

## Focus on your practice and remain true to yourself.

Dharma roadside dialogue series

February 2021 #1 Exposé

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We're going to talk a little bit about practice and staying true to oneself. I received several suggestions for themes and I tried to sort of put them together in a larger folder that we could cover more ground, let's put it like this.

I was initially asked a question on this line, about what the Karmapa said at the end of the video tribute homage to Shamar Rinpoche during the cremation of Shamar Rinpoche. The final words of this documentary is:

*"The teaching of impermanence is the lesson that all beings, even the Buddha himself, must pass."*

That was in the context of Shamar Rinpoche just passing away, and the funeral was going on. Then Karmapa goes on saying:

*"I would like to assure you that by **focusing on your practice and staying true to yourself**, this will have great, great benefit. We will all be connected in ways that transcend the boundaries of space and time."*

This is what I was asked to talk about. There are other things that sort of came from the same direction, and I decided to add them to the discussion, questions such as: *"What are the many ways to free oneself from what binds us?"* A question about desire and renunciation on the path, are they mutually exclusive, or can they find some sort of a common ground and peace? And also a question about how to live the contradiction between the parent, ordinary laws of society, and the necessity of cause and effect. The law of karma actually. Are they compatible, not compatible, and so on and so forth. I felt that this was kind of in the same league, so we could talk about this. I'm going to go through this for the first hour, and then I will invite your questions, and we will have a dialogue in the second part, the second hour of our meeting.

I think it is important in this kind of discussion to really come to understand what is the bottom line of the Buddha's teachings. What is really the core intent in the Buddha's teaching? For that I would like to use two words that are very common in the Buddhist literature and teachings, *dukha* and *sukha*. *Dukha* is translated often as pain, suffering, misery, all the things we don't like. *Sukha* being the opposite, all the things we like, what is easy, pleasant, bliss, happiness, and so on and so forth. And it seems to me that the teachings of the Buddha are really essentially dealing with, how can we move from a state of suffering into a state of ease, well being, *sukha*? If we look at the words themselves, they are actually very revealing, they are very interesting, for that matter. *Sukha* and *dukha*, you probably noticed that they share a common syllable, *kha* that literally means space. In the

later teachings of the Buddha, *kha* would be referred, metaphorically, as the Buddha nature. The Buddha nature that we're all endowed with, whether we're enlightened or not. And *dukha*, in the early days of the use of this word in India, was referring to an ox cart whose wheel was stuck. The axel wouldn't turn, wouldn't spin, it's like the axel was off-groove, and something was blocked. By extension, *dukha* refers to a space, *kha* that is blocked, you could almost say, crowded. *Sukha* refers to the opposite. *Su* means ease. Fluidity. Well-being in the sense of nothing is a problem; nothing is difficult, nothing is holding back. We have two words here that we could render by stuck and unstuck. *Sukha* unstuck, *dukha* stuck.

The fundamental question is how do we get unstuck? What is stuck? It's the mind of the individual that doesn't know itself. By not knowing itself, it leads into mental constructions, theories, and fantasies. We're in a world of speculation, a world of mental representation, which just doesn't work, because it doesn't represent reality. We could say we are basically stuck because we are off the tracks, off the groove of reality. So what should spin easily, should flow easily and be fluid, cannot. *Sukha* is the opposite. Nothing is holding back, nothing is blocking, everything is fluid, and therefore there is a sense of ease.

When it is blocked, the crowded space delivers a feeling of uneasiness and suffering, unpleasantness. When the three forms of suffering are described in the classic teachings, we have the *suffering of suffering* that comes from the different sicknesses and so on. There's the *suffering of change* coming from denying the power of reality that is impermanence. Then, there is the *suffering of conditioned existence*, which is very difficult to notice, because it comes from being conditioned by the *Skandha*. We are stuck, and it sucks, and it's painful. We get very reactive; we want to find who is playing tricks on us. We think that it comes from the outside. We blame the entire world for our being stuck, and we don't like it. Consequently, we project our uneasiness, in the form of violence, onto the outside world. Or for that matter, onto ourselves, if we think that we are the bad one. It's kind of the same thing. We are projecting this. This is the bottom line.

As we are, nowadays, going through interesting but transformative times, experiencing a change of paradigm--the world we knew 10 years ago, or even just 2 years ago, doesn't really exist anymore, and there's not really much chance that it will come back-- I think that it is very important to get in the best possible position to move with the change, and get the best out of it. In order not to get stuck in concepts, habits, whether it is religious habits, dogmatic habits, we have to honestly work with reality. The teachings of the Buddha gave us 84,000 tools to do this. But all the methods that are given will not work if we are not in the right disposition of mind. Okay? You're not freaking out? Cool.

What is the process? We know now that the basic intention behind all of the teachings of the Buddha is to unstick this beautiful mind; *kha* is the Buddha nature, wonderful mind. As the *Uttara Tantra Shastra* says:

*“To this Buddha nature there is nothing to add, and there is nothing to subtract.”*

It’s just basic goodness. But as we don’t know it, we’re stuck. We’re stuck in our complications, in our habits, in our projections, in our mental representations, in our hope and fears, and we need to step out of this. Then we find the natural ease, the natural goodness. We don’t have to make it; it’s just there, waiting for us to be uncomplicated. But it’s very difficult to be uncomplicated. It takes time, so we need courage and we need patience. It’s not going to happen overnight, so we need patience, and it requires a certain dedication to look at reality and not to shy away, as we most of the time do, and that’s where the courage lays.

Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche described the path as three stages.

The first one:

*“First one develops extreme exertion in uncovering one’s own neurosis.  
This one-pointed mindfulness brings a sense of one’s actual human quality.”*

The first step is uncovering. Being brave enough to look at one’s own neurosis, have a deep and serious look at ourselves.

The second stage:

*“The second stage is marked by gentleness.  
Allowing one’s energy to expand and be shared by sentient beings.”*

The third stage is:

*“One develops fearlessness, and a sense of joy and penetrating insight filled with an immense devotion to the lineage and one’s root teacher.”*

These are the three stages of the path according to Trungpa Rinpoche.

And as my intent in this talk is to cut to the chase and go really into the heart of it, so we don’t get lost in the details; the heart is to move from a stuck state of *dukha* to a flowing state of *sukha*, that is only waiting for us to enjoy it.

The first thing we need to do is we have to stop our habitual tendencies. We have to look at them. As Karmapa said: *Focus on your practice.*

What does practice mean in this context? And why do we practice? Sometimes it seems that practice is some sort of magical activity where we recite mantras, and we do visualization, or we count our

breaths, and that will lead us to enlightenment. And all of that is very, very external. Enlightenment is “*there, over the rainbow*”. We have a mental representation of enlightenment and we are trying to go in this direction. We are still looking for solutions outwardly. As we did when blaming externally the source of our problems. We need to turn our gaze inwardly. Find the source of suffering in ourselves. Of course, there are outer conditions that aggravate our inner unbalance, but if we are not stuck inside, there wouldn’t even be a problem. The conditions are not the cause, they only exacerbate the causes that are in our mind, the fact that we are stuck in our ignorance and habits.

We’re looking outwardly, making tremendous efforts to conform our appearance to the image we have of ourselves being great, or good. As we don’t look at ourselves, we create an *avatar*. The *avatar* of a good Buddhist, who does good things, practices and meditates, expecting the reward of enlightenment.

Alternatively, we may desire to please a father or mother figure, our teacher--as if they care. We are constantly projecting the image of a *good pupil*. We tend to lie to the teacher, we don’t show our real face when we have a discussion, and we’re hiding our dirty laundry from the teacher.

We could also practice simply out of superstition. We took vows, we made a commitment, and we have to recite this mantra and so much text every day, or do this and that form of practice. Something terrible might happen if we fail to do it. There might be some sort of divine punishment. In Greek mythology, the gods would send the revengeful goddess *Nemesis* to punish those who were unfaithful to them.

We have all these mental pictures and habits in our psyche; it is part of our setup. It’s interesting; setup, as in being set up. It’s kind of like how we appear and how we are trapped by our own projections. And when I’m saying that, I’d like you to just look at yourself in this moment and.... do you feel bad? Do you feel guilty? Because, hooo, he saw me. Oooo, that’s so true, that’s so right, and so on. If so, don’t! Don’t feel bad about it, because this is who you are, now. And this is good, because deep in the heart of it, deep in the midst of this chaos there is *kha*, there is your Buddha nature, and you have to bet on that, you have to take refuge on that, you have to stand on this and then grow from this. Take the side of the Buddha nature. That’s what really taking refuge in the Buddha means. Take the side of the Buddha nature.

### **Develop extreme exertion in uncovering one’s own neurosis**

Let’s now have a look at ourselves. As Trungpa Rinpoche says: “*Develop extreme exertion in uncovering one’s own neurosis.*” We move beyond the need to practice to become a good boy or good girl. We move beyond the need to practice to please the mama or papa teacher. Or we move beyond the superstitious fear that something terrible might happen. We move beyond that. We see that this is just mental representation. That I’ve been harboring and nurturing since beginningless time, but they didn’t bring anything good. They actually kept me from the starting point, because the starting point

is who I am now. And we have to uncover our own neurosis, which means embrace them. You know, when quite frankly I tell some people that I'm easily upset, they think I'm joking.... but I'm not. I'm really easily upset! Anything. I've got certain levels of OCD, like we all have, especially some of my OCD is around the sink in the kitchen. No sponge in the sink, things must be in the right position. If something is a little bit, like, you know, salad, abandoned in the bottom of the sink...can't you just throw it in the garbage can so that I don't have to do it? And when I see that I can see my whole body tense, I react because it's creating something I don't like, which is unnecessary work. Because not only do I have OCD, but also I'm extremely lazy. So I have to be friends with that, because that's me. If I hate myself, how can I work with myself? Because the only thing I will try to do is to punish myself all the time for not being the "good" person. You know? It's even amplified when you're a lama or a dharma teacher. Dharma teacher is okay, but if you're a Lama it's even more terrible because you have to be up to what you may think that people may expect from you. You have no idea what they expect from you, but you have to like sort of put up the standard thing. I've done that for years, you know, it's very easy. You just wear a red robe and you try to stick everything inside so it doesn't stick out. And then you behave nicely, you Botox your entire psyche. And so you look cool. And then sometimes it bursts out, so you have to be naughty somewhere, but hope not to be caught out.

Shamar Rinpoche told me a story once, a very interesting story of, let's call it a lama, from India, who was caught red-handed in a brothel in Thailand by one of his main sponsors. And Rinpoche thought it was hilarious. The guy thought that he could be naughty on the sly, and leave his perfect avatar on the side for a little trip to Phuket, and then in this specific time, in this specific location, in this specific brothel, his main sponsor had the same idea. They were probably both super embarrassed. Because the disciple is a good student of the teacher, he is not supposed to be there, and the teacher, of course, is not supposed to be there. And then I tried to think what I would do if I was caught in such a situation. And immediately my mind came up with, "*You see what you made me do? You forced me to come here to liberate you!*" All these stupid things might happen, only because we're all trying to protect our avatar, which is only bringing misery. Why do we keep doing this? Why do I inflict this on myself every instant? If I'm pissed, I'm pissed. Okay? If I have a feeling of desire for anything from a rusted truck to a handsome woman, that's what goes through my mind right now. And so, because I see it, I can realize that it's toxic. It's going to hurt me and it's going to hurt other people. And it's actually not in agreement with the initial or the essential purpose of the Buddha's teachings, which is to unstick ourselves. So I think I'm going to unstick myself by getting even more stuck? That's ridiculous. I only need to be unstuck because I'm stuck into pretending. If you stop pretending, you're not stuck in pretension, then you don't need to unstick yourself. So you are who you are. When you see who you are, with interest and kindness, you really want to help yourself so that it's not too painful.

We're becoming friends with ourselves, and that's the beginning of the path. Because we have decided to look at the first of the four noble truths, which is we're all stuck and it hurts. And lying about it, pretending this isn't the case, is not going to help. You need evidence, well, just look at

your life. You've been doing that since beginningless time. It never really worked. Or actually it really never worked. So the first thing really is to develop *extreme exertion in uncovering one's neurosis*. That means we decide we are not going to pretend anything. We decide we are going to be who we are and not be the sort of Photoshop version of ourselves. So when we do that in a way it helps us to understand the shortcomings of other people. We are not so harsh with other people because we are not so judgmental about ourselves anymore. You know, because what we hate in people being who they are is that they allow themselves to do what I don't allow myself, and I suffer so much from not doing it. We hate them for that. So when we embrace who we are, and we are going to really need some qualities there that we will cultivate through meditation, such as mindfulness, attentiveness, carefulness. We look at ourselves and we remember what we want to do. We want to get unstuck. And we want to do that so that we can help other people to find a way out of their own trap. So when we do that, what we discover is that we are sort of shadow and light. Deep inside our mind is good and wholesome. That's our Buddha nature. And it sort of sparkles sometimes; through random acts of kindness, a sense of intelligence, common sense, we make sometimes good decisions, so this is just the sparks of the Buddha nature. So there is something good here. And then there's also the old habits coming from ignorance, and they're really spoiling everything. And we really need to look at them and really address them and work with them. So we're mindful in the sense that we remember what we really want to do. We want to get unstuck. **Mindfulness** is to remember this. Okay? Mindfulness is: I want to be unstuck. I remember this. We will also need **Attentiveness** of every detail of our lives, whether we sit on the cushion and we watch our thoughts and so on, or we are in the midst of a business exchange, family things and so on, we are very attentive to what comes up. What crops up on the surface of our mind. And we remember what we want to do, so we're attentive and we remember. And then sometimes we skip, sometimes we drift, sometimes we go off the road because we get caught off-guard, and we need **carefulness** to bring us back.

So this is what the first stages of the practice will be, and in doing this *we discover the sense of one's own actual human quality*. I think here Trungpa Rinpoche when he talks about human quality he refers to the basic goodness. The basic goodness of the Buddha nature. The basic goodness of this aspect of the ground consciousness the alaya, which is wisdom alaya. We're endowed with this, it is our mind. It's not something that needs to be manufactured, bought or developed. It's good as it is. The *Uttaratantra Shastra* says: "*In this, there is nothing to add, nothing to subtract.*" So, the point is, there is a natural perfection here that we don't need to create, we just need to let go, progressively, of whatever obstructs it, whatever obstructs the experience of it. When we decide to do the essential work of discovering the nature of our mind, we have to be mindful of the fact that the world out there, full of A-holes doing terrible things, is simply manifesting a stream of conditions triggering knee jerk reactions. If there were not something in me that rings back to it, it wouldn't be a problem for me. They are only triggering conditions, not the main cause of my neurotic reactions. If my immune system of benevolence and discernment were strong enough, it really would not be a problem. Quite the opposite in fact, it's certainly a great opportunity to be more patient, to be more skillful, more resilient and so on and so forth. It's all-good, if we don't spoil it. It's all-good. So when

we remain mindful of this, we discover what we have to do on ourselves, and we do it with a light heart, not like punishing or judging or whatever. We like this person that is me, we like this person and we want to help this person to be free, so that his/her/their freedom can be contagious and help other people to also find their freedom. As we come to like ourself, we want to work with this person to help this person. As we also know that the deeper reality of this mind is the Buddha nature, there is a fundamental basic kindness and goodness that we can trust. And all the rest, the fleeting adventitious obscurations that come from habits and karma and whatnot, we're going to work with it, we're just going to recycle. We're going to make lemonade out of all these lemons. And that's what we want to do, that's the commitment; I take refuge in the Buddha, that's it. I take refuge in the Dharma, which means making the lemonade. And also, I take refuge in, and also rely upon, men and women of experience, elder brothers and sisters who have flying hours, and experience and they're interested in our well-being and want to help. That's just as simple as that.

### **Gentleness.**

This will lead us, step by step, to the second stage of the practice, which is *marked by gentleness*. We are not dogmatic. Whatever works is fine. We understand what is the heart of all the Buddha's teaching; get unstuck. So we're not fixed by the numbers; yes, but do you know the 51 this or the 75 that, have you done the 100 thousand this or the 200 thousand that? You know, have you paid your dues to whatever? So, we're not caught up in all these dogmatic tricks that are just props for the avatar of my glorious holy self. We become free. We're still stuck, of course, with some old things that need to be processed, but we know we're on the way and we know how to do it, and that the 84,000 Dharmas are going to help us, we don't have to do all of them, we can select the one that works for us, now, today. And do it. And then tomorrow maybe things change, then we need another tool, or we need another form of practice, then we do it. If we're not sure, we talk with our friends of the Sangha, and say, "Hey, what do you think about this?" And then that's where you decide to select among the friends of the Sangha, the non-dogmatic ones. Those who talk from the heart and experience and not those who talk from preaching with the finger pointed, "You should do that." And there are some of these good people, there are really a lot of these good people that have a lot of experience, they care for you, and together you can have a discussion. It's not them saying, "You have to do this." They say, like, "You know what? I believe, I think, or I sense that that will be really great for you. Or, yeah, what you found is really good, keep exploring it! It's not forever, everything is impermanent, even the Dharma. But for now you're on a good track. You're coming closer to the tenderness and the insight into your Buddha nature, good job! You have a lot to dedicate and offer to the world and rejoice, and be happy about it. Make your life lighter."

This gentleness, which is not closed, not stuck any more, flows. The energy of the gentleness goes through your body, your speech, and your mind. Your mind is gentle, your words are gentle, your body, your physical communication is gentle. It's very smooth. You begin to feel how cool can be the unstuckedness, and when you do that, you develop finally a **sense of fearlessness**. You're not afraid to look at yourself, you're not afraid to embrace other people, you're not afraid to deal with

difficult situations, you're not afraid of trying to explore difficult topics such as emptiness and karma, work with it at your own pace, so there's a form of fearlessness that dawns in you, as well as a sense of joy. Joy is the fuel on the path. If you don't have joy you're stuck! All you're going to practice is because you're forced to do it, errrg, it's going to be extremely violent. So the sense of lightness and joy is extremely important. Because we see where we're at very clearly, we know that if we keep moving we can free ourselves a little bit more, everyday, a little bit more, and never fall back into our habits, or if we fall back for a moment then we can get out very easily because we've done that in the past. **That's the sense of joy associated with penetrating insight.** That means you really see things. Penetrative insight can also be translated as discernment, or prajna, wisdom. Discernment, you know what's right and what's wrong. Not in terms of moral values of the world or the words of the divine creators or whomever. No, in terms of what is bringing you closer to experiencing your Buddha nature, and helping others to come closer to their own Buddha nature. That's all that matters. And so...you know how.

At this point we may experience, coming with joy, an infinite gratitude. You know, if it was not for the Buddha and all the teachers that carried and kept these teachings alive, my life would be miserable. Because I'd be a monster, to myself and to others, I might be dead; I might have burned myself out. I had the privilege to meet these embodiments of the Buddha's wisdom, and whether they appeared in the form of Gendun Rinpoche, in the form of Shamar Rinpoche, the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa, Dudjom Rinpoche, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Pawo Rinpoche, Kalu Rinpoche and Lama Teunzang, they all carry the light of the Buddha's teaching, they shine this in the world. I had the chance to be at the right time and the right place to receive it, and I really can see what it has done to me and how much it has helped me and helps me now to keep going. I have a tremendous gratitude for the lineage that kept the flame alive and passed it on. Oftentimes my gratitude expands from the Buddha to Sujata, the milkmaid who gave him his last meal before enlightenment, yogurt and cereal, or the farmer who gave him a bundle of kusha grass so he could sit comfortably, or the Naga who protected him when the rain came; all of these conditions, all of the people who have been a part of keeping the Dharma alive for future generations, I have an immense gratitude for them. And it's very light, and it's very joyful, and makes my life easy. Having received all this generosity, the least I can do is to try to pass it on, keep it alive, and then work with others so that together we create a network of sanity and kindness that keeps the Buddha Dharma alive.

There is a **tremendous sense of gratitude** that foremost goes to the root Guru, because all the Buddhas of the past were wonderful, but I never met them. The one that really gave me the Dharma is my teacher. I don't want to be restrictive, because this would be an insult to limit the Dharmakaya to Gendun Rinpoche's body, which would be an insult to the greatness of his mind. I'm grateful for whatever form the guru took. Because in essence they are only one, in essence they are the Dharmakaya, they are the Buddha nature, which talk to me through their mouth and heart, and they help me.

These are the stages of the path, according to Trungpa Rinpoche.



## **What does it mean to stay true to oneself?**

I would say, two things:

First, don't hide yourself, pretend you don't exist, and replace your true being by an avatar. Just be who you are. And learn to work and transform the down side, and work to give more space to the Buddha nature. That's being true to oneself.

Secondly, in a deeper sense, to be true to oneself is to always remember that we are endowed with the Buddha nature. Never belittle yourself, saying you're bad, you're a failure, you are useless, whatever.... no! Do not disrespect your Buddha nature. That's being true to your deep no self.

## **How do we free ourselves from what binds us?**

By looking at it. Face it. If you put it under the rug and pretend it doesn't exist, and try to live in a fantasy world of the mental representation of your holiness, you're in deep trouble. But if you look at yourself, however unpleasant that may be at times, you can see, if you take the time, you can really see where it comes from.

*Thich Nhat Hanh* says that when he looks at a piece of paper long enough, he can see the tree that the paper comes from, he can see the water, he can see the sun, he can see the soil... He can see all the things that contributed to this moment of him experiencing what is called a piece of paper. So if you look at yourself, and what you call your flaws, or negative thoughts, or actions, or whatever, long enough with this penetrating insight, then that's what you will see. You will see all the factors that were moving together to create this moment, and thereby realize that there is not such a thing as a moment. It's just a combination of movements that creates this situation, and by the time you label it, in terms of like and dislike, it is gone. You are just dealing with the memory and nostalgia of it. You begin to really see, how devoid of any substantial reality even a negative emotion is, or all the glorious thoughts you had about yourself, your successes and achievements. As Rudyard Kipling wrote in his poem *If*:

*...If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster  
And treat those two impostors just the same...  
...You'll be a Man, my son (You will be a woman, my daughter)!*

If you can look at your downsides, and at your success or qualities in the same way, and come to realize that they don't truly exist, that they don't have any substantial existence, that are merely appearances, you will be free from them.

If we don't know that they only appear, and we think they are real, then we're stuck.

## Three ways of working with mental afflictions (Klesha)

Three main ways of working with this are taught in the Buddha's teachings.

**The first one is very basic: Just say no!** Saying no to what is unhealthy. I won't kill, I won't lie, I won't steal, I won't get drunk so that I can forget my miserable attitudes, and I won't take an opportunity to satisfy my cravings on the weakness of other beings. We stick to this basic ethic. It's a very simple pragmatic approach: Preserve life, be honest, be frank, be temperate, be respectful. If it helps, take vows, to strengthen your motivation. At the same time cultivate regular meditation, that will sharpen your insight, until the point where you realize that this "self", that is the center of all my concerns and all my worries doesn't have a true identity. It's just a bundle of causes and conditions, different aggregates that come together. With this discernment you free yourself from the myth of the self.

**The second method is recycling by cultivating bodhicitta**, the enlightened mind attitude. Relatively, by cultivating loving kindness and compassion, starting with gratitude. More deeply, by cultivating absolute bodhicitta, by seeing all phenomena, all experiences, just like the dream experience. In the post-meditation situations act as if you were the *child of illusion*.

When you cultivate the two aspects of relative and absolute bodhicitta, you begin to see, at some point, that actually they are not two, there's a convergence, and the rivers meet. As you realize that things don't exist, everything becomes possible. Because we believe in the existence of things we get stuck, when we realize that they don't have a truly inherent existence, we get unstuck. Beings have been so kind to me, yet they are stuck. Now if I can unstuck myself a little bit, I want to help. I want to alleviate their suffering a little bit so that they can see that they are only stuck in their habits and their ignorance. I will help them in their discovery of this as much as possible, as much as needed. That's how we free ourselves.

## Desire and renunciation

It seems that being on the path to enlightenment one has to act *holy*. Holy Vs. Horny; ~)  
You have no desire, you're "perfect".... you're so good. You have no feelings. You might as well be dead. Dead and holy. We think that we have to renounce. We consider the things we should apparently get rid of, and we hide some in the closet, so we can go and play with them sometimes. Then we let the world know how much we gave to *Goodwill* or *Habitat for Humanity*, giving away all our attachments. It's just a show! Deep inside, nothing has changed, you're probably as stuck as ever, and probably even more stuck, because you have a holiness double layer of stuckness. Get rid of that first, and all of the rest will fall apart. Gendun Rinpoche used to say, "*If you get rid of arrogance, all the rest will fall down.*" When I see people working hard to look so good, it hurts me. I've been backstage; I know how this show works. I'm sincerely sorry for them, whether they are trapped by themselves, or by the societal pressure where they have to remain closeted.

Everybody is somewhat trying to fool everybody, and nobody remembers why we began to do that in the first place. So, unstick yourself! It doesn't mean you become a freak. We can simply be honest and accept that we have failed that one, but we are learning a lot, and we're going to work on it. We can thank the world to be patient and forgiving, as we are work in progress. That would be a good attitude, but oftentimes we persist in keeping the appearance, pretending that everything is dandy. This desire is a problem.

*Dharmakirti* who was the main teacher of *Atisha*, often commented the following statements of *Vimalakirti*:

*“As seeds do not grow in the sky but do grow in the earth, so the Buddha-qualities do not grow in those determined for the absolute but do grow in those who conceive the spirit of enlightenment, after having produced a Sumeru-like mountain of egoistic views.”*

*“Just as a lotus does not grow out of a well-leveled soil but from the mire, in the same way the awakening mind is not born in the hearts of disciples in whom the moisture of attachment has dried up. It grows instead in the hearts of ordinary sentient beings who possess in full all the fetters of bondage.”*

Desire is the energy of compassion. We just need to channel this energy properly. We don't have to suppress it. Because, when you repress it, it pops out somewhere else, like a pimple. If you can channel it, into compassion, into love, you have then a tremendous amount of energy to do what is needed for all beings. If renunciation consisted in neutering desire, it would at the same time neuter compassion. Yet, if desire is not channeled, it will grow into a monster that will always require more flesh, creating endless suffering. To suppress it is not a solution, to indulge in it is not a solution. There are no viable methods. The only way we can deal with it is to recycle it, and mind training is giving us thousands of tools to work with it.

### **The third method is liberating oneself by recognizing the essence of all phenomena.**

This is the spirit of Mahamudra and Tantra. When we don't let ourselves being carried away by what the emotions, or our expectations are telling us, we are able to read between the lines. We can look at what stuff this thing is made of. Every time we look directly at the agitation of the mental consciousness as waves coming from the alaya consciousness, we can experience wisdom alaya, our Buddha nature. This is called also called *ordinary mind* in Mahamudra instructions. It is a synonym of Mahamudra, Dharmakaya, Dharmadhatu, and Madhyamaka. Consequently, you relax. You rest, keeping your relaxed attentive mind. You don't suppress anything; you don't promote or engage in anything in particular. You look straight through it, and by seeing the essence of it, everything is liberated in the experience of the wisdom alaya.

That's maybe not the first step you want to take, though it is really possible to reach this capacity in one lifetime. In order to achieve this you have to seriously work on the two first methods: Control

the excess, and make your heart supple and your discernment sharp. When you find this tenderness and the sharpness, you are in a good position just to look at all phenomena, and taste the essence.

### **Is there a contradiction between the laws of the world and the law of karma?**

Good and bad are not absolute values, they're relative values. They need a moral compass. Good and bad always depend of a given context. There is no good or bad in the absolute. But there is good and bad in a certain context. Let's discuss the different contexts.

Our ideas about good and bad have been defined at times by **religion**. We have the perfect words of a divine entity that are not to be questioned; it just has to be followed. If we fail then we just need to repent. There is a church that has been created for you to repent and to go on. Do's and don'ts in this context, come from religious authorities.

This has been working for a while, but then at some point people weren't really happy with that. Around the time of the enlightenments (not that of the Buddha, more that of Voltaire.) came the questioning of the moral authority of an infallible God. Humans developed another moral compass which is the **law of nature**, or that of **a humanist approach**, but even that is very dependent on a context. In America, not so long ago, you could have slaves. It was fine. It was legal. If you tried to help them escape slavery, you were braving the law. Slave owners for damaging their tools could sue you. Not so long ago, in the Nazi regime, it was socially accepted to get rid of all the so-called *unnecessary people*, for reasons of ethnicity, or religion, or sexual preferences, and whatnot. If you tried to protect them, you'd be against the law. I'll let you think about nowadays, what is lawful and how unlawful could be some of your actions. The **human society moral compass** is not a constant and reliable source. It depends very much on the society and depends of who is making the law. Americans are very proud of the constitution that was redacted by wealthy, middle-aged white men to serve their lot. It was not designed for the natives, neither for the blacks, nor for the women. So, it's all-good, but it's relative.

Thirdly there's the **Buddhist moral compass**. It is based on one very simple thing. Is this action, word, or thought, bringing others and me closer to our Buddha nature or not? Is it unsticking us, or are we more deeply stuck as a result. If it is unsticking us, it's a good action, it is a positive behavior. If it is promoting stuckedness, it's a negative action. **The moral Buddhist compass is about enlightenment**. You could say this is the ultimate law of nature, in the sense of the universe, the world, the environment, but the true nature of our mind. Consequently, there might be at times, a discrepancy between this moral compass and that of human society based on different values or religious prescriptions. You have to make up your mind individually, and have the courage to stand for what you consider as just. Senator John Lewis said: "*be good trouble*." That's very important. Martin Luther King was good trouble, John Lewis was good trouble, and Rosa Parks was good trouble.

Good trouble means that you're disrupting the common agreement when it is not unsticking us. That is, in my humble opinion, the dividing line between worldly law of the society, and law of reality, in the true sense. I'm not creating a church, preaching that I have the law of reality and you have to follow it, otherwise you'll be damned. I'm just saying that in my opinion, sometimes I should have a little bit more courage and be not so complacently silent. We need discernment and kindness when we take a position. Sometimes it is not possible to do something, even if we are inspired by very good intentions, if it is not the time, the result will be a catastrophe. As we say, "*The road to hell is paved with good intentions.*" Discernment is always important, if something is not possible now, you need to accept it, but not stay put. You need to accept it, and make wishes so that things can reorganize in order to see the change happening a little bit further on. Once I have made this wish, I'll work on the conditions to see the fruit appear. Very humbly, in my neighborhood, in my family. The first step consists in changing myself. If I change myself, there will be a reorganization of the world. That's maybe arrogant, but that's so true. When one element changes, all the rest must reorganize.