

Emptiness

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Tonight we are facing quite a challenge—we're supposed to say something about nothing. With the blessings of the Buddha, hopefully we'll manage.

To understand emptiness, we have to relate to particular teachings of Buddha known as prajnaparamita, or *she-rab-pha-rol-tu-phyin-pa*. These teachings are contained in seventeen texts, which are recognized as the fourth of Buddha's teachings on emptiness. They contain both philosophical teachings and an introduction to the practice of emptiness. Later, Buddha's disciples, such as Lord Maitreya, elaborated on those practices in teachings such as *prajna-paramita-abhisamaya-alankara*, which is an instruction on the practice of emptiness.

With this background information, let us now look into the subject. I will try to share what I know about it in the simplest way possible, since that is the only way I can communicate.

The Nature of Emptiness

Emptiness makes everything possible. If it were not for emptiness, nothing would be possible because everything would be fixed, solid. If everything is solid and fixed, then nothing can change, nothing will happen, nothing will improve, nothing will get worse. Emptiness explains why everything is always changing, why everything happens to everyone, and why we can improve. It explains why those who don't see things clearly and don't relate to things appropriately sometimes develop tremendous ignorance and aggression. All possibilities are based upon emptiness. Emptiness provides space for everything.

In the dharma, there are two sentences which express this subject simply: "There is nothing that isn't interrelated, therefore there is nothing that isn't emptiness." Emptiness simply means that everything is there, but that everything which is there is interdependent manifestation.

Views of Emptiness

There are several ways to relate to emptiness. We can relate to it in an ordinary, practical or scientific way or we can relate to it in a spiritual way. Relating to it in an ordinary way, Lord Buddha says, "Nothing is happening, therefore everything is happening." For example, when a family is in a crisis situation, the husband is the same person he was before the crisis, the wife is the same person she was before the crisis, the children are the same people they were before the crisis, and the home is the same home it was before the crisis—nothing has changed. But the communication between the family members is quite poor, so there are facing a family crisis. Yet when we look at it from a deeper perspective, nothing is happening, everybody is the same. Every situation is the same. But relatively, because nothing is

happening, everything is happening. If the communication between the family members isn't synchronized properly, problems arise.

When we look at emptiness from an ordinary sentient being's point of view, we need money, we need shelter, we need food, but when we look at each one of them, nothing really is happening. One family is living very comfortably and the next family is facing a crisis, but nothing is happening. Everything is the same. Yet because of interrelation, something is happening. One family is happy and the other is suffering. So, from a situation-oriented perspective, we can see very clearly that because nothing is happening ultimately, relatively everything is happening. And everything happens only as interdependent manifestation.

The Interrelation Between External Existence and Internal Individual Sentient Beings

Lord Buddha then taught about how the interrelation between external existence and internal individual sentient beings takes place. It is also based on the principle of emptiness.

Emptiness from a General Point of View

In sutra, and specifically in abhidharma, Lord Buddha explains emptiness in a most ordinary way. He says, "We relate to external existence through our senses—our eyes see, our ears hear, our body touches. How we feel when we touch something is totally interdependent on the nature of our body, and in connection to that, how that external element manifestation exists." It is the same with all of the senses. He says, "What we see and hear as a human being of this planet doesn't cover even the entire human realm. We are only the human beings of this planet and our particular solid existence." It has nothing to do with any other kind of human being, only human beings of planet earth.

Then he says, "If your mind could enter the body of the person sitting next to you and relate to the same environment you were previously relating to, it would not seem the same." If it were possible for us to enter another person's body and touch things, listen to things, taste things, look at things as that person instead of as ourselves, it wouldn't be the same. He also says, "More than that, within a single lifetime, from childhood to adulthood to old age, how we relate to things and how things affect us totally changes." He is talking about the most basic external things changes. Why does everything change? Because of emptiness.

He gave another, more spiritual, example, involving the River Ganges, a holy river in India. He said, "If you are a human being, the Ganges River is a holy river. You bathe in it in order to receive blessings." Then he said, "If you are an animal, the river is your source of water for drinking and bathing." Then he says, "If you are a hungry ghost, you might run away from this river. Perhaps you cannot drink from it or even touch it." Then he says, "If you are a hell realm being, this river will be like flowing lava that will burn you in one second." Then he says, "Even if you relate to the holy river from the different levels of the different realms, it isn't the same river." Why is it like that? Because of emptiness.

But why do all of the beings of the six realms of this place relate to the same river in a similar way? Because we have similar karma. In abhidharma, Lord Buddha refers to it as *kal mnyam*. *Kal* relates to time, or timing, and *mnyam* means equal. So, it

means “equal time.” There are karmic causes and conditions that make us see, hear, relate to and be affected by things in a similar way.

For example, here in this room, in this part of the city, we are all in a similar condition. I'm sure some of you think that what we are communicating is very valuable. Some of you think “I already know that.” Some of you think “That fellow doesn't make much sense.” Some of you wonder “Does he know what he's talking about?” (You're right!) Anyway, *kal mnyam* means “similar.” It's almost impossible to be exactly the same. All of us look different, think different, and feel different because of emptiness. If it weren't for emptiness, everybody might look and feel exactly the same. That is how Buddha explained emptiness from a general point of view.

Emptiness from a Spiritual Point of View

When it comes to the spiritual aspect of emptiness, Buddha says, “Although every sentient being has Buddha nature, he or she can still suffer in samsara, because of emptiness.” Then he says, “Even the most ignorant sentient being can attain enlightenment because of emptiness.” Then he said, “Billions of lifetimes might go by from the time that we make the decision to attain enlightenment until we actually accomplish it, but when we finally do attain enlightenment, those billions of lifetimes are not even a moment—because of emptiness.”

Then he said, “The compassion of the Buddha and the devotion of sentient beings can meet. Why? Because of emptiness.” Even if Buddha has compassion, if sentient beings don't have devotion, it won't be effective. Why? Because of emptiness.

In the sutras Lord Buddha repeated this many times. It simply means that all the delusions, all the obscurations, all the defilements are emptiness. And, all the knowledge, all the wisdom, everything is emptiness.

At this point, I'd like to share some good advice from the teachings of Lord Buddha that I have found to be very helpful, and very important. First, if we understand that both ignorance and wisdom are emptiness, we might develop an attitude that since everything is emptiness, why not just do whatever we feel like doing? Buddha strongly cautions us against this kind of attitude. The term he uses makes perfect sense in Tibetan, but when it is translated directly into English it might sound too strong. It says, *tong-nyi-dar long*. *Tong-pa-nyi* means emptiness, and *dar long* is something like an obstacle. So Buddha is cautioning us that knowing about emptiness can become an obstacle to our development if we develop this kind of attitude.

In some of the tantras, a two-sentence caution is given. In Tibetan it's precisely said *tong-pa-nyi-la . . . sherab . . .*. This means that if we understand emptiness incorrectly, those whose wisdom is limited can be destroyed. And even if we understand emptiness halfway, it isn't good enough because even just a little misunderstanding can cause great damage.

So how do we go about properly understanding emptiness? There is a long verse in Tibetan which says, “Your view can be as limitless as the sky, as space, but your mindfulness, awareness and action should be fine, like a powder.” In other words, to the degree that we understand emptiness, we have to be mindful, aware and disciplined in our actions.

If we understand emptiness and become involved with the method and discipline, much benefit will result, because we will not become fanatically involved with our discipline. We will never get obsessed by attachment to our particular method because we know it is just a method. We know negativity is not solid, it is empty. And we know positive things are also not solid. They, too, are empty. But if we work with positive methods to overcome negativity, then it really works.

Since we know this, we can be more relaxed and explore the subject further. If it sounds like I know a lot, that isn't true. Because of the kindness of all the great masters, I have some information. The good part is that I'm more than happy to share it with you.

Emptiness and Interdependent Manifestation

Emptiness and interdependent manifestation are closely related. Interdependent manifestation is the easiest way to understand emptiness, so I will be using this term throughout this talk.

There is a general samsaric interdependent pattern that explains how every sentient being evolves and continues. And there is another pattern that is like enlightenment, the interdependence of enlightenment, and how Buddha manifests and benefits sentient beings. I would like to explore both of these tonight.

Normal Samsaric Interdependence

In normal samsaric interdependence, every sentient being continues through the twelve links of interdependent origination. The core of the entire interdependent circle is ignorance. Ignorance makes everything happen in a samsaric way. Ignorance simply means not knowing exactly what everything is all about—who we are, where we are, what is happening and why it is this way. It is not so dreadful, it's simply the way things are.

I'd like to share with you four sentences from a particular Mahamudra prayer that relate to the practice of mind. Actually, every practice is a practice of mind, but this one particularly so. These sentences are very important to me because I intellectually understood emptiness through them. It says, "Nothing was ever there. My own projection, reflection—I have said it and I have taken it as my object. Then I always recognize myself, but I miss it and I call it I."

I always recognize myself non-stop, but since I don't really recognize what I recognize, that becomes I. Because of these two—out there and in here—I go in a circle, a non-stop circle. Sometimes I go up, sometimes down, sometimes I go out and sometimes in. But it is a non-stop circle. The prayer is: "May I finally overcome and realize this ignorance at once." These four sentences quite clearly explain what ignorance is.

Twelve Links of Interdependent Origination

There are twelve links in the chain of interdependent origination. I will go through them briefly, one by one.

1. Ignorance

The first of the link in the chain of interdependent origination is ignorance. Because of ignorance, there is I, there is other, and there is interrelation—relatives, friends, enemies, strangers, neighbors. These various interrelations involve many concepts: “These people are our friends, therefore we should be nice to them.” “These people are strangers, so we can dismiss them.” “Those are our neighbors, so watch out!” “They are our enemy, so we have to be nasty, and rude.” All of these concepts are developed. We can reverse our concepts so that we try to be nice instead of nasty and rude to our enemies, but it is still just interrelation.

All of this is related to two major principles—one is identified as attachment, passion or desire and the other is anger, or aggression. We can refer to them as the positive side and the negative side. Both develop because of ignorance. And because these two develop, when we’re in a positive direction in a positive way, good karma is accumulated, and when we’re in a negative direction in a negative way, bad karma is accumulated. When we’re negative in a positive way, another level of bad karma is accumulated, and when we’re positive in a negative way, another kind of good karma is accumulated. This can go on and on and on, in endless combinations.

2. Preparation

The second link in the chain of interdependent origination is that all of this is preparation for more to come. And until the chain is completed, this scenario of samsara is not going to end. It is one scenario preparing for the next scenario. Whatever we do now is the result of the past, of course, but it is also a cause for the future. Just because our present action is the result of past action does not mean that it is also not the condition for future action. Our action now is the result of past but also a cause of the future.

This is definitely the result of ignorance, which is the first link, but it is also called preparation, because it is preparing for the next. It sounds like karma is fixed at this stage, but that’s not true. Karma is emptiness. But don’t worry about this—we will talk about it later.

3. Consciousness

The third link in the chain of interdependent origination is simply “consciousness.” Because of preparation, which we just talked about, everything will continue, and all aspects of consciousness will be strengthened. This preparation of positive and negative activity is reinforcement for our consciousness. We develop more ideas, more habits, more anger, more desire, more aggression and more passion. This will make it more solid.

4. Physical Existence

Because our consciousness became very strong and solidified, it became involved with physical existence, such as the substance of the physical body and all its interconnections. Right now, people like ourselves are totally inseparable from our body. We cannot look at something without looking through our physical eyes. We’re totally sealed, bound and inseparable. That is how mind becomes solidified with physical existence.

5. Five Senses

The fifth link is that when this consciousness and this body are totally involved and inseparable, like the eyes through which we see, the ears through which we hear, the nose through which we smell—all of this develops very solidly, very strongly.

6. Touch

The sixth link is touch. Touch doesn't simply mean physical body touch, but includes all aspects of touch, of being in touch. The eye, the form and the color in touch, the ear, the sound, etc. in touch. All the different levels in touch.

7. Feeling

The seventh link is feeling. Because of being in touch, we develop feelings—"I like it," "I don't like it," "I hate it," "I don't mind," "I'll think about it," etc. All of these are the result of getting in touch.

8. Sred-pa, or Obsession (Fear and Greed)

The eighth link is obsession, or *sred-pa* in Tibetan. Some translators translate *sred-pa* as desire, but it's more like obsession. If we don't like something, we feel as if we can't stand it. Alternatively, if we like something, we can't stand not having it. We can't have it but feel we must have it. Not being able to stand something and pushing it away is called *jigs-sred*, like fear. And when we have to have something, we call it *dod-sred*. *Jigs-sred* is the fear aspect and *dod-sred* is more the greed aspect. So greed and fear develop next. That is *sred-pa*.

9. Taking, or Len-pa

The ninth link is *len-pa*, taking. We push away everything we don't like, and we strive to get what we like. This is *len-pa*, or taking.

10. Srid-pa, or Possibility

The tenth link is possibility. Because of the tremendous activity we've described—which we can understand very well, because we've all been doing it ever since we can remember—*srid-pa* becomes solidified. *Srid-pa* simply means possibility. Nothing is impossible. Everything is possible. *Srid-pa* also means samsara, and can mean existence as well.

In Tibetan, two terms are used to describe the universe, including all sentient beings and all of existence: *srid-pa* and *jig-ten*. Both words have great meaning. *Srid-pa* simply means "possible." So, one of the names of all existence is *srid-pa*, possible. Nothing is impossible. Everything is possible. *Jig-ten* means "impermanence." *Jig* means "destruction"; *ten* is the "foundation of destruction." Everything that exists can be destroyed one way or another. This is another way of saying impermanence. Because of all of this activity, everything is possible, and samsara is maintained. Whatever is needed for the existence of samsara, now the job is done. *Srid-pa* is the last.

11. Birth, or Che-Wa [Skye-Ba]

As a result of cause and condition, there is birth. Birth is very important, whatever kind of birth it is. We have to be born to go through what we have to go through. That is how we become engaged with all of these conditions. Right now I am here as a human being of planet earth, of this universe. To experience another realm, I have to die from this realm and be born in other realm. And remember, birth does not always happen from the mother. There are many kinds of birth.

12. Ga-shi, or Worn Out

The twelfth link is *ga-shi*. *Ga* means “worn out”; something that is used becomes old. *Shi* means “death,” “totally completed.” The circle of relation of body and mind comes to an end. Then the next life, and a new circle, begin.

These twelve interdependent links explain precisely how every sentient being comes into existence and establishes the conditions for his or her future. And this is how cause, condition and result are all interdependent. So it is emptiness.

Emptiness of Enlightenment

Until a person attains the enlightenment of buddhahood, all processes are interdependent. This isn't difficult to understand. For example, when Prince Siddhartha attained enlightenment, he himself was beyond interdependent influence, but his manifestation was not. His manifestation was totally related with interdependence. This is why those who had the karma to see him saw him 2,500 years ago. And those who have karma to see him now will also see him. Those who have the karma to receive his blessing in a most direct way will do so. Those who have the karma to receive his blessing only in an indirect way, that is the only way for them. It is not the case that because Buddha's blessing is given equally to everyone that everyone will receive it equally. It doesn't happen that way. It depends on the karma, on interdependence.

As a follower of Buddha, we say, “I want to liberate all sentient beings.” Well, Buddha attained enlightenment 2,500 years ago, and still lots of sentient beings are suffering, and lots of his own disciples are still confused! We can't say to Buddha, “What's the matter with you?” but everything matters with us. So Buddha, as an individual, is free from all interdependent influences, but his manifestation is not. His manifestation is definitely subject to interdependent influence.

This is how the practice of devotion works. We have to develop pure compassion in order to develop pure devotion. The reverse is also true. We have to develop pure devotion in order to develop pure compassion. Depending on how pure our compassion is to the Buddha, that is how pure the Buddha's blessing will be to us. If we want to see something clearly, we have to have clear eyes. Depending on how clear our eyes are, that's how clear our vision will be.

The same is true with devotion. Depending on how pure our devotion is, that is how pure Buddha's blessing will be. So, people like myself who don't have such clear eyes have to wear glasses. Those of us who don't have such pure devotion and pure compassion will need advice and practice to establish it. Then we can develop pure devotion. As I said yesterday, the potential for that pure devotion is within us, but it won't come out by accident. And even if it comes out by accident, we'll almost certainly lose it.

This is mentioned in *bodhisattvacharyavatara* of the great master Shantideva. He said that in the darkest night, a split second of lightening is brighter than anything, but then it's gone. We can have a pure encounter with our ultimate potential by accident, but we can't count on it happening again. Occasionally, when something extremely shocking happens to us, we experience a moment of understanding, or vision, a glimpse of recognition of something deep, but as soon as things settle, it's over. Since we can't count on those things happening spontaneously, we have to practice.

Application and Practice of Emptiness in Ordinary Life

Now that we have this information, we need a method to help us apply it and share it with others. Whether people are Buddhist or not, they can benefit from it. So, let's talk about the application of the philosophy and practice of emptiness in ordinary life.

I found an interesting sentence in a Tibetan fairy tale which involves a king and his soldiers. It was a time of war and there was lots of pain. Someone said, "No matter what happens, only my body can be hurt; no one can hurt my mind." If we can apply such a clear understanding of emptiness as this in our everyday life, we can lessen our own suffering as well as the suffering of others.

This next piece of advice, which is related with defilements, is from the teaching of the Buddha. It gives us some guidance about what to do if we have a particular problem, like anger. Suppose we feel furious, and we want to shout at someone, and maybe even hit them. Instead of shouting and hitting, Buddha advises us to sit down and calmly look into the face of the anger and ask: "What is the anger?" "Where is the anger?" When we do this, we find that the anger is not there. It is no more than just a reaction of all kinds of interdependent manifestation. This same advice can be applied to any defilement—attachment, desire, jealousy. Many people tell me they have a problem with anger and ask for a method to deal with it. This might be a good one.

Another problem we have is habit. In Buddhist terms, it's *pa-cha-che-dupa*. Defilement is also habitual, but it's a little different. *Pa-cha-che-dupa* is a very subtle obstacle—like projecting ourselves onto other people, or making the same mistake over and over because we misunderstand other people and judge them in an ignorant way. Later on we find out that we were wrong, but most of the time it's too late. So, from the subtle habitual obstacle, the concept of I, to the most rough—that kind of habitual problem.

In the West, this is quite prevalent because you have so much freedom. If people are free, they have to make their own judgments. You don't go up to someone and ask "I think it's like this, but what do you think?" They might think you're stupid or crazy. So as a result of freedom, people can develop a subtle and positive type of presumption. And of course, it is not possible for us to think through every little detail. We have to draw the best conclusion we can—that this means this, that means that, he meant this, she meant that. We really don't know if we have it right or not, but we assume that we know. Consequently, we might live with a particular misunderstanding forever and never understand it clearly because there's no chance for that particular event to take place again.

I'm being very presumptuous here, but I hope you don't mind. I'm sharing this with you hoping it will be helpful. I was personally convinced of this because of some specific experiences I had. When I first came to the West, I heard many people say that they hate themselves. I had a hard time understanding that at the beginning. I

couldn't imagine how anyone could hate themselves. I really thought it was impossible. After all, it's you! I must confess that initially I assumed those people were mentally disturbed. Later I was convinced that it wasn't the case. Now I believe it comes out of a deep subconscious habit that draws conclusions too fast. We drew the conclusion so many times that we were a bad person that it became a habitual thought and turned into something like self-hate. But how, having learned about Buddha nature in our past discussion, hopefully we won't have that problem. The practice of emptiness relating to subconscious habits will help very much here, because if we look at statements like "I hate myself" from an emptiness point of view, it's not there. It's not true.

We have another attitude as well. People say "I can't stand such and such and so and so." People even have nervous breakdowns. But if we look at it from the emptiness point of view, I don't think it exists. What does "I can't stand it" mean? When somebody like myself talks and talks, you might think "I can't stand him," but I could continue talking for ten years, and you could go out, have lunch, come back, and sit there year after year and you would somehow manage. You can stand it. But these things are very disturbing to people. Hopefully you can apply your understanding of emptiness to overcome those difficulties.

Well, it has been very nice talking to you, and trying to explain emptiness and share the great teachings that were given to me by my masters. But I'll be happier if you can do something with it. And you don't have to tell me.

If you have questions, I will try to answer them.

Rinpoche, when you were repeating the four sentences from the Mahamudra, you said something about an I which is always present but doesn't recognize the I. What is that I?

Let's go back to yesterday's subject—Buddha nature, the tathagatagarbha, the limitless potential, the limitless essence that is always there. It is not hidden. We just don't recognize it. We miss it every moment. Therefore, that becomes I. If I said "I which is always here," I made a mistake. I'm sorry. I should have said that particular essence of I.

So, you're saying that what I usually think of as I—this is the real I?

That's close, but it's not exactly true. It isn't two things, it's one thing. It's like this eye is looking through this eye itself. The eye who misses and what it misses is the same. I think that's where the problem is. If it were two different things, it would be much easier to sort out.

Rinpoche, will you explain that in more depth?

I'll try. Everything that is out there, all the objects, were never there beyond my own projection, my own reflection. But because I don't recognize them as my own projection, I take them to be objects. It's like a magician who builds a castle out of his magical power. He forgets that he created it, gets attached to it, and tries to sell it. Then the castle collapses on his head and he dies there. It is something like that. My ultimate, limitless Buddha nature is always there. And it is me, so there's no question, whether I recognize it or don't recognize it. It is not two things. But because I miss it all the time, that becomes "I." That limitless, ultimate essence is limited to one, and that is me.

Now, we can go on and on—that me becomes my body, my race, my sexual gender, and the type of person I am. All of these limitations make us very small and put us in the smallest possible box in the universe. And the box is locked. We can't get out, because the key is in the ocean. No, I'm joking--it's not that bad. The key is inside with you. So, because of this duality, we're circling in the endless samsara, and may I overcome this ignorance. These are the four sentences.

Rinpoche, earlier you said, depending on how much compassion we have for the Buddha, that much Buddha's blessing comes to us.

I meant devotion. Maybe I said it wrong. Of course, we can say compassion because when we have compassion towards sentient beings, that is having compassion to the Buddha, because sentient beings are Buddha by nature. But usually we don't say compassion to Buddha. Asian culture is very specific about that.

How does emptiness relate to Buddha nature?

Buddha nature is emptiness—but as we've learned, emptiness doesn't mean nothing. If we really want to describe the real emptiness, it is the Buddha nature. Buddha nature is beyond dualistic existence, so it is the real emptiness. Buddha nature is beyond time, beyond limitation, so we can say that it is *the* emptiness. But if we say that, we have to use all the other characteristics of emptiness, without the "the." So, it's true, buddha nature is beyond everything, so it is emptiness.

With the twelve interdependent links, where is it in the cycle that we stop?

We can stop anywhere and we can attain enlightenment at any stage. But the key to all of it is overcoming ignorance. Then everything is over.

So anytime we feel we're looking at something and that something is still out there, we're still in the cycle?

Of course. But don't worry about that. When you start to worry about that, I worry too! When anybody is worried about that, we all have to worry! Something can go wrong, so don't worry about it. We should be happy about knowing this, and then we can deal with everything normally, applying effort to overcome ignorance and develop our wisdom through practice. But don't worry about it.

But if someone is awaked, don't they also experience the solid, dualistic, relative world?

By awake, do you mean Buddha? Buddha is beyond. We cannot imagine how Buddha sees and thinks, because we're not enlightened yet. When the time comes that we can think like a Buddha, and understand precisely, we will be Buddha. It's the final taste. For example, how can you explain about snow to a person who lived their whole life in the South African desert and never saw snow? What will he think if he hasn't see it in person, or on TV, or in the movies, or in photographs? He can talk about it, and he might have a particular idea, but when he really sees and walks in it, then he knows. So Buddha's way of relating to everything is beyond dualism, but we can't say anything more than that.

Did you say that you would explain how karma is also empty?

Okay. Yes, I did said I would say something about it. If karma is empty, all the tigers can go to sleep. Karma just means that everything has a cause and condition. The cause and condition of everything is what we call karma. Karma is emptiness because it's nothing more than cause and condition. Karma cause, karma result, karma condition. When we really look into the study of the karma, there are, if I remember correctly, six causes, four conditions, and five results. That's how karma is explained. The karmic cause, condition and result are all interrelated. That is the definition of emptiness.

People talk about emptiness a lot and it seems like they dress it up. It's made into some big thing instead of something sensible. I feel there's a joke being played on me, because when we talk about it, it seems so very accessible.

That's what I try to do, but sometimes it's hard to manage because when we communicate, we have to become a little wordy. But if no one talked about it, it would be difficult for people to know about it, or think about it. So it's a very good thing that there are teachings and methods for it. But I can't agree more with you that the teaching of Buddha is the most accessible, most ordinary and most direct teaching. Whenever Buddha taught, he taught in order to give advice. He never taught courses or performed ceremonies the way we think of courses and ceremonies these days. A person simply came forward and asked Buddha questions. Buddha then gave direct answers and the person went off to practice it. People came to him with full devotion and gave him their cold heart and he made it warm and gave it back. Then, after many hundreds of years, it became the religion of hundreds of millions of people. And still nowadays there are institutions where they study and debate on the texts of Buddha, like in any other religion. But even though there is a vast difference between how Buddha taught and how we learn now, we shouldn't be disappointed. If those things didn't happen, maybe we would have nothing. Instead, we have something. So I think we should accept it.

At the end you were talking about habit, and repeatedly making mistakes by misunderstanding people and projecting ourselves onto them. Could you say a little more about that?

Okay. I think it's unnecessary to involve emptiness in this answer, so I'll just answer straight, without worrying about how it ties into emptiness. First of all, we can't think of anything which we can't think of. And what we can think, and how we think—these things we can improve. Whatever it is we communicate, we can only relate to in our own way. No matter who we are or where we come from, we always deal with things from our level. That's the only way we can do it. But if our mind is able to see whatever it is clearly, our communication will be more accurate. When our mind is confused, we can be misunderstood. So the basic reason to practice Buddhism is to develop clarity.

Meditation methods like shamata are given to settle our mind so that when we relate to something, our mind isn't involved with hundreds of other things. It can just relate to that one thing. Then, when we listen to a person, our mind is calm and clear and we're just concentrating on what that person is saying. We can totally listen to that person from beginning to end. And when we respond, our response wouldn't be too far off. Even a little bit of simple shamata meditation every day will help to develop clarity. It might also awaken our clear potential so we can work with it.

I've found for myself that studying quantum physics has helped me visualize more clearly the concept of emptiness. And I was just wondering if you saw a way of incorporating that into the teachings?

I'm sure there is a way, but I don't know how at this point. What came into my mind was a place I visited in Europe where they worked with the smallest particles. One professor took the time to explain to me what they were doing. He said that the Dalai Lama and a few other great masters had a conference or discussion there several years ago that involved emptiness. It sounds like they understand emptiness, but I can't really judge.

Now let us make a dedication.

[Transcribed and edited by Stephanie Harold]