

Simplicity

a talk given at FWBO Day, London April 2004

Until very recently this talk was advertised simply as 'a Dharma talk' because originally I wasn't sure what to say. And in a way it's ended up as a promotion for the retreat I'm leading for Buddhafield in mid-May. Ever since my recent solitary retreat I've been so desperate for communication, of any kind, that I'll do almost anything to get attention. And for getting attention, what is especially good about Buddhafield is that numbers are virtually unlimited. I mean, you can always put up a few more tents. So if the retreat attracts a hundred or more, I'm sure we could manage it. I think that'd be great. A hundred or two men, women... and I don't know about angels, but last time I led something at Buddhafield, one of the most committed retreatants was a dog called Brian. I don't think Buddhafield usually allow pets, especially not dogs, but Brian was given a special place because of the depth of his meditation practice. Of course, that's never easy to assess, not in anyone, but Brian really was an exceptionally relaxed and peaceful person. He would sit hour after hour in the shrine tent with all of us, quite still, radiating metta and wisdom. Anyway I emailed Brian this week, so I hope he will be able to join the coming retreat.

Anyway as you'll gather, this is a very serious talk. And Brian - in fact Buddhafield itself - represents something very very serious, something very profound indeed. He represents nature - the natural life, life lived in the open air, on solid ground, by flowing waters, in sun and rain, and under open skies. It represents the way the Buddha Shakyamuni lived for most of his life. In fact the Buddha was born under a tree, gained Enlightenment under a tree, and passed away under a tree. I personally like trees very much, and as soon as I connected up with the Buddhafield community a few years ago, I realised I wanted to live like that. And then, a little more recently, when I had the opportunity to take a long break from things and do a personal retreat, I suddenly realised that I could do my retreat that way. Perhaps in Britain it wasn't advisable to live under a tree, especially at my age, but I could build a hut on a hill somewhere. So that's where I lived for eighteen months; in fact I still spend most of my time in that hut, I like so much living right in the midst of nature.

I think it's reasonable to ask why - I mean what is in fact the advantage of living so close to the elements? After all, the elements - of earth, water, fire and air - are not *necessarily* so pleasant to live with. They're fine to *look* at... yes, it's lovely to drive through the mountains, take a train to the seaside, or watch a documentary about wildlife. But why live in it? In real life the earth is hard, stony, or muddy and dirty. Water is wet and damp. In this country, it's cold. Why forsake one's carpets, hot running water, bathroom and mains electricity? Why go somewhere with just an earth toilet, where water has to be carried in buckets, and where the fire keeps going out?

Well, if you've ever been away in the country or down by the sea, or up in the mountains, you know why. Nearly everyone these days lives in a highly artificial environment. There's a sense of wellbeing and beauty simply being where things are not man-made. Where at night you can look up and see the moon and the stars, instead of a ghastly electric glare. That's why. It seems to me that contact with nature, in itself, nourishes some kind of human need.

I wonder if that's true, though. Why should it matter how artificially we live?

I can't easily answer this. But I think meditation might help us understand it, because meditation works by exposing our artificiality, and then dissolving it. Meditation practice purifies us of our artificiality simply by our paying attention to our experience. That's meditation in a nutshell - giving attention to experience. But the attention isn't just mental. The attention is also something we do with our heart. The heart is all about what we wish and hope for; it's about what we want. And what we want in meditation is to find some truth. So looking at it in *that* way, meditation becomes something like prayer. Because in our heart we *want* authenticity. It's because we badly need something real, something genuine - that's why we give our attention in meditation.

And this very heartfelt attention that is meditation brings new awareness. Our awareness of ourselves, of others, of our senses and of the whole world is continually refreshed as we practice. And in the long term, after much practice and reflection, we come to a more philosophical awareness, a kind of sensitivity to reality itself - of the ultimate truth about the nature of existence. And that's the beginning of wisdom. I think it takes a long, long time for our wisdom to come to fruition - but still, I think some of it starts sprouting in us right from the very beginning.

So summarising, we can say that on the Buddhist path our artificiality gradually drops away and we become more natural and real.

A meditation practice that is especially focused on this approach of nature is the meditation on the elements. Earth, water, fire, and air are known in all pagan traditions, and they embrace everything we can possibly

experience. And then in Buddhist tradition experience is itself embraced by space and consciousness, two elements which in a sense are even more elemental.

All six elements are always with us. Some things are hard and resistant, like this platform, and my body standing on it. That's the earth element. Well actually, my body's *outer surface* is an expression of the earth element; but what about inside it? Inside, there's all kinds of colourful fluid, jelly and goo flowing about - so that's the water element. And obviously there's water outside, too, for example there's some in this glass, and the glass itself, being hard, is the earth element. So in various forms, earth and water are everywhere. Also everything is hot or cold; I'm fairly warm, but the water and its glass are cool. So that's temperature, that's the fire element. And it's all moving around, with the movement of the planet and the beating of my heart. That movement is the air element. So everything I experience is a combination of these elements. My body has firmness; it has fluidity; it is warm or cold, and it is in continual motion. And so is everything, everywhere, universally.

The element of space is even more basic inasmuch as it's what gives the material world its place to be in. My body is a shape in space. It occupies space; it moves around in space; it constantly changes its shape in space. But then consciousness, the sixth element, is even more basic than that, because we *experience* space and all the other elements. Everything, even space, depends on our *experiencing* it. The *faculty* of experience is basic to experiencing any kind of world. It's a very simple truth: if we close our eyes and ears, we don't see or hear anything. We won't be conscious of any sights or sounds. So the consciousness element really is basic; it is everything really, it is the whole world - it is whatever is seen, heard, smelled, tasted. Also it's whatever is felt, imagined, or thought about. Consciousness is the ultimate element - or at least, so it would seem.

You can see how meditation on these elements can bring us closer to an experience of our real nature. But we're not usually so closely in touch. Naturalness doesn't come as easily as we'd like, and it's partly due to our history. Here in Europe at least, pagan or natural values were suppressed for centuries by authoritarian religion. We are still only starting to see the damage that has caused, let alone break free from it. Our connection with nature can't actually be broken, but emotionally we are so deeply involved with authoritarianism that it's hard to see much value in being more connected with nature. The only way is to experience natural reality for ourselves. It's an issue not of theory, but of practice.

There are actually many ways to practise this. Today, though, we're using our experience of the six elements.

For most people the earth element is the easiest element to experience directly. Everyone's body has parts that are hard, firm, and durable. Earth is our muscles and bones; our fingernails and toenails; our hair and skin. And of course it's everything out there that is solid, too. So when we do this, whether we're sitting in formal meditation practice, or we're walking around, doing all the usual things we do, we try to get an increasingly strong sense of that nature, that quality of earth that is everywhere. We can feel it bending and stretching as we breathe. We can feel it in the ground under our feet, in the chair we're sitting on, in our homes and kitchens and on roads and in cars and among fields and trees, up mountains - and finally in the white cliffs that run down to the golden sandy beach.

But when we walk out from there, that gold sandy beach gets gradually wetter, and then we are finally paddling, and we've arrived at the edge of a vast ocean. We've arrived at the element water. I don't know about you, but for me there is an enormous shift there. Water is not just a different element... next on the list, element number two... No, it is another world. Water, water, see the water flow, sparkling, dancing, see the water flow. There's a magical touch here. The quality of liquid is utterly different to that of earth. The dry solid forms of earth are hard-edged and rigid. Liquid things are not shapeless, but their shapes always come from what contains them. Water runs down this channel and that channel, forms into pools and puddles and flows on and on, down, down, and down, until finally it reaches the ocean, and even in the ocean the flow never stops. The ocean flows within itself.

So the practice is to appreciate this, to get involved in the sensation, the world of water. Not just H₂O, you understand, but the whole liquid dimension of things. Rain. Oil. Tea. Soup. Mud. Porridge. Everything that flows. But we ourselves carry, wherever we go, a range of liquid substances. We always take along some urine. We always have lots of blood with us, and plenty of saliva and digestive juices as well. These we absolutely take for granted. We hardly ever even think of them as they carry on, tirelessly pumping around, doing their work, keeping us alive. We don't generally feel much in the way of gratitude. In fact, we tend to think of our bodily fluids as a little unclean or indelicate somehow. There's a taboo against mentioning them to others.

I think that feeling reveals some of the conditioning we have inherited, the conditioning that draws us into an artificial way of life. But in this meditation practice we start undoing all those anxious, fearful complexes. And we start simply accepting the elements as they are. We enlarge our awareness to include them. We remember that the elements are simply what's there all the time - and how truly odd it is that we don't accept them. Yet

our oddness is real - we really don't like to think, do we, of all that blood pumping around. Yet it never stops pumping. And so it seems that we need to find a way to befriend the elements. I think the elements are very ready to reciprocate our friendship.

Because the elements are not things, they are qualities. Qualities that never exist alone. The elements coexist; they are all together, all of a piece. Earth and water, for example, are always relatively warm or cold. The earth of my bones and the water of my blood are always relatively warm, warmed by the Fire element. Their temperature is governed by the presence of the Sun, the ultimate source of all heat. When the sun isn't around, it gets cold; if there were no sun at all, there could be no life. I wonder if there is a limit to how hot or how cold things can get; I suspect that the potential, either way, is infinite, which is quite a thought.

Physical heat is important emotionally. If it's *too* hot, I feel oppressed, I feel dull, I can't do anything. I'm definitely a cold-climate sort of person, I love snow and mountain air. So that's the way I notice this element. Fire is another world, with its own particular associations, myths and images. Can we get into that world, can we learn to experience the fire element all around, understand how basic it is? That's the practice: experiencing it, relating to it, understanding it, learning from it.

Personally, I find it's harder to engage with the fire element. In the days when we used to worship the sun, I think we were more in touch with the elemental aspect of fire. We used to rejoice in the fact that it just keeps coming up over the horizon, unfailingly, every morning. There's that Rolf Harris aborigine song isn't there, with the didgeridoo - '*Sun Arise... every every morning...*' But actually, when the sun comes up we don't feel anything, we don't feel grateful, or secure, do we? And very few people I know actually light a real fire to warm themselves. People just switch something on; it then gets warm. And 'it' stays warm until they switch 'it' off. That's our 'simplicity'. But behind that simple switch lies much complexity, and it comes, I think, at a price.

Now the fourth element of wind or air. Nowadays I call this the wind element for a couple of reasons. First 'wind' is what the word *vāio* actually means. It comes from *vāta* which is connected with the Latin *ventus*, and from there with words like ventilation and vent. *Vāio* doesn't mean air in the usual sense of our atmosphere. It's air in the sense of wind - it's *moving* air. In fact it's not the air, but the movement itself. *Vaio* is the element of motion.

In Indo-Tibetan meditation, yoga and medicine systems there is a great deal that is based on the notion of winds or the experience of moving energy inside the body. Obviously there is the circulation of the blood, the digestion of food, etc. This movement is all *vāyo*, along with all the literal winds in the body - the burps, the farts and the rumbling intestines. But there are subtler energies moving around too. For example there are the nervous energies that move in correspondence with our emotions. When we are aroused by hatred or craving - even very slightly - something subtly physical happens in the body. And we can notice these physical changes.

In recent years I've learned that when my body heat starts rising in a certain kind of way, it's because I am starting to feel oppressed somehow. Next thing, I start feeling irritated or upset. But if I can notice that subtle sign first, then I can say to myself - Whoa, Kamalashila! Be careful! Protect yourself! Watch out you don't do something silly! And on my good days, when I can actually listen to my own advice, I can save myself some trouble. Usually at that stage it's not too hard to make an adjustment. For example, maybe I'm cooking or doing some kind of task, but I'm feeling a bit impatient for some reason and my mind is only half on it. If I see the signs, it's quite obvious that if I just get more impatient I'm just going to suffer. Seeing it at *that* stage, I can quite easily relax. It's when it goes past that stage, and I've already got into an impatient, irritated mood, that it is much more difficult to relax.

For me, the transformation of emotion is not just a case of avoiding causing trouble; it's also about staying with the dharma, with reality. If I get too upset, it's much harder to recall it, and I just get stuck in that upset state. I know that in theory I should be able to look straight into any mental state, even the most extreme negative state, and just see that it is something conditioned, something empty, something which I simply don't need to get involved with. Something which, actually, no one is involved with. Which actually was never like that in the first place. And on a good day, that can be done. But it is still very difficult, because I am often so attached to my emotions and I forget the spaciousness of everything.

The practice which helps me create spaciousness is to recollect the elements, including this *vaio*dhātu, the element of continual movement. It helps me to stay in touch with my real nature. In my meditation book I wrote about the absent-minded professor type of person, who is always thinking and forgets the physical world around him. If I'm not careful, I get rather like that! I need to stay aware of the wind element, which is so vast, so extensive, so multidimensional. And I've not told you the half of it, because as well as subtle *physical* energies, there is the movement of the *mind* as it darts here and there. There's the movement of the mind within itself, in the form of thoughts and perceptions. All that is also the *vaio*dhātu. But let's come back to that later, because we mustn't neglect the two remaining elements.

So the next, the fifth, is the element of space. Space is the great container of all things. Everything's *in* space - all this incredible diversity, all these amazing formations of earth, water, fire and wind. Every single thing, even movement, takes up its place in space. Each of us is occupying space. This room, these seats and these walls, all fit perfectly into their own specially shaped spaces. Each one of our in-breaths and out-breaths is making a unique shape in space. When we consider the whole of London, the whole of Britain, the whole planet, the sun and the moon, and the whole galaxy of forms - the stars, the whole universe - we see for a moment just how incredibly accommodating the space is in which everything is moving.

And it is more than just vast. Space is boundless. It is beyond all measure. There is no end to it. That's such an extraordinary thought. It'd be an even more extraordinary reality to comprehend... if we could really comprehend it. But we can't actually comprehend anything infinite or boundless - all we can comprehend is the *idea* of boundlessness. To really comprehend boundlessness, we'd have to be boundless ourselves, we'd have to have become completely enlightened. And of course, as we know, we can in fact do that.

Anyway... finally there's the sixth element, that of consciousness. While I've been speaking of earth, water, fire, wind, and space I hope you've been able to make some kind of contact with each one. These elements all manifest in space. Even air is a movement in space. But space itself, and the four great elements which take up space, itself happens in an even more basic element. The four great elements and the space they occupy are all *experiences*. They are all something we are *conscious* of: that is, they're all embraced within the element of consciousness.

What is the element of consciousness? Is there a particular thing that it is? How do you measure consciousness, how do you even catch hold of it... *where* is it? These questions are hard to answer, and that's why this term 'element' is rather useful. It just refers to the 'fact' of consciousness. Whatever consciousness might be, it's a fact. Whether we are conscious of a thought or a feeling inside, or of something physical outside, it's undeniable that we are having that experience. Our bodies are something we experience. What we see through our eyes and taste with our tongues are experiences. Our thoughts we experience; our feelings we experience. It's all an experience. Our whole life has been an experience; and even death will be an experience.

Thus everything takes place in experience, in the consciousness element. In this meditation practice we don't try to work out what consciousness is, because we'd just end up with some theory; and it's hard to experience a theory. But it's easy to experience consciousness. It is simply true always - *that* we are having - yet another - experience. And *that* is the practice, to be fully aware of the reality of each moment of experience, as it comes and goes, arises and disappears. We can then gradually start seeing into what experience really is.

So that is the start, at least, of the six element practice: *experiencing* the elements. And this is the point where questions quite naturally arise, and we start asking things like 'why am I doing this' and 'what is the point, where is this leading'. This is good, that we start to question, because it shows the practice is starting to bite. We are starting to go a bit more deeply into it.

We need to recall that the reason for any Buddhist practice is to develop liberating awareness. We would all of us be of more use to others if we were happier, more satisfied, wiser, kinder, more patient and at ease. Unfortunately we are all of us - at times and to various degrees - unhappy, frustrated, unwise, unkind, impatient, and ill at ease. I'm sorry, but it's true! And to that degree, we are only of partial benefit to others. Not to mention ourselves. And it's all because we are relatively unaware - because we do not give enough attention to what actually happens. It is that unawareness that binds us into habit patterns that are frustrating, unwise, unkind to ourselves, unkind to others. Of course we don't like being like that; no one does. But we *are* like that, and sometimes we feel the trap we are in. We are trapped in a fuzz of habit. Developing awareness of what really happens, just at a very basic, simple level, starts opening out - unsticking - all that fuzz. It unravels it; it relaxes it. It is like when the sun appears - the morning fog and mist begins to disappear and everything just becomes clear and straightforward.

So we need to understand that this is what the Dharma does. We need to trust it, otherwise we won't be able to let it in, we won't be able to let it expose and transform our artificiality. There's many a person has started out on the Buddhist path and stopped short, at least for the time being, because they just couldn't let the dharma in. Indeed we've all done it - indeed, we often do it. But we can pick our confidence up again; and that's how it works. Buddhist practice causes radical change in our lives, and it's natural sometimes to feel resistance. Often we'll need to pause, reconsider and rediscover our direction. There are times when we need to ask questions, do necessary study, do research, do retreats, see teachers and have all kinds of conversations. We need all that to establish and re-establish our confidence in the Dharma. Then we can go more deeply into meditation again.

The essence of any Buddhist meditation is realising the natural state of things and being changed by that realisation. Realisation is the point of all our practices - mindfulness of breathing, metta-bhavana, sadhana - also puja, study, and spiritual friendship. It should be *why* one does any Buddhist practice. But how do we recognise

it, how can we have confidence that we have it? Well, that's not an easy question. Realisation is something very profound, and also very individual and personal, so it cannot properly be explained in words. But let's try to see if there is anything that we can notice is there in our own experience already. After all, we all have a mind. We all exist. We are all real. Aren't we? This is happening - isn't it?! The mere fact that we don't *realise* the nature of mind or the ultimate nature of reality doesn't obstruct that reality. There isn't anything going on *but* reality - it's just that we don't see it, don't know it, don't recognise it, and so can't have confidence in it. Obviously it's there all the time. We just don't know what to look for.

But we can learn. Over time we can train ourselves in looking into the nature of reality. It isn't so hard to recognise, to some extent at least, what Buddhism calls the emptiness of things. In other words the spaciousness, the magical elusive liberating quality of everything. We've probably all had some kind of glimpse, though we may not have realised what it was.

There are many different ways into this, and I'm going to mention two of them.

One very good way is to take notice of all the inconsistencies, all the incongruities and irregularities that are there all the time. These are opportunities for liberation, they create gaps, make spaces we can use in ways I'll show in a minute. Normally, we prefer not to look at inconsistencies. It's more comfortable and convenient to ignore them, or at least that's how it feels. But then of course our delusions just continue causing us problems.

So let's take a prime example of the kind of incongruity I'm talking about. If we take a serious look into our experience, we'll catch ourselves constantly thinking, 'this is me', or 'this is mine'. This is totally normal. But actually it is *highly* incongruous. It doesn't fit reality at all. Things are never, ever like that.

Yet it's how we always relate to things. My house, we say. My garden. My car. My trousers. My glasses. My hair. My cheque book. My husband. My country. Of course there is usually a sense in which it's accurate to think in such terms. In the case of 'my' house and garden, it's accurate in a legal sense. But in real terms, there is just a person here and a house there. The relationship is purely legal. When we die, someone else will have just the same relationship with it. Unless it's a completely new house, there will have been many others who have already had that relationship. So the way that it is ours is not firm and fixed, as we tend to assume. Our assumption is incongruous; it doesn't fit - it isn't *true*. We are pulling the wool over our own eyes. And the same goes, not only for houses, but absolutely everything in our experience, including our own body. In what accurate sense do you 'own' your body? Even legally? I know it feels as though you do, but in reality, who exactly owns what? There's a habitual notion there which we can open up and learn from. In truth, the idea is *very* incongruous. What is happening just isn't like that. *How* it is, is not easy to say! - but it's not like that.

Now this, you may think, is a very strange pursuit. But the really strange thing is the delusion the practice is exposing. It is truly strange, if we can bear to consider the issue, to regard things like our body as 'mine'. But the feeling is very strong, isn't it? It is perhaps the strongest set of feelings we have. Indeed our notions of 'me' and 'mine' are loaded with a huge potential for unclarity, confusion, and powerful emotion. We all become enormously distressed, and enormously elated, when the feeling of 'me' is threatened or gratified. Of course we do. But if, even for a few moments, we can relax that tendency to get emotionally aroused, and simply experience the situation as it actually is, something relaxes. Life becomes simpler. Life becomes more elemental, more natural, more real.

So here's something already very much in our present experience, that we can use to bring the dharma to life. Of course it's something very subtle and awkward to get at. It's hard to recognise our ego grasping, because we don't want to let it go. But when we start noticing the suffering it causes everyone - not to mention ourselves - we start getting genuinely interested in liberating ourselves from it. Once we get genuinely interested, we start seeing it much more often. And once we start seeing it, we'll naturally want to let it go.

What do we actually see? This is very interesting. There's that grasping I've just mentioned, grasping at an artificial ownership of things for the sake of an artificial sense of security. But we only have to stay with that realisation for a little while to see that things can never actually be grasped in the first place. This is the magical aspect of emptiness. Actually, things in themselves are completely free. A house is just a house. Trousers are just trousers. Food is just food. There is never anything extra. If we relax the tension we bring to every situation with our ego grasping, it is already liberated. And this is something that is both totally amazing and totally ordinary.

Now wait a minute, you may think - my relationships with those things may be empty, the relationships may be messy and painful sometimes, but at the same time... they are my life! They are everything to me. So does Buddhism want to take my life away from me? No, of course it doesn't - what it's saying is that the more we grasp, the more our life becomes artificial and dysfunctional. Ego grasping is what turns life into samsara. But life doesn't have to be like that. Life can be nirvana, liberation - we can come to see that the whole of

existence is intrinsically free in its own nature.

So we can start to realise this by looking at the little incongruities the pop up all over the place, and seeing how they point out the nature of things. That's, if you like, the indirect method. But there are also more direct ways of seeing emptiness.

This is the second approach I had in mind. We can learn to look at anything, anything whatsoever, and simply see, directly, its free and spacious nature.

For example earlier on we were discussing the wind element, the element of movement in the universe, and I said, well the mind also moves, there are winds in the mind. The mind is sometimes relatively still, perhaps in deep meditation it becomes totally still - certainly the winds become very subtle. At other times there are breezes, gusts, gales - even whirlwinds and tornadoes coming our way. We can be overwhelmed by the power of thoughts and perceptions. We usually take them to be very concrete and real somehow. But they are not. They are just empty. You can look at all these moving thoughts and perceptions and see directly how empty and spacious it all is.

You can try doing this as I speak. At least, I find that when I'm listening to a talk I'm fairly aware of my thoughts. Sometimes I'm thinking about what the speaker is saying... sometimes not... I get involved in my own responses. For the purpose of this exercise it doesn't matter at all what the thought is - what matters is that it's there. Now, don't you find that when you look into the actual thought, it somehow disappears so that you wonder - where did it go? Isn't there an elusive, transparent quality to our thoughts, so they somehow seem to slide out of one's grasp?

There may have been some content to the thought, content that one could perhaps express in words. But in the actual experience of a thought, where exactly is its content? This is very interesting to look into. You start to wonder, was it ever actually there? What was there? And what would it have meant, for it to be there? I mean where would it have been... where is this all happening? I hope you don't think I'm trying to confuse you. I find that if I really try to stay with the actual experience of thinking, the more I have to abandon my assumptions about what is happening. Thoughts don't stop being meaningful - one's experience is not reduced or negated at all. But the actual display of meaning in our thoughts is never concrete - we can never get hold of it. What would get hold of what?

If you've ever tried to write thoughts down, you'll know that actually, what you write down is never thoughts. What we write down, obviously, is words. Words are something quite different.

So in all these ways, thoughts are what Buddhism calls, for want of a better word, empty. They just cannot be taken hold of. We can't even say they really exist - but at the same time, it's absurd to say that they don't. And this is a reality that we can experience any time.

It's the same for all other objects of consciousness - feelings, emotions, and our entire perception of the material world. They all have this elusive, ungraspable quality. It is their magic quality. They are there, yet not there. Isn't this amazing? That existence is so unexplainable. That even though we seem so much in control of things, we have so little idea of what things are.

This magic empty quality is the nature of all things. Emptiness is, in fact, the ultimate element, because even mind, even consciousness, the most inclusive of all the elements, the element in which all other elements take place, is itself embraced by the nature of emptiness. Emptiness, the unobstructed freedom of everything, is nature - it's the real nature. If we could see that consistently, we'd really be living naturally. That naturalness would be what Buddhism calls nirvana.

The Buddha described nirvana in just these terms. The natural state of nirvana, he says in the *Udana*, is where the elements of water, earth, fire, and wind find no footing at all, there's no place for them really. They are totally ungraspable.

So on that note, we can bring our meditation to an end. But before we finish, I think we need to return to earth - though of course, we never really left it.

So let me briefly recall our theme of natural living in the ordinary, not-yet-enlightened sense. Surely it would benefit us to live in less artificial ways. How to do it will require a lot of consideration, but I mean the artificiality of our present culture is really quite *extreme*. Sometimes in this country we hardly go outside a building - or a car - for weeks on end. We are using machines to do every conceivable task, even to clean our own teeth. And because we do less and less physical work, we are either overweight, or we're investing lots of extra time on special exercise regimes. I don't have anything at all against machines or technology - I mean, I've got a car, a mobile phone, and two computers - but I do think it can be much better used.

For me, Buddhafield somehow symbolises this whole issue. I don't see Buddhafield as a crude escape into a kind of romantic primitivism, a place where you just take off your clothes and bang drums. Some people might do that; I do do that. But that is nothing in itself - it's only a step on the way. That word 'primitive' comes from the idea of primacy, what is primary, what comes first, what's essential - what is elemental. It is an attempt to find true simplicity. True simplicity is whatever allows more space, more awareness, more room for compassion and for wisdom. It doesn't mean you live in the town *or* in the country, in a house *or* a tipi or even a cardboard box. The ideal of simplicity is a search for what is truly important. And what is truly important is enlightenment or liberation from tunnel vision (as it's sometimes called). That liberation is all I have been talking about this morning. The liberation of becoming more natural, more in tune with our true nature, our enlightened nature. And the ways we can dissolve the artificiality in our lives, especially the practice of awareness of the universal elements of the earth, the water, the fire, the wind, space and consciousness.