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## THE MYTH OF HAPPINESS

**W**e all want to discover the meaning of life. Some people say the meaning of life is to be found only in spiritual practice. Others say the meaning of life is to be found in the human dignity that comes from dealing with the world successfully. Still, the meaning of life remains under dispute. It is the subject of philosophical struggles and metaphysical doubts. Those go on and on; the question is still there, and the answer remains uncertain.

I myself do not expect to fully answer this question. As far as the meaning of life is concerned, I think we could say I am no further advanced than you are. So we have something in common, myself the author, and you the readers. We are baffled about the real meaning of life. We do not know. We are completely uncertain. A lot of people would like to hear definite answers, and I could make up some things to say. I could say that the meaning of life is only found in spirituality, or the

meaning of life is getting down to earth and being a good citizen. However, I feel that producing answers is not particularly a kind thing to do. Quite possibly, it is not necessary to solve the problem as such.

However, since we have to start somewhere, let's start with this thing that we have in common—our confusion. We are bewildered, baffled, so let us start with this. Maybe the language of confusion can be understood. In this inquiry, the author does not regard himself as superior to the readers. Let us consider that we are relating on an eye-to-eye level. There is a Sanskrit term, *kalyanamitra*, which means "spiritual friend." This term seems appropriate here. We can relate to each other as friends rather than as student and master. We are equals, and the rest of the world is also on an equal level with us.

The physical living situation is the only way we can relate with our lives. I do not believe in a mystical or etheric world—the world of the unseen, the unknown. There's no reason to believe in that, because we don't perceive it. Belief comes from perception, so if we don't perceive something, we don't believe in it. Belief does not come from manufacturing ideas, although millions of arguments and logics have been set forth to that effect. For example, it is said that there is an unseen world that operates on the higher levels of consciousness. Supposedly this higher world fulfills human concerns, and it punishes those who don't believe. But from the point of view of physics, that world is unreal. I'm afraid I'm not brave enough to say there's another world. This world that we live in is the only world. Of course, we have the psychological world too. This world where we are, which has these two aspects, the psychological world and the physical world, is the only world we live in.

We have problems in dealing with this physical world. Fundamentally, we become too centralized in relating to it. When we see things in physical terms, we feel we must prove ourselves in that physical realm. We take a materialistic approach, trying to gain something from the world. We want our activity

to produce a good end result; thus our relationship to the physical world becomes one of materialism.

There are two types of materialism here: indulgence in physical materialism and indulgence in psychological materialism. Both are concerned with the achievement of comfort and happiness. However, we want to achieve not only momentary happiness but ultimate happiness. People feel that physical materialism concerned merely with temporary happiness is not sufficient. They feel that if they indulge themselves purely in immediate pleasure, they won't end up with complete, ultimate comfort. Therefore they feel they must work and sacrifice their partial, momentary pleasure in order to achieve greater pleasure. To achieve this, we must all go to our jobs, earn money, have a good roof over our heads, the best food to eat, and close friends around us.

A certain number of people want to go beyond mere happiness, and they seek fame. They feel that they are special people. They wish to become famous actors, famous musicians, famous artists. If you are such a person, you feel that your life is a work of art, and that it is worth a great deal. Your life brings a lot of pleasure for yourself as well as others, and you feel that your intellect and manipulative mind cannot be rivaled by anybody. You possess a high IQ. In business ventures, you are successful. As a successful businessperson, you have more money, comfort, and power than others do. You are respected in your neighborhood or even in the nation as a whole—if your dream goes beyond the level of the neighborhood. Some day you hope to become an internationally recognized person.

Physical materialism at this level is believing in physics on a literal level, in terms of literal gain. Initially, seeking to become a bigger, more powerful, more highly successful person is physical materialism. This becomes psychological materialism at some point, because you plan all of these projects of becoming famous on a psychological level. In fact, psychological one-upmanship is always an important factor here. You are

constantly seeking to outwit your competitors. Physical materialism and psychological materialism in this sense amount to the same thing. The physical situation comes along with the psychological attitude toward it.

Then we have the third type of materialism, which we've already discussed somewhat, which is spiritual materialism. Spiritual materialism always has the same logic. In order to achieve a higher level of spirituality, an elevated spiritual goal, in order to attain enlightenment, union with God, and so on, we feel we should become better persons spiritually. We should become conscientious and willing to put up with problems and discomforts of all kinds. We should be willing to give up this and that and become a hardworking and genuine person who is reaching for spiritual attainment. The object, from a spiritual materialist's point of view, is to achieve a permanent spiritual home. We want to reach heaven. You want to reach a permanent place where you don't have to maintain yourself anymore at all. You want permanent happiness, to be happy ever after. You hope to achieve this by means of all sorts of sacrifices. You're willing to sacrifice this and sacrifice that, inflicting pain on yourself; you are willing to submit to discipline, as you call it by way of euphemism. You give up this and give up that, thinking in this way to gain this and get that. You inflict the pain of sacrifice on yourself because you think your present volume of pain will be equal to your volume of happiness in the future. When the time comes, you will be rewarded by heavenly beings, or whatever.

In aid of this kind of process, new techniques are continually being introduced in our society; new books are constantly brought out. You think the books might tell you how to become a better person, a happier person. The whole time, you are looking for a happy, permanent relationship to something. You want to be happy forever, permanently and independently.

This also seems to be the idea that many people have of freedom, but this is a misunderstanding of what genuine freedom is. You are being entertained by the idea of freedom rather



than truly becoming spiritually free. This idea of freedom actually means bondage, in this case. In your mind, your happiness becomes tied to the idea that sometime in the future you will be free. Once you are free, you think, you will be able to indulge in your spiritual achievement. You will be able to see the future; you will be able to see the past. You will have telepathic powers and be able to read people's minds. You will have power over others. You will be able to wipe out their pain, regardless of karmic situations. Something in you thinks you might take over the whole world. Becoming a spiritual emperor is the essential idea of spiritual materialism.

In short, from the materialistic point of view, spirituality is another dream of happiness. You have the idea that you won't have to pay your electricity bills or your phone bills. You will be able to take off into the mountains and live in a cave. Life will be much simpler and more pleasurable. You will live on natural food and be healthy. You will not be bound by any kind of obligations whatsoever. You won't have to answer the phone; you won't have to maintain a household. You will be perfectly "free." Living in a cave in the mountains amid the beauties of nature and the fresh air, meditation will come naturally because there will be no disturbances. Everything will be quiet. Silence will reign. There will be no one to irritate you, because you've left the nasty associations of your past history behind. You've forgotten your past, you've given it up. You don't care who you were, you think; you only care who you are now. Live in the mountains, enjoy nature, fresh air, fantastic vibrations . . . blah, blah, blah.

There is something uncertain about this whole vision. There may be some wisdom in it, but it has been said that it is not only wisdom that is important but also compassion. If we take the need for compassion into account, the scenario above doesn't completely address the problem. It is in connection with compassion that the difference between the materialistic approach to spirituality and the natural, genuine quality of spiri-

tuality begins to break through. The spiritual approach without spiritual materialism is based on compassion. Compassion tells you that finally you have to return to the world. Not only just finally, but the whole time you have to work with the world, relate with the world, because enlightened mind contains wisdom and compassion simultaneously. You have an obligation to the world you were brought up in. This is the world you belong to; you can't give it up altogether. You can't dissociate yourself from the past or whatever irritates you.

In fact, compassion brings us back to dealing with the world as the only way. We have to work with people. We have to work with our fathers, our mothers, our sisters and brothers, our neighbors, and our friends. We have to do that because the people with whom we are associated in our lives provide the only situation that drives us to the spiritual search. Without those people, we would not be able to look into such possibilities at all. They provide irritations, negativities, and demands. They provide us with everything. Because their energy, possibly even their kindness, inspires us, we should feel indebted for the opportunity to work with them.

So, after all, our spiritual journey is not such a romantic thing at all. It has nothing to do with a vacation or a holiday whatsoever. It is connected with our ordinary, sometimes irritating, everyday life. From that point of view, the spiritual search is a very sober thing. It has nothing to do with special pleasure or transcendent happiness.

Of course, this does not mean that you should seek out pain. Basically, spiritual practice means coming back to the world, working with the existing, living world. If you were brought up in the suburbs, come back to the suburbs and work with the people. If you were brought up in the city, come back to the city and work with the people. Come back. Come back. That is the only inspiration there is. You might read scriptures, the sacred writings of great teachers, but those writings can become no more than a myth. They tell the story of somebody who lived in

the past, who lived a particular kind of life back then and wrote about those things. The true scripture, the true text, lies in the living situation in which we were brought up. It lies in this living situation of dealing with the world we are familiar with, our irritating world. It might be quite uncomfortable, but nevertheless that's where the inspiration lies.

This is where compassion leads us. Compassion is not trying to feel charitable, as many people think. Compassion is the basic generosity that means that you don't have to hold anything back. You relate to the living situation around you generously, without defending yourself.

Sometimes there are problems with how we try to apply compassion and how we try to help others. There's subtle on-upmanship involved when you are *trying* to be skillful and compassionate to others. Let's say I would like to see you become a very together person. I have an idea of what it means to be a together person, and I want to mold you into that. So I lay my trips on you, rather than letting you be as you are. That's often the problem in the relationship of parents and children. Your father is a lawyer and you have a family history of famous lawyers, so automatically the idea is that you should be a lawyer too. Your great-grandfather was president of this country, so you should be a prominent politician as well.

The real idea of skillful means, or *upaya*, is to have a direct, almost scientific or detached understanding of things as they are at this very moment without projecting the past or the future onto the situation. Your understanding is almost at the level of a mechanic repairing a car. It's not a question of what used to be wrong with your car or what might go wrong with your car in the future. In order to fix the car now, you have to know what is wrong at this very point. Certain parts are defective, certain parts have deteriorated—or whatever the circumstance is. Just relate with that actual situation. That is skillful means. The situation speaks for you, rather than your having to strategize anything. It's what is there at that very moment.

The popular, confused notion of compassion suggests a certain idea of charity, which is trying to be kind because you feel that you are well off and therefore you should be kind to others who are not well off. You might go off to underdeveloped nations or join the Peace Corps. Your country is wealthy, but those other countries are not. The people are illiterate, so you will teach them how to read and write and how to manage things. In this approach, you actually look down on those people.

Or you might think in terms of psychological volunteer work. You are supposed to be psychologically well balanced, so you can work with those who are mentally unbalanced. You can function as the model of sanity. Perhaps we like the idea of improving the world. But when we manage to turn an underdeveloped village into a highly sophisticated industrial town, we expect to be rewarded. We expect something in return. We could play all kinds of games of charity, but those are not real charity at all. They are one-upmanship games.

Real compassion is not a matter of "I would like to make this person happy by making the person fit into my idea of happiness"; rather, it is a matter of actually seeing that a certain person needs help. You put yourself at the disposal of that person. You just get into a relationship with that person and see where that leads. That is a more demanding and a more generous approach than following your expectation that the person should end up thus and such a way.

This is the genuine approach to compassion, which is very powerful. This is what we are going to examine further in this book: compassion beyond psychological and spiritual materialism. It is the genuine approach to things, the true approach to our living situation. We have to distinguish between the ordinary approach to spiritual practice, which is spiritual materialism, and true spiritual practice. We have to see this difference clearly.

The notion of spiritual practice can easily be misleading.

People think they are embarking on the spiritual path, but they soon find themselves into spiritual materialism. It is much easier to get into the spiritual materialism that is associated with the competitive world than to get into true spirituality, which means giving up our ambitions and aggression. This is much harder and not particularly appealing. I would say it is not particularly colorful either. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, it is not particularly entertaining.

In working with others, the approach of genuine spirituality is to just do it, just help. If you're doing it unskillfully, you'll be pushed back. A direct message is there always, unless you are dreaming, in which case you don't receive any messages. But if you are relating with things directly, even with ambition, that's okay. There will be messages coming toward you automatically. It happens on the spot. This could be called genuine mystical experience.

Mystical experience lies in our actual living situation. It's a question of relating with the body, the physical situation. If you put your hand on a hot burner on the stove, you get burned. That's a very direct message that you're being absentminded. If you lose your temper and slam the door after a quarrel, you may catch your finger in the door. You get a very direct message—you hurt your finger. In that situation, you are in direct contact with things, with the energies that are alive in the situation. You are in direct contact rather than strategizing a result or thinking in terms of molding or remolding your experience. Then the situation automatically provides you with your next move. Life becomes like music. You dance in accordance with life. You don't have to struggle to remold anything. That is precisely the idea of the absence of aggression, which is one of the key ideas of the Buddhist teaching. Dancing to the music of life is not an aggressive situation at all. It is living with the four seasons, to use the metaphor of how a plant grows throughout the year. This is the idea of *lalita*, a Sanskrit term that means "dance." We

might also translate *lalita* as “dancing with the situation.” Situations inspire you, rather than you create situations.

Again, this approach is not based on strategizing how to help someone. Instead: just do it. If you throw a puppy in the river, it automatically swims. Basically, the underlying intelligence is always there, but we tend to dismiss it and look for something else that is more profound and accurate. As long as we relate with our underlying primordial intelligence and as long as we push ourselves a little, by jumping into the middle of situations, then intelligence arises automatically. When you’re in the middle of a situation, you automatically pick up on what is needed. It’s not a question of how to do it—you just do it. And you find yourself doing it perfectly, even surprising yourself. That can happen. If, on the other hand, we fixate on *how* to do it, that automatically makes us more self-conscious. The approach of “how to do it” automatically contains two ideas: how not to do it and how to do it. Your mind is already split into two sides, involved with possibly making mistakes and possibly accomplishing your result. So taking the approach of “how to do it” can be negative, whereas just doing it is very positive.

The technique of meditation is the way to just do it. In meditation, life exposes itself to you, so you find yourself in the middle of a living situation. This definitely requires an intuitive approach. Using your intuition in this way requires a positive attitude, a conviction that you are a basically healthy person, you are not condemned, and you are not regarded as a sinner. You are already a healthy person, fundamentally. Despite the projections that may be cast on you, despite the shadow that may be cast on you, the point is to see through the shadow and just do it and live it. That is intuition.

Confusion is a split, a kind of schizophrenic attitude, confused between this and that. You can’t get confused unless you have two sides to get confused about. When you are confused, reasoning just clouds things even more so. Sometimes people

confuse the application of skillful means based on intuition with impulsiveness. Impulse is frivolous. You think of something that you want to do, and then immediately you do it. Impulsiveness is mindless. It's based on fear and confusion rather than the direct style of "just doing it" that we are discussing. In the case of intuition, you feel out the situation completely before you do something, but you don't create a split. There's a very big difference between applying intuition versus fixating on "how" or "what" to do in a situation.

The whole point is that you can't get directions in advance for specific first-aid techniques to apply in *every* situation you will encounter. That is why we speak of applying your intuition. There are no directions to tell you how to deal with every specific situation. The question is how to deal with situations *altogether*, before the particular highlight you're involved in has occurred. So if your ongoing daily living situations are related to with intuition rather than impulse, then any particular challenge can be accommodated. There are no set guidelines for how to handle yourself at cocktail parties, for example. If such guidelines were provided and you tried to follow them, you would have to switch on the spot to being a different person, which is not possible. Skillful means and intuition are a matter of your continual process of working with life, even when the cocktail party is not happening. You have to relate with a continual process of intuition and try to sort out the difference between the qualities of frivolous impulse and intuition. If you're able to relate with that during the day, when the party begins in the evening, you'll already be well equipped. There's no quick programmed answer at all. The whole endeavor has to be seen as a long-term process. We have to meet ourselves for the first time completely and properly. We have to make friends with ourselves. I have to get to know who I am, what I am, and what the world is in relation to me.

Intuition is trusting yourself. You feel that you can *afford* to trust yourself, which is making friends with yourself. Then

you feel that you are not a dangerous person, as you might have believed. You may have been told that you are a dangerous person, that you have to watch out for yourself, but now finally you can relax, you can work with yourself. The very existence of yourself is not all that outrageous or dangerous or suicidal.

You are good; fundamentally, you are healthy. Moreover, that particular health is capable of accommodating your badness as well as your goodness. When you're good, you're not particularly bashful about your goodness, and when you're bad, you're not particularly shocked by that either. These are simply your attributes. When you begin to accept both aspects of your being as energy, as part of the perspective of your view of yourself, then you are connecting with the fundamental goodness, which can accommodate all of these energies as part of one basic being. This is very solid and earthy. It is invincible in fact. That is the basic idea of good: that good can accommodate both wrong and right at the same time. Because of that, it is good. It is solid soil, solid ground.

You have nothing to transcend, in the final sense, when you begin to relate with both good and bad. You do that on the basis of the nonexistence of the solidity of good and bad. When you looked at them as solidly existing, you saw good as being finally hopeful and bad being finally hopeless. You don't see it that way anymore at all. Now, when you find yourself bad, that doesn't mean hopelessness; when you find yourself good, that isn't definitely hopeful either. You can accommodate the energies of both light and dark on this basic ground. This is not exactly transcending, but it is accommodating—acknowledging that there is good and bad at the same time. The basic ground is not infected or influenced by either one of them.

From ego's point of view, solidity means that you do not allow any space for flowing qualities to develop. The whole space is concretized. In other words, space becomes antispaces. There's no room at all to move about. But there is another idea of solidity. In the positive sense, it means being fully in contact



with nature. You know how to relate with things directly. You know the laws of nature directly. You are not likely to be influenced by frivolousness of any kind, because your ground is definite. You have no doubt about yourself.

The genuine spiritual search is not purely looking for happiness. However, this limited approach is still very prevalent. In this prevailing idea of spirituality, a person who attains realization looks very happy. He is smiling all the time and saying nice things about everybody. When people follow this approach to the spiritual path, they say "I love you" and they kiss you, throw flowers, wear white, and everything is beautiful and smooth and happy. Their point of view is that spirituality is ultimate happiness, and the idea presented is that once you join their club, you will be happy forever, because they don't believe in badness or unhappiness. Everything's going to be beautiful and full of flowers. Spiritual life is colorful, happy, and bright.

That's the "trip" of spirituality, and the important thing is to get off that trip. Once you do that, your compassionate attitude might still be somewhat fake to begin with. Practitioners have to learn to push themselves overboard to communicate with other people. In the beginning, you may not feel like communicating, so you might have to push yourself to communicate, communicate with the world, communicate with pain and pleasure and all the rest. After all, the spiritual world is not all that happy a world; it also contains tremendous pain, suffering, and misery—along with happiness and inspiration, of course. But relating with the real world is not a matter of pure happiness alone. So the practitioner might need some stepping-stone to begin with. He or she might have to do some playacting, which is not perfect. It could be said to be ego activity, but that doesn't really matter at all. If a person is able to proceed in that way, then she will gradually develop conviction and confidence. Her way of working with situations will eventually become real. She will be dealing with the real world.

At the beginning, even your meditation is not real medita-

tion in the complete sense. You are imagining yourself meditating. Initially, whatever spiritual disciplines you may be practicing are not real at all. You are just imagining yourself doing them. But that kind of limited deception and that kind of acting out have to be accepted as a stepping-stone. We have no other way of doing it. We cannot start perfectly, not at all. We have to use imperfection as a way toward the perfect. That's all we can do. We have to use poverty in order to become rich. There's no other way.

Mysticism usually involves the mysteriousness of something hidden that you can't approach. But a true approach to mysticism would involve appreciating the mysteriousness of the play of phenomena, which is not really hidden from you. Mystical experience in this second sense is often playful and contains a great deal of humor. There is something that is not quite solemn and solid but rather operates on the level of the delight of experiencing things as they are. In the Sufi tradition, for example, there are hundreds of stories about the great mystic Mullah Nasruddin. Nasruddin's approach to the world was very humorous. He discovered humor in every situation. Real spirituality has that same quality, because it realizes that the world is a spiritual world already. You communicate with life as it is rather than trying to invent some new spiritual approach to it. Taking delight in things as they are is genuine humor.

Real spirituality is an acceptance of the world as spiritual already. So you don't have to remold the world. For those who believe in a traditional view of mysticism, the world is mysterious. They can't experience mysticism in its fullest sense because they expect too much. They become deaf and dumb to the teaching. It is highly mysterious for them. But it isn't mysterious for those who actually relate to mysticism in its fullest sense. The reality of the world could be called self-secret. Something spiritual or mystical in this sense means something that strikes the truth. True spirituality is an absence of frivolity, an absence of belief in good and bad in the religious sense, an absence of

religiosity. So spirituality seems to transcend the religion of an established church. It is that which is contained in the living situation, which speaks truth, which reminds you of the natural situation of things as they are.

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## CREATIVITY AND CHAOS

Once a person is able to connect with the basic creative environment of work, then the rest of the process becomes less of a struggle. Creativity is the key to work. Strangely enough, it seems to be the key to sex as well, which we will discuss later. Both are a process of communication as opposed to purely relating with material objects or people as objects. Once you have understood the basic philosophy of work as we discussed it earlier, then somehow work becomes very simple. It's not a matter of tit for tat but a continual process of open exchange.

When work is based purely on ambition, it's as though you have a target that you want to destroy, or else you want to build something very big with your ambition. There's a Tibetan story about a local landlord who wanted to cut off the peak of a certain high mountain because it prevented him from getting sun-

light in his residence in winter. He ordered his people to do the work. Then halfway through the job, they had a realization and rushed down to his residence and chopped off his head. They said they had realized that it was much easier to chop off the landlord's head than to chop off the head of the mountain. So ambition can backfire on you. If your whole approach is based on ambition, then you may lose your connection to the real meaning of work.

A lot of people find work negative, particularly if they have uninspiring work, regular day-to-day work to which they have no personal commitment or link. The trouble is that somebody has to do the routine work. Not everybody can be a craftsman or an artist. That would leave nobody to do the routine jobs. The public wouldn't get its regular services. Somebody has to be willing to be a milkman and deliver the milk; somebody has to be willing to be a security guard and hang around a huge building all day. There is always that need.

However, as we discussed in the last chapter, even routine, uninspiring work can be approached from the point of view of humor and communication. Otherwise we end up with a division in society where talented people feel extremely proud, and so-called untalented people feel useless and purely functional. That's like applying a distinction among humans as though it were a division between human beings and animals. There is a big problem when people are unable to relate to all kinds of work with a sense of communication. If you really communicate, if you are able to see the creative process in an apparently uncreative situation, you are constantly inspired. In that way, everybody can be a talented artist—in fact, much more of a talented artist than the kind of official artist who has the very limited scope of purely awakening her own potential. Those who are not artists as such, who are doing manual labor and ordinary jobs—repetitive jobs—are extremely skillful artists indeed when they are able to see and use the pattern of creativity in their work. We have to look into all kinds of work situations. The Buddhist teachings are not intended for genteel

society or intellectual society alone at all. The teachings are presented to anyone, everyone. There should be a universal quality to the teaching. Of course, we can't achieve anything purely by talking about it. We have to apply the teachings; people actually have to do it.

If a person had been a manager and then he took a job as a simple office worker, he might take days and months to get used to being in his new position. As long as he is open to the situation of being an office worker, he can express the same kind of individual style there as in his previous managerial work. There's no doubt about that—you can express your work of art in any situation. This is true as long as you are not offended by being put in a lower situation, as long as you don't resent that, thinking, "I belong to a higher class of people. I should have a higher position, because I am more artistic or more intelligent." That kind of thinking creates a tremendous barrier.

When the Communist invasion took place in Tibet, many great teachers were put in labor camps. They had never swept a floor or carried bricks before. It took them a long time to get used to manual labor, but apparently once they did, they remained great teachers because they were good workers. They were often made leaders of ten groups of workers. They were shifted to that kind of post because they were ordinary about their work and kept their equilibrium. That kept the work going, so they automatically became leaders.

I'm envisaging something more creative here than purely getting into the meaninglessness of the situation. Things are not really as bad as that, although we might think so. Things could be bad, they could be the epitome of bad, the worst, but what we are trying to point out here is that there will still be some stepping-stone in the situation, in any situation.

There's a big advantage if you are dealing with people, even repetitively. Then it's always a creative situation. People often ask me how I find giving interviews all day long, hearing the same thing over and over again. People have their own

individual style, and each style is distinct, so it's quite creative. The greater problem seems to be when we are talking about a repetitive, mechanical job where you don't see people, where it's purely a matter of pressing buttons or dealing with the constant repetition of objects coming through on an assembly line. Even then, there should be a creative way of relating. A person could explore even a situation like that. One should not seal it off completely and give up all hope. Look into the situation and find some way of working with it.

Your basic attitude toward work is very important. If you feel that you are completely trapped in a job, then you fail to see the interesting aspect of it. People in boring, repetitive situations who don't expect to stay in those jobs forever don't feel so trapped. They feel that they could get out at any moment; it's purely a temporary measure. Therefore, their minds are open, and they can see their job as a creative situation. Your attitude may come down to how much you fear that you are trapped in something, or how much you feel that the present moment provides freedom to you. Again, it's a question of the future and the past. If you view the future as a closed future, then there's no room for inspiration at all. If you realize that the future is an open future, then there is room for inspiration. It is a matter of opinion, from that point of view.

A person might find it inspiring to spend the rest of her life doing some particularly simple work. She's purely living on simplicity. She could find it extremely rewarding and secure in some sense. She doesn't have to step out into another territory and explore any wholly strange situations anymore. On the other hand, if she wants to explore other territories and she hasn't had enough excitement yet, she might feel completely trapped. Our attitude depends on some sort of acceptance.

The same thing happens in monasteries. Monks or nuns feel that the rest of their life is committed to doing the same regular thing, getting up in the morning and doing the religious services, chanting and meditating, and then going to bed at a

certain hour. Since they feel their whole life is based on that pattern, they might feel trapped. At the same time, they might feel inspired. Of course, for monks and nuns they clearly feel that they are doing something spiritual, something supermundane. In reality, that may not mean very much. The actual physical work is often repetitive in the monastery. For the Carthusians and the Benedictines, for instance, the schedule and routine are quite fixed.\* You are not supposed to miss mass in the morning. Your life may largely consist of taking communion, making daily confession, eating food, saying your prayers, and then going to bed, except for celebrations like Easter and Christmas. Life is very routine; you do exactly the same thing, over and over, on and on all the time. Perhaps some people would find that satisfying or even exciting, because life is so simple. The whole flow of daily life is designed to be smooth and repetitive. People appreciate it. However, suppose such a lifestyle were not a spiritual situation but something designed as a daily routine in a therapeutic community established for the treatment of addiction or mental illness. Then it's quite likely that the clients or inmates would react against such an approach. They would regard the whole institution as unworkable, an enormous imposition. So it seems our attitude is very important to how we experience a work environment.

I'm not suggesting that we seek a work situation that is more meditative in nature. Rather, what way of working in any situation will have more human potential, so to speak? What

\* Chögyam Trungpa visited Pluscarden Abbey during his honeymoon in 1970. The abbey is home to a community of Roman Catholic Benedictine monks. On the abbey's Web site, it is described as "the only medieval monastery in Britain still inhabited and being used for its original purpose." Elsewhere on the site, the atmosphere is defined as one of "quiet reflection and of work dedicated to the glory of God." In *Dragon Thunder: My Life with Chögyam Trungpa*, his widow, Diana Mukpo, speaks of Trungpa Rinpoche's great appreciation for the genuine contemplative atmosphere at Pluscarden Abbey. For more on this, see *Dragon Thunder*, pp. 81–82.—Eds.



approach to work will provide more potential for you to put your effort and your style into the situation and become creative? The work doesn't have to be meditative in the sense of being repetitive or simple. There could be a great deal of room in the work environment for inspiration and communication, which is outer meditation or meditation in action.

Creativity in your work comes from your mind. The idea of work being creative is that the mind can connect with the sharpness or the inspiration within any situation. There is always something acute and precise happening in a situation, which can lead you to other possibilities. That quality of mind connecting with the potential could be called imagination, I suppose, but it's not dreamy imagination; it's practical imagination. It is seeing that every step contains possibilities of furthering whatever your process is. That includes your contribution and the whole environment around that particular job. There is room to learn, room to develop.

When you don't feel the creativity or workability in a situation and you have a lot of negativity happening, it begins to seem as though the whole situation is negative. This is true not only in work situations but in any situation. You get into a situation that seems ideal to begin with, and you get used to that. At a certain stage, however, you detect a faint hint of chaos. That hint does not remain faint; it intensifies, and soon you find that you want to step out of the whole scene. That happens in all kinds of situations in life, but it can be particularly heightened when you are engaged in spiritual practice. This is because you expect spiritual practice to provide something profitable and convenient to your ego, something secure. Often, when you realize that it does not provide security as expected, the situation becomes excruciating. You feel a sudden sense of doubt, a loss of independence and security. Such situations are unique ones that cannot be strategized. They are in fact very opportune and precious.

To work with those situations, you need intelligent patience,

not naiveté. You need some understanding that the situation is saying something. It's saying something that you have been ignoring for a long time, and finally it's beginning to speak up. If you try to strategize in that situation, by telling yourself that the negativity is valuable, you turn it into a stage prop in which you view the negative things coming to you as positive, and it loses its direct quality.

In fact, no matter what you tell yourself, you don't really believe that the negativity is helpful. You are not really convinced, because things are so painful. You would like to use strategy to control the chaos, but in reality, you can't control the chaos in any way. If you try to control it, then you're asking for more chaos by trying to control it. That's a well-known effect.

Self-confidence does not come from control. If you have a certain conceptual notion of self-confidence, that view has to be constantly maintained. That kind of self-confidence is going in the wrong direction. If it is built on the wrong foundation, then automatically, it is weakened.

Chaos is actually a sign that there is tremendous energy or force available in a situation. If you try to blindly alter the energy, then you are interfering with the energy pattern. For one thing, you become much more self-conscious. Then you are not able to see where the energy is actually occurring in the situation. The alternative is to go along with the energy. This means, in a sense, doing nothing with the energy, as though it were some independent force. When you go along with what is happening, you uncover the real energy in the situation and then you are able to relate with situations fully, in a true way, a complete way.

In order to accept or reject something in your experience, you have to see the complete picture to begin with; otherwise you have no idea what the right thing to do is. Acceptance might be the skillful choice, or rejecting might be skillful. Before you make a choice, you should find the choiceless quality, which

exists as an element of the situation. It's like buying merchandise. Before you buy something, it is best to know the qualities of the merchandise, its value, and everything about it completely. If you fail to investigate it, then you won't make a good buyer or seller.

If you blindly accept something, you might be inflicting pain on yourself or you might be overindulging in pleasure, which brings future pain. Blindly rejecting things, on the other hand, is usually based on aggression or fear. Before you make *any* choice, you should try to see the choiceless aspect, which is always there in any situation. You have to feel it. You have to relate with things as they are, and then you can reject or accept. Within the overall experience of seeking to understand things as they are, you actually include all the possibilities of rejecting and accepting the situation altogether.

To clarify, you have to learn to see situations first, completely, before you make any decisions. First you feel the situation and open yourself to it without anticipating rejecting or accepting. Without any idea of rejecting and accepting, you deal directly with the whole situation. If you can work that way completely, then rejecting, if necessary, becomes a natural process, and accepting, if necessary, becomes a natural process. You communicate with the situation completely, without any judgment. Communicating thoroughly inspires sound judgment, by itself. You might think that people are unpredictable, but a person actually can't react to you in an unpredictable way. If you are actually one with the situation, you will see why and how that reaction happened.

The main idea I would like to get across here, in terms of how to relate with work, is that no matter what job you have, no matter what work situation you are involved in, it is necessary to see the whole thing with an open mind, without preconceptions. Earlier, we were talking about transcending concepts. That applies very much to this view of relating to work. You have all kinds of choices, and you might well have a blueprint

in mind for the life you want. That is one source of preconceptions. There may also be a certain snobbishness that says, "I'm not designed for certain kinds of jobs." This is not particularly a matter of money; rather, in this case you become indignant because you feel a job is beneath you.

This kind of snobbishness often came up in the monastic life in Tibet. If a monk or a great scholar or even a great teacher in the monastery got too carried away with himself, the abbot might ask him to work as a tea server or wood collector until he corrected his arrogance or transcended it. This was much more effective than an alternative such as asking the offender to do five hundred prostrations in front of the sangha. That would have been more acceptable to him than a lowly job, because it was a religious practice allowing him to redeem his mistake. Being a tea server or wood collector was harder to swallow. Of course, in Tibet there was a great deal of social consciousness within the strict hierarchical structure. The need to save face was greater than it is in North America. Tibet is similar to Japan in that respect. Both of those countries have a much thicker mask of social propriety than we have in the West. People want to belong to certain pigeonholes in society. Strangely enough, the Communists worked quite well with that. They had daily exercises in which the president and prime minister had to go out and do gardening and collect rubbish and excrement from the street. They had to carry that in a basket on their back and bring it to the rubbish heap. Of course, this remedy was off the mark in getting beyond preconceptions, because there was a game involved, the game of "the humbler you are, the more respected you are." This was a reverse version of the problem it was trying to cure.

Whenever there is a game like that connected with work, the whole approach is based on concept, and your ability to relate to the work situation openly and directly is undermined. In the case where you feel a job is beyond your intelligence, or more likely, beneath you, you feel resentful toward it or uninterested. The result is that you automatically prove the job does

not suit you by not doing it well, by not being a good worker at all. The reality is that you would benefit from more of that kind of work.

Another conceptual approach to work is that of an ambitious person who is intent on doing something, on achieving his own glory, yet he lacks commitment to the discipline involved. He desperately wants to do some specific kind of work, without knowing what it is really like. He may have tremendous romantic expectations, and then he doesn't find the actual work romantic at all; he finds it disappointing. Maybe he wanted to be a professional photographer, and he loved the idea because he saw some other artist's beautiful photographs. However, he never realized how much discipline had to go into becoming such a skillful photographer, and he ended up doing badly at photography because he didn't actually want to go through that discipline at all.

There are many examples of people floating from job to job because of concepts they have in their minds about what they would like to do. When they encounter the actual work situation, they are not able to stick to it; they are not able to work through it patiently and explore the whole area. They are unable to painstakingly work through the challenges. As a result, instead of proving themselves, they disprove themselves; they humiliate themselves personally and in front of other people. They give up the work they wanted so desperately to do, and perhaps they tour around different countries, getting involved in exciting or exotic things. This lifestyle is, perhaps, a youthful or exuberant expression of life, but without depth. Quite possibly, during their travels, they get involved with meditation and visit ashrams and religious centers where they meet interesting people.

At a certain stage the money runs out, and they have to come home and do something constructive. Maybe you plan to write a book about your travels, but you never get around to it. You might write two or three chapters of a book, but then

you stop. You are not able to stick with a situation and patiently go through it, explore the whole area and patiently, painfully go through the process to achieve something. There again, you are back to square one. "Shall I go back to photography, which wasn't beautiful? What other sorts of excitement can I find?" Strangely enough, many such people end up being teachers of yoga, meditation, or Buddhism, because that's the easiest work, in a certain way. In that lifestyle, you don't have to produce a sample or a product of your work. You can just go on talking, and you find that your background of tourism also helps tremendously.

Work usually involves producing an end product, whether that product is a thing that you make, a degree that you receive, or a project that you complete. You might say this orientation goes against Buddhist philosophy, but that's not true. The fact that work produces a product is different from the problems of goal orientation, where you ignore the value of the process, which we discussed earlier. I mentioned many times already the Tibetan proverb that it's better not to begin something, but once you do, you should finish it properly. In a work situation, having begun something, you should pursue it to the point of its final achievement. People come up with many excuses for not doing that, particularly people who want to "explore themselves." They might say the situation does not give them opportunities for self-exploration or that the place where they are working has bad vibes. They make all kinds of excuses that don't mean very much. The problem is that those people have become too cunning. Their laziness has become very active and resourceful; in fact, it has become very intelligent and awake. Their sort of laziness is not at all sleepy or dull. It's very sharp and precise in its ability to find excuses. It becomes a spokesman for the fundamental ego.

Particularly people on the spiritual path are in danger of not being able to persevere in the work situation. They can be particularly apt at finding excuses not to work and very clever in

developing the practice of laziness. The moment they don't feel like doing something, the appropriate spiritual quotation comes to their mind.

The basic problem in all of these cases is that people have some concept about a job or project, and when it does not fit that concept, they do not want to go through with it. As I have said, they often find the work beneath them.

The great teacher Guru Rinpoche, Padmasambhava, did all kinds of different work. He was ordained a monk, but as he traveled around, he learned poetry, he learned mathematics, and he learned carpentry and other handicrafts. Also, the traditional Indian way of training a king was to give him lessons in many kinds of work, such as painting, sewing, carpentry, poetry, and physical exercises. Princes also studied warfare and the use of weapons. They learned how to ride on a horse and on an elephant. Building houses was also part of their education. All of this was part of a royal upbringing. If a prince had to be a blacksmith, he could do it and do it beautifully. He still maintained his dignity as a prince—not through pride but by his example.

These days people sometimes say they can't do certain work because they haven't taken a course in it. A lot of things in life don't have to be taught in courses. You don't need a degree to do the work. You just need to drop your hesitation and use your intelligence. You need to get into it and just do it. You can achieve the same end result as those who have received a degree in that particular thing. There are many areas where people's intelligence has been undermined by systematized study. They read books on how to make a fire, how to mend their shoes, how to hike—all sorts of things like that. However, getting into work you haven't done before can be an awakening experience when you have to use your basic intelligence to feel the ground. You use your basic common sense to get things together. Just apply it and work, and you will find that the process is opening and enlightening. Fundamentally, we are capable of anything.

You might say that a certain person would not make a good

fighter because he isn't aggressive enough or that someone else would make a bad watchman because she hasn't got the right kind of concentration. If you look at things from that angle, choices become very limited. That supposedly bad watchman could be quite a wakeful person if the situation required it of her. She might be able to do the watchman job beautifully. I remember an incident that occurred during my escape from Tibet. One night when we were getting close to crossing the border into India, we came over a ridge and suddenly saw a Chinese-built road just five hundred yards away from us with military trucks moving along it. We made a plan to creep up to the road and have everybody in our party cross simultaneously, with one person going behind with a branch to wipe out all of our footprints, because it was a dirt road. We got everybody set and made our move. We thought the people who were usually the toughest would get across first, with the slow people coming later. However, when the time came, the slow people were much faster than the tough people. It's a matter of how awake someone is at a given time.

If there is enough interest awakened in a person to communicate openly with the work situation, I'm sure he or she will be able to do the job quite beautifully. We shouldn't categorize people too much. There's always potential. Everybody has basic intelligence that is capable of surprising us. If a person is able to reach the point of breaking the conceptual barrier to open communication, his or her work becomes open and creative. That possibility is always there. There are hidden qualities in us, always.



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## THE FLAME OF LOVE

Our subject in this chapter is sex, which is a part of the larger question of love. We can only discuss this topic if we understand how it relates to ego. Like everything else in our everyday life, sex and love can be based either on the central reference point of ego or on a more centerless approach that is beyond ego. It is very important to understand the role that ego plays—or doesn't play—in all of our activities.

Ego contains ignorance, which refuses to look back at its own origin. From that fundamental ignorance or confusion, fear or panic arises. Ego expands from fear or panic into the further processes of perception, impulse, concept, and consciousness.\*

\* Chögyam Trungpa is referring here to what are known in Sanskrit as the *skandhas*, the five building blocks of ego. These are form (where ignorance first arises), feeling, perception, concept, and consciousness. Impulse is an aspect of

Why, after ignorance, should perception and impulse and all the rest follow? It is because there is a vast store of energy that is being processed here. That vast energy is not ego's energy at all; it is the energy of the primeval background, which continuously permeates whatever is going on.

The primeval background of the universe (or the unconscious—whatever you would like to call it) is not at all just a blank, vacant state of nothingness. Rather it contains tremendous energy; it is completely filled with energy. If we examine this energy, we find it has two characteristics. One is the firelike quality of consuming heat, and the second is the quality of direction. The primeval firelike energy has a direction, a particular pattern of the flow, such as you might see in a spark. A spark contains heat, and it also responds to the air that directs it toward a particular location—the spark takes on a pattern of movement within the atmosphere. The whole process of the primeval background energy follows a pattern, which is the same whether it passes through the confused filter of ego or not. Its pattern goes on and on, continuously. It cannot be destroyed; it cannot be interrupted.

This spark, this energy that contains heat, is mentioned in connection with the yogic practice known as *tummo*. This is one of the six yogas of Naropa.\* *Tummo* practice has been described as the development of inner heat. The energy involved here has a consuming quality, an ever-burning quality, like that of the

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the third skandha, perception. For a complete description of the evolution of the skandhas, see the chapter "The Development of Ego," in Chögyam Trungpa, *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1973, 1987), pp. 121ff.—Eds.

\* The six yogas are meditation practices transmitted by the great Indian Mahasiddha Naropa to his disciple Marpa. They are practiced widely within the Kagyü school of Buddhism. They are the practice of *tummo*, or inner heat; the illusory body; dream yoga; the yoga of clear light; the transference of consciousness at death; and the practice of *bardo*, or the intermediate state. Many other Tibetan schools of vajrayana Buddhism also incorporate similar yogic disciplines.—Eds.

sun. It continuously burns and consumes until it reaches that point where, psychologically speaking, it no longer allows any room at all for doubts or manipulations. This vast power goes on and on and on, leaving no room to manipulate, leaving no room for confusion or ignorance or panic or doubt. However, when this heat is filtered through the ego process of ignorance, a very interesting development occurs. Rather than remaining a pure consuming process, it becomes slightly stagnated as a result of ignoring the basic ground, as a result of ego's refusal to look at its own origin.

This, one might say, is where the basic twist of love occurs. Ordinary love, love as we usually encounter it in our lives, seems to contain a basic twist, just as the other aspects of our ordinary lives do. This is the basic twist of refusing to see the vast, all-consuming energy we have been talking about. As a result of refusing to acknowledge this energy, ego is forced to accommodate this vibrant energy in some sort of container. Ego accommodates that energy in the form of confusion.

Confusion is a kind of network, like a wire net that forms a container. Once that network of confusion has been created, we try to contain the vast primeval energy within it. Once the energy is caught up in the net of confusion, the basic twist of ego starts to occur. However, the intelligence of ego is not the equal of the power of this burning heat of love. It is only capable of distorting that burning heat. Ego can distort it, but it is unsuccessful in getting hold of it completely. The result of ego's unsuccessful capturing of the basic energy is that the energy churns out a partial burning heat, a partial flame of love.

When the heat of love is captured in the net of confusion, it still churns out an outward-directed flame. However, this outward-directed process is only an expression of fascination, because the flame has not been completely let loose into the open. Only a partial aspect of the flame has managed to escape the net and extend its tongue. That fascination with the other,

or the object of love, is the basic burning energy that has been unsuccessfully filtered through the confusion of ego.

The reason I say ego is unsuccessful is because the ultimate wish of ego is to completely control all the energy, to capture it entirely so that no aspect of the basic flame escapes through the gaps in its network of confusion. Something does escape here, however, but this flame is only a partial manifestation of the energy. So the flame must retreat, or come back into the net, in order to replenish itself. That is how our ordinary confused passion works.

To repeat, ordinary passion extends outward, but because of the network of confusion that entraps it, it has no capability of extending in a limitless way, so it automatically falls back. When it comes back, it has already been somewhat programmed, or readjusted, because of the confusion that runs through it. But strangely enough, this love, desire, or passion hasn't been completely captivated by the ego. It is the one emotion that partially escapes, that is able to operate outside the realm of ego—unlike anger, pride, envy, and the other *kleshas*, or emotions, which have been successfully captivated. Passion is a very powerful thing. It is the powerful expression of the basic origin. We haven't actually managed to captivate or spoil it 100 percent.

Ordinarily, when we project ourselves onto external situations, we extend our passion or desire, and then we try to possess that object of desire. So we extend our desire, our passion, and we would like to draw something in. If our attempt is unsuccessful, we feel very frustrated; if we could only possess the object of our desire, we feel we would have conquered something. It is rather like someone who sets out to do some window-shopping on a busy street filled with expensive stores. She admires the displays, but she also wants the items for herself. She would like to buy a lot of the merchandise, but she realizes she hasn't got enough money, so each time she sees something that she admires, she feels terribly pained. Still, she looks, because she enjoys the first glimpse. Another person

would slowly walk along, simply admiring the displays in the store windows. So we have these contrasting approaches: the possessive way of seeing and the admiring way of seeing.

The possessive approach applies to relationships as well, much more than to objects, because relationships between people are extremely sophisticated. In a relationship, not only does one person have the means to extend his flame out toward the other, in an effort to consume the other, but at the same time, the other person has the same possibility. As soon as one person wants to possess another, the whole process of relationship becomes an intense game. It becomes a question of who has the more powerful and overwhelming personality, which one of the two people is able to subdue the other. Once we take the possessive approach, that is generally the way we look at it.

Trying to possess another person has a primitive, almost apelike, quality. You might want to possess someone purely because of the person's physical beauty. Because he or she is handsome or pretty, you would like to possess the person. Or maybe the person has particular interesting and subtle qualities in his or her psychological makeup, and you would like to possess those aspects of the person. Both cases are extensions of an apelike approach. Possessive sexual relationships are very apelike, that is, purely driven by the basic structure of ego. You see the other person as a kind of juicy steak, and you would like to gobble the person up and be done with it—nothing more than that. It's the animal instinct continuing on our human level.

I'm not suggesting that people should be more sophisticated and develop a particular art of possessing the other. Once our approach has that possessive setup, the more we try to be sophisticated about it, the more we make fools of ourselves—because everybody knows everybody else's tricks. In this field, everybody is a professional, and we know that very well. Trying to be subtle here is rather like the Chinese story of the man who wanted to steal a bell. The story goes that a fool sets out to steal a beautiful bell, a very expensive one with a beautiful sound.

He sneaks quietly into the house where the bell is, and he finds it and picks it up. The bell rings and he panics. It keeps ringing because he is panicked and keeps moving it around. He tries to cover both his ears, while still hanging on to the bell with one hand. He keeps on saying, "I don't hear it; I don't hear it."

Not only in sexual situations but in all kinds of situations, we play this bell game. We are quite sure the other person realizes what game we are playing, but we still don't want to let on. We just continue playing the game pretending nobody knows.

Karma plays a role in this game. Karma is a natural law of cause and effect. Whatever you do now, you are planting seeds for the future. This particular chain reaction started from confusion or ignorance, the creation of ego at the beginning. You decide to act in order to get a result. When you decide to do something to benefit your existence, to ensure your security, then the duality starts right at the beginning of that action, and that is called relational action or dualistic action. Because there's duality involved at the beginning, there is also dualistic action involved throughout that process as well. So whatever you've done in the past has a bearing on your present moment—up to now. Whatever you do in the present moment will also have a bearing on the future. The process of karma cannot be eliminated in the past. But what you do in the future is connected with the present moment. Karma is like growing a flower. If you plant a certain kind of seed, a certain type of flower is going to grow from those seeds. It's a natural force that happens everywhere, all the time. If you hit something hard enough, you will break it—that's karma. It's a natural chain reaction that always happens.

Within the Buddhist monastic tradition, there is a traditional, orthodox, and very disciplined way to work with passion in order to go beyond possessiveness and grasping. You find this approach in many spiritual schools of thought that acknowledge the existence of passion but also seek to control it. It is interesting that at the beginning stages of this orthodox

approach, controlling the passion does not decrease its intensity at all. In fact, in trying to control it, one learns to live with it on a more intense level. The experience of passion increases until you reach the point of passionlessness, where you realize that putting passion into action and not putting passion into action are the same. You have to achieve this kind of passionlessness before you get to the point of learning to live with passion.

This approach acknowledges the existence of this passion mentally. In your mind, you develop your relationship to passion to the point of controlling it. Through tremendous discipline of this kind, you can develop passionlessness. You do this, not by expressing the passion, but by learning to live with desire. Where you can go wrong here is by suppressing the passion. If you try to suppress it, you are not acknowledging the existence of such passion anymore at all. Whatever comes up, you suddenly shut down, because you feel guilty that you are committing a sin or whatever. Then, because you refuse to look into it, it tends to bottle up. It collects like air in a balloon and one day, sooner or later, it will tend to burst out.

Repression is a very unskillful way of dealing with passion. It is not that there is something wrong with the traditional teachings, but you take them the wrong way. If you panic, if you feel terribly shy about your passion, this doesn't let you see it. It doesn't let you examine it. If you do see it, you realize that physically carrying out your passion is not the point. Acting on it seems to be a secondary matter. What is important is seeing the passion clearly.

So in the Buddhist monastic tradition, celibacy is a powerful way of dealing with desire, not by suppressing passion, but by examining the mental aspect of it. In the Buddhist tradition altogether, rather than suppressing any desire that comes into your mind, you look at it. You have to become familiar with the desires; then the need to express them physically automatically wears out. You see that the physical expression is no more than an extension of the desire itself—you see the childish as well as

the chaotic quality of the expression. However, the basic communicative quality of the desire has to continue. You channel your energy into the process of communication. In this way, the basic monastic tradition simplifies life.

Again, monasticism here is not based on suppression or pure asceticism. It is based on simplicity, the simplicity of noninvolvement and the simplicity of being alone. You become familiar with desire and then relate to it with the simplicity of aloneness, or even loneliness. Eventually, loneliness itself becomes a kind of consort, a companion. That is why, in the Buddhist tradition, tantric practitioners who are leading the celibate monastic life continue practicing the inner discipline of yoga, which involves relating with the principle of sexual union, on the mental level. In any monastic situation, both monks and nuns could have an experience of loneliness as their consort or companion. There has to be a way of working with passion, even in monastic life.

Sometimes laypeople believe that it is best to save their sexual energy for spiritual purposes. They think that if they expend their sexual energy, they won't have it available as spiritual energy. As it is explained in yogic texts, that all depends on how individuals relate to sexual relationships altogether. It depends on whether they put all their possessiveness—their greedy quality—into the process or not. If they do, then that transforms their energy into a sort of heavy passion, and that affects their spiritual lives adversely. However, if someone can relate to the physical, sexual expression of passion as part of a process of communication, I don't think sex will adversely affect the spiritual life at all. In fact, it will be an inspiration, because the physical expression of desire then becomes a symbolic gesture, the same as doing prostrations and various other yogic exercises, or circumambulating a stupa or the like. All sorts of physical exercises have been recommended in the traditional teachings to learn to use your energy properly and bring your body into contact with the earth in a way that inspires further spiritual energy.

In the Tibetan monastic tradition, first you receive the



*samanera* ordination, which is becoming a novice monk or nun. Then you receive *bhikshu* ordination, which is becoming a fully ordained monk or nun. Then beyond that you receive bodhisattva ordination, which is connected with the practice of compassion. Then you also receive the initiations of the Buddhist yoga tradition connected with the vajrayana. These can also be taken outside of the monastic ordination. A lay practitioner can take vows in the Buddhist yoga tradition as well as bodhisattva vows. You are then committed to practicing compassion, while you remain a householder who continues to live an ordinary secular life. In the case of taking the monastic vows, you uphold the monastic discipline of celibacy as long as you remain a monk or nun, which may be for the rest of your life. However, in the Tibetan tradition, there is no punishment for giving up your robes. If a lama wanted to give up his or her robes and cease to be a monastic, then the next choice would be whether to continue his or her spiritual work or whether to become a businessman or a householder or even a hunter, for that matter. That choice depends on individuals. Still, after giving up the robes, the practitioner's bodhisattva practice as well as his or her yogic practice continues. The monastic tradition is very much based on a physical relationship to simplicity, such as we have been talking about. The other disciplines are more connected with the state of mind. So even if a monk or a nun decides to disrobe, his or her mind shouldn't be affected. Spiritual health will continue.

## PURE PASSION

Celibacy, as an orthodox discipline, is only applicable to certain types of people. Not many people can achieve passionlessness by totally denying the expression of passion. Most people are still left with the desire to express their passion physically. If we don't embrace this orthodox discipline, how do we manage our passion? There is another view of passion and relationship, which takes another approach to the subtlety of the basic primeval energy we were talking about in the previous chapter. We could call this second approach working with pure passion. In many ways pure passion is just passion in the ordinary sense, but at the same time, it is what is called vajra passion. It is vajra, which means indestructible in nature.\* It is called vajra passion because it is wild

\* *Vajra* is a Sanskrit word meaning "diamond," "adamantine," or "indestructible." The thunderbolt scepter held by Indra, the king of the gods in Indian mythology, is known as a vajra. In the adjectival sense in which the term is employed here, it refers to absolute indestructibility that is beyond all conditioned existence.—Eds.

passion, in that it has no egoistic networks or wire mesh around it. It is free passion, wild passion, *unleashed* passion. It is passion that hasn't been directed by any sort of switchboard, passion that is more powerful than the apelike quality we discussed in the previous chapter. It contains qualities of sparkling light—a wisdom quality—as well. It has tremendous consuming energy, which does not pass through any filters or networks. That kind of passion, whether it is connected with sex or anything else desirable that arises in life, is genuinely wild passion.

Ego and its intelligence are living in a world that does not acknowledge any other dimensions. From ego's point of view, it's all ego's world. That complicates our efforts to liberate this pure passion. The more we try to step out of ego's game, the more logical answers ego supplies, attempting to block our efforts. These solutions are all very limited, based on the fundamental twist of ego.

The world of real passion is a different atmosphere, a limitless world. When you have a glimpse of this, when some unprogrammed moment of ventilation allows you to feel something outside the ego, that could inspire you to try to step out altogether. You realize that it's possible to go beyond your habitual patterns—the maze of ego.

However, just continuing to wander through the maze of ego and trying to find your way out doesn't solve the problem, because once you get out of one maze, a further maze or contraction will start up. While one is going through the maze, one is also producing more and more karmic force. The only way out is to directly see another parallel dimension, outside the egoistic setup. That could appear as a momentary perception, which provides a parallel way out, one that doesn't rely on ego's logic. In one moment, you can step out of the maze completely.

The pure or liberated dimension of passionate relationship relies on the energy of no-mind. In other words, in the experience of pure passion, mind transcends logic. It requires courage

to access that dimension of life. Generally, logical answers provide security. Logical conclusions bring us some comfort. Our logic tells us that if we do this, then that is going to happen. It creates a seemingly predictable world. One tends to plan everything out, program oneself altogether. One has to learn not to indulge in that particular comfort of overlapping answers. It requires bravery to stop doing this kind of obsessive logical analysis and abandon the chain reaction of answers. It requires the bravery that is willing not to involve itself with that comfort. One must stop fantasizing for one's security and come to the point of no-mind, or nonlogical thinking.

The only way to turn off that process of logical thinking is just to step out of it. When there is no logic, we begin to see things very clearly, but we also begin to feel cold. That area, which is free from habitual mind, may feel very bleak and cold because it seems so unfamiliar. So when we experience it, we usually try to reestablish our familiar territory further and further. In order to liberate yourself from habitual patterns, whenever you feel any kind of cold and bleak mysterious corner, instead of trying to fill that mysterious area with anything else, you should just step into that cold and bleak area—because it is not participating in the logical process of ego. That's all you can do. In a way, what you do is to just not do anything.

Whenever there's a mysterious dark and bleak corner where there could be mental spiders or mosquitoes or bats, we tend to manufacture some logic, some kind of alternative to explain away those scary things in the dark. There could be anything in that space. Instead of investigating these terrible things, we would like to make everything homey and cozy. We try to reassure ourselves that everything will be okay. We're always trying to avoid those dark areas.

When you feel this fear of the void, that's exactly when you need to leap. Just go into that space. I don't think you'll be afraid while you're leaping. You're afraid beforehand. The leap itself transcends fear. It is rather like a parachute, isn't it? You are ter-

rified by the thought of parachuting, but once you are in the air, you are ready. The fear dissolves, and the open space of no-mind opens up.

When we talk about wild and free passion, we may tend to think something neurotic and erratic is meant. With vajra passion, however, this is not the case. If we let primeval passion loose, it isn't neurotic anymore because of the very fact that it has been let loose. There's no boundary that resists anything, and passion that operates beyond the question of any boundary automatically acts with wisdom and intelligence. In such an approach, intelligence automatically finds its way. At that point, you are able to have proper communication, real communication, because your basic nature is allowed to come out.

When we talk about wildness and freedom, we tend to think in terms of an almost animal or apelike quality, as we have discussed. We think of something like a gorilla escaping from the zoo. That, however, is a description of ego's passion. If you really let loose properly, however, this basic nature is comparable to the gorilla in the wild, at the stage before it has ever been captured, before it has ever been put in a cage, as though it were still in the primeval state of roaming in the jungle. If you really let that primeval aspect of passion loose, it isn't going to destroy anyone, because that passion has a balanced state of being as part of its natural instinct.

If our approach to sex, or anything else in our life, is connected with that primeval quality, we find there is a possibility of wonderful skillful communication. At the beginning of such communication, we wouldn't feel self-conscious as we do with the neurotic, ego-oriented approach. If at first, at the very starting point, you are completely natural and open, then in the process that follows, you won't feel any self-conscious inhibition. In that case, you will find that your process of communicating, of meeting and seeing the qualities of your partner, is quite extraordinary. This is because you are not judging him or her in terms of the rugged and juicy aspect alone. You are seeing in terms of

the whole, the whole quality of the other person, which is like pure gold. Like pure gold, it is beautiful, solid, majestic on the outside, and it is also solid, beautiful, and majestic on the inside. This is because you are not seeing just surfaces, but you are seeing the whole way through. This is the open and skillful way of relating to passion.

Say you're married and you are attracted to somebody else. You might think that is very free passion. However, I don't think that is really free passion at all. It is a reaction against something in your marriage that is making you feel attracted to someone else outside the marriage. Because you are married, you feel that you are stuck together, and therefore you psychologically begin to feel an anarchist attitude. That is not real freedom at all. It is a kind of dissatisfaction, feeling that the relationship is not right—and the sooner the relationship could be abandoned the better.

*Free* is a very interesting word. It could be "free-free" or it could be "free-wild." "Free-free" is that you are free not because you have been freed by somebody else but because you discover that you can do what you like—you discover that you have the space to move about. "Free-wild" is that you begin to feel you have managed to snatch freedom from somewhere else; it is reacting against imprisonment. Then, instead of creating space, you tend to fill up the space with all sorts of other things. It becomes wild because it is like an echo—once you shout more, the sound will come back to you more as well. That is a continual creation of your own spider's web. It becomes wild at the end. It has to be wild because it is frantic. It is wild in the sense of neurotic. Immediately when you realize you've got freedom in the "free-wild" sense, you begin to shout, you begin to fill the whole of space, and the sound comes back to you. You shout more and more until finally the whole thing becomes complete chaos. You are creating your own imprisonment under the pretense of freedom. So freedom is a question of whether you have real space or not.

When you apply passion with wisdom, you see the whole process and are not fascinated and overwhelmed by the exterior alone. Instead, when you see the exterior, that simultaneously puts you through to the interior as well. You go the whole way, completely and thoroughly, so you reach right to the heart of the situation. Then, if there is a meeting of two people, that relationship will be very enlightening. You don't only see that person as pure physical attraction or pure habitual pattern, but you see both—the outside along with the inside. This applies to any form of communication, not only sex. Such communication is whole-way-through communication.

Now we have another problem, quite a grave problem. Suppose you see all the way through somebody, and that person doesn't want you to see all the way through—he or she might be horrified by you and run away. What do you do then? Well, since you have made your communication completely and thoroughly, you now have to see that this is the other person's communication. Running away from you is that person's way of communicating with you. So you don't pursue matters further. If you do, if you chase that person, sooner or later you are going to turn out to be a demon from that person's point of view—a vampire, in fact. As that person sees it, you have seen all the way through his or her body to that fat, juicy meat inside that you would like to eat up. The more you try to pursue the person now, the more you are going to fail. You have to realize that there must be something else wrong with you if that person reacted that way. You can't always be completely right. Perhaps you looked through the person too sharply with your desire. Perhaps you have been too penetrating. Since you possess beautiful keen eyes of penetrating passion and wisdom, you don't want to abuse that.

I'm not necessarily talking about how to win that person over. If the person runs away from you, there must be something wrong with *you* in your application of that unleashed passion. If people possess some particular power or exceptional

energy, many of them might be inclined to abuse that power, to misuse it by trying to penetrate to every corner, every remote part of the other person. Something is lacking there, which is quite obvious—a sense of humor.

Humor in this case also means panoramic awareness, a feeling of space, of openness. A lot of stories from the Buddhist scriptures tell us that the work of bodhisattvas failed because they were lacking in a sense of humor. They have been too honest, too deadly serious in their application of the teachings. Even if they had a good understanding of how to apply the teachings, they didn't provide the necessary accompaniment to that, which is a sense of humor. They became blunt bodhisattvas.

In a situation where you want to open completely to someone but the person resists you, it is similar to the bodhisattvas. You may have wisdom, compassion, and everything you think you need to communicate with others, but you lack a sense of humor, which is an expression of dhyana, meditative awareness. If you are insensitive and try to push things too far with another person, that means that you don't feel the area properly. You only feel the space as far as your relationship to it takes you—you see what's wrong there, but you don't see what's on the other side. You don't see the other person's point of view, and you don't see the silhouette of the whole situation. Such an overall vision should accompany your relationship to any situation. That is what provides a sense of humor, which is very much needed.

Sometimes people run away from you because they want to play a game with you. They don't want a straight and honest, serious involvement. They only want to play a game. If they are lacking in a sense of humor and you are too, then you both may become demonic in each other's eyes.

This is the point where *lalita* comes in. *Lalita*, which is a Sanskrit term mentioned earlier, means dancing with the situation. It is the dance with reality, with phenomena. *Dance* here means exchange. When you want something very badly, you don't



just reach out your hand to take it. In the case of vajra passion, you don't extend either your eye or your hand automatically. You just admire what you desire. You wait for a move from the other side. That is learning to dance with the situation.

Often we are very blunt. If we don't like something that is going on in our life, we feel tremendously self-conscious. We don't know how to end the scene that is troubling us, because we are creating that scene, putting it together. It is our unskillful action. You don't actually have to create that whole scene at all. You can just watch it, you can work with it. In that way, it doesn't become *your* scene; instead it becomes a mutual dancing together, of you and your world, your phenomena. If you take this approach, in fact, you end up with an ideal situation. No one ends up being self-conscious because it is a mutual scene. Self-consciousness means stagnation. You are stuck because you don't know how to go beyond that scene, but if you go beyond self-consciousness, the situation becomes very creative. Relationship becomes tremendously creative and dynamic.

In vajra passion, which is passion combined with wisdom, a relationship between two people can be very beautiful, because both partners are completely relaxed. Both are participating together completely, so no one has to take the lead. Sexual relationship can be one of the most important examples of this kind of communication, though the same approach also applies to other forms of communication. All types of communication always include both the feminine and the masculine principles, the chaotic or seductive aspect and the skillful aspect. These are present in any communication, whether it is conversation or correspondence or even just communing with nature. In any communication, these qualities of *prajna* and *upaya*, wisdom and skillful means, are always present.\* In the sexual relationship, this is particularly vivid, particularly obvious.

\* *Prajna* is a Sanskrit term meaning "transcendental knowledge," which is knowledge that sees through duality and recognizes emptiness. *Upaya* is also

The symbolism of the yogic tradition of deities in sexual union is applicable here. This symbolism is not purely a metaphor for something; in sex it becomes a real, living application. Sexual relationship is a living, basic example, a living symbol, or *mudra* as we call it.\* In all communication, whether in a relationship between two partners, or friends, or any other communicative situation, the feminine and masculine principles are there. There is all-pervading openness—open space is created or the communication could not take place at all, and in order to communicate, a leap into that space is also necessary. The leap is skillful means, the masculine principle, and the open space that you leap into is the feminine principle of wisdom. The open space that is present must be met with skillful action, action that deals with that wisdom, knows how to swim in that ocean of wisdom.

The interplay of masculine and feminine principles is the basis of inspiration in all aspects of life. If a proper foundation is in place, allowing harmonious interaction of the principles, then the masculine and feminine principles act together very creatively and beautifully in situations. Relating harmoniously, they develop a mode of activity that is known in the vajrayana tradition as the four *karmas*, the four enlightened actions. Through these actions you can bring about peace and gather richness; you can magnetize situations, and you are also able to subdue

a Sanskrit term. It refers to compassionate action that is actually effective in situations. *Prajna* and *upaya* are associated with the feminine and masculine principles, respectively. Enlightenment is sometimes defined as the unity of the two.—Eds.

\* *Mudra* is a Sanskrit word that literally means “sign, symbol, or gesture.” A *mudra* can be any sort of symbol. Specifically, *mudras* are hand gestures that accompany various Buddhist practices, which express different moments of realization or aspects of the practice. Here the author is referring to the more general sense of *mudra*, in which the symbol and the symbolized are inseparable.—Eds.

or conquer or destroy whatever you need to.\* In other words, the relationship between the masculine and feminine principles is the basic formula for a mandala.\*\* The ground where you build the mandala is the feminine principle of openness, and the skillful way you use that ground in constructing the mandala is the masculine principle. In this case, the two principles are also called *prajna* and *upaya*. If you examine the vajrayana tradition, I'm sure you will always find the two basic principles in action. Understanding this could be tremendously inspiring.

You might ask why we say that wisdom represents the feminine principle. Wisdom contains an inquisitive quality: wanting to learn, wanting to know everything, wanting to survey every corner. The feminine realizes she's the ground of everything, and she would like to explore that ground. That is what you call the *dakini* principle in the Buddhist tradition.

Wisdom is learning, knowledge, isn't it? Knowledge can be creative, producing further knowledge, so it is the mother principle. Knowledge can also be destructive, because you know how to create chaos as well. Therefore, there is a destructive quality to the feminine as well as a creative quality. It's the mother principle, basically.

\* *Karma* refers to the law of cause and effect in general. The four karmas referenced here refer to the four enlightened and advanced actions that are practiced by a realized yogi or teacher, which arise from the understanding and ability gained through prolonged practice. The four karmas are pacifying, enriching, magnetizing, and destroying, which the author describes here. He has sometimes characterized the four karmas as the expression of crazy wisdom.—Eds.

\*\* *Mandala* is a Sanskrit word. The Tibetan term *kyil-khor* means center and periphery, or center and fringe. While we often associate mandalas with two-dimensional Tibetan diagrams used as an aid in visualization practice, in general, a mandala is the unification of many vast elements into one view through the experience of meditation. Seeming complexity and chaos are simplified into a pattern and natural hierarchy. *Mandala* can sometimes be almost synonymous with *world* or *worldview*. Here, the author describes how the relationship between the masculine and feminine principles gives rise to a complete pattern of energy, or a world.—Eds.

The masculine principle shows the feminine principle the skillful move to put its pattern in the right order, so to speak. Wisdom is knowing, pure knowing. It is not connected with action. The contrast between masculine and feminine here is rather like the contrast between practice and philosophy, or theory.

We might wonder how passion is related to compassion. Compassion is also communication, the ultimate communication. It doesn't necessarily mean feeling sorry for something; rather, it is basic communication that is not hesitant to become involved. In compassion we are willing to put ourselves into the situation of helping others, no matter what is required. Compassion sees the nature of the samsaric game that is being played, and whenever action is required to cut through that game, the action of compassion comes into play very accurately, right on the point. If necessary, it can be ruthless. The four karmas mentioned above are actually a description of the different aspects and qualities of compassion. When the feminine and masculine principles act together in harmony, that is also the essence of compassionate action.

*Mahasukha*, or the great bliss, represents the union of the feminine and the masculine principles. It is the ultimate communication connected with vajra passion. When you are able to establish complete communication, there will be tremendous joy, because there is no chaos within the dance anymore. It is like the meeting of teacher and disciple, which is the ultimate meeting point that expresses great joy. Such joy exists as the sudden realization or experience of vajra passion.

Vajra passion doesn't inspire you to fill the space at all. When you constantly have the neurotic desire to express your passion in this and that way, then whenever any space is created, you try to fill those gaps by doing things, which is a result of panic. If you try to approach limitless passion from the point

of view of filling space, you can't do it at all. With that limited approach you are completely powerless. But vajra passion, open passion—or we could even say transcendental passion—does not inspire you to fill the space. It just inspires you to create more space. You don't necessarily have to do anything. You just enjoy the space more.

## MEDITATION AND DAILY LIFE

Shouldn't the basic point of spiritual practice be to inspire an understanding that permits us to relate with life in the fullest way? From that point of view, work, sex, and money could be said to be the highlights of the spiritual experience of everyday life. Further discussion may be necessary for you to accept that the daily living situation should be regarded as a main means of practicing spiritual discipline. So we should look into what we actually mean by spiritual practice.

A prominent idea of spirituality is that the point is to surrender, give away, or renounce the world. Relating with the world, accepting it rather than renouncing it, goes against that view. In almost all spiritual traditions, renouncing the world is regarded as one of the first steps in spiritual practice. Spiritual practice is often regarded as a means of salvation. According to that conception, spirituality should provide a permanent shelter

where we can be happy and free; and since our daily living situation does not provide permanent shelter, we have to look for something higher or safer. The idea here is that spiritual practice should lead us to some form of eternity—eternal happiness or eternal youth.

This popular and, we might say, rather primitive notion of spirituality is based on searching for happiness, a sense of security. It tells us we should practice meditation in order to attain enlightened mind or union with God, or something of that nature. All the developments in our practice are regarded as steps toward that permanent happiness, which will lift us above misery, pain, and suffering. We will find a final home or nest to dwell in. The attitude of maintaining oneself in permanent happiness is actually the expression of ego or confused, neurotic mind. It is the neurotic desire to maintain myself, me, my whole being, as a solid entity, as ego. This approach could be called spiritual materialism.

Spiritual materialism is a further step on top of physical and psychological materialism. This materialistic attitude comes about because there is uncertainty about oneself: Am I a definite person? Am I a complete person the way I always wanted to be—do I have power and security? This wishful thinking invites unhappiness, confusion, and dissatisfaction with our way of handling ourselves. We feel that there is something not quite solid about our life, and because it does not seem solid, the possibility arises that *me* and *myself* do not exist in a long-term way. This doubt as to whether we exist or don't exist as an individual entity is a big threat to us.

We are constantly baffled, bewildered, and confused about this. When this confusion crops up, the only way to prove to ourselves that we do exist as an individual entity—as myself, with such and such a name—is to act something out, to make an emergency or extreme move. Such a move may take the form of defending ourselves by means of aggression against what is threatening us, which is a repelling technique. On the other

hand, we may defend ourselves by grasping whatever can be used to maintain us, to prove that our existence is a reality. So our choices are either repelling or grasping. Repelling is aggression, hatred. Grasping is passion, desire. Those emotional principles are the main mechanisms ego uses to maintain itself. On the basis of those two mechanisms, we develop all sorts of other emotions, such as fear, hope, pride, jealousy, and so on. Those further means of maintaining ego are accessories on top of the basic hatred or desire.\*

However, these tactics might not work. In fact, there are constant failures, because maintaining the continual awareness of ego is such a big task. There are constant gaps where we slip up, we forget to relate to our ego, we forget to defend ourselves, or we forget to control ourselves. This is not entirely bad news, because in fact these gaps, which occur continually in our mental state, are the only way to see the nonexistence of ego. They expose us to the fickleness of ego. Seeing this, we can say that though the ego does exist in some sense, it does not exist as a solid entity. Its nature is transparent. We see the transparent quality of ego through these continual gaps, which again and again brings fear of losing our identity, which automatically provokes further fear and paranoia.

This fear and paranoia result in psychological materialism. There is the constant attempt to maintain ourselves by using external pretexts, ideas, and concepts to prove that I do exist, that the functions of ego are right, that they are a definite thing. I constantly have to prove that to both myself and others, and this produces a particular competitive attitude, which is psycho-

\* Here, Chögyam Trungpa explains ego's activity of maintaining its ground, referring to its use of passion and aggression (or desire and hatred) as the basis for developing all the emotional states. In most traditional accounts, three principles—passion, aggression, and ignorance—are given as the fundamental mechanisms that power ego and our confusion. They are known as the three poisons. However, it is not rare, as in this talk, to mention only passion and aggression, since these are the active and obvious ones out of the three.—Eds.



logical materialism. By constantly looking for external sources of praise and blame, we hope to reinforce a solid sense of existence.

Spiritual materialism, which uses a similar logic, comes into play when ego feels that psychological materialism has failed to prove ego's existence adequately. At that point ego looks beyond or above—it looks for a higher level of proof. One might try to meditate, to develop mental power, a greater level of concentration. But this approach to meditation is based on securing ego's territory rather than going beyond it. The hope is that in this way ego can become a more intense and continuous ego rather than just the ego in the form of patches of consciousness that we have been experiencing, which is not really satisfying. Such a patchy ego is not really foolproof in terms of defending itself, so a person looks for all kinds of spiritual ways of maintaining or strengthening the awareness of me, myself, ego. That is spiritual materialism.

The whole problem with these materialistic approaches is too much centralization. There is too much concern with the nature of one's own games as opposed to concern with the external projections of the world around us. One is preoccupied with *here*—wrapped up in the self-consciousness of "What is the best way for me? How should I do it? How should I overcome? How should I achieve thus and such? How should I defend myself?" So one tends to reject the messages from the projections of the world outside. To overcome this self-centered situation, we need to gain an understanding of egolessness, centerlessness, the nonexistence of ego. We cannot just start on ego itself. We cannot rely on ego to discover the folly of ego. We need to recognize our actual experience of egolessness.

Ego is dependent on the confirmation from the relative situation outside. When external phenomena become problematic, as the paranoia of ego begins to rise up, gaps begin to appear in ego's game. So the best way to see the absence of ego is to use the confusion that arises when ego relates to the daily

living situation—the projections of the world outside. “Projections” in this case refers to the output of ego, which constitutes or makes up our seemingly solid, everyday, bodily situations. These interchanges are made up of all kinds of interactions with people and physical situations, which automatically include the sources where ego’s passion and aggression begin. Now, if we are fully in touch with the phenomenal world and see its play completely and thoroughly, then the self-consciousness of ego ceases to be our focus and to play such an important role. By being fully in touch with external situations, we are no longer totally preoccupied with ego’s centralized games. We begin to realize that security is not all that important. So relating with our living world, our daily living situations, becomes a way of transcending psychological materialism.

Therefore, the meditative disciplines that have been recommended to us by great teachers should be accompanied by interaction with the world. Meditation practice could be described as the training ground, and the actual application of those training-ground exercises occurs in working with the situations of daily life. That is why the topics of work, sex, and money become our immediate concern. Spirituality is all about how to handle the situations of daily life.

If you look methodically through the history of the Buddhist tradition, you see that hermits don’t stay in retreat their whole lives. This is true even though they may take vows to remain in retreat. It has been said that retreat doesn’t end completely until you come back into your old life situations. Then your retreat is completed. For instance, Milarepa, a great Tibetan Buddhist practitioner and teacher, took a vow to regard his retreat cave as his tomb. He went into retreat with that attitude, but in the end he couldn’t avoid the world altogether. There were huntsmen passing through collecting feathers for their arrows, and other people occasionally dropped in to ask him questions. Finally he had to move on, leave his retreat and walk out into the world. He had to step out of that retreat situation.

There is also the story of Anathapindika, who was a disciple of the Buddha and a great supporter of the community of monks. He provided meditation centers for the monks and food for them, and he created environments in which the Buddha could teach. Without him, there would have been no possibility of propagating the teachings on such a wide scale at the time of the Buddha. Anathapindika asked the Buddha if he should give up his work serving the *sangha* and devote himself purely to meditation practice. If he did, it might be good for him, he thought, but on the other hand it might not be a good thing on the whole because he would no longer be providing situations for other people. The Buddha's answer was that he should remain a householder. The best way that he could serve the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha—and follow his own path to enlightenment—would be to practice within the householder's life.

For each of us, the answer to this question depends on our individual situations. Your choices depend on what you have gotten yourself into already. There is a Tibetan saying that it is better not to begin things, but once you begin, you should finish properly. So once you have gotten into the householder's life, you may not be able to undo that, and there is a way to practice within it. However, there are other possibilities: if a person is free to do anything he wants in life, he might choose to respect the sacredness of that freedom by putting restrictions on himself and living the contemplative life of a retreatant or a monastic for a period of time. In the Buddhist tradition, retreat seems to be approached quite differently from some Christian traditions of monastic enclosure, where you take a vow to lock yourself behind a grill for the rest of your life. In the Buddhist tradition, there is respect for the principle of retreat and the contemplative life, but still there is some allegiance to samsara, to the ordinary confused world we inhabit. It's almost like an allegiance to paying back the world's kindness.

As it stands now, we have a lack of clarity about relating

with our ordinary life situations. Should we abandon everyday life as a bad job? Should we try to do our best with it? Should we just muddle through? None of these questions is based on a firm and clear understanding at the beginning. It's just guesswork. We think there must be some real and right way of doing things, but we don't know what it is, so we just push ourselves into situations and hope for the best. This haphazard approach lacks the basic discipline of meditation practice, which is the only way to develop a continuity of insight and clarity.

Meditation practice, in this case, is not at all a matter of building something up, which is the approach of spiritual materialism. Rather, meditation is allowing ourselves simply to be and to open by using certain techniques that take away the self-conscious preoccupation with tactics and strategy. Through meditation we develop a way of doing nothing, absolutely nothing—physically nothing and psychologically nothing. The only way to do nothing is to pick some focus and treat it as though it were nothing. This is the technique that meditation has traditionally developed. We pick something like breathing or walking to meditate on. But these are transparent things. They have no individuality. Everybody breathes. Everybody walks. So we choose breathing and walking techniques as ordinary and transparent techniques.

Through relating fully with such techniques, we reach a point where psychological upheavals will arise in our practice. Subconscious hidden emotions begin to come through, to come up to the surface. In other words, meditation practice using transparent techniques such as working with the breath becomes the practice of doing nothing, and that provides a clear place in which whatever comes up will be noticed and recognized.

This is a way of relating with phenomena in the internal sense. In meditation, you don't have interactions with people or the world outside verbally or physically, but still the practice is a way of relating with phenomena directly, rather than being

caught in the centralized games of ego. Meditation is not a matter of withdrawing—you are not drawing in, retreating from the world. In fact, you are getting into the world. Until now the world hasn't been able to show us its fullest expressions, because we never let it happen. We were constantly seduced by this or that. In the meantime, we were missing the boat all the time. Whenever there is an upheaval or uproar—all kinds of energies coming up—our minds are preoccupied with something else. We never become conscious of those things properly. But in meditation there is a sense of forthcoming, opening. Meditation allows us to see the hidden things, so we don't miss one moment of energy or upheaval. We see them clearly, precisely because we don't evaluate them in a self-conscious way. Evaluation requires more self-consciousness, and in the meantime, while we are evaluating, we miss something else. We miss the implications that happen around those energies that arise in our minds.

So in this case, meditation is a way of developing clarity, which allows us to see the precision of daily life situations as well as our thought process so that we can relate with both of them fully and completely.

From this viewpoint, meditation is also associated with how we approach work. A person should be able to carry out his or her job without interruption, and meditation supports this approach. In this way, the meaning of work becomes part of our spiritual practice rather than purely a part of our daily struggle. Work in this case is actual physical involvement with objects, people, and the energies around that involvement. In this sense, working is a constant tutorial. The teacher, in the form of the work situation, is always there: if you do something badly, it shows; if you do something well, it shows. There's no way of fooling this process.

There is no need here to get involved with the self-conscious rigidity of a deliberate artistic approach to work or to dealing with objects. At the same time, one has to have respect for the

importance of life situations. Things around us always have an association with us, whether they belong to us or not. Once we begin to feel that association, we begin to feel things and relate to them directly, properly, and fully.

With this approach, if you are making a cup of tea, you are in complete contact with the process: with what kind of tea you are going to brew and what kind of kettle and teapot you are going to use. It is a matter of relating with those little things, which is not a big deal particularly. It's not a matter of life and death if you make a bad cup of tea. At the same time, in some sense it is a matter of life and death, because relating with each individual thing is important. This is what I mean by work. It doesn't particularly have to relate to a job, although this same style of relating fully to things could be used in the job situation as well.

The little things we do in life may not seem to have a direct bearing on spirituality; maybe they seem quite unspiritual. Nevertheless, it is your world you are dealing with; it is your environment. So the things you are doing should be felt fully rather than rushed through.

That doesn't mean doing everything slowly and deliberately. Rushing doesn't necessarily mean doing things quickly. You can rush slowly—no matter how slow you go, you are missing the point all the time. However fast or slow you rush, there is a sense that your mind is preoccupied with something, constantly preoccupied with hopes or fear or passion or aggression, or something of that nature. Because of that, you fail to relate directly with objects, as in making a cup of tea.

If you're going fast, just trying to go slow doesn't help; nor the other way around. You see, the point is not particularly to change your pace. The main thing is to become aware that you are not in contact with what is happening, because you are so concerned with getting ahead. Whether you do something slow or fast, there's a sense of absentmindedness. So what is necessary is to learn to relate with what you are doing completely. If

you relate completely with what you are doing, then you can't rush. You don't have to think about the future particularly; you are content with what is there at that very moment. Not rushing is having complete contact with what is happening at that very moment. In other words, a sense of nowness is necessary. Some humor or light touch is also helpful. Then you begin to see the present situation fully and completely, because the rushing process is a very serious one, very earnest and honest, in some sense quite solemn.

When you relate to situations directly and simply, you realize that body and mind have a very close relationship. Mind and body are one thing rather than separate. Body is mind, mind is body. The expressions of body are also constantly the expressions of mind. Work, which is an expression of everyday life, brings the body and mind into play equally. We do not have to develop a special philosophical attitude in order to make our work spiritual, even if our activity appears to have nothing to do with spirituality. We do not have to try to interpret it in a special way. We do not have to find appropriate ideas or ideologies to fit a particular job.

On the other hand, many people's work is largely intellectual. This is not a problem. You can appreciate the ordinariness of life in any situation. However, I think some physical discipline is also necessary in a person's life. Without that, you could become totally wrapped up in your ideas, like an absentminded professor. There's always a need for some grounded perspective like physical work or doing artwork—something where you can use your hands as well as your intellect. Once you get in the habit of using the intellect constantly as a means to understand things, there is a tendency to become completely lost in ideas. One might tend to become aggressive, feeling that all the scientific ideas one has are right and foolproof. One fails then to pay attention to ordinary life. So there's an incompleteness to working entirely with the intellect.

There's no need to philosophize work in order to make it

spiritual. It has spiritual bearing anyway. If you regard yourself as a person on the spiritual path, then whatever you do is part of the path, an expression of the path. Decentralization, the absence of ego, the lack of searching for happiness and not avoiding pain—all of that brings us into the reality of dealing with things directly and thoroughly. Dealing with things in this decentralized, egoless manner is known in the Buddhist tradition as *upaya*, skillful means. Without that, there is no means of discovering the inner guru, or inner teacher, as one might call it, which is the constant instruction that you begin to receive on the path. The daily living situation becomes the teaching; it becomes a constant learning process. There's no way of developing that sense of inner teacher if you fail to relate with daily living situations directly, because without that there's no interchange with your world.

The experiences that are part of the learning process in everyday life do not have to be particularly mystical. They do not have to be anything like a voice telling you to do this or do that. They are not like seeing spiritual symbolism everywhere. It's not as literal as that. The spiritual path is profound in itself—it's just a matter of things being seen as real and direct and simple, but that means a lot. Because of the simplicity, we are able to work with whatever comes up. Because situations are simple, they are pure. There are no alternatives involved at all. It's a direct situation.

Dealing with the physical situations of the world also means dealing with emotions at the same time. The emotional expressions of body, of physical engagement, are obvious, and we can work with them in a direct and simple fashion. The point is that we cannot reject the situation we are in now. We won't necessarily achieve spiritual advancement by changing our lifestyle. In fact, we could almost expect the opposite. We should have continuity in our lifestyle, a continuity of experience, and we should get into that and try to find the follow-up, the next step, within that, rather than trying to get into a prefabricated envi-



ronment that is supposedly conducive to spiritual advancement. Such an environment might be conducive temporarily, but at some point we become weak because that situation is ideal and softens us up. Then, when a problematic situation finally arises, we won't be able to deal with it. We will find ourselves trying to re-create that ideal, beautiful situation. We will end up with a constant yearning for the future and an inability to relate with the present situation of nowness. So transcending spiritual materialism has to be based on working with the daily living situation. That is the basic point.