

The Delusion of Duality is the Basis for War

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When we look at the news concerning the many conflicts and wars that rage in every corner of our world it is unlikely that the media channels will offer us a Dharma perspective on these tragedies. We are more likely to hear about innocent good people on one side and cruel terrorists on the other. Who decides which terms rightly apply to which group? Well, that will depend on the sources you choose, and this will reflect your affiliations, your attachments, your biases, and your prejudices. Our own passionate opinions provide the warm winds that fan the flames of war.

However, if we choose a Dharma perspective, it can bring a cooling illumination, a means to clearly see the limiting factors which drive hateful conflict and fuel the misleading consequence of entitlement for the winners and resentment for the losers. If the emptiness of the actor, the object of the action, and the act itself are seen, then there is no basis for celebration nor for retaliation or revenge.

Due to unawareness of our ever-pure, ever-available, open, empty ground, we do not see that awareness, clarity, and appearance are all non-dual with emptiness. Whatever occurs is actually self-arising and self-vanishing, without the least enduring substance. Awareness of this is open, calm, relaxed, and uninvolved. Awareness, or *Rigpa* in Tibetan, is impartial and able to see each and every aspect of the whole. This is the aim of our practice: to open to the intrinsic open and thereby to relax and release the false identities we have clung to by mistaking transient concepts and appearances for reliable real entities. With this, we cease interfering with the natural diversity of unborn occurrence of which we are a part. Awakening to the uncontrived, we see that all artificial attempts to alter or improve what is occurring fade away, and the synergy of relaxation and clarity is revealed.

However, when there is unawareness of our basis, our ground, our source, then the spacious sky of clarity becomes unavailable, and so we come to rely on the ever-shifting patterns of clouds. Having no inherent existence of their own, the wispy forms of cloud-like imaginings offer infinite possibilities for interpretation. Some cloud patterns are designated 'self', while different ones are designated 'other'. The winds of thought and emotion act on these clouds, shaping them and applying identifying

names and attributes. Each ungraspable cloud form appears to be graspable when perceived through reifying, dualizing consciousness. We are rarely conscious of how our consciousness functions. It seems obvious that being conscious is just how we are.

This unawareness of the open empty ground of all keeps us from resting in the unchanging here and now. Believing in the idea and image of existence, we see self and others as entities and then respond to this false 'reality' by manifesting the three root poisons of mental opacity, desire, and aversion. Being unaware of the infinite potential we are not other than, we cling to our limited perspective and see ourselves and others as definable beings with restricted potential. "I do not want to be restricted, I need more, I am entitled, and will not be thwarted, I'm ready for war and conquest."

For those born with human form in a family within samsara, their development is a process of absorbing the assumptions and prejudices of family, school, and the wider culture. These assumptions are presented as truths, and accepting them as such allows us to relate to other children, to parents, to the media, and to the other modes of socializing. Believing as others believe, we come to belong. Thus we believe in the sequencing of the three times: past, present, and future, and become able to attribute duration and location to key events. We learn when and how our group was attacked and by whom, and we also learn to congeal these dynamic events into a thickened belief that those who did this to us are truly our enemies. The mental opacity consequent on reification feeds our tendency to like those whom we believe to be on our side and to dislike those whom we believe to be not on our side. Thus desire and aversion easily emerge from the values we attribute to others — others whose substantiality is attributed by our own habitual delusion that duality and polarity are the inherent structures of our world.

An event occurs and we conclude that, "*They did this to us because they are bad.*" This is simple and definite and encourages us to ignore the recent situational context in which provocations from both sides led up to the event. In particular, there is often an intentional non-attention to the historical context where longstanding antagonisms and provocations have established the other as the dangerous enemy who wishes to harm our harmless selves.

With this it is easy to see how resentments are maintained over generations and can quickly ripen into manifest conflict and war when the latent factors are aligned and awakened. Defeating enemies, making them pay for what they have done, and attributing to them an inherent badness, confirmed by calling them evil, terrorists, sub-human, despicable and so on, affirms our right as the good-hearted innocent victims to extract our righteous revenge. In terms of our own group we adopt a sense of entitlement and a belief in our exceptionalism. This allows us to claim that we are

inherently unaccountable according to the rules and standards which we self-righteously apply to others.

This reifying, dualizing, polarizing interpretation is so simple and yet so powerful in the way it confirms the validity of the categories of entitled and unentitled. Who should inhabit these categories is the central topic of war. Our own misguided beliefs drive the cycles of war and peace, as each person and each group claims that they can perceive the true status of the other.

All our Dharma practices are methods for freeing us from the effort of maintaining these erroneous interpretations and for simultaneously freeing others from the reified identities we attribute to them in order to comfort our egos by generating the hope of true knowledge and mastery. The calm and peace that briefly occur between periods of armed conflict cannot provide liberation from the root cause of such samsaric suffering. We need the deep intrinsic peace of primordial purity from which we emerge without separating.

As a daily support, it is very useful to memorize the Four Immeasurables and to maintain their orientation when we are exposed to all the bigoted beliefs which surround us.

The Four Immeasurables¹

May all sentient beings have happiness and the cause of happiness! May they be free of suffering and the cause of suffering! May they never be separated from happiness free of suffering! May they abide in equanimity free of both desire for friends and relatives and aversion towards enemies and strangers.

Do we truly wish the best for all sentient beings? We need to use the words of these four aspirations to investigate any deeply held and almost undetectable beliefs that we hold concerning our own superiority, entitlement, and real existence. This is especially important for white males. If used well these four infinite wishes are a royal road to awaken to emptiness.

To wish all sentient beings well, to wish them happiness and the root of happiness, is to wish that they awaken from the delusion of duality. The root of happiness is already present in all beings. It is their inalienable buddha nature. They and we do not have to make it or buy it or receive it from others. In the midst of our confusion and lostness — often covered by complacency or arrogance — we are each not even one hair's breadth apart from the site of our awakening.

To wish all sentient beings freedom from suffering and the root of suffering is to wish them the true relaxation that comes from ceasing to carry the burden of 'self'. The root

of suffering is the erroneous belief that we exist, that we are the enduring reference point for all our experience. Having forgotten our ever-open ground we grasp at inner and outer arisings and classify them as self or other, mine or yours and so on. To open to our intrinsic unborn openness is to enjoy freedom from controlling, managing, and adopting or rejecting the diversity of experiences and appearances. May this ever-available freedom awaken in the hearts of all.

To wish all sentient beings happiness free of sorrow is to wish them happiness free of the polarities of happy or sad. This is the unchanging happiness which does not rest on occurrences but is intrinsic to our non-duality with the open empty ground. When we grasp at the phantoms generated by belief in duality we generate our own obscuration. May all beings be released from all erroneous beliefs.

To wish that all sentient beings may abide in the great equanimity free of bias in favour of friends and against enemies is to wish that they will abide in the dharmadhatu, the all-embracing space within which all phenomena are equal in their absence of inherent existence. Equanimity is not homogenisation. The precise details of each arising are seen as they are — yet without the veil of reification that takes them to be really existing entities. All beings and all phenomena are actually unborn. We wish that all beings may see this directly. This wish is for all without bias. It is an expression of all-pervading kindness which has not special objects of concern.

The Dhammapada has many wise verses that help us to focus on analysing the delusions we believe in rather than on blaming others. Here is a selection of verses to help us reflect on how easy it is for us to defend our own ego positions.

Extracts from The Dhammapada²

Chapter 1. The Pairs

1. Mind is the forerunner of all experience. Mind is their chief and they are mind-made. If with an impure mind one speaks or acts then misery follows just as the cartwheel follows the hoof of the ox.
2. Mind is the forerunner of all experience. Mind is their chief and they are mind-made. If with a pure mind one speaks and acts then happiness follows one like an inseparable shadow.
3. "He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me." The anger of those who harbour such thoughts is not appeased.
4. "He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me." The anger of those who do not harbour such thoughts is appeased.

5. In this world hatred is never pacified by hatred. It is by the absence of hatred that hatred is pacified. This is the ancient truth.
6. Some people do not know that we are all guests in this world. Those who recollect this let their quarrels settle.

Chapter 10. Violence

129. All beings fear violence, all are afraid of death. Knowing this to be true of oneself one should neither beat nor kill others.
130. Life is dear to all beings and all are afraid of death. Seeing that others are like oneself one should neither beat nor kill them.
131. A person who seeks happiness for themselves yet acts violently towards other happiness-seeking beings, will not find happiness after death.
132. A person who seeks happiness for themselves and who does not act violently towards other happiness-seeking beings, will find happiness after death.
133. Do not speak harshly to anyone. If you do, people will speak back to you as you have spoken to them. Harsh words are painful and their retaliation will hurt you.
134. If you silence yourself like a broken gong no strife will arise for you and you will gain access to nirvana.
135. Using his staff the cowherd drives the cattle to pasture. Likewise those who are attached to this life are herded towards its end and face old age and death.
136. The fool does not recognise that his activities are evil. The idiot is tormented by his own deeds as if burned by fire.
137. Those who are violent without reason, harming those who offer no provocation, will soon encounter one of the ten results:
138. Intense pain, disaster, physical injury, severe illness, mental troubles,
139. Trouble from the king, grave accusations, bereavement, loss of wealth, or
140. Property destroyed by fire. With the death of the body those without clarity go to the hell realms.

Chapter 12. Self

165. One should not neglect one's own welfare for the welfare, however great, of someone else. If one has understood how to increase one's own welfare then that welfare will be the supreme concern.

Chapter 15. Happiness

197. Living without enmity amongst those who hate we live very happily free of this sickness amongst those who hate.
201. Victory creates enemies. Defeat makes people miserable. Dispensing with both victory and defeat we will live happily in peace.

Chapter 17. Anger

221. Renouncing anger and renouncing pride one should free oneself completely from all that one is caught up in. Suffering does not befall one who does not cling to name and form and who has no longing for anything at all.
222. I say that someone who can check their rising anger just as a charioteer checks a runaway chariot is a true charioteer. The rest are just holding the reins.
223. The absence of anger will overcome fury. Goodness will overcome evil. Generosity will overcome meanness. Truth will overcome lies.
224. Speak the truth and don't get angry. Even if one has very little one should give something whenever asked. With these three one will enter the presence of the gods.
225. The sages cause no harm to others and are always restrained in body. They go to the changeless state where there is no misery.
226. Awake both day and night, continuously training and fully committed to nirvana, they bring an end to all defiling taints.
227. Atula, the following is true not only for today, it was also true in the past. Those who are silent are criticised for this. Those who speak much are criticised for this. Those who speak little are criticised for this. There is no one in this world who is not criticised.
228. There never was, there never will be, and nor is there now, a person who is only blamed or only praised.
229. Those whose faith, morality and undiminished intelligence have been observed and appreciated on a daily basis are praised by the wise.
230. Who could find fault with such a person? They are like a coin of refined gold. They are praised by the gods and even Brahma, the chief of the gods, offers praise.
231. Guard against anger in the body. The body should be restrained. Abandoning causing harm with one's body one should use it to do good.
232. Guard against anger in one's speech. One's speech should be restrained. Abandoning causing harm with one's speech one should use it to do good.

233. Guard against anger in one's mind. One's mind should be restrained. Abandoning causing harm with one's mind one should use it to do good.
234. The steadfast are restrained in body and also in speech. The steadfast are restrained in mind. They are perfectly restrained.

Chapter 20. The Path

277. 'All that is compounded is impermanent.' When this is seen with true discernment one will not be afflicted by suffering. This is the pure path.
278. 'All that is compounded is suffering.' When this is seen with true discernment one will not be afflicted by suffering. This is the pure path.
279. 'All phenomena are without inherent existence.' When this is seen with true discernment one will not be afflicted by suffering. This is the pure path.

Chapter 24. Craving

348. Let go of the past, let go the future, let go the present, and pass beyond becoming. Free your mind from everything and you will not be led to birth and death in the future.

The Mahayana view of karmic retribution is another effective method of seeing how our own habitual self-cherishing blinds us to the consequences of our actions. All those who demean others, beat and enslave them, and torture and kill them are suffering from the same blind delusion that we have only one life and that if we gain enough power and control, we can do as we like and get away with it. The text, **Sharp Weapon Wheel**, points out the inevitability of the consequences of our deeds. These consequences are not a punishment for being bad. No one is doing this to us. Karmic consequences are simply the effects of false beliefs leading to activity imbued with the root poisons. With mental dullness we take ourselves and others to be real and separate. The inevitable consequence of this is that we judge what we encounter to be good or bad and then seek to maximise the good by taking it as ours and minimising the bad by taking it to be the quality of others. The root of all this confusion is unawareness. There are no really existing sentient beings who are inherently good or inherently bad.

There is no evading the power of karma, no matter what fantasy beliefs we might hold to the contrary. Here are some verses to reflect on:

Sharp Weapon Wheel:³ Extracts

The cause of our revolving powerlessly in samsara is our own adherence to our sense of self, this servant of the demonic Mara. We must completely free ourselves from the attitude of desiring only our own benefit and happiness and then happily and enthusiastically strive for the benefit of others.

Being driven by the force of karma and always experiencing the afflictions, is the suffering shared by all beings. I, who like happiness, will take all their sorrows upon myself. If the habit of concern for my own welfare should remain with me, then in order to stop this I will give all my happiness to all beings. In this way, whenever we are troubled by those around us we must encourage ourselves to be patient, recalling that this situation is the result of our own disturbed actions.

When everyone acts against us, this is because previously we were not bothered that our actions and those of others were shameful and so now the sharp weapon of these bad actions comes turning back upon us. From this time on we will shun improper behaviour.

(Alternative reading:)

Previously we were not bothered that our actions and those of others were shameful. Now the sharp weapon of these bad actions comes turning back upon us, so that all people act against us. From this time on we will shun improper behaviour.

When we are powerless and are forced to wander abroad, this is because previously we have expelled gurus and others from their abodes and so now the sharp weapon of these bad actions comes turning back upon us. From this time on we will never expel anyone from their own place.

(Alternative reading:)

Previously we have expelled gurus and others from their abodes. Now the sharp weapon of these bad actions comes turning back upon us, so that we are powerless and are forced to wander abroad. From this time on we will never expel anyone from their own place.

When, no matter what we do, we are still disturbed by anger and desire, this is because previously we have stirred up those who were already rough and vicious and so now the sharp weapon of these bad actions comes turning back upon us. From this time on we will completely eliminate all unkindness towards others.

(Alternative reading:)

Previously we have stirred up those who were already rough and vicious. Now the sharp weapon of these bad actions comes turning back upon us, so that no matter what we do we are still disturbed by anger and desire. From this time on we will completely eliminate all unkindness towards others.

དེ་ལྟར་ལགས་པས་དག་པོ་བདག་གིས་ཟིན།

DE TAR LAG PAE DRA WO DA GI ZIN
like that is and so enemy, by me recognise and hold
ego-cherishing

In this way I come to recognise my enemy.

འཇབས་ནས་བསྐྱབ་པའི་ཚོམ་ཀླུ་བདག་གིས་ཟིན།

JAB NAE LU WAI CHOM KUN DAG GI ZIN
disguise, from deceive robber by me recognise
camouflage and hold

I recognise this robber in disguise who cheats me.

རང་དུ་བརྗེས་ནས་བསྐྱབ་པ་བདག་གིས་ཟིན།

RANG DU DZU NAE LU WA DA GI ZIN
self as impersonating from deceive* by me recognise and hold

* The grasping ego pretends it is me; it says, "I am" and, "This is me." But in fact it is my enemy, the source of all my troubles.

I recognise this deceitful one who impersonates me.

ཨི་མ་བདག་འཇིན་འདི་ཡིན་ཐེ་ཚོམ་གཅོད།

E MA DAG DZIN DI YIN THE TSOM CHOE
amazing self-grasping this is doubt# cut
(believing strongly in 'I' and 'mine')

All the doubts coming from believing that I am an ego or vulnerable entity requiring protection and special treatment. Now the grasping ego is given no more support by my mind for it is seen clearly to be the source of all my troubles.

Amazing! I have cut off all doubts regarding the truth about this grasped-at-self!

In this way I come to recognise my enemy. I recognise this robber in disguise who cheats me. I recognise this deceitful one who impersonates me. Amazing! I have cut off all doubts regarding the truth about this grasped-at-self!

In the Mahayana tradition we study the Two Truths, relative truth and absolute truth. Relative truth refers to how all our experience is deluded when we are unaware of the absolute truth of uncontrived clarity. When the simplicity of as it is is unavailable to us due to our own obscurations, we imagine that the many kinds of experience we have are real. This is the arena of relative truth — we imagine something to be the case when it is not the case.

Our world, including what we take to be ourselves, is impermanent and unreliable. It is imagined and not actual. Because what we experience is only imagined it offers no true certainty. The impure or rough level of relative or fictional truth arises when our beliefs are imbued with the root poisons. Pure relative truth occurs when we no longer succumb to the root poisons and our beliefs become less reifying so that we start to appreciate the truth of the emptiness of all phenomena. Absolute truth is revealed when we no longer rely on beliefs but rest in non-conceptual clarity.

While we are immersed in impure relative truth the instability of our situation allows many different and contradictory interpretations to arise. We may try to establish the facts and find out the truth of what is going on, yet it is hard to establish 'facts' free of opinions. This difficulty is intensified in times of war when propaganda, media control, and intentional deception are widespread. As the saying goes, "*The first casualty of war is truth.*" Due to the spreading web of deception there is anxiety and uncertainty with an intensification of hopes and fears bringing more and more sorrow.

If you wish to understand these dynamics you might benefit from reading [*The Healing Power of Emptiness*](#)⁴ and *Instructions in the Mahayana View which Clarifies the Two Truths* by Patrul Rinpoche which is Chapter 7 in ***Simply Being***.

If we practise finding ourselves nondual with Padmasambhava we will come to experience the illusory nature of our everyday identities, both those we believe in and those others attribute to us. This dissolves the erroneous construct of self from which the three root poisons flow. By this means we no longer have the basis for the judgments and prejudices which fuel the impulse to war. Moreover, in seeing that all beings are always already within the mandala of Padmasambhava, there is no basis for using their diversity of manifestation as a cause for liking or disliking.

Most directly, with the Guru Yoga of the White A, we ease ourselves out of the constriction of belief in existent entities and relax in the ease of enjoying the play of self-arising and self-liberating experiences which leave no mark on the primordial purity of awareness.

No matter what cruel or kind activities we perceive, trust that resting in the openness of awareness free of taking sides is the purest ethical response. This lack of bias is itself an effortless gesture of welcome and inclusion to all those we meet, for we neither confirm nor disconfirm the beliefs that they hold but allow them to hang in the air like substance-less clouds and rainbows. If we stay open and available to these diverse displays of illusory appearance then our non-reactivity allows the unborn nature to manifest as it does, and within this profound nonduality we are freed from adopting and rejecting and can come to see how it is as simply how it is.

¹ *This is It* [James Low, (*Simply Being*, London, 2020) ISBN 9783-0-9569239-7-4]

² *Finding Freedom* [James Low, (Wandel Verlag, Berlin, 2019) ISBN 978-3-942380-27-0]

³ *Finding Freedom* [James Low, (Wandel Verlag, Berlin, 2019) ISBN 978-3-942380-27-0]

Please read: *Me First* [James Low, (*Simply Being*, London, 2021) ISBN 978-0-9569239-8-1]

⁴ <https://simplybeing.co.uk/texts/the-healing-power-of-emptiness-tallinn-2013-2/>