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*Dependent Arising (unedited transcript)*  
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### *Introduction and Refuge*

So, again we think, again we think: it's our mind, so we can put whatever thoughts we like into it. We need to be in charge of it, and we're going to listen to these ideas of the Buddha, and today we'll probably talk about, as it says on the poster, dependent arising, emptiness; which is the way things exist, finally, Buddha says. The way things actually exist, he says; so that we can see if there is anything to apply from all this to our lives; see if we can see the experiential application of it to help us become these marvelous people we can become, so we can be of benefit to others, all the way to Buddhahood.

Sag gye chho dang tshog kyi chhog nam la  
Jang chub bar du dag ni kyab su chhi  
Dag gi jin sog gyi pa so nam gyi  
Dro la phan chhir sang gya drub par shog (3x)

Hmm...alright; so, this week we've been looking at the fundamentals of especially the wisdom wing; we touched on the compassion wing last night – the relationship between working on ourselves and our ability to be of benefit to others, not just some kind of nice gooey feeling; having some sweet feelings for people – not like that. A quite immense amount of work we need to do on our own minds -- we were discussing what we have to do on our own mind. Touched upon the compassion wing...

### *The Primordial Error*

2:00

So now, you know, having kind of led our minds, prepared our minds, now we can start looking at the deepest, the most primordial, the biggest lie of all in the mind; remembering that all these neuroses, which we know are very painful and disturbing, like anger and attachment and jealousy and pride and low self-esteem have also this, you know, interestingly, this function of being liars. It's very curious to us to think like this. One of the terms used to refer to these delusional – delusions – the extent to which we are caught up in attachment, anger, pride, jealousy, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera is the extent to which two things: we are disturbed, or we're suffering, and the extent to which we are *not* in sync with reality. This is the really unique approach that Buddhist psychology takes, you know. When we can *get* this point, we can *see* this, we're really on track with Buddha's view of the universe; because remember, he says – we looked at the Third Noble Truth – he says we all have the potential to achieve this word called 'nirvana', which means the cessation -- specifically the cessation of suffering, and even more specifically, its causes. Then we look at the Second Noble Truth and we see what are the causes; and it comes down to the negative states of mind, neurotic states of mind. They are the cause of our suffering. The third, crucial point that Buddha makes which is this from his observation –

which is *not* how we think in our culture, which is really quite a shocking concept, quite radical,  
-- is that these negative states of mind are adventitious, which simply means that they're not at the core of our being. They're not integral to who we are, which is such a shock to us, such a surprise.

We've got to understand this point; Buddhism is a lot of nonsense if we can't make sense of this point, because the basis of all one's practice is the identification and the removal of these states of mind from our mental consciousness. That's it – so simple.

So if we are attempting to give this a go, based upon the idea that we'd like to be happy, thank you, all the time, stably – that sounds good, the consequence of achieving this – based upon taking on board the idea that, you know, that the negative states of mind are the cause of our suffering; and even more insane, more radical – as I'm saying – that we can *remove* them from our mind. This is a shocking point; I can't say it enough! We're so used to hearing it in Buddhism, we just gloss over it, you know. It should give us so much confidence; it should inspire us to never give up.

So then we have to find the methods, don't we; if we want to rid the mind of these neuroses we need to find the method of how to identify them, 'cause if you've got to get rid of cancer – if you think you've got cancer and some doctor says, yes, you can get rid of it, you're so excited, and you want him to put every microscope on every bit of your body to find the cancers -- don't pull out the wrong ones, please! You've got to locate the exact cancerous cells and rid your body of those, let's say, you know? You don't want him to pull out the wrong cancers, I mean the wrong cells, pull out the nice ones; how silly.

So, we have to learn to distinguish in our minds between the various states of mind in this big soup of emotion that is our crazy mind right now; this crazy insane asylum, insane asylum in our head, where we can't tell one bit from another ninety percent of the time. The only reason we even know we're angry is because our body feels violent, just like there's a storm hit us, and we're practically out of control – a bit late, I'm sorry! The only reason you know you're depressed is because you can't get out of bed one morning – a bit late! We've got to look into the mind and go much deeper and identify these states of mind way, way, way sooner than that; it's way too late at that point. This is where meditation skills come in, concentration techniques; but you know, you can concentrate 'til the cows come home – you can be mindful and concentrate on your own mind, like I said, 'til the cows come home but you won't understand what's there until you can label accurately what you're concentrating on, which is where you have to learn Buddha's psychology, which is the nuts-and-bolts of how the mind works. And this is what we're got to right here; this is what we've been talking about and again, what we're leading to right here.

***Buddha's Psychology – The Three Categories of States of Mind***  
6:32

So, in this mental consciousness, like we've been talking, Buddha would say there are three categories of states of mind; no fourth category. His psychology is very simple and it hasn't changed in two-and-a-half thousand years. Buddhists are either stubborn, or it works; and it's up to us to find out. So, they're called negative, positive, and neutral states of mind, very simple words. These are technical -- *technical* -- terms, not moralistic ones; and the 'neutral', like I've been mentioning, doesn't mean they're not important; it means they've got the characteristic of neither having the virtuous or the non-virtuous characteristics. But they're crucial states of mind, like I mentioned: mindfulness, concentration, you know, all kinds of states of mind that are neither good nor bad, but are crucial to function well as a human being. We need them; they're really important. But the ones that cause our suffering; these are the ones we really absolutely have to learn to home in on, just like when you go to that doctor! You got to home in on the yucky stuff, you know, and distinguish it from the good stuff. That is the job of being a Buddhist; and it's a tough, tough, difficult job, like I've been saying. Because why? Because why? Well, because why, according to Buddha, we've come programmed with eons of habit -- which sounds hilarious to us -- of following these negative states of mind to the point we just kind of think they are who we are. We don't even hardly have a name for half of them; we just think, 'Oh well, this is normal, I'm just a human being. I go crazy. I get depressed. I want to kill people. That's normal.' No, Buddha says, that's terrible mental suffering; and you don't need it, baby, you can get rid of it.

So, we're totally programmed with all this stuff; totally addicted to these habits, so this is why it is so difficult. Even we do identify it, why it's so difficult to change 'cause they're deeply ingrained in our being. So, it just takes time, you know.

### ***Ignorance: The Root Delusion and Source of Our Suffering***

**8:30**

So, the negative states of mind, like I said, are the key and we've been discussing the regular, day-to-day ones, we've been looking at the ones, basically the one that runs us from day to day which is called attachment -- again, so hard to see; simple, cute word, but so hard to see. It's fundamental energy -- it's energetic level is this sense of dissatisfaction: this aching *feeling* of dissatisfaction which we utterly believe is true, then we hanker after things, which is the beginning of the grosser functioning of attachment in daily life, which then -- what does it hanker after? Obviously, the first level of this stuff is the objects of the senses; looking for something that looks delicious to my eyes -- and that's attachment making it look more delicious -- then, attachment makes you believe that when I get it, I'll get happy; and then attachment makes you shove it in the mouth, mouthful after mouthful, waiting for happiness to come; and all you get is misery and fat stomach and more depressed and more hungry for more cake tomorrow -- that's the killer.

So attachment -- just this one alone is this massive liar that leads us up garden paths; but utterly our main addiction. It's the nature of this universe, you know, so it's so hard to get out of. That's bad enough; well, that's not even the main delusion; this is what we're getting to now: the root delusion, the mother of them

all, the main lie, the source of all the suffering such that when *it* is removed from the mind one has achieved – one is now becoming – now cannot go back, can only move forward. This is a crucial, crucial turning point. When we finally rid the mind of the gross levels of this one, it can only then move forward and finally achieve our own liberation and Buddhahood. And the words here for this one – I think we began to talk about it a bit, I can't remember now – all these words; and part of our problem is we've got to get our head around the way these words are used – because they're so – they're Indian, they're Japanese, they're Chinese, they're Tibetan; when you read all the books – you know, because all the people have kept the lineage of the way they've learned it from their masters, and so it's kept very whole; but unfortunately for our minds, it's abstract until we've studied Buddhism for years. So, it's really helpful for us to unpack these concepts and get a way that we can understand them and put our head around them so we can have some confidence in identifying this deepest state of mind: the root delusion, the root misconception, the root disturbing emotion, the source of all suffering.

So what's that called? Very simple – 'ignorance'. But, it's obviously got a very particular definition. In Tibetan, that's '*ma rig pa*' – 'un-awareness'. Unawareness. So, this is a very – it's a regular word, this, but it's got a very particular, specific meaning, of course. So in general – just a general meaning here – this ignorance; its main job is to cause us to be ignorant about *how things exist, actually, finally*. This is a very abstract idea to us. 'How things exist, ultimately.' What does that mean, you know? We don't talk like that in our daily life; but don't mystify it, okay? So, this ignorance; it works in a very particular way; and when we understand this way – which I'm about to talk now – then we'll understand why it's so hard to even identify, not to mention uproot this ignorance.

So, if I – you know, you say to me, 'What's that?' -- you point to this thing here – and I'll just say, 'I don't know,' now that's called ignorance, isn't it? I don't know it's called a 'microphone'; but that's simple ignorance, that's easy ignorance; you can fix that quickly. I've got no vested interest in holding on to this ignorance. I've got – you know, I just don't know what it is. There's a nice space in my mind and you say, 'It's a microphone!' I'll go, 'Thank you very much!' and I'll fill the hole with 'microphone'. Now I see the truth; that's easy. If we had that level of ignorance, which is that merely we don't know how things are, we'd just learn the new words, they'd fall into place and we'd be enlightened in about a day, you know, in a week, a few weeks. We could learn it all – a little bit longer than that.

So *why* – so *what is it* about this ignorance that makes it so hard to replace with wisdom? This is the point. Not only is this ignorance – not only do I not know 'it's a microphone'; I am convinced it's a *cake*. No, it can't be a cake, because I'd try to eat it; I'm convinced it's a *knife*. Okay, just let's say; it sounds stupid. In other words, this ignorance not only doesn't know it's a microphone, but it's made up its own nonsense; and I will defend my right – 'It is a knife! What do you mean?' I'll fight and have wars with you; I'll argue, I'll get upset... So, it's much harder to get me to see the truth, isn't it, because I'm holding on to my own fantasy; that's the problem with not only the ignorance, but all the other

delusions. Not only do we not know how things actually *are*, but we are clinging frantically and desperately to the stories that our delusions have made up; and we believe that *that* is what's true. Buddha says it's like 'double trouble'. This is a *crucial* point.

So this is why, as Lama Zopa said recently, if you want to choose even just one practice, choose a purification practice. Because the developing – the putting into the mind of the – here we are, taking Buddha's view of the universe as our hypothesis, okay? And so let's just assume that is the view that we are trying to internalize into our mind. Let's say we have chosen to be a Buddhist and that is the view we are trying to take into our mind; they're the words we're trying to get accustomed with. We're trying to think about 'impermanence' and see the meaning. We're trying to think about 'emptiness' and see the meaning. We're trying to think about 'bodhicitta' and see the meaning. 'Karma', and see the meaning. That's the one we're eagerly trying to put into our mind, because Buddha's saying that's the truth, and that's the truth we're trying to internalize.

### ***Holding Onto Our Mistake***

**14:35**

Now, that's easy, like I said. You learn the word, and the meaning will become immediately clear to you, 'cause you've got nothing holding you back. You've got nothing hindering you. But now, because we've got all these *lies* in the mind – and we're massively grasping at them; we're massively attached to our own view of how things are; look at why you think you fight with people over just a piece of cake, over what time you come home, over who does the dishes; not like the big meaning of the universe – and we hold onto our position:

'No, I'm right!'

'No, no, you're right!' or; "I'm wrong!" -- I mean,

'You're wrong, I'm right!'

We fight! Because why? Because we're completely, frantically -- like a vampire -- attached to our story: the story of ignorance, attachment, anger, pride, jealousy, low self-esteem. Look when you're miserable, look when another person's miserable: now, you know them; you know they're quite intelligent, they're quite pretty, they've got this quality, that quality; many people like them...you know people like this. But look when they're depressed, look what comes out of their mouth, look at the story they're telling: 'I'm hopeless, I'm no good, I can't do anything, I'm ugly, horrible. Everything's against me. I'm useless. There's nothing worthwhile in life.' We *hear* this; it's like an elaborate story that person has, that they *believe is the truth*. You'll even argue with them; they don't believe a single word you're telling them. We know this; we recognize this in our own mind every day.

We cling desperately like a junkie -- like frantic; it's like immediate, spontaneous -- to the crummy stories that our stupid roommates are telling us every single day. You understand what I'm saying, I'm sure. That's the problem! They are the problem -- you've got to put atomic bombs under the lies; and that's the purification practice function. You've got to get rid of them -- you know, you can't grow a flower if your garden is overrun by weeds. If you've just got a barren ground, you pop a few flowers in and they'll grow like crazy! Same here;

you've got to get the weeds out of the way. You've got forests of weeds in the mind – another analogy – and that's all the lies, the misconceptions, the neuroses, the delusions, the liars. But the point is here to see how they are all fundamentally misconceptions; dramatic nonsense stories. That's what's hard to see. We can kind of hear it; when a person's depressed, we keep thinking it's their genes or their DNA or their chemicals that are wrong, but when we hear the story that they're saying – listen to me! That is what depression is – it's an elaborate series of conceptual ideas: 'I am no good.' 'I am hopeless.' What do you think anger is? Listen to anger: 'You did this!' 'I hate you!' 'You're evil!' 'You are the cause of all my suffering!' Listen to the words these emotions cause us to speak. That is the sign that they are *concepts* – with masses of emotional packaging, of course they are; but the words we speak tell us what anger is saying, tell us the story of attachment, tell us the story of depression; and that's the point we have to see: how they're elaborate conceptual stories and they're *liars*, Buddha says. There's some truth in there, so we've got to unpack them and analyze them in a very sophisticated way, but it really takes sharp analysis to do this, to be your own therapist. Are we communicating, people? I'm sure we are.

So, this ignorance that is the deepest, most primordial lie of all; it's so primordial – certainly in our western culture, psychologically speaking, we don't even give a name for it – well, we do actually; we actually reinforce our right to *be* it, which is --in the sense that all the delusions, all the neuroses lie about things and as we know, anger – and exaggerate. Anger exaggerates the ugliness of that thing. Attachment exaggerates the deliciousness of that thing. Depression exaggerates my horribleness. Ignorance exaggerates the 'delicious-cake-ness', the 'ugly-Fred-ness'; it underpins the other delusions, and it causes the delicious cake to look -- and this is the word for it – 'inherently' delicious: delicious 'out there', delicious 'in-and-of-itself', delicious in a way that has nothing to do with me; there's this delicious cake out there just vibrating deliciousness, begging me to eat it and what can poor me do, I'm just this innocent victim who saw the cake! Look, the cake's doing it to me! That's how ego feels; like this little kind of lemming, you know? Mean old Fred caused me suffering, mean old ugly chocolate cake causes me to be, you know, attached... Like this innocent victim, like even the way we talk; this is the voice of ignorance: 'I didn't ask to get born. Hey, hey, it's not my fault!' This is what ego does! It has no sense of accountability because it has no sense of involvement in anything that goes on in our life. 'I'm just this victim to whom things just happen,' and that's the expression; that's the feeling of this lie of which we speak – this is the intentional words for it – this ignorance is believing I exist '*inherently*'; That that thing out there is *inherent*, is intrinsically this.

### *The Definition of 'Inherent'*

#### **20:10**

That means, it's something that *does* exist, that doesn't depend upon anything else. That's the way of saying that if something *were* inherent, intrinsic; existing in and of itself; this is the word for it. If something did exist this way, then it would be immoveable. It would be completely independent, it would have no factors, nothing would impact upon it, it could not impact upon anything else, it is not the product of causes and conditions; it's *clear* there's nothing existing like

this. And the Buddha says ignorance *thinks* everything exists like that. So, we can't see it because we're so caught up in it; and this is what we have to unpack, the deepest lie of all that we have to unpack; and this is the hardest one.

So we know – we hear when we read the texts – ‘Everything is empty,’ we’ll hear. ‘Emptiness is the ultimate nature of reality,’ we’ll hear. We just kind of go, ‘What?’ you know; so confused. Isn’t it? Did we talk about the emptiness of – the absence of keys? We did, didn’t we? We did that a bit, didn’t we? Okay, we began looking at that. So, that was just to get our head around the use of this word and the way they talk in the Buddhist teachings and it’s really important to be able to unpack this intelligently and know why they talk like that. It’s not just meant to be some tricky, abstract thing, you know? It’s got very good meaning. It’s like we talked about the ‘absence of keys’ or the ‘absence of red’. You were here for that, right, some of you? Okay. This is just – talking like this is just to get our head around the use of the word ‘emptiness’, not of ‘inherent existence’ yet; don’t go there yet. We’ve got two troubles, you know? We’ve got – it’s like, we don’t know what ‘emptiness’ means, just the use of the word; and we don’t know what ‘inherent existence’ means; that’s like double trouble. Forget ‘inherent existence’-- we’ll go there in a minute; but the use of the word ‘emptiness’, the way it’s turned into a *noun*. Like, you know, like I said when we looked at the cup, we said ‘It’s not red,’ that’s a simple way to repeat, ‘Yeah, you’re right, Robina, it’s not red.’ We get that; we know what ‘not red’ means. But we need – in order – okay, I want to go back a bit here and try and get some of Buddha’s philosophical context here... It’s got great meaning, you know?

Okay, Buddha’s saying right now that we’re in la-la land in relation to reality. The negative states of mind are the part of ourselves, that part of our mind that lie to us and cause everything -- all the people, the things, the events; this is the words – to appear in ways that isn’t accurate. It’s like you’re colorblind; you’ve got the wrong glasses on and pink – you know -- white looks red to you. Then, you’re not in touch with reality, are you; you’re seeing things wrongly. You’re seeing things wrongly. This is how Buddha is speaking: so simply. It’s not meant to be twisted and weird, you know? It’s not tricky. He just says that the delusions in our mind, which are so habitual, literally – this is it – cause things and people and events to literally *appear wrongly* to us.

### ***Our Job as a Buddhist***

**23:33**

So, what he says is: all minds have the capacity to cognize that which exists without mistake. That’s an omniscient mind, people! He says everyone has the potential to accomplish that perfection. That’s the goal of the Buddhist: to see things as they are. Why? Like I say, not just to get full marks on your exam and be some clever philosopher; because that’s the source of happiness and the ability to cause you to help others, because you’re now in touch with reality. It’s such an interesting way to talk.

So that’s our job. We’ve got to learn to see the parts of our mind that are causing – that lie to us and cause things to look wrongly. Okay. So, then, when you study Buddha’s philosophy, there are various synonyms for ‘that which exists’; and

this is a crucial point, because he says we're trying to get in touch with 'that which exists'. There're several synonyms for 'that which exists': the term 'existent', itself, 'existent', the term 'object', the term 'established base', the term – there's several -- 'object of knowledge' is another one. Very specific words; each one is a synonym that's used in different contexts to refer to 'that which exists' – one point. Second point: remember, Buddha says all minds have the capacity to be in sync with that which exists; and we need to do this because being in sync with things that *don't* exist is why we *suffer*, people; and we can get rid of suffering. It's very logical, the whole presentation.

### ***Proving Conventional Phenomena***

**25:19**

Okay. So. So, we have to then learn how to cognize, how to identify that which exists. We have to learn to identify what does exist; what does exist. So, we're trying to develop the virtuous, the positive, the accurate states of mind that *can* cognize that which exists. So, okay; next point: do you agree that 'white' exists? Somebody? Thank you! Okay, we agree. So, that's called an 'object of knowledge'. That's called an 'existent'. That's called a 'phenomenon', using these terms, right? It exists. Now, let's start here: 'How do you know it exists, Robina?' Well let's prove it; it's not complicated. Let's prove it; and this is proving something *conventionally*, and it's very simple. Well, let's say, we'll call it 'mug', okay? We call it 'mug'; we agree this is a mug. Now, we all know, in the English language – because we've all been to school, we've all learned English – that the sound m-u-g refers to that phenomenon.

'So what's that, Mummy?

'Well, darling, a 'mug' is a flat...' – you know, she'd give you the definition, and the definition has two parts. The first part tells you its conventional characteristics:

'Well, sweetheart, it's that flat-bottomed clay container that's got a handle.' And I'll see it, and I'll go, 'Yeah, I see that,' but I'm not happy yet. 'But Mummy, what is it? What does it do?' You've got to learn the second part of the definition, which tells you its *job*, its function; because it's really obvious that what does exist – and we're talking conventionally here – has to be able to be pointed to, you have to name it, and you have to tell – you have to give its function; you can't just make something up and say,

'Oh, 'oo-di-da' exists.'

'What's 'oo-di-da'?

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

You can't talk like that, it's cheap and nasty; but we live like that. We believe in loads of junk that don't exist. We believe in a cake that'll make me happy! Excuse me, there's no such thing existing. That does not exist! Can you hear the point I'm getting at? So, we've got to sort out the facts from fiction here.

So, if something *does* exist, before you even begin to open your mouth to discuss it, you have to name it, you have to define it, and then, that's not enough; I can tell you that a cup is a thing that – 'Oh, darling, it's what holds my tea.' Now I know what it *does*, but that's not enough to prove it exists, I've got to make sure that it does fulfill its function. So I get a pot of tea and I pour it in and I see it in fact does hold my tea, which has proven it fulfills its function. But that's not

quite enough to really prove it exists; we've got to make sure there are no other valid cognitions in other minds that contradict that. This is logical; this is how we all live. Simple.

So, we've all come to a conclusion, then, that this is called a 'mug'. We've proven it. We all shake hands; we've written a contract; we all agree that's a mug. That's what life is all about; we have all these conceptual ideas, labels, names; this is conventional reality. It's very simple. There's cups and toilets and knives and we've got -- there must be trillions of things that we have come up with; names, functions, and then we've proved that it functions. That's how we all exist; we function beautifully, and we're good at these things. It's a very excellent thing to think. So then, straightaway, if we're trying to prove -- I'd say, you know, I'm convinced that chocolate cake'll make me happy; which is what attachment thinks, totally. Well, let's prove -- use some logic here. 'Is that the cake that exists? Where's this chocolate cake that makes you happy, Robina? Please point it out to me!' If you search a little bit, logically, you will not find it; because you'll discover that the cake you've been eating every time stuffs you, doesn't make you happy; makes you miserable. I don't think I've ever met anybody who's eaten a chocolate cake that definitely brings them happiness: stable, constant happiness. Nothing. But we believe in these lies, and we are frantically upholding our right to believe in these lies. These phenomena *don't exist*. This is how Buddha's talking to us. We have to prove it but we don't like to prove it; we'd -- you see; this is the thing with our speech in our daily life; we all rabbit on about nothing ninety percent of the time. We read something, we hear about something, and then we'll act as if we know what we're talking about, and then we'll tell somebody! We're speculating ninety percent of the time; we haven't shown our source...everybody believes anything. Talk about thinking we're scientific! It's embarrassing how unscientific we actually are... We rabbit on about nothing most of the time. We believe in things; anything anyone will tell us.

'Oh, Fred did that.'

'Did he really?'

And we'll believe for evermore Fred did that. We've never checked once. We'll tell everybody else Fred did that...and we believe it's true. We haven't proved it, we haven't named it, defined it; we haven't proved it at all. So, it's really shocking how we live, you know. And it's what Buddha's saying: we're believing in garbage ninety percent of the time. No wonder we suffer!

Okay. That wasn't the point I was going to make, but I made it anyway. So go back to this point about 'what does exist': the term 'phenomenon', 'object', 'existent': these terms for 'that which does exist'. So, we have said now, that 'white' exists, okay? There's a phenomenon called 'white', isn't there? Now if we would have done the same process, we'd know the name, we refer to 'that which is white', we know it fulfills the function of 'white', like white paint, say. We all agree it's white; there's no contradictory cognition of it, then we accept it: it's white. Okay. Based upon that agreement between us, we then can say, 'That's *not red*,' can't we? We can, can't we; because we know what 'white' means. And we also know what 'red' means. We've done the same process there: we've named it,

we've defined it, we can visualize it; we've all seen 'red', so we can be confident that this is not 'red'.

### *What the Mind Cognizes*

**31:13**

So, okay, this is the point I'm getting at here now – why the use of the word 'emptiness' or 'absence', which seems quite abstract. We can see that our mind can cognize 'white'. In particular, it's your eye consciousness – that part of your mind that functions through the medium of your eyeball cognizes color, so we can agree that my consciousness cognizes 'white', didn't it? So, 'white' is an object, and 'mind' – they call that the 'subject'. Mind cognizing – it has to cognize *something*; there can't be a state of mind that is not cognizing something. That's an impossibility; because, what is mind? What's the definition of 'mind'? 'That which is *clear*, or *luminous* – which simply means it's not physical, nothing holy – but the second part tells you its *job*: to *cognize*; or the verb 'to be aware' or the verb 'to know'. This is the *function* of mind. If we all agree upon this -- this is Buddha's definition, okay – then we have to ask the question, 'Know what?' Like we said, 'held'; 'Held what?' 'Tea'. That's the verb, the 'doing' thing. A function is a 'doing' word. 'It *holds* tea.' Well, mind cognizes *what*? Guess what? 'That which exists'. 'Phenomena' – that's the other synonym, 'phenomena'. Mind cognizes 'phenomena'. Mind cognizes 'objects of knowledge'. Mind cognizes 'existents' – e-n-t-s, 'that which exists'. It's its *job*.

Okay. So, mind can cognize an object, a phenomenon called 'white'. Well, all I'm getting at with a long description is here why they use the word 'emptiness', or 'absence'. Basically, you're turning 'it's not red' into a noun, which turns it into an 'object of knowledge', and that's called 'absence of red'. Do you hear me? 'Absence of red'; that's so we can now say, 'Oh, yes, 'white' exists on that cup.' 'Oh, yes, 'absence of red' exists on that cup.' You'd agree, wouldn't you? Very simple. So, 'absence of red' is a phenomenon that *does exist* on this cup. 'White' is a phenomenon that *does exist* on this cup. So, it's in that sense the use of the word 'absence' or 'emptiness'. It's crucial. It's *crucial*.

### *Absence of 'Something'*

**33:50**

So, obviously, Buddha is not trying to get us to cognize the 'absence of red'. He couldn't care about that. He's trying to get us to cognize the absence of another phenomenon that actually doesn't exist, has *never* existed; is a complete fantasy that our minds have made up, which is called 'inherent existence'. So, of course, we have to learn about what that means. That's another discussion here. I haven't gone there yet. We've touched on it briefly, but we're trying to get our head around the use of the term 'absence of *something*'; why he talks like that. And I use this as a good example: you know, like I said, if you're really convinced this is red, you believe it –and so, you know, we just don't bully you, we can't just bully you into believing it's not red, or believing it's white, we've got to use logic and analysis, don't we? We have to check your eyes, we have to check your understanding of the colors, we have to check your glasses; so, you check all those dependent arisings, and, you know, you think it all through and you adjust the dependent arisings, so now you look again, and you'll get a big

shock, and you go, 'Oh, my gosh – it's not red!' won't you? What you've just cognized at that moment is the 'absence of red'! Just like I said about the keys – you're convinced your keys are in that little drawer, just near the front door, it's your key drawer. And you're running late and you open the drawer and you get a huge shock – 'Oh my God,' you'll say when you look in that drawer. Because why? Because you saw the 'absence of keys'!

So, obviously, this absence is a very specific kind of absence that's related to something you *thought* was there, you expected to be there, you believed was there, but isn't: 'red' in this case, 'keys' in that case. This is not too complicated, we're all intelligent people; but we've just got to understand the use of this word, which is like this: this absence of something is so vivid, so obviously, the absence of inherent existence is much more subtle. The 'absence' part we can hear; but the 'inherent existence' is our problem; we have to know what that means. 'Keys' and 'red' *do* exist – but not here – so at least we can comprehend this; but this emptiness is like a very total negation. It's the emptiness of something that has *never* existed and – the Buddha would say – could not possibly exist, *ever*. It's opposite to the fundamentals of reality. It's fundamentally impossible to exist inherently. So of course, we are happy to hear that, but we don't *get* it, because we don't *think* we cling to ourselves as inherent. We've never heard of such a thing. Mummy didn't teach us – 'Now remember, you're inherent, Robina...' No. She didn't say that. We all just knew it instinctively, Buddha says. We've been believing in this type of 'me' for eons, he says, and the part of our mind that thinks it is called this 'ignorance', this '*ma rig pa*', this 'root delusion'; that's the one that thinks that, not just about 'me', but about every single tiny thing that does exist.

So, obviously, our job is to unpack this concept of inherent existence and to try and comprehend how if something *were* inherent, intrinsic, existing in-and-of-itself, existing inherently, existing truly, self-existently – they're all synonyms – if something *were* like that, how would it *be*? Buddha says it's impossible, there can be *nothing* like this. So, it's obviously taking a lot of time for us to unpack this; to get to finally cognize, to see the shocking truth of the absence of that. Are we communicating, people? So, do you have any questions so far? We'll unpack all this and we'll go into detail, more detail. Yes?

### ***Mind Not Doing Its Proper Job***

Q: You were defining the mind and you said that its job is to cognize that which exists...

Ven.: Well, to cognize; and then you have to ask the question 'that which' – yeah; to cognize that which exists, that's right...

Q: So, but...we cognize that which doesn't exist, all the time...

Ven.: So, what's the point?

Q: So...

Ven.: But that's its proper job. It's not doing its job right now, because there can't be such a thing as cognizing that which doesn't – because strictly speaking, 'cognize' means 'that which exists'. So, we're not even cognizing anything right now, we're just seeing fantasies. But the use of the word means 'cognize that which exists'; that's its job, but it's not doing its job right now, it's messed up, 'cause you've got it wrong, you know? We've got to know where we're heading to make it -- to get it to be where it is in its true nature so that it can spontaneously cognize that which exists without mistake. Yes, Josh...

*If It Exists, You Must be Able to Name and Define It*  
**38:50**

Q: My question was, you were talking about how things – forgive me, my memory's kind of slipping right now – you were talking about how things exist and how we can prove them -- we can try to prove them – prove it, you know, the process we go about trying to prove it.

Ven.: Well, in simple ordinary conventional reality, in order to have a discussion about something, you and I have to both agree that one and one is two, for example. We have to have an agreement otherwise we can't have a discussion.

Q: There are some things, I notice in nature, that exist; but we don't know what it is...

Ven.: Well, then, you can't discuss it. Very simple. That's the end of the discussion. You can, though – if it does exist, we have to define what it is; and if we can't, it means we're just being ignorant. What's the point you're asking?

Q: I asked about dark matter, because we can't observe it and we don't know what it is...

Ven.: Well then that's what I would say they're cheap and easy to talk that way. You can't, if you're scientific, you can't say something exists but you can't define it. I don't accept that's possible. Then anyone can get away with that. You can say, 'Oh, oo-ah exists,' and we can't speak about it; it's beyond words...' That's how cheap and nasty spiritual people talk. They think it's all 'beyond words' and I don't believe a person who is a scientist – maybe they haven't said what it is yet, but if they can't define it and say what it is, then I'm sorry, they can't say it exists. I would really think that's logic. I would not accept that. Do you see my point? That's my point – be quiet until you *can* prove it. I mean, that's what 'religious' people do: 'Well, it's all just... nobody understands it, it's all beyond words...' Anyone can say that; it's not scientific. You know? That's a very interesting point. Yes?

*Raising Happier Children*  
**40:31**

Q: Are we born with these negative mental states?

Ven.: Yes, totally; from countless lives, Buddha says.

Q: There's no way to raise a child to be...

Ven.: No, no, it's not possible...no, I mean, of course it is; but they've got to *learn*. But, the Buddha would say what caused, even caused us to be reborn is this motor called ignorance and ego-grasping as it's known colloquially, which gives rise to attachment to get what I want; that's the actual – what causes us to even be reborn in the first place. Unless you're like a highly evolved being, like what they call 'bodhisattvas', you know, these highly evolved beings who've cut the belief in ego, and have gone beyond all the nonsense. They don't need to be reborn, but out of their immense compassion, they choose rebirth. There are people like that. But most of us, if we're, quote, 'in samsara' – the way Buddha puts it – means we're caught up in the delusions, and that's what causes us to go from life to life after life after life until we've done the job of cutting the root of all this nonsense, which is what we are trying to do.

So, you know, you can help a person. Because you can't be a blank slate... what does that mean? That's impossible. I mean, if a child got born only with good qualities and didn't have any tendencies for negative ones, then I would say they're already a Buddha, in which case you can relax. Do you understand my point? You know; the Buddha's fundamental point about the mind – you see, we've got this strong belief in the west, in scientific terms, that a mind is your brain and it's given to you by your parents. The Buddha would say that the more – okay, I can only say myself that the more I think about the Buddha's teachings about what the mind is and how it's its own continuity; it's got its own energy and we bring our – we put our own stuff into it and we carry that forward into our next life. It's an utterly bizarre idea to think that you can be given anger or given jealousy or given love or given compassion; an impossibility the way the Buddha talks about the mind.

So, if a child does come into this life with only tendencies for good; but if they're going to have nothing, then they can't even have tendencies for good, which means there's nothing there. You've just got a dead body. There's got to be something in the mind, you know...and whatever's in that mind, the Buddha says, we've brought with us from before. Our mind was already there fully programmed from the first second of conception. That mind existed before, before, and went into that egg and sperm like your child – let's say you had one – went into your womb because of strong history with you; but they brought all their tendencies with them. This is including the Mother Teresas and the Hitlers, you know? So that's where the skill of being a parent – you see what the child is like, you get to see their mind, and so you treat them and teach them accordingly. So, if they've got a tendency to lie – some people have a tendency to lie, no-one taught them – we can't just look at the parents and the conditions to show why they lie; the Buddha would say that tendency is in their mind – so then you can help them *not* lie, because it's *their* mind, you know. Do you see what I'm saying? This is the Buddhist approach... Any more questions? Okay...

*The Experiential Implications of Letting Go of the Root Delusion*  
43:24

So, okay, there's many ways, you know, many methods, many methods for trying to understand this emptiness business. But the first thing is; what is the implication of it for us? You know, we can hear the benefits of giving up anger, giving up depression, giving up attachment, craving after things; we can see that. That's immediate to us. We can even see, if we're careful, how they exaggerate, how they've got the lying component – how the attachment in my mind makes the cake *look* more delicious than it really is, which is why I hanker after it; which is why I believe when I get it, I'll get happy – all this exaggerated story. We can see how this happens. But to hear – what are the experiential implications of giving up this mistaken sense of self? Because we don't recognize that mistake, it seems it's too abstract to imagine how you would be if you didn't have it.

Well, I'll tell you; it's not complicated. Even a little bit, of this letting go of this ego-grasping, this root delusion; it immediately means you'd be less attached. As soon as -- you know, if you attack the root of something, obviously the branches weaken as well. So, attachment and anger and all the rest are the branches of this root delusion. So every time – the more you understand emptiness, meditate on it, learn it, study it, think about it, analyze it, meditate on it; the more you are lessening the grasping at this sense of self as being stuck and frozen in space. So, one of the consequences of this is, we feel separate from others. Now, look at this; this is obvious. You know, you can see that the indicator of strong ego-grasping – this is a colloquial term used to refer to this ignorance -- when there's strong ego-grasping, that's when the 'I' rises like a sleeping lion and freaks out: there's panic stations, you know? Like when we – we call it 'instinct for survival'. Buddha would have liked that term, that's ego grasping rising violently: 'I did not do that! How dare you harm me!' this panic-stricken sense of a very vivid self -- that's the expression of it.

So, when we have that strongly, we therefore have strong attachment, strong anger, strong low self-esteem, strong whatever it might be; and you check when you're caught up in any of those, look how separate you are from everybody! Everything and everyone feels 'way out there', they're all – they're looking really ugly or really depressing, or – there's always this sense of a lonely, bereft, separate me. That's a very vivid way of talking about the mistake of this *ma rig pa*, this ego grasping that we've all got. So, as and when you work on this, you naturally will feel closer to others. You'll feel more interconnected and you will feel more content, more happy, more loving; less attached, less angry, less jealous, less depressed. That means more kind, more loving, more wise, more interconnected, more courageous, more compassionate. You'd be just an amazing person, in other words.

All this is; is Buddha's method for becoming an amazing human being. So simple; in a way. We'd love to be less depressed, less jealous, less fearful, wouldn't we? We'd love to be more compassionate, more brave, more wise, more courageous. This is Buddha's method, that's all: know your mind, see all the delusions, see how they cause you suffering. Get to the root one, of course – and this is the root one – every time you attack the root, obviously it weakens the branches; but encouragingly, even if we're not sure of the meaning of 'emptiness' and 'ego grasping', which is the root delusion, every time you lessen attachment,

lessen anger, every time you weaken your depression, you lessen your jealousy, you're also weakening the root. You've got to attack the root directly, which is by seeing emptiness, analyzing these things, which is quite hard, but basically this is psychological work. That's all this is. Buddha's a great psychologist, you know.

### *Methods to Help Us See the Mistake*

47:24

So what are some of the methods, the way they talk, philosophically, for things to think about that will help us see emptiness, cognize the absence of the fantasies: the fantasy 'I', the fantasy 'this', the fantasy 'that'? Well, a lot of it is, you know, is really using, kind of, logic. And much of this is logic – I mean, even to argue with anger, you've got to use logic. It's clear, because you can see it's irrational; it's not seeing reality. This is what's hard, because ego doesn't like to be argued with. We want to hold on to our stories, you know? There's all sorts of little, kind of, ways of thinking about this, so we'll use – so, okay, so we'll just use the 'I', we can use anything as an example; use the cup, the microphone, the 'I', the cushion, the toilet, because remember what Buddha said: we have to first establish what does exist. So, we can discuss anything that we know and all agree that do exist. A toilet exists. A microphone exists. We know these things.

There's various ways of talking about how they exist conventionally, and then that indicates the way we need to think about them – and this is the point – in order to trigger an insight into the absence of the fantasy. So, the Heart Sutra says for example, 'Form is emptiness; emptiness is form. Form is nothing other than emptiness; emptiness is nothing other than form...' And this can immediately start sounding weird to us, you know? Well, the Heart Sutra is basically one of, you know, Buddha's talks discussing how we have to look into all the different phenomena that exist, and all the Heart Sutra goes through is a list of the groupings of phenomena according to Buddha's philosophy. So, the 'form' is the beginning one because it's the first of the five – the category, the group of categories; the category of phenomena called 'aggregates'. A person is made up of the five aggregates. 'Form' is the first one; that's why he uses this word first -- form.

So, first of all, the simple way to talk about this one, 'Form is emptiness; emptiness is form,' what does that mean, you know? Sounds confusing. Okay, the mistakes we make – we read the literature, we think about it, you know – we make this big mistake that as soon as we hear about emptiness, because it's shorthand, very shorthand, 'emptiness' – as soon as we hear 'everything is empty', even if we hear it saying 'everything is empty of *inherent existence*', as soon as we hear this, instinctively we become nihilistic and we throw the baby out with the bath water and we assume 'Ah, well, there's nothing anyway,' Buddhists will even say, 'Oh, well, it's all empty anyway. It doesn't matter!' we will say. That's a complete mistake. That's a nihilistic understanding. It's the extreme view, Buddha says.

Now, the other extreme view that he says our minds run to is where we *do* hear about that there is a cup existing, as a dependent arising. Buddha talked about the Two Truths, okay: one way of discussing the world, discussing the

phenomena that do exist; which he says we have to analyze. One way of talking about it is that everything that does exist – which we first have to establish – has a conventional way of existing: you name it, you tell its definition, its function, you prove it fulfills its function; then we can begin to discuss it, because that's its conventional characteristics. So, it does exist, conventionally.

### *The Two Extremes*

#### **51:23**

But our trouble is, as soon as we hear 'there is a cup, a mug that *does* exist as a dependent arising' – this is like shorthand that Buddha uses for how things exist conventionally. 'Emptiness' is the shorthand for how things *don't* exist. Okay? So, we need to put these two together. So as soon as we hear, 'Ah, well, there's no mug from its own side' -- there's no 'inherent' mug – we'll immediately go to the extreme view and we'll chuck the baby out with the bath water, like I said, and we'll say, 'Oh well, there's no mug, anyway.' Completely wrong; you just threw out too much. And then as soon as we hear that there is a mug that *does* exist, that *does* function to hold my tea *as a dependent arising*, we immediately over-exaggerate it and we grasp at it and see it as eternalistic and permanent and we'll go, 'Oh, thank goodness! There is something after all.' Grasp! Well, here, we made the other extreme mistake of over-exaggerating the mug-ness. Here, we under-exaggerate; here we over-exaggerate.

And philosophically, these are the views of the universe: the nihilistic one, I would suggest, is the materialistic view. The eternalistic view – exactly what Buddha is arguing with – is the Hindu view, is the Christian view, is the Muslim view that reifies a self-existent, real, independent, self-existent, inherent, intrinsic God-ness that is frozen in space, that doesn't have a cause, and is the creator of everything else. The soul is said to exist this way. And all Buddha's arguing with, with the Hindus back then, the term they used for 'self' -- like 'soul' -- is '*atma*', and he would say, 'No.' So, he is not – and this is the point – he's not being nihilistic and saying there is no self – that's the nihilistic view. He's arguing with this eternalistic view -- which he would suggest is the Hindu view – and indeed, if he were around now, I know the Buddhists would -- would argue with the Christian teaching – not being arrogant, not being rude; Buddha would think it's appropriate to talk, you know, to discuss these things – but the way the understanding of what God is – the creator – is actually a perfect example of inherent existence, and this is what he's arguing with. The way and energy that he would also -- it's called – a creator – he would say, it's a mistake. It's over-exaggerating, it's reifying. So that's the philosophy, but we do that reifying to everything, he says – 'I', cups, microphones. So, these are the two extreme views that he says our mind goes between.

So, we have got to really understand what 'emptiness' means, and we've got to really understand what 'dependent arising' means; and the point is, these two help each other. Right now they're opposite. As soon as we hear 'emptiness', we go this way: 'There's nothing.' As soon as we hear there's a mug, we all go, 'Oh, thank God, there's a mug.' Both are extreme, and we're running between these like a thousand times a day. Of course, we don't know we are, because we don't

analyze it like this; but this is the Buddhist way of analyzing our minds, you know.

So, you could also say, emotionally – it's very interesting – the emotional component of this nihilistic one is depression and despair and you want to kill yourself. Look at it: 'Nothing's important. Nothing exists. I'm not worthwhile.' And you kill yourself. We can see that. And look at the emotional component of this one; this is the one where we think everything's perfect, everything's divine; this is like attachment: 'Wow, fantastic. Everything's gorgeous and wonderful.' And it's like we go up and down between these a thousand times a day, emotionally. It's what we all do. Buddha says we're all bi-polar. I'm not joking now; I know we have this label for all kinds – a whole spectrum of types of mental experience, you know, but the normal kind of bi-polar – excuse me, I know 'cause I was labeled it forty years ago – we are all that. Buddha would like that term, it's very nice. Up and down like yo-yos, you know? One minute everything is divine, the next minute everything is despair. Up and down like this all – that's attachment and aversion. Attachment and depression all the time: that's samsara, Buddha says; nothing special, we're all in it.

Of course there's extreme mentally -- deeply mentally ill people, no question; but most of us? We're up and down like yo-yos every day; just no one's labeled us yet, that's all. But keep away, don't get too labeled, you know...we've got to label, but we don't concretize it...The mind going up and being all excited, that's attachment: always wanting what it wants every second, every second every second every second...and as soon as attachment gets what it wants we go berserk! 'Finally, I've found happiness,' we'll say. As I always quote, when Nicole Kidman – I read the interview, when she was still with Tom Cruise -- I read the interview with her in **Vanity Fair**, And she said, 'We will be together until we're eighty!' That's what attachment, that's what the fantasy does.

When we have something nice -- 'cause we're junkies to get nice things, so we *grasp* at it: 'Now, I've found happiness! *Finally* I've got happiness!' We plan our next forty years, you know, completely: visualizing, thinking about it all day: all the houses we're going to buy, the retirement we're going to do, all the lovely things we'll do; it's attachment gone *mad*. We're doing like this all the time. But then when the bubble burst, when she goes and leaves you or dies on you, or takes all your money, then you go crashing down to despair and want to kill yourself. These emotionally are the two extremes we go between: there's nothing, there's everything. Both are wrong. Both are mistaken. We go between them like we're mad people, drunken sailors between these. Reality isn't – things aren't like this, Buddha says; we're seeing fantasies. We're not seeing truth; and this is a tough job, I mean it is quite a tough job if you think about it; but he says it's do-able. He says he's done it; he's shown us the way -- so if he can do it, we can do it.

Maybe it's time for a break; we're supposed to have a break, aren't you? Don't you want a break? No? No break? Okay.

Q: Are you talking to me? I thought you looked straight at me...

Ven.: What? Not you, Josh, that's okay...

### *Use Logic and Analysis to Break Down the Hold of Ignorance*

57:36

So, okay, let's go a bit more here then, let's look at the different ways we can squeeze our brains to try and understand emptiness. Well, like I said about seeing, when you're mistaken -- this is a crucial point, now -- okay; when you are seeing a mistake here, because your glasses are wrong, your eyes are wrong, your English words are wrong -- we haven't worked out the cause yet, okay? We just know you're not seeing truth, and so we have to -- what do we have to do? We just don't -- like I said, this is an important point. We just don't keep telling you,

'No! It's red! Come on!'

'No, it's white, it's white!'

And you keep going; 'It's white...it's white, it's white...'

It won't help! It won't help; we've got to *find the problem*, we've got to analyze it and look into what is *causing* red to appear to you where it doesn't exist! Are you hearing me, people? So, in this case it's quite simple: we check the eyes, the glasses, the lenses, go to the optician, do this, do that, and check your English words; maybe you've just got the wrong word, you know? You really *mean* white but you *think* red, let's just say. It wouldn't take you too long... You just don't go, 'Oh, yeah, it's white, it's white, it's white...' and hope for a vision to come. Well, the same here with emptiness. You just don't go, 'Oh, they say, 'meditate on emptiness, oh, what's that mean; oh...emptiness... everything's empty, everything's empty.' Squeeze, squeeze, squeeze. Don't be ridiculous! That's not what you do. What you do is you look into the nuts and bolts of the dependent arising of the thing you're trying to see the emptiness of. You break it down and you look at all the nuts and bolts, and you prove logically. So that then, what'll happen? You'll look again -- 'Oh my God! It's not red!' You just observed the absence of red. What triggered you to see the absence of red was using the logic to break down the mistakes.

So, dependent arising, which is how things *do* exist conventionally: this is what you have to think about and analyze, 'cause that's the nuts and bolts, and by seeing this clearly, it triggers the insight: 'Oh my God, therefore there's no I from its own side!' so, you think *about* dependent arising as an example, and that leads to the insight of the absence of self-existent 'I', just like here. Are you hearing the concept?

That's exactly what it says in the Heart Sutra: repeatedly and often analyze deeply the way that all the phenomena of the universe exist in order to see the absence of the fantasy existence which we've been projecting onto it for so long. That's the thing; so you've got to squeeze your brain, I'm sorry. You can't have a quick vision, you know?

So, what are some of the ways that things exist interdependently, or as a 'dependent arising', as they say? No, Josh, no, no, no. Do you want to clarify a term, or what?

Q: I just wanted to -- I thought you were asking all of us a question...

Ven.: No, I wasn't -- I do, but I don't really want an answer. I do ask rhetorical questions, don't I? Not yet, sweetheart. Let me present some things, and when we finish that, then we can discuss.

Okay. What are some of the ways we can think -- okay, what are the dependent arisings that we have to analyze in order to get to see the mistake, like here? Well, we have to look at the way things *do* exist. So, for example, the second one is most tasty. It leads us to something interesting, and that's that we use the term, we use the one called 'I' because, okay, what's 'I'? Well, it's synonymous with 'person', 'self', 'being', all words mean the same thing. It refers to a person. 'Person', 'I', 'self', 'being' are all synonymous. So, what's a person? Well, in this case, you know, we said, 'What's a mug?' well, there's a white mug; and there's a person here, there's a person; we have to first make sure we all agree what a name 'person' refers to. You know, an animal's a person, Buddha would say; the term in Tibetan for a 'person' is a 'mind possessor', 'sentient being'. 'Sentient being', 'person', 'self', 'I', 'being': they're all -- well, 'being' maybe not because they'd be 'superior beings', so then those four -- those four are synonyms for a 'person', a simple word we use is a 'person'.

### *Dependence on Parts*

1:02:00

So, we all know we're one of those, we know we're not a 'mug', okay? So, let's look at how 'persons' exist. Well, one of the ways; the most tasty way to see how a person exists -- as a dependent arising -- is in dependence upon our parts. Our *parts*; okay? Our parts. So, we can say, 'Bob is made up of parts.' Now, the way we think now -- and we can even see with our language -- it's very, very, tricky; this reinforces our grasping in the belief of a separate little Bob. We say, 'Bob has an ear.' 'Bob has a nose.' We say this, don't we?

Okay, here's a little test. This is most annoying; but it's a very good little logical test to show how our beliefs are ridiculous. You'll see. Okay. I'll have to pretend that this is my desk here... My table has an MP3 player, a mug, and a stupa. Do you agree, everybody, looking here -- just pretend there's nothing else, just looking at these three, do you agree? So how many phenomena did I mention there? How many phenomena did I mention? Four -- one phenomenon is called 'my table', -- now, that's an important point, because you know that if I say '*that* table', you'll look over there; if you say 'my table', you look here. So, my table -- okay, it could be this one, but it's *this* one; my table -- one phenomenon -- has an MP3 player, a mug -- are you listening, Josh? Good. -- and a stupa on it. Stupa, a stupa. That's four phenomena, do you agree?

Now, speaking really uncomplicated language here, really simple conventional reality, we know that if that is a true statement -- and how dare I speak words that aren't true, we ought to be speaking words of truth to us, isn't it, you know, I'm not going to make things up -- we've got to *prove* that that's true. Remember what I said before, we've got to prove it; don't just believe what you hear. Look

with your eyes -- which are working nicely -- you know English, and you can identify four phenomena. Now, to prove that that's a true statement you have to -- don't you? -- isolate four separate phenomena, don't you? You have to find a table that isn't an MP3 player, a mug and a stupa. You must find a stupa that is not a mug, a table and an MP3 player, et cetera. It's simple, ordinary, common logic, isn't it? Do you agree?

### *Mini-'Me'*

**1:04:24**

So, we've proved there are four phenomena there; four conventional phenomena. Not a problem. You would say, 'I agree with you, Robina.' You would all agree with that statement. Okay. I will say that I have a nose, an ear, and a foot. Do you agree with that statement? Okay, how many phenomena did I mention there: I, nose, ear and foot? That's four phenomena, do you agree? Now, this is most annoying, but you listen to this: if that's a true statement, you have to find four distinct phenomena that are separate from each. You must find an ear, that is not a nose, a foot, and a -- whatever I said. What did I say? Nose, foot ear, and 'I'; okay. And you have to find an ear that is not the other three, and you have to find an 'I' that is not a nose, a foot and an ear -- can you hear me? -- if it's a true statement. Are you hearing me, people? Okay -- there's my foot, there's my ear, there's my nose -- easy. Now, where's the 'I'? -- a phenomenon that we all agree exists, but where is a separate, independent -- a simple, separate, phenomenon that functions -- that is labeled and functions -- that isn't the ear, that isn't the nose, that isn't the foot? Even cursorily, you will see you can't find it. It is most infuriating, because we believe there is one. *That's our problem.*

We believe there's a little mini 'me' in there that runs the show; that's our point. We *really believe* there's a little mini 'me' in there that *does* have a nose and *does* have an ear and *does* have a foot, such that if we break down 'me' into my component parts, you'll be left exposed with this little naked, little embarrassed, little mini 'me' who's now been found out, who runs the show. This is what we believe, don't you agree? Look at how we talk; look at how we feel every day. We really do believe there's a little 'I' in there; we believe there's a *landlord*. There's all the roommates, but we think there's a landlord. But there's not, Buddha says. This is hilarious to us. It's not as simple as that, but listen to it; but we believe one trillion percent that there is. That's why we suffer, that's why we're attached, that's why we're depressed, that's why we're angry; the reference point for all those emotions is this fantasy 'I' that we have made up.

But then we go, 'But, if there's no 'I', then what is there?' What do you want this extra piece of 'I' for? You don't need a landlord; your ear and your nose and your eye and your anger and your jealousy and your love and your kindness function very nicely without a boss. You don't *need* a landlord. This is the hilarious part; they all work together beautifully. A building stays up beautifully: the cement, the rooms, the metal, the windows all do their job nicely. You don't need a little mini building in there holding up the building! But that's what we think there is; that's the meaning of 'self' or 'soul'. No such thing, Buddha says; he's not being mean or sarcastic or rude or sectarian... He says it's an exaggeration of our 'I',

and it's *why we suffer*. It's why we cling so frantically; it's utterly irrational, he says.

You know, when you nearly fall over the mountain, Pabongkha says; you don't go, 'Uh-oh, my body nearly fell over the mountain!' You say, '*I* nearly fell over the mountain!' -- '*You* attacked *me!*' Now this is the point here; it doesn't mean you don't exist. Don't chuck the baby out with the bath water. There is an 'I' that does exist, in dependence upon its parts; but you don't need a little special 'I' in there: it's enough to say the parts are there. That's good enough because 'I' is a name -- just a name; a designation out of convenience -- you give to those valid parts. That's enough! But we're not happy with that... They study it for thirty years and then meditate on it for another thirty to try and get it, okay; so be patient. But the words are interesting, don't you agree?

### *Like Smoke and Mirrors*

**1:09:04**

As Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, when we have seen, when we have cognized the absence of the inherent 'I' -- listen to this -- on here, on this 'I'; when we have observed, cognized the absence of inherent 'I' upon this 'I' -- or the parts, if you like -- it's *as if there's no I*. But there is, because what *does* exist is, when we know it, when we experience it, it's so subtle, it's as if it doesn't exist. But the Buddha would say *everything exists like this*: enlightenment, emptiness itself, microphones, cups, toilets, good, bad; you name it, you define it, you prove it functions, and it works; but it's *like* smoke and mirrors. It's *like* an illusion. It's *like* a dream. It's *like* -- the nice term we use, 'smoke and mirrors', that's great. So, there is an 'I' -- don't be sarcastic and cynical -- but not from its' own side, not intrinsically, not inherently; nothing could exist like this, Buddha says.

So, we have to do a lot of analysis, a lot of breaking down, of deconstructing all the mistakes our mind makes, in order to see those mistakes, in order to finally help us to see nakedly the biggest mistake: the absence of the fantasy 'I'. And this fantasy 'I', the inherent 'I', an intrinsic 'I': an 'I' that would exist -- if it did -- without depending on anything at all has never existed, could never exist. It's a total thing made up, Buddha says. So, as Lama Tsongkhapa says, to think about dependent arising, and to think about emptiness; these two actually come together, and it's really crucial to see this. So, the instinct we have, as I said before, is as soon as we hear, 'Oh, well, there's no 'I' from its own side,' we tend to go out nihilistic. We consciously take ourselves away from that mistake, so when we say, 'There is no 'I' from its own side,' we say, 'That means, my dear Robina, there *is* an 'I' as a dependent arising.'

Every time you grasp at the 'I' that you think is so existing, you instantly say; 'No, Robina, there being an 'I' that does exist in dependence upon things, it means there is no 'I' from its own side.' Because these two mean the same thing, effectively; you could say like that. So, we have to practice thinking this way; it grounds us and stabilizes our mind. And, thinking about dependent arising, just like thinking about the eyes, the glasses, the understanding of the English, the things that -- you know, to get those correct -- that's what leads you to see the absence of the mistake you're projecting onto the cup. Well, exactly the same

here, except the dependent arisings are somewhat more. Thinking about how things *do* exist as dependent arisings is the 'king of logics', as Lama Yeshe puts it, to prove emptiness.

*Defining 'Inherent' Further*

1:13:03

So; any questions for this? Yes, sweetheart?

Q: Just to play devil's advocate here, if the mindstream is beginningless and endless, some would argue that might be...

Ven.: What, sweetheart?

Q: If the mindstream is beginningless and endless...

Ven.: Right.

Q: Some would – I'm just playing devil's advocate –

Ven.: No, you've got to use logic, that's perfect. So what's your point?

Q: Some would say that that is inherently...

Ven.: So, what does 'inherent' mean to you? We haven't got the same definitions of 'inherent'. So, what are *you* defining as 'inherent'?

Q: Well, it would have to be without change, for me, it would have to be something that...

Ven.: Well, that's not the main -- it's a good example, but it's not the total one; but it could do for some. So, does the mind change from moment to moment?

Q: Yes.

Ven.: Okay, so then it can't be inherent, can it? So, it's not a valid argument...

Q: I know.

Ven.: So then don't say it...

Q: I'm just playing devil's advocate...

Ven.: But if you don't have conviction about it, don't say it... If you are convinced – so, inherent doesn't just mean not changing, okay? I don't want to get too complicated here, but – okay, never mind, I don't want to go there. So, it doesn't just mean that; it means something – if something *were* inherent, it would have to exist in dependence upon parts, for example. So, does mind have parts?

Q: Yes.

Ven.: Give me an example of a part of a mind.

Q: A cell.

Ven.: Pardon?

Q: A cell.

Ven.: That's a brain, dear; we're talking about a mind. What's a part of a mind?

Q: Well, I can't...

Ven.: Of course you can. You don't know the names of your states of mind? Tell me some of the names ...

Q: Sure.

Ven.: Well, then, what do you think a 'part' means? Well, what do you think a 'part' means? That's a part of your mind, isn't it?

Q: Okay.

Ven.: There you go. So, your mind does exist in dependence upon 'parts'.

Q: Yes.

Ven.: Therefore, it can't be inherent.

Q: Right. I agree with it. I was just playing devil's advocate...

Ven.: What I'm saying to you is don't be -- make up things you don't already accept; it just confuses everybody.

Q: Okay.

Ven.: But this surely clarified the point for you; you got 'inherent' wrong before. Did this help you understand better what 'inherent' is?

Q: Yes.

Ven.: Then tell me again what 'inherent' means. If something were 'inherent', what would it have to be?

Q: Dependent upon itself; it -- without change.

Ven.: No. Remember, I said something new. You said that and I said that's not enough, and I gave you a new way of understanding 'inherent'. What did I just

ask you before? What was the point I made? What did I ask you before? What's the question I asked you?

Q: The mind.

Ven.: Yeah. What'd I say about the mind? What was the question I asked you about your mind?

Q: What are parts of the mind?

Ven.: Right. So that is my point. As I said to you, something's not changing isn't enough to prove dependent arising. But something's existing in dependence upon parts *is*. So that's not the way you said it, though. So I'm saying, you'll be glad, from this discussion, that now you've got a better understanding of 'inherent'. Have you?

Q: Yes.

Ven.: Good. Okay, so then it was useful after all. Thank you, Jenna. Anybody have any questions? Yes, sweetheart?

Q: So that's the definition of a 'dependent arising', is that it's built...

### ***The Three Levels of Dependent Arising***

Ven.: No. That's one example. The point she was making – okay, we have to go into it here now; but I didn't want to go into more detail... There are three levels of dependent arising: the first one is that things exist in dependence upon causes, and that refers to all *impermanent* phenomena. That means all phenomena that change from moment to moment. But there are some phenomena that *don't* change from moment to moment; that's why your answer wasn't enough. For example, emptiness itself does not change from moment to moment. It sounds abstract to us, but that's called a '*permanent*' phenomenon. 'Permanent' in this sense does *not* mean 'lasting forever', okay? 'Permanent' in this context in Buddhism refers to the opposite to the 'subtle impermanence' which is things that – 'subtle impermanence' is things changing from moment to moment. There is a way they talk about some phenomena that do exist – for example, the 'absence of red'. We've proven that 'absence of red' does exist, but, you can't kind of touch it and taste it and feel it, can you? It's a kind of concept, isn't it really? It's a bit abstract, wouldn't you agree? It's not made up – it *is* made up of parts; this moment of the 'absence of red' and the next moment of the 'absence of red', but they argue that it doesn't come into existence in dependence upon causes and conditions, therefore, it doesn't change from moment to moment. This might seem a bit abstract to us, but I'm just telling you. So, the first level in which things come into existence in dependence upon causes and conditions is impermanent phenomena, and all the things we know in our world: the body, the mind, taste and touch and smell, all the things that are the objects, that are the impermanent objects of our mind, they come into existence in dependence upon causes and conditions. They are impermanent, okay, changing from moment to moment.

The second level of dependent arising, which refers to *all* phenomena, including those that are labeled 'permanent', is that they exist in dependence upon their parts; and that proves finally the third, the real meaning of dependent arising, which means that things exist in dependence upon the mind labeling it *that*. They're mere designations. These are the levels of dependent arising. So, everything that does exist, Buddha says, which refers to established -- just liked we talked, exists as a dependent arising. That is the main logic to prove that it couldn't possibly be existing inherently; because, very simply, something's being inherent would be something that didn't depend on *anything* for its existence.

Q: And that does not exist...

Ven.: That couldn't exist. That's how 'God' is taught: as something that *is* independent, that *is* inherent, it doesn't change, has always been that; did *not* come into existence in dependence upon causes and conditions. This is what they actually say in Buddha's discussing that exact philosophical point. He says it's a fantasy made up by the mind. It's quite a subtle point, extremely subtle point. Okay?

Q: Getting back to the 'emptiness' concept; that, for some reason, concerns me; it being something...

Ven.: Emptiness.

Q: Yes.

Ven.: Of inherent existence.

Q: Yes. It being something, then it must arise...

Ven.: I know -- this is where -- you can easily argue with this way they talk about it. No, it doesn't -- okay. It doesn't -- they talk about 'arising' -- okay, just the use of the words, you know -- and I'm not trying to be too abstract about it. The way they would talk is that it doesn't come into existence in dependence upon causes and conditions; but straightaway we would say, 'Don't be ridiculous, the presence of this cup is a cause and a condition for the existence of the absence of red on this cup.' One can say that; but the way they use this terminology, the way they define 'arising', the way they define 'causes', they would say that's not a valid... So, I mean, it's a bit abstract here, and the real point of it for me is not to get too caught up in it, because it can get very intellectual; it's to -- really to lead us to understand how the absence of something -- it's all to help us get our head around the absence of something, that's all. And that's the real point. 'Permanent' or 'impermanent' for me is almost not so important right here. It doesn't really matter, you know. The real point is to get our head around the concept of there being -- of how we can cognize absences and why we want to use that phrase, because Buddha wants us to see the absence of the fantasy we projected. That's quite a crucial point. Do you understand? That's my main point. Someone else? Any questions? You had a question? Yes, darling, what?

## *The Mind Labeling a Name Upon the Parts*

1:21:00

Q: Going back to the way things exist, the three levels – the third level was ‘things exist in dependence upon the mind labeling...

Ven.: That’s right.

Q: ...the parts, the

Ven.: Labeling a *name* upon – what’s your name?

Q: Jesse.

Ven.: Jesse. So we can agree, can’t we, that ‘Jesse’ is the name that we label upon this particular set of parts here, in that chair; not this set and not this set. So, ‘Jesse’ is a name – as I’ve said before, we believe instinctively that there’s a little Jesse in there that runs the show; but in a simple way, Buddha’s saying no, there’s just the name ‘Jesse’, and the ‘Jesse’ can’t be the parts. ‘Jesse’ can’t be the parts; because if we define ‘Jesse’ -- it’s a particular definition, it’s not the same definition as your elbow or your knee, it’s a different definition; you can’t say they’re the same thing, they’re not. So in that sense, so, Jesse -- finally, they call this ‘subtle dependent arising’, this is the way things exist – because if we analyze, okay, right back to the beginning; if we say, ‘Mummy, what’s that?’ – you know, I don’t know what it is – and she says, ‘Well, darling, it’s a mug.’ Then she defines it for me: ‘It’s that flat bottomed container that holds my tea.’ Now, then we get proof that it does do this and if no one else disagrees, that actually is really proving that we’ve merely labeled it. It’s just a concept; we put it together, this came from our mind. We made it, we labeled it, we gave it a thing; we decided it. It didn’t fall out of a tree; it’s not *self-existent*; it’s not existing from its own side as something: ‘There is a mug.’

Everything comes from the mind, Buddha says, everything -- out of eons and eons and eons of lives -- we have created everything from the mind. We’re like children, one Nyingma lama says, we’re like children who draw a lion, let’s say, and then we become afraid of it, ‘cause we forget we made it up. You know? That’s how we are in samsara, he says. We made cups, but very soon we’re putting them out there, and we give them all this meaning and we freak out and we sue somebody for taking *my* cup... We made the thing, it’s come out from our mind; we’ve agreed it’s a cup... And this is the way – okay, even more interesting; when we start thinking about things like when I was working with the prisoners, they’d write to Lama Zopa and then he’d write back; these long, long letters of advice; and always he’d talk about emptiness; he’d say, ‘It’s just labeled a prison, it’s labeled ‘bad’, you can *change* it.’ Now that’s true; we could change this label to ‘nice’. But we’d all have to agree upon it, rewrite all the dictionaries, rewrite all the definitions; it’s a lot of hard work...but I, very happily – if I’m in prison, and I’m sitting here thinking what about prison: ‘It’s not fair. I shouldn’t be here. It’s ugly...’ All these things might be true: I might be innocent. I shouldn’t be there. It *is* ugly. So if I keep thinking that, all I’m doing is

being miserable. But I can change my mind, can't I? I can call it 'good'. Why is it good? Well, as Lama Zopa says, many people in Tibet spent years looking for some ugly old hole in the ground where they could put the fence across and have no-one interfere them and they called it 'meditation cave', and that was blissful for them, they won the lottery, you know?

So, you can change your mind. You can decide that a prison cell is 'good'. So when you decide, you've relabeled it. It does fit the definition; of what? – being a place I can meditate. It does fit that definition. So then, it can be your personal label, but that's cool. And this is the proof we can – if we can change our name – we can label anything we like, but we've got to prove it *is* that, and that it *functions as that*. But it's not that from its own side, but we think it *is* from its own side and that's the tricky part.

So we can, you know – 'I'm walking up the hill,' we'll say. Well, first of all, 'I' is a name we give, you know, we've labeled 'I', the we label 'am walking', putting one foot in front of the other; we gave it that name, we called it this, we buy into it being this; 'up the hill' – so, we have a whole meaning to this, you know, we put meanings onto everything; but those meanings don't exist in those words because we *give* them those words and we've *given* them that meaning, and then we buy into that meaning, and then we forget we created it and we go, 'Ah, it's all self-existent, walking up the hill.' Everything that exists, is existing like this; and we can unpack it like this.

This is what Buddha says in the Heart Sutra; we have to repeatedly analyze and break down – to break down these ancient, ancient, ancient habits of seeing things wrongly as self-existent; meaning, especially, 'nothing to do with my mind; nothing to do with me'. This is the real instinct of ego. Do you understand? Okay...

Q: Is it, is it the proof that things are merely labeled by the mind because different phenomena can have different causes and conditions, different parts and still have the same label? If this is a mug, and that's a mug...their appearance is completely different, their causes are completely different...

Ven.: So therefore...? The point being? What's that proof of?

Q: That that's the proof that 'mug' is merely a label?

Ven.: No, because I think if we're going to talk about 'mug' we can't talk about it generally, we've got to talk about it specifically. So, as soon as we – you see, okay, this is a very interesting point – let me say this one... We can talk about red – we can talk about white, can't we? We don't have to look at 'white', we can just talk about 'white' because we know 'white', we've seen 'white', we can agree 'white' exists. But listen to this point: if you want an *experience* of 'white', what would you have to have in front of you? A 'white' thing; a thing that possesses 'whiteness', wouldn't you agree? Then you'd have a direct experience of 'white'.

Well, we can have the same discussion – we can discuss emptiness like we are here. We can understand it, we can label it, we can have arguments about it; but this is the same point: if you want to have the experience of emptiness, what do you have to have in front of you? Say the same words: something that possesses the characteristic of ‘emptiness of inherent existence’. Something that possesses the – you know, okay, something that possesses ‘white’ is what we need to have in front of us in order to have an experience of ‘white’. Well, something that possesses – same words – we need to have in front of us something that possesses the characteristics of ‘emptiness of inherent existence’.

Now, if you want to talk about a mug, and the emptiness of a mug, we can talk about it in general; but if you want to have an experience of the emptiness of a mug, what do you have to have in front of you?

Q: Mug.

Ven.: One mug –*that* mug. Then, we have to look into the emptiness of *this* mug; so there being two separate mugs is not relevant. It’s got to be that mug in front of you: you’ve got to name it, define it, there’s a phenomenon, one phenomenon; you’ve got to name it – well, you can have two together if you want, but that doesn’t mean...

Q: That’s ‘mugs’...

Ven.: That’s ‘mugs’ then, that’s called ‘mugs’, precisely... Yes?

Q: Another concept comes in called ‘mug-ness’...

Ven.: ‘Mug-ness’, well, yeah, that’s what you could say – ‘mug-ness’ or ‘self-ness’ or ‘self’, you know? We’re all imposing a ‘mug-ness’ onto the mug, thinking there’s something – this is the way they say; that instinctively, this ignorance within us absolutely believes – excuse me, try to sneeze here; won’t come – that there’s something in the mug that gives it its ‘mug-ness’. That’s another way of saying what ‘inherent’ is. We think – that’s for sure – this is what we’re meaning here – that for sure, we think *for sure* there’s a kind of a little ‘I-ness’ in there that makes me who I am. We really believe there’s *something* from the side of the object that makes it that object, but all the Buddha’s saying in this absolute – in the final meaning of emptiness –subtle dependent arising – as Lama Zopa says, ‘It’s as if there’s nothing there.’ But it’s *as if* it’s an illusion, because there’s *nothing*, they say, there’s *NOTHING* from the side of the object that gives it its ‘thing-ness’; which *doesn’t mean* it’s not there. That’s the tricky part. And this is kind of scary; it’s like jumping off the cliff a bit, you know?

In the different teachings in Buddhism, in the different tenets of Buddhism, the different tenets of the Buddhist schools of thought that have cultivated over the centuries, in India and now in Tibet, and one studies these texts when one studies Buddha’s philosophy, each of the schools – there’re four levels of them, and then their sub-schools – and they’re all just ways of describing emptiness; and each of the next one takes away a little bit more, and the next one takes away

a bit more; because everyone's trying to cling to *something*, we all – it's too scary to think – because as soon as we say 'nothing', we think it's nihilistic, but it's not.

So, the final school of thinking, they say, the Madhyamika school; the Prasangika Madhyamika school, the consequentialist school of thinking, says there's *nothing at all* from the side of the object that gives it – that can be pinned down – that's inherent; it doesn't *need* it. This is why Buddha's saying we think we need a landlord, we think we need a creator; and it's really kind of a funny way to say it, but it's an unnecessary embellishment. Karma is enough. Sentient beings doing in their thoughts; so you don't need a boss. You don't need a judge or a rewarder. You don't need this dualistic view of subject / object like a reward / punishment. You don't need that for good to be good and bad to be bad. But this is our dualistic view; we embellish, we add something on top; it's a dualistic one, very strong.

Q: So, we really don't need 'mug-ness'...

Ven.: No. But it is a mug and it does function as a mug, but because we've labeled it a 'mug' and we've given it that power and we buy into it as a mug and it does function as a mug; good enough. Enlightenment exists in just the same way. It functions that way. It is enlightened, it is omniscient, it does benefit sentient beings, but not from its own side; it's a dependent arising.

So, in other words, the instinct is very strong – when we put something *up high*, this is the meaning of *reifying* it. We like to make it *special*. So, when you get really fundamentalist religious people, they're shocked when you, like, criticize God. When we talk this way to a fundamentalist, they say you're going to go to hell. It's almost like you're scared to say something. Well, the Buddha says there's *nothing* that you can't talk about. How can there be? That's just superstition; it's complete superstition. I mean, you don't have to be rude to people; we don't have to be rude, but we have to look at what the meaning of reality is. We have to understand what exists and what doesn't. We can't reify it because we're scared, but we do. It's very interesting, and this is instinctive in all our minds because of this ignorance. And that's why they say, when we're caught up in all these delusions we are living in fear; that's their function. And when we've rid the mind of all delusions, then there *is no fear*. We become fearless. There's no longer anything to be afraid of, because we now see truth. Sounds appealing; I wouldn't mind that. You've got to try and jump off the cliff a bit, logically, reasonably. What else?

### ***'Merely Labeled' – You Can Change the Meaning***

Q: Does that mean when we see something – taking us back from the abstract a little bit – if we see something in our lives or something happened, an event happens; say I get hit by a car; then we are – our job is to define it, label it and like figure out...

Ven.: Okay...good. Right there; let's look at the 'merely labeled': the same as going to prison. It's called 'going to prison'. It's hideous in the world, isn't it? You're seen as the scum of the earth, you're labeled as 'bad', you're accused of

doing something wrong, the world turns against you, you're a criminal, you have lousy food, you have no public property, you have no rights; It's like the worst thing to think, going to prison, isn't it? The shame that people feel about going to prison... don't you agree we give it that meaning? Well, it doesn't have to have that meaning. So that proves it's merely labeled. It *proves* it's *merely labeled!* You can change the meaning, right there – if you want to, if you're brave enough. I know some people who've done it. The car accident sounds a bit worse, because it's seen you can feel physical pain, you know, you can't mystify that; even that's merely labeled, too. If you had no ego, you wouldn't feel pain. If we'd gone beyond ego, had compassion, saw emptiness, it would be like a joke for us, we'd laugh... Lama Zopa Rinpoche – I mean I just have to use my own example of Lama Zopa – my job is to see him as a Buddha because he's my lama; but you never mind where he's at, he's pretty incredible. He's renown for his intense compassion. He doesn't sleep; he's a high being, you know?

So, when he had a stroke -- last year, in Australia, I was there for a course. And like a day later, we saw, like, a video of him. Forget even that – we heard about him, no, I saw the video of him, and he looked like he was totally drunk, he couldn't speak, his words came all (slurred sounds)... his right arm and leg, whatever... and the people who were with him, they said he was like – and I'm not trying to be silly here – he was like blissful. It was almost, for me, as if his compassion multiplied a million times right there. There he'd got this stroke, he couldn't use his right arm, he couldn't walk, he couldn't speak; but he was completely, like, blissful. All the Catholic nuns in the hospital couldn't believe this unusual person who was cracking jokes the whole time when most people would be having a mental breakdown about having a stroke. But he was very funny, hysterically funny, unbelievably compassionate; it was like as if his compassion, for me, seemed to me, multiplied so massively...he would think about the people who had made the sheets, and talked about the pillows and the nurses; he was like bursting with kindness and compassion for people... And that's called 'getting a stroke', which is not meant to be cool, but it's like he just went a few eons ahead with his stroke and got even funnier, even wiser, even kinder, even more compassionate. Can you kind of hear what I'm saying here? Well; it's mere labeled, isn't it? So... I don't know; it's an example...

So, we buy into things like 'going to prison'; 'Oh, that sounds terrible.' Or getting five dollars; 'Oh, that sound great.' But excuse me, where's the meaning? I mean, like one of the things like in The Six Perfections of the Bodhisattva, they talk about the different practices we're trying to cultivate, and the very first one is called 'generosity', right? And then for me, one of the greatest practices to try to cultivate generosity; it's exactly this meaning. When you look -- in the old-fashioned days you'd get checks and get bills in the post, wouldn't you; now everything's internet. Let's say you got a check and you opened up an envelope – you opened up *two* envelopes; one was a bill and one was a check. So immediately we know, when you see 'check', you get happy. When you see 'bill', you get sad. Do you agree? Nobody would ever, ever, ever, ever, ever question that; would you agree? It's just seen as an absolute truth.

Excuse me? Who says? You can start being happy when you get a bill. Why not? I mean, if you understood generosity and karma, you'd be so blessed out you have an opportunity to practice generosity: 'Oh, I'm so happy to pay this bill. Wow, it's a bill, I can't believe it,' and rush to pay it quickly because you want to keep your generosity karma in the tank. And if you get a check – it's said bodhisattvas are nervous when good things happen because they're using up their merit; because they agree, they believe, they know that it's all a result of their past action – so every time you get good things to happen, you've used up some good karma. I mean, it's like you eat all your veggies out of the garden, you get nervous because you've got that many less veggies; you've got to quickly grow more. How do you grow more? You've got to write a check! So, it's just 'merely labeled', but we never question this; we see it as an absolute truth that you feel good – everything in our life is like this. When we all have a conversation, we all buy into each other's understanding. You know, you say, 'Oh, I bought a cake today.'

'Oh, did you? That's wonderful!'

How do you know it's good? Because we all buy into the fact that eating cake's nice! 'Someone accused me today,' you'll say. We all agree that's a terrible thing. How do we know that? Because we've bought into, we've agreed, we've labeled it this. We can change any of this we want to, but we see it set in stone. That's what it means, seeing everything as inherent. We have this whole secret language we've learned; we could have a conversation, we'll all know what we're talking about. Why? Because we've all learned the same meanings, like we've all learned maths, you know?

'One and one is seven.'

'No, one and one is two,' we'll say.

We've bought into that; it has no inherent truth. We've *made* it 'one and one is two'. We've decided it's this. But look, it works beautifully – we build buildings and computers on the basis of maths. So it is true; *but not from its own side*. We've decided that one and one is two: the sound, one-and-one-is-two. Everything exists like this; we buy into everything and we see it as existing *out there*, from its own side – having nothing to do with me. That's merely labeled. Everything we have in our life is like this.

Q: And so is our job to re-label things?

***See That It Is Labeled!***

Ven.: Precisely! No...no! Don't change the labels; *see that we've labeled it*. You don't have to chuck out the labels, not if they're valid; keep 'em, but just see that they're empty. It proves emptiness. Then you can just enjoy this 'smoke-and-mirrors' called life. This is the point. And then you won't be unhappy when bad things happen, and you won't be hysterical when good things happen – because the reason we're hysterical when good things happen is because we have this frantic grasping at it as inherent and then attachment to it because we think that makes us happy; and then we won't have this hysteria when bad things happen, because we believe that will make us suffer so we go up and down like yo-yos... *But we have called it that*, like the child who draws a lion, but we forget we drew it!

We can change our response! This is what 'giving up samsara' means! And this is the meaning of emptiness; that nothing has an inherent nature, but that doesn't mean things aren't important. On the contrary, that label is deadly accurate – it *is* a cup that holds my tea; we've all bought into that. We don't have to chuck the baby out with the bath water; that's nihilism to think you've got to re-label it. No! Agree that it is that, but it's only that because I've labeled it that! But look, I can enjoy it, too. You get the best of both worlds.

So, my Lama's always joking: once a yogi's realized emptiness, then you can have fun and enjoy all the delicious dependent arisings! You don't have to walk around being miserable... Now, you know they're all empty, you can have enjoy, and there's no negative karma there now, it's just all bliss... Yeah... Something like that.

Q: Is that why some of these teachers look so happy all the time?

Ven.: It *is* why they're happy all the time. Lama Zopa's even twenty trillion times more happy having a stroke! I mean, like ridiculous! It made him so happy; to have a stroke. It sounds ridiculous to our mind. Of course it's why they are; look at His Holiness. All his people are being knocked off every day, and he's still blissful; because that bliss comes with immense compassion. So, Lama Zopa – just as his compassion seemed to be increased, like, a million times, for all the people in the hospital, he thinks about the compassion of those who made the pillow, who made the sheet, who are helping. He'd be just overwhelmed with gratitude to the nurses, to the cook, to the people. They couldn't get over this person... Of course that's why they're happy: because they've seen emptiness and there's no ego – they've given it up. That's why they can cut their hand off and give it to a starving animal; it's as inconsequential as a leaf falling off a tree... yeah... yes, sweetheart?

Q: So, I was thinking, the thoughts come through of why the precious human life is so important; it seems to me from what you're saying it's because we have the capability to ...think and...

Ven.: ...do all this. That's right; precisely. And if we were overwhelmed by too much ego or arrogance or rage or suffering or anger we couldn't do any of this; we'd just be obsessed with our self. Look at the – when we're caught up in our own misery; we can't see past our own nose! Can you imagine living your life this way: *incapable* of getting past yourself, *incapable* of going beyond ego-grasping and attachment and self-cherishing? So, at least there's this miracle of some *space*, occasionally, to put our heads together and think this stuff through and attempt to apply it, you know? That's the miraculous – I mean, we've all got these tendencies, the Buddha says – Hitler and the lions and the tigers – but they can't access them; so this is the miracle of the perfect human rebirth: *we can access our virtue* and we have the space and time to be in a place like this and sit here, without having to go and grow our rice for ten hours a day or go kill people for ten hours a day, you know, because we've got this leisure that we created because of our past morality; plus the wish to do something with it. So it's pretty amazing.

Well, it's only 3:30, but I think we've had enough; it's my opinion. Maybe we'll just sit quietly, close your eyes, and we'll space out for a few minutes on empty space and just get a – get a sense of – just imagine your consciousness now, imagine your mind not locked in this little body now...but your subtle consciousness, your being, you can call it whatever you like -- some people like the word 'spirit' – whatever you want, this energy, this you, this real you that's seeing reality, that is in bliss, that's got infinite compassion, infinite clarity, infinite wisdom, infinite joy, which are our true nature; imagine they're utterly manifesting now, and expand your consciousness to pervade the universe... no limit, not possible, can't be limit, pervading the universe, infinite empathy with every living being, infinite wisdom that sees their minds, infinite compassion for every one, and infinite confidence that I can never give up, working to benefit every one, and don't have the thoughts but just abide in this total infinite bliss. Just...no words... just vast, blissful space...

### *Dedication*

**1:45:00**

So we then just dedicate: all this thinking, this aspiring, analyzing, a few pennies dropping, maybe, a few seeds planted in our mind, how amazing!  
May we nourish those seeds from this moment on with our efforts and move forward to continue to work on ourselves, continue to grow compassion, to continue to help others, to continue to be courageous, go past our comfort zone, keep moving, keep growing, never giving up – for our sake, and the sake of others.

Jang chhub sem chhog rin po chhe  
Ma kye pa nam kye gyur chig  
Kye wa nyam pa me pa yang  
Gong na gong du phel war shog

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

Alright; thank you everybody.

Transcribed by Fran McDermott