**Ocean of True Meaning**

**Online Order Retreat December 2020**

**Day 1 Session 1**

**Introduction to Mahamudra** (30 mins)

Over these 5 days we’re going to be looking at extracts from a text called *Ocean of True Meaning.* This is a text from the Tibetan tradition written by the 9th Karmapa Wangchug Dorje. So I’ll say a little bit to introduce the text, a little bit about Mahamudra, just for those who need an orientation. So that what we do from then on you've got your bearings with, you’ve got a sense of what all this is trying to achieve and where it comes from. So that hopefully we have confidence in the teaching and develop confidence in how we can practise it.

The 9th Karmapa was a lama in the Karma Kagyu tradition - the Karmapas are the main holders of the tradition coming down the centuries. He was a 16th century lama and he was born in Eastern Tibet, and he spent most of his life actually travelling round in a sort of tent city – a kind of nomad city that travelled around with him, and he was originally taught and he gave teachings. And he wrote not that much. But what he did write has been incredibly influential. Particularly three manuals about Mahamudra practice. And the *Ocean of True Meaning* – or the Ocean of Definite Meaning or Definitive Meaning depending how you want to translate it – is the longest and the most comprehensive of those. And there are two translations available, but one of them is very difficult to get hold of. So the one that I’m using is *‘Mahamudra the Ocean of True Meaning’*, translated by Hendrik Havlat. Lama Hendrik – I think he’s Czech if I remember rightly. So the translation, the English of the translation, is a bit funny at times. But the Dharma meaning is all fine, it’s all good. And I studied this with Lama Tilmann, who guided the 3 year retreat that I did, over 7 ten day retreats where he went through it sentence by sentence. So I had a chance to look at how reliable it was. It’s a text from the Mahamudra tradition. We’re going to look at some extracts from the shamatha, the calm abiding section, and from the vipassana section, the insight section.

I should say a little bit about Mahamudra and what it is. You can see Mahamudra as a lineage of teaching practice; you can talk about the Mahamudra view of how things are; you can talk about Mahamudra practices and you can talk about Mahamudra realization. Sometimes people talk about the Mahamudra ‘state’ - although there’s nothing static about it, it’s completely in the flow of things.

So **Mahamudra as a lineage** gets traced back to India to a Mahasiddha called Saraha very often. And then particularly in this tradition that we’re looking at with this text, it comes down through a very famous line of teachers : from Tilopa and Naropa who were both Indian teachers; and then Marpa who was a gentlemen farmer who went 3 times over the Himalayas to India to get the teachings and bring them back to Tibet; and then his very famous disciple Milarepa. And on from him to Gampopa, who was a doctor whose wife died, and the fact that he couldn’t do anything for her with all his medical knowledge kind of broke his heart and broke his trust in samsara ; so he became a monk in the Kadam tradition of Atisha and then he met Milarepa and practised with him. Gampopa’s very important because most of the insight aspect of Mahamudra – up to that point it had always been practised in a Vajrayana context, it had always been done with Tantric initiation and yidam practice. And Gampopa took it out of that. He also did that - it was fine, but he just took it into a context of what’s now called sutra Mahamudra where you can just look at the nature of things. So all that understanding, all that seeing comes about, but without the need for Tantric ritual and Tantric meditation and all those things. So that means that the insight aspect of things is very clear but very deep. That lineage from Gampopa then carries on down, particularly in the Kagyu school. So Lama Tilmann who I did that 3 year retreat with, he was part of that tradition.

For us as Order Members, our connection with all of this obviously comes from Bhante, who passed things on to us through all those seminars he did on the songs of Milarepa. So I’ve got a shrine here with the Buddha and I’ve also got 2 books on it. One is one of the volumes from the Complete Works of Bhante on the songs of Milarepa, and the other one is a translation of the *Ocean of True Meaning*. Bhante had learned a lot practically about meditation from Mr Chen, the Chinese Chan yogi. So we tend to think of him as being a Chan practitioner. But actually Chen was also a disciple of the 16th Karmapa and he practised a lot of the practises of the Kagyu school. It seems like actually our six element practice probably came out of that. And Bhante also of course had a number of teachers in the Dzogchen tradition like Dilgo Kyentse Rimpoche. And Mahamudra and Dzogchen are close. Their basic view of things is the same, but they use slightly different methods and confusingly quite a lot of different terminology. But the basic approach is very similar. So we are bringing together those two strands if you like : there’s the strand that comes to us down through the Karmapas and into the *Ocean of True Meaning ;* and then the strand that comes to us through Bhante and Mr Chen and his teachers, and his exploration of Mahamudra and that tradition through the songs of Milarepa. I’ve sent you an extract from Rechungpa’s repentance seminar with Bhante, where he talks about just sitting. And it’s very clear from the Mahamudra point of view. He just explains what just sitting is and isn’t. I find it a helpful extract because quite often Bhante never really unpacked just sitting, He tended to say “well when you just sit you just sit”. Which as we’ll see has a lot of wisdom in it, but for us trying to approach it, it isn’t so helpful.

Then there’s **Mahamudra as view.** And the view of Mahamudra – it’s always based on early Buddhism, but it particularly draws on the Madhyamaka and Yogacara approaches to how things are. So Madhyamaka is seeing the empty, ungraspable nature of everything, it’s pointing at that. And it’s doing it by showing us that our concepts, the ways in which we try to fix things by labelling them, never do justice to the wonder and the magic of how it really is. So there’s that whole strand. And then there’s the Yogacara school, which it also draws on, of Mahayana Buddhism, which is all about looking at our experience in terms of all our experience is an experience of awareness. So everything is mind. Everything we experience is mind. If there’s anything out there, we can’t say anything about it. All we have is our experience, and that experience is always an experience of awareness. And that has very profound implications, which we’ll dive into during the 5 days.

So then there’s a whole context of **practice of Mahamudra**. So this book, the *Ocean of True Meaning -* before you get to the shamatha and vipassana sections it has put a number of things in place. It’s gone in detail into the 4 common preliminaries. So it has looked at the preciousness of human life, gratitude, and appreciation - however difficult life may be in lockdown or whatever, we just appreciate the fact that we’re here in the first place, and that we can work, we can work with our body-mind and in that way move in the direction of freedom, move in the direction of love, move in the direction of wisdom. And then there’s looking at the fact of impermanence – the flowing nature of everything. So that we can’t settle down into anything and say ‘right, now I’ve got it, that’s it’. Whatever it is, whether its a house or an insight. And then there’s action and its results. That all our actions, body speech and mind, if it’s intentional, if there’s volition, then they will produce karma which produces results. And positive karma always produces positive results and negative karma always produces negative results. As the texts say, it’s like planting buckwheat and barley. If you plant buckwheat you get buckwheat; if you plant barley, you get barley. And then lastly there’s the unsatisfactoriness of the six realms. So even if we manage to get samsara briefly just for an instant just how we want it, even then it changes on us and there’s still actually an unsatisfactoriness there. It still doesn’t really fulfil us; getting everything just right around us - it’s not it. Because we take our mind with us wherever we go. So there’s these four ordinary preliminaries, these four thoughts that turn the mind to the Dharma as they’re sometimes called, the Four Reminders, there’s a lot of emphasis on those. To start to unpeel our grip on trying to be happy through ways that really won’t work. It’s trying to sort of release our grip on the worldly refuges that aren’t actually a refuge.

And then there are the Mula Yogas. So there’s a whole section on Going for Refuge and Bodhicitta. And Vajrasattva practice and the Mandala Offering, which we looked at on the last retreat that quite a few of you were on from Adhisthana. And guru yoga. And in the tradition you do a lot of practice of these things. You do a hundred thousand Vajrasattva mantras and so on.

So I’m just saying this to make us aware that what we’re looking at now has a whole context within which it’s practised. It’s a context of renouncing samsara, it’s a context of entrusting ourselves to the three jewels – we’re going for refuge, committing ourselves to the path. It’s a context of Bodhicitta and great open heartedness, and finally not just practising for ourselves but practising so that we can really be of benefit to others. It’s working on purifying our mind and developing a sort of positive energy A sort of turning outwards, which is part of what the mandala offering is doing. It’s opening our heart to some generosity, opening ourselves out to the world. And then the guru yoga links us deeply to the resources of the tradition and also makes sure that there’s someone that we trust in when we go off the path. There’s someone who when we go to them and say “well there’s some Buddha nature teaching in Mahamudra so I’m a Buddha already so I don’t need to practice”, when that teacher says to you “well that’s actually not how it is at all and you’re just going to cause yourself trouble like that” – you’ll listen to them. Or whatever it is. *The Ocean of True Meaning* is partly a teachers’ manual. So it gives things where... ‘when the student comes and says this, this how to guide them back in the right direction’.

So in our own ways we need to see that this is all based on a whole lot of practice, so the shamatha and vipassana sections don’t just appear out of nothing. There’s a whole context of going for refuge and great open heart and devotion as well. There’s a whole mandala of practice in there. And it also means that we need to draw on our resources, our awareness of the unsatisfactoriness of mundane ways of approaching life, and our going for refuge. We need to do our best to connect with our open-heartedness. And our sense of kalyana mitrata with one another. All that coming in as the basis for what we do together.

**Mahamudra realization** Then lastly of these four… So we’ve got lineage, view, practice and **realization** or what’s seen with Mahamudra. And Mahamudra particularly focusses on non-dual experience. It focusses on us relaxing out of, and seeing through, that sense of ‘me in here and everything else out there’, or the observer and the observed, the meditator and the meditation. It’s aiming to free us from that whole illusion that we create. And from the Mahamudra point of view seeing that there’s no fixed self, say, is helpful, but it really needs to go into this non-dual experience to be really liberating, fully liberating. And this whole idea of non-duality, you don’t find it explicitly very much in early Buddhism, and I’ve sometimes had people say “well what’s non-duality got to do with Buddhism, I don’t find that in the Pali Canon”. But actually the Buddha talks a lot about ‘not I, not me, not mine’, not being identified with the 5 skhandhas. And as long as there is a sense of ‘I or me or mine’ there’s also a sense of ‘they and them and theirs’, or what’s not ‘I and me and mine’. ‘I and me and mine’ only make sense in relation to ‘other’. So for awakening, enlightenment, whatever Buddhist tradition you follow, that sense, that experience, of non-duality has to be there. The Mahamudra explores it a bit further than early Buddhism in some ways, through looking at this idea that everything is mind, but the fundamentals haven’t changed at all.

So we’re going to spend some time looking at non-duality, and the first extract that I put up for you, you may have noticed isn’t from the *Ocean of True Meaning*, it’s from Leonard Cohen. And it goes ‘if you don’t become the ocean, you’ll be seasick every day’. And yes, very often we feel like here’s me in my little boat of self, of me-ness, trying to kind of stay stable on this ocean of conditions which keeps on tossing me around. And sometimes it’s fairly calm and flat and I think ‘aah’ but then the wind gets up and it starts to sort of move a bit and then ‘oh no, oh dear’. And then some days there are those 60 foot, 20 meter high waves that you get if you’re sailing round Cape Horn, and its ‘wwooooh!’ and you wonder if you’re going to survive. All the time there’s this sense of me trying to keep stable. Because we’re trying to keep a sense of me, we can have an idea of me that’s stable, but actually in experience everything about the 5 skhandhas is constantly changing, so we’re trying to impose a sense of stability on a changing experience, which is what causes most of the dukkha.

So I really like that Leonard Cohen quote. The seasickness, the dukkha comes from not being the ocean. But at the same time his quote isn’t quite right either, because it’s talking about ‘becoming the ocean’. And you get the idea of ‘OK here am I separate from everything, so now I must become one with everything - so how do I dissolve myself away so that I become one with everything?’. And you sometimes get people saying “Oh I became one with everything” and depending on what their actual experience was that may or may not be all right, but if there’s still a ‘me that’s feeling one with everything’, then we’re still not there. So the issue isn’t about how do I somehow sort of turn myself into a cloud that sort of gets finer and finer and finer and dissolves away. The issue is how do I see that moment by moment I’m creating the illusion of being a me that is separate from everything else. Moment by moment I’m having the idea that I’m on this little boat separate from the ocean, when really the boat is made of water and we’re made of water. We never are separate from the ocean. So if we can get back to that sense, that we just happen to be a bit of the ocean that is sort of boat-shaped and person-shaped, then it’s fine. We feel connected with everything, and when that particular manifestation of the ocean transforms into something else we don’t resist and try and hang on to the side of the boat as it all dissolves away. No, we’ve just made a mistake about how our experience is. We’ve created an artificial – helpful, useful – conceptual idea of me and everything else. So we’re going to explore that.

So yes, ‘if you don’t become the ocean you’ll be seasick every day’ is a helpful step in the right direction, but finally we don’t need to do that because everything’s the ocean. So I don’t know if you can see… behind me I’ve got Shakyamuni, and behind him I’ve got a picture of the ocean with a small red boat. The painting is called ‘Red Vessel 4’ and it’s painted by Vidyalila, who’s a very talented artist Order Member – anybody who’d want to commission something from her I’m sure she’d be very happy. Yes, so for me this is just a reminder of the ocean.

**Meditation** (35 mins)

* Let’s begin by giving ourselves a little space - before we ask our mind to do anything else. Nothing to do, no expectations. Mind and body just as they are. Aware of how it is to be in this moment.
* Now noticing whether there’s, as it were, a place in the body which feels like it’s the centre of experience, the centre of awareness. I’ve just thrown a load of words and concepts at you, so maybe in the head. Maybe in the heart. Wherever it is, let’s see if we can have a sense of awareness and energy moving downwards. A downward flow of energy. Till we feel our connection with the ground, with the earth. It’s like coming in to land. And firstly just noticing, feeling into, the actual points of connection with the ground
* Now appreciating that sense of solidity and being held up and supported by the earth. Enjoying that, relaxing into it. Letting the earth take our weight.
* And out of that secure solid base, letting the body rise up. Particularly letting the upper body be light and open, so the crown of the head is gently reaching towards the sky.
* Now bringing awareness into the body with as much kindness as possible. Being receptive to whatever we find.
* So there’s kindly awareness within which all kinds of feelings and sensations arise, are cared for, and transform into the next experience
* Now being particularly aware of the sensations associated with the breathing. Noticing the gentle movements of the body as the air comes and goes
* Now let’s be aware of all of us practising together. All of us in our different countries, different spaces – some of us breathing in warm air, some not so warm. Morning air, evening air. And all breathing with awareness, all linked by our heart connections. As if there’s one practice that we’re all part of, all contributing our energy to, all benefiting from
* And for a minute or two let’s make our breathing as metta-full as possible, as loving and kind as possible. Loving and kind for ourselves as we receive the in-breathh. Loving and kind for everyone who’s part of this practice with the out-breath. Sending well-wishing, sending love. Including all those on the retreat who are asleep in their time zone or couldn’t make it to the first session – all included.
* And finally we relax, nothing to do. Just aware of whatever’s going on.
* Let’s dedicate the merits, share the benefits, with all of us on the retreat, with all life. Let’s do it in the simplest way possible, just with an out-breath, letting everything go, holding nothing back.

*[break]*

**Introduction to Barlung and meditation** (30 mins)

So we’ve cast off on the *Ocean of True Meaning*. I was talking to Moksanandi a day or so ago and she was saying she was going to bring her lilo and float off. And I talked a bit about Mahamudra as lineage, as view, as practice and as realization, particularly in terms of non-duality. And with lineage I was saying that there’s this lineage that comes down from Tilopa, Naropa, Marpa, Milarepa and so on, including the 9th Karmapa who wrote this book. And then there’s also our connection via Bhante – Mr. Chen and some of his other teachers. And something I didn’t mention is the Avalokitesvara sadhana which Bhante gave us – it’s the sadhana of Mahakarunika and Mahamudra conjointly, as it says. Mahakarunika is the greatly compassionate one and it’s the complete union, inseparability of great compassion and the realization of Mahamudra, the knowing how things are. At least, that’s where the sadhana’s taking us – that’s where we’re headed when we practise it. So that’s been a real gift to the Order from Bhante in this area.

I’m just going to briefly introduce a meditation method that’s used quite a lot in Mahamudra tradition. I’m going to introduce it briefly because quite a few of you will have come across it one way or another on retreat with me or Vijayamala or one or two other Order Members. Mahamudra puts a lot of emphasis on relaxation – I’ll say more about his as time goes on. Over these days of our time together it would be really good if you could let yourself relax as much as possible. Really prioritise relaxation. Relax and then relax some more, then relax some more after that. That would be really helpful for the practice. And there’s a little method that’s used quite often which in Tibetan is called Barlung. ‘Lung’ in Tibetan means... it’s a bit like prana it can mean breath but it can also mean subtle energy. But here it’s more about-breathing. And ‘bar’ is the word you find in bardo and it means in between. So the bardo is the in between state. So Barlung is the intermediate, in between breath, and it’s called that partly because you’re not changing the breathing very much - it’s not like you’re doing pranayama or something - but you’re putting a particular awareness on to it, and also you’re putting awareness onto it particularly in the sort of middle area of the body. So it’s ‘intermediate’ in that sense as well. And it’s used in the tradition as a way of relaxing and feeling at ease, and it’s also said to be very healing, it’s said to be a very good antidote to anxiety, and it’s also traditionally said to be helpful for encouraging us in the direction of non-dual experience. Because we’re going to focus on this area, the area just below the navel.

So we’re focussing on there, and we’re just going to be breathing normally, but along with putting awareness into that area as we breathe, feeling the effects of the breath down in that area, we can also use imagery. So whatever gives us a sense of ease, relaxation, of ‘ahhh everything’s OK’, that sense, that’s what we’re looking for. So for a lot of people a sense of warmth will really do it – it’s that sense where in the middle of winter you’re sitting by a warm log fire and it’s just ‘ooh yes this is really good’ you can just sit back and relax and it’s really easy. Some people get that sense, it can be helpful to feel like you’re full, after you’ve just had a really good meal. That sense of you really don’t want to eat anything else, you don’t need anything else, you’re completely satisfied. That sense. So we’re going to breathe into this area and just be aware of this sense of warmth and ease. I tend to use bears, partly. Like Winnie the Pooh or Baloo the bear in the jungle book – they have these sort of big, easy stomachs and they’re all kind of big and easy and slow – in their own way there’s something quite relaxed an stable and steady about them. So just see and explore, really play with this and just see if you can find something which gives you a sense of reassurance, that sense of everything’s all right. So with each breath you are settling into this area with a sense of ‘mm yeah, everything’s OK’ – that’s what we’re looking for. If you play with it, it will be good. Don’t turn this into a thing to succeed or fail at. This is really where you put your feet up and nothing can go wrong. If you’re one of those people who really holds all your tension down under that area, then OK you go gently. I hold most of my tension up around my diaphragm area so for me it’s a relief to go down to this area below the navel but if you really hold your tension there then OK just go gently and concentrate of the sense of breathing easy and whatever gives you that sense of reassurance. Wherever it’s feeling really warm and at ease, just focus on that, don’t worry so much about trying to make the most tense area of your body suddenly into a source of joy and bliss. Don’t worry about that.

**Meditation : Barlung**

* Let’s make ourselves nice and comfortable. In the Mahamudra tradition they say your first thought when it comes to ‘ oh it’s time to meditate’ should be ‘ahh a chance to relax’. That isn’t always our first thought when it comes to meditation. Often we just expect a lot of ourselves. So we’re not doing that, we’re just relaxing.
* And just for a minute there’s nothing to do. No pressure, no tension, that’s all gone. Ha! Just sit here.
* Now let’s bring our awareness down to the ground. Again, relishing and appreciating the sense of the ground being there, supporting us. There’s a giant in Greek mythology that becomes 7 times stronger every time he touches the earth. We become stronger and more stable when we really feel our connection with the earth. Whenever it feels as if you’re losing strength in meditation, losing connection, you can just come back to the earth, like that Greek giant. Gather strength, gather energy.
* From that rooted connection with the earth, being aware of our posture, a sense of openness, lightness in the upper body. Again, feeling into the body as best we can in a receptive, kindly way. Noticing anything that would appreciate our attention
* Now feeling the breathing, feeling that aliveness, receiving it, then sharing it
* Now feeling into the area below the navel, noticing how it’s moved and affected by the breathing. Resting and relaxing into that sense of gentle movement and playing and exploring. Seeing what feelings, what images and ideas even, can help with a sense of ease, relaxation, security, everything’s OK. So we’re just breathing easy. A sense of being nourished by the breath, maybe warmed by the breath, relaxed by the breath
* Breathing in ‘everything OK’ - breathing out ‘everything OK’. All of us breathing in and out together. And whatever sense of warmth and ease, relaxation, security - drawing it in from all of us with the in-breath ; sharing it with all of us on the out-breath.
* Now nothing to do. If the practice carries on by itself that’s fine, if it doesn’t that’s fine. Just aware of how things are.
* And again an out-breath to share whatever’s good, whatever’s helpful

**Day 1 Session 2**

**Barlung and connecting to the lineage of practitioners** (40 mins)

In the first session we started looking at Mahamudra and this book the *Ocean of True Meaning* so we’ve started in on that and I talked a bit about Mahamudra as a lineage, as the tradition; the views of Mahamudra; the practices which are part of it and support it and build up to what we’re looking at which is some of the shamatha and vipassana aspects of it. And I also talked about what’s sometimes called the Mahamudra state which is really where we’re not creating a sense of ‘me’ in the centre of experience and therefore we’re not creating a sense of ‘other’ all around this ‘me’ at the centre of experience. And we’ll explore that as the days go by.

Today we’re going to keep it quite simple. So we’re focussing on grounding, relaxing, which already softens that sense of me and everything else. If you’re really relaxed you don’t create that same sense of ‘me in here and the world out there’, already that softens. And to help with that at the end of the last session I introduced something called Barlung which means ‘intermediate breath’, where we were focussing energy down below the navel here. Being aware of the sensations created by the breathing in that area and doing whatever helped to have a real sense of ease and enjoyment and relaxation and support and security as we were doing that. So I was suggesting things like imagining there’s like a little warm glow in that area – it’s a bit like you’ve got a little fire there or an internal hot water bottle. For some people it works to think of being really nourished, perhaps like a baby who’s just been fed - sort of that wanting of something and wanting of something and then there’s ‘ahh’ this wonderful sort of feed that came in and now you just feel really complete and satisfied. So feeling into if there’s a way of just finding those qualities and associate it with the breathing.

So all this helps to relax, and when we do that our sense of me separate from everything else sort of softens and one of the main aims of the retreats that I’ve been leading recently – the two from Adhisthana and then this one - is at a time when a lot of us are relatively isolated, we’re cut off from people, we’re in lockdown, we can’t visit family and friends we can’t all meet physically in chapters, on retreat and so on, it’s very easy to end up with a sense of being isolated. But all that comes from being identified with the physical body. We think where the physical body is, is where I am and this is how it is. But from a Dharma point of view, and certainly from the Mahamudra point of view where as we’ll see more everything is mind, we’re not limited. We can all meet. And certainly I have quite strong experience when we come together like this and we practice together it doesn’t just feel like ‘Oh I can see you on the screen there so I feel a bit closer to you’, I actually feel like we’re in contact. It actually feels like we’re meditating together, it actually feels like we’re sharing something and it’s quite magic. Here we are, some of us thousands of miles apart and yet we can have that sense. So that’s one of the things that I want to point us towards over these few days is that sense of connection, so that not only are we looking at the insight aspect of Mahamudra but we also are just strengthening those connections and that awareness that OK we’re physically separated but on the heart-mind level we needn't be. If we explore we’ll find that we aren’t. We’ll find that we really are meeting. So whatever helps us to feel that we’re practising together, meeting together is really beneficial.

But we can even go beyond that - and on the last couple of retreats I’ve asked the question ‘Who are we practising with?’ Because it can be really supportive. If it just feels like here’s me in lockdown in England just with Vijayamala – not that that isn’t of course totally satisfying and complete in itself! - if I feel like I’m isolated in my space, that’s really painful. But if I have that sense that I’m really connected with others,if I have the sense that the heart mind isn’t limited by time and space, well then not only can I feel connected to all of you but actually I can feel connected to other practitioners not only in space but in time. I can start to feel a heart connection with Milarepa, I can start to feel a heart connection with practitioners going back to the Buddha who have all explored states of deep meditation, deep relaxation, and who’ve all seen through that delusion where they’ve thought they were separate and discovered I’m not separate, we’re not all separate units. So in a minute we’ll meditate and then we’ll start in, we’ll ground ourselves we’ll do some Barlung. And then we’ll have a sense on the imaginative level of meeting together and connecting with that sense of being in the same heart space as not only one another but also other practitioners right back to the Buddha and then coming down through that tradition that we’re focussing on – Marpa, Milarepa and so on, the 9th Karmapa who wrote the Ocean of True Meaning - right down to Bhante and his teachers. We’re practising with them. And when we have that sense, the more our heart opens to them, the more we’ll start to feel that we’re drawing on that as a resource. That we’re not just another practitioner by ourselves trying to gain enlightenment, but actually we’re part of a great flow of practice which has led so many human being like us to awakening, to freedom, to complete open heartedness, to understanding, to knowing how things are – over two and a half thousand years. And if we feel that, then the practice comes really easily. It’s almost like the practice is flowing through us, we’re just connecting with it. But it’s already there as it were in that flow. So let’s explore that. Sometimes the rational mind goes ‘oh but what about this what about that….’ But let’s just see, let’s see what happens when we do this - in our experience.

**Meditation : connecting to the lineage of practice**

* So as usual we start by – not starting. We start by being as we are, with awareness . The only reason we’d need to change anything would be if there was something obviously unskilful that we can adjust. Otherwise we just let whatever’s happening be whatever’s happening. Really simple.
* And whatever’s happening - no need to be for or against it, no need to compare it with some other experience that isn’t happening. Letting experience just flow along. It’s very good at coming and going, and we just let it.
* Now let’s take awareness down through the body. And where awareness goes energy tends to flow. Down to the earth, down to the ground. We can feel or imagine energy and awareness going down into the earth below the body. Enjoying that sense of stability
* Now out of that sense of stability letting the posture, open, letting the body rise up
* Now letting awareness fill the body and as best we can letting that awareness be kindly, opening to what’s happening, encouraging. Taking a minute or two to be with the sensations, the movements of energy, whatever’s happening
* Now letting awareness and energy gather in that area below the navel. Feeling the movements, the sensations that are produced by the tide of the air of the breathing coming in and out, feeling how that affects that area
* And along with awareness of the area below the navel and how it’s involved with and affected by the breathing, we can use anything which helps give us a sense of warmth and ease, relaxation, safety. Just as an example as we’ve been talking about the ocean, for me at the moment each movement of the breath feels like I’m on the ocean, very gentle waves, just gently moving, and that’s somehow relaxing and easing – but whatever it is, whatever works for you.
* Now if it feels right you could have a sense of all of us, all practising together. So whatever sense of ease, comfort, well-being, relaxation – just share it, share it with everyone. And also with each in-breath we can just receive
* Now let’s explore going a stage further. So from our different physical spaces and time zones, we’re all joining in one practice. So now let’s join in with the practice of all those Buddhist practitioners down through the centuries who’ve worked with the breathing, all those in the Mahamudra tradition who practised Barlung ; people like Milarepa and Marpa. Let’s do a kind of giving and receiving. So we’re still keeping awareness down below the navel, so a sense of that, and with each in-breath we take in the influence, the adhisthana, blessing of all these practitioners. Take that right in, and with the out-breath there’s a sense of not holding on to anything, no need to hold on, sense of opening, sharing.

Still opening, receiving with the in-breath. And with the out-breath, a sense of the adhisthana going out, going out to all beings, connecting more and more of us with the Dharma, with the forces of love and freedom and wisdom

* Now when we’re ready, letting go of doing anything, nothing to imagine, just our experience however it is.
* Sharing the benefits of the practice

If you connect with that, if you find it helpful that awareness of the breath below the navel, you could almost just have it as a mindfulness anchor. So you can keep kind of 10% of your awareness there, as you get up out of meditation and move around. If you practise it for a while you start to get this little thread of awareness that’s always there and it’s reassuring – it’s saying ‘yes it’s OK you can relax, yes, just breathe easy, yeah it’s fine, OK’. It can be very helpful and healing. It helps to take energy out of the thoughts when they’re getting some speed up.

**Day 1 Session 3**

**Mindfulness and inner wisdom** (30 mins)

A little bit earlier in the day I put up some notes that Karunagita took from a session I did on the *Ocean of True Meaning* at Vajraloka in 2018 where I looked at some of the advantages of Mahamudra and Mahamudra approach and also some things to be aware of – you know Bhante had raised various questions at various times about some aspects of it. I don’t want to repeat all that now but please do have a look.

In the last session we explored opening beyond the limitations of our physical space and moving onto the heart-mind level where we can meet one another. And a lot of our practice is aiming to take us onto that level. The six element practice aims to take us beyond the identification with the physical body, into an open dimension of awareness. So does the metta bhavana. So does the blue sky in sadhana practice. And in that space we are not only connected with one another but we are connected with the practitioners who over the last two and half thousand years down from the Buddha have been practising awareness, have been practising on the path to freedom, who’ve been opening their hearts - and we open to their adhisthana. That was my answer to the question ‘Who are we practising with?’ And when we have that sense, the practice naturally opens. When it’s me on my cushion in my room doing my practice, that whole narrow context that we’re putting things in just makes it harder going. So let’s really draw on all the resources we can find. Let’s enter into that great practice of the bodhisattvas.

And I also talked a bit about Barlung - this practice where you’re breathing really easy down below the navel and with a sense of whatever helps, whatever images, whatever enables that sense of just breathing easy, relaxed. You can use all those images that people come out with spontaneously after they’ve met the Buddha and heard his teaching – it’s like being released from jail, from prison; it’s like having been carrying a heavy load and having put it down - you can get that sort of sense. Although what we really want is something that’s quite felt in the body. But whatever helps us to get that sense of ‘ooh now I can just breathe easy’ Because actually we can usually when we’re meditating. We’re in a safe space, there’s nobody demanding anything of us usually unless our kids are kicking on the door or wanting to know when we’ll finish the meditation. Usually we’re just there and we can really allow ourselves give ourselves the gift of ease and relaxation.

So what I’d like to do now is a bit of the *Ocean of True Meaning.* So I’m going to take the first extract which if you have it available to you is the one from the beginning of lesson 25. So we’re already quite a way through the book and we’re in the section on calm abiding, on shamatha. So I’ve just taken a little extract to give us a sense of it. So the 9th Karmapa says :

‘If you get too tense in the attempt to settle the mind, hoping to achieve thereby a really calm, exceedingly clear and very easy-going state of mind and being afraid of mental activity, this will cause an unsettled mind. This is why it’s important to remain loose, without any hope and fear.’

So you get a kind of feeling of what he’s talking about. And he ends up talking about ‘without any hope and fear’. Mahamudra talks often much more about hope and fear than it does about craving and aversion and I find it quite refreshing - when I came upon that it gave meditation a slightly different way of looking at my experience. I can think in terms of ‘am I being pulled and pushed by craving and aversion?’ but I can also look at things in terms of ‘am I creating hopes and fears here, am I creating a whole sense of maybe it’ll go well, maybe it won’t go well...’ Which you get a sense of… well hopes and fears are everywhere. You just have to go on to the media or something. At the moment the UK government is negotiating or trying to negotiate a trade deal with the EU and if you follow the news it sounds like one day ‘oh yes maybe there’s going to be a breakthrough… oh no perhaps it’s just all going to fall apart maybe it’s not going to get anywhere, ah but yes we seem to have made some progress, but now they’re warning that perhaps it won’t lead to anything’, - up down, up down. So on our own level we’re very often doing that with different aspects of our lives and even with our meditation. We turn meditation into something; meditation, which ought to be a relief from all that, can become another thing that we turn into a success or failure project - and when we do that we create tension.

So the first way in which we can do it is if you want the mind to be really settled and you want it to be just really relaxed and really in a good state, then those kind of hopes and expectations and demands, all those ‘are we there yet, is this really how I want it to be’, all that just gets in the way. It’s too sort of ego based. It’s the wrong kind of mindfulness. It’s like there are near enemies of mindfulness. Mindfulness is kind of what we need until we really go beyond it - we need someone kind of keeping an eye making sure that things are going in the right direction from time to time. But it needs to be quite light quite playful. But even that needs to be relaxed and as easy as possible. And very often what we have rather than the really helpful mindfulness is that we have some kind of near enemy of the really helpful mindfulness. So we can have somebody in the driving seat of our meditation who is seeing it in terms of ‘it’s got to go well or this has got to be really good or I’ve got to do the practice just right’. If you have that sort of sense of it’s really got to be special, it’s really got to be good’ - either because then *we’ll* feel really special and really good which doesn’t help or because we don’t feel very good about ourselves and the meditation really going well will finally prove that we’re OK after all - so that person in the driving seat of our meditation is the near enemy of the kind of mindfulness that we want.

Equally we can have a kind of parental judging character who is checking out – ‘is this going how it ought to go? Are there still lots of thoughts coming….ooh...that’s not good’. So we’re creating a sort of standard for how the meditation ought to be and then insisting that we live up to it and judging ourselves when we don’t live up to it. If *we* don’t do this, I can guarantee you that if we’re teaching newer people, a lot of them will be doing it. Because it’s often how we’ve kind of somehow picked up it’s how we ought to be operating with ourselves. So at an extreme we turn ourselves into a police state. Where things have to be going the right way. And there’s no freedom, there’s no joy, there’s no relaxation - it’s all got to be just right.

So what we want is a mindfulness that comes out of that, is actually kind of natural - it’s there in all of us if we can find it, if we can listen to it. The difficulty is that those other kinds of mindfulness they’re quite demanding, so they shout quite loud. ‘That’s another 5 seconds when you weren't there, where were you?’ Whereas what we’re looking to find is a quite quiet voice really because it’s not demanding anything of us, but yes its a guide, it’s helpful. It’s helping us to be on track but it’s very friendly. It’s a bit like someone who, you know, if you’re ill someone who reminds you to take your medicine. They don’t tell you off, they’re just helpful They can see something that’s good for you and so they gently say “hey have you taken this yet?” So it’s more like that. It starts off being more of a something just gently keeping us on track, but as we go deeper into it and deeper into it we begin to realise that it’s more like a voice of inner wisdom, it’s more like an inner guide. There’s something in us which knows what’s a helpful direction, and when we start to really get a sense of that we can follow it and it deepens. And there’s something very natural about it. We often make meditation such an unnatural activity. And one of the things that’s quite strong in the Mahamudra tradition is that practice should be as natural and simple as possible. Sometimes that might be quite complex – but as natural and simple as possible. So as unartificial if possible. It’s like if you have a good book and you sit down to read it or if you have a favourite piece of music and you sit down to listen to it, yes you may just decide to put down what you’ve been doing and turn your mind towards it, but from that point on there’s something quite simple and natural that happens. You don’t remind yourself when you open your book that you’ve been reading, you don’t remind yourself ‘watch out for any stray thoughts here’. You don’t do that. Why would you do that to yourself? You don’t keep checking whether you’re paying attention to the book. No – we all know how to relax and as it were dissolve into experience, how to more and more forget ourselves in an experience, and that’s much more how meditation should be. To start with, OK we have to learn forms and techniques and methods ; but all those are just helps for us to go into those sort of naturally deepening ways of being.

So people say ‘oh Mahamudra practice goes back to the Buddha’, and apart from all the wisdom in it which obviously does go back to the Buddha, one of the things that I sometimes think about is the whole thing of the Buddha under the rose-apple tree.. You remember he’d been sitting under the bodhi tree and he’d gone through all the jhanas and he’s practised austerities for years and none of that’s worked and he feels like ‘oh what else is there?’ and then according to the story - and there’s wisdom in these stories - he remembers a time when he’s sitting under a rose-apple tree as a kid and he’s watching his father ploughing. And I often think well what was that? What was it about that that turned him into a whole different way of practising, a whole different way of being? What was it that he saw there? And it’s a good question just to take for yourself into meditation. And I’m not even going to give you all of my answer but part of it I think is that there was something very simple and natural – a simple, natural absorption there. There’s his father apparently ploughing – his father was a ruler he may have been ceremonially just ploughing a bit – but yeah there are the oxen, there’s the plough and it’s moving up and it’s moving down, and there’s this young boy. And young children tend to be very fresh in their experience, sort of awake and new in it . There’s the plough going up and down, there are the birds descending as the earth is turned over looking for what’s been turned over that they can eat it, and he’s just in that experience, and presumably it just goes deeper and deeper.

So what we’re looking for is a sort of self forgetting. But we can’t tell ourselves to forget ourselves because that won’t work. But we relax, we have some mindfulness and we relax and relax, and then at a certain point what we want is just to be absorbed more and more in the experience. Because otherwise, if this experience is just all about ‘how am I going to get to a really calm exceedingly clear and very easy going state of mind’, we’re not really experiencing this experience - because it’s not important in itself, it’s just a stepping stone to some other experience that we’ll get to one day or that we’ll get to in 15 minutes’ time in the meditation. So we want to be really kind of opening, really receptive to what’s happening now and we just have this kind of - as light as we can manage without losing it - a light kind of awareness or a sense of an inner direction or an inner guide, what helps. And that inner guide can be there in the meditation but it also can increasingly be there through our life and it becomes more of an inner wisdom, it deepens as I say, it deepens into not just being aware of what’s going on or even aware of being skilful it becomes something which reminds us to really take the medicine of the Dharma on a deep level, it reminds us of bodhicitta, it reminds us to really have an open heart, to be soft hearted and when we lose it, it brings us back to that. When we’re making a great drama out of life and what’s happening to us, when we’ve got really caught up in the cinema of our emotions, there’s just like there’s something we can turn to that’s like a quiet voice that goes ‘yeah OK let’s just go for a walk’, it’s something that de-dramatises, it’s something that’s quite reliable and steady in us and we can find that and we can keep coming back to it. So it goes deeper and deeper. And in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition this really deep mindfulness which becomes inner wisdom often gets personified. So as you’re walking it’s said you imagine that your guru is sitting at your shoulder or at the crown of your head. It’s that same inner wisdom, that same inner guide, being presented in a way that we think ‘ah yes OK what do I do now? Well I can ask guru, I can ask the yidam that will help meditation find the direction that I need’.

So yes, not getting too tense, letting the meditation be as easy and natural as possible. And not being afraid of some mental activity. We’ll go into this more, but it’s like if you decide that your mind has to be really calm and that thoughts are the problem and thoughts are the enemy, that doesn’t work - you’re then battling with yourself and that doesn’t help. So any way in which you kind of squeeze your mind so ‘you’ve got to do it like this you’ve got to be like that you’ve got to be really clear, and really calm’ – all that just actually creates more thoughts. The mind responds with more agitation and more agitation means more prapanca. So we’re looking for a practice that trusts the refuges, trusts the Dharma, trusts that things will unfold if we just practise steadily, keep looking in the right direction’ and we have spiritual friends and we’re part of this whole great practice that’s been going on for two and a half thousand years So OK we notice when things need to be worked on and we do it gently, but all with a kind of with a basic metta and with a basic ease as much as possible.

So simple and natural. And Mahamudra even talks about big experience like realization of the Dharma it often calls that ordinary mind. So this sense that we’re trying to find this thing that’s incredibly special and extraordinary and amazing, so that we’ll become somebody incredibly extraordinary and amazing – it’s sort of not really wanting us to go there. And I have to say that some of the people that I’ve met in my life who’ve really practised deeply and other people who I’ve heard about who’ve really practised deeply, yes their qualities are very special but in themselves they seem quite ordinary. People who met Dhardo Rimpoche – I only met him when he was really ill so I can’t really say - but a lot of the people who met Dhardo Rimpoche, they were sort of impressed by how extraordinarily ordinary he was. He wasn’t impressive but he was incredibly moving, just through his simple kind of humanity and his capacity to completely be with whoever he was with, those qualities…. The trouble very often with us is that we have to be special somehow. In our society everyone has to be special. We’re not allowed to just be extraordinarily ordinary beings that we already are.

*[Kamaladhi] Just wondered what to do if I’m so successful at relaxing that I get a little bit sleepy or a lot sleepy*

You have a choice. Your inner wisdom might tell you to gently do all those things that are recommended when sleepiness arises. So you can bring awareness up the body; you can stand up and meditate - I often think that we should do more standing meditation than we do in Triratna. So you can work in all those sorts of ways which I’m sure you know about. Or the other way in which you can work which we’re maybe not so familiar with but which is talked about in the Mahamudra tradition, is to see whether you can keep a thread of awareness through that drowsiness. So there you are in your meditation, you’ve got really relaxed – you might be quite tired actually. When you start to really relax you often discover…... everyday life these days often kind of batters us so we may need to sleep these few days more than we usually do, if we have the opportunity that’s fine. Yes so you relax and you get kind of drowsy and maybe you even do that nodding dog thing and rather than fighting it, see if you can just be aware with it. See how far you can follow it with awareness and if you manage to do that to some degree you’ve then got awareness and a lot of relaxation! And you’ll come out of that very very refreshed. It’s something to explore. So the body is really really really relaxed because you’re almost asleep but there’s just this thread of awareness there – what we’re always looking for is relaxation and awareness together. Anyway, you could play with that.

**Meditation : breath mindfulness with a light touch** (30 mins)

* So once you’ve found a position that’s as comfortable as possible, as usual we start by making sure that the pressure’s off. That we’re not getting into demanding that we go somewhere really fast in the meditation ; start by not going anywhere
* Now as we start to meditate, just noticing the tone, the sort of stance - if there’s some observer of the meditation or someone who feels like they’re in the driving seat of the meditation, what are they like? Have they got expectations of us? Have things got to go a certain way? Or is the person in the driving seat quite happy to go on a magical mystery tour and just discover, find out what happens?
* So now, if our inner guide is in agreement we could let our awareness and energy flow down through the body to the ground. So we’re drawing on the support of the earth, relaxing, giving it our weight. How does that feel?
* And out of that very firm foundation, quite gently awareness can move up the body. Just curious, as if we’ve never done this before. What’s it like to have a spine? Until we come to the crown of the head, just feeling that polarity between that sense of rootedness as we relax to the earth and give it our weight, and that feeling of opening to the sky
* Now letting everything that's between those two be a field for exploration, even a playground. What’s going on? And letting whatever sense there is of a meditator have a very light touch. There’s all these sensations. All these feelings, all these unique moments coming and going
* Now going into that incredible network of sensations on which we stick the label ‘the breath’. Getting right underneath that label, feeling the aliveness, the energy
* So we’re supported by the earth and we’re supported by the air
* And again, letting the awareness that knows this breathing be very light, agile. It can surf in with the in-breath, surf out with the out-breath. Very free, very playful
* Relaxed, playful, aware, touching everything really lightly, really tasting the experience
* Just breathing, just aliveness
* Now, if it feels right, no need for directed awareness - just whatever appears. Whatever appears is known and cared for, that same very light touch. It’s as if whatever appears knows and cares for itself
* And finally, sharing the merits, letting them go to join that great ocean of virtues created by all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, all the meditators, all the practitioners of the Dharma. Just add it into that, that great reservoir to help all living beings.

**Ocean of True Meaning**

**On-line Order Retreat December 2020**

**Day 2 Session 1**

*[missing bit at the start]*

**….** it’s set in a very warm devotional context. Before we’d got to this point, if we’d been doing the entire programme, we would have done all those prostrations, all that bodhicitta practice, all those Vajrasattva mantras and all those mandala offerings and then all that guru yoga. And then you come to things in this section, which can seem sort of a bit simple and not have that kind of richness. And particularly because it’s not so easy to do wonderful devotional things on zoom, at least if you haven’t got a nice community all chanting mantras with you, we want to make sure that in our meditation we are really including that richness, particularly that open-heartedness. So let’s start with a meditation in that sort of an area

**Meditation : meeting in the bodhicitta mandala** (40 mins)

* So starting by letting everything come to rest, as if we come back to neutral, whatever gear we’ve been in. Just opening to these moments of our life.
* And it’s nearly always good to meditate from the ground up. So let’s take our awareness down to the earth. And energy and awareness goes together. Where our awareness goes, energy gathers. It’s as if we’re putting down roots into the earth. And if we find it helpful, we could imagine drawing up energy from the earth – drawing it up into that area below the navel that we were focussing on yesterday. Being nourished by the earth, taking in all the positive qualities of the earth.
* Letting the posture grow up out of those roots, like a tree rising up towards the sky, towards the sun. Rising up to our full height without stress, without strain, just gently opening. Bringing awareness into the body with kindness, with care, exploring how it is now
* Really letting the awareness be as metta-full as can be. So we’re really soaking the body in kindness, soaking it in care
* Yesterday I was emphasising that although we’re in our own physical spaces, we can all meet as part of one practice, on the heart level. And we can strengthen that experience through imagination, so let’s now open out into a sense of blue sky. This blue sky is limitless, peaceful, warm, loving. It’s a blue sky of heart awareness, so there’s nothing empty or cold or dead about it. It’s alive, it’s vivid. And within the blue sky we can feel, we can sense, maybe see a wonderful place in which we can all meet. Could be a shrine room, could be a whole mandala palace if you’re that way inclined. It’s a dharma place, it’s a heart place, it’s a place of bodhicitta. And we and everyone on the retreat, we’re all seated or standing or lying if we want to be, within this dharma place. And just as we do when we meet in a physical retreat centre and do the dedication ceremony, we can imagine that around our dharma meeting place is a great ring of lotuses. Pure, soft, open ; protecting our heart- mind, protecting our shared retreat, with all the qualities of the lotus family
* And beyond the ring of lotuses we see, we feel, we sense a great wall of vajras, diamond thunderbolts; protecting our heart-mind, protecting our shared retreat, with all the qualities of the vajra family, Akshobya
* And beyond the vajra wall a great ring of flames, flames of wisdom; protecting our heart-mind, protecting our shared retreat, with all the qualities of Vairocana, the Buddha family of Vairocana the illuminator
* And protected by all these qualities, we’re sitting together all focussed on the centre of the mandala, in which are all the qualities of awakening, of enlightenment; and they can appear in whatever way it’s most helpful for us. As the Buddha, as our yidam, whatever’s most helpful. Whatever form it takes, or even if there is no form and there’s just a felt sense of the qualities, whatever’s there at the centre of the mandala is all the qualities of all the awakened ones. Just rest for a minute in the experience of being in the presence of complete freedom, limitless awareness, great love, supreme wisdom
* Now with each in-breath let’s take in those qualities that are being offered to us. A sense of all those qualities pouring in from that great treasury of qualities, or we can focus on one particular quality that feels just what’s needed now. Taking that quality or qualities deep into the body, deep into the heart, deep into our being. And that process can just carry on with the in-breath. And now with the out-breath we can start to share. As if we’re just a channel for those qualities ; they come into us, fulfil us and satisfy us, and then they’re shared with the out-breath. Firstly with everyone meditating with us. And then out from all of us into the world, wherever it’s needed, wherever those qualities will help. Seeing and feeling those qualities as they go out having an effect, being a support, being a help, enabling people to transform their heart-minds
* Now when we’re ready, letting go of making any effort. Just aware of whatever’s there. And gently and carefully coming back to the body, sounds we can hear around, awareness of our surroundings and the physical place where we are
* To finish, sharing the merits, sharing the benefits, with a few words or maybe just a wordless heart wish

**Six yogas of Tilopa : intro** (20 mins)

I’ve realised that for me as the decades as an Order Member go on, whenever I do a retreat, yes it always has a particular theme and I do my best to explore that, but somehow it feels more and more important that a large gathering of Order Members is also just a chance for us to come together and sort of constitute a Bodhisattva, and pour some good energy and love and compassion into the world. Whatever else we may do together I’m really grateful when we come together and do that.

So yesterday I gave a short introduction to Mahamudra and there’s more on the webpage. So we looked at Mahamudra a little bit and I introduced this Barlung really easy breathing below the navel, which for many people at least is very relaxing and healing and tends to encourage non-conceptuality, tends to quieten thoughts - it draws energy down into this area. And in session 3 I was talking a bit about mindfulness. We looked at that first extract, and I was relating mindfulness to inner wisdom and something which becomes very deep. So it’s not just something that’s keeping track and about whether we’re doing it right, it’s nothing to do with that at all.

So I’d like to go on and make a short beginning before we have a break. The other extract I’ve sent you – I’ll send you more because these 2 extracts both come from the shamatha chapter and we’re also going to be looking at the vipassana aspect. So I want to start in on the 2nd extract that you have, from Lesson 23. One of the riches of the *Ocean of True Meaning* is the 9th Karmapa gives a lot of quotations from different practitioners over the centuries. So here’s one from the Siddha Orgyenpa. I can’t remember much about Orgyenpa but he’s quite often quoted in these Mahamudra texts, and he was a siddha, a realized being. And ‘Orgyen’ is a bit like Bhante – ‘Urgyen Sangharakshita – ‘Orgyen is the guy who comes from or who dwells in Urgyen.

‘It is said that the practice of Mahamudra is the main method for purifying the superficial impurities. When the end of the path is reached those so- called superficial impurities have been removed.’

So the practice of Mahamudra – and here Mahamudra is not just the beginning practices, this is more moving into the deep practice of Mahamudra – is the ‘main method for purifying the superficial impurities’ and the superficial impurities here are the 2 veils of klesha - the different negative emotions, and jñeya - our various misunderstandings and confusions and delusions about how things are. So when you remove those 2 veils then you’ve completed the bodhisattva path, you’ve completed the six perfections and then you are realized.

So ‘when the end of the path is reached those so called superficial impurities have been removed’. They’re called superficial - that’s maybe not quite the right word. I seem to have been quoting a lot a conversation I had with Bhante when he said people don’t realise just how deep the kleshas go - they think they’re going to dissolve them away with a bit of metta bhavana. Yes there are these kleshas and the jñeya and in a sense they go deep. When we really come up against our deep tendencies to craving and aversion there’s some real work to do there. And similarly with the jñeya, the knowing, the wisdom side of things. Yes we find that OK we see through one level of views we have about reality but then we find oh there’s another whole layer of wallpaper we hadn’t realised was there, another set of concepts that we’re just taking it as ‘this is how things are’ ; and then we realise ‘no that’s another set of concepts’ and that just keeps on going. So there’s a lot of work to be done But they *are* superficial in the sense that they’re not innate, they’re not inherent in how mind is. So from that point of view the really good news is they are what are called ‘adventitious defilements’ which means they’re more like the dust on the mirror than something which is actually on the surface of the mirror that you couldn’t get out.

‘At the request to grant instructions on this mahamudra…..’

So Orgyenpa asked his teacher for instructions on Mahamudra

‘I was told that I had to concentrate on putting into practice the six doctrines of Tilopa, that there were no instructions besides that.’

Well there are lots of Mahamudra instructions that have been gathered together over the centuries, but in a way it’s saying well if you really practice these then everything else is included in that ; if you get this you’ve got everything. And these six doctrines of Tilopa - you may have heard of the six yogas of Naropa. So Tilopa was Naropa’s teacher, he was an Indian yogi and he has these six teachings which we’ll see in a minute

‘At the request to grant instructions on how to put them into practice, I received the following instructions : firstly do not ponder, do not think, do not reflect, do not meditate, do not analyse, leave the mind as it is’

So this is what he was told to do and this is really for deep practice and we’ll see what it all means in a minute, but it’s for a very deep level of just sitting. And we can take these as guides and helpful ways to help ourselves be on the right track, but people tend to read these and think ‘oh but isn’t reflection helpful’ for instance? ‘Don’t we…. Bhante did lots of reflection’. So what we want, we’re not saying to go into things like ‘don’t think about the past, don’t think about the future’, so we’re not saying never think about the past, never think about the future, don’t reflect. All those things can be really helpful. So to reflect on impermanence you have to have some kind of thinking about the past and the future otherwise you won’t really see it. But it’s also really important to be able to enter another mode in which we’re not thinking about the past, we don’t have to think about the future and so on, we don’t have to reflect. We actually have the off button for these things. So that we’re not having to function in a way where mind keeps turning over the past, mind keeps leaning towards the future and so on. So if we practise – its a kind of a non-practice - in the way of these six doctrines of Tilopa we’ll be in just sitting. And just sitting can be as Bhante often described it, a sort of balance to structured practice. So OK you might do some reflection in impermanence when you’re thinking about the past – things that were in the past and they’re not here now and thinking about things that are here now and won’t be there in the future and so on. And then having done that you might just sit, you might just really let all that sink in. You might do a sadhana practice, you might do all kinds of things, and then you come back to this just really, really really simple way of being. So it can work in this way as a counter balance. But also the six doctrines of Tilopa are a direction for our whole practice as we become freer. As we become freer, as we become lighter, we’ll become less caught up in the past, we’ll be less bothered about what the future holds, we won’t be obsessively sort of having to talk to ourselves and tell ourselves to stay in the present and so on. So these six are also giving us a sense, a flavour of a very free, open, immediate way of being, and the more that we can get a sense of that, that will be really helpful.

*[short break]*

**Six yogas of Tilopa : letting go of past and future** (20 mins)

Before the break we were beginning to enter into the six doctrines of Tilopa and the first of those – so these were the Mahamudra instructions that he was given. And the first of those was

‘Do not ponder about the past’.

Ponder means turn it over in your mind, go over and over.

‘Pursuing the past causes the concepts of grasper and grasped to arise. But since the practice does not depend on the past, it is said “do not pursue the past”’.

So as I said before the break, there are times in our spiritual life when it’s really good to reflect on the past - if we don’t learn from the past then very often we repeat those patterns. However when we’re just sitting, no need. No need to go into the past. And it says ‘pursuing the past causes the concepts of grasper and grasped to arise’ So there’s a sense – a memory of the past appears and we sort of latch onto it and we produce this sense of a meditator that this happened to, and a feeling of ‘oh if only I hadn’t done that or oh that was such a lovely time’ or whatever. So then we have the memory, and the meditator that feels like it’s the owner of the memory, the one that the memory happened to. So we create complexity in the mind. We create a sense of a sort of split with me the meditator and the past that this happened to. So the aim is that yes as we’re meditating all kinds of things can pop up, but we aren’t engaging with them we aren’t putting energy into them, we aren’t getting involved in them as we’re doing this practice. We’re wanting to let things just flow naturally as much as possible. So if a thought of 20 years ago comes up, OK there it is, there’s a picture in the mind from 20 years ago, there’s some words. And rather than thinking ‘oh yes I remember and oh that wasn’t good or oh that was great’, we just let it be a picture and some words. And when we do that, what happens next? Having popped up, it pops down again. There’s nothing else it can do. Because of the nature of things, everything is flow everything is impermanent. So unless we put energy into it, it will come, it will arise and it will pass. And then there’ll be the next experience.

So we want to have this sense of that sort of flowing freedom where OK all kinds of things can arise, appear, and they are they are experienced there is awareness of them, and then they go, and the next experience, the next experience. Very flowing, very easy, But what tends to happen is that we get stuck to things. Something comes up and it has an emotional charge and we start to think about it and then we put more energy into it which means that we go into that world. What started off as maybe just a kind of picture of something that happened 20 years ago, because we are involved with it, it produces another picture and another picture and then some thoughts, and the next thing we know it’s like we’re back there 20 years ago. We’ve entered that world. So the instruction is let’s not build on these simple experience let’s just leave – ‘in the seen, just the seen’. So OK there’s an image from 20 years ago, there it is, and we let it go. And that’s true for something from 20 years ago. It’s also true for something from a moment ago. Because very often we’re meditating and just open to everything and then we get caught up in something and then we emerge from that thinking; and rather than just carrying on we kind of go ‘oh where was I? oh I’ve lost it and I must kind of pull myself out of that’. But actually we already had. For there to be, you know, if I’m thinking about going for a run at lunchtime…. there was meditation happening, and next thing I knew there were these images of going for a run at lunchtime, and then suddenly I’m sort of back with present awareness. I’m already out of that thought about running, but very often what I then do is I kind of tell myself ‘oh I shouldn’t have been thinking about running’ which puts me back into it again. Do you see what I mean? Once there’s that present moment of awareness there’s no need to think about what just happened, there’s just this sense of ‘ah! aware’ here, that aliveness, there’s a sort of heart celebration of being now. So no need to even try and investigate what just happened. When we come into the present moment, just flowing with that.

So part of what this is aiming to help us get is that we can really use impermanence as a friend with these things, because whatever arises in mind is a conditioned arising and it will naturally arise and pass, and it will arise and pass very easily and naturally and quickly unless we then go through a process of creating a sense of me in relation to it, taking a stance about it and engaging energy with it. So whatever arises in mind isn’t a problem in itself, the issue is how we are then drawn towards to it and create a sense of me in relation to it and then we’re off and running with moving into a world. So what we’re aiming to discover is the freedom that there is when we experience but we don’t add anything on. Then we discover that things, they just come and they go. So there can be all kinds of experiences, anything can come up from the past and it’s just a picture, it’s just a few words, it’s just an image. In itself that’s not a problem, that’s not an issue. It’s what we add on. It’s catching all the add-ons that we do. And gradually learning to dismantle those and to savour that freedom of not having to be drawn into the past every time. Yes maybe there are things in the past which we do need to reflect on we need to fully experience them, OK but in this practice this is not how we’re operating. In this practice we’re finding that freedom where we allow things just to come and go. We can enjoy watching all kinds of things emerge and then they disappear - they emerge and then they disappear. Finding the freedom of that and not having to create that sense of a split. Not having to be the owner of everything that happened and have a view on everything that happened, and all that. Because we can feel as we do that it gets more and more complex, it’s like all the space gets filled up and something which felt quite light and free starts to become heavier and more dense. So learning to see the use of impermanence, to really go with impermanence, to allow things to arise and pass away, is a really valuable life skill, dharma skill, meditation skill.

OK I’m going to go fairly quickly through these, but we can come back to them and if you have questions we’ll take some of those. I’m going to jump one because the usual order of these is that you go ‘past, future, present’, that’s usually how the six doctrines of Tilopa are laid out. So the next one here, I’m not sure about this translation really but it says

‘Do not reflect, means not to anticipate the future’

Anticipate is the key word really so ‘don’t anticipate the future’

‘ if you anticipate and make plans for the future you betray your practice and you miss a chance to recognise the main practice. Therefore it is said “do not betray to the enemy”

So the Tibetan for that last sentence says ‘don’t let your practice slip into the hands of the enemy’. So just as we’re letting thoughts and images from the past just come and go, we’re doing our best to do the same with thoughts and images about the future. They’re just thoughts and images. No need to build anything on them. Just let them be as they are – let them come, let them go. This is all the practice of learning to flow with impermanence – flowing with impermanence is flowing with how things are, when there’s no resistance. Dukkha is the friction between how things are and how we’re treating them. So not holding onto the past, not holding on to the future. And it says ‘ if you anticipate and make plans for the future you betray your practice and you miss a chance to recognise the main practice. So you miss a chance to really experience how things are, and you miss a chance to experience freedom. And you do that because again, in relation to the future we’re always relating what’s going to happen in the future to me and what I want to happen, what I hope will happen, what I’m afraid might happen, and so on. And the way in which we keep a sense of ‘me’ is through the three times, is through having a sense of ‘me’ ; the sense of ‘me’ is something that persists. There was I when I was six, here am I now, and I really hope I’m going to be here tomorrow and next year and the year after that. So we maintain a sense of a separate self through creating that sense of the separate self that has been there in the past, is here now, will be there in the future. So the more we focus on the future and the past and all that it meant to me, all it will mean to me, the more we’re maintaining that sense of a separate ‘me’, a ‘me’ separate from all other experience. And so that’s betraying our practice.

And I think this one’s particularly important these days because so much of society’s based on an idea of where we’re going, where we’re headed, making progress to some goal or another, ‘what are you trying to achieve, what are you trying to obtain?’ And we could carry that imperative to lean towards the future into our dharma practice as well, because we’re supposed to be trying to attain supreme and perfect Enlightenment, for heaven’s sake! So we should be heading down the path as fast as possible. So there’s a sort of forward leaning that is really really unhelpful because it takes us out of our experience. All our experience now is what’s not good enough because we should really be heading further down the path. All our experience now is just a stepping stone, it’s instrumental in getting us to where we really want to be. So we’re constantly discounting our experience now. We’re not really living our experience now because it’s not what really ought to be happening; what should be happening is this thing that we really hope will happen in the future. So by constantly comparing what’s happening now with the past and the future we create all kinds of dukkha for ourselves, it’s just horrible. So it’s really helpful to have that kind of filter where we’re aware in our practice – am I in the past, am I in the future, am I in the present?

And that sense of self is very much tied up with our whole story telling tendency. As human beings we’re such incredible story-tellers. So we’re always telling ourselves the story of me. The latest episode in this ongoing drama, this soap opera as they call them in English. You know, you get these programmes where there’s another episode several times a week or every day and there’s always dramas going on. We love that, because that really gives us a sense that we exist. ‘I’ve always been here and I know that because all those dramatic things happened 10 years ago, that happened 15 years ago, that happened…. ‘ ‘Here I am now feeling really upset about that and really cross about this… ‘ And when you’re in these sorts of states, there’s a really strong sense of ‘me’ in here. It feels like ‘ here I am!’ And then we kind of create that sense of ‘yes and in the future I’m going to do this and I’m going to do that’ and so on and so on. And then I’m going to die…. And up and down and up and down, and it’s all there’s all these cliffhanger endings of what’s happening in the story. And actually awakening and Enlightenment are much simpler than that. And they’re kind of quieter than that. But because we’re so used to, and we’ve taken it into ourselves so deeply, this sense of separate ‘me’, and because there’s a fear that if that’s not there well what will there be? What would happen if I wasn’t here, looking after everything? ….yes, we just keep telling the story. At the moment I’m just seeing stories everywhere. I’m a bit of a sports fan and I realise actually so much of the coverage of the sport isn’t actually about what’s the actual match that’s being played, or race or whatever. It’s nearly all getting you involved in the story. So there’s this person that’s just come back from this really bad injury which might have threatened their whole career and will they be as good as they were before their injury? And so you’re invited to really feel for that person, really go into their story. Or there’s that person who if they win this particular event they will be the best European woman ever in this sport or whatever. So you’re drawn into the story all the time. And stories are fantastic, I love telling stories. But also it’s really good to be able to step out of the stories and just be with experience now. Because the story always goes back to the past. ‘Once upon a time’ our story starts, and now we’re in this episode and we really hope that in a few episodes’ time there’s going to be that fantastic happy ending. So we need to be able to step out of the story of me. And see how much we’re telling ourselves the story of me. And it feels like if we do that, well what will there be? You know, ‘don’t ponder, don’t think, don’t reflect, don’t meditate, don’t analyse’ – it feels like well what will be left? It’s a bit like being in lockdown and being told right you can’t go to see your friends, you can’t go to a gallery or a museum – what are you left with? But actually in those moments when we just really are fully experiencing, not concerned with ourselves, we’re just *here,* there’s incredible richness, and there is all life and it is all constantly arising and it’s passing away, and it’s wondrous. But we’ve got so used to that other way of being where you know there’s a ‘me’ in relation to life, checking out you know how it all relates to the story of me. We feel like without that there’ll be nothing. But that’s – the whole dharma is pointing us to this other way of experiencing. So let’s try it out, let’s really give it a go and discover the taste of freedom in it.

**Meditation : aware sensations** (20 mins)

* So once we’ve found a position that’s as supportive as possible, just rest – nothing to do
* And it can be really helpful to notice how before ‘I’ do anything, so much that’s important is just happening all by itself. Senses are open, sounds are happening and being registered, feeling of warmth or cold in the room, all the amazing processes in the body all happening without any sense of ‘me’ having to intervene. Heart beating, lungs operating. And there’s awareness of all this, all this is known without ‘me’ having to do anything
* And the earth is bearing us up, supporting us, like it nearly always does. Solid and reliable. And there’s all that space above us and all around; maybe through the ceiling, through the roof, through the walls, open space.
* Now let’s fill the body with awareness. The body’s always present, the body’s always now. Letting the experience of what we call the body just unfold moment by moment
* And whatever sense of ‘me the meditator’ there is, letting it be very light. Letting it be simple, no need to have views about what’s happening – judgements are all way of keeping a distance. We want to get right close up, right alongside the sensations and the energy currents.
* Maybe we could relax any idea of awareness coming to the sensations. Maybe there can just be aware sensations appearing like bubbles, constantly transforming. Everything happening all by itself.
* And finally if there’s been any sense of doing a meditation, just let that go

**Day 2 Session 2**

**Pointers on standing meditation** (10 mins)

A couple of the questions I’ve received related to standing meditation which I mentioned, in relation to drowsiness. And saying it’s not something we tend to do in Tritatna. And Vijayamala and I spent about 10 minutes before the session putting the webcams somewhere where you could get the whole of me in but it was difficult. So I’m just going to say a little bit about standing meditation. I do think it’s a good way to go if you’re very drowsy. I was on a few retreats with somebody some years ago who had serious medical problems and was taking a lot of medication and would repeatedly just fall asleep in meditation, and we had them standing up and just leaning against a chair, so he wasn’t going to fall over, his arms were supported and in that position yeah he could stay awake enough to have a good go at meditating.

There are also quite a few of us in the Order now who are doing standing forms of Qi Gong. And Qi Gong is a sort of Chinese energy exercise. And I’ve done it for a good decade or so now. And there are different positions that you stand in, and so basically I am standing in positions that move energy in good ways, but also I just use the time to meditate. Although they don’t look like much they tend to be quite demanding, so you often have to kind of build up to do them. But the basics of them is you’re carrying what’s a good sitting posture into standing. So you want to be standing with your feet about shoulder-width apart, maybe slightly more. And you don’t want your feet turned inwards, you don’t want to be pigeon-toed. So they either want to be straight on or they could be facing slightly outwards. And so there you are you’ve got that solid base, and your knees, unless you really want to work hard, your knees want to be just not locked. If they’re locked that will block the energy going through them. So you want them just mildly, slightly bent. And the upper body as usual, as with sitting meditation it wants to be straight, you want a little lift from the crown of the head – it’s as if the crown of your head was attached to something. You see pictures of Tibetan nuns in 3 year retreat with very long hair where the hair has actually been tied to something above their sitting place, so they’re actually being held in this sort of position, with the crown of the head really lifting. So you can imagine that sense, and that just slightly brings your chin in. And the arms can be in different positions. You want a little bit of space under the armpits. If you’re sitting with your arms very close in then that blocks energy. If you just notice, if you just leave a little bit of space under the armpits that allows the energy to flow much better. And you want to be lifting out of the hips so (puts camera so V can see himself) so this area here it’s very easy to kind of collapse it downwards in which case your lower back collapses, so you want to be lifting up out of the hips. This is true of sitting posture as well, it’s very easy to just kind of lose that, and your back sort of slumps and again that really blocks the energy. And your pelvis wants to be, from how it tends to be with most people, it wants to be slightly tucked under, so your bottom’s not sticking out and neither is your belly, you have to experiment to get it right. So in that basic posture, energy can flow well through the body. And you can either have the hands just by your sides but just enough to leave that little bit of space under the armpits. The hands want to be relaxed, a little bit of space between the fingers, and slightly - and not in abhaya mudra - but slightly curved and softened, and you want there to be a straight line through the forearm, the wrist into the hand. So you can just stand with the hands down close to the sides and that would be a very good posture and you’ll feel, certainly if you practice it for a little bit, you’ll start to feel blood and energy moving through the body from that. And there’s a whole art to this in the Qi Gong tradition, about 200 slightly different postures, all of which have a slightly different effect on energy - so there’s a whole kind of field of exploration there. If you find you’ve been standing with your hands by your sides like that, after a while that might feel tiring, so another good thing to do is just to bring the two hands so that they are resting down in the area below the navel - so resting in that area where we’ve been doing Barlung. So this area below the navel is a very good place, it’s a sort of reservoir of energy in the body, and you can gather energy there which is helpful. If you’re ever really ill and your energy is really gone and you can’t get out of bed or something, a really good thing to do is just to lie with your hands over that area. It just gathers some energy, drop by drop when you haven’t got any, it’s really helpful.

It really is well worth experimenting with, particularly if you’re tired and drowsy. Even just to do it for 3,4,5 minutes and then sit back down. But also it’s, like walking meditation it’s another way of starting to take meditation out of sitting on a chair or a cushion. Ideally we want to be able to meditate in the four positions: sitting, standing, lying walking.

**Meditation : open in the six senses** (35 mins)

* So in this meditation we’ll do some just sitting, remembering at least the first two pieces of advice from Tilopa : no need to concern ourselves with the past, no need to bother about the future. Let’s explore the richness of our current experience
* So now nothing to do, just aware of whatever’s going on, as it is
* And before we go any further, opening to who we’re practising with. Yes, we’re practising with one another… and we can open to the refuges. Open to the Buddha, open to our yidam, open to all those practitioners over the centuries who just like us sat with their experience, went down blind alleys, kept following the dharma, kept devoted to the refuges, to their teachers, and became freer and freer. Just opening to that inspiration and that influence. that adhisthana which is not anything to do with ‘me’. Whether it feels a reality to you or just an idea, just go with it. And also for a minute or so just aware of who we are practising for – may be particular people we hold in our heart, but we’re also practising to find a way to freedom, to find a way to how things really are, to be able to share that with others, practising to benefit the world.
* And with that inspiration and motivation let’s take our awareness down to the ground. And see if we can experience the contact with the ground, the earth, in as simple and direct a way as possible. No need to add on ideas about how I’m doing this, how well I’m doing this. If they’re there we just let them come and go. Don’t need ideas about me and the ground. Just warmth, just pressure
* Now being aware of our posture, letting it be as supportive and helpful as possible so that energy can flow as freely as possible
* Now aware of the body as a whole. Noticing the quality of the attention, the quality of what feels like the meditator, if there needs to be one. Letting the awareness that we bring be as non-judgemental, as light, as intimate with the experience as possible. And having consciously directed the awareness we just relax, no need to do anything ; sensations and feelings coming and going, no need to create a sense of someone who’s involved with them. Just vivid experience.
* No trying. No trying to make anything super-aware, super-clear, no trying to lose the observer. Just relaxation, letting everything come and go
* Now let’s widen out awareness. Let’s include anything we can hear. If we can’t hear anything, just aware of the silence. No sense of ‘trying to hear’ no sense of sending out search parties to find sounds. As it were, letting everything come to us. No need to build stories on what we can hear, no need to identify or label. But if identifying and labelling happens, it’s OK - not making a big deal out of it. Really relaxed in relation to whatever’s happening in terms of sound
* Now adding in sight. If it feels right, letting the eyes gently open. Not focussing on anything in particular ; because the eyes are open and there’s awareness there, the sights are registered. Staying relaxed, not getting involved, no need to do anything about them. If it doesn’t feel appropriate to open the eyes, being aware of the patterns on the backs of the eyelids.
* Adding in anything we can taste or smell. No need to be for or against it, just really simple. Just this simple experience, nothing added on
* Now let’s add in the movements of mind. Emotions, our mood, words, pictures, whatever’s there. Again not building on them, relaxed in relation to them, aware as they come and go, as they constantly change.
* No-one needs to decide which sense experience we pay attention to. Awareness can just move freely between any of the six senses. That sense of ‘me the meditator’ is just more movements of mind
* Now if there’s any sense of doing something called meditation, just relaxing, no need. Just simple experience.
* Now we come back to where we started ; entrust the whole practice to the refuge, and all the benefit however we think of it, sharing the benefit with all those we’re practising for, which finally is all life

**Day 2 Session 3**

I want to carry on looking at the six doctrines of Tilopa but first I’m just going to sneak in a little question I’ve been asked which follows on from the first session today

*Do you have any suggestions on how we can avoid making the discussion groups another instalment of the soap opera of ‘me’?*

So in the first session I was talking about not chasing after the past, not getting involved in the future and how we create a whole narrative about ‘me’ which we need to do going through time, and that can become a real drama. In fact the more drama there is in it, the more we’re reassured about this solid sense of ‘me’ that’s here. And then we meet up and go into discussion groups, and we talk about us. And that’s OK – the alternative would be that we ‘talk on dharma or noble silence’. But nothing wrong with sharing our experience and make these teachings our own. To do that we need to bring in our experience. But there are one or two things that just occurred to me would be helpful if we don’t want to strengthen the narrative of ‘me’, if we want to move into a freer space. One is that we could really as much as possible with the other people in the group, really give them our attention. The last retreat I did from Adhisthana was called ‘When I give, I give myself’, and there are different things you can give but one really precious thing is that we can just really attend to another person. And to do that means really going out to them, really not holding back, and part of *avidya* is ignoring, so quite often in situations with other people we’re just keeping ourselves back here a bit, we’re not fully engaging, and when we do that then instead of opening our heart and really engaging we sit back here and we kind of comment and we judge and ‘they’re like that, they do that’ - all that just then strengthens the narrative of ‘me’. But if we manage to as best we can really take in those other people with their lives then that works against that tendency, even if we’re talking about experience. And when we’re talkingabout our experience there are different ways we can do it, but the more that we can speak from our heart the more we can speak honestly from our heart without being concerned about keeping up appearances and how other people will see us, all that will all just help. And that really authentic heart communication is coming from a different level than the usual story of me.

So let’s come back to Orgyenpa, and he was told that to practice Mahamudra he needed to practise these six doctrines of Tilopa – so not to ponder on the past, not to reflect and anticipate the future. And I’ve taken them out of order, so I’ve done the first one and then the third one. So then the second one is

‘Don’t think about the present. If you fabricate anything on top of the present you make a fundamental mistake about the practice. And your meditation becomes a victim of circumstances. This is like letting a stranger into your house. Therefore it’s said “don’t spoil with corrections”’

So we think ‘OK right I’ve got it. I’m not going to pursue the past when I’m practising like this, I’m not going to anticipate the future. So it’s all about ‘now’. And you can make a big thing about being in the now. And again that can be very helpful if it’s helping you be aware when you go into the past and the future - although the past and the future are always things that we are constructing ‘now’. We never literally go into the past, we never literally go into the future, we just create scenarios in the present. Yes, so it’s helpful to come down to ‘OK this present moment’. But then something which has been helpful can become another idea that we hold onto. So we keep saying to ourselves ‘present moment, present moment’, and actually the present moment is another concept, it’s another idea about our experience. We never find a present moment. And more than that, this is saying don’t build anything onto what’s happening. Don’t add to the simple experience. So we’re back to Bahiya and ‘in the seen just the seen, in the heard just the heard’. But very often we are building a whole sense of firstly a duality between ‘me the experiencer’ and the experience, and then on top of that likes and dislikes, for and against, all kinds of ideas. So there can be just a simple something – it’s like as I’m sitting here looking at you, you know, if somebody yawns, say, I can think ‘ oh dear this is so boring, why did I decide to talk about this and I’m not doing it very well...’ So what have I got? My actual experience is just someone going *[yawn]*…… That was it, and then it finished, in one second. But rather than just that being in the experience and then the next experience happening, I build and build, and I build the sense of ‘me’ and that person and I build a sense of what are they thinking and how is this coming across, and out of just *[yawn]*…...I make myself really miserable. Easy, no problem! So what we’re aiming to do is just leave things simple, as much as possible. Because when we add things on top we make a fundamental mistake about the practice, when we’re practising like this. ‘And your meditation becomes a victim of circumstances. This is like letting a stranger into your house’. So it’s like we let this person into the house who makes lots of judgements about everything, who’s constantly in favour of this and doesn’t think that should happen. And we don’t need that, we don’t need to make things so complicated.

‘Therefore it is said do not spoil with corrections’. So this practice is really radical, hard core just sitting. Because usually in meditation we think ‘ah things aren’t going in the right direction so I need to make a course correction here, I need to change this, I need to change that’. And if you’re practising in that way, then you do. But if we come to this level of Mahamudra just sitting, we’re just letting everything be as it is, because all our attempts to change things and make corrections are based on an idea of a ‘me’ that can become better and that wants better experience. So even aiming to become more relaxed, even to just simply be….’oh it would be fantastic to just simply be’. So who wants to ‘simply be’? When we really radically let go of not only the narrative of ‘me’ that’s causing suffering, but even the narrative of ‘me’ trying to get somewhere else in order to be more rich in wonderful qualities – even that is still narrative of ‘me’. It’s still referring back to me at the centre of things. And what we want is for mind to forget to do that. We want mind to completely forget to come back to this sense of me at the centre of things. We want for there just to be the unfolding flowing natural experience, natural awareness without a centre. So this is as I say is really radical. Most of our discourse I think in Triratna about just sitting isn’t quite getting to this point. It’s like for instance Subhuti a while ago he gave a sort of off the cuff talk about just sitting where he outlines a number of stages that the just sitting would go through. And one of them’s ‘just waiting’, so it’s like you get so far and then you just hold yourself there with the experience, just waiting, until a deeper experience happens. But from this Mahamudra point of view, just waiting even for a deeper experience - why are we doing that? Because we want it to deepen, we want to have this really deep, rich experience. So even seeing things in those terms isn’t quite getting to this radical level. On this level, we’re really letting go of self. We’re even letting go of me the meditator who wants to be Enlightened. So we’ll be doing a lot of practices that will be working towards this but at the same time this will finally be where the freedom is, and if we can tap into it to some degree we’ll be a lot freer a lot quicker.

So that’s ‘don’t think about the present’. Don’t fabricate anything on top of it. So we’re learning to trust the unfolding nature of experience when we don’t interfere, when we don’t create a ‘me’ that then goes and interferes. Because everything arises and passes, everything just flows.

So let’s carry on a little bit

‘Do not meditate on emptiness. If you meditate on this world and its inhabitants as being empty in a limited way, like a vase empty of water, you will not understand the meaning of the abiding nature. Therefore it’s said “leave appearances as they are”’

So from the Mahayana point of view, meditation on emptiness is really highly recommended – it’s looking into the nature of things. And at times in Mahamudra practice in the vipassana aspect of it we’re going to look into the empty nature of things. But right now we’re not even meditating on emptiness. We’re not meditating on anything, because any move that we make to meditate will be artificial, based on a sense of ‘me trying to get somewhere’. So we’re really trusting life here. We’re really trusting the flow of life to unfold, when we don’t create any artificiality in it. So more generally we could say with this one ‘don’t fabricate meditation according to your ideas about how meditation should be’. So don’t meditate on emptiness

‘If you meditate on the world and their inhabitants as being empty in a limited way like a vase empty of water, you will not understand the meaning of the abiding nature’. So this is particularly aiming that meditation on emptiness where you’re seeing the absence of anything inherently existent in experience. And it says ‘in a limited way like a vase empty of water’ because often that kind of meditation, particularly for Westerners, leads us into a nihilistic place. You look and you can’t find anything so there’s ‘nothing there’. And this seems to be a pitfall that we can easily fall into. So firstly there is no such thing as empti*ness.* There’s just the empty nature of things. And when it says things are ‘empty’ it doesn’t mean that there is nothing. So if I’m on retreat with some of you including Vijaya say and I go into the shrine room and I look around thinking ‘Vijaya should be here, I was told he was in the shrine room’ and he’s not there, the shrine room is empty of Vijayas. It may be full of 45 other people and a shrine and lights and carpet and walls and everything else. But something that I was expecting to find there isn’t there. Or some*one* in this case. So similarly, there is no such thing as emptiness, there are just the absence of things that we assume to be there. An absence of the kind of fixed self that we assume to be here; there’s an absence of the solidity, reliability and kind of core existence of things in our experience; there’s an absence of entities. So we won’t find any of that, which we just kind of assume. So looking into this is helpful. But it doesn’t mean that there is nothing. I think because we live in a society that’s quite nihilistic there’s often a fear deep down in people that if you really explore and go deeply into emptiness you’ll end up in some sort of cosmic black hole. So what you find when you go into experience is all the richness of experience. You just don’t find the fixedness, the ‘thing-ness’. So when you go into your experience of yourself yeah you find all the 5 skandhas, you find all the rupa, all the vedana you find all the thoughts and so forth, you find the volitions and energy and you find awareness – you just don’t find the ‘me’ that feels like it’s the proud owner of the 5 skandhas, which we tend to assume is there in the centre of our experience or standing behind our experience. So if you meditate on emptiness as absence without seeing that it’s the absence of a mistaken idea, and all the richness and dynamism of the mind is constantly producing all the richness, all the worlds that are experienced, then you’re meditating on things being empty ‘in a limited way like a vase empty of water’. And you won’t understand the meaning of the abiding nature. The abiding nature is what is – how things always are

‘Don’t analyse objects of thought. If you analyse objects of thought, however well and brilliantly you may do it, it does not go beyond characteristics, conceptual mind and mental objects. Therefore it is said “do not analyse objects of desire”’

So again certainly in most forms of Buddhism one approach to either to insight or to reducing to pull on us of objects of desire is to go into them and analyse them – what are they made up of and what are they like. You might have some attractive object of desire and you break it down and you think well it’s just made up of bits and pieces and none of those are actually very attractive and anyway if I get hold of it it will change, it will it won’t give me lasting satisfaction. And all that, again, can be really helpful reflection and good meditation. But when we’re again practising this radical just sitting, all that is moving around conceptual counters. It’s staying in the realm of thought and it’s not allowing things to be simple, it’s not taking us into direct experience, we’re carrying on in a world of right view but it’s not going to take us to perfect vision.

So there’s a little list of things not to do. So – don’t ponder on the past, don’t anticipate the future, don’t turn the present into some kind of a thing, don’t make a song and dance about the present moment, don’t build things on top of what’s going on, don’t meditate on emptiness or anything else in relation to it, don’t reflect and analyse it, just let it be as it is. Which is the sixth one, which we’ll leave to tomorrow.

So I’ve just gone at high speed through three of them – is there anything anybody would like to clarify or ask?

*[Chandramani] You were talking about analysing objects and it might be working in the world of right view but it’s not going to take you into perfect vision. A lot of Buddhism is about analysing objects. Are we saying only Mahamudra is going to take us into perfect vision?*

No, but at some point we’ll need to let go. Or the analysing of the objects has to take us into a deeper experience where the conceptual framework falls away. And yes we can all practise analysing objects and if that helps that whole framework to fall away or even if it helps just to reduce the objects of desire, all well and good. But as we’re practising here, it will still be adding to a sense of ‘me’ trying to get to deep insight. Which means we are still in a way reinforcing a sense of me in the centre of things

*I was thinking of the six element practice or something like that is analysing objects – or the skhandhas or any of those things.*

Yes.So we’re not saying you should never do any of those things. You could reflect on the future and think so supposing I have 10 years to live, how do I want to practise, how do I want to live my life? Supposing I’ve got 3 years to live, how do I want to practise, how do I want to live my life? Supposing I’ve got one month to live. That would be really great spiritual practice. And at another time it would be really helpful. But practising just sitting in this way, we leave all that on one side. And that’s a kind of counterbalance to that work of reflection and analysing. So it’s not either/or, but in this situation it’s seen as not helpful for what we’re trying to do right now.

*[Tejasvini] Could you say a little bit more about the natural abiding? I understood that you meant it isn’t how things are but I don’t understand how those words ‘natural abiding’ correspond to how things are*

Well, this translation says ‘you will not understand the meaning of the abiding nature’. So to abide means to dwell somewhere. So what ‘abiding’ means here what is always here. How things always are. So the abiding nature is the nature of things that we always find, whatever we look at.

*[Kusaladana] Are we looking in the abiding nature of kind of developing a faculty of changing the state of the mind so it can just be with the direct experience without all the commentary of an ego behind it. So mind kind of gently lowers its energy and changes its shape so it can actually deep in a kind of deep resonance with how things are?*

There’s certainly a heart opening that happens and yes in a way there’s a term that’s used in Mahamudra which is *rigpa,*  which is very much a heart awareness of things which resonates with everything, and that’s the direction that things go in, the more we relax into the nature of things. So in this practice we just allow everything to arise and to pass away. We don’t manipulate our experience, so we’re not trying to change it to make it more like that. We trust that just by really letting things be as they are and relaxing there will be a deeper and deeper opening to experience and that need to create a duality in experience and a ‘me’ here and the experience there will soften as that relaxation goes deeper and eventually that habit of mind, which is all it is, of creating that duality, will fall away. And at that point it’s as if we are resonating. We are really part of the ocean, we discover that we were always part of the ocean, so we resonate with the whole ocean, we are affected by the whole ocean

*So there’s an element of faith in that, so you sort of get intuition and you actually follow intuition and you’re faith driven towards becoming more and more open.*

Yes, so that faith in…...you need some faith that practising in this way will work because it feels counter-intuitive, because it always feels like well I should be interfering to make things better. So it feels like…..’well you mean I don’t have to do that’? But that faith comes from the testimony of people who’ve practised like that, people like Milarepa, and it also comes from that inner, intuitive guide that I was talking about yesterday in the third session. The more we tune into that we get a sense of rightness

*I was thinking about the rose apple tree you know that experience and then holding onto that*

*and using that to guide your future practice.*

Yes, and I’ve found it quite a helpful question to ask myself : ‘what equivalent experience on my own level have I had of the sort of rose apple experience?’ – where it was simple and natural and I wasn’t making anything happen and yet it was deeply satisfying and fulfilling

*That was Shakyamuni’s key for his future practice*

**Meditation : leaving the senses as they are** (25 mins)

* So first letting everything be as it is, just awareness
* Now making sure we’re in really good contact with our old friend the earth. And that our posture’s as comfortable and as helpful as possible.
* Aware of how it is to be embodied now. Any likes and dislikes about how it is, just let them come and go. Aware sensations, aware feelings. No need to correct anything, no need to build anything on top of these simple sensations and feelings
* Now awareness widening out to include anything we can hear, all sounds. Again, very simple, no need to build up ideas about them, no need to call them anything, no need to decide where they’re coming from
* Now including sight ; we could open the eyes, let them rest somewhere in front of us, not getting caught up in the details. Mind relaxed and easy
* Any tastes or smells
* And all the movements of mind, whatever’s going on emotionally, words, images. Mind’s like an open space in which all these things can appear and then transform into the next experience
* Any sense of me the watcher, me the meditator – just letting that appear and transform and then there’s the next experience
* Mind open to the whole of experience, no choices about where awareness is
* Everything unfolding, nothing a problem, there’s no-one, no agendas for whom anything could be a problem
* There’s no end to the meditation because we’ve just been experiencing things as they are, not doing anything special. But still we could dedicate the merits

**Ocean of True Meaning**

**On-line Order Retreat December 2020**

**Day 3 Session 1**

**Meditation: receiving and sharing adhisthana (**35 mins)

* Aware, just as we are
* As we sit in a good posture and don’t ask anything particular of ourselves the tendency is for things to begin to settle. That settling expresses itself in energy moving down the body. So we could tune in to that or imaginatively encourage that. Until we connect with the earth. Feeling, imagining awareness and energy going down into the earth. So it comes to feel as if the body is just a continuation of the earth ; so it’s completely stable, completely grounded, unshakeable
* Letting the body grow up to its full height, take its full space.
* Now letting the body fill with kindly awareness. And this receptive, open, light awareness registers everything that happens within it. And in particular, all the sensations associated with what we call the breathing.
* Now let’s pay particular attention to the out-breath. Following the out-breath, letting it lead us into a sense of spaciousness. And that sense of spaciousness itself opens out and becomes vast blue sky. We can sense it, feel it, maybe see it, all around, being aware particularly of the qualities of the sky and maybe particularly if there’s a quality that our mind needs. So if our mind’s restless, we could focus on how serene, how calm the sky is. If we’re feeling a little closed in on ourselves, a sense of limitlessness. If we’re anxious, a sense that there’s absolute security in the sky, there’s nothing to worry about. Or we could focus on the warmth of the sky, it’s an emotional warmth, it can warm us right through. We’re not sitting in cold dead space, this is an alive, loving sky of mind.
* Now again as we did in the first session yesterday let’s gather within an imaginal space and imaginal place – so we’re sitting together within the mandala. And again this dharma space, this bodhicitta space, is protected by a great ring of lotuses, all the qualities of the open heart. Protected by the vajra wall, all the unshakeable stability, the power and energy of the diamond thunderbolt. And protected by the wisdom flames, burning, dancing, destroying confusion and delusion. Clear knowing. So it’s in this protected dharma space that we’re meeting and sharing together, practising together – for ourselves, for one another, for the world.
* And right at the centre of this dharma space is what I’ll call the refuge. It’s the embodiment of everything that’s good, everything that’s wise and loving and peaceful and patient and generous. Could be embodied in the Buddha, Avalokitesvara, the yidam, the whole refuge tree, some symbol, however we experience it. We’re in touch with the source, the wellspring of those qualities.
* Now with the in-breath, let’s open, let’s receive those qualities. Let’s take into ourselves that influence, that adhisthana, that blessing; with the out-breath we just rest in that feeling, those qualities filling us
* Now with the out-breath we could start to share those qualities: firstly with those around us, all of us in our retreat community; and then out wherever they’re needed. Different people and situations we know of, and more generally. We focus on particular people and situations still with a sense that the qualities are going everywhere. We’re still receiving from the refuge all the qualities, all the resources, and really naturally and easily those are shared with the out-breath
* Now when we’re ready gently, lightly, disengaging energy from that imaginal level. Letting awareness gather around the physical body, physical surroundings. Making sure we’re well connected with the earth. Just relaxing for a little bit, nothing to do.
* Dedicating the merits – may all living beings find their way into that Dharma space, may they all be protected by Dharma qualities. May they all find true spiritual communities. May they all find a refuge and open themselves to it.

**6 yogas of Tilopa cont’d** (20 mins)

So yesterday in session 3 we did the third fourth and fifth of the guidelines for just sitting, the six doctrines of Tilopa, and we came upon the five terrible ‘don’ts’. The five things we weren’t supposed to do when just sitting. So we weren’t supposed to think about the past, we weren’t supposed to think about the future, we weren’t allowed to think about the present, we weren’t allowed to meditate, we weren’t allowed to analyse. So it was pretty grim really, and I had a question from somebody, I’m surprised I didn’t have more, but part of it read

*Is it just me who responds to a list of what not to do with an increased and judgemental awareness of how much I do them, and despair about the situation?*

So that’s something that we will go through with this if we’re practising. However we could look at it in different ways. We could look at it as five things that we don’t *have* to do. We could look at it as this is a refuge from having to go back into the past and think about what happened and go over it, and it could help us not to get caught up there. We could be free from having to worry about the future, in fact we could be free from even having to meditate or improve our minds. So there are different ways we could look at it. One of the ways that I find helpful to look at it is that all those five are often ways in which I sort of lose touch with my life energy. Bhante years ago talked about we often find it difficult to meditate because our energy is either blocked or wasted or it’s a bit coarse for meditation. And it’s very easy for us even more so these days, for our energy to be really kind of dissipated. So we’re spread across a tremendous range of things. So some of it is still caught up on the past and thereby becomes unavailable to us right in this moment. A lot of it is taken up with what have I got to do, is it all going to go well? - anticipating the future. That kind of nibbles away at us all the time, takes away little bits of energy. Here we are trying to enjoy this or here we are doing that, and there’s these little voices going ‘but yes you haven’t done that yet and what about this’. So our energy gets diffuse, it gets taken and sort of spread. And then very often we’re making unnecessary drama and complexity out of the present, we’re fabricating about the present, we’re adding more and more layers of thought and likes and dislikes onto it. So we end up living in rather sort of artificial almost inauthentic ways, and very often living in a conceptual world that is just cut off from our basic life force, life energy. Which there’s very little of us often left in the immediate experience. We’re not fully kind of here – we’re all over the place. I speak from deep experience! So part of what this is aiming to do is to enable us to have a more direct experience of the vividness and the immediacy and the energy that is there when we come down to what happening here, now.

And these guidelines are also aiming to keep us out of what’s sometimes called klesha soup. When you just sit, the main issue, very often the unhelpful thing that happens, is that our minds are so used to focussing on different things, they’re so used to focussing on characteristics, they’re so used to ‘doing’, that when left with ‘nothing to do now’ they just go into a kind of free stream of what usually happens with mind. Part of the reason why we use all these methods like focussing on the breathing and so on, is so that mind just doesn’t do what it unhelpfully naturally does, which is produce a stream of kleshas, maybe quite light maybe a bit deeper. So yes, left to it’s own devices, mind will tend to do what it’s always done. And what it’s always done hasn’t produced awakening. What it’s always done has been to keep serving up regular helpings of craving, aversion, forms of getting lost in experience, all that. So we know that, we’ve kind of been there. So these are partly trying to help us to be with experience without having to do something, but in a way that inhibits, that helps to prevent the usual klesha soup.

And in session 3 yesterday, I was talking about this practice as radical and if you really go deeply into it, it very definitely is. But it’s also that having some of it in our practice is really important. It’s upholding relaxed awareness which doesn’t have any utilitarian purpose. Even the utilitarian purpose of ‘getting me awakened’ – although it will have that effect. So Bhante, he taught a lot of different methods of practice, but he was always stressing that kind of balance. So in the system of meditation talk he talked about you practise just sitting, you practise mindfulness of breathing, just sitting. Metta bhavana, just sitting. Six element practice, just sitting. Sadhana, just sitting. And in other ways he’d often be encouraging people to spend a bit of a day not doing anything. And the recommendation of how long that should be used to vary depending on who he was talking to. I did once witness him say three hours a day. But usually it was like spend at least 20 or 30 minutes a day, just not doing anything. Just sit and be with your experience. And he also talked about the greater mandala of complete uselessness in relation to *vidya*, in relation to aesthetic appreciation. So he was saying that OK so we have the things that we need to do, but those things shouldn’t be dominating our lives. That utilitarian approach to life won’t lead to happiness if we make that utilitarian way of being our main mode of experiencing and action. So he suggested that OK it’s like you have a mandala of aware experience where you’re enjoying and appreciating life and in touch with the qualities of the dharma and then as part of that – he said a small part of it if I remember rightly – yes, you do the things that you need to do in life. So most of us live kind of the other way round really. We have a mandala of all the things that we do and then we have a little corner that we go into now and again where we just do something for the pure aesthetic joy of it, we just appreciate something; we actually stop and look at some nature, we actually take some time to really enjoy and appreciate. So all of this, the just sitting, is part of a larger thrust of Bhante’s teaching and a larger thrust of the whole dharma, which is - OK we need to, as well as working on our minds, we also need to be practising openness, receptivity, we need to be able to sit with ourselves.

And actually it’s interesting, I kept hearing Bhante saying ‘yes you know just do nothing for 20 minutes a day’ . So at times – this is going back a decade or three – yes I’d do that but then even that would get sort of eaten away at. You know I’d sit down and think ‘oh this is really nice, nothing to do, ah this is good’ And then after a few minutes something in me would start to get a bit a restless. ‘ yeah you know this is really nice, it’s really nice sitting here, yes, beautiful. Ummm’ And then that inner restlessness would sort of build. And then I’d start to think ‘oh yes but I have got to go and write that letter. Oh I’ve got to...’ And quite often I’d just sort of somehow cut that period of doing nothing short. So what was that about? Why wasn’t I happy to just sit under the trees? What was going on there? There’s that famous thing that Bhante quoted, I don’t know exactly where in the suttas it comes from, but he quoted the story of a king saying that he’s much happier than the Buddha because he’s the king and he’s got everything that he wants, he’s got his palace and he’s got his elephants and he’s got this and he’s got that. And the Buddha going “well yes but actually are you sure because supposing I were to ask you to just go and sit somewhere quietly for an hour, could you do that?” And this being ancient India with actually less input coming in all the time the king says “yeah right, I could do that for an hour”. So the Buddha says “well how about 2 hours?” And very quickly the king gets to the point where the king says “no I couldn’t just sit there, doing nothing. No” And the Buddha says “well actually I can sit under that tree for a whole week and I would be completely contented. I’d experience complete fulfilment, just sitting”. So it’s interesting just how far I certainly was, still am, from the Buddha. And what’s going on, what’s my objection to just being with experience? And I won’t speak for any of you but in my case there’s certainly an unease that starts to come up, there’s a restlessness, and that’s partly habitual because I’m so used to doing this and then finishing doing this and then thinking ‘right well what do I do next?’ and then doing that, finishing that and then ‘oh I should have done this’. Or looking for the next source of satisfaction, which is going to come from out there somewhere.

So in that way we’re constantly on the search in sort of hunter-gatherer mode, looking for this, looking for that. But then there’s also a kind of unease with just actually experiencing what’s here. It tends only to surface as a kind of usually as good reasons why I shouldn’t just be sitting here. But if I go underneath that there’s definitely an unease. And if I go underneath that I realize that actually something in me can be on the run from my experience, doesn’t actually want to be experiencing my experience. And some of that may be because the experience might be a bit unpleasant. As we go into deeper experience the first thing we usually experience is the sadness or the discomfort of having been out of touch with a deeper experience. So we have to go through that, we have to be prepared to sit through that discomfort, that unease. But then as we go even deeper, as I go deeper, I hit fear. I hit a fear that if I don’t do anything I’m losing control of the situation. If I’m just letting life happen, I’m not directing it, I’m not doing this and making that, there’s quite a deep fear of loss of control. And then if I really relax even more deeply there’s just sounds, there’s just sights, there’s just thoughts, and then there’s the fear that somehow the ‘me’ that somehow I’m convinced is here in the centre of things, will cease to exist. There’s nothing reinforcing that sense of me in the centre of things. So we can do it in all sorts of really helpful and supportive ways, but in our dharma practice, we are going to have to just meet our experience deeply. Which means we’re going to have to be prepared to go through these waves, we’ll have to be prepared to go through the initial kind of restlessness, because we’ve been doing doing doing and our nervous system is really wound up. We’ll have to be prepared to go through that sense of sadness that we’ve been living on the surface of ourselves, as we start to get a sense of ‘oh there’s something deeper there’ It’s like maybe we feel we’ve been neglecting that and so there’s that sadness. And then we come down to deeper issues about being in control of life. And finally even we hit that deep sense of oooh does that ‘me’ not exist? there’s nothing, I can’t find the me that I usually operate from. Which is just one way in which mind organises itself. It’s like there is a real ‘me’ in the centre of things. So part of the reason why we put emphasis on seated meditation in a good position, being really grounded, energy flowing freely, practising within the refuge, practising with the support of others, all that is so that, as well as all the beauty and richness and wonder of the dharma, when we come into contact with these waves on the ocean we’re not just kind of pushed off by them. We stay still, we don’t just turn and run. We’ve got all that we need to meet these things – with kindness, with care.

So this just sitting could be a very very ‘advanced’ practice, but it’s also something which needs to be there as an element in our practice ; we need to be moving, keeping that balance, so that we’re not always doing doing doing in daily life and then doing doing doing on the cushion, and there’s no space just for that different kind of experience of ourselves. There’s no space just for things to settle, and for us to move into a sort of depth dimension of ourselves.

*[break]*

**6 yogas of Tilopa cont***(15 mins)*

A few people have asked if they could have more of a structure for the groups. So if you’d find that helpful we’ve posted a structure based on insight dialogue by Greg Kramer which Viveka has used on some of her retreats. It just gives you some guidelines for making use of the groups.

Before the break I was talking about just sitting and that sort of balanced approach that Bhante tried to produce in Triratna where yes we’re fully engaging, fully using different methods, but also being able to just sit with experience and develop an appreciative open awareness that isn’t utilitarian. He gives an example of going for a walk with a Nepali friend you might remember and there’s this massive pine tree and Bhante’s just gazing up at it and says “oh what a magnificent tree” and his Nepali companion says “oh yes there must be enough firewood there for the whole winter”. So Bhante contrasts these two ways of approaching life. So we need to make sure we’ve got our firewood for the winter, but we also need to be doing that within a context where we can go ‘isn’t that magnificent, isn’t that beautiful!’ a sense of a real wonder about life. And it’s hard to keep that sense of wonder about life when we’re busy as it were manipulating it. So what we’re trying to do with the just sitting is to be able to be with experience without the sort of drivenness and compulsion. The aim isn’t to be able to…. it’s not that these six doctrines are another sort of checklist that we need to make sure we are doing correctly. That would be the near enemy kind of mindfulness. We’re just seeing them as helpful pointers so that we’re not driven and compelled to keep on doing, to keep on being caught up in reacting to experiences. The just sitting that’s suggested by Tilopa, in a way it’s taking to a deep level Bhante’s mind reactive and creative. So we’re fully experiencing, we’re experiencing the body, we’re experiencing sounds, we’re experiencing sights, tastes, smells, our mood, our emotions, all the words and pictures – but discovering the possibility that we don’t have to react to them. There’s nothing about them that’s compelling us in themselves to do anything. But usually we’re drawn in, and everything becomes more food for the narrative of me. But we needn’t – there’s another way to be.

I started off quoting a question that I had and there’s a little bit more to it.

*yesterday you talked about the inner guide or inner wisdom. I recognised this and felt in touch with faith. This evening under ‘don’t think about the present’ you seemed to suggest this inner guidance as a ‘don’t*

Well we’d have to check what I and the questioner mean by ‘inner guidance’ and ‘inner wisdom’ but as I would see it inner wisdom even as a guidance isn’t something that you can turn off. All you can do is drown it out. It’s like, to talk about it poetically, there is this voice, this really helpful voice that has the sense of ‘this is the way we need to be going’. So it’s like having the yidam on our crown or the guru on our shoulder, and that’s always available but we do need to turn towards it and we do need to create the space to be able to hear it. It’s almost like that’s moving into the depth dimension that I was talking about just sitting leading us into. So it’s not like sometimes it’s there and sometimes it’s not but usually there are these loud other voices saying ‘hey there’s a party tonight and are you going?’ and’ where shall we meet’… and there’s a whole kind of group of them all talking loudly and somewhere quietly in the background there’s this voice going ‘do you actually really want to go to that?’ ‘ is that really how you want to be spending your evening?’ But you can’t hear it because there’s too much chatter. So similarly there is a kind of - it’s not necessarily a voice - but a kind of felt sense that we can tune into, a sense of guidance, but it does need some space, until we are reliably really connected with it. And if we are compelled to go and do this and think about that and the next thing and the next thing, as I say it gets drowned out, we can’t hear it, we can’t find it in amongst all the pulls and pushes of everyday life. So again, if we make that space there’s more chance that we find it. And I guess it’s possible not to turn off but to not allow ourselves certain ways in which we access it. So some of us will access it through yidam practice over a few years or a few decades and just contacting those qualities through a particular form, that becomes a way in which we can find contact with our inner wisdom. So yes you might in a practice think ‘OK I’m not going to visualize the yidam’, but in a way whatever practice we do, even if we’re just being with direct experience, if we start by going for refuge - however we do that we can invoke the yidam if we want - it’s like at the beginning of the practice we invoke that inner wisdom. We do all the practice under the guidance of that. So even if we’re not visualizing, we’re not reciting a mantra, still it’s in that context. The inner wisdom is what is beyond selfing, it’s beyond the narrative of self. So we need to be finding ways of giving that space. Just sitting is one way to do that.

So I’m just going to start in on ‘Leave the mind as it is’. This is now what we *do* do!

‘Leave the mind as it is, in it’s natural state. If because of wanting to do well you fabricate and alter things you’ll only exhaust yourself, no matter how you do it’

So it’s not that altering things in itself necessarily exhausts us, but if we’re doing it ‘because of wanting to do well’ there’s usually too much trying in that. There’s too much of the wrong sort of effort. We’re doing the practice often to kind of live up to an idea of how the practice ought to be or how *we* ought to be as a practitioner, and putting that sort of pressure on ourselves is tiring. It’s tiring to have to do that. If we’re not careful we end up practising in order to reach a sort of ‘all right’ line all the time. And the practice should be just taking us deeper into our experience.

And then the rest of the passage we’ll explore more as the day goes on. It’s talking about what mind is like, in itself. And practising just sitting, to do it with confidence, we have to have confidence that the relaxed mind….. that when mind relaxes, good things happen. In the Buddhist tradition there’s the whole idea of *tathagatagarbha* – Buddha nature - which Bhante was very wary of because he was very aware of it being turned into a thing or an entity. But really it has two practical uses. So if we’re not going to thinking terms of Buddha nature we need to have the confidence that if we relax, mind will produce qualities. If we relax really deeply, positive qualities will unfold. And that’s one sort of foundation block of confidence in just sitting. And we can just look at our experience – is that true? Is it true that when I’m really relaxed, mind is more open, it’s more satisfying, there are fewer kleshas, or they’re less strong. We need to really reflect on that – is that true in our experience? And if it’s not, well by all means do ask and we’ll explore it more.

Let’s draw a line under that for now – we’ll come back to it particularly in session 3 and we’ll go into exploring the nature of mind.

**Meditation : opening in the six senses (**20 mins)

* Just aware experience.
* Supported by the earth, relaxing, giving it our weight. Opening, gently extending towards the sky
* Aware of what’s happening in the body. Letting the awareness be very light and free. As if these feelings and sensations are themselves awareness, they kind of light up with awareness and then transform into the next aware experience
* Now including any sounds ; no need to identify them, label them. Just the immediate experience.
* Including sight, letting the eyes just rest some way in front of us. As much as possible just the simple, immediate appearances in our visual field. Just completely relaxed in relation to whatever’s there. We’re letting sense experience come and go without having to be involved, without being compelled to be for or against it or to make it part of a story. Just relaxed and equanimous.
* Any smells or tastes
* And all the movements of the heart-mind. Mood, emotional state, images, words. As much as possible, this bright awareness. As all the six senses are open, everything’s registered. Just relaxed in relation to it all
* An aware flow of experience. No need to hold onto it, no need to push it away. No need to choose or prioritise, unless we keep getting lost in which case maybe keep the breath as a bit of an anchor – maybe Barlung
* Now just checking if we’ve been making some kind of a subtle effort or doing something like meditation, a bit artificial – just relaxing
* Finally, sharing the merits with all life. May all beings find deep relaxation, bright awareness, inner wisdom

**Day 3 Session 2**

So in session 1 today we carried on looking at those 5 terrible ‘don’ts’ of Tilopa. Which are all really, rather than focussing on what we’re being asked not to do, in a way it comes down to feeling our way back as much as possible to the immediacy of experience rather than being in a thought-world. Very often, it’s like there’s a sound and that sound is just the immediate *[click of finger]* but we think ‘oh that’s a finger snap so why did Vessantara snap his fingers and what does this mean?’ and that sound just lasted a fraction of a second but we keep replaying it to ourselves, so we keep doing sort of like on the football and things you get action replays. So some things they just last a very short moment, in fact everything just lasts a very short moment, but then we replay it and replay it and replay it, so we can think about it. And then from there very often we move into a thought chain. So we’re having thoughts about thoughts about thoughts. And nothing wrong with thinking, it’s really useful, but it does mean that we lose the freshness and we lose the newness and we lose the wonder of our experience. So part of what we’re doing with this just sitting is just coming back to that simple, immediate experience.

One of the images that’s often used is that it’s a bit like being a child going into a temple in Tibet. Yes, if you go into a Tibetan temple there are pictures everywhere, it’s like a kind of storybook. When I went to Tibet in 2006 I wrote *Meeting the Buddhas* so I’d go round and go ‘oh that’s Sridevi, that’s …..[VV didn’t recognise the name here], oh that’s Akshobya, oh that’s in that style of painting’. The child goes into the temple and doesn’t do that. It just goes……...ahhhh! Ooohhh! So I have to, from underneath that avalanche of knowledge I have to be able to come back and also be able to do just that simple ‘ahhhh! Look!’ ‘All these Order Members on the screen – wow!’ As well as yes being able to think about this and that and what’s helpful and what do I say…. But yes I also need to come back to that really simple first open-hearted meeting with experience. So that’s what we’re looking for – if we can get some sense of that then all will go well. And very often doing this kind of practice, it’s good that we do quite short sessions so that we keep that freshness. And if it feels like it’s all just starting to tail off then it’s better to be able to break the session even just before that, while you still feel fresh and like ‘oh I could do another few minutes happily here’. So we’re training in that sort of fresh, alive, immediate, open awareness. So quite a lot of little sessions is better than one long one where it all kinds of comes and goes and we lose it for a while and we come back to it….. We want that freshness and immediacy.

**Meditation : freshness, the six senses and looking at the nature of awareness** (40 mins)

* So first off just savouring the fact that there’s nothing to do – just time to do what’s beneficial for mind and body
* Now in whatever way works for us, invoking a sense of refuge. So we’re drawing on resources much deeper than those of everyday me. All the support of the refuges and the tradition. All the well-wishing of the Buddha and all those who’ve come after him, who’ve all sent good wishes to those in the future who practice the dharma. If we want to invoke our yidam, now would be a very good time
* And with the support of the refuges, all those resources, let’s also bring to mind who we’re practising for. For ourselves, for one another, for the whole Order of which we’re a significant gathering, particular people and situations. And with the wish to be of help to all beings.
* Making sure we’re as grounded and rooted as possible, that our posture’s a helpful one. And feeling for a combination of relaxation and awareness. There’s a brightness, and an ease. Letting that relaxed awareness pervade the body. So with the sensations, movements, movements of energy, there’s knowing, clarity, and there’s relaxation in relation to them, knowing that they all arise and pass away.
* And being relaxed with what’s happening doesn’t mean being distanced. So it’s a vivid experiencing, just allowing the natural process of things arising and passing away - when we see that and allow that’s going to happen, then there’s relaxation
* Now letting this relaxed awareness open out, to include whatever sounds there are. And if there’s nothing we can hear, just being aware of the silence
* This relaxed open awareness provides no resistance to experiences arising and passing. With aversion we resist what’s arising, with craving we resist their passing. Letting everything as it were have its freedom.
* Now let’s include the visual field. You can open the eyes or half-open them, or if you really don’t want to do that just be aware of the patterns on the backs of the eyelids. The same relaxed awareness.
* Taste and smell. Constantly changing experience.
* Now relaxed awareness of everything that’s happening in the heart-mind. The shifting currents of feeling and emotion, images, words. Not resisting their arising, not dulling out while they’re there, not resisting their passing away.
* Relaxed awareness open to all the senses, open to life. Relaxed open-hearted awareness that allows experience to flow
* Now let’s come back to that sense of relaxed awareness. And very lightly let’s explore what awareness itself is like. We talk about being aware of the body, widening our awareness to include sounds, and that means something in our experience. Is this awareness anything we can see or point to? Are there any limits to it? We say ‘open out our awareness’. Is it any kind of a thing that we can find or point to, or is it a quality? We’re not trying to work this out, it’s more that we’re trying to feel into our experience. How is it to ‘be aware’?
* Now again, just relaxed, nothing to do, senses open
* And when we’re ready, as if again we could pour the merits of our practice together into the great reservoir of merits of all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, all the practitioners, with the wish that it’s available for all beings

In session 3 we’ll carry on looking at ‘leaving mind as it is’ and look a bit at what mind is, that we’re leaving alone

**Day 3 Session 3**

**Exploring the nature of mind** (40 mins)

This afternoon we looked at particularly the freshness and newness and wonder, the Tibetan child going into the temple, aspect of just sitting. And earlier in the day I was talking about Buddha nature and saying that Bhante had been wary of us talking in terms of Buddha nature but that there were two advantages with that language, so if we weren’t going to use that language we had to find other ways of gaining the advantages that you would have if you used that terminology.

So I mentioned one of them is that relaxation enables positive qualities to unfold. So somehow we need to have that confidence or to build that confidence that the more relaxed the mind and body are the more positive qualities will naturally, spontaneously be there. And the other advantage of talking in terms of Buddha nature is just that, particularly in the West, lots of people we come in contact with and teach suffer from low self esteem, they don’t like themselves, feel like somewhere on some deep level there’s something really the matter with themselves. And that Buddha nature view of things really counteracts that. It’s saying well no actually that’s not the case. Yes there are the kleshas, and they are powerful. But they’re not inherent to how mind is, and if mind rediscovers its way back to its natural state having lost track of things and sort of become identified with the 5 skandhas and a ‘me’ that’s separate from everything else, if mind can rediscover how things are then you discover there’s all the richness of experience and those qualities there. So yes, no need finally to have a view of ourselves as human beings or anyone else as human beings as there being something fundamentally the matter. What’s the matter is that we’ve lost track of how things are. We’ve fallen into a confusion, we’ve made some wrong assumptions and then on the basis of that we’ve suffered, and out of that we’ve kind of struggled and made all those difficulties for ourselves and others. So that’s the other advantage of seeing things in terms of that view.

So in that last session we just sat and we experienced as best we could or my suggestion was (who knows what Order Members do in the privacy of their own meditation?), I was suggesting that we really be aware of relaxed awareness and the freshness of experience. And we sat with the six senses and then we came back to that sense of relaxed awareness, and I was suggesting that we just look at – well what is awareness like? Can we say anything about awareness in itself? Awareness is present in all experience because if there were no awareness there would be no experience. That’s fundamental. Awareness makes experience possible. So it’s worth looking into the nature of that awareness, looking into the nature of experience, because otherwise if we just focus on the content of experience and we take it for granted without ever looking at the nature, we’re going to wander endlessly in samsara. It’s only seeing, directly knowing, the nature of experience that is really going to free us. Otherwise it’s a bit like kind of watching a movie and really hoping that happens or really worried that that will happen but never looking at the nature of the experience and seeing ‘this is a movie’. If we just take experience as given on a kind of everyday level, it’s going to be really difficult to free ourselves, because we’ll be taking all experience as being very solid and real, and we’ll be taking all our emotional ups and downs as completely solid and real, and things that we have to work and fight with. And that’s a big ask. So I was inviting us to have a little look at what awareness is, is there anything that we can say about awareness in itself? And I’d be interested in just a few responses, anything that you noticed, or what happened when you did that.

*[Nagarakshita] Constant change, constant flow of everything*

OK and did it seem like it was the content of the awareness that was constantly changing or did it seem like awareness itself? Or could you not separate them?

*Difficult to separate. I think I noticed it through the content. But the content was the awareness as it were, I couldn’t really separate them*

Other offers?

*[Kusaladana]* *I was just thinking about attention and perception as being kind of manifestations of awareness. So behind the attention and the perceived coming into the mind there’s a kind of feeling of a kind of space, like a blue sky space behind it. Just a sort of being-ness. But it’s not, you can miss it quite easily in the actual noise of the attention and the perceptions. It feels like there’s something behind it, kind of intuitively something behind it*

And it feels like that - what we can’t really quite say - it feels kind of like a space to you?

*Yeah like a field*

And would that field have any limits to it?

*No, it feels like it’s not bounded in space or time? It’s got that quality of being beyond everything. But what I find in terms of my mind is attention and perception, and I rarely get to the point where I really sort of see there’s more than this.*

Anybody else?

*[Akasharaja]* *I guess I just got a bit kind of I, was trying to tie myself in knots a bit really. I can kind of see experience arising and passing away and sit there being quite relaxed and open to the information of the senses, but then being asked to look at my awareness was a bit like being asked to look at my own face or look at my own eyeballs. So I think it introduced an unwelcome degree of tension into the experience*

Yes often as we start exploring questions like this, it can create tension because we’re exploring something which certainly the rational mind can’t encompass and can’t manage to do. But without getting wound up as much as possible staying relaxed it’s still worth exploring these questions.

OK so we’ve had a few looks, and thank you for sharing that.

In the six doctrines of Tilopa that we’ve been looking at, where it says ‘leave the mind as it is in its natural state’, the 9th Karmapa starts telling us what mind is like, according to his experience and the tradition. So let’s have a look at that. So it’s like we can look at the back of the book and get some answers and then we can go back to exploring. And it’s interesting that the text does that, even does it in the shamatha section. Because even knowing the tradition, you know, you’ve been working with a teacher on these things, and you’ve been given very open-ended questions, even if you come out with the right answers as it were, even if you’ve read the right answers, still a teacher working with you will be able to tell whether you’ve actually had some experience or whether you’re just repeating what you’ve heard or what you’ve read. So these days, things like this are around all over the place. We can get a sense of the traditional answer. But still rather than starting completely from scratch we need to take things like this and just take them as pointers, to look and see what we can find in experience. So it says

*‘*The nature of the mind [and it shouldn’t really say that, it should say the nature of *mind*], because as soon as you have ‘the mind’ you have a thing, you have an entity, you turn it into an object which you could somehow point to so….. ] ‘the nature of mind is clear, vivid, naked, transparent, pure’

So I’m not going to go into each of the adjectives and their exact meaning in the tradition, but from that we get the sense that mind – for now I’m going to use ‘mind’ and ‘awareness’ as if they were synonymous, as if they meant the same thing. We can explore that a bit further later. I’m talking about ‘mind’ but for now I’m meaning awareness . So yes when we go to explore the aware aspect of experience, there’s nothing that we can find, nothing that we can point at, it’s all transparent, there’s nothing there that we can see. And yet it’s a quality that makes everything clear and vivid, it’s what enables things to be known. So it’s more like, as we’re looking at our zoom screen, there are all the appearances on the screen and yet there’s the pixels, they are all lighting up. So it’s a bit like the light that enables us to see, enables me to see Swadipa and Bodhinandi and so on. But in itself I can’t say anything really about that light. It has no shape, it has no form, and in terms of the screen as a world it has no limits either, it covers the entire space. So awareness is fundamental to experience, we all have the experience of being aware, it lights up so to speak, using that as a metaphor, all our experience, and yet there’s nothing we can point to, nothing that we can locate. So in that sense it’s ungraspable. Which would be quite a nice interpretive definition of ‘empty’ as in shunya. Things that are shunya, they are empty of something in particular. So awareness is empty of being any kind of entity, it’s empty of being any kind of a thing that you could point at or that you could catch. It’s like there it is, it’s a fundamental condition for all experience, and yet we can’t even point at it. Or can we? Maybe whatever we point to, it’s all aware. It’s all awareness. Otherwise there would be no experience. But can never sort of peel the content off from the awareness and say ‘ah there’s the awareness’. Just as I can’t somehow take all your pictures off and just have the light on the screen.

So it’s transparent, pure, and wide open. It’s maybe partly what Kusaladana was getting at, that sense of awareness being limitless. Because awareness seems to be able to reflect whatever appears in experience, it doesn’t matter that it’s the appearance of a star 25 light years away, awareness just reflects it, there it is. Because awareness isn’t any kind of a thing, it doesn’t have any boundaries or limits. He was saying it’s more like a field, so we talk about a field of awareness. If it had limits we’d be able to say it was some kind of a thing, we’d be able to locate it.

‘It is free from any label’

Which means that it can never be caught in words and concepts. Finally, there are heaven knows how many adjectives in this sentence, but none of them in any way really do justice to the experience. Word fail when you come to something as fundamental about life, about ourselves, as awareness. We all kind of have an experience of it and we can try with words to point at it but really we’re like a mute person who has had a dream as it says in some of the texts. So it can be known, but we can never sum it up, we can never really get to it. It transcends verbal expression. So it’s ‘free from any label’ -

‘and yet no label is in contradiction to it’

Which means you can call it all sorts of things, that’s really what that means.

‘ This is the dharmata’

‘Dharmata’ is the ultimate nature of how things are. It’s the ultimate nature of mind and phenomena.

So Mahamudra and Dzogchen and some other traditions make a good deal of looking at the nature of mind and exploring the nature of mind, and you can think ‘well why is this helpful? Why is this important?’ But it helps because we want not to suffer and our suffering is partly based on taking our experience as real, in a way that it’s not. So if when we look at the nature of experience what we find is this ungraspable, limitless….. what other words were there?…. Oh clear, which is like clear and vivid, so there’s something really knowing about, there’s a knowing quality to awareness. So if all our experience is an experience of awareness, that means that that sort of solidity that we give to things, that way in which we take them in really heavy ways at times that causes us suffering, that starts to all lighten, because we see that the nature of our experience isn’t what we thought it was.

So that’s one aspect, that we don’t give things the emotional weight that we’ve given them because we see that they’re not as solid and heavy and necessarily impactful as we thought. And then also, all our experience is an experience of awareness. It seems that awareness can be experienced as like a field of awareness. And yet somehow we’re dividing up that seamless field of awareness and identifying with a part of it. If we really get well into an experience of the nature of mind, the sense of duality is going to fall away, we’re going to feel at home in all experience. And we’ll unpack this more, I’m just trying to give you a sense of why it could be helpful to engage with this, and why all these realized Buddhist yogins and yoginis over the centuries have written and talked and continued making the nature of mind and seeing the nature of mind a really key aspect of Buddhist practice. So some of the qualities would be : awareness, the sort of knowing quality; the ungraspable quality of awareness, there’s no kind of a thing or entity ; limitless, not even limitless in terms of just being very very big, but not in space and time in the way that we think of it. And there’s something alive about awareness, – awareness is always associated with energy, energy and awareness go together. So there’s an aliveness, and a sort of responsiveness to awareness.

So over the next 2 days which seems very very short indeed, we’ll be looking at the nature of mind, looking at awareness and at least opening up the areas of how awareness relates to mind movements, thoughts and emotions, and how it relates to appearances in what we think of as the outside world. We’ll at least get into that territory and see if we can open up and expand our vision of our own mind, and therefore expand out of our often very limited ego-prison. If we can really explore this deeply then this is a key out of the prison of samsara.

So just coming back to the instruction

‘leave the mind as it is, in its self-luminous, self-knowing, relaxed nature, and never get yourself tight up’

As I say the translator wasn’t a native English speaker so ‘never get yourself wound up’, or ‘up tight’ as we used to say way back when.

So ‘leave it as it is in its self-luminous, self-knowing, relaxed nature’. ‘Self-luminous’ and ‘self-knowing’ are both terms which mean that….. let’s go back to our screen. Usually when we think ‘self-conscious’ or something we think of it as something bringing awareness to something. But the Tibetan terms here mean that the thing itself is luminous, the thing itself is knowing. So it’s a bit like, if I had photos of you all in front of me I could bring the flash-light over there, the light that’s helping to light up me as I’m speaking to you and I could shine the light on the photos and that would light you up, and that’s usually how we think of experience. We usually think ‘I bring the light of awareness to… this person’. So what’s being said here is that the nature of awareness isn’t that awareness is brought to something, but that awareness is itself luminous and knowing. So it would be more like what’s happening now which is, rather than having to bring a light to light up all of you so I could see you, I’m looking at this screen where there are all these appearances and they are lit up from within, by the light of the pixels on the screen. So awareness and experience are together and experience is itself aware. So just as each of us on the screen the colours, the forms are all lit up and you can’t peel the light away from the colours and the form, similarly you can’t separate out awareness and the contents. And that sense that we bring awareness to an experience turns out to be not quite how it is.

So we leave mind as it is and we relax in that nature. So we usually think ‘oh I have to be aware, I have to be aware of the sound’. But for a sound to appear there must already have been awareness. If there was no awareness we wouldn’t have registered the sound which we then think ‘oh I must turn my awareness to it’. For any experience to be there there has to be awareness in it, as it were. Which means that we can relax, rather than have to make an effort and sort of chase an experience. So with a sound, sound is already going on. I don’t necessarily have to think ‘oh I must really listen to the sound’. All that creates a tension. The sound is just doing itself. With all of you in front of me I can think ‘oh I must really look at Maitreyi and Shakyajata and so on’ but actually if my eyes are open there’s awareness there, and you’re already there. But what I do is I create a sense of separation and then I feel I have to focus. But if we relax and relax it’s already there, it’s already happening. So that’s kind of what’s being pointed at.

‘These six doctrines contain all the instructions for practising mahamudra. If your practice embraces these key points, the superficial impurities will have no place to stay’

So if we have this relaxed, open awareness the kleshas which all come out of that sense of dualism and separateness, they won’t have anything to stand on. And the more relax the less we’ll create that sense of a subject and an object. There’ll be less and less of the confusion and delusion.

So for now, if we can just from time to time just keep coming back to being interested in awareness, rather than the content. Just have a sense of what is that, that knowing quality like? There’s something about experience that makes it bright and vivid, and what’s that like? Is there anything you can get hold of? Does it have any limits? Just play, don’t make it into a big serious ‘got to understand this at all costs’ thing. Do it in a very relaxed way. Just relax and from time to time just go ‘oh.. what is it like then?’

**Meditation : awareness in experience** (20 mins)

* So just with our experience
* And again – we say ‘bringing to mind’ in English, but it’s more like ‘bringing to heart’ the refuge. That real sense of practising with the support of others – one and another here, but also as part of a living stream of awareness, of love and compassion and understanding, that’s been flowing right from under the bodhi tree down to us
* And a few moments to bear in mind who we’re practising for
* Now relaxing, letting the earth hold us secure. Letting the upper body open. There’s both relaxation and alertness, aliveness.
* Now we don’t really know what we do and we don’t know how we do it, but if we say ‘let’s fill the body with awareness’, something happens. Experiencing what that’s like. And the awareness kind of lights up sensations, little movements. And we could think ‘this is me bringing awareness to the sensations’. Let’s explore – is it like that? Or are the sensations lighting up with awareness themselves? Maybe no description does it justice – how is it, what’s our experience? Maybe it doesn’t fit in words
* And can we play with this? Can we focus more on the appearances of the sensations? And then focus more on that knowing, bright, aware quality? Is that possible?
* And if I say ‘let the whole body be filled with bright awareness’ - is that possible? And if it is, how is that experience? Not thinking about it, just experiencing.
* Now relaxing, just experience as it is
* Sharing the merits, however feels right

**Ocean of True Meaning**

**On-line Order Retreat December 2020**

**Day 4 Session 1**

**Meditation: participating in adhisthana** (40 mins)

* Just experience as it is.
* Now relaxing, down to the ground. Feeling or imagining energy and awareness going down into the earth. And if it’s helpful, imagining that with the in-breath we draw up energy from the earth into the area below the navel. There’s that meditation instruction ‘body like a mountain’ - as if the body’s a continuation of the earth. Unshakeable.
* Now bringing awareness up through this body like a mountain, right up to the summit, letting the mountain be its full height, take its full space. Letting the crown of the head gently reach towards the sky; just slightly brings the chin in.
* Now letting this mountain-body be a very alive mountain-body. Filling it with awareness - awareness with a kindly, loving quality to it.
* Now let’s bring awareness to our heart centre, into that deep core place, that place which isn’t a place, which we feel. And from our heart, invoking the refuge, invoking the refuge to be present. The refuge could be in our heart centre or if it feels more appropriate it could be somewhere above us, in front of us. Wherever we feel it, we’re in touch with great love and compassion, complete knowing of how things are, all kinds of richness and beautiful qualities, all the resources we need. Fearlessness, patience, and so on. In the presence of the refuge we can relax and open – open to those qualities. When we open to the qualities, open to the refuge, the adhisthana, influence, qualities are just instantly there. So if we have the refuge outside, the qualities pour into heart from outside. If the refuge is in our heart, the qualities fill our heart.
* And then it’s as if they overflow, fill our body. And if there’s a particular quality that we feel the need of – it could be fearlessness could be understanding - whatever it is, that particularly fills our heart, fills our body, so every cell in our body is fearless, every cell in our body is filled with understanding of how things are. And right to the depths of our being, deep into the heart-mind. To all those unintegrated areas, all those unconscious areas, qualities flowing into those – that great love, that fearlessness, that understanding, whatever it is.
* And now it’s as if these qualities overflow anything we could think of as ‘me’, and they go to all of us on the retreat. So there’s a network of qualities being shared with everyone, being received from everyone
* Now the refuges continue just pouring down qualities, so that they flow out everywhere, from all of us, to whatever there’s suffering. And we see and feel the process having an effect, that they become more loving, more free, and that they too develop any particular quality that we resourced ourselves with. Maybe they become more fearless or they understand the dharma, they understand reality.
* And now we’ll let go of imagining refuges, beings – the qualities are still there. Just relaxed, open space, filled with love, filled with understanding, whatever it is
* Now in our own way dedicating the merits, sharing the benefits. Making the gentle move for awareness to fully inhabit the body, be aware of the physical environment

**Relationship between relaxed awareness and insight exploration** (20 mins)

So yesterday we carried on on our voyage across the *Ocean of True Meaning* and we began looking at the nature of mind. And exploring in session 3 yesterday in a not very structured way I looked a little bit at why some forms of Buddhism really focus on the nature of mind and feel that it’s such a kind of key to things. And then we were exploring it a little bit using that sixth doctrine of Tilopa, and we found some qualities of awareness, of mind – for the moment I’m just using them a bit interchangeably, there are some difficulties with that but I think as we’re at our current level of explaining things I’m just going to treat them a bit as if they’re the same thing – so we found that awareness, we all have the experience of awareness, awareness is experience in a way. Without awareness there is no experience, and yet it’s ungraspable, there’s nothing we can point to, we can’t locate it anywhere, it seems to be empty of being any kind of an entity or a thing or an object. And it seems to have no limits, awareness doesn’t seem to have any problem if you ask it to gaze out at the Milky Way at night - it doesn’t run out of kind of bandwidth or anything and say ‘no sorry I can’t stretch that far’. It seems natural just to do that. So there’s a sort of limitless quality to it. And it’s also alive and responsive ; it’s kind of inseparable from energy. And then we did a meditation going into the body and at a certain point we were just looking at relaxed awareness and what awareness is actually like. I had a question which maybe now is a good moment to touch on. The questioner is asking about the six doctrines of Tilopa

*I wonder where these fit into the practice of intense analysis and questioning found in the vipassana side of the Mahamudra approach? Such as ‘is the mind inside or outside’; ‘does it have a shape or colour’ etc.*

So the vipassana aspect of Mahamudra is looking at questions like that. It’s not asking us to work them out with our rational mind because that will start to hurt after a while, our brain will hurt, but to actually explore our experience of these things. And the questioner says ‘I wonder where these fit into the practice of intense analysis and questioning’. And certainly in the approach that I’ve been introduced to over the years that sort of intense analysis doesn’t seem to be the best way to go for most people. You can decide that you’re really going to look and you’re really going to look and you’re going to look really hard until you see, but for most people that...when you squeeze the mind it produces more thoughts. And that intense drive - we have to be sure where it’s coming from in us. Is it coming from a deep place where yes we just want to be free, we want to end dukkha, or is it coming from a sort of willed effort? So for most people the best way to go is to do what the six doctrines of Tilopa were leading us to, is to be very relaxed and easy. To really focus on the relaxation, the letting go – letting go letting go – and out of that relaxed, easy state from time to time you just take a little look at how things are. And you don’t make a big deal out of it.

So often when we’re really trying to see, either we start thinking our way to how things are, which doesn’t get us all that far, or we get reactions to that. We try really hard and it doesn’t work and then we get frustrated and we get bored and decide the whole thing’s stupid : ‘what on earth does it mean mind being inside or outside’, or whatever it is. So I suggest that you start – you know yourself much better than me. we each have our own kind of spiritual make up and tendencies – but I suggest we start with relaxing and relaxing and then looking very gently. It’s almost like subtly looking. It’s like if you want to see the nature of ‘me’ if you want to look at ‘me the meditator’, where is that, what is that? – OK so you relax and get very easy and then it’s almost like with just a subtle little bit of your mind you just kind of take a look. Because if you go looking for ‘me the meditator’ and you won’t be able to find it, you find there’s another ‘me the meditator’ that you’ve created that’s now the one who’s looking, and you can carry on like that. So quite gentle, and quite playful. Just get really interested. It’s like we are trying to get back to or to rediscover that sort of sense of wonder, the child in the temple I was talking about in session 3 who’s just...yeah they don’t have ideas about ‘oh that’s Avalokitesvara in the thousand armed form…. ‘ there’s just that ‘wow! Look at that!’ So we want more of that sense. The trouble with reality as is often said in these traditions is that it’s too simple for us. We’re just too complicated. So we need to come back to really simply – oh let’s just have a look. And when we look without preconceptions, without assumptions, then ah OK then it’s straightforward actually. So I would suggest that we don’t do *intense* analysis and questioning. Yeah by all means let’s look at ‘what is awareness like, you know, does it have a shape, does it have a colour?’ But gently, just interested, curious, not sort of insistent that you know we’re going to find the answer in a hard-edged way.

The instructions about the six doctrines of Tilopa seem to have a more reflective or passive element. I wouldn’t say they’re reflective really, in fact they’re asking us not to reflect on the past, not to think about the future and so on, but there is something, it’s just coming to something that’s more immediate, and there’s a relaxation there, so it’s not that we’re passive but we’re really receiving each experience, really receiving it. Fully alive and awake and open to it. So we’re really living each moment. A big part of *avidya* is that we don’t actually experience the experience. And when we’re very tense we tend not to really experience the experience. And with tension usually there’s a lot of thinking, so there are layers of concepts between us and the immediate experience. So we’re just relaxing out of those, and coming back to something that’s quite simple, no preconceptions – ‘ah that’s how it is’.

So that way of practising, sort of relaxing into immediate experience, it has a more receptive element you could say, while the formal analysis, questioning maybe seems to be more active and investigative. Yes well it is more exploring, but as I say unless it really works for you I would do it in a really gentle way. Still really receiving the experience but with a little...it’s like we just put a little question mark up against the experience. ‘What is this, what is this like?’ And as we do that we can put a little question mark against some of the ideas that we’re automatically bringing to it. And just see ‘well is this how it actually is?’ So it’s quite a light process.

*Are the instructions about the 6 doctrines of Tilopa to be used or adopted at the end of the more active questioning or in parallel?*

So most of the time I would be spending in this very relaxed easy awareness, and then I would spend some time looking. But for most people - and again see what works for you, but you could start by assuming that you’re one of ‘most people’ - so if you were doing a session of this you could really invoke the refuges and sense of bodhicitta and then move into relaxing, relaxing, immediate experience, and then from time to time you might just spend at most say 20% of the time just kind of looking. And then you have a look for a little bit, but we want a really fresh mind to look with. So it’s better again to look for a little while and then you relax. If you find that the looking is just taking you deeper and deeper well OK that will just continue by itself – but if there’s a ‘me the meditator’ there who’s deciding how long to do things for then give more time to the relaxation. And a very good way to practice is to just practice relaxing and relaxing, and then you just notice where the holding on is. And where you notice that, you take a kindly interest in that. ‘How am I holding on? Or what am I telling myself? What’s the kind of condition that’s creating that holding on?’ So it’s like maybe I can feel a physical tension in the body and can think ‘oh there’s some anxiety there, almost fear there’, so what is that what do I have to be telling myself or what concepts am I creating which are holding that in place? Which are preventing it from just arising and dissolving away? Which are preventing it from just feeling as if it’s part of the flow. So we can just practice like that. Just relax, relax, nothing to do, and then where you find there’s tension OK you invite it to relax and if it doesn’t just kind of go ‘oh thank you yes sorry I didn’t realise I was tense OK I can let go now’ then you can investigate – what’s happening here? Where’s the holding, what’s the root of the holding?

So in this way, yes that relaxing into immediate experience and the putting question marks, that curiosity about the nature of experience they kind of go along in parallel. They can be there in one session.

*What would you say would be the most useful question to use to explore how things are? Because there are lots, like inside and outside etc.*

Probably the most useful one is the one that engages you. The one that you’re most drawn to. I’ve recently started working with a little group of Order Members with some questions from the Mahamudra tradition and we’ve been exploring them together, and we’ve been partly sort of taking it from the top. And the top would be questions about ‘well what is awareness like, in itself?’ If we really get that, that’s a real sort of foundation for things. But I’ve also found myself saying to people ‘well you know just pick one of the questions that engages you and interests you’, because wherever you open up new understandings, that will all help the overall process. There’s a certain kind of path which the *Ocean of True Meaning* takes you through in terms of understanding but we don’t all have to be completely on the path of regular steps, there is a path of irregular steps. But if you didn’t quite know where to start then OK let’s look at the nature of awareness.

So yes sure, we want to come up with answers that are liberating for us, but in a way the crucial skill is to learn how to explore our experience in this way. To be able to explore really really simply leaving aside or looking through the ideas or the assumptions that we have, and coming back to the most direct experience we can find. And doing that in a sustainable way, in a relaxed way. Because with relaxation mind tends to settle and then it’s easier to see, it’s easier to see what’s there. So you can do the very intense questioning and some people it really does work for so, as I say, please, you’re the ones who really know about your own minds. But yes for most people a sort of relaxed looking

*[break]*

**Some pointers for exploring experience** (10 mins)

So before the break I was looking at that question, and exploring how to explore experience and finding that balance between increasing relaxation and doing a certain amount of putting question marks against our experience. And it is like that. Because the insight questions in the *Ocean of True Meaning* are put as questions, the tendency is to think that you have to come up with something on the same level. So the question is ‘is awareness inside or outside the body?’ and it feels like you need to come up with the answer to that. Or even a very simple question like ‘how is it to be aware?’ or ‘how is it to be alive?’ It feels like ‘oh I’ve got to come up with some adjectives to describe it’. But that’s not what we’re after. What we’re after is to take a question just as an indicator, just as a pointer at our experience. So we go from that question into so if it’s ‘how is it to be alive in this moment?’ yeah I can sit here and kind of feel and go ‘oh it feels like this or it feels like that’. The aim is that I just experience more and more deeply, really simply. And I get below my ideas about what it’s like to be me, who’s alive, in this moment and I come just to an immediate sort of experience. So there’s an intuitive knowing – prajna in the full sense of it – it’s direct intuitive knowing, or ‘direct intuitive understanding’, that’s the kind of phrase that Bhante would tend to use about it. So that’s what we’re aiming for, to call it that. Subsequently we may want to communicate our experience to somebody else so OK then we have to go back onto the verbal conceptual level and on that level which will feel like a very very rough approximation, almost nothing to do with the actual experience, with these funny little things called words, we’ll do our best to spark off in somebody else some kind of empathetic feeling for our experience. But we’re heading for wisdom beyond words. The *Ocean of True Meaning* is an ocean of wisdom that’s beyond words and beyond concepts. So we’re not just ... although the questions may be phrased in words they’re pointers at deep experience, so we steer to the deep.

And also before the break I was just talking a bit about how when we’re practising that relaxed immediate awareness, we can be noticing where the tightness is. Because the dukkha always comes from lack of freedom, there’s a tightness in experience, there’s very often a drivenness and compulsion in experience. So with those six doctrines of Tilopa there’s absolutely nothing the matter with remembering the past, there’s absolutely nothing the matter about thinking about the future. You know, the Buddha would think ‘oh tomorrow I shall go to Rajagrha’, Bhante wrote those volumes of memoirs full of recollections. That’s not a problem. The problem is when we’re driven and compelled, so we can’t stop thinking about the past, or our minds just go round and round about the future : you know – ‘will I lose my job, what happens if I lose my job?’ over and over and over. It’s the lack of freedom that we’re trying to solve, that’s the dukkha. So the same with all those what I was calling those 5 terrible don’ts. They’re not doctrine. It’s not never think about the past, never think about the future, don’t even think about the present. They’re method. It’s really helpful at times to practise in a way where we’re letting go of the past, letting go of the future, not fixating on the present and so on.

So where shall we go from here? So the progression of the exploration in the *Ocean of True Meaning* as I said it starts with looking at ‘well what is awareness like in itself?’, and that takes us into the knowing that all our experience is an experience of awareness. Which has to be the case. It’s like if there’s no awareness there is no experience. That has implications which we’ll unpack a little bit further. And then it moves on, into looking at the relationship between awareness and mind movements. So we start to look at the relation of awareness and what appears within awareness. So we start with mind movements which is emotions and moods and ideas and all those words and pictures all that internal cinema, all that, and then we look at the relationship between awareness and the body. Is awareness located in the body? Where in the body? Is it just in the body? All those kinds of areas. And then we look at the relationship of awareness with everything which appears in what we think of as the external world. So there’s that sort of progression through. And I’m aware this is just like a one of those kind of tours you can do on a coach where you visit sort of 5 different cathedral cities in a day and then you get up the next day and visit another 6 and you just carry on like that. I don’t think I’ve quite learned how to explore something like this with a really large group in 5 days. When I did it, when I was taken through the book by Lama Tilmann, we had I think seven 10 day retreats sort of like six hours a day, so that’s 420 hours I think, and I’d already done a three year retreat before that sort of looking at this. So we’ve got oh 19 hours something like that? So part of me’s going ‘oh dear!’. But we’ll do what we can, we’ll sort of get a sense of things and hopefully if this approach speaks to you we can find ways of taking it further.

So let’s do some meditation and we’ll do a little bit of looking at awareness and then maybe we’ll look a little bit at thoughts. Here not so much emotions but maybe what I call that internal cinema, the words and images

**Meditation : exploring thoughts part 1** (30 mins)

* So starting by not interfering with experience, not manipulating it. If we’re doing anything, we’re appreciating what is going on. Part of the practice is appreciating what we usually just take for granted. The simple fact of there being a body, there being open senses, there being the earth
* So again just invoking the refuges. If we explore our experience we want to be fully resourced and in touch with what’s really meaningful. Again, a sense of who we’re practising for.
* Now making sure we can feel our connection with the earth. The body’s like a mountain - stable, poised between the earth and the sky
* Coming into the body. Noticing what goes on. How we go from words catalysing an experience. If I say ‘making the whole body a field of awareness’, how is that experience , what’s it like?
* Within this experience that’s being pointed at when we say ‘field of awareness’ there’s an experience of what we describe as sensations, feelings, energy movements. In themselves they aren’t these things called feelings or sensations – so how are they? What’s the experience of it? And does awareness somehow come to them and light them up? Or are they themselves awareness?
* If we’re happily absorbed then great. If it feels like we’re trying to see how it is then maybe we could relax a little bit more. No big deal, just playing, just curious
* Now let’s become a little curious about what thinking is like. Let’s start really simple. Let’s just take a few words that don’t have a particular great meaning for us. I seem to have a couple of phrases from communication exercises we used to do ‘the sky is blue today’ ‘do birds fly’. Something simple. So does it feel as if awareness moves to somewhere else to experience these words? Does it feel as if the words are happening in some space in the head, or the heart or the throat or none of the above? Are we seeing these words? Just hearing them? Or somehow feeling them? Do they appear from anywhere? Or are they instantly there? And to be aware of them -is it as if awareness is brought to them? Or are they themselves awareness? If it feels like awareness is brought to them, where does it come from? If it feels as if these visual letters or these sounds are happening in a space, is it the same space as when we were experiencing the sensations in the physical body?
* And now if there’s a sound to these words, let it die away into silence. If we’re seeing the words, we let them dissolve away, just like a visualization dissolving into the blue sky. We really relax
* Now sharing the benefits with all living beings

That was quite a lot of looking in one session – I tried to give you a taste of the kind of ways you can explore. Really basic, simple questions about our experience, the ones we take for granted, we go back and we really look at those. We kind of pioneer with our experience really doing this. We pioneer for ourselves and for one another, and for more and more beings. The more clear we become about how it really is to be alive and a human being, the more we can help others to be free.

**Day 4 Session 2**

**Questions : non-conceptuality and gathering of resources to meet challenging emotions and situations** (15mins)

So this afternoon we’ll mainly mediate but before we do I’m just going to slip in one or two quick questions

*Earlier on you said at different times that barlung promotes non-conceptuality, and later you said that it promotes non-duality. Could you say something about the relationship between non-conceptuality and non-duality?*

So non-conceptuality. Barlung, as I said, has a lot of advantages : it’s really good for a tendency to anxiety, it’s healing, all sorts of things. And yes, taking energy down into this area below the navel tends to quieten the mind. So there are fewer concepts. Non-conceptuality as it’s used in Mahamudra doesn’t necessarily mean that mind is completely quiet. It means that there’s no getting caught up in whatever thoughts are arising in the mind. And when you don’t get caught up, you don’t put any energy into them, then you don’t get thought chains in the usual way. A thought starts and because we don’t put energy into it and sort of blow it up like a balloon it just arises and it passes. Or to use the Mahamudra term it self-liberates. So yes, non-conceptuality needn’t mean that the mind is just really completely, deeply silent. But it does mean that we’re not engaged with concepts, we’re not engaged with the thinking process. And it’s those layers of concepts, backed up by the force of the kleshas, that prevent us from seeing experience as it is, things as they are. So being in a state of non-conceptuality means that we aren’t having to kind of see through layers of assumptions and preconceptions and habitual ideas about how life is, in order to know directly how life is. So the non-conceptuality creates a space within which that intuitive direct knowing can easily function. And it does seem to be interesting that the traditions that stress non-duality often do also emphasise practice down below the navel here. So Mahamudra and Dzogchen both put quite a lot of emphasis on practice in this area. And Chan and Zen do too.

Another little question left over I’m afraid from the beginning of the retreat. I was talking about how part of the process usually for us as dharma practitioners as we go deeper into exploration of the nature of things and as our practice goes deeper, is that we encounter fear of losing ourselves, fear of losing control, fear associated with the sense that the ‘me’ that I always thought was here at the centre of things maybe isn’t here. Well actually it never was here and we’ve been functioning perfectly well in fact, it’s only been that sense of me in the centre of things that has tended to mess things up for us – so we have nothing to lose but our delusion. We’re never going to lose a real self. And nobody who’s ever really seen through that sense of a substantial self has ever really regretted it. It’s not like you’ve ever had some yogins coming together in a meeting in the 12th century and somebody saying ‘oh I’ve just seen through self and if only I hadn’t and how do I get that self back!’ No, it’s all just light and free. So it feels like we’re going to lose something really precious but we’re just losing a very deep habit in a way. So I was talking about that and I had a questioner saying

*Is fear a necessary stage of the process? It’s constricting and brings up more selfing in my experience. Couldn’t love and devotion see you through to the other shore?*

Well it would be great if fear wasn’t a necessary stage of the process and I think I’ve met a few people for whom it hasn’t figured very largely. We don’t want to prejudge how we’ll be, if we have as Bhante used to say if you have a really good reservoir of positive emotion then this kind of insight work goes much more easily. So it may be that it won’t arise but there’s a fair chance that it will, just because we’re going into the unknown – or what feels like the unknown. So yes ‘fear is constricting and brings up more selfing’ Well certainly usually fear arises, has arisen in our lives when we’ve been unprepared and it’s often arisen when we’ve been small and we really haven’t had the resources to deal with it. So there’s a source of fear and then we’re precipitated into that situation and we don’t have the resources to deal with it and so that threatens us even more. And of course, that’s extremely difficult. Then the questioner says ‘could not love and devotion see you through to the other shore?’

So there’s a real difference between the kind of fear that was there where circumstances came to us and we didn’t ask for them, we didn’t have the resources, and the situations where we’re dharma practitioners and we gather the resources. So before we go into difficult territory in ourselves we always want to kind of gather the resources that we can find. There’s a difference between just being in a scary situation without the resources and being a dharma practitioner with a refuge, with confidence in the dharma, with spiritual friends, with members of the Order that we can call on, all that, and deciding deliberately with all those resources to go and meet that situation. It’s completely different. So when we do that yeah OK still some fear arises, but what we’re aiming for – we can’t precisely judge this because life doesn,’t work like that – is to have sufficient resources that when we go into that scary situation the dharma comes through. And the more love and devotion that we have, the more when that difficult situation arises, yes some fear may arise but that love and devotion, that trust in the dharma, that connection with our yidam whatever it is for us, that sees us through. So if we’re practising gathering resources all the time, we’re deepening our love and devotion, we’re deepening our confidence in the dharma, we’re deepening our inspiration, we’re deepening our trust that the dharma is really worth seeing through the difficulties, if we deepen our trust that the insights that the Buddha talked about are liberating, then when we go into these situations and take them on it’s like Mara who was chasing us all over the place, suddenly it’s like you turn and face him and he goes ‘ oh hang on a minute yes OK you carry on’

And as dharma practice goes deeper we start to almost have that confidence where we start to go looking for the difficulties. And you even welcome difficult areas. So yes in the tradition, in Milarepa’s tradition, you might be a yogin or a yogini practising intensely under ideal conditions, and then at a certain point your teacher would say ‘all right, so now go into the town and do this, now go and do that’. Go to that cremation ground, go into that scary place. And the teacher would try to judge it so that you’d be sent to do that at the point where you had the resources and then you could take your practice further. You start to take the dharma into the places that scare you. The places where you’re not sure how this will work out. The areas where you’re working on your sort of weaker sides. So that we become really fully confident. It’s like each time we do that there’s a deepening of confidence in the dharma, there’s a deepening of confidence in your spiritual friends, so then the practice actually goes quicker. To start with we try to give ourselves really good conditions and kind of keep out things that are unhelpful but then that’s just gathering momentum, gathering force, gathering that reservoir of positive emotion so that then we start to move into more challenging areas.

**Meditation : sense meditation and the nature of mind movements** (30 mins)

* So everything as it is, just aware experience. And just simply in whatever way works for us invoking the protection, the guidance, the support of the refuge. And again, just briefly in our own way calling to mind who we’re practising for. Letting awareness of them strengthen our motivation
* As well as practising drawing on the resources of the refuge, we’re also drawing on the support of the earth, feeling the earth beneath us, feeling in this moment the qualitative stability. Drawing on the support of a really helpful posture – centred, upright, alive, energised.
* With all that, coming into the body. Letting the body be a field of bright awareness. What happens when we take that suggestion into experience? Noticing how the feelings and sensations arise, and pass away all by themselves
* Now being aware of what happens, what changes with the suggestion ‘now let’s widen out and include sound’. Noticing how the sounds arise and pass away all by themselves.
* Now including all that we can see. Relaxed awareness, no need to focus on anything in particular, no need to label. In the seen just the seen.
* And smell and taste
* And all the mental movements, whatever emotions are there, whatever mood, whatever ideas, images. No-one has to be for or against them. They come and they go. Being curious, let’s subtly explore the words and pictures. Or if mind is really still we could even stimulate a little so that there are some words and pictures. We’re not engaging with the content, we’re looking at : what is a thought anyway? Is there anything solid about it? Are thoughts like images on a screen, appearing but nothing really there? How is it? Do they have any power of their own?
* And now if we relax as completely as possible, does anything happen in relation to the thoughts? And are the thoughts like sensations in the body, or sounds – do they just come and go all by themselves? How is it?
* Now just resting, no need to be doing something called meditation. No need for a meditator.
* And finally dedicating the merits. All those we were meditating for

**Day 4 Session 3**

**‘look directly at the nature of whatever thoughts arise….’** (30 mins)

In the last session I answered a couple of questions and then we explored a little bit more: we did a sense meditation and then we came to the mind movements and we took another little look at what they were like. And in this session I want to carry on doing that, and then I’m imagining that tomorrow we’ll look a bit at external appearances, all those things ‘out there’ that are different from us.

Let’s start with one of the quotations I shared with you. There’s one from Lesson 49. And the 9th Karmapa Wangchug Dorje says

‘Look directly at the nature of whatever thoughts arise’

So this isn’t a meditation instruction that’s so obviously there as far as I can think in early Buddhism. In this practice rather than…. if mind is very busy we have to find ways of settling it. If there’s lots of prapanca and we’re a bit lost in it we may or may not actually be able to look directly at the nature of things, we may need to use other methods. But the key method from the point of view of Mahamudra is to look at the nature, which isn’t exactly a looking with the eyes but it’s a use your intuition to feel what the nature is of whatever thoughts arise. So not what the content is. Whatever it is, whether it’s some great wave of jealousy or whether it’s a thought about the number 7 bus it doesn’t matter. It’s going to have the same nature when we really look at it. So ‘look directly at the nature of whatever thoughts arise’.

‘When the thoughts themselves are experienced as an ungraspable luminous emptiness there is no need to reject a bad thought or to seek a remedy apart from it.’

So we look into the nature of an emotion, a mood, a story that we’re telling ourselves, whatever it is, and because whatever it is is a dependent arising there’s nothing substantial, there’s nothing graspable about it. So when we look into thoughts they are quite flimsy, to use that word. ‘Flimsy’ means nothing solid – a ‘flimsy’ piece of wood is one that you wouldn’t want to stand on because it would just break and you’d go through it. Quite, let’s say flimsy. So the nature of them is experienced as ungraspable, so nothing we can get hold of, emptiness. So it’s not that there’s nothing – there’s the appearance of the number 7 bus or whatever it is - but in its nature there’s no solid core to it, there’s nothing that we could get hold of, it’s an arising within mind dependent upon certain conditions, and it passes away. And it’s ‘luminous’. ‘Luminous’ here doesn’t literally mean ‘lumen’ in Latin means light but it doesn’t literally have to do with light, it’s about the aware quality. Awareness as it were lights things up so that we can as it were see them. But it’s an analogy, it’s a metaphor. So ‘luminous’ is a word that you get a lot in Mahamudra and Dzogchen but it doesn’t mean that things are very bright. It just means that there’s an aware quality. So there’s the appearance of the great wave of jealousy say but then along with that when we explore its nature there’s no core to it, there’s just an aware appearance but with nothing substantial there. Just as if we were to look at a film where there was a number 7 bus or somebody had a great fit of jealousy, there would be the appearance but we would know that actually there was nothing there we could get hold of. You know you’d go up to the screen and there would just be the blank screen and the light reflected on your fingers as you put your hand up. So when we see that that’s the nature of a thought, as I say whether it’s a powerful emotion or whether it’s just a random few little words that are going through our head, then there’s no need to reject it or to seek a remedy apart from that. We don’t need to do anything about it because there’s nothing solid and real there that we need to do anything about. It’s enough that we just really see that there’s just a dependent arising that comes and goes. And the only reason that it doesn’t come and go is that we invest energy into it. It does come and go but we keep sort of re-creating a similar experience. So from the Mahamudra point of view thoughts are not an enemy, they're not the problem. Even big whooshes of anger aren’t the enemy, aren’t the problem. They are if we express them at somebody else, but in themselves they’re just another manifestation of how things are. The difficulty is that we invest belief in them and take them as much more solid and real and heavy and serious than they are in themselves. And that then leads to whole chain reactions of emotions and chains of thoughts and so on.

So no problem with ideas, no problem with images, no problem with feelings, no problem with emotions. The issue is that we mistake their nature and we grasp at them. And the more strongly we grasp at them the more real and solid they seem to become. And we enter their world, we create a sort of whole rather small world in which the thought form seems to fill the entire space. And we can kind of watch ourselves doing this at times. We can watch it in meditation. It’s like we’re with the breathing, we’re with the breathing… and then there’s this little kind of uneasy sort of slightly agitated slightly irritated feeling….. but we’re with the breathing we let it go…..., but it kind of comes back and this time there are one or two images associated with it of something that happened at work yesterday…... but we’re with the breathing…. and then somehow another thought comes along connected with it and that’s, you know, we’ve been letting the thoughts pass but then *this* one sort of it comes like in a sort of motorcade with motorcycle outriders and it’s a Very Important Thought and we have to think about it. And the next thing we know, we’re back at work yesterday with what was going on, and we’ve just entered that world, for however long it is until we can kind of manage to find our way out again. But however much that happens, in any moment if we can look at the nature of it we’ll find that there’s nothing substantial there. We’ll find that it’s nature is always that it’s a dependent arising. It’s always ungraspable aware, emptiness. And seeing that*, if we really see tha*t, that’s enough. If we’re in the midst of a complete strop – a really really bad mood – if we’ve been doing this kind of practice, in the middle of it it’s possible that suddenly a little bit of prajna appears and it just pricks the mood like a balloon with a needle and it will just go *[finger snap]* stop. There will be no decrescendo, it won’t die away, it will just stop. If we really see it.

So some of the Mahamudra texts like Gampopa for instance in the *Ocean of True Meaning* he’s quoted as saying ‘ thoughts are friends, thoughts are beneficial’. Because they give you another opportunity to look at the nature of how it is. Here comes another thought and never mind what it’s about let’s look at the nature of it – yeah, it’s like another cloud across the blue sky, there’s nothing really there, there’s nothing we can get hold of – yeah! It’s just there were some conditions that came together in that moment, but it never turned into something that was really there, that really existed. And look! It just goes. It just goes. So if we can get into that way of practice, with experience it’s completely win-win. Either mind is really calm, really quiet, relaxed, easy – in which case great, be really calm, really relaxed, really easy. Or thoughts are appearing. A big wave of emotion or something. In which case it’s another opportunity to see how things really are. it’s another opportunity to see ‘yes, you know, everything *is* dependent arising, everything *does* just come and do; no there isn’t anything fixed about anything – no it all appears really real and important but there’s nothing really there’. So if we can get something of this going, to start with at least it will get us away from what often certainly newer meditators do which is fighting thoughts. It’s like you have the idea that meditation is about having a calm, quiet mind, and thoughts start to turn up and we have to sort of bar the door and kind of hold them out - ‘no thoughts, no thoughts, go away’. And there’s all the tension in kind of holding the door of mind closed against the thoughts. And eventually we get a bit tired and just go ‘ oh all right then’ and our meditation is wiped out in a stampede of thoughts whose energy we’ve been holding back. So we want to get really away from that. So OK, we’re open to experience, we’re welcoming it, when we’re just sitting we’re open to all experience. Relaxed as much as we can be in relation to it. And the more that we can keep taking a look at the nature of the thoughts, the nature of the feelings, the nature of the emotions, the more relaxation there will be.

And in a way we ought to be good at this, because we’ve become incredibly sophisticated, we 21st century beings, incredibly sophisticated at knowing that something is an illusion that’s being produced and acting as if it’s real. So we’re interacting with it when we need to , but knowing that finally it is not as it appears. We’re all doing it right now. We’re all kind of on one level having the illusion that there are 25 people that we’re looking at or one person if you’ve got me on speaker view – that there’s Vessantara in front of me talking to me. But on another level we know that that’s just a picture on a screen. Look, he’s not really there at all, there’s just pixels and light. So we need to be able to move between those 2 views as dharma practitioners. Yes, where somebody is suffering in front of us we need to be able to interact with it and respond to it. So we’re not just going ‘well nothing is real, so nothing matters, so let’s forget about compassion and all that’. Not that at all. Just as hopefully if we’re talking on zoom we act as if we’re really in contact, and actually we are on a different level. But in another way we also need to be able to move into seeing the nature of things. You do this if you watch a scary movie or something - which I never tend to do if I can avoid it – but yeah you know you are sort of happily watching it, but then at a certain point it turns really violent and unpleasant, and very often at that point you bale out, you take yourself out and you just remind yourself ‘oh it’s just a movie’. But with the movie that we run in our own minds we seem to lose the capacity to do that very often. So we practice that capacity. We just keep not even just reminding ourselves that that’s how things are, although that would help, but actually each time to have another look. Because that’s what’s really effective. We can go through the day, through our practice, reminding ourselves of right view, and that will certainly be of huge benefit. But much much better still is that we really just explore our experience and know ‘OK this thought is just a dependent arising, yeah, this thought is flowing, yeah there’s nothing graspable to it, and so on’. That real intuitive knowing is coming into play, again and again.

So then the 9th Karmapa says

‘As is said: whatever it may be that is binding you, once you become aware of it [and that really means aware of it’s nature] it is liberated’

You’d think it would say *you* will become liberated. But it’s like seeing its nature, we no longer hold onto it, we no longer re-create it, we no longer sort of put energy into that world, and so then it just does what it naturally does which is that it arises, it passes.

‘If you understand this extraordinary way, you will go to the place of the buddhas in this life’

May it be so, may it be so, may it be so.

So maybe one other thing before we meditate. We’re used to thinking of ‘me’ as the subject. So here’s me sitting here talking to you in Spain or Norway or wherever you are, and it’s fairly clear you know ‘here’s me the subject and there are you the object’, in a common sense way of thinking about it. So if I’m doing that then the body is me, the feelings are me, the emotions are me, the thoughts are me, the volitions are me, the awareness is all me and mine. Then we start to look at thoughts in the way that’s being suggested here. And now the thoughts aren’t me, now ‘me’ is looking at the thoughts. So what was previously part of ‘me’ are now objects, that ‘me’ is now looking at. See what I mean? So what does this say? Well, what it says to practitioners in the tradition is that we keep creating a duality of subject-object, and that when it really comes down to it we can create objects out there, but we can turn the body into an object, we can turn the thoughts into an object, we can turn the emotions into an object, we can turn the movement of energy into and object. When it really comes down to it our basis tendency is to split things into awareness which is ‘me’, which is the subject, and whatever appears to awareness which is the object. So that almost seems to be that ‘me’ is a shifting concept. When ‘me’ retreats to its final basic position it’s ‘I am the awareness that knows all this’. That knows the thoughts. So looking at thoughts, it still feels like there is ‘me’, or it can feel like there’s ‘me’, the awareness looking at the thoughts, which have now become objects. So as well as looking at the nature of thoughts we can also look at the nature of that relationship. We can look at what thoughts are like, we can look at the nature of the subject, we can look at me the observer, me the meditator, me the one who is bringing awareness to the thoughts. And we can also look at how it seems like we’re doing that. Can we actually see ourselves ‘bringing awareness to thoughts’, or is it just that the thoughts are themselves awareness, are themselves aware? So there’s a whole big field of exploration in there. So probably that’s some food for thought, or hopefully not too much thought, food for exploration, food for things to be curious and interested in, about experience.

**Meditation : from content to nature in sensations and thoughts** (30 mins)

* So letting experience be as it is. And as we’ve done before, but letting it be fresh because this is a new moment, it’s never been like this before, invoking the refuge however we do that – connecting with our yidam, opening to the deep qualities of the dharma
* And opening to other people, other beings like us. And all beings are fundamentally like us. Longing to be happy, avoiding suffering without ever quite succeeding. So we go into the practice as much as possible with an open heart.
* Now we start by touching the earth, connecting with the ground. The sense of stability, the ground on which the body’s resting, and that can give us a feeling of the quality of mind of stability. It’s a foundation for our practice. And from that base, the body rises up, the upper body light, opening towards the sky, and along with that there’s a sense of lightness of mind, brightness, alertness
* And then we bring that stable, bright, alert way of mind into the body. Aware of what’s going on, warmth, movement, pleasant sensations, unpleasant sensations.
* Now moving awareness from the content to the nature of what’s happening. Let’s play with looking at the nature of different kinds of bodily feelings and sensations. So we could find a pleasant sensation and an unpleasant sensation. And then we could look at their nature. Do they both change? Maybe they seem to change at different speeds. Is there anything we can get hold of in a pleasant sensation or an unpleasant sensation?
* And if you’d like to, just relaxing not particularly exploring, maybe being with the breath in some way, maybe Barlung if that comes easily to you
* Now let’s explore some mind movements, if you’d like to. I suggest that we take some images. If you’d rather take some other mind movement that’s OK. So firstly let’s bring to mind an image of something we find pleasant. Something that’s attractive to us, something that we enjoy. Just let it as it were be there. No need to create stories about it, memories of the past or thoughts about the future. Just having the felt sense, maybe a visual image, of this attractive appearance. Now again let’s look what it’s made up of. What is it actually, what’s there? When the 9th Karmapa does this, he finds that the image is ungraspable awareness, with no core, no substance. Is it like that for us?
* Now relaxing completely, not doing anything. So now what happened to our attractive image? Is it still there? Has it changed, has it disappeared? If it disappeared, did we make it go away or did it go away by itself when we relaxed?
* Now let’s bring up an image that we find a little unattractive. An image that isn’t so easy for us, produces a little bit of aversion. A felt sense of it there – maybe we can feel a reaction of some kind in the body, maybe we can see the image. Then again it’s as if there’s a shift of focus from the content to how it is. Is its nature the same as the pleasant image, or different? If it’s different, what’s the difference? If it’s the same, what’s that nature like? Is it a nature or a sort of no-nature? Not as it were staring, not trying too hard. Really receptive, allowing it to reveal itself.
* Now again relaxing. Nothing, absolutely nothing to do. And very simply, in whatever way works for us best, transferring the merits

**Ocean of True Meaning**

**On-line Order Retreat December 2020**

**Day 5 Session 1**

**Meditation : exploring the difference between words, emotions and physical sensations** (20 mins)

* Just aware of experience as it is
* Now a sense of relaxing, opening, with whatever’s going on. Feeling how that relaxation promotes a downward flow of energy through the body. Following that or imagining following that, down to the ground. Tuning into the solidity, the stability of that experience – like we’re on a vajra seat. Centred, unshakeable
* And from there, the body rises up. Sitting with the dignity of being a follower of the Buddha, the Awakened One.
* Letting awareness fill the body. There’s an aware flow of experiences, constantly changing
* Gently relaxing, softening a sense of there being someone aware of what’s happening. All these experiences are themselves awareness
* Noticing any words, pictures, emotional responses – they’re part of this flow of experience, constantly changing. Yes, thoughts and emotions are different from physical sensations, but finally is their nature any different? Words are words, pictures are pictures, emotions are emotions, aches and pains are aches and pains. Do they all come and go in the same way? Do any of them have anything that we can get hold of? Do they have any centre, anything fixed? Are they all expressions of awareness?
* Now relaxing, letting go, nothing to do. What changes when we relax and let everything happen? Awareness continues, the flow of experience continues. So what’s different?
* Now no questions, no exploring. Just everything as it is.
* And finally sharing the benefits with all life. As if we’re sitting with open hands.

**‘Everything is mind’ and the subject object duality** (35 mins)

So that meditation was taking us into territory that we were looking at yesterday, with looking at the nature of thoughts, and we got a couple of extracts that were about that. Yesterday we looked at the one from lesson 49 and we’re just very briefly going to look at the other one seeing that I gave it to you. I’m not really going to go into it very much. So the second one is from lesson 50 and it’s from Phamodrupa, who was one of the 3 main disciples of Gampopa if I remember rightly. And he founded or was the forefather of quite a few schools of the Kagyu tradition. And he says

‘Thoughts are awareness’

So that seems fair enough doesn’t it? No awareness, no thoughts that we would know about. So ‘thoughts are awareness’.

‘Wise persons know that awareness has 3 doors of liberation’.

We remember there’s the signless, the directionless or wishless and the empty ; the *animitta* the *appaṇihita* and the *suññatā*. Yes we’ll pass that by for now

‘With great joy, think of them as particularly beneficial’.

So we’re trying to get away from this view that thoughts are the problem for me the meditator. Thoughts are those pesky bothersome things which stop me meditating. Always it’s the clinging and the aversion. The thoughts will just come and go. It’s when we pay attention to them and put energy into them and struggle with them that there’s the issue. Because:

‘Thoughts are mind itself.’

Thoughts are part of the fabric of things.

‘If you want to get rid of them, they increase’

So if you put more energy into them, even by trying to drive them away, it’s like you’re just entering more into that world of the thought. It’s like, you know, somebody says something a bit sharp to you over breakfast - if you were not to put any energy into it, that was just something that lasted 3 seconds while they made their little comment. And then you just go on with your day. But those 3 seconds we then sort of replay to ourselves : ‘they said that’, ‘oh I didn’t like that very much’, and we start putting energy into it even though it’s disappeared and we build it up and we build it up, and so by lunchtime when we see them again it’s gone into a really big thing and it’s taken up quite a lot of our mental space. But the original comment was just 3 seconds and it was done. And the same with the thought. The thought arises and that thought goes but then we replay it and have feelings about it and get concerned or excited or whatever we do and then we’re into a chain of thought. And that’s the issue. Something arising in the mind and passing is just another manifestation of mind itself

‘But since they are unborn there’s no need to get rid of them’

Because they’re of the nature of mind, and because they’re dependent arisings, they never really come into existence. As I say they’re flimsy, there’s nothing you can get hold of, they’re constantly changing. So there’s no need to get rid of something which isn’t really fully there in the first place. We give things greater solidity and then we battle with them or we try to hold on to them. If we really see the flowing, dependent arising ungraspable nature of them then there’s no need to get rid of something that isn't really there. We’re giving things too much solidity. So as we saw, thoughts, you can be meditating and mind can be quiet in which case that’s how it is or we can be meditating and thoughts can be arising in which case it’s another opportunity to look at the nature of things. To see well are they just dependent arisings, do they really flow, is there anything I can get hold of about them? All that we’ve been talking about, we need to really confirm in experience . An emotion or a thought is another opportunity to take a direct look at how things are.

OK so all that was yesterday so to speak, and today in our coach tour we’re going to do a quick check around appearances - so what we think of as the external things in the external world, and how we create a sense of ‘me in here and everything else out there’. So the last quote that you’ve got is from lesson 54 – Master Gotsangpa who is one of the early Mahamudra masters in the Kagyu tradition in the late 12th early 13th century. Let’s take his basic statement here:

‘Generally speaking [in fact always] the experience of all kinds of appearances is in your own mind’

So all appearances are appearances in / of awareness. So this relates to what I said earlier in the retreat that there’s no experience without awareness. It would be impossible to have any kind of experience if there were no awareness at all. So whenever there’s an experience, that experience is an experience of awareness, and everything we experience is an experience of awareness or an experience of mind. And this is Yogacara, but it’s also modern psychology, it’s modern theory of perception. The senses are active, but what we experience is the mind’s creation out of sense experience. The mind is doing all kinds of things in order to build up an image out of what the senses are, the sense data that it’s being provided with So in that way, even assuming that there’s something out there, we never experience the something out there as it is - we’re always experiencing our mind’s interpretation of our senses sensing of whatever it may be. So we can never say anything about it in itself. What we’re always dealing with is our own mind and its interpretation of experience. There’s a whole lot going on there which we don’t have time to go into. But there’s the senses themselves are functioning in a particular way, so our eyes are designed to take in certain kind of wavelengths and all that kind of thing. And then mind does a whole lot of basic processing to provide us with the sounds and pictures and the smells and so on. And then on top of that there are all the interpretations that we bring based on our upbringing, culture, all kinds of things like that. So there are scientific studies showing that certain cultures would be more likely to experience things in one way than another for instance. So we’re working with our experience which is always an experience of awareness. We’re living in that world of mind. So that’s true whether our experience in this moment is of the body, is of a thought, is of some kind of emotional experience , whether it’s a sound, whether it’s a sight and so on.

So hopefully you're with me so far. Then, on top of that, as part of the process we impose conceptual layers onto experience. And one of the fundamental concepts that we work with is things to do with one and many and inside and outside. And then we put concepts onto experience and then forget as it were that we imposed the concepts onto experience, and take it that this is just how it is. So part of our investigation in order to free ourselves involves looking at how we create senses of boundary, and it also involves going deeply into our experience to experience without those concepts. So it’s like we’re doing two things. We’re aiming to move into states of mind where those concepts fall away, so we have the direct experience, but it’s also really helpful to start unpicking some of the kind of concepts that make it difficult for us to experience on that deep and very simple level. So it’s worth playing around; maybe we can sort of play around with a few things to start with.

So a lot of our suffering comes from that sense of ‘me in here; everything else out there’, feeling separate. Part of us really wants to be separate. We feel that if we can somehow take ourselves out of the messy rough and tumble of life we’ll be able to sort of create a place of safety back here somewhere. So we want to do that, create a bubble to live in, but that never really works. It’s a futile endeavour because even when we create our bubble we’re still unhappy because then we feel separate, cut off from everybody else, existentially alone and that’s the deep dukkha. There’s always that sense of somehow trying to bridge the gap between us and life which we’ve created by creating a sense of self sort of back here. The full sense of satisfaction is in knowing that we are just life, we are in the flow of life. So as we’re looking at this screen, if you were to go on gallery view…... I’ve got you on gallery view so I’ve got 25 of you and I can focus on any of your and think right there’s Chandramani, and Chandramani is in that little box there and then next to him is Subha in that little box there and I can make the lines between the boxes really hard so they become hard borders. And then Chandramani and Subha are completely separate and so on and so on, I can go across the screen Or I can look at it in another way and there’s a screenful of us all together on this screen there’s Vimalachitta, there’s Vijayasri… and we’re all meeting. So it depends where I draw my lines. We can always discriminate. But it’s whether we discriminate and those discriminations separate us, or whether they’re just helpful ways of exploring things within an open field where nothing is truly separate. And what’s interesting is how much our boundaries shift. We tend to think well they’re fixed – here’s me in here and there’s everything else out there - but what we think of as ‘me’ keeps shifting. So with the body, say, some of the time the body is ‘me’. It doesn't happen to me any more but if I was in a crowd somewhere and somebody was rushing along and bumped into me I wouldn’t think they bumped into my shoulder I’d think they bumped into me. So at that point the body is ‘me’. But then there are other times - perhaps I’m sort of really tired and didn’t sleep very well and I start to wake up and it’s time to get up and mediatioe and I think ‘right, let’s get up now’ and the body doesn't move. At that point the body isn’t ‘me’ – there’s ‘me’ and there's ‘the body’ that won’t move. So before when I got bumped the body was ‘me’, now it’s ‘my body’. But then also maybe I could do the six element practice and maybe on a good day there would be exploration of how the elements that make up the body they all came from outside, they’re all going back and so on, and I might let go of any sense of the body as being ‘I or me or mine’. So which is it? Is the body ‘me’ is it ‘mine’ is it ‘not me or mine’? So when we do this kind of thing we start to notice that it’s not as if ‘me’ is a fixed boundary somewhere – ‘me’ is shifting. ‘Me’ grows and expands and contracts and becomes stronger under certain circumstances and softer under others. So if there was a real boundary there you would imagine it would stay the same. But because it’s an idea that we’re putting onto things, a concept that’s changing upon conditions and depending upon our emotional states amongst other things, then it comes and goes. So that helps us to see that there is no fixed boundary between me and other. It’s just constantly moving.

And when we take this Mahamudra view that all experience is an experience of awareness then again where is the boundary? If this is right - and it seems fairly clear - that our experience is an experience of awareness and it’s our mind that we’re experiencing, if that’s right then the screen in front of you that’s an experience of awareness, it’s an experience of mind. Your left foot, that’s an experience of awareness, it’s an experience of…. the same mind presumably? So where’s the boundary? Not very clear is it So maybe we’ve got used to identifying with part of experience. Maybe mind has got used to identifying with part of its totality. So seeing things like this, its as if there’s open awareness which is registering all kinds of things. As I’m sitting here it’s registering all kinds of little movements that I’m making, its registering the fact that if I look out of the window there’s a forest in the distance it’s registering somebody just moving with their blanket. And out of this great field of experience I then come along with an idea, a deeply held idea backed up by a whole lot of kleshas over a long period of time, and I carve out part of that and I call it ‘me’. And that – immediately, as soon as I identify with anything - makes everything else ‘other’ and out there. And suddenly rather than feeling open and spacious I can feel ‘oh there’s only one of me and there’s 25 of you and there you all are and you’re all looking at me’. And if I wanted to – it doesn't, it all feels very warm and lovely – but I could sort of start feeling outnumbered and a bit kind of self-conscious and so on and so forth. I could create all sorts of dukkha for myself. And yes we can work with, we often work with the dukkha, we work with the feelings of unease and so on, but we don’t always question the fundamental cause of it which is that we’ve created that sense of a split in the first place by identifying with a part of the field of experience.

So it’s like there’s one field of experience. If you drive across Europe you drive across France and you go into Germany, say, OK you go from France into Germany but you may just drive through a forest as you do that. And the trees don’t know that they’re French trees and German trees, there’s just the forest. It means *something* – now I’m in France, now I’m in Germany. But that’s an idea that we’ve all agreed on to put onto this forest. So similarly we have the whole of our experience, and then we divide it up into not France and Germany but ‘me’ and ‘you’, ‘me’ and ‘the world’ out there.

[*Sudaka] The immediate question that comes to mind is I had an experience a few days ago trying to explore moving out as it were into the walls of the room that I’m in, but there’s a kind of a sense that I identify with this skin and bone as this sort of basic survival posture. Well I can imagine….. but how could I be as it were everything that’s around me?*

And this is a question that always comes up because it feels like…. it’s usually rationally put ‘oh if I become everything or if I become part of everything will I remember to eat or will I look after this’. But it seems like Buddhas and dharma practitioners always do. It’s not like you can’t discriminate, but it’s that rather than creating a sense of separation OK there’s an opening out, so now you’re caring for everything. So yes awareness is connected with this particular body so we look after that particularly, but part of the deeper dharma practice is going to be moving beyond the promptings of just survival mode. There is a survival instinct which tends to keep us just looking after this and we honour that – yes self metta means looking after me as well as any other part of experience. But yes there needs to be an opening, because otherwise there’s just samsara. It’s like life and death can just carry on because we’re focussing on the bit that lives and dies.

[*Akasharaja] Whenever I play with this kind of thing, this sense of all kinds of phenomena and objects and space and time and our experience, I always come up against this sort of idea, but then there’s like kind of agglomerations or concentrations of experience that aren’t me. So there’s you and your experience and there’s the experience of everyone else on this call. I think I can say with a reasonable amount of confidence that I’m definitely not you, so to speak. So I suppose I start to get a bit confused at that point. How do you account for that? At least to some extent there seems to be a sort of fundamental separation between me and other subjectivities.*

That takes any of us into a kind of realm of philosophical thinking and views about experience which are interesting speculations. Yeah sort of, I have to assume that you are somehow there as a consciousness, it’s not simply solipsism that I’m the only thing that exists around here. But none of that is going to help us deal with dukkha. So in order to deal with the dukkha we need to focus on what we can influence. Which is everything that appears in our mind. So it’s possible for us to take apart the sense of being separate, being isolated, take apart that sense of identification with I and me and mine. It’s possible for mind to become very open and free and to discover that we’re much less separate than we think we are. In meditation, and without actually, we quite often pick up things from one another - you know we get a sense of how people are. Even when they’re not around we get a sense sometimes. There’s much more networking going on than we think. But those philosophical issues, yes the rational mind wants to know and understand how that works. But none of that’s going to help us any. All we need to do is look at be clear about what concepts we’re laying onto experience and to have a direct experience of simple awareness before we believe in all those concepts and put them on top.

*Yes it’s just an area – I always have to remember that the Buddha’s not encouraging us to engage in metaphysical speculation really. But there’s always something that definitely seems to elude me, that’s something there are definitely subjectivities out there that are not... I mean they have their own dukkha don’t they*

Yes and we need that awareness

*Yes if we’re not careful we just become get lost in solipsism – ‘other beings are just manifestations of my mind’, which I suppose is where the mistake comes in. Therefore their suffering is not real and therefore they don’t matter, and of course that’s not what the Buddha’s teaching us.*

No. We’re looking at how much we’re just building up that whole way of looking at things in the first place. So you know we’re putting onto experience the idea of one and many for instance on which is based this whole kind of discussion. Nagarjuna starts with: things don’t come and go, there’s no one and many, those are all conceptual overlay. Yes that’s all really interesting, but what’s really interesting is that our heart somehow doesn’t feel happy if we really explore it. Just the thought that there’s only me and that other subjectivities don’t have any sensitivity to them or there isn’t that sort of aliveness there - somehow that just doesn’t feel that’s how it can be. It’s interesting to kind of do the work of looking of the concepts and somehow to really feel into there’s somehow a deep heart knowing in all of this. And in that deep heart knowing that there’s the connectedness with one another comes more and more, comes stronger and stronger.

*break*

**‘Everything is mind’ contd. - including a couple of illustrative meditative exercises** (40 mins)

Before the break we were in the deep waters of the *Ocean of True Meaning* I think. Exploring how we put concepts on top of experience and especially the concepts of ‘me’ and ‘other’, self and other. And we don’t notice that they’re concepts and we also don’t notice how much they shift. Not only do the boundaries move around, so some of the time the body is ‘me’ sometimes it’s ‘mine’, sometimes it’s not me or mine, but also we don’t often notice how the boundary sort of hardens and softens. It’s like if you sit down with somebody for a conversation that you think is going to be quite difficult, maybe you don’t know that person very well, you tend to feel that they’re definitely ‘out there’ and that this is ‘me here’ and there’s quite a clear division between the two of you. You know, you’re keeping that space. But then maybe you thought they were going to give you some difficult feedback or something but they say ‘no I just wanted to say how much I appreciated the way you did that’, and something in you kind of softens and thinks ‘Oh this person’s all right’, and then you get into more communication and that sense of ‘me here’ and ‘them over there, out there’ gets really soft, and we get drawn in. So now it’s more just like ‘us’ you know, sort of playing along together. And that sense of ‘me’ and ‘them’ gets forgotten in the process, in the flow of communication. It can almost disappear. It’s the same whenever we start to engage with an experience very often. To start with we listen to music or something, to start with there’s the sense of the music, but then we just enter the flow of it. There’s that TS Elliot quote that I always quote at this point ‘you are the music while the music lasts’. So it’s like we just become the music, so that sense of separation ‘me’ and ‘the music’ softens and softens and softens. Unless the music changes and suddenly it’s sort of harsh and we don’t like it and then there’s a sense of ‘me’ and ‘the music’ again. So the boundary moves ; and it gets harder and softer. So that really suggests that it’s something that we’re creating. And if we’re creating it, we can also relax it or recognise that it is just something we’re putting onto our experience. Something which would be a helpful way of operating in the world we take as something which is just given about how the world is.

So how we would be freer would be if it could just be open experience ; all this richness, all going on, nobody separate from any of it, so it’s all vividly experienced. And then when necessary we can think ‘oh yes and I need to do this’ or whatever it is. If somebody asks you who you are and where you’re from OK you can answer that, you don’t just say ‘well I’m the universe’, or universal consciousness. Some people these days they put how they like to be addressed in terms of gender and things – so you don’t say, you know, I’d like to be addressed as ‘it and its’ because I am universal consciousness. No, you can as it were come back to that awareness of you as a particular aspect of that whole experience, but you know that you’re an aspect of that whole experience. And that also means that when your heart really opens – in fact the more your heart opens - the less separation is there. Because once there’s that big open space and it’s not being sort of walled off by creating a boundary against it, then in a sense everything becomes mine. If we're identified with anything – there’s no need for anyone to be identified with anything in open awareness – then it’s like we’ve identified with everything. And whatever we identify with we care for. It’s like I’m identified with my hand. If I bang it, I rub it, I look after it, I put something on it. So if I’m identified with everything, I care for everything. So in exploring this way in which we create boundary and going beyond it, learning that we don’t need to create it, that all that’s happening is experience, it’s all happening just opening to the richness of that - then we care about all that. It’s as if we’re identified with all of it. So everything gets cared for, everyone gets cared for. And that’s where the Bodhisattva is, it’s natural to care for whatever appears in awareness. It’s like that open awareness is a loving open awareness and then within that different conditioned arisings come. There’s that Blake quote ‘eternity is in love with the products of time’. So there’s open awareness which is not just a dead space but it’s alive openness, it’s a heart space. And then within that, whatever appears just gets cared for because it…. just because it appears. It’s another manifestation of things. It’s like….. let’s not meditate but if we just sit here for a minute and just settle:

* There’s the body, there’s the breathing, there’s the ground. Now let’s call to mind blue sky. There’s blue sky in all directions.
* And this blue sky is the *citta,* is the heart-mind of the yidam. It’s not the form of the yidam, it’s their great open loving awareness. So it’s Tara’s awareness, it’s Manjusri’s awareness, Vajrasattva’s awareness, the Buddha’s awareness, Padmasambhava’s awareness. It’s limitless, it’s free and it’s loving. In the vast open loving sky appears a rainbow cloud. So it’s a cloud made of rainbow, light, nothing you could get hold of. So is this cloud separate from the sky? Or is it a manifestation of the sky? And the vast blue sky doesn’t have a viewpoint but, as it were, it loves and cares for the rainbow cloud, because it’s the display of its own energy, it’s a manifestation of awareness
* And now the rainbow cloud fades away – it’s a dependent arising
* And the blue sky itself fades away. Just stay with the feeling that we’re left with

So that little on the run meditation was just trying to give us a flavour of the way of experiencing that can come about as we 1) see through more of the concepts that we’re putting on to experience and 2) as we just open out into the full field of awareness of experience that’s here without sort of closing down, creating a sense of self and other. That sense of self and other is a creation of mind. It’s almost like mind loses track of its own nature. It thinks that it’s a cloud which is passing through it rather than realising ‘oh now it was the sky all along’. And as long as we identify with the cloud we feel very uneasy because a cloud is a very temporary phenomenon dependent on certain conditions which easily just kind of changes and dissolves. And we’re trying to make the cloud into something fixed and solid and reliable that will always be there, and it doesn’t work. But if we allow mind to open back into the full experience of awareness, then OK clouds come and go, they’re cared for they’re loved and appreciated whatever they are while they’re here. And then there’s the next thing and the next thing. Nothing troubles the sky.

So quite a lot of Mahamudra practice is with just sitting, and it’s just sitting with open senses. It’s giving us the experience to start with of us being aware of all that’s happening in this field of experience, and increasingly as we deepen into that, that sense of ‘me the experiencer’ having the experience softens and softens; that sense of boundary softens and softens. So there’s more a sense of that open, eventually kind of limitless, sense of awareness. Along with noticing what seems to be preventing that, or holding us back into sort of assumptions of selfing. Along with heart opening practices with which we kind of expand. All those work together to lead us into a state where we’re not creating the suffering of selfing. And in different ways all the practices that we do as Order Members, if they’re working as practices for us, should be helping in that direction. So if we we practice metta, we open out, yes we really care for ourselves, we care for our good friend, if we do it in the traditional stages, neutral person, enemy, and then it widens out to all beings. And Bhante - it got a bit lost - but Bhante did suggest that we also do this sort of objectless metta where there’s metta going out in all directions to all beings. You let go of a sense of all beings, and then you let go of a sense of ‘me’ as somehow the source of the metta. And you can take even the concept of ‘metta’ out of it. And then where you’re left is loving open experience. Or if you do the six element practice – OK, we let go of identification with the body, it’s not ‘I’, not ‘me’ not ‘mine’. We let go of the territory that the body had occupied and that we thought we had to defend. That’s not ‘I’ not ‘me’ not ‘mine’. So now there’s just great open spaciousness, we let go of the mental movements. And people sometimes think that the six element practice is just about seeing that there’s no self in the body-mind. But actually it’s more moving beyond that identification, so that then again there’s open awareness, open awareness, free awareness , liberated awareness. So that takes us into the same space.

So with Mahamudra practice in general there’s an encouragement to live with the awareness open and relaxed, and not just sitting in meditation but allowing awareness to be open and relaxed through the day as much as possible. So there’s a full…… words keep failing me because all our language is based on subject and object, which is part of the difficulty. We were taught language when we were really young which is wonderful, but smuggled in the idea that everything is about the subject and object. You know, I learn to read : ‘John sees the cow’. And I thought I was learning to read, but actually I was being given a conceptual framework about how life is, where there’s a subject ‘John’ seeing an object ‘the cow’. And that’s so deeply entrenched, so deeply sort of taken in to us that it’s hard to see beyond it, to see through it. But the more deeply our shamata goes, the more our heart opens, the less that sense of subject and object as separate is there, and the more we go into the nature of things we discover that it’s not like that.

And with open awareness we do more and more.. we start to be very receptive. We pick up all kinds of intuitions about other people. We can actually.. we can empathise, but we do also actually pick up information about people. Doing a three year retreat I felt that I was really networked in to the Order in all sorts of ways. You know, people would come to mind for no reason, and I’d think of them and have a very strong sense of how they were, and sometimes I’d discover yes actually they were ill at the moment or they had died. Just very natural, because my mind was in a more open state. The strong kind of selfing mechanism kind of dulls our awareness and dulls our receptivity. It dulls us to what’s immediately around us. You know, if I’m really worried about something I don’t really take in the fact that... how Upekshanandi’s looking at me or anything. I’m just worried about me. But then as mind really opens, then it’s not just about receiving from the immediate environment. We do really pick up a lot from one another. We’re much more deeply connected than we think. If everything is mind, then what do physical limitations really mean? Is there any reason why we can’t be in communication with one another? Not just through zoom but… if Carudaya and I are sort of really thinking about one another in a heart way or whoever it is, yeah what are the limitations in mind that makes that something that can’t happen? Maybe as an Order and a community we’re in much more communication with one another than we think we are. In the early days in Shabda when the Order was fairly small a lot of people would report in, and it was interesting how, you know, people would be reporting in from different parts of the world, or at least the little outposts of Order Members that there were in a few parts of the world - if you were in Glasgow or whatever, Nagabodhi in a community near Croydon or wherever - and you could see similar ideas and thoughts and interests sort of popping up. And it wasn’t clear why, because we weren’t in any direct communication, we hadn’t been in any direct communication since last month. And you could say well we were all part of a sort of common flow of unfolding of conditions so we’d be likely to have some things in common. But it was quite striking, how there were sort of... independently, it seemed, we were coming up with similar ideas and questions and new experiences. And it just seemed to me pretty obvious that that was happening because we weren’t just all independently doing it - there was a real connectedness between us all. So perhaps we’re not as separated in lockdown in our own places as we sometimes might think.

Let’s do a few minutes meditation now. In session 2 we’ll do some meditation in this kind of area of opening out awareness – aware appearances

**Meditation**

* For these few minutes, could we go back to that blue sky again. So this blue sky is still the heart-mind of the yidam, it’s the great loving awareness of Amithaba, Avalokitesvara, whatever you most connect with. It’s limitless, it’s free, bright and knowing and clear. And it cares for everything that manifests, everything that appears out of its own creativity
* And now out of the blue sky appears a person, who looks just like us. Like all appearances they’re ungraspable, dependent arisings. And it’s magical and wondrous that they’ve appeared. So are they separate, in this great open loving sky? Or are they a manifestation of it?
* And this great, loving heart-mind of the yidam cares for them, it’s inseparable from them
* Now this person who looks just like us dissolves away, into the blue sky. They were a dependent arising
* We relax the blue sky, letting go of creating anything. Just staying with the feeling that we’re left with

OK, if you want to practice with that over the next few hours, see how much you can let awareness be fully open, just including everything as it were. And/or just notice that boundary between ‘me’ and everything else, and notice how it opens and closes depending on the situation, how there’s nothing solid about it. It’s something that we’re putting onto our experience.

**Day 5 Session 2**

**Non-Separation** (15 mins)

In the last session we were looking at mind and how within the seamless open ‘space’ of awareness we create boundaries and things become divided up into ‘me’ and ‘the world’, self and other. And that session provoked a whole rain of questions poured down into the *Ocean of True Meaning*. Which I should have expected because I opened up a whole other area to look at. But fools rush in where wise people fear to tread! But yes, I partly wanted to give you a sense of another dimension of the *Ocean of True Meaning,* and an important one. And also amongst all of us we have different approaches, we have different ways of connecting with the dharma, we have different things that speak to us, so I’m trying over these few days to come at things from a number of different angles, so that hopefully somewhere along the line there’s something that really helps takes things further. Or at least opens up something that you think ‘oh yes I’d really like to explore that in my practice, I’d really like to go deeper with that’.

So yeah, we were looking at ‘everything is experience’ and there’s always our experience which is always an experience of awareness. So from that point of view, everything is awareness, everything is mind. And within that we create boundaries. In fact moment by moment, out of this open, seamless field of experience, this field of awareness, our habitual tendency and our habitual understanding of how things are means that moment by moment we’re creating a sense of self and other. And we do it incredibly fast, we’re really really good at it, it’s one of our great skills, and having done it we then feel the tension between the subject and the object. And that tension is uncomfortable, that’s basic dukkha. And so we want to relieve that tension of ‘here’s the subject and there’s the object’ and we try to do that by doing something. We either pull the object in or try to, if it’s a pleasant experience, and if it’s unpleasant we try to push it away or destroy it. So I mean it’s really sort of tragic really. Here we are in this great open awareness and first we create a sense of separation and then we try to bridge it. And it never works, because we’re not looking at the actual cause, which is how we’re creating the sense of separation in the first place. We’re always dealing with the symptom, which is the tension and trying to find some way of relieving that.

And we saw that this sense of separation, this sense of boundary, it shifts in relation to the sense of ‘ me’. ‘Me’ can be greater or less, and it gets harder or softer. In a situation where I feel uneasy it becomes a hard border, it becomes a barricade, a barrier, and I try to stay behind it. In a situation where there’s something really enticing going on it becomes a very soft border. But still usually there’s some sense of ‘me’ aware of something that is ‘not me’ even if it’s very very subtle. Even in higher dhyana, there’s still a subtle sense of observer, a meditator, and an experience. We’re creating that, and it’s not that we never want to be able to say ‘I’m going to the shops now, do you want to come with me’. On the relative level that’s all fine. We can discriminate between aspects of this seamless field of awareness very helpfully. But the discriminating wisdom of Amithaba isn’t a separating wisdom, it’s not a dividing wisdom. So if you like there’s a sort of seamless field of awareness within which we make distinctions without creating a sense of separateness.

So the way out of this creating of an illusory sense of separation is firstly just to keep relaxing, relaxing, relaxing. In that example I was giving of communicating with somebody else, first off you weren’t sure how the communication was, so there was tension and they were definitely ‘out there’. And then ‘oh no they just wanted to give us some appreciation’ - so we liked that idea so then something in us relaxed, and as something in us relaxed it’s as if the sense of separation became softer and softer. So the more deeply we relax in relation to things, the less there is this sense of boundary, this sense of border. But along with that it’s usually helpful to explore how it is, what we’re putting onto experience, which is creating that sense. So what are we telling ourselves, what’s our underlying view of life, which is creating that sense? And usually we have a sense of well there’s ‘me’ the subject doing something in relation to the object. And we can look at any aspect of that to see how it really is. So we can look at what seems to be the object, we can look at what seems to be the subject ‘me in here’ - where is that, what is that? And we can look at how that interaction happens. So it’s like in leading some of the meditations I’ve been saying things like ‘now bring awareness into the body’. So good luck with that, because that statement is kind of creating a sense of me bringing awareness like a kind of searchlight into an object the body. But we could look and see well is it really like that? Is there a ‘me’ bringing awareness to the body? What is going on there? We just explore and play – how is it really?

So that playful exploration, that taking a look, being prepared to knock down some of the kind of castle in the air of concepts that we’ve built on experience, all that is helpful. As is opening the heart more and more. The more metta, the more open-heartedness there is, the closer we can come to this sense of open, unboundaried awareness. Or there always only is open unboundaried awareness, but the closer we come to knowing it….

Maybe that’s a little commentary on some of the rest of the quote that we were looking at.

‘Generally speaking, the experience of all kinds of appearances is in your own mind. Since there has never existed a duality between appearances and emptiness, there’s no need to hold on to the consciousness inside’

There’s no need to separate into ‘me the observer’ ‘me the awareness here’ and everything else out there that it is observing and interacting with as out there

‘When a visual form appears as an object of the eyes, that appearance of a visual form itself is in your own mind’

So whatever we’re looking at right now, how can it be completely separate from us? We’re looking at our own awareness.

‘The appearance and the emptiness of that visual form are inseparable. By being directly in a state of non-grasping with the visual form….’

So really relaxing with the visual form

‘the grasper and the grasped [so that sense of a subject interacting with an object] will be liberated in their own place.’

They’ll just – snap! - disappear

‘Likewise when perceptions of sounds, odours, tastes, tactile sensations and mental states move in the mind, if you stay in the immediacy of these movements, they will be self- liberating’.

So experiences come and if mind is really relaxed and open, they come and then the next thing comes ; the next sound, the next taste, the next thought, the next sight. But usually mind doesn’t stay relaxed, and it relates whatever’s happening... it creates a sense of a self a ‘me’ at the centre of things, relates everything back to that. How does that relate to me? And then starts to move into doing something in relation to whatever’s appearing. And in that way mind never really relaxes. And there’s tension, tension, tension. So let’s do a bit of meditation and we’ll start just by spending a few minutes exploring what I’ve just been talking about and then we’ll move into something that’s more of an open being in an open dimension of things.

**Meditation : small minds, big mind, no container** (30 mins)

* So starting with everything as it is. There’s this popular kind of phrase in English at the moment ‘it is what it is’. Which can be a bit fatalistic but it’s also not arguing with whatever’s going on. So, it is what it is, with awareness
* Invoking the refuge. We always want to be practising within that sense of refuge. That protection, that support, that openness to a deeper dimension. And also a sense of linking in to the practice of so many people over the centuries, linking into the practice of so many people now who are doing what they can to go deeper into the nature of experience, to open their hearts and minds, to be of benefit to the world
* Making sure we’re well grounded. And as much as possible in a position that enables our energy to flow, that enables us to be relaxed and aware
* Now for a minute or two let’s just play a little but with exploring sound – see how well this works via zoom. So I’m just going to ring the gong, and just notice what happens as we listen to the sound of the gong

*Gong*

So as that sound happens, is there a sense of ‘me’ listening to the sound ‘out there’?

*Gong*

Where is the sound? Is it some source, out there, our speaker on our computer or wherever? Is it in the ear? Is it in the brain, the mind? Where is it?

*Gong*

And does anything change, is anything different, if we relax and just let go, not particularly trying to listen to anything, just open awareness

*Gong*

Can we be very very simple? Do we need to create a sense of something called a sound? Does it have to be inside or outside? Could it just simply be…

*Gong*

* Now nothing to do. And let’s come into the body and be with the breathing, however we’d like to do that, however we’d enjoy to do that
* So now as we’re sitting here, with the room or whatever it is around us, we’re often starting from what in Zen would be called small mind, identified with the body, the emotions, the thoughts, all that. But if Milarepa and co are right, then everything that’s appearing in all the senses is a manifestation of our own awareness. So rather than being identified with part of our experience, let’s see if we can identify with the whole of it. So we can go from my small mind to my big mind. Let’s widen out the identification so that everything that we can hear, letting all that be as it were part of me. And if our eyes are open, everything we can see. So as well as the physical sensations, as well as the thoughts, all the sounds, all the sights, they’re all our awareness manifesting. How does that feel? Let’s see if we can do this not just as an idea but as a real heart opening. So our heart includes the driver of the car we can hear going by outside. It includes the pictures in our room, it includes all our experience. How’s that? If we have some subtle sense of meditating with other people – they’re not other people, they’re all manifesting in this open awareness. Nothing is ‘other’.
* Now we could just notice any concepts we’re putting onto this experience. For instance, the idea that this is ‘my’ completely open awareness. Does anyone need to own this experience? If there is an owner, who on earth could they be? Maybe the sense of someone owning this is just something else that’s arising within this great open-hearted awareness. It can come and go.
* Maybe too there could be a concept of this great open-hearted awareness as a kind of container, in which everything appears, like the contents of a bowl. Do we need that kind of idea? Just open heart, open awareness, everything happening by itself. No tension, just relaxed
* Now if we’ve been doing anything at all, no need. Everything as it is
* Now sharing the benefits with all these beings who aren’t ‘other beings’

**Day 5 Session 3**

**4-line summary of Mahamudra** (15mins)

In Session 2 we were looking at that big open, expansive, open-hearted way of being, and looking at how we create boundaries within that open dimension. And then we did that meditation when first off I played at ringing gongs at you – don’t know how that worked. Trying to get a sense of... do we need to create a sense of somebody listening to something out there, or could it just be a very immediate, simple, just *[gong]*. Then we did that meditation when we went from kind of small mind – me in here, my body, my thoughts my feelings – and then we opened out. If the Mahamudra view is right then all that we experience is our own awareness, so let’s expand out into big mind. Let’s expand out into as it were identifying with all experience, and how does that feel? And how does that feel compared to ‘me in here with everything out there’. So that was a big step already. But then that big mind doesn’t have to be my big mind, in fact it can’t be my big mind. Because for it to be my big mind I’d somehow have to be the owner standing outside it, and where on earth is that. So in that way we can get a sense of well OK there’s just open-hearted awareness, and it doesn’t need to belong to anyone, and yet it’s experienced. Can get a taste of the freedom of that. And then we ended up by just looking to see whether we might still have some other concepts that we’re putting onto it. Like a very common one is that we kind of imagine it as a like a big container of awareness, within which these things appear. That’s a really helpful idea, but do we need that idea? What happens if that idea just drops away? How are things then? So that was what we explored.

So in this session I’m just going to go through as a sort of summary of what we’ve done or at least of some of it, a 4-line summary of Mahamudra. And we posted on the web page something that I wrote just yesterday – it’s very rough but it’s giving a bit of a sense of where Mahamudra is drawing some of its inspiration from. Particularly, as well as early Buddhism, it’s drawing on the 2 great schools of Mahayana, so Madhyamaka and Yogacara. And it’s drawing those together. And then I put in this 4-line summary of Mahamudra.

So the 4 lines start with

**Everything is mind**

So we’ve been looking at that a bit earlier, but also today. Yeah, what we have is our experience, and our experience is an experience of awareness, it’s an experience of mind. So whatever we look at – it’s good practice just as we’re walking around, from time to time to just remind ourselves and look at things in terms of’ this is all awareness’. So it’s a bit more like being in a dream. It’s like we’re walking through a dream. Where, if we become lucid in a dream we know that everything that appears is awareness, it’s a manifestation of mind. And equally, this state that we’re in now is awareness appearing as a screen, and the sound of a voice and so on. So ‘everything is mind’. And I think to start with, as we’re getting used to this kind of view, it can be helpful to think in terms of ‘everything is awareness’. If we can get that sense, you can build from there. So that’s the first line ‘everything is mind’. Which is very Yogacara. And then the second line is

**Mind is empty**

Or ‘awareness is ungraspable’ if we want to put it in those terms. So we can look into things and say yes OK everything’s awareness, everything’s mind, and then the tendency is to latch onto that and hold that as a concept and maybe treat that as the one thing that really exists. ‘Now I’ve got it, mind is really what there is’. But then along comes Madhyamaka, along comes Nagarjuna and says ‘no no no that’s just another view of things so you need to let that go’. And particularly as we said earlier in the retreat, mind isn’t something that we can point at. It’s not something that we can find. Mind isn't a thing, it’s not an entity.

So everything’s mind, and mind is empty in the sense of ungraspable in the sense of nothing that we can point at, no kind of a thing.

And then

**Mind [or awareness if we find it more helpful to see it like that] appears in endless unobstructed forms**

So awareness appears as the pen that you’re using. Awareness appears as the feeling of sitting on whatever you’re sitting on. Awareness is appearing as the walls of your room. Awareness manifests as the sound of this voice talking. And so on. All the thoughts, all the emotions, they’re awareness appearing. And ‘unobstructed’ here just means that there’s an ordered flow. It’s not like the sense impressions through the eye and the sense impressions through the ear kind of all try to appear at the same moment and sort of collide and it’s all a mess. There’s an unfolding quality to experience.

So mind appears as or in these endless unobstructed forms. And we’re kind of used to the Heart Sutra. We’re used to ‘form is no other than emptiness, emptiness is no other than form’. So here we could also think of ‘form is no other than awareness ; awareness is no other than form’. Or appearances are nothing other than awareness ; awareness is inseparable from appearances’. So that would give us a whole different angle and exploration and insight to come at things from. And as we’ve seen, the second line of the summary is ‘mind is empty’, it’s ungraspable. So we have aware, ungraspable appearances. But as we’ve seen, what we do with those aware, ungraspable appearances is somehow lose track of the nature of them and we create a sense of a ‘me’ in relation to them. But all the time there’s just aware ungraspable appearances, coming and going.

So we’ve had ‘everything is mind ; mind is empty ; mind appears in endless unobstructed forms’ . And then the 4th line is

**All these forms self- liberate**

Or ‘all these forms liberate themselves by themselves’. And we’ve spent quite a lot of time on this very short retreat looking at how, if we don’t grasp onto things, if we don’t catch them and put energy into them and replay them, then they just arise and they pass. So particularly we were looking at thoughts. Thoughts come and they go. So in meditation there’s absolutely no issue with thoughts arising, the issue is that we get caught up in them, we put energy into them, we go into the thought-world that they’re about. So this is pointing us to in a way a very lazy person’s kind of practice. Where rather than having to go and sort everything out and bring in all those antidotes and so on, we’re just really relaxed. And things can arise, because they’ll pass. Things arise, and they’ll pass. And it’s easier to do that if we see that everything that arises is empty, aware, ungraspable appearances.

OK that at least might give you something to catch some of what we’ve explored this week and give it a certain kind of structure that you can work with.

**Concluding meditation** (25 mins)

* So as I said a few days ago, it’s good if we can associate time to meditate with to start with ‘ahh time to relax’. We don’t want to make meditation another thing on our to do list. That’s the last thing it is
* Invoking the refuge. Our yidam, or connection with this great meditation of wisdom and compassion that’s been going on within time, as it were, for two and a half thousand years, and beyond time, always
* And being aware that we’re not practising alone. We’re practising for our own benefit, we’re practising to benefit one another, we’re practising for the world
* Relaxing, feeling the support of the earth, giving it our weight, letting the body open, poised between the earth and the sky
* Awareness lighting up the body, awareness appearing as feelings and sensations. Awareness appearing as feelings and sensations that constantly transform. That arise and pass away. That liberate themselves by themselves. And when awareness appears as an emotion or as images or as words, they all liberate themselves by themselves.
* Now let’s again have awareness including all experience. Awareness *does* include all experience. All the sounds, all the sights if we have our eyes open, whatever felt sense we have of space around us, whatever intuitive sense we have of connections beyond our immediate environment.
* Sense of all that as aware appearances, awareness manifesting, all this richness of experience. No boundaries anywhere – one seamless field of aware experience, aware appearances. A field of awareness that’s ungraspable, yet appears, in all these extraordinary manifestations.
* Noticing any ideas or concepts that we don’t need, that we could relax out of
* Now if there’s any sense of doing anything, making anything happen, letting it go. Nothing to do
* And to end with, dedicating the merits of this practice and of all that we’ve done over the last 5 days. Offering all that to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, to all the teachers of the past and present. Pouring them into the great ocean of wisdom and compassion. Sharing them with the Order, to strengthen our practice and our work for the world, our dharma connections with one another, our heart connections with one another. Sharing them with all suffering sentient beings