

Dharma Roadside Dialogue 2022 #7 Prayers & Mantra_Exposé

We're back after our summer break. Although I saw some of you in Europe this summer, we're back now to our online once a month Saturday series. The theme requested for today is about prayers and mantras; how to use them, and also the doubts that might come up as we use them. "Who am I praying to, what should I expect? Is the language I recite them in important, such as Tibetan? Is there a special language we have to use?" But mostly it's questions of confidence, you know like the song, *Jesus is on the Mainline*. So, like, is anybody on the mainline? Is Chenrezig on the mainline, is Buddha on the mainline, or am I talking to myself hoping good things will come of it? So this is the theme, and I'd like to begin by giving a larger picture of the situation. Prayers, mantras, and vows that we might take, like refuge, individual liberation vows, or bodhisattva vows all belong to relative reality. They are skillful methods to help us to grow and free ourselves from old habits, ignorance, mental afflictions, karma, and the consequences of our actions that create static and make it difficult for our mind to know itself.

So this is like the trees that hide the forest. Relative reality; actually the definition of relative reality is that which hides. It's an appearance that mesmerizes the mind and leads the mind to think that this is the only reality there is. We can't see through it, and so can't see a deeper layer of reality which is the ultimate reality. If you translate directly from Sanskrit into English the word *paramartha* means super factual. Beyond appearances. All the methods we are talking about now: prayers, mantras, vows, all this belongs to relative reality. And thereby they are skillful methods using reality as we understand it to help us transcend obscurity that arises from our not being able to see the ultimate nature. Since we're not able to see this ultimate nature right away, it's very useful to have tools that allow us to transcend duality. So that's the general idea.

Now, a little bit of etymology. I really believe in the power of words; words have been formed to convey meaning in a way we can relate to and understand. Let's begin with the word prayer in the Buddhist context. The Tibetan word for prayer is *monlam*. You may have heard about the Kagyu Monlam, the Kagyu gathering to recite aspiration prayers, so that's the *monlam*. There are two words in it, *mon*, and *lam*. *Monpa* is a verb that means to aspire, and *lam* literally means the path. So *monlam* is a path that is made obvious by the aspiration. The aspiration creates a path, it creates a dynamic. You could see it the other way around, the path that comes from an aspiration and an aspiration that comes from the path. It could be both. As you progress along the path you have a larger, deeper, broader aspiration. For example, you begin with a very basic simple aspiration, *I want to free myself from the contrivance of ignorance and the suffering that comes from that. I want to reach beyond suffering*. That is a very basic aspiration. And then you can enlarge this to, *as I progress along the way may I find the resources and discernment and compassion to help other beings to also join the path and progress towards enlightenment*. So that's another way of seeing that simple basic aspirations will open a path.

In our culture a prayer is very much an expression of the Judeo-Christian and Islam, I guess; it's a dialogue between a person and God, God being the creator, the maker, the Almighty. An all-loving superior authority. Then we are like their subject, and also kind of poor. There is a huge discrepancy in this approach where someone is in a weak position that requests from the higher authority gifts of grace that will bestow freedom from suffering, and this perspective where there isn't the idea that we are not different, in terms of Buddha nature. That's a huge difference, it's almost essential. Because no one in this context will have the arrogance to say, "*I want to be God.*" Buddhists are arrogant in a way because they say, "*I want to become Buddha. I want to reach Buddha the enlightened state.*" It's very different because we start from the premise that we're all endowed with Buddha nature; that the only difference there is between an enlightened person and a non-enlightened person is the awareness of this Buddha nature and the realization of it. That's the only difference.

So when we ask for a favor, let's say we are talking to the Buddha nature saying, "Please, can you help to clarify the Buddha nature in me." We are not asking for something that we don't have. We're asking for support to clarify what we have but are not aware of. So the dualistic perspective, which at the relative level may feel like the theistic approach, is actually very different from prayer in the theistic approach. Because it is all based on the awareness of the Buddha nature. That's a very, very important starting point. We are invited to cultivate a sense of respect and understanding of the fact that we are all, all sentient beings, endowed with Buddha nature. So at no time are we dispossessed of this Buddha nature, or lacking it. But we just don't know it, we just don't see it, we just don't feel it, we just don't experience it. Because of ignorance, because of habits, of mental afflictions, and the consequences of karma that creates so much dust in our life that we have no peace to see through relative reality, the hidden reality, to see through this in order to see the true nature of our mind.

So the path of aspiration is an aspiration to meet enlightenment. And how do we do that? By transforming our actual situation. Becoming aware of our actual situation, transforming our habits, clarifying ignorance, accumulating a flow of positive energy that will offset the flow of negativity that we have created since beginningless time; these sorts of things. So that when we are praying we're actually opening a path through our aspiration. So that's the idea of prayer. *Monlam*, a path that is made obvious by aspiration, and aspiration that creates the path. Okay?

Now, the *mantra*. *Mantra*; again, a little bit of entomology to begin with. The first part is *manas*. *Manas* is *mantra* in Sanskrit, and *manas* means dualistic conceptual mind. In terms of the description of the eight consciousnesses, it's the seventh consciousness. You have the mental consciousness, which is *namshe* in Tibetan, or *vijnana* in Sanskrit. Then you've got the dualistic mental consciousness, *nyi* in Tibetan, and another word for mind, like the ground mind, which is *sem* in Tibetan. I am not going to go into the eight consciousness descriptions now because it would be too much for the time we have, but you can go back to this in books or notes or whatever you have. But *manas* is the seventh consciousness, the dualistic mental consciousness. Dualistic because *manas* turns every instance of consciousness into a dualistic reading of the situation; "me" seeing it, "me" doing this, "me" doing that. Okay? But also this is a mental consciousness so this is the part of our mind that decides

whether to take options, or to go in a certain direction, wants to achieve things, and so on. So it's very important.

And the second part, *tra*, can be translated or understood in different ways, but the most common is that *tra* is a suffix that is added to *manas*, *man*, and the suffix gives the sense of a tool, the tool of the dualistic consciousness. The effect of an action of the dualistic consciousness. That's one way of understanding *tra*; Sanskrit is so complex, so the context will define its meaning. And according to whether the word is used in a Vedic or a Buddhist context the word can have a different translation. The first one is; an action, the use of; the tool you could say. Another possible understanding of the suffix *tra* is "to protect." Something that protects. So something that protects *manas*, that protects dualistic consciousness. A third one that is more rare but the suffix can also mean is to call forth, to evoke, or invoke, a presence. So it's kind of like the mind that aspires to the presence of something; kind of like an invocation. This is particularly used in the Vedic context. So if you recite *Om Namah Shivaya* you are invoking the presence of Shiva, for example, or Brahma, or other Vedic Gods. But in the Buddhist context it's a tool or function of the dualistic conceptual mind, or something that protects; protection of the conceptual dualistic mind.

So how do we relate these two, *monlam* and *mantra*? First, they are both skillful methods. They pull the cart in the same direction, so to speak. The *monlam* is more commonly used in the mahayana, where the *mantra* belongs to the tantra tool box. But they're working in the same direction, towards enlightenment; enlightenment being mind coming to know itself. Both of them in their own way are a way to modify our perception or habits, our outlook, how we see the world, how we perceive ourselves. They have the capacity to change this, therefore in *mantra*, the *tra* we understood to mean tool, is appropriate for the mind. What happens now? Now we have a certain vision of what reality is. We see ourselves as an entity that has some sort of independence or substantial reality and permanence, and then we look at phenomena and we also attribute certain realities to them, substantial realities, and therefore there is a strong dichotomy. A huge gap between what is me and what is not me; and between me and what is not me is a space where mental afflictions can rise; what I like and what I don't like and I don't care. In between. These are the first three kleshas of attachment, ignorance, and grasping. So this is the way we see the world. And we are very much in the perspective of a vision that somewhere out there there is something that will bring us sustainable happiness and freedom. My freedom depends on an outer phenomena; and that's why we are looking for it. And when we don't find it we're sad, and then when we don't find it we think other people are responsible, therefore we're angry, or we're jealous because some have what seems to be great and we don't have it and so on and so forth. So it's an endless hunt for the ideal object out there.

And of course the ideal object can be God. If I find God and own God, then I have the source of every happiness. So there could be an obsessive quest for grasping God, which in this case is just like having an ice cream. If I have a vanilla ice cream I'll feel so good. Or if I can own God I'll feel so good. You know, that's why sometimes in Chinese Buddhist literature you can read the

statement, “If you meet the Buddha, kill him.” Because if you meet the Buddha it means you have reified the Buddha into an object, and what you’ve grasped is a concept. It’s just a mental representation. The Buddha is Buddha the enlightened state, not the teacher or the historical Buddha figure. Buddha the enlightened state is beyond, forms, names, and concepts... or conceptual representation. So any image you can have of the Buddha is your own representation. Okay?

It’s useful because it gives you a direction. Because if you didn’t have this representation you couldn’t open a path of aspiration. Aspiration is to realize the true nature of my mind, to meet the Buddha in our own childish way; the way we express it with our words and concepts is the only way we can represent it in our mind, that’s okay. But it opens a path, and as it is often stated, as you progress along the path you’re going to have to let go of everything, eventually even the Dharma. You crossed the river, you don’t need the boat anymore. But please, don’t give up Dharma before you’ve crossed the river.

So, what I’m trying to point out is that we may have a childish representation of enlightenment totally imprisoned by dualistic representation. And that’s okay...for now, but it shouldn’t be cultivated into a habit and made into a permanent state, that wouldn’t be okay. But for now it’s okay. All these questions regarding the prayers are like, is there somebody? If I say there is somebody, I’m basically reifying the Buddha. If I were to say, “Yes, there is a Buddha.” Then Nagarjuna would come and say, "The Buddha doesn’t exist, nor does he not exist.” It’s beyond this. We’re thinking in terms of duality; to be or not to be. “I am here, you are there, I pray to you and something good happens.” Yes, this is the way we see the world and this is the only platform to work with right now, so that’s okay.

We can dream that we would like to make a non-dualistic prayer, but this statement is so ridiculous. “I” would like to make (preferences, me) a non-dual (whatever that is) prayer (again, this is a mental construct.) So begin with prayers, generate an aspiration, and that aspiration creates a path, a dynamic between this moment and what might come after. And when you see the path, then you see the first step; then you take that step. Then as you progress a lot of the concepts and ideas and representations we have will fall apart, and that’s the process of following the path that arises thanks to an aspiration. In the process we’ll readjust all our tendencies and habits and way of seeing things.

The mantra pretty much works in the same way. The way I try to describe the mantra is like a tuning fork of an instrument. It’s the sound of the ultimate reality that takes a certain form because the Sanskrit letter has a shape, and this form is a dynamic movement; it’s not just a letter, it’s also the movement and has a sound which is a vibration. Okay, so there’s form, there is sound, and there is experience; the body, the speech, and the mind are represented in the mantra. This is a tuning fork and then when **bing**, we can hear and we can see that there is a discrepancy between this form/sound/intention (mind) in our representation of the body, our representation or use of speech, and the way our mind is. And we can use this tuning fork to adjust, to finely tune our body, speech, and mind and in this process we come into harmony with the Buddha nature. So in that

sense it is mantra, something that protects the mind from its own deviation and disharmony or of going out of tune, but it's also mantra in the sense of a function, a tool that will help the mind in its aspiration to get into this perfect pitch, the perfect tuning of the Buddha nature.

So you see, mantra segues with monlam here. It's kind of the same thing. A different function or different work but same intention moving in the same direction. So, for example, when you recite a prayer, it's very important to recite the prayer regularly and as often as possible and to be fully aware of what you're saying. So the question about the language might come up, and we can talk about this later, but first and foremost you have to understand what you're saying. So if you recite something that you don't understand because you use a foreign language, you cannot relate to the instructions or the meaning that's conveyed in this prayer. You cannot. It may feel exotic and nice, but you can't relate. Now you can read it in your own language. The problem that might occur is that you think too much about it, because it seems if we know the words we think we know it, but the words just represent the meaning. When you say "Buddha" it doesn't represent the Buddha, because nothing can represent it. Not a form, not a statue, nor a word or a concept. So the word Buddha doesn't represent the Buddha. Likewise all the words of the prayers don't represent what you think they're representing, but they're helping you to change and rewire your body, speech, and mind.

Let's take an example. *The King of Prayers: The Bodhisattva Aspiration* as expressed by the bodhisattva Samantabhadra. This expresses the ideal of the bodhisattva, and it's also something that works with the limitations of the representation of the world as being limited into what we think of as time and space. I call this prayer the mind-blowing prayer. It's constantly blowing your mind when you recite the words that multiply and expand all concepts into a much vaster limitless viewpoint. It's too much, it fills the entire universe with limitlessness. So suddenly our limitations of time and space that we believe as a reality are opened up to multiple dimensions and multiple perceptions of time and space. It blows away the limits of our mind. But most importantly it also expresses taking refuge in the Buddhas, making offerings to the Buddhas of the ten directions and the three times while aspiring to come to Buddha the enlightened state. And then, how to do that by accumulating positive actions, in the sense of I will generate the flow of positivity through my actions and help all beings who are suffering and so on, and when you recite this and you really understand what you recite, you also have to come to the point where you decide that this is what you want to embody, this is what you want to truly be; I want my mind, my body, and my speech to be in full harmony with these aspirations. And then, throughout the day there will be so many opportunities where you realize you're doing just the opposite of the *King of Prayers*. You recite the *King of Prayers* but actually in your days you have many opportunities and you turn your back on this and behave in a radically opposite way. It's very important in each instance of your life to be able to keep in mind some aspect of these prayers; they'll sort of pop up in your stream of consciousness. Like as a remedy against the actual configuration of your body, speech, and mind and giving you the opportunity to tune your body, speech, and mind activities to be that of the bodhisattva Samantabhadra. This is the way the prayer works; almost like a mantra, in the sense of 'that which protects the mind.' That which is a tool for the mind to work on its own transformation. Transformation of the four veils,

ignorance, habits, mental afflictions, and the consequences of former actions. Work with this and recycle it and come closer and closer and closer to the general aspiration of the bodhisattva, or in particular that of Samantabhadra. Same thing with the mantra.

The mantra is used in conjunction with what we call a *yidam* in Tibetan, sometimes translated as meditation deity. I'm uncomfortable with this translation, I must say, because it's almost misleading, really. If you take the word *yidam* there is *yi* and *dam*. *Yi* is the Tibetan for *manas*, the dualistic mental consciousness. *Dam* means to tether. To bind your mind kind of like a seatbelt when you drive your car. In case of a crash with reality the belt will save your life. It's pretty much like the Samantabhadra prayer that pops into your mind when you're about to do something which is radically opposed to your bodhisattva aspiration. The mantra will also protect your mind from crashing and falling back into old habits and under the power of the usual representation of the world. So the mantra in this case is that which protects the mind, the *yidam* is what the mind binds itself to, and to come back to the tuning fork, the *yidam* is a tuning fork. You've got the perfect pitch of the body, the speech, and the mind in the visualization of the body, the function of the mantra, the energy. If you work at a deeper level with the mantra you also have associated visualizations with the *prana* and the subtle energies circulating through your body, and their relation to the mind and their location in your body and so forth and so on. And the intention is also to truly realize the nature of this *yidam*, which is in other terms, the true nature of our minds. There are tons of *yidams*. But they are like all the roads leading to Rome, they are all the same in the sense that they lead you to the realization of the nature of your mind.

That's why Shamar Rinpoche explained that through the practice of mind training, where you need to cultivate calm abiding, vipashyana, and compassion, that through these positive actions and the accumulating and generating of merit and wisdom, you'll come to the point where you'll realize the true nature of your mind; mind comes to know itself. Mind sees its own face, as we say. So you can do it this way, or you can do the same work with a different methodology with a *yidam*; you tether your mind to a visualization, an intention, a certain *samadhi*, a certain mantra; you follow all the protocols of the practice very precisely. You're not here to reinvent the wheel, just follow the prescriptions given by the guru and just go through this and do all the development stages, and then through the development stage you come to the point of freedom and a fulfillment of the qualities, where mind can see its own face. That's the perfection stage. Basically at the end of the mind training process and at the end of the *yidam* process you come to the same realization, which is mind knowing itself; mind discovering its own Buddha nature.

So these are different methodologies, but basically it's the same thing. Another question that was asked was about the vows that we can take. The refuge vows, the vows of individual liberation, like the pratimoksha vows, or the bodhisattva vow. It's the same thing; binding this mind that goes in every direction, binding it, giving it a certain frame so that the first aspiration, which is reaching Buddha the enlightened state, realizing there is a path to reach that, which is the Dharma, so we bind our mind to this, and there is the need to receive the Dharma, and as we say in Tibetan, the Sangha

is the basis of Dharma. And here, just to be clear, when I mention Sangha, I mean four fully ordained monks or nuns that have perfectly received the vows and are following them perfectly, preserving them and keeping them. Not just somebody wearing a piece of red cloth. Okay? So these four people are worthy of our respect. In Sanskrit, *arhat* means worthy. In the Tibetan version of it, *drachom* means the one who has overcome all the enemies. But in Sanskrit, it means worthy. Worthy of our respect because their effort on the path led to a certain realization; so they can be good companions and guides along the way. And then in the Sangha there are also the bodhisattvas, the men and women of experience who have already realized the nature of mind partially, or almost completely; they are not fully Buddhas yet, but they are well advanced on the way. So these are friends, these friends of virtue are really our best companions if we go astray. Like all good friends they will bring us back to the path; they don't have a horse in the race, and they're not your friends in order to gain your friendship, or your respect or approbation; they couldn't care less. This is very important, they have no self-interest in the process. They are just here to help because they know how precious and rare the Dharma is as a path, and they just want to make it available so that we can use it, study it, contemplate, meditate, and eventually reach enlightenment. The wish of every member of the Sangha is that as soon as possible you won't need them anymore; because you're good, you're independent, you're on your way. They are just there to help you to a certain level in your practice and then happy in your accomplishment, and definitely not attached to any feedback or reward.

When we take refuge, the aspiration is Buddha the enlightened state. As it is clearly stated when you take refuge, the only refuge that's reliable and permanent is Buddha the enlightened state. The Dharma and the Sangha are provisory refuges. Dharma is the way to cross the river to the other shore; you don't need to keep it once you've crossed the river. The Sangha helps, but they also take refuge in the Buddha; they are not Buddha the enlightened state. So we have to distinguish the difference between relative refuge with Dharma and Sangha, and ultimate refuge, which is Buddha the enlightened state. So that's how we bind ourselves. We bind ourselves. Just like when Ulysses wanted to hear the sirens sing, but he knew that if you listen to the sirens they will drive you into the shore, trash your boat and then eat you alive. And so the only way to survive was to ask his crew to tether him to the mast, block their ears, and no matter what he said or did to not listen to him. He could hear the sirens without being devoured because he bound himself to the mast. The vow protected him. The vow allowed him to not be devoured. So here there is a similarity to the vow, and similarity to the mantra, which protects your mind, body, and speech.

Then the bodhisattva vow prevents you from falling back into small mind. When you have given birth to the precious mind of awakening you don't want it to decline, you want it to grow. And because you've taken the bodhisattva vows, then every time you're tired or there's somebody who really, really annoys you and you don't have the energy to work with it anymore and you just want him to disappear, you need to have something that says no, if one is excluded the entire bodhicitta doesn't work; nobody can be excluded. Maybe you can take some time because you need to be more equipped to work with this particular individual, and to cultivate more skill and more compassion,

but please don't exclude anybody for any reason. So that's the binding, that's the protection. So you see, prayers, mantras, vows, they somewhat share the same aspiration which is to bring us closer to what is the ideal position where we can adjust what needs to be adjusted, to abandon habits and our old vision of the world, and come closer and closer to Buddha the enlightened state, which is actually indissociable from our own mind. To see our own mind, as Suzuki Roshi said: "This very mind right now is Buddha." Sometimes it's hard to believe, and sometimes we have doubts, so that's why we need all of these skillful means to protect us, bring us back, open our sky up when it's overcast and we can't see the direction anymore.

So this is how they work together, and now questions come sometimes: "Who are we talking to? Is there somebody out there? Does it work? How can I know that the mantra works?" The problem is that most of the time we're in a very self-centered perspective of the practice, what Gendun Rinpoche used to call spiritual ambition. We're pretty much taking selfies of ourselves reaching enlightenment all the time. You know, "Is my practice good?" No, delete this one. "Is my aspiration correct," delete. We're constantly trying to evaluate and weigh our practice and this is such vanity. Such self-centered petty concern. Because when we're doing this in the background then what happens, because we're not present, because we are busy taking selfies, when we're doubting if we're good, or admiring ourselves, we cannot deal with reality; we are somewhere else. We're on Facebook so we can't deal with reality. Since we're not here we're on auto-pilot, and what reacts is our compulsive, usual habits. And then a lot of other things will pile on top of this self-spiritual navel gazing. Spiritual navel gazing. Jealousy will arise, thinking others are better at it than we are. They've accomplished this or that, oh, and the teacher is always talking to him or her so they must be more interesting than me! All of this pettiness just piles up higher and higher, as if we didn't already have enough problems, we create more. And all of this doesn't have to exist, it's only a proliferation of spiritual ambition. So don't panic and keep practicing.

Since there's doubt about whether we're doing it right, then we need somebody to tell us we're right, so we're always looking for validation; like a word from the guru makes me ecstatic, or the guru doesn't look at me therefore they think I've been bad or whatever, we are thrown into this hell of doubts which are absolutely unfounded. There's no ground for this. None at all. You can't lose anything, Buddha nature is the very birthright of mind. You haven't lost it through countless lifetimes of absolute madness, and now you think that because you don't recite enough mantras you might lose it? C'mon, let's be reasonable. The only thing we do in this case is just to add more layers of dirt that will have to be removed at some point. So yeah, we can see that we react, we can see jealousy, we can see our desire to be recognized, the desire to be recognized as a very spiritual person and recognized for our positive trajectory towards enlightenment, all of that; but please see through this. All of this has no reality, no substance whatsoever; it's just bubbles on the surface of your conceptual mind. And if you spend too much time trying to suppress it then you'll waste a lot of time trying to mold an ideal picture of yourself. Both waste time; promoting an ideal picture of yourself or suppressing or deleting the bad selfies of yourself. All that is just a waste of time.

See it as just like a cloud floating around you, see through this and come to see the incredible beauty of your mind. Maybe through the Buddha, maybe through Chenrezig, or maybe through Tara, if you need some sort of external reference. You'll see this magnificence, in Tibetan I really like this word *dzī gi?*, it means natural uncontrived elegance. And that's the *dzīgi* of mind that we look at, not all the, "Am I good, am I bad, am I doing this right, does everybody notice that I'm enlightened?" *Dzīgi*, and then you just relax and look at this and see through the relative chat of your own mind. And whether you use a mantra to come back when you're distracted, or use an aspiration prayer when you feel that you're not dignified enough, you're not a bodhisattva, you're not this, you're not that, beating yourself up and then after that trying to purify all this;~}. This is kind of ridiculous, like you beat yourself up, you feel bad, then after this you have to ask for a way to repent. Just don't do it in the first place then you don't need to repent! Repentance is just as illusory as the self-flagellation; and it's all connected with, "Am I good enough?" Yeah! You're good enough, you have Buddha nature! You just need a little tweak here and there because you can't see it. And in the meantime life goes on, yeah, sometimes you're angry, sometimes you're lost, sometimes you have to take a little break; that's okay if you can always connect back to your Buddha nature by taking refuge in the Buddha or the *dzīgi*, the magnificent dignity through the yidam practice your sacred outlook will be enhanced. That's really a technology word in tantra, it means the way you look at the world is not painted by your likes and dislikes, but you see it from the point of view of elegance. The elegance of the world, the elegance; in every situation there is some form of elegance. There is some beauty in it, a reflection of the Buddha nature in it, even in the weirdest things. Your sacred outlook will overtake your judgemental mind.

Then the vajra dignity, when you look at yourself and see yourself as Chenrezig or Tara for example, or the Buddha, this helps you not to fall under the self-judgemental mind, like, "I'm an imposter, I'm not good enough, I don't deserve this, I yada yada," the whole thing when you tear yourself down all the time. Instead, how about, "Hey, all phenomena are the union of emptiness and awareness and so is my mind. All sentient beings are the embodiment of wisdom and compassion and so am I." And the "I," instead of being an expression of ignorance and self-centered obsession, "I" becomes a scepter of your royalty. You are Chenrezig, and therefore there is dignity that has to shine through your body, speech, and mind; your mind will adjust to this and then all the rest will fall apart. All the rest are just adventitious, fleeting obscurations that come through causes and conditions and that we've been prisoners of for so long that we tend to think that they're true. But they're not. They're just the same as a dream; an illusion. It feels like a dream, or it might feel like a nightmare, but it has no substantial reality. The more you connect with your mind through the practice of shamatha and vipashyana, through the practice of yidams, through the practice of mind training, whichever methodology you want to use, whatever's close to your heart, in the end you come to the same realization which is you see your own face, mind sees its own face. You meet the Buddha; not your representation of the Buddha, but Buddha the enlightened state. And then maybe there is great laughter that's like, "All of this for that." Ha ha ha. Sometimes we look at it and realize in hindsight how complicated we are.

I was just watching and interview of Yvon Chouinard, the founder of Patagonia, the mountain expedition gear company, and this guy gave three billion dollars, he gave all his money away to Patagonia and they changed everything and say now they only have one stakeholder and it's the planet. He's just giving everything away, three billion! So anyway I was watching the interview made by kids from a middle school in Santa Barbara, California, and he seemed like such a simple guy and he said, "I realized that the main problem, whether it's in your business or your life, is that everything is too complicated; I realized that the only thing we have to do is to simplify." Simplify. Less is more. The things you carry around, less is more. The obsessive thoughts in your mind, less is more. The anxiety about reaching enlightenment or not; less is more. And as we progress along the path, as we mature in our practice, we come to realize that less is more. And sometimes we think maybe we're abandoning things, we might have doubts that if we don't recite as many prayers or mantras, or don't do the prescribed practices that maybe you used to do more of in the beginning. But again, these are the boats that help you cross the river to get to this point; you don't have to continue to carry something you don't need. It's as simple as that, see what you need and then bind yourself to it until something changes where again you see what you need, bind yourself to that, and let the rest flow. All of these are skillful methods that only apply in a relative context. They don't have any permanent and absolute value, and as we evolve and grow, then of course certain things get dropped along the way; then we realize again, less is more.

I get to this point in my life quite often where I'm in the schnapps of mind, the distillation of mind to the simplest expression. For me it's very simple. It's one word, bodhicitta. So that's it, I bind myself totally; body, speech, and mind bound to bodhicitta. And I relax. I don't have to make enlightenment. Gendun Rinpoche was always telling us, "You don't have to make enlightenment, you don't have to buy enlightenment." There is no shopping center where you can purchase this, no do-it-yourself shops where you can buy the tools and whatnot to make enlightenment. Enlightenment is mind knowing itself. Not as an external object, but in itself mind seeing its own face. So you relax, because it's already there. One of Gendun Rinpoche's poems said, "Don't go in the jungle looking for the elephant when it's just in the house." We always go out, and the more we go out the further we go away from the nature of our mind. That's what the 16th Karmapa said when he first visited Europe. He thought it was great in the sense that people have material comfort, they have education, they have good food, they have really good health and medical systems and so on, but they're always looking outside. In doing that they are going farther and farther away from their Buddha nature. So it's very important that the Dharma comes to this part of the world now to bring a good balance of having comfortable external circumstances while we're alive in this dream, but it's more important that we turn our gaze inward and look inside to find the cause of the problem, the possibility of a solution, and enjoy the liberation. That's what Shamar Rinpoche once said when he was asked, "Is there one thing that you absolutely believe in?" He said, "Yes, there is something I absolutely believe in, there is a beyond suffering." There is a beyond suffering. And then after all the rest, how are we going to do it? It's open, flexible, and once it has fulfilled its function, you don't have to keep it. As they say in mind training, once used all remedies must be dissolved.