

Responding to climate, culture and environmental changes

4 Extracts taken from 'The Happy Twins: Dzogchen and Mahamudra'¹

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¹ Two texts were studied on this retreat. The Mirror of Luminous Revelation (from Nuden Dorje Drophan Lingpa) and The Mahamudra Middle Way of the Ganges (from Tilopa).

Excerpt 1

Engaged buddhism

In buddhism we look at four factors in our practice: **the view, the meditation, the conduct or behaviour, and the result.** Often we see conduct as something which is minor or secondary and the main thing is the view. However we live in a time of great change (environmental, ecological, political...) and at a time like this there is a pressure to act, to do something. Our conduct has to shift in order to be connected to the world as it is.

Buddha has three aspects: the **dharmakaya, the sambhogakaya and the nirmanakaya.** The dharmakaya is the open buddha mind, unborn from the very beginning – ever fresh – ever open. This is the truth of our own mind. This mind is not just a big empty space, it is radiant with clarity and lucidity.

It sees and this seeing is the connectivity; the interplay of subject and object. This is a pleasurable interplay and that is why it is called sambhogakaya: the aspect of enjoyment. Everything that we see in this visual field, the colours, the shapes of different people's bodies, their hair and so on is a field of incredible richness and variety which doesn't have to be understood or interpreted, but you can have an immediate response. You are just here with different people in different ways.

Manifesting from this we have the nirmanakaya which is the mode of apparition. Generally, an apparition is a kind of ghost-like form. This is the real meaning of the Tibetan word *trulpai ku* [Tib. sPrul Pa'i sKu]; it means a kind of magical formation, something which shows appearance and emptiness. Traditional examples of appearance and emptiness are rainbows; the reflection of a full moon in a pond; a mirage – something which you see but which you can't get. Our manifestation is like that. It is not just that some special lama is called a tulku – an emanation – and that we are some peasant out in the mud digging up potatoes.

We are also creatures of light. We are energy. We are not things. We make ourselves dull, heavy and stupid by the accumulation of beliefs and ideas compacted together. The density of our being is our accumulation of ideas about ourselves. An idea is something very subtle and soft like a feather of a very small bird. But then you put one feather on top of another feather and gradually they start to accumulate. There is one gram and then ten grams and then a kilo.

As we go through life we accumulate experience after experience. Each experience is hardly graspable – there is almost nothing there – but we find a way to take hold of it and start to build up a sense of who we are, what we like, or what we don't like. On the basis of that we have the solidity of ourselves, which in a world where other people seem solid, seems not a bad defence. *'I don't want to be just a little puff of wind. I have to be someone. I have to stand up for myself. I have to find myself. I have to find my way.'*

These are the demands of this culture, so without throwing away these structures we want to deconstruct them from the inside to see the emptiness of the formation and to see that the formation is a pulsation of energy. Energy has power. When the wind blows, the leaves come flying off the trees. Although

you can't grasp energy it is powerful. When the wind comes roaring up the valley the first line of trees often get blown over. Wind has power.

The nebulous, the unshaped-ness, the ungraspable, is also powerful. By coming to see our own dynamic presence we start to be aware that other people are also a dynamic presence; they are not a thing. You cannot take hold of another person. Each person is a showing of the creativity of the ground. We are each here manifesting second by second, moment-by-moment, which means that each little thing we do is very important.

For example, the tantric tradition places emphasis on mudras and on tunes for chanting. These are outer ways of pointing to the precision of the moment. If you learn a mudra then you know it should be done a certain way. However in the path that we follow we are not so concerned with how things *should* be; we want to attend to what *is*.

Look at the people around you; notice their posture. Some people hold their shoulders back; some people have their shoulders collapsed; some people's heads are forward as if they are carrying a twenty-kilo weight. This is us. This is not a secondary factor. This is our manifestation. We are precisely this in this moment – this and not the other. But in the next moment our posture changes, our gestures change, the rate of our breathing changes, the contents of our thoughts, feelings and sensations change. Each person is just this, then just that, then just something else.

So how shall we be to each other then? We have to be present. We have to be open. We have to be responsive. We have to see how other people are. Some people are available. Some people are not so available. Some people are here for the first time and may be a little bit shy. They feel they would like to hold back. They don't want to be pulled in yet. Being human, we tend to be ambivalent, so maybe we also want to be invited in as well.

How can I know what you would like? We don't know. We have to make a gesture and if it is not responded to by the other person we rock backwards. We are creatures of pulsation not of demand. We are not using other people to reassure ourselves that we are okay. The basis of our being okay is the ground of our being, which is *kuntuzangpo* – pure from the very beginning. When we realise the primordial purity of our own mind, and we settle in that, then it's fine. We don't need other people to make us okay. If I am going towards the other, we are for the other.

In the tradition it is said that the dharmakaya, or the truth of your own mind, is for yourself... That is what you need to get. You need to awaken to how your mind is. The form aspects, the sambhogakaya and the nirmanakaya, are for the other therefore, as we manifest, we are in our connectivity.

This is the fundamental shift in our orientation. It is not that I am manifesting as me, for me, and then, secondarily, I look around and assess who here can be of advantage to me, or who here could be some danger or difficulty for me. That would be the positioning of the ego. What we want to see is that I am here for you because you are me. You are me in the sense that as I am here and I relate to you, how I am is inseparable from how you are. If you smile at someone and they look a bit glazed, you get a particular feeling. If they smile back at you and give you a hug you get another kind of feeling. The fact that they smile at you and give you a

hug doesn't mean that they particularly like you. It means that their energy was available to do that. The fact that they look glazed may have nothing to do with you; it may be that they are just preoccupied with something in themselves. If my basic mode of interpretation is self-referential, if I think that everything in the world is a communication about me, then I am going to start manipulating other people in order to get what I want – more attention from the people who seem to like me and less attention from the people who seem not to like me. Back in the usual game of ego manipulation.

However during this retreat we have a great chance to increase our sensitivity to the nuances, to the micro-movements of how we pulsate in presence with other people. Are we coming to the world with a demand? Are we saying love me, find me interesting, be somebody on whom I can rely? Or are we just responding into the moment? Once we formulate a person as a person they have already become a thing: 'They are like that.' You start to make predictions about their behaviour and to get trapped in predictions is terrible.

I have mentioned before that when I was little and was out with my mother she might meet some of her friends. They'd start talking away and she might start talking to them about me. *'Ah, Jimmy is like this... he is finding it all quite difficult...'* I would get so angry. We know what that is like. You are just yourself and then you realise that somehow there is a story about you. Someone else has got a shape of you, and they think that is the truth of you. For me that was a very scary experience – that somehow my just-being-me-ness had cast a shadow which was picked up by my parents. They were thinking about me, because all parents worry about their kids, but in that concern they had created a 'little Jimmy' who wasn't me at all.

That is our life. We create these representations and images of other people and in that we can easily lose the freshness because when we worry about someone we are worrying about our idea of them. We can talk with a person and have direct communication, but it is better not to be worried. If somebody says, *'I am really worried about you...'* Whoa! We need to be open and to see and to respond flexibly to what is there.

The paths of dzogchen and mahamudra practice are the same: it is all about softening. It is not about power or about strengthening your position and acting from a power base in order to shift the world. It is about relaxing into the open ground and trusting that the energy of the ground will manifest in connectivity.

When we say 'ground' we mean the basis out of which we manifest; this is the open, empty, ungraspable quality. (Dharmakaya) This manifestation arises as the undivided field of clarity. (Sambhogakaya) We feel the sensations in our body, we have our memories, we look around and different thoughts arise. We see the walls, the colours, the trees out of the window, and so on. All of this is arising at once – undivided, non-dual. Inside that we have precise moments of connectivity (Nirmanakaya) in which we adjust in order to get some proximity with the other person. We come into precise formation moment-by-moment within the undivided field, which is the lucid shining display of the open empty ground. This is the language of dzogchen.

Mahamudra uses slightly different language and we will come to that as we are lucky to have quite a lot of time together.

The key thing for each of us is to enjoy the possibility of being here in a new way; to focus on our senses and bring out the clarity of that.

We are in this very beautiful countryside and when we walk out we can see this vast forest. But what we can see in the forest is that all is not well with the trees. Many trees are sick and dying and these are aspects of climate change, new diseases, new insects, and other changes coming into the world.

Countries wonder and worry about immigration but it is not just people arriving over the border that are immigrants. As the climate changes, different species arrive. Mosquitoes are moving further north carrying the malarial virus. Grey squirrels were introduced to stately homes in England as an ornamental species and since then they have killed off most of the red squirrels. It is very rare now to see red squirrels in Britain. Different species come in. Giant crabs are coming down from the Norwegian coast to the British coastline and are killing off native crabs. Jellyfish are thriving and spreading worldwide in our warmer nutrient-rich waters. The expansion of some species and contraction of others goes on all the time. This affects the world that we live in. As the climate warms up and the weather changes this is supportive for some species and not for others.

This is an ever-changing world and it means that for many people their life situation is catastrophic. The Sahel region in north Africa is getting hotter and less rain is falling. Cattle are dying, water holes are drying up, livelihoods are destroyed and people displaced. There is political instability. All over the world we see these things happening. The glaciers in the Himalayas are drying up and melting away. Dams are built in Tibet to divert water to China, leaving India vulnerable.

Hostility between nations can be acted out in terms of the control of natural resources. This is all catastrophic. We are coming into times of deep conflict. Implicit in the concept of the nation state is the drive to benefit your own people. That may seem a noble aim, but the shadow is *'We don't care about the rest of you. Our people come first. Your needs are not relevant to us.'* That is splitting. The Buddha showed that ignorance is characterised by splitting. It is a separation of self and other: me first, you second. When that is established on a national level you get conflict. It is becoming obvious that if a solution is to be found for global warming it will need to be universal and global and that people will need to collaborate.

What can we do? When we are here we can observe if and how we collaborate with each other. Are we thoughtful? There are lots of things to be done. Some of our ritual practices involve offerings that need to be prepared. Some people will need to go to the market to buy things; some people will need to tidy the room and prepare the water bowls, and so on. During this brief period when we are together can we find a togetherness which is not a community, but a comity? Comity refers to a functioning together as a brief organisational unit which then dissolves.

This was very common in Tibet where nomads and yogis would gather for religious teaching or a ceremony, put up their tents, and practise together. Afterwards they would take their tents down and go off in their different directions. All that would be left on the open plain would be a few blackened stones where their fires had been. This is a very beautiful way to live – not to own or build up territory, but to work into the circumstances of the situation.

One of the things I would like us to do in our time together here is explore how a buddhist understanding can help us think and act in relation to climate change. This afternoon there is some free time. You might go out into the forest and see for yourself what is happening to the trees; it is very shocking. Shocks

can either put us into avoidance – *'I don't want to know. This is too much. I feel overwhelmed.'* – or they can make us more awake, and wanting to do something. Which brings us back to asking, *'What is the basis for mobilisation?'*

This is where the nature of the problem arises. When the basis of mobilisation is our ego sense of self, and our ego is suffused with habits of aversion, aggression, of desire, or jealousy or envy, then a lot of intensity arises. In Britain a group called Extinction Rebellion has led a lot of protests. What happens is generally very good because protesters do need to raise awareness and consciousness but in some of the protests the feeling tone can be quite aggressive. *'I am going to interrupt other people's lives.'* Because every act of aggression involves a pushing out it is likely to evoke a pushing back, and so we get some hostility. When we have hostility we don't have collaboration or mutual understanding; we just have more splitting into them and us.

Our understanding of dependent co-origination can help us frame a sense of how to interact with people as they are, rather than splitting them into good guys and the bad guys, people I can get along with and people I don't want anything to do with. Once we see that everything arises from the same ground and that our connectivity is already established, then we are always already related to everyone including the CEOs, oligarchs and so-called terrorists. These are all people with buddha nature. These are people who have worldly concerns in wanting to make money, have a nice lifestyle and make improvements for their country. We can understand their motives, but their view is limited because they are not wanting to attend to the consequences of their actions. They may be thinking, in terms of the capitalist structure, of the profit motive. *'If we do this, and the costs of production are this, then the market price can be that and we can make a profit which will make our shareholders happy, therefore it's worth doing.'* They are thinking about cause and effect in a particular way.

From the buddhist point of view, we take the same understanding of cause and effect but open up the frame and explore the consequences of behaving in this way. Unless we include the long-term consequences with the immediate notion of cause and effect, then we have the false notion that an action which is destructive is actually virtuous. *'This year we are able to give a dividend of six and a half per cent. The shareholders are very happy. The management is going well so therefore we are going to give our senior executives a very big bonus because they have done well.'* Done well, yes, but only inside their frame of reference.

When we look at ourselves we may find that we also operate inside quite small frames of reference, so unless we are willing to open up our frame of reference and see how our concerns fit into this wider frame of interaction and co-emergence, we don't really have an ethical basis for challenging other people. We end up in a kind of hypocritical situation.

This is our chance to use the meditation practice to understand, to go deep, and to have some awakening and clarity – then use that as the basis of thinking about conduct. How shall we behave towards people? We should be respectful. People are limited and so they cause a lot of trouble. What is causing the trouble? Their limitation. These people have buddha nature. If we see a person only as their limitation and get angry with them because of what they do, then we should try not to do that because what we are doing is just confirming their limited shape. We are not inviting them to a wider sense of who they are; we are just saying

you are the enemy, you are the problem and you are the cause. It is very unlikely that that will help people to change.

The nirmanakaya – our manifesting into the world – is manifesting into a world of already connectedness. What it means is that we have to stay with our connection even with people we don't like, which means we have to look at what it means to not like. 'I don't like what they do.' But they like what they do, so it is me against them – right and wrong – ding dong – fighting. 'I don't like what they do.' What value does that have? If I take 'I don't like what they do' out of it and say, 'This is what they do' then we have a simpler description of what is actually occurring. We are returning to the phenomena and taking the emotion out of it.

Buddhism often refers to the emotions as the Five Poisons: the mental dullness of taking things as separate and strongly real; the tendency to get more of what we like and want; the tendency to push away what we don't like; the tendency to jealousy and insecurity; and pride, which is feeling safe and secure in our self-identity. These inflections – these twists and turns which put energy and passion into our position – make it very difficult to see clearly, because once we have already decided that what other people do is bad and wrong, conflict is inevitable.

Part of our practice is to move towards a deep understanding of what the mahayana tradition calls the **Two Truths: Relative Truth and Absolute Truth**. In Relative Truth we see everything as relative to every other thing, although relativity is usually obscured because what we see are discrete entities: we see other people as separate, strongly real, and internally determined. Mahayana says there are two aspects to Relative Truth: impure and pure.

With **Impure Relative Truth** we have a sense of other people alongside a sense of whether we like or don't like them. Some people are easy to get on with and some people are not easy to get on with. If I find it difficult to talk with you I think you are a difficult person. I go from my subjective feeling which might make me feel inadequate, *'I find it difficult to talk with you'*, and beneficially flip it over to *'You are a difficult person. The reason it's difficult to speak with you is because you are difficult to speak with.'* We project our problem into the other and see them as a site infected with real limitation, which is why I can reassure myself that *'I like everyone, but you are a bit difficult. It must be you, because I am a nice person.'* That is Impure Relative Truth: a limited view enriched with the emotional quality of liking and not liking.

The purifying starts when we begin to see that you are like this, and I am like that, and both are just patterns. By taking away the evaluation of good and bad, right and wrong, winning and losing, we simply see a field of patterning and that some of the patterns are more harmonious and others are more disharmonious. That is just how it is. If we don't add a moral reading to it we just see that due to my constitution and the patterning of how I am, I can't quite find you. It doesn't imply or say anything about the value of the other person because the true value of the other person is their buddha nature. Everyone is emerging from the ground; everyone is the luminosity or the energy of the ground, and this ground shows itself in infinite diversity of patterning. Once we stop judging and stop applying our interpretive criteria we start to see the richness of the field of pulsation.

If somebody is a certain way then we may be able to communicate in a couple of sentences. With someone else, because of how our patterning and their patterning is, we can chat together for a couple of hours. It doesn't tell you anything about the true value of the person. That is **Pure Relative Truth**, where you are working with circumstances without drawing any conclusions, without solidifying, without separating. You are just seeing this as a movement in the field.

Absolute Truth is the ground of both these modes of Relative Truth. From the very beginning everything is unborn. Unborn means it hasn't come into existence as a separate entity.

When we look around the room and we see different people we can focus on their shape, the clothes they are wearing, their gender and so on. One of things we probably don't notice consciously is the fact that people are breathing although this is the most important thing about them because if anyone was not breathing we would have a dead body in our group. Breathing means they are sharing the air. We breathe out, and they breathe in the air we have been breathing out. That is to say, molecules of their body are coming into our body and vice versa. We are sharing this space. We are not separate from the world. Without breath, which is – world into me, me into world – without that pulsation we have death. Being a separate isolated entity is an illusion. Ignorance is to imagine that you are separate. Just by looking around the room and observing people breathing, we see that we are breathing together. This is a system of interaction of sharing air, sharing space; this is our life together. There are no separate entities.

The plants are in communication with the earth and the air around them. The roots of the trees go deep into the earth taking in the moisture and minerals of the soil. They are communicating in a mycorrhizal network, with photosynthesis and other ways with what is going on around them. Everything is communication. When we see that this whole field of communication has no separate entities in it then this is the infinity of dependent co-origination. There is no truly finite form within it. The infinite shows itself as the seemingly finite, but the finite is the showing of the infinite, and so the finite is infinite even in its showing as finite.

We see people and we hear their name and we get a sense of who they are. We think that this is Mary or this is Susan – this is this person – but we are giving them a name and the name belongs within culture. We are linking them in. There are no separate entities.

The reason I am pointing this out just now is because this is the basis for both dzogchen and mahamudra. The beginning point for theravada and mahayana buddhism, is the position of, *'I am me. I exist as me. I am a limited person. I have lots of problems. I need to do purification. I have a long path to enlightenment ahead of me.'* The starting point of theravada and mahayana buddhism says, *'I am stuck in the swamp of samsara and I need to work very hard to get out of it.'* However the beginning point for mahamudra and dzogchen is the immediacy of this moment here. How am I? How is this? We notice thoughts, feelings and sensations arising. The experiences through the senses arise and change moment-by-moment as the dynamic showing of the ground. There is no separation. There are no entities. Again and again, we can become aware of the assumptions we have that seem to separate us off and turn us into finite entities.

Continuing with this theme of the environment, we will have an initial meeting here at the retreat for those who are interested to think about how a buddhist understanding can respond to environmental changes, because this is going to be a very big issue for the future.

One of the things that will definitely arise is anxiety, and when anxiety arises we often have violence. We have the desire to find someone to blame or to punish for doing things. In order to minimise that, if we can be calm and clear, seeing precisely how it is but avoiding habitual reactivity, we have the possibility of being connected with the phenomenal field and respond into it in a way that is fitting and just.

Buddhist ethics may help make it easier for people to collaborate together in times of increasing stress and change, rather than splitting into those who are connected with wanting to change our ecological structure and those who resist it. If we make that into a split of good and bad and we feel that somehow buddhism should be on the side of the good guys, we are not going to get very far.

Our possibility is to say everything arises from the same ground. All problems are the result of the Five Poisons, of ignoring how things are and imagining life will just go on. *'It will all be fine. Scientists will find a way. Mother Nature will adjust herself.'* People come up with ideas like that. We need to stay grounded, open and connected. For those who are interested we can have an initial meeting and then maybe form subgroups of people who have particular concerns, although of course it is everybody's concern now. If we dare to use words like kindness and love and compassion then that has to be for all; it cannot be with bias, because just taking care of the people you like is not love or kindness. Taking care of those who are your enemies is the more important thing.

Mao Tse Tung died when I was in Bengal with my teacher and we spent a lot of time and energy burning butter lamps for him and reciting many different prayers. My teacher said that when a bad person dies this is the time to do practice. They are lost souls. They have tortured and hurt other people. It is very easy to say, *'Well, fuck them, they can go to hell. They will get their punishment.'* Where are you when you say that? What has happened to you? You, yourself, have become a demon. We have to have some thoughtfulness of the narrowness of the selfish mentality that causes people not to care, and do what we can to bring some light, tenderness, and attunement into that field.

This is a big challenge because primitive reactivity – splitting – friend and enemy – good and bad – right and wrong – is very attractive. It is so quick and definitive and it gives you a sense of knowing who you are and what to do, but actually this is a complex system. When 'systems theory' is applied to living systems it is always seeing that there are more variables and more complexity in any system than first thought. This is the infinite interdependence of all phenomena; it is beyond the mind's rational capacity to compute. However we are fortunate in having the possibility of opening to awareness that sees everything all at once: Here I am, I open to everything. The only way to do that is not to take sides or go into partiality, not to allocate meaning, but to allow the movement of the patterning of emergence to be the field of our existence and to work with that.

I hope some of you will be interested in taking this up because how many good voices are there in the world? Conflict is building up. Dictatorships are more and more pervasive. Strong leaders having strong views

are becoming very attractive. When there is confusion there can be an attraction to strong leaders even when people know the strong leader is crazy.

With the collapse of the Weimar Republic, when Mr Austria arrived, he was seen as a hero because he was offering simple solutions in a time of economic and political chaos. There were so many different views, but he said, *'You don't need to have different views. All you need is me and my guys. We are right and the rest are the enemy.'* That was a very attractive solution and we see it happening all over the world. The good and the bad. The winners and the losers.

Very sadly, I imagine that this is going to intensify and that the ideas to come will be stupid solutions. We have the possibility of finding a way of living with complexity without being overwhelmed, and hopefully supporting other people to engage with the complexity without drowning and going into primitive reactivity.

Excerpt 2

Connectivity, collaboration, mood and resonance

In the meeting last night there was more discussion about climate change and about the many problems that are around and how we might think about them.

Hopefully you can find an informal structure that will help to support that so that people with similar intentions and ideas can collaborate. That is the main thing. If we see that one way of describing compassion is connectivity, then we have to be attentive to the possibilities of connectivity and how they change through time.

We meet together, and some of us have been meeting for many years. That continues and then people don't come because they get old and tired and they can't travel anymore, or they get some new events in their lives. I will also vanish and then you will need to decide what you do. If you put too much focus on a teacher, and the teacher vanishes, there can be quite a bit of chaos. That is happening in many dharma groups at the moment.

As I have said before, the most important people here are the learners. When I am talking, although I don't know exactly what I am going to say, I know what I am saying. If you need to learn something you are the ones who should be working harder than me, so you should support each other in collaborating and finding networks of support, like making an agreement to do your practice every Sunday afternoon. You can link up now on Zoom and Skype – whatever will support you – but if you don't work together to support yourselves, and you project it onto someone else to do, then that would be very sad.

People here have a lot of skills. For example, some people have a lot of knowledge of music. There are many wonderful songs which give advice and are kind and beautiful. There is a Crosby, Nash, Stills and Young song that was running through my mind this morning, and it has a line in it about treating your children well. That song is so sweet, gentle and encouraging, but a little bit wagging finger too because it is addressed to people in the '60s many of whom got a bit lost, had children and were all over the place. There is something about having freedom without getting lost.

I think we need that kind of encouragement when life gets wild. We are going to have a lot more pressure from the right wing, a lot more focus on rules and regulations and people feeling desperate and protesting in a way that becomes very provocative. The Middle Way uses sweetness as a pathway of wisdom, which lowers resistance. People who know about music could maybe build a playlist to support people on bad days. Whatever comes to mind, use the resources you have.

There is this word – comity – which I think is very helpful for us. It means a loose network of people. It is different from a committee or a community. When you have a community you often have membership cards and inside and outside, but a comity is a kind of alliance of the willing: those who are interested support each other and function together for a while according to circumstances. It is a grouping that is led by mood and not by rules and, as we know, mood is absolutely vital.

Our worlds are dominated by moods. Indian aesthetics is essentially an exploration of mood, whether it is in music or dance. In dance you have these nine particular moods of frightening or gentle, and these are shown by posture, by gesture, and in particular the gesture that becomes a mudra. We are going to be looking at mahamudra, the great gesture. What is a gesture? It is a kind of connectivity; it is a way of communicating directly without having too much conceptual reliance.

While you are here on this retreat people talk about various things, and if you feel some resonance you can work with that resonance because then you are immediately into something together and that is very important for us.

As the text was saying yesterday, don't struggle, don't make too much effort. CR Lama used to say, "*Take the easy way.*" Some struggles can become quite an addiction with people pushing through or taking on more challenges. It also can be taken as a sign that there is an obstacle and I should overcome the obstacle. Or maybe the obstacle says "*No, you don't have to*" so then you have to relax and release. I can't go one way, so I will go another way; a different kind of life.

Water flows where it can. If we go from earth element to water element we will flow.

Our lives have a path. From the stories people tell me there are many people here who fell in love, got married, had children, and then something pops. Now you are a single parent with kids and you have to get them to school. You don't have so much money, you have to live in a place you didn't plan to, and that is your life.

The question then is how do you inhabit that life without feeling hard done by or that you have made a big mistake, or that the other person is a total bastard?

One of the things we have been looking at is not entering into judgement, which means not blaming. Events are all we have and an event is something which is evanescent – it manifests – this moment... and this moment... and this moment. We have our conceptualisation of the event, but the event is immediate and authentic, and the conceptualisation is a kind of wrapper.

You fall in love with someone and you imagine your life being one way, and then it doesn't work out. You feel betrayed, let down, hurt, and abandoned. You blame them: "*You have done this to me.*" This is the

voice of the ego and when we have this it becomes more difficult to do practice together. We carry resentments and in particular we build up a sense of the truth of the other person: "*I know what they are like - not nice!*"

For example, there might be a family event that you have to attend and you know that your ex-partner will be there with their new partner. You feel aggrieved by that. "*Why do you have to come?*" But they are entitled to be there, and that is very painful. What do you do with that? This is a sentient being wandering in samsara. They have the five poisons; you fell in love with someone with the five poisons. Interesting choice. Actually, there aren't many charming people without the five poisons, so you got in a mess.

We live with mess; we have histories and wounds. The key thing is to see the relation between blaming and reification. There has to be someone there to blame, and the more you blame, the more you make someone there. The strong negative emotion consolidates your belief that you know who the other person is. Many people have stories of being hurt and some of them tell me these stories. Generally when people come and talk to me about their life they confess the sins of other people, not their own! Interesting.

We have to bring this back to ourselves. What do I do? What was my part in the situation? The most important thing is that the past has gone and the future hasn't come. Whoever that person was for us in the past is gone. When you meet your ex they still don't give you enough money for childcare. What are you going to do with that? You can bear resentment, you can feel hard done by, you can feel self-pity, you can feel angry; you know all the variety of things you can feel. What for? What is the point?

These feelings don't change the dynamic between you because you have already had your fights. You have got to live with it, so how will you live with it? This is a new person. If you can't let the other person be new, how are you going to be new? The more you hang on to what they did, and what you imagined they were, the more you are stuck in your own past. Every time you meet them you jump back ten years in time and then you are locked into that. That is why when we do the practice our instruction is always to stay present in the moment. The past has gone – let it go – don't go after past thoughts.

Interpersonally, it is the same. When you get to know someone you build up a picture of them, but they are not the picture you build up of them. People are the freshness of the meeting in the moment and that is all we ever get. The rest is just mental construction which is a prison for us and a set of weapons we can use to attack the other person. But what is the someone-ness about someone? That is the issue. When we look at ourselves we are changing and moving. Sensations, thoughts and feelings are always going and yet we talk about someone else. We say, 'You did that to me. You have hurt me.' Who is the one who hurt us? This is our mind. We are then projecting our memory and constructions on to other people.

We have a lot of opportunities to function together as a learning community, to think about tolerance, forgiveness and collaboration, and then take that out into the world. If we can't do this together amongst ourselves now when we have opportunity to reflect and talk together, it is unlikely we are going to do it out there, as it won't be any easier.

This is a chance to see how you restrict yourself. For example, in the afternoon we have a movement group and in the morning we have the opportunity to go outside and have some experiences together. As far

as I am aware, not many people are taking advantage of these opportunities. There may be all kinds of reasons, but one reason may be feeling a bit shy or inhibited and not wanting to expose yourself. What does that mean? You wouldn't feel comfortable. There are six realms – hot and cold – you won't feel very comfortable in any of them! Do you want to be a cow in a field? Do you want to be a wasp when winter is coming? Life is not comfortable.

We say, "*I will save all sentient beings, but I don't want to take part in the movement group because I will feel embarrassed.*" It is a long journey to enlightenment. Go to the group. Feel stupid. Feel embarrassed. Get in touch with your growing edge. We grow in that uncertain state; we don't grow inside our comfort zone.

While you are here with other people you can observe for yourself how you sell yourself short; how you cheat yourself and don't open. You talk about opening, but you don't open, because you come to a place in yourself where you are scared of opening and speaking from the heart, and you turn away.

In the practice of dzogchen and mahamudra, you have to go forward and enter into the situation. Say the difficult things, try to resolve conflict and then drop it. This is as far as we are going to get, so just say good luck. We have to have good wishes for other people.

Here is a real opportunity for us to observe how we make ourselves small without blaming ourselves or other people. Observe how you might have a tendency to reflect on the past or to be sad. Some people become sad and some people become angry. You have to look for yourself. What is your tendency? Some people become very avoidant. *'I don't ever want to see that person again. I can't bear it.'* You are going to see the face of someone you used to know, but who are they now? *'No, no, I just can't.'* This is so sad.

Namkhai Norbu used to talk about this a lot. He said people came on retreat and they would get into a relationship, and when the relationship turned sour they stopped coming to the retreats. Their broken heart is more important than the dharma.

We feel happy, we feel sad, we feel expansive, we feel contracted. The feeling is not the truth: we all have feelings. Everything is self-liberating but feeling is not liberating and by staying with it we are cooking inside. There is nothing to blame in other people. I have to sit with myself and observe how I grasp on to my grudge, my resentment, and my blaming. *"I am doing this. I am cooking me."* Then your meditation becomes meaningful because you have a real problem. You start to see that you are your own gaoler keeping yourself in prison. No one else is keeping you in prison: this is your grasping, your obsessional thought, and your resentment.

When you sit and do the practice at home or in the forest or here, when you shrink you are in touch with your prison. You say the mind is like the sky or the ocean but you are in a locked room. Wow! Now you have a chance to see what the walls are made of; this is frozen energy and you are freezing. This is a wonderful opportunity.

Excerpt 3

Climate change – bringing space into the response

Our final meeting will give us a chance to think about how we might respond to some of the issues around climate change.

I think it would be helpful to meet like-minded people and try to have some sense of how you might continue your discussions by Skype or Zoom. See what you want to do. If you don't want to do anything that is fine. If you do want to do something, that is also fine. The main thing is don't worry about it, don't blame yourself or make it too serious. Our basic fact or truth is that everything is illusion. It's like a rainbow or a mirage. The mirage has patterns. Tilopa says that foolish people don't realise that everything is illusion and so it becomes real and they suffer.

Everything is an illusion. When you look back on your life, all the events you have been through – happy times, sad times – they were there and they vanished. You expanded, you contracted, you were joyful, you were miserable; it was there and it had texture, impact, feeling tone, and then it was gone

All the events of climate change will be very similar to that. The key thing will be to have openness and some sense of the importance of responding, notwithstanding the illusory nature of all responses. Then we can bring space into the response. I personally think that the most important thing that we can offer anyone is to be there, intelligent, on the button, able to do things, but with the real sense that our energy arises from space, as the energy of space, like the wave arising and passing away.

If we make it strongly real, the five poisons will jump in. Agitation will arise for sure and our position will get more fixed and definite. This will result in us having enemies and a lot of conflict. There are enough people doing that already for us not to do it. We can be present, calm, clear, focused, but not agitated. The absence of agitation will bring calm to others.

Before the meeting you can already be thinking if there are any people you need to link with before we finish here? What can we talk about tonight? How can I bring this forward? Maybe you won't bring anything forward with anybody who is here, but you might do it more locally with your neighbours or with some collective... running allotments, growing vegetables... it could be any kind of situation.

But when the thought arises it is empty in its arising, empty in its presence, and empty in its dissolving. Whatever you do it is like that. Whether you decide to repair clothes; the needle goes in, goes through, and comes out. Everything is a sequencing of patterns. Patterns of what? Of energy. Subject and object, both empty of any essence, moving together.

I think with that approach you will bring a helpful different flavour to the many things that other people are doing.

Excerpt 4

Practice – climate change – including others

We now have a space to think more about how we want to proceed, or not to proceed, and explore the practices we do in relation to the issues of climate change.

A lot of the impact of climate change will happen very far away from us in Europe. We can imagine the sort of issues that will happen — how we keep our homes comfortably warm or cool, what cars we can drive, there will be all kinds of inconveniences for us — but for many other people the places where they live will be submerged by the sea, or too hot or too dry to sustain life. They are going to have nothing.

This raises the question of whether meditation has any power to benefit others. Do prayers help? As far as I know, all religions say that prayers help because one of the things praying does is to include others in the space of our mind. The more we are in touch with the space of our mind, and the more we hold others present, the less they are abandoned. Charities like Amnesty International and Pen International are ways of not forgetting the journalists, writers and political prisoners who are imprisoned. It is a terrible thing to suffer and have no one there for you, to have nobody caring about what happens to you. Part of what we are doing in our prayers and inclusions is, in some small way, showing solidarity and openness to the fact of other people's lives and including that.

Earlier today we used the image of multiple streams coming down the sides of a hill and joining together into a single stream. Already there are many lonely desperate situations for people, and there will be more. You can say that on one level this arises from their karma, but it arises in this world, and in as much as we are aware of it, it is with us. What do we do with that suffering? Hopefully, it softens our heart and we send light out to them.

When we do the first round of mantras in our Padmasambhava practice, he is there in front of us. As we are reciting the mantra we visualise the letters Om, Ah, Hung, and rays of light are coming out. These rays are not just coming to us, they are going out to all sentient beings in all the different realms and to all the people in the five continents. We include Africa and the terrifying jungles of the Congo where machete gangs move around inflicting terrible wounds on people, and the Amazon where tribal people are being displaced from their homes. Wherever there are people, both the victims and the persecutors, the light goes to them; it falls on the virtuous and it falls on the terrifying. There are horrible people who delight in killing and in the pain of others. The light of Padmasambhava goes to them as well as the poor tortured victims. It goes to the desperate farmers, and it goes to the people who sell them the grain whose seeds are sterile, so forcing the farmers into a cycle of dependency on commercial seeds and their accompanying chemicals. It is for everyone.

That is because, for our practice, we don't take sides. We should be without bias. May all sentient beings be happy. When we include that in our practice it keeps opening the space, and opening the space...

Communicating productively and harmoniously

If you are going to communicate through electronic media please remember that basic politeness is always the case. If you have something critical to say, think about why you want to be critical. Does anybody really benefit from being criticised? Who is entitled to criticise anybody else? Criticism can get in the way of communication.

I would suggest that everybody would benefit from reading Entering the Path of the Bodhisattva by Santideva. It is a standard text that everyone in a Tibetan monastery would read, and it sets out the paramitas (generosity, moral discipline, patience, diligence, meditative concentration, wisdom), because these are the basis for interpersonal ethics from the buddhist point of view. There are many translations of the text into various languages, so everyone can read it in their own language and it is really helpful in giving you clear guidance. Whenever you notice a response arising in you, and you feel that you want to say something, run it past the six (or sometimes ten) paramitas which will act as a kind of inner guardian so that you won't let you leak out into the world things which are better dissolved inside.

It is a very beautiful text with a lot of wonderful imagery and sweet language. It is such a great text because he writes a lot about love and tenderness and compassion which is the background to all the practices that we do. We don't foreground it, because we have other concerns, but if you neglect being thoughtful about others, tuning into them and speaking as sweetly as possible, then our practice is empty, is without compassion and then there is no point to it.

We begin our Padmasambhava practice with refuge and bodhicitta, and after that we say that we are going to develop these paramitas and that everything we do is for the sake of other beings. Our lives are meaningful. In the longer ritual text for taking the bodhisattva vow, the text says that this day I become a son or a daughter of all the buddhas. Again, this also means that our life has become meaningful. This is something very beautiful. Whatever you do, in whatever situation, your life is meaningful because the motive of whatever you do is to be of benefit for other beings.

If you have that as a background there is no need ever to be bored, or to be lost, or confused. If you become anxious or depressed you use this experience to understand the suffering of others. Everything can be used as a tool for more connection with other people: if you feel selfish or greedy, if you become bossy and bullying, if you become hard and cruel — whatever arises.

On an outer level you want to restrain the impact of that, but on the inner level you want to watch how that arises. And then you can understand, *“Oh, yes. Now I can see why dictators behave in that way. I also have that capacity.”* That is when real functional connected compassion starts to make sense.

So now I open the space for you all to discuss this and see if and how you can help.