
The Story of Nyima Özer

Talk by James Low

London, 22 April 1995

Transcribed by Ruth Rickard

Edited by Barbara Terris

Excerpt

I think the key thing that I want to emphasise is that this story of Nyima Özer is about the nature of service and of being a servant. The bodhisattvas are our servants and from that point of view, their service is holy. It is the servitude not of those who are crushed and hopeless, not of those who have been taken over by other powers, but it is the service of those who willingly and voluntarily give of their best to others, for others, without counting the cost. That is something quite amazing.

NYIMA ÖZER IN THE WINE SHOP	2
THE KING PAYS UP	2
THE SUN	3
THE PHURBA	4
WHY DOESN'T HE GET DRUNK?	4
INCOHERENT	5
WHO IS THE SERVANT?.....	6
DECONSTRUCTING THE SELF AND DECONSTRUCTING THE STRUCTURE	7
TIME-OUT	7
HUNGER	9
NEITHER SERVANT NOR MASTER	9
THE PROMISE OF GURU RINPOCHE.....	9
ENLIGHTENMENT IN DEVIANCY.....	10
THE NATURE OF SERVICE	10
THE FIVE DZOGCHEN QUESTIONS.....	11

Nyima Özer in the wine shop

The story is that one day Guru Rinpoche, in his form of Nyima Özer, was travelling and came to a little wine shop in Varanasi. He sat down and started to drink, and he enjoyed it. So he had a little more and a little more. Finally the landlady told him that she had to close the shop. *"Why do you have to close the shop?" "Well, because it's getting late. See, the sun's about to set."* So he said, *"Oh, well, so you always have to close down at this time?"* and she said, *"Yes." "Aah. Mmm. It's very good wine."*

The shop always closes when the sun goes down, but on the other hand he likes the wine... *"What can I do to make sure that the sun doesn't set?"* He pulls his phurba out of his belt, sticks it into the ground at exactly the point where the light of the sun and the shadow are meeting, and fixes it there. It cast a shadow across the table, *"I'll pay you when this shadow moves."*

He carries on drinking. The woman continues to bring out the wine. He's drinking away, drinking and drinking, she's getting tired of having to go and bring these barrels from further and further away, and she's also starting to worry because the sun's not setting. She's getting tired, she's getting hot, what's she going to do?

Other people continue to turn up—clearly this is an interesting party—so he's not on his own in this story, there are a lot of people around drinking and drinking. They're all getting drunk and falling over, but he's still sitting there somehow, handling the whole situation. Eventually, he's drunk one whole barrel, two barrels, three barrels, four barrels, five barrels, very happily smiling, and the landlady is kind of looking questioningly at him, because he doesn't look very wealthy. He's dressed in a somewhat skimpy yogic robe, he clearly doesn't have little bags of money or gold hidden on him, and so she's starting to think, *"Ah-ha Barrel, barrel, barrel! Money, money, money!"* and is getting quite alarmed.

Not only that, but because the sun's pouring down, the cats aren't sleeping, the babies aren't sleeping, nobody's sleeping, the cocks are crowing. Everybody's getting a bit disturbed and wondering what on earth is going on.

The king pays up

Even the king can't go to sleep, though he does need his rest and his bed is very cosy and comfortable. He leaves his palace and comes to the wine shop to see what is happening. He doesn't normally go to wine shops; he's a very proper sort of king.

There he sees this crazy-looking guy sitting there happily drinking. All his country people are lying around drunk, rolling on the ground, whilst this half-naked yogi sits there drinking, drinking and drinking. What to do?

The king asks, *"Why do you keep drinking?"*

Crazy guy says,

—*Well, I enjoy it.*

—*When are you going to stop?*

—*Well, I'll stop when the sun goes down.*

—*When will the sun go down?*

—*The sun will go down when someone turns up who can pay for the wine.*

The king is a nice guy, a bit of a sap so he says, “*Okay, in order to have things back to normal here in the land, I’ll pay.*” The king pays up; Nyima Özer pulls out his *phurba*, he finishes the last barrel, the sun continues to set, and Guru Rinpoche moves off. That’s basically the structure of the story.

The sun

So what’s going on here? The sun represents wisdom in Tibetan buddhism—in Indian buddhism, because it’s an Indian story. The sun comes up and the sun goes down. Sometimes we’re a little bit clear and sometimes we’re not so clear. Clarity is moving in and out. There’s sunrise, sunset, night comes, morning comes. Nyima Özer in this moment, through inserting the *phurba*, is able to arrest the movement of the sun, so that there is a moment in which wisdom continues without abatement.

When wisdom is continuing, the rays of the sun are pouring out; there is illumination everywhere, no need to stop. It is in this state of wisdom that he’s able to keep drinking. Remember, the drink is supplied by an old woman. In the Tibetan Wheel of Life the figure of the old woman represents ignorance. It’s a woman because the female represents wisdom, and in the Wheel of Life, she’s blind because wisdom has got tired, it doesn’t see too well, so it’s wisdom collapsed down into ignorance.

It’s ignorance which is there, running a wine shop, giving people the illusion of some kind of relief, the illusion of some kind of happiness. Though the moment of exaltation in the first glass or two creates some kind of openness to the world, some conviviality, people talking together, enjoying each other’s company, to keep on drinking, in most cases, makes us stupid and dull and the senses heavy.

So we have here pleasure linked with stupidity, interrupted by the possibility of eternal light, a light which is able to permit the methods that would lead into stupidity through pleasure being revealed as the possibility of a pleasure that is without cease. Of course in the story, the ordinary people who drink a lot of wine still keel over, because although the sun is shining on to you from outside and so you have some relief, it’s not the same as identifying with the sun. The whole thing about Nyima Özer, as his name implies, is that he exists in fusion with the rays of the sun. That is to say, the openness of his mind gives rise to the effulgence of the possibilities of different ways of being. Out of an understanding of the spaciousness of mind itself—unborn, unceasing, without any beginning or end, without any height or depth, without any colour or form, a source of all things yet which can never be identified as any one thing—there is the radiance of the realisation of all manifestation as being simply the empty play of this vibrant openness.

It is in that open state that Nyima Özer is able to incorporate all the things that would normally stun people and make them stupid, as a means of realisation on the path. Well, this is enormously important. The teachings in this story may be taken as an invitation to mock ordinary people and to be licentious and indulgent. In a sense, that’s what Nyima Özer does: he has a laugh at their expense. There’s also an element of cruelty, the cruelty of the peacock that dares to shake out its tail in front of a dirty old goose. That’s our state, isn’t it? We are the dirty geese of the world, our feathers soiled with all the karma that we’ve accumulated, all our greed, our selfishness, our egotism, our desires to be important.

The phurba

The little shimmers of the peacock tail, all these lights and colours dancing —the incorporation of all possibilities being inside an expanse of openness— all this is held in play by the insertion of the phurba.

The phurba basically has the function of being a nail; it's for nailing things down, for pinning things down, for keeping things in their place, because, as the Buddha taught very clearly, this world and everything in it is impermanent, is constantly changing. As object changes, subject changes, the outer world, without cease, is transforming itself moment by moment, and on an internal level too our consciousness is party to that dance. It is the co-player emerging together with the objects as they arise, giving the partial notion of a continuity which is predictable, reassuring, but at the same time a delusion. A delusion because it gives us the notion that the future will be the same as the present and that by predicting from the past what can happen we will be able to exercise control.

Control, in this story, is an exercise in establishing the ending of movement. That is to say, wisdom's light, by revealing the endless flux of the revelation of ideas and forms as the manifestation of open awareness, shifts attention from a subject/object control plane of trying to establish 'I am one who has power over the situation', to the mind being the very source of all manifestation. A mind that is not a personal mind. Awareness is not something that one has, awareness is something that the self dissolves itself into. One cannot 'get' enlightened. One cannot say 'Guru Rinpoche was enlightened' because the enlightenment that pertains at that time is not something that one person can have or even experience. Enlightenment is the dissolving of identity.

Identity is the reflection outwards, but we are so used to a substantive appropriative view of things, that we as people 'have' qualities. We, as the nouns, surround ourselves with the elaboration of modifying adjectives and so forth; we polish them to create the false resplendence of the illusory sense of identity.

By the insertion of the three-sided phurba at the point of meeting of the sunlight and the shadow — which is the boundary between samsara and nirvana — Guru Rinpoche is establishing the three blades of the phurba going in as the dharmakaya, sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya merging together from one point into one point, unifying all that arises. Whether we see things as good, healthy, open and happy or as closed, demented and full of sorrow, each of these possibilities is arising from and around the central point, which cannot be established as a point. That's what a phurba does: it nails down the illusion of the possibility of naming anything, because nothing is established in that moment of appropriation, of claiming.

Why doesn't he get drunk?

Now, why doesn't Guru Rinpoche get drunk? It's a very good question. Why do we get drunk? What is drunkenness? What is stupidity?

When there is a notion of a sun which takes up a particular position and then seeks to manipulate the environment around it in order either to get rid of what is not wanted and act

as host to things that are wanted—then when you deal with the ego in that way you have a problem. In fact, a great deal of ordinary spiritual practice is certainly formulated in that structure, that there is a central core of self which must be maintained. Because of the shifts in the world, the changing interface of subject and object, the core still has to be maintained since it is constantly getting out of kilter.

You may, like me, be finding that as you get on in life, there are things that you did when you were young which you can no longer do. We have points of self-identity which we know as being 'us' because they are aspects of ourselves, and yet somehow, they're redundant now, and they don't really help us in the world. For example, somebody who was abused as a child, or had a very cruel withholding parent, may feel that they have to please other people by giving sexual favours. Or they may feel worthless and always exclude themselves from any moment of happiness. When such position-takings ring true, they will lead to particular interpersonal choices where the basic notion of self-identity is affirmed again and again.

The nodal point itself is without essence, and as long as we don't understand the absence of essence or the presence of emptiness there will always be something for things to cohere around. It's a kind of vortex spiral, just like water going down the plughole in the bath there's a kind of force that sucks things down. When we enter into engagement with the world we are both sucking in something of the other, trying to fill up an emptiness. We are trying to install a false point of accretion and adaptation which prevents a truly living interface with the world, because we're stuck in something, we're stuck on something, we're stuck as something.

In plunging the phurba into the ground, Guru Rinpoche is halting the play between light and dark, and, as buddhists, we want to have more light, we want less dark. *"Please get rid of the darkness, please get rid of the ignorance. Let's have more illumination."*

Many Tibetan texts are formulated in those highly dualistic terms. When we are going to say prayers and do a devotional practice, we often set up a scenario: *"Big, big Papa in the sky come, pull out my bad bits and give me your good bits."* That's very important, and we can make use of that as method, but not if it is constellated around just getting a better quality of node. This is what is very important. Patrul Rinpoche says in several of his texts, that in order to understand something you have to keep repeatedly dissolving the basis of understanding. If you try to hang on to what you've got, if you try to mould it and form it, cloning yourself into your pre-existing notion of the Buddha, then you start to become false to yourself.

Incoherent

The only way that you can find yourself is in the process of becoming whatever it is that you are called into being. We're called upon to be something in the face of the world that presents itself to us; that is to say, the development of wisdom is used to de-cathect, to untie the emotive alignment that we have towards fixed positions. We are then freed up to have as the matrix of our becoming that which lies outside ourselves. That is to say, the other in whatever form it manifests. Doing this will bring into question these points of coherence in ourselves.

We actually want the world to make us incoherent. The problem for the ordinary people in the story is that when they start drinking they become incoherent, but they become incoherent in a way that makes them cohere even more!

A radical incoherence is one in which one is in the inchoate, where nothing sticks together. One is then in the realm of the slippy, the metaphorical, the allegorical, things are not what they appear to be. For most of us, however, we are caught up in the endless struggle to make things appear more as we would like them to be. We want to turn fantasy into reality; we want our dreams to come true, whereas in this story, it's the end of dreaming.

When the phurba is in the ground the sun's eternal; when the light of wisdom is shining forth there is no need to rest, because there's never any tiredness, there's the possibility of the endless flow of becoming, of responding to whatever the situation requires. That is also a moment of wisdom which has no place to hide in itself.

Whenever we try to build something up we encumber ourselves with a position which cannot be modified. And if the position cannot be modified, then we have constructed a cage for ourselves.

That cage inhibits compassion. The structure of hierarchical organisations, including Tibetan buddhism, can be understood as an implicit attack on the possibility of compassion. When people are known as being something, then it's then very difficult for them to become something else. Anonymity is a much better place than basking in the light of sun, because if you're in the light of the sun without being the sun itself, you're going to cast a big shadow, and casting shadows is a bummer, because someone else is sitting in your shadow. You get all the sunlight and you feel warm and toasted and there they are shivering behind you, getting sweet fuck all. So it's very, very important to take up the place of the beam of the sun.

The sun goes everywhere, gives its light to whoever needs it, without need for recompense or reward. It's like how Shakespeare describes mercy in *The Merchant of Venice*: "*It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath*". This is a very beautiful thing, very gentle, very generous; it doesn't say in advance, "*I only want to fall on sweet, young, beautiful flesh*." It's prepared to fall on dog-shit as well, to fall anywhere.

Who is the servant?

The problem with the hierarchical structure of many religious traditions is that the more you have a displacement into subject/object division in existing established social structures, the more difficult it is to have a malleable reaction to how people are in themselves. For me, this is a key thing in this story: who is the servant?

Is the king the servant, because he's the fall-guy? Is the woman who owns the little wine-shop the servant, since she's running around serving the wine? Is Nyima Özer the servant? What is he doing? Why is he doing it? Who learns anything from this? Is it like *High Noon*? A fable-istic elaboration of the power of the lone hero, riding into town, sorting out the problems and riding on again, untouched, uncommitted to community, yet somehow having indulged his every whim?

For us, compassion usually involves some kind of limitation whereas wisdom involves some kind of opening. It's the balancing of wisdom and compassion that can make us open to the possibility of being restricted by the demands of the desire of the other.

The lone hero is subverting compassion as a one-off special act to the play of wisdom as something that can endlessly repeat itself without commitment. The commitment to compassion, and engagement with responsibility, places an enormous burden on wisdom, because it means that wisdom has constantly to be used to deconstruct the desire to move on when the tightening of commitment and identification and labelling comes into play.

I remember that when I was practising all sound as mantra in an Indian village where I didn't know the dialect, it was very easy. There were all these people talking away—I had no idea what they were saying—so clearly it was mantra! If I get off the plane at Heathrow, it's a different ball-game. All these people are talking and mostly I understand what they are saying; it's got a lot more hooks to get caught up in.

Deconstructing the self and deconstructing the structure

The key question to ask ourselves is, how can we deconstruct the points around which a formulation of self may arise? And at the same time how can we have a stance which is ethical and volitional towards the suffering of others in the world? This means being prepared to have one's narrow sense of self subverted by the needs of other. This is not easy for us. Much of the structuring of Tibetan buddhism serves the needs of self, seemingly serves the needs of those in power and authority, and has very little to do with the needs of ordinary people.

If we compare about the advances in public education in the West there is little to learn from whatever public education there was in Tibet. Most people in Tibet couldn't read. Because they couldn't read, they didn't have access to the dharma. Since the dharma was the predicate of the whole society, they had a pyramid structure, not a democratic one.

In this story of Nyima Özer we have to think about what is the relevance for us practising the dharma in the West, in a democratic society, where hopefully, we operate on the basis of mutual trust and mutual respect, thinking about the well-being of all, without establishing little potentates and feudal rival systems?

Time-out

When the phurba is inserted into the ground, what is bound together in the phurba are all the tails of all the snakes that create poison. These are bound and refined as the energy that drives the point into the ground, that transforms the energy of our own selfishness and delusion and self-importance into an energy that can effectively stop the desire for time-out. That's really what the story is about: that we don't need to take time out if we're constantly in. It's when we're halfway in that we get burned-out.

If you have a self, and you give yourself to others, it is extended, because it's nailed down somewhere. It's nailed down in 'me'. I'll give this to you, so it comes out of 'me', but it's tied on, so there's a kind of boomerang effect—at a certain point it returns to 'me'. And on the

return journey, I've got my hands out; I want to grab onto anything that's going. Our hands naturally grasp and usually we want some kind of reward for whatever it is that we've given. *'Don't come back empty-handed.'* we tell each other. The dharma says again and again don't go empty-handed when you leave this life. So all of these lamas with their gold cups and golden-roofed monasteries and all the rest of it, they're making sure that they won't go empty-handed!

Take the story of Jesus. He went into the temple forecourt with a whip and kicked out all the merchants and money-changers. Now there's a very important lesson in that—it gave a space for things to happen. Previously the forecourts of the temple had been noisy with the clamour of people, packed with people buying and selling, selling pigeons and doves for sacrifice, selling food, selling all sorts of little offerings that could be made in the temple. The forecourt was not a space to get into a peaceful state of mind before entering the temple.

Is the structuring of the dharma in its hierarchical mode, with great temples and formal worshiping, is this promoting peace of mind, or is this an enemy of peace of mind? Now it may appear on one level that it does promote peace of mind, because it provides distinct objects of worship and clear identification of the particular qualities and attributes of the Buddha. However, it also creates a particular kind of clamour.

Buddhism, particularly the Tibetan form of buddhism, is full of knowledge, full of information that you can acquire. Everybody seems to be trading in one thing or another, be it new kinds of training, new books to read, new practices to do, things around which you can build up a particular structure of understanding. There is so much that it can often be very difficult to have a space just to experience things in their simplicity. There's always something to do. When do you ring your bell? What is the latest version of our chant? Do you need to wrap yourself in some special garb?

There's a constant garlanding. The garlanding can be the effulgent rays of the sun, if one is the sun. If one is not the sun, then it can be a smothering; it can be a cocoon. How can you be in the place of the sun when the place appointed to you in the hierarchy is down at the bottom, praying, looking up at the sun established in the place of authority?

There's very clearly a tension that exists between the notion of points of enlightenment coming into the world, of revelation by the other, and the notion of a universal enlightenment, of a buddha-nature which is everywhere, held by everyone, revealing itself through our every ordinary action.

Yes, it is important to be able to make use of hierarchical forms, but to make use of them as methods for universal liberation. However it can only be universal liberation if each person takes up the burden of asking themselves, *"How is it I fuck up in my life? What is it that makes me narrow and dull and stupid? What is it that makes me selfish and frightened of other people?"* Through this clear analysis of our own situation—that is to say, turning the light of the dharma into a way to eliminate our own narrowness and habitual limitation—we use that as a means of identifying what it is that we need from a hierarchical form.

Hunger

If you go to the dharma without hunger, without need, without desire, you're going to get fucked-over, because this is a system that demands a whole lot; this is a very hungry, devouring system, that needs to build temples..., that needs more and longer and bigger and higher... This is Mammon; this is what Moses saw when he came down from the mountain the second time. What did he see? He didn't see a crowd of waiting people, demanding, *"Hey, quick, share the good news you have brought us!"* They were all dancing, singing, getting drunk and feasting around a new big golden statue. So what did he do? Well, in the Hollywood version anyway, he picked up big stones and threw them at Baal, the golden calf statue they had made in his absence, and then there was this gasp and they all became very humble.

Neither servant nor master

How are we to find a way of thinking for ourselves, of engaging with the richness and the fruit of the dharma? How to see the dharma as our servant and not as our master? Buddha Shakyamuni did not want to have servants. The last thing that Guru Rinpoche wanted was to have servants. These people travelled and taught in order to help people from being servants. We're already servant enough. We are servants to the five poisons, we are servants to the maintenance of the notion of self-identity through the five skandhas, we are servants to ignorance, delusion, false understanding of our own nature.

If we then become servants of the dharma, then we are simply changing one master for another, which, given the short period of time we have left before we die, will probably not help us to move on very long.

What we need to do is to take up a place in-between being neither a servant nor a master. We need to make use of the bonds of servitude that have been taken on by the Great Ones who really *are* able to carry these forward for us, the Bodhisattvas, those who have declared, *"I promise, I voluntarily make myself a servant of all beings in order to help them. I will use my wisdom in order to be and to do whatever you need in order to get some understanding."*

The promise of Guru Rinpoche

That is an amazing thing to do. That is really a truly incredible, impressive thing to be able to say, and this is the promise of Guru Rinpoche. This is one of the reasons why Guru Rinpoche shows these different forms, to provide a point of inspiration. He is showing that there are different ways of being so that no matter how weird we are, how fucked-up we are, whatever kind of distortions and confusions we carry with us, there will be some hole in Guru Rinpoche's history where he's behaved in just the same sort of shitty way that we behave, so that we can think, *"Well, if he could make it in that mode, we can make it in that mode."* That's his kindness: not to sit on a throne, not to be special, not to be lying, cheating, devious, hypocritical (always the problem of hierarchical religion).

The one thing that we know about Guru Rinpoche is that he's an ass-hole. Why? He's murdered children; he's run around creating chaos wherever he went, flying about on a magic horse. Well, what kind of lunatic is this? This is clearly a nutter! But it's a nice nutter; it's our nutter.

On our behalf, he's very, very kind, because he shows us that being weird, being strange, being out to lunch is not necessarily an impairment to gaining enlightenment, and that's a great kindness, otherwise we'd all have to be incredibly straight before we even got on to the front step.

Enlightenment in deviancy

Through this recognition of the possibility of enlightenment in deviancy, he is showing us very clearly, that the conventional forms through which we predict what is a good person and what is a bad person, is just so much bullshit. The essential task of the dharma is to understand the nature of your own mind, and through that understanding, to act with compassion. What compassion is, nobody knows. Compassion reveals itself in the situation, and having revealed itself, it moves on. It is not a substance. We cannot 'become' enlightened by cloning ourselves, by pretending to be the same as somebody else. We can only find a point of openness, live our lives revealing ourselves, carrying the can for what we do.

I think this is what Guru Rinpoche reveals again and again—that whatever funny things he was up to, he did them in public; he didn't try and cheat them or hide them; he didn't creep into other people's bedrooms in the middle of the night, you know—he did it in the daylight!

There are so many important things in this story: not to be hypocritical; to be up front. If you want to drink, drink, but be able to carry the can. Or if you can't carry the can, to know someone who will—someone like the king! So if you have friends in high places...

The nature of service

I think the key thing that I want to emphasise before I end is that this story of Nyima Özer is about the nature of service and of being a servant.

The bodhisattvas are our servants. From that point of view, their service is holy. It is the servitude not of those who are crushed and hopeless, who have been taken over by other powers, but it is the service of those who willingly and voluntarily give of the best that they have to others, for others, without counting the cost. That is something quite amazing.

It is something that is under attack in this country at the moment, in the National Health Service, in Social Services, in Education... In all the places where people feel a vocation and a desire to be of use helping others this comes under attack. And I think this has to be resisted.

This has to be resisted by a movement in the heart, by willingly taking up burdens on behalf of others, rather than looking to the richness of the world for things which we can add on to ourselves or use to scrape away the rotten bits that trouble us. The servant suffers for the other, whereas the modern capitalist uses the world, tortures the world, turns the world into servitude for the sake of comforting the ego.

The key issue is whether or not we have some acquaintance with emptiness. Emptiness is absolutely everything in the dharma. If we have no acquaintance with emptiness, even though we may have the highest aspiration to help others, we will find ourselves returning

again and again to the hard core of a self that doesn't want to be dissolved, a self that needs to reaffirm itself and establish itself as being something existing in truth.

Nyima Özer is showing us the possibility, through meditation, of relaxing into the nature of the mind, and then arising from that nature of the mind as a wisdom which, by shining ceaselessly, provides an illumination that is without break. It is the force of that ceaseless illumination, moving in one direction like the rays of the sun, moving outwards—not cyclical, not seeking any return, not like a pot that will get drained unless it's topped up—but like the sun, just endlessly effulgent, giving and giving without any thought of return. 'Casting your bread upon the waters' is an attitude to be cultivated in most religions. There is the trust that if we are open and if we give, things will return, without it being felt as a return, because the world will be seen as pleasing, productive and supportive.

This is one reason why the image of the great birds like vultures and eagles are used again and again in Tibetan buddhism. These are birds whose vast their wings-span allows them to coast on the thermals, with minimal effort and minimal movement. Just by how their wings and feathers are, so beautifully apposite, and by their total trust. You know the way they launch themselves off a cliff, trusting that something will be there and carry them?

What will carry us if we take up the burden of the bodhisattva vow? It won't be the things of the world because the things of the world will make us heavy. The more we get returning the more we hold on to it and the more protective we get. *"Oh, I've just had this special initiation! Shame you were not there!"* Or, *"Look at my new vajra! How do you like it? Isn't it beautiful and shiny?"*, or, *"See this new thangka I've just had made in Nepal! He's the very special best artist."* All of these things may be very useful, but if we hold onto them as solidifying our sense of ourself as somebody who exists as something, then we'll find that they turn out to be our worst enemy.

So if we are wanting to sustain the effulgence, the generosity that moves out and gives, then we have to find a place which has no place. This is why, in the mahayana tradition, enlightenment is described as 'the enlightenment that has no place', that does not rest anywhere. As long as there is a place in us for things to return to and rest in, as long as there is a hand reaching out to grab the boomerang, or a face for the boomerang to bang into, then we have a problem. Why? Because there is a particular torque, a particular twist that we put into most of the things that we throw out into the world. We may feel that we're being generous and are really giving something away, but there's usually some unconscious, or not so unconscious, hidden agenda such as wanting to liked or respected or rewarded or being seen as important. Some kind of stuff like that.

The five dzogchen questions

Where does the mind come from? Where does the mind stay? Where does the mind go? What colour is the mind? What shape is the mind? If we take up these five questions seriously and use them as vehicles for going deeper and deeper to get to the real realisation that mind is without form, without substance, is unformed, unchanging, undying—if we get that as a realisation, then whatever arises is no longer moving as a sequence across the sphere of our consciousness. We no longer are simply sitting back and observing things moving, but we are ourselves the very nature of the universe. Because we are the nature of

the universe, we are open, happy, fulfilled yet empty, not needing to be greedy because we've already got whatever it is.

If we can see things and hear them, what else is to be done with them? Say you get something very precious, what are you going to do with it? Hang it in front of your eyes and walk around the street like that so you can always see it? Stick it up your nostril so that you can always smell it. There is only so much that one can do with worldly possessions, in fact possessions rapidly become your slave driver unless you can enjoy them. Enjoyment, in any case, is a transient phenomenon.

Real-life fulfilment through the senses, in the path of tantra and dzogchen, is about a return to the world and about finding ourselves in the world *as* the world. After all, we are the world—there's nothing else. Who else are we if we're not the world?

Through our identification with ourselves as the process of the revelation of becoming in the world, why then would we not give to ourselves as somebody else? At that point there is no difference. The one who is giving, the gift itself, and the one who receives are the same—all empty! Everything returns to its source, not into a piggy-bank or a Swiss bank account, but into the ground where it dissolves and endlessly recycles.