

NATIONAL IDENTITY, PERSONAL IDENTITY AND BUDDHA NATURE

JAMES LOW

PUBLIC TALK, BERLIN. 25 OCTOBER 2017

TRANSCRIBED BY LEA PABST AND EDITED BY BARBARA TERRIS

Contents

"I" is an empty signifier	Error! Bookmark not defined.
'Me' in here and 'you' out there	2
The unreliability of identification	4
Building our identity out of concepts	5
Seeking security through categories	6
The five skandhas	7
Moving from identity to buddha-nature	8

Excerpts

...What I take to be my identity is not something I have inside me, but is a potential which can manifest in different ways according to circumstances. It is the same with national identities. Countries can be friendly in one direction and quite murderous in another...

...To be born is to have an identity, to be someone. But the someone that I am is a set of concepts. I am a story that I both tell myself and tell other people; that story includes the stories that other people have told me about me. So who am I if I am not a story? Who am I before I tell myself who I am? We use meditation to try to find that out...

...Our buddha-nature is open awareness like the sky within which thoughts, feelings, memories and so on move like clouds. Some clouds are light and fluffy and others are dark and full of storm. But they all pass and the sky is there. From the point of view of the ego, we become excited when the sun shines and depressed when it's cold and rainy because we are addicted to clouds. However the Dharma view is: "Don't worry about the clouds. When you awaken to the sky-like ground of your own being the clouds won't bother you anymore."...

The topic is identity – national identity, political identity, religious identity and personal identity... – in relation to the buddha-nature.

“I” IS AN EMPTY SIGNIFIER

Generally speaking, the more specific we can make an object, the fewer elaborations can be made about its identity. We may say ‘chocolate ice-cream with nuts’ and there is a shared sense of what that is. We can still imagine a few things, but the mind doesn’t have much room to move around that concept. If we simply say ‘ice-cream’ there are many more possibilities: flavours, colours, ingredients and so on.

This is the same with identity. If you say “*I am German*” this could mean thousands of things, hundreds of thousands of things. Many and various people can unite together and say: “*We are German.*” It might mean something completely different for each of them, but somehow all these different ideas of German-ness can be inserted into the notion of being German.

This is the power of the empty signifier. We have words like ‘love’. ‘I love you’ could mean anything. There are many words which are very difficult to find out exactly what they mean. But of all the possible signifiers the one which has the greatest possibilities of expansion and contraction is simply ‘I.’ ‘I’ functions for us because of its emptiness. ‘I’ as a linguistic term and as a sense of feeling-tone is able to accommodate a very wide range of associations. I can feel lonely, I can feel happy, I can feel expansive, I can feel shy... All of these are possible for us to express and identify with because ‘I’ by itself has no determination.

Day by day, hour by hour, in fact second by second, the content of what we take to be ‘I’ is shifting and changing. ‘I’ can be filled with aspects that seem to be internal – with sensations, with feelings, with memories that perhaps only I have access to – but ‘I’ can also be filled with the colour of the autumn trees. ‘I’ can be filled with the early evening darkness and the light reflected in a puddle of water on the road, the pathos that that evokes. Things which are outside and things which are inside feed in and generate the sense of an individual self.

From the buddhist point of view this is very important and very significant because the continuity of ‘I’ is the emptiness of ‘I.’ If a particular content of ‘I’ was to get stuck – if ‘I’ was always going to be sad for example – there is some echo of ‘Oh, I was not always like this.’ So I can compare and contrast.

Usually we are caught up just in the flow of significations which marry with the signifier ‘I’. ‘I’ is filling and emptying, filling and emptying moment by moment. And yet, when we speak of ourselves it is as if we are expressing some definable identity. One might say “*I like being by the sea.*” Not really. Sometimes. In the summer. When the beach isn’t too busy.

When we make these general global statements they are usually not quite true. The more we finesse what we say, the more we customise it to fit ourselves, the more we see that this thing which I say is true about me is situational and conditional.

On a more general level a term like 'being British' or even the notion of 'being European' or even 'being a human being' is very generous. It is willing to accept all kinds of associations. When we hear that people have behaved in a way which is very cruel we might say *"That is inhuman."* That is to say, human beings don't behave that way or shouldn't behave that way. And yet they do. So human beings can be non-human, can be inhuman.

There we have the problem of category. We imagine that the category of 'human being' indicates something: two arms, two legs, walking about, causing trouble... But some of the time humans are inhuman. How is this possible? Because the category starts to get twitchy when you try to put things into it that extend it too much. Despite all the unbelievably nasty things which human beings do we still hang on to an idea that human beings are good. We approach our impressions of the behaviour of people with our categories of reasonable/unreasonable, compassionate/selfish and so on. And if what the human beings are doing is basically inside the parameters of our favourite categories, we say *"That's what human beings do."*

You can watch a video clip on YouTube of somebody having their head cut off with a blunt knife and you can say: *"This is inhuman!"* Somehow using a blunt knife or axe is worse than using a sharp one, or the sharp blade of a guillotine. So maybe we have to say that a definition of inhumanity is using a blunt knife.

This is how we start to see that we are playing games with concepts. The tool by which I move towards the world and make sense of the world is primarily useful to me because it's not overdetermined. The indeterminacy of the language allows us to occupy it in a particular way while at the same time enjoying the feeling that we are saying something very precise and meaningful.

'ME' IN HERE AND 'YOU' OUT THERE

Why is this important? Well, from the buddhist point of view, especially in the dzogchen view, the ground of our being or the basis from which everything that we see, hear, smell, touch, and know, all arises from this ground that is beyond the reach of language. Language emerges out of the inexpressible, the ineffable. Ignorance is the loss of simple, relaxed, open presence in the ground. When this arises there is a kind of mixture of anxiety, a sense of instability, and this manifests as grasping, as clinging on, as holding to something as a means of gaining reassurance.

This is how duality arises. Duality is subject and object. 'I' hold on to 'that'. I am James. There is a grasping, a holding on to a particular formulation which appears to be definitive or at least accurately referential to me. Now that I feel 'I am me' I can ask 'So who are you?' Then we start to multiply our words and concepts and give names to everything.

In the Old Testament this process of naming is described as an act of the wisdom and generosity of God. From the buddhist point of view, however, it is the mad stumbling of the ignorant. We name things because we don't see what they are. Whatever we encounter is the radiance of our own mind but what does that actually mean? We are sitting here, we are aware of being here, and generally we are aware

of being here in our body: I am inside me looking out at you; you are inside you looking out at me. This is normal and deluded. So what is actually happening? I experience my feet on the cushion beneath them. I experience a sensation which I interpret to be the pressure of my buttocks on the cushion I'm sitting on. That is to say, there is a flow of experience which I identify as 'I, me, myself'. And simultaneously there is a flow of experience which I identify as being 'you'. You arise for me as experience. I experience different peoples' shapes, the colour of their clothing, their posture. This arises for me. What is happening for you, I don't know. I only have access to the 'you' for me. The 'you' for you belongs to you! That's why it is never a good idea to talk about other people, since we're always just talking about ourselves. We never reach anyone else. We think we have an accurate perception, but we have an interpretation.

For example, from where I am sitting I see people's faces, shoulders and so on. It's not possible for me to see anyone's back. I impute that you have a back, I imagine that you have a back, but I don't know. But that fact doesn't worry me, because I'm not only imagining your back, I'm imagining your front as well. I am constructing you. In Tibetan this is called '*du she*': '*du*' means to gather together and '*she*' means to know. When we open our gaze we see light and colour. With this as a basic raw material we massage into it our habit formations, our identifications. That is to say, you appear as human beings to me because I have access to the perception of human beings. If I was a mosquito or a bird I wouldn't see you in this way. I would have different associations. Most small birds are rather wary of human beings. Most mosquitos are quite happy to meet human beings. Both engage according to their own interpretive matrix. This world is our interpretation.

We are used to being what we call 'ourselves'. We are used to seeing the sort of things that human eyes see. We are used to smelling the things that human noses smell. We know that dogs can hear things that we can't. We know that dogs are fond of smells that we probably are not so fond of. So the quality of the sound or the smell is something revealed through the bandwidth or aperture of the sense organ linked with the particular associations that arise. The implication of this is that there is no meaning already established out there. It means that a baby is born into a world of meaning, but rather the baby as it evolves is helped to find the way to find the world meaningful. The baby learns to allocate meanings. If the baby is born in an upper class German family then they will drink their soup without making a noise. If they are born in a Chinese family probably they'll make a little bit of noise, because slurping, which is a normal thing to occur, is given different interpretations according to culture.

The point of this, especially for meditators, is to start to appreciate that I am part of whatever is arising, that the world is revealed to me through my interpretive structures. Some of these structures we can relate back to our family background and some tendencies we just seem to have, they seem to flow through us.

From a buddhist point of view that would be a sign of a pattern, a karmic pattern, established from a prior existence, that the patterning of my tendencies that was arising at the time when in the intermediate period, the bardo, I became aware of my parents copulating, becomes determinant of whether I enter into the point of sexual contact or not. I am implicated, I am already in process. As I grow up in the family I'm learning and changing, I'm making choices. I learn things about the world, I

know things about the world and the normal conclusion that we have, and that we are encouraged to have through our parents and school, is that the world is out there and you know some of the things about the world so you are becoming bigger and you can function with more independence.

THE UNRELIABILITY OF IDENTIFICATION

If I start to observe how I approach the world it's based on selection and apprehension. When you walk down the street some things catch your eye more than other things. It's quite unusual to have a completely even panoramic gaze at everything you encounter. Our disposition and our tendencies are already tilting us towards some features of what is revealed and away from others. Although I say "*I walk down the street*" – 'the street' – what I am actually doing is walking down 'my street', the street that is revealed to me at this moment with this degree of light, this weather and my mood. When I'm more relaxed and happy I might look around. If I'm a bit worried and preoccupied by something I can walk down the street and not see anything. Oh! The world is a revelation. And I am part of the process of the revelation.

There might be a song that I have some positive associations with and then some heartbreak occurs and I don't want to hear this song again. Some sound or place or person which appeared to be a road that opened up the world for me now is like a wall and I want to turn away from it.

This is indicating that what I take to be my identity is not something I have inside me, but is rather a potential which can manifest in many different ways according to circumstances. It is the same with national identities. Countries can be friendly in one direction and quite murderous in another. When we study history we learn about the Greeks and the Persians and the Romans and at every stage every country has some friends and some enemies. Friends and enemies means liking and not liking. This is the fundamental polarisation that we use to organise the experiential field.

Buddhism talks about the three root poisons or afflictions. There is mental dullness or assumption, which means primarily the assumption of reification: I am real, you are real. Flowing from that as soon as you have something real out there and somebody real in here, you have liking and not liking. On the basis of liking I say '*You are good.*' On the basis of not liking I say '*You are bad.*' '*You are my good friend*', '*You are my bad enemy.*' This is very unstable. While we are fighting ISIS the Kurds are our good friends. When we realise we have to support the Central Government in Baghdad then the Kurds are our enemy.

This is life. As the Buddha said: "*Friends become enemies and enemies become friends.*" This is why our world is so turbulent; because we speak as if what we said was the truth. But what comes out of our mouth is just a stream of lies. "*You are my friend.*" "*You are my friend – yes, but for today.*" That's a bit more honest. "*You are my friend at the moment because you are washing the dinner dishes and I don't have to!*"

We start to see that 'You are my friend' is situational, contingent. We are using the word 'friend' as if it indicated something intrinsic in the other. You are my friend because 'friend-ness' pervades you. But our world is co-emergent. The friend-ness I see in you is put there by me. It's the same with enemy-ness.

And so our world is pulsating and fluctuating between expansion and contraction. We find ourselves being more available to those who we call 'friend' and less available to those who we call 'enemy' but neither are fixed identities. This is the play of identification.

Let's go back to the point earlier about the progression from ignorance through anxiety to the polarity of subject and object. Once we have a sense of 'I am the self inside me and you are the other outside me' then I have to work out how you are in relation to me. What is your current value for me? Externally the currency markets have fluctuations of exchange rates all the time yet the values that we ascribe to other people are even more volatile. Maybe this is true for you. It's certainly true for me. Unreliability is one of my hallmarks. People like us to be reliable. This is a theatre of stupidity. If you were really reliable you would see a beautiful sunset and be indifferent. You would stand in some dogshit on the road and be indifferent. We are creatures of mood. Mood is primary. Mood is what we operate from. Mood is ungraspable yet it is everywhere operating. So our identity is filling and emptying with different kinds of moods which are teased out and flavoured and coloured according to thoughts, feelings, memories, hopes and fears and so on.

I am unstable. This is why I can communicate. If I were completely fixed I could not communicate. For better or worse the table is not talking, *I* am talking. And the reason we can talk is because we can relate, which means I am available to manifest with you. I'm not pre-formed on the inside and then showing something I prepared earlier. We find ourselves being in a particular way with a particular person at a particular time. So where is the identity? You have a very pleasant evening with a friend. *"We must meet again soon!"* Next time you meet them it's not so interesting. Why not? They are in a different mood, you are in a different mood. What you had was a moment. Moments are there, full, but unreliable. *"But I like this person!"* The problem is that this person doesn't exist anywhere except in your mental construct!

BUILDING OUR IDENTITY OUT OF CONCEPTS

This is a fundamental buddhist view: The stability of the world is conceptual, not phenomenal. Moment by moment the phenomena which we call 'self' and the phenomena which we call 'object' are always in complex interactions.

This is not a problem, however, if the mind is relaxed and open. Relaxed and open is the quality of the ground, the ground of our being. However, when we fall into this delusion of ignoring the ground and imagining entities, the entities come into being because of concepts. We interpret the world not after the fact of the world but we interpret the world as our participation in the emergence of the world.

This is why the buddhist texts say, 'Wake up!' Your life is dynamic. It's not stable, it's not secure, you are going to die. What will happen to you is determined by how you are. Are you here? Moment by moment this experiential field is patterning according to (not totally determined by, but according to, a large extent) your mode of participation.

When we start to meditate we start to become more aware of this. We are sitting quietly, not trying to do much. But all kind of thoughts and feelings and sensations are arising and passing. I don't know if the same things are happening for anyone else; they are happening for me. 'My thoughts.' But I didn't make them. The ego is a thief. The ego has nothing of its own. Everything we have we got from the world. The body grows from getting food from the world. We take nutrition when we are inside our mother's body and later from her breast. We learn a language that already exists. We are taking.

—But what I take is *mine!* I am speaking.

—Words you learned.

—Never mind. *I am speaking!*

In that way we make ourselves more and more stupid as we become more and more intelligent. We learn to steal more quickly and hide the evidence of our theft.

When I worked in a hospital they had a slogan for the medical students regarding small operations: 'See one, do one, teach one.' You see someone doing the operation, next day you do the operation and the following day you're teaching someone else how to do it. It's a little bit alarming in the realm of surgery, but it's actually how we proceed in life. You learn to go on your skateboard without falling off and then you show your friend how to do it. This is not an accident. This is the sign that the ego yearns for mastery. "*I know what I'm doing!*" "*I can do it!*" Small children spend a lot of time getting other people's attention to show what they can do.

Now the most powerful man in the world is constantly tweeting to his universal mama and papa to say: "*Look what I can do!*" This is very helpful for us, because to have so much money, to have so much power and to still be so fundamentally insecure is terrifying. We might imagine "*Oh, if I had more money, if I had a bigger house, if I had a better partner then I would be confident and relaxed.*" And it's this kind of longing which keeps us in the process of self-development and hunger to find better objects. But we never really arrive, at least not for very long.

This is not a personal fault. This is a structural fault. We are the manifestation of the ego-structure. The root of the ego-structure is the patterning of mental activity which arises consequent on ignoring the ground of our own being. This anxious, hungry, very active formation which we find ourselves existing as is a desperate attempt not to be nothing. "*I exist!*" "*I am someone!*" "*At least someone loves me!*" "*I exist!*"

From the buddhist point of view – no! We don't exist. We manifest. That is to say we are patterns of shape and colour moving in space, dynamic and situationally emergent.

SEEKING SECURITY THROUGH CATEGORIES

What is it that we think we exist as? For example, "*I am James.*" In Britain there are a lot of people who also are James. "*But I am my mother's James! I am her special James. That's only me.*" Being 'James' is a relational definition. The 'James' is not pointing to anything intrinsic or inherent. Likewise whatever we take to be our identity – young or old, intelligent or not, male or female, black or white, gay or straight – these are all categories. And how do we cope with somebody who doesn't fit into the basic

categories? That middle territory is sometimes not very welcoming. This is because we seek stability through category.

Categories are conceptual, however the actual phenomena of our life, the way experience arises moment by moment, is ungraspable by concept. Nevertheless on the level of an ego-self we want stability. We see this all the time in political formations. Many national governments have been intentionally destabilised by the CIA. Generally the state departments and the Pentagon and so on have a clear idea of who is friend and who is enemy. Why would one want Salvador Allende to have any power in Chile? Much better to have General Pinochet. He wears a uniform and so we know what that means. It means he's a regular guy. After he had seized power he did exactly the right thing: he promoted his friends and killed his enemies. The US government understands this; this is how 'proper people' behave. It simplifies the world. Like/not like. Good/bad.

This is at the heart of the Buddha's teaching: once ignorance arises you necessarily start dividing up the world. If we come into mahayana practice we start saying things like '*May all sentient beings be happy.*' Not only that, we also say: '*May all sentient beings be equally happy.*' We don't say '*May the capitalists have more happiness than the communists.*' Irrespective of the qualities I might perceive you are having and irrespective of the interpretive categories I might use, '*May all sentient beings be happy.*' May terrorists be happy. May torturers be happy. May politicians be happy. May everyone be happy.

"But I don't like torturers. I think doctors who save sweet little children should be more happy than torturers. They deserve it. Happiness and goodness should be distributed according to merit." Judgement however is always situational.

From the point of view of meditation this is very important. We see that here is a torturer, or in any case somebody who does things that we think are horrible. They may even enjoy doing these horrible things and so it seems reasonable to say that this is a bad person. Certainly, the behaviour is bad and any enjoyment in it is self-referential and devoid of compassion. So here is a person and we look at their behaviour and we say, "*Aha, this is a bad person.*" We have the evidence. It is undeniable that what they do fits into the category of 'bad.'

Let's put that to one side for a moment and just stay with '*this person is.*' There is a 'person.' Who says so? I say! We all say. We all know. Why do we know this? Because we are wandering in samsara due to ignorance. The category of 'person' arises for the ignorant, not for the wise. This is not something you would have learned in school since our capitalist economy, being based on commodification, cannot tolerate nouns that are empty, nouns without an adjective.

THE FIVE SKANDHAS

So what is a person? In Tibetan they say '*gang zag*', and in Sanskrit '*pudgala*'. *Pudgala anatman drishti* is the view of the absence of inherent self-nature in persons. This refers to what are called the 'five heaps' or the 'five skandhas'. 'Five heaps' means there are five aspects or five parts which are juxtaposed, placed together, to create a pattern that we then take to be a sentient being, a person.

The first is **form**, that is to say shape and colour. Actually it means shape and colour taken as 'something.' Essentially it is the establishment of a 'something.' Form would be, 'in my hand there is a watch'. Even before we say 'watch' and go on to say anything more about it, 'something' is there. So form indicates a basic 'something-ness.' And as we looked earlier this arises from ignorance. We have this double move of reification, of solidification, plus grasping. As soon as it's there I am holding on to it. My holding on to it invests it with its seeming separateness and intensity.

Next to that we have **feeling** or response, which is positive, negative or neutral.

Then we have **apprehension**: we take hold of this watch. Because I like the watch I look at it more. Because I look at it more it becomes more separated out from the background, it becomes a kind of Gestalt-formation and that is what I'm taking hold of.

Then **associations** gather around this watch. These associations are the construction or the elaboration of what is here. Things that we see bring other things to mind. When I looked at the watch a thought about my father came in to my mind. He used to say, *'Never buy an expensive watch! You'll lose it or you'll break it. Buy a cheap watch and when you need a new one you can buy another.'* That brings a further relatedness, a massaging of significance into the object.

The fifth skandha is **consciousness** or comprehension: bringing everything together into a formation. This functions as a normalising conclusion. I think: *'Oh yes, this is my watch.'* Then it recedes into being just a something; it's just my watch. Having created this particularity it reassures me about the seeming givenness – which of course is not given – of this world I inhabit.

In his first teaching the Buddha said that there is an absence of inherent self-nature in phenomena. For example when we look around the room we see people. Maybe some people you have seen before, maybe some people you have never seen before. Some people might seem more interesting, others less interesting. Anyway these are all people: that seems like a starting point. If you like the person you might think: *'I would like to get to know you better.'* I start from the assumption that there is a 'you' to get to know. But as I get to know this 'you', 'you' come into formation with 'me'. As you start giving me the 'you' towards me, I then grasp with my crumbly fingers and form a 'you' for me. So now I am getting to know the 'you' that I imagine you to be.

Where is the person? The person is a process of construction. This doesn't mean that people don't have a presence. It means that they don't exist as entities. They are not held in place by an internal identity. Rather they are an infinite potential of identities which emerge according to circumstances, both emergent and co-emergent.

MOVING FROM IDENTITY TO BUDDHA-NATURE

Who then am I before I emerge? We use meditation to try to find that out. That is like the question, *'What was my face before I was born?'* To be born is to have an identity, to be someone. But the someone that I am is a set of concepts. I am a story that I tell myself and other people, and that story

includes the stories that other people have told me about me. So who am I if I am not a story? Who am I before I tell myself who I am?

This is when we move from identity to buddha-nature. In telling a story about something we are constructing it. The Buddha said that all compounded things are impermanent. The constructs that we developed at the various stages of our lives have a sell-by-date. They lose their relevance. I can say, '*I used to live in India*' but that was thirty years ago. A lot has happened since then. At first when I came back from India I found it very difficult to adjust to life in Britain. Life in India was what seemed very true to me, but gradually the years go by and now it is something in the past. I can still say '*I used to live in India*' but now there is not much juice in it. The juice of the saying was the feeling I put into it: '*Oh, India!*' Unfortunately I have never been able to say: "*Oh, London!*"

In that way we can see how these five skandhas or five heaps move around as potentials to keep creating pattern after pattern after pattern. They are like sandcastles in that they have no deep truth or self-definition in them. They are unreliable.

If we are troubled by suffering, if we see suffering in the world and would like it to end, we heed the Buddha whose third Noble Truth is, '*There is an end to suffering.*' Suffering has an origin and it has an end. Suffering is not intrinsic, it is generated, it is fabricated. If you stop fabricating it, it will not be there. We make suffering for ourselves.

How do we do this? We look at the flow of experience, which is constantly changing, and we take the scissors of duality and try to cut out little bits, and stuff them in our pocket for later. Now I have something! Maybe but it's rotting, decaying, dying. So we keep cutting and taking and hiding, cutting and taking and hiding. This is suffering. It is never stable, never secure.

But there *is* something secure – the buddha-nature. This is the mind itself. The mind has two aspects: Unborn openness (that is to say, it's not a thing in that it has no shape or colour; it doesn't have an origin in time or an end in time) and the quality of the mind, of awareness, is the clarity that reveals the ceaseless flow of experience. This flow of experience manifests as the eternal conversation or dialogue or dialectic between subject and object.

'I, me, myself' is experience. I think I am the experiencer, but I am something revealed. The revealer of the experience is the clarity of the mind. The clarity of the mind is not the ego; it's not an intellectual clarity. It is the clarity which is present with the arising of phenomena. As the phenomena arise we layer them over with narrative. The freshness of the arising moment is being smeared with the faeces of the past. We do this all the time and we tell ourselves that the shit smells like roses. I can even pretend that shit is not just roses but tulips and daffodils and snowdrops as well!

The central task and the central point is to see that you cannot get out of samsara by relying on concepts. Clearly in talking with you this evening I'm using a lot of concepts. But my hope is to use concepts to deconstruct concepts. We don't need to accumulate more concepts to become Buddhists but we do need to become more suspicious of ourselves. I am in ignorance. If I believe what the Buddha said then what I think is true, is probably not true. So I can't fall asleep in speaking. I can't wrap myself in

a duvet of concepts and dream my life away, because now I want so see what I am up to, what tricks I am playing on myself.

The practice is again and again to relax our excessive mental arousal so that there is some space for what is actually here, to reveal itself. It is quite a challenging idea, that when I think I am simply seeing I'm actually involved in complex imaginative interpretations. That is to say, I am so easily merged with, so easily confluent with, thoughts and feelings that I take them to be the messengers of truth.

When we start to do some basic meditation we become aware of the kind of thoughts and feelings that arise. We start to see that we are crazy, that the mind is full of weird stuff coming and going all the time. We see how our mind fills with things we don't want it to fill it with, but are difficult to get rid of. Our mind fills with things we'd like to identify with, but they keep running away and we can't hang on to them. Yet somehow I'm still here. The good moments, the good thoughts, the good feelings come and go and similarly the bad moments, the bad thoughts and the bad feelings come and go.

So who is the one who is here when all is passing through? Clouds are in the sky; the sky offers hospitality to the clouds, but the clouds are not the same as the sky. Even when clouds are in the sky, the sky is free of the cloud. If the sky wasn't free of the cloud then when the wind blows the clouds wouldn't move. But they do.

In the same way our buddha-nature is open awareness like the sky within which thoughts, feelings, memories and so on move like clouds. Some clouds are light and fluffy and others are dark and full of storm. But they all pass and the sky is there. From the point of view of the ego, we become excited when the sun shines and depressed when it's cold and rainy because we are addicted to clouds. However the Dharma view is: *"Don't worry about the clouds. When you awaken to the sky-like ground of your own being the clouds won't bother you anymore."*

This is the difference between an identity based on selection and grasping, and the buddha-nature which is forever open to everything that occurs and is neither imprisoned nor diminished by anything.