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Dependent Arising (Unedited)
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Introduction and Refuge

Can you all hear me back there? ... So, we're going to talk about dependent arising as the perfect method to help us loosen the grip of ego so we can realize emptiness and thus remove all the nonsense from our minds and thus prepare ourselves to be of benefit to others.

So, we motivate, we think, when we listen to these teachings -- whether you've heard them a thousand times or once -- so that we can see if there are tools here we can use in our lives to develop our marvelous potential so we indeed can be of benefit to others, which Buddha says is our natural potential.

(Refuge prayers chanted in Tibetan)

Dependent Arising, the King of Logics

02:19

So, after yesterday, talking about karma is the perfect introduction, the perfect first step to get to this next step of understanding of dependent arising, you know, which is the best method or the 'king of logics', as Lama Yeshe says, paraphrasing Tsong Khapa, the 'king of logics' to prove emptiness.

So, we know from reading our Buddhist books and listening to the teachings they've got this big drama about emptiness, you know? It's almost like this special little trip all about emptiness. But actually all of Buddha's teachings, from grade one to graduation, you know, are based upon the assumption of emptiness. Emptiness is implicit in all the teachings. This is the unique characteristic of Lord Buddha's view, you know? You could say that the view of self-existence -- which is what Buddha argues with, which is exactly the opposite view -- is the assumption of all our current views of samsara. All the views of, you know, 'my mother and father made me, I didn't ask to get born, it's not my fault, I'm just the body' ... all of this. The samsaric world is all based upon the assumption of self-existence, and this is the exact opposite of the Buddha's view. The exact opposite. The exact opposite.

And so, the point of it all is, as always with Buddha, it's experiential, you know. I mean, we can read all about emptiness, we can squeeze our brains, as Lama Yeshe puts it, we can get all very excited when we hear about emptiness, you know, but unless we understand how to internalize it, it's just filling your head with knowledge. It's like, you know, you just stuffed your head full of knowledge and go get a degree in Buddhist philosophy, you know, and think you're all clever. It's useless.

So let's, again, like all of this, let's try and unpack it. De-mystify it, you know, and see how it applies to our daily life. Because if it doesn't, it's completely useless.

Everything is a Viewpoint

05:25

So, actually everything we've talked about even so far is, you know, one way of describing what Buddha's doing, what Buddha's talking about, and we mentioned this yesterday, we talked about this a lot. Let's go for more -- is Buddhism is all on about, 'everything is how we see it'. Everything is how we see things. In other words, everything in our mind is a viewpoint, is an opinion, is an attitude, is an interpretation. Everything in our mind is a viewpoint, is an interpretation of the people and things and events and self that are the, you know, the occupants of our lives. Everything is view. Everything is how we see things. And all Buddha's -- in other words, Buddhism is a way of interpreting the world. That's all. I mean, cakes are cakes are cakes, toilets are toilets. Cups are cups. It's how we interpret them that is the distinguishing difference.

You could even say, you know -- Buddha uses the term, for example, 'superior being'. Well, we all know from being Christians that's exactly how they talk about God. The same term, 'superior being'. You hear the characteristics of God: omniscient, all-knowing, all-powerful, blah-blah-blah. Pervading the universe, seeing everything. That's exactly -- Buddha agrees with this. He's also saying: there's omniscient mind, pervades the universe, knows everything, infinite compassion. You could say they agree on this. But the difference is in the view of -- the particular interpretation of *how* that 'superior being', how that 'omniscience' exists. So in other words, the Christian teaching, the Muslim teaching is that it's self-existent. It exists from its own side. It's intrinsic, inherent. The Buddha says it's the capacity of every mind, and all minds can become enlightened. So, it's even the same thing, with different interpretation.

'We've Got It Wrong'

07:10

There are people...we have minds, we have experiences. Christianity would interpret it one way, materialism interprets it another way, Buddha interprets it another way. So, it has to do with interpretation, it has to do with view. That's what it means, 'how things exist'. Because what Buddha's saying, right now, Buddha is basically saying, 'We do not see correctly how things exist.' We get things right to the extent that we can say, 'I'm Robina and you're Fred.' 'That's a cup and not a knife.' That's cool. Correct. But we don't get it right anything after this. *We've got it wrong.*

So, basically, things exist in the world. Things exist. But as Lama Zopa Rinpoche puts it, 'The delusions in our mind' -- we talked about this yesterday -- 'the neuroses in our mind, the misconceptions, the negative states of mind, what they do is decorate, layers upon layers upon layers of characteristics on top of what does exist.' These characteristics don't exist. We decorate on top. In other words, one way of saying what the delusions do is that they exaggerate everything. They distort everything. So, we can talk about cups and toilets and one and one is two and flowers -- it's cool -- but then, deep in the bones of our being we've got these different viewpoints that we don't even think we have; about how the flowers exist, about how the cup exists. About how George Bush exists, about

what a ??? (09:02) is, about everything, you know? It's altogether view, you know? It has to do with view.

So of course, Buddha's point is that -- obviously -- his view, he would say confidently, is the correct view. But the big difference there, is he's not forcing us to *believe* him; he's not saying, 'If you don't believe me, I'll send you to hell.' It's not his job to do this. He's like Einstein. If I were Einstein here, and I'm sure you've heard me say this before, and I start telling you about $E=MC^2$ and I say, 'This is the truth!' well, you would hope I would be confident in what I have found; if I'm sitting here thinking, 'Well, I'm not sure if it's true...', you're laughing and tell me to shut my mouth, don't confuse you. If I'm not confident, keep quiet.

So we want Buddha to be confident that he is right. But he's not asking us to believe him. He's asking us to check it out ourselves. It's up to us; we're the boss, not Buddha. So, it's nothing to do with *believing* anything; it's to do with listening to what Buddha says, and then we make the decision, as I said yesterday. If we like what we hear, we're confident in the Buddha, and we're confident in what we hear so far, we're prepared to give it a go -- prepared to take his teachings, his *view*, as our working hypothesis. How else can you work with something if you don't propose it? That's why it's got nothing to do with *believing* it, squeezing it inside yourself. Nothing like that at all. Nothing to do with liking it or not liking it, 'cause it's either true or it's not.

'Wisdom' Means Seeing Things as They Actually Exist

10:29

So this is what wisdom means. Wisdom's not some -- you know, we use it a lot in Buddhism, it's not some special holy word, all high and fancy, I'm sorry... 'wisdom' simply means being correct. If you say there are two cups on my table, that ain't wisdom, honey, that's ignorance. There's *one*. There's one cup on my table -- that's wisdom. You get it right. So, of course, the wisdom Buddha's saying we can accomplish is a pretty, you know, pretty outrageous level of wisdom, seeing the universe as it exists without mistake. That's the level of wisdom we can accomplish; he calls it 'omniscience'. I mean, my Catholic mother was shocked by that! This is what Buddha is saying. So, it's quite radical, what he's saying...

So, what is this Buddha's view? Well, yesterday, we talked about his view of how we come into existence, his view of what 'mind' is, his view of the law that runs the minds, his view about karma. This is his view, the law of 'cause and effect'. We discussed that. That's Buddha's view. And remember, you have to take it as your assumption, you have to take it this way. Otherwise, you know, if you read a scientist's book, and you can't even trust that he's speaking from his own experience, then you shouldn't be reading the book, don't get yourself confused. So we have to -- having checked -- decide that Buddha *is* talking from his own experience. That's why you need to check the Centers carefully, check the Buddha's teachings carefully, check the people who teach, check the Dalai Lama, and if he's a valid person who represents Buddha's teachings, you can be greatly delighted to hear his teachings. If not, be careful. Don't confuse yourself.

So, we have to assume that Buddha is a person who has accomplished these things that he states. Otherwise, how can he talk about it if he hasn't realized them himself? It's extremely arrogant...

So, basically, what he's saying is, as I'm saying, that there are countless minds, countless mind possessors, 'sentient beings'. And there are some minds that are 'in samsara', and there are some minds that are 'not in samsara'. You can say like this, broadly speaking. Really just broadly speaking. And those of us who are 'in samsara', the main determining factor, the factor that determines our being a samsaric being -- an ordinary being -- is the presence in our mind of these delusions. If we look at our mental consciousness, as we discussed yesterday, you've got positive, negative and neutral states of mind; there's no fourth category. Let's forget the neutral, you've got the positive and the negative. It's a simple statement. Positive / negative. But don't hear it in a moralistic sense, like we tend to.

Negative States of Mind are Not in Sync with Reality

12:49

A characteristic of the negative ones is that they're liars, they're not in sync with reality -- like we discussed yesterday -- the simple level of reality of interdependence. But the virtuous ones are to some extent in sync with reality, like my example yesterday of when Helen and I were just chatting away being friendly.

So the virtuous states of mind have the characteristic of being peaceful -- just check the last time you were loving, kind, generous...you felt peaceful. And, there's a sense of interdependence there. You've got a sense of connectedness with others, which means you're in sync -- to some extent -- with interdependence, which is reality. When you're caught up in anger, depression, jealousy -- check the last time -- it's a nightmare, isn't it? It's like hell... Depression... we live in it most of the time... you're not in sync with reality, you've got this vivid, vivid sense of a separate, unhappy 'self --pity me', as Lama Yeshe calls it -- lonely, bereft, 'not fair', 'poor me', things are 'done' to me. Hungry, needy, wanting something more, resentful, angry, hurt, low self-esteem...this is samsara, being caught up in this junk, that's samsara. That's what it means, 'being in samsara'. And the root, the mother, of all these lies in the mind, these neurotic emotions is called, as I said yesterday, is simply called 'ignorance'. Like all these words, it's got a very specific definition. '*Ma rig pa*' in Tibetan; 'un-awareness.'

So, unawareness -- specifically -- of, finally, how things exist. Or, as they say in Buddhist language, the ultimate way that things exist. Don't fantasize it. It means the actual way that things exist in their bones, finally. The ignorance of this reality. But like I said yesterday in quoting His Holiness from the teachings in (Washington) D.C. recently, you know, this ignorance has two functions: the first one is the mere ignorance of how things are, just merely not knowing; but that's not the main problem. This ignorance also has an added problem of having made up its own fantasy story, and that's the one we're believing in now, which is --

and this sounds abstract to us -- the story, the belief, that everything exists in and of itself. This is so abstract for our minds, we don't even get it.

So, before we even go into the meaning of what ignorance is -- you know, what ignorance thinks, that is that everything is intrinsic -- there's an inherent 'I', intrinsic self existent blah-blah-blah...forget that. Don't even go into that. Let's just look more broadly at how things *do* exist, which is -- will counteract that.

The Two Truths

15:20

So, the Buddha would talk about how things exist in two ways, well, many ways, actually. But the particular way of presenting it, he calls 'the Two Truths': conventional truth, the way things exist conventionally; and the way things exist finally, or ultimately. So initially when we hear these, they, for us, totally contradict. But in reality, they actually are like flip sides of the same coin, and our job is to get to see that, to understand that -- even first intellectually, very beneficial. So the shorthand for how things exist conventionally is -- the term, 'shorthand', write down -- is 'dependent arising'. You read it sometimes as 'dependent origination'. I prefer the word 'dependent arising', or even more simply, the word we would use in our ordinary language: 'interdependence'. Things exist interdependently. Things exist *in dependence* upon this and that, conventionally. And then ultimately, the shorthand is that they're -- '*emptiness*' is the word. Write down -- the essence, '*emptiness*'. In other words, the words they use in the Tibetan -- Buddhist literature as you know is that '*emptiness*' is the nature of how -- is the nature of reality ultimately. This is the way they talk.

So let's unpack these ideas. Let's look at the use of these words, because part of our problem is we don't even know how these words are used. We can't get our head around the general concepts. You know, thirty years of hearing Buddhism, you still haven't got a clue what emptiness is because we haven't just technically got ourselves sorted out, how to use this terminology. And that's really quite helpful if we can do this. Just look at this word, '*emptiness*'. Well, in the most simple sense, it means 'absent', doesn't it? It means 'not there'. So if I say, well, it can't be true -- pretend my cup has no water in it, it in fact does, but pretend it doesn't -- we would simply say, 'Oh, yes, my cup is empty of water.' We would say it in a grand sense, 'Water is absent from my cup.' I mean, you get the point, right? You wouldn't say it like this, but we know what it means -- 'There is no water in my cup,' we'd say. That's all emptiness -- the word emptiness, 'empty' means 'not'. The word often used is 'void.' The common word in the English language is 'devoid', you know, 'devoid' of it... this cup is 'devoid of water', is a grand way of saying it...old fashioned way, isn't it? So we get the meaning of the word pretty simply.

Empty of What?

18:33

So, obviously, the question is: empty of what? Clearly, Buddha's not telling us that cups are empty of water... So let's look at this word, 'empty', and how it is used in Buddhist philosophy, and therefore, how we can learn to experience the

meaning of it with our practice. But we first have to understand the way it is used.

Okay. So, if you're not colorblind, you're going to agree this cup is not red. You agree, don't you? This cup is not red. So we would simply say, 'You're right, Robina, it's not red.' The Buddha would say, using this language -- this is how they talk -- 'This cup' -- hear the words -- 'is empty of being red.' It's a fancy way to talk, but we can hear the meaning very, very simply, can't we? It's just that we don't speak it like this. We don't say, 'The cup is empty of being red,' but the use of the word there is exactly the meaning. The cup is not red. But there is an added way of using this term and this is a really important thing to understand. This is really important, okay? If there was red on this cup -- hear the words, now -- you would say, 'There is red on this cup.' It's a quaint way to talk, but you understand that word, don't you? 'There is red on this cup.' (If there were, you understand my point.)

Now, we can see there's no red. So, we can also say -- hear the words carefully -- 'There is an absence of red on this cup.' Would you agree with that? That on this cup -- wouldn't you agree -- there is an absence of red. It's a weird way to talk, but can you get the point clearly? Can you hear what I'm saying? It's a weird way to talk, but you need to get this point, because if you can understand this concept -- the way they talk -- you can really understand the way, at least first -- intellectually -- understand emptiness. Are you with me so far? It is true -- on this cup, there is an absence of red. And it's important to think of it this way. Let me explain why.

In Buddhist philosophy you learn about how -- there's about six or seven or maybe eight, I forget now, synonyms for 'that which exists'. And Buddha is all about discovering 'that which exists'. That's his big thing. Because he says we're in la-la land right now, believing in things that don't exist. In other words, when you've got the delusion called 'attachment', for this cup, you know, 'attachment' decorates on top of this cup layers upon layers of characteristics that aren't there. In other words, if I've got attachment for this cup, I've got my -- what do you call them? rose-colored glasses on, and I'm going to go, 'Oh, this beautiful cup! It is so special! It's my grandma's special antique and it's worth a thousand dollars...' I'm going to just be in bliss every time I look at it, right? And I'll be so attached to it, I'll cling on to it, I'll believe it's permanent, I don't want people to steal it, I'll have insurance for it... All of this comes from this fantasy of my attachment that is exaggerating the characteristics of this cup as being more beautiful than it really is. Now, we get that. We all do that with everything, right? We understand attachment, don't we? That's how it lies. It's a liar.

All Buddha's saying is the cup doesn't exist this way, because if it did, you'd all see it this way. But Bob could go, 'What a revolting looking cup!' So, when he sees the cup, he's got his aversion glasses on and it looks disgusting to him. Now, we know this, and this is why we have wars on this earth. Why we have divorces and fighting and screaming between each other, because I believe I'm right and he believes he's right. Isn't it? We know this. It's so simple -- we can see

this problem. But these delusions, they have this characteristic of being a liar... so attachment is not the main one. Its root is this ignorance.

So, attachment -- okay now, I'm going off, there. I went to the wrong point. I'm trying to work out -- I'm trying to tell you, there are various synonyms for 'that which exists', so what I'm pointing out is Buddha says we're not in touch with that which exists in the moment and we're trying to get there, we're trying to establish what does exist and what doesn't, we're trying to establish the facts from the fictions. This is what it's all about. This is what Buddha's wisdom means.

So... the terms used for 'that which exists': there's a term called 'phenomena'. There's one -- 'object'. Phenomenon. There's about six or seven synonyms. There's one called 'existent'. They're all synonyms, they're all used to refer to 'that which exists'. And what Buddha wants us to do is to get us to see, to perceive, to cognize that which exists. Now I'm getting to the point about emptiness.

Cognizing 'the Absence of Red'

23:10

So, do you agree there is white on this cup? Yep. So, white is a phenomenon that your mind can cognize. Would you agree with that? It is -- it does exist. White does exist here on this cup, doesn't it? So, therefore, it is something that your mind can cognize. Because what is existing is that which can be cognized by mind. So your mind can cognize white on this cup. Isn't it? Do you agree? Can your mind cognize the absence of red on this cup? It can, can't it? Can you hear my point, now? Your eye consciousness sees white, but because we're intelligent -- a dog wouldn't see the absence of red here; you've got to have an intelligent mind to get your head around the concept, right? But because we know it's white, we can deduce it's not red. Therefore we can say -- listen to my words -- there is a real phenomenon that does exist called 'absence of red'. Can you hear my point here, people? This is not just meant to be intellectual, you'll get the point. You've really got to hear this.

So there is a phenomenon called 'white'. Easy -- no argument. And there is also a phenomenon called 'absence of red'. And so they've got equal status insofar as they're both phenomena that do exist. There is a phenomenon called 'absence of red' that exists and there is a phenomenon called 'white' that exists; so can you hear my point here? Now, we'd just say, 'There is no red, and there is white,' but this is just another, more fancy but important way to state these things. Are we communicating so far? Okay...we're intelligent, we can get this. So, why do they talk this way? I'll tell you why. If Buddha comes along -- if you come along and say to me, Bob says to me, 'Robina! The cup is not red!' why would he say that to me? Can you hear in the way I'm saying it? Why would he point out to me that it's not red? Why would he? Why would he?

Audience: Perhaps you thought it *was* red.

Ven. : There you go. That's the whole point. Hear the point, please. That is the entire point. 'Robina, the cup's not red'... The only reason he would tell me this

is -- for God's sake -- if I already know it's white, why would he bother? What a waste of time, isn't it, just wasting time? So, obviously, I think it's red, and he has to point out to me my mistake. You agree my point? 'Robina, it's not red' ... So, if he was talking like a Buddhist he'd say, 'Robina, you've got to recognize the 'absence of red' on this cup.' Are you hearing my point, people? There's a particular phenomenon -- so, okay -- I'm making a big mistake. I have seen this cup as red for eons. All my life, my philosophy, everything...my suffering is all based on the belief in a red cup. I believe it's a red cup -- I mean, sounds ridiculous -- but Buddha is saying the mistake we make, we have imposed a characteristic on our own self, on everything in the universe, simply called 'inherent existence'. Okay, we don't know what that is yet, so don't worry. That's the equivalent of 'red' here... It's a much bigger mistake, obviously. So don't even worry about what it means yet. Let's just get our head around the way they use the terminology.

So Buddha's saying, for eons we have totally believed that there is an inherent 'me'. You hear the words? Okay. And he says, 'Robina! On Robina, there's an absence of inherent you.' He's not just saying, 'You're not inherent, Robina...' He says there is an emptiness of inherent Robina on Robina. There's an absence of red on this cup. There's an absence of inherent Robina on Robina. Hear the words! It's a weird way to talk, but you hear my point.

The Big Mistake

26:06

So why would he point out that on Robina, there's an absence of inherent Robina? Why would he point out that mistake? Because? Because I think there is an inherent Robina. You with me? So, Buddha's saying for eons we have been believing in this big mistake. Now, we don't -- who told us we think we're inherent? Where did you learn this? We don't -- we think, 'Excuse me? I'm inherent? What are you talking about? Who taught me that?' But all he's saying is, every bit of our suffering, all our attachment, all our anger, all our pride, all the wars, all the dramas, all the rebirths are all the consequence of this misconception. This misconception is the primordial misconception that is the source of all suffering. So it's kind of a deep mistake we've got, he's telling us. So we can't see it, 'cause for us, it's totally assumed as the truth. It's at the default mode in our minds. We can't even begin to even comprehend the meaning of 'I see myself as inherent.' You get my point here? Don't worry what it means yet. Hear how we're making a mistake.

So Buddha says -- hear the words -- we have to *see*, we have to *realize*, the absence of that mistake. So that 'absence of inherent Robina' is a very vivid thing that our mind has to cognize just like the 'absence of red' is a very vivid phenomenon that we have to cognize. And it's not just meant to be fancy-wancy talking. It's got something real specific in it: this idea of 'seeing the emptiness', as they say. It means this. So, just this concept now, I want to talk about. So now you ask me some questions. Just the way the terminology is used. You've got to squeeze your brain a bit to get it first. But once you get used to this, then you read about emptiness, it will start to make sense, I promise you. So, do you understand just the concept first? A little bit? Okay. So, why it's so important to hear it this way

is this: When we hear 'emptiness', we tend to think of it as meaning, like, 'nothing', you know? So let me give an example... so listen, okay. Ah, let me think...alright. Let's say you are late, and you run to the drawer to get your keys. And you know the keys are there. And you expect the keys in the drawer. And you're late. And you run to the drawer and you open the drawer and you go, 'Oh my God! No keys!' You with me? That's a very vivid thing you just saw. What did you just see in the drawer? What did you see in the drawer? Absence of keys! It's a very vivid thing, isn't it? Now, if I'm not expecting keys, I open the drawer and there's nothing ???? (28:54)), a boring drawer, nothing in it. I see nothing, you see something very vivid -- the absence of a thing that you thought was there. And that's the idea about emptiness.

'Seeing Emptiness'- The Paradigm Shift

29:05

When you finally *see* the absence of the 'I' that you think is there, that you thought for eons is there, they say there's this mind-boggling universal paradigm shift that occurs in your mind. When finally, the penny drops, and you get to realize directly the absence of the fantasy 'I' that you always thought was there but in fact has never been there. Can you hear the idea? So, 'seeing emptiness' is a very meaningful way to say it. It's the emptiness of the fantasy 'I' that you thought was there, just like you saw the absence of those keys. And only you'd see 'absence of keys' if you had keys in your mind. So, you only see the absence of your inherent 'I' if you had inherent 'I' in your mind. So, it has nothing to do with vacuous space, vague nothingness. It's a very vivid, vivid thing, when you can get it. So this way of talking is extremely important. When we can understand this, it can really help us, you know?

And like I'm saying, the only reason Buddha's telling us that, you know -- as the way they use the words 'emptiness is the ultimate way that things exist' -- it's not some fancy religious trip he's putting on us; it's just the way they talk, you know. But the only reason he talks about emptiness is because we've made the mistake of thinking there is something in us that isn't there. That's all. So, of course, to understand that -- to understand the 'absence of red' -- red's easy, 'cause we *get* 'red'. Inherent 'I'? Squeeze our brain, you know. But all I'm talking here is the way of talking about the absence of something. It's extremely important. Okay.

So let's talk about, then, how there isn't -- what it means -- okay, what it means, 'inherent I', 'intrinsic I', 'self-existent I', 'I that exists from its own side', 'I that exists in and of itself'. They are all synonyms for the one mistake our mind makes, for the mistake that this ignorance in the mind makes. So attachment, you know, projects a delicious, divine cup -- the mistake called 'attachment', the delusion, the lie; 'aversion' -- another lie -- projects 'ugly, revolting cup'. 'Ignorance' projects 'self existent beautiful cup', 'self existent ugly cup'. In other words, 'ignorance' underpins all the other delusions. It's the deepest assumption underneath attachment, aversion, depression, jealousy and all the rest. Once you remove that underpinning, all the other samsaric views collapse in a heap of nothingness.

So the deepest assumption, the deepest mistake is this belief in the 'inherent me'. Like I said, it's so subtle, we don't even think -- I mean, we don't think we think that. No one taught us this. It's just the default mode. We were born with it. It's in fact the motor that propels us to even take a rebirth in the first place. So, it's pretty primordial. And as I said before, this self existence is the assumption of all the materialist/nihilistic view. It is the assumption of the eternalistic view of the Christian and the Muslim and the other 'creator' philosophies. So Buddha's not being rude when he argues this, he's just arguing philosophically. He says that, you know, the exaggerating of omniscient mind to call it 'inherent, it's always been this way, and the creator of everybody else', is an unnecessary addition. Saying there's a soul is an unnecessary addition, Buddha says. It's an elaboration. It's an exaggeration. It's an unnecessary extra thing that isn't necessary for us to exist. And it's really quite a subtle point.

The Middle Way

33:17

I mean, in all the Buddha's teachings -- there's different levels of Buddha's philosophy -- and each of them, you know, progressively removes a little bit more of what does exist until eventually you get to the highest view, the actual meaning of Buddha's teachings -- they call it the 'Middle Way' view -- that actually says, there's the *prasangikas*, even divide it into different viewpoints, as His Holiness talked about this in D.C. (Washington, the Kalachakra teachings) recently, that when we finally have the true -- the correct view, according to Nagarjuna, who really explained this, you know, back in the -- thousand years ago, whenever -- fifteen hundred years -- that when you've got the correct view -- it sounds so radical, it's scary -- that there is, they would say there is nothing from the side of the cup, the 'I', the table, the mala, the flower -- there is nothing from the side of a 'thing' that makes it that 'thing'.

We think there is, and we desperately cling to there being something inherent -- something in the 'thing' that makes it the 'thing'. That's what we think. That's what ignorance thinks, and we desperately want this. We cling to this, because there's panic and fear to think -- it just sounds like nihilism. And that's why it's so tricky. The moment -- you see, the two truths -- the moment we hear this ultimate one, as they call it -- that there is nothing from the side of the thing that gives it its 'thingness', we immediately hear it as, 'Oh, there's nothing there.' Nihilistic. We chuck the baby out with the bath water. Instantly, we hear it this way. We can't help but hear it this way. Buddha says that's one of the 'extreme views'. We go too far, we chuck too much out. And then as soon as we hear 'dependent arising', that there is something existing, interdependently, but we don't hear it this way. We hear it as, 'Oho, what a relief!', and *grasp*. 'Thank goodness there is something there after all.' So we reify it. So we put too much onto it. And that is actually -- all the 'Creator' religions are the actual manifestation of that philosophy...that there is something 'from its own side', something special and unique and inherent in a thing that makes it a thing.

So, it would seem these two extreme views -- one is saying, 'we think, 'Oh, there's nothing'', and the other one says, 'there is something', and we can't hear the Middle Way -- which is like, for me, it's Harry Potter's Platform 9-3/4 -- in

between there -- you can't find it, it's infuriating. So what Tsongkhapa says we need to do, to practice, is every time we hear 'emptiness' -- that there is nothing from the side of a thing that makes it a thing, there's nothing in and of itself that is making it that, there is no 'I' from its own side, there is no intrinsic, inherent 'me' in there that makes me, me -- instead of instantly going to the nihilistic view and chucking the baby out with the bath water, we consciously bring ourselves toward the Middle Way and we say to ourselves -- which is counter-intuitive for us -- 'Aha, Robina. That means there is an 'I', interdependently.' There is a dependent arising 'I'. There is an 'I'. There is an 'I' that exists in dependence upon this and this. And then every time we hear about interdependence, that there is an I existing interdependently, instead of clinging onto it and exaggerating it and reifying it, we will again counter-intuitively go towards the Middle Way and say, 'Aha, Robina, that means it is empty.'

So, right now, these are opposite to us. Because what Buddha's saying and what Tsongkhapa really runs with is that when you think 'emptiness', it should remind you it means 'dependent arising'. And when you think 'dependent arising', it should remind us that that means 'emptiness'. They in fact are the two sides of the same coin. In fact that's the true Middle Way. That when you think 'emptiness', you think 'dependent arising', and when you think 'dependent arising', you think 'emptiness'. So one has to practice this, because intuitively we go to the two extremes. And this is very meaningful, this is very tasty, and experiential. It's not just intellectual clever stuff, you know? This is why it is crucial to have the right words. Buddha's main gift is his words. If you can't put it into words, then we're just being lazy. We have to practice, because words are the way of communicating. I remember Lama Yeshe said to one of his dear friends Olle, a Danish guy, he's about ninety-something now, he was seventy-something when Lama lived, and he was a friend of Lama's, and he was a Taoist. And Lama asked him, 'Tell me what you think, what your philosophy is?' and he said, which is very typical of Taoism, 'Oh, no, it's beyond words. You can't describe it.' And Lama said, 'Ah, you're just being lazy. You're cheating. If you can't describe it, then what good are you to sentient beings? How can you help?'

So, he took this to heart, and he said he spent twenty or twenty --five years thinking through the entire philosophy and writing a book. So, because the words -- if you don't have words -- if you don't have words, how can you hear Buddha's teachings? It's not possible. We have to have words and the words have to be correct. Like if I give you a cake recipe...and because I'm describing the cake to you, it's beyond words, it's so blissful, it's so amazing, it's so special, wow, far out... you're very happy.

But now you say to me, 'Please, Robina, show me how to make it.'

'Oh, no, I can't tell you that -- it's all beyond words...'

Well, excuse me, how selfish of me! If I can't give you the boring facts and figures that how you can get the taste as well, I'm being mean... Buddha's main gift is his words. So words are deadly serious, because they lead you to the taste. So, get your words right. That's why you need to listen to authentic teachings. Check carefully before you read, there's so much junk around, you know, that's called Buddhism. Be very careful what you listen to, and you'd better be careful

about what you hear from me! From the Dalai Lama! You should check. You know, we all love the Dalai Lama; we think, 'Oh, isn't he wonderful, he makes me feel good.' Well, I'm sorry -- Hitler made people feel very good! No logic. So check up on your facts, you know. Have some confidence, have some certainty.

Countless Causes and Conditions

39:38

So, one of the ways then, in which things do exist interdependently, conventionally... well, look at the wording, it's marvelous -- 'convention', what's it mean? First of all, we have to say, 'There is a cup.' So then we have to define our terms, and the definition has two parts. It's very simple, our definition.

'Oh, Mummy, what's a cup?'

'Well, darling, it's that flat bottomed clay container with a handle on it.'

'Well, I can recognize it, can't I? But Mummy, what does it do?'

'Oh, it holds my water, sweetheart.'

So, a definition has the first part that tells you its conventional characteristics. The second part tells you its job, what it does, its function. 'It holds my tea.' So you learn those two parts and you now know what a cup is. And then guess what? We all agree: 'c-u-p' refers to that phenomenon. We agree. We'd be in trouble if you think it's a knife and I think it's a cup and we have a war about it, isn't it? We have to agree. And it's only a convention...this is the meaning of emptiness anyway -- we just agree that means 'cup'. Simple enough. But Buddha says we might know that but we don't get it right...even conventionally, we don't get it right.

So, how does it exist conventionally? Well, there's a lovely way of describing how Tsongkhapa does this one. Well, actually, His Holiness did this one in D.C. He just talked about two. But there's a third one in the middle there, we're going to do, too. So, that is the first way that things exist conventionally -- and we talked all about that yesterday -- and when it comes to people, '*karma*' is its name. It's the first level of dependent arising; which is that things come into existence in dependence upon -- in fact, countless -- causes and conditions.

So, '*karma*' is the word Buddha uses for this law when it comes to people, when it comes to *me*; that I exist in dependence upon countless causes. And I remember, when I first learned this from Geshe Khenchog (42:09), former abbot Khenche Rinpoche, Jampa Khenchog who was the abbot of Sera Je monastery for seven years, he was the abbot of our monastery in France for ten years and my teacher in England in the seventies, who is now the Masters Program Lama in Italy -- he's now about eighty-something, he's wonderful... Ah, okay. He said, when he talked about this, he used the example of the object called '*Robina*', which is obviously why I remember it.

He said, 'It can be said that everything in the universe up to the first moment of '*Robina*' can validly be said to be a cause and condition for the existence of '*Robina*'.'

I'll never forget -- at the time, that sounded pretty cosmic. But let's look at the logic of it. It's perfectly true. You can start anywhere you like, you know...

So, I always like to use the example of who made the cup... So let's say Mrs. Smith was the designer of this nice cup. So we can say, obviously, one of the first main causes of this cup is Mrs. Smith, isn't it? Her mind...imagining, conjuring up this design. We can say that, can't we? Very clear. We know that perfectly well. We know it didn't fall out of a tree like this. A human mind created it. So, Mrs. Smith had a mother, didn't she? And if Mrs. Smith didn't have a mother, there could not be Mrs. Smith. So, Mrs. Smith's mother had a mother...and then you can't help but say Mrs. Smith's mother had a mother... and where can you find the first mother? Because as soon as you posit one, you've got to posit the previous one, which is the simple logic of cause and effect. It's like a domino effect, going the opposite direction. You understand my point? That's the simplest level of dependent arising. As soon as you posit a thing, it has to have a cause. So talking in broad terms here, Mrs. Smith's mum, you know. Then you've got another angle -- you think of the clay. Well, clay came from a mountain and that came from previous something and that turned into something else. Then you think of the paint. Everything you look at about this cup -- you can't -- once you start, you *cannot* factually find the beginning, the first cause.

And you see, what's fascinating, we always want a first cause. This is the view of self-existence. This is the view of the reifying one. This is the view that is actually manifesting in the Christian and the Muslim teachings of 'Creator' and 'soul' -- that there is a 'first cause' and it's called 'God'. Buddha says it's irrational and illogical. You cannot -- if you posit a law of cause and effect -- you cannot have an effect without a cause. You can have a cause without an effect. You know, if there's a chicken, it has to have come from an egg. And you know that egg has to have come from a chicken. But you know that if you have an egg, you don't have to get a chicken, you can break the egg.

So, if there is an effect, it assumes a previous cause, so you will never find a first one. But we frantically want there to be a first cause.

'But-but-but there must be,' we'll say. We ask the question: 'When did it begin? When did delusions begin? When did suffering begin? When did karma begin? When did everything begin?'

We've got this view *because* we cling to self-existence, because we have this misconception deep in the bones of our being. We assume there has to be a first cause, because grasping at self-existent 'me', grasping at 'self-existent anything' is the opposite to cause and effect.

So the first way in which things come into existence, the first level at which things exist interdependently is in terms of their existing in dependence upon causes and conditions. And you just keep going. You can't find a first cause. And there are countless causes for everything. That's why karma is a marvelous example of this. The object is called 'me'. So right now, we can see we cling to a sense of self that's very vivid, that's very solid, separate, lonely, bereft, self-pity, self-conscious, angry, depressed, fearful -- all the drama. We live in the bubble of this sense of a separate, lonely 'me', don't we? There's me, and there's everyone else. This is the biggest lie. This is the experiential, emotional consequence of believing in 'inherent I'.

Like I said, we don't *think* we believe 'in inherent I', we don't even know what it means. But this is the experiential consequence of it. Fear, drama, anxiety, anger, depression, low self-esteem, loneliness, poor me -- these are the experiential consequences of this primordial mistake.

In other words, the way we assume about 'me', is that there's no causes, it's just me, I didn't ask to get born, it's not my fault, everything is 'done' to me. So, you know, we don't want the ugly things done to me so we have huge aversion and anger and push it away, and we do crave the lovely things so we have attachment. Attachment and aversion are the consequences of this ignorance. The natural outcropping of ignorance, because we assume an 'I' to have things *for*. We assume an 'I' that doesn't want suffering. It's an assumption deep in the bones of our being. This is the experiential consequence of this mistake that our mind makes.

But thinking about how I am the result of past karma, I'm the result of past actions -- you hit me because I hit you before, you're generous to me because I must have been generous to you before -- it loosens the grip of this lonely, bereft 'me'. It sees that I'm this interdependent scenario. That's why to talk about karma, to think about karma is the most marvelous way to loosen the grip of the 'self pity me', to loosen the grip of the ego. Takes time, of course. This is why, you're not really a Buddhist until you think about karma...karma means interdependence and interdependence is Buddha's thing. So the first level of dependent arising is that- cause and conditions. Now, cups -- clearly, we're not talking karma. 'Karma' is just a word Buddha uses to refer to the causes and conditions of *beings*, that's all. But the law of cause-and-effect is the same logic whether it's me or a cup.

So, there is a cup that does exist -- in dependence upon countless causes and conditions. But you will not find a 'cup' among any one of those causes and conditions. This is the first level to think about -- dependent arising, you know. And what this means is, you think about this and what it brings -- this is the point -- is the conclusion: 'Oh, I see! Therefore there's no cup from its own side.' You see the absence of the inherent cup. So, to think about dependent arising is the 'king of logics' -- remember -- to prove emptiness.

We go, 'Well, how do I think about emptiness? The cup is empty, the cup is empty... the cup is empty...' waiting for some vision to come. Ridiculous! You don't think 'about' emptiness... you think about dependent arising -- and what that does is trigger the conclusion, 'Oh, I see -- therefore, there's no cup from its own side, therefore the cup is empty of existing from its own side.' So emptiness -- if you like -- is the conclusion you come to, having thought about dependent arising. It's a very practical thing. It's not cosmic, because very simply, if you think about how the cup exists *interdependently*, this proves that it is absent of existing *independently*. Obvious -- they're the opposite.

If it is empty, if it is interdependent, it is empty of being independent, isn't it? *If it is interdependent, it is empty of being independent.* Independent and interdependent

are opposite. So if it is interdependent, it lacks being independent. Simple. That's the simple way of talking.

Parts

50:27

Now, the second way the cup exists in dependence upon 'factors', is the cup exists *in dependence upon its parts*. Or in America, its 'parts'. (gives the American pronunciation, resulting in general laughter) I'm an American, I've got a passport now, so I'm allowed to speak like that... 'We Americans...' My Australian accent -- 'pahts'... I don't know if that's a Montana accent or a California one, I couldn't tell...

So, 'cup' exists -- it does exist in dependence upon its parts. There is a cup, but you won't find 'cup' apart from its parts. But we think there is, and our language cheats us. Our language is really tricky. It reinforces self-existence. You listen to the way we talk, you know? So back in the seventh century, Chandrakirti, this Indian great commentator on Nagarjuna's teachings on the Middle Way and emptiness, which are the basis for all the main teachings on emptiness in Tibet, he talked about using the example of a chariot.

'Well,' he said, 'in order to look for this inherent chariot that we think is there, let's break it down into its component parts, to search for this inherent chariot.' Now, this is a really good meditation to do, about the cup, but in particular the 'I'. So, you listen. You listen to this.

Okay. Let's pretend there are three things on my table, okay? There are more but... pretend there's a cup, a clock and a vase. Okay. Can you see? Cup, clock, vase. And you can see table.

'Table' has a cup, a clock and a vase on it. So, how many phenomena? Four. Table, cup, clock vase, okay? Four phenomena. Now, even conventionally speaking, don't you agree that if we say that there is a table that has a cup, a clock and a vase -- which is four phenomena -- very simply, without complication, you have to be able to point out four phenomena. You have to point out a table that is not a cup, you have to point out a vase that is not a clock -- you get my point. You have to point out four separate phenomena, distinct four phenomena. Easy. And we can do this simply, can't we? There's a table, there's a cup, there's a clock, there's a vase. You agree, don't you? Simple, even conventionally, talking ordinary language. Okay.

I have a nose. You agree? And I have a foot. And I have a hand. How many phenomena? Three? No. How many phenomena? Four. Four phenomena. 'I', nose foot, hand. Do you agree? Now, if those four phenomena do exist conventionally, you have to find four separate distinct phenomena, don't you agree? Well, there's my foot -- cut it off! There's my nose -- you can have it! There's my hand... Where's the 'I'? You can't find a separate 'I', it's very annoying, isn't it? It's just the same as the cup. Cup has a handle and a base -- there's the base, there's the handle. Where's the cup?

So this gets us to the third level of dependent arising, which is: 'cup' is merely a name we use, we impute, upon the valid base. The parts: the handle, the base, the clay, the this, the that. 'Robina' is a name we impute upon the hand, the foot,

the nose, and all the rest. It's a simple point, but we make it so complicated. Even conventionally, we're speaking here... It's just convenient language. We speak -- our language is convenient.

So, of course, as Rinpoche points out, as Buddha points out, the parts also -- you can't find a handle among the parts of the handle, because 'handle' is merely a name imputed on the parts. You can't find a hand among the parts; it is a hand, it does hold a cup, but it's merely a name imputed by mind upon the valid base, which is the fingers and the thumb and the palm and the wrist. So, we're not satisfied, we think, 'Oh, I'm just a name? What a bore... thought I was more than that...' So, the thing is to do this kind of little meditation. You'd do this kind of analysis in your mind, you'd do it very rigorously. You would start to break down your component parts, and you'd put them all out there, in little piles, you know, of you. All the hard bits and the soft bits and the mucky bits and all the bits of your mind -- the negative states, the positive ones -- as many piles as you want. Keep stripping it away, deconstructing this 'I' into its component parts. Now, when we finish that deconstruction, we believe we're going to find, now, this little naked self-existent little 'I' that's been found out, that's the owner of all the parts; 'cause that's what we believe is there. We talk like this:

'I did not do this.'

'I am a special person.'

'I am so fat and ugly.'

'I am not this.'

'How dare you say that about me!'

Fear is the Voice of Ignorance

56:28

As Pabongka Rinpoche says, 'When you nearly fall off the mountain, you don't say, 'My body nearly fell off the mountain. You say 'I' nearly fell off the mountain.' If someone insults your nose, you don't say, 'How dare you insult my nose!' 'You insulted me!', we'd say. We believe there is this 'me' in there, that's more than the parts, that is the owner of the parts, that runs the show like a puppeteer. Even conventionally, Buddha says, you won't find that one. He's just being practical, not being cosmic. But this belief in this self-existent, over-exaggerated boss that runs the show *is the source of all suffering*. When we have realized the absence -- when we have *seen* the absence of *that*, when we have 'realized emptiness', as they say -- that's all it means -- when we have cognized the absence, the emptiness of that fantasy 'I', as Lama Zopa says, 'Then there is no fear.' Fear is finished, because fear is the main emotion of all the delusions, in particular ego-grasping. This ignorance is known colloquially as ego-grasping, and its main job is fear. Fear and panic. And I is the main voice of it. So when we realize emptiness, there is no fear, as Rinpoche said.

When he was a little boy, when he was eight -- he was recognized when he was very small -- as the reincarnation of a previous yogi called Kunsang Yeshe up in the mountains in Sherpa country, you know. He was this meditator called Kunsang Yeshe and he lived as an ordinary layman, hanging out, you know, going off to Tibet and buying salt and selling it to the Sherpas and everything, and eventually left home and went to this little hole-in-the-wall in the

mountains. And it was basically, I think it was where they -- I forget now the meaning -- the word is 'Lawudo', the little village there -- 'Lawudo' means 'radish' or 'onion', I can't remember which... and basically it was a little hole-in-the-wall where they stored the radishes. And so he pulled out the radishes and moved in, and that became his little home for the last twenty-five or whatever years of his life. He got to be known as the 'Lawudo Lama'. And so when he died, he passed away and so these great yogis, it is said in all the teachings, all the Tantric teachings, they have complete control over the death process, you know, and they can choose their rebirth.

And so anyway this little boy got born down the hill, in the little village below, Lawudo, and he was -- I forget his name then, he wasn't Zopa, actually -- anyway, he's Lama Zopa now -- pretend he was called Zopa then, I can't remember ... but from the time he was a tiny boy, apparently, his mother, she'd go outside to chop the wood and Zopa's gone, you know. He's crawling up the hill, back to -- well, not back to, we discovered this later -- he's crawling up towards the cave. And from the time he could talk, he's always going up the hill, always. He's relentless, very determined. And his mother would say, 'Come home!' He'd say, 'No! That is my home.'

So then from the time he could play games, his sisters said, that, you know, he'd always play the role of being a lama, sitting on a throne and having a bell and having all these pujas and doing tormas offerings and then he'd say that 'all my benefactors are coming' and he'd give the list of all the names of his previous benefactors from his past life, you know, saying they were turning up for puja.

So, she'd thought she'd better check with the local lamas and so found out they considered, yes, he's maybe the reincarnation of Kunsang Yeshe so he got known as Zopa Rinpoche -- 'precious one'. So then he had a manager and everything -- they're very professional, these reincarnated lamas -- so he's handed over to some manager, and he told this story one time about how up in the mountains at some particular monastery -- he's eight years old -- and there's this big river. And on the other side of the river, there's these kind of strange, straw-hair colored pale faced, weird looking kind of people, you know? Anglos, like us, like some of us. So, he really wanted to meet these people. This must have been -- in the early fifties. He was born in 1946, 45. So, he wanted to go over this river, there's this little rickety bridge, his manager kept saying, 'No', but he insisted. So he bought a little bowl of potatoes, being a Sherpa, you know, you bring your gift of potatoes, and he went halfway across the bridge and he fell in the water... And he told the story, it was very nice, he said, he said, 'The head' -- he's very objective -- 'The head' -- meaning his own head -- 'was bobbing up and down.' You know, up and down for breath, because of course, they don't teach them to swim, up in the Sherpa country, you know, didn't swim, and he's going up and down, and he's seeing his manager running up and down on the shore, and he said, 'Huh... the thought occurred to me, the person known as the Lawudo Lama is about to die,' he said very rationally to himself, as he's coming up and down for air. And then he said, 'I didn't know anything about emptiness --' meaning in that life he'd never heard about it, but we can deduce from his experience, in my own opinion, we can deduce from this that he obviously had

the realization of emptiness, if he is said to be who he was, and it was in his mind already -- but he said, 'I didn't know anything about emptiness, but *there was no fear.*'

So this is the point that we would find utterly inconceivable, this sounds insane, you'd be called mentally ill if you proposed this to Western psychologists, you know? Because Western psychology is based absolutely -- like I said, not just the religious teachings but the materialist teachings as well -- based on the absolute assumption of the self-existent 'I'. We call it the 'self'. We state it is there. We say it is natural to have fear. We call it 'instinct for survival'. We assume fear, jealousy, anger, paranoia, upset, depression, all the rest are normal behavior. Animals have it. Humans have it. So everything is based upon the assumption of this as reasonable mental health. So to hear that Buddha says you can absolutely extricate this from your mind, you can eradicate this from your mind utterly, and go beyond all fear, and develop infinite wisdom and infinite compassion for all sentient beings, they'll think you're psychotic -- they'll give you a pill and lock you up... but this is exactly what Buddha's saying. He's just really more radical, you know, that's all... Psychologically really radical, in what he's asserting is possible. It's easy for us to say it in nice religious terms. But I like to put it in really ordinary words -- it makes us wake up -- wow! It's real stuff! Not just some religious fantasy, you know.

So this ignorance -- this deep, deep primordial delusion -- this absolute default mode, this ancient, eons-old habit that we come programmed with from countless lives, along with its branches called attachment, and anger and all the rest -- this is just what we call 'normal', you know? But Buddha says we're all mentally ill. We're all living in a mental asylum in our own head. So, our job is to get rid of all the delusions, but this is the root one. So once we understand the ordinary ones -- how they misconceive, how they exaggerate -- then we can rid ourselves of this deep one. You know, the teachings in Buddhism about emptiness are sort of taught in this very unique way, some special little trip, you know, called 'wisdom', but actually that's all wisdom teaching, about how things exist. You learn about attachment, aversion, jealousy; they're all misconceptions in just the same way that ignorance is a misconception. They're all their own particular stories, their own particular misconceptions, their own particular viewpoints. But these other ones are the branch delusions based upon the root called 'ignorance'. Once you've seen the emptiness of the fantasy 'I', you've pulled out the root. The others collapse, the branches die. There's no longer anything to be attached to, or to be angry about, or to be depressed about. So, now you have some questions, please? That's a summary of dependent arising and emptiness, according to Lama Tsongkhapa.

Renunciation and Bodhicitta

01:04:13

Q: Do you have to have *renunciation* and *bodhicitta* to experience emptiness?

Ven.: You have to have renunciation, you don't have to have bodhicitta; bodhicitta might come first, it might come after depending on the person. But renunciation necessarily. Renunciation is like junior school and high school.

You've got to have that first. You can't possibly have wisdom if you haven't got that. Because renunciation is where you're working on the branch delusions -- you're giving up attachment, and anger, and jealousy and all the voices of ego-grasping. So you've got to have a deep recognition of these first, and want to be disgusted by them -- do you understand my point? And then, you've subdued those enough, and now you can pull out the root. Do you see my point? Because renunciation is simply working on those other ones. That's all. See, it's not presented like that -- I'm just saying it in my way. Does it make sense, what I'm saying? To hear it in a psychological progressive sense, you know? Do you understand what I'm saying? Someone else? Yes, sweetheart?

The Big Bang

01:05:14

Q: Would you... can we think that the beginningless, ...the expanding universe, you know, find the beginning of it, if that sounds like in keeping with what you're talking about...

Ven.: That's true, Barbara, but relatively speaking,

Q: ...there's no first cause...

Ven.: No, no... that's an interesting point, but I think that's a bit of a misconception there...we can definitely say Barbara did begin, relatively speaking. There was a moment in time when the egg and the sperm came together, and the consciousness that went into it was the first moment of this package, you would agree with this, wouldn't you? So, there is relatively speaking a first moment of Barbara, but not an absolute first moment. Because the egg and sperm came from your mummy and daddy, the consciousness came from the previous person, so in a long-term sense, there's no absolute first moment; but in a relative, conventional sense there is a first moment of Barbara. There's also a first moment of this universe, maybe they can't find it. But it's not the absolute first Big Bang, as His Holiness says, 'Big Bang? No problem. Just not the first Big Bang.' So that's the point. They tend to think that the Big bang was the beginning of everything, but that would imply 'first moment', and that's the one that's not true, and they're even beginning to find that now, I think.

Q: And they don't know what went before the Big bang...

Ven.: Well, that's right...

Arya Beings

01:07:00

Q: ...and my other one was, in passing, did I hear you say, '...non --samsaric beings...?'

Ven.: Yes. Superior beings. You could say... That's what the term 'arya beings' or 'superior beings' means. So you could say, from your first moment of your non -- conceptual insight into, cognizing of, seeing of the emptiness of Barbara -- for example -- the very first of your first non-conceptual insights into it -- is the

first moment you begin to climb out of samsara into nirvana, you become a 'superior being'. You're still -- relatively speaking, you've got to go further, to really be an 'arya being', not until the seventh -- I forget now, which of the ten paths -- but, you know, you're out, from that moment. You already now get the label, 'arya being'. You just keep progressing all the way to Buddhahood from there on. That's 'superior being', out-of-samsara-into-nirvana sort of thing. Do you understand? And that's the job. That's what we're trying to do, you know? So, some people can have bodhicitta first, depending on the person. Some realize emptiness first, depends on the person, but renunciation you've got to have first. Do you understand? Yes?

Deconstructing Phenomena

01:08:07

Q: Would it be right to say that in order to go from our default view of seeing everything as self-existent to the correct view, that virtually every phenomenon that we encounter, we have to deconstruct? We have to start doing this...

Ven.: That's right.

Q: ...every day, all the time, every time we look at everything...

Ven.: Absolutely. Even if we just remind ourselves that it doesn't have an inherent nature...Pabongka Rinpoche says, 'You're not even sure of the meaning of the word 'emptiness', but just have a doubt about things maybe don't exist the way they appear to me.' To begin to be intelligent about seeing the disconnect between appearances and reality, already that, too, is profound. Most of the time, we just suck into everything as being true... we never question for one second, we're just on autopilot. So the more we can catch ourselves, in all these different ways, the more profound is the practice. Absolutely. That's the point. Yes? Someone else?

Any Inherently Existing Phenomena?

01:08:59

Q: Is there any phenomenon that has inherent existence?

Ven: No. Buddha says it's a contradiction in terms. You cannot have such a thing. If something -- the way they put it was -- if something were inherent, it would mean it existed without depending on anything. And that is simply an impossibility. Buddha would say it's a misconception. It's an impossibility. Everything that exists, necessarily exists interdependently. By definition, existence, all phenomena are dependent arisings. This is by definition. This is where they say the eternalistic view of 'creator' and 'soul' are a mistake. There's this need for us to hold onto *something*, as if somehow 'inherent' is above everything else. And that's very much the feeling... I remember talking to a friend of mine -- she's a Buddhist now, but she was a Christian, and very sincere Christian -- and she said she had a real struggle when she heard that a Buddha was ordinary first, and then *became* Buddha. That seemed to diminish Buddhahood. Whereas she was more comfortable with the idea, which is the Christian one, which is that God is always above everything. And has always

been. And doesn't exist in dependence upon anything. It sounds like it's diminishing God, and that is the emotional component of this, and Buddha would say if you argue very carefully and look at this, you'll see something that is inherent can't exist. It's the opposite to existence.

Dependent arising -- in other words, they even say 'things exist *because* they are empty of existing from their own side'. One has to think about this obviously, but that's the words they use. Yes, that's what they say... Things exist because they're empty. *Because they're empty, they can exist.*

Q: You just blew my mind...

Ven.: Okay, good! You see, our instinct is to think 'empty' means 'nihilistic', so we hear the opposite... it kind of splits us in half, so we've got to keep remembering, 'emptiness *means* 'dependent arising', 'dependent arising' *means* emptiness'. To cut the two wrong views, we just have to train ourselves to think that. Yes?

Advice on how to Move from an Intellectual Understanding of Emptiness to an Experiential One

01:11:17

Q: I was wondering, do you have any advice for taking our understanding of emptiness from an intellectual one to ...

Ven.: Yes...let me tell you. Have you ever learned anything? You didn't know before? A certain science or a skill? Give an example. What is it? What have you learned? Okay, you've learned piano. Okay. When you first began, it was merely intellectual knowledge, don't you agree? Wasn't it? And even then, when you looked at those weird looking notes with those kind of black and white little holes, you thought, 'What is this stuff?' You couldn't even hardly get around it, even intellectually. Then you started learning the theory, didn't you? And then slowly you started putting your hands on the piano and you could gradually translate that boring intellectual stuff into something experiential...so what was the main that thing you did every day?

Q: Practice.

Ven.: And then guess what happened? It became experiential, didn't it? Then, what do you think? That's how you learn everything. Nothing special. This is how you get enlightened. There's *nothing special*. You just have to be patient and know *this is how it works*. When you understand the principle of 'practice makes perfect' and you just keep thinking about it... If you had the wrong theory, about Mozart's music, you'd never play it right. So you got to have the right words, and then you just think about them every day, you analyze, you meditate on it, you think about it, and gradually, slowly, over years, months, years, the penny begins to drop, until eventually it becomes your direct experience. *It's exactly the same process*. You just have to be patient and just...persistent. Do you see what I'm saying? That's the answer.

Then , of course, in Buddhism, especially in Tibetan Buddhism, you've got all this little, kind of, tool kit of tools...which seem to be the more religious side of things. So this is why all the lamas would say, this is the real job, this 'wisdom', this 'being your own therapist', working on your mind...But they say the delusions are so strong, we need other things to help us, that enable us to do the job. So, my analogy is like this: You know, I always think of -- now, I'm probably twenty years out of date, but I always think of Michael Jordan. I don't know who the latest basketball players are, don't ask me...he's probably dead by now. But anyway, I always think of Michael Jordan. You see Michael Jordan getting all these balls in the hoop.

'Wow, I'd love to do this. Michael, please show me how to get the ball in the hoop.' Right? Looks easy, doesn't it? You go boom, boom, boom, you get the ball in the hoop. Because you can see -- with basketball, the essence of it is getting the ball in the hoop, wouldn't you agree? Now, he will tell you, 'Well, I want you to go off for ten years, and do jogging and build muscles and get balls and do this and learn all the theories of basketball and...'

And you say, 'No, no no -- You didn't hear me. How do I get the ball in the hoop?' And he'll repeat his answer, and tell you to do all these other things, because you know perfectly well, when you prime your body and prime your mind and practice and practice all these other things -- which on the face of it, don't look like it's getting the ball in the hoop -- that when you finally get there, you can get the ball in every time. You need to do all this other work. Do you understand my point?

So, the Tibetan Buddhist one, this is what's called the 'preliminary practices'. You've got to purify your mind. You've got to create masses and masses of virtuous karma that prepare your mind to do the actual job of being your own therapist every day and getting the realization of emptiness. So, they are all -- and we take those on board as and when we feel. All the prostrations, all the water bowls, all those different things that seem so abstract and so disconnected from practice. That seem so un-psychological. And when we understand their function -- and we have to think about this carefully -- they're the ones that prime our minds, that enable us easily to get the realizations. Like, you know, if you're going to be a pianist as well, you can't just sit down at the piano, you've got to learn lots and lots of things and lots of boring theories, you know? Then when you sit at the piano you can do it. You get my point? Yes?

'...under God...'

01:14:54

Q: Do you think we should have 'under God' in the Pledge of Allegiance?

Ven.: Well, darling, you can't argue with it, don't worry about it...I wouldn't worry about it. I mean 99% of the people in this country who talk about God...let them have it... Imagine fighting to get that out -- there'd be war! Don't even go there, darling! Who cares? When you have your Pledge of allegiance just keep it out, just don't say it. It's the world; the world thinks about God...so let them have God. Isn't it, don't you think?

Q: Yeah, they do...

Ven.: Then let them have it! But let them have it, darling. Well, then it's okay, you just keep it quiet...

Q: ...but then you're a bad person if...

Ven.: Well, then it's okay...you don't tell them, you just keep it quiet.

Q: No, but they want to publicize it...

Ven.: Why, darling, why? It's not a political issue, it's private. Come on. I'm less than interested in something like that...I couldn't care less. It's not a political issue, you know? It's private. I mean, even my Catholic nuns, when I went to one of my reunions, said to me,

'Do you pray to God, dear?' I'm going to argue and tell her 'no'? Don't be ridiculous.

'But of course I do, Mother...'

And then she said to me, 'Oh, good. Please, we need vocations. Please pray.' You know, Catholics, you get vocations, you get a calling from God to be a nun? She had to first check I'd prayed to God first... Of course I'm going to say 'yes'. I'm going to argue with her? Oh, my God, how rude of me... Let them have their God -- it doesn't matter. Just put the word Buddha there, it doesn't matter. Really, it doesn't matter. So what else, people, about dependent arising... No questions about dependent arising? Is it all clear?

Buddha/Bodhisattva

01:16:23

Q: Why didn't the Buddha become a bodhisattva?

Ven.: Why didn't the Buddha...?

Q: No, I mean if the Buddha is all-compassionate...

Ven.: What do you mean, 'why didn't he become a bodhisattva', what do you mean?

Q: Well, the bodhisattvas are the ones who decide to become reincarnated...

Ven.: No, no darling... Buddhas become reincarnated, too. The job is to become a Buddha as quickly as possible, and then you take millions of rebirths throughout millions of eons for millions of sentient beings' sake. Oh my gosh... Bodhisattva *precedes* Buddha.

Q: Did Chenresig become a Buddha?

Ven.: But they are really Buddhas, they just call them bodhisattvas...they're really Buddhas. What else, folks? Yes?

Q: Never mind, it's off-topic,

Ven.: Come on, say it!

Q: In all the teachings, when Buddha passed away, passed into parinirvana, he said he would not reincarnate...

Ven.: Did he say that?

Q: Well, he said he would not take birth again...

Ven: Well, he meant that in the sense that he doesn't *need* to take birth, he's finished the job. But of course, if he's a Buddha... Listen, listen, listen! A bodhisattva -- the lowest level of bodhisattva, and there are ten levels of them -- if they are propelled by this great compassion, there's not a fraction of ego left, if they've completely realized emptiness, there's no motor there to propel them to take another rebirth. The *only* reason they take rebirth -- which is their entire job -- is to be of benefit to sentient beings. So a Buddha then has the capacity to be manifesting their mind simultaneously in millions of forms throughout millions of eons for the sake of trillions of sentient beings for as long as time exists. So, of course, the Buddhas are manifesting! That's just him talking about how, in the sense of -- 'now I've finished the path'... But he's out there bopping around like a crazy person, just not one we recognize, that's all.

Q: ...or an ordinary birth like...

Ven.: But *he is*... if they're dogs and ants... There's this lovely story -- the Dalai Lama one time -- you know how the Dalai Lama's said to be a Buddha -- I mean, I wouldn't know but I'm prepared to accept other people who say he is. Anyway, Lama Zopa Rinpoche said this lovely story one time, back in the seventies in Lawudo he said, 'you know, in the sixties, after the Tibetans came to Tibet -- to India. And in the early sixties, you know, the Tibetan government was negotiating with the Indians, who so kindly offered them hundreds of thousands of acres of land down south for their monasteries, which is now where vast tracts -- there's whole new Tibetan towns there, that own millions of monasteries and everything down south. So, they were doing all this negotiating and it was quite difficult, and the Tibetan minister for His Holiness was sent down to Delhi to meet the appropriate Indian minister to do these negotiations. And of course, Indian bureaucracy being the way it was, he couldn't get a meeting. He went up to Dharamsala very frustrated, to see His holiness, and His Holiness said, 'Don't worry, It'll be okay. You go back down right away.' So, he went back down, got to Delhi, and then that particular day, the Indian minister's little boy was in the office. And he was chatting with the Tibetan minister, and he wanted a dog. So the Tibetan minister was delighted to do *something*. 'Oh, I'll get you a dog', he said. To grease the wheels, you know.

So, he went outside and he saw this saddhu -- this holy man -- on the street, and that he had this little dog.

'Can I buy your dog?' , he said.

'Sure.'

So he bought the little dog. He went back to the office and the little dog ran to the little boy and the little boy was happy and he ran to his daddy and his day was happy and everything was happy and dandy and everything worked. Well, as Lama Zopa said, 'The saddhu and the dog were manifestations of the Dalai Lama's *mind*.'

So there's all these levels of bodhisattvas, people, you've got to hear this. I mean, this sounds weird, wacko stuff, unless you read all the teachings and understand the logic of it... They're *propelled* by this compassion, it's their job, you know. They're beyond the thrall of all the delusions, the highly evolved ones... and they can do what they like; you know, they can manipulate the universe and do what they like. They're in control, now. They can manifest their minds in at *least a hundred forms simultaneously*. If you're a Buddha, and my goodness, you're beyond the tenth level, you can just be countless manifestations: in the hell realms, in the animal realms, as ants, as dogs, as rats, as people, as beggars...there's all these stories, all the time. You know, Tibetans have a saying, 'you don't know who anybody is, so please do not judge,' you know. I mean, Lama Zopa in one teaching I was reading recently, talking about Naropa and Tilopa and guru devotion, and how you'd never know who anybody is, you know, and so one time in Lhasa in the time of the fifth Dalai Lama, there's one butcher, behind the Potala, and they said he was a manifestation of Yamantaka, you know. We don't know anything...I remember Lama Yeshe one time, he was being quite tough with us. He said, 'You people!' He says, 'You have no idea what we know.' And I was shaking in my shoes and thinking, 'I think you're right, you know.'

But this is why it's really important -- we can have faith, we can have a lot of devotion, but if you haven't heard the teachings, the nuts and bolts of what people can do and how and where and at what level, it's all a bit mysterious to us, you know. Anyway. Whatever. Where'd all that come from -- what was the question?

They're Out There Helping Us *01:22:12*

Q: We really have no idea how many of these beings -- these Buddhas -- these beings are out there right now...doing everything they can to help us in the universes -- they're all out there, doing everything they can...of course all they do is feed us this stupid negative stuff on the TV -- but incredible things are happening...

Ven.: I know, that's right...we do have to get a bit upbeat and a bit positive sometimes, instead of stuck in our little miserable self-pity nonsense...that's why it's inspiring to read the teachings of the bodhisattvas and the lives of the yogis, it really lifts our minds out of all this mundane nonsense we live in...

Q: ...there's some really interesting stuff on tv...

Ven.: All right...come on...let it go...

Q: ...there's this show called 'What would you do?' What they do is they set up these scenarios...like a typical scenario might be that a black person goes into the diner. And say, the owner of the diner starts getting on the black person, saying 'you don't need to be here. We don't serve your kind...'

Ven.: ...okay...

Q: ...and so it's all on film, right? And they wait to see what ordinary citizens will do...

Ven.: I see...okay, good...sounds great...

Q: ...and in a lot of instances, people get up and say, 'hey, you can't treat him like that...'

Ven.: Right. Well done... So what else about dependent arising, people?

Bodhicitta as a Quality of Emptiness

01:24:05

Q: You mentioned in response to her question, that you don't have to have bodhicitta necessarily to experience emptiness...

Ven.: That's right.

Q: It seems like bodhicitta is a quality of emptiness... like wetness is to water...

Ven.: Eventually, of course... You can say this -- all I'm saying was, sometimes, according to the kind of mind, some person might realize emptiness before they realize bodhicitta. Some person might realize bodhicitta before they realize emptiness. But -- a bird needs two wings. You've got to have both, because if you don't have wisdom, your bodhicitta only goes so far, and you will never get out of samsara. And if you only have wisdom, then you're limited because you don't have compassion for all sentient beings. So they absolutely are qualities of each other, you can't separate them, but all we're talking here is, in a linear sense sometimes you get this one first, sometimes that one. But you've got to have them both, no question. Of course.

So for example, I remember Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche, one amazing old lama -- I think he was here years ago -- didn't he come here years ago to the center? Wonderful old lama... There you go, okay. Precious Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche, I remember he said -- he was talking about one particular level of bodhisattva -- he said, 'For that bodhisattva' -- I remember these words, he said -- 'for him, the action of cutting off his hand is as inconsequential as a leaf falling off a tree.'

That blew my mind. Now if you think of this, just bodhicitta would not be enough. You'd have to have realized emptiness. You'd have to have absolute insight into the absence of an inherent 'I' in order to go that far. If you've got bodhicitta without emptiness, there's still incredible compassion, but there's still

an assumption of an 'I' that has compassion. You get my point? Whereas, you're beyond the 'I', your compassion is limitless -- it can sail into the universe. You get my point? So you're right, yes... someone else...anything else? Any more about dependent arising?

How Enlightened Beings See the Things around Us

01:26:05

Q: What's a way that we can just kind of go -- the question that I have sometimes is, like, how do these enlightened beings see the things around us?

Ven.: As just like they are. They see a cup and a toilet and a thing, and they get constipation, and they look at a carpet...The things are ordinary. *But...* Like, I rang up one of these holy beings, one time in Ireland, he runs a center there, and he's the Panchen Rinpoche; he's known, he's sort of known unofficially as the same mind as the Panchen Lama, he was one of the candidates, right? And he's got a couple of centers in Ireland, and he's one of my lamas. And I had a problem one time about some guy and I thought he was possessed by spirits... and I was in Greece and he was in Ireland. Now, this is just ordinary clairvoyance, this is not even the Buddha's quality. But, I remember -- he's ordinary, he's humble and unassuming, you can't believe it, you know?

And then I dais to him -- I told him my worries about this man and I said, 'Do you think he's possessed by spirits, Rinpoche?' And he said '...No...I don't see any spirits...'

So in other words, they're ordinary -- but you ask them a question, they've got sight so far...they can see -- they can tell you the precise answer, you know? Lama Yeshe looked so humble, unassuming... there was this one monk in Kopan who was sick -- like mentally ill -- and a friend of mine was helping him and found a doctor. Lama Yeshe said, 'Just leave it alone, don't do anything.' Which sounds kind of cruel, but Lama Lhundrup told this fellow, Harry -- 'Well,' he said, 'what was happening was because of Lama's clairvoyance he could see precisely in the past, the karma this monk created. And that if he'd gotten better in this life, he would have been fine -- but he didn't finish the karma.' So, next life even worse. So that's wisdom.

So, they're ordinary people, but their wisdom is just kind of outrageous. They see way into the past, they see way into the future...so, there's this wonderful Khandro-la, this amazing woman lama, who is now treating in Europe, one of the students of Rinpoche, but she's an extraordinarily highly evolved being. She came over the mountains from Tibet, and she was in Dharamsala, and she'd sort of -- she'd be in the pujas and things for His Holiness and she'd go into this trance and things...people tried to chuck her out, but she's this highly evolved lama, she's genuinely realized emptiness, bodhicitta, an extraordinarily realized person. Amazing lama. And so she's a healer, and so Rinpoche -- and she takes care of Rinpoche, she's incredible -- she came straight to Australia -- and as Roger said, he saw her working on Rinpoche's body -- well, she is clairvoyant. She can see Lama Zopa Rinpoche's subtle body, and knows exactly how to work it, all the blockages, cause she's got -- they've got this extraordinary capacity to

see beyond -- we can't see past our own nose! We can't see past walls, We can only remember only a few thoughts of today. Their minds are just super-powerful, but on an ordinary level, you just see humble, unassuming people. They don't walk around being grand and special.

Q: The way that I heard it phrased is that 'A Buddha -- becoming enlightened, the Buddha didn't instantly know everything but he could know anything to which he directed his attention.'

Ven.: ...Yeah, well, that's just meaning, that just means, if you're an ordinary person, like this lama -- remember that movie with Tom Cruise -- ...'something Report'? 'Minority Report'. You know how they depicted all those clairvoyant people? As these sad looking depressed bald girls living in water? It was the most weird depiction of clairvoyance I've ever seen...Because they saw the whole universe, they were clairvoyant, so they were so sad, and depressed. It was a really naïve depiction of seeing everything. Because when you're a high being, you've got wisdom, you're like rock solid on the earth. You're ordinary. You're humble. You're unassuming. But you've got this astonishing power, and you don't run around seeing everything at once. As you said, you just ask them a question, they sort of trigger that part of the computer, they 'look it up' and go -- boom, there it is. But they're being ordinary, meanwhile they look at a cup... You ask them a question about you, they'll see your entire life. But they're not seeing it all at once like, a big wow, dazzle, far out, they're seeing the whole universe, it's too ridiculous.

And if we have got some clairvoyance, it could be -- the feeling could be like that, and you could be kind of scared of it, because there's no wisdom -- not enough wisdom, you know. The channel isn't powerful enough. So, they're ordinary people. Like, I remember when Lama Yeshe -- when I remember when I first met him, I was so scared of him. And I said, 'Lama, I'm so scared of you.' And he almost burst into tears, he said, 'I'm just an ordinary person...'

Look at His Holiness -- it's why people love him, His holiness -- he's so ordinary, it's a joke... and as he said himself -- he said, 'The higher the lama --' he kept talking about this -- 'The higher the lama, the more ordinary they appear.' Look at Sangye Khadro, you know, Sangye Khadro, the nun, my dear friend who's off doing the Master's Program now, she's in her fifties or whatever. But she told me when she first went to India, looking for a guru -- she was twenty-two, a little California girl -- and she met Lama Zopa in Dharamsala and she was blissed out, it was this perfect guru, you know? So perfect and humble, you know, Lama Zopa's style... And suddenly, this monk walked in the room, and started rifling around in a suitcase and she wondered who this 'servant monk' was... but Lama Zopa sort of leapt up looking like this...and it was Lama Yeshe. 'Cause he just looked like an ordinary guy. Lama Yeshe always just looked like an ordinary guy, you know -- humble, unassuming, funny -- but the higher the lama is, the more ordinary they appear, you know. This is the one.

There's this lama in New York, Dhugpo Rinpoche, who's one of -- Rhukto Rinpoche, who's one of Lama Zopa's main gurus, an extraordinary high lama,

but he is reknown for being so humble, it's almost embarrassing. He's like -- we don't always understand this kind of humility, you know. We think, if we know something, we're going to leap in --

'Yeah, I know something!'

Someone says, 'You show me how to do this?'

'Sure, I'll show you!' But these lamas, they are so genuinely humble -- so, the students of this lama, they told me -- they met him back in the eighties or something -- or seventies -- he went to New York and became a layman. He's a Rinpoche, humble, working ordinary jobs just like an ordinary fellow -- and they heard he was a Tibetan lama,

'Oh, please, teach us something!'

But he'd been genuinely humble -- 'Oh, no, I don't know anything... go to this person...'

So they didn't bother asking him again. For fifteen years, they knew this Tibetan lama, having cups of tea with him and just hanging out. Then he took them on pilgrimage with him at one point to Dharamsala, and he's a close student of Ling Rinpoche, and they started to realize that he was treated as this really high lama... they realized they had this jewel in their presence for fifteen years. And what I'm also saying here, we're so thick and stupid -- we assume, you know, that everyone's going to come along and tell us everything.

We have to ask. We have to request the teachings all the time. And if we really knew, and checked up on him and knew he was a valid person and he said, 'No', we would have taken no notice... you know? Do you understand -- from our side, we have to request and request and request, and really be clear this person's valid. But this humility, of acting like you're knowing nothing -- and it backfired one time in Los Angeles -- His Holiness always saying he doesn't know anything -- and this fellow, he cried.

And he said, 'Well, if you don't know anything, what chance have we got?'

Which is a really good point...

So he kind of -- he went back a bit and he sort of backstepped; said, 'I know something', he said; trying to say he knew a few things... I mean it's true, it doesn't work for us, you know. We need a person to say they knew a few things. It's really funny...

Q: Who?

Ven.: The Dalai Lama, he had to sort of go back a bit, say he knew a few things after all, you know... So... we're got to talk about we have to check so carefully, I mean, you know, in the West, we're very used to a person blowing their own trumpet and it's just our style. You put your letters after your name and you've got a posh job and if someone says -- asks you for advice, you'd never say, 'Oh, I don't know anything...'. Even if you don't know anything, you'll still say you know something. We're so arrogant, you know. So, we're not used to this humble style... Very funny... What else, folks? 8:35... Have you got your money's worth yet, or do you want me to talk more? (General laughter...)

Q: Well, we got 24 pages already...

Ven.: That's right... an hour and a half, you're right... So, okay, yes, sweetheart? Go on...

Starting to 'Get' Dependent Arising

01:33:28

Q: So, what happens when you start to *get* dependent arising...

Ven.: What, darling?

Q: What happens? When you start to actually get dependent arising?

Ven.: So, basically, what we've talked about here -- what have you got? What have you heard that you might get? Why would you think about dependent arising? What would it trigger in your mind? What's the conclusion you're going to come to? What was the point of this discussion? Which is the other truth?

Q: Emptiness. When you start to get that...what's it like?

Ven.: Well, that's what you have to find out! Listen, darling... listen.

Q: Does it grow, like, exponentially...

Ven.: What did I -- remember the answer I said to her? What was the answer I said to her? This one here? (points to student) What was the answer I said to her? What did I tell her?

Q: Try it.

Ven.: No...what did I tell her? What were we discussing?

Q: Learning to play the piano...

Ven.: So I have to ask you the same question, because we just don't listen...that's okay, I understand. Have you ever learned anything?

Q: A few things...

Ven.: And you began by knowing nothing, didn't you? And then what did you do? You learned it first theoretically, and you stumbled a bit... Even just driving a car -- and eventually what happened? Eventually, what happened? Eventually, what happened? It becomes experiential, doesn't it? Well, this is how you learn about emptiness, how you realize everything...you just have the right words, you listen to it, you think about it and you just keep plodding. That's all. You've got to have confidence in the process. Do you understand my point?

But you've got to have the right words to think about. If you even know how the words are, how are you going to think about it? If you've never even known the words, how can you ever 'get the cake'? You've got to know the words. D'you hear my point? Do you hear my point?

Q: Yes.

Ven.: Good. So just keep truckin', girl. So, put it this way -- if the consequence of believing in the 'fantasy I' is fear and drama and attachment and anger and pride and jealousy and depression, then what do you think the consequence of unraveling that belief would be? Say it. Say it. Sweetheart, what did I just say? Repeat what I said. If the consequence of believing in the 'fantasy I' is fear and drama and attachment and jealousy and anger and pride -- are you hearing my words? So what do you think understanding the opposite would bring? What's the opposite of that?

Q: The absence.

Ven.: That's right! The absence of anger and jealousy and depression and fear. Wouldn't you like that? Wouldn't you like *that*?

Q: Yes, but there is a fear...

Ven.: Sweetheart, stop! One step at a time. Wouldn't you like to have less anger, less jealousy, less fear?

Q: Yes.

Ven.: So then that is the answer to your question. As you keep understanding it, you'll get less angry, less depressed, less jealous, less fearful. Isn't that fun? That's the answer to your question, darling. Do you hear me? So just keep on bopping... You look really doubtful. What's your doubt?

Q: Well, I think to go there, there's a fear in going there...

Ven.: Going where?

Q: To emptiness...to really realizing, you know, what you're presenting, I think there's a fear of letting go of the misery... not misery, I mean like...because then you won't be attached, and then you will...

Ven.: Right. But that's just all a bit intellectual... You just do it one day at a time and just plod along one foot in front of the other, and don't go on about it too much and speculate too much. Just go one -- thinking about it, and the end result can be fearful, but that's intellectual. If you take it one step at a time, suddenly you discover that you're there, you're going to be surprised... You understand my point. Just take it one day at a time, honey...just keep plodding. Look back at how far you've come, check how far you've got to go and just keep moving. And before you know it, you'll have a realization of emptiness right there, it'll take you by surprise...

Labeling

01:37:46

Q: Isn't it all going backwards, into not taking the steps of labeling, getting back to the positive/negative...

Ven.: What, darling? Sorry?

Q: It just seems like, hmm... a large piece of it in my mind, my mind is creating those negatives and positives by laying all my conditioned pieces on an object, or a situation or a topic. So, is it like drawing, trying to just be conscious or mindful of that?

Ven.: Yeah, mindful of trying to see each moment in your experiences, in your relationships, in the events, in your sense of self, trying to distinguish between the facts and the fiction. That's the job of being a Buddhist, every day. Deeper and deeper... one day at a time. Yes?

Q: So, one step at a time and things like that -- 'oh, wow, this is a habit', or 'oh wow, gee, I thought that was beautiful but maybe it's ugly', or 'gee, that person sees this as ugly and I see it as beautiful', or -- you can fill in the blanks. So you kind of take a little step back...

Ven.: Everyday, you're just looking freshly at things and try to discover what's real and what's not. That's the one. And, you know, if you're using Buddha's view of this, then Buddha's saying we've got all these lies in the mind. One lie is called attachment that exaggerates the beautiful things. One lie is aversion which exaggerates the ugliness of things. One lie is permanence which thinks everything is solid and unchanging. So all these different lies we have and they -- believing in those lies is why we suffer. So, every time we catch ourselves grasping onto the beautiful cup and arguing with Bob that it really is a nice cup, you catch your mind and you get a bit flexible -- you go, 'oh, alright then, Bob's right, yeah, it's cool...' You give up on your little view, meanwhile, you know. 'Cause one of the main functions of the ego-grasping, the deepest delusion -- the mother of the others -- is that it has this aspect -- (they all have this, but this is the primordial one) of grasping. It holds on tight. It's -- like you said -- scared of letting go. 'Letting go' is a great term -- ego holds on tight. It is scary to let go 'cause there's an instant sense we're going to *lose* something. But -- yes, we're going to lose something. We're going to lose the rubbish, you know. That's the point. Yes, you're right. Yes?

Remembering Impermanence

01:40:27

Q: So, for me, what works for me now at this point in my life, is just remembering impermanence.

Ven.: Yes, that's a good one, yes, exactly. Precisely.

Q: It's samsara... it's all impermanent. I'm not able to intellectualize anymore, to any depth, so I have to simplify...

Ven.: That's right, darling. Impermanence sounds so simple, but actually -- and it's 'junior school' in all the teachings -- but actually, already it's so profound... and actually they say by realizing things are impermanent is a perfect stepping stone to realizing emptiness; because you're loosening the grip. Even in one of schools of thought of Buddhism, they mistake the realization of subtle impermanence for the realization of emptiness. So, you can easily be tricked into thinking they're the same. So this is a perfect...

Q: What did you just say?

Ven.: In one of the particular schools of thought, their view of subtle impermanence is the same view of the previous school of thought -- they think that's emptiness. So, in other words, impermanence at the subtle level means 'the second you think there's a cup, already it's changing', you can't even find a millisecond of a cup that's not changing. So it's like emptiness. So, it's a really good stepping-stone. It's marvelous. If we can realize impermanence, especially at the gross level -- that we're going to die -- we're already blissful. It's a perfect stepping-stone to emptiness. And it's manageable, you know. It's perfect. Perfect, sweetheart, perfect. What else? It's a quarter to nine... Go on?

Q: I was thinking when she was speaking, I thought, when I first started hearing about the teachings on emptiness, in particular from Rinpoche many years ago, it *was* terrifying. It was really scary because what I found myself needing to let go of was *eons* of habits and attachment.

And luckily -- it's like one of the Kadampa geshe said, 'We're fortunate that old age comes on slowly...if it happened all at once we couldn't bear it.' In that same way, I was thinking that -- ooh! If I suddenly 'got' emptiness, ooh, everything would shatter apart...

Ven.: And that's the one about leaping too far into the future of it. That's it. Take it one step at a time.

Q: (unintelligible...)

Ven.: Yeah, that's right. No, that's right... Then we think it's too -- like if we think we want to look like Arnie Schwarzenegger, it looks like, 'Oh my God, how can I be like this. Look at me now all puny and pathetic.' But you forget that it's a process. You don't get to be like Arnie Schwarzenegger overnight. One step at a time, you know. Before you know it, you're looking like Arnie Schwarzenegger.

Q: Aw, he's deteriorated... already impermanent...(Laughter)

Changing the Mental Script

01:43:27

Ven.: That's true... I know... So, well, I think, emptiness... the thing is... experiential... One way His Holiness, so sweetly -- one of the -- one way of saying 'seeing things interdependently', which is the same as seeing dependent arising

is that simply you can see something from another point of view. You think of that, it sounds so simple. But if your mind is flexible enough to change the view you have -- because if you look at our minds now, we are *stuck* with a view, 'I'm this.' 'I'm that.' 'I'm depressed.' 'This is no good.' 'I do this.' -- and we reinforce that story everyday. So all you've got to do is simply decide you're going to put a different script in your mind. See it from another point of view. It's magic. It's astonishing. It sounds so simple, but that is really the implication of seeing that nothing has an inherent nature! But we cling to our stories, you know. And another way of saying it -- it's a nice term we use in the West, but it's a good way of saying it -- all the viewpoints in our mind are just elaborate stories that we tell, and then we tell, and then we tell, and we keep telling every single day and we believe and reinforce. And then we cling to them and we fight to hold on to our right to have them. I mean, my mother used to say, 'You're your own worst enemy, Bobbsie...' (She called me 'Bobbsie') It's right. We are.

I mean, sometimes we have to fool ego. There's various ways of being your own therapist, you know. One way, we've got to go deep inside. We've got to look in and see all the fears and the drama and try and unpack them. But I'm telling you -- it's not a joke -- another method is you simply decide you're going to speak or think differently. So, some person I was talking to yesterday, I said, 'One of your practices should be just stop speaking certain things.' This is profound. I tell you. We -- you know, we have our neurotic views about ourself and one of our commonest habits, we burst it out our mouth to whoever's listening. Our own view, our low self-esteem view. Well, excuse me, if you just made a decision to stop saying those words, guess what? You're going to 'fake it 'til you make it'.

It's a profound change, to change your speech. Forget about going deep inside! Just tell yourself to shut up and make a decision: 'I will not ever say anything negative about myself in front of other people.' We love to put ourselves down to other people, thinking it's humility. Excuse me, it's being arrogant! Who do you think you are talking about yourself all the time to me, thank you very much! Putting yourself up, putting yourself down -- it's the same problem. One looks in the mirror and says, 'Oh, I'm so ugly...' One looks in the mirror and says, 'Oh, I'm so beautiful.' They're both the same problem! So just make a decision to stop certain speech, you know. Just stop certain behavior. Or, make a decision just to begin to think different thoughts, that's more difficult, but just change the verbal one. This is profound, I tell you. You're going to suddenly leap into a new habit. You're *causing* yourself to think differently. It's not so complicated sometimes. Do you understand my point?

And we get obsessed with trying to have to get to the root of it and try and understand where it came from... and of course in the materialist world, that means working out 'what your mamma did and work out what your bloody father did'. Who cares about them? You know, being your own therapist in Buddhism -- you don't worry about your family, you look into your own mind! But even that wasn't what I was saying, you don't always have to do that all the time. We can theorize things to death, and nothing will change.

Just suddenly, we're going to make a decision to change. You change your behavior. You decide you're going to start doing this. You'll go to the gym. 'I'll eat this food.' 'I will do that.' 'I will stop saying those words.' It is *profound*. And then your mind will catch up with it, changing habits. Seeing something from a different perspective -- it sounds so simple but it's really profound. And you can see, anybody who's really ignorant, really narrow-minded, really fundamentalist; they're incapable of doing this.

As Lama Zopa says -- and this is delusions in general -- 'We don't even think -- when we're in the midst of being samsaric -- we don't even realize that our mind is playing a role in this scenario.' 'We think the cake is 100% delicious and divine and it's sitting there begging me to eat it. 'What can I do? It's not my fault,' we'll think... We don't think our mind plays any role at all. This is the classic victim view, and this is the view of self-existence. And that's the fundamentalist view. That's the narrow-mindedness of ignorance. Look at the world.

You know, when somebody says, 'George Bush is revolting,' you know... Like I know that's all past now, but people would hate George Bush. They didn't think, 'Oh, well, I realize my mind is seeing George Bush as negative, but I'm sure George Bush is a really nice man. It's just my view.' What a joke! We don't think we have a thing called a 'view'. We just think what we see is the truth.

As Lama Zopa says, 'It's bad enough that we see things wrongly. But the worst part is we believe it's true.' So he says one practice here -- I mean, we've got the belief real deep -- so at least stop believing in it. This is why Pabongka says, 'Even if you're not sure the meaning of the word 'emptiness' -- just to doubt, just to think maybe things don't exist in the way they appear to me.' But as Buddha talks, there's this big disconnect between how things appear and how they actually exist. And once we can get our head around this, we're really on track with being a Buddhist, I tell you. We've got to fool ourselves -- we've got to 'fake it 'til we make it'. It's like that. It really is like that. It isn't that difficult to change our minds, to change our words even, to change our behavior, to see something from a different point of view. So simple, so profound. Slowly, slowly, slowly, okay? One step at a time. And that's why it's so important to have some practice in the morning -- you get up, make some offerings, take refuge -- do that before you do anything else, you know -- don't leave it 'til afterwards, because you'll never do it then -- and then, you know, a bit of practice, determine that you're going to, you know, make the most of today, and then you watch the mind during the day and at the end of the day, you do the four opponent powers, which we're going to do Wednesday night. We always talk about it when I'm here, and I'll always talk about it 'til the day I die. It's one of our best practices. Lama Zopa says we are *insane* not to do it every day, you know. It's just this marvelous, again, psychological practice helping us move in new directions. It's just an excellent practice.

So, you do something in the morning, you watch your mind during the day, you do something at night, and, as Lama Yeshe says, 'You go to bed with a happy mind'. And you get up again the next day, and you keep going 'til you die. It's

not difficult, you know. It's just that dramatic, ridiculous nonsense in the head *makes* it difficult. Just one day at a time, one step at a time.

The Importance of Rejoicing

01:50:36

And then, the important thing is to rejoice. Delight in our progress. To delight in our good qualities. We never do this. Because you know why? Because ego loves trouble. Ego is addicted to misery. That's the terrible irony of ego. So, you know, we can all go on about our bad qualities. We love going on about our bad qualities. But you ask a person, 'Tell me some of your good qualities,' we look embarrassed.

'Oh, I don't know...'

But we're desperate for other people to tell us our good qualities, isn't it? But why we can't do it ourselves? It's kind of dumb, you know. We get offended if someone points out a bad quality, but we hunger like vampires for them to praise us, and then we'll go, 'No, no, that's wrong. It's not true, it's not right...'

So, we're so mixed, you know, so stupid. So we need to rejoice in our good qualities. We need to delight in our progress. That's why it's contextual -- we've got to see how far we've come; where we are now; and how far we're going. And the other thing to remember -- and this is where it's really tricky, you know -- because we have this view that, 'oh, now I'm practicing Buddhism, I must get better', and somehow we find that we think we're getting *worse*... I have a friend who's been doing years of long retreats -- five year, four year, three year retreats -- the last thirty years, you know? And at one point after many years of retreat, he's out of his brain with anger and rage and pride and all this rubbish. He's going crazy and he felt so distressed; and he went to Lama Zopa Rinpoche and told him. And Lama Zopa laughed and laughed and said, 'Fantastic. The dirt has to come out.' And this, I swear to you, is an extremely important point to remember. It's just like if you start to eat properly. You go on a fast. You eat good food. Guess what? All your stinky smelly farts are going to come, your stinky smelly breath and all your zits on your body; the dirt is coming out. So, you know it's a good sign! You go to the gym for the first time, you come home with muscles you didn't believe you had. You don't think that pain's a bad sign; you know it is a good sign. So, we have to have this intelligent interpretation of our practice. Many people get worse in their depression, get worse in their anger; you're *not* getting worse because you're working on it. But it's fiercely coming up out of you. *The dirt has to come out*. So we have got to be really intelligent in our interpretation of this; and not just get all self --pity and freak out and think we are getting worse. We're not. There's a big difference in feeling angry and working on it and feeling angry and following it. It's like, you know, I've got a problem with Bob and I hate him and I go to Dinae and all I do is say, 'Bob this and Bob that, and he's so evil and he's this and he's that...'

'Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know what you mean, Robina...'

All I've done is increase my anger. Right? Wouldn't you agree? But let's say she's my therapist; and I'm struggling with my anger, and I'm crying with my anger; and I go on about Bob. But the only reason I'm talking to her is because I'm trying to get rid of my anger. That's different. That's not being angry. That's working on your anger. So, you've got to see the difference. Do you understand

that? Don't be so scared of our emotions, you know. We're sort of like all these goody-goodies and we want to be all nice and holy and when a naughty thought comes up we get all depressed... excuse me, you've got to have your hands in your own shit, okay? You've got to see the rubbish in there. It is a good sign, be brave!

So what I'm getting at here is, it's bad enough having anger and depression -- I always figure like this -- it's bad enough being angry; why be miserable as well? It's bad enough being depressed; why be miserable as well? So all we've got to do is have the intelligence to see the rubbish in our mind *and then interpret it differently*. Are you hearing my point, people?

Instead of thinking: 'Oh, I'm depressed, I'm getting worse, I'm bad. This is wrong. I shouldn't be this way...' That's double trouble. The depression and the anger are the vomit coming out from the past; you're cleaning it up. The interpretation of it: 'this is good, it's transforming problems, I'm getting rid of it, I'm purifying...' You'll be happy about being depressed! And I'm not joking. This is really important. We've got to catch our minds and learn how to see things differently. This stuff has to come from the past; it's vomit. It's got to come up. It's like you're digging up your garden, and you've got a great big mess there; it looks worse than it's ever been, but you're so happy about it because now you're cleaning it up, finally. It's going to look worse before it gets better. This is reasonable. We all know this. So, we've really got to be sensible how we interpret our stuff, you know. It's extremely important. And then be brave -- you've got to be brave. We're so scared of our emotions; we just want it to go all away, you know. We just don't want to look at it; we're so scared. We've got to be courageous; we've got to look into it, we've got to taste it, look at it, feel it, look at it, understand it, swim in it and *not identify with it*. This is the point. This is a really major point; we've got to be courageous. Not joking. To have this idea that being a Buddhist is walking around all mindful looking holy with a cute little grin on your face -- like what I said yesterday -- it is such a clichéd idea, I tell you. Eventually you will, you'll be like His Holiness -- a happy laughing guy the whole time. But, way to go, baby.

Q: He's not happy laughing all the time...

Ven.: He is.

Q: I've seen him in Dharamsala...

Ven.: He is still happy, the next minute he's laughing with tears coming out... because he's got the ability to cut the thing...he's got compassion. And compassion means tears, but it's not suffering. I know what you're saying, but you know what I'm saying, too. I don't mean in the stupid sense, happy, smiley, you know, but mind stable like a rock, you know. So -- slowly, slowly, folks. One step at a time. Be brave. That'll do. Allright?

We dedicate; we think, all sitting here now, listening -- I'm listening as much as you guys. So thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk -- I'd look stupid

talking to myself! So thank you for coming, I'm most grateful -- it's my practice, my analytical meditation; blabbing on to you lot. I'm really sincere, you know. So, you know, a few little pennies dropped, tonight. That's very good, isn't it? We delight in this, another step forward, more insights coming, slowly, slowly, you know... may we nourish all these seeds by our continued practice, our continued effort, our continued rejoicing, so these seeds ripen in the development of our amazing potential for our sake and the sake of all our suffering mothers. And it doesn't matter, we'll never give up, no matter how long it takes. We just keep on bopping.

(Dedication prayers chanted in Tibetan)

May we never develop -- even for a moment -- wrong views towards the deeds of our most precious gurus. With faith and respect gained from seeing their goodness may their full inspiration flow into our hearts.

Okay. Thank you.

Transcribed by Fran McDermott