

The Four Seals of Dharma

Dharma roadside dialogue series

April 2021

Part two: Dialogue

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 sideways 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.