

Thin Veneer of Confusion on an Ocean of Wisdom.

Dharma roadside dialogue series

January 30, 2021 #1 Expose

Lama Tsony

Thank you very much for joining from all over the world. Welcome to the first session of Dharma roadside dialog. The reason why I thought to begin such a session, is that I felt, through exchanges I had with you guys from here and there, that there was really a need for a place where we could exchange and discuss about the practice, I mean since the Covid started everybody went on line, so there's really a lot of offers online if you want to study, if you want to deepen your understanding of Dharma, it's fantastic from that point of view. But I felt there was a sort of lack of a platform where we could just very informally discuss about what the path means for us, and where we are at, and the difficulties we may have, or share some experiences that we find are interesting, and that other people might be interested in, so that's why I wanted to create this. The way it is conceived is in two movements; the first one is I will make an expose of 45 or 50 minutes or so, of a certain theme, then we will have a half hour break, a potty break and tea break, to refresh our mind, and then we'll have another hour, where I'll be receiving all of your questions, suggestions, and then we can discuss about whatever you want, but yeah, basically also related, connected to the topics, the themes, that were picked up for this session. So, as it was the first one, I picked up a theme arbitrarily, but I really invite you, whenever you have time, maybe during the pause, whenever, in the chat to write themes that you would like us to discuss in the future sessions. I will group them into bigger genres, so that we can discuss in the following sessions, every last Saturday of the month we'll have this meeting, this exchange.

So, in a slightly provocative way, I picked up the first theme and I gave it the title: *A thin veneer of confusion on an ocean of wisdom*. Maybe this is how you perceive your mind. Or maybe you are just sort of swimming in the floating detritus on the surface of your mind, which has mental afflictions and struggling with that, and you have no idea that there is really a very beautiful ocean at the deeper level of your mind. But, you might also be aware that life must be more than that. Life could be bigger, and there's a sense of a wanderlust, a wish to explore, to travel, and come to know your mind better. So, this is really the theme, and actually what underlies the theme, or just the title let's say, is the idea of the Buddha nature. Buddha nature being the ocean of wisdom. And we are in this paradoxical situation where all of us, whether we are enlightened or not enlightened, or whether we are humans or animals and so on, we are all endowed with the Buddha nature. And I would like to really talk about this, about the Buddha nature and the fact that we are all endowed with, or another way of saying is, we all partake of this Buddha nature. Particularly in these days where a lot of our external references, our outer refuges, are falling apart; there is a big society transformation, induced by the pandemic. The pandemic just reveals what was on its way, it's just a very deep change in the world, and so far it seems we could live in the unawareness of what was going on and just keep

doing business as usual. Now with the pandemic, and in some places, you know this morning I was zooming with a group of French, and so their waiting for the 3rd wave of confinement, and so there's a lot of anxiety related to this, I don't know, each country has a different way to react to this, but anyway, our habits, our life, to put it simply, has been totally disturbed by this pandemic. And for most of us it is a curse, it is really a source of lots of suffering, anxiety, tension, stress and whatnot. But, from a Buddhist perspective, if we're truly engaged on the path, it's a tremendous opportunity, because we can't escape reality. We have no way of being distracted. It always comes back to us that we are limited, there are things we can't do, death is close, and before maybe it was maybe easy to avoid seeing that, but now we are forced (to take a new word here in the USA) we're forced to be "woke." We are forced to become aware of what's been there for a while, for a long time, but because of our privilege, maybe our good karma, I don't know, we could put aside, and not really face it. So, I really wanted to talk about this, and in which manner the teachings on the Buddha Nature can be helpful in these particularly turbulent times. I was inspired by the book about the 10th Karmapa, *A Golden Swan in Turbulent Waters*.

So that's the goal. We become golden swans while swimming in this turbulent water. And I read about the swan, something I had never thought of, is that when you look at the swan from above, you see a majestic bird which is gliding on the water, effortlessly. But if you look at the swan from under the water, that bird is paddling like crazy to keep afloat. So it's a little bit our position, we have this inherent treasure, we have this beautiful Buddha nature, and we are totally unaware of it. We're unaware of it because, for most of us, we were never even introduced to just the concept, the idea that we have, that we are endowed with the Buddha nature. We just see ourselves as we see ourselves. And we are not coming close to it because we are constantly dealing with the world, with situations, and that all of our attention, all of our capacity, is dragged outwardly. And as we are pursuing happiness, outwardly, which is just chasing a mirage, at the same time, we've run away from the true source of happiness, which is in our mind, just waiting for us, like sleeping beauty waiting for a kiss. So, that's what I wanted to talk about. In the turbulent times, we need, maybe more than ever, we need to find a stable ground on which we can stand, on which we can grow, from which we can engage with other people in a very human way. That means with discernment and benevolence. And it seems that now, we cannot find this ground, because the world is shifting, the world is changing, all our references are just going away, which again, was always the case.

But it seemed that there was some sort of stability, somehow we could manage, it was not moving that fast. So it felt, then, that we could manage. But now it's moving so quickly, that there is no way really to find a stable ground. And that brings a lot of anxiety. We start pointing our finger, you know, the "blue" did this, the "red" did that, the "green" will try to do that, uh, my neighbor, whoever, somebody else. And so, as we try to find the solution outwardly, we never find sustainable security and happiness or stability, looking for it as an outer solution we need to grasp and bring into our garden. So, as someone engaged on their way to enlightenment, if we remember the reason why we took refuge, in a sense of we formally accepted enlightenment as a direction, the Dharma as a way to go, and the community of spiritual friends as companions who are going to help us grow and

come closer to this goal, that's the moment where we have to remember this threefold refuge. But enlightenment can be perceived, for now, as an external goal, which is almost a utopia, something which is far away, which is, you know, hardly describable, and the path may appear at times as an endless journey. And there's a time when we're tired, when we're like, "Are we here yet? I'm so tired, when is retirement, when is holiday? When is Buddhahood?" And so we may lose courage. And then at the same time, we have to struggle with our neighbors, and the other people, who are so terrible, and they use the planet's resources, and destroy it, and they're going to kill our planet, and there is greed everywhere, and competition everywhere and so on, so we have to prevent them from invading our safe space, so it's very difficult to keep track of where we are and where we go.

So, in the tradition of the mahamudra, which is very well explained, by the way, in Shamar Rinpoche's book, *Boundless Wisdom*, in the tradition of mahamudra in the third chapter, Rinpoche is describing mahamudra, quoting Gampopa. Mahamudra as a basis or a starting point, mahamudra as a path, and mahamudra as a fruition. And so what I want to discuss today is mahamudra as a basis, the starting point. And so Gampopa explains that mahamudra as a basis is the Buddha nature. Buddha nature is a synonym of dharmakaya (I'm going to throw some Sanskrit words in the mix), which means the mode of manifestation, the reality. Shamar Rinpoche would translate dharmakaya as the body of truth. Mind as it is. This Buddha nature is also a synonym of mahamudra, ordinary mind, great perfection, Madhyamika, all of these terminologies that you come across now and then, they're all talking about the same thing, ultimately. Which, by the way, is mahamudra as a fruit. So we have mahamudra as a basis, which is the Buddha nature, unknown, unseen, and then, at the end of the path, we have mahamudra revealed and discovered. That's the fruition. It's not that we are creating anything, that wouldn't have been here, and that we need to manufacture in some way, or to chase, or whatever. No, what we discover is what is. And so, mahamudra as a fruit is actually coming to realize mahamudra as a beginning, as a starting point, as a basis, minus the thin veneer of confusion, that prevented our mind so far to see it. That's all. The path would be, in this perspective of mahamudra, to clarify the natural state.

The text, *The Supreme Continuum* of Asanga Maitreya, when talking about the Buddha nature, it says, "In this, there is nothing to add, in this, there is nothing to subtract". That is, in the Buddha nature there's nothing to be added and there's nothing to be subtracted. It is in itself beyond purity and impurity, it is in itself, perfect. So here we find the terminology of Dzogchen, the great perfection, the mahamudra, beyond pure and impure. So, that's mahamudra as the basis. Maybe in the future, we'll talk about mahamudra as the path, then maybe mahamudra as the fruit, but that will be very hypothetical. So let's talk about reality. Our reality. Mahamudra as a basis is embracing the reality of Buddha nature. And how do we do that? Obviously we are not yet in a position where we can experience it, otherwise the mahamudra as a path would be the mahamudra as a fruit, in which case there is no need for a path and practice, because we would already be what we want to become. You see the contradiction. So, we are on the basis, the basis is the Buddha nature. We cannot perceive it directly as an intimate, personal experience, but we can begin to move in the direction of this experience. And how do we do that? Through study and reflection. As the third Karmapa said in the

Mahamudra Prayer, “With study we free our mind from the veil of not knowing.” And then reflection, contemplation, pondering over the instructions, and the commentaries, and the explanations we get from our spiritual friends, we free ourselves from the veil of doubt. That means that our understanding becomes very, very clear. But this is not sufficient. It is essential, but it is not sufficient. This study leads us to the possibility to reflect in a concise and sharp way. Then we contemplate. Then we gain a certain confidence in how things are, let’s say...could be.

I compare the studying and reflection to the pruning of a tree. You remove all the dead branches, the excess, so that the sap can flow and really stay in the good branches and bring flowers or fruit. So you see the study and reflection is not about the acquisition of more concepts. We have plenty of these concepts. But it’s about getting rid of the unnecessary concepts. The unnecessary vision of the world we have. And in a way it’s clearing away all mistaken views that are unfounded, that have no basis, habitual, to embrace a clearer and new perspective. So, this will be study and reflection. And then when we have, you know it’s like when you’re in the jungle, and you open up a clearing, then you can sit. Then you can build a house in this clearing.

So that’s the idea behind study and reflection. It brings you to a good point where you can drop the intellectual process and abide in the experience, the intimate experience of meditation. And even meditation will have several stages, but that’s not the topic for today, so I will stay on what I want to talk about. Buddha nature. When we, through study and reflection, through just that, through study and reflection come to understand that yes, it makes sense that everybody is endowed with Buddha nature, that there is no essential difference between the mind of an enlightened person and the mind of a non-enlightened person, in essence. There is no difference. We also understand that the qualities of this mind that are indissociable from the essence of the mind, all-pervading. So wherever there is mind, there are these qualities. Qualities of discernment, of benevolence, of bliss, and so on and so forth. Except that we don’t recognize them. It’s a little bit like if you are in the dark and then somebody comes into your house, and you’re a little bit suspicious that this could be an enemy, until you recognise that it is your child or your spouse. There is a moment that this person coming into your house is a threat, and in our mind, everything is either a threat, or something we have to grab and own, because it’s pleasant. But we never see it for what it is. We see it for what we think it is. We project this mental representation on every phenomena.

So, when we change our perspective and say, okay, logically thinking, we’re all endowed with Buddha nature. Logically thinking, the more we look outwardly, the less we find it, for it is at the very heart of our mind. So the only way we really have to look is in. And you know, we use the word Buddhist, maybe you say, I am a Buddhist, but Buddhist is a 19th century invention of the Brits. Tibetans will say Nangpa, Nangpa means insider. Somebody who is looking for the cause, and the resolution of suffering, inwardly, and not, only and essentially, outwardly. So, when you’re a Buddhist, think in terms more of, I’m somebody from the inside. I’m somebody who is looking inside to find the ground, the foundation, on which I can act, and find in myself what is obstructing my activity and what are my talents, and how can I enhance them, and how can I relate to the world

on the basis of discernment and benevolence, rather than confusion, habitual thinking, and egocentrism. This can't be solved outside, this has to be solved inside.

So, once we have a clear understanding through study and reflection of this basic notion of Buddha nature, this Buddha nature becomes our first refuge. In a sense of that I have a solid ground to begin a path, to begin a journey. In *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, Gampopa opens the text, the first chapter, by the statement, "The cause for enlightenment is the Buddha nature." So it's very important, because that's the starting point. In a way, all the rest, all the other chapters, wouldn't make sense if we were not endowed with the Buddha nature. So it's a very important statement, and as Gampopa opened his book with this statement, I wanted to open our series of dialogues and discussions with this statement, "We are all endowed with the Buddha nature," whether we know it or not.

And in the *Supreme Continuum*, this text I mentioned, that exists many translations in English if you are interested, there are many similes that are given to express that. The Buddha statue, the golden Buddha statue, wrapped in rags in a pile of trash, that's our Buddha nature, hidden in the pile of trash of our habits and kleshas. The treasure buried under the cabin of a poor man, the man is poor, because he doesn't know, under, if he would just dig one foot, there is a treasure. The single mother who is pregnant without any income, no money, and no prospective future, but there is a child that will become a universal king, who will have all the power in the world, that's another way. And so on and so forth. Tilopa put it like this, "If you have the sesame seed, you also have the sesame oil." But the sesame oil will not be revealed til you crush the seed. But the Buddha nature of the sesame oil is in the sesame seed already. So these are all illustrations, similes, that you can use, and you can even create your own, to come to this intellectual understanding and confidence that this very likely might be, let's put it like this. It's a working hypothesis. I'm not saying you have to believe. I'm saying you have to take this intelligently, and see it as a working hypothesis. Assuming I have the Buddha nature, assuming all beings are endowed with the Buddha nature, assuming that there is no essential difference between the mind of a Buddha and the mind of any bug, or you. From this perspective, what is my action, what is my line of conduct. That will be the starting point. That's the basis. And these days it's very important because most people, 99.9% of us, are not informed about or not aware of the Buddha nature reality. So we basically conceive ourselves as what we "think" we are. We find security and satisfaction in outer circumstances; our job, our family, a good relationship, a stable government, and so on and so forth. We are looking for a good life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, that's for the Americans;~) That's what we think and that's what we do.

Now, let's say we don't have a good government, we get sick, our family is a mess? How can we have a good life, how can we have liberty when facisism is taking control of the government, and how can we have happiness in general? This becomes extremely painful and disruptive. We are sort of falling in the rabbit hole of this, trying to find a solution, deeper and deeper and deeper. Like when you have a nightmare, trying to find a solution in a nightmare by trying to organise the thing. The way to get out of a nightmare, number one is to realize your dreaming. And number two, go

out, because you have to go to the bathroom. Go out of the dream. That's why you are also stressed. So, we have to learn to step out of the dream, but we have to do it slowly, incrementally and gently. When we are lost in the rabbit hole of our nightmare, everything will be perceived through these eyes, through this vantage point. People are a problem, or people are the solution. People are going to bring me things, so I must own them, or these people are going to be a problem so I must get rid of them. If I can do it I'm happy, or it changes and I can't maintain it, I'm so desperate. I cannot protect myself from them, I'm so desperate. If I protect myself but they come back, I'm so desperate. However you do it, you know, it just doesn't work in the end.

So, if you start thinking from the vantage point of the Buddha nature, you say, okay, there is the Buddha nature, that's the good news. We either don't know it, or we don't see it, that's the bad news. But that's workable. And so what you cultivate at this point, with this understanding of the Buddha nature is a sense of dignity, which is very important for the path. It's not pride, pride is to pretend to be someone you are not. Dignity is to embrace who you are, deeply. Deeply, deep inside, it's only you, you're not exceptional, in everybody there is a Buddha waiting to be awakened. Or a Buddha who is perfectly awake, waiting for you to see, it, she, her. And everybody else. You know, even the people that are the biggest pain, are endowed with the Buddha nature. So, when you look at them, you look at them with these two eyes, not just the eye that we usually use saying, "You're a pain, you're a tool, I don't want to see you," or, "You're gorgeous, I want to own you." You know, we look at them definitely like this, but we also say that this is only my mental representation. What I think of you is not what you are. I'm just projecting my habits and likes and dislikes on you, you are just a screen for my hate and my desire. And then, you look with the other eyes. And you know what? We are all endowed with the Buddha nature. You're a beautiful person, you're a beautiful person, such as I am. The pity is, we don't know it. How can we help each other to do that?

I understand that you are maybe not yet in the position to even hear such a statement. Or maybe not in the position yet to say to somebody that you really see as an aggressor, "Well, you're a beautiful person." But at least we begin the process by considering it intellectually. We begin by thinking like this: "You're not only this." "This doesn't define you." And as far as you are concerned, if you think you are your profession, if you think you are your social status, if you think you're a parent, or if you think you're a child, all of these things are very, very volatile and very, very unreliable. These will change. So your identity based on status will change. And if you're high in social status and then you fall, you lose your job, your bit of influence, or you're not reelected, then you collapse. And you hate yourself, and you hate them for not recognizing how special and great you are. And all of that creates tremendous suffering. And so you've lost the vision of your dignity, and you've lost it because you thought you were defined by this; your social position, your fortune, and so on and so forth. So this is very important, because we're going through times of transformation.

A long time ago when we first met many of the Dharma teachers of Bodhi Path here in Virginia with Shamar Rinpoche, for what I call the "masterclass," Shamar Rinpoche was teaching those who were going to become his teachers, the teachers of the Bodhi Path. He really put us through the

wringer. He put really a lot of pressure, a lot of pressure, to see if we hold the pressure, if we are up to the task and up to the job. And so, we came from Europe, we came from this “Lama factory.” And then we were among people who really saw us as lama, and thought that we could fly and do miracles and all sorts of things and so on, and some of us were like, maybe, maybe I can do that, you know? We lost some on the way;~) And so, we come with this status, I am a lama, Lama Tsony. Okay. Shamar Rinpoche said, “Okay, all you have been doing this for a while, twenty years or more, and you’ve been practicing the highest tantra and so on and so forth, and then all the texts say, if you practice them you should be liberated and reach enlightenment in seven years. Who’s enlightened here?” Crickets, crickets. Big silence. Then he just kept going, and said, “When Gampopa described in *The Jewel Ornament* the quality of a Lama, he is not talking about you. Don’t make this mistake. The basic lama, what really a lama at minimum is, is someone like Gendun Rinpoche. That’s a lama.” So, we are all students, disciples of Gendun Rinpoche, and then he asked us, “Who is a lama here?” Cricket. Cricket. Cricket. Silence. And he said, “If you work hard, if you become (as he said) professionals, that means you know your job. At best, for now, what you can be is Dharma teachers.” So we were sort of downgraded; from almost Buddha-like lamas to janitor Dharma teachers. You know, here’s the bucket and here’s the mop. Some of us couldn’t take it. They quit, we lost them on the way. And when this first thing was passed, and we said, “Okay, what’s the procedure boss, what should we do?” Then he began to teach us what he is intending and what he wants us to do, and how he could see that we can help to disseminate his vision and his intent.

So, if you were attached to your position, like I’m lama such and such, you don’t come here and join this band. You stay in Europe and, you know, and you play whatever you want to play. But if you realize that actually the names really don’t matter, and by the way, after saying that, Rinpoche would always call me Lama Tsony. So, who am I? I am not these titles. You know, like my good friend Lama Dharma teacher Khaydroup says, “Call me whatever you want, but don’t call me late for dinner.” The name doesn’t represent you, you are not your title, so if you have it, you don’t have more, and if you don’t have it, you don’t have less. And if you don’t know who you are, that’s your problem, you have to look. And you have to look inside, so you have certainty, and whether they call you this or that, it doesn’t matter. You have certainty, you have confidence in the fact that you’re endowed with the Buddha nature. You have confidence in your understanding coming through study and reflection of Dharma. You can debate on that, nobody is going to easily put you off. You really have it, it’s not just repeating the words of somebody else. This is your experience, your understanding. And then as you meditate, this is comforted and amplified, deepened, by your meditation experience. And that, nobody can take it away. You know, but somebody could take your job away, they could take your social status away, but not your Buddha nature. You’re the only one who can obliterate this, by not looking at it.

There are two main obstacles. The first one is distraction. Distraction is to be carried away by the show out there, so that you lose contact with your Buddha nature. That’s the first thing. You don’t look inside anymore, because, oh, something is happening over there. It’s just like our dog, when

there's a squirrel...he's gone! Or smells some rotten meat somewhere in the forest. He's gone. So the first obstacle is distraction.

And the second obstacle is kind of funnily described as clarity. But not the clarity you gain through shamata, or the utmost clarity you gain through vipasyana. You could call it a false clarity. The clarity that is the clarity you think you have, in the sense of, you know what you know, and you think that it's all. That what you know is the sum of what has to be known. And you judge everything from this intelligence. And so, as you judge, even your intelligence from this intelligence, even if you're very, very limited, you think you have a lot. And so this prevents you from opening up to new perspectives. And that prevents you from studying and reflecting and meditating, because you have some false certainties that remain as a certainty because they make you comfortable. And that you will never question, because that might make you uncomfortable. We'd rather have the comfortable life than the inconvenient truth. So, we must find in ourselves the curiosity, the wanderlust, the wish to travel and explore the mind.

Lama Teunsang, an old lama of ours, came in before the first retreat to give us some piece of advice before we embarked on the first three years, and then one of his advice was do not fight about the details of rituals, how they should be conducted, nobody cares. Which proved to be very important in this context when we were singing all day long, and some wanted to sing like this, and some wanted to sing like that. So, it doesn't matter, don't fight about this, nobody cares. And the second piece of advice that he gave from this day I have kept. Never think of yourself as a "master." Never harbor a "master's" mind. Always keep a "student's" mind. And that's a way to protect you from false clarity. When you think you know everything, you may fool everybody, well, you can even make a job out of this, you know, but it's leading nowhere. It's just creating a sort of false environment where you are sort of entertaining a crowd of people who think you're omniscient, so they don't have to look at their own lack of understanding and maybe see that, okay, you may have some knowledge, but you don't have it all. So, if you scratch my back I'll scratch your back, everybody's happy. It doesn't lead anywhere. It doesn't lead anywhere. But when you have a "student" mind, well, I'm very comfortable when I don't know something. I can easily lie about it (I'm just kidding). I can say, "I don't know, what do you think?"

You know, for some of you in DC, maybe you remember Lama Tenpa, the American lama who lives in France. A very sweet guy. People liked him very much, he came a couple of times here in the US to teach and people liked him, and some people told me, "This lama is really interesting because everytime we asked him a question he said, "I don't know, what do you think?"" And people liked it. I wasn't going to say, like, "What the heck, a lama is supposed to know, if you don't know your job, learn, study." But actually his humility, his simplicity, and he was inviting people to be part of the discussion. So, you know, if you teach somebody, maybe people won't understand or they'll forget, but if you involve them in the process of discovery, they will remember this. They may not remember what you said, but they will remember their involvement in what you have discovered. So,

after, years after, I thought, “Yeah, that was great.” But Tenpa never thought he was a lama. Like, very honestly he was saying like, “I have no clue, what do you think?”

So, that’s the way we should all be. Like Ram Dass, for the US, you probably know Ram Dass, maybe not everybody knows, but, he was a leading figure in the 60’s, with Timothy Leary, but he turned into a more meditative approach, he said, “We are walking each other home.” We are walking each other home, we’re simply helping each other to go back home, to the Buddha nature. And that’s what we’re doing. So, if that becomes your operating system, if that becomes your OS, we’re all endowed with the Buddha nature, we’ve made a mess of it, and we’ve lost the way home, and we help each other to go back home. You’re in a good position. And, I know I can do it, I know you can do it, we can all do it, because I’m very, very confident in the possibility that we’re all endowed with the Buddha nature. The Buddha was a human being, he never positioned himself as a god or a supernatural being, a deva, or whatever, and he was just pointing out what humanity can achieve. Then after that thousands, millions, of men and women have just followed his footsteps and did the same, and that’s what we are doing now. So, even if the world is a mess, inside there is the refuge of the Buddha nature, the discernment and stability, benevolence, and the desire to know more about it, and the desire to help all of us mutually to come back home. That’s it! That’s just the premise of the path. So from that, hey, let’s do that. No matter what, okay, the world is on fire, that’s fine, the world is a beautiful place, and so fine, we’re just gonna get all intoxicated with bliss and sleep. It’s good to have a little bit of a challenge. You know? You feel the wind and the bullets, that keeps you alert, and awake. So we can keep, even in this really difficult and challenging time, we can keep sanity. We can keep dignity. We can move forward, inward, and whatever we discover in terms of realization, stability, and so on, it will expand to others, we’ll become a shelter for others, we become, not an absolute refuge until we become a Buddha, but we become some sort of a harbor where people can find some peace, some sort of solace, some sort of comfort. And, you know, we can decide to do this until enlightenment, generally speaking, and as far as we are concerned right now, until my last breath. That’s what I’m intending to do. Is there another job? Is there anything else more important?

All the rest is just opportunities to keep the inner job. Having a family, having a career, money to pay the rent, we all have to do this...take care of yourself, wear a mask, wash your hands, stay 6 feet away. We all have to do this. But this is not affecting the inner temple of sanity, the inner sanctuary of benevolence and wisdom, with the desire to deepen this wisdom. So we’re in a good position. No matter what happens externally.

And to finish on that, I will tell you a story, because I mentioned Lama Teunsang. In 1977, when the Karmapa, the 16th Karmapa came to France, Lama Teunsang came, with a young tulku, came to Dhagpo Kagyu Ling, to meet the Karmapa. On the way back to his monastery, which is about 400 hundred miles away, the car broke down. And so, the secretary of the center was driving the car and said to the lama, “We have to find a way for you to go back to the center, and I have to stay here with the broken car, because it will take at least three days to get the spare parts and fix the car.”

Lama Teunsang says, “Okay.” They hitchhiked. One guy stops, he lives like 10 miles away from the monastery. And so, Lama Teunsang doesn’t speak a word of French or English, only Tibetan, the young tulku is British, doesn’t speak a word of French, the guy doesn’t speak a word of English. And so the secretary says, like, “Can you please take them to their monastery that is such and such address?” and so on, the guy says, “Sure, don’t worry, I’ll take them there.” And so here they go. And then they arrive at the monastery, and the guy says, “Yeah, I’m happy you’re here, thank you, enjoy, bye-bye.” And then he goes. And then Lama Teunsang realizes that the secretary had kept the key of the house, there’s no way for them to get in the house. And Lama Teunsang, no telephone, no internet, we’re in the mountains, not even a landline, nothing. Lama Teunsang managed to open the door to the barn, and here is their manger, you know, the place where you put the hay for the cows, and he made a little cradle for the young tulku to sleep there, and then looked around and there was a root cellar where they had some vegetables; potatoes, carrots, and beets, and so on, and he managed to make a fire, find an old pot, prepare a soup, feed the kid, and then go and do his practice, his daily puja, then the kid fell asleep. And the next day, same soup, and so on. And in the meantime the secretary realized he had the key and he was horrified, he freaked out, Lama Teunsang...never freaked out. We have a fire, we have a roof, we have some hay where we can sleep, I can do my practice, and then we have some things to eat. And then hikers came by, from up in the mountains, and then they saw this Tibetan lama, and they saw this young English, and then tried to communicate, they don’t speak a word, so they couldn’t really communicate, but they just realized that, man, they are locked outside of their house, their locked outside of their house and they have nothing to eat, so they go back down, and bring them back groceries. Bread and cheese and milk and whatnot. You know, life gets better. Lama Teunsang is cooking for the kid, doing his daily practice, going to bed in the hay. Three days later, the secretary comes back with the car, totally mortified he has been freaking out for three days, and so on, totally guilty, and what he found was that they were all chill, they were okay. They had good food, people came and took care of us...they actually had more than what they needed. So, one freaked out, one was cool as a cuke. The difference is the inner confidence. Lama Teunsang knew that the causes and conditions for survival and happiness do not come from the outer, but come from the inner, and the accumulation of merit from the stream of positivity that we have created, and if we don’t we do without. It’s just as simple as that.

So I always kept this as a reminder when I’m crying from a very high position, you know, that there’s too much salt in my gourmet dinner, or whatever. And sometimes I had moments like this in my youth, in the early years in Dhagpo when I’ve slept in many, many impossible places and found food from the dumpster, doing dumpster diving, or getting things from the marketplace, or whatever, so I know I’ve done that, for 15 or 20 years, and it was fine. These days in Dhagpo were just like, some people would never come there, because it was just too rustic. So I have a sort of almost quasi nostalgia because this was a very simple life. There is no commitment, I didn’t have to think of my retirement money, I didn’t have to think about my health insurance, I didn’t have to think about renters insurance, fixing the car. It was all, basically people would say, like, destitute. Poor, but it was free. So I think that if we can touch this freedom, even in a comfortable

environment, you don't have to go through misery to find it, we are in a good position. Because we have found our refuge inward. The Buddha nature is our refuge, it helps us to swim through the surface, the veneer of confusion, and recycle this into what really the essence of mind is, into the discovery of the Buddha nature, also known as mahamudra, also none as ordinary mind, also known as dharmakaya, also known as prajnaparamita, also know as madhyamaka, and so on and so forth. So, that is what I wanted to talk about today. Let's have a little break, and then we'll come back for the Q&A.