

Reflections on *'A Prayer for Peace'*

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Zoom, 23 February 2022

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Revised by James Low April 2022

How can our dharma understanding help us to stay open and relaxed in times of war and conflict?

In Europe currently a great and terrible conflict is raging with much death and destruction. There are conflicts in every continent. Conflicts arise very easily for human beings because we have a negative alchemy whereby we turn transient anger into enduring hatred.

When we interact with other people and they say or do something that upsets us, we are likely to experience some anger towards them. Because the anger arises due to causes and conditions it is relative and without any inherent existence of its own. There was a movement between two people and these people were themselves simply patterns of movement. But the fluidity of that momentary moment can be thickened by adding concepts. We project into the other person an ongoing quality of unpleasantness: *"You are dangerous for me; I find you loathsome."* This sense of the other as an enduring entity allows us to layer more and more projections onto them.

The other person has no inherent existence and neither do we. The hater and hated are both illusory and so our projections don't actually arrive onto the other person. They adhere to and form around our own mental construct of who the other person is. Because this is developing in our own mind, when we take a negative attitude towards the 'other', this projection of the negative is unimpeded and can build up to a hundred percent. This supports us in having the delicious sense of absolute knowledge about the other: *"You are an enemy of the people. You have betrayed your country."* Once this identity of traitor is fixed onto someone, it's very difficult to get rid of it. The insulting projection allows us to bleed out the sense of living humanity from the other, so that they become an empty signifier that can be entirely filled with our own devious projection. However, because I'm enjoying the certainty of my definitive knowledge about who you are and what your value is, I don't feel any urge to enter negotiation or modify my own self-affirming knowledge about you.

A Prayer for Peace

From unawareness of the open source
Thoughts of self and other arise
Resting on the false ground
Of imagined inherent existence.

Imagining myself to be real, and
Looking at others as mere resource
I select and reject in order to
Develop and maintain my identity.

With my sense of who I am
Others are deemed to be friend or enemy.
This ego-self seeks unimpeded mastery, and
Resistance is taken as insult and proof of guilt.

This deluded and deluding patterning
Imposed on ever-fresh occurrence
Is the root cause of war and conflict,
Of denigration and absence of empathy.

All appearances are empty of inherent existence.
Attributions of 'good' and 'bad' are applied to rainbows and clouds.
The unborn ungraspable is our source,
Our radiant field, and our apparitional dance.

May the light of the Buddhas' love
Shine into the hearts of both
The fearful and the fearsome
Dispelling the dualistic reification that traps them.

Buddhas, please dissolve the dark night of entities
With the dawning of awareness of nonduality.
May we live in the bright day of awareness and emptiness,
Clarity and emptiness, appearance and emptiness.

In this timeless now may we all
Abide in peace, love and collaboration.
May the radiance at the heart of all beings
Softens their ego-shells and let the light of love shine forth.

February 2022

I want to briefly go through this prayer which I wrote the other day. It is simply a restating of our Dzogchen view.

*From unawareness of the open source
Thoughts of self and other arise
Resting on the false ground
Of imagined inherent existence.*

We are familiar with the teachings on how this happens. The uncaused arising of unawareness brings the absence of presence and an oblivion out of which the delusion of duality manifests and reifies itself. We find ourselves believing that 'I am me and I am not you'. In the intensity and totality of this imagining we forget that we are imagining. It just seems true.

*Imagining myself to be real, and
Looking at others as mere resource
I select and reject in order to
Develop and maintain my identity.*

I imagine myself to be real and grounded in my own inherent existence. Then I look at others as a mere resource, as something I can bend towards my own purposes. I select and reject in order to maintain my sense of my identity. With this activity my self-referential ego-self feels powerful in its capacity to define the value of everything it encounters.

*With my sense of who I am
Others are deemed to be friend or enemy.*

According to my own sense of myself and what I find myself liking or not liking, I make alliances with those who seem similar to me and I push away those who seem different. These habits are powerful and often unrecognised and so we need to use our meditation to release ourselves from our assumptions and attend to the presenting actual. The key point is to see that our activities of adopting and rejecting are themselves creating and projecting the qualities that we perceive as inherent in those we are considering. We are not seeing them as they are. We are unknowingly creating how they are *for us*. All phenomena arise from causes. They are not self-existing, they are not just there. When we feel someone is our enemy and we hate them, it is as if we see some definite quality in them which is unpleasant. Yet this projection is arising because of the quality of the relationship we have with the other person as we experience them. If they please me and fit in with my plans I take them to be a friend. If they do not please me and do not comply with my plans I take them to be my enemy. It is the very absence of inherent existence that lets me define the other according to the current contents of my mind.

*This ego-self seeks unimpeded mastery, and
Resistance is taken as insult and proof of guilt.*

This isolated ego-self that I inhabit seeks unimpeded mastery. The fantasy of omniscience and omnipotence manifests in the details of life just as I am convinced that I know the best way to prune the roses and arrange the pots and pans in my cupboard. On the basis of this certainty, resistance to my will is taken as an insult and a proof of other people's inadequacy and guilt. Difference is taken to be an attack on the validity of my singular vision.

This reveals the vicious quality of duality: If you're not with me, if you are not on my side, then you are against me. These are the only two possibilities. If you are against me, I will destroy you. We see this in many countries in the world where there is only one kind of good person: the one who likes the dictator.

*This deluded and deluding patterning
Imposed on ever-fresh occurrence
Is the root cause of war and conflict,
Of denigration and absence of empathy.*

When others suffer, we are indifferent. When a nation is under the power of the bloodlust of war and I am sucked into this, then my confidence in my own opinion (merged with propaganda) and my own positioning (of alignment with the leader) is supported by my denial of any value in the despised enemy: *"I don't care about you. You are nothing to me. The people I like, they are everything to me. But you, my enemies, are nothing so I'm not bothered by your pain."* In fact, their pain and their suffering can help me to feel even more powerful. Soldiers with their armour jackets and their big weapons and big boots can feel very secure in the face of civilians who have no weapons. What is vital for us as practitioners is to keep the clarity that these are not two different kinds of people: good people and bad people, my kind of people and those other kind of people.

All appearances are illusory. They arise, they show, they have an impact in their dynamic presentation, but they are devoid of inherent existence.

So, when hatred arises and we're trying to work out who is good and who is bad, it is vital to remember that the foundational Buddha, the original Buddha, who is the bright presence of the ground, is called 'Always Good'. Good in all directions, at all times, encompassing everything. Everything is the all-good display of Kuntuzangpo. Yet war, hatred and aggression can pull us into these whirlwinds of dualistic thinking and feeling.

So we have to remember:

*All appearances are empty of inherent existence.
Attributions of 'good' and 'bad' are applied to rainbows and clouds.*

We see the rainbow and we think: *"Oh, it's so beautiful, it's very good."* But it vanishes. We might think that the storm cloud is very bad, but the aeroplane can go up through it. It has no self-substance. Appearances are not the appearance of something, they are the appearance of illusions. Illusions are simultaneously here and not here. Having no independent existence, they offer no basis for the attributions and judgments which we project on to them.

*The unborn ungraspable is our source,
Our radiant field, and our apparitional dance.*

These are the three aspects that we look at in all our dzogchen teachings: The open empty source; the ceaseless, effortless presenting field of non-dual clarity and all-pervading apparitional responsivity.

Good moments come and go, difficult moments come and go. When we rest in openness we are freed from ego agency and the anxiety and blame that accompany it.

We may have intense feelings about somebody: *"You make me feel so angry! You and your stupid irritating behaviour make me so angry! It's all your fault that I feel angry. I'm a good person, but you are a troublemaker!"* These kinds of interpretations arise from duality and we know where they lead. With our understanding of the view we start to see that they are completely false and an aspect of the delusion that arises with unawareness. Everything is the radiance of the ground. So, however our situation is, whatever provocations we get from other people, if we want to find freedom, we have to rest in the openness of the source and not enter into the deluding contrivances of the split into duality of subject and object.

*May the light of the Buddhas' love
Shine into the hearts of both
The fearful and the fearsome
Dispelling the dualistic reification that traps them.*

Anger arises on the basis of activity – someone has done something *to* us. Our reactive anger is a dynamic response to the actions of others. Since it is conditional, arising from activity, it will dissolve with time and changing circumstances. When anger is fused with concepts attributing essential badness to the other, it thickens and solidifies into hate. It becomes unconditional and is present towards the enemy however they are. It imputes a fundamental negative quality of being in the other. Hater and hated become locked in an enduring duality.

Liking arises on the basis of activity - someone has done something *for* us. Our reactive liking is a dynamic response to the actions of others. Since it is conditional, arising from activity, it can dissolve with time and changing circumstances. When liking is fused with concepts attributing essential goodness to the other, it ripens into love. It becomes unconditional and is present towards the loved ones however they are. It rests on a basic belief in a fundamental positive quality of being in the other. Lover and beloved are co-emergent in a vibrant field of connectivity.

Whether we are the person who is being attacked and fear that we are going to lose our country, our freedom, the health of our body... or whether we are the terrifying one who is able to fill other people with fear, both positionings are held in place by our belief in their reality. When it seems that this is how it is, we are swept along in reactivity. So it is vital to relax and release ourselves from this fusional intoxication. By remaining in openness we can see how even the most powerful urges and emotions arise and pass. They have no reality or inherent existence yet they carry messages which become true for us if we fuse with them. This is why we do the Guru Yoga practice again and again. It is the simple direct way both to release ourselves from fusion with the risings and to allow whatever arises to vanish without trace.

Of course, in these dangerous times full of intense provocations it is very difficult to stay open and relaxed as the shape of the world around us and the shape of our own life is altered by circumstances. As we know, the borders of the countries of Europe have changed so many times. People think, "*I am Ukrainian, I am Polish, I am Russian*", but the borders of these countries have shifted a lot in the last hundred years. When we can see that the name of a country, the name of a city, the name of ourselves, is applied to a dynamic, interactive process rather than to an entity, then we start to free ourselves from the bondage of believing in fixed reliable existents.

*Buddhas, please dissolve the dark night of entities
With the dawning of awareness of non-duality.*

When we believe that phenomena are real each aspect of the world takes on a clear definition and each appearance seems to be something unique and specific. Yet this commitment to the existence of things carries a darkness because these appearances seem to be impenetrable in their self-definition. However, such seemingly existent entities are not separate things. They are experiences, interpretations and constructions arising from our own mental activity. All phenomena are relative to each other and arise in interaction. The term

'phenomenon' indicates something appearing, something revealed through consciousness. Consciousness is the mental activity of apprehending objects, things that can be thought about. Both subject and object are mental events. If they are not recognised as such then this is referred to in the dharma as 'relative truth'. Relative truth is only 'true' in the imagination; in fact it is a discourse of fiction, of invention. When we awaken to the nonduality of awareness we see that everything is like a rainbow, like a mirage. It's here, but it has no substance. Then it is clear that both 'subject' and 'object' are experiences nondual with the ground source.

*May we live in the bright day of awareness and emptiness,
Clarity and emptiness, appearance and emptiness.*

Awareness of emptiness thins the dense opacity of self and other. If we see that another person is arising due to causes and circumstances without an internal, personal defining essence, then where is the truly existing enemy that I don't like or am frightened of? I am frightened of a construct. This construct arises from me because I believe that words like 'enemy' signify some nasty, bitter essence. In fact there is no nasty, bitter essence. The nastiness and bitterness that I perceive in you, my enemy, is my interpretation of the impact on me of how you are moving and changing with circumstances. Your 'enemy-ness' is relative to our current situation. It is not intrinsic.

*In this timeless now may we all
Abide in peace, love and collaboration.
May the radiance at the heart of all beings
Soften their ego-shells and let the light of love shine forth.*

In this timeless now, in this infinite present which never changes, may we all abide in peace, love and collaboration. May the restless agitation of the ego come to stillness free of hungry grasping and so may it dissolve all traces of being an entity. The light of our heart shines out through our senses linking us with all the movement of which we are part. So, our practice is to release ourselves from the delusion of solidifying conceptualisation which leads into the splitting of friend and enemy.

May we all abide in ever-fresh open availability!