

The Cuckoo's Cry heralding the Good Fortune of Glorious Presence by Vairocana

Extract taken from 'The Happy Twins: Dzogchen and Mahamudra'¹

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[Note: The retreat had a focus on exploring possible Buddhist responses to environmental, climate and culture changes. The topic was *The Happy Twins: Dzogchen and Mahamudra, with reference to The Mirror of Luminous Revelation (a terma text from Nuden Dorje Drophan Lingpa) and The Mahamudra Middle Way of the Ganges (spoken by Tilopa to Naropa)*. This commentary came at the end of the retreat.]

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).

Commentary

This is the first dzogchen text that came into Tibet, and it is from Vairocana. I have done several different translations of it. It is only six lines long and it is composed in three groups of two.

The first two lines refer to the ground, the second two lines refer to the path and the third two lines refer to the result.

The infinite diversity of experiences and their actual nature are non-dual.

Yet the actuality of each particular occurrence is beyond judgement.

What is known as 'as it is' is untouched by thought

Yet the forms of appearance are unobstructed, being complete as they are.

Being intact we are free of the sickness of effort,

Spontaneously abiding and so everything is settled.

Diversity and nature non-dual:

Specific apparitions, each beyond judgement.

'As it is', neither concept nor conceptualisable:

All manifesting is perfect, complete in itself.

Intrinsically complete, untouched by the disease of effort:

Spontaneous presence, unchanging.

Diversity essence, non-dual:

Apparitions specific, beyond judgement.

'As it is', not concept, not caught by concept:

Manifest, perfect; the common good.

Complete in itself, the disease of effort discarded:

Spontaneous presence, settled.

Although there is no difference, or no separation, or no opposition between diverse appearances and their essence which is emptiness, there are apparitions specific beyond judgment. That is to say, what appears is just this. If you see the just-this-ness — the immediacy of how it is —

is beyond judgment, you don't need any judgment because it is the ground. There is no judgment in the ground; there is everything that arises.

We say that, 'Due to karma we have the experience of being in the human realm.' This building where we are was put together by builders who built the walls, electricians, painters and so on. This building was the movement of bodies and materials all of which were apparitional. That is to say, they were appearances without essence. They have form and that form relates to the five elements, so a hammer is harder than the putty used to seal the windows.

Hard things are not more real than soft things. Hot things that burn you are not more real than cool things. Intensity does not prove inherent existence. Everything is open. This is the ground; this is how it is.

The next two lines are dealing with the path for us 'as it is'. We open ourselves to how it is 'as it is', not caught by concept. What is this room without concept? The immediacy of 'as it is.' The concept moves in the field of appearance. When you separate concept from appearance and apply concept to appearance then you have the locking in: *"I can say something about this – this is the basis of my being able to say something about it."* But when we see that it is 'just this' you cannot catch it with a concept, but it doesn't block concept. Thoughts and opinions are moving in this space but not defining it.

We are back here with the image of the mirror. The reflections come in the mirror; in the moment that they are in the mirror they are the mirror, but they are not the mirror because they don't touch the mirror. This is the mystery of non-duality.

"But surely it must be this? But surely it must be that?" No, it is both empty and full. The law of exclusion that establishes the polarities does not operate; that is a false understanding. The simplicity of 'as it is-ness', and the flow of 'as if', of what we imagine, are inseparable. Then he says, ***'All manifesting is perfect, complete in itself.'*** So when we see this we do not need to do anything artificial.

Normally, on the path, we are trying to turn this into that; we are wanting to add value, to make something better happen, or to try to improve something. Why? It is this. The world is rich, multi-dimensional; it cannot be sorted out or made simple because it is already simple and simultaneously rich in its variety. Everything in the room is empty and that is its simplicity. Everything in the room is different and that is its irreducible precision, being 'just this'. There is no opposition between the two: simple and complex. All manifesting is perfect – complete in itself.

When we hear the bells the sound is perfect, and the thought 'it is the bells' is perfect. When we were looking at it before we wanted to see that the apprehension, the taking hold of the sound, and saying, "this is the sound of the bells", is not useful if you are practising being with sound as

sound. But when you have a sense of the phenomena as they are, the 'as-it-is-ness', then the interpretation is just another stream or pathway of 'as-it-is-ness'. There is sound. There are bells. I don't like the bells. The first is pure description, then there is description plus name, and then there is description plus name plus affect — an emotional response: 'I don't like these bells.' All three arise and pass. All three are empty of inherent self-nature.

It is important to see that at first we are sorting out the strands and we may feel a bit overwhelmed. Tilopa described this by saying that at first it is like this torrent with all this stuff going on. However, don't block the torrent; allow the rich infinite complexity of everything to be there simultaneously.

The disease of effort is discarded

Thirdly, he is saying, '**complete in itself, the disease of effort discarded**'.

When you see this is fine as it is, the effort that disturbs us is discarded; there is nothing to do, it is just this. Of course, this does not advocate helpless passivity, or being a victim where you just accept whatever life throws at you. It means that you don't activate effort to change things which don't need to be changed.

There are some things that do need to change. If you are travelling on a busy bus and somebody stands on your foot you need to push them or say something. If they haven't noticed you need to inform them of the fact they are on your foot. To tell them that you are going to work with your internal sensation would be silly. Just ask them to move and they will move. The disease of effort is having to change things which do not need to be changed.

This is what I think we see with climate change. People changed things that didn't need to be changed, interfering and upsetting the balance. In Tibet they had a lot of minerals and precious stones and people knew where they were located but they did not touch them because the land is under the protection of the guardians. Before the so-called Industrial Revolution iron ore had been mainly transformed on a small scale into blocks of iron which were supplied to blacksmiths. But then all of a sudden there were big furnaces and later blast furnaces which needed a lot of fuel and that involved a lot more deep mining which meant disturbing the land. There was no thought that maybe the land will be upset, because everybody was fixated on profit. Nobody questioned what they were doing to the environment. That is what is meant here by '**the disease of effort**' which is blind to the consequences.

If you are lucky you may go to places where people are still living in a tribal way and you can see how the houses they live in are made of bamboo, mud and thatch. Tribal areas in Bengal dig the mud out from the banks of the river, cut down the bamboo at the edge of the bamboo forest, and gather thatch at the end of the harvest. Every year the monsoon washes away some of what they

have built and then they build it back up again. If it is beyond repair, then within two monsoons there would probably be no trace left; it is non-invasive. There is harmonic effort with the resources. Our modern way leaves traces. We are very aware now about all the plastic in the ocean because plastic leaves a trace; modern materials do not self-dissolve.

In India people used to eat their meals off leaf plates. In some rural areas perhaps people still do. Afterwards they collected all the plates, put them in a pile, and the crows would arrive to peck at them, and the cows would come and eat the leaves.

If you apply that ecological thinking to the mind, thoughts arise and vanish without a trace, and yet we have situations where they seem to leave a trace. What is going on? How come I have got a plastic formation in my mind?

Perhaps your school lessons taught you about nuclear fuels and you heard this strange term, 'half- life'. How many thousands of years would it take for a substance to lose half of its power? You made it, but it doesn't go away. The rain doesn't wash it away and it doesn't get killed off in the winter; it is here for a long time. It is samsara – here for a long time. Karmic traces last a long time. The thought 'I am going to steal money from you' arises and vanishes. But if I recycle the thought and bring it back again, formulate my intention, and steal from you, you are getting a displacement of energy about time and you will get the consequences in the future. That is really what Vairocana is referring to here.

Then there is '**spontaneous presence settled**'. That is to say, the mind does not move although everything is moving. You have stillness and movement, the two basic principles. It is a very sweet little text but the key thing I wanted to highlight is that diversity and emptiness have the same ground, and are non-oppositional.

As our world gets busier with more complexity we have less social cohesion. Certainly, in London, people are less and less polite. Traditional codes of behaviour are vanishing and there is an incoherence in the movement of the social group. There is a lot of basis for confusion since there is no attunement and so there is no kind of spontaneous alignment. There is no symphony. We have cacophony, and cities are more and more cacophonous with fast-moving vehicles which cannot be integrated. That is where the practice comes in; to stay relaxed and open with all of this stuff. Not reacting – it is just like this.

People throw their rubbish on the floor. I still have from my childhood thoughts that they shouldn't do that. What is on the ground? Shape and colour. What is applied to that shape and colour on the ground? Rubbish. What is then applied to rubbish? Judgment, stacking it up. It is like an artist painting a mural on a wall. The child throwing the packet of crisps on the ground has created an art

object – shape and colour – in that particular location and it has been done so beautifully and randomly. Wow!. What is it? It is just this. This is going to be so important for us.

As you settle into the practice don't block whatever is coming; don't judge it, don't work out if it is good or bad. It is the unimpeded radiance of the mind.

Taking the practice into life

We are coming now to the time to go our diverse ways. We always have the same situation: not knowing if we will meet again. Our intentions could change, our physical presence could change, work and family situations could change. Perhaps we will meet again, perhaps not.

I hope that the heart of the practice goes with you and that there is enough clarity of understanding in these texts² to have them with you as good friends. You could shrink them down. You could photocopy them. You could save them on your phone and take them with you wherever you go just reading a few lines at a time.

Take it out into your life. It is up to us — we have the choice. The fact is it is a very lonely business to be alive. We alone have our experience through our sense organs; nobody else is exactly the same as us. We have connections, meetings and partings. There is a kind of sadness, a pathos, to our existence – and yet when we open to the teachings we see that the mind is alone yet never lonely. Open awareness is never lonely because it is singular, infinite, full and complete. It is the great completion – it is the mahamudra.

When we have that experience, any situation is going to be okay. Meeting and parting is the movement of the waves of the energy of the mind. The mind itself contains everything. For each of us, when we are in touch with the mind itself, everyone here is always in your mind because it is coming from the ground of your mind. No need to be lonely.

On the outer level, we have our bodhisattva intention. Connectivity is the antidote to selfishness and loneliness. Our view is that connectivity is intrinsic, but it is also something that you can develop through reading Shantideva and other writers.

So now, it is the time to end. Our meetings function because of how we participate. It is always amazing how friendly and supportive people appear. People who come for the first time seem to find some place and some way of inclusion. Some people like to be in at the centre, some people feel more at home on the periphery. Wherever you are, that is where you are; it is fine to be however you are.

² James is referring to the other two texts that he taught on this retreat.

There is no demand because nobody can tell you how to be because nobody knows how you should be; even *you* don't know how you should be. I like being here. It is a very beautiful experience for me to be with people who are genuinely interested in what I am interested in, and it is very uncommon in life. When I trained as an art therapist I worked in places where the psychiatrists and therapists didn't seem to have any interest in art therapy. I'd weigh in with my paints and they would ask what I was doing. Art therapy.

It is the same with dharma. We put our lives into this and we structure a lot of time and energy around this. People outside might wonder why we bother? So when we meet together it becomes a learning community where we can have synergy, and on a very subtle level the confirmation that what we do is worthwhile. Not because it becomes a dogmatic belief that gets strengthened, but we can feed it through our skin.

We see people over the years softening and changing and ripening.

It is lovely to be here. Thank you