

Transcription

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Andrew: Hey, everybody. Can you hear me okay? You can hear me? So, what I'm doing... This is cool. I'm doing a quick scroll through names and faces here which is great, because usually when I do these things I don't have this kind of contact, which is super helpful for me because otherwise I feel like I'm talking in a cereal box. And so what this is about... This is great. Oh, fantastic. Beautiful. What this little event is about is coronavirus. The social intimacy series, coronavirus chapter.

This is really a very informal way for us to simply gather as a community and support each other, talk about things that we feel may be of some value, either in terms of sharing — I mean, there's so much information going around these days. I can barely keep track. And the spirit is different from what I usually do with events like this, which is where I usually present some big, prepared thing, and then we have a Q&A thing. I will just have a few preparatory comments, but really, this experimental gathering is much more spontaneous, hopefully playful, and participatory, where I think what will really bring this to life is your questions, your offerings. What did you come across that really helped you? What have you tried or read that was like, "Well, that's definitely worth sharing." So that I become, you know, perhaps more a facilitator than a play person here. Again, this is really in the spirit of experimentation, emergent design. Let's just see where this takes us. You know, I think with the collective wisdom as I scan through these names, there's a lot of wisdom in this group.

I'm just going to say a couple of introductory comments. There were a couple of questions that were piped in to me, so I will address those. Then really it's for those of you who are listening in. Think about something that you might want to ask, contribute, offer that we can then just spend an informal, campfire chat riffing about, because this sense of really, what should be labeled, in my opinion, social intimacy, physical distancing, is that we can use these modern avenues of the internet and whatnot to really stay connected in situations that are otherwise driving us apart.

I did want to share a couple of things that I read recently. This is something that I read that was interesting. It is being together is really not the same as being connected. The scholar that I referenced here that I came across is Martha Welch from Columbia University. She has some interesting recommendations that are worth sharing. One of them is in the spirit of one very simple meditation that I do want to share with you. A really simple thing that I have found to be incredibly helpful during this time is the kind of — if I use this word carefully — vaccine against this defensive, and sometimes offensive, contraction that comes about when there's just so much threat in the air.

But this professor says that one of the best ways to connect is with deep, intentional, and vulnerable conversations where we allow ourselves to reveal ourselves to others. She recommends that during really deep, intimate connectivity that one pause for up to 90 seconds as a way to really incorporate what's been passed along, and also to curtail the usual reflexive tendency we have, reactive tendency we have, that we're almost always preparing our responses before we even open our mouths, and so we lose our sense of connection with others. This is largely in the spirit of openness, and connects deeply to my very favorite definition of meditation these days, which I often speak about, which is habituation to openness, staying open to what's happening, staying open to each other. Not so easy when there's so much threat in the air. So much, really, that brings about levels of contraction.

The other thing she recommends that I thought was

compelling, very interesting, is to do rhythmic activities that create a sense of attunement with your body, and then also with the earth. She recommends singing, dancing, yoga, and when you're in contact with others, deep eye contact. That's why having you for me to look at is actually really helpful. The other thing that's mentioned in this article I read was, — apparently a study by Anna Freud, daughter of Sigmund Freud — where she found that children — during the London bombings in World War II, the children that actually remained in London that had greater social contact and relationship, even though they were under physical threat from the bombs, actually ended up faring, doing better after the war than children that were taken outside of the city that were more in isolation and that didn't have this type of connection.

Even though they were physically safer than the children that were left in London, they had more deleterious consequences of this type of isolation. That's really the spirit of what I'm trying to do here, kind of just winging it in a way, just saying how this will work for all of us. It's really kind of a living thing. The reason I want to turn mostly to Q&A and discussion, is I want to know exactly what it is that you're interested in, what you can teach me, so we can just be really targeted. If you're all following my silly propaganda I'm doing a ton of stuff in a sort of formal capacity around this. I'm actually finishing up tomorrow a third course in a program I'm doing through Tricycle Magazine. Next week, I'm starting a 10-week program for the center here in Boulder. I'm going to be doing a weekend program at Shambhala Mountain Center specifically about this kind of stuff.

I'm really teaching this in a quite expanded way using these other formats and venues, and that's why I don't want to just repurpose and reiterate all that stuff here. But I do want to say one thing around this, and this is what inspired me at the very beginning to make these kinds of offerings, is that I teach a lot, as many of you know, on the Bardo teachings from Tibetan Buddhism, you know, the teachings that are associated with death and dying. These teachings are incredibly applicable to what's happening right now because we're in a Bardo. Bardos are those groundless spaces where the rug of your reality has just been pulled out from under your feet and everything that you associated with consistency, stability, security, constancy has just gone.

These are really powerful instances in life. This is why they say in the Bardo teachings that if one is prepared and relates to Bardos properly, there are more opportunities for psychological and spiritual growth in Bardos, in instances like this, than in other instances. Because, in a certain way, the snowglobe has been shaken. Everything is in disarray, right? Everything that you thought was safe and secure is just up in the air, and it's really interesting to watch. It's really highly revelatory to me. It's like, where's the snowglobe going to settle? What are the new patterns? How am I going to take rebirth, so to speak?

The karmic part of the teachings on the painful Bardo of dying, which is the painful Bardo of letting go, that's where we're in right now. We're letting go of so much of our sense of normalcy. The teachings on the Bardo of becoming will also start to be applicable because where will we land out

individually, collectively in a social, cultural world level? How, in fact, will this change us? Can we use this uncomfortable experience, as an opportunity to realign our priorities, to do something that really can shape-shift our own life and the lives of those around us?

The other thing that I wanted to mention in relation to what's happening here, is that, obviously, because of all the social distancing, every avenue of entertainment, distraction being curtailed, we're being forced within. For students of the contemplative spiritual traditions, this is just a way to work with retreat mind, retreat principles. It's very interesting that, collectively, we're being forced into this kind of retreat. Some people do really well with this sort of thing. Some people thrive when they have the opportunity to look at things more concerted, more directly, while others have, you know, a really hard time as they perhaps are not so comfortable spending this concentrated time with themselves. I'm saying this because this can be revelatory. It has been for me, for our near lost for distraction, how when all these avenues are taken away, how we can almost feel a kind of detox taking place. Oh my God, you know, my football game, my tennis... The Masters was supposed to be played this week. I'm a golfer, so this is my big event, and that's gone. Noticing that within myself, and then using the invitation as curfew that's being voluntarily — and then, in many cases, involuntarily — imposed, there's an opportunity to look at things a little bit more directly.

One of the ways I'm presenting this material in my more formal classes is that it's like what's taking place now is reality

concentrate. It's where so many aspects of the world, especially the samsaric world, the world of confusion and suffering, they're really being brought out in stark relief as all our usual avoidance strategies, distraction strategies have been pulled away. George Saunders, this beautiful writer who wrote *Lincoln in the Bardo*, is this wonderful image that we're basically living our lives on top of the sleeping dragon, and the sleeping dragon has stirred. We're all on top getting all kerfuffled by this assault on our constancy, when really it's the stability that is more the exception than the rule. I mean, if you really take a very close look at things, which is what I think this situation provides, you actually will see that it is Bardo instability, inconstancy, that's actually the rule.

These are the sorts of things that have been brought out to me that have really given me fodder for my path. I want to just share with you one meditation that I'm really using a ton these days that I find extremely applicable. It comes from my teacher, Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche. He's a great meditation master. In 1991, he gave a really profound set of teachings on what's called Mahamudra, the summit teachings in the Karma Kagyu tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. During the course of this program, I thought it was somewhat gratuitous at the time, but in a decade since then I found this to be incredibly powerful practice. It's literally a one-breath meditation session, literally.

I use this a lot as a kind of immediate vaccine against this kind of contraction. I invite you to take a look at this, and see if this is, in fact, not true. This is something we can explore, that when we're so assaulted, when there's so much...when the

rug of our reality has been pulled out to such an extent, the tendency for the untamed, untrained mind and heart is, in fact, defensive self-contraction. I invite you to take a look at this for yourself. In fact, you may notice this manifesting in you. I've certainly noticed it in me, manifesting as a heightened sense of irritability. That's a form of contraction, a heightened sense of anxiety. that's a form of contraction. A heightened sense of disquietude, and even moments of — you know, I feel it coming on. I don't capitulate to it, but even moments of anger. Every one of these are defensive strategies, that when I pay attention to what I'm feeling, they're contracting energies, and they serve to kind of protect and reify this illusory thing called self or ego, but fundamentally, they're not helpful at all.

This is, in fact, what creates the disconnect that this venue that we're playing with today is designed to open. Whenever we notice this contraction, this irritability — like, you know, I have an inclination to kick my cat more than ever before, but I'm not doing it. To me, it's revelatory. It's like, wow. There's this underlying kind of dread. It's just kind of underlying aches. Just being aware of that, tuning into that, and then smiling at it, and realizing, "Hey, this is just where ego goes to maintain its strategies of defense." Then what I do is I feel that, and that's why I like this, because it's not cognitive. It's not a head thing. It's a body-heart thing, so what I do now is every time I feel that, which is a lot, especially when I'm watching the news, is I feel this contraction. You know, sometimes I'll even feel my shoulders collapse. Literally, I'll often close my eyes, and I invite you to do this with me now. I will try to maintain enough mindfulness that we can do this between each and every question as a way to do just a brief

connection to what Martha Welch was talking about, in terms of just pausing in itself as a type of Bardo practice or gap practice.

The invitation really is quite literally for one inhalation, one exhalation, one breath. You connect. You do a one-breath meditation session. Let's try it. It couldn't be easier. Okay.

[00:16:30]

[silence]

[00:16:48]

Andrew: That's it. For me, it keeps the commentary that just hangs out up here. The spin doctors, the excessive thinking, it curtails that, keeps it in check, keeps the obsessive thinking that can happen, especially to me, and allows me to contact my body, to stay embodied, to feel what's actually happening within. With that said, those are my preparatory comments for today. I want to respond to the two questions that were sent in. Again, this is very much an experiment, and let's just see how this flies. I'm going to read these questions, and then I open it up to all of you, not just for your questions, but for, again, your contributions. What have you done that really works for you that others can learn from? Suggestions, tips, offerings, and the like.

Here's a couple of questions.

**What can this pandemic teach us about our relationships, especially how we have come to define intimacy and human decency?**

Well, again, I think if we allow it, this so-called teachable moment, we can learn a lot. This can teach us everything, because like the journey into the Bardos themselves, the journey into really challenging life situations, what I've certainly noticed specifically when I'm working with dying people, and really, to some extent happening now, is you really feel the squeeze. All kinds of things get squeezed out, right? The good, the bad, and the ugly, all comes out, and you just have to watch the news to see instances of each one of these things.

This also applies in my experience to relationships. How important are these relationships to you? Do you take them for granted? How can we actually increase, again, in the spirit of what we're doing here, our level of connectivity, strengthen our relationships? Instead of capitulating to this contraction — it sends you down into your study and slams your door, or, you know, otherwise contracts you away from others. This is a difficult question to answer *carte blanche* for everybody, because everybody is different. The thing that it has shown me is really just that it can teach us a great deal about our relationships, because they're being, in a certain way, tested. The degree that we can open ourselves to others is, I think, highly revelatory of the opportunities that are being presented to us.

The intimacy around this especially how... What's the question here? How we've come to define intimacy and human decency. Well, intimacy really depends on our willingness to be so vulnerable, to be so exposed, to open our hearts to

others, to share our anxiety with others, which is something I think that we can also do within ourselves, to realize the commonality of the human condition, and that we have aspects or dimensions of our being that are absolutely, positively being threatened here. Can we establish a proper relationship to that, and then share that?

Levels of intimacy really will be, in my experience, brought about by how willing are we to be open to ourselves, first of all, connecting with ourselves, and then connecting with others. Then the decency I think, the human decency aspect of this question for me — and I love to hear if somebody else has something else to say — I think it's also connected to this notion of openness and vulnerability that really in my experience, so to speak, “indecent activity” is activity that's born from defensive contraction. When I lose contact with myself, I lose contact with others, and then decency goes out the window. The more I can stay open to myself, the more I can stay open to others, a natural consequence. That is, in fact, what we call human decency. Something like that.

**Second one, and then I want to hear from you all. Do you think that introverts or extroverts are having it harder with social isolation?**

Well, I would suspect that introverts are probably doing a little bit better with this, because they tend to live in a more interior landscape to begin with, but these kinds of generalizations are a little bit difficult to surmise. I think intuitively, it's not too much of a stretch to say that extroverts, those who are always looking outside of themselves, may be a little bit more

challenged, but then with the right kind of teaching tools, those who are extroverts can use this as, in fact, an opportunity to cultivate this more introverted relationship. This is really, of course, super central in the Buddhist tradition, where the very definition of the word for Buddhists in Tibetan, “Nangpa,” means insiders, introverts, turning within, really looking within.

**Let's see. There was another part of this question. What about Buddhist practitioners who are practicing not seeking entertainment and striving to just be?**

Spiritual practice seems to have made me somewhat introverted indeed.

**Can you say something about the fundamental human desire for social connection, and how it might relate with people on the spiritual path and social isolation right now?**

Well, again, this is another one to nail with 100% authority in that kind of carte blanche statement. It really just depends on how we relate to social connectivity altogether. The way I play with this one is that social connection can either be a distraction, or it, in fact, can be what we're trying to do here, a way of genuinely connecting.

It really just depends on how we relate to it. I think at the deepest levels, the type of connectivity that we're really fundamentally looking for, of which even — again, this is just my take on it — of which even social connection is just a provisional, or even a substitute gratification. The

fundamental connection that we're looking for is the connection to our own heart and mind, the connection of our very being. I think, again, if we can see that, and make a connection to that, it is from that authentic space that then we can become, so to speak, extroverted or reach out to others from this more authentic, open stance. I think, again, this is what the situation has invited and presents to me. These are just some ruminations on my own approach to this, but I really want to hear more and more from you and definitely share in what you have to ask, offer, or even challenge.

Please, at this time, let's just make this an open conversation. Anything, questions, comments, and even jokes. Please, let's open this up. Here's the other thing you all. If you think that it's beneficial for me to just blah, blah, blah, I can restructure this event to do more of that, but I want this to be a little bit different from that usual approach. With that said, I'm really open to almost anything, so I just want to open it up at this point.

There are some questions, comments that have scrolled in.

**Okay. Here's the statement. We are collectively struggling with a conundrum of not being able to congregate and solidify this sense of belonging in a time of social distancing. All the faith traditions are struggling with this, for instance, last night, was Seder in a time of COVID. Easter's coming and Ramadan after that. So, how do we distance without isolation?**

Well, yeah, I mean, that's the \$100,000 question, right? I'm

not actually sure what the targeted question is here. I wish I could hear you all. Okay. Hold on just a second, folks. I'm trying to see what happened to my co-host. Hang with me.

Here's what I like to do, you know, since this is a new run on this. Hang with us as we iron out a few things here. I noticed that four people have their hands raised. I would much prefer if I could consider reading these things, because when I talked about isolation, you know, then I really don't feel like I'm having connection with you all. My strong preference, and I think we can start to do this, is those people who have raised their hands, we can select you, unmute you, and then that way I can see and hear you. That, I think, is a much better way to do it than trying to just read off these scrolled questions on the right. Can we try that and see if that works? I think that'll be very cool.

**Q: I can just share a personal comment. Of course, I'm curious to hear about other people's experience, because we are locked up in our little boxes and I would think that our experiences are, you know, interesting and varied. My own has been that I have allowed myself to jump off the treadmill and stop striving, which I'm really good at, and I have found it really, really useful. I didn't realize how unbelievably exhausted I have been, and I am slowly, sort of coming in for what I hope is a soft landing, and finding it really useful to emphasize more being, and less striving, and more body-based being.**

Andrew: There you go.

**Q: So, really, really, really healthy.**

Andrew: Yeah. I could give you a big hug. This is exactly the kind of thing I want to do, where it's not just me, it's offerings like that, and really, just maybe brief comments, or one or two things that come to mind. I couldn't agree more with you. It's just we finally realized that we're not human doings, we're human beings. When we're being forced to stop doing, which again, that's what happens when we enter into the Bardos. This is an intimation of that. Then we can start to realign our priorities, pay attention to what's more important, and often just like you, when I go into extended, really long retreats, the first thing I do, almost for the first week, is I just sleep like crazy. It's like I didn't realize I was so fundamentally exhausted. So maybe we can use this as a way to recontact, replenish, and recharge. Thank you, my friend, for that beautiful contribution. Love it. More of this kind of thing. This is really what I aspire to connect to. Again, anything. Questions, comments or offerings, but I find this stuff really helpful.

**Q: Oh, wow. This is wonderful. A question relative to what... Well, I'll just go to it. "Om mani padme hum. Om mani padme hum." Connect that. To me, that's so automatic. When I don't need the mind, which is 90% of the time. "Om mani padme hum." Is that the six levels of existence?**

Andrew: Yes. The "Om mani padme hum" is the mantra — and a couple of things here that you already kind of intimated suggest this. Mantra literally means mind protection, mind

protector, and what mantras do is they protect us from spinning off into our heads, and getting lost in raging discursive thought, just like you were talking about. This particular mantra is the mantra of compassion. It's actually the sound of compassion. It's the mantra of Avalokiteshvara, also known as Chenrezig in Tibetan. He's the Bodhisattva of compassion, and "Om mani padme hum" — I sometimes talk about it. That's like his email address, right?

So, if you want to connect to compassion as it is represented in Chenrezig, that's how you do it. Specifically, you suggested this in terms of what it really implies. A little bit technical, but since you asked, each one of the six syllables of this six-syllable mantra "Om mani padme hum" is connected to one of the six realms in Buddhist cosmology, and therefore, this is considered to be the most important mantra for preparing for death, in that, again, technically, that what we want to do is prevent taking form, rebirth, into any of these six realms of samsara. I playfully talk about it as each one of these six syllables of the mantra kind of duct tapes the entry into these states. The important thing for us with this is that the mantra protects us from taking rebirth psychologically in the poisonous six dimensions of passion, aggression, ignorance, jealousy, and pride. Not only does it allegedly protect us from physical rebirth at the end of this life and the literal Bardos, as they say, but most importantly — and this is the point — most importantly, this mantra protects us from taking rebirth into the six poisonous states of mind psychologically, moment to moment. So, something like...

**Q: Wow.**

Andrew: Is that helpful?

**Q: Yeah. Very helpful, because I find the mind automatically says it constantly when I don't need the mind. It just rests in "Om mani padme hum" and...**

Andrew: That's really...

**Q: It's great. I have your other talk on what happens to the mind at death. Could you elaborate a little? I just think when I'm dying that mantra is going to be there.**

Andrew: It'll be there. I'm not going to elaborate too much on that particular topic, but I think what's important here that I do want to elaborate on, and then I'll probably ask you for just another question or comment, is that what you said is so cool, because if you're finding yourself defaulting into that mantra, that's fantastic.

**Q: Yes.**

Andrew: That's a gesture of your progress on the path instead of the usual default... Neuroscientists actually called default mode network. Instead of our usual default into the mantras of samsara, which is all about "me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, my, my, my, my, my." That's that mantra. We're reciting that mantra all the time. That's our usual default. By reciting this mantra or others, you actually get to the point where you seem to be where that's where your mind now defaults, and that, in the Bardo teachings, is a really good thing, because that is, in

fact, then, where your mind will go. It's really using the power of habit in a really skillful way.

**Q: Yeah, exactly. Yeah.**

Andrew: So, this is now the habit that will take care of you, because you've invested in it. It just makes me smile to hear that something like this is being brought to fruition in your experience, because it will really help you, as it already has. I can just say good for you, and thanks for sharing that. That's terrific.

**Q: Well, thank you. Thank you. That's very reassuring.**

Andrew: Yeah. Just keep it up. Keep it up. If you invest in it now, you will pay the dividends and you're already paying...reaping the benefits. Thank you for sharing that. That's terrific.

**Q: Well, you were very encouraging. It's an automatic thing now. I just rest in "Om mani padme hum." Okay. Thanks again.**

Andrew: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Here's... I have to pause and tell you. I can't tell you how much this means to me, because I'm spending so much time talking in front of this screen, and it really — I feel like I'm just in a shoebox. So when I can connect to a face over this medium it means a lot. Anyway, I just wanted to say, it makes me happy.

**Q: First of all, thank you for your teaching in this time. It's invaluable. And your generous and incredibly intellectual, powerful...**

Andrew: Go to bed.

**Q: ...words. I have a sort of conceptual question.**

Andrew: Okay.

**Q: The fundamental question which is that the Bardo teachings which are so profound, expansive, invaluable, imaginative seem to be rooted in a fundamental belief in rebirth and reincarnation. How do those of us who appreciate it, who absolutely cannot hook into reincarnation, rebirth — it seems like there's a deal-breaker situation there?**

Andrew: Yeah. Not necessarily. Not necessarily because — and this is a great question. Because what happens here, and I invite you to take a really close look at this one, is that the Bardo... A way to frame this is look at Bardo principle. Look at the Bardo principle. I'll say a little bit more about that. Then whether that Bardo principle is applied towards the big Bardo at the end of life — whether you believe in that or not, that's a different issue. The invitation for me here, and this is actually why I'm teaching more and more on this. Literally, the title [of the class I'm teaching] is "Bardos in Everyday Life." What you can therefore do, and you can do this almost as a type of cultural translation, when you read these teachings, is realize,

because, you know, you mentioned some intellectual predispositions on your part, so I'll speak to you at that level, the Bardo principle is iterative. In other words, it has applications on many different levels of reality, only one of which is the Bardo at the end of life.

What I would recommend is read, study the Bardo teachings, and understand how they have immediate applicability to anything that ends, whether it's a relationship, a job, a day, a thought. Every moment abides by Bardo tenants. This, to me, is what makes this material so beautiful, because in my reading of it over the years, I playfully refer to it as “stealth help.” There's a whole lot more going on than meets the eye. If you read this literature properly, you will realize that Bardo principles apply to anything that ends, and therefore you can't have endings without beginnings. They mutually define each other.

Bardo teachings also apply as much to birth as they do to death. Then what you can do is you can say, "Oh, you know what? I'm not really that interested in the application towards the end of life. I just don't buy that." Then you say, "Okay. How do these Bardo teachings, the Bardo of dying” — because we're in a Bardo of dying now — “how do they apply now?" You realize, "Oh my God. They apply to this situation. They apply to the end of a dream, the end of whatever."

I really work more and more with this kind of thing for many, many reasons. One is there's a tremendous elegance in this kind of universality of these tenants, and this is not just to the Bardo teachings. This applies to most descriptions of reality.

You will find iterations of this everywhere, in chaos and complexity theory, visually represented in fractals. You'll find it reiterated in philosophical jargon literally called the theory of recapitulation. I don't want to blah, blah, blah too much on this. I think the most important thing, really, is make these Bardo teachings your own. Go to the deep structures that underlie Bardo principle, and don't get so hung up on all the stuff that happens at the end of life. That just doesn't speak to you. That's fine. Centrifuge that out, but then stay with the core, which is how these teachings really apply to close examination, they apply to anything that ends. That's what I get excited about, and that's why in the context of what's happening now, these Bardo teachings are absolutely applicable to what we're going through. Something like that. Does that make sense?

**Q: It does. Can I ask you one tiny other little question?**

Andrew: Yeah, absolutely.

**Q: Leonard Cohen said that he was hoping that death would not be too uncomfortable and dying of COVID-19 seems to be extremely uncomfortable. And in your meditation teachings, which allow for a kind of spaciousness around an event, a painful feeling, one-breath meditation. I wonder if you have some guidance, not only what is extremely uncomfortable, but perhaps extraordinarily confusing and terribly painful.**

Andrew: Yeah, this is a terrific question and it's huge. What I might invite you to do, I will say a little bit about it now, but

just because there's so much to say here, I might invite you — and it's a free course, the course that I'm just doing with "Tricycle Magazine." We can send you the link. It's free. You can listen to it, because I go into this in some depth and detail, because the depth of the question requires a deep answer. In the briefest way, and you can learn more about this in the course, you want to establish several new relationships. One is a new relationship to unwanted experience altogether.

This is where a really powerful set of practices that are central to the Bardo teachings called the reverse meditations come in, where you literally do meditations on pain. You literally alter the relationship to pain. Tremendous amount to say on that. The second thing you do is you start to understand or work with a deeper more integral aspect, complete aspect of your very sense of identity. This may seem like metaphysical mumbo-jumbo, but is enormously applicable because we suffer physically in direct proportion to how exclusively we identify with the superficial-most dimensions of our being, in other words, our physical form.

If you think your body is all, that's it, you're going to suffer a lot. That's why people who aren't prepared allegedly suffer a lot during death. If you start to let go, differentiate, these are euphemisms for death, die to these relative, you know, superficial levels of identity, and transition your identity to deeper, truer levels, which is precisely what the spiritual path does, then it is from that deeper, truer perspective that you can actually witness this passionately but compassionately — anything that happens on the surface. It just doesn't have the same impact anymore.

This is enormous. Just to show you how enormous this goes, and then I'll let this one go for now, is watch the video... Look it up. Watch the video of the burning monk, Thích Quảng Đức, who self-immolated during the Vietnam War. This man sat in total equanimity, unflinching, unmoved as his body was ravaged in the most violent possible way. How on earth can someone do that? How can someone maintain such equanimity under these most extraordinary physical conditions? My guess is because this individual, through his spiritual practice, was able to transition his identity into these deeper levels, which are, in fact, according to the wisdom teachings, they're untouchable, they're indestructible dimensions of your being that don't enter the world of space and time. They don't get sick, they cannot be touched by this virus. You can see how much traction there is on this one. I might just kindly invite you to take a look at this course, because that's where I go into this in quite a bit more detail, but it's a really beautiful, deep, powerful question, and maybe I'll just leave it at that for now. Is that okay? Yeah. Terrific. Thank you.

Andrew: Oh, it just means so much to me that I can see you people. I can't tell you. I can give you, like, the internet hug here. Anyway, fire away.

**Q: Hi, Andrew. I have been... I can't believe I'm talking to you because I've been emailing you and I'm one of those "hi," friends and there's just not enough hours during the day, and so I can't respond to you in person. But I appreciate that you responded. I'm finishing a 100-day**

retreat. Thank you. I can't tell you how much working with a dream book and with a course has meant to me. It just launched me into a whole nother level of my practice and...

Andrew: Thank you for saying that.

**Q: I can't... I'm really... It's amazing. It's amazing. It's such a confirmation, and I get confirming dreams, but my question right now: when I went into retreat the world was a different place.**

Andrew: Yeah. Right.

**Q: And I'm gonna come out in a week's time. One of the maybe opportunities during this retreat was really to see what Tulku Orgyen so eloquently says, you know, "When the mind is turned outward into its projections, that's samsara or inward that's Nirvana. And so I find it gets played out every time I expose myself to the news and when I talk to my loved one, especially elderly mother where, you know, if I just allow myself to go there, I go into sheer terror about what will happen to her and yet, you know, and then in another moment I practice whether it's with Yidam or with the nature of mind. It's the same, right? And all is well and it's like big mind. Can you say something about that play? How do you work with that? I mean, I don't want to use it to avoid..."**

Andrew: That's right.

**Q: ...suffering out there, and I'm not going to. I'm a nurse, and I'm probably going to go back and work because I want to help, but I don't know how to play with that.**

Andrew: Yeah. Yeah. That's really, again, a beautiful question. It has to do with this delicate dance, because as you just so beautifully put it, there are a host of near-enemies, right? Wherever you find light, you will find shadows. There are a host of near-enemies to anything, even these really beautiful, incredibly noble, powerful practices. The near-enemy of, like, what you were talking about, nature of mind practices, Yidam practice, and the like, is in fact what you're suggesting, which are things like spiritual bypassing, technically for the intellectuals out there, cosmological dualism. There's just a host of places where you can slip into dissociation where you think, "Oh, it's all empty. It's all a dream. It's all illusory, so, what does it matter what I do?" That's a very powerful near-enemy. Obviously, just the fact that you're asking the question is indicative of your sensitivity to that pathology. What we want to do, then, is differentiate, not dissociate. Still, we play this kind of dance, and if you can tag into the talk that I'm going to be doing tomorrow for...

**Q: Oh, I am. I'm following that course.**

Andrew: Yeah. I'm going to riff on this a lot tomorrow, because this is exactly where this course is going to conclude. You know, those of you who may not be listening to it, we're using the classic Buddhist approach of view, meditation, action. So, you're in retreat, you're strengthening your view through your meditation. That is, you know, that's just

remedial work. When you finish your retreat, you're going to step into the final phase, which is really action. How do you act in an enlightened way? How do you act in a non-dualistic way? This is precisely what your question is, and the answer is a large part of what I'm going to be talking about tomorrow.

Again, just in the purposes of allowing other people to talk today, plus, on that venue tomorrow, I'm going to riff on this for a good 15, 20 minutes, because this is a hugely important topic, especially when you're coming out of deep teachings on emptiness, nature of mind practices. There are so many shadow elements to these luminous practices that understanding what enlightened activity really is, how to engage in it, being aware of all these side traps is critically important. With your kind permission, can I just refer you to that talk tomorrow? Then, again, we'll be back online next Thursday. If there's a trail or a question, just come back on, and we'll talk about it then.

**Q: Yeah. And not get lost in the reflection either...**

Andrew: Yes, exactly. Yeah. Exactly.

**Q: ...with the other piece.**

Andrew: Yeah. If that works for you, is that okay?

**Q: Yes, it is.**

Andrew: Because, again, I'm going to be... This is exactly what's on my docket for tomorrow in the course, so you'll

definitely refine it then. Okay? Great.

**Q: Blessings.**

Andrew: Good luck with your retreat. See you.

**Q: Nice to see you. I just wanted to add a couple of things. I'm a student... I'm a yoga instructor, and I studied with Judith Lasseter, who was, like, the queen of restorative yoga. Her big mantra is "Do less," so, I'm constantly instructing my students to do less, and it's really, really, really, really hard because they don't know what that means. I don't even know what it means to be honest. Another thing I wanted to add, I just finished reading Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche's book, "In Love with the World," talking about the Bardos.**

Andrew: Beautiful book, huh?

**Q: Beautiful example of the many different Bardos.**

Andrew: Yeah.

**Q: I'm new to the study of Bardos, and so it was a revelation to me. I just thought it was, you know, something that occurred at death, and it was just a beautiful, incredible examination of the mind.**

Andrew: Isn't it?

**Q: That I highly recommend people read, but the one**

**thing I wanted to ask you, both my husband and I, since this quarantine, have started to have had really explicit dreams.**

Andrew: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Q: I just wondered if everybody else or anybody else has had that experience, and how to work with that. My husband had a nightmare. Oh, has coronavirus appeared in my dreams. Not to my knowledge, and I've been trying to work with lucid dreaming on this, and it hasn't really been successful, and I think that's a sign of my anxiety about this whole thing. I'm really surprised at how I'm holding my body, how I'm breathing. I've been feeling a lot of body pain, not related to the virus, I don't think. I hope not, but I think the anxiety is just really surprising and how it's manifesting. Even though I know I have practices to work with that, but I just wondered about the dreaming and a bit about that.**

Andrew: Yeah. A couple of things. Well, I want to say something at the very beginning from your initial comments, which is really interesting, this idea of doing less. This, again, I'm going to be pinging a little bit about this tomorrow when I talk about enlightened activity, because it's very interesting as they say in the Taoist tradition, the teachings on Wu Wei, "By doing nothing, nothing is left undone." This idea of doing less is a really interesting thing to understand. If you understand the strata of your being, the dimensions of your being, and the parts of your being that really are involved in applying wisdom, apply... Applying wisdom is compassion.

Compassion is applied wisdom. That wisdom finally arises within us from this deep, changeless, immovable, utter-silent, stable core of our very being.

The core of the very being where you can't do anything because there is no you. You're literally resting in the primordial bed of mind, and for human doings, that level of being is really difficult, but the idea... this is what I'm going to be talking precisely about tomorrow. What we want to do is an invitation, and the path in practice is, learn to identify and take refuge in this deepest, unmovable nature of our being where fundamentally nothing needs to be done, and nothing actually can be done, but yet from that, then we radiate and shine out precisely what does need to be done. It's like the center of the cyclone, always silent, always stable, always deep, profound, immovable, changeless, staying there, that's a problem. That's a spiritual problem, but what we want to do is identify with that from that space, then we automatically know how to do, we automatically know what to do, because we're informed from this deeper sense of refuge. I'll be saying more about that tomorrow.

In terms of the dream thing, this is also really interesting, and we're about to launch... Not launch. I'm about to post on our Nightclub site an article that was sent to me, that's actually three articles now, that I've read about how this virus is being played out in the individual and collective psyche. Again, I seem to be just referring people to everything. I will refer you to that. The idea for now is that what is, in fact, happening is that... And they found this out doing studies during the Third Reich and how it was there during that terror in Germany,

how it affected the collective mass, the psyche, and how people were dreaming and processing in their dreams Hitler and the whole Third Reich.

This starts to work with this very interesting domain that researchers like Harry Hunt and Robert Ogilvy talk about, which basically, they paraphrase as, "The farther down the rabbit hole you go, the more collective the experience becomes." Therefore, what happens is when you drop down — of course, Jung talked about this in terms of the collective unconscious. What I was talking about at the very outset of my response to you goes even deeper than that, but the idea is that there is, in fact, this environmental collective and people are starting to tune into that, and it's manifesting in their dreams.

When you start to... When you read these posts that we'll be putting out shortly, I think it will be profoundly illuminating in terms of what's happening to your psyche, and how it's being affected at the level of the dream by what's happening in the world, because when we start to go down into these deeper domains, the mind becomes, in a real way, increasingly more porous. It's more in the public domain, so to speak. Really sensitive folks, practitioners, those who develop this kind of porosity of mind and heart will actually find themselves dreaming in this larger way and literally, at some point, quite literally become like surrogate dreamers where you can quite literally dream for another person.

The idea is that this is a completely normal thing for people that have a more sensitive, open relationship to the contents of

their mind, meditators, contemplatives and the like, they start to notice these sorts of things happening in their dreams. To me, I find it really quite beautiful, because, again, it to me it points out the commonality of the human condition, and that what I know as my waking consciousness is just the top, it's like this pyramid, this little pinched sense of identity associated with body and me. That's just the salt on top of the ocean. And when you fall asleep, that salt dissolves into the ocean.

Therefore, you develop this kind of talk about connectivity that we were talking about at the outset. You can register this underlying connection, connectivity with what's happening in your family, in your neighbors, in the world altogether. To me, this is really — it's elegant, it's beautiful, it's mysterious, and it makes me feel part of the human condition. It makes me feel part of the whole sentient condition, and therefore it's not disturbing to me. I find it like, you know, I'm dreaming about this stuff as well. I'm finding it really connecting me to others who are sharing similar types of concerns, anxieties, and the like. And then what you do with that, that's a different story that I might pass on for now. That's where the dreaming practices particularly come into play. That may be worth another conversation at another time. But something like that. Is that helpful?

**Q: Oh, that's wonderful. I love the idea of going deep into the collective consciousness about this. I think that's incredible. It blends in with some of the teachings I've read by B. Alan Wallace about meditating.**

Andrew: Yeah, exactly. Yeah. Perfect.

**Q: Thank you.**

Andrew: Great questions and offerings. Thank you so much. Awesome.

**Q: So glad to see you, Andrew, and relate to your teachings.**

Andrew: Oh, there you are. Nice to see you. It's been a while.

**Q: Sure. I'm going to read a question that I asked. Please, Andrew. This major disruption isolation feels like a dream shift.**

Andrew: Feels like a what? I'm sorry.

**Q: A dream shift.**

Andrew: Yeah.

**Q: The music duped commentaries seem like waking from an old dream, the old dream is fading in the unknown. Everything I'm listening to is the past, and will not be revived again. Yes, a new Bardo. What is important? Why not start the fast to death? Is there any reason for optimism?**

Andrew: Wow. Yeah, beautiful, my friend. Is there any reason for optimism? It depends on us. It depends on us. Everything

about this is... I'm using this classic Maxim from Vajrayana Buddhism, transforming obstacle into opportunity, pessimism into optimism. That's not going to happen on its own. In fact, studies... My friend, Roger Walsh, was sharing a study wherein times of duress, stress, anxiety like we're feeling now, the actual default is regressive. The actual default is actually re-constitutive of old ways, because that's what we're most familiar with, and so the reason this question and comment is so beautiful, is that it's really up to us whether we transform this obstacle into opportunity. It depends entirely on how we relate to it. If we relate to it as Humpty Dumpty hitting the ground, and we're just going to kind of try to patch him back together again, because we don't know an alternative narrative, then there's not a whole lot of optimism here. It's really a pretty...it's just super samsara.

But these wisdom teachings, to me, they provide alternative narratives. That's where shaking things up like that, if we're armed with these alternative narratives, and the practices that help us implement them, then this is like what Trungpa Rinpoche said. You probably remember this incredibly famous quote. "Chaos should be regarded as extremely good news." Whoa. Sounds good on paper. It doesn't sound good in life. Chaos is to be regarded as extremely good news because it shakes up the egoic snowglobe, the egoic structure and agenda. It's only good news if we can somehow take "advantage" of what this actually has to offer to us, and then make the appropriate skillful actions based on that view.

That's a terrific question that, I think, to me is why arming ourselves with these wisdom teachings — for me, Buddhism,

Kashmir Shaivism, nondual Saiva Tantra, integral theory — and then the Bardo teachings, it's critically important, because then I can use that matrix as a way, in fact, to change the narrative, and to do something that can really be advantageous out of this. Otherwise, you know — pardon my French — it's just a three-ring shit show, and it's not going to get any better unless we take the opportunity to really look at this chaos, in fact, as potentially good news. It's no guarantee. It's no guarantee. Something like that, but it's a beautiful contribution. Thank you.

**Q: I have one more addition.**

Andrew: Okay.

**Q: Are you familiar with Charles Eisenstein?**

Andrew: Absolutely. Yeah.

**Q: He has written a very instructive article called "The Coronation." I highly recommend it. It's both on audio and video, and it goes through the whole thing from beginning to end, and possibilities, and room for optimism and pessimism.**

Andrew: Fantastic. Can you possibly send me that? You have my email address, [andrew@andrewholecek.com](mailto:andrew@andrewholecek.com). Can you send me a link to it, and we can actually post it?

**Q: I will do that.**

Andrew: I'd love it because this is exactly the kind of stuff that I want this venue to provide for others, because I'm not familiar with that, and I'd very much like to share it. Send me the link to it and we'll put it up there.

Q: Thank you. My pleasure.

Andrew: Thank you. Really appreciate it. Terrific. Okay. Maybe a couple of more. We have a few minutes. I'm here for another 20 or so if you want.

**Q: Okay. Thanks. A couple of quick comments. One is that I'm realizing that I had a dream a few nights ago was a lot more... There was a lot more depth there about human connection. I'm not going to share the specifics of it just because of time, but I'm just realizing there is so much fruitfulness available to us in the dreams we might have at this time. That's comment number one.**

Andrew: Beautiful.

**Q: And then comment number two is just sort of a light comment about connecting in a way that just occurred to me yesterday, and that is that all of our forebears survived the Spanish flu epidemic. If we can maybe put ourselves in their shoes for a little bit, maybe our grandparents, our great grandparents were teenagers then during this time. What was life like for them in their house? Maybe they were in a big city, maybe they were in a rural area, and that's why they survived, and we wouldn't be here if they hadn't. It's just... I think it would be a bit of a light**

**connection and a light meditation to ponder in this time about our grandparents, and our other ancestors who made it through, and now we know a little bit more, a little bit more what it was like for them. I just wanted to make those two comments.**

Andrew: Yeah. But that one touches me very personally, because I've been doing exactly the same thing with a newfound sense of appreciation for my parents. My mom was a refugee from Lithuania, so she suffered Nazi Germany coming east and then Stalin coming west. My father was conscripted in the Red Army when Stalin and the Russians took over Czechoslovakia. He defected, and so exactly what you were mentioning is something that I have also been using to gain a deeper sense of respect.

Also it's very interesting. I've been watching this breathtakingly powerful, not easy to watch — it's like 8, 9, 10-part series that Netflix recently posted on World War II. It is the most elucidating, informative thing I've ever watched. I've watched 8 of the 10 by now, and it's done a tremendous amount for me. One is, obviously, learning so much about the horrors of World War II, but also raising my gaze and putting... and again, this is not in any way to dismiss what's happening now, but just like understanding the Spanish flu, which like what? 50 million people died? I can't remember. Or something like that. I know in World War II, 50 million people were killed.

Recontextualizing, reframing what's happening now, raising our gaze into a larger historical — whether it's genealogy or

history all together — what it does for me, is it helps decentralize, because otherwise, again, you know, the natural tendency is this kind of regressive, contractive, defensive thing. All these types of strategies bring me out of that into a larger, more encompassing, open way of relating to what's happening, and this is really important because, you know, the smaller the mind and heart gets, the more it suffers. The larger the mind and heart gets, the less one suffers. Whatever we can use to connect to our forebears genealogically, historically or whatever, I think is very fruitful. Thank you for sharing that. It's good stuff. Appreciate it.

**Q: Sure. Thank you.**

Andrew: You bet. So a couple of more?

**Q: I think my question has a lot of the same as what some other people have asked, which is like, I am actually doing really well. I have a great house and I have enough food and, you know, I'm fine, but I just keep thinking about other people, like people in India, people in South America, other people who were homeless, in jail and ICE camps and all that, and it just is so overwhelming. When I meditate, I think as someone else was saying, like, I can meditate and be in this really open space, but then, you know, as soon as I start thinking about what's happening to other people in the world, I just find it really difficult and really hard to take in and process. I'm going to listen to your talk tomorrow, I think you said, but just whatever pointers or anything you can say about that.**

Andrew: Yeah. Well, one thing I would say is when you take it in, don't take it personally. I think that's one of the biggest things. I will give you a practice that... In fact, I'm going to talk about it tomorrow in the Tricycle course, but I can just share the name with you, is, you know, the practice of Tonglen. I'm doing Tonglen more now than I ever have in my entire life. It's the central practice I do when I'm working, specifically at the bedside of someone who's dying. I find myself doing Tonglen for the ER docs, for... I mean, you name it. There's no shortage of material, so to speak, and I actually find myself doing Tonglen for myself.

The approach here is a really delicate, very interesting one where... I believe my friend, Ken Wilber, has this jingle something like, “as we progress along the path, we feel things more because we're more sensitive, we're awake, we're more porous, open and accommodating, we feel things more, but they hurt us less, because we don't give them a place to land.” This, to me, is the key to working with this, because, usually, when we have these experiences, it's just... Again, this is just ego's default mode network. It's just what it does, this fundamental mistake of appropriation where something arises and you take it personally.

The delicate dance here is, in fact, to receive it, to accommodate it, to take it in in that sense, but then you don't give it a place to land. One really beautiful way, one image of this that may helped you is allegedly — the story has always haunted me, of when Trungpa Rinpoche first heard of the death of his dear, dear friend Suzuki Roshi. He wailed in anguish, just spontaneous outbursts of tremendous grief,

because one of his most beloved friends who just died, but after he registered this impact, he felt it, but he didn't feed it. See? He let it register, but then he didn't proliferate on it, this thing called Propecia that I'm teaching a lot about these days.

I think somewhere in there is the way to play with it. Allow it to touch you, because otherwise instead of becoming more sensitive, you become insensate, less sensitive. Let it touch you, but don't let it land. See? Then you still feel it. Then from that space, that brings about the motivation, the compassion to really be a benefit to others, but you actually find that your suffering, personal suffering, so to speak, diminishes in this almost paradoxical way. Something like that, play with that, and then, yeah, and just let me know. I mean, Tonglen, to me, major important practice at this point. Something like that.

**Q: That makes a lot of sense. I feel like I've been breathing it in, but not breathing it out, so that really makes a lot of sense. Thank you.**

Andrew: Then what you could do... What I do with this, sometimes, is, I will actually... Because, you know, doing the Tonglen in and out, in and out, sometimes that's hard for me. What I will do sometimes is I will do, like, 10 in-breaths, and then I'll do 10 out-breaths, you know, because then I find I can feel into it with a little bit more authenticity if the alternation isn't so quick. 10 in-breaths. Again, you're not taking it in, and this is exactly what I'll be talking about tomorrow. The cosmos is taking it in. You're not taking it in. The universe is taking it in. You breathe that in through every pore as a representative of the cosmos. It's not you that's inhaling this.

Then, similarly, as a representative of the cosmos, you send it out. Something like that. Okay?

**Q: Yeah, that's really helpful. Thank you.**

Andrew: Yeah, welcome. Okay. A couple of more. I'm gonna go till 1:30 or whatever time it is here, 2:30.

**Q: I'm coming... I'm speaking from Los Angeles. And one of the things that we are very concerned about is this medium, this virtual reality that we're in.**

Andrew: Yeah, no kidding.

**Q: What we're exploring, and we have been exploring for the past year, because in our community we've had the rug pulled out from underneath us with regards to our teacher. In some sense we've kind of, like, had some experience with that, and the dust is still kind of in the air waiting to be settled, and this is not unfamiliar to us in some sense. What has arisen is a connection to protector practice.**

Andrew: Yeah.

**Q: And how do we bring protector practice into this venue? We are already experiencing this venue with actual meditation sessions. We did the Sadhana Mahamudra last weekend and there were 160 people who showed up for that. That was really amazing. This really brings up some questions about how this particular venue is allowing us to**

**enter a larger connection with each other. It's like it's my responsibility to really explore that, and to actually bring into that mix a sense of protection, a protection for the openness for that experience, and the expression. I just wondered if you had some thoughts on that.**

Andrew: You bet. You bet. Yeah, protector practice, protector principle. Two ways to look at this, my friend, just to remind you. One is relative protection from things like protector practices, rituals, liturgies and the like I have an extraordinarily deep allegiance to protectors. They have... Let's put it this way. These entities, however you want to call them, they are just as real or unreal as we are, and so I have a deep, profound, intimate relationship with protector principle. I have met these protectors in my dreams. They are every bit as real as we are, and so for those who are listening who have a connection to this relative form of protection, I have to tell you, I'm ramping this stuff up.

I'll share one quick story around this from Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche, and then I'll talk about another form of protection which is even more important. Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche once shared the story where he was walking along the path and he had to go to the bathroom and so he kind of sauntered up to this bush or something. Then just before he got to it, he just had this feeling like, "I shouldn't go there." As he backed away he heard the rattle of a rattlesnake, and he knew instantly that that was protector principle at work, that there was something there, some part of him that said, "Don't go there." For those of you who have allegiance or connection to protector principle, I have to tell you personally, I'm doing

those practices. I do them every night anyway. I'm doing more of them.

The other type of protection is actually more universal and applicable even for those who don't abide or have relationships to protector principles as perhaps we do as students of Tibetan Buddhism. That is that the ultimate protection is the teachings of Dharma, the teachings on emptiness. This is exactly what I'm going to be talking about tomorrow in my last Tricycle course, which is where we're going to talk about this foundational teaching from the Tibetan Book of the Dead, which is really largely about protector principle, where it is said repeatedly "Emptiness cannot harm emptiness." Understanding absolute levels of protection through the teachings on emptiness is of critical importance at this point because if we don't reify, if we don't concretize, solidify what's happening, in a very real way, that's the ultimate protection. As you know as a student of this tradition, this exhortation is replete. The teachings on emptiness are the absolute form of protection.

With your kind permission, my friend, I'm going to refer you to my little riff tomorrow because I'm going to go into that again in some detail. Many of these questions are exactly where we're going in that conversation, and again, this event is free. You can just find it. Just go to the Tricycle website and you'll see this course, and it's also archived, so you'll be able to listen to it. Something like that, my friend. Is that helpful?

**Q: Thank you very much. Yes.**

Andrew: Yeah. Nice. So nice to see you again. It's been a while.

**Q: Me too. Yeah. Thank you.**

Andrew: Take care. So, we still have a few more hands raised. I want to try to get through these. I want to honor the four hands that are raised.

**Q: I've been going to that crowdcast and it's amazing. I hope everyone goes there. But I just want to say that you are really a light in this Bardo, that you're the bright light and that's an amazing thing. I wanted to mention that at the very beginning, you said that... What was it? Being together is not the same as being connected.**

Andrew: Correct.

**Q: And, you know, for me, I think I've been training for this my whole life. The last 40 years I've taught online. What's new for all these people who are online now, I've been doing this for 40 years. I've had students in the wilds of Alaska ,and I had a student in Fukushima when they had that nuclear reactor meltdown, and I really like this environment. I think it's an amazing, connective environment. The only thought I had was something my wife said to me this morning. She said, "Well, it's another day for Corona Rinpoche." I said, "What?" And she said, "Well, viruses are alive. The respect that we should give to Corona Rinpoche because he's giving us this Bardo gift as a way of adapting to the world." To me, that struck me as**

**being so beautiful, because everything you've said is how you're giving us some good guidance in terms of how to be where we are now, and I don't think we should be running from anything as you say, because we run into ourselves, but the fact that we have this opportunity, I think we should have that kind of an honor, you know. Not a fear, not a runaway, but it's something there for us to grow.**

Andrew: Yeah. Beautifully said, my friend. As you know in the Bardo teachings, one of the central teachings is staying with a bright light. Literally in the Bardos, they say that your gaze, you know, should not be down, should not be the side, or to the soft lights. Your gaze should be directly ahead, so I couldn't agree more that we have the courage to stay with this bright light to face it. It's an extraordinarily powerful teaching moment. Again, that moment won't happen if we don't take it as such, and if we don't relate to it as such, so thank you, dear friend, for offering that. Always good to see you, and so appreciate your comments and participation. Take care of yourself. Wash your hands.

**Q: Thank you.**

Andy: Okay.

**Q: Hi. So, I'm calling from the UK. I just wanted to...**

Andrew: Oh, wonderful.

**Q: I just wanted to reiterate what the other fellas just said about your teachings. I'm really getting a lot out of them,**

**so thanks very much.**

Andrew: Welcome. Thank you.

**Q: I don't know if this is an appropriate question or an appropriate time. But I've heard you talk a lot about, like, openness and there's a phrase that you said. I can't remember right now, enlightening being about awakening to openness, something along those lines.**

Andrew: Yeah. Yeah.

**Q: I've done quite a lot of nature of mind practice. Nature of mind can be with anything, like everything is nature of mind, that everything that arises is nature of mind, so how does openness and nature of mind come together, because you can have nature of mind with contraction? I feel like my nature of mind practice is quite good, but I think I'm not open, but if I'm bringing openness into nature of the mind, it's not just being with what is it. It's manufacturing something. Does that make sense?**

Andrew: I think so. Let me just say what comes to mind and then you can direct me if it's not. Yeah, you know, the nature of mind is fundamentally beyond both openness and contraction. What we do, however, is provisionally, as a way to make contact with nature of mind, we are invited to open. In fact, I've heard some translations of Budha, Budh, B-U-D-H, not just the awakened one, but also the opened one. It's very interesting. It has a lot of very interesting double and triple entendres where it's not just openness in the colloquial

sense, but openness is a synonym for emptiness.

If you conjoin that, then you can start to see how helpful it is as a path quality to access nature of mind by opening the aperture of our awareness, our heart-mind so that we recognize it. Here's the real gold mine in your question and comment, is that fundamentally, once you maintain this recognition, you attain the recognition of nature of mind, then it doesn't matter from that stance whether you append the following kind of expression of that mind in what we would call openness or contraction. Everything has the quality of one taste at that level, so openness and contraction define each other. They only have existence at relative levels of reality. They have no fundamental inherent existence.

With that said, just to repeat, we open to gain access, because contraction initially is somewhat in contradistinction to this level of recognition of mind nature. We use openness to connect to it, but then once we've connected to it, then we realize that we can come back, kind of manifest experience what we would provisionally call contraction. It's still registered that way in a relative way, but on an absolute level, it's no longer really perceived that way. See?

Therefore... And I can refer you to a text, a book that writes really beautifully about this from a Jewish mystical perspective. My dear friend, Zvi Ish-Shalom, wrote a really beautiful book a couple of years ago called "The Kedumah Experience: The Primordial Torah" K-E-D-U-M-A-H. In this book, which is, you know, Kedumah is kind of pre... Or actually, you could say post-kabbalistic Jewish mysticism. In

this book, he writes really beautifully about exactly this topic, and how it is that at the highest levels, there really is no longer a bias towards openness or contraction. They all have this fundamental equanimous, one taste quality, but that taste only comes about once you actually taste and to a certain degree digest, metabolize the nature of mind itself. Something like that. Does that make sense to you? Oh, it does. Okay, cool. Great. Yeah. Check out his book. It's a really, really beautiful book, "The Kedumah Experience." Check it out. Okay? All right. Starting to closing up.

**Q: Hello from Rome. I have a background in Vipassana, and so I'm really very interested in your discussion of Tibetan Buddhist thinking and philosophy. There's so much here that it's hard to remember everything. You've given us so much.**

Andrew: Sure. It's recorded, by the way. This is all recorded.

**Q: Oh, this is recorded? That's great. My response or my feeling right now is about time. Time is so insubstantial, and it falls apart, and especially now that we're in the same place. I'm used to not being... I'm sort of introverted, but I'm used to not having to go out and be with everybody all the time. It doesn't bother me, but I do find that scheduling around Zoom meetings is a little bizarre, and I find that, you know, things are out of sync. I don't know if you have anything to add to that, but it struck me as a particularly important quality right now, you know, hanging onto time or not hanging onto time.**

Andrew: Yeah. Well, a couple of things here. Again, I'm not sure if this is exactly where you're going, but, you know, this could go really deep. It depends on how far you want to look into this, but it's somewhat interesting to me as well. I have noticed being in this groundless Bardo space that a lot of things are quite different. My experience of time is a little bit altered. Things do definitely feel a little bit more dreamlike, more groundless. The issue of time... Again, this is an enormous topic. On one level, of course, there is no such thing as time. It is 100% an illusion. Einstein said this. Physicists say this. I can refer you. William James wrote about this beautifully. I can refer you to some literature that talks with tremendous elegance, philosophically, scientifically, and spiritually about the illusory nature of time. In fact, I'll do it within the next 30 seconds that don't fundamentally exist. I'll give you a little thought experiment to show you the illusory nature of time. Okay. Are you ready?

**Q: Yeah.**

Andrew: So, we can pretty easily all recognize that the future doesn't exist. That's easy. We're not there yet. Also pretty easy to look back and say the past is no longer, the past doesn't exist. Pretty easy, right? Therefore, what is the actual present moment? Well, there isn't one. The present is an illusory line, imaginary line drawn between two non-existence. It doesn't exist. That doesn't mean it doesn't appear. There is this — you know, the wisdom traditions talk about it as the eternal now, there's only just now. I'm not quite sure where you want to go with this. I can refer you to some books if you want to read more about this. The illusory nature of time is super

interesting to explore. The fact that we're in this kind of time warp and things feel a little bit different now is somewhat a signature of Bardo-type experiences as part of the constancy of our usual frameworks being pulled out. Therefore, all kinds of things like time and others can kind of be warped. That is not at all uncommon. I find it really interesting. I don't find it disconcerting. I find it like, "Well, this is really kind of cool." I'm not sure if this is where you're taking this or where you want to go with it, but that's what comes to mind.

**Q: It goes into quantum physics and all that stuff too.**

Andrew: Yeah.

**Q: That's way beyond me, but I do have a number of discussions with friends who are physicists, or engineers, or scientists in general, and they say, "Oh, but of course, you can measure time. That's how we understand the difference between now and then and, you know, the ticking of the clock." And I say, "Yeah, but the clocks are all bizarre." That's an invention of the Middle Ages as far as the westerners are concerned.**

Andrew: Yeah.

**Q: I mean, but that's a level of understanding that isn't necessarily easy to...**

Andrew: No, it's not easy. It's not easy, but I have to tell you that the contemplation on the illusory nature of time and then space is well worth the effort. Let me refer you to a book

written by a dear friend of mine, Jonathan Bricklin. The reason I mentioned this is twofold. One is, it's a really beautiful exposition on the illusory nature of time. Secondly, it's a beautiful exploration of the work of transcendental wisdom in the western context. In other words, the New England transcendentalists. It's a beautiful book on the work of William James who — I love this guy. This book is called "The Illusion of Will, Space, and Time: William James's Reluctant Guide to Enlightenment." I really recommend you give it a look, because there's quite a compelling chapter or two on William James's analysis of time that is conjoined with a bunch of other kind of references from scientists, mystics, and the like.

I really encourage this type of contemplation because a really deep dive into this stuff will pull the rug out, hence you're heading towards another Bardo, will pull the rug out of what we know as time. One last thing on this, and then I'll take the last question, and we'll stop for today. Fundamentally, where we want to go is what my friend Surya Das talks about. This relates to the question on nature of mind earlier from the UK. Fundamentally, we want to enter what Lama Surya Das talks about as Buddha Standard Time. Buddha Standard Time, which is timeless. It's called the fourth moment. It's beyond past, present, and future. And even Wittgenstein said this. He said something like, "If one looks at eternity not as endless temporal duration, but as timelessness, then he who exists in the present moment exists eternally. So, look at the work of Wittgenstein, look at the work of William James, and then take a deep dive into this thing, and you will find that you're basically floating in just one big non-thing called the ever-

ending now. Maybe I'll let that one go for now.

**Q: Thank you, Andrew.**

Andrew: Awesome. Great. Thank you guys for hanging in there. This is exactly what I was aspiring to do is this last hour, this kind of sharing of contributions, questions, and the like. We will continue to do this every Thursday for, you know, basically as long as we want. Between now and then, enjoy this illusory moment. Enjoy this Bardo. Wash your hands, and I'll see you next week. Bye.