

Impermanence and Illusion

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This month I was asked to address, in a practical way, as in everyday situations, how to use impermanence as an angle to come closer to an understanding or an experience of what non-duality and emptiness could be, and also how interdependent origination works. Philosophically speaking it's a big topic, and obviously I won't have time to cover all of this, so that's why I decided to start with a practical way of approaching things. The teachings of the Buddha are often explaining that the first step in any serious commitment on the path to awakening is renunciation. I'd like to begin by talking about this. What is renunciation? I think in our Judeo-Christian mind renunciation means to be poor and miserable, eating moldy bread in a cave, or something like this, you know, like it's only possible with a lot of suffering like this that we get close to holiness. But this is not what we are talking about here. Renunciation, in the context of what we are going to discuss today, is the courage to look at our present situation and take a little step to the side, or a little step backward and relax the grasping we have, the investment we have, in the narrative of what's happening.

We could look at it a little more objectively and less subjectively. Subjectively means from the point of view of "me," the point of view of the subject, right? And we have to remember that this mind, although endowed with all the possible qualities and being perfect right off the bat, there is nothing to add or subtract from this mind of ours, but it's clouded by old habits. And these old habits create a form of distortion in our capacity to cognize, so that whenever this mind cognizes, instead of being aware of mind being aware of mind's own movement or play, it perceives it as something else. So there is a dualistic glitch in every instance of consciousness, and then we superimpose onto the cognizant quality of mind the concept of a thinker. "Someone" is doing this. "Someone" is having this experience, and therefore this estranges the manifestation of the phenomena as being something else, somewhere else, different. And the fact that we cognize this phenomena tends to reinforce the idea of the thinker being here, because otherwise, you know, how could I cognize if there is not a thinker. That's the cognitive distortion that we suffer from, which is the fundamental veil that prevents mind from knowing itself.

On the basis of this, this fleeting habit that Trungpa Rinpoche called the "basic split" between a subject and an object, we attribute a certain autonomous substantial and permanent nature to the subject; the thinker, me. And thereby we also attribute a lasting substantial independent nature to the phenomena that is perceived, whether it is perceived through our mental consciousness as a thought or as an emotion, or by the other sense consciousnesses through the gateways of our senses, and then eventually and finally all of this is analyzed and described by the mental consciousness. This is happening all the time, and this basic split creates an open field for appreciation, so what the subject,

i.e the thinker, me, receives is either pleasant or unpleasant, pure or impure, good or bad; and it is not objective at all. It is totally subjective.

It is good because it is good for what I decide is good for me now, in this very moment...and this might even change, in five minutes it can be totally different. And it is not good because it hurts me, disturbs me, but in the long run I realize it was very good and helped me, so I will like it...but for now I don't. When we have this emotional subjective appreciation then we implement this, we follow these impulses into thoughts, strategies, ideas, projects...then words become a little bit more incarnate, a bit heavier, and then actions. And all this has consequences, and it bounces back, and brings new stimulation that we perceive as external objects, and then we react and so we have started a vicious circle. Actually this vicious circle is very ancient, traditionally the way of saying it is "since beginningless time."

On the basis of this, we tend to repeat this, we tend to repeat the same reactions to the same stimulation, habits are formed. And habits create a tendency to react, so we don't have to think so much, we are on automatic pilot. You know, the bell rings and we look for the food. We are constantly reacting in more or less the same ways to more or less similar situations. So, actions create a veil, habits create a veil, emotional subjective reaction creates a veil, and obviously this basic split, this dualistic cognizance is **the** primordial veil...all of this comes from ignorance. That's what we are confronted with. That's what we are dealing with. And so there are two options here...one option is to just keep doing as usual, just try to get a little bit better. You know, like you are in a cell, but maybe you try to have a padded cell, or you try to have 24 karat gold leaf bars on your window. Or you want to have an extra dessert from the jail's kitchen. This kind of thing; and then some days you have it, some days you don't. So this is one way, and this is what most of us are just doing all the time.

The alternative option is to decide that this is not enough...or this is too much. Either way. This is not enough in the sense of, there must be more to this than just trying to survive. Survive the day, get little goodies, and try to avoid the chores...and eventually die. But for some of us, this is not sufficient. This is what the Buddha taught when he taught the Four Truths of the Noble Ones. The first truth is to acknowledge the discomfort. The truth of suffering. Suffering is a heavy word; of course there is suffering, but mostly to begin with there is discomfort. It's kind of like your Sunday clothes, they are a little bit too tight, and the shoes are a bit too new and you're not free, you don't feel like there is freedom, like you can sort of move but not too much, there are walls everywhere...maybe at first you can try to bounce and fight and think that the problem is the wall, but the problem is that the walls are in your mind. When you begin to notice this you know that's where you need to work. That's what you have to address, the walls within your mind. Because if you address the walls that are in your mind, then all the outer walls will just fall. It's like the trumpets of Jericho, you know, if you blow your mind like the trumpets of Jericho, then your walls will fall like the walls of Jericho. Right? I'm feeling very biblical today;~}

So how can we do that? By renunciation. Renunciation is acknowledging the discomfort. “This joke is not very funny, why am I even here? What am I doing here? Okay, okay, I have a nice house, I have a job where I can make some money, you know, sigh, I’m still okay.” But you have the feeling that it’s precarious, it might change at any time. And sometimes you cannot afford to lie to yourself, saying, like, “Yeah, I know it could be better, but it’s okay.” When you come to the point where okay is not okay and you really acknowledge the discomfort you are ready to embrace the first of the Four Noble Truths; you are ready to embark on the path to awakening. Before that you’re still trying to cut a deal. “Okay, I’ll get the Buddhist thing on the side in case the other thing doesn’t work.” Or do the other thing, where you add on top of it an icing of spirituality. That’s not going to go very far.

So the first thing is to acknowledge the discomfort, and be okay with it. That’s another form of renunciation, which is, you renounce the pseudo-comfort of alienation. “It’s okay, I don’t want to rock the boat.” But instead you renounce that, like, “Truth is more important, finding what’s really happening is more important than any comfort, than any compromises can bring me.” So that’s a form of renunciation, the courage to decide to look into it.

The path is not really guaranteeing you ecstatic moments all the time, and there are going to be a lot of things that need to be seen; it’s not always pleasant with things that need to be adjusted, that require transformation, and that’s not always easy. But you come to realize more and more that it is necessary, it is in the long term extremely beneficial.

So that’s where we are when we start. We take refuge in the path because we trust our Buddha nature, that is taking refuge in the Buddha, and we want to find it, and we want to use anything that will help us to discover the natural state. So everything that will help us discover the natural state is the Sangha; the pointing out companions. Whether they are people, lineage holders, the world at large, our challenges and enemies or whatnot; all of this, if we embrace them properly, will be fingers pointing out the true nature of mind and the way to go. So that’s the prerequisite, that’s where we must be, that’s our starting point. So the first form of renunciation is to renounce the pseudo-artificial comforts of the little goodies, the little crumbs you’re given if you accept the Faustian deal of samsara...so you can be like Marguarite and enjoy your jewelry, or you can really understand what’s going on.

The second form of renunciation is a little bit more subtle in the sense that we need to cut through this fascination we have for what is happening. We are always interested, we want to be part of it, we want to get more from it, we want to make sure that it’s going to go the way we want. It’s kind of a strange mixture of a desire to have more and more control, and also a kind of very subtle reaction to fear that something might go wrong and I might get left high and dry and this shouldn’t happen. And so we’re always busy with the narrative, trying to modify, trying to influence, so that we cannot step back, we are glued to the screen. There is no distance whatsoever.

And in terms of meditative practice, the first thing we learn is to practice calm-abiding...which is actually stepping back or allowing all of this circus just to play, but just not be sucked in. Calm-abiding is abiding in the calmness of a mind that is not dragged in, not sucked into the narrative of mind's agitation. And how this happens is because we realize that we are sucked in, or dragged in, by our fear and our desire. And they are bad advisors. And we have to remember that anytime we have been dragged into a situation out of desire or fear, there've been terrible outcomes...and it happens again and again and again. But it seems that we don't remember, because maybe we never noticed it in the first place.

But it's time to become a little bit more aware and mindful. So that's the first thing, step back, step to the side, and bring into your life a second degree. You know, it's not like first degree, where everything is deadly serious, a matter of life or death and we can't miss a step and have to be always doing things. Let it be! Dare to let it be, dare to let it happen. That's another form of renunciation. Which is not always easy, because there is a sense of panic, like what might happen if you're not holding the wheel. But you don't have to hold the steering wheel, you're on a karmic roller coaster. It's not so important. You realize that at some point you bought the ticket, and baby, you've got the ride. And then as soon as this thing stops, step down, don't buy another ticket...even if they give it to you for free, don't take it. That's renunciation. And that's really the prerequisite mindset to begin this work.

So now how can we do the work? What can we use? In the Buddhist literature they offer us different examples or similes of illusion. There are many sources, some have seven examples of illusion or twelve examples of illusion...it really doesn't matter, it's not an exhaustive list; it's more a way for us to start using these things. I will briefly give you a list of the examples of illusion, and maybe I can pick one or two and then we can use them as a sort of template for what we do with them. So the first one is magic, as magic is what an illusionist does, right? A magician. A magician is an illusionist, it's somebody who masters the act of tricking your mind. Tricking your eyes. But if you attend one of those shows and you've paid, it means that you want to be tricked. If you're not interested in being tricked, you don't go to the show. If you attend the show that means that you want to be tricked...because you want a thrill, you want something that "wows" you. You want some excitement that takes you out of your plain, flat, boring life. Something that will be extraordinary; that's why you buy a ticket to this show.

This is exactly what happens in our life. We want to be thrilled, we want something extraordinary, because our life is plain and boring. We know that there is some sort of discontentment; we feel it. We need spice. We need a thrill and we want to be enchanted. You know this word enchantment? That's a curse. You're enchanted, mesmerized...and even the greatest magician can be tricked by this.

In the Arthurian legends which I enjoyed reading as a kid, there is the mention of the wizard Merlin, who was the master of all magical tricks. Yet he got seduced by his young apprentice, who learned

all his tricks, and finally cursed him into a tree where he remained trapped for a very long time. His desire was the gateway for her to lock him up. So, even the greatest magician got tricked by his desire.

Magic. There's so much to say about magic. "I'm enchanted." Illusion. Prestidigitation, do you have this word in English? Digit, the finger, presti, quick. Quick finger creates the illusion. All of this, but the important point is that we are participating...we want it. Nobody can fool you if you keep a clear eye. Like the Buddha sitting under the tree and when Mara's daughters came and tried to trick him, he just looked at it for "what it was"...and then the trick fell apart. There was no participant in the Buddha's mind that wanted to be tricked, he had no horse in the race. He didn't hope for something from that, he knew that it wasn't the way it was.

The moon in the water is also a very classic example; if your head is down and you don't look up and you look at the surface of a pond, on a clear night when the moon is full it seems that the moon is in the pond. And you might, like Narcissus, fall in love and try to reach it and fall in the water and drown...because again, you want it. We are in the world of desire. We are driven by desire. Desire and fear are the same. There are not many desires, there is just one desire. The desire of having what is pleasant, and the desire to not have what is not pleasant. It's all desire. So that's where the problem can be.

Visual distortion. A visual distortion is like the story of the man who was recently married and he needed to travel for business, and he asked his wife to take care of his mother, who, of course, didn't like her new daughter-in-law. The daughter-in-law prepares meals and so on, and the mother is disgusted because everytime the daughter-in-law serves rice with the meal, there is hair on it! Dirty, dirty, dirty! So she doesn't eat, and she becomes weak, and when the son comes back he sees his mother is sick, and she says, "Your wife tried to poison me by serving me dirty food with hair in it!" So the husband asked the wife what happened, and she said, "I don't know, I just cooked the meals, and she didn't like it." Finally the son took his mother to the eye doctor only to discover that she suffered from floaters. She had impurities on her eyes that made her see hair in everything. So that's the optical illusion. Beauty and ugliness is in the eye of the beholder. If there is an optical illusion, there is also a way to understand illusion, or here in this case a visual distortion. There is a way to come to understand that this comes from "me;" when mind uses its reflexive quality to look at itself you will discover this. This can be greatly facilitated by the good habits we gain through the practice of calm-abiding and insight meditation. It will help us to cultivate discernment, to discover that.

Mirage. When you are in the desert and thirsty and you see an oasis in the distance and you run towards it, that's how you die. Because you don't realize that causes and conditions create this.

Dreams. This is probably the most useful example. Everything is so "real" in the dream while we dream, but if we become aware that we are dreaming or when we wake up, we realize that none of

this really happened outside of our subjective mind dealing with its subconscious projections. That's another way to break the "charm."

Echo. Echo is interesting. In Tibetan the word is dra nyen. Dra means a sound, and nyen means to reach out, to cause to touch, or similar. So it's like we hear something and it seems to be like the one before...but it's just an echo. Something that's like a shadow, that's repeated. Through causes and conditions...high cliffs, a narrow valley, whatever. But it seems like when you say, "Hey," somebody answers back, "Hey." Like dogs barking at their own barks forever because they think that there is another dog on the next hill. So if we can observe this, an echo, that's another way we can cut through the illusion and stand back from this very, very captivating story that we are dealing with.

Optical illusion. You know, when I was a kid I used to go to the county fair, and then they had what they called the "Mirror Palace." You could go in and there were all sorts of mirrors that made it look like you were bigger or smaller or larger, it was really funny...especially if you were short and it really expanded you, because then you looked slimmer if you were shorter and kind of a fatty;~}...but all of this is just an optical illusion. It appears and you enjoy it, but it's not really reflecting reality at all.

Rainbow. A Rainbow is also very interesting because it appears to your senses yet it depends on how you're positioned. Let's say there is a rainbow; there's rain and then a sunny day and light and there is a rainbow, but if you move some distance, maybe a mile to the right or to the left, then probably you won't see the rainbow. And if you fly above the rainbow then probably you'll see a circular ring. So the rainbow exists but at the same time, well...we know the story about the pot of gold at the foot of the rainbow yet who's trying to find it? Nobody really.

Lightning. With lightning again causes and conditions come in. It appears to be very real, and it comes with thunder so it's also very scary. It illuminates everything, in a flash it's like the middle of the day...and it suddenly seems like, wow, it's day; but it's just the causes and conditions creating a moment. And we could think, "Oh, it's daylight now, I can do what I planned for the day," but very quickly this disappears.

Water bubbles. Water bubbles are very interesting because when you look at bubbles it seems that you've got little pearls in your glass of whatever you're holding, but let's say water. It seems like you've got little pearls in the water, but actually they're just an absence of water; it's the oxygen that creates this impression by creating an emptiness of some sort, and it looks like there is a bubble, but this bubble is just an absence of water.

One we are very familiar with because we use it everyday is a reflection in a mirror. We think we see ourselves in the mirror, and we are pleased or horrified...depending on the day;~} But actually we're not seeing ourselves. We are seeing a reflection that we assimilate to ourselves. It's kind of an extension of our projection of, "I cognize, therefore I am." I see myself, therefore I am. It's kind of a bold assumption because "I" is a big assumption. Seeing "myself" is a big assumption. I'm in the

mirror, therefore I am. Three assumptions, but none of these really reflects reality, but we ride on that, and then come the strategies. I like this face, I don't like this face, how can I enhance it, beautify it...or you become very philosophical and think, you know what? In ten years I'm going to miss that face, trying to convince yourself that everything is okay and so on...so that's sticking to the narrative, you're playing with your assumptions, and everytime you do that you get farther and farther away from reality. That's why renunciation is important.

So how do we do that by using these images, this situation in our lives?

I think first is to relax the grasping we have to the narrative, that's really the first thing. Step to the side, step back, and observe the steps of the dancers. There is the subject and there is the object, and they are dancers...and because there are dancers there is a dance. But there is no dancer if there is no dance, and there is no dance if there is no dancer. And there is no partner in the dance if you are not there and the partner is not there if you are not dancing. So any dance is actually only the result of interdependent production. You don't exist as a dancer outside of the dance. The dance is only because you move in relation to someone or something...let's say a dance partner or let's just say the music. You dance to the music, okay? So there is this interaction. But now when you dive into the protagonists and you look at them, you use your experience and this skill you discovered in your practice of insight meditation. And you look at what is this "me" dancing? Is it in the body, is it in the mind, is it in the feelings? And then you sort of take it apart. It's nowhere to be found, really.

Okay, some will say, the dancer is all about the hips;~ } So, which hip? The left one or the right one? If you have a prosthesis, if you had a hip replacement, are you not a dancer anymore, because that's not your hip? Then if you look at the dancer who is your partner, and do the same observation, you realize that there's no such thing as a dancer; dancer is just a nominal convention. We just agree to call these dancers, or partners, or sliders, or I don't know, whatever we want to call it. And then what we really notice as we look more and more inside is how everything is very, very rapidly changing. The body is changing, like the muscles, when you need to dance, and all the parts of your body you need in order to dance, and then your mind...and then are you counting the steps or are the steps in your body already so you don't need to count? All of this, suddenly you realize that it's a giant, gigantic production with so many people involved that we are unaware of.

We went to see the movie Dune and we stayed for the credits at the end of the movie, and I thought the credits were almost longer than the movie. Because there were so many people involved in creating this illusion, that you like or you don't like, and so many things are involved in that. And none of this exists, it's all an illusion. All the fantastic things you've seen that fascinated you or scared you are, most of them, CGI...augmented reality.

So renunciation is the willingness to look at things from this perspective. Otherwise there is a price to pay, which is the price of your fascination and the hope that if you drink the Kool-Aid you'll have something really wonderful. There is a story of a man who is struggling with erotic fantasies, and he

has all these pictures in his mind all the time; he's very, very tired of it, so he goes to see a psychoanalysis to ask for help with his erotic fantasies. And the doctor says, "Sure, we can work together and I can help you to get rid of them...but beware, I won't be able to bring them back." You have to be ready to let that go. Do you want to let it go? That's the question you should be asking yourself.

So we see the dance; the dance is in this case phenomena that are perceived by the cognizant mind as if it was a subject, a thinker, and then getting into it subjectively...it's pleasant and we get dragged into it. Or it's scary so we get dragged into it by trying to push it away. Grasping or rejecting is pretty much the same movement. So we have to see this dance, which only happens on the basis of this mind not knowing itself. And the way things manifest, it happens through interdependent production. Cause and effect. And the fact that everything is changing all the time is indicating that there is no substantial reality in this phenomena outside of their appearance that is produced by interdependent origination. So we are evolving in a world of mere appearances. And then out of desire. Remember? Desire for, desire against. One desire...out of desire, we drink the Kool-Aid. And then we just stick to the narrative, we follow the plot and then we try to get the best out of it.

What is important to discover when we observe transitoriness is the fluidity. I think it's really important. The awareness of fluidity when observing impermanence is a fantastic asset for our liberation. Because when we look at any phenomena, whether it is during the awake state or in our dream, it's pretty much the same, there is a constant form of solidification. It's like we sort of freeze things so that we have time to find a strategy and position ourselves in the best possible way. Okay, I am here, you are there, and you are doing this, and how can I answer to this, how can I counteract what you do? Okay, but in order to do this you must freeze everything. But while you're freezing things life happens. Things are still flowing, so like a hundred years later you wake up and say, like, "What happened?" Well, you were busy with your mental consciousness freezing things...that means you were out of reality, so you didn't notice things weren't moving.

Like the story of the great Saraha and his smart wife. Saraha once asked his smart wife, "What's for lunch?" And she said, "Well, it's gonna be some curd, cucumber, and radishes; since you like this I will make it." He said, "Oh, great. I do really like it. When's lunch?" "Oh, another fifteen minutes or so." "Okay." Then he started meditating, as he was a good meditator and he didn't want to waste an opportunity...and then fell into samadhi for like half a year. Then when he came out of his samadhi six months later, he asked his wife, "What? It's not ready yet?" She's like, "What the heck are you talking about? You've been "gone" for half a year. Radish season is over, there is no more curd. Fix your own lunch."

That was an awakening for him. He realized that he had conceptualized what meditation was, he had fixed a bubble and was attached to his stillness or whatever he was experiencing in this. And so she woke him out of this delusional dream, one of a very spiritual nature and whatever, but still an illusion.

Notice the fluidity. Like when somebody asks you how you are doing? How many times does this happen in a day...? What do you answer? "Okay, I'm fine." But that's a convention, because that's a way to say, "I heard your request, and I notice you don't really care, but since you're just being polite, I'll do the same and reply, "I'm okay, How are you doing?" Here in Virginia everybody's polite. You go into town and even people you don't know that you meet in a store or on the street say, "How're you doing?" It's kind of a question, but really a greeting..."How're you doing?" And I always paused. You're not supposed to pause, you're just supposed to say, "How're you doing?" You're supposed to say the same thing back. It's a question, but nobody really cares to hear the answer. It's just a way of being polite in society. But for me I always paused, like I wanted to give an honest answer, but by the time I started to answer they're gone.

This reminds me of at Dhagpo Kagyu Ling in France we have a friend who is there, his nickname is Baba, he came there in 1975. And this guy is "something else," he's a wild guy, and we really loved it because nobody would ask how Baba was, or tell him good morning, or bon appetit, you never say that to Baba, ever. The great fun was seeing the newbies who came, and meeting Baba who was the old guy, and we were sitting outside eating lunch, and he was always the first one to be served because he always had to have his, and then he was eating outside too and the newbies come and say, "Bon Appetit!!!" Baba would just get on them, like, "What the heck are you saying that for? You don't really care!" So he would just sort of insult them, calling them out for being insincere more or less.

Once during something we were doing with hospice at the hospital, an end of life discussion with the nurses to help them, there was this old local guy and somebody asked him, "Hey, long time no see, how are you doing?" He said, "Well, I'm still on the right side of the dirt." He had a sense of humor. He was still civil, and answered, but it shows that this kind of greeting is kind of ridiculous and superficial. So the way to perceive things is with the second degree; that means with a little bit of humor to it. Like don't be so deadly serious. We're all gonna die anyway, it doesn't really matter. The only thing that matters for our lifetime is, do you cultivate kindness toward yourself and other people? And is your mind clearer and clearer everyday and do you have more and more discernment, so that your kindness can be efficient instead of stupidly compassionate. That's all that matters. Know thyself, change thyself, be kind to others. It's not like I'm going to write a big bible of this stuff, but there's no way we can forget it.

And so looking at the fluidity of everything is a fascinating observation. There's less and less passion, we're neither pro or against this or that, we just see what brings anything valuable for anybody. Maybe you think there's something in it good for you, a profit, but in the long run it's not. Or you can think that, but you're still able to see that this is an illusion. In *Boundless Wisdom*, in the chapter, the fifth chapter on mahamudra/vipashyana, Shamar Rinpoche explains that the result of our practice of vipashyana is to be able to see all phenomena very clearly, very precisely, without any confusion, and at the same time to be able to see them as just movement of mind, and therefore

empty in nature. You have a sort of a double scale; it's like you have one eye that looks at the nature of reality, the eye of wisdom, and then the other eye is looking at manifestation, and that is the eye of compassion. You use these two to get the correct vision with depth of field and everything, so you can really see correctly what is happening, and you answer with compassion, with love, and discernment, wisdom. So that's the result of the practice of mahamudra vipashyana. That any phenomena, naturally, when you cognize it, brings you to an awareness of interdependent production, but not in a conceptual way, because the word itself is very academic. Interdependence, interconnection, inter-are. Interbeing.

Anytime there is one instance of cognition to any of the six consciousnesses, there is at the same time the understanding of its empty essence. But this understanding of the empty essence doesn't throw you into a world of nothing where you reject manifestation, like, "I don't have to be involved, I don't have to say yes or no, I don't have to do anything, I am not here, nobody is speaking..." This is just another conceptual play.

Rather it's the understanding that everything is devoid of any substantial reality because everything only exists as an appearance, it doesn't exist as a substance. And as it appears, it might become the source of suffering. As the Four Seals of Dharma say, all contacts are painful. That means whenever there is an instance of cognition in a mind that is under the spell of duality, this contact will be painful; the contact between the object through the sense perception to the mind of the subject will be painful. It doesn't have to be, this is what Shamar Rinpoche once told me, maybe we should add something that says, "99% of the time they will be painful...but they don't have to be."

Contacts can be enlightening. Any instance of cognition can be, as a result of our practice of vipashyana mahamudra insight meditation, enlightening because you can see that it appears, in the sense of arise, it comes to be. The deeper sense of the word to appear is that it's an appearance. Like sometimes you're invited for an opening and you don't really want to go, but you have to make an appearance. You have to show that you were there. Or any social event, you have to make an appearance. And quickly you do a "vanishing act." You disappear;~} Right?

Phenomena appear...think deeply about this verb "to appear." They appear. They appear to your deluded mind, and they stimulate your habitual mind's reactions and bind you even more. But it's not actually, as Tilopa said to Naropa's son, "The object is not to be blamed, the mind is binding itself." The object doesn't bind you. The mind that wants to possess it, the mind that doesn't recognize it as being essentially devoid of defined characteristics; substantial, permanent and autonomous, this is what binds us. And the very thing that binds us can liberate us. The very same thing. We don't have to embrace a life that is different from the one we have. We can keep the life we have. Just change the perspective, change your perspective. That's the idea of stepping back, stepping aside, and looking at things from a different angle. Not the usual story telling, the Kool-Aid that we drink all the time, and into which we put a lot of our time and effort, hope and fear, and hoping to avoid fear and so forth. Step back. Look at it with a grain of salt. With a sense of humor.

Because sometimes it is really funny...the way we always react in the same way. It's kind of pathetic, but also very funny. If you look at it by yourself you'll find it funny, but if someone else is pointing it out, you won't find it funny. But in the end the result is the same; you realize you're just playing the same old song again.