness. When we study the Mahayana path we study the Paramitas. What makes something a Paramita – a transcendent quality – is not that you have a big quantity of it; it is not transcendent generosity because you have a lot of generosity, it is because the generosity is inseparable from emptiness. Endurance and patience are inseparable from emptiness. Wisdom is inseparable from emptiness, that is to say, in the manner of a dream, like a mirage or a rainbow or an echo; it is there, but don't take it too seriously.

This is the orientation of the Tonglen practice. You don't have to do it, and if it is not what you would like to do, then please don't do it. We will do it for a while and when we finish, we will just stand quietly for a moment. We can then sit down and move into some open awareness practice. We do this standing up and because we are making these gestures with our hands, we need a bit of space around us. We start by making the sound of *Aaa* and then move into the movement.

[Tonglen practice]

That brings us to the end of our practice for today. If you like you can explore moving into sleep from that position. You can either sit up a little bit in bed or lying down just relax into the open space and be with whatever is coming until you gradually fall asleep.

And then when you wake in the morning, as the first thoughts and feelings start to register, just welcome them into that same open spaciousness and stay with that for some time before you move and get out of bed. As you move your body, you are moving it within the space which is encompassing all phenomena.

Saturday 13 October

We start with the refuge and bodhicitta, and then go into some open sitting.

SAN GYE CHO DANG TSOG KYI CHOG NAM LA

JANG CHUB BAR DU DAG NI KYAB SU CHI

DAG GI JIN SOG GYI PAI SO NAM KYI

DRO LA PHEN CHIR SANG GYE DRUB PAR SHOG

To the Buddha, Dharma and the best assembly, I go for refuge until enlightenment is gained. By the merit arising from my generosity and other virtues may I attain buddhahood in order to benefit all sentient beings.

Curiosity can get in the way of our being present

Yesterday, when we were looking in the text, Ayu Khandro was referring to the signless nature of our natural state. I want to say a little bit about the functions of our mental activity, and then we can observe how we get lost through the nature of our mental activity.

For example, when children are small it is very helpful if they are curious because small children have many things to learn. They are generally curious about nature, games, television and so on. Sometimes, they become not at all curious, and they decide they only want to eat one thing which is very annoying for the parents. You can try to tempt them with all sorts of other foods and they say, *'No. I don't eat that.'* We see that when curiosity and the child become small that is usually a sign of problems. It is one of the things that nowadays teachers in schools look out for: the child who can't be available and participate in the class is usually a sign that something not very good is happening at home.

Curiosity in its open sense is very unbounded – it takes us here and there – and for small children that is very good, because they start to weave patterns of life. Curiosity can be very important for some adults as well, particularly in the arena of science; someone might have an intuition and follow that line and it takes them into some new area of discovery. The question for us would be: what is the function of curiosity in our lives? There are many fascinating things in this world as well as fascinating facts about people, places, movies, novels, foods and so on. There is always something new to try; there is always some question you can take to another person.

But if we are in the practice of dharma we are faced with the issue of: if I get information on this new area, what is it? Is it feeding a body of knowledge or information which lets me know something about the other person whereby I build up a profile, and what is the function of that? If you are

having to do a diagnosis, then getting accurate information and seeing how these various signs and symptoms might lead to a clear diagnosis could be incredibly helpful. But diagnosing people – working out what other people are up to, or why they do what they do – may not be very helpful at all because that kind of information acts as a barrier to contact.

There is the immediacy of being with someone, encountering their embodied existence revealed through the openness of their face and gaze, where we feel some kind of impact and alive connection; and then there is knowing about them, which usually comes because we have been building up a story. The question is what is the benefit of having the story? Because what we do in our outer life is pretty much the same as what happens for us in meditation.

When you sit in the meditation and you find yourself caught up in story lines – in constructing meanings and making sense of things – even when there is a kind of insight in that, Ayu Khandro is suggesting is that this is a very false path because you remain within the domain of the sign. Signs join together to make patterns which construe meanings, and then you have the constructions of various kinds of interpretive, heuristic edifices; useful for some purposes if we have the task of fulfilling that purpose.

A lot of curiosity is a way of not being present; it takes us into the future where we are thinking about something and wondering why? If you are a policeman that is very important; like doctors they are looking for clues and trying to build up a picture, and on the basis of that picture they can move into activity. But if our task is to be in the world, to be in contact with what is occurring and receive as much of the immediate quality of that contact, then story lines are not very helpful.

It brings us into thinking about what are we actually doing? Sometimes we have the encouragement to observe ourselves, but then we have to think what is the nature of that observation? If we are looking, are we looking for something? Is the observer already taken in by some kind of agenda? The agenda could be a particular time frame: in certain occupations problems have to be solved very quickly. The pressure of time makes for a proactive search for information. You know you are looking for something, and if you are looking for something, there is already a figure ground selectivity that is operating. The areas that seem significant are brought forward and given more attention to and what seems less important recedes into the background.

That can be very helpful, but when you are doing that you are centred inside your knowledge base: you are looking for something because you know what to look for. There is a self-referential confirmation of the validity of the position from which you look out at the world. This is reassuring to our sense that we are people who know something, but it's going to block any freshness of encounter, particularly, a non-conceptual experience. You can look through many Tibetan books and they talk again and again of non-conceptual awareness: an awareness, a light, an illumination, a clarity, which is not resting on or generated by concepts, but is quite different. It is much more like an aesthetic appreciation.

We can enjoy the mental activity in curiosity. Some people like reading crime novels because it has a sense of how will this go? Can I see the clues? Can I work out what's going on? And there can be a pleasure in that because there is a problem to be solved. The question would be: if we are looking for our true nature is that a problem to be solved? Are we having to engage in some kind of hero's quest? We have our little sword and shield and we set off through the jungle of ignorance. Various obstacles arise and we have to find our path until we arrive at the one true goal. That is a kind of metaphor that you will find in many forms of dharma.

But in dzogchen, we are not going on a path to anywhere else. Paths are about movement. We are concerned to find the stillness which is always present in the movement, therefore, if you move with the movement it is not likely that you will find the stillness. We want to find ourselves in the place of the stillness which is always present whatever kind of movement is going on, and that means not being curious, not observing, not looking for something; but relaxing and opening and allowing the movement to occur while being present with every form of the movement.

If then there is a noise outside and you find your attention moving towards that, that's a sign that before the noise occurred you were here and now you go out towards that which has occurred. That is good feedback that you are locked in a very dualistic conscious perception. When we are relaxed everything is arising in the field, because awareness, in having no shape, doesn't have to go from here to there; it is different. When we become particularised, this is movement. There is nothing wrong with wondering who is out there. If you woke in the middle of the night and you heard some funny noise, you might think that somebody has broken into the house. That is a kind of mobilisation which is the organisation of energy along a pathway, and that could be very helpful. But we don't need to be in the movement of energy to find stillness, because how will movement find stillness? Movement seeks movement.

That is why we live in a dialogic existence: we live in this endless conversation between various aspects of ourselves, conversations with other people, and conversations with phenomena. There is nothing wrong with this interactive pulsation of the waves of energy, but energy in seeking to play with energy is not being still. Energy is never still. How you look – being curious – trying to see what is going on – is it this or that? If the attention is mixed with a movement, you will find the answer to your question is another movement, and there are many forms of Buddhism which are primarily concerned with this.

For example, to go to one of the pure lands like the western paradise of Sukhavati or Dewachen, there are many and very beautiful prayers that you can recite. You imagine somewhere to the West, beyond the setting sun, that there is a beautiful land with special trees and lakes filled with lotuses. *'May I be born there. May I hear my lotus open. May I hear the sound of the dharma. May I see the face of Amitabha.'* This is very beautiful, but this is thought chasing thought. As you enter into this kind of prayer – almost a guided fantasy – it produces a particular set of sensations of trust, openness, hope and love, and that is very nice. You are using a particular shape to create a shape.

Just as if you have had a really shitty day at work you might come home and think *'I'll just watch some nonsense von the television'*. You turn on the television and there is a documentary on about starving people in Africa. You think, *'No! Enough,'* so you look at some stupid comedy for a while because it doesn't make any demand on you at all.

In the same way, when we engage with a field of arising it impacts us. If you walk outside and you see the beautiful autumn trees it shifts your mood and brings about particular feeling tones. This is very important, but it is about adjusting our mood. When we feel sad we can cheer ourselves up. When we feel excited we might want to go out and do some sport or go dancing, and we make use of that energy. What we are doing is fitting the subject to the object. We are finding a way that the arising subject of energy fits the pattern of the object, and on the level of energy playing with energy that is a good thing to do. However, if you spend a lot of time doing that correcting experience by saying, *'This is not really what I want,'* or *'This is how it has to be,'* these are the two moves of rejecting something or merging into or going with how it seems to be; what we are avoiding is just being present with what is occurring.

It is very useful in the course of a day to keep an eye on the various forms your intelligence takes. Intelligence is clearly a very wonderful capacity to have, but you can make use of it when there is actually nothing to be intelligent about: to want to know why something is the case. There is maybe no purpose at all, rather, we can stay with what is there and just be present with the immediacy of the sensory impact. Because one of the things that intelligence can do is to take all the energy up so that we are in this conceptual realm of abstraction and interpretation, and the other aspects of our response to the situation get locked off.

In the Indian tradition this is seen in terms of the chakras: the various gateways of integrative relatedness both inside the person and of relation to the world. We can see if we are talking to a friend or colleagues or patients when people are blocked. We say some people are in their head and not really in their body. They are just talking and talking, but they are not really in the world. Other people are completely in their fear and you can see that they are trapped in that, whereas some people are completely in their energy and they are very aroused. These different places in the body around the navel, the genitals, the heart, the throat, and the head are activated in different ways.

Responding fully to the world without having to make sense of things

In the practice of dzogchen, we want to open ourselves to the fullness of our responsive capacity. If we over-emphasise the mind as the method of making sense of things, perhaps it is useful to spend more time with our intuition and the senses.

In the afternoon break you can walk outside and be with the sound of the wind blowing in the branches, or the sound of birds, or the sound of a car in the distance, and so on; and without checking it out by looking at it enter a soundscape which produces a different quality of relatedness. You can do this with taste. You can lick various kinds of leaves, pieces of stone or some dry wood, and see how they taste. *'Oh! This is how the world tastes.'* You can touch various things with your eyes closed because then you get less immediate shape recognition which sets the mind to apply names to whatever is there. This not about having an intellectual curiosity. You are not trying to work out some interpretation of what it is; you are trying to receive it. The world shows itself to us.

You can relate this back to the great Austrian philosopher, Wittgenstein, who spent a lot of time clarifying the difference between saying and showing. There are many things in life which cannot be said, they can only be shown, but we try to say them, and Wittgenstein said this is one of the reasons why people become very ill. His understanding of philosophy was that it's a kind of therapy: a way of helping us not to spend a lot of time in the mental turbulence of solving unsolvable problems.

For example, we have the question what does it mean to be loved? Someone comes to therapy and says she is not sure if her boyfriend loves her anymore. I don't know what I am supposed to say to that, but I have to say something! We start with the obvious question:

'What does he say?'

'He says he loves me, but he doesn't come home until four o'clock in the morning.'

'Okay. If you believe the words, does that let you go to sleep and not worry where he is?'

'No.'

'So the 'saying' is not good enough. You want some more showing. When did you last have sex?'

'Quite a few months ago.'

And so you get a sense that something is being shown, but if it is said she comes to the conclusion that he doesn't want her anymore; better not to say it. A lot of information is there, but if you join

the dots it's too much trouble, and this is how we have deceit. A lot of the immediacy of knowledge in the world is there, but because we have constructed fantasies, maps, plans and hopes in our head, we don't want to see it. Therefore, we have attachment to a vision – a construct – around which we've built the pattern of our life. And if we actually see what is happening, it may mean that this wonderful world starts to collapse. Is it then better to live a lie? These are the choices that we all have to make in life. Some things are there and then they are not there; our experience tends to be discontinuous.

When you have kids it is always best if you can hold some relatedness that gives them a safe space, but there are all kinds of fluctuations of feelings that can occur in relationships. Maybe what helps relationships to work is when people stay in contact, which is to say not talking *about* things to each other. From my experience, when couples get into difficulty it's because they tell each other *about* the world, or they tell each other *about* themselves, rather than actually being in contact with each other. When you are in contact, you get the fullest possible experience of the other and you have room to maneuver. Even if some of what you are feeling is a bit difficult there is at least the possibility of engagement.

But many people come home at the end of the day, and they start telling their partner about their day:

'Why do you want to tell me all this? I don't know these people.'

'Are you not interested in me?'

This is very strange, isn't it? You are telling your partner about the remnants of your day. Why not take them into the toilet and show them your shit, and say, *'That is the remnant of my meal!'* That is to say, if you are interested in me you should be interested in everything *about* me. Why? You are alive and you are living here with me, but your story is not alive. It is alive for you, but unless you are very good at storytelling it may not be very alive for the other person.

In that way we can see how mediated experience can act as a kind of muffler or dulling of contact between people. And exactly the same applies inside our mind: what we experience in meditation when we tell ourselves *about* what is going on, and we give interpretations rather than simply staying present with the immediacy of the experience.

Presence is not about observing something at a distance, it is not about interpreting or making a story, it is not about constructing patterns; it is letting go of the realm of signs, not because they are bad but because they don't work here. We need to look in a different way: a looking which is about an offering of availability, or, if you like, a kind of vulnerability. We can't be defended, we have to be trusting. We just open and things are going on, and some of what is going on feels like me. The more busy our mind, the more likely we are to bind ourselves into the subjective polarity and its movements because there is a confirmation of that kind of energy. We are wanting to be present and give equal valency and balance to what seems to be object and what seems to be subject; they are different, but they both have their value.

How do we do that? How do we locate ourselves? For example, if I am seeing a couple in therapy, I place the chairs in a 'Y' formation so that I am looking down the gap in between the couple. I am trying to give equal attention to the couple and I am wanting them to be in a place where they see each other and talk to each other. I am positioned. The observing self can be positioned, but awareness is not positioned or placed, and this is what is difficult to understand.

That is why when Ayu Khandro says it is beyond the realm of signs, she means it is beyond the realm of interpretation; it is other than our ordinary sense of identity. Again and again, just opening, we feel sensation in the body, we see colours in front of us, we hear sounds, there are thoughts and feelings, and all of these arise and pass in the flow of experience. Which one is the real 'me'? No arising is the real identity, but our habitual tendency is to say the feelings, sensations, and the thoughts that feel like me, are 'me', and this is the centre of the world. The practice is to de-centre felt subjectivity as being the true site of identity.

Clearly our felt subjectivity is our identity as we move into the world as movement, but it is not the centre as stillness. Stillness is an infinite space out of which movement can occur at any place. It is a bit like on a summer's day; you might be sitting on the banks of a lake observing some fish. Every now and then, whenever they see a fly, a fish plops up out of the water. The fish arises out of the lake; it comes wherever it comes, and wherever it comes from it is coming from the lake, in the lake, and back into the lake. The lake is the home of the fish; it doesn't have to arise from one little hole.

In the same way the infinity of the mind is open, and our thoughts, feelings, sounds, and colours, arise wherever they arise. But they are always within the lake of the dharmadhatu: the infinite hospitality of the fundamental merging of awareness and emptiness. We are the lake. We are not the fish, but some of the fish feels like us so you end up like a big pike moving around eating a lot of other fish.

Okay, let's return to this lovely text.

Being blown around by karmic winds

She goes on to explain the nature of confusion and ignorance. She says:

However, due to the illusion of diverse thoughts in the manner of a dream, sentient beings are led to all the sites of existence in samsara.

We merge with the conceptual interpretation of the world, which here also means the sensory interpretation of the world because it is not just referring to human beings. All creatures which have sentience are engaged in a relational move with the world; that is what life is.

You are eating something, so you are scanning the world for food and predators, hopes and fears, attraction and aversion, and this is dominant in the life of all living things. These are the main concerns of most animals. Conceptual means inside an interpretive frame attributing value and purpose to what is going on. Once we take up a particular embodiment, we develop particular agendas.

You probably remember when you had a break time at primary school that some kids always played football, while some girls always played skipping or singing games. They have taken up a sense of value in the world. *'Unless I play football it hasn't been a good day.'* For other kids it's not like that at all; they have got their little motor cars or they chat in corners. From very early on human beings take up their sense of what is important and what's not important. Some children play with soft toys and dolls for many years, and others hardly do this at all; they get into other kinds of activity.

Each of us is particularising through the patterning of our concepts, our own world, and what seems meaningful to us. And inside that frame of reference you have selection: pulling towards you what you like and rejection of what you don't like. Once you set out on a particularised path you get more and more particularisation through selection; our lives become formed. And that is really what it is

meaning here when she says *in the manner of a dream*. For whatever reason, we see some things as important and other things as not important. Traditionally, Buddhism would say that is your karma as you already have a particular predisposition.

In the same way, the traditional explanation is that when you die you go through the various stages of the transitional periods – the bardos. If you are going to be born as a human being, you come down this dark passage and you see in front of you this image of two people having sex. If you are drawn with interest towards the vagina, you enter into the point of conception and develop a male body. If you are drawn towards the penis, then you enter into the moment of conception and develop a female body. That would be saying that right from the very beginning of existence there is a choice based on this or that, and that some things hook our attention and other things don't. In that way we find ourselves wandering in these different realms of the world due to being blown by the winds of karma, and due to the selective attention that we bring.

Sometimes we have children, and we see them choosing a path, so we say, '*No! Don't go there. It's terrible.*' But they are just going – almost in the manner of a dream – as if they are mesmerised, fascinated, completely captivated. By what? Freud would say 'by Thanatos', by the death wish; they want to destroy their existence. However, the next person might see it as Eros, as desire, as life. We can find life in death. People play all sorts of games and take part in high risk sports like mountain climbing or parachuting off high buildings. Why? '*I've always liked doing that sort of thing.*' From the Buddhist point of view these are the streams of energy that we bring.

When you are born this is just one chapter in the middle of an infinite conversation; there are many lives before, and many lives ahead of you. What you take as *your* life and living it *your* way is a complete illusion, because your life is being led for you by these currents of interest and non-interest. If you look back on your own life, how many doors were open in front of you that you didn't go through? You thought, that's not for me, so you went through another door. When you were at that choice point or crossroads, why did you choose one thing and not another?

I would suggest a lot of our decisions are not rational. We don't sit and do a clear audit of all the possibilities. We just somehow throw ourselves into it and hope for the best. If we are lucky it works out okay, and at other times it's pretty difficult. Looking back we think it seemed a good idea at the time, and it did. Why? Because the frame of reference was a small one that only allowed you to see very few aspects of what was going on.

We can explore this. If you are outside watching a little bird like a sparrow or a robin, you will see they are very different. The robin is usually quite curious and comes quite close, and a sparrow is usually a bit more weary. Blackbirds are a bit more confident, and pigeons are fat and stupid! Each of these birds clearly lives in a different world. The bigger the bird, the more confidence they have. When you watch how much attention a pigeon can give, it is kind of slow and majestic, but with sparrows it's much quicker. It is very interesting to see that they are living out a particular kind of embodiment and relationship with the world. When you see swans come into land they are usually very clumsy, and then suddenly they are gliding across the water. It is amazing! Swans are magnificent in flight, however these transitional moments are quite difficult because of the balance of the size of the wings and the weight. Other birds, like kingfishers, just glide perfectly.

We see this when we look around at other human beings. Some human beings have an infinite grace and there is something easy and majestic about how they are, and others are bumbling and stumbling making a mess of everything. And, of course, how you are in that way opens up the world for you because other people react to you and it opens up this particular field of dialogic

communication. This is really what Ayu Khandro is pointing to here; we find ourselves in our particular situation. On top of that, we have the fantasy of mastery and control that we are making choices when actually most of our life is happening for us before we become conscious of it. Our interpretive narratives are after the fact: they are a kind of explanation of why it happened, but posed in the form of 'this is why I did it'.

Dissolving the need for fantasy

Then she says,

When you have seen your own nature, by the truth of that, due to emptiness, the way of being of how you are is what is known as buddha, and you won't go searching for anything else.

Here she is pointing out that the reason we go searching is because of a sense of lack, of something missing. The blackbird on the lawn that is hopping around and listening is searching for a worm, it is very worm conscious; as if it eats enough worms all its problems will be solved. But it is not true. This is the consumerist fantasy.

Living creatures tend to be structured around a pipe: we have a mouth at one end and an arsehole at the other with things coming in and going out, so we are only ever full for a short period of time. When something looks very exciting, the mind is similarly structured. You read a good book, but you don't want to read it again. We want something – it does the business for a moment – and then it's gone. We are moving like a pipe through the world, sucking things in and extruding them because they can't stay.

What she is saying here though, is, if you realise your own nature – the spaciousness and the unchanging nature of being itself, or awareness – that this is inseparable from the field of arising within which everything is coming into being, or becoming and vanishing. All phenomena, what we call self and other, are self-liberating: they appear and they go. When you see that, why would you want them to be your permanent companions? To ask something which is going to go, to stay, would be silly. It is that simple. If you want to find the thing that stays, look for the thing that stays and then it will stay.

The mind itself rests open and you can rest in that restful place. Movement never rests. Therefore, the self-liberation of all things is the experience of samsara slightly differently; it is not a huge tilt. Suddenly, we realise that since we were born all our experience has just been that – just experience. Looking back you think of your first bicycle or your first day at school, and how all these experiences came and went. What is it? It is just experience.

For instance, kids tend to get excited about what they are going to get for Christmas. Christmas Day becomes this big thing. The kids open some parcels and then after a short while they wonder what to do next? They need more – it is never enough. It could not be enough, because what we have got here is a vertical axis and a horizontal axis, and at the centre of these two axes is lack. What do I lack? From the dzogchen point of view, what we lack is the direct experience of our own nature that gives deep satisfaction. When that is not seen, the lack is moved onto the horizontal axis of past, present, and future, and so it is endlessly changing some experience which it believes will fill the lack; but it cannot do that, because the lack is too big.

What we lack is emptiness, and so when you go looking for something, something will not give you emptiness. Of course, it does really give you emptiness, because the child on a Christmas morning,

having got their special present, sees the emptiness of it. The fantasy was that somehow it would transform them or it would be more than it is, and it is what it is. If they get a scooter or some skates and go out on them, they soon realise that they can't play with these very well. In their fantasy they thought that as soon as they got the skates they would skating up the road with ease, so as soon as they fall off they say, *'I don't like them. Is this all they are?'*

In the same way, what comes is never going to be enough, but if we taste its emptiness it's always enough. Now there is an interesting paradox because the emptiness or the openness of the phenomena, as Ayu Khandro is saying, is a dreamlike experience. And if it's a dream you don't over-invest in it, you just stay with it. By allowing things to be what they are you free yourself from these big waves of hopes and fears, and so you can rest more easily with what's going on.

She says, seeing your own nature, being at ease, tasting that, how you are then is called buddha. The Buddha is not anything other than the experience of a spacious presence which integrates or has space for whatever is occurring. The Buddha is not something bright and shiny. The Buddha is not some marvelous pure realm, where there are peacocks singing all the time and rainbows in the sky. This is a fairy tale, because even if you go there you would find the peacocks are very loud and there are mantras twenty-fours-a-day! *'Not my cup of tea. I read the brochure 'Dewachen: Wonderful Place' but when I got there the rooms were half-built. It was the same when we went to Turkey last year.'* Of course you will always be dissatisfied if you have entered into the situation with fantasy, because how can your fantasy meet reality? It doesn't. What it is saying here is: see the emptiness and dissolve the need for fantasy.

Emptiness is the vanishing of situations

Emptiness is a very central concept: it doesn't mean nothing at all, it means there is no self-defining substance in anything. Here we are in a building which has arisen due to causes and conditions, and some of these conditions are in the past and some are in the present. We know that if and when these conditions change, this building will be changed.

We can see on display, on the outskirts of this village, a little metal trolley that was used when they were mining for coal in this area, but they are not mining for coal now. The seams of coal are finished. This used to be a mining village, and at that time the people's lives would have been very different. When the coal finished, the job of being a coal miner finished. Some people would have found jobs easily, and other people, if they were very identified with being a coal mining family, would have been very unhappy.

We know this kind of story. The coal mining occupation arose on the basis of there being coal. Your life changes. *'I don't want my life to change.'* But your life was based on something not in the palm of your hand; and that is the key thing. There was no inherent truth in being a coal miner. Being a coal miner depends on coal, and being a fisherman depends on there being fish in the sea. Around Scotland there used to be many fishing boats, but as the stocks of cod and other fish get less and less, and as there is more competition with people coming with huge trawlers from other countries, there are less fish. You then get the EU putting in quotas for each country on how much fish they can catch. Therefore, a lot of people stopped being fishermen although their families may have had boats for two or three hundred years.

This is very powerful, isn't it? If you look around you can see that applies everywhere; what we build our house on is always sand. That is what emptiness means: there is no reliable substance in anything. Physically, we can become sick very easily. Blood clots can go into the brain, cancers can develop and so on. Every day people are dying in the hospitals, and one day it will be our turn. We

don't know how long we are going to live. We don't know whether our employment will be secure. We don't know whether the tax system will radically change.

Therefore, many of the plans that we make are just tentative; they are hypotheses. We can't be sure what they are and that is because there is no substance to any of these formations. But it doesn't mean they are not there. There is appearance; there is phenomenological facticity of our existence. We are able to be in contact with and engage with whatever is occurring, but we don't know how long it will continue to occur for. What we have is this moment, and we can work with this moment perhaps to promote some degree of continuity, but we don't know.

Some bands are successful for a while and then they vanish, and other bands are continuously successful for a long period time. Some bands are successful... vanish... and then have a revival. Why is that band having a revival? Who knows? Something in the Zeitgeist turns, and everybody wants to see a band from the seventies. Why? We don't know. A door opens and you can go through the door or the door stays closed. If you go through the door, you can say, '*Hey! This is good. I am back in myself*', but you didn't open the door. We find that again and again the door is opened by the luck of the world or karma. Therefore, emptiness is not some scary notion, nor is it something abstract; it is palpable. You can touch emptiness, because emptiness is the vanishing of situations.

For example, we are coming towards the end of the season for gorgeous figs. You can find a fig and put it in your hand and squeeze it out through your fingers. You are observing the death of a fig. You apply some pressure to this perfect shape, and then you have this sticky goo in your hand that you can lick. When you buy figs they are wrapped in paper and presented very nicely. The fig has continued to have this shape because it has been protected from too much sun or rain or pressure. And now, with just a little bit of movement, that shape is gone. The fig-ness of the fig was resting on these circumstances, it was not inside the fig. The fig was not self-defining as a fig, but when you look at it you think it is just a fig. The seeming integrity of this fig is an illusion, because the integrity of the fig was inseparable from the maintenance factors which were outside it and extraneous to the fig.

And this is true of our body: we continue in this body until there is a car or plane crash, or we slip on ice and break our hip, so we walk in a different way. All sorts of external events have to maintain a particular harmony for us to continue to have the sense of 'I am me' – 'this is who I am' – and often the moment where you see something as different it's because of something you hadn't expected.

For example, I went to a meeting by train recently about two hours away from London. I got out my papers to read, and I didn't have my glasses. Normally, my reading glasses were just a magnification of 1, so when I got off the train, I went into a chemist shop and they had many pairs of glasses. I tried them on and 2.5 magnification was really good! Wow! Suddenly the world was much more clear! If I hadn't forgotten my glasses, I would still be wearing the other pair of glasses thinking I can still see! In that way, in these moments you are suddenly in a different realm and something has shifted. I would suggest this is going on all the time.

Emptiness here can seem negative in that it is the dissolving of what is familiar, but it is also opening the potential for a lighter, more flexible, and more spontaneous way of being with what is there. Not taking things too seriously doesn't mean a nihilistic disregarding of them, but a more playful interactive joint experience, and this is what Ayu Khandro is referring to in this line.

[break]

Where is this continuing self?

We continue with the text. She says,

Indeed the manner of abiding of the ground cannot be altered by the activity of any phenomena.

Once again, this is very helpful. The manner of abiding of the ground means how we are – our basic nature. Awareness or presence cannot be altered by any particular patterning or activity of phenomena; it means nothing that happens alters the nature of the mind. Therefore, with that very familiar example of the mirror, no reflection can change the nature of the mirror. The reflection will alter what appears in the mirror, but it doesn't change the mirror itself. This means that our mind is indestructible: it's not changed by anything that occurs, and it is always there.

If we are alive, the nature of life is experience; all living things experience something. A baby in the womb clearly experiences things. Nowadays, they take pictures of babies responding to music. If there are twins in the womb you can see them interacting in various ways. Movement is always influencing movement; reflections influence reflections. But the mirror – the mind itself – doesn't change. When you are alive you have a mind because there has to be the basis for the experience that causes the movement, and this basis cannot be lost, because it is the basis.

For example, a common experience is that people put their glasses on top of their head and then they can't find them! Functionally, they have lost their glasses, but actually they haven't lost their glasses. The glasses are where they put them, but they have forgotten where they put them; the glasses haven't moved. If you hold that in mind, the ground nature – the basis – has not moved anywhere else; it is always where it has been, but it is not seen. Why is it not seen? Because of our intoxication with movement. We are carried away by the ceaseless flow of experience, therefore, this should give us confidence.

Even when you sit in the meditation, and nothing clear seems to happen, or when you feel stupid and you feel you can't meditate; the basis of the experience is there. The instruction is very simple: be with the experiencer. The subject claims to be the experiencer. That is to say, I am sitting here talking to you and I am aware that I am doing this; this is my life and this is what I am doing. I appear to be the experiencer of myself, as if there was a self-reflexive and a self-reflective move which is the validation of the self.

And that's the normal way of thinking of these things in psychology: that consciousness is self-validating in the moment of its arising. Dzogchen would say it's not. This individual consciousness, having the light on myself, being able to observe myself in the process of being myself; all of that is simply a movement of energy because it's there for a while and then it's gone. Knowing what you are doing is not a continuous experience for you, unless you are practising mindfulness very, very well. Most of the time we forget what we are doing; we are just in it and then we are out of it.

This tumbling of clarity and dis-clarity on the level of subjectivity is movement and change. When we don't see the self as change, but we see the self as a continuous phenomena passing through time which reaffirms its continuity by the accretion – the gathering together of memories, the development of a self-narrative which includes our place in the world – when you have this composite creation of 'this is my story,' then we do indeed seem to be continuing through time.

This is why, again and again in Buddhism, we look at impermanence. We see that our body has changed since childhood, indeed our body has changed a bit since the summer. You might have had

more of a suntan and now it has started to fade. Our body feels different just before we eat, while we are eating, and after we have eaten. Our body feels different at different times of the day according to the weather. There are many different factors which affect our embodiment. How we speak depends on the context; the kinds of thoughts and feelings we have are stimulated by many different aspects.

So where is this continuing self? In Buddhism they say there is no self, *dag me*. It doesn't mean that we don't exist at all, it means our existence is not constellated around or resting on an enduring personal essence. There is no me-ness of me, rather we are each a unique particular form of the display of the ever-open ground. Each of us are the radiance of being and we take on this form and interact with other people. Some people's personalities are quite large, and some are quite shy; some people talk a lot, and other people are quieter. There is room for everyone to be just as they are.

There is no ideal way for a human being to be. It is not that we have to develop a particular form or shape to our existence, rather it's to see that the self is performative: it is showing itself, and the basis of the performance is the emptiness or the absence of inherent self-nature. The reflection arises because the mirror is empty. The mirror has two qualities: it is empty and it has the potential to show reflections. The mind is empty and it has the potential to display experience, and this is the continuity of ourselves.

What arises for us has aspects which are familiar and unfamiliar. The familiar can be taken as boring or reassuring. When you get up in the morning and you look in the mirror it's quite nice if you recognise who you are, if not, it's a little bit troubling! So there is the familiar as reassuring. Maybe you go to work on the bus or the underground and that's the familiar as boring. Or you go to the supermarket and you think, *'How many hundreds of times do I have to be in this bloody place! Till I die?!*' I look at the vegetables hoping they will speak to me and inspire me! The familiar has a sort of entropy: a bleeding away of energy.

The unfamiliar, or the new, could be inspiring or it could be terrifying. In that way the forms that arise evoke memories, plans, emotions and interpretations, and we are all the time using our intelligence to create patterns. When we like something we expand out and wonder about how to get more of this, and if we don't like something we retreat a bit, and we think about how we can get less of this. This is a dynamic creative interaction, and in the language we have been using this is the movement of energy; there is no substance in it.

For example, on a very ordinary level you might find that you buy some food and put it in the fridge, and then every time you open the fridge you think, *'I don't want to eat this.'* And then after a while you have to throw it out, and you think, *'Why did I buy it?'* When you bought it you thought it looked good because you hadn't eaten it for a while, and when you took it home you realised why you haven't eaten it for a while – because you don't like it!

In that way, we have moods which open doors, and maybe only half of us gets through the door and then we retreat. We have ambivalence. We have mixed feelings about things. We are not some simple decision making machines. We are much more complicated than that. We say, *'Yes... and yet,'* or *'perhaps,'* or *'maybe,'* or *'I'm not sure,'* or *'Well... I suppose I could,'* and this kind of moving web makes life very complicated. All of which is energy.

'Why don't you make up your mind? Why can't you just tell me what you want to do? Then I would know and I could make plans. Life would have a shape.'

'I don't know.'

'You mean you don't know what to do, or you don't know why you don't what to do?'

'I don't know.'

It is often very difficult to know what you want because how many 'yous' are you? We are a multiplicity of voices, of memories, of aspects, and of thoughts. The fact that we can pretend to be reasonably coherent to other people is pretty amazing when we actually feel rather incoherent ourselves. If you stay with the incoherence, then you start to see the dynamic flexible movement. And the fact that there is no essence, there is no root definable enduring self-substance, and the fact that we have a wide diversity of kinds of experience, many of which are arising simultaneously, none the less, our lives have certain patterns.

This is very interesting because you have the emptiness, the form, and the in-between – a kind of variability. Sometimes things are clear and sometimes they are unclear; sometimes we know what we want and sometimes we don't. All of this is movement. Even if we are consistent about something in our life, that consistency is a reiteration – a repetition; it is not continuing in and of itself.

If you think that first thing in the morning you really want a coffee, and you like your coffee made exactly the same way each morning, this is a definite fact you can know about yourself. *'You can observe me every day of the year, and you will not see me doing anything different. This is who I am.'* How do you make this wonderful cup of coffee? It is a sequence of activities. It feels as if it is somehow distilling some kind of essential pattern, but it is just a movement.

When you go to a café in the summer to have your perfect cup of coffee, you are wearing a different shirt from in the winter. The mood of the person making the coffee for you changes, or if you're making the coffee yourself, sometimes you do it with skill, and sometimes you are a bit clumsy because you are half asleep. Each time it will be different. The only essence – the only continuing factor – is the abstraction 'this is what I always do.'

The continuity of the self is a storyline which is taken out from a wide range of subtly different phenomenological situations, and generated into an ongoing narrative of 'this is what I always do.' The story is a lie, but it's reassuring. This is what it means in Buddhism when they say there is no self – no inherent self-nature; it means when you fall into this story of knowing who you are and knowing what you like, it creates the sense of a largely unchanged entity continuing through time. First of all, it is not actually true, and secondly, more importantly, it blinds us to the immediacy and the freshness of each moment.

Each time you have a coffee it's different. Each time you prepare the coffee, it's different. Each time you do the dishes, it's a new experience. But if you start by saying, *'I hate doing the dishes. Why do I have to do this?'*, this demonstrates the inability to be present in your existence. *'I would rather be doing something else.'* Your creativity and your imagination is actually stealing your life from you, because you imagine another existence which would be better, and on the basis of that you can't attend to what is there. You get this a lot in offices and families where people develop an image of how they want their kids, their partners, or their colleagues to be, and when other people don't fulfill this image we feel something is wrong.

The task is always to return to the freshness of the situation. How can I be fresh with a situation which seems to imprison me? Shouldn't I be resisting it? Shouldn't I be saying no? If you are fresh it doesn't mean you are freshly enslaved, it means you are getting more of a sense of possibilities of movement. Essentially, that is what Ayu Khandro is describing here.

Presence is the revealer of all movement

Then she says,

The manner of abiding just is and with it there is no interruption of the spontaneous flow and thus there is no wavering from it.

It means that presence or awareness remains the same just because it does, it is not resting on anything else, so it doesn't have to be maintained by any effort or encouraged into doing what it does; it just is what it is. Therefore, once you recognise this nature, it is always the same because it is not anything at all; it is not something you can get. And being in that state, from that state, there is no interruption of the spontaneous flow, and so there is no wavering from it.

If we are doing very basic calming meditation, and we decide we are going to sit and we are going to focus on our breath, we are sitting and then we find our attention has wandered off. It is pretty clear that we have been distracted from the object of our intention. What Ayu Khandro is saying here is if the focus of your presence is on whatever is happening – the spontaneous flow of experience – you cannot be distracted. Where would you be distracted to? You don't have any presupposition or intention before the event as to what you are going to do, you are simply staying with what is there.

This is a very interesting thing in relation to improvisational music. Often in jazz there is a background tune that all the musicians know very well. Just when everybody thought something else would happen, the lead guitarist starts to move the tune around, and if they follow that lead then something new happens. Most of us have had that kind of experience in music or dance or movement, and if you can be with that rising quest you feel the way forward. You can't know the way forward, but it's as if the whole field of experience is reorienting itself. Does that make sense? If you try to think about and hold it in relation to your idea of what should be happening '*Hey, but why are we doing that? I thought we had agreed not to do that,*' then you lose it because you are not actually connected with the evolving frame. And this is what Ayu Khandro is saying here; stay relaxed and open – in touch with the field – and it keeps moving.

This, of course, is not in any way different from *The Three Statements of Garab Dorje*, which are the founding instructions on dzogchen. Garab Dorje says, first of all awaken to or be present with and as your own natural awareness. Taste it. Don't just know it as a concept but have the experience. The mind is like space, it's unmoving, we sit in the practice and we get it. The introduction is not just the words of the teacher. We, in our practice, come into that and we taste it, so now we experience some spaciousness.

His second statement is: don't go looking for anything else. Don't stay in doubts about the situation, don't develop a dogmatic confidence about it. Just remain again and again in the presence with whatever is occurring.

His third statement is: maintain that presence whatever occurs; there is nothing else to get. Just stay present and that will be enough. You will find that these waves of emotion and dualistic possibility which keep arising will lose their hooks; they won't grasp you. They will self-liberate and presence will become just continuous. This is what Ayu Khandro is pointing to. Again and again in these texts everybody says the same thing which is very reassuring! It also means if there is no wavering from what comes, then whatever comes, comes, and whatever goes, goes.

This brings us to the question of: is this just passive? How do you incorporate some degree of active movement of the unfolding field of experience, with an acceptance of how it is? If it is too passive,

you have to think who is the one that it's happening to? Presence is not engaged. Presence is not in the movement. Presence is always the revealer of the movement. Presence is the experiencer without any name or colour or shape or form. It is a pure presence – just being open. Presence has no history, gender, or any other quality. Inside this, subject and object are arising, so the energy we call 'I, me, myself' and the energy of the field have the same source and so I am in the world with you.

How to behave? What to do? This arises with the relation between what seems to come this way and what seems to come that way. As we move towards the world, the world is coming towards us; it is the intermingling. It's not that the world has to win or that we have to win, but it's a co-emergence – a joint creation – and that's a particular kind of circumstance. Now let's not be too romantic and idealistic about this, because if you are in an environment which is completely stupid then what is co-emergent is frustration. If I sit in a management meeting and I see that a lot of money is being wasted, how will I respond? Is there any point in complaining? Save your breath. The feelings are there. What to do with the feelings? They are part of the field. If you express them or not, does it help? Spaciousness means things can just be left hanging in the air like a rainbow in the sky. They don't have to be brought forward.

Some of you may have seen the movie, *The Matrix*. There is one scene where the protagonist is in the underground and he is being shot at, and the bullets are traveling very, very slowly; he just sees them coming and moves out of the way. This is a similar kind of thing. If there is a lot of space – space is the same as time – we are space and time – we don't need to go into an impulse of reaction because that is usually based on 'what about me?' But our energy is not only invested in the 'me,' our energy is the world: it is a non-dual energy field. If I am losing, I am losing; if the assholes win, they win. Sometimes it's like that, and then it changes. The meeting is over and I go and do some clinical work and life is much better.

Sometimes we can expand and sometimes we contract. If you try to expand when it's the time to contract, it's not helpful. In English they have a saying: 'He who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day'. This is very wise. They also say a good general fixes the battlefield and the time. If you go into battle at the wrong time due to some ideological necessity like '*This is not fair! It shouldn't be happening!*' and you keep insisting with no power to change it; it's not helpful.

This is, in a sense, what it means by spontaneous. I would describe an impulse as something which is already created inside us and brought forward, like in the earlier example where you take something out of the freezer and pop it into the microwave; it's prepared very quickly, but it's old stuff. Whereas spontaneity is the fresh creation in the moment of what fits, and sometimes the object or the environment determine what fits, and sometimes the subject determines what fits. You know that with kids. Sometimes you can get them to do what you want, and sometimes you just have to do what they want. If there is enough to-ing and fro-ing, generally, you get a reasonable harmony, but we are not in charge; we are working with circumstances. We are in a moving field of experience.

Maybe we will take some time to talk in pairs and see whether what we have covered makes sense, and if there are any questions.

Clarifying what is meant by a sense of lack

Question: Could you clarify what you meant by a sense of lack when you were using the example of a horizontal and vertical axis?

James: Generally speaking, you could say human beings have a hunger, and sometimes it shows itself as a hunger for progress, or it can be a hunger for domination, or a hunger for contact with others. There is some kind of wanting more, so that is the expression of a lack.

A lack usually indicates that something is missing. What Ayu Khandro is saying in the text is if you find yourself at home in your original condition, the fundamental lack is removed, and therefore the sense of dissatisfaction which drives a great deal of activity can start to settle.

Of course, you still need to eat and sleep, but there is some kind of dissatisfaction which often mobilises us forward. That is the horizontal line; we are in the world and we're trying to get something. People plan ahead to keep themselves in good spirits, and in that way, the lack can channel us into planning, fantasies, and control. But no matter what good things you get, somehow they never fill the gap or the lack; not because they are bad in themselves, but because it's a particular kind of lack. That is the traditional dharma teaching.

I also have a belief that if there has been a great deal of deprivation in early childhood, if you have had a lot of invasion from big people controlling through violence or sexualisation or abandonment – no love, no concern and nobody being with you – this creates a lack of the confirmation of the validity of our being. There is no space for healthy narcissism: the small person saying I am the centre of the world. If a small person is turned into an object and made use of by a big person, there is generally some kind of collapse that happens in the heart. And then very often in later life, that person comes into relationship with a huge longing, but a whole set of unskillful patterns. They are often quite difficult to get on with, because they have never really found their own centre and balance. They long that someone will love them enough to repair this primordial wound – this deep wound in the heart – but it's never enough.

Personally, I think there are only three things that cure it: nature, art or beauty, and some kind of spiritual practice. I think if you have that deep lack and you try to take it to another human being, even another human being working in a professional capacity, they will usually be overwhelmed because there will always be boundaries and reservations. And if it's in a love relationship, the other person will be saying, *'What about me?'*

However, when a baby is very small the mother forgets herself, and it's that self-forgetfulness that opens the field of welcome to the small person. Try as we might it is very difficult to get that as a big person! But you can get some flavour of it watching a sunset or looking at a beautiful painting, when your whole being merges into the colours, or into a piece of music. You can also get some experience through meditation. I think that is what can deal with that fundamental lack, especially if you recognise the natural fullness of the situation.

The term dzogchen itself is translated as 'great perfection' or 'great completion', so it indicates a state free of lack; nothing is missing. Generally in Buddhism when they refer to samsara – this state of suffering – it begins with some kind of slippage or errancy, or some kind of fall into ignorance. Ignorance means you don't see something which is there; you ignore it. When you ignore your own nature, you then have to construct a false nature or ground, and the ego is the false ground of identity. The ego is not bad in itself, it is just a substitute; it doesn't ring true because it's not true, it's something false. And therefore your ego will always cheat you, not because it is bad, but because it doesn't have the resources to do what is required.

When we feel it is all up to me, I have to do it, it's a terrible burden and is very lonely; it cuts us off from having allies. The first step to becoming more healthy is to find some kind of sangha, of

relatedness, which doesn't necessarily mean meeting with a bunch of people regularly. It means getting the experience that the world is basically on our side; it's not our enemy if we find a way of working with it, and then gradually we can start to recognise our own nature.

Therefore, the nature of the lack is very important. For example, let's say I get a bad twist in my neck. I am only able to look at what is here, so I have a lack of what is over there. The fact that I can't see what is happening over there doesn't mean that nothing is happening. This is the nature of ignorance. I only see what is happening here. I have a functional loss of what is happening over there, but what is happening has not vanished. All that is required is to go to an osteopath, and suddenly I'm enlightened! That is why it says it is always there, but because of this tilt that we have, we don't see it.

The more invested you become on what is happening in one particular direction, you have no time, space, or energy to look in the other direction; particularly if there is an intense vibrancy or a crudeness of presentation on the manifest realm, and a lot of subtlety on the unmanifest realm. When you look in the mirror the reflection immediately impinges on you, and you have some response to it. The emptiness of the mirror is much more subtle; just being relaxed and open it is difficult to say anything.

Let's say you are sitting on a beach in the summertime watching the sunset and observing the colours, the shapes, and the light on the water. You meet someone later, and they ask you how it was. *'It was wonderful.'* *'Any more details?'* What are you going to say? It would be meaningless. It is inexpressible. But if you go to see a movie or if you are in a meeting, there is a lot going on, and you might have a lot to say. In that way, the level of manifestation catches our attention; there is something to chew on in the engagement even if the engagement is not pleasant.

Whereas this subtle, relaxed open state cannot be grasped, you can only be it, and when you are it, it is there – complete – but there is nothing to say. That is why it can be very easy to miss the one site that will remove the lack, because on the site of manifestation there are things to hang on to. Just as when we are hungry we imagine taking in food, or when we are thirsty we take in water, or when we are lonely we want a hug. We go shopping for something concrete, and the concrete form may not help.

Doing prostrations is not a bad thing to do, but how far is it going to take you? It is like a bus that goes so far and then runs out of petrol. You do some Dorje Sempa practice, and at the end of your ngondro the lama says, *'Now we have the next bus, and this is a very special bus. This bus has twenty million mantras. It will take you to the next village.'* You get off that bus and get on to another bus. Dharma tours! All of the buses are good, but they all take you somewhere. If you do a lot of zen sitting it takes you somewhere and gives you particular kinds of qualities and skills in your mind. But what is the mind itself? That is the thing.

Maybe we can do a little bit of practice now on that. Going back to these questions we want to raise them in a very relaxed way: What shape is the mind? What colour is the mind? Does it come from some place? Does it rest in some place? Is it resting on anything? Does it go anywhere? Essentially, these questions are asking is the mind a thing like everything else?

We know where the shop is that we bought our shoes from, and we know when they are worn out and we need to get some new shoes. We are used to that kind of calculation. But is the mind a thing like a pair of shoes? Was it there when we were born? Even now, as we are just sitting, where is our

mind? Is it inside our body or our head? Is it developed from movements in the brain? Just sit and observe your mind in the moment that it shows yourself.

Everybody has a mind. If we didn't have a mind we wouldn't be here, so your mind is here and we are just trying to hang out with it and get to know it. What is it like? We can't interview it and ask it questions. You can interview your consciousness and ask it questions and it will have a lot to say, but you can't interview your mind. Like a very quiet, shy person, you have to just be with them and, gradually, the mind – awareness – presence – will show itself.

Okay, we will do that for some time.

[Sitting practice]

That is a practice you can continue to do this afternoon. It is absolutely fundamental to all of the dzogchen paths, because our own nature is not a theory; it's not an idea; it's not a dogma; it's not something you should believe in or not believe in; it is just yourself. Moment by moment, as we exist and go about our lives, this basic presence, which is the basis of our experience, is always there, so at any time, under any circumstances, we can become more or less aware of it. It is not something mystical, it's not special, it's not transcendent; it is the base, the actuality of all our experience. Therefore, it really helps if we just give some space to that task rather than always looking for what new kind of experience will arise.

As we know, there is no end to experiences; something is always happening. There is always something to be curious or excited about. But to have the chance to take the time just to attend in a relaxed spacious way: What is the experience of me being me? In that we see the content of our mind, the thoughts and feelings that seem to be me and who I actually am, go. All of the solutions which are concepts vanish, because concepts don't last long.

'What is it that is always there?'

'It is not a thing.'

'How can I find it?'

'You can never find it.'

'How can I see it?'

'It doesn't have any shape or form. You can't see it.'

'Well, if it's me, how come I am not getting it?'

'You won't get it. You are it. But you don't see it because you believe you are something else.'

It is in that subtle point of the deconstruction of the edifice of the self as a self-existing phenomena, that allows us to see its base which is spacious presence.

This afternoon, for those who like, there will be movement with Eva in the room above where we eat. I recommend that as a useful way of being in touch with yourself as movement, and exploring the relation of stillness and movement, and space and movement. Afterwards we meet back here.

Dzogchen is not about applying antidotes in meditation

We continue with the text, and now Ayu Khandro is starting to talk about mistakes and confusion that can arise. The first sentence is very important for us. She says:

Having confidence in this ally, when mistakes and confusion occur you will not go looking for other allies.

This means that it is enough to have confidence in the natural purity of the mind.

In the field of Tibetan Buddhism, and in the realm of dzogchen, there are many techniques. There are methods of breathing, postures, and of holding the body in different ways. We have done a few of these here and maybe at some time we will do some more of them. All of these are useful, but are they necessary? Because the fundamental point of dzogchen is: everything which arises, arises in, on, through the ground; it doesn't leave the ground. The ground is not like the flat ground that we see outside, because in the springtime you see many plants coming out of the ground. When the plants come out of the ground, they are not in the ground; you can't be in the ground and out of the ground at the same time.

Nothing ever comes out of this ground of the dharmadhatu, everything is within it, so that is why in some traditions they talk of it as the womb of the Great Mother. Everything is unborn, nothing comes out into a separated existence. Whenever we have an experience whether it's a thought or a feeling or a memory, and we think, *'Oh, this is difficult. I shouldn't be having this. What can I do to change it?'* We are treating what we take to be this problem as if it is existing in itself and coming to attack us in some way. It's either binding us and making us feel limited, or it's agitating us so we enter into a kind of confusion; we have a sense of this shouldn't be here. *'I don't want my mind to be like this.'*

We sit in the meditation and we feel dull and stupid. I don't want to feel this way so I have to change something. Who is the one who feels dull and stupid? Stay present with the experiencer of the dull stupidity; this is the one medicine that cures all ills. Once you go into an antidote by thinking, *'Oh, my breathing is trapped, so there is some lock in my nadis.'* And you do your practice and everything feels better. Who feels better? I feel better. I'm a pretty good guy. Actually, I've just fucked myself up through dharma because now I am the dharma champion!

'Guruji, do you know what happened to me today? I was having some problems, but then I remembered your sweet intelligent conversation with me, and doing your practice I have achieved something.'

You have achieved the state of the higher asshole, because there never was any need for you to do anything! Who decided you didn't like the mind the way it was? You did. This is the part of you that is like the good housewives that live in this village. Somebody drops a cigarette butt on their pavement, and because they are constantly looking out the window, they run outside to sweep it up. *'Phew! That's better.'* If you want to have a mind like that, you will be busy all the time.

What about all the stuff in your mind? It is not your business. The mind itself is not a personal property. Awareness – rigpa – is exactly us; it is more intimately 'us' than anything else, but it is not a personal possession. Nowadays, if you go through the airport, you'll see lots of signs saying don't take anyone else's bag and don't take responsibility for anyone else's property, because if you take their bag through customs and it's full of cocaine you'll be in trouble. You can't say, *'Somebody gave it to me.'* You have to know what is yours and what isn't yours.

When this dull, stupid experience arises in the meditation and you say I don't want my mind to be this way, then you are saying, it is mine, but I don't want it to be mine. I am now having to cut inside myself to remove something which appears to be mine. This involves the duality of self and other, the duality of hopes and fears, and the desire to get rid of something as if it was poisonous. *'If I sit with my mind like this, I will have a bad meditation.'* We have already decided that the quality of a meditation is decided by the content of the mind.

This is not dzogchen. The quality of the meditation is determined by the integration of the ground and what is arising. When you see that everything that arises is the radiance of the ground, it doesn't matter what form it shows: sometimes it looks like nirvana and sometimes it looks like samsara; sometimes it's bright and shiny and sometimes it's dull and stupid. But if you decide you don't want it to be like that and you apply an antidote, you are following the path of duality. It may be the higher path of duality according to the tantras and so on, but it is still the path of duality. Therefore, rather than entering into the path of technique, we bring ourselves into the state of just being with what is there. How do we do that? What is there is already there; don't merge into it.

In the afternoon, if you feel tired and a little bit collapsed, you gently draw your attention back. Of course you can do some breathing techniques or exercise to make yourself feel more lively and increase your energy, but you don't have to do that. Just very gently recognise this state and you are present with it. You are not present as standing side-by-side, shoulder to shoulder, and you are not merged in or standing back and observing. The experience will change and go, and this is the self-liberation of phenomena that is the heart of this teaching.

And that is what Ayu Khandro is saying. If you have confidence in the ally of being present with whatever happens, then when mistakes or confusions arise, when it feels terrible and you don't seem to know what you are doing and life is very hard and you want someone to help you - don't go after anything else, just stay present with however it is. That is very hard because we don't want our life to be determined by a force other than us. Deep inside us is the fantasy of the omnipotent ego self: I should be able to live life on my terms. A great deal of spiritual practice is there to reinforce our power to control events, whether it is doing some wrathful deity to stop obstructions and difficulties, or whether it's to make life easier.

In the big tantric practices we have the four activities: pacifying, increasing or developing, overawing using majestic presence, or destroying. These big pujas are called *trinle* which is an honorific term that means activity. When you do a puja you are engaging energetically in the transformation of the structure of the world, partly psychological, and according to the tradition, partly cosmological. It is setting out to make things different.

Dzogchen says from the very beginning everything has been inseparable from the ground, so don't use your energy to change energy. Allow energy to rest in the ground and then there is the freedom of openness, and from that, when there is a necessity of manifesting, you can change. That means that if you are crossing the road and a car is coming towards you, and you notice that the car is going faster than you thought when you first started to walk across the road, either you run forward or back. You don't stand there and do nothing, that would not be dzogchen! It is not being stupid; it is using energy when you need to use energy, and not using energy when you don't need to. A car is dangerous if it's going to hit you. A horrible thought in your mind in meditation is not dangerous unless you throw yourself in front of it. If you throw yourself in front of the car it will hit you. If you throw yourself into the negative thought it will trap you.

'Why are you doing that?'

'I don't like it to be there.'

'Who is the one who doesn't like it to be there? Stay with the one who is having the thought 'I don't like it to be there.'

One ground, and arising from it these two aspects of our energy – looks like object, looks like subject – these two movements of energy are moving together. The subject side says, *'I don't like the object. It's my world. Fuck off! Go away.'* But subject and object arise together, so one moment I am free

and then in the next moment some object catches me. It is always like this, it can't be other because this is the realm of duality.

The subject is like a tear in the world. If subject and object arise together, they are like twins and collaborate. But if the tear of saying, 'I am the subject', 'I don't like the object', or 'I can control the object' occurs, that tear doesn't keep the subject safe, because the subject needs the object; so now you have an antagonism towards what you need and that is a big problem. You are like a stropky teenager saying to your mum, *'I don't like you. Fuck off!'* The mother says, *'Oh, I think I should leave home then, because clearly this is your house and you bring in the money! You're such a marvelous little boy!'* The tail shouldn't wag the dog; the dog should wag the tail.

When you have this situation, the subject thought is telling the object thought: 'don't be the way you are because I don't like it'. Who is the one who is present with the subject and the object? This is awareness. When you over-identify in the subject thought, you lose the ground of your being, and you are trapped in this endless movement of subject and object. This is the vital point in meditation. If you go into the subject complex and you try to privilege it by thinking 'this is who I am', you have a problem.

In tantra you take this complex and you merge it in with the deity: I am Tara or Padmasambhava. And you use that through the *kyerim* and *dzogrim*, through the development and completing stages to dissolve the sense that this subject part is the true self. In dzogchen, we do that directly. The work has to be done to see there is no substance in my feeling I don't want this thought in my mind.

That is what she is saying very clearly: this is the real ally. Stay with the empty presence which is uncontaminated by whatever arises and therefore doesn't need to be afraid of whatever arises and doesn't have to get rid of whatever arises. As soon as you go into pushing away what you don't like and pulling in what you do like, you are not doing meditation; you are doing bias; you are doing prejudice; you are doing the work of dualistic consciousness. If we really understand that then life gets much simpler.

Then she says,

And when good or bad thoughts of whatever kind arise, without artificiality or adulteration remain shining in your own place.

This is just what I have been describing. Shining here means having a clear, simple surface.

In the dzogchen texts, you often see they use the word clarity – *salwa* – which is the quality of the field of experience. It is not the quality of the ground but the field of experience, that is to say, everything is shining and bright, therefore, there is no need to have prejudice or bias in any particular direction. If a good thought comes or a bad thought comes, it's arising inside the field which is arising in the field of emptiness. Emptiness shows everything, out of which, or within which, there is this specific moment of something or this particular thought.

We are sitting here and our gaze is slightly open, and we are aware of the building, people, sounds, bells and so on, and a thought arises in the mind. If you lose the context and collapse into the thought, you've lost your frame of reference. You have lost the clarity of the field of emergence that everything is arising at once. Instead of feeling the subject and object as movements in the same space, you've merged into the subject side and forgotten the object side, and that tumbles you down. What she is saying is you don't need to enter into any artificiality; you don't need to

adulterate it or to add anything; it doesn't need to be improved in any way. Just allow what is arising to be as it is, because who says this is a good or a bad thought? We do.

When you go out into the country there are many different plants. You walk through the fields in the summertime. You might be wearing shorts and have bare legs. If you are not looking where you are going, suddenly your leg feels scratched by brambles or nettles and it is as if this plant is attacking you; now your leg is stinging. *'This is a bad plant. We shouldn't have plants like this!'* Who is the plant bad for? Human beings. Some other creatures quite like these plants as they are able to eat them and find little insects living on them, so they are not bad for everyone. It is always how we are positioned, our point of view, our interpretation, that makes things good or bad.

When you get a strong experience, we say that's wonderful or that's terrible. It is the intensity of our own bias or turn which generates the sense that the problem or the value is in the actual object; it is not arising in the unification. Again and again, we are saying this is a bad thought. This is why we need to go back to the preparation: What shape is the mind? What colour is the mind? Where does the mind stay?

When you see directly the mind is infinite – it has no boundary – then there is nothing outside the mind, so clearly everything arises inside the mind. When you look at a thought, as they do more in mahamudra (Where do thoughts come from? Where do they stay? And where do they go?), there is no separate point of creation for these thoughts; they arise out of the mind within the mind. Just as in the summertime when you sometimes see a cloud that seems to be arising out of the sky. When that is the case, if we see that the mind itself is pure from the very beginning – fresh, naked, perfect – why do we think this product of the perfect mind is a bad thought? It is not intrinsically bad in itself; it doesn't have an essence of badness in it, badness is the interpretation. Badness or goodness is the movement of duality. The thought itself is just the radiance of the dharmakaya, whether it looks bad to us or not.

Therefore, when you are sitting and you feel tired and stupid, this is also the radiance of the dharmakaya. How can this be? This doesn't make any sense. The Buddha is shining. Where did the thought come from? It comes from emptiness; it is empty, it doesn't have any other source, it is radiance. But surely radiance is bright and shining with rainbow colours, sweet music, and a side dish of chocolate? Maybe not.

To taste direct experience, let go of the constructs

What we encounter here is our prejudice, our knowledge, and our fantasy of how we think things should be; and this whole construction now meets the actuality of what is occurring. We have a map and we have the territory. We've had the map for quite a long time. We like our map, but we are not so sure about the territory which seems to be full of horrible thoughts. The map says, *'When I am enlightened my mind will be radiant and shining. There will no problems, it will be like the clear, blue sky.'* And now, today, our mind is not like that. The map is correct and the mind is bad, therefore on the basis of our holy map we will correct the mind. No. The map is wrong.

This is what Ayu Khandro means when she says in the beginning of the paragraph, having confidence in this ally, being close to your own direct experience, taste it for yourself. Emptiness is emptiness – awareness is awareness – this is it. Therefore, what is arising is the energy of awareness; it's not good or bad – stay open with it – and whatever interpretative framework you have, or supposition or imagination of how it should be, is just another set of constructs. If you hold onto the construct you won't get the actual direct experience. Let go of the constructs; this is always the choice. If you follow the path of interpretation you will be saying something is good or bad; if you stay directly

present with whatever occurs, the experiences come and go and what remains is the openness of natural clarity.

This is what she means when she says you rest with whatever comes, shining in your own place, because you haven't got involved with what is going on.

By continuously keeping to just that state of clarity and awareness you will experience the self-liberation of whatever comes.

If the mind moves, life becomes complicated. In the zen tradition, they always say when the mind moves the ten thousand things arise. All the phenomena of the world occur when your mind moves; when you get trapped in this subjective sense of 'I am this person', you are immediately looking around at what you like and what you don't like, and you start to apply names. If the mind doesn't move and is just present, phenomena and appearances move, they arise and they are self-liberating, but the mind itself never moves. This is the key thing. The energy of the mind or becoming or movement is always changing; the mind itself doesn't change.

She says,

By developing the continuous practice of the non-meditation of thusness, the afflictions will gradually diminish.

By developing the practice she simply means that you get better and better at not moving. You are not trying to become better at doing something; you are becoming better at avoiding the hooks that would bind you into movement or prejudice. The more you can relax and stay open, this is the non-meditation of thusness. You just stay open with whatever occurs. You are not artificially trying to create or avoid anything. She says if you do that the afflictions will gradually diminish.

At first, you have many rough thoughts, and it is so easy to be involved in what's going on. It feels natural and almost irresistible to be caught up in thought and emotional turbulence. The more you can see that this turbulence has no real value in it and that actually you don't need to get anything, then the power of these afflictions of mental dullness, attraction, aversion, jealousy, pride and all the particular feeling tone drivers which bring about subject/object interaction, gradually lose their power. Why? Because desire without a desirer is just a possibility; anger without somebody who is willing to be angry is just a possibility; jealousy without somebody who is willing to be jealous is just a possibility; so these remain potentials or patterns of energy. When you become angry then you have an investment, and that makes the anger more energized, because anger doesn't really have much energy in itself; it exists as a potential.

If you have a jar of chili powder it sits there very peacefully. If you take some of that chili and put it on a piece of paper imagining you are about to snort cocaine by taking a line up your nose, then you will have a certain kind of experience, because the chili will now be in a dualistic interaction with the mucous membrane of your nostrils! In the same way, the power of the chili is just a potential. Unless you put the chili up your own nose, nothing is going to happen. The anger, the jealousy, the pride, the stupidity: all of these are potentials, it is our engagement with them that makes it come alive. Therefore, the more you relax, these energetic forms simply become quiescent because they don't really have any energy of their own; they feel like they have energy because you always go to them.

The power of the object lies in the subject

If you smoke cigarettes, when you see a packet of cigarettes, this cigarette says 'smoke me.' You say 'okay', and you have a cigarette. Every time you have a cigarette you reinforce the power of the cigarette to say 'smoke me,' and if you are a drinker, the bottle says 'drink me.' You say okay. And so next time you see a bottle you hear it calling; even when it is hidden in the cupboard, it seems to be shouting 'time for a drink.'

It looks as if the power is in the object. But then you have a friend who never drinks alcohol, who just looks at the bottle as there is nothing in it for them. The bottle is not calling or singing or dancing or taking its clothes off; it's not doing anything exciting for the person who doesn't drink. If you don't smoke cigarettes, you look at them and think why would anybody do that? But the person who smokes sees it, and they want to have a cigarette.

The power of the object lies in the subject. The power of the five poisons lies in the subject. And this is what Ayu Khandro is meaning; there is one golden key. If you stay relaxed and present, gradually all these vibratory energies around you that seem to be calling out to you, that seem to be demanding that you get involved, don't shout so much; it becomes easier to walk past them and not be bothered, and that is what she is indicating.

Then she says:

However, although we practice to always abide in thusness, just as a sweet sound requires the string to be just right, if you find you are tuned too tightly or too loosely then you must maintain the state of undistracted recollection.

Although we are saying the central thing is to be relaxed and open it doesn't mean to be sloppy or anything goes, because openness and clarity also has a precision and a balance. If you are balanced on the middle point between going towards the object or away from the object, then that is the perfect balance and there is no energy in it. But if you are off-balance then difficulties will arise, because if you think that when you are off-balanced you are balanced, you have a problem.

She is using the example of a musical instrument here. If the strings are too tight or too slack you have to get them perfectly adjusted to the key that you are going to play in. The key that we play is the middle way. We want to be balanced between subject and object – open to each – so whenever you find you have a bias return to the relaxed openness which has clarity. The mind is empty and clear and that is the central balancing point. If you've got too much emptiness it can become a bit vague, and if you have too much clarity it can move into agitation. And these are the main problems you see described again and again in the meditation texts.

How do we do this? We return to the basic issue of presence: where does the mind rest? When you find that the mind is resting nowhere, nowhere is where you have to be. As soon as you find yourself going somewhere you are losing your balance, because nowhere is everywhere. When the mind is not resting anywhere or fixated on any shape, it is always wherever something is happening. How is this?

The church bells ring and we know that the church bells are about two hundred metres from here; they are not in the room. We think we are sitting in the room hearing the church bells. We did some science at school, so we know that when the bell rings it sets the air in motion, and the vibration comes through the air, all the way up the street, through the window, and into our ears which then vibrate.

Dzogchen would say, *'Oh, that's an interesting set of ideas. Let them be self-liberated'* because in the immediacy of the experience a sound arises. How do we know this? Because we hear it. How do we know we hear it? Because we have an awareness of the experience of the sound of the bell and the hearing of the sound of the bell, therefore, the sound and the hearing – the object and the subject – are both revealed in our awareness. We are aware that we hear the bells. Is everyone here able to do that? Where is that awareness? It is wherever it needs to be. Sometimes you might hear it as if you are hearing something from very far away, or sometimes it might be right in the centre of your being, and it might feel as if the whole of you is vibrating. Wherever the experience arises, you are present; if you were not present, you wouldn't hear it.

You don't need to put your presence in the back of a car and drive it around very fast with a siren going off, saying, *'I am a dzogchen practitioner!'* It's not like that. Immediately the bell is ringing, you are present. The presence is the basis of hearing the bell, it's not an optional extra, something you add on top. Presence is always there but you are not aware of presence; without the presence you wouldn't hear anything. What she is saying here is that undistracted recollection doesn't mean memory or a conceptual recollection of something, it means collecting yourself back into where you are. The Tibetan word is *drenpa* which is also used for memory, because they have exactly the same difficulties we have with language; but it doesn't mean remembering something else.

When you were a kid and you were out with your mum making some noise, your mum might have said. *'Remember where you are.'* Remembering where you are is not remembering something else, it is calling you back to where you are; not calling something else towards you, but calling yourself into exactly where you are. Therefore, undistracted recollection is just another way of saying 'be present' exactly in the moment of the arising of each experience.

Okay, so let's do a little more practice, and we can try to bring this into being. Whatever is arising in the mind whether it seems clear, helpful, difficult, confused, even if you don't seem to be able to get any clarity, don't collapse, just be aware of the dullness. You are present with the dullness. The dullness is dull, but the presence is not dull. The presence is inseparable from the dullness, but it is not dull. In the same way, when the dull image arises as a reflection in the mirror, you look in the mirror and you see something dull, but the mirror is not dull; it is the clarity of the mirror that allows the dull reflection to appear there. Don't fall into the content of the mind; stay with the clarity of the presence, whatever happens.

[Sitting practice]

What about love?

Clarity can seem a little bit cold, so there is always this question about the implications of this kind of practice for people being together. Or in another language, what about love? What does it mean to feel some warmth for another person? The word love is very problematic. Love and hate are not so far apart.

From the Buddhist point of view, we have a general desire, may all sentient beings be happy. But of course we don't live with all sentient beings, we live in particular circumstances where we spend more time with certain people than with others. We are drawn to people for all sorts of reasons: there could be sexual interest, family interests, children and so on. What is the purpose of that being together? Does it have any purpose apart from the initial desires that create the glue that binds us together?

From the point of view of dzogchen, subject and object are inseparable. If there is a subject, there is always an object; if there's an object, there is always a subject. Everything is experience. What quality do we want to bring into the field of experience? We talked about how openness can give rise to spontaneous contact which is fresh. Is this the same as love? The word love also carries connotations of dependency and reliability, as well as, in fact, the incorporation of the other into the matrix of my assumptions and predictions about how the world will be.

If we say to someone, '*I love you,*' it usually means something like '*Don't leave me. I need you.*' What do I need you for? At first it might be having fun and having sex, but after a while, if you get close to the other person, I need you in order to be me, because how I am is becoming inextricably bound up with you. Is this a bad thing? If you are following the hinayana path of renunciation you need to be a little bit careful, because clearly desire and attachment are becoming very strong. From the point of view of non-duality, it is not such a problem because the self has no skin around it; the self isn't a private domain.

We are always being impacted and influenced by other people, so the idea that 'if you leave me, I will lose a part of myself' is exactly true. I get used to being this way with you because you are a door to a room in myself. When we first meet and get involved the door opens into quite a small room, and the more time we spend together the room gets bigger and bigger. We have shared memories, shared hopes, and there is a particular kind of relaxation that although I know you will get pissed off with me, I am not scared of your judgement anymore, so I can relax in this room. There is a kind of ease of being with someone under those circumstances.

We can integrate that in the meditation. We can see that the energy of self and the energy of other, and the intersubjective movement, creates a new complex pattern. This arises due to causes and circumstances, and it has some particular advantageous and not so advantageous flavours to it. How are we going to spend the time between now and death? You can spend it on your own – happy or sad. You can spend it with someone else – happy or sad. There are not so many other opportunities! Wherever you find yourself, the main issue is happy or sad.

What do you have to do in order to feel at home in that situation? For some people being on their own is good because they can make their own shoes and the shoes always fit their feet. For other people being on their own is terrible; they feel ill at ease, unsatisfied and lacking something. For some people being in a couple or a family situation is very fulfilling, and for other people it becomes persecutory and they feel they are losing themselves. Each of us has to be in touch with our own energy and try to make the micro-adjustments that make whatever form of life we have possible.

Love and compassion as availability

How can dharma help in this? Relaxing, opening, and being in touch with feelings of irritation, antipathy, aggression and so on, allows us to see that these feelings are not so real and don't have to be acted on. Whatever we choose, we are also, simultaneously, not choosing other things. This is a fact. If you say 'yes' to the right, you immediately – undeniably – are saying 'no' to the left and vice versa. You cannot have it all; it's not possible. Whatever we choose will be a slice or a section of the world. Tibetans call it *cha*, your share.

You have to make sure that you make the right choice for your share, because you have to live with your share, or do something to change it. The share is the pattern of energy that you end up spending your time with and is empty of inherent self-nature; it can change. Relationships can break up and new family constellations come into being. Even if it remains stable it is still not established as something truly real; it is an ongoing interplay of energy.

If a couple meet at seventeen, and spend the rest of their lives together, that is a movement of energies together day-by-day and night-by-night over a very long period of time. You can say, *'Oh, they were born to be together.'* But being together is a dynamic situation full of micro-choices and adjustments, so that between the two of them they create a new centre of balance. The balance line is no longer running through each individual, but is somehow in between them. If they both can feel that balance, respect it, and want it to be there, then the alive awake responsiveness – the mutual adjustment – keeps the balance going. It is when people don't want to do the work of keeping the central balance that you have difficulty; only one person doing it becomes a problem.

What does this say about love? May all beings be happy. May this particular person be happy. May this particular person be happier than other people... but may all sentient beings be happy! How can I give something special to this person who wants me to give them something special, otherwise, they will be pissed off? *'You don't want to spend time with me. You never want to do nice things with me!'* When we do something special, what about all sentient beings? We can't take all sentient beings to the cinema or out for a nice meal.

It is exactly the same issue in the meditation: how to hold the field of experience, and be in the precise moment of the experience? If you are blinkered, you have a forgetfulness that can make the world small. If you always keep very open, you don't have the connection that makes intimacy possible. We have to be available, but not trapped. If you over-invest someone with importance, then they start to carry the burden of your identity, and that can be quite heavy because the meaning of their life is your life and that is very small. In English, they say, don't put all your eggs in one basket, and I am sure every language has a similar kind of saying. However, if you want to have a nuclear family you do put all your eggs in one basket, but we also know that each member of the family has to have their own friends and activities that they go out to, otherwise, it becomes a little bit tight in there.

From the point of view of dzogchen, compassion is essentially availability: I am available. I am not turning my face away from you. But it also means I am available as me, with my particular configuration of energy; I am not available according to your fantasy. I can't necessarily promise to give you what you want, but I can be available. Therefore when relatedness works out well as a mutual thing, both parties have to be aware of the condition and capacity of themselves and the condition and capacity of the other, because if you ask someone to give something they can't give, you start to feel rejected.

If somebody says, *'Actually, I have to go to this meeting tonight. I can't be with you.'* The other person can hear that as a neutral fact or a personal rejection. If it happens all the time, they are likely to take it as a personal rejection. If they are narcissistically sensitive they may well take it every time as a personal rejection, but it is actually a statement. The fact that I have to go to the meeting *de facto* means I am rejecting you, but not from my heart, just from my timetable. The fact that I love you doesn't mean that I can burn my diary! I still have things to do, which means that if you want to have a fight, the things that I do are more important than you. You know couples are in trouble when they start fighting along those lines! That is a battle you don't want to have.

'But I thought I was everything for you!'

'Yes, I did say that... I seemed to recall I said it in bed one night... but now it's Monday morning and I am getting late for work.'

In that way, living systems require mutual attention. The danger is because you feel you want to save and be available for beings, you go into rescue mode, which turns you into the lonely hero – it

is all up to me. But real relatedness between people can't be someone doing ninety percent of the work; it has to be a proper balance otherwise the system is so biased it is going to crash.

The nature of the mind – our presence – is open to everything. We engage in the field, which means we are aware that there are a lot of people in the world. We have lines to many different people in the world as work colleagues and so on, and we have responsibilities as parents and lovers which require particular qualities of energy. All of that needs to be balanced, and maybe space is the best field for it to be balanced in.

When people get anxious and feel they are being deprived, it is usually because there is an imbalance of the elements. We have earth, water, fire, air and space. When we feel 'I am not getting enough of you,' the fire element is going down, the wind element is going up, and it starts to feel unstable; there is a contraction. There is an absence of the space element, and it can lead into a kind of rigidity. There may be tears – lots of the water element – dissolving and falling apart – and then a kind of 'Fuck you!' so that the fire and the earth elements come back in a combative form.

Space is the central point

How to rebalance the elements is very important; the basis is always space. Space is the main harmoniser of all the elements. Everything can come into space. Whether you are doing a yoga practice functioning on the central channel and integrating the chakras and the energy through that, or you are doing open meditation and allowing everything to be just where it is, or you are doing tantric transformations - space is the central point.

The best way to balance other people's energy is to have our own energy in balance. The balance is always dynamic and is going to be flexible. If you want to have a close, ongoing relationship with someone, you will have to allocate resources in that direction. If you are going to have kids, you will have to allocate resources in that direction, and that means they are then ring-fenced and kind of protected from being given to anyone else; if something new and exciting arrives you don't have much to give to it. A lot of ordinary life is about voluntarily putting yourself into restriction. If you want to have kids it costs money, time, energy and all the rest of it.

But I want to have freedom as well. So then there is the question, what is freedom *within* restriction, rather than freedom *from* restriction? How to feel free and at ease, satisfied and happy, even when you have many obligations, duties, and responsibilities? Personally, I think the heart of that is a kind of volunteerism: it is the ceaseless process of giving yourself to the situation.

There are many demands that come to us; when I go into work on Tuesday morning there will be eighty or more emails and my answerphone will be full of messages. People want me to do things. Do I want to do these things? Of course! Why would I not want to do them? What else would I do with my time? I can have many fantasies about what I would rather do, but if we follow the bodhisattva path, and we are going to be available for others, then we say there is a primacy to the other rather than to the self. Our ordinary orientation is 'me first – you second'. The bodhisattva flips that over to say, you first – me second.

How do we keep doing that without this rubber band of '*Fuck you! What about me?!*' This happens, doesn't it, if you get burnt out or overextended for the other? I think that that always comes when we are stuck from the ego position. The ego is small, it is a limited resource, and it will get exhausted. The heart or the buddha nature is not a limited resource. The ego and the buddha nature need to be in friendly communication because otherwise the heart is saying, '*yes,*' and the ego is saying, '*Fuck off!*' That is very important, isn't it?

What about loving yourself?

Comment: Could you, within this context, say something about if you want to love others then you have to also love yourself.

James: That's a very nice link, because to love yourself is to be available for yourself.

We have many voices which might say, *'I don't want to do this. What is in it for me? Why should I?'* Listening to these voices may feel like taking care of myself, but it may be taking care of my limitation. These are the voices of the ego that says we have a small pot, and if you give away all your sweeties and chocolates what are you going to eat? Keep some for yourself. In fact, don't tell anyone you've got any chocolates! Then the heart says, *'May all beings eat chocolate,'* and that is a real tension. What is the basis that I need to stay fresh and available? The heart is an infinity. The more we can rest in that, the more we have a cornucopia; our body will get a bit tired, but you can give a lot.

Personally, I have seen many old lamas giving long initiations and teachings of over eight hours with very little gap in between. They are carried in half-dead, they sit down and begin and everything is fireworks; then they are carried out half-dead because their life was in the practice. Their energy wasn't for having a chat; they were putting everything into the main project.

We have to know how we want to live. We also need to know how to say no, because learning to say no is very important.

'I will not do this for you. I will not help you'

'Why?'

'Because I don't want to help you. I don't like you. You are the sort of person I personally don't want to help, so I am referring you back to your doctor and he can refer you to another hospital. I don't want to see you in this building ever again, and I'm putting that on the computer. You've insulted the receptionist. You always come late. You talk about your masturbation all the time; it's boring and it's sickening and you don't want to change. I also have a life and a mind. I am not a toilet to hear this drivel from you. If you don't like it there is a complaint form down in the office. Now go away!'

That is quite strong, and sometimes I have to do that. If you can't do that, life is very difficult; you are always eating shit. That is the real world and some people are horrible. If you can't say no to them, then you might think you are being a nice person. But what are you doing? You are in collusion. You are going along with their corrupt habit by not saying it is intolerable, and sometimes that is a real intervention.

'Oh, I didn't really mean to do it.'

'Well if you didn't mean to do it, why did you do it? Do you think that your actions have no consequences?'

They say that in a future time the human race will decline to a point when people are dying by the time they are twenty. And at that time, the future buddha, Maitreya, will arrive. He will start by saying try to do good things, don't do bad things, because actions have consequences. Sometimes we have to be like Maitreya and just say that to people. If you are clear, that could also be love. If you are in retaliation and you have had it up to here, or if you are acting out your own neurosis, it's

not love at all. But if you can see helping somebody to continue causing trouble is not helping them, then you can be very firm and clear.

I think we need to know our own capacity. We need to be available to see the other person, and we need to be willing to meet them. How we will meet people will depend on our own judgement as people. You can't learn it out of a rule book. That is why being alive is such a perilous and uncertain business, because if you deal with somebody very harshly, they will make a complaint. You have to be willing to go through the Complaints Procedure, and all the rest of it. But if you don't block it, what are you doing? We have a saying, 'anything for a quiet life,' but that is not a very wise way of proceeding as life sometimes requires courage as well, therefore, love can involve a lot of challenge.

From the point of view of dzogchen, the more relaxed and open we are, the more attentive to all the information from the field, including ourselves. What is my capacity? Am I just getting pissed off? Is this an old number? Does this person remind me of my mother? Whatever it would be, we have to see what are the internal and external factors operating and how are they coming together? Is there clarity in this, or not? I think that for me would be the work of love: to try to really be present with the optimal possibility of the situation.

And that may involve us stepping out of where we feel safe; we may need to be more challenging than we would like to be. Life's okay if you are nice person; you help people and you smile a lot; probably nobody is going to attack you. But once you start challenging people and say, '*Get a life! This is intolerable! Do you have any idea what you do to other people? Let me tell you,*' then you are on very thin ice. I think that is where the line of love from your heart to their heart to make some bridge of understanding becomes very important – but it's scary.

If you read these stories of Padmasambhava, and all these great saints, what they did was very radical. Naropa comes to see Tilopa, this crazy yogi in India, and he asks him for instructions and gives him outrageous things to do. He takes him up a tower, and they are looking around at the lovely view. Tilopa says to Naropa, '*If I had a good student, he would just jump off the tower. But I don't have a good student.*' So Naropa jumps off the tower and is lying in a mess. Nowadays, an ambulance would come and there would be a risk assessment and you would be in court because you would not have been taking care of somebody you had a responsibility for. Luckily, at that time in India, it was a bit more casual. We think Tilopa is wonderful, but he was willing to make a radical action to disrupt someone.

We are talking about love in different ways. Love as a kind of containment that will develop a family and make children or lovers feel safe is one thing. Love as a meeting which can help to bring out the best in someone else whether that is done in a formal or informal setting is a bit more risky, because it involves applying a pressure. And, of course, who the hell am I to act on someone else's life? What right have I got? Shouldn't I just be tiptoeing carefully and not causing any trouble?

If Tilopa had thought that, there would be no Kagyu lineage. If Naropa had thought that in relation to Marpa there would be no lineage, and if Marpa had thought that in relation to Milarepa there would be no Kagyupa lineage; it would not have occurred. They took radical action because they saw something. Just as, according to the stories, Michelangelo could look at a block of marble and see the figure he was going to carve inside it. He would begin by just taking away everything that was covering the figure that he wanted. That is pretty amazing; he could see something.

Just as when Marpa met Milarepa and gave him this big bowl of chang beer to drink, and he drank it all. Marpa says, '*Okay, you're a good boy. Now I will treat you like shit.*' Why? Because that was the

most helpful thing to do. How did he know that? He got a computer print out from Head Office, and looked up page three in his Guru Manual! He didn't know what he was doing, but he was working with the circumstances, the vibration, and the potential.

Essentially, love and compassion and all of these things requires us just to be available, therefore. whatever can help us be available is probably useful.

Okay, maybe we will do some more sitting before we eat.

[Sitting practice and break]

We can do some meditation practice, but first I will say a little bit about this style which is a slightly different style for entering into this state of openness. It is very familiar to many of you and it belongs in the family of practices called guru yoga.

Guru can mean many different things. It can mean teacher or it can mean master in a kind of hierarchical usually patriarchal sense, and it can also mean facilitator: somebody whose job it is to make life a bit easier.

Yoga has different understandings. The Indian notion of yoga is usually linked to the Indo-European root that we have as a yoke: the piece of wood that brings together two buffaloes for pulling a cart or a plough. It is linked with the idea of joining you back to your natural state or your original condition, and it is also linking the breath to the body. The Tibetan translation of yoga is *naljor*. *Nal* means relaxed or easy, and *jor* means to join, so it means staying in, or abiding in, or being at ease.

One of the things that can make us uptight is the feeling that we are lonely or lost or abandoned. Human beings are relational creatures; in fact, just about every living thing is relational. We come into our existence through relating to others and, as we have looked in the last couple of days, in dzogchen we would understand that in terms of the very nature of non-duality: subject and object are not two separate things. How could one thing that is cut away, cut asunder, cut adrift, be complete in itself? As soon as we separate off, we feel that we are incomplete and we seek for that which completes us.

As we have looked, in the dzogchen tradition the main line of the completion is the vertical one: integrating our manifestation into the ground of the manifestation. In tantra the link is more through the teacher, and this is incorporated in the general dzogchen practice. The teacher here represents all the teachers who have existed in the lineage, from the time of the primordial buddha Kuntuzangpo, to Vajrasattva, to Garab Dorje, Manjushrimitra, Shri Singha, Padmasambhava, and so on, down to whoever is teaching you now.

It also means the presence of all the teachers who you have ever had, because if you didn't have some kind of an education you wouldn't be able to follow the teachers. The people who helped you to learn to speak, to read and write, to go to school, to think, and to try to understand things; all of these are within the lineage of the practice because they are the points of communication. If somebody is teaching, there has to be somebody who is receiving the teaching; who wants to learn something. You can't just have a radio station pumping out messages if nobody has a radio, as it would have no meaning. Therefore, subject and object are in this continuing intercourse.

The function of the guru yoga meditation is to take us from our point of isolation as an individual and to bring us into alignment with a form that we can trust or believe in, so that we can experience an

unimpeded flow into that state, and to experience the non-difference between the state of the teacher and our own state. It is essentially a way of breaking down the boundary of isolation, and also breaking down the fantasy of the superiority of other people's situations. It is very easy to imagine that somebody is really marvelous, and they have whatever is required.

Here, we have a big throne for the Karmapa, because the Karmapa has a lot of whatever people want. He doesn't have any more buddha nature than anyone else. He can have a very good education and be very talented in music, painting, and dance. He can do rituals forward, backwards, and upside down. He can perform many marvelous things, but he doesn't have any more buddha nature. His name is Karmapa and karma means activity, so he is manifestly on the side of movement. He is an energetic force that links with other people, and that is very helpful for transformation, but his basic nature and your basic nature is the same. Nobody has got a better buddha nature; nobody has got an inferior buddha nature.

When we do the guru yoga, you can do it in different styles. You can do it by putting the teacher up, which would be the tantric method, and feeling blessing coming down. There are many beautiful chants and songs calling the guru from afar, which are poignant, evocative, and romantic, and similar to Sufi and Christian chants. In dzogchen, it is not done in that way. It is much more what we have and what the teacher has is the same, but we are a bit cut off from what we have because we are protecting ourselves. Therefore, if we can drop our protection, but move towards integration with the state of the teacher, then we don't remain in that uncertain state of *'I've given up all the things that I know how to do, and now I am in this new state and I don't what the hell is going on.'*

The guru yoga is essentially a transitional move to help us stabilise the integration of our awareness in the ground, and subsequently and consequently of all the movement into being recognised as the energy of the ground. That is the basic structure of it, and we do it very simply. We imagine in the space in front of us – about two arms length away – a white letter 'A' surrounded by rainbow coloured light. The white letter 'A' is the traditional symbol of emptiness. It means the heart of all the buddhas, the essence of the transmission, and is the direct experience of emptiness which is open, devoid of limiting substance, and yet with the potentiality to show everything in the manner of a dream.

The letter 'A' is surrounded by these five-coloured lights, which symbolise the emergence of the elements out of which all the forms and structures of the world are created. Essentially, it is the condensation of 'form is emptiness, emptiness is form', that we are familiar with from the Heart Sutra. We focus our attention on this white letter 'A.' If you know the Tibetan shape of it you can imagine that, or you can just imagine a capital 'A.' If you are not very good at visualising it doesn't matter; the key thing is just to have the feeling tone that here in front of you is the actual direct presence of all the teachers of the lineage. This is the unperverted, undefiled purity of transmission right from the heart of the original Buddha himself.

You can also visualise a white 'A' in your own heart, and then we make the sound of *Aaa* three times. As we say *Aaa* – the sound of emptiness – we release all the tensions in our body, our voice, and our mind – just completely open. In that state, our empty open heart and the empty open heart of all the buddhas comes into alignment; there is no difference between them. We rest in that state, and then these *Aaas* dissolve and we are just sitting.

It gives us a way of gathering ourselves together, which can be useful sometimes at the end of the day if you are tired when just to sit and relax you might easily fall asleep. This is a slightly more elaborated artificial version if you like. It is also useful because it has some warmth, so you can bring

a devotional aspect into it; you can sing the Seven Line Prayer, mantras, and so on, to make a stronger connection. However, we always have to remember, if we do that, we are building up an energetic field which means we are focusing on energy. And if at this stage in our practice we need to find the direct simple nature itself, this energetic warmth and turbulence, reassuring as it is, is not necessarily the key thing to help us on our task.

Okay, so we will try this. Sit in a relaxed way visualising the white letter 'A' and make the sound of *Aaa* three times, then letting the visualisation dissolve, we sit in a state of openness. In that state you can just be with whatever is arising, or you can return to these questions we looked at earlier: Where does the mind stay? Where does it go? Where does it come from? Does it have a colour or a shape? Just explore what seems most useful to you.

[Guru yoga meditation]

Sunday 14 October

Assumptions rest in the house of artifice

Last night, some of us were dancing, and it was a very nice, freeing, pleasurable experience that has the effect of shifting one's mood; the body feels in a different way, people speak in a more relaxed way, and certainly the mind is more spacious and immediate. In some ways, this may or may not be helpful for meditation, and this is central to the whole question of the use of technique.

For example, if you want to see the sky and it's a cloudy or misty day, you look for the sky and you see the mist. You think, *'I can't see the sky because of the mist,'* and that is true in some ways. Clearly, you are apart from the sky, so there is the sky, the mist that hides the sky, and the sky itself. This is the very common structure that you see in general mahayana and a lot of tantric dharma. *'I am in samsara. I want to get to nirvana, and along the way there are these blockages. Unless I overcome these obstacles I will not get to where I want to go.'*

Primarily, the blockages are our own absorption in our assumptions, and so we have a three part movement. We start to recognise that we are trapped in our assumptions, our neurotic habits, our beliefs, our hopes, our mental turbulence; and we can then develop certain kinds of intention to free ourselves from that. You can develop a practice of refuge, so instead of relying on your general worldly concerns you are going to rely on those who point the way to some better state and the methods which provide that. You can also develop the bodhisattva intention: instead of being only concerned with yourself, you will help other beings. You can develop an intention to study and understand emptiness. You can develop an intention to gain the initiation and do the practice of many different tantric gods.

As we looked yesterday, these intentions all shift our energy, our situated-ness, and how we are. Both the assumptions and the intentions are in the house of artificiality: these are things which we decide to do. And on the basis of doing these we bring an intention which is the energy constellated through our ego self – our individual consciousness – an energy of directing the nature of experience; because when we are in our habitual assumptions we take it for granted that what we do is meaningful.

Some people are very concerned about keeping their car or their house clean, or their garden nice, and other people are not so bothered. Therefore, the kind of belief you have shifts how you are in the world. Some people think that growing their own vegetables is very important, and other people

would think that that is completely unimportant. According to these beliefs and orientations our energy is developed.

Let's go back to this very first praise for Ayu Khandro, where it says, *kadag tro dral chö kyī ying nyid*. It describes the mind itself, the primordially pure unartificial space of all possibilities. The home of Ayu Khandro doesn't have any artificiality in it. Again and again, we have to remember our goal is not to cut through the clouds to see the sky; our goal is to be the sky, and the sky is the sky whether there are clouds or not. By insisting, '*What is the point of being the sky unless it is blue and shining? In fact, I want to have a Mediterranean sky,*' you call in the Buddha Interior Decoration Service, and they paint the inside of your mind light blue! It's not like that. The sky comes as it comes with whatever it is; with all your own limitations, assumptions, and habits. Your neurosis and your bodhisattva intention arises in the sky. Your habitual karmic assumption and your pure intention to help beings are both moving in the sky. One may look like a cloud, the other may look like a rainbow; neither is the sky itself.

This is very important in the practice; there is nothing wrong with intention. Of course, we will always have intention because if you are in your body you have to be doing something. Bodies are made for movement and they are communicative. However no amount of movement will generate the clarity of the mind, because the mind doesn't need to be clarified. The clarity of the mind is not affected whether it is filled with assumptions or pure intentions. Pure intentions are not intrinsically better than perverse assumptions; they are functionally better in that they make us nicer people.

If your assumption is that raping and murdering children is the greatest pleasure in life – and some people have that – then we would say you are a dangerous person and we would try to keep you away from children. If your desire is to help people and you set up a charity for children who have been raped and hurt, then we would say you are a very good person. Clearly, as social and ethical beings, we want to have the second possibility more than the first possibility. These are movements of energy; the ground itself gives rise to both.

There is no such thing as evil; there isn't the devil. Somebody doesn't whisper in your ear to make you a bad person; it is not that you have been caught by something. The ground itself can show many forms. The energy of the ground when it is displaced from where it is and is whirling very fast loses its sense of proportion, and this is very much what we have talked of: the openness, the field of experience, and the particularity of our existence.

I would suggest to you that all the bad things that happen in the world, including the various bad things that may be quite small that we do, arise when we become decontextualised: when we forget that we are citizens of the world and that we share the space with other people. And of course it's easy to become separated out in that way, if we don't see that the whole field of self and other is inseparable from space. The real medicine, if you like, is integration in space, and if you adjust your behaviour that can also be helpful.

In the book *Simply Being* the first chapter begins with the general teachings on morality: don't lie, don't steal, don't cause trouble. These are good things to remember because they mean that our energy is being controlled and directed. However, since some of us have quite turbulent energy, we can spend a lot of time trying to regulate ourselves and stay, as it were, on the right track in the right way. And that activity means that there can be no time for looking at who is the one who gets lost. This is the radical thing that we come back to again and again. Not being so concerned about *where* we get lost, but *who* is the one who gets lost? And, in fact, where are we when we are lost? Because we are always lost inside this open spacious realm.

At that point, we always have this crossroads. We can look at the next moment of arising, the next phenomenological manifestation, the next experience, and try to get an answer from it to tell us where we are; or we can look directly into the experience of being where we are and see where we are. In the dzogchen tradition this is always what we have. We can just be present and see *'Oh, I am here and the sky is full of nonsense'* or *'This is nonsense, let's make it better.'* How will you make it better? *'I will do this and that practice, and I promise I will never do this, and I will always do that.'* You can do that, but it will always take you into the realm of movement.

We are not made for conformity

I think one of the fantasies that can underlie this is the sense that somehow we should be consistent and reliable. Clearly consistency helps, that is to say, adaption to rules helps. If you have a parking system with double lines painted at the edge of the road meaning you shouldn't park there, it helps if people follow that. At an airport it helps if people get to a plane on time otherwise the flight is delayed, and air traffic control gets blocked and everybody is late. On that level, conformity is very helpful.

However, we are not made for conformity. We have these different chakras or centres which move in different directions, and which have their own energy. Another way of saying this is we have sub-personalities or self states which cannot be homogenised. We are not all of one taste. We cannot be put through a machine that makes all the milk taste the same; we are inconsistent. You could turn that into a more positive statement and say we are diverse and rich in possibilities; it is just that we can't predict very clearly which rich possibilities are going to come our way! Of course, that is the basis of having connection with other people.

One of the functions in our capitalist and consumerist culture is that we very easily become commodities. We can see this now with the economic crisis. The people who have a lot of money are thinking about which factories to keep going, and the workers in the factories are primarily commodities. Just as in order to build a car you need to get steel, and if you are not selling many cars you buy less steel and keep less workers. The workers have the same status as a bit of steel; they are just things that cost money on a balance sheet. Because this is the all-pervasive metaphor or trope that we live inside, it's very easy to experience ourselves as commodities.

When you are looking for work, you have to work out what price you can charge for your services? Where do I fit in this? That is quite tricky. Do you charge a lot or a little? What directs the shape that you have in the world? It becomes very important to keep seeing the invitations to standardise yourself and your practice and become part of a movement, whether this is working in a factory or whether this is entering into a dharma institution. Dharma institutions are absolutely connected with the same organisational dynamics as a factory. Human beings are human beings, and the same kind of conflicts that you have in a factory you will get in a Catholic or Buddhist monastery. Why would it be different? You get inside fighting; likes and dislikes; people jockeying for power; and so on.

One of the things that big organisations really want is conformity. Dzogchen has been particularly practiced in the nyingmapa sect, which is the least conformist of the Tibetan traditions. It is a family of different small groupings, many of them arising from discovered and re-discovered treasure texts – terma – which we believe were hidden by Padmasambhava in the eighth century. When a tertön, a treasure discoverer, finds some teaching like that, they usually keep it secret for some years and they might teach it to one person, and maybe that one person later teaches two other people. There are many, many practices that are only being done by about twenty people in the world, therefore,

you don't need a huge amount of standardisation; you can work with the people who are in receipt of these teachings.

Waking up to the nature of the machine

If you have a much bigger organisation like a monastery with four thousand people in it, you have to have a lot of conformity. The big gelugpa monasteries had these dharma police with big sticks who would go around and beat people, because you have to get people to do the right thing. Everybody has to be in the temple at the same time, and the tea has to be served at the same time. Conformity means lack of attention to detail; it says that the template – the official shape – is the most important thing, and you, the individual, are less important.

If you are running to catch a train because you are late, you could be crying and saying, *'My mother is dying!'* but the train still leaves on time. The train driver has a schedule to keep; he is not a friend of your mothers'. The fact that you are suffering doesn't mean anything to anyone else because life goes on.

There is a kind of insensitivity inherent in efficiency. As we know from the early industrialised factories, many people were wounded and many children had their hands torn off. These were terrible crimes, and there was no insurance. If your fingers got pulled off in the weaving machine, you lost your job. Tough shit! Therefore, we have to be aware of the nature of the machine. *'Everybody has to do ngondro. I am completely unwilling to teach any of the higher, special, delicious, private teachings, unless you do what I tell you.'* It is really important to know that this is the structure of the machine. It is very easy to set up machines because they are efficient; you know that everyone is at the same level because they have all done the same thing. Now, that is what we call stupid!

I could go to the gym every day for a year and do a lot of exercises, but if on the same day that I joined, following exactly the same programme as me, was a healthy young man of twenty-five, at the end of the year we would not be in the same condition. What makes a difference is where you start from, and you start from where you are. No machine can make everybody start at the same place, therefore, the outcome of the machine process cannot bring everyone to the same point. You cannot guarantee that following the practice of the machine will do that for you.

The logic of this is very clear. Haute couture costs more than prêt-à-porter. This is why it is very important in the dzogchen tradition to think about your own practice and your own problems. And to ask questions like: when this happens, what could I do or how could I be? Together we are trying with our scissors and our needle to make a cloth that will fit; we all have to participate. I can do what I can, but you also have to do what you can, to think does this fit? If it's too tight then you can't move your arms, so we have to open up the sleeves. It is not difficult to do that, but we can't know unless we communicate, so this is very important in the practice, otherwise, everybody wears the same garment and nobody has anything that fits. If it doesn't fit and it's a dharma suit, who's to blame?

I think we have talked before of the ancient Greek story of Procrustes. Once upon a time, in ancient Greece, there was a wide open plain and travellers would have to walk across it. In the middle of the plain, there was a little house owned by a man called Procrustes. Every evening, he would look out to see if there was a tired traveller crossing the hot and dusty plain. He would invite the stranger into his home for food and shelter. The stranger would come in and he would feed him very nicely. He would then say, *'Oh, it's getting late. It is time for bed,'* and he would show them this lovely big broad stone bed with some straw on it. The traveller would lie down and if they were too short for

the bed he would rack them out; he would stretch them with ropes until they fitted. And if they were too long for the bed, he would trim a bit off their feet.

The bed of Proustes is the most important thing, and the person comes second. Therefore, if the dharma clothes are the most important thing, you will have to contort your body to fit them. We have to think about this. Of course, you can't do it just on your own terms because we are all caught up in our own habits. Here we have two polarities: one is alignment with an abstract system, and the other is self-indulgence; trying to do things just the way one wants it to be done. Is there a middle way? Yes. Again and again, observe who is the one who is getting trapped? Who is the one who gets free? This is very important.

I remember the main bonpo teacher, Tenzin Namdak, saying that during most of his life he was head of a big monastery in India and he was teaching everybody many rituals concerned with changing energy. Bonpo are quite similar to nyingmapa in many ways. And then one of his old friends from Tibet escaped from prison and managed to come over the hills. As he couldn't do any rituals in the prison, Tenzin asked him what he did? He replied, *'Oh, we didn't need to do any rituals. We just did dzogchen.'* because bonpo also have a dzogchen system. Tenzin Namdak is thinking, *'Oh... maybe all that I have been doing is not so useful.'* From that day, he started to practice mainly dzogchen, which of course he had learnt, but somehow he had thought the rituals were very important. After he had been doing this he said the heart of dzogchen, the most important thing in dzogchen, is to do absolutely nothing at all.

This is very important because this is just what we have been looking at; it's not that these rituals and practices are bad, one just has to see energy takes a form of its own. You can see that when you are dancing: the music comes on and the body moves in different ways to the music because we are participative beings. Our energy will be pulled into the field of what is going on, and there is no end to thought and the movement of energy.

From that point of view, we are concerned with the unique specificity of our situation. This means allowing ourselves to be unreliable, to be inconsistent, and not to act on that inconsistency to try to correct it and put it into a standardised form, but to allow the inconsistencies to self-liberate. Just as Ayu Khandro was explaining yesterday, the less you invest in your habitual forms of inconsistency by not entering into them, then gradually the energy is not held in them. And then without making any corrective effort you find yourself stable on the path of just being present. It is very important not to mix the dzogchen path with other things. You can do the other things as well, but you need to know that dzogchen has a particular flavour.

Of course, when people say, *'Oh, this is difficult. I am not sure I can do it. What else could I do?'*, teachers invent many different practices that you can do that are both useful and not useful. We have to come back to this again and again; these practices will shift your energy, but the sky is always the sky whether it has clouds or not. If the sky is clear blue and you don't pay any attention to it, you just say, *'The sky is the sky,'* and you scurry along with your life. The fact that the sky is clear won't make much difference, it might make you a little bit happier, but that is all. It is the actual experience of being present with the sky as the sky – the ground openness – that is the heart of it.

Therefore, if you put your energy into release and relax rather than construction and stay present with whatever is happening, then you remain in the pattern of dzogchen. What you start to see is that unplanned spontaneity has a natural order; it is not that if we don't impose order there will be chaos. If you are present with what is going on, some order will arise.

This is what we experience with this modern kind of dancing. We are not doing a waltz, a foxtrot, or tango. Some tune comes on and people's bodies move around, and if they are really in the music you can see these incredible shapes that arise. These shapes are fine in themselves; they have a spontaneous ordering – a coming into shape – a showing which has an integrity. How beautiful!

I was sitting watching all these different bodies moving in different ways, and each one is exactly that person moving. That is a self-ordering spontaneity, it doesn't have to be imposed, and it comes about when we relax enough to really feel the music. When we stop being self-conscious, and thinking what will other people think of us if we dance in this way? Or, other people are better dancers than me; once you do that it is very difficult to move. You just feel the music and then the body is there. In ordinary life we can see the truth of this and it's just believing that that will be the case. You can go to work and do whatever you need to do, but with this freshness – this immediacy arriving on the point.

Okay, so if we return to the final part of the text. She says:

It is not useful to hold to any kind of analytic contemplation, therefore let awareness be naked and uncovered.

Here she is saying again that pure intentionality, even dharma intentionality, is not very useful. Therefore, if you are studying a great deal about emptiness or logic, everything you learn can be very helpful. These things are not bad, but they are not helpful for meditators, because no matter how precisely your mind is moving, it cannot take you where you want to go.

The buddha nature, or natural awareness, or presence, is not a thought; thought cannot reach you and no amount of thoughts can take you there. Therefore, thought development has other functions. She is concerned here with helping us to recognise our own nature, and for that reason she is saying there is no need to enter into analytic contemplation that means reviewing your experience in the light of certain concepts. She is also saying let awareness be naked and uncovered. You can cover your awareness with habitual bad karmic patterns or with pure dharma ideas.

Our tendency to disregard space

For example, Namkhai Norbu, a great dzogchen teacher, always says if you are in a prison with iron bars you can't escape, and if you are in a prison with gold bars you also can't escape. The dharma can become another kind of prison because you enter into this feeling that you have to maintain and protect the teachings. Some people, because of their job or if they are a lama, have to protect the dharma; that is what they do. But the concern for meditators is to recognise their own nature.

The very state of the original knowing of that instant actualising is to be experienced in its fullness.

'Instant actualising' here is the immediate taste of what is there, it means it becomes actual and not theoretical for you. When you have an experience which is not a conceptual experience we don't really have a word that would describe it, it is like just when you are that; when you are fully present. When you are fully present with your own open awareness that is all you need. She says this has to be experienced in its fullness; having a little taste of it is not enough. One has to gradually find the way to be in that state for more and more of the time because space is infinite. Everything is in space, but our particularising consciousness looks at the forms of things, which although it doesn't displace them from space means that the space is disregarded.

For example, if you go to a portrait gallery, you are looking at painting after painting. You are seeing somebody's face; our gaze is usually very caught up in the face. You see the eyes, the mouth, and some character the artist has managed to bring through, but it is not usual for that face to fill the whole frame; there is a background. However, because our gaze is caught with the foreground, the background recedes from our attention and becomes almost invisible; we just don't see it. This is an image for our normal state of preoccupation. We walk through the world looking for the things that we see and we don't see anything else: I see what I like and I like what I see. We just go into a little sealed ball. Whereas here we are always trying to find the context or the wider frame: the situation within which the particular form that we are focusing on is present.

This afternoon I will go to the airport. I'll be looking at the little screen where it will show what gate I have to go to, to get to the plane on time. There are many other flights, but they are irrelevant for me. In that moment you can see how one's own anxiety or need to be on the plane moves us towards a tunnel vision: this is relevant to me and the rest is nothing. This is our life.

There is a very beautiful poem by the poet W H Auden, called *Musée des Beaux Arts*. It was inspired by him looking at Brueghel's painting *Landscape with the fall of Icarus*.² In this painting, Brueghel shows some beautiful fields, houses, and trees, and in the foreground there is an image of someone ploughing a field. The sky is in the centre of the painting, and there is Icarus who had flown up with his father on these wings he had made with wax. His wings got too near to the sun, and the wax melted them, so Icarus is falling into the sea, and the man just continues to plough. The poem is saying here is a tragedy, here is something incredible – someone falling from the sky – and the ploughman continues to plough the field. The suffering of others is intense, and it is nothing to do with us.

This for me is one of the great advantages of working in a hospital, because in walking past every day I remember all the people who are having operations, and that people will die. My own youngest son had a very major operation in the hospital where I work, so that is always a big memory of the children's ward and those in intensive care. And that is happening all the time; people are being born, people are dying, and we are in our little life.

What she is referring to here is if you open into this fullness of awareness your life will become much bigger, because why would there be anything which is not relevant to you when it is all arising in your awareness? When we are sitting here, I see you, you see me, and you see each other. You see the other person's face, but you don't see your own face. Their face is more immediate and present to you than your own face, so how can we say, '*I don't know who you are. Get on with your own lives, it is nothing to do with me.*' Our life is given to us through the presenting of other people.

In fact, other people are our lives. Whether they are people close to us, family or friends, or whether they are strangers. You walk down the street and this is the flow of your experience. You are not seeing strangers, you are directly, immediately, experiencing the unfolding of the dharmakaya. Everything is important, therefore we have to be present, and that means we have to be balanced in our body, not running around, but being very clear and engaged in a beautiful interaction. When we are speaking with people we need to listen and respond: not speaking too much or too little, with our minds open and infinitely accepting.

The fullness of this experience is not a meditation experience that takes you away into a private world; it is exactly *the* world. There is no difference between the three kayas: the openness, the

² You can read about it here. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mus%C3%A9_des_Beaux_Arts_\(poem\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mus%C3%A9_des_Beaux_Arts_(poem))

richness of the field, and the precise moment in which we encounter each other is all one non-dual experience. She is saying the more we have the openness this is really good; you can't just have a little bit of it.

She then says:

This is the life blood of practice

to stay open in emptiness and to what arises.

She says,

There are many who accept and explain that all phenomena are empty.

This means that there are many teachings on emptiness and there are many ways of showing it, but often as a kind of abstract concept, as something to think about.

She says,

But simultaneous awareness and emptiness that is shown at the time of initiation is your own current presence which is beyond being judged as existing.

What she is really saying here is don't make the buddha nature or emptiness special; don't turn it into something that only wonderful great meditators have access to or that you after many, many years or lifetimes will have access to. Don't turn it into something that can persecute you, because it is your own current presence and it is beyond being judged as existing.

That is to say, it's not ever going to be something you get. *'I'm not sure if I get it.'* You get enlightenment the way you get a joke. When you get a joke, you don't get anything, you just laugh. When you get enlightened, you don't get anything, because there isn't anything to get! You already have whatever you needed to get; you just recognise you have it. Like when we looked yesterday. If your glasses are on top of your head you don't need to get your glasses, you just need to have what you have. When you remember that your glasses are on your head, you don't get bigger glasses or a free pair of glasses; you just get what you already had, it's quite straightforward.

Your nature is instant naked liberation.

Your nature is instant naked liberation, not your potential that exists hidden inside you like gold that needs to be refined; but your nature now – the actual sub-stratum and dimension within which you are moving – this is instant awareness. And it is instant naked liberation, because whatever arises goes free from it, that is to say you will be immediately fresh.

I heard a radio commentary on the Olympic Games, the men's one hundred metres race. The woman who was giving the commentary had won a gold medal for the one hundred metres in a previous Olympic Games. She said she had been looking very carefully at the video footage, and the men all started pretty well, but the guy who won was not in the lead at thirty metres. At fifty metres he started to edge forward just a little bit. Then, she said, his main rival who was running just to the side of him, looked slightly and saw that this man was ahead of him and immediately tightened up; then the person next to him tightened up. But the guy who won the race was relaxed because he was just in the zone; he wasn't in any kind of relative relatedness.

I think that is a very beautiful example that once you come into conceptual elaboration – the full flow – the spontaneous movement of your energy which integrates all your capacity – gets interrupted. You enter into internal dialogue and you slow down.

What she is saying here is: stay open in that state and trust the liberation, so that this movement has gone and the next moment is fresh and fully there. If you are fully present, that allows each moment to be fully present. When you are not fully present you are moving on this shuttle of the past, present, and future. The past, present, and future is like a great loom on which you weave the meaning of your life, because you have hopes and memories that make these beautiful colours. You have this great tapestry of existence. If you stay fully present, you don't need any of that. You don't need to have a wonderful body of memories, because what is happening now is okay. This is the freedom of liberation.

Unartificial, instantly at ease infinite completion (dzogchen) – this is it.

This great teaching of dzogchen, was kept secret for years and years, though some lamas made people pay a fortune to get any word of it. Now however it is all readily available. There is nothing more secret than this. Inside dzogchen you have such teachings as *tregchod* and *thodgal* and nothing in any of these practices is fundamentally teaching anything different from this. Dzogchen means it is complete. Other aspects are like small torches which illuminate some part of it, but when the sun is shining you don't need a torch.

What gets in the way of being in the place of the sun is your own attachment. Buddha Shakyamuni said it: the cause of suffering is ignorance and attachment. Ignorance is ignoring the immediate presence which is always there, and attachment means being attached to ideas and the belief that ideas will give you what you need. Only we, ourselves, can do this work. No initiation or blessing or pilgrimage or building a stupa, can do this work for you. It is not to say that pilgrimages and stupas are bad things, but they don't do this work. This is the work at the heart of dzogchen.

Then she says

Furthermore there is no other way of opening with emptiness.

She is saying if you really want to understand emptiness this is the key way, because when you have self-liberation of phenomena you are not hanging onto anything, so the mind is emptiness and the emptiness of phenomena exist in non-duality. For example, the mirror shows the reflection. The emptiness of the mirror allows the reflection to be shown, and the emptiness of the reflection allows it to appear and disappear instantly. If the reflection had an inherent self-nature, then it would be like a painting.

If I held up a painting and turned it around in the room, everyone in the room will see the painting. But if I held up a mirror and turned it around, everyone in the room will see something different as the mirror passes by. This is the difference; it doesn't have an inherent content. Therefore, through dzogchen, the emptiness of the subject and of the object, the emptiness of the ground and of experience, the emptiness of stillness and of movement - this is all revealed.

And then she says:

You can turn towards awareness of infinite hospitality, or not.

This puts the responsibility back on to each person. It is not the blessing of the buddhas that is going to do it, it is not the blessing of the lama, or getting more and more teachings, or doing more and more mantras; it is you being present with yourself, because the crossroads – the choice point – is there moment by moment. We are either present or not.

In some of the accounts of samsara, it is as if samsara began a long time ago. The texts talk of 'from beginningless samsara' as if it has always been here and is one realm, and somewhere else there is nirvana that we want to get to. What she is pointing to here is that nirvana and samsara are simultaneously present; they have the same ground. If you recognise the ground, you have what is called nirvana; if you don't recognise the ground, you have what is called samsara, but both have the same ground. Samsara is simply forgetfulness of the ground and all that then elaborates from that, so it is always available, but it is we ourselves who have to do this, and nobody is stopping us. We haven't been invaded by the Chinese. We haven't been made to work in prison camps. We have free time.

If you have busy work in an office, you can take just ten seconds to breathe and then go back into the work. Who is going into the work? The one who is in the work is the movement of energy. The work that you are doing is the movement of energy. Energy is moving with energy. Who is aware of this? Unchanging presence. This will not make your work more difficult or complicated; it won't slow you down or make you look strange; it is not as if you are sitting in a meeting reciting some mantras under your breath. That is not helpful, because if you are doing the mantra and it has any value, you have to be concentrating on the mantra. Your colleagues would be looking at you in a rather glazed manner! But if you are just relaxed and open; it's invisible; it's ungraspable; it is not an additive, nor is it subtracting anything from the situation.

The energy, which is our subjective consciousness, can be fully involved and engaged with whatever is going on: problem solving, dealing with difficult issues, and so on. And yet beneath it, through it, surrounding it; the basis – the flavour of it – is unborn natural presence. This is the result, and the result is not different from the ground.

Then she comes to the colophon: the final concluding statement.

At the time of enjoying everything in awareness this instruction essence of all arose in my mind.

She was just sitting quietly in her house having a good time, and she wrote this down, for which we are very grateful. This kind of teaching in the tradition is called *men ngag de*; it means it is a kind of distillation of personal experience. It is not written as an academic text, although everything she says in it you can find in the commentaries of Longchenpa and Jigme Lingpa. But she is speaking from the heart. She is saying don't make your life so complicated. Don't persecute yourself by thinking there is a long way to go, or you need to make a great accumulation of merit and wisdom before you – poor defiled humble creature – can ever approach the golden gates of paradise. Don't do that, because that is just another mental construct. Without constructing anything just stay relaxed, and if you do that you will enter into the same state as she is.

If you remember the key points of the commentary you can just be present with your mind. That won't cost you anything – not money – not time – not energy. It doesn't cost any energy to be aware, because awareness is not an activity, and this is very, very, very hard to understand. We cannot believe that it could be so simple or easy, yet it is easy because it is already there. You don't

have to make something that is already in existence. The Garden of Eden is where we are all living; we never got kicked out.

Response: But it needs discipline...

James: No, rather it needs remembrance; it needs calling ourselves back. You might want to think of external reminders. For example, if you lived in Tibet there were stupas and prayer flags everywhere like little reminders. In the same way, some people have a little alarm if they have to take a lot of medication. If you live in a topology or geography like Tibet, there are many reminders, so the question might be where do we put the reminders? You can write something in your diary or put a reminder on your desk. You could put up some images that remind where you are. If, by discipline, you mean the imposition of an artificial structure, it is not really like that. It is just, where am I? Not why, not how, but who and where? Where am I? I am here. Who is here?

You can set aside times for practice, and that is useful and may be necessary given all the pressures in your daily diary. However, in the real dzogchen tradition, you do the practice when you feel able to do it, because if you feel very angry and agitated, it is not easy for you to practice in that state, and so you can do something else. It doesn't mean that you have to shift the anger in order to be able to practice, because then you would be using something artificial to shift something artificial to get to something natural, and it is not likely to work very well. You can't go from being very powerful to being very open very easily.

If you are working during the day and you have lots of papers to get through and replies to emails, at a certain point you breathe out and then you go into the next email. The email is arising within the space of awareness; it's not coming from anywhere else. But if you feel the email is coming to you, and you don't want it and feel persecuted by it, then you have a resistance to it.

The energy which is if you like our individual personality, needs to flow out to meet the world.

Okay, we will take a break here.

[Break]

We have our last bit of time together, so see if there are any questions you have, particularly any confusions that you want to try to clear up before you leave or questions about the practice.

Any other thoughts or questions?

Question: Is there a handbook describing the practices that you can do, and what the practice is for?

James: There are many books describing different practices, and if we understand precisely why we do them that can be helpful. However what I was trying to say earlier today is that firstly we have to start with ourselves, and where we are, because that makes a huge amount of difference.

There is a story about some American tourists who got lost driving on some country roads in Ireland. They stopped an old farmer, and they said, '*Can you show us the way to Cork?*' And he said, '*Cork?! If I was going to Cork, I wouldn't start here.*' We have to start where we are.

Now we will do a short final meditation, and then dedicate the merit of all our practice together. We can imagine rays of light spreading out from our hearts to all the beings in the universe to bring them some light and encouragement.

**GE WA DI YI NYUR DU DAG
OR GYAN LA MA DRUB GYU NAE
DRO WA CHIG KYANG MA LU PA
DE YI SA LA GO PAR SHO**

By this virtue may I quickly attain the glorious Guru's stage. Then may I put all beings without even one exception, on that same stage!

¹Musee des Beaux Arts

W. H. Auden

'About suffering they were never wrong,
The old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position: how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,

But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water, and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.'