

Dear dharma friends

This is a brief update on my cancer career. I finished thirty-seven sessions of radiotherapy one month ago and have experienced a wide range of side effects: headaches, deep fatigue, aching joints, sleeplessness and so on. I have been told that they should soon start to lessen.

I am very appreciative of all the messages of good wishes that have been sent to me. These kind thoughts for my welfare have also led many of you to do practices such as the Urgyen Menla Medicine Buddha, the Padmasambhava visualisation and the Seven Line Prayer. Doing these practices with the intention to help all those who are sick and troubled by imbalances of the five elements is a powerful aspect of our commitment to work for the awakening of all.

The root of all suffering is ignorance of the truth of our situation. When we are unaware of this we inevitably nurture the three afflicting poisons: mental darkness or lack of clarity, desire, and aversion. As we start to recognise how easily we are infected by these poisonous distortions we can use this sorrow to energise our wish to free all beings from their thrall.

This flow of compassion needs to be accompanied by the flow of wisdom arising from seeing that all phenomena are devoid of inherent existence whether they seem to be self or other. To see the empty illusory nature of all experience allows us to work for the benefit of others in the manner of a dream — responding to suffering without reifying it.

This points to the importance of turning towards the practice of the Guru Yoga of the White A. If the various symptoms of the toxicity of the three poisons are focused on as real persecuting entities, then this merely increases the delusions of duality: ‘this is happening to me.’ But by opening to our intrinsic open ground through using the Guru Yoga of the White A as a means of release from all dualistic identifications, we find ourselves as the integrity of our three aspects. These aspects, ungraspable openness, ungraspable luminosity or clarity, and ungraspable co-emergent expression, are inseparable.

Resting in awareness of ungraspable unborn openness we are in the unchanging here and now. This is the Dharmadhatu, the site of infinite hospitality — the only site where occurrences actually occur. The past occurs here; the future occurs here; all that we

conceptualise as the present occurs here. This unchanging here and now is always available if we open to it.

So when symptoms arise, such as aches, pains, irritations, hopes and fears, anxiety and exhaustion, our practice is to let whatever comes come and whatever goes go. We have many habits and tendencies of involvement and so getting pulled into the flux of reified experience will occur again and again. Yet, if we do not brand this as 'error', we can start to see that such experiences have no inherent existence. Gradually the habit of selecting and organising and explaining experience lessens and clarity emerges that 'my experience', or 'these experiences that arise for or as me', do not define me. We remain open and unmodified as diverse patterns, each with momentary potential to be taken as 'self', arise and pass by themselves. The openness of awareness is inseparable from the ceaseless display of self-arising and self-vanishing experience.

Without blocking whatever arises, no matter how negative or self-critical, each arising goes free by itself — and this includes all the thoughts, feelings, memories and so on that constitute our sense of existing as a separate self. Our open ground is ungraspable and seeing this, the clarity that all occurrence is unborn within openness is manifest and ungraspable.

If we use this brief Guru Yoga practice many times a day, by refreshing our sense of openness we can see that all that occurs is always already inseparable from openness, whether arising as seemingly 'inner' thoughts, feelings, memories and so on, or as seemingly 'outer' trees, people, houses and so on. In this way we are not limited by the diverse illusory forms which come and go. We participate in the non-dual dialogic, co-emergent with the shifting patterns of the field of which we are a part. We do not start from 'I, me, myself', but from our own ungraspable openness free of fixed identity. Our openness, clarity and participation are neither three separate aspects or one unified fact. It is vital not to try to catch the mystery of presence with the hooks of familiar concepts. Relax, release, trust, open — all is well.

Then if we find ourselves lying in bed without energy to move, this is no longer a constraint but functions to allow full awareness of inexpressible freedom: freedom from existence and non-existence; freedom from separate identity; freedom as simple presence; freedom to abide in non-involved presence; freedom within the luminosity of occurrence.

However if we remain in dualistic tension we can neither open to the open nor enjoy the luminosity or ungraspability of experience. Then we focus on the experience of being some-one communicating with other some-ones, and on organising diverse arising some-things into the patterns of some-thing we know. Living within this little forcefield of reification and identification we are effectively cut off from our own ever-open ground. Therefore it is vital to open to the open and avoid the error of trying to think our way out of samsara.

When we maintain our practice we nurture the life blood of our loose-textured sangha. Even though I have been unavailable for a while I have kept you all in my practice.

With love and warm regards

James