

## Questions & Responses from Elizabeth's Talk

Q1) Rinpoche talked about the "grace" of the Buddhadharma on Friday evening. Can you comment on what is your understanding or interpretation of his statement regarding grace of the Buddhadharma?

R1) Of course, i cannot completely speak for DKR! But my understanding is that grace comes harmonious relationship. I think that grace in Christianity is often thought of as something you are given. In this tradition, grace, or ease, or clarity comes from understanding the relationship between mind and its world. It is having a sense of openness, humility, and love, that comes from letting go of strong grasping and rejecting.

### Regarding the ball jar exercise:

Q2) Non-Thought Life Surrender: Whenever I quiet my mind, there is an underlying anxiety...kind of like a geyser under the surface. How to work with this somewhat fully unexpressed experience?

R2) Yes, i understand. Sometimes we don't know why there is this underlying discomfort. There is a lot of sensation in it, and maybe there are also some underlying concepts that are not completely conscious. Sometimes, this kind of discomfort is very physical. During practice these kinds of things are so noticeable, aren't they. Sometimes when we are busy they may present themselves but we can ignore them. Still, they are not permanent, or concrete in any way. They will change and maybe re-occur at times.

it is interesting when we feel such things to ask ourselves if they are positive or negative. I think that thoughts and sensations that are unpleasant could be said to be negative and ones that are pleasant could be pleasant. Often the thought and sensation really arise together. Often when we feel something physically, but our mind opens up, our body feels a sense of ease and relaxation.

As you continue to do the exercise you may develop a bit more "compassion" or ease around this feeling. You might decide that it itself is quite innocent...not inherently "bad". Then you may find that at some point it opens up with a positive thought or you just begin to experience it differently.

It is amazing to look at the mind and see all these expressions. But they are not solid and you are not doomed. The different practices help us find a different way to relate to the mind. In this exercise we are just noticing and challenging our perceptions of positive and negative and maybe trying to reverse the way we understand these different experiences that arise in the mind.

You described the experience as “somewhat fully unexpressed.” That is really nice. I think we don’t really let ourselves, often, have a full experience, because we have already decided we don’t like it. What would happen if we learned to let it be and gave it the space to unwind?

Q3) I can't tell what comes first - the feeling or the thought. If I am feeling open it seems that that informs the context for the thoughts.

R4) Yes! It is really hard to say? Sometimes, and this is what it says in the teachings, that due to the subtle feeling of needing to cherish and protect the self, which is VERY instinctual and often pre-language or non-conceptual, a lot of negative emotions arise and then we react and solidify things into more concrete ideas. But luckily, the antidote to both feeling and thoughts is to let them be without grasping and rejecting them. So it is like one medicine that cures all ills. Good investigating!

Q4) During the exercise there was a long interval without thoughts. I felt as if I had to "force" them to mind. How do we explore the gap between thoughts?

R4) That is a very good question. Sometimes “non-thought” is a very vague experience...kind of foggy. At other times, the experience of feeling very open and alive and not fixating on thoughts arises. These are 2 very different experiences. In the exercise we could have looked for “positive”, “negative” and “neutral,” but I just followed the story, which just had the 2 options. As you get more subtle in your investigation you begin to see the difference between neutral and awake, which is in itself a deep investigation. Ultimately, one can appreciate all experience beyond positive and negative and just watch it arise with appreciation for its nature, knowing that every arises in such an amazing way through the nature of interdependence.