

*Dharma Roadside
Dialogue*

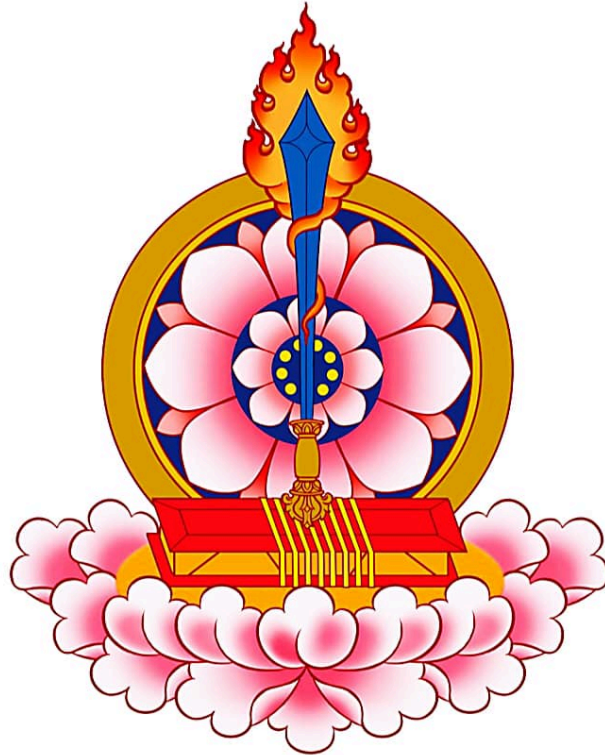
Lama Tsony

-2021-

Dharma Roadside Dialogue is a collection of themes developed by Lama Tsony in 2021 during Zoom sessions.

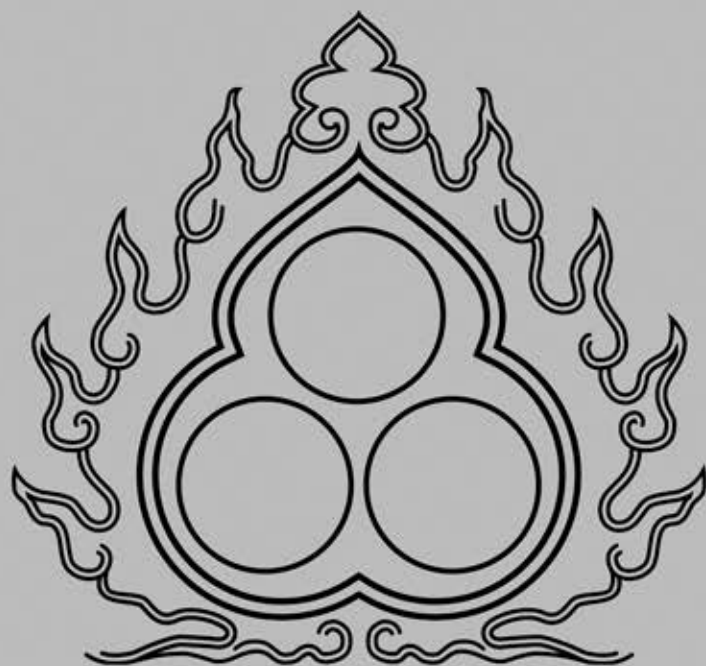
The participants proposed the themes.
They are usually composed of an exposé followed by a moment of dialogue.

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Focus on your practice and remain true to yourself.

Dharma roadside dialogue series

February 2021

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, *dukkha* and *sukha*. *Dukkha* 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 *dukkha*, 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 *dukkha*, 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, *dukkha* 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, *dukkha* 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 16th and the 17th 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 forms 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. Horney; ~)
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 stuckedness. 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, unstuck 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.

Questions & Answers

Q. My question is, could you speak a little on the alaya and what happens to our subtle form of consciousness after death?

A. In the teachings of the Buddha, when we are talking about the skandhas, and then the aggregates, that sort of like constitute the experience as an individual, a self, we talk about consciousness as being the aggregates. In most of the teachings of the Buddha, the consciousnesses are only referred to as the mental consciousness, and the five sensory consciousnesses. Later on, in the Yogacharya school of Buddhism, meditators mostly, in their practice, sort of discovered the subconscious. They found that the sixth consciousness had several layers, or functions if you want. And so from six consciousnesses we move from seven and to eight. Eight being the alaya consciousness. Alaya in Sanskrit means repository, like in the word Himalaya, like the snow and ice that rests on the mountains. So this part of the consciousness we can maybe compare to the subconscious, as the sort of container, or what receives all the imprints, coming from the intentions and the mental impulses as we did things or say things, said things in the past, and so on and so forth. So that’s sort of a big container of possibilities, seeds if you want, often referred to as seeds. And when in different times and different circumstances they are reactivated, they are sort of, you know it’s like when you notice a fragrance in the air and that reminds you of your grandmother, because she wore this perfume or whatever. So there is a sort of active memory, it’s kind of a reenactment, or it’s an awakening of seeds and so on, but you would respond to these impulses, that most of them are unconscious, or subconscious proposition, with your actual situation, your actual way of dealing with things, so that’s your mental consciousness that will react to this. Sometimes thinking that you’re making a very clear decision, and you don’t know how much you’ve been influenced by these seeds that were sort of reactivated. And in this eighth consciousness, some commentators, and in particular the 3rd Karmapa, in [*The Profound Inner Principle*](#), describes very, very precisely the alaya consciousness, and explained that there are two facets to it. There is one facet which is the alaya wisdom, and that equals the Buddha nature, it equals to all the terms I used, Mahamudra, Dharmakaya and so on and so forth, really the essence of mind, and at the same time, almost simultaneously, actually the word we use is coincident, you have the part of the alaya consciousness that is the repository of all the previous impulses and actions and so on. But they’re like traces, and the difficulty I think, to really

catch the idea of alaya is definitely not to turn it into some sort of fixed object, like a mind. It's more important to see it like a river. River in a sense that river doesn't exist, I mean we have a name for it, river, but this is just a nominal convention. And it doesn't really cover the reality of what a river is, and if you break it down it is just drops of water, hydrogen and oxygen, there is no river really, per se. As a great philosopher of the past once said, "We never enter twice the same river." Because we are a different person, having a different experience of the river, the river being a stream, it's not 'something.' It's in constant movement.

So, the question of what transmigrates...? Someone once asked the Dalai Lama this question, and he answered, "Bad habits." Bad habits. In the stream of mind there are sort of habits, and they function in the sense that "this" brings "that." The river is a flow and it's a dynamism, and this brings that. The conditions, the width of the river, the depth of the river can change the flow, the cohesion of the different elements will do this and that, so the river will change according to all these circumstances. In the same way the consciousness will be affected by all these external parameters, so to say, or conditions. So, what transmigrates is bad memories, or bad actions, or bad habits. Because in a chain reaction, this brings that. And in the moment of transition what was, disappears, for what comes to be able to arrive, to come. This is illustrated in the sutra called [*The Rice Seedling Sutra*](#), where the sutra tries to explain what is rice. Is the rice the seed, or is it in the sprout? When the sprout grows, is it the stalk? You know, you look at the different things and each one has to disappear for the next one to come, and this entire process we call rice production, but rice remains a nominal convention because, how do you say that...? If you say for example that cotton is the seed of cotton, then you should be able to wear a t-shirt made of seed, because if the seed is the cotton, then that's good enough to make a piece of cloth, and we know that it's not like this. We need to do things to have the thread, and then to weave it, and then have the cloth that we can wear.

So, I think that the question of transmigration is very much linked with the question of who we are. And often I'd rather approach the question of transmigration by asking first, "Who are you?" If you can define who you are, then you get a clearer picture of what might transmigrate. Because when we think in terms of transmigration, we think in terms, often, of what we see as a self, which is a homogenous, independent, autonomous, substantially existent entity. And so that entity must move somewhere. But this entity, when you practice meditation, and for example, when you use the full placement of attention, this entity, me, is not to be found in the body, is not to be found in the feelings, is not to be found in the perception, it's not to be found in the mental phenomena of any sort, and so it's pretty much sort of illusive, it sort of appears, yet doesn't have a defining characteristic. So, I would really start with that. Who am I? To help me to understand what transmigrates. In terms of energy, in the tantra they explain that there are five main values, five main wind energies, so you could say prana, the prana vayus, five main ones and five secondary ones. And of the five main ones, one is called the life holder vayu. The other ones are functional, they are for digestion, evacuation, movement, and so on and so forth...upward, downward, spreading energies. But one is the life holder.

And in tantra they say this life holder energy resides in the heart. Which actually if you look in the heart you won't find it, but in terms of energy, that's where it is, the heart center, the heart chakra. So that's the great tigli, the great sphere of energy, the mind itself, abides in the heart. And when we die, all the other prana, all the other winds, the four others, that were developed during the time before our birth, the creation, the conception, gestation, coming from the elements that we gained from our mother and our father, all these pranas develop. They're sort of like the function; we develop the bones, the flesh, the marrows, the sinews, the nervous system, the veins, and so on and so forth, and also the network of meridians and the prana that circulates and allows the function of the body, otherwise this body would be just a log. So these four winds are linked to this body, and they will disappear with this body. The fifth one, which is the life-holder, is a very subtle wind that sort of holds the life; the mind principle that used to reside in the heart sort of rides this subtle energy. And so that's in terms of energy. But in terms of the mind's experience, it is just one thing bringing another. And if you read a little bit about the twelve links of production in interdependence you can see that one thing brings another. And that from desire comes grasping, and from grasping comes becoming, and becoming propels us into a story that is birth, and then we are sort of stuck in this story until we die. And it's the mind that experiences all of this. The mind has a physical experience, it's not the body that has a mind. It's the mind that has the physical experience. Or by association, because the mind doesn't have a body, really. So transmigration movement somewhat is kind of like moving from one place to another, and somehow implies some sort of materialism.

So that's why I think it is so important to really understand who we are by studying the twelve links of production in interdependence, by studying the five skandhas, by studying the different layers of consciousnesses, like in the Yogacharya school, particularly the eighth consciousness, and through this, and by practicing meditation, like the full placement of attention, where we try to figure out what is the zip code of the self. Where does the self live? We're experiencing, in our self, the self-less-ness, or the identity-less-ness of the self. So we are in the better position to understand, or to approach, transmigration in a very different way than what we usually do, thinking of, "Okay, the mind is a guest moving from one hotel to another, carrying the suitcase of karma." This is a very simplistic way of putting it. Okay, that's all I can do in a short time.

Q. On the point of making friends with our neurosis, I'm confident that I'm not the only person that when I am in the process of doing that, I just want to run and hide. I have, you know, a strong aversion and the last thing I want to do, instinctively, is make friends with it. So, that's just where I'm at with that point. It's extremely difficult, and I'm wondering if you have a little helpful tip for that.

A. In French we say "A chaque jour suffit sa peine". Everyday you have your little work to do. Okay? So, just pick up the strongest thing first. What bugs you the most, what sticks you the most into habits, and you hate it, you really don't like it. It's kind of like you don't really feel comfortable with that any more, but it's still there. And see how you could just change it a little bit. Don't expect too much. Don't expect an instant resolution. But just, a little step on the side. For example, sometimes I catch myself in the act of enjoying having the last word. And then when I have

somebody who is really good at that, like my wife, she should have been a lawyer, I mean, she's better than me, so it's difficult, I cannot. Oftentimes with other people, I can do it, I can have the last word, but with her, not. It doesn't work. So I see I'm really annoyed, and I see that I'm going to become nasty. I see that I'm going to have a really caustic joke that is not funny, because it's acid....and I try to cover it with a little bit of fun and gloss, and I really hate myself for doing that because basically I don't want to concede my defeat. That's so ridiculous. I look at myself and I say, "She knows your trick, you know your trick, who are you playing for, what's that!?" And you hate it. So that little thing, you know? I hold back some of my finest jokes, that are actually dipped in acid, and I look at myself and I say, "Oh, that was good." And I look at myself and I say, "You're such a liar, because you really mean it, and you didn't say it!" I found a middle way between these two. Between holding back something that is unnecessary and harmful to both sides, and at the same time feeling a little bit that I'm not true to myself, because my "true" self is to be an A-hole. And I refuse to do that, that's good! Yes, I refuse to be that. I'm getting used to that now. I'm doing that more and more. I will be a saint very soon;~}

You see, little by little. Little victories. And I often mention what I call the red nose strategy, you know, when things get deadly serious, wear a red nose, like a clown. But don't get another incarnation as a clown, create another avatar. Just step back with a little bit of distance. And your mind is quick-witted, and things go quickly, and you can see both aspects, which is where you get stuck. But use your quick wit, you have it, and it's a gift, and say like, "Yeah, it's not worth it, why should I do that. Okay, you can have the last word. That's okay. Who cares."

Q. So the difficulty that I'm having is really much more with conventional reality. A little bit like what you were describing, but a little bit different. I went and got myself all involved with worldly matters, organizations, and I find myself thinking that my thinking is clearer than a lot of people, and then they do power moves on me. So I'm dealing with disappointment and frustration.

A. Well, welcome to the world. Sometimes we might think that the only possible companion is oneself. And then all the rest is such a pain. But we cannot escape. We are in a world of interaction, relative reality, or conventional reality, is all interdependent production based, and we have to accept the rules of engagement, as we are part of it. Because our body functions like this, the relation between our mind and our body functions like this, our relations with other people functions like this, so these are the rules of engagement. Remember it for next time. When you're out of this context and you can say, "Uh, I don't want to go back." Say no to reincarnation.

A good friend of mine who was a very devoted practitioner and very devoted student of Shamar Rinpoche, she's trying to really make her mind ready for Dewachen, you know? That's where she wants to go. The other day she asked me, "But if I'm a bodhisattva, I have to come back to help beings, but I don't want to come back, I want to stay there, I want to stay in Dewachen and enjoy myself there." And I said, "Well, it's not going to be experienced in those terms. First, go to Dewachen, just don't think about it, just go there." And what is Dewachen? Dewachen is the

mahasukha, the great unstuckness. So, once you're there, you are totally unstuck. Then you find out that you can appear, like the moon does, on every stretch of water, without having to leave your paradise in the sky. And then you can be an illusion-like actor with multiple forms and really helping sentient beings in all possible ways without any effort, pain, or tiredness. The tiredness that you conceive is only because of how the world is experienced right now. Once you move to this higher level of consciousness you are free from this context. You are in a different context, and you're proceeding toward the absolute freedom from all breakthroughs in all contexts. So, that's gonna be okay, and for now you can let people do their plays, and you don't have to buy them. Sometimes we think that we have to do what they expect us to do, but deep inside, if you really look into it, you see that you have a horse in the race. Why do you think that you have to do that because you think that they want you to do it? Gendun Rinpoche, and actually all of them, they just couldn't care less about your own little desires of you doing this or that. Gendun Rinpoche, when he received presents, I didn't know that, but I noticed it later. One day he was gone for some teachings, and we decided to refurbish his room, to make it clean and so on. So we took all of the furniture out, and under his bed we found dozens of unopened presents, wrapped boxes. He was like, "Oh, thank you very much." Whoosh, under the bed, he didn't even look at it. It could have been a gold bar, it could have been food, whatever, he couldn't care less. And I think this is a good attitude. You take it, say thank you, it's not for me, it's thank you for your being generous, I'm happy you could find a moment of generosity and that you want to invite me into your world, I'll consider it, but there is no engagement, there is definitely no strings attached with peoples trips, otherwise it would be endless, because they're always changing their mind anyway! So if you agree with this trip, the next day they have another one! They hate the trip they had before that you agreed on. So damned if you do, damned if you don't. So do what you have to do, be kind, be polite, and just let it roll off, like water on a duck. So you're not against them, you're not subject to their whimsical mind, if joining is helpful you join, if disbanding is helpful, you disband. That's the way it is.

In the perspective of the twelve links of interdependent origination, when some sort of a desire created an attachment that propelled you into becoming. Becoming, opening the door to the world, and here you are in Narnia, and then the door in the closet closes and is gone; here you are in Narnia and there's no way back. And you have to go through it until Narnia dies. It's as simple as this. Same with this life. Whoops, I did it again. You didn't have to go in, but you're here, and you have to go until the end of the show, which is death. And then you've got another opportunity not to make the same mistakes. Think of Dewachen next time.

Q. I have a question about the self, I mean, intellectually I can begin to see that the self really doesn't exist, you call it an avatar, which makes sense, yet that sense of self has such power and I can't quite shake that power. I guess the simple answer is to keep meditating, but how does the sense of self degrade, disappear? Are there any tricks?

A. Often when I look at my attachment to the self and how it abuses me, I compare it to an abusive relationship. I always wonder, when I see this beautiful, very resourceful woman who is paired with an absolute idiot, who beats the daylight out of her, abuses her and takes her money, and she still

sticks around! And I say, "What's wrong with you, you're all good except for that?" And then I stepback and I say, "Hey, that's what I'm doing with myself." I beat myself up and I want more. You know why? Because I think I'm the only one who understands me. I think I'm the only one that can save me. I think that I'm really important to this person. That's exactly this. We are going through codependent abuse with the self. Because, to go back to the domestic issue. She has an image of who he is, which doesn't correspond to reality. Everybody else has an image of who he is truly to her, and that corresponds only to their reality. Nobody knows this guy, and very obviously this guy doesn't even know himself. But if you really look at all this, it just doesn't exist really. It's just cross projection that creates sort of an ectoplasm of appearance of manifestation, and we're stuck with it, because of our habits, because of our tendencies and our desire. This is codependency. The codependence of the self in the "need" mind. The self in need of being recognised. And it's just gonna take some time. You need to find a halfway house where you can go when the beatings are too strong. And then try to reconstitute yourself; that's called meditation. And then make some changes, make some decisions, find some help. Because you know, this self, like the abusive husband, is always going to try to find you. And he's always going to find you as long as you need him to find you, for some really twisted reasons that have to do with habits or your personal set up. It takes time, and a lot of beating. But there is a moment where you say, "That's it!"

You know, I'm talking about abusive relationships, but I could have been talking about alcohol, or drugs, or whatever....gambling. It's all the same story. An extension of the abusive relationship between myself and myself. So we have to go down, get to the bottom, anchor ourselves there, grow, and then flourish. Follow the 12 steps toward illumination.

Q. I am in a place with my practice that I can no longer pretend. I'm not comfortable...

A. It's new territory, that's why it's strange. You are exploring new territory, there is a sense of freedom to it because you can explore new possibilities that you couldn't explore before, but it's all kind of a little bit scary because we don't know how to handle this, this is new, not to have pretense, at the same time not to disappear, I'm still here, I still have all these residual tendencies and I have to work with them without denying them but without being carried away by them; it's a new territory. And it's great! First of all, what I want to say is that I'm very happy to hear this, even if it's unpleasant, it's great! It's unpleasant because you're not used to it. The rest was like wearing the same old underwear and then thinking maybe you should get a new one, but then, "It's okay, I'm used to it, it stinks but I'm used to it." And now you take a shower and decide it's time to wear a new shirt. But it's kind of like, eww. Like you have to break in the new shoes, you have to get used to it, that's all the idea of meditation. It's a path of discovering freedom and joy and gratitude and honesty and there is something really beautiful in it, it's just a matter of getting used to it, slowly slowly. Not playing tricks anymore. Not playing tricks. Okay?

Q. I would like to ask 2 questions. What should I do to become conscious during sleep?

A. That's the first question? Actually, to become aware of the content of your dream, or to become aware that you dream, you have to prepare yourself during the awake state. You have to make strong wishes. You have to be really making strong wishes, "May I be aware, may I wake up, may I notice a little detail that is anachronic, that shouldn't be here in the dream, that will be the trigger to become aware that this must be a dream." So it's kind of like a strong auto-suggestion, you are telling yourself that is what you want to do. And eventually it will work. It will work because habit is of the essence in this process. Repeatedly, repeatedly. Also, what is good to have shorter sessions of sleep. In a way you could say, I like to get a solid night's sleep, that's good. But very often you don't remember your dreams. You had some dreams, but you don't remember. But I notice now that I am aging and sleep is evading me, escaping me, it's actually quite good, because I remember more dreams. Cause I wake up and I remember, ohhh, I was dreaming about this. So remembering the dream is one thing. But then, remembering that you are dreaming as you dream is more important. So, preparing during the awake state is important. When you go to bed, before you fall asleep, make this wish. "May I be aware of my dream when I dream." And during the day, as you are in the awake state, try to wake up to the dream of the awake state. Like when you are in the thick of a situation and something is happening, and like, some situations now are so surreal, that they could just as well be a dream. So you create a habit of jumping out; during the awake state you're like, "This is so surreal." And instead of being angry and being like, "Oh, I need this, I need that," you just look at this and think, "Oh wow, this is really like a dream." Even if you don't deeply realize it, you sort of induce, in your mind, the tendency to skip out, to step to the side, and that prepares you for the moment of the dream. Okay? Second question?

Q. The second question regards death. We know in Buddhism there is reincarnation. In other religions we often hear there is heaven and hell. So if the mind reincarnates after 49 days, how can certain people talk with dead people, even if it's after 60 days, or half a year, or even a few years, how they still can talk with those people?

A. A friend of mine here in Virginia who is a Catholic said to me once, you who are Buddhists are lucky, you have several attempts, me as a Catholic I have only one shot. I have to do it well in this life. You guys come again and again until you're perfected. So this was kind of a funny discussion we were having, but everybody has different views on the matter. For some people, death is the end, there's nothing after that. For some people, there's a continuity and there is a constant evolution until you reach God. And some people say you can go up and down. So there are many ways of seeing what death might be. It's pretty much like when you have never kissed a girl, and you're thinking about how this feels. So you can create all sorts of religions about what it really feels like to kiss a girl. And then when you kiss the girl, then you have an experience. And probably it's not like the Church of Kissing was preaching. So, we talk a lot about death, but mostly we don't remember, although some do, but most of the people don't remember what happens, and what it feels like. So it's not really necessary to get into big trouble with people about what's going to happen after death. For me I tend to ask people the question, "Is there not so much a life after death, but do they have a life before death?" Because that for me is more important, I'm more into the life before death than the life after death experience. And if they have a life here, what is it made of? Is it made of kindness

and compassion and so forth? And then, when you die, you pass the pearly gates, and there's nothing. It's a big nothing. You're actually, you're not even there. That's it. Don't worry, it's cool. You had a good life, you left some good memories, and inspiration for the next generation, that's fine. And then if you pass the gate and you're still doing the same thing, then keep doing the same thing, because it's proven not to be so bad, so why worry. If God is waiting for you, that's good. If not, then you do with what comes. It's really not a problem. Now, how can we talk to dead people? You're right that, you said 49 days, that corresponds to the sort of classic idea that there are seven times seven days that follow the 3 times 24 hours after the last breath, and then through this you go through the inbetween state of bardo. You go in between states, and it's sort of like the triage, you go this way or you go that way, and so on and so forth. Okay, that's one way of seeing it. Most people, they just go through this very quickly, and the first impulse that is a good one, they just follow that and they're back into the game. Think about mosquitos. They don't go through 49 days. So the 49 days is sort of like a standard number, it's more symbolic, it explains a lot of things if you really want to work in the details of it.

But how can we talk to dead people? What constitutes our experience now as a human being is described as three elements; vitality, longevity, and one thing that is called lha in Tibetan. Lha is sort of like the radiance, the magnetic field that comes from your being; the mind, the body, and the speech. Okay? So there is the vitality, that's the life force, and it can be strong or weak, it depends on your karma and your genetic pool, and it can be affected during your life by your way of misusing the body, for example. Longevity is the lifespan, how many years you can live, ideally, or you could say all human beings could live 100 years, but not everybody does, also because of your genetic pool, environment, lifestyle and so forth. And then there is the lha. And we never really found a good translation, it's very complex. Some say it's almost like the soul, but I don't buy this. Lha. When we die, these elements dissolve, like all of the other elements of the body, they sort of dissociate one from another and they dissolve. And the vitality is gone with the elements of the body. Earth, water, fire, all of this, the four pranas, or values I mentioned, this is gone, and what is left is the lha. And when you die, this lha is like a residual shell of yourself, if you want, that has nothing to do, you've moved, but there is a sort of residual shell, an energy shell, and that's what people think they see when they see ghosts. I mean, there are some ghosts, that means there are beings who went through the bardo and sort of entered the life of what we call the hungry ghosts, the yidak. Okay? These are ghosts. But a lot of people that you can see, like when you do the Ouija board and seances, knock knock are you here, and so on, you're getting more into contact with the residual light, energy of this person who is deceased. And this lasts for a certain time, and you can get in touch with them. And in a way they're kind of neutral, they kind of offer a sort of interface for your own projections and desires.

But also there are some forms of spirits, Tibetans like to work a lot with spirits and elemental spirits, they're a form of mischievous spirit that like to play with grieving people. And they are like the fortune teller, who is good at picking up details of your life; you say one word and they conclude this and that very quickly because that is their skill, and begin with sort of a picture that is quite close to

how you think and what you feel and what you experience, and so they play with that, and then you think they are the real deal, and then you give them money, because you want to know more. So there are some mischievous spirits whose idea of fun is to come and fool the people grieving. And they can manifest in the form, because they can perceive how you perceive your person you lost, and so on. They can give you this image, and then build on that. And then as you build on that, they feed on what you give, and it becomes more and more real, and you become totally trapped, and then they can force you to do whatever they want. So there are many options there, in the spook world;~} But I think the best thing to say is when you're dead you're dead. Farewell, may you find your way towards enlightenment, and maybe we meet in a different form in a different place, and we can resume our conversation. And move on.

Q.I think of myself as a good person, but I don't always do good things, and so is my thinking of myself as a good person just some foggy recognition of Budda nature, that everybody has, that I have, through no real "fault" of my own? Another Dharma teacher said once, "It's not whether you are good or not, it's what you do." Is this accurate in your assessment?

A.It's true that the Buddha nature shines through the lampshade of our afflictive emotions and habits and whatnot, in a sort of burst of kindness and intelligence. You can find it even in wild animals. The way they take care of their young, it's an expression of love. The way a spider creates a spider web, I would be unable to do that. I'm always amazed by birds who build nests with clay, flying with no hands on a rafter, it's just amazing, this creativity, this talent; all of this, this skill, intelligence, and kindness, are the rays of light of the Buddha nature, with it's intelligence and kindness, which shines through the thick lampshade of our habits and ignorance. For sure. And when we see that, we can say, "Oh, that's an outburst of the Buddha nature," and you can appreciate that. And try to have more of this, they come randomly, but you can also work so that they come more often, and maybe in a more controlled fashion. Work to produce them. And so yeah, I understand, like we say, "There is no love, but only proof of love." There is no good person, but only people who are doing good things. So it seems that the quality is in the action, and I think it's true to some extent, but also intention is good, good words are good, good actions are good. We shouldn't just emphasize action. Action is one thing, speech is one thing, intention is another thing, so all of that defines you as a "good" person, and again, good person in this moment. Not a good person as a sort of identity. As you said, "I'm a good person, who is sometimes not so good." Again, we are not creating an avatar of the good person. We don't care about this. The important thing is, how do I engage with myself, and how do I engage with others, from instant to instant; is this a contributing factor to everybody's awakening and liberation? And now if you want to call me a hero, or saint, or a good person you do it.

Gendun Rinpoche, when we came out of retreat said, "Now you have to teach and share what you've experienced and some people will call you Lama. You don't call yourself Lama. Other people will, because they appreciate what you offer, and they want to express their respect and so they use this respectful title, but as far as you are concerned that's not your choice, you don't decide this. You

don't decide in the sense that you don't impose your title on others, and you also don't reject being called as such by other people." Like my good friend Khaydroup said, "Call me whatever you want, but don't call me late for dinner;~}

It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. So in that sense you could say that if you prove to be of use then you can be called a Lama. If you want to be called a Lama, and proved to be harmful, then you're phoney. So if you want to say, in this instance, in this moment, in this specific situation, through my body, my speech and my mind I have been helpful, it's very good. It's very good to be able to do this, because we cannot only see the dark side of our being without honoring the positive aspects. We have to be accountable. For example, in the 35 Buddha sutra, the Three Heap sutra. The first one is offerings and homage. The second one is seeing what is wrong, and lay open and lay bare. But immediately after the third aspect, the third heap is to see what is right, and to celebrate and rejoice in it and offer it. So the process cannot be completed if you are only seeing what isn't working; you have to be able to also acknowledge what is working. Stuck, unstuck. Because when you see both and accept them for what they are, just simply facts, you don't have to add a superimposed layer of moral judgement or any qualification, then you see what unsticks you and what got you stuck. And then you can take one side and let go of the other. So it's very important, both aspects are important. Sutras are never random, they are all full of meaning. Even the repetition, the fact that you repeat the same thing again and again in the same sutra, has a reason. Every word counts in the sutra. So the fact that you have at first the homage, you rely upon the Buddha nature, the Buddha, then you see what has stuck you, and what unsticks you, and then the conclusion is, I'm going to lead a transformed life. Very important. That's the process of purification. Moving from dukkha to sukha. So at times you are a good person, and that's fine. At times you just missed a step. Just a fact. You acknowledge it, you learn from it, you don't try to dissimulate it, but you don't also exaggerate. Because we are always doing that. We exaggerate or we minimize. Sometimes we exaggerate our qualities and we minimize our faults. Sometimes we minimize our qualities and we exaggerate our faults. Why can't we just be plain. "Yeah, I did that. Oh yeah, I did that too.. Now you call me a good/not so good person, well, that's okay with me."

Q. "Yeah, that would require me accepting myself for who I am, which is a challenge for me."

A. That's exactly what Trungpa Rinpoche says, "The first step is that. Stop hiding by pretending or by exaggerating your faults." That's another way to hide. It's hiding in plain sight. "I'm so bad. I say it myself, I show it myself, so you can't tell me about it because I've already said it." This makes you feel secure. You could just say, "Hey, sometimes I miss, hit and miss. It doesn't make me a good or a bad person, as sort of an absolute identity."

You know, on my website or my Facebook, I don't remember, when you have to define yourself, I describe myself as a mammalian with bodhisattva aspirations. So that's what I am.

Q.I wanted to ask you about teachers and the formal guru tradition. If one has a teacher and he passes on, as in my case, then some people say he essentially remains your root teacher, but now I'm switching over to a different tradition, and I realize your group has a lineage. So my question is, is there a specific guru or person when you get into the deeper aspects of devotional practice, what do I do at this point with that?

A.I think that the manifestation of the guru is the response to a need and a certain reality. If you are in the early stages, you might have informers, you might have people who help you to understand the basics, the meditation, and so forth, and then you do your practice. And then really when you begin to have essential experiences through the rigorous practice, then you really need to exchange with one person or a group of qualified people that can help you to sort out through all the things that you may discover in your practice, and that may at some point shed a certain doubt or maybe a contradiction or whatnot. There is, to begin with, no obligation of “signing on the dotted line with your blood” and it's not like, “I give you my life forever” or something. This is very romantic...I guess it's like a first marriage;~} You think it's for life, but after a couple of divorces it's like, “Let's just try to get along and be happy together, you know?” And so the idea of guru, and the word guru itself, guru literally means heavy. Something grave, serious. So it is something which is heavy, you're not fooling with it, and that refers to your buddha nature. It is a serious matter, it's very important, don't be a child. That means do your job. Don't pretend, don't hide, don't try to cuddle or seduce or please, just do your job.

And so the guru is that somebody who embodies this seriousness with which you commit to the path. But if at this point you're not committed, it's not really necessary. You're in the phase where you learn, you're trying to evaluate, so you need to have good informants, where people can give you a good image of what the path might be, that's definitely important, but truly the relation to the guru becomes increasingly more important as we deepen our own experience. Because we come to areas where we can easily fool ourselves. And we need to have an external reference to help us cut through our own confusion and entanglements. But in *The Ocean of the Definitive Meaning* by the 9th Karmapa, there is a description of what a guru is. And the guru changes, the function of the guru changes, it's not linked to a person. First, it's somebody who has the knowledge and experience of a tradition. A tradition means something that has been proven throughout countless generations and countless people have benefited from it, so it's a proven fact that this works. Somebody who understands and has the experience of this, and is willing to pass it on. Then, as we learn from this person how to read the texts and to read them free from our usual bias, then the texts themselves become our teacher, and we can read more sutras, we can read more texts and so on, because we know what we are looking for in these texts, and we know how to read, we've learned to read. And then once you have done that and then all the books of the tradition make sense and help you in your meditation experience, then you realize that actually, all books are books, and the nature and the phenomena of books are pointing out some essential teachings, other people that are challenging you are pointing out specific teachings that you can learn from. So phenomena becomes your guru.

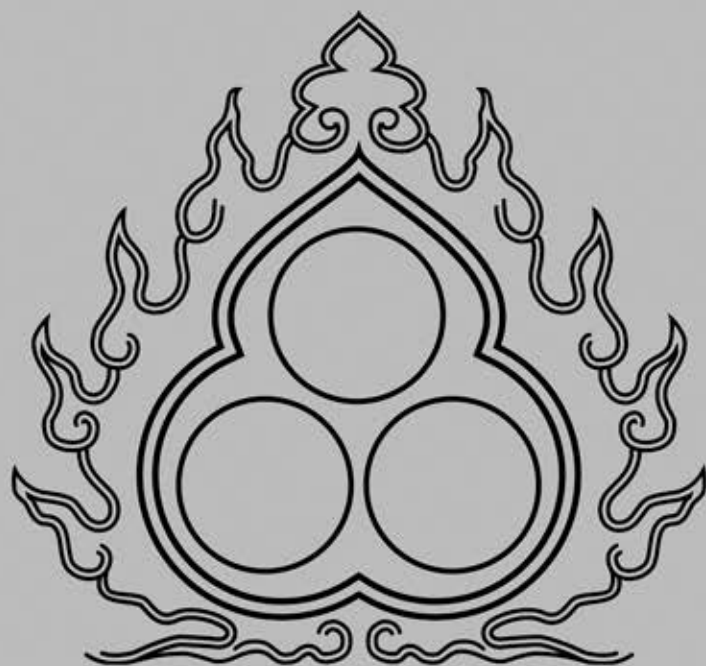
Then finally you realize that, who is going through all of this is mind itself, it's the Buddha nature who is sort of self-proclaiming. Then your mind is the guru in the end. So, the presence of the guru is important, but when the guru passes away, what has been created, the bond, the experiences that were felt, the grace that was received in the moments of communion, they still exist in our mind. Otherwise why would we pray to the Buddha? He's dead. The 16th Karmapa is dead, Gendun Rinpoche is dead, Shamar Rinpoche is dead; all my gurus are dead. But they are so alive, because they're sort of like they're in me. They are not external anymore because they are gone, but their memory, what they said, what they told me, how they interacted with me, is still very, very much alive with me in my mind and I totally base my actions and so on on what I received from them. In my own way! I am not trying to be Gendun Rinpoche, there is one. It's not necessary, I need to be me, that's all. So, the guru, it's a delicate topic because there are not so many. There are not so many authentic and genuine people, really. So when you meet somebody that is that good, somebody like Karmapa, somebody you can really trust, it is really a good platform. But if you are not aiming for the highest league, there are some good spiritual friends that you can benefit from. So, you know, your heart is open, but your eyes remain open. It's not a romance. It's not even a bromance;~)

Like Ram Dass said, "We are helping each other to go home." That's what we do, we are helping each other to go home.

Q. A question about death. My own parents passed on about 10 years ago, so to me it's kind of like, well, obviously they've gone on to whatever is next; and they don't have time to play around with me. So when we think about our parents and our loved ones who have passed on, essentially what is still there is that you are both still within consciousness, even though they might be on another planet somewhere. We're still within Buddha, we're still within the same consciousness. So I feel like, as far as remembering my parents, there's nothing I can do, but hope they are in a good place.

*A. I think one of the best readings on this is from Thich Nhat Hanh, *No Death, No Fear*. He talks about how he's in contact with his dear mother, who died, because he was sad when she died, of course. But now the mother, earth, water, fire, air elements, are back into the earth, fire and other elements, so when he lays down on the earth, he is in contact with his mother, the earth of his mother. When the wind blows through and touches him, he is caressed by his mother, in a different form. And then all beings are seen in this way, and in this way you can expand and see that all beings are my mother. For they're all made of these elements. This is in the same vein as when he sees a piece of paper, he can see the sky, and the clouds, and the trees and so on, when being in contact with all the elements, he's in contact with the former elements of somebody formerly known as Mom. So yes, in that sense, we are in contact, especially in our little microcosm of planet earth. I've heard that there is one rare gas in the atmosphere that is called argon, a rare gas in a very limited quantity, but there is a constant percentage in the air. This means that every time you breathe in the atmosphere of this planet, you're breathing in a certain percentage of the Argon. And this argon has been in the lungs of Hitler, in the lungs of the Buddha, in the lungs of your dear mother. So we are breathing the air of the Buddha, and of Adolf Hitler, and of our dear mother. Because just this little*

tiny particle of gas, argon, is always in the atmosphere, and since we are in this atmosphere, this planet, we are part of this planet, we are not from this earth, we are of this earth. Everything matters, water, air, and so on, needs to be respected not only as the past of our fore parents, but also as the matter of the present, and also as the matter for the future. For all these reasons also, we should develop tremendous respect for the environment.



Right Livelihood.

Dharma roadside dialogue series

March 27, 2021

Today's suggestion was to talk about right livelihood and living a wholesome life. In a way, it's kind of following what we have seen in the past months. **We started with what is the basis. The possibility of enlightenment comes from a fundamental cause, that is the Buddha nature.** It's a good starting point. We are all endowed with the Buddha nature, we partake from the Buddha nature, we can decide to set our course in this direction. Clarifying the natural state of our mind, if we want to use the mahamudra terminology. And clarifying means to remove what are fleeting adventitious impurities, that though they don't harm the Buddha nature, they prevent the mind from knowing itself. So that was the first thing.

The second thing we discussed was to focus on one's practice, but also to remain true to oneself. And that's really connected to the condition through which we can actualize enlightenment, or through which we can clarify the natural state in the course of our human life. As a human being, we have a wonderful workshop that we can use to practice and clarify the natural state. Then we have to define the practice. And practice here means what leads us to liberate ourselves from suffering, dukkha, and explore, discover, experience sukha, which is the bliss and ease of the natural state. So you remember these two key terms sukha and dukkha, and dukkha should be understood as dis-ease or suffering in a sense that our mind is stuck. Stuck in ignorance and all the mental afflictions that come from that. And this is not the natural state of the mind. It feels like that's what is, but it's not, we've just been in this since beginningless time, so it seems almost like this is the natural state, but it is not. It is a state of confusion and delusion that prevents our mind from knowing itself, and therefore enjoying the full freedom, bliss, comfort, and ease of the natural state. That which is translated by sukha. Dukkha, stuck, sukha, flowing, free, open, liberated. So to focus on our practice is really to keep doing this. Keep doing this in a very motivated and determined way, and also in a very natural way that takes into account our actual situation; the current state of affairs, I could say, that we have to deal with. So that we are not living in a fantasy, but we are actually connected with our reality; who we are, and what we can do with that. So, in that sense, to remain true to one's self.

Now today we are going to talk about right livelihood, which is following quite naturally the last two discussions about the Buddha nature and the practice, and remaining true to ourselves, by finding what is the lifestyle which is the most supportive to move from dukkha to experience sukha. If we come back to the original teachings of the Buddha, we can see that everything he had to say, in a way, was quite precisely described in the Four Truths of the Noble Ones. And the first one is: we're stuck. The second one is: how did we come to be stuck? How did it happen? The third noble truth is: if we're stuck and we fell into this trap, that means we can come out. It's possible we can retro-engineer our suffering and delusion so that we come back to the natural state. And so that

leads us quite naturally to the fourth reflection, which is: the path leading to this recovery, or discovery of the natural state.

In the traditional exposition of this path, it is done through the description of what is called the eight-fold noble path. Eight fold, the eight stages, that lead us from where we are to where we aspire to be. But these eight-folds are often described as the three trainings, that means that the eight-folds are redistributed within three trainings. The first one is the training of sila; the training of discipline, or ethics, in which we would find right livelihood. And this training of ethics leads us to the capacity to cultivate a familiarity with mind, in other terms, to meditate. And then the meditation, through calm-abiding and vipashyana, progressively will lead us to the third training, which is the training of discernment leading to wisdom, or as it is known as prajna in Sanskrit. It is taught that we could say the first seven folds of the eight-fold noble path are all present and taught to help us cultivate and reach the final stage, which is wisdom. Because the goal of all the Buddha's teaching is to alleviate the suffering and liberate from the suffering our self and all sentient beings. The source of suffering is ignorance, not knowing the natural state. So that's what will be the liberated factor, but we cannot do this right away if we haven't prepared our mind, we cannot just go from zero to a hundred just by a nice wish that we have. There is a certain construction that is necessary; gathering provisions, freeing ourselves from old habits, and so on and so forth.

So, I will concentrate on the first training, which is discipline, in which we will find right livelihood. But I just wanted to show the eight-fold noble path, so that you get a glimpse of the larger picture. The larger picture being: on the way from dukkha to sukha, what do we need to do, and in terms of training, what are the appropriate steps. So when we talk about discipline, morality or ethics, there's three points, three exercises we have to work with.

So now let's go through the term "right," that we use for right speech, right action, and right livelihood. So, the term we use here, or we translate, is in Pali "samma," and in Sanskrit, "samyak." And according to different Sanskrit dictionaries, I'm going to use mostly the Sanskrit word, the word samyak means: all, wholly, in the sense of complete, in one or the same direction, in the same way at the same time, together, also means duly, by honorable means, thoroughly, but also distinctly, clearly, correctly, properly, fittingly, in the right way or manner, well, but also, which is important, with. Together with. So the general sense of the term samyak in this context refers to something that is wholesome, that is appropriate, that is fitting, that we do together, there is a harmony in it, and we are sort of pulling the cart in the same direction all together. So all of that would be what we simply translate as "right." So it's really right from the beginning, from the inception of the word samyak, it gives a sense of community. It gives a sense of we, rather than I. A sense of community based on a certain intention, and here we are talking about the sangha, the buddhist community of intention, buddhist intentional community, let's put it like this, which is to progress from dukkha to the natural state of mind, which is sukha. And in different modalities, to help all other sentient beings to have access to this possibility, and eventually to the fruit of the path.

So anything, in terms of speech and action, that sort of fits in this perspective is right. And whatever is not really fitting in this perspective is not wholesome, is not appropriate. And so you see that the moral compass here is not limited to what a society declares, because, you know, slavery was legal. Discrimination by gender, color, ethnicity, sexual orientation, were sort of like mainstream and socially accepted; was okay. In this perspective, with this specific compass, it is not. So at times your commitment to cultivate right livelihood might be at odds with what the mainstream and what society accepts as valid, or even glorifies. So at times it may be a little bit difficult to swim against the stream. But I just want you to remember that all the fishes that swim against the stream are alive. Those who float downstream belly up are dead. Okay? So just keep that picture in mind;~} We are against the stream sometimes, sometimes we are just, we are living in the golden age we could say, and this is the golden rule for the society. Wonderful, it must be really great to live in such a society. But it's not always the case. So that's the definition of the word samyak. And by the way, when you think or want to express the concept of full and complete enlightenment, you use the same word samyak. Samyaksambodhi, which means the full and complete awakening, which is sort of not the awakening of an arhat, somebody who has reached a personal level of liberation, which is a great thing, but it's not a complete samyaksambuddha, sambodhi, the full and complete awakening. When we talk about the awakening of a Buddha, it is samyak; full, complete, every aspect has been covered, every aspect has been liberated. Just for your information, it's the same samyak, even if it's slightly different in its use in this case.

The first one is right speech.

Right speech, which is not to lie, not to sow discord or disunity, not to use coarse language, and not to waste time in idle chat. So that's the proper use of our speech, and again, the proper use of our speech if we are aiming toward sukha away from dukkha.

The second point is right action.

Right action means here basically living in agreement with what would be the precepts that we might take. What we call pratimoksha precepts, the vows of individual liberation. And these five vows have to do with mostly behavior of body and speech. The vow not to take life, or preserve life. The vow to be honest, the precept of being frank, the precept of not disappearing in artificial paradise when the task is a little bit heavy, that is using drugs, using alcohol, or other forms of addiction, that comes from the a desire to dodge the confrontation with reality that becomes unbearable, so we sort of seek shelter in these additive substances or behaviors. Also, since we are in the world of desire, there is a commitment to properly address our sexual life. As a lay person that means to have a sexuality that is not harming anybody, in the sense that you don't use your position or your power to impose on others your sexual desires or requirements. You also preserve the harmony of established relationships that are trying their best, and you know it's hard, they're trying their best to work together and grow and overcome difficulties and so on, and you don't come in that, and say, "Oh, there is a little flaw in their joint venture, I might get something out of it." That's not really the thing

to do on this path towards liberation, because we are creating turbulence and suffering that are not really conducive to enlightenment. You're creating dukkha when you're pretending to work for sukha, so there is a contradiction. So, it might come in the right livelihood in that we need to talk about what is a predatory sexuality, so don't be limited by what I say, especially if you need or want to talk about this in the upcoming question and answers, there is space for that.

Thirdly, right livelihood.

Right profession. Why I make a difference between right livelihood and right profession, livelihood shouldn't be limited to work. It should be larger than that.

So, let's talk now about what the classic texts tell us about right livelihood. In those classic texts Buddha teaches that wealth must be acquired according to certain standards; there must be some standards for the acquisition of wealth. It should only be acquired by legal means. It must be acquired peacefully, without coercion or violence. It must be acquired honestly, not by trickery or deception. And it must be acquired in such a way as to not cause harm and suffering to others. So that's the standard. The Buddha mentioned five ways of earning a living that harms others, and are therefore to be avoided. The arms trade, human trafficking, which includes slavery and prostitution, but also, sentient beings at large, not just living beings in the sense of human beings, the breeding of animals intended for slaughter, is part of these professions that are not part of right livelihood. This opens a big thing, because, "I don't kill this beast but I eat it." So where am I in this? And then, not only the slaughter, but the production of butcher's meat, the meat packers after the slaughterhouse. Poison and intoxicants, that includes alcohol and drugs. And the Buddha also names other dishonest ways of making money that fall under an improper lifestyle, practicing deception, betrayal, fortune telling, conning and usury. Obviously, any occupation that requires the violation of right speech and right attitude is a bad livelihood, because on the right speech you build up the right life, and on both you build up the right livelihood. Right speech brings right action, and both bring right livelihood. If you don't follow right speech and right action, you can't have right livelihood. It's kind of obvious, but maybe it's good to mention it again.

But other professions such as selling weapons or intoxicants may not violate these factors while being improper, because of their consequences for others. "I'm not lying. You know, this is a perfectly functioning assault rifle. I'm very honest, and what you buy has a good quality for a fair price." so you're not lying, but you're actually enabling people to hurt other people. It's kind of something very, very present in the American culture. We had the latest mass shooting in Colorado, to bring that back to mind, but unfortunately it's just one in like the last two weeks or so, we had what, three, four, five? So that's why it's something we really have to think about, and also think about what we can do to stop that.

So a right attitude in action means also that a worker should perform his/her task diligently and conscientiously. There's kind of a pride and honor in doing one's job properly. The right attitude

towards people means that respect and consideration must be shown to all people, regardless of their social status. And fairness to things, means that business and commerce transactions should be presented honestly without misleading advertising, cheating on quality or quantity, or dishonest maneuvering. So that's the general framework. These were guidelines given by the Buddha, who wasn't some sort of disembodied meditator, but somebody who was very, very present to his time, and the needs of people in his time. He gave a lot of advice that could be regarded as social guidelines, or to some extent almost political guidelines in some of his sutras. And it's very interesting, because he's not talking as a politician, he's talking as an enlightened person who is trying to give some guidelines to people in society who are struggling with the context of the society and who are very honestly, despite these constraints, very honestly aspiring to reach enlightenment. So now that all of this came to the west, 2500 years later, things have changed a little bit. We sort of equate right livelihood with the job we are doing, how we make our money or our profession.

But it's broader than that; we'll see that as we go along. Now, when we think about a job, largely speaking, we are aspiring to find a job that is personally fulfilling, a job that makes a difference in the world, a job that maybe serves others, and of course, that pays the bills. But also we are aspiring to find a job that leaves time for self-exploration and development. So these are the concerns in our time regarding jobs and professions. And then of course this comes on top of the basic requirements that the Buddha gave in his time.

When we were, many, many eons ago, hunters and foragers, the work was very light in a way. It's estimated by anthropologists that they had to work about 24 hours a week. And so they had a lot of time for the community, which was vital then, the tribe. They had time for the family, time to educate their children, because if they didn't teach them hunting and foraging, they would not survive. And they had time also for creating the tools that were necessary, but with time, and not being under the pressure of production and time, make them beautiful. As beautiful as they are efficient. When you look at the way that they cut their flintstones, made arrowheads, and like the Inuits, the way they made their hooks and so on, each one is a piece of art. And everybody had to know how to do what it took to survive. And if you couldn't cover all the jobs, then you knew that the community would do the tasks that you cannot do, because you do the tasks that you can do. So there was sort of a community of intention, which was about surviving together and helping each other to go through some difficult times.

Then came the evolution, where they became farmers. There is an anthropologist who refers to this not as the evolution, but as the fall; the first mistake. Because then we became prisoners and dependent on the weather, and the crops, we became afraid of thieves, and some had a lot and became barons, and the other became serfs. And as we were afraid of the weather, and so on, religion came. Then not only did you have the barons, but now you had the clerics. And so you couldn't roam free wherever you wanted, and worked 24 hours a week, and get what you need to live with your posse, with your tribe. And so supposedly agriculture was an evolution;~) Then after that we came to the third fall, which is industrialization. Now we are here in a time when we depend

on money. We cannot make the things we need to use every day. Look around your house, and look at all the things that you need on a daily basis and ask yourself, “Can I make this? Can I start a fire?” So we are dependent. Much more dependent than probably the hunter gatherers were. And then, of course, there was a redistribution of wealth, so that some capitalized all the wealth and the products and the tools of production, and others were just proletarians, in the sense of just workers. Actually the word proletarian is really interesting, it comes from the word proles, which means the only good thing you can do is make more children so they can work for us. That’s basically it. And if you want anything in this world you need money. And if you don’t have money, too bad for you. But this creates a tremendous pressure, and sort of enslaves you. In the time of agriculture there were serfs, and now there are people who are serfs of their own incapacity to be independent in making their livelihood, therefore they are dependent on the society and they cannot be free. So they are forced to adopt behaviors and make choices that are against, maybe, their deep aspirations.

So that’s what right livelihood is all about. It’s a reflection about adopting again the structure of the Four Noble Truths. “How come I’m so stuck? Where does it come from? Can it finish or change? And how do I do that?” So it’s the structure of the Four Noble Truths that you apply to right livelihood. They respond one to the other. So that’s the general tone of what I want to address. It’s not all about work. The question we should ask ourselves is, is it profit driven or benefit driven? When we are talking about our actions, we’re talking about our speech, our words, our thoughts, is it profit driven or is it benefit driven? Profit driven is, you try to capture all the goodis for your sole interest. Benefit driven, you see beyond this basic predatorial business, and you see the true benefit for myself, to begin with, is in fairness, a sense of respect and treating everyone with equality. And that will be, of course, indispensable if we aspire to be of benefit for everybody. So this implies environment, social justice, and fair economy as a necessary basis for wisdom. This is not me saying that, or Karl Marx or Engels, this is the Buddha.

In the tradition of the Theravada there are three collections of the Buddha's teachings, the sutras, which are called the Short Exposition discourse, the Middle Length discourse, and the Long discourse. In the Middle Length discourse the Buddha says, “Poverty is the cause of immorality and crimes, such as theft, falsehood, violence, hatred, cruelty, and so forth.” The natural reaction of a society is punishment. And the Buddha says, “Punishment to suppress crime can never be successful. In order to eradicate crime, the economic conditions of the people should be improved. Grain, and other facilities for agriculture should be provided for farmers and cultivators. Capital should be provided for traders and those who are engaged in business. Adequate wages should be paid to those who are employed.” 2500 years ago. Hahaha, we’ve made a lot of progress;~}

“When people are thus provided with opportunities for earning a sufficient income, they will be content and have no fear or anxiety, and consequently the country will be peaceful and free from crime.” Minus the few sociopaths and psychopaths that need mental care. So, basically what the Buddha said 2500 years ago, is that there is no social justice if there is no wealth equality. This out of fear and out of anxiety creates all the crimes that we all suffer from. So, for the Buddha it was very clear, that if we talk about right livelihood, we have involve all of this perspective, and as far as we

are concerned in our time, I think it is true for social justice and for the economy still, but even more, now we have to add environment, which was not an issue 2500 years ago.

Environment.

We have to really consider as part of the right livelihood the way we consume, what our footprint is on the environment. And what we do to offset our presence, so that we, I don't know if we can ever be a zero human being, in the sense of passive, like houses, but at least try to have the lightest footprint as possible. And so in order to do this, just like the foragers in the past, our ancestors, who couldn't do it alone because they were facing nature, they were facing wild animals, they were facing a lot of unknown and dangerous situations, so they needed the community. So we need to recreate the community, because this has been lost. The medieval sense of community, villages, even basic agriculture with all the limitations that they had, you still had a sort of community fabric that would help everybody one way or the other. And then you had all the religious days off, way more than during the industrialization era, where you had leisure to consider higher perspectives and higher thoughts than just work.

In German the word is *Muße*, which I really like. It's poorly translated in English as leisure, but it's really a sense of freedom, a space that's not oriented toward any task or any obligation, and usually it's associated with *Kult*, that means worship, and that's the Sunday. *Kult und mußse*, it's a time where you think about, in this case, God, the divine, but something beyond the pettiness of our daily life. Something bigger. All of this has been eradicated with industrialization. As I moved from France to the USA, the thing that shocked me the most was the shops that were open 24/7. Like Walmart. Every day, 24 hours a day. So, when do these people have time for *Muße*, for this leisure, this enlightening leisure? Their life is total work. And as the German philosopher Josef Pieper said, "A life of total work leads to bankruptcy and slavery." He wrote that in 1948 in a very interesting pamphlet *Kult und mußse*. And that's where we are. Full work. You cannot go out to see your friends, you might die, but you can pack in the subway to go to work. And you have no choice, because it's the law. This is leading to the bankruptcy of the system, because once we have exploited all of the resources of this earth, then the system will fall apart. And then maybe we will move to the fourth evolution of humanity, which will be a post-industrialization ecological society, but this transition will be really painful for a lot of people.

So all of this is part of right livelihood. Why do I say that? I say that because right livelihood is impossible without a community of support. You know that, when you feel alone in your apartment, you're in lockdown, maybe in different countries in the world you cannot even leave your apartment, or only briefly, you feel that you are totally disconnected from the rest of your usual community. You don't see them, you cannot exchange, you cannot get nourishment, like both material and spiritual, you cannot share and give support for those who need it. How many people are dying alone in an old folks home, and then their family cannot even come and be there for the funeral? This sense of community has been really under attack since, let's say, very obviously a year and a

half. So we need to, in terms of right livelihood, recreate a sense of community. I read an article about this and the author was talking about interstitial community. You know, and interstice, the little space between two big blocks, interstitial community. This little micro tribe, if you want to use the terminology of the hunter/gatherer. In the Buddhist perspective that would be our sangha. And for others that would be a non-profit association that shares a certain project, aspires to the common good and wants to help. A circle of friends or the larger humanity. So we need to spend some time to recreate, or to explore the possibility of these interstitial communities, or intentional communities. Because they will be the support and the nourishment for our right livelihood. And the right livelihood will be the basis for a serene mind that can look at itself and find wisdom.

What is the key of this intentional community? The trust. So it cannot be profit driven. Because when it's profit driven, you try to get more. And then you betray, and people don't trust you. It has to be benefit driven. Benefit in the sense that it benefits everybody, myself included. Based on trust. I tend to think that it doesn't really require any hierarchy, because it's a fellowship. Of course, even in this fellowship at times there are leaders, but they are functional leaders, not essential leaders that are leaders all the time. Nobody should take a load of leadership more than a year, three years; like in the old days we said, incorporated. A company was created, incorporated, to fulfill a certain task. Once the task is fulfilled, we de-corporate. We don't need to keep it. So it's kind of more of an organic community, than a hierarchical organization or corporation. And being based on natural leadership when needed, and the leaders can change when needed, then there is trust and everyone can feel that they are equally important and equally participating. And so, everyone has their place, whether they have money or not, because in this case money doesn't matter. You know, if you have three billion in your bank account and you come into the tribe of hunter gatherers with your credit card and say "Hey, I'm the boss," they will laugh at you. They will take your credit card and make some kind of nice jewelry, or a scraper to prepare the hides; nobody cares about your money in this context. So in our communities, intentional communities, there must be this natural leadership, and everybody has an equal, not the same, but equal position. And everybody is useful.

At the time of the Buddha, there was a question regarding at which age one could join the sangha. And the Buddha said, "Seven. By seven, a child is autonomous." This means, you know, potty trained;~) "And if a child can scare the crows that disturb the monks and nuns who are meditating, this child is useful in the community, and therefore can be part of the community." So there is no small or big. Jean La Fontaine, the French fabulist, wrote *The Lion and the Mouse*. In this story the lion is so big, and so on, and he is disregarding the mouse, and then one day he got trapped in a net by a hunter, and the mouse comes and chews the net and liberates the lion. Everyone is important. Everyone. So that is the kind of community we need to create. And they are interstitial communities because they are little pockets in the bigger thing. If we try to work with the bigger thing, very quickly we are disheartened. You know, you voted for this one, and said, "Do the job." And they don't, so next time you vote for the other one..."Do the job." And they don't. And then vote for the other one. And in the meantime in the years they are in power they destroy all the good things the other one has done. So you might say, "Why should I keep voting? It's useless." It is useless if

you are not part of the community. You cannot delegate this like if you're a hunter-gatherer and say, "By the way, you go and hunt for food for me and bring it to me tonight." Surely they will not, because you are a dead weight in this community, you're not bringing anything. So however you participate and whatever you bring in, you are a living element of this community and feel important, you're sort of becoming closer to your Buddha nature by this. You don't feel like an outsider, a misfit. There is no misfit in intentional communities.

Another point that is very important in the building of these intentional communities is as permaculture would say, always give back to the earth more that you receive from her. Restore the earth, not as it was when you began to use it, but even better, enhanced! So always, that's the general idea, always give more than you receive. Give back more than you received. This doesn't work with the profit driven mind. It only works with a benefit driven mind. Because what is good for me is good for the community, what is good for the community will be, indirectly, good for me too. So, these are maybe a few directions for the question and answers session that we have after this. I really wanted to bring this reflection on a global, a more broader sense than just, "Am I doing the right job?" It's more than that, as a human being, where am I? A job is just one aspect, it shouldn't be sort of like the tree that hides the forest. And besides this, the work as we know now, is something that is for most of the people, imposed. It's not something that we like, it's oftentimes something we do just to pay the bills and we are sort of hoping there could be another life, or there could be something more than just that, and we don't see a way out or how we could do otherwise. That's why we need these intentional communities, so that we can imagine our future differently, and begin to take new routes, new directions, to invent the future, as a collective, as a community, rather than as an isolated and independent attempt, that doesn't have much weight.

So our age is the industrial time, money is the golden veal that everybody worships, some small fraction owns 90%, and the rest work for them in order to get enough to get by. Do we want this forever? There is no time, it doesn't make sense, there is no time for self introspection and discovery of the nature of our mind, and we die very bitter, like we have wasted our time, we have wasted our life. And it's really a bad way to go out. We should go out with a sense that we had a good life, we did our best. For sure it could have been better, but I tried to be an honest person, I tried to give more than I received, I tried to know myself better, I tried to be more tolerant of other people, when they are going through their dark night and their difficulties. And as Milerepa said, "In my tradition my practice is to die without shame or regret. That could be a good way to summarize "right livelihood."

When you come at the moment of death you have no shame and no regret. I know it's kind of heavy duty but it can also be really pleasant, I think, this idea that we can imagine our future, and together with, it doesn't have to be a big movement, a small community, an intentional community, our "tribe." We find love and support and help and create, invent, a future. On the side, in the fringes, between the cracks, you know. And then if progressively there are more and more people like me (it sounds like a John Lennon song, "I'm not the only one"). And at some point you might realize,

wow, there are more people that are like me, benefit driven, not profit driven. And we have to learn how to connect, and create a network, a broader fellowship.

In sangha, we have the sangha, and the mahasangha. I don't know if you've ever heard of this term mahasangha. In the 35 Buddhas, it is called the sangha of the 10 directions. The sangha is your immediate fellowship. The men or the women that you live with. In the monastic context it would be the monastic community that you live with. Your brothers and sisters. But they are connected with other sanghas, other small intentional communities. And at times there are gatherings of what they call the mahasangha. For example, when the Buddha passed away, that was the first gathering of the mahasangha. All the different small communities who were inspired by the message that would live here and there and sort of share his teachings in an oral fashion, kind of a small biotope. They would meet with another community and suddenly realize that, we are a lot. And what message are we spreading and passing on, is it the same? And then they would realize that oh, we have lost a little of the meaning here, and then there would be an adjustment by checking and cross-checking with the different communities. That is what happened in the time of the Buddha, and has happened many many times since. I think one of the last mahasangha meetings was during the celebration of the 2500 years of Buddha's parinirvana, in 1956, when the Karmapa came from Tibet, and this was in India, probably in Bodhgaya or somewhere, and all the communities came from somewhere, Sri Lanka and wherever, and met and recited the sutras together and came to know each other. This is the mahasangha, composed of sanghas, of intentional communities. The strength of community like the sangha, in Tibetan terms, "gendun" means: dunpa, to aspire and gaywa, to what is wholesome, complete. In a sense like samyak, what is right, appropriate. Beneficial. So that's the intention of the community, and that's also its lifeblood. What keeps a community is not hierarchy, what keeps a community is common aspiration. Where everybody has a position, some will assume leadership for a time, and then they will pass it on, and some others will assume leadership because it's necessary, purely functioning. And that's what keeps this alive; everyone feels included, and everybody's happy with what they do. Then they have the best job, the golden gig, in the sangha, the best job ever. Whatever that is. Whether it's scaring the crows when you're seven, or making sure there is enough food for all the nuns and all the monks when it's necessary to prepare the daily meal. And that brings a sense of joy because we do our best, and we cannot do beyond that. And so I'm not depressed because I cannot do what I cannot do. Well, by definition, what you cannot do, you cannot do. Why would you be depressed;~} It's just a fact, and it prevents you from doing what you can do. Which is scare the crows. Or get the vegetables to prepare the meal for everybody. Or whatever, whatever your task is.

You know, here in our town, we have a supermarket that hires various people who have some sort of challenges, and they become baggers that puts your shopping in bags. And there is one guy in our town in the local supermarket who's name is Willy, and he's just so happy with his job. The other day we spoke with him, and so while he was packing our purchases, he said, "I've been doing this for 12 years, and this is my dream job." Also he helps taking their groceries to their car, and help them to put them into their car, because there are a lot of older people that cannot lift all the things

they purchase. And he counts how many people he helps every day. One time I saw him and he always says, “Have a woonderrfull day!” That’s his mantra. And then he told me, “I hit my record today, I helped 60 people!” That’s his golden gig, he wouldn’t dream of having a Goldman Sachs or whatever job. He’s happy packing the bags, serving the customers, making them happy, telling them a story, wishing them a good day. Flirting a little bit with the girls saying, “Oh, I really love your sweater.” He’s a really sweet and simple minded guy. And he’s happy with his job. Of course maybe he has something that we don’t have. He’s autistic. So he is more qualified than we are for simplicity, to some extent. So joy is there for him, even in the midst of chaos. He’s always friendly, he’s always smiling, he’s always helping. Right livelihood, here we are.

But we don’t all have to be baggers. We don’t all have to be scarecrows. We can do other things. That’s fine too. You can run a big company and make sure that everyone is treated fairly, they have decent work hours, decent wages, and good social welfare in the company. Like where my Dad worked, the company owned apartments at the mountains by the sea, and the employees could rent an holiday house for almost nothing. Basically cover the expense of electricity and water. You could do something like that also, if it comes into your hands, if you are leading such a business, you can do it and be happy with it. Or miserable, and make other people miserable. So that’s right livelihood.

Questions & Answers

Before we begin the questions and answers, I’m going to say a few words about something that is surrounding us in normal times all the time, but even with more acuity these days, and that’s death. A lot of news of death came for me. Friends...parents, it seems to me like the last month was the parent’s month, like I don’t know, no kidding, like maybe six of my friends had their father, their mother. You know, they were in their eighties, nineties and so on, of course...you could say yeah, that’s fine, but anyway, that’s their parents that transited.

My uncle died in the early time of Covid. He was in a memory care home, and there was no way to visit him. The family couldn’t even, and only 2 of them could even go to the funeral. This has been a really hard time for a lot of people. Death in general is a hard time, especially when you are not prepared, but death under the circumstances where you cannot communicate, in this sense, the family, you cannot be together. If you think about the old days, especially in the countryside, around a death there was the gathering of the family, there would be a wake; in some cases there would be a service, a mass. In France we had what was called a quarantine, a kind of strange way of putting it, but forty days after the death you would have another service, a little bit like Tibetans do for seven times seven days. 49 days of the bardo, or in-between time, where we do some prayers and intentions for the deceased. So it is a particular time, you know, we cannot take care of our dead, and the family can’t be together to acknowledge that one of the elements of the community has disappeared. And so when we can do that it is quite fortunate.

Recently, one friend of mine died, mid-fifties, of cancer, leukemia actually. He was in the hospital, and the hospital was quite flexible, because like five of his very close friends were in the room with him, you know, massaging his legs, holding his hands, being with him. Like we've been doing for thousands of years. So now there is this extra difficulty, and we had a life remembrance service for him on Zoom. Everybody was scattered across the world, but nevertheless there was this participation. So, what do we do, what do we do when our beloved one goes? First, we really have to acknowledge that there was a life before death. And try to cultivate a sense of gratitude for what we received from them. Like I think particularly of our parents in that case, or our friends, and what they brought into our life, and try to keep this in mind. And then from the bottom of our heart, whatever our form of spiritual practice is, to send them good wishes; like a farewell.

If you're a Buddhist you can recite mantras, and in this case the Mani's, Om Mani Padme Hung is probably the best way to go. It's very simple, it's very basic, and it covers the ground thoroughly; I call it the aspirin of the mantras, it's good for everything. The Mani is like a wire transfer, like your love goes to them, without moving. You know, when you send money, the money doesn't go. But on the other hand there is a way that they receive money. And when you make wishes, the intention which is love, is actually an expression of the luminosity of mind. And the essence of mind being empty, this luminosity radiates and pervades the space of emptiness, and reaches everybody, touches all phenomena and all beings.

So Gendun Rinpoche said to me once, "When you have realized the union of luminosity and emptiness, you'll have the capacity to bless." Objects, and of course, more important, people. But because of the closeness of the heart, and almost, we could say, the physical link we have with our family, our parents, Gendun Rinpoche was saying that our prayers have more power than even Gendun Rinpoche's own prayer. Because the distance is shorter, it's local, it's not long-distance. Of course you go to a great bodhisattva because you know that the texts explain that the great bodhisattvas have the power of wishes; because they have accumulated the merit, because they have realized the truth of emptiness, and realized the union of emptiness and luminosity, which, by the way, is another way of calling Amithaba, the union of luminosity and emptiness. Amita means limitless, and abha means luminous, so it's the union of luminosity and emptiness. The bodhisattvas have the power of this union, but we shouldn't disregard the power of our "close to the heart" prayers. Because they are very, very, very powerful. Very powerful.

So you know, as long as it feels natural, offer light, make good wishes. Make your own good wishes if you want, but if you feel inspired by prayers that exist such as the prayer to be reborn in Sukhavati. Dewachen. This is a really good prayer. And then send this, knowing that the union of luminosity and emptiness makes contact with that which seems now broken because of the distance from the physicality; the transition of the mind continues, but the body stays behind and falls apart.

So the Mani is very important. The prayer of Sukhavati. If you want to know about Sukhavati, and what it is, you can go on my website. I gave a talk a few weeks ago, you can go on Tsony.com and

search for Amitabha & Sukhavati. And then you will have access to the recordings. And there I put snippets of the Chenrezig practice, which is the prayer to be reborn in Sukhavati in English, sung by a beautiful voice of an angel, who's my wife. And so you can see that there's a text, and then you can feel inspired, and maybe then there is a melody which is in your head, and you can send wishes, send good wishes, and so on.

Okay, we all know impermanence is the nature of all compounded phenomena, but that, when there is a death of a loved one, that's not enough of a compensation, really. And so the life celebration is important, is to rejoice that we had the chance to meet, even so briefly, but maybe they gave us life and maybe in some way we could help them make contact with Dharma. One way or another. Because we are connected, let's say to Karmapa, then they are connected to Karmapa through us. And so Karmapa will, as the 16th Karmapa said, and I believe it's still valid for the present Karmapa, "Whenever somebody I have met, under any circumstances, comes to die, this person comes to me, at some point. And if they recognize me, I liberate them." So that's the wish. If you see a Black Crown, go there! If you see light, go there!! This kind of prayer. Don't go towards the darkness! Don't be afraid! Just cultivate a higher aspiration. These kinds of wishes, because even if physically there is no possibility of having a verbal conversation, a heart to heart, there's some messages that still go.

Then after a while, the Tibetans say seven times seven weeks, forty-nine days. And in Christianity in France they say forty days. When you feel it's quite natural that they're gone, and that's fine, and they are fine, it's time to go on with your life. And it's time to, you know, to just keep what they gave you, what they stimulated in you, what they kindled in you. And then pass it on to the people around you, the children if you have, because that would be a good way of perpetuating their memory. You can always write a message, like in Kunduel Ling, they do monthly rituals and prayers, and you could always ask if they could add your loved one on their list for wishing prayers. But I think your own prayers are really the most powerful, because they are a direct connection from your heart. Just sit and open your heart, whatever you can touch of luminosity and emptiness just be there, and just send love, "May you fare well, thank you, thank you, may you fare well." Offer light, offer incense. And what becomes not quite a habit, I find it very nice when, for funerals people say no flowers please, but maybe donate in the deceased persons name to a certain charity. So this is kind of like accumulating and directing power and force and merit on the behalf of the person who just died. That's a very good thing, That's a very good thing to do. So that's my 2 cents about this.

T: So, right livelihood. What do you want to talk about?

Q: I was wondering what you think about how artificial intelligence (AI) might be replacing people's jobs, so people could have more leisure, but they might also become obsolete. It could be positive, or it could be pretty scary. What do you think?

T: I think at the time of industrialisation, in the early times they thought machines would liberate people; that they would do all the mechanical tasks, and the people would have more time. It actually was just the opposite. They had less time because they had to become machines so that they could operate the machines. So they had to simplify their language. Like every time I go into my bank account there is a captcha to verify that I am who I am. So basically it is a robot that verifies that I am not a robot. That's ridiculous! So I think that of course there's no doubt that some sort of mechanical devices can do things, you know for example the very handy robots that can go into the nuclear power plants. Or highly contaminated zones to repair things so we don't have to send humans in there, that would threaten their health and life. That's great. The bottom line question is: what the heck do we need a power plant for? So I am okay to have robots that do all the jobs, but these jobs are necessary because the industrialization profit-driven needs to make more profit and basically replace humans with devices that never strike, never ask for a raise, that don't ask for holidays and that aren't asking for basic dignity.

Once I was shocked, I talked with a very wealthy person and she had just bought a washer and dryer that we have here in the U.S., you know this gigantic thing, which was very uncommon in Europe at this time, this was in the late 70's, early 80's in France. And she had imported from the U.S. this gigantic thing to wash her clothes. And I said, "Wow, that's very good, that's very efficient. And she said, "Yeah, it's better than the staff I had that was always complaining." ;~} They never complain, they do the job!

So that's the future of industrialization. I'm interested in what the future of post-industrialization will be, because there was forager and post-forager agriculture. Then there was post-agriculture, and now we have industrialization. Even agriculture is now agri-business; it's an industry. They don't need mom and pop's little farm. They don't need them. They want to make corn and soy and all of that. And they have tractors that don't even need a guy sitting on it, to pull endlessly across the fields of the midwest. I am more interested in what we humans are going to invent as a model of society that doesn't need artificial intelligence, but heart-human intelligence.

In talking about right livelihood, I don't want to follow the dictate of the profit-driven mechanization or think that we've never really pondered whether we need them or not. We don't need more plastic spoons! We don't need more mass-manufactured plastic things. You know, when plastic was invented somebody thought, "Oh, that's a great idea, it's clean...it's easily produced. It doesn't cost much. A totally short-sighted vision. Now we have to live with this for thousands of years.

So, again, if a machine can do a job that will make more time and space for humans, without having to go even more deeply into industrialization while depleting the resources to the point where we humans cannot live on this planet, if we can have the use of the machines it's fine, but as it is blinded by ignorance and driven by profit it's for sure the worst option that is taken. You know,

there is no shadow government or somebody planning that, it is just stupidity at hand. Short-sighted vision and profit-driven mind. The result is a lethal cocktail and we are all drinking the Kool-Aid.

I would rather learn how to start a fire and carve my own wooden spoon...if I have the choice, than worship an artificial intelligence. I'm already very afraid of the only intelligence of human beings, disconnected from the heart, and so, a machine? I think I will live in the forest..but, I'm already in the forest anyway;~} I don't see this as progress, really. There are things that are really good, like the progress in surgeries and so forth. Knee replacements, hip replacements, and all of that, wonderful. But in all of this you have to think of the context. There was a doctor who worked with the problem of senescence and the brain, and he said we don't work enough to research about memory loss and Alzheimer's and such, we invest money in Viagra and plastic surgery, so we will end up with women with very firm boobs and men with a hard sex and not know what's it is used for. So what is the comfort in life? When you're in a home where nobody can come see you, and they will pump you up til you're 100 years old and in absolute misery, and will milk you for all the money you have to maintain this life which is not a good life. This is also something we have to think about; it's not just about longevity it's about quality of life.

If your body is sound, even with a little limitation of age, and your mind is clear, and you can be useful in the family, you know, taking care of the kids, so they don't have to go in these brain factories and squishing their minds called school, you can take them and then teach them the magic world of stories, like my grandma did with me, taught me how to sew and embroider and these kinds of things. That's a good life! But when you are alone, nobody visits you and it costs hundreds of thousands every year for you just to barely survive and then you suffer and you're not happy and you don't feel useful, what's the point? Is it progress?

I don't really have an answer for that, but my personal answer is just when I come to this point just leave me in the forest where they won't find me. Let me go. Dignity. That's part of a human life. Not efficiency and machines. And artificial intelligence is interesting, because who is putting the intelligence in this machine? And how much intelligence do they have? But I'm a little bit cynical about this.

Q: When you were talking about right livelihood, where are the boundaries, for example it seems we all have to have cell phones today, it's no longer a luxury but necessary to participate in work and relationships. Where does one draw the line though, when it comes to the type of labor practices involved in manufacturing cell phones...and the environmental impact of waste produced, it seems like if you are aware of these issues, you shouldn't have a phone, but most of us need to at this point. We need to negotiate in the world. How do we evaluate these day to day concerns?

T: I think individually, to begin with. I don't think we can draw a general line that would be good for everyone, in all circumstances. We're back to right livelihood as a personal responsibility. It's part of ethics. The three trainings, ethics, meditation and discernment are individual training. They are not propaganda, they are an invitation. That's the first thing. So individually, what can you do? What is

the outcome of the use of these devices? Like I could throw away the phone, and the computer, but then we couldn't have this conversation. So I believe that if the outcome offsets the pollution it is still workable. Knowing that we are in a conditioned existence, there is no ideal solution. This is good for the use of technology, this is good also for food. Do we eat the suffering of living organisms? The answer is very simply yes. You may choose to have a lesser footprint by becoming a vegetarian or becoming a vegan, but there is still some implication of death. Or the way in agribusiness the way your food is produced.

For example, if you are a vegan you use a lot of processed food. Because, you are a vegan but you still want your cheese. Or your "beyond" meat. It sort of tastes like cheese and meat but you don't have meat. And this processed food has a cost. So there's not a way you can be on this planet and not have a footprint. It's not possible. You know, even the Jain, who may be the most dedicated people to protect life, for them the summit of practice is death by fasting. They renounce even eating, as an act of non-violence. But it's the ultimate act of violence against yourself!

So you are the footprint yourself. So I think we all have to acknowledge that we are in dukkha; that means we are trapped in a conditioned system, and the only thing we can do is to try to lessen, as much as we can, our footprint and maximize the outcome of our life as much as we can. That is by bringing support, help, and inspiration to other beings so that they feel compelled, or feel invited, to begin their path of transformation and move toward enlightenment. That would be, for me, a good reason to live.

And then frankly I am totally in line with Shantideva in the Bodhicaryavatara, who says if your body is not dedicated for enlightenment and the benefit of all beings, you're a waste of oxygen. He didn't say "exactly" that, but basically he said that it's like having a kitchen full of cooks and servers and so on and they never serve food, they only eat the food themselves. Why would you have a staff that doesn't provide you with a service? So if your body doesn't really have an outcome, which offsets, even one percent only, offsets your footprint being in existence, then it makes sense.

So now the question is, "What am I bringing to the table?" That's a question I ask myself. It's not about having or not having these objects. Actually, if I have means, if I wanted to have and had means, then I wish I would be like some people who have, like Putin...Putin doesn't have a cell phone. He's very famous for that. There's no way to hack him, he doesn't have a computer, he doesn't have a phone, but he has people around him who are doing the job. Yeah, I could do that. Maybe Putin is not a pleasant example. Jim Jarmusch, a very famous director, doesn't use a cell phone, but he has a secretary around who has one, and she tells him that people want to talk to him and she makes the appointments and so on. So, you can't always think that if you don't have this phone that you're not part of the problem, but in the larger picture you are still part of this conditioned existence. This is samsara! Helloooo. Conditioned existence, we are not free from this.

So the short answer I would say is, “If the use of this device brings about an outcome that offsets the footprint, it is still valuable. If it doesn’t, you’re in deficit and you have to do something about it. You have to find the ways and means to compensate so that you offset the negativity of the use of this thing. There are companies now that are selling you Fair Phone. It’s a company that produces fair phones that are sort of clean, in a sense. Or as good as possible. But the thing is, they’re just not sexy! They don’t have all the bells and whistles that you have on the phone, so it’s like having chocolate without sugar and without cream or flavor or whatever. Why would I even eat chocolate if it’s like that. This means we have to do some work on our attachment, it’s complex.

Right livelihood, maybe, right after karma, is the most complex thing in the Buddhist teachings. Because it is so much connected to everything else. You can’t have a one size fits all answer. But I would say to watch the outcome. If it offsets the footprint, then you’re okay. And then try to have a larger and larger outcome, all the time.

And there are some good movements, like I don’t know if they’re passing now in the U.S. or Europe, sort of a law that you have to be able to fix your phone. Because now phones are made that you can’t fix them, you have to throw them out so that you have to buy another one. But there are some people who have really been advocating and lobbying so that devices should be fixable. For example farmers; if you’re a farmer in the midwest in the USA and you buy a John Deere you cannot fix your own tractor. You cannot. You have to bring it to the John Deere company because just like for your Mac, they are the only ones who can open it and change the spare parts or you will lose the warranty. When do we have a farmer that doesn’t fix his tractor? Well, it happens now. So you know what? The farmers buy hacking software to be able to bypass John Deere’s restrictions so that they can fix their own tractors. That’s what I call human intelligence. That’s where we are now.

I have computers that are thirteen or fourteen years old. I’ve changed everything in it. And I had one that I fixed, works fine, but Apple doesn’t want me to run their software or their operating system on this refurbished old thing that I just made in my garage. Then I said, “I’m sorry Apple, I’m gonna use Linux, because they don’t care”. So I got a Linux, looking like a Mac. So that’s also an option, but it’s a lot of work. You just want your computer, and you press on it, and it works. All of this right livelihood asks a lot of your time and your creativity. And that’s why it seems difficult. Also, you can buy a used phone, like getting a rescue dog, instead of buying from a breeder. I always buy my phones on Ebay, a phone that’s two or three years old. You know, the phone you buy this year for \$1200, three years later you can buy for \$150 or \$200, and it’s just as good for what I do.

Q: It seems we are in a process, and are the four immeasurables our touchstone as to how we are doing in general, how we are progressing?

A: It’s interesting, I didn’t immediately link between the four immeasurables and right livelihood, it didn’t jump into my mind at first, but when I was preparing this dialogue what did jump into my mind was the link between the five strengths that we find in mind training in Chapter Four and right

livelihood. Like determination, familiarization, virtue, reproach...that means seeing what we have done wrong or what we could amend and transform. Reproach the laziness we may have, and always falling back into our old habits, this sort of thing. And then aspiration. I could link these five, the practice of the five strengths with right livelihood.

But linking the four immeasurables is quite interesting. Apramana is the Sanskrit word which refers to the four immeasurables. Knowing that they are immeasurable, because they are connected with wisdom. Because, let's start with love. It's love that's not "regular" love, we could say, like the love between two people; a feeling between a person and another person, or an environment, or whatever, let's just say between a subject and an object, let's put it like this. The apramana makes a difference by understanding that though there is this movement of love, the subject and the object are not two entities that exist distinctively, they are actually both the play of mind. And so there is a transcendence here; it makes a difference between what we call the brahmavihara, or the pure abodes, brahma meaning pure, which is love, compassion, joy and equanimity, with the apramana, which is limitless, the four limitless considerations, that have this element of transcendence. And they're aiming at enlightenment, not just, like the brahmavihara are understood to be what causes rebirth in the world of the deva's, with a mind that is free of aggression because of love, of compassion, of equanimity and joy, but it remains a personal experience. It doesn't lead to an engagement, a commitment for action, which when it happens, when it becomes ventured brahmavihara, engaged brahmavihara, then it takes this supplementary dimension of the apramana, the unlimited. And so it becomes really right livelihood leading to enlightenment, before that it's really right livelihood leading to pleasant good experiences in the future rebirth. There is a little difference between the two here.

Because the right livelihood can be also understood as just a personal endeavor, like for one's own peace and one's own benefits. You know, Shamar Rinpoche in *Boundless Wisdom* divides the aspiration into three types; there's those who want to have a happy life, very basic, everybody really wants to have a happy life, and possibly a happy future life, if they think there is after. The second type of people will understand that conditioned existence is the basis of suffering and they really aspire to free themselves from that, but they cannot consider taking upon themselves the task to work for everybody, it's just too much, too big of an endeavor. And then you've got a third approach which is the same, the understanding that conditioned existence based on ignorance is the source of all suffering and there is a desire to free oneself, but also the understanding that everything being interdependent you cannot really find your own freedom if it's not everybody else's freedom. So there is the necessity of the path, the universal liberation.

So in these three approaches you can also put the right livelihood. Right livelihood as the recipe to have a happy life. If you don't want to go to jail, you don't do anything stupid. That's right livelihood, because you don't want to be in jail. Or, you try to be honest and frank and so on, so that you have the respect of your community; you don't want to be struggling with your community. Si it's a personal benefit you're seeking, and it's okay! So it's a right livelihood driven by personal benefit. You don't want to inflict suffering on others because this will have bad consequences for

you. Then you can practice right livelihood because you know this is the way through which you gain your personal liberation. And then you can practice right livelihood because this is a way through which the universal freedom from suffering will be achieved.

So it's different intentions, the modus operandi is somewhat similar, and the result will be different. The results will be different. You will have a happy life, or you will reach the state of arhat, or you will reach samyak sambodhi, full and complete enlightenment, after going through the different stages of the bodhisattva. Intention makes a difference. But even to begin with, let's say, the personal attempt to have a simpler and happier life by practicing right livelihood is a sign of intelligence. There is already a little spark of discernment in your life. It's good. Just keep moving, and it will expand.

Sometimes we may feel guilty, like, "Oh, I am doing this, but only for myself." Either we pretend that we are not doing this, and we are in denial, or we try to project the image of a very generous person, and we are lying. Remember last month's dialogue? Stay true to yourself. If you see that what you really want at this point is just peace, that's fine, because when you find peace, you're not aggressive, and therefore more friendly and you don't harm people. So that's good. Stay true to yourself.

Q: You say be where you are, practice where you are comfortable, but I guess I thought I should be more regimented with my practice and not too relaxed. But I am happy to hear of a more balanced approach.

A: Of course when we read the texts that have been a foundation in our tradition, say the Kagyu, or of any of the buddhist traditions that were in Tibet, you've got this feeling that someone is really cracking the whip, you know, you must practice like your hair's on fire, you must practice like this and like that. And in one of my conversations with Shamar Rinpoche I talked about this, and this was actually Shamar Rinpoche's first advice when I came to the U.S. for the first time in 1991. Rinpoche said, "Okay, you're going there, don't talk about the hell, they don't like it over there. Talk about how wonderful and beneficial your life would be if you could meditate now and then." And at first I didn't really understand because I come from a very classic background; like one time in Bordo I taught on this one chapter on the hell realms from the *Jewel Ornament*, until everybody died. This was the point, to get them to be repulsed. Someone actually even said, "Shut up, I'm done!" Literally what I saw from where I was sitting were people trying to crawl out of the room, unnoticed, because it was just unbearable. So I thought, great, we have finally reached the point where we can talk about what is your problem with pain.

Then we started another conversation, not at all the classic texts. Rinpoche was telling me that this classic way of interacting with the material was not efficient, they don't like it, it meets with resistance and then everything is blocked so the message doesn't get through. Then they classify you as an old retrograde cleric. They throw on you all the old trauma of church, and so the dialogue cannot happen. So it's not skillful. So I spoke with Rinpoche about this and he said, "You know,

you really have to understand that the teachings, the way they were given in Tibet, were really meant for Tibetan culture.” And Tibetan’s, if you know them, are really laid back, they like to chill out. What Tibetan’s like to do is hang out with their buddies, drink tea, and chat forever. And womanize. And so you don’t have to tell them to relax, they’re already relaxed. You have to remind them that life is short, and they really ought to think about death and then practice, because that is what is appropriate for the culture and general traits of Tibetans.

And he said, “But, you, you don’t need to be stressed. You are already stressed enough.” So you don’t need to come with the heavy artillery of the hells and so on. You can take care of yourself, be kind, it’s fine, do what you can, because we have this very heavy sense of guilt, this panic that if we don’t do more than possible, something terrible will happen. We are just paralyzed, or like the white rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland*, we’re always late and we’re huffing and puffing and looking at the clock. And Rinpoche comes and says like, “Chill.” He told me to teach people that meditation, if they really do it, is like paradise. So it’s really difficult to use the classic texts of the Tibetan culture without a little adjustment of that sort.

Many years ago Shamar Rinpoche was in France at Dhago Kagyu Ling, he was giving teachings, and there were people from all nationalities, everyone came from everywhere in Europe. And among them you have the Diamond Way group who came from Germany, very dedicated. You know, 6 am out in front of the stupa, doing prostrations emphatically, you know, full of energy. Then you’ve got the Spaniards, and the Spaniards, until 10, 11 o’clock at night around the bonfire, they’re singing, drinking wine, and of course, you don’t have the Spaniards at 6 am in front of the stupa doing prostrations. And then the Germans became really upset because the Spaniards made so much noise that they couldn’t sleep and be fit for the prostrations at 6 in the morning. So then they sent a delegation to Shamar Rinpoche so that he could intervene and tell the Spaniards to shut up and go to bed so they can practice the holy dharma at 6 in the morning. Shamar Rinpoche says, “Sure, thank you.” Comes the teaching, Rinpoche said, “Meditation is really easy and enjoyable and can be like heaven...and when you meditate, you should be like, you should be like, like the Spaniards!

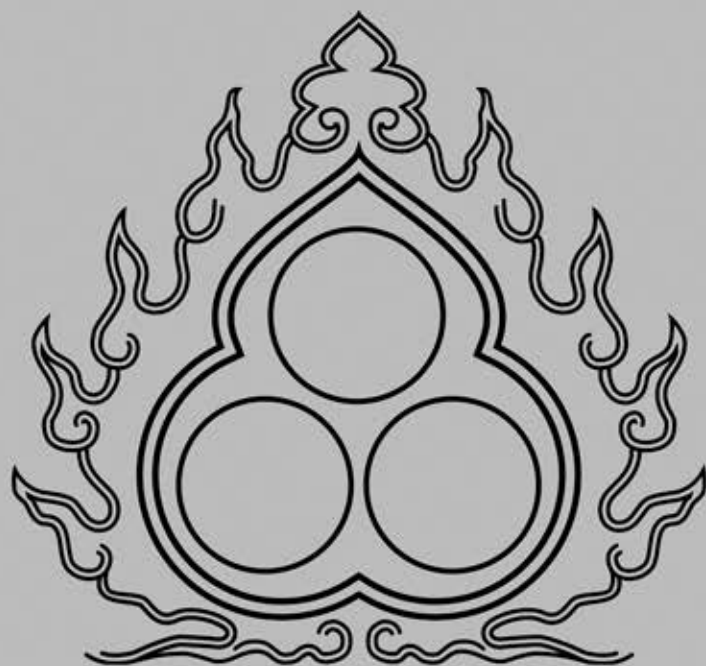
But maybe in Spain, he would say, “You know, guys, okay, I understand, the mid-day nap and all of this, but life is short. You also have to think about it. Different context. And it was not to put down the Germans and promote the Spaniards. It was an excess, I would say they were not enjoying their practice, it was forced fed, and Rinpoche had to address this. I saw him doing this all the time, always considering the situation in a given context. And if you listened to him two days in a row, in a different context, he would say the opposite of what he said the day before. People were mad at him all the time, because they said, like, “Make up your mind...give us a strict thing.” While it’s true that everything is contextual and changing all the time. This applies today, and not tomorrow.

So I think that’s really being true to ourselves. You know when you’re lazy, or when you’re not really doing it. And we should also be able to know when we are overdoing it, because of superstition or

panic or fear or whatever. Yes, life is precious. Enjoy it! Life is precious, enjoy it means fully appreciate it.

Like Thich Nhat Hanh and his tangerine. One student comes up to Thay, and he says, “Master, I want to meditate, please give me instructions to meditate.” And Thich Nhat Hanh looked at him and gave him a tangerine. Then the guy says, “Thank you. So, what are the techniques, what should I do? And so on.” And Thich Nhat Hanh said, “Peel your tangerine.” “Yeah, yeah, yeah, but practice?” “Peel your tangerine.” So the guy started to peel his tangerine, and Thay said, “No, no, no, slowly...Can you smell the fragrance? Can you begin to feel the sweetness of the fruit when you put it on your tongue?” And like that. And so he taught him how to enjoy life, and particularly a tangerine. And that was his introduction to mindfulness.

So I think maybe we need more of that. And be confident that this works. That’s why, when you feel super stressed, read Thich Nhat Hanh;~} Take a tangerine and read Thich Nhat Hanh and have a cup of tea, and peel it. And smell, and enjoy it. And once your mind is at peace, just lift up your gaze and let your mind be, give it a break. And see what happens. Nothing is fake, nothing is pushed, that was Gendun Rinpoche’s way of teaching. He didn’t use a tangerine, but that’s the same idea. Be with your mind. Because production, result, it’s a sickness of our industrial mind. Nothing to do but become familiar with your mind.



Thin Veneer of Confusion on an Ocean of Wisdom.

Dharma roadside dialogue series

January 30, 2021

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 facissm 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.

Questions & Answers

Who wants to open the dance?

Q. I wanted to say, I was thinking about when you spoke on the Vineyard not that long ago, and you were talking about one of the guideposts for you as a teacher, as a lama and practitioner, was the ability to articulate thinking of the Buddha without having to delve into the glossary of all the books, that it wasn't all in the scriptures, that it was really the deepening of yourself and the ability to be able to speak, and in your case teach. Is that one of the five practices Gampopa talks about in the book, is that the ability to have confidence in your own speaking about it?

A. Your classic texts will say, the Dharma is almost inconceivable. What it means by this is that it's very difficult to apprehend, at first glance, all of the different layers and subtleties of Dharma. The word Dharma also has many possible translations, it depends on the context. The root verb in the word Dharma, if I am not mistaken, is dhr, which means "to hold." So the Dharma means to hold what is true and valuable. True in the sense that it is unerring, it is not misleading, it is not serving any personal interests, neither the Buddha's nor the listener's, it is only really designed to help people to hold what is true. And the Dharma being inconceivable, it doesn't mean that you cannot grasp it, it means that it is difficult. It means that it is not meant for people who are not interested in this inner quest. People who are not interested with this inner quest will have no interest whatsoever with Dharma. Maybe intellectual Dharma, it's like, okay, I know a little bit of everything, I studied comparative religion, and I know a little bit about everything, but it doesn't really affect me deeply, I'm not deeply willing to let it transform me and open treasures, and also expose things that need to be seen and corrected and so on. I'm not willing to be touched by the Dharma. So then, Dharma means nothing. And I'm not judgemental when I say that, it's just a matter of fact. You need to be proactive in your relationship to the Dharma. It can't be just, the Dharma comes to you, otherwise, you know, we're just by the TV satellite like all the other TV evangelists, you know, just blasting 24/7 Dharma through the TV, internet and so on, and people will be enlightened. No! It's proactive! That's one thing. It's only talking to and appealing to, people who are on this inner quest. Or people who are cornered, or lost, they have tried everything else, and nothing works, and they're looking for something that might help. So they have this desire to discover more and step out of their situation. That's one thing. Dharma is conceivable in the sense that it shouldn't be trapped into scholarly wording. It's not meant for specialists. It is not meant for Buddhologists, you know, people who study the scriptures without the intention to be touched by them. So, the Buddha himself said, in the sutra, that as long as the vinaya, just 1/3 of all the teachings of the Buddha, is not accessible in the language of the people of any given country, the teachings will not take root. It was very clear that for the Buddha it was not a language, it was not sort of a secret in the sense of something belonging

to the happy few. It is something that needs to be made understandable. So I think a lot of the teachers that have some, let's say, success, in the sense of people listen to what they have to say, it's because they spend time trying to figure out the way to use other peoples lingo. What I always say, like "Please, send me your lexicon, please send me your dictionary, so I can see which words you use." Like, if you're a baker, let's talk about bread, if you're a carpenter, let's talk about joinery, let's talk about wood. The Buddha, in his days, spoke in Magadhi. There are many discussions about what language the Buddha spoke, but let's agree more or less that he spoke Magadhi, which was the language of the area he was from. So that means he talked in the vernacular. He used common language. Understood by kings and farmers, by literate and illiterate people equally. And then there is the universal language of what Trungpa calls the authentic being...that is, your realization oozes. And this is the miracle I've seen with great masters. Shamar Rinpoche, Karmapa, of course in the first place, but Gendun Rinpoche and others. Gendun Rinpoche, I've seen people moved by just seeing his picture. Gendun Rinpoche had a chiropractor in Paris that was helping him with some physical issue, and he had one black and white picture, a portrait, of Gendun Rinpoche in his office. He had dozens of people everyday coming in, patients, for treatments. One day one man looked at the picture and said, "Who is this man, I need to meet him." This was the authentic being of Gendun Rinpoche that was perceptible through a picture. And that's why in the '70's we flocked around him. We didn't know anything, he didn't even speak our language, he never spoke our language. The only time I heard Gendun Rinpoche speaking French, I was knocked out of my socks. We were sitting in the yard in the retreat, there was a bird flying above our heads, and Rinpoche said, "Oiseau." I was just like, aaaa!?! And that's the only work of French I heard him say. And so, we didn't speak the same language, but it didn't matter. For many years I'd been asked to interpret for Gendun Rinpoche. In Tibetan, which now is gone, but back then it was really so-so. But I found out that he could speak through me, and if I tried to be using my intellect and my knowledge of Tibetan, it was a catastrophe, because I would block the channel. I would sit next to him, and just receive his blessing, and just try to remember the first word. He would speak for 15 minutes. I would just try to remember the first word, and then I would start from the first word, in a relaxed state of mind, and then it would unravel. And if by any chance I'd forgotten a piece, after the end of my translation, then Gendun Rinpoche would start at this very point. Go figure. I have no idea what happened. I remember one day, I was trying to be the "good" translator and use my intelligence and all my knowledge of Tibetan, which was almost close to zero, and I was just paralyzed. And so he looked at me with sort of a laugh and then hit me on the head, and then he said, "Well today the radio is broken." He called me the radio. So, he was speaking through me, he had capacity so that he could go through the barrier and used me as his radio. Basically, you can have this little device now that you speak into your phone in your language and then it translates, you know, and that's what I was. I was his radio. And then after that, when people heard I was his translator, I was so ashamed. Then they said, "Oh, now you can translate for this, and that, and I was like, "No, I can not." Like a one-use radio, it doesn't work, I'm not compatible with others. And one time when we were in retreat, Shamar Rinpoche visited us, and he started talking in Tibetan, and he was expecting that I was going to translate and he was talking in Tibetan and his Tibetan was like pure Central Tibetan, and Gendun Rinpoche was speaking the dialect of a farmer of Eastern Tibet, some Tibetans couldn't

even understand him, so anyway, Shamar Rinpoche speaks with his really perfect Tibetan, and my mind just draws a blank, I'm just, I couldn't even think, and Rinpoche looked at me, then he kind of went, hfft, then he continued in English. So, this capacity to adjust, at my level, I try to understand the language of the people, if I'm in France, in Austria, wherever, my communication is different because it is based on what I know of this culture. What I have absorbed in my journey, and being with them, and so on, here and there, or in the states now, what I have absorbed of this culture. The melody of the music of their language, their jokes, their sense of humor, which is very particular. All of this gives me ways to adjust my communication, so this is what I do. It's not a translation, if you will, it's a transposition, like in music. What I want to say is written in a certain key, and then I transpose it into another key, for another language. This is what I do. And then a hundred notches above that, is like Gendun Rinpoche, who can speak to you without even knowing your language. And then wayyy above that, there is the Buddha. Who all the sutras say, he could speak to all beings in their own language and dialect, whether they were humans or not. This is the art of communication. And personally, this was my gateway, this is what led me to my utter admiration of the Buddha. His capacity to convey what is inconceivable in multiple languages to all sorts of people. To me that's like, "Namo Buddha." That's the top, because I'm very into this, as you've probably noticed, I like to talk. So, that's my thing. I've been asked to write books, which is so painful, like I can't do it, it's not my thing. There is one that's about to happen, I swear, that's gonna be the last one. Like you can take all of my recordings and do something out of it, I don't care, it's not my problem, it's your responsibility, but I'm not going to do that. I want to talk, because that's what I know. So the skill is something that you cultivate. And it was a challenge for me, changing from my French-centric mind, and first traveling throughout Europe, where you have all these different people, even in one country you have different people, like think about Austria, or Switzerland, you know if your in Vienna, or you're in Graz, it's just another country. I make a joke now, people in Vienna know they're great, people in Graz know they are great. Then Switzerland, then French speaking, then Italian, it's all different! Once I was teaching in Basel, and my translator, this was in Switzerland, which by the way was kind of funny, because the place where I was teaching was a former kindergarten turned into a Buddhist center, right across the street from the house of Carl Gustav Jung. I thought that was really cool, all of that together. And then the translator asked the crowd if they wanted her to translate in German, or Deutsch, or in dialect. And they all said dialect. And they were all so happy to hear these words in their own dialect. And all of that for me is so important. I love the dialect. All of you in Austria know how much fun I had with our dear friend Christian Loidl. Because he was in Wien (Vienna), and he could translate with a strong Wiener (Viennese) dialect, in slang, like Cockney for London, and he had so much humor. Once we were giving a talk, I was giving the talk, but I say we because it was almost like a group thing, together, and then everybody was having so much fun, it was in a theater, we were on a stage, literally. And someone came up to me during the break and said, like, "Is this improv, or do you rehearse?" He thought it was just a skit, kind of like stand-up comedy. So a friend of mine told me, I'm in the sit-down comedy business, not the stand up. That's about communication. The bottom line is that there is no communication, because if what I have to say was objective, I wouldn't need to say it to you because you would already know it. If my jokes were ultimately funny, even my dog would

laugh. So what I understand and how I express it is very personal. When you hear it it is already distorted by your own false clarity, your own way of understanding it. But maybe it just rings a bell, I have no idea what I say means to you, I hope it's good. I hope it's liberating, that's all I can do. It's really fascinating, maybe we could do one talk about communication one day, it's really fascinating. But Dharma is inconceivable. It can not be grasped by concepts. Concepts can help you to come close to a point where you can drop it, and get into an intimate experience. For that, the concepts and the words must be extremely sharp, like when you study philosophy, such as madhyamika, every word counts. Every subtlety, if you study abhidharma, every subtlety counts, relatively speaking. So you need precise communication, you need to be listening and in tune with your audience, but the real thing is not happening there. But that's all we have. And for me this is what is at the source of my absolute admiration for the Buddha. This mastery of communication. That's my goal, that's what I want to be when I grow up, when I am older. When I grow up I want to be a Buddha master of communication.

Q. Thank you for your teaching. I have a question about tendencies, I've been hearing Dharma talks for a bit now, and I've heard now many times you speak about inner happiness, and I know that many years of pursuing this goal of being happy inside, I catch myself trying for outside happiness, even if it's futile, and now I'm realizing it's okay, not to feel guilty if I'm appreciating good food or whatever. My question is about the attachment I can feel for all the good things, food, movies, etc, and before I was holding back from enjoying these, thinking this was proper Dharma. What's your view about living a normal life in the meantime while not exactly renouncing, but somehow enjoying something but not craving it?

I think this is an experience we all share. On our way we go through many stages of transformation, and there is a time where maybe you are in maybe a vision of absolute purity, and the renunciation, which means to cut from whatever ties you to samsara, or at least what you conceive as samsara. That means cutting yourself from all of the sensual pleasures and so on, because they are a trap, especially women, why do you do that to men, really? Just kidding.:~) You project your idea of holiness and it has the form of renunciation, in the sense of creating a sort of ideal picture of the "white knight" with stainless armor who is going to help the widow and the orphan and has no desire for himself. This is just bullshit! But there's a time that propels you, and then come to a point where you say like, "I'm tired of selling to myself and other people this idea." It doesn't represent reality. Gendun Rinpoche said all the time in teachings in front of many, many people, a lama is this, a lama is that, such qualities and so forth, "But it's not somebody like me, I am just full of emotions, full of kleshas, full of impurities." And we were like ho ho ho, yeah, sure, we know. But actually, now I know he meant it. I know Gendun Rinpoche, when he looked at himself and saw something that for him was a mountain of negativity that needed to be purified, he was honest. And for me, what he saw as a mountain is not even a dust particle, I would not even see that as a problem. His vision was getting more and more deep and subtle. And he was not fooling himself, and he was not fooling us. He was telling it as it was for him. So, I think it's important to work with what scares you and what attracts you in a more and more dispassionate way. So that we work with it for what it is, we don't overdo it, like I keep telling people, we are Dharma practitioners, not drama practitioners.

So quit the drama. The drama in comedy, “I want to be a holy practitioner,” the dramatic, like, “I’m just such a piece of crap, I’m so useless, I’m so terrible.” Nobody cares, this is just promoting, your the best of the best or the worst of the worst because you just want to be the first. Who cares. This is not real. So take what comes, like Lama Teunsang, the house is locked, then stay in the barn. Food comes, then take the food. It’s gone, then go without. Whatever comes your way, that’s fine, it shouldn’t change your inner composure, it shouldn’t change your inner stability, your inner mind. You know, there is an Italian author Italo Calvino, I don’t know if you’ve heard of him, a great author, he wrote book called *The Invisible Knight*, it’s about this perfect man, this perfect knight, he’s a perfect gentleman, and he never takes care, he just does good deeds and never lets down. And then there’s a woman, a lady who falls in love with him, and in the end we find out that actually there is no one in the armor. It’s empty. It’s just an appearance, just a shiny armor with nothing inside. So, if you want to turn your gaze inward, you have to see what “is” inside, okay, I like food, I like men, I like women, I don’t like kale, I don’t like greens, and that’s okay, if I have to eat it, I’m grateful, because food comes on my plate, and I’m very grateful and I eat it, but I don’t like it. But that’s okay, it’s food. Like Milarepa in his cave, when he has nothing but nettles to eat, you know, he put some water, and then he cooked the nettles, and then he said, “Hmmm, these nettles need a little bit of spice, a little bit of salt,” and he added some nettles, and,”Hmmm, maybe a little bit of chili,” and put a little bit more nettle, that he’s just making a soup of nettles, and that’s it. So I think the point is not about suppressing, repressing, it’s not about being overpowered and possessed by your likes and dislikes. It’s to see them, both of them, as liars. They’re not true! They’re not deeply true, they’re just habits that you’re pursuing, and you have to remember that they lead nowhere. I’ve done that before, been there, done that. I can say, been there, done that, didn’t work, I’m not going to go there again. And I’m not going to go there again because I “shouldn’t,” I have to be pure, no! Because I’ve done it, it leads nowhere, I’m tired of this bs. That’s renunciation, renunciation is when you give up bullshitting yourself.

Q You mean that you’re saying that the pleasures are actually the path too?

Yes. But it’s not like one needs to experience everything, there are things that I experience myself and I know the consequences, I’m not interested. There are things that I’ve seen other people doing, and inferentially, because I’ve seen people running headlong into the wall, and I’ve seen them hurt, so I know I don’t want to do that. So I learn from my own experience and from watching other people. And I’ve been for decades the interpreter for Gendun Rinpoche, and so I’ve met thousands of people, I’ve listened to thousands of stories of people, and as they were open, it was like being in a confessional, the place you confess your sins and so on. I’ve heard so many stories, and you know what? They are all the same. And it’s my story. And so I’ve seen that, and I’m not interested. My wife would say, is she here? She would say, “It’s because your testosterone levels are down.” Ha ha, she might be right.

Q. I have my own business, that I started almost 4 years ago, I dye wool, and I actually started a web shop this last May, and even with the pandemic I was so amazed, and after a while, after 2 months when the money was really just

coming in and coming in, I started feeling unhappy. And shortly after that, I found the Dharma, or the Dharma found me, so this is just half a year ago, and now my passion, that I used to feel about this job, which I always thought this is a lovely job where i can do something creative, it's not harmful to anyone, it's paying off very nicely, but now it feels completely useless, it has no meaning anymore, like just blowing bubbles through the air, and it feels so strange, because I put so much effort and worked so hard to get there, I got there, and now it doesn't mean a thing to me. I'm really confused about it, I'm really thinking of letting it go, because financially I'm not even dependent on it. I could use the time for Dharma, but on the other hand it seems so silly to let it go. What would be your advice?

You're in charge of your life, so I'm not going to tell you what to do, right? I'm barely in charge of mine, so I wouldn't dare to be in charge of somebody else's; I think you come to a point where, you know, this false clarity I was talking about, but then it's fading, and this is a good sign, because the clarity comes and replaces the false clarity. Now, with the perspective of clarity, you can make whatever decision you want, you could take it as a hobby, you could keep doing it as a job but you see, it's a different job, because you're a different person. So you could do it as a way to give some joy and beauty in the world of people, I know people like my mom, during the confinement, she has been sewing and knitting, she has so many things that she had to buy another cupboard to put all the things she produced. She said that was her saving grace. If she hadn't had the sewing machine and the knitting and the internet, you know, she discovered zoom and all the rest at 86! This could have been extremely painful being alone in her apartment. Lately, I wanted a hand drum for doing puja. I didn't want to buy a "made in China," and I found on Etsy a little company which is called Gaia something, you know, really woo woo, it's a group of 3 women in Portland, Oregon...of course, where else, where they do these beautiful little hand drums with cedar or maple tree, they build it from scratch, and then you send them, the words, or something that you want them to use while they are manufacturing the drum. So I sent them and asked, can you inscribe inside sarva mangalam, "May everything lead to enlightenment." So then I wait months or so, and then here it is, I received it. I don't know if they live from that, probably and what a business! And I was very happy when I received my drum, much better than if I'd bought one from Walmart for \$10. Made in China, plastic. So, when I get something that is unique, I keep in mind the joy with which it was produced, and that brings me joy. Like when I was in France, I met a craftsman who is not far from Dhagpo, and he makes leatherwork, but he is using a very ancient tradition of fish skin, the way some of the Arctic circle tribes are tanning the fish skin with birchwood or other plants, like sturgeon and salmon, and so I went to see him, and told him I would like to offer my wife a nice little folder to put her ipad in. He said, "Sure," and asked what I wanted as an ornament. I said, "Could you use fern," because she really enjoyed the time she spent in New Zealand, and fern is important in New Zealand, and he said, "Oh, I just came from Madeira where they have these big ferns and I took many pictures of them." And the guy showed me pictures from his holidays and we discussed ferns and chose the fish and so on, and now my wife is still torturing me to tell her how much I spent for that, probably more than for the ipad itself. But this is a beautiful object. I hope she likes it, but I personally was very happy to give this guy who wants to support an ancient tradition that because of Stalin almost disappeared and that they are rebuilding. It's just a piece of leather with sturgeon skin to put an ipad in. You could say, "Oh, he's very attached, why don't you

buy a cheap one?” But there is the hand, and there is the intention, that brings me joy, and I know because we discussed when I went to pick up the piece, I know the guy was very happy to do that. And he also makes his money, I paid the fair price. That brings joy, it’s not about the product, it’s about the process. I don’t know, maybe it’s a way for you to think about this, but if you want to quit, that’s fine. Quit, because again, it’s not the medium, it’s the intention.

Q. Yeah, I used to feel joy, I have been waiting for 3 or 4 months now for the joy to come back and it’s not. And I’ve been reading Dharma, and I read about the gap between when you fall asleep and waking, and also between the thoughts in meditation, and I was like, “What, there’s a gap??!!” I feel like I am in my mid-forties and I still have so much to learn. When will I do that if I keep working? I mean, I didn’t even know that there was a gap you should look for.

Well, if you take public transportation they tell you when you come into the tramway, “Mind the gap.” This is what is beautiful about life, it’s all open, anything is possible. Like if you’re a photographer, I see my friend Thule on the call, so if you’re out taking photos 10, 12 hours a day, when you come home, you don’t want to be taking pictures for yourself. Because suddenly your pleasure became a job. I took a lot of pictures and I really liked it, and when I look at the pictures I took now, they’re all crappy. Because I don’t care, I’m not interested any more. At a time, I thought it was my duty to be a reporter at the center to archive, I was archiving!!!! The pleasure of framing the shot was lost in the duty to archive. So now I have to go on a photography diet, to fast so that I maybe find the pleasure of framing again. But if I don’t find it that’s fine. There are so many ways to find the nature of your mind.

Q. If we try to, as much as we can while going about our daily activities, try not to grasp, would that be a good training to improve our meditation on the cushion?

The capacity to do that in action depends on the skill we have cultivated on the cushion. So we need to balance both. The cushion I call the gym, that’s where you build up the muscle, and then life is where you flex your muscles. You use them. If you haven’t prepared, you can not lift what you have to lift, and then you may be in a difficult position. So it’s very good to have the training, the building of the muscles, in the gym of the meditation cushion. That’s very important. Then, in daily life situations, what we think that we have realized through our practice of meditation on the cushion will be put to the test. Then we will see whether we fooled ourselves or if we really have found something. In English we have a saying, “When push comes to shove.” We’ll see what you can do. In French it’s, we judge by the result. Everybody can be a great meditator, just on the cushion, and not talking to anybody, but the Tibetans would say, we recognize a learned person by the way he or she speaks, gently and calmly. We can see a meditator by the way he or she controls their mind. So, the daily action will reveal what you have found or not found, will expose what you think you have found as real or as untrue. But to come back to grasping, grasping essentially is to hold for true the self of the individual who perceives and hold for true the object that is known by this self. That’s the essential grasping, the dualistic clinging. We cling to these two aspects as being substantially existent,

permanent, and independent. It's kind of difficult to see it when we are in the midst of the action because, let's say, a part of our capacity to know is used by dealing with the situation. Like when we began our zoom session, I was still trying to figure out how this darn screen could go on the other screen, and I was trying to talk to you, and I needed to let people into the session, and I was clinging to the reality of the screens and everything as mad. See, we need to cultivate, in meditation, this skill of recognition and letting go, and it will translate as a plus, as an asset, in our daily action. So, long story short, we need both aspects. People sometimes ask things like, "If I'm doing the dishes mindfully, does it count as my meditation." No! It counts as your taking care of chores in the house. It doesn't count as meditation. And besides this, who counts meditation? Do you keep tabs? Is there a bookkeeping of your hours of meditation? This is totally nonsensical. Ideally wisdom will be 24/7....actually so 24/7 there will be no time anymore. But I would say it's a validation. It validates what needs to be cultivated, needs to be taken care of, and that's very helpful for that.

Q. I have a question about my experience, it may sound very funny, but when I look in the space in front of me, or around me, and I point my attention to what is looking through my eyes, I see that the space in front of me and what is looking through my eyes are the same thing. Is this an experience of emptiness?

It depends how you see it. You see, because when you said, "When I look at what sees and what is seen at the same time, and then I see it's the same thing, who is knowing this? Is it the mind that looks at the object, because then you've got a second mind, you've got a mind that is looking at the object, and the object who is the same as the mind, and then you've got an extra mind who is looking at the subject looking at the object and seeing that's the same thing. Is it something like this? Do you have a second mind?

Q. No. I'm not thinking about, I don't have any thoughts. I just have a feeling that these 2 things are the same. Because I'm not thinking about my feelings, I'm not thinking about my sight, my senses, I just see that what is looking through my eyes is actually space. Empty.

Okay, that's a good start, keep digging. It's hard to use words for trying to explain an experience beyond words, to translate this into words. We use words and just agree it's a way to try to communicate. So, when you look at this thing, when you realize what sees through your eyes and what is seen is the same thing, then look at this. What is it? Is it just a blank space with nothing? Is it also vibrant? Is it also that there is a sense of awareness even if we don't "see" something? I would suggest when you come to this experience, if you come to this experience, that you dig into this, that you look at that in your meditation.

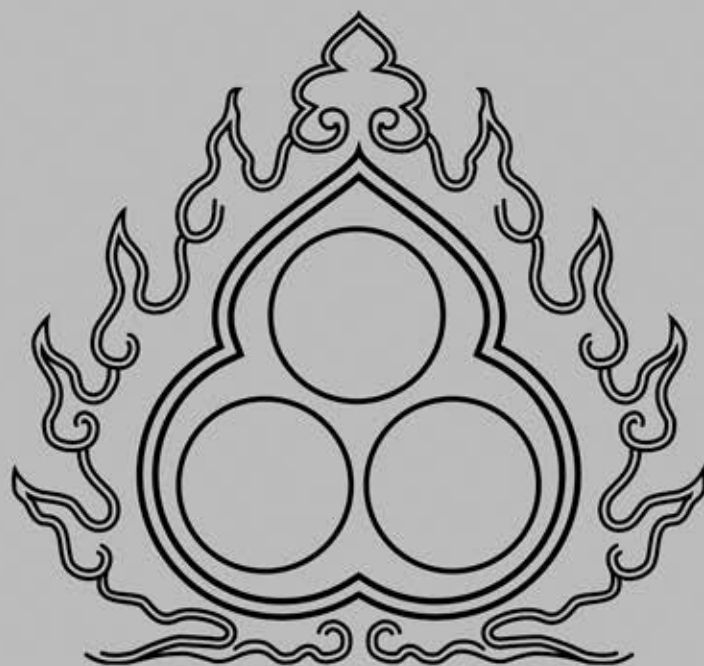
Q. I feel that there is a huge potential, that anything can happen in this space. Like the outer world.

Yes, that's the natural radiance, the natural creativity of mind. But I think it's good, it's a good starting point. And I would really recommend that you keep observing and, I think the way you do it is probably a good way, it's just look at it without trying really to find words and concepts and then

wrap it into some sort of manufactured project you can communicate. You know, like showing me, hey, this is what I found. And so, keep digging in this direction, and keep placing your attention on this. Begin to see whether this has some kind of fixture, some sort of substance, or is it illusive, it's nothing. But is it really nothing? Because there is still this thing that sees. It's clarity, and the creativity and all the potential. And as you say, whether it is the outer manifestation or inner manifestation, everything is possible. So keep looking at it, until that becomes really a stable confidence, a stable certainty. Keep looking at it. And I mean there's no time frame, you don't have to rush, you don't have to come up with some nice algorithm or some sort of definition for it, nobody cares. Just explore it to the limit of it, or maybe beyond, because maybe there is no limit. But think you are on a good track. Just keep observing.

Q. I'm not sure, but I think I heard Jigme Rinpoche say, the main cause of our suffering is our attachment to thoughts. Because usually we say that the cause of suffering is ignorance, but he said our main cause of suffering is the attachment to thoughts.

Well, attachment to thoughts, and I would add to this, attachment to thoughts as being substantially real, autonomous, and existent is an expression of ignorance. So that's the loop. You suffer from this. Basically it's a non-recognition of reality. So we're back to what we were discussing in French. As long as you don't see that the subject and the object, that is the thought and the thinker only appear to be existent in this interdependent origination process, we tend to cling to the thinker as an entity, and what is perceived by the thinker as "another" entity, which is dualistic clinging. In Tibetan they say *zung-zin*, *zin* is to grasp, *zung* is to be grasped. So what grasps is the mind, what is grasped is the mind, and the grasp grasping and grasped only arises because mind doesn't know itself. And that's really the reason we look at this mind, to come to the definite meaning, the certainty that yes things appear, they do appear, yet they have no substantial existence. They appear in an independent origination process. And all of that is fueled by habits and tendencies and so on and so forth. So when we see that we can relax a little bit. Because we know that there is nothing we have to achieve, and there is nothing we have to abandon. That's another way of describing Mahamudra. There is nothing to gain and there is nothing to reject. In some approaches it's a path of transformation where there are things to be achieved, like nirvana has to be achieved and samsara has to be abandoned, but in the perspective of Mahamudra what has to be, not even abandoned, what has to be seen is confusion, and as Gampopa puts it in the Four Dharmas, the famous Four Dharmas of Gampopa, the final step is, may confusion dawn as wisdom. Confusion arises and is revealed as wisdom itself.



Learn by Doing Nothing: Emotions and Thoughts in Meditation

MindWorks, 11-2021

How do you practice being present in every moment of your life?

Through meditation we learn that we can relate to our emotions with a more natural attitude. Once we've developed a meditative foundation of being present in the moment, the next step is to recognize that our emotions are not forced upon us. We ourselves are producing them and we take responsibility for them. With this recognition, we learn we can distance ourselves from them, to observe them in the same way that we observe any other movement of mind, such as a thought or feeling, during our meditation practice. We come to realize that an emotion is simply a mental event. It doesn't have any inherent weight or power. The only power it has is the power we give it by solidifying that particular mental event. We give that emotional event a particularity, an importance and meaning, based on our preferences, likes, and dislikes.

Usually, without noticing it, we want the mind to be like this and not like that. But here we can observe the mind's productions in a very benevolent and spacious way. During your practice, I invite you to simply be the witness of all the movements of mind, without being the judge. Just [be that mindful moment](#).

Of course, in post-meditation situations (also known as life), we have to make choices. Yes or no, do it or don't, is this appropriate or not. We all need to make choices based on circumstances and situations that we encounter. Choices are necessary. But when we meditate, as we sit in the boudoir of our mind, there's nothing to explain, there's nothing to justify. There is no decision, only watchful awareness—one moment meditation.

On the cushion, we don't have to project a glorious or ignoble image of ourselves to ourselves. We don't have to lie to ourselves by pretending that we are something or someone we're not because we don't actually know who we are. In our usual way of functioning, we're makeup artists. We're always making stuff up, and then we become storytellers. "Hey, look at me. This is my story. This is what I am." And then we buy into our own tall tale, hook, line, and sinker.

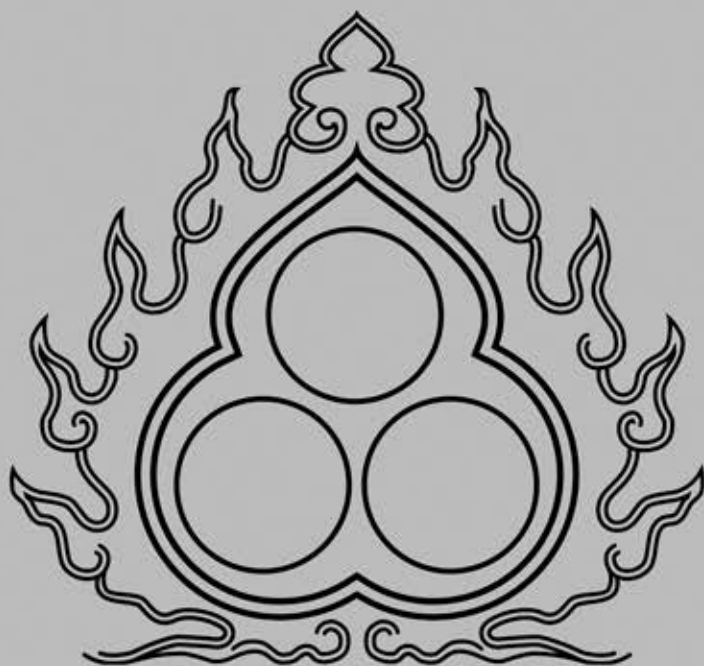
All of the usual judgments and labels that arise are relative: they present themselves according to your own preferences, right? Your thoughts don't have a value as such. They are just thoughts. Through practice, you can come to see that. When your meditation is focused on the present moment, you no longer believe that "These thoughts are so clear, powerful, vivid, and vibrant that I tend to cling to them as being real and substantial. And on the basis of my thoughts I freak out or I'm elated—but actually I'm just making stuff up."

What's the point? Cut it out! Sit and do nothing! Stop making stuff up! Doing nothing doesn't mean that you suppress or you hide or you turn your head away from whatever arises in the mind. No, it's just the opposite. Whether your [thoughts and emotions](#) are glorious or inglorious, whether they

are beautiful or not, making use of them in this way will help you come closer to [present moment awareness](#), and eventually to a direct understanding of the nature of mind. Even if this practice belongs to the “do nothing” file, you will come to realize that it’s hard work at first. It takes effort to do that much nothing. It requires diligence. But eventually it becomes relaxed. Naturally. Don’t panic, just keep observing. Be a benevolent, spacious, open, and mindful witness of your mind’s own creation.

Emotions arise and disappear. As you are more and more able to be the gentle, mindful witness of their genesis and disappearance, they lose the ability to create trouble, cloud the clarity of your mind, and blind you. They become the finger that points at the moon. They’re your great friends because they offer you opportunities to [look at your mind and disentangle yourself from your old habits](#). They become reminders for what you need to work on, to let go of, but again in a natural way, not as a project. The awareness of holding on is the beginning of letting go.

[Look at your thoughts and emotions for what they are](#): they arise and they fall. For most people, the simple practice of coming back to your breath helps you keep this distance and maintain a nonjudgmental mind. You are learning to be with what is. The training is to progressively let go of the training wheels on your bicycle of meditation, whatever meditation supports you use—the breath or a different object—and come to this mindful spaciousness. Mind is spacious because it is not restricted to one thing, it is not located anywhere: it is open and aware of everything. There comes a moment where the meditator is no longer a reference point that is looking at things. In that [mindful meditation moment, the meditator becomes awareness](#) itself.



Unleashing the Goodness of Mind

MindWorks, 2021

One beautiful thing about the mind is that it doesn't have to become anything else. You might think of it as a gold nugget that you've discovered. Let's assume that you recognize it as gold even though it appears to be rather lackluster and ordinary. From the moment you begin the work of transforming the gold nugget to the moment the gold has been refined and then made into a beautiful piece of jewelry, the essential qualities and potential of the gold never changed. The gold didn't become "golder."

The whole process of bringing out the best of the gold begins with refining it. We don't need to alter its chemical element; we appreciate its natural potential and want to give it the opportunity to shine. It's the same when we work with the mind. When we embark on the journey of meditation, we don't hold on to the idea that we're going to add value to something that wasn't particularly valuable to begin with. It's totally the opposite! We're not improving on the mind; we're not making it better. By sitting with the mind and observing it, we are giving ourselves the means to discover its beauty and natural freedom. We're refining it. Through our meditation practice, we're basically removing the impurities that were obscuring its brilliance, just as when we remove the impurities that never were an essential constituent of the gold.

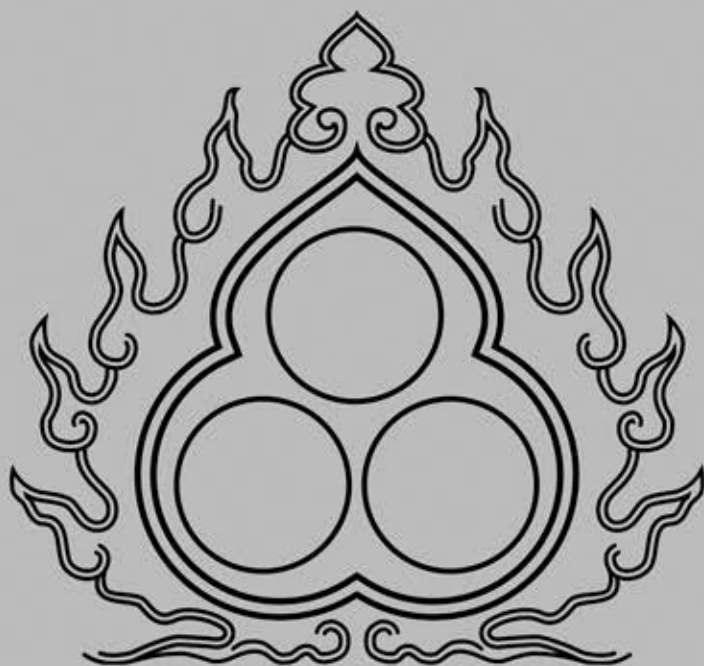
Mind's impurities, its confusion or delusions, are just fleeting, adventitious; they arise when causes and conditions come together and seem to sort of agglomerate or coalesce and stick to the mind. This is why the practice of meditation need not be a forceful practice. It may seem that way in the beginning because it's kind of tedious—you're supposed to maintain awareness, to count your breath, to notice and let go, and you can't quite do that. It feels like you're constraining the mind--the first steps of any training often seem like a restriction. And so you might assume that the general path of training and refining the mind through meditation is a path of constraint: you'll have to squeeze your mind into the form of goodness.

But it's the exact opposite! You're not molding your mind into goodness—you're unleashing goodness that's already there. It's so spacious! Mind isn't located anywhere in particular in the body, the brain, or wherever. You can't point to it and say, "there it is!" Mind's essential quality is spaciousness. Its very nature is goodness. This is what you discover progressively as you sit with your mind.

An early revelation is that mind can find peace simply by not running after all the perceptions, memories, ideas, and thoughts that arise from it and come back to it. By not engaging in mind's projections, we find peace. This is a great discovery! It's like the sense of freedom and lightness that comes from dropping a very heavy piece of luggage--a suitcase full of stones--that we've been carrying since time immemorial. We might find ourselves thinking that we should have let go of this a long time ago. This sense of being liberated from the heaviness is a very important stage in our

process. When we feel lighter and less encumbered, we are that much closer to unleashing mind's natural goodness.

Until now, we've always been devoting our attention to strategies, ideas, and thoughts; to yes and no, pros and cons, and all of that. We've been trying to ensure some security, pave the road to happiness, whatever. In fact, we were totally distracted. We were so busy running with mind in every direction that we were never able to stop and appreciate its qualities. Now, sitting still, running nowhere, we are refining the gold nugget of mind, unveiling its spaciousness and inherent goodness.



A Calm Mind in Turbulent Times

Dharma roadside dialogue series

December 2020

This year was, I guess like for all of you, an open year. There was no way to plan anything, and sometimes it could be a source of anxiety, like: “*when are we going to be able to travel?*” and for some of us, able to work, because as you know, we live in a relative reality where we need to buy some food, pay the rent and whatnot, so I understand, there is an anxiety that might come up to the surface. But I think also all in all it was a very good year for me. It was full of opportunity and creativity. If it was not for this year’s shambles, we would not be doing this.

At first, I was a bit reluctant to communicate via Zoom, you know how much I like to see people, feel your presence. It's really hard for me not to see, 90% of my creativity comes from you. And so if I don't have the feedback, I'm just like dry, I don't know what to say. Well, maybe it's hard to imagine, so let say: it's more difficult;~}

I thought that the present situation is a very interesting reflection on relative reality and the nature of illusion, that constitute our experience of this world, because, you see, we are in the same place but we are not, we are in the same time but we are not. Some are on European time and East Coast time, and some probably also joined from California, very early, or elsewhere, and we are not at the same time in the same place yet we are.

What makes the gathering possible? It is the intention. My intention is to make this available, and your individual intention is to be also available, and so as we are both available, then something happens. And we need a stage for this to happen, this is the internet. It reminds me of how the sutras were always presented. When you read the sutras they often begin by, “*Thus have I heard...*” at this place and at this time on this occasion such and such a teaching was given. So what is needed is five conditions. The presence of at least two persons to have a dialogue; we need a place, we need a time, and we need a topic, and we need to have a common ground of interest to discuss. And so we have this. The place is virtual, you and I are here at the same time, not at the same time but at the same time, and we have a common interest, and we want to have a dialogue. That's very auspicious, to use Buddhist lingo. It's very auspicious that all of these conditions are here. A couple of weeks ago I tried to live-stream the guided meditation I lead every Sunday morning here in Virginia, from my phone, but I couldn't do it. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't, and so the place was missing. That is, the internet connection. Now we have everything together, all the good conditions together, and we are very fortunate, it's very good.

So, let's talk about the topic of the day: “*How to keep a calm mind in turbulent times?*”

I would like to discuss this point from four angles, four approaches:

1/ **Is there a problem?** That's the first question we should ask ourselves. Because if we are not aware that there is a problem, it's probably impossible to find where it comes from and find a resolution.

2/ **Where does it come from?** If there is a problem, which we need to assess its origin, where does it come from?

3/ **Possibility of freedom ahead of us?**

4/ **What is the process, leading to the cessation of the problem?**

So for you who understand the Buddhist system, you probably understand that about the four truths of the noble ones. I'm talking about this basic teaching of the Buddha: Suffering, origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and how we do that. And so I would like to use this classic structure, but bring it into today's problematic questions that we have. Because the teachings are wonderful, there is no doubt about it, and their value comes from how workable they are, what influence, what impact they can have on our lives. Otherwise they remain a sort of distant philosophy that we might be very interested in, we might find very deep and so on, but it doesn't really change anything in our life. The general idea of the teachings is to change our life. To be transformed by the teachings.

1/ Is there a problem?

So what are we talking about, because we are talking about a calm mind in troubled times. So what is the problem? Is it that the mind is not calm, or is it that we are in troubled times? When we are talking about a calm mind, we may approach it from two perspectives. Let's say, an insider perspective and an outsider perspective. The outsider perspective is that the world is in trouble, and everything comes to me as violence and confusion, and basically we try to blame the world, or accuse the world, for the suffering we have. This is the general attitude we all, more or less, as a sort of inherent habit that we have cultivated through beginningless time. So that's the outsider approach. The insider approach would be more of a, let's say, Buddhist approach, in the sense that we are more looking inside, in our mind, and trying to find what is really the cause of my dis-ease, or my pain, or my troubles. Trying to understand if outer circumstances were different, would that change the inner state of my mind? You see, sometimes we are dissatisfied and no matter what happens outside, we might have all the best circumstances in life that we can dream of, we're still unsatisfied. And then sometimes we may have difficulty and we are not satisfied. So, if we really look at the way we react to situations, we can see that yes, the outer events have a certain impact on my inner life, that means the state of my mind, the peace or the emotion I have or whatever, but it also depends on how I receive it and what I do with it. And actually it depends greatly on this. Two different people going through the same situations, having the same external experience, might react differently. For some it's going to be a catastrophe, and for some it will be a challenging opportunity to learn something. So, Gendun Rinpoche was always telling us to turn our gaze inward. He said, like, "*You guys look outside too much, and therefore you miss the point.*" Because if you want to look outside and find a culprit, someone who is responsible for your dis-ease, this is endless. It lasts forever. You

can not cover the earth with leather, as Shantideva explained, because there are thorns on the ground. Shantideva said, "*Wear a pair of shoes.*" So, the pair of shoes is your mind. And Gendun Rinpoche was really inviting us to do this, to always come back to the inside and look at our mind, and not try to be so preoccupied by the outside. So that would be really the first resolution, movement towards a resolution. We look for the state of our mind, and we try to understand what is a problem in our mind; basically what type of reaction we have. So, I'd like to shortcut the outer circumstances because, you know, I'm not into changing the world, of course I'll do what I can when I can, like everybody, but my main concern is not to create a better society, my main concern is to help individuals to find inside the resources for their own freedom. In that sense I follow the footsteps of the Buddha.

The Buddha was born in a ruling family, he could have been a great politician in his time, maybe, and make some substantial amelioration in the life of his people, but he decided not to go this route. He decided to go inside. So I was very inspired by his legacy, so basically I do the same. Knowing that if I found a resolution inside, there is not a problem outside as long as I have inside the resources to work with it. If I don't have the resources, even happiness can make me sad. I mean this in the sense of good outer circumstances. Let's bypass now what the world might be and all the social aspects of the transformation of the world. That can be another topic of discussion, but for now I'd like to go back more to the source inside and try to understand what in my mind is reactive to whatever circumstances I collide with. So that's going to be the first thing, in my mind there is a form of allergy to a lot of things. And then, I react by creating dissatisfaction, by creating reactions that are of a toxic nature, just an expression of my allergy so to say. And, as everything that goes around comes around, whatever I throw out comes back at me. And amplifies the situation I am in already, which is not ideal, according to my own tastes. Yes, there is a problem, this problem is, I don't know what to do with uncertainty, change, violence, helplessness, seeing so much suffering in the world and I don't know what to do with it. All of this makes me really unhappy or unsatisfied. So, we are not trying to find a solution outwardly and try to find somebody who is responsible, guilty, punish this person, and then we'll feel good. No. We are looking inside. But as we look inside, we shouldn't also accuse oneself of being the cause of one's own misery. Saying you're too bad, you're too weak because you're not smart enough, you know, all these things of self-derision. We shouldn't go this way, it's counterproductive, it doesn't really do anything, it just actually adds to the uneasiness that you already have. We have plenty of it, so we don't need to put more of a load on our situation. So what I can see is my reactions are based on appreciation. Okay? There are things that I like, and things that I don't like. But when we look at the appreciation, the like and dislike, they're actually very subjective, very volatile in the sense that they can change very quickly. You know, we have the idea of friends and enemies, or maybe we have the idea of what we call "frenemies" here. They are partly friends, partly enemies. Or we don't know where they stand, they change, they look like they are your friend but they are your enemy. So we have all of this appreciation regarding what we come to know through our senses or what we think about, and we immediately label them as pleasant or unpleasant. And when they are pleasant we want more of them, and when they are unpleasant we want them to disappear from my life. Now, pleasant and

unpleasant is not a permanent status. Something that is pleasant now can be unpleasant next month. For example, when I had the idea that having pizza is a good idea, I like it, and then four hours later, when I have this tennis ball of cheese in my stomach, I wonder why I ate this pizza. It was a friend, and then it turned into an enemy. It's the same pizza. Things are changing all the time. What we come to see again is that friends and enemies are not solid values, they are not pleasant and unpleasant, and not reliable, in a sense. And then our feelings are equally pleasant or unpleasant. Our feelings are equally volatile. They are not trustworthy. So what we can see is that we change our mind very, very quickly, our likes and dislikes change very quickly. This is really the cause of our dissatisfaction.

The fact that we try to have what we like, even though what we like is not reliable, even though the "*likeness*" of it is not reliable. Basically we are trapped in a hunt for illusory sensations. This being said, when you're in the middle of conflict and difficulty, you lose your job, you're gonna lose your house, can't pay your bills and so on, it's very difficult to have the kind of clear mind that looks inside and try to understand what is the core of the problem. That's why it is so important to do it, this exercise, and gain some experience, mastery, before we are confronted with this big problem that we don't have the muscle to lift up and turn up. So when we become aware that we can be easily turned upside down, it's very important to also understand that there is really a need for preparation. When you have to lift a very heavy load, that's not the time for you to build up your muscles. You have to build up your muscles before, so that when the load comes, you can lift it. When you are in this situation where the situation is too much, not in terms of what comes to you, but the lack of capacity to work with it, or the unwillingness to look at it. We are like this, when a problem comes, like children often do, we'll pretend it doesn't happen, and we will hope that it will magically disappear. Well, it doesn't. We can't spend our life in denial. But at least what we can do, even if we are crushed, even if we are overwhelmed, is try to use whatever resilience, whatever inside discernment we have cultivated to try to understand what is the real source of this problem. Because that's the only condition for us to find a resolution. If we are in denial, it won't disappear. If we think that the world is responsible, and we try to change the world, again, like following Shantideva's example, it's like trying to cover the entire earth with leather in order to avoid a few thorns that are on our way. It's almost in vain. You can't produce that much leather, it's impossible.

The first thing is, is to acknowledge that there is dissatisfaction, and try to turn our gaze inward, and that's where meditation is going to be very helpful, because meditation creates a space, which is an open space, which is a welcoming space. We're not trying to do anything in particular when we meditate, we just sit. We just sit, and allow the mind to be, we allow the mind to be creative. We look at it in a non judgemental way. We look at it, we could almost say, in a factual way. We look at it as if it was not "my mind." And we see all these things, we see the conflicts between what we want and what we don't want, and the reluctance to really work with the core. The core problem. In the Buddhist classic literature, they say that there are four veils that prevent us from experiencing the natural state of our mind or to use the Sanskrit for a minute, the Dharmakaya, the natural mode of being of our mind. And these veils have to do, for some, with the mental affliction, the reaction we

have to whatever comes our way in terms of likes and dislikes. Habits. Like a rut in the road through the mud, you always fall back into it, and then your car gets stuck. Then there are also the consequences of our actions that always come back at us, and as we are not ready to work with them, we try to push them away, and in doing so we create actually more problems than solutions. Finally, the real cause of all of this is a cognitive dissonance. Whenever we look at something, there's always this pattern of duality. Someone, who is perceived to be an individual substantial entity, is looking at something, which is also seen as a substantial, independent entity.

I call this cognizant dissonance because there is a twist in the way we cognize, in the way we know things. Our awareness is always afflicted by this sort of dualistic pattern. So that creates a field between the knower and the known, and in this field all the afflictions, likes and dislikes can arise. And that's the real cause of our suffering. But this cognitive dissonance can not be removed by simply deciding it. We can't decide that from now on I won't be in duality. Because who is saying what? So even the nice statement that I don't want to be in duality is just an affirmation of duality. So we can't work with it like this. We have to start with the problems we have. We have to begin with the problems we have, in ourselves, not the cause so much, or the circumstances or the conditions through which the problem arose. What is the real problem in ourself? And for that we have to look at it. This willingness to look at it requires a certain amount of courage. So that's the key question in this first angle. There is a problem. Is it their problem? Are you in denial? Do you have the courage to look at it, or do you want to find somebody who is responsible, or something and try to get rid of this external element so that you can enjoy peace again? Or are you trying to look inside to find the real cause of the problem? Which is in the end the ignorance that creates duality, but in our experience it's the fact that, "*I don't want to work with this, I want it easy. I want this suffering to go away.*" It's kind of a magical thought, like shazam, disappear. The path of the Buddha, the path inside, requires courage that translates into a willingness to look at things directly. It's only from this starting point that there is a chance of liberation, a chance of the cessation of suffering.

Otherwise we just build up on what exists and we just proliferate more and more and more of this, and it becomes more and more complex. If we look at our society now, even though where I live and where you guys live is slightly different, but it's the same thing. There isn't in general a sense of ease, you know, we've been looking for comfort, we're looking for convenience. When I talk with my Mom, she says like, "Well, that's nothing, I went through the war." With nothing to eat for years, and we had to run down the roads, and as usual telling all the things that went on during the war. But she's resilient, because she saw that, whatever comes her way isn't a big deal, she can work with it. We've seen worse. We are blessed and cursed by several decades of comfort, and we take it for granted. The thing is, we come to the end of a certain cycle in terms of environment, in terms of society. We have to be aware of this and be willing to pick up the challenge. The point then is not to avoid and push it away, like here in America some people wish that we could go back to the time when America was great, which is just an illusion. It's a fantasy. You know, pick a point in time when it was great, maybe it was great for the white males, but not if you're a woman, or not if you're black, or talk about how great America was for the natives, it was great before "*you guys*" came. Not

even sure. So we want to have what we like and we want to have it cheap. This created an industry of buying cheap things, but the cheap things have a cost; there's the environmental cost, there is a social cost, all of this has a cost. We never pay the real price...we just want it cheap. The convenience, paired with laziness; there's a form of desire for satisfaction at very little cost, because we don't want to produce too much effort. So we have to look at this in our mind, like, we all agree that we have to do something for the environment, that we are slowly killing our planet, we don't know how many years we have left of possibly reversing the thing, but when I look at myself I say, "Yeah, yeah, but I need my car to go into town." I'm not ready to be like the Amish and just use a horse and carriage. So this kind of habit is created, on the basis of desire, to have something without much effort, and without having to pay the consequences. It's kind of a general sickness of our mind these days. So you create a universe around this. And then there's a moment when this doesn't work anymore, the planet says like, "*I'm done, I'm done with you!*" Or the society is not functioning for a growing number of people. I consider myself to be very privileged, I'm an old white guy. Male. So I'm kind of like the top of the crop. But if you are a woman, or if you are trans, or a person of color, or a migrant running away from war that most of the time our countries have created, it is unbearable.

And so this mass of suffering will come and disrupt our dream of a convenient and comfortable society. I've been following the news and I know in Vienna you have had your share of this, explosions, and violence. That creates a sense of closing and expelling and protecting ourselves. If we can not really courageously address the problem there will be no solution. And it can't be really a tucked down solution, it's a button up solution. It's each individual's revolution that changes the general feeling of a given society. That's what I was saying, I'm not really into outside political or whatever activity, you have to pick your battles, right, you can't be on every front. So I'm more on trying to help individuals to come to peace in their mind, by working with what in their mind disrupts the natural state, the Dharmakaya, the natural state of your mind, that is peace. If you meditate, and then you're sort of able to let go, for a while, all of the concerns, all the problems, you forget the news, you don't pay attention to the outer circumstances, you don't follow too much your fears and expectations. There is a moment of letting go.

There's one word for liberation in Sanskrit, "*moksha*." I really like this word because the sound itself is liberating. The idea of *moksha* is that the lightness that you experience when you let go of the heavy load that you have been carrying for a long, long time. If you're not good at meditation, then carry heavy bags for ten minutes, and then drop them. Feel how liberating, in the physical sense, that is. Maybe that gives you an idea of how it can be the same with the mind. And it's not all of nothing. Sometimes I hear, "*But yeah, that's too easy, if I sort of log out, leave this world then I have my peace, but there are still problems in this world so I'll be a quitter, I'm not doing my fair share.*" I understand this, but this can not be a justification for you not to do that for half an hour. Because if you can do this regularly for half an hour, and then you come to experience the uncomplicated stability, clear, and in a way extremely satisfactory. If you can experience this, then you know that it's from this experience that I must work with whatever I collide with. If I don't work from a mind at rest, spacious, clear, I can

not solve any challenges. So it's important to work on that first. But I'm already on the fourth solution, on the fourth angle, so let's try to come back to the first one.

There is a problem. It's not really coming from the outside, it's from an inner lack of capacity or balance to work with whatever comes my way. This is based on the ignorance of the real situation, or the lack of willingness to work with the real situation, or the desire to be free of problems and troubles in a very cheap manner. So own your present situation and what is very important is always to remember that we are all endowed with the Buddha nature. That's a heavy one, okay? All sentient beings are endowed with the Buddha nature that is the natural state. The natural state of our mind is not troubled by the superficial fleeting adventitious impurities and conflicts and problems. We are actually deeper than that, but we remain on the surface most of the time because we have no contact with our Buddha nature. But this Buddha nature is there. And if we can take refuge in this, refuge in the sense of standing on this, that's my ground, that's my foundation. I am deeper than the surface of my agitation. This mind has more qualities than I see. This mind, as Suzuki Roshi said, *"This very mind is the Buddha."* Maybe we don't know it as a personal experience yet, but at least we have to know it as an understanding. If you want to know more about this, Shamar Rinpoche just published a small book about the Buddha nature. It's in English, I don't know if it exists in German, I'm not aware of this. But why I recommend this is because it's a small book, and as Shamar Rinpoche usually does, it's kind of the essence of the teachings, because of course you could read many, many books that exist also, but sometimes maybe you get lost in the details. So this book is very interesting because it helps you to understand the continuum there is in the mind, between the mind of an enlightened person and the mind of an unenlightened person there is a continuum. It's not that we become Buddhas, we become aware of our Buddha nature. We don't *"become"* that, because this quality is inherent. It is native to our mind, but because we are so busy dealing with the outer agitation, or struggling with our superficial agitation, there is not really a moment where we can be sufficiently calm and at peace to tap into this resource, the Buddha nature. When we meditate, sometimes we have glimpses of it. When we have a moment where we feel a sense of ease, comfort, both mental and physical. When we feel a sense of clarity. That means our mind is very precise, very sharp, and when we also experience the fact that we can have many thoughts, a lot of turbulence in our mind, and if we do not grasp them, this is not a problem. That's a very important experience, because when you do that in your meditation you realize that you can have a lot of thoughts, there can be a lot of noise in your mind, but it's just like wind in the trees. With the practice of shamatha meditation, calm abiding, you step back and you look at this. You look at the movement, you look at the anxiety, you look at the desires, you look at the nostalgia, you look at the past and the future, and so on, like you're just watching clouds passing through the sky. And then at times you just don't pay attention to the clouds anymore, and you just notice the sky. This experience is very important because you can keep your freedom to make the good choice, whenever you will have to do it in post meditation situations. When you will have to decide between this or that, then if you make the choice from the clear mind there is more of a chance that this is going to be an enlightened choice. If you do it from the confused mind, superficial mental rumble, then it's pretty sure this is going to be a bad choice.

So, we have the problem, and we have to really accept it, and not project it outwardly or blame somebody for that, and also you have to turn your gaze inward and look in your mind to really try to understand where it comes from. And when you do that you realize that, so that's the first angle, that there's a problem, and it comes from not looking inside, and being lost in our preferences, likes and dislikes and so on. When you begin to see a little bit more clearly after these first two observations, then you realize that, wow, there is a possibility to really end this. Because the natural state of my mind is Buddha, it's the Buddha nature. So you can say you have Buddha nature, full and perfect, that's one way of expressing it, sometimes you can express it more into a potential, like a seed, or like a basic element that you will have to take care of. Like if you have a seed, you need to place it in good soil, water it, weed the grass and the weeds from around it, so you can also see it like this, there are two ways of seeing it. As a potential that will grow with your efforts and your intentions, your love and care. Or, another way of seeing it which is more, you can say, aligned with the true reality of the mind, is that clear and perfect right now. In both cases we just cannot connect, we are locked out, we are not connected, we are not online with the Buddha nature. But when you begin to see that, then you see, wow, there is great hope. There is great hope because I am not this confused mind, inherently, it is just accidental. It is the result of causes and conditions. And so if I work on the causes, and the conditions, I can stop producing the cause, and therefore bring conditions to an end, or the fruit, the result of it. So it's kind of a retro-engineering, you know, you retro-engineer, you start from the final product, which is a problem, and then you walk back, you take it apart.

2/ What is the problem?

The problem comes from, let's say, conflict. What is the problem? The conflict comes from the fact that I reacted very, sort of, superficially, and following my preferences, my likes and dislikes, also nourished by my, kind of, laziness, or lack of courage to really look at things, trying to find an easy patch. The easy patch never works. You know? I guess some of you are married, right? You know that the easy patch never works. You really have to work it out, you have to talk it out, you really have to....let's sit and take a minute, the work can stop, and very deeply talk about what is the cause of this dissonance, this lack of harmonious flow between the two of us. And then you have to practice what Thich Nhat Hanh called "*deep listening*." And there your practice of calm abiding will be super handy, because you know how to stay and not be like, "*Yes but..., you said...*" You just say, "*Okay, give me the download of your grievance.*" And then I listen. Then I really go into this and see what is part of my responsibility, and where my responsibility lays, and after listening then you can come up with your own expression of your "*side*" of the story, because it seems that we have one story between the two of us, but actually there's at least two stories. Your story, my story, and these two collide and make our story, so there's three stories. So, it takes a lot of courage to do that. But that's really, in my experience, now I've been married for twelve years, in my experience this is one of the recipes for harmonious interaction. That's true in a family, true in any form of dialogue. And it's not always easy. You know, because sometimes you say like, "*Abbrg, there she goes again, she wanna talk.*" There is a problem, let's talk about it. It's usually, like, men don't really like to do that first. It's very

rare that men say, *“Oh, listen darling, we have a problem.”* Most guys are like, never mind, this too shall pass. So you have to say, *“Okay, let’s drop everything we’re doing, nothing is more important than this,”* and then look at it. So you can have the same dialogue with your mind. Your mind says, *“I hurt.”* Listen to it. And don’t try and fix it and say, *“You know what, you should do this, you should do that, it’s very easy, let me fix you.”* Again, in my experience, being the fixer doesn’t fix anybody. It doesn’t fix anything. Be the listener first. Express your point of view, as honestly as possible, that means don’t hide the part, you know, like the dirty secrets of yours.

You can have this relationship with your mind. You can really begin to have this, almost like you’re in a relationship with yourself. And then you begin to see that there is a possible exit to this conflict. I mean, it’s not only divorce. Instead of divorce we can find harmony. We can find a common ground. It doesn’t have to be my way or the highway, doesn’t have to be your way or the highway, what do we try to achieve? This is a very important question you should ask your mind. What do you want to achieve? If I really look deeply in my mind, what I want to achieve is freedom. I want to be free, not so much of the outside world, I don’t care, really. Because I know that the outer freedom depends on the inner freedom. If I am free within, there is no problem in the world. I mean, there’s no problem in the world that creates a binding situation for me. So that’s what I really want. You know, happiness is overrated, I don’t care. If freedom comes through bitter or sweet, I’ll take both, because I value freedom more than happiness. So this is truly what I want, I want to achieve. And this idea of liberation or freedom has matured throughout my life. When I was seventeen, eighteen, I wanted to be free to do what I wanted to do. And now I want to be free to really respond to what has to be done in my dialogue with the world and that my own confusion and lack of clarity and so forth doesn’t create sort of a filter, a barrier, so that I can truly be of help when needed. I’m not aspiring to be a savior, there is already one savior, the job has been taken.

3/ Possibility of freedom ahead of us.

I can see, when I look at the problem, that there is a possibility of freedom, because of the experience I gain, now and then, little insights into my mind, I see that this mind is limitless and free and clear. And loving, and cognizant. I love this mind! I really love this mind. It’s beautiful. And when I look at the Buddha, you know, whether it’s a statue or a thangka, or I think about the Buddha, that’s what I see. I see my freedom. I don’t see a savior, per se, I see somebody, a human being, who went through a process very similar to mine, and opened a trail for us to follow, and I’m sooo grateful. And when I’m grateful, I’m grateful to also, sort of like in the mirror effect, I’m grateful for my mind. For my mind’s deep wealth and richness, and whenever I’m disconnected from this aspect of my mind, because I’m busy with trivial, superficial needs and so on and so forth, that comes from habits, I feel like I lose the preciousness of my existence. I’m wasting my time. And so that’s the third aspect, that’s seeing the possibility of liberation, freedom, in other terms Buddhahood, because it is the very nature of my mind.

And so, what is the fourth point then? The fourth point is how do I connect with this mind? How do I connect with this mind? First, by looking at it. And that's what Gendun Rinpoche told us, "*Turn your gaze inward.*" Whatever you do, whether you are meditating or not, whether you are in a very kind and loving mind state, or you are grumpy, angry, lustful, or jealous, whatever, look at this mind. You can see this mind without drama, and see that all these moods swinging, back and forth, have no substantial reality. Then you stop believing in them as being real, and this capacity comes from the practice of meditation. Meditation means to become familiar with what mind is, and to become very familiar with what mind is, is through looking at it in a non-judgemental way, not trying to promote this and suppress that, not trying to reach a projection of an ideal state that will be "*my*" conception of what enlightenment is, or be afraid of not reaching this. All of this is just superficial mind's usual business. Whether you dream of a new car or your version of enlightenment, it's the same thing. It's just an object that you have created, and you get high on it. That's not looking at mind. When you look at mind you see that, yeah, it's true that through causes and conditions all sorts of things come up from this mind. Like clouds in the sky. Clouds need humidity and evaporation and all sorts of phenomena. It's the same with the thoughts, it's the same with the emotions. But they never really form mind itself. Like the clouds. They don't scratch the space. They don't soil space. All these thoughts, all these emotions, only hurt us when we assume they're real and therefore, as I feel them, I exist. Therefore we create the target for our misconception to become hurtful. All of this is self-inflicted.

4/ Path of Liberation

The process of liberation will come from, on one side, cultivating discernment that is an insight into the true nature of mind. And this will be through the practice of calm abiding as a foundation, followed up by vipashyana, or insight, where we really come to see what is the stuff mind is made of. With progressive experiences that deepen and deepen. So that's working on the essence. And then, cultivating through the practice of the six paramitas, harmonious relation to oneself and the environment through generosity and patience and finding joy in the effort of doing this, not being afraid of the effort but enjoying the process of liberation. And cultivating a mental stability, you could say a reliable mindfulness. All of this will contribute to the soil from which wisdom can be experienced. By removing what hinders the natural state of mind. You see, when you're generous what you remove, actually it's kind of a twofer, it helps in both ways, when you're generous you help other people, obviously, when they're in need, but you also free yourself from grasping and owning and being very possessive. When you cultivate the sense of "*right livelihood*," you stop hurting yourself and others, by a lifestyle and actions that are only coming from ignorance and emotional reactions. So we cultivate a sort of a skill in being generous by being ethical. We could say ethics are the manager of generosity. And then patience. Patience is the key to the process. This is not going to happen overnight. This is going to take a long time, because these habits have been created and perpetuated and solidified since beginningless time. So we need to be patient. We need to be patient with others, when we try to be generous and ethical, and they are not reacting as we wish they would, we need to be patient with ourselves, when we are lazy, when we are cowardly, we need to

find a way to encourage ourselves, and we need to be patient with the process, which means fearless. Because there are things that are very difficult to deal with, because they're really out of our comfort zone. When we think about cause and effect, when we think about the illusory nature of all phenomena, that's scary. Like, thinking, "*Cause and effect, it's just too complicated, I don't even want to think about it.*" Emptiness, you know, like the big trap of big thinkers; "*emptiness,*" "*emptiness.*" Everything is empty. My wallet is empty. My cup is empty;~}

As we cannot *know* what emptiness is, we come up with our own description of it, and we don't like it. Because when we describe things from our conceptual emptiness point of view, it is a no, it's zero, it's nothing, and we don't like it, because we want plenty, we want happy, we want quantity, we want quality, and so zero cannot apply to my dream. So we get all confused with these ideas. So, these are very deep topics and they require courage and perseverance, and a gentleness in the process. We don't have to accelerate artificially the way flowers grow and bloom. The flowers bloom in their own sweet time. It depends on the soil, it depends on the light, it depends on the humidity, and depends on how much you took care, on the surroundings of the plant. We cannot pull on the flower and say, "*Grow faster.*" The same goes with our mind.

We discover this beautiful process, which generates joy and energy, that we come to appreciate. When we have the joy we have the energy to go on with the process. If the process leading to the cessation of suffering, liberation from suffering, freedom of enlightenment, is felt as an obligation, is felt like we have to give up what we hold dear, we are not going to be very willing to do it. Or we'll do it with a certain bitterness. There is no joy. The joy is very important. And joy comes from a full apprehension of where we are and what the freedom of enlightenment might be. It's not about creating a concept of what enlightenment is, but it is sort of like looking at our situation, the first angle, there is a problem and it hurts, and try to imagine what it would be like not to have this problem anymore. We use the suffering that we do not deny anymore, and that we acknowledge, to help us understand what would be the cessation of suffering. Wouldn't it be so great to be able to look at the mind in all its turbulences and smile at it. In this moment there is tremendous freedom. Wouldn't it be wonderful to be like this over time? When you look at the Buddha's smile, and particularly the Khmer representation of the Buddha, that have the most gorgeous lips, that beautiful smile tells you, "*It's gonna be okay.*" It is okay. Stop worrying.

Look at your mind, it's all in there. The freedom is already there. And so the lips of the Buddha in the Khmer art, for me, are talking about this. They're talking about the possibility of liberation, because we're endowed with the Buddha nature. And then the process is just to get rid of what obscures the natural state. Clarifying the natural state. Removing the fleeting impurities. And maybe you come at the point where you realize that actually even the fleeting impurities are mind. And so it's all good. But that will be for the day after tomorrow:~} For now we try to find peace by not constantly grasping and rejecting. That's the basic practice of shamatha calm abiding. And then when we find ease, when we find clarity, and we begin to let the mind be hyperactive, or calm; no matter what, that has no influence on the stability of your mind. Then you're in a good position to

begin really looking at this mind. Because the fear, the judgement, the hope, the expectation only comes from a worried mind. If this mind doesn't worry, because you understand, you realize, that the trouble comes from the worried mind, not the outer conditions that trigger my worrying. This is really the key point. Outer conditions only trigger a mind that is prone to a reaction. And then this reaction creates suffering. If there's one thing you have to probably keep in mind, it would be that. You're not denying the world, and saying all of this doesn't really exist because I live in a bubble, and because I'm in a bubble I can be cool, and I'm almost enlightened. No. But you realize that whatever comes your way is kind of like teasing you.

You know, in a very trivial manner I say the world is doing it's lap dance on you. You don't have to touch. You can just see it, and why I use this trivial example is because actually that's what happened to the Buddha. You know, when he was about to reach enlightenment, obstructions appeared to him in the form of beautiful women (because he was a man, I guess, if he would have been a woman then it would have been Chippendales) trying to trigger his reaction so that he would lose the budding contact with his Buddha mind. He didn't say to these women, like, "*Oh, all you women come to disturb me, you're so bad, just go away,*" and whatever. He just looked at them for what they are. You look at the body and see it's just transient, there are like four seasons, there is spring, summer, fall and winter in the body, and that's what he saw. And there was not enough there for his trained mind to be reacting in a grasping way. The story tells that then the gorgeous women start withering and aging, and falling apart, and so on. We should really understand what this is about. It's not about the meanness or the vicious nature of these women who are disturbing this poor man who is about to reach enlightenment. That's not at all what this is about. This is about looking at reality for what it is, so that you don't project your expectations and desires on the screen of manifestation. And so if you do that then your mind remains unperturbed, non-distracted. You don't have to say good or bad, it is what it is. And you know it arises with causes and conditions, and it will disappear, but you have enough stability in your mind, and enough insight not to be perturbed by whatever the world throws at you. That's really what we should begin to work with, cultivate this capacity. We went through a long year here in the US, it was not only covid, but an election year, a surreal environment, like I don't even know what reality is at this point. And some of my friends just freaked out, the entire year, they are just like so angry, and so upset, and you could say from their point of view, yeah, there are reasons to be so angry and so upset, because logic, and common sense, and truth is disregarded, and it's just like everyday was another low, like, how low can we go? Like, man, there is no bottom to that thing. And I was looking at my mind, and, of course, now and then, I look at the news, and then I can feel that my mind suddenly gets sucked into that, and starts processing that and generating a sense of indignation, or righteousness, or whatever, and then dividing what is good, what is bad, and it took me a lot of skill to step back and then really look at it in a dispassionate way, and see that there is suffering in this world. Most of the suffering comes from a mind that is obscured by it's own ignorance. And that's what I am trying to address. I'm trying to address ignorance and the offspring of ignorance, and I work with individuals, not as a global world system. I'm not the United Nations. I'm talking to each of you, personally.

Maybe, as we have this dialogue some insights, some new tracks will appear in your mind. You can explore them, and find what is useful, beautiful and true to your heart, true to your Buddha nature. As you tap into this Buddha nature, you progressively gain freedom, *moksha*, *Ah*.

A space that is crystal clear, where you can look at the mind, where you can look at all phenomena and not be fooled by them anymore. That's where your freedom is.

Questions & Answers

Q. Advice about the difficulty of change.

A. I think, the habits, first are not seen. They sort of lead us; they drive us, without us being aware of it. It can be comfortable in a way. Sometimes it's creating trouble, and putting us into a very unpleasant situation, but it's kind of like our nest. It takes a lot of courage to decide to step out of this, because there is a conscious choice that has to be made. Like, I want to be aware of what's happening in my mind, I want to know why I react in this way, and you enter an area that is somewhat uncomfortable. Trungpa Rinpoche said, "Cultivating awareness is irritatingly refreshing." It's irritating; it's not comfortable, because you are exploring areas that you have never explored before. Going into uncharted water. Uncharted water, your position is not on the map when you are sailing, you don't know where you are and where you go. So, in order to do that you need to have the capacity to connect, or rely upon, your inner resources. What I call your refuge. In Buddhist classical terms we would say the Buddha as a goal, the Dharma as a path, the sangha as support and friends and inspiration. But even more so, I would say the experience you have of Dharma and how you can also relate to the sangha, and of course the sort of connection with the Buddha as an inspiration, but also the connection with the Buddha nature as your deep inner resources. So even if you are in unfamiliar territory, because you've decided to step out of your comfort zone, you are not traveling naked, you have some tools that you can bring with you, which give you a sense of fearlessness. The fearlessness of a Buddha comes from his or her realization. The fearlessness of a bodhisattva comes from his or her confidence in the Dharma and in the process. So that's very, very important to build up this trust. And that's why our regular practice of meditation, study, and reflection contributes to creating this foundation that we can take with us, so that we are never away from this splendor of Dharma, you know, there is a Tibetan prayer that is translated, "Throughout all my existences, may I never be separated from a genuine inspiring teacher, never be separated from the splendor of Dharma, and following the steps, one after another, may I reach the state of Vajradhara, may I reach enlightenment as quickly as possible." So this is a very important form of inspiration that you keep with you. And of course they are ups and downs, and as long as we're not fully enlightened there will be ups and downs, but they shouldn't discourage us. And also, the task sometimes is heavy, you know, and what I really like in the chapter on diligence in Shantideva's Bodhicaryavatara is that is throughout the entire chapter he says how we should be courageous, how we should work, and how we should keep doing and pushing no matter what happens, and then in the end he says, and that being said, it is very important to know when you have to relax. It's very important to know when you have to make a pause, you can't be always on the front, there are times

where as a bodhisattva you need to step on the side, disappear a little bit from the world, or the engagement, a little bit of time of restoration. And it doesn't have to be a year; it could be a day or two, a couple of days, a week, or whatever, or just, when you're in the midst of a very tense situation, just a little while. Like, just give me a breather. Literally...breathe in and breathe out. Take some minutes, and come back with a fresher perspective.

A lack of determination can be caused by laziness. Having a sort of ambition to achieve something can cause the excess of determination, and really there is no plan, it's kind of unfolding as we do it. It's kind of like the old saying, "There is no path, and there's just a step." So you try your best on this step, and then you do another one, and you try to remain as aware as possible. And you don't take more than you can decently carry. No Buddha or bodhisattva will judge you for not doing your best, and failing to do the impossible. You see, this is very important, we are the only ones asking to do the impossible tasks and things, and I always question this, why do we ask ourselves to do the impossible thing? I came up with the idea that maybe we do that so that we can fail and then we don't have to do the possible. You see, when you ask too much, somehow you try to undermine what is already quite a lot of work, the possible. So let's be reasonable, let's be kind, let's give our best, and let's be humble with the result. Because all these things will take several generations of ourselves and other people to be done. I'll give you one example. You know that I was asked, not only me, but also I was asked by both Gendun Rinpoche and Shamar Rinpoche to create an art school, while I was in Le Bost in charge of Kundreul Ling. And for some reason, causes, and conditions it never actualized. And I was very bitter somehow, because I felt like I failed. You know, I was asked by both Shamar Rinpoche and Gendun Rinpoche to do this. And I failed. And, then really for years and years, I was thinking, like, "How arrogant are you to think that this failed because of you, and would have been successful thanks of you? You know, you're just an element in a multiple factor situation that includes a lot beings, the merit or the absence of merit, and so you're just an element, so you can't take all the victory and you can't take all the blame." And then recently, I called my friend Kunkyab in France, who was also part of this project, and he said, "Do you know what? Gendun Rinchen (who you know is the reincarnation of Gendun Rinpoche) asked that we create the art school in Le Bost. And I was like, "Okay!" It's not on one generation. It's going to happen on several generations. He has interest, I guess I would say, still has interest in this project that couldn't be concluded. Another example: Shamar Rinpoche asked me to make an empowerment vase out of crystal. He didn't want a metal one, he wanted a crystal one. And I couldn't find a way, you know, I tried when I was in Austria, good friends offered me to sit with Mr. Swarovski, and go to Bohemia, and then try to see there if we could do it, and it wouldn't work. And then when I was in Germany, in Jaegendorf I met a lady who said, "I'm going to do it, what are the prescriptions." And so I gave her the details and so on. And she was very, very persistent. And she met Shamar Rinpoche and he said, "Oh yeah, but that was a long time ago, I'm not really into it anymore." And she said, "But I am, and I will make it." And she was ill. She had cancer, and this was really one of the last projects she did. She found one artisan crystal maker in Austria, and she had two vases made. And so the group in Graz gave me these two vases, and I was going to bring them to Shamar Rinpoche, but he died. So I have the two vases in my closet, and I'm just waiting

for the 15th to be old enough and say, “Oh, by the way, we finished the project, it just took two generations.” You know, that’s okay. So relax, and keep doing a good job!

Q. Thank you for the wonderful lecture. It helps me a lot. I was brought up in Austria where I understood the values, and now I live in the Netherlands where people are completely different. For example, my son was taught in school for two hours with a Covid positive teacher without the distance of protocols that I would expect. So daily I am put in situations where I feel unsafe or uncomfortable. What should I do now? I’m anxious, sometimes. Okay, meditation and stepping back helps me a lot. It supports me. But I have to be honest, very often I’m very angry, or I run away, or...I don’t know, a lot of things coming up in my mind. I think it’s a process I have to follow, it’s also a challenge for me, and I have to practice Dharma. And, well, I always try to remember in the situation, first to think, or to step back, breathe, and then try to react but it’s not always easy. It’s just sharing, not really a question.

A. Thank you for sharing. I think this is something that we all, maybe differently, experience. Where I live, this county where I am living, has been quite preserved in a way from Covid, until recently. And now there is a really big surge, it’s really getting really, really bad. And so the question is, do you succumb to panic and become irrational and lose your quality of life and your peace of mind? Or, do you do your best and also trust that causes and conditions are operating and there might be things beyond, even all the precautions you take, as a mother you take care of your son, but then the son goes to school. And then the school is maybe not processing this wisely. And I have friends and members of my family who are teachers and they are also as lost as the parents because, do they do hybrid classes, or do they do online classes...there are a lot of choices to be made that are not easy. Where I live here in a rural county it’s very poor; you have the little town, which is well off, and then you’ve got the county, which is mostly farmers, which is very, very poor. And like us, a lot of people don’t have access to Internet. And so how can kids go to school. And then their parents have to be at home, because they have to work, and sometimes work two jobs, to make ends meet. So of course, this is a lot of stress! But I think we should, and that’s where the stepping back is important; we should be able to differentiate between rational, fear-based action, and irrational action. When I go into town, I’m very careful, and follow the recommendations of the CDC, the distance, the mask, washing hands, sanitize my hands, and so on and so forth, but I also know that there is always the potential risk, you know, there is a risk to just simply be alive, called death. And I think if we can’t accept our vulnerability, we live in irrational fear of what might happen. And I’m not a parent, but I guess this is what the parents feel most, like what might happen. This can happen, that can happen. We sort of follow the irrational tendencies in our mind. And that is a source of anxiety. We do our best, and you know, you can think that one day you will die and that’s the end of it, but you can also think that every day, until the one you die, you live. And every day you can do something. I also feel for the kids who are in school and they have to wear masks and they can’t be close to their friends, they can’t hug them or they can’t play, I mean, it is also painful, and for them somehow it is more painful than the possibility of dying, or the possibility of Covid. So I think we have to keep a certain reason, like we are not dare devils, you know, like we have in this country unfortunately people that think that wearing a mask is a sign of weakness. And it’s an infringement on their 1st amendment rights and freedom, and so they are a danger for themselves and others. So that’s ridiculous. But

also, to succumb to the irrational fear and you end up like Howard Hughes, you know, who was so afraid of germs that he locked himself in his apartment and would never see anybody. So, something between these extreme should be found. Because this is not only a learning curve for you, it's also a learning curve for your son, because he has to learn that life is dangerous, yet full of opportunities and possibilities. And the absolute security doesn't exist. When you want to trade your freedom for security, you actually as Benjamin Franklin said, "You do not deserve either of these." Freedom requires intelligence and a little bit of risk taking. And that goes with what I said earlier about becoming aware, "woke" some might say, becoming aware is uncomfortable. When I think, from my perspective, white old male, it's kind of okay, but if I think about what's happening for disenfranchised people in this country, my neighbors, then, you know, it really sort of like spoils my evening, and I'd rather like to be happy and so not think about that. But I have to be aware of what's going on so that I have a broader perspective that will nourish my actions and my words. So, that's life. Life is death, death is life. Life is life. And that's part of the game. But we need a little bit of rational discernment, but it shouldn't cut the fun, really. You know, the enjoyment of the pleasure we have.

Q. I just this morning finished my retreat, and I am in quite a dilemma, but I don't expect you to give me an answer, but I hope to find more security to find and answer. I'm very used to do Guru yoga and pray a lot, but at the end of the retreat I was hoping to clarify but I am more confused actually. I'm at a point to decide whether to continue with retreat or if I should go back into the worldly life, or do more at a Dharma center, and support more in activity. I feel split. And there is some joy missing, I feel confused and it is scary.

A. First, congratulations for finding the time to do retreat, it's really good, because everybody is really busy and has good excuses not to step back and do the work of exploring the mind. So, very good, I'm very happy to hear that. You know, in the old days, people, and when I say people I mean meditators, would alternate times of retreat and times of validation of what they have found in retreat through different activities. You put to the test what you have found in retreat in the meditation moments. And I think this is a very good way of alternating moments of retreat and moments of immersion into what was life, and to see if maybe your life now has a different taste, because you're in a different position can you deepen the work that you began with the retreat, can you deepen it as you are involved with action? And then there will be maybe a time when you lose the connection with the experience of retreat, because of course the involvement with life brings a sense of heaviness, and reality management and all of that, and suddenly everything becomes so real that we lose the sort of distance we had maybe touched in retreat. And then maybe it's time for another moment of retreat. The same applies for retreat; there is maybe a time where retreat becomes like a comfortable shell in which we hide, when reality is too unbearable. It's important to have the courage to go into retreat, it's equally as important to have the courage to go out of retreat. When I finished my second retreat, when we finished our second cycle of the 3-year, I had a dream. And at this point we had to decide whether we wanted to stop being in retreat, or if we want to go on, and then, some of my friends are still in retreat. They've literally been in retreat since 1984. Maybe you were not even born yet. So they are still in retreat. There was a discussion whether we

wanted to do this, or that, and as I really liked it I was kind of inclined to go on with more retreats. And then I had this dream. And in this dream I was in the ideal hermitage, a little house in the mountains, very well organized, nice view of the valley, all my books on the shelf, and I was just like so happy...And food was provided, everything was really, really fine and very comfortable and very peaceful. And then, I kept hearing people calling my name, from outside, like a lot of people calling my name from outside, and then I realized I had to answer to this call. And I also realized it was a very selfish attachment to the quiet peace, the peace of the non-confrontation with the world. And so, this dream was so powerful that it influenced my decision of coming out of the retreat, and make myself available. And then after that, for seventeen years, I've was a business monk, in charge of the monastery, and Gendun Rinpoche put this on me, and said, "Whether you like it or not, you do it." And I did it. And after seventeen years I realized that I had done it, and I wanted to keep exploring other ways, in different situations. So I passed on the responsibilities and then I left the monastery. And as I wanted change, I changed continents, I changed my lifestyle, and I got married! So that's quite a change, and looking for a challenge, this is a lot of challenge. The monastic life was easy sometimes. And so I really embrace this, and now every day I'm curious what is coming up. But I think, until you have a very stable mind, that means the quality of calm abiding, samatha or shine, which are body and mind at ease, clear mind regarding itself, in the sense that you can go through anything in your mind without being turned upside down. Okay? Until you have this, you really have to concentrate on practice and choose solitude. Shantideva would say that, and Paltrül Rinpoche would say that, but when you sense that you're attached to solitude and you're attached to quietness, then it's time to step out and go outside and see how true is your realization, because life will put you to the test. And can you work with it; can you still be insightful and gracious? Or do you want to run back to your cave? This is also another form of learning, and it's very important. So, I think, my view in general is to alternate, with moments of solitude and moments of action or being with the world, so that you learn to be with the world but not a prisoner of this world. And that's really important, because there's so much to learn there. You know, before you were born, in '77 when I met the Gyalwa Karmapa, the previous one, he told me to stay with Gendun Rinpoche, and study the life of Milarepa, and follow up and try to emulate his example. And I did, I studied with Gendun Rinpoche, I stayed with him until he passed away and beyond, and at some point I realized that actually my life in the monastery was only maintenance of the monastery, you know, this particular aspect of samsara which is called monastery. So, I was in charge of this samsaric aspect, and I felt that I had sort of lost what the Karmapa had asked me to do, because I was a business monk, as I said. And so I had a discussion with Shamar Rinpoche and I asked him, "Something went wrong, I was supposed to follow the example of Milarepa, but now when I look at it I'm more busy than Marpa." Marpa was famous for having nine wives and business and many kids and whatnot. And Rinpoche just made a pause and then looked at me and he said, "If you can really be Marpa, it's better." And even Milarepa said that, that he would never compare himself with Marpa, in terms of the scope of his activity and the depth of his wisdom. I'm not saying we are all Marpas, but at our own scale, that's the idea of balancing, finding the stability and the depth, bring it into life and put it to the test, and then go back to the stability, and so what you will discover in doing this is that there is a red thread that goes through all the moments of your life, whether you're in retreat or in action

in relation to the world, and once you find this thread, there is no contradiction any more in you're life, you'll not divide it anymore, between retreat and activity in the world. And this is what we need to find this red thread, the continuum, and that gives us courage and confidence and joy, because wherever we are, we keep doing the same thing, which is clarifying the natural state, coming to realize the true nature of our mind, that's the intention of all Buddhas. That's what we are here for, that's what we are supposed to do. This is not advise, this is just reflection on your sharing. And you have to remember what Shamar Rinpoche called the pushy crowded karma, like when you're in a crowd of people they push you somewhere, even if you want to go this way they push you the other way. Karma has its ways. I'm here living in America and married. If you had asked me this fifteen years ago I would have said, "Are you crazy?" There is no way to know what's for you, and this doesn't matter, because whatever your life will be, if you are connected with the Buddha nature, and your refuge in Buddha as the enlightenment and the Dharma as a valuable path, then everything goes. Everything is good. So there is no need to be too anxious.

Q. I have a question, and you were talking about going in retreat and out of retreat, but some of your friends are still in retreat after a very long time, and as people say, you need to be in the market place sometimes, and sometimes you need to be in the cave. So long term, your friends are still in retreat for decades, and you are in the world. Are your friends further along because they stayed, or are you farther along on your path being engaged in the world's activities? This question is about me, after working for my whole life, and now thinking about retiring, and so now I have time to consider a retreat. What brings someone further along in their spiritual life, a blend of both things, or a retreat, or what?

A. I think we are all different and we have different paths and different modalities, and I'm not really interested in seeing who is farther on the path, them or I. I trust their path, I trust their dedication, but I also trust what I do. I think as a bodhisattva, the activities of a bodhisattva can be very different. A classic example, we say some are like kings, they want to reach enlightenment quickly so they can help other people, so they try to find the quickest way to the realization of the true nature of the mind. Some are like a ferry person, as they take the ferry to the other shore they take people with them. And then some are like a shepherd, they make sure that everybody is safe and that everybody is in a good place, then once everybody is safe and in a good place, then they can enjoy the splendor of their realization and become Buddhas. And so I think these three ways of being are valid, and I remain really confident that actually a good measure of all would be important. Some people are basically contemplative at heart. That's their history, that's their background, that's what they've built up. They're contemplative. And some people are more like literati, they need to understand, they need to understand the words, the concepts, and so on. And some other people are more active, they're the ones that build up the monasteries, the ones who build up the centers, and so on and so forth, So, each one of these three types of characters need to have a fair dose of the two others, so if you're contemplative, let's say that's half of your motivation, you should have 25% of study and 25% of action. If you are literati, then you should have 50% literati, 25% contemplation, and 25% action. And if you are an active type person, you should have 50% activity, 25% study, and 25% contemplation. So you really have to evaluate or judge your character, you

know you can't make a cat bark. We have to respect our basic nature, not that it speaks forever, but this is who we are now. And we cannot force ourselves to do something that is against our nature in this moment, but we should also know that we shouldn't be excessive

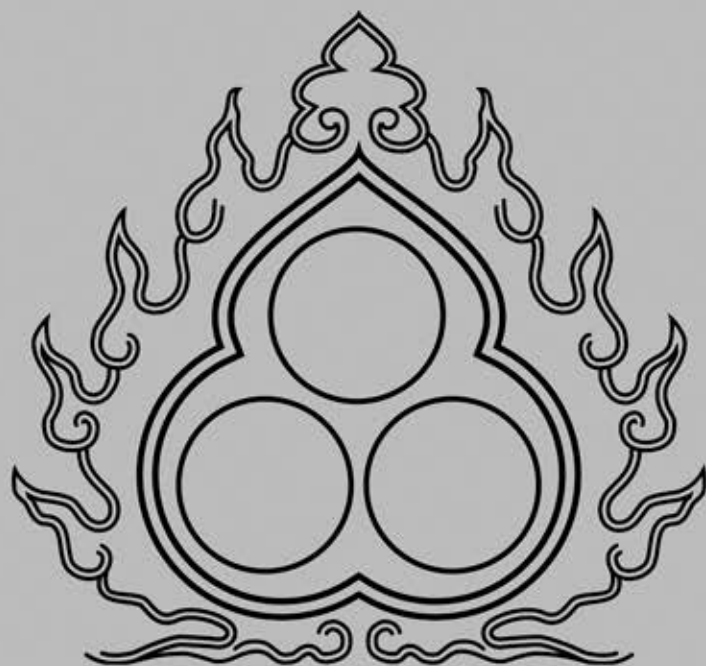
And when I say my friends are in retreat since '84, it doesn't mean they never stop, they had every 6 years or so, they had little holidays of couple of months, they went out of retreat, they went to see their family, they travel, they taught, they had some encounters with people. When they're in retreat people write to them and ask for prayers and ask their advice and so on, so they're in touch with this world; not as much as I am, but they are in touch with the world. They're not out...they haven't disappeared. When you look at mind, let's say like a piece of cloth, and you fold it so there are little wrinkles on the surface, I work mostly with the wrinkles, manifestation, and they work mostly with the cloth. But when you work with the wrinkles, you cannot ignore the cloth. And when you try to understand what is the nature of the stuff mind is made of, you cannot ignore the wrinkles. So, contemplatives are very important because they don't solve the problems, but they work on the cloth. Everybody benefits from their blessing that is unknown; we don't know it, because we can't relate to this level of presence of bodhisattvas in the world. But believe me, if it was not for the bodhisattva's prayers and activity, and in particular contemplatives, this world would be worse than it is now. They bring into the network buckets of goodness that we benefit from and we don't even know where it comes from.

And then you have other bodhisattvas that are more into the action, either to show, hey, look at your mind, that's where things are happening, or to help people in need, you know, bodhisattvas are not only teaching Dharma, bodhisattvas can be baking bread for hungry people, or working for a Habitat for Humanity and building houses for people who have no home. So there are many ways, and all of this for me is a source of rejoicing, because I realize that the Buddha mind is at work in many, many ways. And what I have to do is not to compare myself with others, but I have to come to know myself, and do what I'm good at, what my call is, and answer to this. It sounds very Christian, but that's the general idea. In order to be truly helpful, when requested, when asked to be helpful, I have to be free. And that's my responsibility, to work on my freedom, so that I can be free to help. And that's why, even though I'm in this world, I didn't get a 9 to 5 job, or I didn't get a whatever, but basically my wife and I decided to live frugally so that we don't need so much to live. By the grace of Shamar Rinpoche we have a home to stay in, we can use the car of the center, so a lot of money we don't need to earn to have like everybody's necessities of life covered. So I'm still, somehow it's strange, but I feel myself being more of a monastic than when I was in the monastery. And this is a choice in life, what do you want to do, and what do you need? This the reflection we had, and we decided to live like this; we don't have a retirement plan, we don't have savings, we don't have a second home, or whatever, but we have space and freedom, which is probably the most luxurious thing in this world. This is a real richness. And I use this not to indulge myself in my freedom and liberty, but to share, to be with everybody. So I don't see really a difference between now and when I was living in the monastery, it's kind of the same thing. Roof and food came to me in mysterious ways. And it still does:~) And I know where it comes from, it comes from the accumulation of merit, so I try to replenish my credit by being generous and ethical, patient, and so

on, cultivate the 6 paramitas. Because I know how you cultivate, and you have to be also careful about how you use the resources and blessings that have come to you.

So that's my life now, and it's really the best time of my life, frankly. I feel like everything I did before was to prepare me for this moment now where things are much more natural and direct and simple. I'm totally free. One of the last conversations I had with Gendun Rinpoche, he told me, "I'm free, you know, if I want to leave I leave. If I want to die, I die." And I thought, "Wow, someday I come to this point."

There are a lot of illustrious examples if you read a book called *Buddha's Lions*, the lives of the great accomplished masters of India, the 84 Mahasiddhas, the great accomplished. They all had a job. The founding father of the Kagyu lineage, Tilopa, his name means sesame, he was grinding sesame seeds for oil during the day, and during the night he was the go-between for a prostitute to bring customers to her. So, you see, very glorious past we have;~} and some of them were shoemakers, some were musicians, and some of them were freaks. One of them was called the all-eater, he was a glutton, and he was eating all the time. Okay? Another one was so lazy that he could hardly breathe, you know, when he had to go into town to get food he couldn't do it. And so his practice was based on laziness. The other one his practice was on eating all the time, and another one was a fisherman. It is very interesting to see that there is no standard, because of course when we think about a Buddhist practitioner, we see the sangha of the Buddha, we see the well ordained and very sound and politically correct Arhats and bodhisattvas around the Buddha, and this is one example, a wonderful example, they're inspiring but there was a lot of other people who reach enlightenment in strange ways. Like the first Tibetan masters, you know, Marpa, Milarepa, Gampopa to some extent, we probably could have had a hard time to relate to them. It seems that the history of the lineage tells us that Marpa was short-tempered, he was always angry, and he was very busy and so on. Kalu Rinpoche once told us, he said, "You are lucky, because if you had to meet Milarepa, you would see a green yidaks, a hungry ghost in a cave, and you would be scared and run away. And if you met Tilopa, then you would meet a crazy guy, like you see in New York in the streets, people talking to themselves. Maybe it's Tilopa, you don't know, totally weird. And Naropa, sometimes you see him, some times you don't. So you couldn't relate to these teachers, so that's why you need this very nicely ordained sangha, who give us a sort of a human, reliable and relatable representation of what a path is. But I really believe there are many ways, many ways to do this as long as you keep your foundation of refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha for the sake of all beings. You keep this basic sanity, and you keep it by sometimes learning, contemplating, sometimes meditating. And you do that in action and in retreat, and then you're all set.



The Four Seals of Dharma

Dharma roadside dialogue series

April 2021

Part one: Exposé

Lama Tsony

The Four Seals of Dharma is an important teaching of the Buddha and the interest I have in particular for this teaching is that it points out four key points that will be a really important foundation as we practice. And I am always keen on trying to find the most essential aspects of the heart of the buddhist teachings so that we, in our very busy times, and are own limited capacities in terms of time and so on, we have something that we can practice, put into practice seriously, and have a result. What matters for me is that at the end of this session you have good tools that you can use throughout the rest of your life, and then before you die you reach enlightenment. Okay? And if not before you die, just right at the moment of death. And if not then next life. And if not next life. No, I'm kidding, but you have good tools so that you can really move forward on your discovery of the nature of mind. That's really my intention.

So these four points, and thanks for asking to talk about this, for requesting this theme, because for me they are very important because they are seals; and I understand it as a radical experience that changes your mind. In the sense of a seal, like when you apply a seal on a document then it becomes something that has an importance, the value is transformed.

So, these four seals are four directions for our exploration of reality. And they're called the Four Seals of Dharma, and Dharma of course can be understood as the teachings of the Buddha, this is one of the ways of understanding what the Dharma is, but also it could be understood as reality as it is. I like to approach the Four Seals of Dharma not as four teachings about the Dharma, but rather as four instructions for contemplation that will have a radical influence on your mind because they reflect reality. Through them you can come closer to reality and that means farther away from delusion and ignorance.

So, four seals. The first one, because I am going to list them out, the first one is: everything is impermanent. The second one, which is the one I will probably spend more time on, is: all contaminated contacts are a source of suffering. I will explain what that means. The third is: all phenomena are empty. And I will explain that. And finally, the fourth one is: nirvana is pacification and peace. That is the way leading to peace, pacification is the way leading to peace and peace is the result of the practice. So we have here a sort of blueprint of the way to enlightenment in the form of four considerations.

We will begin with the first one. The first one is quite obvious if we really want to look at it. Everything is impermanent. Everything is constantly changing. Nothing stays. It's always changing. And it's very important to understand and to bring this into our lives as a central piece of truth,

because we are constantly in denial about this reality and that brings a lot of suffering. We are actually convinced that we as an individual have a sort of existence that we are moving through time and fairly unchanged. And we try to calculate a sense of stability in our environment so that we are not confronted with transitions and the difficulties that come from transitions. What are the difficulties? The difficulties coming from transitions are basically adaptation. We don't like to adjust.

We want things to stay as they are, especially if they are good. You know. When we have good circumstances we don't want to see them go. And then when we have difficult circumstances, because of this idea of permanence of everything, we sort of panic, because we project this into the future. That's what I call copy and paste; we copy the present situation, and then control v and then we copy it for the next moment and the next moment and the next moment, and so we project the future of it's going to be the same shit again and again, and then we freak out, we don't like it. So whether it's good or whether it's not good doesn't really matter. It is a source of anxiety, this is called the suffering of change. Which is not really due to change, but due to our incapacity to dance with change. To adjust and adapt and transform as the conditions change, our position must change, our relation to the world must be adjusted, and we hate doing that. So the first consideration is really, whether you like it or not, everything is impermanent. Whether you like it or not will not make you happier. But what makes you comfortable with change is to embrace it and accept it and be with it. And be intelligent and kind enough to adjust to the new movement. The new distribution, the new shuffle. We're talking about like a hand in cards, a new set of decks that are given to you or that you receive.

So, we must really study this, that means understand. And then we need to contemplate it, and then we need to digest it, through a contemplative meditative practice of some sort. The difference between the three; study, reflection and meditation, I will explain like this: to study is to come to the understanding that everything is impermanent. Contemplating means that you agree with this and you are willing to do the transformation. From knowing to willing. That's what contemplation will make. And then meditating is actually doing the job. Actually doing the work of transition and transformation. So this is how we should always proceed. First the acquisition of the new idea, the new concept, then the validation through our own logical reasoning and study in a deeper way, and come to a certainty, a conclusion that, yes, this is what I have to do!

There is no other way, really. I can really reject change but I'm still subject to it, and so it will not help. So I have to embrace reality, I have to see it, I have to agree with it, and then I have to embrace it. That's study, reflection, and meditation. And then the transformation will take place, because we follow this three-fold process. Then once we are at this point, then we can move to the second. And the second point is: all contaminated contacts are suffering, and this is a very, very important point. Contaminated contacts is the translation of the Tibetan word tsakjay, tsakjay. Tsak means stained, polluted. Okay? And that refers to applying a dualistic perspective on any contact. To any contact. That's the pollution. Whenever there is a moment of conscious awareness through the six operative consciousnesses, visual, tactile, and so on, the five sense consciousnesses and then the

mental consciousness. I call this the six operative consciousnesses. This is always happening with the stain of dualistic perception. Even the words in Tibetan and Sanskrit sort of reflect this reality. The word in Sanskrit is *vijnana*, or consciousness. *Vijnana* is cognizance, awareness. *Vi* is a prefix that means divided. And the same in Tibetan. *Nampar shepa*. *Shepa* is *jnana* in Sanskrit, and that's consciousness, awareness, and *nampar* means in a divided way.

This means that there is always the knower, the known, and the knowing, or the knowing act. In every instance of the function of the six operative consciousnesses. And that's the stain. That's the flaw, you could say, in our cognizance. And why all these stained or polluted contacts are the source of suffering is due to the dualistic perspective. Where we conceive a subject and an object that are different, that are opposed, and exist as entities that have a sort of substantial reality and a permanence. And in between the two is opening a gap for all the apprehensions that will become the mental afflictions. If something is deemed pleasant by the subject, then it becomes an object of attachment. And then if it's deemed unpleasant it becomes an object of rejection. And if it's kind of vague, there is an indifference. But there's not really recognition of what this object truly is, so it's not really indifference, but also a sort of mental opacity. Not really seeing clearly through. And of course these three *kleshas*: indifference, stupidity, aggression and greed, will motivate actions and words. And these actions and words will have a kickback. You don't need somebody who will be the accountant of your misdeeds and will be in charge of punishing you. It's just that actions simply have consequences. And if they are made in the framework of duality, a subject towards an object, they will be felt in the same framework, from an object to a subject. It will sort of bounce back. So that's why the contaminated contacts are suffering. And to this effect Shamar Rinpoche once told me, "It's very important to be precise on this point, because we might understand that all contaminated objects are the source of suffering, that is, put the blame on the object. This is not correct. The contamination is not in the object. The contamination is in the lack of awareness of reality."

Mind doesn't know itself, and becomes the prey of its own ignorance and delusion. It's not. Don't blame the object. The blame should be like what we read in the mind-training literature, "Drive all blames into one." All the problems you see in the world come from this contaminated contact which is the ignorance of mind that creates dualistic perception. What I found is that this dualistic perception can bring us to a difficult point that in Western philosophy we call cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance. When you are caught between two opposite aspirations. In the Melanesian culture the man, the human-being gets caught between two aspirations. One is of the tree, and the other of the canoe. The canoe is traveling, and the tree is the root and the family. If you want the canoe you have to cut the tree. If you want the tree you have to cut the travel. And it's almost impossible to reconcile these two opposite aspirations, so you suffer from a mental dilemma, which is to be caught between these two aspirations.

If we don't pay attention to the manner we engage on the path, and that we're still very much ignorant of how powerful this dualistic perception is, we might project ourselves into the desire of

enlightenment. Like enlightenment becomes an object that needs to be obtained, and thereby samsara is another object which needs to be destroyed, rejected; it's dirty, the other one is clean. Pure, impure. And then when we are trying to gain the "object" enlightenment, we need to follow a procedure that eradicates, that suppresses, all the dark aspects of our personality that are actually very fertile ground to discover also a lot of qualities. We have to suppress this, but actually this is not possible. As a part of ourselves is coming to the surface, it sort of disrupts the beautiful clean party of me reaching enlightenment, so our practice of Dharma is contaminated....by this dualistic projection. And it's not able to do its job, which is to bring us beyond this opposition of pure and impure.

That leads us to the fourth point: Nirvana, enlightenment, is peace. And peace means the peace that is beyond the dichotomy, the opposition between peace and turbulence. Samsara and Nirvana. If we consider Nirvana as merely peace, we want just to pacify everything, so we have to cut anything that disturbs. We have to repress. And then the more you repress, the more it pops up, and the more you have to repress, and the more it pops up and so on and so forth. And that's where you've got cognitive dissonance in your practice of Dharma. Then you fall into an extreme of puritanism. You know, the one definition I like of puritanism is: the fear that somewhere someone is having a good time. This is unbearable, because I have to cut myself off from all forms of pleasure in order to achieve enlightenment. But if anybody else has a party, I hate it because it makes me doubt that my path is right.

You know all these forced conversions we have seen in religion throughout the ages are not meant to enlighten other people, they're just meant for you to make sure that you're right. The more people adhere to your view, the more you're justified to think that you're right. So you don't preach to educate, you preach to gain members so that if your party or club is big, you must be right. The famous words, "too big to fail" applies to this. So, it's very important to understand that if you don't have a firm understanding through study of how dualistic perception is the source of all our trouble, we will keep desiring an object enlightenment and we have to repress what does not conform to this mental representation of enlightenment that we need to hold; we have objectified enlightenment.

This is what Trungpa Rinpoche spiritual materialism. Spiritual Materialism. And so for me the second point is a warning. There is no problem in the world for a mind that is enlightened. Everything is an option, everything is an opportunity to work, this is all very good material for recycling, it's a great opportunity to cultivate more discernment and more compassion. But as long as I maintain this dualistic perspective, as there will be pleasant things and unpleasant things, I'm in trouble. Because remember the first point, everything is impermanent, right? So there are the things that are pleasant. You have them, great. You lose them, because everything is impermanent, so it doesn't work well. Or there's the things you like, and they're illusory, you can't get them, you get frustrated, maybe you're jealous and angry because somebody made it like that? And then there are the things you don't like. You try to avoid them. They're coming, you keep trying to avoid them, but they're coming. You're good at dodging, but they keep coming. And then there is the fourth point,

which is: you're weak, you're down and out, there's no way you can avoid it any more, and then you suffer, full load.

So whether it's pleasant or unpleasant, in the end there is really not much difference between the two. The result is suffering. Unease. Dukkha. And then, of course, you're bitter, frustrated, jealous, you're angry, disappointed. And then you have to find a scapegoat. You know. And then you spend a lot of time trying to find somebody so you can pass on the hot potato that you can't hold anymore, or someone to punish. The idea of the scapegoat; in the Judaic tradition there was a goat that was charged with all the misdeeds of the people, basically this animal was pushed away, sent out of the city, to be the scapegoat so that all the problems of the people would be solved. That's my memory of the story anyway. But the idea is basically that somebody else will clean up my mess. And take the responsibility. But this doesn't work. This doesn't work.

So in mind training, when we practice sending and taking, tonglen, the first thing we do is to own our problem. "I'm angry!" I'm not trying to say, "Yes, but..." No! I am angry! Period. This anger is mine. We own it. And because we own it we can look at it. And then because we look at it and we open our eyes and look around and see that there are so many brothers and sisters who are in the same predicament. Then we have a sense of compassion, and our anger becomes compassion. And then we think, "What can I do? Oh, by owning my suffering I can alleviate theirs." How is it possible? It's possible because there is only one suffering. Whether you call it my suffering or your suffering, this is just a way of dividing things artificially. Suffering is one. If you treat one suffering, you treat all suffering. If you take one suffering and then you recognize it and you recycle it with the process of tonglen, then you find a freedom and a wisdom that you can offer, and that will be the giving part of sending and taking. It will be the part of giving. You can give the result of your transmutation of suffering into compassion. So you're not stalking misery as you deplete yourself from your goody, you recycle. You never give anything else other than what you have taken and recycled. It's just a flow. And this is possible when you understand that the dualistic framework of action is the source of suffering.

A question I was asked in the previous discussion was about this sort of cognitive dissonance in Buddhist practitioners; there is one part of us that is actually very appreciative of the world, we have a sense of the beauty of the world, nature with its sunsets and mountains, rivers, flowers, it all smells so good, and the food is fantastic, and the cheese is so good and the bread is so wonderful and life is so good when it's good, really good! And then there is the little part of the puritan in your mind that is saying, "You're not supposed to have an orgasm. You're not supposed to have enjoyment, because then you go astray from the path of purity which is without any feelings and sensations. Oh, yeah, I want to be enlightened so I have to cut all of this out." So we are caught between these two opposing experiences. On the one side the mind does as it quite naturally and openly marvels, and then on the other side this tedious, constrained mind of purity/holiness that we try to maintain.

How can we go beyond this? Because this is really the heart of the problem when we practice. You sit, and then you say, "That's not enough." Or you like to see your friends and have a coffee or a beer, but then you think, "Oh, but that's wasting time." When you study you want to meditate, when you meditate you want to study. When you meditate you think about work, when you work you hope you can be in retreat, when you are in retreat you're so bored, you have to go back and check your emails and social media, and so on, so we are constantly pushed too and fro between these two things. And in the meantime your life is going and the clock is ticking and soon you'll be dead. Let's be serious. In the best case the lifespan is 30,000 days. How many days are left?

I will link this point to the fourth one. I will link this point of how can we go beyond the dichotomy of marvel and hardline pure practitioners that reject samsara and feelings? Link this with the fourth point, the fourth Dharma Seal which is pacification and the path leading to peace. With the practice, particularly the practice of mahamudra, that begins with shamatha, calm-abiding, because calm-abiding is very very important because it creates the foundation where your mind can just rest and look at itself. Free from all the agitation and turbulence related to the management, control, or promotion of the object that mind perceived. So we pacify this. As we pacify this the mind becomes more stable and calm, there's a sense of well-being and ease, sukha, there's a sense of spaciousness and also a very important quality of reflexive consciousness, a capacity to look at things and analyze. Because we can see. We are not lost in the thoughts, or the struggle with thoughts. Once we have this, then we can begin to look at the mind. And then when we look at the mind, that is insight, vipassana, lhaktong in Tibetan, we're going to really question this object that we perceive, that was, so far, the source of all love and hate and all sorts of problems. It seems. What is it really? And then as we look at it we see that this is like a ghost, this is like a rumor. It makes a lot of noise, but actually it doesn't have any defining characteristics, it doesn't have any location, it doesn't have any form of shape, or color, or smell; it doesn't!

At the same time it's very clear. It is really vivid. But it lacks substantiality. So we begin to understand what will be the third point: all phenomena are devoid of substantial reality with regard to the object. Then when this becomes clear about the object, then we look at the subject. The subject is that which knows. The cognisance of mind. The cognisance of mind that we have disguised, or we have crowned with a crown of a self. We've turned the quality, cognisance, into an entity, me. We look at this, "What is me?" Yes there is cognisance, we cannot deny this. But when we look at "me" where is it? Is it in the physicality somewhere? Is it in the feelings or emotions I have? Again, we can't find it! It's like a rumor, it's like an optical illusion. It appears very real but can't be found. And as we look more and more we see that yes, there is cognisance, but there is no identity, or there is no entity that we could correlate to cognisance.

Then we are going to observe the action. What is moving back and forth between the subject and the object? Same. It is very clear, sharp, but we can't find it. It is very elusive. So as we practice vipassana in this way, the dualistic pattern is exposed as a fraud. Or a mental construction, a habit. And we begin to understand how the pseudo-subject gets pseudo-excitement regarding the pseudo-

object. And that is all very clear but it's all a mental construction based on old habits and ignorance. It doesn't reflect reality. And then when you keep looking at it reality becomes more obvious and as clear as what obstructed it; habits are peeled off by this laser-like mind observing itself. So that's the moment where we begin to realize that actually yes, all misery comes from dualistic perspective and the entanglement in this process of relation between subject and object. Yes. And at the same time it is devoid of any substantial reality. And even more deeply we realize that the so called subject is just the cognisance of mind, mind's own cognisance, that the object is mind's own creativity, and that the movement between the two is just the natural display of mind.

So we begin to see that these are more like the three waves of the same ocean. They have different functions, but this doesn't entail that they are three different entities, because they partake of the same essential reality, which is the emptiness of mind. Also known as the ocean. So when we begin to see that we can either see the ocean, or we can see the waves. Or when we see the ocean, we don't miss the waves. When we see the waves, we don't miss the ocean. Therefore the conceptual duality we've been operating upon since beginningless time, doesn't apply anymore. It is non-applicable in this experience of vipassana. And as we abide in this we realize that this is the natural state of our mind. All phenomena are in essence empty. But they are also clear and manifest because the nature of mind is luminosity. Mind has the capacity to conjure, create, manifest through the power of interdependent origination all sorts of phenomena.

As the third Karmapa said in the *Profound Inner Principles*, "This mind is empty, in essence, yet due to its nature of luminosity, it may manifest itself in any form." And that is turbulence, also known as samsara, or peace, also known as pacification or nirvana. Both of them come from the same mind. They are not opposed entities; one has to be obtained, samsara has to be rejected or abandoned, no!

And so that's where for me is the marvel. Of course I like sunsets and flowers and so on, yeah, that's beautiful. I like Cezanne and the painting of the forest behind me. Okay. It's all wonderful, right? But it's all an illusion. But what is really marvelous? It's that the mind can produce all of this!! The mind can know itself and ignore itself. At the same time. You ignore the something that is, it is, and you ignore it, so the ignorance and the presence of the wisdom of mind is simultaneous, or coincident, co-emergent, that's wonderful! The mind can create hell, the mind can create heaven. It's all an illusion, but it's also real when you go through it. This is wonderful! And that's where my sense of beauty is applied, in how wonderful this mind is.

You know the term in Tibetan, Emaho. Ema is wonderful, and Ho is joy. It's just like "amazing!" So when I correlate this mind with the Buddha, which is another way of naming it, my devotion and aspiration for the Buddha the enlightened state just blossoms. And I'm in awe, and I'm amazed by the capacity of this mind to create so many details, and so much perversion in the suffering at the same time. Maybe it sounds kind of crazy, but you can appreciate the transcendent beauty of the ugliness and torture. And there is one text by one of the Dodrupchen Rinpoche's that is the one flavor of bliss and suffering where he explains this. If you go on the website Lotsawa.org there is a

whole test there, it's a whole mind training teaching. But really from the ultimate bodhicitta perspective. So there is a sense of marvel. You can have the marvel, and at the same time understand that suffering is despicable because people are trapped into their own confusion. And because you know that there is nothing to add or subtract to this beautiful mind, in terms of its essence and its nature, you can relax your crusade for enlightenment. Just abide in the natural state. Follow the procedure of cultivating shamatha, cultivate the proximity, the close investigation of the nature of your mind through vipassana. Become inspired by the view of mahamudra, and if you don't know how to do that, read *Boundless Wisdom* by Shamar Rinpoche, it's very well explained. And if you want to know more about it, join us on Tuesdays, we study it.

And then you can really abide in the natural state. Emaho! It produces pure and impure, it produces hell and heaven, and this is really amazing. So through this practice you free yourself from dualistic minding. You free yourself from a path of self-inflicted torture of puritanism in order to reach your pure nirvana. And you don't despise the samsara as inherently bad. As Salingpa said, "Just like the lotus doesn't grow from a well leveled ground with drainable water, the flower of bodhicitta will not grow in the mind of disciples who have desiccated desire." It's very important to understand this. This is how you can really go beyond the fact that all contaminated contacts are possibly the source of suffering. But you can also possibly flip back, and through the contaminated contact come to realize non-duality, the wisdom of non-duality. And that will be your workshop, so don't throw it away.

And so we have seen the third point, all phenomena are devoid of substantial reality. We could talk for hours and hours more on this, but I want to talk a bit more about the fourth one, nirvana is pacification and peace. So, pacification in which sense? The path of mahamudra. Shamatha and vipassana leading to the realization of the true nature of mind, beyond pure and impure. Beyond embellishment and discredit, if we take the formulation of madhyamika. When we follow this path of mahamudra, when we come to realize Emaho, how wonderful and beautiful is this natural state, that is peace. But not a peace that is in opposition to turbulence, because the peace in opposition to turbulence is just pacification in the sense of shamatha pacification, we're just calming it down. We don't liberate, shamatha is not liberating. It's just creating peace so that you can begin to look at mind through vipassana and then through this, find liberation. So this peace is just pacification. It's sort of like the shadow and light of turbulence and peace. Nirvana, the peace of nirvana, is beyond this. Beyond turbulence and peace. Because you realize that both are just the play of the same mind. And because you see the nature of mind, there's luminosity and it's essence is emptiness. This wisdom liberates everything. All delusions will be totally liberated. All the rust will be totally removed. Or dissipated, it's not even removed. Like the sun dissipates the morning mist just by the warmth. The warmth of wisdom dissipates the mist of ignorance. And so that is truly peace.

And there is no coming back. There's no falling back, there's no relapse. Because in the process of pacification everything has been investigated, everything has been seen. All the mistakes are being corrected, and we've totally transformed our behavior but it is now totally inspired by wisdom and

benevolence. And so there is no more the seed for suffering, there is not the soil for it to appear, so for that reason it is a state of the wisdom of no return, there is no falling out of this enlightenment.

And then of course there will be a sequel, like all the good movies, they have a sequel. The question would be like, so what, you reached enlightenment, but what for everybody else? So what comes after is this wisdom, which is the union of luminosity and emptiness, keeps radiating what we call enlightened activity, which is described as for the benefit of all beings without preconception. And this just flows; it's just a flow of benevolence and wisdom, which is the natural state. And as you progress on the path of pacification, the path of the bodhisattva, you make powerful wishes, like the bodhisattva who was going to become the Buddha Amitabha made 48 vows where he ear-marked his enlightenment with the realization of his wishes. If such and such cannot happen, I don't want to be enlightened. The power of his enlightenment is irrepressible, and couldn't be stopped if the wishes were followed. That's the warmth of the Buddha. Amitabha, like he's the sun. That's enlightened activity for the benefit of everyone. As Shantideva said, "As long as space endures, and as long as there are beings in need, until then may I too abide to dispel the misery in the world." That's the enlightened activity.

Questions & Answers

Q: How can we, as elders, pass on some of our wisdom to the younger generations?

A: I am from the generation before the internet, and this present generation is fully immersed in the world of tablets and Disney and premanufactured dreams. So what can we do? I was trying to think back to my childhood when my grandma was taking care of me while both my parents were working, and how she taught me how to sew and she taught me how to embroider and we did some gardening together, and it was a great time when we would take a nap because I needed one, and now I understand why she also needed one, and she would read the newspaper and I would read my little fairytale book, and then we would be about to fall asleep, and we would wish each other a very pink or blue dream, and then we would fall asleep for our nap. We did a lot of things that related to that time in society, it was more like contact between two human beings, and I think that the first thing I think is important is to give this space for the child, because they are like the adults, they're caught up in their very busy schedules. I'm really appalled when I see how busy the kids are. I think this isn't natural. They're moving from class to advanced placement to dance and football and whatnot; these kids are always busy. I had long periods of boredom in my childhood which I really liked very much.

So I think the first thing we can give to our grandchildren is the fact that we have gained through hard labor the pleasure of enjoying time. Time is the new currency. So that's what we give, we give them time. Parents don't have time. And then grandparents can do things that parents cannot do, because they're not connected with survival, and the homework, and all that. No, it's a different thing. I think it's very important because we can give a sense of timeless wisdom. I think we can introduce them to the other worlds, other ways of thinking that their parents can't offer them,

because of their function in the child's life at this time, cannot offer them. This is a great time for this kind of thing. They're not too young to introduce them to Tolkein, or like when I was young I was introduced to Roman and Greek mythology. Or the Authurian sagas, or all of these fairytales, like Grimm. These gave me a broader perspective on life and death. There are many ways of seeing things; and our Western society, which is more and more digitized, is not the only way to see things. I think it's very important to give an opening on other things.

This may not seem very important, but I think that it is structurally important. It gives a structure to kids that they can think outside of the only box that seems existent, which is more and more rigid because the numeric world requires one or zero, make a choice. You know, I've rarely played computer games, like driving cars, because when I do this I get motion sickness, I can't do it. But one thing I tried to do, you know you are driving the car and supposed to stay on the road and go faster than everyone else while avoiding the obstacles. But instead I was constantly going off the road and trying to see how far I could go sideways. There is always something that brings you back; no, you are not supposed to go there. Why not? I thought somebody should have created something like this where you could go somewhere else.

So this is what the grandparents can do. I would connect this with the value of each age. 20's, 30's, etc. You do different things. That's fine, you do what you have to do. But by the end, or close to the end, you have some sort of perspective on things, some sort of philosophy of life, if your not totally overly mummified;~} You can still think and in a larger sense, what comes to mind as I say this is the movie Harold and Maude. This idea that there is some kind of cross-generational benefit. This I think we can do. I'm thinking about this, and thanks for the question, and I don't have children, therefore I don't have grandchildren, but I've been asked to be part of an intervention for drowning students in France. Confinement, lockdown, the virus, cut off from your friends; they're in their 20's and 30's, they have no risk of this thing, but still their life is in lockdown. And they're really going berserk from that, so long story short, this friend said, "Hey, we're trying to give some way for them to cope with that through readings, and massage, and some sort of physical activity, and essential oils; whatever we can do to help these kids." Then she asked me if I could somehow intervene and help them with meditation. I've been thinking about it and I was wondering if I should just try to fix them so that they can keep going in this insane world? By saying, "Count your breath, be mindful," and if you are mindful, you can be more efficient building the stuff that needs to be sold, that nobody needs and is going to kill us. Or am I just going to tell them, "You know what, kiddos? Go out! This is your life! You'll live. You only live once. Dream it! Explore it. But, see that you are the builder of your own prison, nobody else. And to see that we need mindfulness. You need to see yourself.

This kind of thing I can do because I don't have a horse in the race. They're not my kids, these are not my monkeys, not my circus. Therefore I'm free, and that's what grandparents are, in a way. Free, unlike parents. I think that's a great thing we can offer, a sort of a sideway track that says, "Hey, we can go this way, explore something else. Be creative." I remember my grandmother would allow me

to, with my playdoh, to create things that I would stick on the windows. So I would have the garden, I could see it through the window, and I would create mountains and houses and so on. And of course, I would totally mess up her windows; she couldn't care less. My mother would never let me do that, I couldn't even blow on the window to write my name because there would be a stain, and I had to clean it!

And I understand, totally. That's a mom's job. Now probably as a great-grandmother I don't think she cares. The only thing she cares about is if someone comes in and says her house is dirty, and since Covid nobody comes in anyway. But with my grandma I had a space of freedom. And I think this is what we can give. To give them the possibility to think outside of what seems the only way. My grandma would invent stories, bedtime stories. And of course everytime I would ask her she would forget and I would have to remind her what the story was, because she had forgotten, and she would say, "Oh, yeah," and then she would come up with something again. You know? We didn't need Disney to tell us what fantasy is. It was super creative, and I think we can always do that, give some space, time, and attention and let's try crazy things together. And don't tell your parents:~} They can't understand, they're too young.

Q: If you were residing in the non-dual nature of mind, does that mean you don't experience the 5 skandhas? How does it work?

A: The six operative consciousnesses actually belong to the five skandhas. They are the fifth one. And they are afflicted by the glitch of duality, in every instance of consciousness. And that is the seventh consciousness, the afflicted consciousness, the klistamanas. The habit to always perceive in duality. When we are enlightened the framework of the skandhas is not operating as a mind that knows itself. The manifestation and the experience of a Buddha, well, it might be a little presumptuous of me to claim I know how the Buddha sees, I really have no idea how a Buddha perceives the world. Even sometimes when I question myself I wonder if there is a Buddha outside of what the people saw. Because the Buddha appears in the world, an enlightened person manifests in the world like the texts say in a poetic way, like the moon shines on the surface of a stretch of water. The moon at no time has been in the water. But it appears to be there. So there is a sort of presence, but it is not as we understand presence.

So when we are free from this structure of the skandhas, we are basically out of ignorance, and for this we should maybe go into the twelve links of interdependent origination. When the consciousness, out of ignorance, is projecting itself into the skandhas, merging and associating itself with it, where you have psycho and physical elements. Form is the first one, so that's physicality, all the sense objects, and then the consciousness collides with this, so it's sort of a psycho-physical experience. We tend, through this and the duality and so on, it's a very complex set up of causes and conditions, but it gives the impression to the mind that it is an entity perceiving things, and these things have a reality, and then there is a sort of materiality, like in our dreams we can reach down

and touch the earth; but there is no earth, we can still touch the earth, we can be killed by a rock falling from the cliff in our dreams but none of this really happened.

So we are prisoners of the illusion of the dream. Whereas the Buddha is not. So the Buddha can be a master of special effects, in a way, and play with our skandhas and play with our sense of perception of reality, in order to educate us and help us to be free. This is called taming the beings by adopting the methods of the ways of the world. This is what happens when a Buddha is born, and goes through life, and has the twelve deeds, reach enlightenment, teach and so on, and pass away. And all this can be seen, as in our own world, in our own way of seeing things, a reality that historically there is a Buddha, 2500 years ago, named Siddhartha, Guatama, he was born in India and archeologists found remnants of his father's palace in Nepal and whatnot, but you can also see that all of this is a kind of magic, it's an illusion that is only designed to help us to step out of illusion. It's like a homeopathic remedy that uses like to cure like. When you use the illusion to liberate from delusion. So really what a Buddha feels, and what is a Buddha in this world, I don't know. But I'm sure there are a lot of commentaries on what a Buddha is thinking that have been written, but I'm not really interested;~} Dealing with all the speculation, I don't know.

So what matters for me now is where I am and what I do. What I realize now is that I am in a framework of this identification to the five skandhas, and this is the main problem. I'm sort of like shrinking myself to a small capsule and I'm trapped in that. And this capsule is a contraption of my own creation. And I can undo this, it's a long process because it has been maintained so long it is difficult to step out, like an old habit that is difficult to quit. That's what is important to me at this point.

Q: I have a question about awake/asleep...lucid dreaming. Can you share any experience with this?

A: Well sure, I was of the generation of LSD and so forth, and I have had a lot of lucid dreams, which is really a blast. Because basically you can do anything you want because you're free, there are no cops, and there are no boundaries of morality except the inbuilt cop, the lucid dream cop that comes and says, like, "Dude, you can't do that." But basically my lucid dreams were about driving in fast cars. You know, sliding against railings and crashing and keep going and then always faster, faster, faster. And then after a while I felt like I was creating an attachment to what is supposed to be a way to understand the illusory nature of my awake state. So I am spoiling my beautiful opportunity of the dream that could be a teaching on how to free myself from the attachment so that when I wake up in the morning I am saying, "Hey, this wake state is just like the dream experience."

But what I am doing is the opposite, I bring all my crap and my frustrated desires into the lucid dreams, and then, you know, I was into cars, but I could have been into food, or women, whatever, and just bring all of my kleshas and desires and so on...or murder if I was into murder, into the dream. And so I felt that this was for me, nah, I'm not interested in this anymore. And then

fortunately I was introduced to the Six Yogas of Naropa by Gendun Rinpoche and one is a dream yoga, but where you actually work with the dream, but in a liberating way. The work you do in the dream yoga during the dream state is linked to the work you do during the wake state which is called “illusory body.” And so the two work together so that you free yourself whether you’re sleeping or dreaming or you’re awake you’re working on: this is all an illusion. So you don’t bring your garbage into the dream. Because, hey, it’s fun. I’m not saying you shouldn’t do it. I guess it’s entertaining.

In *The Seven Points of Mind Training*, in the seventh chapter on absolute bodhicitta there is a recommendation for the post meditation behavior, and the slogan says, “Be a child of illusion.” So that means that you know that you’re a child born from illusion, and so you constantly remind yourself of that reality. It’s very important. Being a child of illusion doesn’t mean you don’t exist and you’re not here, it means your presence in this world, actually even the way of saying this is misleading, you are not present in this world, this world is present in your mind. You’re not in the world, the world is in you. Just like in the dream. And the wake state is the same thing. So that’s why you begin to realize that by repeating this like a mantra, be a child of illusion, be a child of illusion, and then during the meditation see all phenomena like a dream. See all phenomena like a dream. You are deprogramming yourself, from the previous thing, that this is all so real, the dream doesn’t exist, and then the very sophisticated way of dealing with the dream which is, “Hey, this is a free-for-all playground, I can do whatever I want!” There are no morals, no rules, no police because it just doesn’t happen. The only thing you ignore is that all of this springs from your subconscious, and whatever crap you create falls back into your subconscious. And when you wake up, you know what? You just want to do it in your daily life, in your wake state. Why not? And then that’s where you get into real trouble.

That’s what also happens to addicts to all sorts of computer games. You’re disconnected from your reality because you are in a dream state, and even if you don’t want this affects your wake state. It sort of creeps in. And if you’re not careful then you will implement it, you will implement it through actions, then you’re in trouble.

Q: I know you said you couldn’t speculate, but I’m still wondering what an awakened being might do in a difficult situation, such as I endured this morning in a park when a scary mentally-ill guy was being loud and aggressively in my face. I fluctuate between wanting to be compassionate, but safe. What is the skillful way to respond? What would an awakened being do?

A: Well, I won’t speculate, but I can, you know, tell you a story. A very famous story. The story of angulimala, which means knuckle rosary. A rosary made of knuckles. This guy was very devoted to a weirdo guru, who told him if he could have 1000 knuckles, that means 1000 fingers that he cuts from men that he killed, and make a rosary, then he would reach enlightenment. And this guy killed 999 people, and he had almost achieved his rosary but he was very famous in this area for being a, you could say, a serial killer. So everyone was running away from him, and so on, so he was really desperate to find his final finger to complete his task, because he wanted to reach enlightenment. So everybody ran away, and the only one who stayed was the Buddha. So Angulimala starts running

after the Buddha to kill him and get his finger. And the Buddha kept walking and Angulimala kept running, but it seemed that the Buddha was moving farther and farther away. Even though the Buddha wasn't speeding up, Angulimala was going as fast as he could, until out of exhaustion he gave up, realizing he was never going to catch up. He was also exhausted as he realized that accomplishing his goal of getting the knuckles was receding. So he had a breakdown, and then the Buddha stopped and engaged him and said, "What's going on?" And Angulimala says, "I need your finger because I need to reach enlightenment." And then the Buddha, in this moment where Angulimala was exhausted and had a sort of meltdown, sees the opportunity to talk to this person and show him how he has been misled by this crazy guru and that this was not the way to reach enlightenment, yet his determination to reach enlightenment was a quality that he should keep. And Angulimala joined the sangha! And of course, you know, it's like the Buddha brought Charles Manson to Sunday meditation, everybody was freaking out. And all the monks were afraid, no one wanted to sit near him. He had to overcome all his past misdeeds and the rejection and so on, but the Buddha gave him the space for that! And because he knew that Angulimala's determination was only misled, it was only misled because of ignorance. And eventually I think the story says that he became an arhat. In his very lifetime. So in this occurrence that's what the Buddha did.

We are not the Buddha, and we don't have the capacities through miraculous powers such as the Buddha had, to be able to change the mind of somebody who was not, Angulimala was not mentally ill, he was only misled; a very different situation. So Gendun Rinpoche used to tell us that the police are like the protectors of Dharma, they are here to protect the practitioners, he had a very romanticized idea, I guess, of the police, or the ideal that the duty of the police is to serve and protect. So basically, when you have this type of situation, call the relevant authorities to protect this person, basically, from his own madness or his possible misbehavior. So discernment would be there. Obviously there is a need for an intervention.

Q: Do you have advice for Buddhists who are alone amongst Christians in their life, family, community, etc?

A: Even at the time of the Buddha, he was himself brought up in what you could call a non-buddhist environment, because it was before his enlightenment;~} He was brought up in a Vedic, to make it simple, environment. And all his students were also brought up in some sort of Vedic environments as well. And they had a lot of problems regarding the coexistence of this new, I guess like Jesus and his new ideas in the old Jewish world, there were serious clashes. So when the Buddha tried to teach, and his students became renunciates, as they became monks, this was a tragedy for a lot of Hindu or Vedic based families, because just like in Judaism, the quality is going through the birth and the caste. So if you don't follow your dharma, in this sense, that is to make a boy that you can send to the Brahmin to do a good Brahmin job, you are basically endangering the Brahmin lineage, and therefore you are injuring your predecessors, and then of course, those who came after since you won't be having children if you are celibate.

There was an intervention at the time of the Buddha that was really funny. You read that in the Vinaya. An intervention of mothers and wives who came to the Buddha and said, "Okay, I respect my son or husband's desire to become a renunciate and follow your teachings and so on, but this celibacy thing, or chastity thing, doesn't work; we need a son, so could you make a rule that they can come back to their wife on occasion, until they have a child? We need to have children in order to keep our businesses going." So the Buddha had to deal with this kind of thing. And he said, "No, nope, this ain't gonna happen." He had to mark some very strict limitations on essential points, but he was also very careful not to go unnecessarily against established cultural habits of his time. At the same time being quite the, you could say he was a radical Hindu, like Jesus was a radical Jew.

So I think that we can always find differences, but we can also work on understanding the common ground. And that's probably where I would go. I was invited by one of the pastors in the county here to talk to his congregation about meditation, because they heard that meditation could be good for regulating blood pressure and other health issues that a lot of his congregation had problems with, and so I went to his church with my wife Wendelin and I talked to his congregation and I was trying not to be offensive and, like, mention that Buddhists don't believe in God. And at some point he said, "You didn't mention God." And I said, "Yeah, do you want to talk about it? Okay, I will use one of your scripture that says be quiet and silent and you will know that I am God. I am here to teach you how to be quiet and silent, and then your pastor will tell you about God." So we had the best relationship, because he understood that I am not his enemy. And then I noted that all the Abrahamic religions are saying the same thing in a different way. The Muslims will say: Do not represent God. The Christians will say: God is a mystery. The Jews say: Do not invoke the name of the Lord lightly. So what does this mean. It means that God transcends all the different definitions we can make of him. Of him! That's already a definition that comes from humans, or white males. Do not represent, that means don't conceptualize. In my tradition we would say the ultimate reality of mind escapes all concepts in words and representation. Now we all agree that, as questions, for example, you can invite the holy spirit and receive a sense of grace. In meditation, we meditate and we can sense the luminosity of mind that we call the Sambhogakaya, and that we can correlate, if we want, to the holy spirit. So we can experience this; the holy spirit is sort of perceptible enough for us to be able to receive and feel, and closer to God enough that you can not grasp it into a form or name.

And then there are the prophets. The prophets, in the old traditions, are said to be giving a face to God. And the Buddha is sort of like the reflection of the moon in the pond which is the luminosity of God that appears in a way that is perceptible for us. So I work on trying to explain that there are realities that are beyond the discrepancies or the differences between the phrasing and the conceptualizing, and so on. I also often quote the French philosopher Voltaire, who said once: "God created man in his likeness, and man did the same." So we don't need to argue, because arguing is just arguing about our conceptualization about something that is beyond conceptualization. What we can agree upon is that we all can sense a sense of transcendence and

blessing in our practice, whatever religion you have. And we all agree on the fact that you should love thy neighbor. Period. You know, love thy neighbor, pass it on.

So if you approach in this way you realize that we are going to the same place we just don't name it the same way. A lot of our friends and family and so on are very worried because they think that we're going to hell, and they want to help us. Because we are heathens. So they want to bring us back to the true path. But if you can show them there is only a difference in words, but not a difference in essence, they will feel reassured. Jesus said: "There are many rooms in my father's house." So okay, you're in the kitchen, I'm in the living room, we're in the same damn house. Stop arguing about that. You can always find a way, because if you want to see only the differences, even in the Dharma itself you find differences. You will oppose Mahayana and Theravada, you will oppose Vajrayana to the pure orthodox Dharma of the Buddha. You will try to find all the little texts and things that say you shouldn't do this and you shouldn't do that, and say others do it.

When I was in Bodhgaya the first time I met monks from Burma. I had never seen any monks from there before. They follow the vinaya very strictly, and they vow not to take intoxicants. Those monks don't drink, obviously, but they all smoke! Not weed; they smoke cigarettes. So it's very shocking for me, these very venerable monks in Bodhgaya, with a fag. What the heck! Because in my tradition it is said if you smoke tobacco you pollute your inner channels and all the mandalas of deities within your body. Dujom Rinpoche wrote a book about this, if you're a smoker don't even read it, because you will freak out. He says passive smoking is as bad as pulling out the hearts of thousands of people. So I saw this guy, this pure monk, smoking, and I thought, "Oh my God, I have to save them." And in the meantime we were doing the ajna chakra, and in the end we took a small amount of alcohol, and the monks thought they had to save us. It's just a misunderstanding, a not knowing.

So I think if we love our neighbor, we want to understand them. And if it's difficult for them to come to your ground, then help them to understand it's only a way of saying and doing things slightly differently. Even among the Christians. The first thing I did when I came to this country was to buy a book about the history of religion in America. I was surprised to learn there are two hundred forty-nine denominations just among the Christians. Two hundred forty-nine! Can you believe that? And if you ask a Southern Baptist if the UU are Christian, the Unitarian Universalists, they will say, like, "No friggin' way!" And they worship the same God and the same Jesus!

So if you want to find discrepancies, let's talk about being a Catholic in Rockbridge County. "Oh, you're one of the Pope's minions." So, you can always find differences. I think if we love our neighbor and we try to help them to understand that basically what Jesus and Buddha said is to love thy neighbor and know thyself. And that's the bottom line. But I would recommend a very, very good book by Thich Nhat Hanh, the title is *Jesus and Buddha As Brothers*. It's a reflection of the common ground between Christianity and Buddhism by Thich Nhat Hanh, and it is very soft and

gentle yet very, very strict in a powerful way. I often give or recommend this book to people with similar questions.

There is no difference. There are differences on the surface, but at the basis is may all beings be free from suffering and the origin and the cause of suffering. But at times we have to be discreet. Once in Austria I was invited by a woman; she wanted me to come to her house to do a consecration of her meditation room. And she had a problem because she was married to a very strict, very observant orthodox man who would have a priest come to their house to celebrate the mass, every week or something. They had a chapel in their house, they were really wealthy people. So she said she can't have a shrine or place to meditate with a statue of the Buddha, so I was trying to explain that she didn't really "need" it if she can't have it, if it would create trauma or drama for the family, no need to do it. But she really wanted it. I said, "You have a chapel in your house, so maybe you could have a little cabinet that is behind a beautiful icon from Jesus with a secret door you could open and behind is a Buddha statue, so your husband doesn't know, and when you are alone in the chapel you can open it and have the Buddha. I don't think Jesus will care." It's kind of half a joke but also I'm kind of practical so I thought maybe she could do that. I don't know if she did or not. This was the same dilemma because she wanted more, deeper, and the family was sort of not agreeing, here in this case it was her husband.

Q: I grew up in a family of atheists, and I have a hard time somehow using the methods within some of the Buddhist practices. I can intellectually understand that they are skillful means, but on the other hand I have the habit of thinking it is more like superstition. Even as I look at the mind I have a voice in my head that is saying it is just the impulses of the brain.

A: I think that's fine. I think we should use all the information that we have, and validate them, and use them to validate the Dharma teachings. We don't use Dharma to validate science and we don't use science to validate the Dharma but we can see how they work and how they help us, each of them in different ways to deepen our understanding of the nature of reality. So we have a common goal, and I think the common goal of all scientists is to understand. I think a lot of them are for the enhancement of human society, so that it's a better life. There is a humanist element, even for atheists, I understand that they can be kind of tired of the repression from the religious establishment, and they want to break free from that because they want to be free to think. And that's great, I'm totally on board with that. But you have to think in a way that is holistic, where you can see all the possibilities. And like in science there are things that you can intuit but you can not prove, but you don't reject them, because they are your working hypotheses. If you practice science from what you know, you're stuck. You have to have an open mind. And validate this working hypothesis.

What I always liked in Buddhism is the scientific process of taking one thing and validating it through study, reflection, critical reasoning and personal intuitive experience. Once we have this validation, it becomes the base, and then we can validate the next one, and so on and so forth. There

is no belief package in Buddhism. If you don't agree with karma, if you don't agree with future life and so on, just forget it. What attracts you in Buddhism now is maybe that you want to pacify your mind and be a more benevolent person who is not always under the sway of mental affliction. Good, we've got enough work for a lifetime. Just work on that. You can begin by being a good person, and as you progress things open up. Keep an open mind. There might be another way of seeing things. A certain sense of curiosity drives us, or at least drives me. There's more to this, I guess, than what I can see, and I'd like to know more about it. And when I look and I find something I didn't know, I'm like, "Wow!" And there's probably more; that's why I keep going, that's what drives me. The curiosity.

