
*The Direct Indication of
Buddhahood Beyond
Classification.
A terma text by Nuden Dorje*

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Excerpts

According to this lineage which comes down through C R Lama, this is a very powerful and important instruction. The more time you spend looking at your mind, observing the process of stillness and thoughts, the more the richness of this text will be revealed to you. It is not abstract theory. It is not philosophy but it is the heart friend of your return to yourself. Therefore, hopefully you will be inclined to do the practice.

...

When our awareness becomes fixated on something, because awareness has no shape itself, it will manifest as the shape of this furniture that is currently in our mind. And in that moment we are our jealousy, our pride, our laziness, our diligence, whatever the qualities are.

...

It is not that we are necessarily attached to these things in the way we can become attached to a particular object such as a watch, an iPod.... Rather, it is the quality of awareness to reveal what is there. Therefore, if we are not in touch with awareness, what awareness will do is simply reveal the manifesting qualities moment-by-moment. And if we think, 'Oh my God, I am too tired, I can't do this!' it is because all that there is, is the tiredness.

...

Is nothing better than something? That is the real point. You have to decide. Is the yogi who spends his life in a cave wasting his life? In the midst of 'nothing' is everything. In the midst of 'something' is disappointment.

...

The problem is never with the object. The answer is never with the object. The problem and the answer are always with the mind. The problem is the mind that wants to control and interfere. The answer is the mind that relaxes and trusts.

When we become overwhelmed the structure tends to be that the object feels big, and we, the subject, feels small. We, the subject, feel vulnerable and unstable and this object-situation seems to be powerful and inevitable. Therefore, we are sure that we are going to be crushed; we are sure that we can't survive. I think the only real antidote to this is in the meditation; just to hold our courage and turn to face this and relax. Keep relaxing into the face of it and it will dissolve in front of us.

...

When you listen to the dharma try to experience the words as droplets of rain gently falling on you and washing away all your doubts and confusions. In particular, as you listen to sentences being formed, you can see the various grammatical particles in operation together. This co-dependency, interdependency or dependent-co-origination is very obvious in language; each part of the sentence plays its role in bringing something into being. So we can start to feel

directly, the energetic quality of words as they impact the various centres in our body, and the relative and compositional nature of these structures. The fact that language itself— something so fleeting and so interdependent—seems to support the notion of real entities, is really quite amazing.

...

Are we our clothes? When my teacher, C R Lama, used to go out to work in the university he would just go in the clothes that he wore around the house, an old lungi with maybe some holes in it and a T-shirt. His wife would say, 'Oh, you can't go out looking like that.' And he would reply, "When people see me coming do they say 'Here comes C R Lama' or do they say 'Here comes C R Lamas clothes.'?"

...

If dzogchen is saying 'All things from the very beginning are pure,' and we are saying, 'No, I have some really bad thoughts, really horrible. I don't want anybody to know this about me,' we are excluding ourselves from our own natural purity. The fact that other people might agree with us, that indeed our quality is terrible, would be to make use of their limits to reaffirm our limits.

...

In the practice everything is pure but the practice of being in the world with others is to be careful. Dzogchen doesn't mean that you should be naive.

...

At Halloween children dress up as ghosts and demons and go out knocking on people's doors. They put on masks or paint their faces and go 'Wooh!' They want to be very terrifying but really they are just sweet little children. It is the same with these thoughts which look so terrible and seem so unbearable. Actually, are just the sweet children of emptiness; they are the children of the dharmakaya. When you observe thoughts from this point of view, they are a shining radiance even though they may appear to be dull. That is to say, the 'shining radiance quality' is not, as it were, the semantic or the overt content; it is the very process of the movement of revelation. It is the relationship with the ground that indicates it is a radiance, not the fact that it looks polished

Don't despair if your mind seems very dull. This dullness doesn't mean that you are far away from your unborn awareness. The fact that you are alive and cognisant of this dullness of your mind is indeed the very natural radiance of the unborn mind.

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Preliminary reflections before entering the text

I will just say something about why according to the tradition it is a good idea to work on a text like this. Clearly, it can seem quite dense since there is a lot of information and difficult ideas. In the Tibetan tradition lifelong study of dharma texts was seen as very important. They are the true food for the mind and nourish the heart, because in the Tibetan buddhist tradition the mind resides in the heart. Therefore, when we hear the text and the explanation, we should allow ourselves just to be *bathed* in these dharma ideas, feeling the way in which ideas come together. In that way you gain a confidence that these texts make sense, that they have value and meaning, and that this meaning can be applied in our lives. Ideas that might initially seem very foreign and alien are actually very close to us and very helpful for illuminating the actuality of our existence.

Let us start, then, by doing some basic sitting practice, a very simple *shiné* practice of developing a more focused attention. We do this by choosing a simple object for our attention and keeping our attention on it. Whenever you find your attention straying off to something else you simply bring it back. You could use the sensation of the breath going in and out of your nostrils, an external object in the room, an image of the Buddha, a small white ball... It doesn't really matter what the object is; you simply have to know what your object is and keep your mind on it. So let us do that for a while

[*Shiné* practice]

Attachment as a basis for our suffering

On the actuality of what is here, we put the sunglasses of our assumptions, our constructions, and our memories. Therefore, what we encounter is a mixture of what is fresh and what is stale. When children are small, like this one we have in the room just now, everything is very fresh and interesting. This child is very desperate to explore everything, however *we* don't need to explore so much because we think we know already what most things are. As a result our lives are a bit duller, but also a bit more stable. So how can we get the best of both worlds? How can we have both the stability *and* the freshness? This is what the practice of meditation is about.

Attachment on its outer level means attachment to particular 'things' however its more subtle and insidious level is attachment to the identification of things existing as real separate entities. This is the attachment that becomes the basis for 'our world'. Take for example, attachment to health. We may take it for granted that we are healthy and because we are healthy we like to walk in nature enjoying the sunshine. Maybe while we are enjoying this an insect comes and bites us and then we are not so healthy. In that way, suddenly, you realise that the health that *seemed* to be 'you', which seemed to be an enduring quality of 'yourself' is in fact something very fragile. It is very easy to get sick; infection spreads in the body very quickly. Our mental stability also is easily upset; bereavement, stresses at work, stresses in relationships, all can easily upset our sense of balance.

Therefore, the subtle forms of attachment are the felt sense: *I know who I am. I am this person. I am like this.* It is from these positions—which are built up through time, due to familiarity of patterns—that we start to have a sense that something which is impermanent and dependent on the meeting together of complex conditions, is actually self-existing. For example: *I am a healthy person. I am a balanced person. I am a wealthy person...* All of these conditions can change very easily. Therefore, attachment is a way of resting on phenomena in the world; finding a secure basis for ourselves through beliefs, assumptions, and feelings. However, we then have the question: *Well, why would I need something to rest on? What is this heaviness of myself and also*

this fragility of myself that makes me need something secure and supportive in order to feel OK? How is it that, as an adult person who can do so many things, I still find myself being very vulnerable?

This is because there is never any security on the level of a sense of a self which is a construct. All things that are born will die. All things that come into existence from being put together will one day fall apart. Our bodies will fall apart. The construct of our own personal identity will also fall apart. This is because these things which we take to be ourselves, 'my' body, 'my' self, have come into being through many factors meeting together. Suffering arises because we believe that we can stabilise something which we *cannot* stabilise.

Our own situation is always changing because we are part of the world. We cannot establish ourselves apart from the world. Changes in other people will also impact us. For example, yesterday when I was in Freiburg I went for a walk up the hill with Thomas. We were looking at some of the beautiful old houses and imagining how lovely they would have been maybe fifty years ago. Nowadays many new houses are being built, spoiling the view of the beautiful old houses. Nobody is rich enough to make these 'bad people' stay far away. Other people's behaviour will always impact us. Again, one of my friends has a little meditation centre in Wales. It is very peaceful and beautiful. There is just the wind blowing, the birds singing and the sheep wandering on the hill. However, the sheep need a shepherd and the shepherd is young and lazy. He uses a quad bike to travel around all the time and so, morning to night, there is the roaring. However Buddha says that suffering can come to an end. This is expressed in his Third Noble Truth. How is this possible? Well, because suffering is created out of particular conditions which are not truly or inherently real. If the *process* of ignorance, of actively ignoring what is going on and of being actively involved in attachment to phenomena, comes to an end then suffering will come to an end. This means being able to let go of the constructs on which our ordinary identity is based.

Eightfold Noble Path

In order to do this we have to have some alternative vision of ourselves. This is what is set out in the Fourth Noble Truth: the idea of an Eightfold Noble Path whose principles are an orientation towards the world that allows us to be *in* the world, but not *of* it. Therefore, we have 'right livelihood': finding a way of living which will provide the resources we need but causes minimal turbulence for those around us and for ourselves. We should apply this when thinking about which occupation to take up. For example under a liberal government, working in the prison service might be a very useful occupation. If there is an orientation towards rehabilitation and education, then prison could be a very helpful and socially useful place to work. However, the government could change and the economic situation could change so that there is much more thought of punishing prisoners. By not having any education in the prisons, they become a very soul-destroying environment in which to work. You are actually there to punish other people and make them suffer. Another example: somebody might train as a doctor because they want to care for the sick but if they work in a country where the health service is not well supported, they have to see so many patients in a day that they cannot give them much care and attention.

Each aspect of the Eightfold Noble Path is useful for encouraging reflection and examination of the assumptions inside which we normally exist. Rather than taking things for granted, we learn to put them into question. For example, there is 'right diligence' or 'right application': turning one's mind towards a task in a disciplined way. If this is applied in the wrong way, however, it become a kind of blindness. Therefore one has to think: 'What is happening to 'me' when 'I' am being diligent?' If my diligence used to develop qualities in order that other people will admire me, then the diligence is contaminated by pride. If my diligence used to make me more successful

than other people, then my diligence is contaminated by aggression. Every year somebody finds a new way to climb Mount Everest: climbing it without oxygen; climbing it with one hand tied behind their back; climbing it hopping on one foot... When they succeed, their name goes in the record book and people remember them. In such ways, a huge amount of diligence is directed towards something really quite empty and meaningless.

One aspect of the Buddha's eightfold noble path is 'right understanding'. On a general level, this means directly understanding impermanence, that is to say not just having an intellectual understanding of impermanence but living with the felt experience of impermanence moment-by-moment. In order to develop a 'right understanding' we have to start to examine what are our existing beliefs, what do we believe about the world and our life and our purpose here? Most people would think, 'Well, one of the reasons I am here is to be happy.' Therefore, what will make you happy? We have all sorts of answers to this. For some people it is getting a new bicycle, for some it is an ice-cream, for some it is having someone to kiss; it can be all sorts of answers. From a buddhist point of view we would want to ask, 'Well, how much happiness do these things generate?'

It would seem that your happiness arises and falls in accordance not just with the presence of the object but also with the *newness* of the object. For example, very often children want to get something very nice for Christmas. However, by the end of January, maybe, they are not touching this wonderful toy that they wanted so much. That is because part of the desire is wanting something *new* which in its 'otherness'—in its being different from the world that we have—we imagine will transform how I am. However, of course, when we've had that object for a while it loses its bright shiny quality and becomes incorporated into the world that we know. And that is because our existence is lived in the process of time: whatever is new will become old; the freshness will cease to become part of it. Then, when we encounter it, we encounter it layered with the memories and associations that we have put on to it.

The tedium of samsara

One of the reasons that we like to travel and go to new places is because we don't know what to expect. The freshness of the 'object situation' allows us to feel fresh in ourselves. However, once we get to know the place we lose that immediacy and although there is the compensation of starting to feel at home, of knowing our way around, there is a slight diminishing of arousal, of energy, of feeling vibrant. Therefore, one is again tilted towards going to a new situation in order restore that freshness. However, of course, once you realise that all the trees are pretty much just trees you might not feel the need to go and look at more trees...

For example, when my teacher C. R. Lama was living in Munich there were a group of people who would meet with him on a Sunday. They liked to take him out in a car to see the wonderful scenery, to see the hills. And he would try to explain, '*Well, in my country in Tibet we have a lot of hills. It is mainly hills. I am not so interested to see your hills.*' We can understand that in many ways it is also that at a certain point one has a lot of experience of the world, and then what? This is the tragedy or the situation of middle-age. By middle-age one has experienced many many different things, and now what? Is this all there is? Where else shall we go to have another coffee and another piece of cake? What is the point? And of course many people become depressed in that situation. However, we can start to see that, actually, this world that we inhabit—or as it is called, *samsara*—has embedded in it a kind of dissatisfaction.

This is because of the nature of time. Whatever we have, whatever we gain, will cease to be what it was when we first encountered it. And in our time we are very lucky we have been able to do

so many things. However, that means we can come to a point where there is nothing new to experience. Therefore, where shall one go?

This is the point of entry into buddhist practice: that actually samsara is a great tedium, an uninterrupted nothing- at-all-ness. It is a bit like the play by Jean Paul Sartre, *Huis Clos*, where four people find themselves together in a room and start talking with each other. Gradually they get a sense that nothing very much seems to be happening and that they can't really get out of this room. It starts to dawn on them that this is their eternity. This play exemplifies his notion that hell is other people, the endless tedium of other people's minds. When you meet someone who seems very fascinating you long to get to know them but once you get to know them, then what? This is the structure of samsara.

Can we find a way in which the freshness doesn't fall off? Can we find a way in which we could be fresh moment-by-moment, wherein the experience of freshness wouldn't be dependent on the particular qualities of an object but would be there in this horizontal ever-changing movement of interaction?

Three main categories of the buddhist teachings

Hinayana – orientated towards separating subject and object

In buddhist practice, though there are many different styles or levels, they are all concerned to free us from attachment and ignorance. The various buddhist teachings can be grouped together in three main categories. The first are those concerned to separate subject and object. These are the paths that are based on renunciation. That is to say, they start with saying,

Well, if my suffering is generated by the impact of certain situations on me, then if I can simplify my life by removing these disturbing objects, I will have less suffering. Therefore, if I avoid the excitements and sufferings of sexual contact, avoid the hopes and fears of being in the world of business affairs, I can create a stable situation in which there is minimal disturbance. In that way I can become a monk or a nun living in a monastery, in a secure environment in which the rhythm of life is very predictable and the structure will support an absence of disturbance. And I can link with that the kind of meditation practice we started with today so that by developing my capacity to focus my attention on a simple object I can gradually learn to protect myself from the many different stimuli that being-in-the-world arouses. By holding my attention in a simple clear way and living a life that separates me from stimuli, everything can become very calm and very clear. In that way, the mind can find a way of being undisturbed and that will lead in the end to the absolute absence of disturbance.

This, then, is the historical Buddha's enlightenment, a separation from the world of turmoil and change; nothing can get to him. It is one particular vision of what peace would be. There would be no suffering but there wouldn't be anything else; there is just a big nothing. It is often compared to blowing out the lamp—and 'after this, only silence', as Samuel Becket would say. That is one vision and it attracts millions of buddhists all over the world.

Mahayana – orientated towards expansion and inclusion

The second, general, grouping is called the 'mahayana'. These are the practices and orientations which are tilted around the idea of expansion and inclusion. These are grounded in two basic principles: the understanding of *emptiness* and the development of *compassion*.

When you understand emptiness you see that there is no true self-nature, no inherent self-nature, in any phenomena. Therefore, you don't have to avoid any object. Rather, you can see that the object is devoid of inherent truth and also that the qualities evoked in the subject by the object, are also empty.

Therefore, if you see someone and you don't like them, with the understanding of emptiness you can see that this is an empty phenomenon in front of you—there is no truly existing person not to like. You can also see that you're own 'not liking', this feeling that is arising in you that seems very strong and real, is also empty. *Before* you saw the person you didn't feel like this, however, on seeing that person you *do* feel like it, and when you are no longer in contact with them you *won't* feel that way any longer. In that way, we can see it is situationally evoked and therefore impermanent. Even in the moment of its arising it is a process and not an entity and so is devoid of inherent self-nature.

In the same way, if you see someone whom you find interesting or desirable, the image that you see in front of you—their qualities, their hair, the colour of their eyes and so on—all of this is an empty form, an illusory form. The feelings of desire that arise inside you are also empty. Therefore, by allowing yourself to experience this desire *and* to see that it's ungraspable in itself and passes through time, you can see that it invites you into a dream-like engagement with an object which is not real. In this way, the intense emotion is deconstructed from the inside, you don't have to avoid it or destroy it. Emptiness provides a sense of the transparency of phenomena—the transparency and fluid evanescent dynamic nature of your own being.

With this point of view there is nothing to secure. You cannot make the world stable—which tilts us towards compassion. Here compassion means to be with others in a way that brings some sense of lightening up, loosening up. Therefore, compassion is helping people to lessen their attachment and to lessen their ignorance— not to take themselves so seriously, not to take the events in their lives so seriously—and if possible to help them catch the way in which they construct the intense solidity of situations and through that, create the prisons that trap them.

There is also a sense that one should develop this compassion out to all beings; developing a *bodhisattva* intention or an intention to help and awaken and save all beings. This infinite intention is also serving the function of wisdom, because, if your intention is to help all beings you are immediately re-located away from the narrow world of your own personal self concerns, from your family and friends and so on. And through that you can start to develop equanimity, so that helping other people is not based on whether they are connected to you by blood, whether they have the capacity to help you back in return, or whether you like them or not. There is no limitation to the movement of compassion. Therefore, in this opening out to all others as they are, you find yourself having to unlock the ways in which you close down and set up particular win/lose games with the world.

Tantra – oriented towards transformation and initiation

The third approach, the approach of tantra has the same basic orientation as the mahayana view. However, it uses the methods of transformation in which, through initiation, you become able to enter the mandala of a deity. That is to say, you enter the pure or sacred divine realm and from that state bring all of experienced reality into the mandala.

This method is regarded as being much quicker than the general mahayana method. This is because, instead of helping each being one-by-one-by-one, all beings can be immediately transformed into divine members of the mandala in which their empty nature is manifested through the translucency of their bodies. They have transparent bodies moving in a very light way

and with that perception they are now offering you no hooks for the residual attachments and projections that your karmic base is going to bring. It also means that view that your compassion flows out ceaselessly since you have no desire to incorporate them into the restrictions of your ordinary perception.

Then there is the level of Dzogchen which we will focus on later. This is a more direct approach to immediately awakening to the situation. However, what is very important to remember is that these are *all* methods. What we take to be reality is an illusion. When we open up and awaken to that illusion, we see that everything we experience is completely unspeakable. Therefore, what we read about in dharma books and what we can hear in teachings are all methods. They are a kind of massage for ourselves to loosen the knots of our understanding so that our being can flow freely, and through that awaken into a state beyond description. This means that, *as methods, they have to be applied; they are not intellectual theories but are ways of existing in the world. It is by embodying them, by living them, that the world will reveal itself in many different ways.*

Emptiness: the beginning of the practice of dzogchen

Emptiness is a very important and central understanding. Therefore, before we do some practice I will say a little bit more about it.

When we experience negative mental states, for example, self-hatred, we are relating to ourselves in terms of subject and object. That is to say, 'I hate *myself*.' There are some things I really don't like about *myself*.' Therefore, we have a story about 'who we are' which, in that moment, is existing as a kind of object which *we* stand in relation to. Of course, we can apply an antidote to that through a practice like *Metta bhavana* which is a practice of developing loving-kindness directed towards oneself and all sentient beings.

We do that through a notion like, 'May all beings be happy.' You can do this by imagining a point of light in the centre of your heart radiating light out and filling yourself up, then going out to all beings in an unobstructed flow of warmth and inclusion. It is the un-conditionality of that feeling of loving kindness that is especially important.

Metta bhavana is practiced to turn us to an attitude of infinite generosity both towards oneself and towards all others. It is, of course, grounded in a notion that it can't be infinite unless it has an infinite source. One has to have the capacity not to be limited at the point of generosity. Therefore, just this practice in itself takes you out of the situation in which you are an ordinary person who is counting costs.

This is taken even further in the mahayana position, by the practice of developing of giving and receiving, called *tonglen*. This is absolutely the opposite principle of consumerist capitalism. The philosophy of Wal-Mart is that 'we will sell you shit and you will give us money' but the philosophy of *tonglen* is that 'we will give you money and you will give us shit'. Therefore, we say, '*All the pain and all the suffering of all beings—this is what I want. All the happiness that I could possibly have, I will give that to you.*'

Metaphor of recycling. Emptiness is a recycling plant.

Now, why would one want to do this? It is not a masochistic position but it is a fact that the mystery of re-cycling was discovered by the Buddha a long time ago. Therefore, in the middle of your heart you have this recycling plant which is called emptiness. And when all the pain, all the suffering of all beings is gathered in it, it dissolves into absolute emptiness. Everything which was narrow, which was painful, which was troublesome, is dissolved into nothing at all and what

remains is a shimmering quality of energy. In that way, we experience the openness to the suffering of others as fundamentally energising which then allows us to keep giving out positive feelings of loving-kindness to all beings.

With this practice it is important not to operate beyond our capacity. If we don't listen to our body, the body says something like, *'Stop. You are tired. Have a rest.'* However our mind can be captured by a sense of pride, by a sense of duty or whatever, so that we find ourselves going beyond our capacity. In order to avoid that, it is absolutely important to have this experience of the emptiness at the centre of your being. This is because emptiness is nothing; it is *no-thing*. It is then freed from the qualities of all finite things.

Things which exist in this world have a particular shape, they have a colour, they have a dimension and they exist in relation to other phenomenon. Therefore, we can take, for example, a quality like generosity and we can think about our own generosity. We probably know people who are less generous than us and we surely know people who are more generous than us. Therefore, our generosity can be located in terms of how other people are; you can put it into a hierarchy. And in that way, it appears to be a kind of *entity* which could be increased or decreased, but if you act beyond the limit of your generosity you are likely to feel a kind of anxiety afterwards. Therefore, here we can see that our attachment to a particular sense of ourselves, to a particular way of defining our capacity, gives us an anxiety about what we should do. We also live at a time when our culture emphasises taking it easy, relaxing, chilling out, play some nice music, sitting in the garden...

However, in the dharma tradition there is a lot to be done, but how can you know when you are doing enough, and enough of what? Who can decide? What would a proper indicator be? If, when you get tired you stop, that could be very wise or it could be very stupid. You could be taking care of yourself, or you could be lazy and self-indulgent.

The Tibetan tradition tells of Indian and Tibetan yogis such as Tilopa, Naropa and Milarepa. Milarepa was not somebody who lay abed on Sunday reading the newspapers. He didn't have a little stash of chocolate and other tasty treats. When his close disciple Gampopa asked him, *'Rinpoche, please tell me your secret. How did you get to be such a great yogi?'* Milarepa said, *'No, I won't tell you because this is a teaching you don't want to get.'* However, Gampopa asked him again and again. Then Milarepa said, *'OK, I'll show you.'* So Gampopa sits in a formal posture, expecting some very profound mahamudra teaching and Milarepa gets up, turns around and shows him his backside. His backside is covered with calluses and torn skin from many years of sitting in rocks in caves. This, then, is very different from our way of doing just enough dharma to make sure that we feel OK. Working hard will make you tired; it will make you feel exhausted, depressed, lonely, sad and hopeless. There are many stories of yogis feeling like that. In some of these yogi monasteries and nunneries, yogis and yoginis let their hair grow long and they would tie their hair on to a rope from the roof so that if they fell asleep in a meditation they would be pulled back again. Many yogis would sleep sitting up in a small 'meditation box' which is not so easy to do.

Reflecting on 'what is life for?' is the real meaning of refuge and some refuge texts say, 'Having taken refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha **I promise not to take refuge in anything else.**'

So what then, is meant by relaxation, about which dzogchen has so much to say? In Tibetan it is *lo de* [Tib. blo bde] which means, 'flowing easily with no tension'. Now, if you are lying in bed on a Sunday morning and you think, 'Today I have nothing to do and I can just relax,' your relaxation

is then part of a sandwich. Friday is busy, busy, maybe even Saturday is busy, busy, and Monday will again be busy, busy. However, in between, on Sunday—‘Ah...so relaxed!’ This is *not* the relaxation of dzogchen. Real relaxation is not wrapped up between states of tension; it is not a holiday, getting away from something. It is a state of relaxation within which you can do a great deal. You can work very long hours; you can be a servant of the world but in a very relaxed way. Therefore, relaxation doesn’t mean avoidance or time-out. It means to merge the mind in a state of infinity so that there is no limit and so that everything is just completely opened.

This also means being able to welcome everything. What I think *is* really stressful is to have a selective welcome, ‘I will welcome the things that I like and I will reject the things that I don’t like.’ This keeps you busy all the time. You are always at work running this triage, sorting out what is important and what is less important. This is why we would say that deep relaxation is the quality of Kuntu Zangpo who is the primordial Buddha of the dzogchen tradition and who represents that ‘everything is good’. This means that, ‘I accept it all’ which in turn means things can be just as they are. One’s life is what one gets, not what one plans for. Therefore, the more you can relax, the more you can open to the situation, then, whatever comes, comes. That is what there is.

In relation to the practice like *tonglen*, if we try to do this practice from a place in ourselves that is trying to manage the world, trying to control the world, trying to do things on our terms, we will find that it becomes impossible.

The emptiness of tiredness

This is because when our awareness becomes fixated on something, because awareness has no shape itself, it will manifest as the shape of this furniture that is currently in our mind. And in that moment we *are* our jealousy, our pride, our laziness, our diligence, whatever the qualities are. It is not that we are attached to these things in the way we can become attached to a particular object that exists in the world, like a watch. Rather, it is the quality of awareness to reveal what is there. Therefore if we are not in touch with awareness, what awareness will do is simply reveal the manifesting qualities moment-by-moment. And then we think, *Oh God I am too tired; I can’t do this!* This is because all that there is, is the tiredness. Who else is existing? *Me So who is tired? It must be me. I am tired. I have had enough. Can I go home now please?*

This is very important. If we relax and stay in open awareness what is revealed is just tiredness. If you were doing the theravada vipassana practice of scanning through your body for sensation, you might describe, ‘heavy’ or ‘sinking’. You would use very simple terms to describe the momentary phenomena. It uses an intentional practice of naming and labelling to diminish the likelihood of identification with the arising. However, if we are not doing an intentional practice like that, we just feel tired. But of course, we don’t ‘just feel tired’. There are various steps which are invisible to us which have led to the composite formulation, ‘*I just feel tired.*’

So in our practice here, the understanding of emptiness needs to be brought directly to whatever experience arises, for example, with the feeling of being tired. It is experienced directly as something which is arising and passing, rather than solidified into what *appears* to be an absolute limit, ‘I have had enough. I can’t take anymore.’ Who *is* the one who can’t take any more? This is the one who *has already* been woven in, *already* caught up in many different arisings and therefore is a composite. The composite *appears* very solid but has no inherent-self-nature.

For example, here we have a cushion and it appears to have some solidity to it, some strength, some existence; it has a shape. However, you can feel just by rubbing it that it’s full of stuff; bits of foam rubber probably. Therefore, if we were to unpick this, lots of bits of stuff would come out. The seeming solidity of the cushion depends on the way it was prepared and put together. It

appears to be something, it has the appearance of something but there is no solid, enduring, substantial basis to that appearance. Therefore, as it says in the *Heart Sutra*:

Form is emptiness and emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form; form is not other than emptiness.

Therefore, in order to see the emptiness of the cushion we don't have to take the cushion apart; something appears and simultaneously with its appearance it is empty of inherent self-nature. Even if this cushion was made of steel this wouldn't make it any less empty. It is not the density or the specific gravity of a substance which is more-or-less emptiness. It is the fact that all phenomena arise from causes and, these causes are not *inside* the cushion. Therefore, as a basis for developing compassion, in terms of opening the heart, to be able to reside in this fresh infinite dimension of emptiness, and in order to be able to enter more easily into the practice of dzogchen—which operates on the sense of energy rather than of entities—it is very helpful to really get a felt sense of emptiness for yourself.

We can try this now by doing a little bit of sitting practice; we can observe how what appears in front of us is changing according to the changes in the light. For example, you are looking at this cup and as the light is changing, as the sun goes further behind the hills and it gets darker, the shading of the blue seems to change. It really will change but you might think, *'Well, I saw this cup earlier and I know what blue the colour of the cup really is. It just looks a bit different now because there is not so much light. However, if you switch on the light then you will see the real colour of the cup.'* This is how we think most of the time. But is there really a blue which is there and self-existing? Or is the blue of the cup co-created with whatever light is around it, in which case the blue is not in the *cup* but is in the *relationship*? The light, the cup, our eyes, our quality of sensation... this is the emptiness of the blueness of the cup.

You can apply that to object after object; to your own body and to your own sensations. In that way, for example, with a sensation in your body, you can start to experience it in a lighter way, feel it as it is, as a process. Therefore, if you start to feel tired, rather than expressing that as a conclusion, 'I feel tired'—which is a kind of shorthand for saying, *'Once again I find myself in a state that I often have in the evenings, a state of tiredness which is a sign I need to go to bed.'*—rather, what is arising is a flow of momentary sensations. By not gathering them together into a composite conclusion 'I am tired' and falling asleep on to that conclusion—in fact you have fallen asleep before you have even gone to bed because you have collapsed into your assumption—you can be awake to the nature of tiredness and then find that you are tired-ing.

You will see that these sensations are different: maybe sometimes your legs start to ache a bit or your legs get heavy, or a yawn comes out, or you lose connection with a conversation. Each of these is arising and passing. There is no actual 'tiredness' that you can grasp and hold on to. It is by doing that, that you start to be able to stay present with your tiredness. If you do that your tiredness will go and you'll be energised and you can do something else. This is why yogis didn't sleep very much. They weren't taking adrenaline, they weren't taking cocaine, however they were not falling into the thought as if the thought defines reality.

If you observe the process of the arising and passing of the thought, the emptiness of the thought will reveal the emptiness of what *appeared* to be real. Therefore, when you say, *'Oh, I feel tired,'* you know this is just bla bla. In that way you can be tired without being tired. This is the emptiness of tiredness and is the beginning of the possibility of dzogchen practice.

Questions

Participant: How can you go to sleep then? I mean we are lying in bed and we want to sleep? Is there a certain position?

James: You can just decide yourself, 'Now, I will go to sleep.' I remember when I was in India doing a retreat, I would be sitting doing my practice and then suddenly I would be making a cup of tea. I would have no memory of having got up and lighting the fire to make a cup of tea. Therefore, my mind had gone into the idea of tea. I had just gone into a kind of little tunnel, like a rabbit running into the earth. And then later when I would be preparing texts for translation I would be copying them out late at night by candle light and I would be feeling very very tired. It was hot, mosquitoes were buzzing all around and I would say, 'Oh, I will just go to the end of the page.' and then I would think, 'Oh, I will do another page.' Then there would be another and another... That could go on for many hours. Who is going to decide the end? Does the thought decide the end, or does the awareness? Does the tail take the dog for a walk or does the dog take the tail for a walk? That is always the question.

Participant: There was once a suggestion that it is helpful to focus on maybe a white 'Aa' or something like that.

James: Yes. That would be very useful to develop a kind of ritual. If you find it difficult to sleep you can do some deep breathing and focus on the 'Aa'. Just allow any thoughts of the day to go. If they continue coming just imagine them like rain pattering down on a little lake.

Participant: When you were talking about the middle way—with the extreme of denying the reality of the cushion, which was nihilistic, and the view of the cushion as being totally real—you said that the middle way is something between those. However, I cannot really make sense of the difference between the middle way and the empty thing.

James: OK. The cushion is still a cushion: you can see it, you can feel it, you can hold it, and yet, there is nothing in itself which is there. For example, in a theatre, we take people to be other than they are. You may know the actor or the actress in their ordinary life but when they are in the role from the play they *appear* in that role. If they are good, that hooks your attention and they become believable as that role. However, if someone, for example, called John is playing King Lear, John is always John even though we all take him to be King Lear. Therefore, the John-ness of John is invisible when we all believe this is King Lear. Yet, King Lear has always been John. Being King Lear doesn't stop John being John. Therefore something *appears* to be the case, which *is* the case because it's what it *appears* to be, and yet, it is not the case because it's not really the case.

Participant: So this is the middle way then.

James: Yes, this is the middle way. We see the 'cushion' and this is like 'King Lear'. This is our cultural drama: we believe this is a cushion. Yet, it is composed out of many different pieces, none of which is a 'cushion'. Therefore, these things which are *not* a cushion, when put together *appear* to be a cushion, and so, this is both a cushion and not a cushion. Therefore, the cushion-ness of the cushion is deconstructed, is opened up by the non-cushion-ness of the cushion. And the non-cushion-ness of the cushion is deconstructed by the cushion-ness of the cushion. This is the heart of the *Heart Sutra* teaching.

Our tendency is to say, 'Well, either it is black *or* it is white.' or 'What the hell! Let's just put the white and the black together and make grey.' However, this middle way is not grey. It is neither white nor black nor grey. The *Heart Sutra* says, 'Form is not other than emptiness. Emptiness is not other than form.' They are inseparable, and yet, not the same thing, yet not different.

This is something to investigate for yourselves. For example, you might want to eat an apple. You cut the apple in half and then you can cut it into pieces. Where, then, is the essence of this apple? It was in the shape. Nothing has been stolen from the apple by chopping it up. And yet, these small pieces don't look like an apple. You *know* they are apple because you've observed the process and you can smell it and taste it. This helps us to see, *'Oh, yes, I hold in my mind a concept of 'apple' and that is what I use to create my identification of these phenomena.'* However, what is the real, substantial, or solid basis for my confidence in knowing what things are? This is a serious dharma doubt, a doubt that can spring open the prison door of the certainty of alignment with the human condition.

[End of Day One]

Three Aa meditation practice

Let us begin our session with a little practice. We imagine in the space in front of us a white letter 'Aa'. 'Aa' is the symbol of emptiness and it represents the ground nature out of which all phenomena arise. It is the heart understanding of all the teachers. Therefore, when we visualise this white letter 'Aa' which is surrounded by a ball of rainbow-coloured light we imagine it as being the presence of all the teachers of the lineage from Kuntu Zangpo down to the present time. The notion of lineage is very important in the Tibetan tradition: without the great kindness of the great work done by people in previous years we wouldn't have access to this. Now that it is available, part of our work is to feel able to open to it and to be entitled to *really* accept it and make use of it. We support that by holding this visualisation, reciting 'Aa' three times and integrating our state into the state of presence of the teacher. Then we just sit in that state for some time.

[Practice of *Three Aas*]

Introduction to the text

This short text comes from Nuden Dorje who was an incarnation of one of the close disciples of Padmasambhava. According to the Nyingmapa tradition Padmasambhava, the great yogi of Oddiyana, gave many teaching when he was in Tibet, in particular, to his twenty-five close disciples. This took place especially at the monastery of Samye. These teachings were then gathered together, particularly by Yeshe Tsogyel and hidden in various places in Tibet. Some were hidden in rocks, some in lakes, some in the sky and some in the mind. At later times, in various different ways these teachings would come back into the world. Often, one person would find the key, that is to say, a little core point. This could be a stone, a mark on a rock or a small piece of text. That would then be used by the same person or by someone different to open up the full range of the texts. Nuden Dorje found this particular text and it is part of a large sequence of his dakini teachings. It was passed on in a very short lineage and Chimed Rigdzin was the fourth person to receive these. He also had it in a direct transmission himself and he taught it to me in India. I then did some retreat practice with it. It is a very condensed text, so we can now open it up.

The Direct Indication of Buddhahood beyond Classification

Salutation to my own awareness, the supreme ruler

The text begins, as is traditional, with the salutation or respectful bowing, *'Salutation to my own awareness, the supreme ruler.'* Our own mind is the creator of all things. There is nothing that we

encounter that is not brought into being through our mind. The function of these teachings is to free us from the illusion that we are small trapped vulnerable people living inside a box of skin and bone, and to awaken us to the openness, the ever-fresh dimension, from which this 'skin box' arises.

It is very important to understand the starting point of dzogchen. We don't start from the position of being limited and having many problems which need to be solved. Nor do we start from the position of being very desperate and praying to a father-like guru. Therefore, we are not working on the basis that there is somebody superior to us, somebody more powerful than us, who are going to help us or save us. We move directly to recognising that at this very moment the root nature of our own existence is something which has been pure and complete from the very beginning.

When we say that our mind is the supreme ruler this is not an inflation: it is not saying that our *ego* is the supreme ruler; it is not saying that our personality is the supreme ruler, and it is not due to being inhabitants of Europe that we are the supreme rulers. This understanding is not grounded in any of the particular constructs through which we create our ordinary sense of identity. Our mind is the supreme ruler **because our mind is empty**.

The Bible says, 'The first shall be last and the last shall be first.' The ego wants to be first and through its efforts to be first, it makes us last. Our awareness is last because it is the last thing we attend to. However, if you attend to it and awaken to it, it will be first. Therefore, it is very important to recognise that what brings you to the fullness of your being is *not* who you take yourself to be. The games of power, all the various ways in which we try to make our lives safe and secure, actually cover up our true nature.

All you meditating yogis should thoroughly receive the nectar of instructions from the holy gurus

'Concerning the practice of these instructions on the pristine cognition of the primordially pure natural great perfect, the profound peace free of all interpretation, all you meditating yogis should thoroughly receive the nectar of instructions from the holy gurus you follow.'

That is to say, when you have the possibility to receive the teachings or to learn from someone it is very important to be as stupid as you can. It is best to be stupid now, have lots of questions and struggle to understand something because then you can become clear later. However, if you are clear now and you think, 'Oh, yes, I know this and this is very nice' then later when you do your practice you are likely to find lots of problems arising and you are on your own. Therefore, '*thoroughly*' doesn't mean that the teacher has to talk for a long time, it means that when you get the idea you massage it into yourself so that it is completely absorbed. He describes it as the '*nectar of instruction*'. Imagine that you have gone to Paris, to a very expensive boutique, and have bought a little pot of wonderful face cream; all wrinkles and blemishes can be removed with this magical cream—500 euros for a little pot. And you are rubbing it very carefully, very slowly. Maximum absorption is necessary. It is the same for these dzogchen teachings.

Flee society and live alone in isolated places

'Having been born in this impure samsara you should flee society and live alone in isolated places.' Why is this necessary? This is because our karma is not something which is inside us. Our karma is our relationship, the relation between subject and object, and we have no wall of protection against this. Other people are disturbing not because they are bad, but because we don't know what to do with their energy. We find ourselves being upset or excited, disturbed or

moved in some way. This is fine if we have clarity because then we can allow this movement of responsiveness to be an effortless flow of compassion. However, when we find ourselves attached to our familiar positions—our hopes and fears, our anxieties and longings—then other people's existences become very disturbing.

Therefore, in terms of practice, from time to time it is very useful if you can do a solitary retreat. If that is not possible then it is important to at least put aside some quiet time. One of the things about interpersonal turbulence is that it disguises the turbulence we have inside ourselves. When we are with other people, especially if we are in a position where we help them—if we are school teachers, nurses and so on—there is a sense of efficiency and direction and everything can seem very meaningful. However, when you sit with your own mind you realise how out of control it is. Therefore, clearly it is very tempting just to return to be with other people because you feel better. Other people provide a holiday from ourselves. Therefore, it is very important to take some time just to be with yourself and to really understand how these webs of illusion get woven and bind us.

Keep your body in the posture of Vairocana

Then he says, '*Keep your body in the posture of Vairocana*.' This particularly means to keep your spine straight. The more your spine is straight and the weight of your head is resting down through the vertebrae, the more your muscles can relax. However, if your spine is not properly aligned then the muscles of your back, your shoulders will be doing the work of holding you stable. Sit with the shoulders back and hands resting in the lap. Place the left hand on top of the right hand with the tips of the thumbs meeting together. The chin is slightly lowered and the tongue is touching the hard upper palate just behind the teeth. The eyes are not closed and not open too brightly—just lightly opened. If your legs support it then you can put them in the lotus position. That posture is seen as good because when the legs are locked it helps the spine not to collapse. However, that position is easier for some people than for others; we are usually used to sitting in chairs. The key thing is to have a position where your legs can relax and you're not holding them tightly. In that way you can experience your body as a flow of energy and sensation, without being pulled by gross sensation back to a concept of what your body is.

Keep your voice free of all conversation and recitation

Then he says, '*Keep your voice free of all conversation and recitation*.' The voice, this throat point, is seen as the sight of energy. It is the point where we connect with the world; breath is coming in and out over this point which is directly linking us to the world. Our speech is arising from the voice box and so when we speak we are mobilising and activating our energy. However, at first the practice is to focus on the natural space. Therefore, for that reason we stop speaking with others and we also don't do much recitation.

In the practice of tantra, and in the general practice of buddhism in the Tibetan traditions, there is a lot chanting and recitation. Reciting the buddhist texts is seen as a way of generating merit which can be offered out to all beings. It is also focused on particular functions. For example, if you go to Ladakh you can still see in the summer time the monks from some of the monasteries going in procession around the fields. They carry on their backs the very large volumes bound with wooden planks of the *Prajnaparamita* in a hundred thousand verses. These bless the fields so that the crops become good. The monks then go back to the monastery and recite for several days this entire collection of many volumes. The merit of this goes to the stabilisation of the environment so that there is no provocation of the local gods and the crops will grow well. In the tradition you will find texts to recite if you lose your cow, texts to recite if your sheep are sick... There are *many* reasons for reciting texts. Also, of course, in the tradition of tantra, there is a belief that mantras are very helpful; that mantras provide a protection against distraction. In that

way they give us something to do, something useful. And when we do useful things we feel powerful; we have a sense of being in charge, of knowing something important. Nuden Dorje is here saying not to do any of that.

The path of dzogchen is the path in which you **become useless**. This is because as long as you feel that what you do is very important you will stay identified as the one who is powerful and important. However, our value doesn't lie in that importance. When we see small babies they don't do anything very much but we don't think they are unimportant. When we see old people just sitting in a chair, if we are still human beings, we don't say to them, 'Oh, time for you to die.' Just by sitting there and falling asleep they are also part of our world. However, we are very frightened of being useless or a burden, because, we feel that our value is something created by our activity.

The idea of creating your own value is one of the fundamental forms of ignorance. This is because it means, 'I have to create myself. It is all up to me.' What a big burden to carry on your own little shoulders. Therefore, stop speaking, stop recitation—nothing for you to do. In that way you start to re-identify the ground-basis of your own identity.

Expel the air from your body and remain relaxed in your own place

Then he says, '*Expel the air from your body and remain relaxed in your own place.*' There are different ways of expelling this air. This is based on the traditional idea that the fundamental energy of our body is connected with that of the world around us. A major part of the maintaining of the sense of our dualistic separate identity is the trapping of air inside ourselves, the cutting off of energy, so that we don't have a 'free-flow' with the environment. That is to say, due to our habits or neurotic tensions and our anxieties, the paths, or the flow, of energy through our body become knotted. Just as the build-up of deposits in our arteries and veins can stop the flow of blood, so in this energetic system linked with the breath, our mental anxieties and limitations—which are also linked to poor posture and collapsed physical existence—can lead to an inability to experience a fully open relationship with the world.

One way we can do this is through what is called the *nine-fold breathing*. Men and women do it in a slightly different way. Women start with the left arm and men start with the right. Therefore, if you are a woman you raise your left arm up and as you are doing that you are breathing in. You are doing this quite slowly so that your chest is *really* opening and you are getting optimum inhalation on your left side. Then your arm is coming round, bending at the elbow, and with your middle finger you press on to your left nostril. At this point you breathe out through the right nostril. Then, as that arm goes down the next is coming up. And we do this each way three times. If you are a woman: left, right, left, right, left right. If you are a man: right, left, right, left, right left. Do it slowly in your own time, just taking in this breath and slowly releasing it. After you have done that for six then with your hands out on your knees you breathe in through both nostrils and then lean forward as far as you can. Doing this uses the pressure—that is building up from your intestines pressing on to the diaphragm—to squeeze the very last bits of air right out. Then you slowly breathe in as you come back up. And we do that three times.

Any questions about that before we start this?

Participant: Why is it different for men and women?

James: Because down the middle we have one central channel, the *avadhuti*, and on either side of that we have a solar and lunar channel. These are on different sides according to your gender.

OK, so let try this in our own time.

[Practice of nine-fold breathing]

This is a practice you can do to change your energy. It is quite useful to do if you come home from work, say, and you feel the turbulence of the day. Just using this is simple process in the body can open up a bit of space.

Don't entertain past confusions and don't encourage future ones

He then continues by saying, '*Don't entertain past confusion and don't encourage future ones.*' Many things have happened in our lives. Often when events occur they don't seem particularly resolved; they still keep turning around and around inside us. And yet, the actual context, the actual situation within which that event occurred, has gone. However, we don't let it go.

In many cultures there is a fear of ghosts. Ghosts are also called the 'un-dead'. They are the dead who don't go away, who don't move on somewhere else but hang around. They are hanging around because something needs to happen, they are not free. A lot of our mental activity is the movement of ghosts; events which have gone, which in that sense are dead but remain alive. However, they are not really alive because we don't have direct access into what they are describing. We might think, 'Oh, I wish I hadn't talked to my child the way I did last week.' However, all we can do is speak to the child today. Today's context will be different. If you want to speak to the child to make reparation today for what you said last week, you will miss how they are today. In that way, you are speaking to a ghost in your head, because, the child is actually different today. This would be the same with colleagues at work, with partners and so on. We become inhabited by these 'thought forms' which insist on staying alive, insist on giving us some kind of message.

However, ghosts don't live in this world. Ghosts live in the ghost world. The ghost world and our world are not the same. How the world is, is very sharp and very clear and if you are sentimental, you will find it to be very cruel. People want to live as if they are in a play by Chekov; still holding on to the vision of 'how life used to be'—but it has gone. And because it has gone thinking about it won't bring it back. While you are thinking about the past, you are not living in the present. Therefore, what happens is that the ghost-like thought of the past makes you a ghost; you are not fully alive; you are pre-occupied.

It is the same with regard to thoughts about the future, 'What will I do when I am old?' Maybe you won't be old, maybe you will be dead. We don't know. And nobody knows what life will be like ten years from now. Of course, it is important to think that if you are alive you want to eat something; therefore, having some money would be helpful. However, we don't know what the social structure is going to be at that time. The thoughts, plans and assumptions that we build up—because they become invested with our energy, with our libido, our prana, our chi—they start to take on a life of their own. And so instead of having the direct immediacy of life as it moves from moment-to-moment, we find that we are living with a triangulation. That is to say, there is ourselves, the situation, and our assumptions but the assumptions and the situation don't fit. However, you need to have both. If you let go of your assumptions, who would you be? If you let go of the actual situation, you would be crazy. This is the structure of the affair, '*I am married, I don't want to leave my lovely wife or my lovely husband but there is this other special person who is so very important to me. What will I do?*' A little bit here and a little bit there. The other people are not happy, not satisfied, and you are always very busy! [Laughter in room]

In that way, this is what happens when the mind gets fixated on particular ideas, particular projects. This image gets in the way of what is actually there. Of course, to have a vision of how something can be, can be an inspiration and help you to mobilise your resources to try to achieve your aim. And if you are building a house or painting a portrait or a bowl of flowers, it will be very important that you get it right, according to your invention. However, it is very important to be aware that in that moment you are pre-occupied; there is a foreclosure of attention. Your image of what you want brings a selective attention privileging some features of the environment and making others recede.

This is a very brief exploration of these two key points. However, clearly, the more you can be present in the moment the less you are *pulled* across this continuum of time. And by being just on the point of the present moment you see that, although that point seems to be linked in a series of other points (the points preceding it and the points following it), if you go right into the centre of the point of the 'experience of being present now', it is infinite. And in its infinity it contains all the three times. That allows us to be fully here with all thoughts of the past and the future but they hover around, like the dakinis in the sky around Padmasambhava. Therefore, in order to gain that experience, whenever you find your mind wandering off to past and future just very gently bring it back.

Stay in the present, without doubt and uncertainty

He then says, '*Stay in the present, without doubt and uncertainty.*' If you stay in the present, the present is what occurs. Very often what we are doing is a movement into the past or the future. You might experience that in meditation—maybe when you are sitting focusing on the breath—you find yourself going off. The two most popular destinations for these journeys are the past and the future. This is because it is in the past and in the future that we sense a particular kind of agency, the sense of ourselves as doing something. When we are just present in the moment, life is more what is arising, not on 'my terms' but on how it is. This often feels less formed, more confusing and more disturbing. Therefore, it feels more pleasant to sort things out by making plans of some kind.

However, Nuden Dorje is saying, '*Just stay in the present without doubt or uncertainty.*' This is the point where trust in the lineage and the tradition is very important. In terms of ourselves, in terms of our felt sense of self, 'I', 'me', 'myself' it *often* feels uncomfortable. We might feel, 'This is a waste of time. It is not going anywhere, what am I doing? Time is going by and I am not getting anywhere.' We can have a sense that we should feel clearer, stronger and so on. We have our little shopping list however, none of it is happening. I must be in the wrong shop—they sell these nice things in the past and the future—time for a little journey! Uncertainty comes about when we feel that we have to understand what is going on. If it doesn't make sense to me then that must be a sign that something is wrong, however, this is a very humanistic vision: 'man is the measure of all things'.

The English mystic and artist, William Blake, represented Newton as a demon because he saw Newton as wanting to map everything out, to make sense, to make everything explicit. Whereas, the mystery of existence is that we participate in something we don't understand and we are not in charge of. Therefore, part of practice is to tolerate the anxiety, the doubt, the uncertainty and the confusion that arises.

With the French revolution, the Russian revolution and the Chinese revolution, each had a policy of extermination of those who couldn't change and radical re-education for those who could be changed. That is to say, those who were used to being princes and rich land owners, who had a sense of entitlement to the soil and a particular social situation, were forced, often very painfully,

to recognise that they were just human beings—two arms, two legs, one nose and one mouth. In that way, the richest person and the poorest person are very similar—just eating and shitting. The shit of the rich and the shit of the poor are not so different. That is to say, these revolutions pointed out that the differentiations that *had* been made were purely historical and cultural. They were *not* presentations of the innate value of human beings. Therefore, the person who felt that he was in charge, he was the boss, could perhaps find a way to become a servant of the people, become one of the people.

In the same way, the ego has claimed a particular kind of dominance and control. We feel that we have to work to set up our lives in just the way that we want them; that the choices that we make are very important. However, this ego, this sense of self, is not self-existing. It is constructed out of our history, our culture, our gender, our age and so on. I am fifty-eight years of age and I don't like hip hop music. If I was eighteen years of age I probably would like it. There is nothing essential about me and nothing essential about hip hop. However, it is about how one comes into being under certain causes and circumstances, so that styles of dancing, types of music etc. Feel real and part of your own existence. In that way, we can see that this ego which seems so definite, so sure, so entitled, so real, is actually a composite of parts, which it seems to have appropriated, almost stolen, from the general field of possibilities.

Now, we don't need to have a guillotine to deal with this. Generally speaking, it is about re-education. We have to say, *'No. King Ego, remove your little crown and put it down. It is not yours; it belongs in the kindergarten. You can play with it again tomorrow but you can't take it home.'* We then can start being able to observe how we construct ourselves. We can observe ourselves moment-by-moment and see that the ego is a particular patterning of energy that constellates thoughts, feelings and sensations, and that it shows itself in endless ways.

Everything which constitutes your self is taken from the world around you. The food you eat is eaten by other people; the language you speak is spoken by other people; the clothes you wear are worn by other people; the kinds of thoughts, feelings, and sensations that you have are not so different from those of other people. Your own home which can feel very personal, unique, and special to you is made of bricks, cement, and normal materials. It becomes *your* home because of your relationship, because of the investment of your energy. Therefore, the ego is composed out of the parts of world, parts of the environment that you have grown up in. What makes us individual and separated from other people is the amount of energy we invest in feeling our own particular difference.

Therefore, by observing ourselves we can see the moment-by-moment construction; that the ego will take on whatever is around in the environment, will respond to whatever is there, and take an immediate full identification with it. The ego is indeed the 'God with a thousand faces': sometimes we are hungry, sometimes we are tired, sometimes we feel masculine, sometimes we feel like a child. The ego, as the point of manifestation, is completely unstable. Therefore, in observing this, one can start to release the fantasy story, 'I am always the same', 'I know who I am', 'I am this', 'I am that'. However, when you do that of course some doubt and uncertainty arises, because, you are not, in that moment, constructing yourself. Who will I be if I don't construct myself? This is the point where existential anxieties can occur, 'What will be there if not the "some-things" out of which I present myself to myself and to others?' 'If I am "nothing" then I am nothing at all.' However, the particular mystery which is revealed in the Buddha's teachings is that out of nothing comes everything.

This is not a deathly void but a plenum void. With that we can rest in the indestructible presence which allows everything to arise. However, becoming used to that is not easy. This is because we are used to more substantial phenomena. We are used to the intensity of 'liking' and 'not liking';

the powerful movements of hopes and fear. And now we are just welcoming whatever is there, and one of the guests is our self. Therefore, we come and all other beings come. In that way, the ego is displaced from the central function, around which the world turns, to merely one of the guests. When it is resolved in that way it develops a kind of sensitivity and the guest becomes concerned with the comfort of other guests. It is one of the gang and the success of the group becomes important.

The ego becomes a team player. This is the beginning of spontaneous compassion, where the view is now the benefit of all sentient beings. This is not on the basis of a vow or an aspiration, but on the basis of the direct experience that self and other arise *together* from the same ground.

Not thinking of anything, not developing anything

He then continues, '*Not thinking of anything, not developing anything—just abiding spontaneously in the state of non-distraction.*' This means that when a thought starts to arise in your mind— it has a delicious quality and is inviting you to be with it, to create something of great value—you let it go. And as you do that these little tendrils of energy from the subject side, start to become quiet and these fascinating thoughts and feelings just go by. There is nothing to do anymore—let it come and let it go. In that way, there is no discrimination, no saying, 'I don't like this kind of experience. I do like this experience and want more of it'. There is just being relaxed and open and equal to whatever is there. In that way one then abides spontaneously, just by itself, in the state of non-distraction.

The traditional example for this is a waterfall. In Tibetan they say that the waterfall is self-falling [rang 'bab]. Therefore, when you sit with your mind, you let your mind fall like a waterfall with its splashing, turbulence and movement. Good thoughts and bad thoughts just let them all flow by. The central point in this is that your mind is not made better by good thoughts and your mind is not destroyed nor damaged nor contaminated by bad thoughts. However, of course, we *do* feel that our ego, our felt sense of self, *is* improved by good thoughts and *is* damaged by bad thoughts. Therefore, the central point here is to recognise the difference between awareness, or *rigpa*, and ordinary conceptualisation—the mind which appropriates things to itself.

Meditate on the deity without taking the appearance to be strongly real

He then continues, '*Meditate on the form of your deity without taking the appearance to be strongly real.*' We meditate on the deity in this particular context as a way of strengthening the awakening into the way of dzogchen. Use a *vidam*, a particular meditational deity that you have your daily practice with. The function is to use the quality of the deity to again displace you from the ordinary centrality of the 'ego self'. If you don't have a practice focused on a deity you can visualise your teacher or you can visualise a point of white light, believing that this point of light is the essence of all the Buddhas. This is because it has all these qualities; it has great power and great compassion.

Then he says, '*Pray very strongly.*' Usually we do this with a familiar prayer. Most practices have a central prayer inside them that particularly connect you to the deity. The main function of such a prayer is to act as a kind of hook that will go in through your intestines and pull your heart, your lungs and your liver right out of your mouth, so that you are gutted and ready for stuffing, like a chicken. That is to say, when we pray, if we really pray with devotion, the whole of this area will start to move. Tears come in the eyes and the body starts to shake. This is a way of developing a one-pointed focused attention. This is a very strong defence against distraction and it is a way of transforming all your loneliness, your sadness, your fears, your anxieties, into the path of dharma.

Here we are wandering in samsara. The years go by, we don't do so much practice, the world seems so interesting and yet always lets us down—and death is coming. We can't make it by ourselves. Therefore, the path of tantra takes the focus of the ego and uses the ego's own intensity and anxiety to let the ego dissolve. Therefore, the ego wants something and we pray to the guru, we pray to the deity, 'Please save me.' And, of course, the deity says, *'Yes, I will save you. However, I will save you the way you need to be saved not the way you want to be saved. You want something? I will give you nothing. You will recognise that nothing is better than something. And how I will show you that is by showing you that I am something. Do you see my beautiful ornaments? Do you see the rainbow all around me? I have a little bell and a drum and I'm dancing and prancing. Wouldn't you like to be like me?'* 'Ooh, yes please!' In that way, the faith and devotion takes us *into* a path, 'I want to be like you. You are the solution to the problem of my existence.'

Then, as Nuden Dorje says, *'...and then allow the deity to dissolve into light and melt into yourself so that he or she is inseparable from your own mind.'* In this way, the deity becomes inseparable from your own mind. And in that way the openness and emptiness of the deity allows all the points of fixation, all the knots, all the tensions in yourself, just to dissolve into light, and the light merges into light inseparably.

In these two sentences, the function of doing tantra practice is explained. The whole reason to do tantra is just to achieve this. If you sing a praise to the twenty-one Taras, you have to ask yourself 'Why?' The whole idea is to tell you that the twenty-one Tara's are very good. Because they are very good you want to be close to them and eventually you want to be so close that there is no difference. You have to turn their emptiness into 'some-thing' in order to hook your attention. And in that way, you can allow their 'some-thing' which is 'nothing' to help your 'some-thing' become 'nothing'.

When you do the puja practice there is a refuge, a bodhicitta, mandala offerings and big visualisations and so on. This is called foreplay. This is called kissing and caressing, 'I like you, do you like me?' 'How close do you want to be?' and then the main practice is when you become naked together and the subject and the object merge together. If you spend too much time doing the foreplay you will fall asleep. It is the end of the day, it has been a long day, you are quite tired and are not eighteen anymore. Therefore, if you spend two hours kissing it will end up with only snoring! [Laughter in room]. Therefore, what is the main point? The main point is to have the direct experience of complete non-resistance, complete letting go *into* merging with this state of infinite openness which is the heart of the deity.

Nuden Dorje then says, *'The meditator and the experience are clear so remain relaxed in non-distraction beyond expression.'* This means that having dissolved into the deity you are very relaxed and open but thoughts and feeling continue to arise. Therefore, you start with the complexity of the world and you focus your attention down more and more narrowly on to the deity. Then you go into one point together and then into infinite emptiness. From this infinite emptiness the world then starts to open out again. Thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions arise. Where do they come from? You have been to this one point which is the centre of the world; everything has entered this point. Now, everything is coming from this point. There is no other source for all phenomena but this one point. In Tibetan this is called *thigle nyag chigpo* [Tib. thig le nyag gcig pa]. This means the sole one thigle, or point or bindu.

Therefore, you the meditator are clear because you are now relaxed into a state of awareness. This awareness has no personality to it. It is not a private possession; it is not personal. You are present but it is not the presence of yourself. Your identity is now re-configured in terms of a pure presence, just a noetic awareness. And what is arising—the thoughts, the feelings, the

sensations and so on—are also clear because they have only now this source; they are emptiness themselves. Now subject and object start to move together as there is a response arising with the thought and feeling. However, if you stay relaxed, you can see that as you start to move into being captured by a thought—and you start to elaborate more thoughts around that—there is always this shimmering point where you can move towards absorption in the experience, or you can relax and be present with subject and object as they move. Therefore, in that way, you recognise that the awareness itself never changes. However, within it the energy of this awareness, or the energy of this dharmakaya, is the movement of a self-identificatory subject standing in relation to object.

There is no particular object of meditation here. There is no visualisation to do and no mantra. The object of attention is simply whatever arises. The one who is attending, is the unborn dharmakaya. By resting in this way no matter what is occurring—no matter whether it is calm almost going into sleep or very excited with a lot of anger and fear and so on—it will be absolutely clear as it arises and passes. Nuden Dorje describes it as—well, Padmasambhava, since it is *his* teaching— ‘non-distraction beyond expression’. It is non-distraction because the mind, the nature of the mind, *rigpa*, is never moving. And yet, it is not blocking any movement.

Therefore, everything can occur but there is no distraction. Included in what can occur, is being distracted; this is how you can be distracted *without* being distracted. If you find yourself distracted and then you worry about being distracted you really *will* be distracted. However, if you find yourself being distracted and you just relax and are present with that distraction, the distraction will go by and you will find yourself present in a state that is never distracted.

This is ‘*beyond expression*’ because there is no way of speaking about or indicating what this is like. There are traditional metaphors that are used, however. For example: the sky, a mirror, a crystal ball, or the tail feather of a peacock. These are used to give some sense, some aspect of what the experience might be. This is an experience which is not like anything else however, similar states are revealed in other aspects of life. For example, in deep sleep, in sudden trauma, in orgasm; various kinds of spontaneous states, in a state of awe, for example, when you are suddenly, say, looking at a big sunset. We could see these as moments when the clouds of busy experience clear for a moment and suddenly the blue sky is revealed. Clearly trauma and orgasm are connected with intense events. They are connected with excitement, and deep sleep is also kind of cut off from ordinary experience.

Although these experiences are useful it is very difficult to integrate them and use them as a basis for awakening. Therefore, we use this practice as a way of re-integrating with ourselves; a self which is something quite other than what we had always imagined.

Instruction in using shiné as a way into the natural state

Now he moves on to another description. He says, ‘*You can also focus your attention at a statue, a letter, a symbolic implement, or pebble—whatever feels appropriate to you.*’ This is a very brief way of talking about *shiné* practice. *Shiné* means ‘staying peacefully’. It means not being distracted. In order to do that you can focus on your breath, on an external function like a statue, or on a letter, usually a white Tibetan letter ‘Aa’ on a blue background. It is also suggested you can use a symbolic implement. This is usually a vajra but it could also be the particular implement of the deity that you practice on. So it could be a curved knife or a kapala, a skull cup... A pebble also can be used as an external focus. It is ‘*whatever feels appropriate to you*’.

This last comment is very important in dzogchen. *You* are the one who has to decide on the best way of meditating for you. It is not a matter of obeying the teacher’s instructions but of knowing

how to apply the teacher's instructions in this particular situation according to your own condition. For example, if you are very distracted and you generally have a lot of devotion to the deity, if the deity normally holds a vajra, then by putting your vajra in front of you on a table you'll be able to mobilise your devotion to the deity to help you to focus your mind on the vajra. However, you may feel that a simple pebble, a round stone with no corners or edges, would be better for you because its simplicity and the fact that it offers no hooks for the elaboration of concepts, helps you to remain calm.

People often anxiously want to know what to do. They want knowledge to precede experience. However, if knowledge precedes experience, that can deprive you of really knowing how to inhabit your own experience. Therefore, here we have to make experiments for ourselves because, again, it is about observing triangulation, 'me', 'my anxiety', 'and the teacher'. 'I' and the 'teacher' will gang up together; join together, to defeat 'my anxiety'. However, that is like going to school with your big brother everyday so nobody will punch you. In that way, when you are sixteen and you ask a girl out for a date, you will have to say, 'Oh, and my brother will be coming along too.'

How can I know what will be best for me? Only by trying. 'But maybe I will get confused.' There is no 'maybe' about it—confusion is guaranteed. 'So what will I do when I am confused?' Remember the instruction of your teacher, 'Just relax, don't worry—don't get distracted.' That is to say, we turn the teacher from being the father who gives this patriarchal advice that you have to align yourself with, to being like a more experienced friend who can be with you, and just at the right time their voice will ring in your meditation and help you to just move a little bit.

Therefore, you choose your object and you sit. We now practice fixation on the object, using this to stabilise our attention. Then from that state you shift the focus of your attention into the space in front of you. Now we are practicing fixation without an object. We often do this when we do the *Three Aa* practice and we allow our gaze just to settle in the space in front of us. I will just continue with the explanation and then we can do the practice.

He continues then by saying, '*Then not thinking anything with your mind, do not meditate...*' There is nothing for you to develop. When the mind is resting in space you don't need to remember any of the teachings, remember the deity, remember your breath or posture or anything; everything is just open. Therefore here he is saying, '*do not meditate.*' That is to say, don't take any particular object as more important than anything else.

He continues this sentence, '*...don't pursue the objects of the six senses but remain naturally without being mixed with even the most subtle thoughts of being or non-being.*' Therefore, in this state, because we are meditating with our eyes open we can see things: we can see the wall, the shapes of people's bodies; I am looking out through the windows and can see the trees moving. However, of course, when we are resting in the state of meditation there are no trees to see. The mind's activity of organising the raw direct quality of the six elements has settled. Therefore, even if we see a branch moving up and down and we think, 'The wind is moving the branch', this is not correct. It is the mind that's moving the branch. If you allow your mind to settle, nothing is moving. This is beyond expression. If you could express what you are experiencing, this is a sure sign you are lost. If you know what is going on, you are there in the position of the 'one who knows'. Therefore, he is saying, 'Don't pursue these thoughts. Don't pursue these sensations of the six senses.' The six senses means the five bodily senses plus mental consciousness which is the processing of the raw fruit of the senses.

Why would we pursue these things? We pursue them to make sense of them. For example, if we listen now, what is that? [Somewhere outside the room there is a sound like a lawn mower] What

do you think? Someone is cutting some wood? If we don't quite know what it is, it's a little bit annoying, but what is that? 'Oh, maybe it is a motorbike', 'Maybe this', 'Maybe that', 'Ah, now I know what it is!' In that there is a kind of settling; everything in the world is in its proper place and I am the master of the world who knows what is what. This is poisonous. You have to become stupid before you become enlightened. We have to become Mr or Mrs No-nothing.

There is something about the way the movement of energy arises from the dharmakaya. The traditional example is the sun. The sun is always sending out rays. Now, the Tibetan understanding of this is not modern-scientific. They would say that the ray from the sun doesn't diminish the sun; the sun's nature is to send out light. The sun remains the sun although it is giving out light all the time. In the same way, this radiant openness, the relaxed state of rigpa, is ceaselessly giving rise to phenomena. However, the sun doesn't have to move with its rays, just as the mirror doesn't move with the reflection. The mirror is the site of the arising of the reflection. However, the mirror is not touched or affected or moved by the reflection.

If you can get the flavour of this, then in the meditation practice, when something *feels* like you, when it *feels* like your personal subjectivity moving towards the object, without blocking the arising, relax into the state of the ground of the arising. In this way, the ground and the arising will be integrated together. This is the primordial non-duality—and energy will move without disturbing the state of awareness. Of course energy manifests as subject and object so when you have the sense 'this is happening to me', 'I feel this', be aware that this itself is ephemeral energy and rest in openness without blocking the flow of what appears to be subject and object.

The above sentence concludes: *'...remain naturally without being mixed with even the most subtle thoughts of being or non-being.'* From the very beginning awareness and emptiness have been inseparable. When we look to find this awareness we don't find anything so it seems to be 'non-being'. And yet, this state of awareness is always present and so it seems to be 'being'. Without trying to establish its state one way or another, we have to allow the arisings to just occur by themselves. The son of a king is not going to crown the king just as the thought doesn't need to crown the awareness. 'Ah, now I know what it is! Ah, it is like that!' This is not necessary. Awareness, from the very beginning is naturally pure, naturally perfect; it doesn't need any coronation. Nothing can add value to it. This is why it is called dzogchen; the great completion. Whether you recognise or abide in your awareness or not it doesn't make any difference. Awareness has no requirements which have to be provided by the ego. Therefore, understanding your own mind is a tautology: it's a confusion. The mind itself has a clarity which is not the same as a cognitive conceptual understanding. Therefore, when he talks here of *'subtle thoughts'* it means observing very closely how you become seduced by the idea that you can know awareness in the same way that you can know arithmetic or Latin grammar.

He continues, *'At that time do not block the process with thoughts of hoping to remain in that state for a moment...'* That is to say, if you have a moment of clarity, real clarity, and everything is 'just as it is', it feels very tempting to hang on to this. However, this is a great mistake because it will pass, since it is ungraspable. There is just this moment and then there is just the next and just the next. Some moments are clear and some moments are not clear; this is the experience of the content. Where is the content occurring? It is occurring in the open unborn mirror of the mind. You don't have to look for the clarity of the mind; the one who is looking for the clarity of mind is already the child or the fruit or the display of the clarity of the mind. Just because a child has lost its mother in a big shop doesn't mean it doesn't have a mother. The mother is always thinking of the child. In the same way, awareness is always present. Therefore, trying to solidify or concretise an experience as if it was the answer turns the un-graspable, non-dual, co-emergence of subject and object into just another object that one tries to grasp.

'...and don't spend time wondering how long it will last.' This is because in doing that you have already left it. If you are in it, you are in it however it is. It will be there... and then there will be another experience... If your attention has gone *into* the experience, because all experiences are impermanent, when the experience goes, you will go. And then you will be looking for the next one, because, *you* will have moved with the experience.

For example, if somebody was to come in the door and walk across the room, if we were to watch this person as they did that, we would find that our head had moved from one side right around to the other. Now, do we want to spend the rest of our life with our head in this angle? It would get quite painful. So now I have to bring my head back to the middle. Therefore, it is better to keep your head in the middle and your awareness open. In that way when someone comes in the door and walks through the room, you can see them coming in with your peripheral vision. They then move into your central vision and then to the peripheral vision again. In that way, without moving, everything is there. Otherwise, you become like someone watching a tennis match. This is the nature of samsara: this happens, that happens. It generates energy and there are hopes and fears.

Therefore, when you do the practice, either in this way or through the praying to the deity and dissolving into the deity, there is a moment and it is very open and then—stuff comes. And this 'stuff' will keep changing and moving. There is always 'stuff' just as the mirror always has reflections in it. The mirror is not better when it has no reflections. In fact, it would be a useless mirror that did not have any reflections. If you remember, we looked briefly at these different levels of practice earlier when we were thinking about the theravadin practice with its idea of a nirvana which is 'to be gone'. "Once upon a time there was a wonderful man who was a Buddha. He went away but he left us some very nice statues, and every day I put some flowers in front of the statue and that makes me quite happy." We don't practice in that way.

In merging into this state of the deity, now, manifestation is occurring. The emptiness of the mirror is the dharmakaya, the richness of the complex reflections is the sambhogakaya and the precise movements and interactions occurring moment-by-moment within the field of the reflection is the nirmanakaya. Therefore, don't try to hold on to the dharmakaya as if it was the one true thing. Simply relax and welcome and be with everything that arises as the natural display of the openness of the mind. If you make discriminations that one kind of arising is better than another and you try to hang on to the ones you *think* are good and try to quickly get rid of the ones that are bad, you have voluntarily left the state of awareness. Then in order to gain this one little shiny thing, you will have lost your chance. Like a child whose football runs into the road, when the car hits the child it is a great tragedy and the weeping parents say, 'I would have bought you a million footballs.' The ball doesn't matter, leave it alone. Thoughts are just coming and going. How many have you had already? How many thoughts have you had that you thought were so very important?

When I was doing a *chod* practice in Ladakh, I was sitting outside my little tent one day writing something down on the packet of incense stick, because I always write a lot. The tent was pitched in a little cemetery quite far from the nearest village but this lama came striding across the stones to the cemetery and looked at me writing. He picked up two stones and he banged the stones together and said, '*Stones are better than words, they won't cause you so much trouble.*' And then he shot off again. He was a very nice lama. This was Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche and he was very interested in anyone who was doing practice. He had thought, 'Oh, someone is doing *chod* in the cemetery, I will go and have a look.' Therefore, in this way, fascination with particular things, trying to freeze the moment or capture it or have one's own thoughts which are very important, is a big seduction.

And then he says, *'For whatever sudden thoughts appear, recognise them immediately and continue without distraction in the state which does not grasp after the site where the thoughts arose.'* To recognise them immediately means, 'Hey, don't cause trouble, I know your mother and I know your father. Leave that bicycle alone!' If you know its mother and father, 'Oh, always the same kind of children, empty but pretending to be something.'

If you do as he says here you are not disturbed, *'Continue without distraction in the state that does not grasp after the sites where the thoughts arose.'* When you go into this one point, for example, as earlier, in praying to the deity, this is described as a thigle because it is a ball. A ball has no corners, it has no edge. That is to say, it is the same in all directions. And this ball, although it seems very small, is infinite, and this infinity is the ground of everything. Your mind is inseparable from this infinity. The site from which the thoughts come is not something you can grasp, because it is your own mind.

We can listen to this sound from outside again. Where does it come from? Does it come from up the hill or down the hill? What do you think? Front, back, north, south? Because this state is infinite it has no points of reference; all thoughts arise from the mind. They may appear to be here and they may appear to be there, however, here and there are not outside your mind. As long as you feel you are living in your little skin bag, looking out of your water-bubble eyes, everything will seem far away from you and thoughts will appear to come from somewhere else *against* you.

Therefore, recognise there is only one source and that source is ungraspable, beyond conceptualisation. Don't follow after thoughts to see where they are going and don't try and work out where they came from. Without moving, relax in non-distraction, in a state that allows things to come and go.

If you find yourself not stopping the flow of thoughts but following after them...

Nuden Dorje continues, *'If you find yourself not stopping the flow of thoughts but following after them, then keep your posture in the seven-fold position, keep your attention sharp and look with the mind well focused.'* When you are sitting in the meditation practice many experiences are arising and somehow you become rather too interested in this. If it was your body that was present, it would be leaning forward, fascinated in what is there. Therefore, Nuden Dorje's instruction is to return yourself clearly into this seven-fold posture. This will make you more awake and allow your attention—which is to say, the bright edge of awareness—to be properly focused. That is to say, you are not focusing or enquiring *into* the thought or feeling as it arises, because, as he has already pointed out, there is nothing in particular to gain from these thoughts. As we have already established they are simply the fruits of emptiness. Moreover, the attention is just gently *resting on* the thought. We are attending to whatever is arising in the mind in terms of its aspect of dynamic process.

For example, nowadays, if you fly into an airport they have people sitting there with checklists looking very attentively at the people who come through. The security and immigration police are very concerned that nobody dangerous comes into the country. *We* don't want to look in that way. We want to be more like traffic policemen who want the traffic to keep running. They are just watching and traffic is going by. Therefore, there is nothing in there, what is important is that it is moving. It will always be moving but if you become interested in it, it is as if the movie slows down. The whole thing is moving, because you are now moving with the thought. 'Well focused' here means focused just in this open awareness. If you do that, then thoughts and feelings are coming all the time.

This then is how the text begins. When we meet back after lunch will do some practice linked with this. After lunch you can also walk outside, if it is nice, and do a bit of the practice yourself. In a simple way, if you go walking in the hills or along the road just have a simple focusing of your attention on whatever is occurring. Don't focus at looking at particular things but as you are walking just experience how the movement of your body and the experience of the environment are one and the same thing. With every step that you take there is a new world. And in that way you start to experience non-duality.

[Lunch break]

[*Three Aa practice*]

Questions

Are there any questions? When asking a question, try to formulate it in a way which is strong and true for you. If you formulate it in a way that comes right through you—that speaks of your actual experience—you are more likely to get an answer that is useful to you. There are lots of things that may be interesting, but don't actually do much internal working when you get the answer.

Participant: There is always part of my mind that is reserved for a kind of 'watcher', who is watching or observing the whole process. It is also, in a certain sense, asking if what I am doing is the right thing. This is more of an observation and so is not really a question. After a while, will this watcher diminish when doing this practice?

James: Yes. That is correct

Participant: Like riding a bicycle where in the beginning you have to be very careful and in the end you just do it?

James: No. The watcher is part of the maintenance of dualistic understanding. Therefore, it is different from riding a bicycle because being careful when you are learning to ride a bicycle helps you later to ride a bicycle well. Staying as 'observer' won't help the revelation of awareness.

Participant: What I was trying to say is that when I do it I am having some kind of monitor. So this kind of monitoring the process, if it is done properly, is it still completely wrong?

James: If this was a vipassana teaching, we would say 'very good' but we are doing dzogchen, so we would say 'very bad'. OK. Now let's progress with the text and I think you will find that the real answer to your question will come through the text.

Remaining relaxed without forcing a focus

Nuden Dorje continues, '*You can also practice by remaining relaxed without forcing a focus.*' In this way we become integrated into space and we have no positioning. That is to say, you are not locating yourself in any physical aspect of your body. You want awareness to be as open as possible, rather than starting from the inside and moving out, and the object of focus is whatever arises. There is no stable focus with which to re-orient yourself. Awareness is fully integrated into space and everything happens all at once. This includes, especially of course, all the thoughts and feelings that would pull you into a substantial, habitual, sense of yourself standing in relation to the object.

Therefore, again, you have to use your own capacity to see where you are at; what is the best way to proceed? Nobody can tell you from the outside so explore different methods and then look at your actual situation.

Practice by merging attention with the objects of the six senses

Then he says, '*You can practice by merging attention with the objects of the six senses.*' You can practice each of these senses in turn. For example, sitting just as you are, bring your full attention out into your ears. Feel that your ears are bigger than the whole world, just this infinitely expanding awareness. You can sit with this heightened sense of awareness and ear consciousness being integrated together so that whatever is impacting is not being transformed or worked on through your ordinary mental categories. It is very nice to this on a day like this when the wind is blowing in the trees and you get many kinds of strange sounds. By completely opening yourself to the sound without any editing, defending, making sense of, naming or interpreting, you will find that much more is heard, much more is received and you develop the confidence that all sound arises and passes. You come to directly know that sound is sound and emptiness, always at all times.

This is the most important factor of the sound, rather than what the sound indicates. Of course, if you are going to cross the road and you hear a sound, it helps if you know it is a sound of a car; awakening and stupidity are not the same. This is a meditation practice and once you have this capacity you can then bring it into the very precise interactions you have in the world.

You can do this same practice with your eyes. Open your awareness as your eyes, with no processing at all, and in an instant you are in a completely different world. Everything is luminous, just movements and pulsations of colour, no entities at all, and you can stay with that. You can do that outside, sitting on the hill looking at the clouds and the movement of the trees. You may find yourself feeling a bit crazy, a bit ungrounded, a bit overwhelmed because there is so much and you don't know what it is. At that point just relax into the out-breath and welcome whatever is coming. Then it just resolves and there is more movement. Therefore, here we are using *space* rather than *control*.

Again, you can apply this practice with smell and with taste. When you taste something, have your awareness fully in your mouth. You can experience the texture and the taste as it starts to swell out through the various receptors in the mouth. Again, we are not labelling it. We are not saying, 'sweet', 'sour', 'pleasant', 'unpleasant' but just allowing completely this unspeakable, un-nameable experience to reveal itself.

Similarly with touch. You can have that in sensation: walking through the trees as they move on the body; putting on your clothes and feeling the sensation of textures and weights on your body; touching or embracing someone. Just be fully present exactly on the surface of the revelation of the sensation without interpretation. Experience how sensation is always immediately dissolving. What is really interesting about sensation is not how it builds itself up and then is suddenly gone, but rather how instant-by-instant it is just vanishing. Sensation of all our senses is very good for taking us into emptiness. We know this through sexual intercourse; even the slightest gentlest touch, its quality is that it's just vanishing. Because of the wonderful nature of our body with so many nerve endings, there is the immediate intensity, the full presence of the meeting of subject and object—and then—gone.

Again, we can do this with our sixth sense, the mental consciousness, whose object is the information provided by the other five sense consciousnesses. In the same way, you rest your awareness in through the centre of the heart and just sit as these messages come simultaneously

from *all* the senses. In this way you experience your body as completely tingling, alive, and radiant, as this ceaseless movement between the empty centre of yourself and the infinity of the universe is pulsing through you. And if you do that, then the point of accumulation of your sense of self as *having* experience is just immediately dissolved. Like a child coming home from school, whose mother asks, 'What did you do today?', you can say, 'Nothing.' 'And, all your life?' 'Nothing.' What does it all mean? 'Nothing.'

Is *nothing* better than *something*? That is the real point. You have to decide. Is the yogi who spends his life in a cave wasting his life? In the midst of 'nothing' is everything. In the midst of 'something' is disappointment.

Practice this together with inhalation, holding and exhalation

The text continues, '*You should also know how to practice this together with inhalation, holding, and exhalation of the breath.*' This is the circularity of the breath which, of course, is ceaseless otherwise we would be dead. One can start by focusing on the experience of 'OM' on the inhalation; on the experience of 'Aa' on holding; and on the experience of 'HUNG' with releasing. This is to say, that as the breath is coming in, the world is *coming to you*. This is the realm of the body or 'OM' where you are impacted by the senses. When the breath is held, the gap between breathing in and breathing out, you are neither in the world nor out of it—there a gap. That is the function of 'Aa', the energy of the body which exists as a potential that can go in different directions. And then the breath is released and in that we are moving *into* the world. The one who moves *out* towards the world is empty. In taking nothing *into* the world there is a great releasing; mental activity goes down. This is why it is always important to relax into the out-breath and to make the out-breath a little bit longer than the in-breath.

As this cycle of breath continues you experience the movement of object-to-subject, subject-to-object; just turning round and round and round. This is being revealed within the empty mirror in which all experience arises. In that way, the turning wheel of the breath becomes a kind of support and all experience is turning around with this wheel. Our experience, our embodied experience with others, is then revealed as living and dynamic. There is nothing static and controlled or fixed in it.

This is a very nice practice to do if you have to travel on the train or the bus or if you are sitting in a meeting at work and it's rather tedious. You are still aware of what is going on around you, so as far as other people are concerned you are there and involved in what's going on. However, the focus of your attention is this ceaseless revolving of the breath. This helps not to be pulled into what is going on or to find oneself thinking, 'Oh, I have had enough of this I don't want to be here.' Therefore learning to rest on the breath—because the breath is so subtle, you can't rest on it heavily—it just supports you very gently to stay present and alert.

Remain simply in awareness free of thought.

He then continues, '*For the beginning yogi meditators who practice in these ways, there are many ways that thoughts can arise.*' This means that sometimes you have very intense experiences, sometimes you have very dull experiences, sometimes thoughts seem to rage at you and push through, sometimes they run over your shoulder and away from you. Therefore he continues, '*Do not see this as error, for if you maintain your practice you will be able to remain simply in awareness free of thought.*'

When we do this practice we make our mind a public arena. When we do this *Three Aa* practice we integrate our mind with the mind of all the gurus, which is the infinite dharmakaya. The

dharmakaya is not a private possession so we are not controlling what is happening; therefore when things come, don't be worried about them. If you just relax and allow them to move freely you will become aware that you are still there when the thoughts are gone.

However, the one who is there is not the one whom you think you are. This is because, the one whom you think you are is also a thought which will be gone. Just as in judo when the master lets the energy of the attacker defeat the attacker, in the same way the meditator uses the energy of the thought, to defeat the thought's capacity to hook the subject, by letting it go free. You will see in many texts that it says, *'The things of samsara which bind the ordinary person liberate the yogi.'* This is exactly what it means. Whatever thoughts feelings and sensations are arising, without moving, keeping one's calmness, clarity and courage, trust that the energy of the thought cannot grab you but will always go past. In this way, the very intensity, confusion and difficulty of thoughts will become a way of increasing your own clarity.

The problem is never with the object. The answer is never with the object. The problem and the answer are always with the mind. The problem is the mind that wants to control and interfere. The answer is the mind that relaxes and trusts.

Participant: I do understand this while I am meditating but the idea is to remember that in daily life this also functions. Then it gets more difficult because the objects can very easily overwhelm the subject

James: Yes. And then what happens to overwhelm subject?

Participant: You feel overwhelmed

James: For how long?

Participant: It depends on the object.

James: Imagine you do something and it's a bit wrong and you feel you have made a mistake. This often leads to a tightening inside, perhaps a feeling of being judged by other people, and that somehow one might have to make reparation.

Participant: My experience is that some objects are quite oppressing and come again and again. You say it is a question of being shameless, but my actual feeling is of guilt and shame.

James: Exactly. You are very absorbent. The foolish thing is that good people feel shame; bad people never feel shame. In fact the only wrong thing with you is that you are taking the shame from the bad people. Give them back their shame and you take their shamelessness.

C R Lama used to say...

This is a very central thing. C R Lama used to say, *'If a yogi has sex in the middle of the road, no-one will see.'* However, *if ordinary people have sex in the bushes everyone is looking.'* Certainly, C R Lama was often quite shameless and not concerned about being rude or not. This wasn't because he was getting away with doing bad things because he was a lama, but that he was living exactly on the moment of impermanence; the self-liberation of all phenomena.

However, when **we** feel guilt and shame, we are not allowing that moment to go past; our spongy surface is sucking it in, *'This shouldn't have happened. I have upset these people. How could I have done that? I must never do it again.'* However, the event has gone by. If other people are

upset then, let them complain. Let the world be your brakes, because, if you have your hand on the brakes all the time then you will have a very juddery ride. Now, this is a bit scary, because, usually we think: “My guilt and shame exactly protects me from other people being the brakes and saying, ‘Hey! Why did you do that?’” However, if somebody is angry with us, then we deal with that. We can apologise. But if they are not upset why are we upset? We become upset because we have a map or a reading of the situation that tells us in advance how things should be and how we should behave.

Therefore, one of the purposes of the meditation is to help us to be more confident with self-liberation. I don’t think this will make you more unpleasant as a person. You won’t be suddenly full of bad feelings and doing bad activity. There is a big difference between an impulse which is an old habitual tendency and being completely spontaneous in the moment. In order to allow an impulse to arise, capture you and take you over, you have to have collapsed into the thought. Being relaxed and open is the best defence against that.

Spontaneity means working with the situation. Therefore, the more present we are with other people the more likely we are to find a way to meet them. However, sometimes it won’t exactly fit; it will be a mis-take—we will have taken it the wrong way. The question then is, whether we can just re-take it. For example, we say something—the other person seems upset or confused and all we can do is apologise and try and say it in another way. What we are involved in is a shared experience of movement through time. However, if we feel that we’ve made a kind of moral error, we’ve done something bad, then we sink into ourselves and it’s as if we drop out of the shared experience in time, into this private world of ourselves.

I think it does take quite a while to practice this in the world. If we have a tendency to guilt and shame, we should perhaps be very attentive in our meditation to observing how we are likely to identify with the judge. There is a lot of power and certainty in the voice of the judge and although it is giving us a hard time, in that moment we are two different people: we are both the judge and the victim. Therefore, it is helpful to be especially attentive to just gently easing back from the judge, while observing the intensity of the energy—plus noticing that it passes by itself.

When we become overwhelmed it is often the case that the object feels big, and we, the subject, feel small. We, the subject, feel vulnerable and unstable and this object seems to be powerful and inevitable. I think the only real antidote to this is in the meditation: just hold our courage and turn to face this and relax. Keep relaxing into the face of it and it will dissolve in front of us. Whenever we have the sense, ‘*I can’t bear it*’ we have to go back to the basic question, ‘*Who is the ‘I’ that can’t bear it?*’ For meditators these unbearable moments are incredibly useful, because, it is **exactly** in that moment that you can see how you get tied in a knot.

These experiences are described in a prayer in the *Big Ridzin*¹, ‘*Although I know worldly appearances are illusory I still go under the power of them.*’ It is also the central point of courage: everything is impermanent, these forces are coming towards you, they have sharp swords and they are going to cut you to pieces. Don’t move! If you move they will kill you, because they can only kill the one who moves. The mirror never moves. That’s why it doesn’t get killed. However, the ego always runs. That is why it is getting a lot of suffering in samsara. Therefore these very frightening moments are very, very, helpful for meditation—just stay.

Therefore, this fits exactly with what Nuden Dorje is describing, ‘*... you will be able to remain simply in awareness free of thought.*’ Therefore, if a thought arises in your mind, such as that you have been very stupid or have done something completely wrong—and recognising it as a

¹ Part of a terma from Nuden Dorje Drophan Lingpa, and also coming through Rigdzin Godem

thought, you are not seduced by its semantic content and so don't add extra thought on to it—it will go free and you will find yourself in this *'awareness free of thought'*.

If you practice like this...

He then continues, *'If you practice like this then you will not like distraction.'* That is to say many of the things that now you find exciting will start to seem quite tedious. You will speak little because what it there to talk about?

'And you will abide in one pointed recollection.' That is to say, you will always know where you are and not get carried away. For example sometimes one gets carried away in a conversation, 'Did you have a good time last night?' 'Ah! Yes! We were talking for hours, we covered everything; we went here, there and everywhere. It was really good!' However, it is not good for a meditator—because, at the end of it, this great journey has taken you exactly nowhere.

'This is the method by which one practices lucid calm abiding.'

Reflection on the emptiness of all phenomena

All experienceable phenomena have from the very beginning been like the sky

He continues, *'The outer objects we believe in, all the experienceable phenomena of samsara and nirvana, have from the very beginning been like the sky.'* This sky cannot be grasped. There is no limit to the sky. Although we say things *about* the sky, for example, 'This is the sky over Germany,' the sky here is not different from the sky over Switzerland. The weather may be different but the sky in which the clouds or the sun is appearing is the same. When he says, *'...all experienceable phenomena of samsara and nirvana'* he means absolutely everything; you can't imagine anything outside of this. All that we call 'object' and all we take to be 'subject' is like the sky; you cannot grasp it. It is there but you cannot grasp it. It is not resting on anything.

When we say, 'this is a watch', it looks like the word 'watch' is resting on this 'thing' that I have in my hand. However, this watch in my hand is resting on all things: the watch is linked to the notion of glass, of metal, of time, of leather, to cultural formations, to all the semantic categories that arise through binary opposition. Therefore, each of these signifiers links out to other signifiers in an endless chain of significance. There is a traditional image to represent this and it is called *'Indra's net'*. Indra is an Indian god and his net is made up of jewels each with many facets, mirror-like surfaces, linked together in a vast chain that covers the entire universe. Whatever appears in one facet is reflected in, and changed by, all the other facets.

For example, we are here in a buddhist centre. One of the things which makes it a buddhist centre is that it is not a christian centre. If there were no christians, muslims and jews we wouldn't need to call it a buddhist centre. Therefore, what appears to be defining something in terms of its internal characteristics is functioning to also relate it to all other phenomena. The true essence of all things is not *inside* them but lies in their relation to all other things. There is nothing inside them which is truly existing, therefore, they are like the sky.

All mentation's dualistic ideas are merely names

Then he continues, *'All mentation's dualistic ideas are merely names devoid of an atom's worth of true reality.'* This is a very important point: naming creates the seeming sense of an inherent identity in the thing that is named. The name is put on to it by the mind through the cultural development of language. However, once having been named, the name seems to represent the very essence of things.

The Bible says that *"In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God and the Word was God."* but buddhism says that the word is very dangerous. The word, from the very beginning, has been nothing other than the energy of the dharmakaya. However, instead of the word, language acts like a soft massage bringing up the radiance of the complexion of the world, so that instead of feeling the aesthetic quality of the bree-ee-zes flo-oo-wing in the tre-ee-es—we name it. *'What do we call the wind when it blows through the trees?' 'It's a breeze, it's a breeze.'* 'Right answer, children...' So we come to feel that the word has caught the thing, that the word is somehow the essence of the 'thing'. Buddhist understanding of language is much more like Wittgenstein's notion of language games, where language speaks to language, and is a completely different dimension from the physical world that it *seems* to represent, that it *seems* to subsume.

We are having a tea-break now and in that period you will probably find yourselves speaking to each other. It is very interesting to observe what it is like to speak. Do you become mesmerised and intoxicated by the words you use? Do you take them seriously? Do you seem to be talking about something both important and real?

If you are making tea and you put the hot water on to the tea-bag, you can try just bringing your awareness into the senses; hearing the sounds, getting the first aroma of the tea as it is released by the hot water. Experience what that is like and then start to run a little commentary on top of it, 'This is the tea; this is how it is made. It is like this; it is like that.' By doing that experience what that's like in your body as you move from being open, to something which is just shimmering and ungraspable, to a whole load of assertions and grasping.

[Break]

Nuden Dorje continues, *'Towards the bewildering whirl of illusory appearances which are empty and devoid of inherent-self-nature we look at them in terms of particular entities and apply names to them.'* That is to say, we use language on the basis of perceiving entities; the sense of real separate entities exists prior to language. If that wasn't the case then since all sentient beings have mind, the cows in the field would be closer to enlightenment than us because they are not troubled by the complexities of linguistic usage. However, it is reification—the turning of processes, movements, moments, into real separate substantial entities—that is the real problem. Therefore, there is nothing wrong with language *per se*. And in listening to the dharma we should try to experience the words as droplets of rain gently falling on us and washing away all our doubts and confusions. In particular, as you listen to sentences being formed, you can see the various grammatical particles in operation together. This co-dependency, interdependency or dependent-co-origination is very obvious in language; each part of the sentence plays its role in bringing something into being. So we can start to feel directly, the energetic quality of words as they impact the various centres in our body, and the relative and compositional nature of these structures. The fact that language itself— something so fleeting and so interdependent—*seems* to support the notion of real entities, is really quite amazing.

'So we must decide that their nature [the nature of all these phenomena] transcends being the objects of limiting interpretation.' You can experience that for yourself. If you walk outside and you look at something growing and you say, 'tree' there is always an excess of experience over language. Modern literary theory would tend to say that language has the excess over experience, because the words, as a signifier, link in many, many other chains of meanings. However, when we open ourselves on a direct level to what is in front of us, the words just slip off like a snowball thrown on to a window pane. Therefore, being aware of limiting interpretations, the function that they have, and the way in which the world eludes capture by them, points to a new way of understanding of what is going on.

Instead of seeing language as a means of acquiring knowledge or being, as it were, on the side of wisdom, we start to see it as being on the side of compassion. That is to say, speaking together is a way of exchanging energy, of coming into harmonious articulation, of finding ourselves connected and able to resonate.

He then says, *'Whatever objects arise, are self-liberating...'* We have already explored this. *'...and towards the ceaseless flow of whatever appearances we see we should remain free of the stain of holding them to be truly existing.'* Again, it is just allowing phenomena to arise and go free in their own place. And in that way, language becomes a passenger on the bus; it is not the driver. Language and conceptual thought is not in charge, it is not deciding where we go but it arises together with the flow of experience that we are involved in.

The recognition that will arise: clear, empty and free of grasping like the sky

He continues, *'Clear, empty and free of grasping like the sky—that is the recognition that will then arise.'* It is **clear** because the mind is not resting on a conceptual basis. Every time we build up our sense of seeming clarity on the basis of knowledge, we find ourselves *wrapped* into words and located by them. However, here, like the clarity of the sky which is infinite and open, our presence is there with all the phenomena as they arise, including the discourses we make about them. And it is **empty** because when you try to find the true internal essence, there is nothing to be discovered. And it is **free** of grasping because when you have this clarity there is no need to make further effort to understand what is going on.

One of the particular qualities of western culture is 'great curiosity'. We want to know what is going on. We will travel around the world wanting to visit all sorts of things in order to see how other people live and so on. There are many people now who want to go to the Galapagos Islands, especially because soon they will be closed to tourist because of all the damage done to the environment by these very same tourists. If I can't be the first person to climb Mount Everest perhaps I can be the last person to visit the Galapagos Islands!

This ceaseless curiosity which leads to amazing developments in medicine, science and so on, and clearly can have many functions, is very much like the sword of Manjushri, the Bodhisattva of wisdom. This sword has two sharp edges so you may be cutting to clarify the object but it can bounce back and cut your own head off. We have a saying, *'You can't see the wood for the trees.'* That is to say, curiosity can take you into the minutiae of existence, but this wonderful display of intelligence can be just a new way of developing samsara.

Therefore, part of the quality of 'free of grasping' is to be able to say, 'I don't need to know that.' Knowledge and wisdom are not the same. The pre-occupation with knowledge can mean that there is no time left for wisdom. Therefore, 'free of grasping like the sky' means ceaselessly letting things go.

'To remain spontaneously in that state is the development of insight, lhag tong' As you know, *shiné* and *lhagtong* are the two main pulsations of many systems of meditation; they are also called *shamata* and *vipassana*. Therefore, all the real deep themes of meditation are present just in these few words.

Advice on practice and the difficulties one may encounter

He continues, *'When practicing, however you do it, many different kinds of thoughts and experiences will occur.'* For example, if you are practicing tantra and you have a lot of devotion you may find that many holy ideas will arise in your mind. And you may feel, 'Oh, so beautiful

that I have learnt this practice of Chenrezig. I am so lucky.’ However, whether the thoughts are good or bad, you have to look at them, as he continues to explain.

‘Then you must unwaveringly examine how they are in terms of where they come from, where they stay, where they go and what shape and colour they have.’ Therefore, whatever thoughts come, you must ‘unwaveringly examine how they are in these terms’. This means: really look, where does this thought come from?

In the world now, we know that there are millions of forged passports and identity fraud is a growing business worldwide. In Britain now many people buy little shredders to keep in their house. This is because, even for ordinary people, fraudsters go into their dustbins and open the bags to find things from the bank and so on. It’s very easy to create a false identity. They do some electronic movements and take money out of the bank account. Where I live in London in the local high street there are always groups of Chinese people selling DVDs of new films. You can get a new film for about five euros. It’s very cheap. However, of course, these are pirate black market copies. Just because something comes with a name and a label on it doesn’t mean it is the real thing.

In the same way, when thoughts arise in your mind they come with their little identity card and you should be very suspicious. Where does this thought come from? It says, ‘Papa, I come from you! I am your own little thought, don’t you recognise me?’ ‘No, you come from emptiness—get back there!’ [Laughter in room] This is how you have to look at the thought. The thought will always tell you a wrong story about its provenance. This is what we have to become *very* aware of. When you do the practice—whether it is the meditation of dissolving into the deity or the chod practice and using ‘PHAT’ to cut off thought, or using the *Three Aas*—again and again recognise there is just one point: there is only emptiness.

It is the very nature of the thoughts of samsara, not to understand that they are in fact the fruits of the dharmakaya. They present themselves as having a different origin. And so again and again, when you do the meditation practice, you have to look:

‘Where has this just come from? Where does this thought stay?’

Maybe it seems to stay inside you.

‘Where do I stay?’

‘I stay here.’

‘So who has said ‘here’ to me?’

‘I have said ‘here’ to me.’

In this way I am chasing my own tail round and round. What is established by this? Well, if I run fast enough it looks like a circle. This is Ouroboros², the big snake that eats it’s own tail. And this is what samsara is; it *all* makes sense. However, it is solipsistic; there is no fresh air inside.

When you look at it, you think, ‘A thought is telling me about another thought- and about another thought- and I’m existing for myself as a series of thoughts.’ Therefore, even if you gather together a tonne of fool’s gold it wouldn’t make one gram of real gold. Therefore, no matter how many thoughts like this you bring together, and you accumulate and create all these wonderful insights—really, it is just *ca ca*, because, it hides its own origin. Therefore, again and again, hour after hour, day after day, in your meditation you look and look until you see directly where thoughts come from, where they stay and where they go to. If you understand this then it makes sense, when the Buddha said, ‘Everything is the mind, the mind is chief.’

² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ouroboros>

However, when thoughts seem to come from other thoughts it becomes like a waterfall in front of your eyes that you can't see through. This is like looking into the mirror and seeing only the reflections; you forget what the nature of the mirror is. However, if you see that the reflection comes from the mirror, if you see that the thought comes from your mind, then instead of identifying with the reflection you can relax into the open state of the mirror.

In this way, you then have the non-duality of the mirror and the reflection; the mind and its products—the thoughts.

Examine the many different thoughts very carefully

Therefore, here, Nuden Dorje has been talking about the object side, about what arises for you, thoughts and so on. Now he turns in the other direction and says, *'Also look at awareness itself.'* That is to say, pay attention to, 'Where is this mind itself. Who is the one who is looking?' If you can't find a sense of where awareness is; *'If you don't see anything at all then examine carefully who is looked at and who is the looker. If you don't see anything without self-substance then really examine the many different thoughts very carefully.'* That is to say, when you look for your mind, when you examine what this awareness is, if the answer which arises in your mind is a thought which seems to be truly existing—as he says, *'Remain spontaneously without grasping in the sky-like state without limits, free of objects and thus be totally clear that mind is without any root.'*

For example, you sit relaxed, maybe do the *Three Aa*, relax in this open state and you have a sense of yourself as a presence, 'Something alive is there and it feels like me.' You try to get a sense of it, but of course, you slip into your normal way of making sense of things which is to apply names and concepts to them. You might think, 'My mind is open, my mind is clear.' However, instead of that thought being a kind of jumping board—like you have in the swimming pool—to leap on and then dive out into space, it can slip back on itself and you think, 'Ah, now I know what my mind is.' That is why Nuden Dorje reminds us, 'Don't look to the object for the answer of who is the subject.' If you look on the side of the object you will only find objects.

Because we know how to find objects, that is where we look. It is like the famous story of Mulla Nasrudin who one night was out in the street looking under a beam of light that was coming from a house. He is scrambling around in the dirt and a friend walks by and says, 'Oh Nasrudin, what is the matter? He replies, 'I have lost my keys.' And his friend says, 'Oh, let me help you.' He also gets down on his knees and they look again and again. After some time the friend says, 'We have been up, we have been down, we have looked at every single bit of this land and the keys aren't here.' And Nasrudin says, 'No, my keys aren't here; they are over there but it is dark over there. Here is where the light is.' Therefore, in the same way we know how to look for objects. If you look for your mind among objects you won't find your mind; you will only find more objects. In order to find your mind you have to leave the familiar light of knowing 'how things are' and move into a space where you have to feel your way in the dark very subtly.

'If you understand and examine in this way and clearly see all the varieties of the faults of stillness and movement, then by staying in this practice for a long time you will really understand.' This refers to the confusion of taking things which are 'still' to be 'moving' and things which are 'moving' to be 'still'. Thoughts, feelings and so on, all the familiar constructs of the mind, are always moving. You will never find peace by depending on them, yet, this is how samsara functions.

That which is still is ungraspable. You have to *become* the stillness of the dharmakaya; you can't find it as an object. Therefore, because you can't find it, it seems to be elusive, moving this way and that. That is the problem of not knowing how to look. Therefore, he is saying again and again

just to relax into the natural state, the state which never moves, and all manifestation will be self-liberated. However, this is completely different from our ordinary experience, so if you don't practice it deeply and strongly for quite some time it won't really sink into you. As he says, *'Thus towards whatever thoughts arise be without encouragement or expectation. Without accepting or rejecting, look at their self-arising and self-liberation.'*

Three Aa practice and questions from participants

Now let us do some practice. We will do the *Three Aa* practice and just stay with this simple point. With the three 'A's the mind relaxes and is open. Then, whatever arises is coming from this open dimension. Therefore, treat everything that arises equally; avoid the partiality of your habitual karmic traits. And then in that relaxed spaciousness observe the self-arising, how the thoughts just come into formation and their self-liberation as they pass away.

[Practice of *Three Aas*]

You can begin by doing this for short periods of time. It is not useful to do it for long periods of time until you are very experienced. This is because, after a while, you start straining to do something and you get very involved in what is going on. Therefore, because you are trying to get a particular kind of recognition, it is better to do it for five to ten minutes again and again with a gap in between. In this way, you are fresh into it and you get the optimal sense of just being on the turning point as thoughts merge with you or pass by. That is to say, you have to work with your own condition and your own energy. It is not like doing prostrations or long mantra practices where you can push yourself beyond your limit. Here you have to have the optimal level of sensitivity.

Participant: I have this experience that when I'm at the point of recognising the thought, I'm doing it, somehow, so roughly that instead of seeing how the thought liberates itself, it vanishes. It is as if the thought cut off its head and is a blank state. However, soon enough there is another thought. Therefore, the end of it is quite abrupt; it is not something that is smoothly going by. So what am I doing wrong?

James: Well, in the general buddhist notion, the thought and the owner of the thought arise together, so consciousness always takes an object which is the thought. This is the mentation consciousness, *yi kyi nam pa she pa* (yid kyi rnam pa shes pa), and the thought arising at the same time. Now, when you recognise, 'Oh, there is a thought' you have now displaced yourself from the consciousness that was present with the thought. Therefore, as your mind moves out of the mentation consciousness, the object of the mentation consciousness, the thought, vanishes at the same time. Therefore, what we want to do is to try to subtly bring the awareness close to the mentation consciousness, so that, as it were, it merges into it without displacing the object. Therefore, in that sense, we want to be aware *with* the arising of the thought *and* the one who has the thought; as an inseparable part.

For example, at the moment, I am talking to you and I am aware I am talking to you. Therefore, I am aware that part of me is the 'subject who is doing the talking to you' and that you are 'the object I am talking to', although, I am aware of both of these at the same time. However, very often, if I am talking with you 'I am just talking with you'. Therefore, I am now attached or fused into the consciousness of doing the talking. What we have to try to do, then, is to relax away from the intensity of the 'lock on' in order to have a more panoramic vision. In some ways this is a little like the observer, as a transitional phase—so that we start to experience ourselves in interaction with the other; a kind of interpersonal movement.

Just as when we are bringing up children and we help them become aware of the impact of their actions on other people so that they can experience themselves in relation to others—and come to see that the relation is the most important thing, not the winning or losing, or getting or not getting—so in our own mind (because our consciousness is very much concerned with winning and losing, with pushing away what we don't like and getting what we do like) we have to practice observing how *we* are in interaction. This understanding is developed through all the preliminary practices, for example, becoming aware of the karmic nature of cause and effect, dependent co-origination, so that we start to look at interactive *movements* rather than positions. Taking that quality of attention into this practice, gives us a bit more space from which we see the movement of subject and object together without too much partiality, bias or identification on the subject side. In that way, my presence or awareness is not my presence as 'me' but is the presence which is 'the mirror revealing the interaction of the subject and object'. Therefore, in that way, we are not, as it were, *pulling* ourselves back from being the 'consciousness which is involved with the object' but relaxed back into an awareness which is separate from the illuminating quality of consciousness.

It is almost as if you have two different electricity supplies for two lights. So the light of our *consciousness* which is illuminating this particular object, or is caught up with that, is different from this *awareness* which is more like a diffuse light which is pervasive. Part of it is trusting that there is a natural clarity of mind, a natural light, a natural illumination as it were, running simultaneously with the light of consciousness. Because, otherwise, in order to get the power going through awareness we switch off the consciousness and then the object goes. For example, I was visiting a friend's house and in his kitchen there was just one plug. I was listening to the radio and then decided to have some toast. However, in order to have some toast I had to unplug the radio, but now I want to get my radio!

Therefore, I think it is quite a tricky thing, because, we are used to the powerful, 'I know what is going on' light of consciousness. However, the *awareness* is just revealing what is there and if what is there is dull and stupid it will appear to be a very dull and stupid illumination. Therefore, it is really about affecting a paradigm shift in ourselves so that we don't transpose our familiar expectations from one field to the other.

When there are many swirling thoughts, do not see this as a fault

He continues, *'Moreover, when there are many swirling thoughts do not see this as a fault. Don't get mixed with ideas that don't perceive the qualities of naked clarity and emptiness, but practice with the display of uncontrived reality.'* That is to say, in terms of our ordinary perception, if the mist comes in the valley so that we can't see anything, we feel that the mist is spoiling our enjoyment of the view. We then think, 'Until I get rid of this mist, these swirling thoughts, I won't have clarity.' However, the ground of the mist, the ground of the many confusing thoughts, is clarity itself.

Again, if the room is very dark and you look into a mirror you will see some vague impressions. This doesn't mean that the mirror doesn't work; it means that the clarity of the mirror is showing what is there. However, if your notion of clarity is that of something very bright and shiny then you think, 'This is a useless mirror.' In a lot of translations of Tibetan texts, because the term for 'clarity' is *sal wa* or *od sel* which means clear-light, often 'Clear-Light' is put with capital letters. It is then very easy to imagine something incredibly bright, luminous and shining is going to come in your mind, as I did. I went to my teacher and said, 'Look, I never see this light.' 'What do you experience?' he asked me. 'Just my stupid thoughts, the same boring stuff again and again.' And who is experiencing this?' he asked. 'I am, Rinpoche.' 'Oh, yes. So when you forget who you are that is what you get.' 'But if I remember who I am, what will I get?' 'Just the same.' he replied.

Therefore, that is always the big mistake: you imagine that the content of the mind is going to be magically transformed, that everything will be radiant and when you walk down the street people will look at you and say, ‘Wow, look at all those rainbows!’ Clarity really means ‘just this’. Something is happening, which is this basic aliveness, this presence, this awareness which illuminates what is happening whether it is bright, dark, happy or sad.

Again, here, is a really important difference, in that consciousness shows different forms according to its object. For example, if you are studying a book which is very difficult, at a certain point your mental consciousness will start to feel very tired and you collapse and feel, ‘Oh, I can’t make sense of this.’ That is to say, the clarity of the illuminating power of the consciousness is relative; it arises in relation to the general energy of the biodynamic system—our body—and in relation to the difficulty of the object.

However, the clarity of awareness is not like that; it is always the same. It appears to be dull when what is arising in front of it is dull, but it is still clear just as the mirror is clear if you hold it in front of it a dark brown wall. The dark brown doesn’t seem to be bright and shining—it’s maybe painted a matt colour—so what is revealed in the mirror is not something shiny. However, the mirror is displaying the same degree of clarity in illuminating that, as if you were to hold in front of it a powerful electric light bulb. That is to say, the clarity of the mirror doesn’t change but its content changes according to how it presents.

This is very important. For meditators it means: don’t despair if your mind seems very dull. This dullness doesn’t mean that you are far away from your unborn awareness. The fact that you are alive and cognisant of this dullness of your mind is indeed the very natural radiance of the unborn mind. In the same way, sometimes meditation seems to go very well and you seem to be very clear and you now understand things. However, don’t be excited by this. This is just a passing phase. The clarity of the mind is not increased by the fact that you have an exciting experience. The clarity of the consciousness is increased but not the clarity of awareness.

This is a very important difference, because, if you can see this then you are freed from the fluctuation of hopes and fears, of liking and not liking, that continuously move through us when we are puppets reacting to the force of circumstance.

This is one of the reasons why in the dzogchen tradition there is the practice of meditating in the dark. If you do a retreat in a dark room where there is no external illumination, the familiar source of your capacity to see and make sense of what is going on has been removed. However, if you can relax into this state, you start to experience the presence of what is there. The natural clarity of awareness starts to reveal these very dull, vague, or opaque forms. And you start to experience that there’s a natural clarity of mind, a light which is inherent in the alive quality of presence itself, and which is not dependent on any external source.

Therefore, this is, as it says in the text, *‘practise the display of uncontrived reality.’* That is to say, without interfering, without bringing contrivance to the thoughts and feelings that come, by allowing them to move in their own way, they will increase the clarity of the mind. However, if you continue to be drawn towards the things which seem bright and shiny to you, and to turn away from the things that seem dull and not interesting, then in searching for the light you will continue to be blind to the natural radiance of your own mind.

Do not go under the power of even very subtle thoughts

He continues, *‘If when sitting in the seven-fold posture with the eyes correctly focused, there occurs the familiar presence of known objects due to the power of subtle thoughts, then it is very important not to go under the power of these very minuscule movements.’* This means, for

example, say we do the *Three Aa* practice and you're sitting and a thought arises or a sense arises, 'I am looking at the wall.' This is a movement of your mind creating a particular interpretation. It is a very familiar interpretation and on that level it is very reassuring, because if it is not a wall what is it? However, of course, it is not a wall. It is your mind, but the thought tells you 'it's a wall'. Therefore, that thought which seems like a helpful thought is actually a very dangerous thought. The thought catches you and binds you into a situation.

This, then, is proposing something very radical, offering a different route for your experience. We are used to having the root of our experience in the concept, in the thought. However, now we start to see that what is experienced has its root in emptiness. The **miss**-interpretation, the **miss**-taking, the ignoring of this, is however very familiar to us. Therefore, it involves a very radical attention to the ordinary ways in which we have our mental existence. The fact that a thought arises in the mind, 'I am in a buddhist centre' doesn't *make* this a buddhist centre. To enter into the thought, 'this is a buddhist centre' is to enter into a kind of dream. The fact that in your dream there are other people who share your dream doesn't make your dream a truly existing reality. Therefore, it means one has to be very very careful in subtle thoughts.

A traditional example is of a water meadow, where just under the surface a little river is running. In the same way, in our mind all the time, there are these slightly subterranean streams, chains of very familiar thoughts which maintain the continuity of our sense of how things are. One has to be very attentive when you have an indication that this is going on. Otherwise, from the surface you look free; you think you have got a kind of open space but, actually, the binding is going on just below the surface.

To put this in another way, 'I don't need thoughts, thoughts need me.' Of course, normally we need thoughts; our thoughts are what give us our sense of identity and purpose. However, when we start to look we see that the thought has no meaning unless there is someone who is interested in it, invested in it, identified with it.

Here you can see again the difference between the ego and the mind itself. The ego needs thoughts but the mind doesn't need thoughts. Thoughts are an ornament to the mind itself but thoughts are the life and food of the ego.

He then continues, '*From the very beginning emptiness has been without inherent-self-nature, free of all interpretation.*' This means, at the heart of everything is the state of emptiness that nothing escapes from; there is not one thing that has a true existence outside the realm of emptiness. And when it says, '...free of all interpretation' this means that no matter what you say about things, it doesn't pertain to the essence of the thing, because, things have no essence. On this level what we have is opinion; and opinions are not facts. Therefore, the interpretation doesn't establish anything.

The mind's self-expression

Then Nuden Dorje says, '*It is very important to know that your present consciousness, beyond intellectualisation, is just awareness itself.*' Therefore, here we are sitting in this room. We can look around and we are conscious of shapes, colours, and so on. We are conscious of many things. This consciousness when it gets layered over—covered with, mixed with, intellectual conceptualisation—becomes, what we would call, the quality of a developed person. This is because we normally think we develop our qualities and our understanding by putting more and more complex understandings *into* ourselves so that we can discourse in a very sophisticated way.

However, if we stop that mental activity for a moment and we just stay with the immediate movement of our consciousness—for example, above our heads here is this beautiful *thangka*³. If you just allow your gaze to settle on that and you become present in the moment of gazing at the *thangka*, that is to say, if you feel a kind of uninterrupted movement from your heart out through your eyes—this is just awareness itself. However, once you start to have some commentary going on in your head, ‘Oh, this is a very nice *thangka*; it is painted in very soft colours’ then the addition of the thought makes consciousness feel to be very far away from awareness. The consciousness is the ‘*mode* of awareness’ that has lost its root. When you catch the moment of the functioning of any consciousness through the senses or through the mental conscious and you plant its root into emptiness then you have awareness.

Therefore, Nuden Dorje explains, ‘*What is looked at, the looking and the looker, as well as stillness and movement, are all the clarity of natural self-expression.*’ Therefore, if you are looking at the *thangka* you are the ‘looker’. The *thangka* is what is looked at. And there is this movement between; you have the sense of an extension of yourself towards the thing you are looking at. And in relation to this, the experience of the dynamic movement of the mind, of constructions and so on, *and* the experience of stillness, of the open un-turbulent quality of awareness—all of this is the clarity of natural expression.

Natural expression means that the mind itself, although it is empty, has, as its own inherent quality, the potential to reveal—to show itself. It is the very nature of the mirror to reveal what is in front of it. The mind is always revealing something; it has the potential to reveal infinite forms. All of these forms are the self-expression of the mind. For example, if you look in a mirror you see many different images. You might think, ‘That is a face.’, ‘That is a candle.’, ‘That is a book.’ However, actually, what you are seeing is the clarity, or the quality of reflection of the mirror. When you look in the mirror you don’t see a book, you see a reflection. If you think the reflection is a book then you don’t understand what a mirror is! In the same way, we say, ‘I exist’, ‘I’, ‘Me’, ‘Myself’. ‘I don’t think I am a reflection, I think I am a real self-existing person.’ However, when we relax into the meditation we realise that all we take to be ourselves is merely a reflection, a shimmering image without any inherent-self-nature. In that way, all things which occur are the clarity, or the illuminating potentiality, of the tendency of the mirror to show reflections—or as it says here, the mind’s self-expression.

‘To be without grasping regarding this is to recognise one’s own nature or to decide on the one ground of knowing. This is a most important point.’ Therefore, it is saying that if you want to know who you really are, stay present on this point of the ‘clarity of *all* experience’ as the self-expression of your own mind. If you do this without grasping—without concretising, without making a definite conclusion, without making it something you can take away with you as a particular knowledge—this is to decide on the ‘*one ground of knowing*’. That is to say, all the knowledge I have, arises from the mind itself.

However, you might think this is stupid. Because, no doubt in your house you will have some books and when you look in the book you will get some knowledge; clearly knowledge comes out of books, it doesn’t come out of your mind. However, where is your book? It is in your house. And where is your house? It is in the mind. If your house was outside your mind how would you get into it? This is very important, because, always we think, ‘My mind is in my head. I have my key in my pocket, I walk up to the door, I put myself in my house.’ However, all the experience: opening the door, closing the door, finding the mail on the carpet, opening it—all of this is the movement of your mind. Without your mind there would be no house. Without the house would we still have a mind?

³ A Tibetan painting, usually in a brocade surround

Therefore, really understand this one point: there is no other source of illumination but the natural expression of the mind.

If you do not have that understanding...

Then he says, *'If you do not have that understanding then what is looked at, the looking and the looker will be differentiated.'* Therefore, you now have three different things, 'I am here living inside myself **looking** out at **you**.' I am 'me', you are 'you' and somehow we have some kind of 'relationship'.

He goes on to say, *'Stillness and movement will be examined and labelled and you will be bound by the concepts of being and non-being, inhibiting and encouraging.'* That is to say, you will use your own intelligence to establish a conceptual understanding through naming and labelling all the different phenomena. It is through doing this that *'you will be bound by the concepts of being and non-being'*. For example, you might put on the television and when you are watching a film you know it's a film. And, when someone comes to visit you, you know that they are not in a film but they are real. In that way you say, 'I know what is real and what is not real. I know what is truly-existing and what is not.' It is this which will bind you, because, you will now be the one who attributes value to all things. And that is a lot of work. Think about the CIA; this is all they do, 'Who is a terrorist, who is not?' It is a lot of work.

When he says, *'Inhibiting and encouraging'* this means that because I am now separated from the object field, objects can upset me. Therefore, again, because I like myself and I need to take care of myself because I am all on my own, I must stop bad things and try to make good things. And that again is a very busy thing to do.

He then continues, *'So not only with the conceptual labelling of emptiness in terms of outer and inner but also regarding attachment to the object of meditation and notions of good and bad, hopes and doubts, do take care not to get bound up in these.'* Therefore, in this way, on the basis of concepts we construct a wall or a barrier between outer and inner, between self and other. And on the basis of that, with regard to the meditation, we construct a notion of how meditation should be, what is a good meditation, what is a bad meditation. Then from that, we develop a notion that we have a lot of things to do to keep our meditation going in the right way.

That, then, brings you into these dualistic notions, 'I had a good meditation', 'I had a bad meditation but I hope it will get better' or, 'I am sure it will never get better.' And he is saying, *'do take care not to get bound in these.'* However, of course, it is almost inevitable that that will happen. This is because as soon as you have the separation of subject and object, instead of the subject being niched in the wave-like pulsation of non-dual interaction, it experiences its terrifying pseudo-autonomy, and within that state tries desperately to secure its territory.

He continues, *'Don't let your mind get distracted by the hidden movement of thought.'* That is to say, beware of selective attention.

As soon as you focus on one thing, that thing seems to become your world. However, of course, that is *not* your world; there is a lot going on. Therefore, if you only see one particular thing, that leaves a lot of other stuff in the shadow. And this stuff is not sleeping in the shadows; it is moving, creeping, joining and creating. And in that way, you have the experience of the sudden uprising of strong patterns of thoughts that were previously invisible to you. I am sure we have all experienced this. For example, you are sitting in the meditation and things seem to be reasonably clear and the next thing you know suddenly you are in the midst of a complex thought. How did I get there? How did this happen to me? Someone must have put something in my drink! This is

how it operates: suddenly you are not there. Suddenly, you are in something else and you can't see how it happened.

Therefore, here he is saying to not let your mind get distracted. That is like your mother saying to you when you are going out to a party, 'Do take care, son.' It is a nice intention but not very helpful. Therefore, how do we take care? By being a little bit distrustful. You can't trust thoughts. You have to know what they are and not believe what they tell you. If you do that you stay relaxed as we looked before, and so you are less likely to be mesmerised by a particular thought. It is whilst that is happening that, 'Whoosh.' they get you from behind. Thoughts are like wolves; they hunt in packs. One thought is coming and gets you going in one direction and so you try and get free of it. Then, just as you think you're safe and you run around the rock, there is another one waiting. Thoughts never cease. You will never be free of thoughts. They are not the enemy but if you find yourself trapped in them, you will never outwit them. Therefore, this is always the instruction: relax, open; relax into the out-breath and allow the complete continuity of experience to continue without cutting it into little pieces.

'It is vital to gain the understanding that is free of objects and beyond limits.' Again, this doesn't mean to have no thoughts in your head. It means not to be troubled by thoughts, to rest in the confidence that thoughts have nothing to give me and thoughts have no way of taking anything from me. When the mind relaxes in that state it is beyond limits. We limit ourselves by entering into conditioned states: hopes and fears, particular kinds of positioning, when we feel, 'I can't survive without this' or 'this would be terrible for me'. Then the quality of our identity becomes very small and we seem then to be at the mercy of the thoughts that arise.

He continues, *'When one is undistractedly in a posture and way of viewing that is not like that, then one automatically wanders in the confusion of not understanding one's thoughts, and this process is not recognised.'* This means that when you lose your way and you think that you are on the right road, you become un-distracted in your commitment to continuing as you are doing.

For example, if you are driving and you take the wrong way but you think it is the right way, then you have full confidence to continue without examining what you are doing. You are therefore un-distracted in your confidence that things will be fine. Therefore, he is saying that with this positioning you automatically wander in confusion. Not only now are you lost but you have no way of knowing that you are lost, because you have convinced yourself that you are going the right way. Therefore, while not understanding where you are, you don't understand that you don't understand where you are.

Another way of saying this is that samsara becomes normal. This is because getting up, going to work, keeping in touch with your family, going to the shops, paying the bills; all of these activities are rewarded. Plenty of people will reassure you that you are a good person if you do these things. It is very rare for someone to come up to you in the street and say, 'Do you really need to go where you are going? Perhaps you are a Buddha. Why don't you take today off work and find out.' No, we meet people who encourage us to stay asleep inside the particular dream of assumptions that we are in.

This is why, on an outer level, if possible, it is very good to have some symbols and reminders of this other vision, this vision of dharma. Especially, it is useful to have some sense of sangha, of people who are connected with dharma because they can help to interrupt the intoxication of this forgetfulness which seems to be a state of self-discovery.

He continues, *'In other words, one does not know anything; one is stupid and revolves in unclarity. This is also described as not maintaining the spontaneity of thought and this leads to*

being bound by the necessity of distraction so that one cannot enter free expression.' The permanent state of everyone nowadays seems to be 'to be busy'; there is so much to do. All of these things which we have to do are, from a dharma point of view, choices of distraction. They don't have to be. However, they operate as ways of subject being bound up with object in reactivity. And because they are rewarded by the eight worldly dharmas: gaining and losing, fame and notoriety, success and failure etc, they are reinforced all the time. However, the practice of dharma is not reinforced in that way.

Therefore, as he says, *'...one does not know anything, one is stupid'* and yet it appears that one is intelligent by performing all these tasks. Cleaning your car, for example, people will come out and say, 'Oh, your car is looking very nice today.' People don't say, 'Oh, your mind is looking very nice today.' If you were to polish your mind and leave your car dirty the neighbours would not be so happy! Here he is bringing just a little bit of an edge of danger into this: if you get lost you can get lost for a very long time. This is because the reminders of the right way are very rare but encouragement to follow the wrong way is very omnipresent.

In the last part of this sentence, where he says, *'and because of this one cannot enter free expression'* this means that the freshness of spontaneity as you encounter the world from a state of naked awareness becomes hidden from you and your behaviour becomes the stale repetition of familiar habits.

He continues, *'Thus movement and recollection must be under the control of understanding.'* This doesn't mean an ordinary level of understanding. A better translation would be 'in the state of presence.' If you are present in the moment then all the variations of experience from stillness to movement will be self-liberating. However, if you are absent to your own presence, if you are ignoring it, if you are caught up in something else, then you won't be able to integrate stillness and movement, and movement will take you all over the six realms.

He then continues, *'Moreover one can follow after the thoughts which are consequent on the arising of the various objects of the six senses.'* Therefore, it is again saying that if you are tilted towards the object and you find it interesting it will generate thoughts which you will then feel obliged to follow.

He continues: *'Then one examines and judges, pursuing each one after the other so that recollection is strengthened.'* Recollection sometimes has a kind of open or high meaning and sometimes has quite a low meaning. Here it is a low meaning, meaning memory. That is to say, you see something, for example, this thangka. Your thoughts start to pursue it and you become interested; you look at the colour, how it is painted, how it is made etc. In that way, the object starts to remain in your mind as a real conscious experience. In our western psychological way, we would say that the experience of the thangka has been transferred from the short-term to the long-term memory. Therefore, it now becomes a part of your internal furniture.

He continues, *'Also when the mind does not rest in itself, thoughts go wandering all over the place without reaching a limit and this you must recognise as due to obstacles in your view and meditation.'* This is meaning that when awareness is not relaxed, open, and settled in itself, instead of the energy flowing out of the mind while the mind stays peaceful, the energy *seems* to take the mind with itself which is where awareness takes on the form of consciousness. In this way, thoughts are then just wandering all over the place, looking at things which seem to exist in the realm of perception, creating all sorts of imagined realms, expressing opinions and biases etc. And this becomes a rich and fulfilling intellectual life: there are always new interesting magazines to read, new movies to see and discuss and new art exhibitions to go to. If you have the time and

the money you can be busy with these activities all the time; there is no limit, they never come to an end.

Therefore, what we have to recognise is that this is generated due to a fault in our view and meditation. Instead of awareness being stable and thoughts being self-liberated, you immerse yourself in thoughts in search of stability and make awareness redundant, although everything that is occurring is not different from the energy of this awareness which has been forgotten.

It is like teenagers when they are very determined to lead their own life and go out and do what they want to do, and we have to say, very politely, 'Oh, this freedom is so wonderful, arising as it does from the clothes I buy for you, the food I put in your mouth and the money that I put in your pocket.' Therefore, in forgetting the parent, in forgetting the ground which is awareness, the adolescent thoughts seem to have found freedom. However, sooner or later they come home with their dirty washing!

If you becomes lost, do not obscure things further

He then continues, '*If one's practice develops in these ways then as explained above, do not obscure things with erroneous understanding.*' This means that if in your meditation practice you realise that you are completely lost, don't try to justify it and don't try to improve it. Recognise that you are lost and don't throw good money after bad.

Therefore, he then says, '*Avoid conceptual artifice and maintain automatic spontaneity.*' That is to say, don't add concepts on top of concepts. On practical terms, at this point, if you feel intensely lost you can go for a walk or have a cold shower and then come back to the practice. You could pray to your guru with great devotion and then, as said earlier, visualise your guru or deity in front of you or on top of your head and practice the integration. Or you could do the *Three Aa* practice.

Whatever you do, don't try to think yourself out of the swamp of thoughts. The more you do that, the more troublesome it becomes. If you relax into that state, which means avoiding conceptual artifice, then you will find the automatic spontaneity. That is to say, thoughts will come just as the free-flow of the mind.

Ka dag and Lhun drub

This is a very condensed little sentence. '*Avoiding conceptual artifice*' refers to *ka dag*, primordial purity. From the very beginning the mind's nature has been completely pure. It has never been mixed with or covered over by any kind of arising, concept or construction. And from that state there is the arising of the '*automatic spontaneity*' which in Tibetan is *lhun drup* which represents the way in which, without planning and without effort, there is the immediacy of the presentation of the reflections in the mirror.

These two aspects, then, are the heart of dzogchen: because with the purity (*ka dag*) there is now no longer any false basis for the mind to rest on; and with *lhun drup* there is no basis for busy activity, constructing things according to any plan. *Ka dag* is linked with this realm of practice which is called *trek chod* which is the idea of cutting free or letting go of all that binds you into limitation. And *lhun drup* is referring to the practices of *tho gal* which are about the immediacy of the manifestation of all phenomena in an instant from the open dimension. What this means is that when you really see that awareness is inseparable from emptiness and that this is the basis of all things, then without anxiety, without a need to control, without guilt, without shame, without

worry, you can allow the free-flow of experience whether it is in the realm of meditation practice or an interaction in the world.

He continues, *'For whatever movements and recollections arise, remain on your understanding and clarity: don't enter into evaluation; neither accepting nor rejecting, adopting or discarding.'* Here the word translated as *'understanding'* is a difficult word. In English it means more like 'remain on your presence and clarity'.

Again, it is always saying the same thing in slightly different ways: when you rest securely in awareness and you trust the clarity, that is to say, you trust that all things are non-dually inseparable from this ground basis; you have no need for evaluation. You already know the value of everything. You don't have to work it out, you don't have to make sense of things; the value of everything is already established—the cake is made, the cream is on the top. If you have some 'hundreds-and-thousands'⁴ you can even decorate the top. They look nice but they don't really mean very much; this is the same as evaluation. Evaluation is only an ornament; it doesn't change anything. For example, maybe you like to be a vegetarian, maybe you like to eat meat; this is your choice but nothing much is established. From the very beginning everything has been empty, everything is like a dream. However, you can invest one position with a lot of meaning. The fact that you find one way of behaving more meaningful and important and valuable than the other doesn't make any difference; it is just your opinion which is not even worth a bag of beans.

It is our own narcissism that makes us feel that we are central, that we have to do these things, that we make it this way or that way. This then is another way of looking at what we looked at before: the ego is now decentred. Installed at the centre on the throne is awareness and the ego is simply a messenger. It is not in control. It is not making any big decisions. However, if it bends the knees, if it recognises that it is a servant of awareness, then it can become an agent of compassion.

He then goes on to say, *'And don't go following after anything that occurs.'* This means that if it is gone, it's gone. Sometimes in meditation you have lots of very interesting ideas and you might want to try to remember them so you can write them down afterward. Let them go. It is very important to let them go. Letting go of your best ideas allows your best idea to be empty. However, if you hold on to them, you say, 'The real value of this thought is not its relation to emptiness but its relation to me.'

Don't block movement and don't inhibit cessation

And he says, *'Don't block movement and don't inhibit cessation.'* Whatever strange thoughts, feelings or sensations arise just let them come and if something is going just let it go, even if it seems very important. In that way you will be constantly undermining the ego's claim to be in charge which is where the real work of meditation occurs. You feel this desperate impulse not to have certain things in your mind—they feel like an insult, a contamination—and now we just have to let them come. And other things which seem so important, so very special, we have to just let go of. Aren't we letting the bad guys win? Aren't we betraying the good guys? Of course we are. We are practicing dzogchen!

We are not discriminating between good and bad, high and low, right and wrong. This is a land without law, out on the border,  down Mexico way . We have escaped away from the Texas rangers—it is like that. And this makes a lot of anxiety, 'What will happen to me?' Well, you will die. What will happen to your awareness? It will be there as you die. 'But I am me and I

⁴ Very small coloured pieces of confectionery sprinkled on top of cakes as a decoration.

don't even know anything about this bloody awareness, couldn't we just sacrifice the awareness so I could stay here—I am quite a nice person, actually.' So which side is going to win? The ego has to relax and allow the world to be not on its terms. For the ego this feels like the complete loss of freedom, being out of control. Awareness, however, has not got this need to be in control, because awareness is never in danger. (If we remember, the mirror is not improved by having beautiful things in front of it and it is not spoiled by having ugly things in front of it.)

He continues, *'The essential point of the view is to remain exactly on the awareness of the real nature of the one who gives rise to thoughts.'* Who is the one who gives rise to thoughts? We do. One of things we have to learn as children is that we have to take responsibility for our actions and our actions arise from our thoughts. Nuden Dorje is asking us to look a little bit deeper here, 'What is the *real* nature, what is the *true* nature of the one who gives rise to thoughts?' Again, we have to look at our mind. When thoughts and feelings arise and they seem to be *our* thoughts, who is the one who has the thought? The thought may arise, 'I am the source of these thoughts.' However, if you stay with that thought it will pass. Who then is left? And then another thought arises. It arises from the place which is left by the thought that has left. In this way, we come to see that the source of all our thoughts is the empty open nature of our mind. It is because the mind is open and empty that it can keep giving rise to thoughts. If you stay with that point then there is liberation. However, if we start to imagine that 'we', as our ego-self, have given rise to the thoughts, then we are hooked into evaluation, 'Is this the right thought?', 'Did I make a mistake?', 'Could I improve it?', 'If I share my thoughts with other people will they still like me?' In that way, again and again, when you find yourself having a personal relation with your thoughts, when you feel that the thoughts are about *you*, and that *you* as your individual self are the source of the thoughts, that is the time to relax into the out-breath and see that the thought 'you are the master of the thought' comes from emptiness.

He continues, *'You need to recognise what is known as the practice or implementation of the play of reality, which means understanding the view just stated.'* This simply means everything is an illusory display; it is like a *lila*⁵, like a dance, which means don't take it so seriously. All that we think is so very important has been empty from the very beginning.

If the root of movement has not been cut

He continues, *'At that time, if the root of movement has not been cut so that thoughts are experienced as abiding, and one protects one's own familiar story, then many thoughts arise as the objects of consciousness that is without understanding.'* This is very lovely. If you cut the root of movement, that is to say, if you see that movement is the empty display of the mind, then thoughts are seen just as little puffs of smoke. However, there is a kind of paradox, because, if thoughts are allowed to move then they appear to be abiding, they appear to be stable.

For example, 'Today is Saturday, isn't it?' Am I sure? Yes because of... We have all the reasons to back that up don't we? And then, 'Ah, yes, now I am sure!' In this way, all this movement seems to bring me to a place of absolute certainty. However, when the mind remains relaxed the thought arises and it is gone. Therefore, it cannot establish itself as becoming a foundation for any definite proposition. Therefore, when this happens one protects one's own familiar story, because, it is the *seeming* stability of thoughts which then becomes the building blocks to one's familiar sense of who one is. And then, all the thoughts that arise in our mind—thought here is shorthand for sensation, feeling and so on—simply become the objects or the fuel for the ordinary consciousness which doesn't understand its own ground nature.

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lila>

He continues, '*One's immediate knowledge sinks and one experiences the obstacle of stupid calmness.*' The use of the word 'knowledge' here is a high usage, meaning a little like *rigpa*; your capacity to be there, to really get it. And what he is meaning here is that, 'I know who I am, I know where my house is and I know what to do. Things were a bit difficult when I was young but now I think I am a bit sorted.' This sort of bourgeois complacency is here called stupid calmness.

He continues, '*So keep your mind sharp and clear. Practice in short sessions and allow the mind to move. It is very important to recognise movement and stability.*' The stability is always, only, awareness and emptiness inseparable which never moves. And movement is everything else.

Because everything has been pure or good from the very beginning there is no need for us to be worried about anything that occurs. This means we can welcome everything; we can welcome our body, our emotions. Yesterday, we were talking a lot about thoughts but as I said 'thought' in that context is a short form to mean sensations in the body and all the various kinds of emotion; *whatever* one experiences. The body is clearly always changing in terms of its sensation, in terms of how it presents itself, and our emotions also are arising and passing with great frequency. Sometimes we have emotions that we don't want to have: anger, jealousy, envy. They make us feel uncomfortable. However, the heart of the practice is to just stay present with whatever is arising. Only by doing that can you realise that your real nature, the quality of awareness is indestructible.

When Nuden Dorje is talking about the relation of stillness and movement it is to highlight to us the absolute importance of not moving in the face of particular kinds of arisings. When we react to thoughts or feelings or sensations, when we find ourselves moving towards them and merging or trying to cut off and avoid them, this movement doesn't allow us to see what they are in themselves. In that way we are experiencing them in terms of our own desires, primarily our desire for more of some things and less of other things. However, when awareness is described as naked and fresh it means without any partiality; equanimity is the acceptance that whatever comes, comes. Therefore, this means finding the way to experience what is there without reacting to it. The reaction to the arising is another arising. However, when the reaction *feels* like *yourself*, when you feel like you have to do it, then you start on this path of confusion which is to take a moving thing as the basis of your true identity. You are then left with having to try and stabilise it.

Therefore, all the explanations are designed to help us just to stay present. To relax is both to open and become more spacious but also not to move into the path of reactivity. As long as we get caught up in impulses and reactions we have no freedom. You can choose to do something, particularly if it seems useful in relation to other people, but that is very different from the inevitability that comes with the feeling of an impulse, that you just have to do it. That is the freedom that we seek.

There is the obstacle of the mind becoming excited

Nuden Dorje's text continues, '*Moreover, if one follows after movements, be they subtle or gross, then there is the obstacle of the mind becoming excited, so control attention.*' This is pointing to what I was just saying: if your attention gets distracted by the power of whatever is arising then you will not be able to recognise how you move into the excited or impulsive response.

Here we are looking directly, that the mind is open and the mind is *also* the source of all arising. For example, just as we can sit still, when we are sitting still we still have the capacity to move. However, if you are sitting outside meditating in the summer time and there are many mosquitoes flying around you, you have to make a decision about where you are with

mosquitoes. If you decide that they are not likely to kill you then maybe you can just let them buzz around and take a little of your blood from time-to-time. And with that clarity of decision, you are not pulled into the reactivity of trying to push them away. It is the same with the thoughts: our mind as a potential can give rise to all kinds of movements. Therefore, while we, in the meditation practice, are focusing on settling and opening, the mind continues its function of allowing manifestation to occur. If the task we set ourselves is to explore openness and stillness, then we have to resist the impulse to go with the movement which occurs. And this is often very hard because we are drawn towards reactivity. However, as long as we do that we lose the sense that one can stay relaxed and open and allow movements of all different kinds to come without having to be involved.

Therefore, it is very important to make a clear decision before the meditation that you know what the focus of your attention is. For many many lives we have been very busy wandering in samsara doing many different things; always engaged and reacting. Therefore, now we make a decision to readjust the balance and to focus into the stillness.

Therefore, Nuden Dorje says, '*As before, develop the clarity of abiding without inhibiting the understanding of stillness and movement.*' For example, we do the *Three Aa* practice, we are open and at that point maybe not very much is happening and so we just stay with that. Or, maybe, a lot of movement comes and so we just stay with that. The main thing is just to abide, to rest easily in this open state. And in that state you will experience this subtle purification that occurs: you will still be you, in the sense of the familiar quality of being present, but you will not be you because the usual constructions, the building blocks of your personality will now be free to come and go. Like, for example, if you took your clothes to a charity shop and then the next week you see someone walking down the road in your jacket; now it is just a jacket and in fact it is *their* jacket—the fact that it feels like your jacket is not relevant.

He continues, '*The essential point of the view is the direct experience of the real nature of this clarity.*' Which is exactly this: observing that all things arise and pass there is no need to appropriate them as self or discriminate them as other. That clarity is a more precise boundary of your identity than the constructions that you normally wrap yourselves in. Therefore, the clarity, just the open potential which reveals everything, is like our naked body. On this naked body you can wear many different kinds of clothes and as you do that you appear to be different kinds of people.

However, are we our clothes? When my teacher, C R Lama, used to go out to work in the university he would just go in the clothes that he wore around the house, an old lungi⁶ with maybe some holes in it and a T-shirt. And his wife would say, 'Oh, you can't go out looking like that.' And he would reply, "When people see me coming do they say 'Here comes C R Lama' or do they say 'Here comes C R Lamas clothes'? We are very attached to our clothes.

He continues, '*If the faults of sinking or excitation occur, they can be cleared by praying while meditating respectively on the red or white form of Padmasambhava.*' Sinking here refers to the loss of energy when the mind becomes dull. It is described as being like a tired swimmer who finds himself just sinking under the water. If you find that occurring a lot, you should visualise Padmasambhava in this red form. This means, in one of these more powerful or excited forms, Dorje Drollo, for example. It is through the identification with that, that your own energy starts to rise. However, if you find yourself excited with many different thoughts then you can visualise

⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lungi>

Padmasambhava in a very peaceful form and use the tranquillity of his presence just to readjust your energy.

Nuden Dorje continues, *'If thoughts arise very strongly, such as feeling sick and much pain, and one is not able to sit and doesn't know how to meditate, then this is the obstacle of the arising of dispersal and excitation.'* Here it means that many different thoughts are arising, sensations in the body, feelings of sickness which seem to have a life of their own, things that one feels powerless in the face of. Therefore, in reaction to these we can become very dispersed because we have lost the sense that the clarity can be maintained. We just go after reacting to what is going on. This is because something very real seems to be happening: we feel, 'I am sick, I can't go on like this, this is not how I should be.' And in that state, of course, our capacity to welcome whatever is occurring is diminished.

For example, say you are in retreat and you get sick you don't know what the state is if you are not a doctor. You might think, 'Oh, I am going to die. Oh, I need to see a doctor.' However, as the Buddha has described many times, we are all going to die, and yet the thought is always surprising to us. Therefore, in being unwilling to welcome our own death, we make the sickness a problem that has to be solved. This then gives rise to many different thoughts and feelings and just a lot of time goes by.

Meditation practices to help these problems in meditation

Therefore, it says, in this situation, *'Relax body speech and mind and direct your attention to the end of the sky.'* This means, if you can, go into a clear open place, with the sun behind you and the clear blue sky in front of you. Just relax on the out-breath and let your gaze extend into the infinity of the sky. In doing this the mind will integrate with its own ground of infinite spaciousness and these agitating thoughts—which when they are compressed inside you bang into each other and generate a lot of friction—will have a lot of room to move around in and will gradually disperse. This is a very helpful practice to do. In the summer time, if you get a clear sky, it is the quickest way to empty yourself out. You have to be aware, though, that when you do this the return into the normal functioning of your body/mind takes a bit of time, so you shouldn't get into a car and drive it immediately afterwards.

He also suggests that you visualise a 'V' shape which is half of the Tibetan letter 'A' (meaning it emphasises emptiness as well). You imagine this 'V' two fingers just below the navel and imagine it as a holder for a fire. All the obscurations and difficulties you imagine as blocking this central channel—also all the thoughts and concepts that create your sense of self, the five skhandas and so on, all the building blocks of the outer world, all the concepts by which we name everything—you imagine as being like fat. And as the fire burns up, the fat melts and goes into the flame making it rise higher until you have a great inferno and everything is burnt out. And then—there is just emptiness. Now you rest in that state where there is nothing at all.

'Do this repeatedly', he says. This is because, sickness is a very powerful thing; it gives us the sense, 'Poor me. I am so small—this is awful.' That is to say, the symptoms of the physical illness become a limit to our identity. We can become obsessed by them. They seem to be defining who we are. Therefore, something which is arising and temporary now *seems* to be the absolute limit of who you are. This condemns you to being trapped in the state of a finite consciousness and to be limited in your capacity by the presence of this all-powerful object. This is how the world feels from the point of view of attachment and fear.

However, from the point of view of awareness, this sickness, the pains in the body are just temporary arisings. Not only are they impermanent but they have no other source than the mind

itself. Therefore, one fruit of the mind is being persecuted by another fruit of the mind, like siblings fighting and the mother is trying to say, 'Hey, we are in the same family.' If you see your brother or your sister as your enemy then this battle will last a long time. Therefore, the root clarity is to recognise that all things have the nature of emptiness. All things arise from emptiness and never leave it.

Therefore, when we fall away from that and we get caught in the attachment. Using this method of the flame of wisdom, like a *tummo*⁷ flame, to burn it all up is very helpful. Therefore, in this state you have to focus your attention *completely* into the visualisation and bring all the pain and suffering into the matter which is going to be burnt up.

Then he says, '*If the obstacles of sinking, fogginess and stupidity arise so that the mind is repeatedly obscured then control body speech and mind.*' When this occurs you might do the nine-fold breathing that we did earlier and then concentrate on slow diaphragm breathing. You can do some holding, some *khumbaka*, with that if you know how. However, the main thing is to make the breath deep and conscious.

Controlling the mind means simply to return to this state of presence. In order to do that you might do 'Phat' until you can clear a little space in the fogginess. And if you do this very strongly your body will also be tingling and you'll feel more present. And then in the state of *hedewa*, of just shocked openness, you bring your presence into that and remain very present. Your eyes should be bright and shining, very kind of alert. Then, when you feel more vital you can just relax that a little.

Nuden Dorje continues, '*Be diligent in purification practice and in the accumulation of wisdom and merit.*' Although, when we are practicing dzogchen we want to maintain the view of primordial purity and great spaciousness, what is very important is not to cheat yourself by pretending that you are open when you are not. When that is the case then you have to do what you would do according to some of the other systems of buddhism. If you do that then you will be working at the level of capacity. Doing the purification means that if you have a sense that this dullness is due to habits that you have developed, maybe through drinking a lot or talking drugs or wasting your time, then doing purifications through prostrations or Vajrasattva practice is very helpful. Moreover you can develop wisdom and merit through particular kinds of practice. For example, Tibetans would usually chant this particular praise of Manjushri, *Manjushri Nama Sangiti*, which they believe makes the mind very sharp. You can also develop merit through burning butter lamps, setting up your altar, through acts of kindness to people and so on. You can see that all of these are activities. Therefore, if the mind is not capable of very subtle, fine quality attention, then do something more gross. In this way you will then be making use of the state you are in.

All the practices are good. It is not that you go to a Lama and say, 'Oh, what practice should I do?' It is much better if we come to understand the function of the different meditation practices, the variations in our own experience, and then, try to find the most harmonious way of making use of them.

He then continues, '*It is important to complete these two accumulations and offer bliss to the gods who reside in the channels by raising and lowering ones energy.*' This is referring to the developing and completing stages of tantra; that we can visualise the inner channels and at the different chakras are the different deities. By focusing on raising your energy up through these different channels and then down again, the very intense level of sensation that is generated and

⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tummo>

the non-dispersal of it becomes an offering to the gods in the different chakras. It is also a very strengthening way of maintaining your vitality.

The important thing here is that if you have the luck to find this kind of practice and do it that is a good thing. However, if you don't know the practice, then you can do something else. Practices which become very esoteric are not necessarily particularly useful. What is important is that you understand the principle, which is to find some focused clear dharma activity which you can mobilise your energy into. The best dharma practice is the one that you *can* do and the one that you *do* do.

When practicing the naked experience of awareness

He then continues, *'When practicing the naked experience of awareness, the objects of the six senses may manifest. Don't let the mind stray after them.'* This means, for example, if we are meditating here and we hear some noises from outside, just allow the sound to pass through. Or, if you are meditating with your eyes open and you become aware of some image, just relax and allow it to be there and it will change. This means, have confidence in the view. The view says that everything is empty, therefore, stay with the emptiness of the phenomena

'And when the mind is focussed within, remain free of encouraging and inhibiting and all self identification.' This means, for example, if we have a tea break and we go downstairs, you are not focused, as it were, on a 'close-held', kind of, awareness—you are talking with other people. Maybe you start talking to someone and then you think, 'God, this person is boring. I would be much happier talking to someone else.' However, just relax in that moment. Even if you were to talk to the most interesting person in the world, it would be sound and emptiness. This kind of person is offering you a particular form of sound and emptiness.

Therefore, instead of seeking excitement through the content of what the person is saying, attend to the self-liberation of the sound. In that way you won't be seeking after exciting things and keeping away tedious things but will remain open to the other person.

It is that openness which is the real meaning of compassion. Each person is the centre of the universe; each person is a point of the arising of awareness out of emptiness. Their quality of mirror-like lucidity is obscured for them; you, however, do not need to believe their confusion. Remain open to the shining, shimmering quality of the world you inhabit. We shouldn't believe what people tell us about themselves. People are immediately the radiance of the dharmakaya. If you remain in this practice everyone is shining. However, if you go into discriminations these will hook you into your karmic prejudices and you will see people only in terms of whether they fulfil your wishes, or block your wishes. Then your ignorance will feed their ignorance, and their ignorance will feed your ignorance.

He then continues, *'Although the six sense objects may appear, don't be bound by hopes and needs.'* When you approach other people or when you approach any setting, what is your agenda, your shopping list? If you go feeling empty and sad, wanting something, or if you go feeling playful, wanting to find someone to enjoy time with—and you are strongly identified with these positions—you will make choices on that basis which will limit the possibility of the situation returning you to yourself.

What we need to do is hold ourselves very lightly, in the manner of a dream. For example, say you feel lonely—be present with the loneliness. There is nothing to be ashamed of in being lonely. 'I am lonely. I am aware that I am lonely.' In being present with your loneliness you are not conditioned by the loneliness. You don't need to be *only* lonely. You don't need to push it away but in that state, you may phone a friend, meet and spend some time chatting. While you are

sitting in the café, you can be present: you can have some nice chocolate cake and smell the chocolate. You can have the experience of the openness of your awareness and the quality of the chocolate in your nostrils. You can feel the saliva forming in your mouth as your tongue longs to eat this chocolate. And in being present with this you can experience the arising and passing of sensory forms. Not only will your meditation increase but the chocolate will taste better!

A useful practice can be to write down all the aspects of yourself that you have the most difficulty with; things that you might feel ashamed of. Some people feel ashamed of their body. Some people feel ashamed of the way that they speak; maybe they speak too much or are very shy and don't find the words. Some people feel ashamed that they are not successful in the world; maybe they don't have a job or they don't make much money. Some people may feel ashamed of being jealous. Whatever it is you just keep adding to this list. Sometimes we can't recognise it directly but we can see it in a secondary way when we see other people behaving in a certain way and we think, 'Oh my God, how terrible, I wouldn't like to be like that.'

Then go through the list and with each thing you say, 'I am this.' 'I am jealous.', 'I am shy.' etc. Just stay with that and feel what that is. Then you can go into the *Three Aa* practice and sit with the quality of this thing which seems so awful, and directly observe the empty nature of its arising, which becomes an ultimate limit to your happiness. This is not an abstract theory that we are dealing with, this is our own existence.

If dzogchen is saying 'All things from the very beginning are pure,' and we are saying, 'No, this bit is really not pure. It is horrible. I don't want anybody to know this about me,' we are excluding ourselves from our own natural purity. The fact that other people might agree with you, that indeed your quality *is* terrible would be simply for you to make use of *their* limits to reaffirm *your* limits.

Generally speaking, people are full of shit; full of prejudices, bigotry, and nastinesses. This world is full of war. All sorts of armies will have marched through these valleys in the past. We should never doubt the power of the five poisons. However, from the very beginning the five poisons have been empty. **In the practice everything is pure, but the practice of being in the world with others is to be careful. Dzogchen doesn't mean that you should be naive.** You have to be a little clear. Your karma is manifesting, again, not just inside you but also in other people. Other people are your karma, therefore, part of our practice is to integrate other people's bigotry into emptiness. Otherwise, their limitation is likely to provoke an anxiety in you and your ego will adapt into it in order to get a pat on the head from somebody who is a bit of a 'tosser'.

As Nuden Dorje says about these different sense objects that appear, '*For example, however many waves arise in the ocean they are all self arising and self dissolving.*' Every situation that arises for you will pass away. If you think back in your life to times which have been truly awful; they have gone. They always go. This is just a fact of life. And the good times; they also have gone. Nothing endures. Therefore, if you over-intensify a particular moment you simply increase your own suffering.

As with this lovely image here, when you are by the sea or a lake and it is a windy day, just observe the little waves moving on the water—rippling and rippling. Observe that your own mind is just like that; there is no stability. Again and again see for yourself how you turn something which is moving, into something fixed. For example, when an arising hits the wall of your limit, it seems to get compacted so that it becomes very dense. Therefore, when we say, 'I can't bear it', that wall that we erect to try and avoid the experience doesn't stop the traffic from coming. In fact, it gets packed more and more together until you feel, 'Oh my God! This is terrible, unbearable.' However, it is your own resistance, the force that you are applying *against* the

situation, which has intensified your felt sense of the reality of the situation. Therefore, again and again it is about releasing and allowing experience to arise and pass through.

Avoid storing up thoughts

He continues, '*For whatever thoughts arise, if you can really avoid storing them up then at that time you will be abiding in the state of the higher calm abiding.*' That is to say, be careful of your punctuation. For example, if somebody is angry with you and listing your faults, each time they say something don't put in a full stop, just put in a comma. In that way the experience is lighter, 'Oh yeah, oh yeah, all these big bad things.' They all go together in one. However, if you take each point seriously then it will impact you and you will feel a need to justify yourself. The fact is this person is angry and they are entitled to be angry. However, you have a choice of what to do with that anger. If you make it solid it will impact you in a solid way and the likelihood of your reactivity is greatly increased.

For example, we know that if you are in a relationship with someone and you start to have a fight, there can be so many memories from years back of things the person has done wrong. You start to pull these up, '... and five years ago when I had to go and visit *your* mother, she said ... and you never spoke up for me ...' This is what happens when things are stored up and not allowed to go. It doesn't mean you ignore what the other person is saying. You can be very present and open to the person and really give them the sense that you are hearing what they are saying. Nevertheless you don't hang on to it, don't take it seriously. If you allow what is being said to liberate then you will remain open, and in that openness you can find a way to respond out of the person's situation and your own capacity.

When Nuden Dorje uses the term '*higher calm abiding*' this means to be able to stay calm in the face of interaction. For example, if somebody is angry with you, they might say something which hurts you. If you are calm and present with yourself, you know you're hurt, and you know the hurt is going. So now what? There is some possibility: you could retaliate; you could stay relaxed; you could provide some compensation for the other person's grief. There are lots of options. However, if you have fused *into* the hurt, if you are now 'hurt' you are not so available to hear their anger, to hear their pain. In this way, you are then more likely to respond to them from *your* pain. This has lots of disadvantages because now you are caught up in a narrow state. You are allowing yourself to be defined by a momentary experience. Inside this blinkered moment you say many things which are not very useful in the wider context of your life *and* you are overheating the other person. It is very common for people not to recognise that what *they* feel as an authentic communication is experienced by the other as a provocation. Maintaining the view means that space and relaxation is more important than anything else.

Participant: This sounds a little too simple because pain often comes from experiences of your early childhood and the childhood of the other person involved.

James: If you sit for long periods in meditation gradually all the memories of this life and previous lives will start to come up. You become more conscious of particular constellations. Also on an outer level, if you are doing a purification practice like Dorje Sempa you may consciously be thinking of all your errors and faults of this life. This practice is purifying the 'object-relations matrix' in your own mind so that you encounter people in a more fresh way, without these layers of conditioning which unconsciously model and mould you.

However, generally speaking, if things stay in the unconscious we don't need to worry about them. The issue is where they impinge, where they make contact. Of course, from a buddhist

point of view if you take the bodhisattva vow and you do *tonglen*⁸ you have already taken the unconscious of all beings into yourself. Therefore, there *is* a lot of stuff around and at that point it doesn't really matter whose stuff it is, or where it is coming from. Our task is again and again just to observe it passing by. However, the fact is that this stuff is sticky. All its little velcro hooks are going out and all our karmic tendencies are hooking on as well.

From the point of view of dzogchen the most important and most helpful thing is not to block arisings. Don't try to edit out before it arises, but by maintaining fresh clarity you optimally promote the self-liberation of arising. However, unless we have some capacity for calmness and clarity this will be impossible. A conceptual intention is not going to be enough. This is why in meditation it is important for us to practice the liberation of our own arising thoughts.

If it is not possible to liberate our own thoughts when we are sitting on a cushion it will be very difficult to liberate them in the hot situation of an energised interaction with someone else!

Clarity free of the waves of movement and recollection

Nuden Dorje now says, *'If thoughts manifest, then they will manifest as the great play of pristine cognition.'* When you experience yourself, your awareness, as infinity there is no other source for anything. Then whatever arises is simply the play or the movement of this state of awareness.

'With the gradual experience of the mind itself there is clarity free of the waves of movement and recollection.' That is to say, clarity is resolved as the state of the mirror, and within this state, the movement of thought, feeling, sensation, the body and so on. 'Recollection' here means calling oneself back to a particular understanding of who one is; you find that you have strayed off into something and so you pull yourself back.

That is no longer necessary if you are always present. So, not only are you no longer falling into tracking the movement but also you don't have to pull yourself back from the movement.

'And with the natural clarity of this, self-expression is unceasing as shining radiance.' This means that in this state of natural clarity whatever occurs is directly seen as the self-expression of the clarity and so is experienced as shining radiance.

For example, you feel a kind of dull or humiliating emotion, perhaps envy. If you can relax into the state of openness, as the envy arises it is not coming to visit you from somewhere else—since you are not located in any particular place. The infinity of the awareness allows you to see that this envy is arising from emptiness. It looks terrible but it's actually lovely.

Halloween is an autumn festival where children dress up as ghosts and demons and go out knocking on people's doors. They put on masks or paint their faces and go 'Wooh!' They want to be very terrifying but really they are just sweet little children. It is the same with these thoughts which look so terrible and seem so unbearable. Actually, they are just the sweet children of emptiness; they are the children of the dharmakaya.

When you observe thoughts from this point of view, they are a shining radiance even though they may appear to be dull. That is to say, the 'shining radiance quality' is not, as it were, the semantic or the overt content; it is the very process of the movement of revelation. It is the relationship with the ground that indicates it is a radiance, not the fact that it looks polished.

⁸ <http://www.bodhicitta.net/TONGLEN.htm>

Therefore Nuden Dorje says, *“This is the essential point of entering the meditative balance of the union of emptiness and clear energy.”* Meditative balance means being in a profound state of undisturbed meditation. In this state the emptiness, or the openness, of the mind is inseparable from the clarity which is revealed as the energy-flow of many different things arising, sensations and so on.

‘Although beginners will experience a ceaseless flow of thought, their many faults will gradually, spontaneously, be pacified and remain for only an instant.’ This means, don’t worry. You just continue in the practice. Many thoughts come but don’t worry about that. Each thought that comes offers the opportunity for seeing the relation between the thought and its ground. Through time you will see the spontaneity of the self-pacification of these thoughts, that is to say, their intensity will decline. This is not, however, the intensity of their energetic form but the intensity of the way they seem to grab you. It takes time for it to occur but when it does occur, it always occurs spontaneously or suddenly. It is not that it will gradually get better, but that you shift from one place to another. It took me many days to walk to the French border, but with one step, spontaneously, I was in France. Like that.

That is the introduction to stillness (gnas), movement (‘gyu) and awareness (rig)

He continues, *‘Thus, as with the faults of the outer objects like sounds, thoughts come and this is known as movement.’* That is to say, something is going on. *‘The understanding that discriminates between movement and stillness is known as recollection. That is the introduction to stillness (gnas), movement(‘gyu) and awareness (rig).’*

That is to say, awareness, when it rests in itself is stillness and, awareness when it reveals its own energy, is movement.

Openness [dang], clarity [rolpa] and dynamic radiance [tsal]

Awareness has these three qualities of energy, or how it shows itself. The **openness** of energy reveals many different forms, like a crystal ball taking on different coloration when it is put on different kinds of cloth. For example, when we do the *Three Aa* practice and we are immediately open, this whole world is instantly in our awareness. This is the quality known in Tibetan as *dang*. Awareness also shows itself as the **clarity** of the mirror, the capacity of the mirror to show different images and reflections. Therefore, when you sit in meditation many thoughts, feelings and sensations arise and pass away. This is called *rolpa*. And when we take this quality of meditation into the world and are talking with other people, looking at them and having precise interactions moment-by-moment, this is like light shining into a crystal and refracting into different rays. That is to say, that the infinity of our potential is manifesting in *this* moment in *this* particular way. The fact that I am manifesting in this way doesn’t condition or limit me to always be like this. It is just part of the **dynamic radiance** of the energy of awareness. This is called *tsal* in Tibetan.

These three qualities of movement, then, occur simultaneously and without altering the unchanging openness. Therefore, attending to the difference between stillness and movement allows one not to get caught in the movement and this is called ‘recollection’ (*Here ‘recollection’ is used in a higher way to mean recollection of the state of presence.*)

He continues, *‘Sometimes there is great stillness and then some movement occurs. Do not pursue the movement but maintain the recollection.’* The recollection is again and again back to the ground, back to the state of presence. *‘Do this again and again.’*

'Moreover, don't look at the good qualities of stillness and the problems of movement.' It is not that one is good and the other is bad. Rather, because we have been biased, because we have been over-connected to the level of the dimension of movement, in order to re-balance ourselves, we need to pay more attention to stillness. However, that doesn't make stillness better than movement.

'To stay on awareness, on clarity, is the natural mode.' Natural mode here is something similar to the dharmakaya. It means just how things are; the most basic uncontrived, un-adapted state. Movement is the manifest mode; that is to say that movement takes us out into connection. This is like nirmanakaya. Clarity is the radiant mode. This is seeing the living potential of things arising in the manner of a dream. These three aspects are called *ngowo*, *rangshin* and *tukje*. The fulfilment and the integration of these is buddhahood itself.

So he says, *'Thus, there is not even a hair's worth of difference between good and bad thoughts.'* That is there is no basis for discriminating between the two.

If this is not realised and one has attachments to good thoughts and bad thoughts

He continues, *'If this is not realised and one has attachments to good thoughts and bad thoughts, then if one likes to be involved in the experience of emptiness, one will be born in the formless realm. If one likes to be involved in the experience of happiness, one will be reborn in the realms of desire. And if one pursues or is involved in the experience of clarity, one will be reborn in the form realm.'* This is quite condensed. It means if you don't relax into the state of openness then even if you meditate a lot you will find yourself caught up in three particular kinds of experience. These experiences are called *nyam* and there are different descriptions of these.

Here he is saying that the *nyam* of emptiness, or the absence of thought—which is one of the states that you can enter in meditation—will lead to re-birth in the highest realm of samsara where there is no activity at all. If in meditation you experience a lot the *nyam* of happiness, *dewa*, you will be reborn in these desire realms which are the realms of the form gods, where all good things are present. If you are involved in the *nyam* of the meditation experience of clarity, you will be born into the form realm in any of the lower aspects of samsara: the lower god realms, the *asuras*, the humans, animals, *pretas* and hell realms.

Now, you might think, 'Hang on a minute. Nuden Dorje is talking about clarity all the time and clarity is supposed to be very good but now it seems that clarity gets you in a bad state!' The central issue here is integration. All the qualities that exist are themselves inseparable from the ground but if attention wavers for a moment and you forget the integration with the ground, then these qualities seem to be self-existing. You can see that with some meditators. Some are very calm, others are smiling blissfully and other people become very sharp and clear. There is a subtle identification. Thus, Patrul Rinpoche in his commentary on the *'Three statements of Garab Dorje'*, says, 'The yogi develops his meditation by destroying it.' If the root of all things is emptiness, by destroying them, by using *'Phat'* very strongly and clearly and cutting off the level of manifestation, everything will be revealed as emptiness. However, when we don't trust emptiness, when we believe that this experience which is arising is *our* experience and we want to hang on to it and become attached to it, then the idea of putting it into emptiness is terrible.

However, meditation shows us the dynamic nature of the world and when things are dynamic it means that they don't stop. There is, in the Christian tradition, a God who works for six days and on the seventh day he rests. However, there is holiday for the Buddha. Awareness means to be present. If you are not present you are absent.

Therefore, everything what looks like a lovely motel with a sauna and some very nice food, actually, is the motel from the American movie *'Psycho'*. There is no safe place except here and now. Therefore, experiences you can have in meditation which *are good* can become bad if you take them.

We can live without pockets. Become like the primitive people, like aborigines. There will always be berries along the road, living moment-by-moment; living in the present and not trying to hold on to something.

The experience of bliss that cannot be changed or removed

He continues, *'If one is free of the bewildering movements that arise like that and practises clarity for a long time, then there is emptiness. In the state of that natural condition with the experience of bliss that cannot be changed or removed, one should peacefully stay for a long time.'* 'Practicing clarity' means not resting in it but keeping your attention just on this shimmering evolution, moment-by-moment of all phenomena. As you experience the self-liberation of the phenomena, because you are present with them, you see their innate emptiness. With this quality of presence, as you experience it filling and emptying though time with images, you experience that it is also empty. This then gives rise to a complete contentment, a satisfaction.

This is the *'bliss that cannot be changed or removed'*. It doesn't mean bliss in terms of a state of excitation but just an absolute fulfilment. This is the great perfection, the great completion. This is *dzogpachenpo*, the completion through emptiness.

Therefore he says, *'One should stay peacefully in this state for a long time.'* 'For a long time' means forever—because what is better than this? This is what Garab Dorje says in his *'Three statements'*: first you have to find yourself in that state; secondly, you have to become fully convinced that there is nothing better than this, that this is truly how things are; and thirdly, you have to continue in this way, not imagining that there is anything better.

Nuden Dorje continues, *'The ceaseless arising of thoughts as the power of awareness is clarity.'* This is the fruit. You now see there is no thought which has any ground other than this open clarity, and so you will never be caught by anything. This is called *shardrol*: liberation on the point of arising. This is because it is arising from emptiness, into emptiness, as emptiness. Then all activities arise and pass and the mind is open.

Recognise the basis of these things which are to be purified

He continues, *'Hopes for these experiences and sadness at ending and dispersal, and not seeing the primordial purity of the essence of the meditation—the point is to recognise the basis of these things which are to be purified.'* Hopes and fears; what is their basis? Their basis is not recognising the natural condition. Don't pursue them; they have nothing to show you. Simply relax into the practice through the out-breath or the *Three Aas* or any of the many methods, and rest in the state of openness. If you feel that you have gone wrong, simply return to the correct way.

This is very similar to the most basic instruction in *shiné* practice. If you are observing the breath, and have your attention on the breath and your mind wanders off, as soon as you recognise that you simply bring it back to the breath. Blaming yourself for having getting lost or trying to work out why you got lost, is a waste of time. It is exactly the same with this level of practice. Self-pity, hopelessness, great ambition; all of these are cul-de-sacs, all of these are just ideas which are arising and will vanish.

The way to purify all these problems of meditation is simply to return and relax into the natural condition. If you pull the leaves off a tree it may gradually die but if you cut the root, you have really killed it. We want to cut the root of samsara and the quickest way to do this is to replant it in nirvana. Therefore, relax into the practice.

He then says, *'Thus, if there is the bewilderment of many thoughts, in the knowledge of pacifying of outer and inner dispersal in its own place, abide clearly without contrivance. This is the real nature of calm abiding.'* This *'calm abiding'* is made up of these two words: *zhi* and *nay* (zhi gnas). *Zhi* means to pacify and *nay* means to stay. How do we pacify all these outer and inner dispersals, the many different thoughts and turbulences that occur? By doing nothing—leave them alone. They are self pacified. Then you abide clearly without contrivance; you don't need to do anything artificial. This is the real nature of this shiné. Trust in the calmness of the mind, don't do anything and all troubles will be pacified by themselves.

He continues, *'On the ground of this natural condition, without modification or adulteration, the powerful un-obscured expression of awareness is seen directly and this is the introduction to insight (Lhag mthong).'* *Lhag* in Tibetan means superior or best and *thong* means to see. On the *'ground of this natural condition'* means that by merging yourself in emptiness itself, without doing anything artificial, no modification, adulteration, not adding or mixing anything to anything else, the powerful un-obscured expression of awareness is seen directly. This *'un-obscured'* and *'powerful expression'* is all manifestation. Having a cup of coffee, walking down the road, chatting with fiends, this is nothing but the powerful and un-obscured, uninterrupted, expression of awareness; awareness which is grounded in emptiness. Therefore, this *lhathong* or *vipassana*, in Pali, here means something different from the theravadin tradition point of view. It means to directly see the non-duality of the ground open awareness and its clarity as the movement of all things.

'Thus, for whichever of the afflictions arise, be it aversion, attraction, stupidity and so on, and for whatever thoughts arise, good or bad, do not inhibit them. Do not see them as enemies. Do not evaluate them. Their real nature has been empty from the very beginning and they do not go beyond that. So it is very important to develop your ability to abide in spontaneity free of grasping.' This means, don't be afraid of how things are. You, on the level of the ego, are not the boss. People blame you but it is not your fault. You just happen to find yourself wandering around in this state of confusion. Why would you not make mistakes? Be kind to yourself. Be kind to others. And accept, 'I am stupid', 'I am angry', 'I am full of desire.', 'I am lost.' Now what? So what? You are simply accepting how you have been always. Everyone else knows it; no-one is going to be surprised. These things happen, you haven't died yet because of them. Don't worry about them. Just let them be. Whatever thoughts arise, whatever kinds of things we normally see as poisons, don't inhibit them. Don't try to block them. Don't try to protect yourself from them. Do not see them as enemies. 'But I feel persecuted by them. I don't want to be like this.' Who is the one who doesn't want to be like that? It is the one who tries to invent himself. The ego is always unnatural; inventing, retelling its story, trying to become other than it is. When a small child tells you that, really they are superman, we can enjoy this as a game but also understand that this is a compensation for the fact that they know they are not very powerful at all. The ego is not very strong. And when it makes claims to total responsibility all it does is make a bigger prison for itself. Therefore, the basic starting point is not how we would *like* to be but how we *are*. And if we can see how we are, accept how we are, then we can look more precisely at how we are and then start to see that actually we are not really what we are. That is to say, although, I might be jealous, I am not always jealous and my open potential is not conditioned or defined by the jealousy which arises from time-to-time.

Therefore, with all of these experiences we have to stay close to them and find out what they are. Otherwise we are like a child saying, 'Oh, I don't like spinach. I am not going to eat it.' And the mother says, 'Well, you have never tried it.' 'Yes, but I know I don't like it—it's yukki!' In that way, we do the same. We don't actually know what these states are; we haven't really been with them. We have had only half the experience of our anger, half the experience of our pride. Therefore, if we allow ourselves to fully experience them, stay present with them without getting wrapped up inside, our presence will remain and they will go free. And in going free they will increase our clarity. Therefore, it would be ridiculous to say that something which is so helpful is our enemy. They only appear as our enemy because we don't know how to be with them. Therefore, we shouldn't stand in judgement or evaluation of them. The judge implies a particular kind of perspective: standing back with a kind of cold distance; looking objectively. However, this objective gaze from a meditation point of view is not very helpful. Rather, we want to have a welcoming but uncontaminated openness. And in that state you don't have to work out what things are because you will feel it, it is palpable: if you feel jealousy it comes up through the body and you feel this process, this dynamic movement.

So he says, '*So it is very important to develop your ability to abide in spontaneity free of grasping.*' This means that the more you relax and trust the openness with its attendant clarity then you can trust the spontaneous flow of the energy of this awakened state. You don't have to plan so much. You don't have to plan how you will speak to that person; what will I say. By abiding in the non-duality of all manifestation, on the level of your expression or manifestation into the world, you are inseparable from the one you are speaking to. By allowing yourself to feel the full presence of the other person, words will arise.

In the fresh, naked, raw, openness of the dharmakaya, energy arises spontaneously into the field of interaction which is always within the mirror. Therefore, on this level, you can trust how you are. Of course, this doesn't mean being impulsive, it doesn't mean being delinquent. If your tax return has to be in by a certain date then that is what you have to do and it also can be spontaneous. You can find yourself fresh within that situation too.

Why be burdened by actuality? 'Oh, I hate doing that.' Being in your hatred may also be part of your spontaneity but just doing your tax very easily and sending it in, is also spontaneous. The key difference between being spontaneous and being karmically wrapped up is that in the latter there is a lot of internal commentary. Whatever is happening, just stay present with that. In that way you do what is required in the moment. Thinking, 'Oh, I'll do it tomorrow,' is already a conceptual move. If something is there, you do it.

[C R Lama and people with broken hands](#)

C. R. Lama always used to say that he didn't like people with broken hands, meaning, people who only talked. He liked people who would do things. If something needs doing, you do it and then it is done. In that way life is very simple. Time-wasting is binding into time. When you don't do something then you have got to remember that you haven't done it. You put it into the future but now you can't be in the present because you have to remember that the future thing belongs in the past!

[How making effort will bind you](#)

The text continues with a quotation from the *Thal Gyur*.

*All the thoughts that can possibly arise
Are self-liberated like a knotted snake tossed in the air.*

*Knowing what is to be abandoned,
They seek the antidote elsewhere,
Those yogis who, having the hopes regarding benefits and
Difficulties, are bound by duality.*

This means that even experienced meditators, even people called yogis, can take the wrong turning. The first two lines express just the simple actuality that all thoughts, all sensations, emotions, the body and so on, all of this is self-liberating in the way a knotted snake, if tossed in the air, would untie itself in an instant. However, even yogis who know what is to be abandoned, abandon the pure view. That is to say, they come to the point where they believe they know what the problem is and they feel empowered to apply an antidote. This move may empower their ego but it takes them far from dzogchen practice.

In seeing the faults of meditation as the enemy they seek to apply the antidote of corrective practice. By wanting good experiences and wanting the absence of bad experience they find themselves bound by duality.

What this means is that it is easy to get lost. This is because it *seems* like a kind of stupidity to experience a 'dull state of mind' as being as useful as a 'clear state of mind'. It seems self-evident that life is better and you are closer to enlightenment if your mind feels bright and shiny and you feel good in yourself. When your mind feels dull and confused and you don't know what you are doing, it seems very natural to think, *'This is a sign my meditation is not going well. I am very far away from enlightenment.'*

However, the mind's nature has been enlightened from the very beginning; enlightenment is not a construct, it is not created by an accumulation of good thoughts. The mind—as we have been looking all the way through this text—is the source of all thoughts. This would be like a mother having a prejudicial relationship with her children; forgetting that these children come from her and liking this one more than another because of their superficial qualities. All experience is the child, the fruit, the exuberance, the self-expression of this open dimension of awareness.

Therefore, the text says, *'Experience the primordial liberation from that false effort!'* That is to say, the effort that you make to free yourself, will bind you. By not making effort to free yourself you will realise that from the very beginning you have always been free.

The text continues, *'Thus as regards the objects of the five senses in which are sought antidotes for the afflictions which are to be abandoned, if you maintain spontaneity no matter what grasping thoughts arise then there is self-liberation of the objects of the six senses.'* For example, maybe you do something very bad and you decide, 'Oh, I need to purify this by accumulating some merit. I will go on a pilgrimage to Mount Kailash and because this is a very holy place and very difficult to get to, I will get a lot of merit.' This is looking to an object of the five senses to find an antidote. However, as your vehicle drives across the wilderness of Tibet, the windscreen becomes a great cemetery as hundred and then thousands of insects are crushed on it. Therefore, in order for you to accumulate *your* merit, many beings have to die. Of course, prayer and pilgrimage is an important part of spiritual practice. However, it is primarily for allowing you to centre, to be focused, to open your heart in faith.

Therefore, if you look on the dharma teaching as an antidote, then you become focused on the problem and its antidote. It is not that this is wrong; it is just that it is not very efficient. It takes a very long time and life is very short. Therefore, rather than chasing for antidotes to a problem why not look directly at the nature of the problem.

Therefore rather than looking to these antidotes, *'...if you maintain spontaneity, no matter what grasping thoughts arise, there is self-liberation of the objects of the six senses...'* 'Spontaneity' here is the freshness of the mind, the fact that each moment something new is possible. If you stay on that bright shining edge without investing thoughts, without being caught up in them, without developing a story—'I am a bad and sinful person. I don't know how to meditate. I need to do this.'—then in that state all these objects of the six senses go free by themselves. What you hear with your ears, arises and passes. What you smell with your nose, arises and passes. You live in the world as it is, vibrant, integrated, pulsating, with you as a full participant, free of the veil of conceptual identification, relaxed and free from the intensity of impulsivity. This is the mind remaining in its state of openness while all objects are self-liberated.

Of course, part of the reason of explaining this text is that we are fortunate enough to be interested in the practice of dzogchen. In practicing dzogchen you can also practice all the other different styles of buddhism. However, it is important to recognise the actual qualities of each path. There are real benefits in going on pilgrimage; however, the real benefit is if you can maintain a state of awareness all through the pilgrimage.

He continues, *'Whatever good thoughts and bad thoughts arise, do not pursue them in search of benefit or harm. Practice the state of the one who develops happy or sad thoughts.'* This verb here, *'develops'* is not a strong active verb; it means the person who finds themselves developing these thoughts. Again and again it is saying the same: don't chase after thoughts, don't try to have more good thoughts than bad thoughts, but just allow them to develop as they do and then they will vanish.

Then it says, *'Meditation abides in its own place. Thoughts manifest and recollection is held.'* Settle into the practice and you don't imagine that there is something better somewhere else. Recognise that just staying relaxed and open is better than saying a mantra, better than praying for a blessing, better than going to get an initiation from a high lama... When you do this, then thoughts manifest, but recollection is held. That is to say, whatever arises you see directly as the fruit of the dharmakaya.

He continues, *'For example, it is easy for one man to perform the three activities of going, sleeping and sitting. Similarly you must realise that the reality of these three (abiding, manifesting and recollection) is their inseparability in one nature.'* Therefore, we are calm and open, many thoughts are manifesting, including the ways in which we move into the world with others, and we are always present. These three operate together.

The traditional image for this is a *gakyil*⁹ (which is like a yin/yang symbol but made of three swirling points); they circle their unbroken integration and these three modes pulsate together. Because we have been wandering in samsara we have a tendency to privilege manifestation. Therefore, through the practice we enter into the state of abiding and develop the capacity for the recollection, which is to hold the manifestation and the abiding together. And in that way we remain awake in the state of non-duality.

Calm abiding and insight have one nature

Nuden Dorje continues, *'Calm abiding, which is the pacification of all thoughts in their own place, and insight, which is directly seeing awareness, have one nature.'* This means that the meditation that you do must be brought together: don't just focus on having calmness, don't just focus on insight and clarity; the stillness and clarity have to be brought together. And when they

⁹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gankyil>

are integrated then you understand, as he continues to say, that, *'All the possible appearances of the energy of the ground are self-liberating.'* There is not one phenomenon in the whole of samsara which is not self-liberating.

Very often in the West we imagine that the remembrance of things is the best protection against their repetition; that if we remember the tragedies of war it will protect us in some way. However, there is no evidence that this is the case. The people who make wars—the politicians who want power and the soldiers who need promotion—have a very different view of war. Remembering what happened in the wars and remembering how much pain and suffering there was doesn't stop soldiers going to war and killing people.

Therefore, from this point of view of dzogchen, it is not about building up histories and understandings and complex analyses of situations, which helps us be more simple and straightforward. Rather, just come completely into the moment. Because, in the direct moment when you directly see someone's face, how could you kill them? The person I kill is my enemy but 'enemy' is a concept. I want to kill them because 'they are terrorists', because 'they are the Taliban', because 'they are Americans' but the person who is in front of you, from the very beginning, has been a radiant form of awareness. 'American' or 'Taliban' is just some temporary clothing they are wearing.

This is the basis of ethics in the practice of dzogchen. It is not to be carried away by interpretative structures and naming but to stay with the immediate freshness of the living situation. And in that way, we can see that all forms are the energy of the ground and that they are self-liberating.

C R Lama, the thief, and his wife

When C R Lama was doing a retreat in Tsopema a thief came to the house and took many of their precious possessions. His wife who was living with him wanted him to go to the police. C R Lama said, 'Don't you believe in karma? Karma will punish the thief. It is not my job. Let it go.' That is much nicer. Otherwise you have hopes and fears and become involved in sending someone to prison—and all of this because 'we want justice'. However, if we understand karma, if somebody robs us, this is the result of some previous action from ourselves. Who are the criminals? Who are the bad guys? It is impossible to discriminate. Understanding that everything has this pure nature, stay relaxed and open.

'To express this in its briefest form: stillness and movement, recollection and awareness, good or bad thoughts, however they arise, do not make them separate! Don't enter into inhibiting or encouraging, rejecting or accepting. In the state free of appearance and interpretation directly maintain awareness and emptiness. When thoughts arise it is very important not to err in terms of the instructions.' Therefore, always avoid duality. Samsara begins with duality: when subject and object go separate, when there is grasping to 'I', 'me', 'myself' and the rejection of everything else as 'other'. Then this orphan-self has to fend for itself and it becomes desperate and employs many different methods. Yet, from the very beginning everything has existed in a state of non-duality.

That is why in the Nyingma tradition they talk of the first level of ignorance *lhanchig kyepai marigpa* [Tib. lhan cig skyes pa'i ma rig pa], the ignorance which is born together. What is it that is born together? Openness and closure; primordial purity and confusion. The confusion arises from the ground but the confusion says, 'I am my own master.'

It is often said in the tradition that there is one ground and two paths. One path leads to the recognition of the ground as the ground of everything. The other path leads to seeing manifestation as being self-existing, as consisting of true entities which are the ground in

themselves. This second path is always inseparable from the ground. The path hasn't come out of the ground, you haven't actually gone anywhere. If a teenager says, when they are angry, 'You are not my parents, I don't like you,' that doesn't make you not their parents. The child's desire to be autonomous, the child's desire to invent their own life doesn't mean they have no ground, no root which is their parents. The ground of samsara, the ground of all phenomena, is exactly the same as the ground of nirvana. Therefore, recognising this ground, we relax the tension of separation and isolation and see that everything arises together.

And so he says, *'...stillness and movement, recollection and awareness, good or bad thoughts, however they arise, do not make them separate!'* Don't go into discriminating; don't set one thing up as high and another as low.

When he says here, *'In the state free of appearance...'* it means making things solidly real; seeing nouns, seeing entities. And *'interpretation'* means adverbs and adjectives; making sense of things. Therefore, he is saying 'don't enter into that. Just maintain awareness and emptiness.' The best function of your intelligence will be realised through re-integrating it into the ground.

For example, sometimes domestic cats run off into nature. We call them feral cats. These cats have to use a lot of intelligence to work out how to live in a difficult situation. Before, someone was putting out milk and opening cans of rabbit meat and so on for them. Now, they are happy if they can find a little field mouse. What a lot of intelligence for so little result. Better to remember the way home and climb in the window, sit in front of the fire, be covered in love and have good food regularly! In the same way, this is the nature of us in samsara: we use all our intelligence to survive in the wilderness, and yet, home is available. Therefore, the intelligence that's applied to surviving actually keeps you from finding your way home.

Maintain the recollection of distinction

He then says, *'In this way for whatever appears or arises maintain the recollection of distinction and stay with it however it is, and thus keep the meditative balance.'* Again, *'distinction'* here doesn't mean a dualistic separation. It means to recognise that the arising form is none other than emptiness. That is to say, what is distinctive of all phenomena is their integration of the ground, not the surface discrimination of being 'this' or 'that'. If you do this then the mind will remain settled in its own place because it will trust that these thoughts will just go back to their own place.

Thoughts go back to base: metaphor of cows

For example, you can sometimes see on a farm that there are very well disciplined cows. They go out in the morning, walk about in the field and eat a lot. And then at a certain point they turn around and go, one-by-one, back to be milked. Nobody had to go and chase them. In the same way, this is how thoughts are: they just go back to base. Therefore, it is really about trusting. However, you have to do the practice enough in order to be able to trust it.

He then continues, *'Then practise with the knowledge that has a natural confidence in the unwavering unchanging real nature so that there is the consequent gain of the unchanging mutability of movement and recollection.'* This little paragraph is bringing together two concepts: one, is what is called in Tibetan *'nyam shak'* [Tib. mnyam bshag] which means 'being settled in the state of meditation'; not being disturbed. And the second is *je top* [Tib. rjes-top] which is the experience that arises when you take your meditation out into the world and you have complex interactions. Therefore, in the first state while doing your sitting practice don't be disturbed by the many different forms that arise; recognise they all have the same nature. Then, from that,

you develop a stable confidence that this state is unchanging no matter what is happening, so as you move from your meditation into your encounter in the world you are able to stay present with this changing mutability of all forms without trying to control or correct them.

He continues, '*In this way wavering thoughts lead to lack of thought after which is an empty space in which thought manifest—so really understand this, whatever thoughts appear.*' **If you stay with the various kinds of thoughts and sensations that arise, when you stay present with them they move into a space where there is no thought. That is to say, you follow the thought back into its own ground, which is the empty space in which thoughts manifest.**

Therefore, at first it is like the cows going from the milking shed out to the field and back to the milking shed. However, now you start to see that this ground-empty-space *and* the movement of the thought are not two separate things. Rather, the thought's movement is always in the empty space because there is no limit to the empty space; there is no border post that you go from to the other. Therefore, when that occurs, then you have a freedom which arises. Now, you have the non-dual inseparability of emptiness and form.

So he says, '*Maintain instant, direct experience without residue.*' If you are riding a motor bike very fast on a wet day you have to be in the moment. If you go round a corner and you think, 'Oh, my god that was very dangerous!' while you are still in your thoughts, then when you go around another corner you get a whack. You can also see this in sport. If I watch Wimbledon on television I can see the tennis players' faces very clearly. When a player makes a bad shot or loses their serve, you often see that they get perturbed; they get lost in themselves. This is usually a sign that they are going to lose the match. The tennis players that tend to be successful just keep going: next ball, next ball... In that way they are 'just there'. Once you start thinking about the past, you are already out of it. You can't mobilise your whole energy through your body to serve if you are worried about what you did. Therefore, it means exactly that: no '*residue*'. Don't go after past thoughts. Don't worry about mistakes. That time has already gone. What about now and now and now... Therefore, that is what it means by '*instant*' and '*direct*'; it means *fully* in this moment and the next moment—whatever the situation is.

Then the next sentence says, '*Maintain self-liberation.*' This is the same thing: if you stay present with something it will go. If you chase it or try to avoid it, it will remain. Your presence will be lost and you will go on a long journey.

So then he says, '*Don't mix this up with effortful activity.*' This means that if you really understand this and you really *trust* this, you don't have to have a parachute. You don't need a safety net. You don't need to do any prostrations. You don't need to do go on a pilgrimage. You don't need to light another butter lamp. You don't need to do any mantra. That is, if you understand it and if you put it into practice.

The danger of running different styles of practice at the same time is that you don't really understand or trust non-duality. 'I need to do more preparation practice.' What is it you need to prepare? 'Well, I am not ready. I get confused all the time.' Who gets confused? 'I do.' Who are you? Have a look. Then you are doing dzogchen. It is not so complicated.

However, if you say, 'It's too much for me. I can't do it' and ask some lama they will say, 'You must do Dorje Sempa because clearly you have many sins from your past life. Dzogchen is a very high practice and you are a very low person and you don't want to cheat yourself. I would be cheating you if I was to say you should do that. You better do your *ngondro*¹⁰ because without

¹⁰ A sequence of preparatory meditation practices

preparation how can you get there?’ But where do you want to get? To the place where you already are!

Why understanding the view is so very important [James]

Understanding the view is very important. That is why we are spending this whole weekend looking at this text in order to understand the view. If you really understand the view and you take it into your practice it will give you the confidence to know that you are not cheating yourself. Then if some Tibetan lama says, ‘These western people, I don’t know what they are doing. They don’t understand these things.’ you will know that this is sound and emptiness, this is dorje wa wa [Laughter in room]. And there are many people selling ‘dorje wa wa’.

Therefore, stay close to your own practice. This is the pure tradition which has come from Padmasambhava. If you trust it, it is very helpful.

From the very beginning everybody has ‘buddha nature’. This is not just as a potential; the fulfilment of the Buddhas’ qualities has been there unobstructed from the very beginning. Your primordial purity is always already there with you. Therefore, trusting this and doing the practice, you don’t have to do anything else. Of course, you can do every other dharma practice as the exploration of energy of movement. We have to do something. You can walk about, you can take your dog for a walk, you can go to the cinema, or you can do your puja. These are all forms of movement. If you integrate the movement into the ground it doesn’t matter what kind of movement you do. The main thing is to understand the non-duality of stillness and movement.

That is why Nuden Dorje says, ‘*don’t mix this up with effortful activity.*’ Effortful activity seeks to improve some things and to block some other things. This arises from the view that merit and wisdom should be increased and obstacles and sins and obscurations should be decreased. This is an authentic view, but it is not the view of dzogchen.

Therefore, he says, ‘*Keep a direct knowledge of this in yourself.*’ This means you don’t need to imagine your guru on the top of your head, you don’t need to imagine some seed syllable in the middle of your heart. If you live this then all the Buddhas will be happy and all the dharma teachers that you ever met will be happy. All your vows will be fulfilled and all your samayas will be kept. The function of all the dharma practices is to bring you to exactly this point.

This, then, is the main thing to maintain by day and by night, sitting on your cushion and in moving through the world.

The results of following Nuden Dorje’s instructions

He then says, ‘*Whoever meets with this instruction will be one with good karma and opportunity. If it is realised in the morning, one will be a Buddha in the morning. If it is realised at night, one will be a Buddha at night.*’ There is a term *chig char* [Tib. chig-char] which means instant or sudden and this practice of dzogchen is exactly that—if you get it, you get it. It is not a preparation for anything else. There is nothing higher than this; there is nowhere else to go. The various techniques of dzogchen: the *semdzin* practices, *thogal* and so on, are all ways of helping to support this understanding. However, they don’t take you to any other place; they resource this kind of process, however, they are not doing anything different.

He continues, ‘*Whoever practices it will gain Buddhahood in this life if they are of the highest capacity. If of middle capacity, they will gain enlightenment in the bardo at death. And those of ordinary capacity will be freed from bad births. Of this there is no doubt. This teaching is under the protection of the Tanma Chunyi and Nyanchen Thanglha.*’

These are dharma protectors appointed by Padmasambhava to protect this text. Therefore, remember this has come directly from Padmasambhava, taught directly to Khyeu Chung Lotsawa¹¹ who incarnated later as Nuden Dorje. He then rediscovered this teaching which he originally had from Padmasambhava.

The final essence extracted from the ultimate essence

Then he says, *'Regarding this essence of all the essential profound truths, although there are many profound practices of all the special and most secret teachings, this is the final essence extracted from the ultimate essence.'* This means that it is pretty good! In particular it means, because you have a tendency to be distracted, because you are fascinated by bright shiny things, remember that whatever you find anywhere else, if it has value, will not be different from this. If you imagine that you need to get some special tantric initiation, if you imagine you need some additional instruction, then you are like somebody who puts their sunglasses up on top of their head, looks around to try and find them and then goes back into town to buy some more because they have lost their first pair. If you need more teachings, if you need more instructions, that is just a sign of your distraction. What you need is not more instruction or initiation but some hours on a meditation cushion.

In the first teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha which come down to us in the Pali tradition, the Buddha says, 'Mind is chief.' In *The Dharmapada* he says, *'Not mother, not father, not son, not daughter, not friend, not enemy – nobody can help you more than yourself. Not mother, not father, not son, not daughter, not friend, not enemy– nobody can harm you more than yourself.'* Therefore, the problem is not 'Who are other people?' the problem is 'Who am I?'

Many people receive these kinds of teachings but they don't believe them. They believe they may be true for someone else but not for themselves. Maybe you 'know' that you are really a troubled person, maybe you 'know' that you really can't meditate and so you need more help before you can practice these high teachings. In this case you know more about yourself than Padmasambhava! So, good luck.

He continues, *'It can be discovered only by a fortunate person with good karma for it is sealed in secrecy. It is sealed against those without vows and those who have wrong views. It is to be given to my vow-keeping devoted follower. The treasure protectors are under orders to protect it. It is sealed beyond classification by Urgyen Padma. It is the dakinis' heart blood and heart treasure. Secret seal. Body, Speech, Mind will not err. Vajra vows. Seal. Seal. Seal. Treasure seal. Hidden seal. Profound seal. Secret seal. Mandala. This is the special teaching of Nuden Dorje Drophan Lingpa Drolo Tsal.'*

According to this lineage which comes down through C R Lama, this is a very powerful and important instruction. The more time you spend looking at your mind, observing the process of stillness and thoughts, the more the richness of this text will be revealed to you. It is not abstract theory. It is not philosophy but it is the heart-friend of your return to yourself. Therefore, hopefully you will be inclined to do the practice.

Let us dedicate the merit now. If there is any merit arising from this work we dedicate it so that all being may realise the state of Padmasambhava.

¹¹ Go to http://www.simplybeing.co.uk/simply/About_CR_Lama/Short_Lineage.html to see an image and the short lineage to C R Lama

Question about how the text was taught to James

Participant: Tell us about how Rinpoche received this terma teaching and how he taught it.

James: Sometime when he was very young. When Rinpoche was teaching these texts he didn't teach anything. When we translated this text he taught me for maybe one hour, that was all—not anything. He hated doing that kind of thing. I would go to see him in the house which had a little compound garden inside. I would go in with the text and he would say, 'Now what?' His wife would make him some more tea and give him some biscuits. He would drink his tea, have his biscuits, gossip about this and that and then say, 'Now we do!' Then he would do it very very quickly and say, 'You know all this.' And so, we would do it very quickly.

It is also that if you have a connection with a text it will sing to you. Part of Rinpoche's style was to avoid making false bridges. That is to say, if you get a lot of information you can absorb all this information and think you have got something. Generally therefore he would just say a few words on something. And he looked very clearly at people to see how they are, because a lot is communicated directly.

However, I think for our purposes it is also important to see how the text is put together. That is to say, the transmission of this understanding is not exactly through what was said—because very little was said—but the important thing is that you can *inhabit* the text and everything will then shine for you. If you do that then different movements of the text will help you not to cheat yourself.

Dedication

Let us do a final *Three Aa* practice. After a while when you are sitting in this, allow your attention, your awareness, to expand out. Let it extend out into the valley, through Germany¹², Switzerland; taking in the whole world and all sentient beings so that you really have an awareness of everything being contained in your mind. Then whatever virtue, whatever value, whatever enlightenment you have, allow this to spread easily among all these beings.

[Practice of *Three Aas*]

Concluding reflections. Treating teachings with respect.

You are very welcome to have copies of this teaching and to listen to them but please treat them with respect. If a young man is very angry and he goes into a shop where they sell sharp knives, the man who sells him a sharp knife then helps him to go and stab someone. He then is part of the problem. Some people are drawn toward buddhism because they see it as a way of becoming very special or very famous and they use teachings, which have been designed to liberate people, as a way of building up a centre of power and status. Therefore, if you feel you want to share

¹² The teaching was given in Germany.

some of this with other people, the root text itself is already published.¹³ However, be very careful because if people have the wrong motivation and you feed their neuroses or their wrong intention, you are also part of that problem.

Padmasambhava predicted that at this time many false teachers would arise. And there are western people who take on all sorts of elaborate titles for themselves. However, even those who appear to be acting with some degree of restraint can become confused. For example, in this mindfulness tradition, the theravadin tradition, many people now say, 'Oh we have dzogchen too. There is nothing in dzogchen that we don't have in our tradition.' This is not true. However, people like to think it is, because it looks similar. This is why, when we study these texts, although there are many technical words, we have to really understand what the difference is.

There are many ways in which dharma gets confused. For example, people mix it all together to have 'Western Buddhism' or mix Buddhism and psychotherapy to increase the attractiveness of their work. One reason is that there is a lot of money to be made out of these things *and* a lot of status can be acquired. Therefore, if we want to take things *out* we always have to be very clear what our motivation is, because all the schools of Buddhism say karma is real. In dzogchen they say, 'If you remain in this open state, karma won't get you.' However, if you slip out of that state it will bite you doubly hard. Therefore, there is always a consequence to one's actions. Anyway, in our little world here, life is not so bad.

We are very lucky to have Robert Jaroslowski do the translation into German; it makes my job very easy. Also we are very fortunate to have this good retreat organisation from Ruth Kurmann and her helpers [Applause in the room]. We also have the recording work done by various people, perhaps especially, Krishna who will make the videos available. That can perhaps evoke some of the feeling of what we have shared together.

Of course, the main thing is yourselves. Coming here, wanting to participate, wanting to learn and this openness of heart and this willingness to connect, creates an atmosphere that allows the transmission to continue.

Now we come to part. Perhaps we meet again, perhaps not; the world is a big mystery—but anyway, good luck! [Applause in the room]

¹³ In *Simply Being: Texts in the Dzogchen Tradition*