

The Path of Accumulation

Dharma roadside dialogue series

May, 2021 #8 Dialogue

Lama Tsony

Q: There is a little difference between the preliminary practices of Buddhism and the Mahayana Sutra stages, is that true?

A: It's kind of a different way of cutting the pie. There is one way towards enlightenment, okay? And then there are many ways of describing the progression, and there are many ways of progressing along the path. So the preliminary practices that we do in the Kagyu tradition are very much part of the Buddhism in Tibet. And the Mahayana is to be found in China, it's to be found in Viet Nam, and of course some in India, although that has mostly disappeared, so they are following more specifically the Sutras. And in the Sutras you will have the, and also in the Theravada, you would have the eight-fold noble path, which is also a way to practice. Another way to describe this eight-fold path is the three trainings of ethics, meditation, and wisdom. The eight-fold noble path and the three-fold training are sort of one package you find in the Sutras, and in the Mahayana Sutras the same thing is described in the five paths.

Q: I'm working on a meditation on impermanence, which sounds a little bit like what you talked about today, as well as in the preliminaries there is a very strong focus on impermanence of body, mind, and otherness, etc. So I just wanted to clarify that as I move forward with my meditation practice.

A: That's exactly part of what I was explaining in the four applications of mindfulness. And one is on the body. And the thing that you see about the body is, as everything is in constant flux, there is no solid entity. So in a way, observing impermanence, you come to realize independent origination, and that's where you might have an epiphany on what emptiness is. If you try to think about emptiness in a conceptual way, you might go astray into a very conceptual world of made up world of one or zero, it is or it is not. And that's why I really recommend, and because it's a very accessible practice, to really deeply contemplate impermanence, so that you really see that everything is in flux, that this idea of something that is solid such as the self, me, or the world, and so on, is really exposed as being just a mental construction that does not reflect reality. And when you see impermanence, first you see the movement, the fact that it's in flux, but what you very quickly see is that this brings that; that there is sort of a connection between all these moments, either of perception of objects or awareness of the thought, or whatever, there is like a net of interaction. And actually we can describe it as a net but the threads are not even sort of existent, they're just like moving; in the Vedic tradition they call it the net of Maya, the net of illusion. When you observe impermanence then you come to also see independent origination. And when you really understand independent origination, and you have a real experience of it, then there is a certain insight into the

wisdom of emptiness. This would be more difficult to access from a purely intellectual point of view.

Q: I would like to check in about the quality of my meditative awareness. How can I assess whether my meditation is “close” to one-pointedness?

A: Regarding how long and how far away, well, a few Sundays ago I talked about Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche who said, “When you extend your finger towards the sky, how long does it take before you touch space?” So that’s about how far you are from your Buddha nature. That’s the general idea. Now, we shouldn’t have a misunderstanding of one-pointedness. One-pointedness is not like when you have bad internet and your picture is frozen. This is not one-pointedness. One-pointedness, wherever you place your attention, it rests. It rests. If your attention is on the spacious nature and open nature of mind, and that’s where your attention rests, it’s one pointed on space. It’s not closed, it’s open. It’s spacious, wide, wide awareness.

Now if you have to do something, then you need to be totally present to what you do. Let’s say you need to thread a needle. You need to be very very precise, one-pointedly there, because you have to do this. Then, if you can thread your needle while twenty wild kids are running around you and yelling, you’re good at one-pointedness. Okay? Exactly what you said. When you meditate, you sometimes are just a little bit caught, you drift slightly, and then come back immediately, because it’s kind of a background noise, and you’ve reached this point where you’re not carried away by the outer noise or the inner noise. They’re not annoying anymore, they’re just sounds, they’re not noise even. So this is an accomplishment of shamatha. An accomplishment of calm-abiding.

Of course we need to deepen it and stabilize it so that you can always be unperturbed. This is very important because I read one sutra that the 84,000 sutra group translated, I can’t remember the name of it right now, where the Buddha said, “Each phenomena is a samadhi.” Something like that. Each phenomena is a samadhi. What does it mean? This means that whenever we perceive a phenomena we are one-pointedly engaged with it, we have engagement and because we are interested we sustain the engagement, so that we can have the information. So even in ordinary fashion, when you perceive something through your senses and then your mind, your mental consciousness, will of course be engaged, that’s part of the 51 mental events, that’s part of the ever-present mental event, part of the formative skandha. You perceive the object, there is an attraction, there is an engagement, you sustain the engagement; therefore, the relation between the mind that knows and the mind that is manifest is created, and there is, of course in the context of ignorance, a subject that knows an object. But this is an engagement.

If you suffer from attention deficiency, you cannot sustain this engagement because there is something else, or something else, they all come at the same time, and one thing brings another, and you cannot have the thread. And sometimes, you know, when I really meditate, and one thing comes

and then another, I feel like that it is some form of attention deficiency because I don't sustain it, I don't care. But I'm not a victim of that, this is a choice.

I've been trained from a very young age, because my mother has a very particular way of moving from the conscious level to the subconscious level, even when she speaks. And there are big gaps. She's kind of like a dolphin, she goes up, so you see her, and then she dives down, and comes back to the surface and continues your conversation, which is a completely different conversation. So she started on one conversation, and then there is a big gap, and then she talks about something else, which for her is a continuation of the conversation we were having, but not at all for me. So I learned that from a very young age that, you know, that's okay, you can drift, you can change, then you can catch up, it's the same but a different conversation; it was just the way my Mom talked. We call it the Jeanine language. So I have this, and sometimes I speak like I'm doing now, I think about something else, and then I'm gone, but there is a subtle thread. This brings that, but in my experience, and maybe other people don't follow that. And that's when my wife says, "Stop talking Jeanine now, I don't understand, be coherent."

So that's fine, the one-pointedness, which I come back to, is not fixed or frozen. It can be very spacious. You know, when Gendun Rinpoche would use the word samadhi, in Tibetan it is ting nge 'dzin, he would use the modulation of his voice to describe it. He would say, "Ting nge 'dzin" going high and low on each syllable. Abide. And so the holding can be this, tight, or holding can be this spacious. How tight can you be when you hold space? He would express that through his modulation.

So one-pointedness is not a needle, unless it is needed to thread it, because you need to sew something. There are examples in the sutras, like, a brahmin who is spinning thread, you know the brahmin, they wear the sacred cord, the white sacred cord that represents the status of brahmin. And they have to do it themselves, and they have to use the spinning wheel to make the thread. And to make the thread you have to be very attentive. Or for those who make butter lamps and make the wick by taking the cotton wool and then threading it, and if they're not paying attention they end up with a big bubble and the wick will fail. So you need to get the thread thin, and you need one-pointedness to spin it like that. Or when you pour your coffee and you really want to have the last drop up to the brim, you have to be very, very present. That's one-pointedness. Also, but not only.

Q: One thing on my mind is about sticking with one organization for the rest of my life after having tried on several, but it seems that Bodhi Path has guidelines that I will be able to follow that will carry me to the end of my life. And when someone reaches the last years or days, how does one's practice change at that juncture?

A: Organizations are to Dharma what vases are to flowers. What matters are the flowers. So the one organization I subscribe to is the three jewels organization. Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. And the hierarchy is the Buddha, and the way of going is his teaching. Now, to help me to understand, there are many spiritual friends that are part of the Sangha that can have different ways of presenting the

essence. So it looks like the form might be different but the essence is the same. So that's where I am now. I don't belong to anybody, deeply at heart I'm an anarchist so I never really liked the idea of belonging to anything or anyone. And then deeply, because you don't belong, you join, you tag along, you agree...but as far as I'm concerned I contribute. At this point. I contribute to, hopefully, a better understanding of Dharma for whoever is interested. I've been doing this in France, in monasteries, I've been doing this in Dharma centers throughout Europe, now I'm doing it here in the Bodhi Path in Natural Bridge Virginia, per request of Shamar Rinpoche. And I really like the way he opened for us, because it is a very inclusive, as he said and often repeated, we are non-sectarian, meaning not dogmatic, we have a backbone, we have a certain direction, we have a methodology, but we are not fundamentalist and preachy. Or opposing to anyone else, other ways are good. That's fine.

So I really liked his way of presenting things, and I like it because in a way it is very similar, if not essentially the same, as when Gendun Rinpoche taught. And Shamar Rinpoche would make jokes about organizations, all the time. Be flexible, don't be machine minded. Every time you came up with an idea of making a very well-organized administration, he would sabotage it. That was quite interesting. I really liked his maverick ways. And being able to be a Dharma king when needed, to confer transmission and blessings to 100,000 people in Nepal...and I remember once he was giving this empowerment and they had over 100,000 people coming, and they knew it by counting the blessing cords; and they gave one cord to each person who came forward for the blessing. 120,000 people. And when our friends from Natural Bridge came to give him a khatak and receive his blessing, he'd look at them with a smile and say, "It's not like back in Virginia here." If you needed a Dharma king he would be a Dharma king, but also I've seen Rinpoche cooking, preparing dinner! I've seen him doing everything in the way it was appropriate. That's for me a free mind, so I want to stick to that.

So, I don't know. I was in a monastery and I thought it was forever. Then "pushy-crowded karma" pushed me away, and now I'm here and married and living in beautiful Virginia. And I might think it's forever but who knows what "forever" is? I guess the bottom line is, my roots are in Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. They are not in administrations, organizations, but they are all fine, as long as they take care of the flowers; they nourish Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. That's fine. If everybody is just busy taking care of the vase that's cracking and falling apart and there is no more water and then the flowers are all gone, then what the heck, I don't care. Just let it fold.

I understand your question, because we need some stability, but I think that the bottom line is that the stability will be in your realization and your understanding of the Dharma. And once you have really found the way to proceed that's good for you and that works, keep doing it until enlightenment. And as you develop the inner witness, your own discernment, as you progress it becomes obvious what to do and what not to do, and you'll be your own guide in that sense. But to begin with you need some sort of guidance.

Before we began the first 3-year retreat, I asked Shamar Rinpoche, “What should I do?” Then he said, “Do a 3-year retreat.” Okay. Then he said, “Then do another one.” And what about after? “By then you will know what to do. Don’t ask me, then you will know.” If after two retreats you don’t know what Dharma is, what are you doing? And it doesn’t mean I’m close, it doesn’t mean that if Karmapa tells me something I’m not going to listen because I “know.” So far I haven’t heard a word, maybe I’m lucky, that Karmapa has said that would contradict my understanding of Dharma;~} Or what I’m doing. Or maybe more the opposite, I’ll have had some intuition and I didn’t really dare follow, because I told myself it was just one of my ideas, and then I read something Karmapa said, one of his thoughts, and it is just totally spot on and confirms what had been my intuition.

So that’s all good, and that’s where we need to reach. I often tell people, “Okay, I’m gonna help you with your Dharma practice until you reach what I call your plateau of independence. Until the point where you can move on by yourself; you know how to study, where to get the real information, know the difference between bs and real Dharma, and then practice and you know when you are fooling yourself you can correct, you know when you are doing right and you don’t need a pat on the shoulder and someone saying, “You’re a good boy, a good girl.” You just keep doing it. And then it just opens, opens, opens, opens.

So my job is to bring you there. To help you to reach that point. And that could be done in a couple of years. Really. I hope so, because I don’t want to carry you all the time. Then after we are friends, not that we aren’t now, but I mean we are just like comrades, we’re just walking the path. You know, in Europe I have been travelling and teaching with Gendun Rinpoche, as early as ‘78, and on my own starting in the early ‘90s. I’ve met people that I’ve known people for like twenty years, thirty years. I mean, they call me Lama Tsony, okay, you know, or Lama Francis or whatever, but the relationship has changed because they know what their practice is; they’ve done it, they’ve practiced, they’ve gone through all the stages, and they’re confident. And maybe sometimes they ask something, or sometimes I say something that maybe they didn’t think of and that brings some light in their practice, but basically they don’t really need me. They can go on. So that’s what I’m trying to do with everybody, to just bring you to this point where you’ve reached the plateau of independence, and you can keep walking, and the next mountain is yours. Because I’m walking the way with you. Nothing special, I’m not the guy sitting on top of the mountain, I’m just walking with you.

Q: Could you expand on what to do as we get older, sick, and dying?

A: Living in the awareness of impermanence makes you aware that we aren’t always going to be young and vital and healthy. And we want to go through these moments where we have less vitality equipped with more wisdom. So we need to cultivate the wisdom right now, it’s not just going to happen when we think we need it. We have to prepare. So that’s living in the awareness of impermanence and old age and death. There’s no spoiler alert here, we’re all gonna die. And who

knows when it's going to happen, maybe we want to live longer, maybe we're tired of living and we want to go and we cannot, and there's other things that might happen. So I think that if you have discovered what is the heart of the Buddhadharmā, and that you can put it into practice, it doesn't require anything special like being able to read a lot of books, or being able to recite a lot of mantras; the essence of the Buddha's teachings is to abide in the natural state. The natural state of your mind, which is the union of emptiness and awareness, or the union of emptiness and compassion. If you arrive to this point, the union of emptiness and compassion through the practice of Chenrezig and the mantra Om Mani Padme Hung, if you really become a maniwa, somebody who is realized through the practice of the mani, then when you get old and you're in your bed, your mind is halfway in Dewachen anyway. And then, as long as you have a breath and you can recite Om Mani Padme Hung, it just blesses the world. Or you can take upon your own suffering, through the practice of sending and taking, and that's what you do.

I spent a lot of years doing text recitation, I was so excited by that, reciting, reciting all day, all day, mantras and rituals, reciting very fast, and now, you know, any ritual that lasts more than ten minutes exhausts me. I can't do it. But I'm happy to be with them, everyone is reciting and chanting, and I'm just, just abiding in the natural state. I remember in the early 90s, the previous Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche was in Dhagpo in France and he was giving empowerment. And so there was a lot of preparation, a lot of rituals, everyone was reciting a lot of texts and so on. And then there was Nyoshul Khenpo Rinpoche who was a great Nyingma master, a great friend, a buddy of Gendun Rinpoche, and Gendun Rinpoche would always make a joke, and then he would pull his beard and say, "Oh, he's in the perfection stage of the perfection state." And Nyoshul Rinpoche was always just abiding in the natural state you know, and he was just a source of blessing. Lama Purtse was just like this also, he was a *maniwa*, he was reciting Om Mani Padme Hung, he made hundreds of millions, hundred of millions of recitations of the mani; and so of course when he died his brain was a little old, and he didn't really remember where he was and so on, but he was a radiant source of blessing and obviously radiant bliss for himself. Even if his brain was affected by age, his mind was unspoiled. And his realization, which is not conceptual or mental, was still shining. And so, he was like a baby. I've seen Pawo Rinpoche also aging, he was like a baby. But just like a Buddha baby, radiating and beaming, totally relaxed.

So if you can practice with this in mind, "May I come to abide in the natural state," the natural state of mind, where mind is just abiding in it's own self awareness. Will it be through the practice of sending and taking? Will it be through the practice of Om Mani Padme Hung? In the end you come to the same thing, which is the union of compassion and emptiness. You're radiating blessing and you are blissed. There is no problem. And when these old parts of your body break, then your mind is free, and your mind, because you have known it to be space, just merges with space. And that's it. No bardo, no complication. E Ma Ho!

So that's where we should go, and that's really why I say I love so much what Shamar Rinpoche has done. Is to create a way that's a way of simplicity moving to the utmost simplicity. That's where we

should go. I feel sorry for people who are merely only intellectuals, they know a lot and so on, when they start being a little bit slow in the mind. And they can't remember names and they confuse things, one with another and so on. Their world falls apart because they have nothing else. They only had words and concepts. When you have love in your heart and wisdom in your mind, it doesn't need words because words cannot anyway describe them. So who cares if words escape, if concepts escape. Just abide there.

Moving towards simplicity, letting go, letting go. Know the essence, digest it, make it yours, pacify your mind, see your mind, abide in the natural state. That's it.

When Lama Purtshe once was very sick, he had to go to the hospital and so Lama Shenpen accompanied him to be the translator and we went to the hospital and she asked, because she had a very strong devotion to Lama Purtshe, she really saw him as a very special being, very realized being. He was, but not everyone was aware of that, but she definitely knew him like this. So she said, "Lama, should I bring you your texts?" And he was so exhausted and so tired he said, "No, I don't need my texts." She offered, "your mala?" "No, I don't need my mala. I don't need anything." That's where we go, the point where we don't need anything. Because we are one, we are complete. That's the path.

Q: I am looking for a larger Dharma community. I am in France, and of course it's Covid times, but I am wondering what advice you could give for developing a connection to a broader community.

A: Communities are very important, actually they should be what keeps the Dharma vibrant the sangha, community is what keeps the Dharma, in Tibetan there is a phrase that means "the ground of Dharma is the Sangha." The ground in which the Dharma grows is Sangha. The Dharma in terms of transmission, teachings and so on, not the Dharma in terms of reality. So it's very important. Especially during the Covid time I felt that there was a sort of greater awareness of the benefit of a community. But of course community has a down side too. Like in a marriage, you've got some good aspects of the marriage, but you've got some bad aspects too. The good aspect is that you are with somebody else, and you have to listen and take care. The bad aspect is that you are with somebody else, and you have to listen and take care;~}

So, it's the same with a community. Community at times is very heavy because there is a group dynamic and maybe you don't always agree with it, but also there is a sense of belonging. We belong to a group and that's what is very supportive when you are working on the path, and sometimes you feel very alone. There was one question that came and I thought it was going to be the topic of the day, but finally I changed my mind, but the question was, "I feel disconnected from the world when I practice very deeply and I try to be quite clear, and at the same time I have very little patience for the stupidity of everybody else, or the small-mindedness of others." So this is a downside of a community, but you have to always balance the positive aspects with the price you pay, the dues you pay for whatever good you get. And you must accept both. So how do you do

that? It's almost the same question as how to find the right life partner. I'd say definitely don't wait for the charming prince. Meet people and experience, and then something might happen. It's kind of a magic.

I would say small communities are very good because there is a closer connection, tightly-knit connection. A community around a teacher that acts as the inspiration, that gives the direction, is also very beneficial. I know that Gendun Rinchen is already creating a certain community around him. I'm not sure how to explain; he's not actively creating a community and declaring himself the "leader," but by nature a bodhisattva of this caliber, a bodhisattva in general, are magnets. They attract people. I've seen that with his previous incarnation of Gendun Rinpoche, his benevolence and realization was a magnet. I didn't ask if should I join the community; I couldn't care less about the community. I wanted to be with him. And there were other people who wanted to be with him, and so we had to be together. And that's how the community was. Then he said to organize it this way and that way, and so we did it, but I was never a big fan of community and monastery myself; but I ended up spending two-thirds of my life in a monastery, in a community;~}

So, it happens. Find your people with the same spirit, the same mind, first. And then among these people you will find people who are challenging you, so that's very good because you have to develop qualities that you wouldn't develop if you were only with friends that are very nice and thinking like you. There's a lot to gain from that, but anything that's too dogmatic...again we're back to the question of the flowers and the vase. In the community do you have more flowers than vase, or do you have more vase than flowers? Is the Dharma alive and thriving, or is everybody sort of trapped in a form of a administrative, almost a cult? Where you have to think like this, and you should not express your differences and your character and so on and so forth. To this kind of community you can say, "Thanks but no thanks."

There are a lot of communities in France. You can go and visit them, you can spend some time, and find a place where you like to be. Also, the community doesn't have to be a residence. You don't have to live there. But when you arrive there, and stay for a week or two, people know you, you're immediately merging with the group; and so it's as if you are always there. Then you go back home. So you get the connection but you don't get the entrapment; that could be a way of being in community. But I think if you really find a place that you like, and the people that are thinking and behaving in a way that feels similar to you, then you will sense a sense of family. A sense of belonging.

I think in our fellowship here in Virginia, everybody is very different. We have a lot of very different cases here in Virginia. I don't know if it has to do with Virginia, but there's a lot of...you know, characters are welcome. There's a lot of very different-way-of-being individuals. But even after one year during Covid when we didn't meet regularly, and sometimes people didn't see each other for a while, they always care for each other, there is a great love, and even at times when there are little clashes...Gendun Rinpoche told us that this is unavoidable. If you have four cups in a basket and

you swing it around, that's gonna make some clash. So that's unavoidable. But beyond the clash, beyond the little frictions about minor details, what I can see here is there is a tremendous love and respect for each other. Everybody cares about each other's wellbeing. And everybody has a very deep commitment to Dharma and a great confidence in the way Shamar opened the center. Whether they had met him or not; at this point it doesn't matter. That's why I use the word fellowship rather than community. Community is more like a herd, where the sheep come together; in fellowship it's more like we are fellows, we are sisters and brothers, we are helping each other. Like Ram Dass said once, "We walk each other home." I really like this, we are taking care of each other.

So when you find a place where this is really happening, whether you decide to live there forever (which sometimes can be a little bit difficult.) Because when you always in a community, you tend to ignore the good aspects and you only focus on the problems between people. And when you come, and you don't reside there, well, it's always beautiful when you're on holiday, but if you had to live there it's not so nice. So when you come to this community and you feel this, "Wow, this is beautiful, everybody practices, everybody is so kind, and so on." It's true, but for two weeks. Then maybe it's time to go home. But you have the contact. And their all very different, if you live in the south west you can go to the Thich Nhat Hanh community, you've got Dhagpo, you've got Marfond, you've got different communities in this area, then you can see Le Bost, you can go to Marchandot, or go down in the Alps and see my friend Tsultrim, who's a good friend of Kunkyab, who is also another anarchist Lama. Kunkyab and Tsultrim, he's got a great community there, those guys, they just exhaust me with their projects, they're building all the time, and it's really good, and it's all in French, and Tsultrim is a real Lama, but at the same time he is very simple with everybody, this is a good place to go. And the nature is just gorgeous. There are these little pockets, try them. Try them, you'll find your magic place. Maybe not forever, maybe for a while.

Q: In the Jewel Ornament of Liberation, in the first chapter it talks about beginningless mind. I have a hard time wrapping my mind around beginningless and it's ramifications. My understanding of this would mean that no matter how far one reaches in realization, all the way to Buddhahood with it's spontaneous activity, is there wouldn't be any end then to working for beings?

A: Let's start with beginningless. What beginninglessness really means is that mind doesn't exist, and that's why it doesn't have a beginning. For something to have a beginning, a genesis, a birth, a coming, it implies that there is a certain existence; because there's the birth of something. So the something is an entity that has a lifespan and then will cease to be, so it has an end. So something that doesn't abide, doesn't have a beginning, and doesn't have an end. So this actually refers to the essence of mind, which is emptiness. Emptiness is beginningless. Space is beginningless. It was not created, it is just an openness; therefore this openness is not a something, mind is not an entity.

As the 3rd Karmapa said in the Mahamudra Prayer, "We cannot say that the mind exists, for even the Buddhas of the three times have not seen it. But we cannot say that the mind doesn't exist, because it is the basis for all the manifestations, whether they belong to samsara or nirvana." This is

actually what Gampopa says in the opening of the first chapter, “Mind is beginningless, endless, and it can be experienced as samsara or nirvana.” So beginningless refers to the essence of emptiness. Because it is empty it is not abiding, that’s another term we often find, non-abiding; it doesn’t abide in the extremes that are “to be” or “not to be.” We can not say that mind is, and we cannot say that mind is not. So for that we say that it is beginningless. Beginningless does not mean once upon a time, like a very long time ago. So that’s what beginningless is, and the endlessness. Yes, mind is beginningless and endless because its essence is emptiness, yet it is indissociable from luminosity, from which all manifestation will arise.

If mind is affected by ignorance, it doesn’t recognize this, so whatever mind produces is felt by an individual as suffering. If mind knows itself, it is felt, not by an individual, because this has been exposed as fraudulent, a sense of the self that exists, and it is self aware, mind is self aware, and this self awareness is bliss.

So, in a way when you say reaching enlightenment, you’re only talking in terms of relative reality. Because reaching enlightenment is in opposition to being confused, being under the power of ignorance. So the question is when did we begin to be under the power of ignorance? The very old chicken and the egg question. Who came first, the chicken or the egg? What about the rooster?~} So this big question, it’s very central in our culture because we bathe in religious views that are talking about a genesis, talking about a god that creates, talking about original sin, the way how we lost Eden, and now we are spending our time to try to go back to Eden. So there is a kind of linear perspective that comes from the Abrahamic tradition, in general. There was a golden age, we did something terrible, we lost it, we tried to repent so that we can again be [Pause](#)reunited in that heaven, even in the future. So there is a beginning and then there is an end.

In the Buddhist perspective there is two levels of reality, the relative and absolute reality. From the absolute reality, all of this is a dream. So when were you born in the dream? Who were your parents? What hospital were you born in, in your dream? No! You appear in the dream with the assumption that you have a story, before. And you don’t question it. You are in the present now, and as you are in the present now it’s sort of sure that you had a beginning and you’re moving towards something. But all of that is only valid in the framework of relative reality. If you step out of the dream, either by waking up or by becoming aware of the dream, you realize that all of this didn’t exist. The mind that dreamt was beginningless and endless. The events of the dream had a moment where they appeared, a moment where they disappeared. But as they are movements of this mind that is beginningless and endless, they are also an illusion, they are also emptiness.

So what we perceive is merely a manifestation of the mind. It doesn’t have a solid reality. So actually, phenomena do not arise or cease. They are just a manifestation, like an echo, like an illusion, like a mirage, like a rainbow; they have a strong presence, but they have no reality. And as they have no reality they have no birth and then they have no cessation. And when we think of this, and it is mere speculation, really. Yes, samsara, as a principle, confusion has no end, and the number of beings is

infinite and they will always be in pain. As Shantideva said, “I will be there as a bodhisattva, as long as space endures.” So if we approach the path to awakening with a mind of a retiree, and you try to see how many weeks I still have to work before retirement, enlightenment is retirement. Yes, you get puzzled, because you wonder if you will have to work forever. But the I that works forever is just a problem of this mind right now; that conceives an I that is working for a time that is just a conception and that is unbearable, it’s just unbearable in this context. Take I out of the equation and then you have activity for sentient beings. This is what we call *trinlay* in Tibetan, as Gampopa describes it in the final chapters of the *Jewel Ornament*, the enlightened activity is the benefit of beings, spontaneous and without preconception.

You know, to try to keep this straight I use the metaphor of a foundation. You work hard, you make a lot of money, and then you create a foundation. You put all of your money in the foundation and it’s going to be the Tsony Foundation for Education and Wellbeing. And then you die. And then your foundation keeps growing. It’s still the Tsony Foundation working for people, but Tsony is dead. Five hundred years ago. The activity of the bodhisattva actually not only continues but expands as a Buddha after the self is gone. And so nobody is tired. Only the self and it’s entrapment entangled in it’s own limitations thinks of how much time it still has to work.

And yes, there will always be people in need, and yes, the activity of the Buddhas is beginningless and endless and inconceivable. And this will continue, the enlightened activity will continue. So if samsara is infinite, because it is mind, the specific experience of samsara for each individual will have an end. Each individual will reach enlightenment. But never all individuals, because their number is infinite. That was the meltdown of Chenrezig when he took the vow of working for beings til the end, and so on. And he worked, and he worked, and he worked, and then he paused and looked back to see how many people were liberated and then he found that the number of people were the same, infinite. And so he had a breakdown, and said, like, “I quit.” And his head exploded, his body exploded, and Amitabha, who was his guru said, like, “Hey, get over yourself.” Literally, get over yourself. And then put him together, and we have this Chenrezig with eleven heads and a thousand arms. Amitabha was not very good at putting the things together, somehow, so he had an enhanced Chenrezig, after the meltdown. So, happy meltdown;~}

I think that’s a good mantra, get over yourself.