

Repelling all Troubles

Commentary by James Low. This is a commentary on a practice text also called "[Repelling all Troubles](#)"

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All the sufferings of samsara arise from the delusion of the real, the belief that there are separate beings and things, each with their own inherent existence. Due to this, appearances are taken to be other than their pure source. From this belief in duality there arises the misperception that there is a true difference between subject and object. This then leads to the identification of some as 'friend' and some as 'enemy'.

Believing in one's own existence and superiority over one's enemies, one can easily feel entitled to attack them and dispossess them of their lands, their property and their lives. On the other hand, when we believe that those who oppress us and endanger the lives and happiness of others are really existing entities, then a feeling of hatred towards them can easily arise leading to thoughts of revenge and violence.

Dharma teachings point to the illusory nature of all appearances. When our reluctance to see this is intensified by the aggression of others, we become both rigid and unstable. If we wish to antidote this limiting tendency we need to settle our minds in emptiness and avoid indulging dualising thoughts and emotions. We can avoid the extremes of hopelessness and hate-filled arousal by following the middle way of non-duality. In particular, we can recite the following short texts to enliven our Dharma understanding and use the power of non-duality set out in the Heart Sutra to repel the dualistic delusions of the aggressor.

Once when Buddha Sakyamuni was out begging he came to a village hut and waited by the door with his bowl in his hands. A man came to the door and shouted at him, "You beggars are so lazy yet you want to eat! You want me to feed you. You are useless!" On and on he insulted the Buddha who waited patiently. When the man had finished shouting the Buddha said, "I came requesting food not anger. Please keep your anger." Then he peacefully walked away.

The power of equanimity is great. It is the calm clear midpoint between being cut off and being aroused. We should try to infuse our practice with the spirit of the Four Immeasurables.

When our mind is calm, then like a polished metal surface, the bright clarity of emptiness reflects back the harmful energy directed towards it. This non-reception and non-confirmation allows the inherent emptiness of hatred and aversion to be seen.

All beings have the same source as the Primordial Buddha Samantabhadra, the All-Good. We should avoid reification, denigration and bias. We simply and calmly reject and turn back all harmful energies and appearances. May they vanish into the unborn source without a trace! May we all awaken as the unchanging presence of awareness!

These are very troubled times. Events occur that show how very quickly a storm can arise and blow away everything we thought we knew. This kind of destruction has happened many times in history. There is no safety in samsara. This is the basic point of view of the buddhist teachings. Wherever you look all over the world all kinds of sudden disturbance occur by which the security of our prediction that 'tomorrow will be like today' is just blown away. What is currently happening in Ukraine is a very extreme and vicious form of this, but the structure is basically the same. Our dualistic tendency to privilege our group over all others is the root of all suffering. The sequence of simple practices set out here is an effective method of unifying the wisdom of emptiness with the skilful means of kindness to all.

Refuge and Bodhicitta

I go for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Assembly of the Excellent Ones until enlightenment is gained. Through the virtue of practising generosity and the other perfections may I attain buddhahood for the benefit of all beings.

We say: *I go for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Assembly of the Excellent Ones until enlightenment is gained.* This is very useful because if you have this refuge then you are holding onto something that is simple and grounded and true and helpful. This is an enormous protection against doing harm yourself or other people harming you, because you affirm that *“My orientation is towards awakening and liberation.”* When we say these words we need to think about their implication. For example: you can take refuge in the motherland or the fatherland; you can say *“I am Scottish”* or *“I am Polish”* or *“I am Ukrainian”* or *“I am Russian.”* When you take refuge in a narrow identification like that you are immediately in a world of oppositions. Due to history, geography, politics and economic resources there are many structural oppositions embedded in how people are defined by their identification with countries. The security of knowing who I am based on narrow identification automatically puts me in opposition to those who have different identities. This is the unsettling paradox: that my self-reassuring identity is itself the structural basis of my conflict with others.

When we hear of people being prepared to take up arms and act in a violent way to protect their own land and people our heart can feel for them because who would not want to protect what is dear to them? But we also can see that these people, places and objects which are invested with so much value are unstable in themselves. Friends become enemies and enemies become friends. With this understanding we develop compassion for the wide variety of people because they take refuge in things that can give them very little refuge: national identity, gender identity, economic status identity and so on. All the relative truth foundations of identity are very fragile. They arise due to circumstances, they are held in place by patterns of circumstances, and they can easily be undermined.

It is very important to reflect for ourselves on true refuge. On a relative level I can do my best to help other people and offer support and fellow feeling to those who suffer when the foundations of their world is under attack. Yet, having gained the deeper refuge afforded by dharma we also can try to offer people the sense that liberation from dualistic attachment is the great method for gaining enduring safety.

Through the virtue of practising generosity and the other perfections, may I attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings. ‘All beings’ indicates all sentient beings in the six realms – the gods, jealous gods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell realm dwellers. When we apply this to human beings we include the people whom we think of as selfish and bad and dangerous, as well as the people whom we might see as victims at the mercy of difficult forces. Our mahayana or Great Vehicle view is inclusive, welcoming and non-judgmental. In our dharma of the middle way we aim to avoid all extremes and polarities. We do not rely on the misleading belief in eternal selves with inherent existence nor do we believe in death as absolute oblivion. In order to help all beings we need an open heart free of all bias. If I identify myself as Scottish, then I don’t want to help the English. If I think I am from Glasgow,

then I don't want to help the people from Edinburgh. We all know these nationalistic turns: the people in the valley don't like the hill people and so on. There are so many ways in which narrow identification creates opposition. So, when we say ***May all beings be happy*** we are doing something enormous to and for ourselves. We are peeling away the constricting carapace of narrow self-identity so that our infinite buddha nature is free to offer its potential.

In the mahayana the development of true compassion is considered to be a slow process because you start by seeing how small and bigoted you can be. You might see that a child has been blown up in a war and you say Argh! These terrible enemy soldiers! Why do they do this? They are horrible! It is very easy to have this kind of feeling. With this you are saying that some people are good and some other people are bad. You are pulled to these extremes and so reifying bias happens very easily. Therefore again and again we have to come back to the middle way: ***May all beings be happy***. This opens our hearts to its intrinsic inclusivity.

The mahayana view indicates that people are not to be helped solely on the basis of their qualities or the things that I like or admire about them but rather, simply for the fact that they have life. The basis of life is the mind. They are people with a mind and the root of their mind is not different from the dharmakaya mind of all the buddhas. It is because we don't awaken to the true nature of our minds that we get lost in prejudice, bias and confusion. Developing bodhicitta infinite kindness is to become aware that the infinite potential of the Buddha is already present in me and so my task is to open to this intrinsic openness. This potential is present in all beings. If I put others in a box of narrow identities through my prejudicial definition then both of us will be constricted. With this I will be pulled necessarily into liking some and not liking others. Dissolving this dualising discrimination is the great work of the Great Vehicle, the Mahayana.

Seven Branch Practice

By salutations, offerings, and confession, and by rejoicing at the merit of others, beseeching Dharma teaching, and requesting the Buddhas not to die – whatever small amount of virtue I have collected, I dedicate it all for the enlightenment of all beings.

This section is the familiar Seven Branch Practice which we use in order to accumulate merit which we can dedicate for the benefit of all beings. We begin we begin by imagining that the whole sky in front of us is full of Buddhas and that each Buddha is surrounded by a great ocean of Bodhisattvas, all of them radiant with light. They are all gazing at us. We make use of the ever-present kindness of the Buddhas to make our practice experiential rather than abstract or theoretical. We are not merely thinking about the Buddhas but we are directly connecting with them. The root of samsara is isolation from the inclusive wisdom and kindness that is the heart of the Buddha. Faith and devotion dissolve the veils of separation so that the presence of the Buddhas is a fact of our life. We then make salutation to the Buddhas, bowing in devotion and gratitude.

The ego-self is always in isolation. Even when a person feels part of a group their basic reference point is 'I, me, myself'. In relation to me everyone else, however close, is 'other'. I, in my singularity, stand apart from all that is around me. This is the experience of our self, our personal consciousness. It is not the experience of our intrinsic awareness. However until we are present in and as that awareness, we will find ourselves identifying with our finite self. Then there is just me getting on with my life activated by what I like and what I don't like. I am like a mole living under the ground, living in a little tunnel. I am like a frog at the bottom of a well, believing that my little world is all there is. When I do this practice I gradually see that twenty-four hours a day, in every situation, the Buddhas are looking at me with love in their heart and with light in their eyes. So I make offerings to them with the request, *"Please gives us all more light."* All the problems in the world, the problems of war, selfishness, cruelty and so on arise from the darkness of the hardening heart.

Gratitude softens the heart. We become humble through recognition of all that has been done for us, both by all our mother sentient beings and by the Buddhas. The Buddhas are undefended, open and available. Not only can we offer them all that is sweet and beautiful but also all that is ugly bitter and seemingly bad. The Buddhas see the emptiness of all phenomena and by offering everything to them we soften our own dualistic prejudice and start to open to all without judgement.

Then we confess. When we confess our faults and our selfishness we are distancing ourselves from our dualising limitations. We disidentify from our feelings of what we like and what we don't like, from our discriminating ideas of insiders and outsiders, us and them. We are not distancing ourselves from the objects but from identification with our prejudices. As long as we believe that the qualities we perceive in the 'object' are truly inherent in and definitive of the object, our perception of the world will be merely the projection of our distorting prejudices. Moreover, we will not be able to distinguish between the current contents of our mind and our mind itself.

The dualistic of structure of judging to judged leads to theft, exploitation, cruelty in relationships, unkindness to children and to every possible form of harm. It arises from duality, from thinking 'I am real, you are real', which progresses to 'I am better than you, I need what you have got.' All nastiness arises from the delusion that self and other are truly separate.

We confess our outer faults, the specific actions, feelings and thoughts that are not in harmony with our bodhisattva intention to bring happiness and liberation to all beings. We also confess our deluded beliefs which underpin each and every negative thought and intention. We confess that we believe in entities, that we believe in the inherent existence of phenomena. In so many sutras and tantras the Buddhas have taught that this is a false view for there are no self-existing people or entities.

If we stop breathing, we die. If we stop eating and drinking our body will go into decline and die. We are relational with the world. We talk with other people, we go to school, we work with other people...our life is fulfilled through relational contact. It is vital to be able to feel free to openly respond to other people. Confession is to free yourself from the guilty self-critique which makes you shrink inside, feel unworthy or bad or harmful. Many people believe that others would not like them if how they believe they truly are were to be known: *"Only my mask is likeable – I have to keep so much of myself secret."*

These delusional beliefs maintain our habitual falsity and pretence. Confession is a powerful way to release us from this artifice so that we can become truly available.

We rejoice in the merit of others. This is a great protection against envy. This current war in Ukraine was started by Russia. It will be difficult to end due to the many factors fuelling it. One of these factors is certainly envy. Ukraine is a democracy with a good economy. This provokes envy in Russia where the more controlled economy is not doing so well. The dictator wants his economy to be better than the Ukrainian economy but he does not trust his own people to behave properly unless he controls them. Control leads to fear, anxiety and inhibition — the very opposite of rejoicing in the success of all. To rejoice is to say, *“You have done well and I am happy that you have done well.”* What could be better for me than to live in a world where people do well, are kind thoughtful and generous? Your good fortune does not diminish me in anyway. In fact when I celebrate your success and virtue, I get to share in your virtue as well. This is an infinite expanding system.

We ask the Buddhas to teach the dharma. Without dharma we will be lost, caught up in prejudice, blown away by the five poisons. The teachings found in buddhadharma are unique. If the Buddha had not taught we would be trapped in the echo-chamber of endless conceptualisation. The dharma is not a refined form of human thinking but the revelation of the ground of being that offers us direct access to how we truly are.

Then we request the Buddhas not to die. This is to say, we need their availability. In life, if we meet good people with whom we can have an honest deep connection this is such a blessing. Unfortunately most people are unavailable. Wrapped inside their assumptions, they don't see themselves or others clearly. They are not intrinsically bad, yet because of their karmic veils they don't see life as it is. The veils of their assumptions and involved activity are very thick. We all need the teachings of the Buddha to free us from the deluded beliefs we rely on.

Whatever small amount of merit we get from this practice we give to others so that they may be enlightened. We give it to all beings and this actually happens because the infinite commitment to benefit all beings is like an amazing magnifying force that takes even a small piece of virtue and makes it vast enough to be available to all beings. However, if we pull back and want to keep this merit just for ourselves, our family or our racial group, then it will shrivel and vanish. It is by giving away our merit that the increase occurs.

The Four Immeasurables

**May all sentient beings have happiness and the cause of happiness.
May all sentient beings be freed from suffering and the cause of suffering.
May all sentient beings never be separated from the happiness that is free of suffering.
May all sentient beings abide in equanimity free from cherishing friends and relatives and being dismissive of strangers and enemies.**

Then, we have the Four Immeasurables. If you were to learn martial arts you would need to start with two things: how to stand upright, balanced and relaxed, and then how to fall without being harmed. The Four Immeasurables are about how to ground yourself in a way that will prevent the circumstances of life from pushing you over, and if you do fall, you will be able to bounce back due to the generous vitality of your heart.

We say, ***May all sentient beings have happiness and the cause of happiness.*** Happiness makes sense; we understand what that is. The cause of happiness is a little more difficult. For some people that might seem to be food, for others money, for others sex. However the true cause of happiness is to be free of the five poisons: opacity, desire, aversion, pride and jealousy.

Opacity is the dull mental state in which you rely on assumptions, on the opinions you have received from your culture, from your education and so on. If you free yourself from that encapsulation you start to open to the freshness of true awareness, the radiant mind which is hidden from you by your own preoccupations.

We also have desire, the felt sense of needing more. All desires arise from a basic sense of lack. We have aversion towards aspects of ourselves and towards aspects of our environment. It arises from a sense of excess, of having something I don't want and need to get rid of. I feel that how you are is too much for me, *"Get back, go away. I don't want you."*

We have pride, our sense that we have good qualities and possessions which make us superior to some other beings, or even to all. We can feel pride in beauty, in health, in skin colour, and in achievements, status and power.

Jealousy arises when we feel that the qualities and possessions on which we have built our identity are being devalued by the qualities or actions of others. Your partner is attracted to someone younger, richer, or more handsome than you. Fear of loss can evoke many strong feelings especially depression, hopelessness and rage. When rage arises the wish to annihilate the other as the perceived costs of pain can be implacable. The other must feel vulnerable in order to free me from my own vulnerability. I must win because I cannot bear to lose. This binary structure easily leads to murder, war and subjugation of the other.

These five poisons are very dynamic. They are like a swirling storm and they can completely upset the balance of our life. So it is very important not to be misled by the transient enthusiasms fed by these afflicting poisons. Under the power of their toxicity, we easily act in ways that we will later come to regret. We wish that all beings have relative happiness – food, comfort, security and so on. But more importantly, may they have the deep, deep root of happiness, which is to awaken to their own true nature, free of the five poisons.

The dzogchen tradition emphasises the importance of being able to see your own face. When we wander in samsara we are all living inside our masks. We grow up with certain cultural assumptions about being polite to people, about learning to speak in a proper way and so on. We learn the masks of language, and on an inner level we learn to adopt the masks of concepts by identifying with the thoughts and feelings

that run in our mind. However our own true face, our naked face, is the infinite awareness of the Buddha. It is not anything other than this. This is the true cause of happiness.

We say, ***May all sentient beings be freed from suffering and the cause of suffering.*** There is the misery of birth, old age, sickness and death as well as the misery of accidents, of war, of unkindness, of being exploited physically or sexually and so on. There are many ways in which desolation can arise for beings. The root of this is not seeing our own intrinsic pure face, the freshness of presence.

It is common for human beings to imagine that difficulties and the sorrow they bring are accidents. My life should be easy. Bad things happened to others. In fact, I don't believe I will die. However if we avoid the painful truths of our existence, we will have no motive to seek an exit from it. It is better to taste sorrow in the knowledge that it has a cause and a cessation. Moreover, the Buddha has taught many methods to free us from suffering and sorrow. There is the Eightfold Noble Path of right view, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. For us, the key method to achieve cessation of suffering is to rest in unborn awareness free of duality.

Then we say, ***May all sentient beings never be separated from the happiness that is free of suffering.*** Such a happiness could not be a construct; it could not possibly be something that you cause to happen. As you know, if you clean your home then after some days there is again dust and dirt. We don't know where all this dirt comes from but somehow there is always dirt arriving and arriving and arriving. We work hard to create a situation the way we want it – but other factors outside our control are also operating. What we clean cannot be protected from the impact of the activity of life such as dust and dirt blowing in through the open window. All compounded things are impermanent. Everything which is created is liable to decay, including all states of relative purity. Relative existence means that this event arises on the basis of that event – there is no inherent existence in anything that we encounter. A happiness that is never touched by any sorrow is not a relative happiness. It is not something that you can make by looking at a good movie or walking in a beautiful natural landscape. It is the intrinsic happiness of the mind itself.

According to dzogchen this unconditioned happiness will be revealed by allowing whatever thoughts and feelings come to arise and pass without dualistic involvement. By resting in this way, we come to see that our mind is vajra, indestructible; it is uncontaminated, untouched by any limiting factors. When you see that this is how your mind actually is, neurotic housework stops. You don't need to be endlessly trying to control what occurs, to improve yourself, to become more generous, to become more this or more that because you see directly that these are just transient movements inseparable from the mind itself which is unmoving and pure from the very beginning.

Then we say, ***May all sentient beings abide in equanimity free from cherishing friends and relatives and being dismissive of strangers and enemies.*** This equanimity is vital when we are thinking about situations of war because war forces people to take a side. War and exploitation make it very difficult to think clearly about what is going on. For example, Britain had a long connection with the slave trade over many, many years. Yet, cover-up, avoidance of the topic, excuses of different kinds – these behaviours somehow seem easier than a simple and sincere apology, accompanied by a willingness

to make reparation. It is very difficult for the British establishment to sincerely apologise for the slave trade. *"These things happen. That was in the past. I wasn't alive then..."* There are many ways people can try to avoid implication in what occurred.

Our defended view of ourself, our country and our values is anything but impartial. Yet if we recall that we also are suffused with the five poisons and easily succumb to provocations, then we might imagine that we too could have cruelly exploited others. To always align ourselves with the good guys is tempting but deceptive. In order to achieve equanimity we have to become aware of our capacity for good and bad, for generosity and selfishness, for kindness and cruelty.

Seeing our potential to experience every aspect of samsara and nirvana, we can be more honest about the many ways in which we get lost. Developing the clarity of equanimity in relation to our own complexity, we can start to open to our world as it is. With this equanimity I am not going to put one group, my group, my family or my friends, above other group. Generosity has to go 360 degrees in all directions, equally for everyone. Of course, on an outer level, if you have children you need to feed them and keep them warm and buy them presents and so on. It would probably not be very helpful to say to the children, *"Ahh! There are so many poor children in the world so I don't think I will give you any more presents."* That wouldn't feed all the poor people in the world and you own little children would be very unhappy.

Our practice is that when we give to one, in our mind, in our heart, we give to all. Just as we imagine all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas filling the space of the sky, we can imagine that all our enemies and all the people we find difficult are assembled in front of us so that they are nearest to the Buddhas and their blessing. We imagine our friends are behind us with the lineages from our father's side moving out to the right and the lineages from our mother's side moving out to the left. All sentient beings are with us in the practice, all sentient beings equally receiving the blessing of the Buddha. Our view is always inclusive and not exclusive. War means exclusion: some people should be killed or driven out of their country or deprived of freedom. The inclusive attitude view is profound. It is not based on the qualities you see in the other person. All are included because all are kin, arising from the same source. Equanimity can be very challenging for us. It confronts us with the biases inherent in our dualistic vision.

Children are often encouraged to try hard at school, to do their best, to behave properly to grandmothers and aunts and uncles, and so on. They are encouraged to transcend their limitations and improve so that they become worthy of praise. *"Oh! I am very proud of you. You did well!"* The mahayana view is completely different from this. Inclusion is not a reward for being good. I will help all sentient beings because they suffer and because of their intrinsic buddha nature. With equanimity good intentions spread in all directions. In this way, we are stepping out of the self-referential concern with cause and effect which is the matrix for generating karma. Karma comes about when we develop an intention towards a specific situation perceived within our dualistic vision. Equanimity is beyond that.

Aspiration for Happiness

Unfailing sources of refuge, the three Jewels and the three Roots, and especially Chenrezi, the benefactor of the world, with Jetsun Tara and Guru Padmasambhava — we pray to you to think of the vows you have taken. Please bless us with the full accomplishment of our aspiration.

In these present degenerate times, due to the causes and conditions of the wrong ideas and actions of all beings, and the commotion of the elements in the world and in our bodies, there are formerly unheard-of diseases in humans and animals and we are oppressed by the planets, snake gods, spirit-rulers, trouble-makers and evil demons.

The crops are damaged by rust, night frost and hail, and there is war and dispute. Rain and water supply are not appropriate, there are snow avalanches and rodents destroy the pastures, bringing famine. There are earthquakes, fire, and destruction by other hostile forms of the four elements.

In particular, there is trouble for the teachings due to border wars and so forth. May all the many kinds of harm and trouble in this world be quickly pacified and completely uprooted.

For all beings, human and non-human, may the precious, excellent bodhicitta arise naturally so that, free of harmful or troublesome thoughts and deeds, they have minds full of love for each other. May all the world realms have happiness, joy and prosperity and may the doctrines of the Buddha spread far and remain for long.

By the power of the truth of the three roots, the buddhas and the bodhisattvas, and whatever virtuous roots there are in samsara and nirvana, and by the power of our excellent and very pure intentions, our prayers and aspirations must be fulfilled!

Buddhist aspiration takes us beyond the remit of our egoic vision: *Unfailing sources of refuge, the Three Jewels and the Three Roots*, - that is Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and the Guru, Meditation Deity and Dakini – *and especially Chenrezi, Avalokiteshvara, the Benefactor of the World, along with Jetsun Tara and Guru Padmasambhava*. These last three deities are all in the lotus family in the western direction of the mandala. They are concerned with the purification of desire, transforming it into discerning wisdom, the capacity to see each situation exactly as it is. This precise perception prevents us from entering into propaganda and dogma. The rich texture of actual phenomena cannot be reduced to concepts, interpretations or final judgements. Appreciation of the actual frees us from the imprisoning delusion of real entities.

The unique specificity of each person, just as they are, is inseparable from their buddha nature, the buddha nature which is the same for all beings. This is what we have to be aware of. When we say Turkish people are like this or Scottish people are like that, these statements do not point to anything except concepts. There is no such thing as 'the Turkish people' because each person living in Turkey is himself or herself with the shape of his or her face, whether they are energetic, whether their spine bends easily or not. Moreover, how they manifest is situationally conditioned and so any one image of a person will be an unreliable guide to how they are, moment by moment. Identity established by concepts has no true referent. Reliance on concepts leads us astray. Rather, we should rest in the non-duality of inherent emptiness and the unique specificity of each moment of phenomena.

We pray to you and we ask you to think of the vows you have taken. Please bless us with the accomplishment of our aspiration. In the Tibetan tradition when we pray we are not saying, "We humbly beg you to do this." We are saying, "Hey big people! You said you would do this! Now do it! Padmasambhava, you said you would help all beings! I am a person, I want help, help me now!" Why can you have such confidence? Because of non-dual connectivity. Padmasambhava is not somebody else, somewhere else, far away. Padmasambhava is the shining presence of your own potential and so he will respond to your pure aspiration. Confidence in this connection opens the way to the experience of non-duality. When you pray to these deities what you are doing is awakening your own potential which has always been with you but hidden by your beliefs.

The text says,

In these present degenerate times, due to the causes and conditions of the wrong ideas and actions of all beings and the commotion of the elements in the world and in our bodies... We know that all over the world people behave badly; they are selfish and they act for their own immediate benefit. However, we have a crisis with climate change and people are having to ask, "Should I make a lot of sacrifices for the sake of my grandchildren? How will the world be for them?" If I keep the temperature in my flat high because I don't like the cold, that will be burning up fuel which will endanger the climate for them. Perhaps I should put on two sweaters and a coat and sit with a woollen hat on my head. I won't die from doing that and maybe it would help them.

We have to think of our actions yet we often choose selfishness. We take it for granted that we can fly to different countries for holidays and that we can eat soft summer fruit in the winter time. We go to the supermarket. The shelves offer us endless, endless unnecessary choices. These outer forms of the wrong ideas and actions of beings are often invisible because we think, "Well, if it is in the supermarket that means it must be okay..." However we have to practise looking at the implications of our actions. What does it mean to be generous? What does it mean to help people? Is what we do in harmony with our dharma aspirations?

Each situation where you relate to another person is a series of events, each coming into formation. Relating is co-emergent and not already established. We have to be clear about how we respond to others. Are you in a relationship in order to correct your partner and show them the right way to think? Are you here to fit in with their point of view so that they feel dominant and happy? Nobody can

decide these things for you, you have to find your own balance. If you let them win all the time, no good. If you try to win all the time, no good. You have to move with their movements while remaining balanced and grounded. This is what makes life difficult.

C.R. Lama often said that the dharmakaya is easy, finding the true nature of your mind is very easy because it is just there. The nirmanakaya, being with other people, that's what is very hard because people are not the way we want them to be. They stubbornly insist in being themselves. *"I am trying to help you and you just want to be you! How outrageous!"* We need to be flexible. We need to be responsive, we can't just take up a position. Although in statues and paintings the Buddha sits on a big throne and never moves, the actuality of the Buddha coming into the world is very relational, very flexible, endlessly meeting different people in different ways.

The turbulence of the mind leads to the commotion of the elements: earth, water, fire, wind and space. They are not in balance, as we see with climate change. Also in our own bodies there are many new kind of sicknesses, such as the COVID virus. There are countless viruses around, in animals, in the forests, in jungles. We human beings are cutting down forests and getting more and more contact with wild animals, and so these viruses will spread. They spread through birds, through insects. This is how our world is. We imagine we can expand and take what we want with no adverse consequences, but this is not so. You might act badly and think that you got away with it because nobody found out. Yet the consequences will come to get you later, like a boomerang coming back. In the same way, when you undermine the balance of nature, sooner or later the consequences manifest.

There are formerly unheard-of diseases in humans and animals and we are oppressed by the planets, snake gods, spirit rulers, troublemakers and evil demons. Many people nowadays don't believe in demons and spirits. We forget about them and live in a rational world, yet as we can see, people behave in very irrational ways. War is always the result of something irrational. You imagine that you can win. In life winning and losing is not a helpful frame of reference. They are one of the binaries that form the eight worldly concerns: happiness and not suffering; fame and not insignificance; praise and not blame; gain and not loss. I want to win, I don't want to lose. However winning and losing are born together, like conjoined twins. You may win for a while, but sooner or later you are going to lose.

The idea of spirits gives us a sense that there are many energy formations all around us. We need to be very thoughtful and careful about the power of these energy formations because although we may not be in contact with them, they are in contact with us. They feed into situations like causing distraction when someone is driving a car and then there is an accident, or people slipping on the stairs. Many of these incidents arise due to forces our culture ignores. In the teachings in dzogchen everything is the mind. The radiance of the mind is not a fixed thing; everything is the movement of energy. Energy is an unboundaried interactive field, so new empty pattern formations can happen very easily.

The crops are damaged by rust, night frost and hail, and there is war and dispute. Suddenly emerging conflicts play havoc with our plans. For example, for some reason the majority of people in Britain who voted, voted to separate from Europe, to have Brexit. They thought that by being self-governing Britain could reduce immigration and have more freedom. Since separating from Europe

more and more so-called 'illegal immigrants' have been leaving France in little rubber boats to paddle across the channel that separates France and England. We can't prevent them leaving France. We can't prevent them arriving in Britain. We are not in charge of what is happening. We are not the boss. We are not the autonomous agents we would like to be. When you see in your own life how much you would like to be in charge of everything, then you start to be able to understand a bit more how it is like to be Mister Putin. He is not from another planet, he is a sentient being caught up in the delusion that he can be the master of circumstances, that he can control what is going on. But our world is so complex with vast numbers of variables operating at any one time. Nobody can establish stable dominance for it is a delusion.

Rain and water supply are not appropriate; there are snow avalanches and rodents destroy the pastures bringing famine. There are earthquakes, fire, and destruction by other hostile forms of the four elements. In particular, there is trouble for the teachings due to border wars and so forth. May all the many kinds of harm and trouble in this world be quickly pacified and completely uprooted! On the general relative truth level in which we see self and other as real, we see clear differences between day and night, good and bad, hot and cold. The value ascribed to the polarities shifts with circumstances. Yet in each situation we develop our own ways of locating events within our hierarchies of meaning and value. Due to this ongoing reactivity, turbulence is guaranteed. There has never been a time when the whole world has been peaceful. There are always wars, conflicts and differences as some economies expand and others contract. When there is a transformation like the ending of the USSR, some countries gain more freedom. For some people that was very good but for other people it was terrifying. For the people who were young, creative and wanted to be entrepreneurs and start their own companies this was a huge opportunity, but for older people who had worked in state factories with a subsidised lunch cooked every day in the canteen, this new freedom was often terrifying. All the factors which provided security and reassuring predictability were suddenly in flux. How we respond to such new situations depends on the specificity of our karmic structure, our body and our emotions. That is why we cannot say objectively that this is definitely good or this is definitely bad. Due to this our minds are likely to experience a lot of turbulence.

For all beings, human and non-human, may the precious, excellent bodhicitta arise naturally so that, free of harmful or troublesome thoughts and deeds, they have minds full of love for each other. We wish this for all beings. Bodhicitta is the mind of awakening, the buddha mind as a potential, and it is already present within the minds of all beings. Although it is there and can never be lost, at the moment it is obscured and covered over by negative thoughts. So we say, "*May all obscurations be removed from people's minds.*"

What makes someone look good or look bad to us is just the interaction of the patterning of their obscurations and our obscurations. As an ego-self, we are never a neutral observer looking in from a stable place outside the commotion. The ego-self is implicated in all its experiences. The intrinsic, the inherent, that which is there from the very beginning is all good. We say it is Kuntuzangpo, Samantabhadra, the primordial Buddha, pure from the very beginning. All limitations arise contingently; they suddenly arrive and then they start to move in relation to each other. They are relative to each other and lack inherent validity. Love for all beings dissolves all limitations. May the pure mind of all beings be revealed to all

beings so that they open to each other. We don't pray, "*May all the bad people be defeated and the good people triumph!*" This kind of language is unhelpful. We are not concerned with victory; what we want is liberation, freedom. May the dull coverings fall away revealing the naked mind, naked awareness.

If you have a shower you take your clothes off, you go into the shower, you wash and you feel very fresh. However, we then put our clothes back on, re-enter the world and again become dirty through interaction. The naked mind is not like this. No matter what arises in it, it remains naked, uncovered and uncontaminated. If you only see the reflection, the mirror is taken for granted. But if you see that the reflection is non-dual with, and inseparable from, the mirror, then nothing obscures the mirror for it is not other than the reflection. Our thoughts, feelings, opinions, and beliefs can be seen as truly non-dual with, and inseparable from, the unborn mind. This accurate perception sets us free. Or we can take these arisings to be the mental clothing of our personal identity, our gender, our language, our race, our age. These kinds of clothing cover up or hide our naked mind if we believe them to be real. Then awakening to the actual is difficult.

When we sit in meditation practice we can feel how we get carried away by little swirls of thought. We find ourselves merged in sensation. This is like putting on clothing. You go into the meditation for a shower but you can't feel the water because you keep putting on a sweater, a shirt and all the items of clothing that make life familiar. Yet meditation is the time to be naked. Thoughts come and go. You don't need to cover yourself in thoughts, feelings, sensations; they just come and they go. Come and go. When we see this directly, then our mind can relax and fill with love. ***May all the world realms have happiness, joy and prosperity and may the doctrines of the Buddha spread far and remain for long!*** That's a beautiful aspiration.

By the power of the truth of the three roots, the buddhas and the bodhisattvas, and whatever virtuous roots there are in samsara and nirvana, and by the power of our excellent and very pure intentions, our prayers and aspirations must be fulfilled! This kind of aspiration is common in buddhist teachings and it links us to the power of the practice. The practice is not just something we do, but it is as if we are plugging ourself into a universal energy system which can then be efficacious in bringing about good results. When we connect with the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, the yogis and gurus, their loving kindness, which is the energy of emptiness, starts to flow through us and links us deeply with others.

Interconnectivity grounded in emptiness and non-dual kindness is invulnerable. We become unafraid and this supports the equanimity we have previously developed. We see the illusory nature of good and bad and so remain open yet uninvaded and untouched by the negative. This allows us to repel all negative forces without any ill will towards those who are attacking us. Again, like the mirror, we reflect back as a neutral gesture. Confident in the inviolability of emptiness, we are allowing the negative energy to turn back on itself without our having to do anything except not receive it. Dissolving all self-doubt, we align ourselves with the power of the Buddha's word and remain calm, open and invulnerable.

Heart Sutra

In the language of India: Bhagawatiprajnaparamitahridaya. In the language of Tibet: bChom lDan-'Das-Ma Shes-Rab-Kyi Pha-Rol-Tu Phyin-Pa'i sNying-Po. Forming just one bundle of paper.

Thus I have heard:

At one time Bhagawan Buddha was staying at the Vulture Peak Hill at Rajagriha together with a great assembly of the sangha of ordained monks and bodhisattvas.

At that time Bhagawan Buddha was resting evenly in the absorbed contemplation known as 'Profound illumination, which discerns the nature of phenomena.'

At that time the great bodhisattva Arya Avalokitesvara was clearly observing within the profound practice of transcendental wise discerning. Through this he truly saw the inherent emptiness of the five factors of composition.

Then, through the power of the Buddha, the venerable Shariputra spoke as follows to the bodhisattva-mahasattva Arya Avalokitesvara: "In what manner should they train, those of good family who wish to follow the profound practice of transcendental wise discerning?" Thus he spoke.

Bodhisattva-mahasattva Arya Avalokitesvara made this reply to the venerable Shariputra: "Shariputra, whichever of those sons or daughters of a good family wishes to follow the profound practice of transcendental wise discerning, they should look thoroughly in the manner I will describe and thus clearly see that the five factors of composition are intrinsically empty of inherent existence.

"Form is empty. Emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form. Form is not other than emptiness. In the same way, feeling, perception, formation and consciousness are all empty.

"Thus, Shariputra, in that way all phenomena are themselves emptiness. They are free of signs and identification. They are unbegun and unstopped, without stain and without freedom from stains, and are without decrease or increase.

"Therefore, Shariputra, emptiness is without form, without feeling, without perception, without formation and without consciousness; without eye, without ear, without nose, without tongue, without body, without mentation; without form, without sound, without smell, without taste,

without sensation, and without objects of mentation. Emptiness is without the domain of vision and without the domain of the other senses up to and including the domain of mentation. And emptiness is without all the domains of consciousness up to and including mentation consciousness.

“Emptiness is free of ignorance, and of the extinction of ignorance and of all twelve factors of dependent co-arising up until old age and death and the extinction of old age and death. Similarly, emptiness is free of suffering, its cause, its cessation and the path that leads to the cessation of suffering. Emptiness is free of intrinsic original knowing and is free of attainment and also of non-attainment.

“Therefore Shariputra, because there is nothing to be gained, bodhisattvas rely on transcendental wise discerning and, dwelling with minds free of obscuration, are without fear. Having passed completely from the domain of deception they attain the full release of nirvana.

“All Buddhas abiding in the three times also rely on transcendental wise discerning and thus, with unexcelled, perfect awakening, are completely enlightened buddhas.

“Due to this being so, there is the mantra of transcendental wise discerning, the mantra of great awareness, the unsurpassed mantra. This is the mantra which balances the unbalanced. This is the mantra which completely purifies all suffering. This is not deception so you can come to know that it is true.

“Recite the mantra of transcendental wise discerning: TADYATHA GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE BODHI SVAHA In this way, gone, gone, gone beyond, fully gone beyond. Awakened — as it is! Shariputra, in this way a bodhisattva-mahasattva should train in profound transcendental wise discerning.”

Then Bhagawan arose from his absorbed contemplation and praised the bodhisattva-mahasattva Arya Avalokitesvara, saying: “Very good. Very good. Son of a good family, it is like that. It is like that, and so profound transcendental wise discerning is to be practised just as you have shown it. All the Tathagatas will rejoice at this.”

Bhagawan spoke thus, and then the venerable Shariputra and the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara and all of their retinues, and all the gods, men, jealous gods, local spirits and so on of the world rejoiced and sincerely praised the speech of Bhagawan Buddha.

This text, the *Heart Sutra*, presents the heart of transcendental wisdom, the awareness of emptiness. It is important to study this text and relate it to your life and your sense of your world. The

text refers to many Buddhist terms which describe how our world is constructed. Since they are not terms we use in our daily life, they may seem abstract. Therefore, we have to see that the basic point of the absence of inherent existence in sentient beings and in phenomena can be applied to anything and anyone we encounter, including ourselves. We need to observe how we reify and judge the events that we encounter. We tend to see things, think about things, feel things, remember things. Yet the actual fleeting nature of each of these events is being ignored. Our concepts are misleading us into a deluded experience of entities, of things that seem to have their own intrinsic existence 'out there'. This false perception is essential for our continued existence in samsara. However, if we wish liberation then it is vital that we directly see the unborn nature of all that occurs. Life is like a dream, and each moment is an illusory display nondual with emptiness. The *Heart Sutra* helps us to put all our assumptions into question and see them as magical displays referring only to other magical displays. All that occurs is unborn within the womb of emptiness, the Great Mother.

In this sutra, Buddha Shakyamuni, through his meditation, supports the great bodhisattva Avalokitesvara in clarifying the doubts of Shariputra, a leading representative of the theravada. Buddha Shakyamuni is resting evenly in the absorbed contemplation known as 'Profound Illumination' which discerns the nature of phenomena. He rests in, and is at home in, absorbed contemplation. He is not busy. He is not trying to do anything. Everyone else there was active, busy, intentional. They were all up to something. The Buddha alone rests in Profound Illumination. 'Profound' indicates emptiness, the depth of which has no bottom: it cannot be found as something. But it is not just empty, for it is 'Illumination', the ceaseless clarity of all illusory appearance. Illumination, the ceaseless display, of unborn appearance is bright, clear, ungraspable. It is neither something 'real' nor mere vacuous nothing. This is appearance inseparable from the awareness non-dual with emptiness. This is beyond concepts. This is Buddha as she is showing that all appearances are aspects of the whole. All beings are kin, the unborn children of the Great Mother and so kindness is all pervasive and inclusive. Liberation is possible for all because they are always already non-dual from their own pure ground.

Shariputra asks ***"How should a person of good family who wishes to engage with transcendental wise discerning, train?"*** Avalokitesvara explains that ***they should look thoroughly in the manner he will describe and clearly see that the five factors of composition are intrinsically empty of inherent existence.***

In the theravada tradition the five factors of composition are seen as the basic constructive factors of all sentient beings. They are form, feeling, perception, association or mental constructs, and consciousness. When these five factors are operating together they generate our deluded experience that 'this is how I am'. These factors which were often taken to be fixed and definitive are actually empty of any self, any own existence that would fundamentally set them apart from other 'things'. There is no actual basis for their seeming difference – it is an illusion made real solely by our belief in it.

All the basic concepts that are used in the theravada traditions, and are deemed to provide an accurate account of how samsara functions, are shown to be devoid of true validity since they refer to phenomena which lack inherent existence. Emptiness is without limit and this boundlessness reframes all that has been taken to be real. The non-duality of appearance and emptiness is inclusive and uncontrived.

Then Avalokitesvara says, ***Form is empty. Emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form. Form is not other than emptiness.*** Look at any form, it could be a tree, an apple or a tomato. Look at the tomato, it is there, it is just a tomato, all by itself. This idea is our stupidity. It is a tomato that was growing on a tomato plant; it has been removed from the tomato plant and if you keep it long enough it will go mouldy and rot. So, a tomato is a tomato for a brief period of its life: when it is a green tomato growing on the bush we don't want to bite it. Now it is a red tomato, you can pick it off the plant and prepare it for use. If you leave it too long it will no longer be good to eat. Thus, a tomato is a process moving in time. It is emerging within dependent co-origination.

If the tomato plant had not been planted in the garden and had not been given water in summertime, the tomato would not have grown. If the tomato had not been picked at the right time, it wouldn't have been available for you. Now it is your job to eat it at the right time. Your desire to eat the tomato and the ripeness of the tomato are dependent co-origination. These two factors come together. As you approach the tomato its seeming autonomy and integrity will start to unravel because you are going to chop it in pieces or fry it in a pan or maybe just bite into it and eat it raw. You are concerned to de-tomato the tomato. If the tomato was made of steel then it would be a real problem; you could not eat it. What attracts you to the tomato is your capacity to destroy the tomato. And the reason you can destroy the tomato is because it lacks inherent self-existence. It is not a separate entity and that is its vulnerability. We human beings are also vulnerable: if we stop breathing we die! I need air, I need air! I need the same temperature, I need food, I need many things. I don't have an independent existence.

This is the central point of the *Heart Sutra*: all appearances are linked together. There are no truly separate entities, they are not isolated, they are not things that exist in and of themselves. Our world is a world of collaboration. If you appreciate the finesse of how the different parts move together, it's so amazing! We all have our amazing bodies! We have a liver, we have kidneys, we have bowels, we have a heart, we have teeth, we have lungs... all of these parts are functioning together. Moreover, each of these parts of the body is made up of many parts – molecules, atoms, subatomic particles, all of which are patterns of energy. The complex whole of the body is an elaborate play of energy. Entities arise as our misperception of energy due to our over-reliance on concepts. The parts of our body collaborate together to give us the sense of 'I am me.' Without their collaboration my sense of being me would have no relative site of manifestation. I am the flowering of the collaborative system of this body which is itself collaborating with its environment. The whole world of infinite phenomenon collaborates together to give rise to us as aspects of the undivided field of experience.

Avalokitesvara then says, ***Thus, Shariputra, in that way all phenomena are themselves emptiness. They are free of signs and identification. They are unbegun and unstopped, without stain and without freedom from stains, and are without decrease or increase.*** Because each and every phenomenon is not other than emptiness, they offer no basis for the attribution of signs or identities. Names, classifications, indications of value and function – none of these can touch the empty actuality of phenomena. Signs refer to concepts about the actual but they do not reach the actual itself. Because phenomena have no inherent existence or inner personal essence, there is nothing that truly separates one phenomenon from another. There are no boundaries between them – they are all-together-all-at-once. So there are no entities to begin or end – they are 'unbegun and unstopped'. Since

there is no actual other, there can be no marking impact of this on that – and so there are neither stains nor freedom from stains. And being devoid of all truly defining characteristics, they are free of increase and decrease.

The emptiness of manifestation is the potential for manifestation. If you were just one thing your life would be unlivable in its narrowness. It is your flexibility, your pliability, your capacity to relate to circumstances which is the ungraspable quality of your life. Some people unfortunately become paralysed due to outer or inner circumstances. They have to lie in bed, maybe in a coma. This makes life very difficult. If you have a body that is reasonably healthy and you can stand up when you want to and sit down when you want to, go to the toilet by yourself, this is a blessing. As I get older I start to wonder, *“How long will this life last?”* Due to causes and conditions when young we run up the stairs, but after a while it is like climbing Mount Everest. This is dependent origination. There is no fixed truth to our identity. There is no true fixed identity embedded inside anything. I become me with you, according to how you are in this moment. Experiencing the ‘me for you’ as it emerges with these transient circumstances is the means by which I find out how I am. All day long we are moving in mutually influencing conversations with aspects of the world.

This is the meaning of form and emptiness: no form is fixed by an enduring essence inside it. We relate to different emergent forms through our responsive movement. We are not a fixed form. This is why photography can be unhelpful in its capacity to fix an image of a transient event and thereby create the delusion of an enduring truth. Many religions have a prohibition on the making of representations. In buddhism, in the early days, the Buddha was by shown by the image of the bodhi tree or of the vajra seat where he was enlightened. The Buddha was not shown in human form. Only in the latter part of the pre-Christian era did statues of the Buddha start to be made. However, when you look at the statue, it is tempting to think that that is the Buddha. But the statue is only a Buddha for those sentient beings who recognise it as such. Some people will have faith in it and others will see it as a sign of delusion. Is a piece of stone or a piece of metal the Buddha? When you do prostrations in front of a statue to bow to the Buddha, you are bowing to your mind. Why would you bow to a piece of metal? What is it going to do? You are bowing to your faith in enlightenment. The mind is chief, always the mind.

The mind is full of thoughts, feelings, sensations, memories, plans. The mind itself is not a thing. The more you see the absence of fixity in phenomena – that they arise relationally without absolute existence – then you start to see connectivity. Avalokitesvara points out that the six senses of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching and thinking are all empty, along with the objects they attend to, and the consciousnesses which formulate these experiences. All this activity of construction of seemingly real experience is in fact devoid of inherent existence. There is not one single atom in the universe that is self-existing.

Everything you can think of, including your mental consciousness, your hearing, your intelligence, everything arises due to causes and conditions. Yet under the power of unawareness and ignorance we are convinced that phenomena are real and existent. Emptiness is free of ignorance. This does not mean that ignorance does not occur, but rather that ignorance is empty of existence, of self-validity. It is not something that can be attached to emptiness. Ignorance and emptiness are not two discrete things – they

are non-dual. All the schemas identified in buddhism as giving rise to the beings and the phenomena that we take to be 'real' are in fact empty of existence and thereby unable to generate even the least existent.

Moreover, emptiness is free of intrinsic original knowing. Whatever arises, good or bad, desired or undesired, is unborn and ungraspable. These arisings arise, yet are unborn, for they do not separate from emptiness. Wisdom is empty; friends are empty; enemies are empty. If you believe that the term 'enemy' refers to real people who are inherently bad, then you have not bathed in the ocean of emptiness. Awareness is free of subject/object polarity. It is never an object for the workings of dualistic consciousness. All that is revealed in and as the clarity of awareness is appearance devoid of existence and nonexistence.

When you relax and open and your awareness is like a bright spaciousness, you can't say anything about it. It is not an object for thought, is not an object for language. With language you can *say* 'I feel sad', 'I feel tired', 'I am hungry', or 'I find you really annoying.' When you make statements like that you have a sense that somebody is out there and that you can comment on them. You can also comment on your feelings about them. The something-ness of phenomena is part of our structure of being a person with other people.

However, when you actually look at people you think you know well you find that they are not exactly how you think they are. Are you okay? You look a little different today. Ah! Of course I look different! I am always looking different. Nobody ever looks the same. The fact that you recognise certain things is because you have a template of me, as if you worked in the police department. They have their profiles, you have your profile. *"John, you look like my image of John!"* That's good! Now I know you are John because you look like my image of John! This mediated connectivity is the domain of dualistic consciousness. With such pre-existing images of how situations are, our experience is not fresh. Awareness is fresh, consciousness is stale.

All experience is without inherent self-nature. This fact is distilled into the mantra TADYATHA GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE BODHI SVAHA. The truth of our life is beyond what we think it is. It's gone to the other side beyond the reach of concepts. We are awakened by seeing that the actual is beyond the realm of the conceptual. As long as you are living in your mentally constructed world, thinking about things, labelling them, naming them, stabilising your understanding, you are veiling the freshness of the world with your interpretative system. If you start to allow whatever is arising in the mind to freely come and go, you will open to the freshness of the awareness and see everything as it is.

All the seemingly substantial truths I have believed in – my mother, my father, what this kind of bread tastes like, what this kind of beer tastes like – everything I thought I knew was dependent on my belief in the existence of other things. The value of every emergent thing is secured by all the other 'things' we imagine. Our friends are friends because they are not enemies. Our enemies are enemies because they are not friends. All that I take to be facts are merely concepts with only situational validity. They are themselves empty of inherent value and existence and are unable to establish inherent value and existence in anything else! If you stay close to your senses they can show you the truth of this. When you have a cold your favourite beer will taste differently, your sense of smell will be different. As your body

changes, so the impact of phenomena shifts. Everything is moving together, the experiencing is also experience – there is no objective truth to objects that the subject can access. What we access are shifting patterns of experience. Our familiar reliance on fixed objects leads us astray.

When we allow that reliance to dissolve in the spaciousness of open empty awareness, we find that all phenomena are non-dual with emptiness and non-dual with awareness. Then there is no self and no other, only bright patternings of unborn non-dual experience. This offers no support or focal point for the five poisons and so they lose their toxic power. They are mere energy waves moving in this space of awareness, with no structure of self and other to direct them. Thus, terms like ‘friend’ and ‘enemy’ have no referent – there are no existents that they point towards.

Hopefully you can see that this is vital in terms of these troubled times. If you start to reify hurtful events and search for their causes it is easy to conclude that they are caused by bad people. We build up pictures of the ‘bad ones’ and see them as inherently dangerous. Our own thoughts are thickening the density of our ideas about who these evil leaders are. You may believe that you are searching for the truth, but in fact you are developing your prejudices.

The greatest cause of the harm that one group can do to another is the definitive knowledge the first group has about the status and value of the second group. When the attribution of inferior status is not recognised to be an attribution but is taken to be an accurate description, it easily leads to enslavement, torture and killing. The *Heart Sutra* is a reminder that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence and therefore there are no people with actual existence, and therefore no people whose existence is less valuable than that of others. Since all phenomena are illusory like figures in a dream, essentialising judgement is deeply deluded.

If you develop reified mental images of the world you will feel that you are seeing more clearly but actually you will be going blind, because you will be imagining and not seeing. So relax and allow the self-releasing of all these compositional factors so that you stay fresh in the moment.

In war there are so many provocations stimulating our negative tendencies. This makes it easy to hate people or to be fearful or angry, and this solidifies our sense of who is involved. Paradoxically, this can be a great opportunity for dharma practice. Feelings and sensations become intense and the rush to conclusions is powerful. We need to make use of this energy to see the actual insubstantiality of these arisings which, if merged with, can lead us into deluded definitions.

So much is suffering. Yes, but what is suffering? If we see it as meaningless, unnecessary experience created by bad people, then we will feel pressure to do something about it – and that often involves harming the bad people. Buddha Sakyamuni pointed out that suffering comes from unawareness and grasping. Unawareness of dependent origination and the absence of inherent existence blinds us to the actual emptiness of phenomena, including sentient beings. Grasping arises from this as we cling to the false and misleading belief that self and others are real and that in order to survive and thrive we have to get as much of the good and as little of the bad as we can. However, whatever we encounter in the world or in our mind is a dreamlike formation. It is an illusion. Illusion is the middle way. It is neither real and truly existing nor is it completely unreal and nothing at all. It is appearance and emptiness. The clarity

of this insight allows us to avoid retaliating to provocations. We can feel them yet not absorb them. We can return them to their sender.

Repelling all troubles

Whatever arises in dependent co-origination is without stopping and without starting, without annihilation and without permanence, without coming and without going, without diverse meanings and without just one meaning — thus all conceptual constructs are fully pacified. To the peaceful doctrines, the excellent teachings of the speech of the perfect Buddha we pay homage.

Namo. Salutation to the Guru. Salutation to the Buddha. Salutation to the Dharma. Salutation to the Sangha. Salutation to the Great Mother Transcendental Wise Discerning and to her surrounding circle of sons, the Buddhas of the ten directions. By the force and effective power of making salutation to you, these true words of mine must be fulfilled.

In former times Lhawang Gyajin contemplated the deep meaning of transcendental wise discerning. He read its profound words and thus was able to repulse all corrupting demonic tendencies. Similarly, we also contemplate the profound meaning of transcendental wise discerning and read these profound words, and due to this we, the gurus, disciples, sponsors, beneficiaries and all those we are connected with, must have all our troubles, obstacles and difficulties completely repelled! We must be without them! They must be pacified! Dok! Dok! Dok!

Method, protection, purity and mahayana practice decline, and the activity of mara who deceives sentient beings – all these troubles must be repelled. Dok! Dok! Dok!

For those practising to gain complete enlightenment, all outer and inner troubles which create obstacles must be fully pacified! Dok! Dok! Dok!

This practice of repelling, or sending back what is not wanted, is very important. It is called *dokpa* (Tib. *bZlog-Pa* or *Zlog-Pa*) in Tibetan and carries the sense of Reverse! Go back! Return to where you came from! We are not retaliating. If someone upsets us and gets to us, the urge for revenge, to do something to make them experience what upset is like, can be very quick and strong. Instead we follow the middle way between giving in and retaliating. We simply say “*No thank you. I think this is yours. Please have it back.*” We need to have calm equanimity to do this and so in the first paragraph, which is by Nagarjuna, we rely on the emptiness of all conceptual constructs.

Nagarjuna says: ***Whatever arises in dependent co-origination is without stopping and without starting, without annihilation and without permanence, without coming and without going, without diverse meanings and without just one meaning.*** These eight positionings form the

four fundamental polarities which we employ to organise our world. From them spring all other polarities. Every single thing in this world arises in dependent origination and therefore does not exist in itself. In fact, there are no single entities with their own personal foundation. There are no intrinsically good or bad people. We, and everything that we encounter, are moving in a seamless pulsation of inseparable organising factors and therefore you can't say that there is stopping or starting. You can only say 'stopping' and 'starting' when you freeze the world and you cut a little circle around one bit and then you compare it with another bit that you have isolated. Yet the whole field of experience is undivided. When you are actually present in your life as it is, you see that there is no beginning and no ending. Things don't get annihilated and vanish forever since, being unborn, there was nothing actually there to vanish. Nor are there any permanent entities to be found since all that arises has no inherent existence and therefore has no basis for permanence.

Nagarjuna continues, *thus, all conceptual constructs are fully pacified*. This is to say, whenever we adopt one proposition in our mind, we will find that the opposite polarity is also around. For example, if I say, "It's very hot today" the term 'hot' has no meaning without its counterpoint 'cold'. Hot and cold, although seemingly oppositional, are born together, and if one is overtly present then the other is covertly present. You can't have hot without cold. If you only had cold then you wouldn't know what cold was because there would just be cold. It is the fact that you experience hot and cold that allows you to mark the gradations between them. Thus hot and cold are not separate entities; they operate together as a matrix of relatedness.

We might feel that the Ukrainians are very good and are fighting for freedom while the Russian soldiers are deluded and are only going to cause trouble. Many of the people in Ukraine who are carrying guns now are not soldiers. They are carrying guns because of the Russian invasion. The invasion and the fact that these Ukrainians are holding guns are born together; they arise together, and they are in dependent origination. This linked patterning is not a linear causality. Each party feels threatened by the other and these feelings escalate into aggressive behaviour, whether offensive or defensive. The identification of bad people is linked to the identification of good people. These qualities are relative to each other and they are identified differently by different people according to their different criteria. I need to have had a cold winter in order to say the following winter was warmer. I need to have beautiful flowers to understand faded flowers. A delicious apple can only be identified on the basis of another apple having been identified as non-delicious. These hierarchies of value are interpretations; they are creative constructs. They are artificial and not intrinsic.

People are killing other people on the basis of conceptual identification. People kill because of ideas. The energy of anger or hatred or rage arises on the basis of an idea, the idea of enemy, of non-friend. For President Putin, the Ukraine is part of Russia. That is an idea. On the basis of that idea, he feels entitled to invade and takeover that land. The fact that people will die in order for him to achieve this is not so important for him, because for him his idea is foundational and of supreme importance.

Buddhist texts describe the dangers of conceptual elaboration. It is not that we shouldn't have thoughts, but if we believe that our thoughts tell us the truth, then we are likely to be less attentive to the actual phenomena. Ideas about the world feel true to us because of our history, the country we live

in, the language we use, our gender, our age, and so on. Many factors operate together to generate specific patterns of thinking, feeling and activity that ring true for certain people and not for others. There is no inherent existence in any phenomena, no personal defining essence that can support definite qualities which will be equally recognised by all. There are no inherently good people and no inherently bad people. All formations are the energy of the mind.

Finally Nagarjuna says, ***To the peaceful doctrines, the excellent teachings of the speech of the perfect Buddha we pay homage.*** The teaching of the Buddhas pacifies all suffering and helps all beings to find the calm and peace of equanimity. Abiding in awareness, we let concepts come and go. However once we start believing that concepts tell us the truth we are at the mercy of dogma, propaganda, cultural belief systems and so on.

Now we call on the power of the truth of the Dharma: ***Namo. Salutation to the Guru. Salutation to the Buddha. Salutation to the Dharma. Salutation to the Sangha. Salutation to the Great Mother Transcendental Wise Discerning and to her surrounding circle of sons, the Buddhas of the ten directions. By the force and effective power of making salutation to you, these true words of mine must be fulfilled.***

All Buddhas, each and every one of them, is unborn within the Great Mother, Prajnaparamita, the transcendent wisdom. We can imagine her to be like a goddess whose womb is the symbol of emptiness. It is by awakening to emptiness as the fundamental truth of everything that we are born as Buddhas. To be born as Buddha means to let all delusion fall away. These delusions have hidden our own buddha nature from us. When we see the emptiness of all the beliefs, attitudes, assumptions, habitual patterns and behaviours that have misled and deluded us they vanish like mist in the morning sun. We have always been within emptiness, non-dual with emptiness, and now that this truth shines forth we are buddhas within transcendent wisdom within the Great Mother.

The Great Mother is like a mirror in which reflections are arising and passing, arising and passing. The reflection is always in the mirror and can't be taken out of the mirror. Phenomena cannot actually be taken out of emptiness. We're always already buddhas. This non-duality has the power to dispel all ignorance and unawareness. It has the power to repel all the troubles arising from dualistic beliefs.

In former times Lhawang Gyajin contemplated the deep meaning of transcendental wise discerning. He read its profound words and thus was able to repulse all corrupting demonic tendencies. Similarly, we also contemplate the profound meaning of transcendental wise discerning and read these profound words, and due to this we, gurus, disciples, sponsors, beneficiaries and all those we are connected with, must have all our troubles, obstacles and difficulties completely repelled! We must be without them! They must be pacified!

We merge our minds in emptiness as we recite this. Our body, speech and mind are inseparable from emptiness, and as such our fundamental nature cannot be harmed by anything that happens. Therefore calmly and compassionately, we send back all the troubles that afflict us. With our understanding of dependent origination, we also send back all the troubles that afflict all sentient beings. On a relative level, we send whatever troubles us back to those who sent it to us. Yet they too are

inseparable from emptiness, and so all problems and troublemakers go back into emptiness as we deify them. All phenomena are the shimmering presence of emptiness and are free of the least trace of inherent existence.

Then we say, *“Dok!, Dok!, Dok!, Go back!, Go back!, Go back!”* As we say this, we clap our hands together and the explosive quality of this noise energises our words so that all that troubles us is sent back to its sender and simultaneously to emptiness.

The mirror is uncontaminated by the reflections that arise in it, for it is empty of substance, empty of otherness. Similarly, our mind is empty of defining entities and is therefore invulnerable and beyond contamination. It is vajra, indestructible – and so it remains open and present whatever occurs. If we awaken to this then we will abide in the clarity which is uncontaminated by the many provocations that arise.

This clarity is bright and unwavering. It has no personal identity and is untouched by signs and names. So if somebody says, *“James, you are just like all these other Scottish people, you are mean and stupid...”* Am I Scottish? If I feel I am Scottish, if I identify with this sign, then I am likely to feel aversion. Who the hell are you? What are you saying? However, if I simply hear sound and emptiness then who is it who will receive the insult? The empty mind is alone and untouched by any comment or projection whether positive or negative. Yet if I am fused with my ego-self and feel that I have been elected to represent all Scottish people, then I am going to say that if you continue to speak in that way to me then I am going to kick you! Do you understand?! I am Scottish and this is my core identity, so you are now clearly my enemy.

This shift of mood happens very quickly. It happens in every playground, in every school when children tease and provoke each other till one of them gets upset. The ego-self is a patterning of signs and so signs, words and names can seem to undermine who we are. The absence of inherent existence in the ego-self is its ineradicable vulnerability. This vulnerability means that negative provocations have to be resisted.

Therefore, our practice is to relax our mind into spacious awareness. Then there is no vulnerable recipient of these enemy attacks. The one who starts to vibrate in response to them is the ego. It is the ego's identification with nationality, age, gender, economic situation and so on that causes the vibration. As long as you identify with a constituent factor of the ego-self, if somebody says something against it, you are going to vibrate. Somebody says, *“I love you”*, and you think, *“Really? That is wonderful!”* but if someone says that you are ugly then there is shame and/or anger.

We know this. It happens so quickly because I believe that I, in my only identity, am the one who is addressed. But who is this I? The heart of our buddhist practice is to see that the ego-I is empty of self. This does not mean that we are not present and aware. We are alive as presence, but we are not a thing. It is the thing-ness, the delusion of inherent existence, which makes us liable to react. Therefore, we need to attend to our practice and dissolve the nexus of the ego-self within the ever-open space of awareness.

When we say, ***all these troubles must be repelled!*** we are not repelling something which really exists. In the whole of samsara and nirvana, not even one atom can be found that 'really' exists. All appearance is illusion. All appearance is inseparable from emptiness and empty of any inherent constituting factors. We are neither the object being acted on nor the subject fighting back. By resting in non-duality, we see clearly that from the very beginning our experience has actually been free of these reified polarities. It is only due to unawareness that we have been caught in the delusion that subject and object, self and other, exist in truth.

When the linked duality of subject and object dissolves we find that our clarity is free of the vibrations of reactivity. When the Buddha went begging and was standing with his begging bowl and a man started to insult him calling him a useless, lazy, good for nothing the Buddha remained calm: *"I came requesting food, I didn't request anger, please keep your anger."* For most of us if somebody is angry with us we get upset; we feel it inside, we start to tremble. Maybe we want to run away, maybe we want to attack them. We get into a vibration and this vibration is the tension between subject and object inside us. This is why in the meditation practice we again and again release our identification with the patternings of appearances as they arise. If we are not able to do that then we will easily be caught in a vibration.

Method, protection, purity and mahayana practice in decline, and the work of mara who deceives sentient beings. Method indicates skilful means, the counterpart to the wisdom of wise discernment. Method indicates compassion. Wisdom is emptiness and method is compassion. They are inseparable. When we awaken to the empty nature of all experience, we see that we have no ego-self to defend. This releases all our energy to be in the service of others. Our manifestation is for the other; the wisdom of non-duality has revealed the compassionate kindness of connectivity

Mara indicates the energy of duality, the basic structure behind all troubles. Mara is often depicted as a demon, yet it is nothing other than the mind when it is blind to its true nature. When duality directs the patterning of our life, compassion declines and we have less protection since the ego-self is inherently vulnerable. We are trapped in reactivity and are marked and tainted by events, and this leads to anxiety and self-centeredness and so our mahayana practice goes into decline. This must be repelled. These forces must have no power to condition us.

How I am is linked with how the environment is. The maras are the force fields which surround us and which can activate us into reactivity. ***All these troubles must be repelled! Dok! Dok! Dok!***

For those practising to gain complete enlightenment, all outer and inner troubles which create obstacles must be fully pacified! Dok! Dok! Dok! Difficulties occur in life due to many different kind of provocations. We cannot control the outer forms of the world yet we can avoid being caught by them. The one who is caught is our ego. Our awareness has never been caught, is not now being caught, and never will be caught. Awareness is not a thing. Our ego-self feels like a thing: I, me, myself. I am like this; I like this; I don't like that. We get caught by the construct of self and then, under its power, we see all beings as having selves, as existing as entities. Self and other are the key obstacles from which all the others flow. They must be repelled! They must be purified!

Giving Joy and Accepting Suffering

Whenever I am glad I will dedicate that joy to the happiness of all beings — may their happiness fill the sky! Whenever I get trouble I will take the suffering of all beings as my own burden – may the oceans of suffering become dry!

When merely the thought of helping others is more excellent than the worship of the Buddhas, it is unnecessary even to mention the greatness of striving for the happiness and welfare of all beings without exception!

Whenever I am glad I will dedicate that joy to the happiness of all beings — may their happiness fill the sky! Whenever I get trouble I will take the suffering of all beings as my own burden – may the oceans of suffering become dry! These two sentences offer a poignant and beautiful reversal of the attitude of the ego-self. We give our joy to others and take their suffering to ourselves. We recite it here as a further strengthening of our intention to avoid hatred, retaliation and revenge. May this arising happiness I feel be a basis for happiness for all – enough to fill the sky. May this arising trouble remind me to take the suffering of all onto myself so that no other being will be troubled. As Nagarjuna wrote in the *Precious Garland*, “*May their wrongdoing ripen on me and may my virtue ripen on them.*”

We offer our happiness, joy and health to all beings, including the torturers, the prison guards and the vicious soldiers. To all the heartless ones we offer joy and we take from them their misery, their anger, their confusion, their regret. We take all of that into our heart where we dissolve it in emptiness. You cannot do *tonglen* (Tib. *gTong Len*) practice, the giving of joy and the taking of sorrow, without emptiness. The Buddhist view is not masochistic. We are dissolving the solidity that exists in our own and other people’s minds, all the definitions, judgments and hatred. War arises from hatred, which arises from definite knowledge of who and what the other is. In war each side holds ever-narrowing and intensifying definitions of the other. We are righteous and they are evil. These views become rigid, solid and non-negotiable. They are ‘the truth’.

With this practice of exchange we take the solidity of these thought formations and allow them to dissolve like snowflakes landing upon water. We remain open and receptive and all the hurt and hurtful thoughts and feelings just keep dissolving and dissolving and dissolving.

All suffering arises from unawareness of the ground. The ground of all experience is empty of entities and is open without limit. The ground of the minds of all beings is the same. The essence of all beings is that empty ground. I and all others are intrinsically beyond definition, judgement and identification as something as such. The diversity of appearance is the diversity potential of the ground, inseparable from the ground.

All beings suffer due to the belief in duality that arises with unawareness. And yet duality and suffering are empty of inherent existence. There is no actual separation between ‘my’ suffering and the suffering of ‘others’. Our suffering is non-dual – it is precise as it is, being neither a homogenised same nor an actual different. Our own open awareness will embrace this as the quality of our presence. With this, suffering dissolves. It has no actual existence of its own. In the open space of awareness, all

experience is self-arising and self-vanishing. With this we directly see that the essence of all suffering, duality, and the afflictive poisons is emptiness.

There is no one to be harmed and no-one to do the harming. Suffering is revealed as empty sensation, not different from great bliss. Being present in the inseparability of self and other this great bliss thins the self-grasping and self-cherishing of all beings.

In giving happiness to others, we give the happiness of emptiness free of the basis of suffering. This is non-dual kindness within which giving and taking are empty. The immediacy and vitality of presence is itself the giving of happiness and the dissolving of suffering. All that arises with unawareness is inherently free of existence; it is an illusion. Free of grasping at an illusory self, there is undefended openness to all.

Then we recite a verse from Shantideva, the great Indian yogi.

When merely the thought of helping others is more excellent than the worship of the Buddhas, it is unnecessary even to mention the greatness of striving for the happiness and welfare of all beings without exception.

This is a further reminder of the importance of generosity of spirit. The Buddhas do not need our praise – we praise them in order to accumulate merit. But all beings in samsara need our help. Even one thought directed at helping others is wonderful for it starts to dissolve the walls of separation which enclose each ego-self. We help others without bias or judgement. If we have a fleeting thought that says this or that person is not worthy of our care then we need to examine the cataract of duality which is veiling and distorting our vision. All beings have been our mother in previous lives. Moreover, all beings are without the least inherent existence. They offer us nothing to support our own biased views. Every differential quality we perceive is simply our own deluded projection.

Dedication of Merit

By the virtue of doing this practice may all beings awaken to how they actually are. May all beings enjoy the rich happiness of this world and be free of anxiety, fear and harm.

Then we dedicate the merit: ***By the virtue of doing this practice may all beings awaken to how they actually are.*** May they see their own original face. May the masks of ego-identity come off. May they awaken to their own original purity, to their non-dual awareness. Being released from the delusion of cultural beliefs, of habit formations and all notions of self, may each one directly see: I am the presence of awareness.

May all beings enjoy the rich happiness of this world and be free of anxiety, fear and harm. How wonderful to wish that all may be free of anxiety, fear and harm. May people everywhere have peace and joy. May they be free of war, injury and sickness. Free of agitation, may their hearts open in love for all. May all beings in the six realms find freedom from all the many forms of restriction which hide their intrinsic freedom.

Anxiety makes people dangerous. I don't want to be hurt and you may hurt me, so the best way for me to be safe is to kill you. The desire to control others arises from the anxiety which is inherent in the belief in duality. This desire causes so much grief because no one has the power to control everything. We share the world with all beings, with insects, with fish, with birds, with people of different cultures... We cannot control this vast diversity. We have to allow people to be in ways that make us feel unsafe or anxious. Rather than trying to control the behaviour of others, we can focus on our own minds. Seeing the impermanence of all experience, we awaken to the illusory nature of all phenomena. They are not a threat to awareness. Resting in awareness, there is freedom from vulnerability and anxiety.

We are meditators. We relax, release and open. When we rest in openness all arisings are directly showing their vanishing. This fact of self-liberation frees us from judgement so that we rest in all-inclusive awareness available to all. There are so many people that need our prayers and good wishes.

When we dedicate the merit, we can think of all those who are suffering. Those who have lost their homes, lost family members, lost any sense of their identity. We can reflect on our own life and how our identity is based on our job, our flat, being able to take our kids to school... Yet all these factors that give me my sense of being me are not stable at all. Earlier this year the people in Ukraine could not have imagined that this tragedy could suddenly happen. Now their lives are just like stones rolling down a mountain. Beforehand life looked stable and now it is a big landslide. We should learn from this and take refuge in our unborn awareness and use our clarity to truly help others.