

Find liberation through both reflection and analysis.

Dharma Roadside Dialogue 2022 #5.

Exposé

The topic that I will talk about today, and which we can discuss after, comes from a slogan from *The Seven Points of Mind Training*, in particular the seventh chapter. The seventh chapter deals with advice and instructions on how to make the practice of mind training easier, or sustainable. This particular slogan is “Liberate yourself through analysis and investigation.” The word in Tibetan to describe this concept is *tokchö*; it’s actually two verbs, *tok* and *chö*. The first one, *tokpa*, means to consider, to examine, to identify. The second one, *chöpa*, is to investigate and put to the test through logical reasoning. Usually the two come together into one word *tokchö*, and that means to examine, to come to a diagnosis, to figure out what is really going on. So that’s just a few words in Tibetan to indicate what the original text in Tibetan is talking about.

The illustration that’s often given to describe these two processes is that of the forest. When you look at the forest you have two different ways of approaching it. You look at the forest as a general concept or a general idea, that’s one way of looking at it. You have general descriptions; it has wood, it’s green, these sorts of things. And then the second part is to look more specifically in detail. Look at each tree, and when you look at the tree go into the details of the branches, the leaves, the bark, maybe fruit, whatever. So it’s much more in depth. We could say it’s an introspection, it’s an observation that has a view of the generalities and a view of the specificities at the same time. That’s the general context, the general idea of what we are going to discuss.

We are invited to do this as a preliminary to the practice of mind training and in particular the exercise of sending and taking, which is *Tonglen* in Tibetan. If we don’t have a clear understanding of what’s going on...that is, what’s going on in our mind in relation to the world and other beings, we are in sort of a haze, it’s kind of vague and lacks precision in our understanding of the situation. What we need to do is to clarify things so that we understand how our mind, our psyche, works in relation to the world. What are our habits, what are our tendencies, what needs to be adjusted? What needs to be corrected to some extent, because there are things that we take for granted that actually have no ground, no basis, but since we take them for granted and we’ve never really examined them, or scrutinized them, so to say, they keep operating. We’re in auto-pilot mode, right? As far as reactions and our perception of the world is concerned.

So this is the preliminary work. The preliminary work is really coming to understand what happens in my mind when I am caught in a relationship to the world that is maybe generating displeasure, or maybe generating pleasure, and how I react; how the mental afflictions, the kleshas, arise and what I do with them; what kind of actions, what kind of words, what kind of strategies come into my mind. We need to see this very clearly and for that we really need to understand that in every instance of consciousness, whenever we are aware of something, something that comes to the gateways of our

five senses or something that we can see with the mental consciousness, there is always a veil, there is always a distortion. Actually there are several.

One distortion is the distortion of dualistic fixation. In every instance of consciousness, there is the sense that a subject precedes an object. That's the sort of twist that always manifests in our mind when there is an instance of consciousness. And we don't notice it because this is how we think we know things. I am aware, therefore I know. But we don't see the underlying problem of dualistic fixation; the basic split that happens in my mind, and the fixation on that which knows being an entity and that which is known being an entity; or in Mahamudra terminology, the grasper and the grasped are perceived as two entities or two realities that are opposed, or at least that one knows the other.

In every instance of consciousness this arises, and in some previous sessions I think I've mentioned Vasubandhu's four confusions about the self. First, the wrong view about what the self is, then confusion about the self being an entity, then the arrogance of the self (thinking that I am the center of every action and therefore I am important, not to say superior), and fourth is the attachment that the self has to its prerogatives, i.e. self-righteousness. So every instance of consciousness is afflicted by these four types of veils. That's the first distortion, the distortion of cognition.

Then there is a second form of distortion which is a little bit more obvious to us, even if we don't always want to agree. That of the kleshas, the mental afflictions. If something is pleasant, it is pleasant per se, it is not pleasant to "me," it is not only pleasant in a certain organization or configuration. It is always pleasant, and therefore as I am the center of the universe and I'm entitled, I want it. I need it and want it; desire.

If it's unpleasant, same, I'm entitled not to have it. I hate it. I want to get rid of it. Hatred. Rejection. And so on and so forth. Every conscious instant is flawed by these two veils; the cognitive distortion (cognitive dissonance) and mental afflictions. So we are not well equipped to deal with the world, because we are already within a certain constraint of habits, ignorance, distortion of cognition and reactive afflictions. We've already decided what's going to happen, or what we want to happen...so we are not open to a fresh, flexible, benevolent initiation. We are already programmed somewhat to get the best out of the situation for me, and to expel all the possibility of failure, pain, problems and unpleasant situations away; to push this away from us.

This is our structure, so it's very difficult to even practice mind training. You know, it's like when you were a kid and your mom would call you for lunch and then tell you to wash your hands because if you eat with dirty hands you're going to pollute your food. This is the same, because if you come to a situation with a mind that is "dirty," (meaning sort of flawed) nothing clear or constructive can come out of this. Anything that you say or think or do will be under the influence of this habit or pattern or construct. So the preliminary work and what this particular slogan in mind training in the seventh chapter is inviting us to do is to first "clean your hands." Make sure your

hands are clean, then when your hands are clean you will be much more efficient and you'll have much more discernment.

So first things first. How can we practice this exercise of finding liberation through examination and analysis? How can we do that? We can find liberation by first of all applying a slogan that is also found in the mind training literature, which is, "Drive all blames into one." Do not project your problems and blame somebody "out there." You have to free your mind for this time of introspection, at least begin there, you have to free your mind from the tendency of always trying to find a scapegoat. Because all the energy of your mind, all your creativity, all your intelligence will be like a lawyer that you've hired to prove the guilt of the entire world and so you have no resources for introspection anymore, they are totally hijacked by this attempt to outsource your problems or justify your actions. The very famous, "Yes, but..." that we use all the time. We try to push this away from us.

So the first thing is really to say that in this exercise it's rhetorical, because it's contemplation, it's reflection and for a change I'm going to try to subtract the possibility that the problems come from the outside. That's the starting point, the working hypothesis. The problem is not coming from outside. Why do you do this? Not to exonerate the world from any possible misdeed, but to free your mind from the loss of energy and resources that are spent going after whoever we think is responsible. Let's try to work differently. Usually we try to find who is guilty and throw the blame and all the problems into the landfill of others so that our house seems clean. Let's try something else, because we've been doing this since beginningless time and it doesn't work. Like, "I don't know why...I throw this garbage out there and I just keep having more." So there is a problem. So let's try something else, a new strategy, let's try something we haven't tried before.

Now let's take a look at our reactions. Why do we react in such a way, when confronted by such and such situations. If it is pleasant, we're satisfied, but not fully satisfied, because we want to have it forever, we want to have more, and then also at the same time that we enjoy the situation we've got some level of fear that we might lose it. That it will come to an end, and we don't want this to happen. How come we're not able to enjoy this without fearing that it will disappear?

Why do we get upset when somebody just says words? Are the words responsible? For example, if I insult you in French, most of you won't mind because you wouldn't understand. Your mind cannot define these words (which are just sounds to you) as an insult. This shows that it is your own evaluation of the insult as an insult, the sound as an insult, that is actually creating the ground for the reaction of rejection. Regardless of what they say, even if they praise you, you still don't understand and it doesn't make you happy.

So, the general idea of this introspection is debunking. Debunking the idea that what we see, hear, taste, and think is real, absolutely real, valid in every and any circumstance. And believing that the way I see things is not the way "I" see things, it is the way things are. We are back to self-

righteousness, and based on that come confrontations. So the little game that we are invited to do here is like a role-playing game. You decide to take the “other” position. You decide to consider the situation from a different vantage point, from a different place. Maybe you can walk a mile in the shoes of the other person and try to feel what it might feel for this person who said or did this or that.

As part of the role game you might also think more in terms of Dharma. You know, what Buddha would do? What would Buddha do in this situation, or say? What would a bodhisattva do or say in this situation? Then if you walk a mile in the shoes of a bodhisattva, you say “Okay.” A bodhisattva is someone who has an understanding of the underlying reality, which is emptiness, and understands that all manifestations come from interdependent origination. A bodhisattva comes to understand in this awakening that subject and object only exist in interdependent relation, and that it seems real, it tastes and feels real, but it's just an illusion. So the fire of the situation burns less for a bodhisattva, and at the same time is more accurate. There's more precision but less personal involvement and suffering. So how come a bodhisattva can deal with things that would crush me, or even half of that would crush me? And he or she can work with ten times more, or a thousand times more intense situations. It begins to occur to us that it's not about the object, it's really about the reaction of the self, the reaction of the mind. And just to be able to accept this possibility is a great step forward. Because when people are trapped in the constraint of dualistic fixation and mental afflictions, if you come and say, “You know, it's just an illusion and it's mostly your mind that perceives it as a problem,” what is the reaction of this person? “Oh, you're with them, now you're in the enemy camp,” because the option of another possibility is seen as aggression.

So you can't say that to others. I'm not telling you that every problem in the world is your responsibility. I'm just telling you that if you look at your own mind and its reaction, you may have the space to change your reaction and the outcome of this collision could be different. Let's be clear, when we say, “Drive all blames into one, and don't accuse others for your suffering,” we are not saying, “Oh by the way, you're a monster.” As if it weren't for you everything would be fine, like you are really the cause of all the suffering in the world. This is another arrogant posture. I'm not the best of the best, but I am the worst of the worst, so still #1 in my category. This is just another posture, don't even go there. What we are saying is that if you try to find who is responsible “out there” you're falling into a rabbit hole and you will never come out of it.

Remember the story in a sutra of the man who has been shot by a poison arrow? The doctor comes and he's going to remove the arrow and apply some anti-poison unguent, and the guy says, “Hold on, hold on. I want to know who shot the arrow. What's his name? Who made the arrow? What are his parents' names? What kind of beef does he have with me that made him want to shoot me?” And the doctor said, “Well, I can probably find all that out, but by the time I gather all the answers you'll be dead.” So that's why we say, “Drive all blames into one.” Work inside to see how you react and why you react in such a way.

When you become an Arhat you become an enemy-destroyer, that's the literal translation. You've overcome enemies, because the enemies are not external enemies, the enemy is the enemy of impaired cognition and kleshas, mental afflictions. Once you've overcome this there is no outer enemy anymore. So this little exercise here, that we are invited to do as part of our daily reflection as we go through our life and circumstances is just to help us to understand that the thing that we see and come to know is only a matter of our own appreciation. It doesn't have an absolute reality. It depends.

You know, like some days you wake up on the wrong side of the bed, and you know it's gonna be a bad day. Or it's a bad hair day. You know it's gonna be bad, and then when you go out, it rains; it's gonna be a double bad hair day. And so you're already sort of edgy, and everything is a drama. You react, you sort of snap, and then you hate it, because you don't want to be snappy but it seems that they force you to be snappy. Or the situation forces you to act this way. And you hate it; you don't like it but you feel like it's the only way you can go.

So if you can step out a little bit of today's configuration and decide to be somewhat slightly different in your perception, maybe you could question your response to this situation. If you could be slightly different, maybe you could use your practice. Maybe you're a dedicated practitioner of let's say Avalokiteshvara. You've taken the refuge vow and you've taken the Bodhisattva vow and you're striving for enlightenment for the benefit of everybody. Okay? And you practice the 6 paramitas, and so on and so forth. This is your dedication. You do that. And then, you know, daily, or regularly, you practice Chenrezig. You visualize, above your head, Chenrezig; at some point you become Chenrezig, all sentient beings become Chenrezig, and you recite the mantra, which is sound and compassion, the union of emptiness and compassion. Okay? So in this moment when you feel like you're trapped and it's a really bad day, a bad hair day or whatever, and you're about to snap, just come back to your practice and say, "In this moment I'm Chenrezig, all beings are Chenrezig, all sounds are the union of emptiness and compassion, sounds like Om Mani Padme Hung." You change your vantage point. It might be artificial at first, of course, it's training, right? You change your vantage point. And then of course there is immediately a confrontation with reality, and then you're torn between the usual compulsive reaction and the new freshly cultivated bodhisattva aspiration. Then you see that, well, Chenrezig wouldn't answer like this... a bodhisattva wouldn't answer like this, because the snappy answer comes from a mind that has been cut from loving kindness because of ignorance and affliction. And so the mantra (which means that which protects the mind) the mantra brings you back to the sacred outlook, the pure vision that you cultivate with effort in your regular and daily practice.

So this is the application of your practice of Chenrezig, it's just an example of the transformation of any given situation by just embracing another vantage point. Exchanging yourself for others, which is also one of the big aspects of mind training... "What's going on in their mind that seems so aggressive, that *seems* to me so aggressive?" When you look at it from the point of view of the other person, then you'll see they're just like you... maybe they had a bad day, or they're afraid to lose their

job, or money is tight, everything is a problem, and whatnot. So you can see all the parameters of this person's own trap, the constraints...and it's just like a drowning person trying to react and exporting the suffering outside and blaming somebody else. In this example blaming me for all his problems. They have no real foundation but this person is using whatever they can to liberate themselves, it's like puking, getting rid of something that's heavy in your stomach. This person is puking on me. It has more to do with their liver than with me, so in order to be able to play this role for a moment you come to understand where this person stands. You have to first be confident that a) you are not going to blame and b) you're going to look inside and c) what you're really trying to find here is a situation where there is a harmonious exchange or communication so that peace can be felt by everybody. Even if we speak very different languages, we can come to find a common ground of peace and security that then we can transcend; go beyond the constraints of duality and afflictions.

So it's a very important exercise, a training, a role playing game...because it gives us a hint that the object is not at fault. What is the problem is the relationship of the subject to the object. And how the subject is triggered by the contact with the object. Triggered in their habits, in their compulsive reactions. So we have a chance to say, "Oh wow. That's what triggers me!" Then you can have gratitude. "Thank you very much, I was not aware I am so easily triggered." And then someone will inevitably pull that string and snap, now you see it. These exercises must be done in a space of absolute kindness. For others and for yourself. Because when somebody pulls the string and you see that you react and you begin to see that's how you always react, you can get upset with yourself and hate yourself, or you can kill whoever is pulling the string or even worse to the one making you aware of how you react. You don't want to be exposed, it's just too painful. And it's painful because you immediately evaluate yourself as a failure. If you're not exposed you can pretend you are a success story. If you're exposed you can see you've got flaws (I would say rather the opportunity to learn) and you hate that! You hate to be exposed. We all hate to be exposed. We want to keep the story, we're storytellers. We want to keep the narration of me and my success and my security and so on and so forth. It's pure fantasy, but we're prisoners of this. So we hate the person who reveals this, when actually we should prostrate before them and thank them for showing me something I haven't noticed or that I've noticed but didn't want to recognize but that's been creating my misery since beginningless time; and then by extension projecting consequences of suffering around me and my whole world, even the ones I love. So this is a very important objective view.

I remember that Gendun Rinpoche was always telling us, "Turn your gaze inward, you guys are always looking outside, always looking outside, don't look outside. Look inside." That's exactly what this slogan is about. Turn the gaze inward, not with a mind of punishing yourself or to find your weaknesses so you can take yourself down with a self-destructive mind. The only reason we want to destroy ourselves is because we have been exposed as having flaws and so there is a need to transform; but we don't see that, we don't see that as an opportunity. We just see that we've been exposed and we hate ourselves for being exposable. We dream ourselves to be perfect, the perfect knight of stainless steel that nothing can rust. Perfect! Trungpa Rinpoche said about this, "Drop

your iron pants!” Don’t be afraid to be caught with your pants down, we might say. Don’t be afraid to be exposed.

Embrace this vulnerability because if you embrace it with kindness then “let’s learn something together from it, shall we?” If you embrace it with discernment then what’s the real problem here? Then you can learn, then you can take a step towards liberation. And when you can do that there is no ground for compulsive reactions, for klesha. There’s no ground anymore, so you free your mind from these reactions, it’s like, “Okay, I don’t have time to be angry. I have to look at my angry mind. I don’t have time to be attached, I have to look at my attached mind.” Because if I look at my attached mind and I realize what it really is, that its true nature is dharmakaya, then I’ve defeated all the kleshas and all the enemies in the outer world. If I run after all the enemies in the outer world and I try to sweep the kleshas under the rug so nobody sees them, we’re actually not doing the work of liberation. So there’s really not much choice. If we really want to find liberation from ignorance and kleshas, we have to look into it. The first thing we have to debunk is the myth of its absolute reality. And we do that by assuming different positions and different roles.

You know, like how come I always get triggered by this when my friend, my spouse, my child couldn’t care less about it? For instance Wendelin and I had to work a lot on different stories regarding time. I think it’s kind of a common thing with couples, right? I am part of the earlier time, and she is part of the last minute is always the good time. In the early years of our relationship it created a lot of tension and possible clashes, especially when we had to take a plane. I was anxious way before the time and then I would express that in a passive aggressive way. We had to look into our respective stories regarding time and find personal individual strategies regarding time management that would overlap and be reasonably functional. So I had to make an effort, she had to make an effort, and we are getting better about it, more or less, with only the occasional outburst about the others’ infringement on “my” story about what the right time to be at the airport is. This is just one example. There are many examples, and it’s good in a family or in a couple because you have so many opportunities to see the mismatched stories. Like, “It’s okay whatever anybody thinks, I don’t care, just don’t drag me into your trip.” That’s the point where you learn.

When you have to interact and co-exist, that’s where the work is. You always have problems to work with, with these kinds of stories. Like, if I am part of the leadership I think that I have to be the one to pull and the others are just dead weight. It’s a different perspective. If you are an employee you think that the leadership is too into micromanagement, nobody trusts me, my creativity is not valued, and so on. So you have your story. You have your position. Like whoever is above me has power over me and I hate it, or whoever is above feels like they have to deal with some half-wit employee who’s lazy, etc. So all of this is just different stories colliding.

It’s important to remember what we are trying to achieve. And coming back to the Dharma for a minute, what are we trying to achieve as bodhisattvas? We’re trying to achieve harmony within the different stories of different individuals that overlap in order to create a harmonious experience

where the Dharma can be heard, the Dharma can be practiced, and individual liberation can be achieved. That's what we want to try to realize with everybody. We want to be in a space of negotiation and harmonization of two different universes. Totally different universes. If you have no flexibility in your mind you can't do that.

Like sometimes people think diplomats are spineless because they are always trying to find compromises, negotiating back and forth. But some people prefer the military because the military might crushes weakness. People might think this is straightforward, and that they have a spine...but actually war is not the answer, right? At the end of every war there are always a bunch of guys who sit in Vienna, or Geneva, and try to cut a deal and find a common ground. So why not start there? Right off the bat? Why not start by negotiating? But not negotiate in the sense of I win more and you lose more. More like, what is acceptable, reasonable, and comfortable for everybody. So if you put yourself in this position, in this mind set, then that's the way you're going to approach all situations. The bottom line is trying to find a possible coexistence of two radically different stories, but at the same time not lose yourself in the other's story. We keep our own values. Because we can be influenced by others, like good company can influence you positively and negative company can influence you negatively, so we need to keep our spine, keep our values straight, but with a lot of flexibility.

This was Shamar Rinpoche's motto. "Don't be machine minded." It's way more subtle than just black and white. We are not robots. We're human beings, we've got a whole range of possibilities. And another mantra of Rinpoche's was, "Be more flexible." Flexibility means you can adjust, it's not my way or the highway. We can find a way to work together. It's possible, it just takes a little bit more kindness, time, and goodwill. So that's the exercise we are invited to put to the test, and we're going to do this by looking at the situation of how in general we tend to see things. Like here we are in the middle of this world, and this world is crazy, or beautiful, but it's out of reach, or we gain it, or lose it, or people want to take it away from us. That's the big picture, we have to see it as a story we are telling ourselves. It's just a story.

We are in what the yogacara call the imputational world, the world of speculation or imagination. But we don't see the screen because we are projecting light and colors on it. So we're living in this imputational world and in a way we are denying the reality out there. We're sort of negating the reality out there because we want to fix it. Nip it and tuck it when it's not exactly what we'd like. For example people don't like Dobermans with floppy ears so they cut their ears. Like who cares about a Doberman with floppy ears. And then you have to cut their tail. You have to do all these things, crazy things, and these poor animals have to be molded into the human's idea. People who are makeup artists or storytellers. People tell a story, they put on makeup, and then think the makeup is the face. People think that the story, the narration, is the reality. That's why they get fooled by the news media. Because they think what those guys say is the reality. Forget it! Wake up! Everything has a spin.

So we are living in this imaginary world, or this imputational world, in our mind. This doesn't exist! The makeup, the face doesn't exist. But as we don't relate to the object, and we only relate to the makeup, our mind becomes dependent on and tethered to the makeup or the story. And our mind is trying to conform to this story, and is going to do all sorts of things to justify that this story is real, that it is as I project it. So that's what the yogacara call the dependent nature.

And then there is an underlying truth, which is the truth of dharmakaya, the union of luminosity and emptiness, that we actually never see because we are so busy with the "makeup."

Struggling with the makeup. The underlying reality that escapes us is Buddha the enlightened state, this is buddha-nature, this is the nature of your mind. This is the third nature, that the yogacara describes as the consummate or fully realized nature, which is enlightenment. We are mesmerized by our own narration. This can even fall into our Dharma practice, or the Dharma practice can fall into that, "Here I am, being such a nice person...having no needs, I only eat once a day, I sleep very little, I practice a lot, I do a lot of good deeds, I meditate, I'm on the way to enlightenment..." We are so happy with ourselves. The problem is that we raid the fridge at midnight, because we are hungry; we are pissed because we keep a facade of "I'm a bodhisattva." So we are constantly building up a story about what a beautiful being we are as a bodhisattva by negating the reality of our needs.

Like somebody says to me, "I don't sleep much," and I say, "wow, I don't know how you do that, I need a lot of sleep." People are shocked, they ask questions like, "when do you go to bed and when do you wake up," because they want to conform their narration to my narration because in their story I represent, I don't know what, maybe someone who is a good meditator, and therefore doesn't sleep. So I said, "You know what, I go to bed when I'm tired, and I mostly wake up when I have to go to the bathroom. I don't have an alarm clock. And if it's six hours, seven hours, eight hours, I don't know, I don't care." So this cuts their projection and idealization, because we do this sort of thing all the time, and when we are not conformed to this narration of our excellence and our holiness, then we hate ourselves. And if we hate ourselves sometimes we blame the other, like, "I could do that, but I have the damn kids to feed." You know, "I've got my job, and I have to take care of my parents," like if it were not for all these people who are just a pain I'd be enlightened by now! It's kind of an exaggeration but that's the kind of story we build up.

So it's time to demystify all this by looking at the imaginary nature that we are busy playing with and how we can demystify by fearlessly using introspection and analysis within the sharpness of our mind. Look into it. If you can do that you can see that we are all telling stories, and also how that leads the mind into a one-sided story, and then how this mind becomes a prisoner of this story. Just see that there are many other ways to relate to the world than this narration that I have maintained, for whatever reason, with myself and with others. I've been trying to sell this to others, trying to make sure that I still agree.

There's a story of the Mormon missionaries. So two Mormon missionaries go out to try to convince and convert other people to their persuasion but nobody wants to talk to them, nobody opens the door, and the two guys go back to their headquarters and they're really disappointed. They talked with their mentor and they said, "We tried to convince people how good our persuasion and our church is, and how good it would be for them, but they don't want to hear us, they don't want to change. It's hopeless." And the mentor says, "You've got it wrong. You're not sent out there to convert people, you're sent out there to make sure you still believe in our church. Because when you try to convince people it means that what you believe in is right. It's just a way of making sure that our guys still believe in our church."

And that's what we do, we try to convince people of our story because we are always doubting ourselves, and need to reinforce the belief in our story, otherwise what's left? Panic. The only way out of this deadlock is to look at things from a different perspective, to embrace another view and see how much the difference in the vantage point changes the object we're looking at. So something that was an enemy can become an opportunity. Or something that was a friend can become an object of addiction, and it's not the friend that I look at, it's my addiction to praise and to feeling part of a group or whatever.

So when we see this we progressively realize that, yeah, I'm trapped in a story of my own making, and that makes me dependent and opens up the ground for kleshas and actions and consequences and suffering and so on. It could be different! It can be otherwise! If I'm trapped, what would Chenrezig do? If you're trapped, look at somebody else who looks like you, maybe a colleague, you look at them and see that they are also trapped in their narrations, they're so trapped in their beliefs, and their imagination creates a prison in which they inhabit and they have to conform to the narration, even at the cost of their own suffering. And I am like them...I am like them with maybe a little difference, because I can authorize my mind to think that maybe there's another way of seeing things. And that's a radical transformation. That's a sign of progress. When you look at yourself in hindsight, how you were three or four years ago, you realize that you were pretty much like your colleagues, totally trapped in certainty and fighting to protect your story and your narration and in converting people to your church.

But now you're able to say, "Well, there are many different persuasions, there are many different ways of seeing things." Just that is a huge achievement. A huge achievement, because you have a foot on the path to liberation and now you just have to keep doing it. Keep the introspection and don't be rude or aggressive with yourself when you see that you need to change some things. Recognize it and say, "Hey friend, how can we change this together? It doesn't have to be today, it doesn't have to be tomorrow, but let's begin a new adventure. Let's see the other options, the other possibilities, and what kind of story I can write today?"

Because stories are fine. In a way, it's all stories. But there are stories that imprison you and there are stories that liberate you. The Buddha's teaching is a story that liberates us. It is not absolute reality.

He is not talking about absolute reality, he is talking about what you might think is absolute reality, but this is not absolute reality, it's just a story you want to tell yourself about absolute reality. And the Buddha was not fooled by this, he knew that nothing can conceive the underlying full accomplishment, this consummate nature; it's beyond words, it's beyond concepts. But what we can say is what it is not. And we can use examples and illustrations to guide the mind in the direction of the experience, but not by telling anything about the absolute nature, the absolute reality.

So some stories are good. Tell yourself the story that you are Chenrezig, and you are a bodhisattva. Tell yourself the story of many stories, when it doesn't matter who is right and who is wrong. What matters is what brings love and compassion and what brings discernment however you tell about it, and whatever story you use to talk about it. Since we have different stories and are in different universes, the question is how can we cooperate harmoniously? I don't want to change your story, but if I can be of help in liberating you from the toxic aspects of your story, and promote the liberating aspects of your story, I'm very happy to do that. How can we do that together? Like Ram Dass said, "We are walking each other home." We're helping each other.