

Defeat the Klesha
Part Three: By the depth of discernment

Dharma roadside dialogue series.

Lama Tsony
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#2 Dialogue

Q: If we are deeply convinced that our thoughts come from our mind, from alaya, and therefore our thoughts are not separate from our minds, could we say that we can take our thoughts less seriously, and therefore have less grasping of thoughts and as a consequence, less kleshas? In other words, if we take our thoughts seriously by grasping them, does it mean that we believe our thoughts to be separate from our mind?

A: I see where you're going here, and it's quite interesting ...umm, it's true that to some extent we tend to believe that what we think is an absolute reality, and then we don't see the relative nature of our thinking. Everything we perceive is just projection...as Shamar Rinpoche said, a projection of our confused mind. So when we come to know the true nature of mind we come to see that there are many ways to see things. There is a way I see things, and there is a way that other people see things.

It's not that we don't value our thoughts, we actually know them better, we know them to be relative and we then maybe focus more on what we are trying to achieve with our thoughts. Thoughts are important and we need to organize them if we are going to achieve anything. We have to have a clear idea of how things work and how we are going to realize this. So it's kind of ambivalent maybe, I could say, because on one side you realize that they are not absolute, you come to see they are relative, and also when you look at the thought which is the manifestation aspect you can always see the essence aspect of it which is emptiness; that brings you back to the alaya. The alaya, and what is also called alayavijnana, the groundlike consciousness, are so intimately connected it's really difficult to make a distinction between them. The Third Karmapa's commentary on this said that they are like milk and water, you cannot distinguish the milk from the water once they're mixed.

You have the part of alaya that conceptualizes in a dualistic way under the influence of the seventh consciousness (klistamanovijnana), the afflicted consciousness and its

dualistic division, and thereby, the clinging to the solidity of both what we call the thinker and the thought or the knowing mind and the perceived mind. The perceiving mind and the perceived mind are seen in the alayavijnana as substantially existent, and therefore we attribute them a certain reality and importance. When we come to connect with alaya and we go beyond the divisive habit of duality and dual fixation we come to understand that there are thoughts, but they are only the expression of mind. And there is cognizance which we believe to be a thinker, which is just another expression of mind, so we see that they partake of the same essence of emptiness, and so that liberates ourselves from our attachment or the fixation we had about their reality. But it doesn't mean that we don't care, it's actually the opposite. I think an enlightened person is very, very conscious of the power of thoughts. Actually the activity of a buddha is the result of countless aspirations that he or she has cultivated throughout the path of the bodhisattva. The power of the thoughts is very important, so you are not casual with them. So between not being casual and not being fixated....somewhere in there.

Q: First, I want to thank you for your teaching, and to share my experience and express my gratitude. I listened very, very carefully, and it was an experience of a tour de force. Like listening to a beautiful concert...I really enjoyed it, but it's hard to imagine myself being able to put into words my understanding of what you shared with us. Now I look forward to meditating and experiencing what comes with that.

A: Thank you. You know, when you said that, it reminded me of a concert I attended that stayed with me quite awhile after; it was such a moving concert. I don't know what happened, there was a catharsis I guess, between the musicians and me, but it was truly ineffable and almost inconceivable and I felt that if I had to afterwards try to put into words, I wouldn't even like to try, because it would sort of burst the bubble...like a charm or a spell that you break by trying to conceptualize it. I think it's like any experience of meditation you may have that lingers with you for a while. If you try to describe it and give it a certain shape which you then try to store somewhere and come back to when you want, you actually kill it. So I think in general all experiences are alike, the transitory nature of experiences. In the moment we go through something we experience it fully, and we shouldn't be limited by our preconceived ideas, like, "Oh, I shouldn't be experiencing things in this way, or I

shouldn't be open to that situation in that way," because of whatever constructs you have about who you should be and how how you should feel.

I tend to be more into whatever happens now, happens now; it lingers for a while and then it goes. And when it's gone it's just as fine as when it came...because when it goes it's an experience, and then something else instead arises and that's another experience. The thread that goes through all of this is that your mind is increasingly present to this moment and therefore turned inwardly...even if you're enjoying sound, touch, smell, whatever. Enjoying the sense of having contact with and noticing whatever feeling you have about it. Even if you're simply enjoying that, your mind is not directed outwardly, you're not possessing an object and closing your hand to try and keep it. You're enjoying it, and the enjoyment brings you to the basis, it brings you to the emptiness of it...but not emptiness in a sad way. Empty means that there is space, it arises because there is space, it arises because manifestation is indissociable from emptiness.

All of these experiences bring you back to emptiness. That means that the thread that runs through all of this is mind coming to know itself more and more. Knowing itself through its own observation, through awareness and emptiness, or through manifestation and emptiness. If this is remaining and all of your experiences come and go, I think you are in a good spot. Keep inhabiting this space...not owning it, but being present to it and enjoying it when it comes your way. Trungpa called it "touch and go." This means that you open your arms and embrace it, you welcome it and dance with it for a while...this means that you touch it and are very present to it. Every detail in this discerning wisdom, every detail, every range of perception; the sounds, the tastes, the touch, the smells, are all very precise. And each of these varieties of sensations brings you back to the basis, brings you back to the essence of mind. And your certainty, your confidence in the spacious nature of the wisdom of Dharmadhatu, is experienced more and more. You see? It's not a struggle any more. You are not fighting kleshas, you are not attached to sensations. You are present to what is, and that brings you closer to your mind. And after that, the fluctuations are part of it...don't be fixed.

Q: I've had the same experience of what was just discussed, so I'm glad that you articulated it. Today I started by taking notes, but then I just stopped, just said, "No." There was something about the way it was going and the way I was experiencing it, I didn't want to miss the moment after moment

after moment by fixating on it; it was such a wonderful journey through the afflictions and through the transformation of them. I've read Rinpoche's book many times and I've read your book and heard you talk about it before, but something happened for me today too. And I also want to ask you what the concert was.

A: Björk. Björk in a very appropriate space. You know, I can't go into these halls where you have to stand as if you were in a slaughterhouse. I can't do that anymore. But this was a classic auditorium, where usually they play classical music; it was a small venue, with ushers that took you to your seat...the real thing. She had a little electronic box with all her loops and whatever, and there was a choir singing behind her in Icelandic, so there was connection between what she calls the inner and the outer sounds, like the electronic sounds for her are the sounds of the inner body, you know, the flow of blood and the nerves, etc, and the choir is the sound of nature. The two were coming together, and she also had two guys with a very cutting edge electronic group called Matmos, if you have heard of them; basically if you have listened to them it's almost unbearable, the screeching sounds and whatever, and they have a little endoscopic camera with a microphone and put that on their faces and you hear the sound of their skin and the electric field around their bodies, by itself it's unbearable but together it was just a mind blowing experience. I don't know if you've seen any of her concerts but everybody has these amazing outfits and masks and hairdos, and it's just...I was just flabbergasted, spaced out for a week, I've never had this before...maybe when I saw Massive Attack. I realize why they were called massive and attack, but that was different. Or going 200 kilometers an hour in somebody's car listening just to funk. Hahahaha. Yeah, Björk.

I think one element of the concert was, as mentioned, tour de force; and then trying to be really attentive and present and so on. I think this is just another way of saying present to the situation while not being distracted by considerations regarding the past of the future or other sidetracks that we can have; just being totally in the experience. That's why this idea about using the kleshas for transformation, although I'm a little at a loss for words actually, because it sounds a little derogatory...I feel like, this is not klesha, this is wisdom...these are my friends. I don't really know how to say that, but it is totally being present to it. And not trying to define them or put them in the right folder...like they are friends, or enemies, or are they frenemies? Or I don't know what they are. I don't care! What it is is an experience, and if I'm open to this experience

and not distracted by all my labeling and definitions and need to secure myself and make sure that I'm not doing something wrong and all of that, you know, just taking a chance allows for this encounter and then something really magical happens. After that if you are trying to remember then you are just going to be rehashing something, and then it's like, "Who cares?" It is; that's all that matters. It's like music, it's a nonconceptual language. You know, you could just be a headbanger, or into pure jazz; you have these other languages, right? But there is something that's happening, and you are present to this. You're open to this, you're not afraid of it. You're not easily the prey of it. Not because they are predators, but because you placed yourself in a position where you are going to be carried away. So that's what I wanted to convey, this magic, but it's difficult because it's experiential, but I'm happy you guys gave this feedback, I thank you for that...because you can translate this into other words and other circumstances.

Q: I'm interested today listening to you Tsony, because they've been doing all these recent experiments with hallucinogens with people who are who are dying or very ill, and it seems that it liberates them from fear and from anxiety, when they understand the spaciousness and emptiness of these kleshas for themselves, and it struck me that this is what the enlightened ones have been teaching us for a few thousand years; about the power of the mind, with or without hallucinogens. And it's kind of interesting to be on the initial steps of this practice, without having to take psilocybin or LSD or something like that; I can see that there's a clear path that may not require drugs or medication.

A: Well, everything also needs to be properly addressed, and there is a tradition and the tradition is very necessary. I mean, when these substances have been used, whether it's psilocybin or ayahuasca or whatever, people had shamans to guide them, and not only from the outside, but from the inside; and so freely jumping into the psychedelic world could be hazardous...and it's the same with meditation. With meditation you need to be helped, the initial steps are easy, but there comes a moment when you're really getting into it and it opens up and there are all sorts of possibilities...all possibilities of liberation and also possibilities of complications, so you really need to have a good shaman who is going to help you along the way.

But I think that you're right that a lot of people, when they come to the end of their life, unfortunately come to the wisdom that they wish they had had when they were 20 years old. Like just to not give a shit about what everybody else thinks, and just be

who you are. But because of society, your position, your job, and parenting, etc., you create a lot of constraints and you have a lot of obligations. I see the same thing in meditation. People sometimes think they have to do as prescribed and have to do this and have to do that; there's a lot of thinking, a lot of obligations, behaving in such a way, having a particular attitude, following a dress code; all of that. If you could just free yourself...like Milarepa said, "Be like a madman, be like a leper." Like, you have no hope as a leper, you can't be handsome and...it's just not going to happen, your nose is falling in your soup when you're drinking it, so just forget it, you know? And if you are crazy, then everybody thinks you're crazy anyway, so why would you try to look like you're well behaved? Just be who you are. Basically, be without pretense. Sometimes that's even why people drink, because it lifts the inhibitions. The problem is that if it's not accompanied by a follow up, meaning your own work, then you think that the substances and only the substances are having the effect. It's a jump start, for some, a jump start, but it shouldn't become the 100% reliable answer...because then you trust the substance, not yourself. Or you trust the shaman but don't trust yourself. It's the same. It's interesting, and it seems that some people really need this strong thing, a strong kick in the butt, like, "Dude, you're going to die, so for the last five minutes of your life can you just be yourself?" And just fully enjoy it. It's such a relief. I try to live in this awareness, and it's not always easy to have to compromise, but as Rinpoche said to me, "Be free, but don't freak people out." Don't freak people out, so I still maintain an appearance of civilization. But if you're around me for a while, you'll realize, oh, okay...this guy is kind of crazy sometimes. ;~}

Q: I'm going to continue along this vein of conversation, and the reference to your talk earlier being like a concert, and it reminded me of an experience I had once which was shortly after I had gotten involved with Buddhism and with you and the center. I was attending a classical choral concert that was in honor of my late wife, so I was there for that reason more than for the music. I realize that while I was sitting there, listening, or sort of listening, I realized that I was mostly being judgemental...of myself, of whether I understood the music correctly, or judging the singers, whether they were singing it correctly, which I wouldn't know if they were or not anyway, and I was even looking at their clothes, were they outfitted properly? And suddenly I thought, "Man, you're just sitting here in your head judging everything! Stop that! And I don't really know what happened, but when I said, "Stop that," it stopped...and it was like the music exploded into the room, like I hadn't even been there before. So I guess I'm asking, or commenting, on judgment, and being judgemental, and it goes along with what you were saying about being yourself. It seems impossible to

be yourself...most of my time is being judgmental of myself, others and situations too, but mostly of myself...and along with what you're saying, it is inhibiting. It leaves me feeling out of it somehow.

A: All of this judgment and so on that, as you say, keeps you in a sort of bubble...so actually you were not at the concert, it took you some time to come into it. I had a similar experience at the Massive Attack concert I mentioned before. It was in a big arena, and then the opening act was under-teched, like only two speakers, and I was just thinking of how they were going to make a show with such poor equipment...you could hardly hear them sing and play...I was in that bubble, very judgmental. At first I thought the opening act was using Massive Attack's equipment, and I had this whole narrative going on...then there was a little intermission and they came out, and I didn't even see more speakers, and was just very doubtful about the whole thing. Then the concert began, really slow and soft...and then blammo. Light, sound, wow, talk about acid, it was like being on acid. Both physically and emotionally. It was so unexpected, it blew me out of my whole story of 'yadda yadda.' So I entered the concert at this moment, and you entered the concert at the moment when you said, "Stop that!" You pushed through the door. In terms of psychotropic drugs, this could also help to push the door of perception in that case. And then you were propelled into a universe that was totally unexpected and unknown. But you are brave, maybe you are overwhelmed, but also brave to stay in that experience. Don't fall back on the habits of defying the experience just so you know where you are...because we are always in this duality. Saying, like, "Okay, this is a massive attack that I received from Massive Attack," and then here I am right back in my old nest of duality. No, you let go of this by resting on the natural ground of indissocial ability. And then you are aware of all the experiences and the multitude of shapes, colors, tastes, forms, touches, all of that. And if you have a background of meditation, then at this point it brings you to the essence, so that it doesn't matter if it's Massive Attack or the choral or Bjork, it brings you back to the nature of mind. So all of this becomes vipashyana. All of this is bringing you back to the nature of mind, because that's how you proceed. That's how you process the experiences. In that sense there is no klesha. No "this is sacred and this is profane." Or this is Dharma and this is not Dharma. All of these limitations are exposed as falsity. But you're not even thinking in those terms, I'm just saying that for the sake of this conversation, but in the experience, you're just totally in the experience. And afterwards it just depends how long it lingers, it depends how much you go back into your usual thinking.

I may have mentioned before, forgive me if I have, but I had this experience...this was in Nepal when we went to the Yanglesho Cave outside of Kathmandu, a famous cave where Guru Rinpoche stayed, Machik Lapdron came there, Marpa came there and had the vision of Vajrayogini, I mean this is a very woohoo powerful place...and then above there is a little hermitage, a little monastery temple of Chatral Rinpoche who was a great yogi. And I always wanted to see him, since I was like 16, I always thought, "I will see him, I will see him," I was kind of fixed on seeing him, but I never saw him. But then we're there and we went up to the monastery and we heard a rumor that Chatral Rinpoche is there...you never know where he is or when he will come, it's impossible to see him. But they said, "He's here," and they let us up and we sat in the courtyard waiting to receive his blessing. We waited quite a while, then at one point one of his attendants came and ushered us into the small temple which was packed with monks and yogis, and suddenly we were pushed in front of Chatral Rinpoche and I just threw a khata and he had this huge book and he just went bong, he hit me on the head; that's the blessing. Then we were pushed right out. So I'm out and I'm like...I can't think. I'm in the space of thoughtlessness. And there's part of me that's trying to jumpstart my thinking process, like an old car when the battery is going rr rr rr. Rr rr rr, can't think, you know? Then another part of me is simultaneously thinking, "What the heck are you doing? He blessed you into the space of Samantabhadra and you try to get out? Are you crazy or what? Find a place where you can be as spaced out as much as you want and where nobody's going to step on you." There was a crowd, but I found a little corner and just sat there, for I don't know how long. Like, they had time to finish their pujas and leave, they were gone, but I was still there in my corner totally blissed out. And then I saw Chatral Rinpoche coming out, you know he died at 102, so maybe at this time he was 100, or 98, a very old man with a long white beard...and then he passed a corner of the house and came to a staircase, and he literally flew up the staircase! Shoo...he didn't walk or run, he flew. I was awestruck...that was part of the experience. And then his attendant who was walking a little bit behind saw me, saw him, and saw me seeing that and he saw me being spaced out...and then he started imitating him, like pantomiming Rinpoche flying up the stairs, and we were both laughing, and then they disappeared. And I still have this; but just the outline of the experience. The core of the experience was then and I could be there...but if I wanted to be like a tourist and take a picture, or a video of him flying up the stairs to put on instagram, I would lose everything. So just be

there, just be there. That's so precious, and that's a training in fearlessness. It's really hard, because we've been trained to behave. Reasonable, sensible, and so we're always afraid to step out of line and make a big booboo, and we don't really know the difference between what is necessary and what we "think" is necessary. We don't know what's supposed to be done and what society expects from us, or what we think they expect from us. And you know, the bottom line is that nobody cares about you...unless you step on their lawn...but otherwise they really don't care, they are very busy with themselves, we all are. So it's good when you come to a certain age where you can allow yourself to be a bit more free from that. It would be good to do that quite early in our lives so we would have more time to experience that. Well, whenever it comes, it's welcome. :~} Before you're dead, hopefully.

Q: As years go by, what I have experienced is that the kleshas don't really bother me as much, and I am almost ashamed to have such a peaceful and pleasant life as I near the end of it. I enjoy meditating and I'm remembering right now that a few years ago you told me after I expressed to you that I had experienced an advancement, you said to be careful because I was going to reach something like a plateau, I think you said, and it's difficult to come out of it. And really I think I'm there now, because I cannot say I'm not happy. I enjoy my life and I enjoy meditating, and I feel at home with myself...I don't have many moments of excitement, though I am happy for all of you.

A: Well, I think you are on the altiplano, and that's fine. It doesn't have to be so colorful and so on, it can also be very smooth. It can be very smooth, and besides this, I think the experiences we were referring to are maybe, like, an hour or two in our whole lives. The rest of the time is quite different. I think it's good when you come to a place which I would call contentment. Contentment. And in terms of the classic literature, we talk about three doors or three gates of liberation; the first one is that phenomena do not have defining characteristics, or all phenomena are empty, and the third experience that you have is aimlessness. This means you are not looking for something better or higher; it's a sense of contentment. Thich Nhat Hanh calls it, "I'm at home." I'm at home, and there is peace. And there is clarity. Then you just keep on living, keep on breathing, and then you die, and then it keeps on going and you're still doing the same thing and your mind is very content and is very well equipped to handle some wind, sometimes stiffer than others...but you are very deeply rooted. That's why I said, altiplano, it's a plateau, but it's high. A high plateau of contentment, it's very good.

Just keep doing what you're doing, and sometimes it's a bit broader, a bit deeper, a bit more precise; it doesn't have to be flashy. It can be very smooth. And with this peace and contentment there is no fear, no anxiety. You know, the fearlessness of the Buddha is one thing, and actually in this text *Buddha Nature* when describing the 32 qualities of dharmakaya, the enlightened mind, within the ten powers Shamar Rinpoche talks about the four fearlessnesses. Buddha fearlessness is one thing, but bodhisattva fearlessness...bodhisattva fearlessness comes from trusting the process. You trust Dharma. Your refuge in Dharma is very solid, and you trust yourself in relation to Dharma. You trust your practice. It's not spectacular, you have nothing to prove to anybody, but you're consistent, you're not obsessed, you're fluid and flexible, and you're not afraid because you know that whatever life throws at you you have tools to work with it. Something will come out of it which is enhancing your certainty about the nature of mind...or your compassion for other beings, or your bodhicitta will be magnified by this. So eh, no problem, business as usual. And please don't feel bad because you feel good. ;~}

Q: It did throw me when Shamar Rinpoche switched the wisdoms, and it's very funny to notice how one can get so attached to the concepts in the Dharma when there are different ways to point out mind.

A: Yes, I answered to the friend who asked me about this, "All Dharma is relative, like fingers pointing out the moon." And then you can go with this one or that one, but look at the moon. Look at the moon. She replied, "Yeah, I am trying to master the fingers though." It took her some time to understand how, like anger for instance, when you see through anger you can see that everything appears like a reflection in a mirror, it doesn't have any solidity. And therefore when you see that the object of your anger has no solidity, as everything is interdependent, the anger falls away, because there is no object, really. You see there is no object. It makes sense to expose it in this way. But then when you look at the other exposition that says it turns into dharmadhatu wisdom, suddenly my mind thought in terms of "anger is closing." It's like a fist. Then everything closes after that, all of your body, all of your energy...and you keep densifying your being through this energy of anger...and to the deepest level, that's hell. You are the first casualty of this aggression. So when you look at it, instead of being focused or hypnotized by the manifestation of anger as it closes and becomes very heavy, its essence is space. When you have a fist of space, how do you

close it? It's not even that it re-opens, you can't close a fist of space! And then, wow, it's liberated in the dharmadhatu wisdom. And the dharmadhatu wisdom is to realize the ground, it's to realize alaya, it's to realize Buddha nature, it's to realize all of that, that yeah, mind is a very open space and dynamic, creative, where everything can arise. Samsara and nirvana and everything in between. And you are so far away from whatever was the cause of your anger in the first place. And that's a very valid way of pointing out the experience...and I think both ways are valid. I don't know if my mind is like this, but I tend to see more in terms of integration than exclusion and division. For me Dharma is not the sum of paradoxes, it is different ways of talking about the same reality that nobody can really talk about...I don't know, maybe I have a mind that works this way I guess, maybe some other people need to have classifications and so on, and I understand that because the Buddha taught in a free way, he didn't talk three yanas, he just talked to humans, and then after that, a thousand years after that, people made it into this kind of system, and there's probably a clientele for this, people need this, and that's fine, it's fine with me...if it helps you come closer to your mind, that's find; it's all good.