

# *Transcript Interview Tenzin Palmo*

09-06-21

**Question 1-On the one hand, we are happy that Westerners are interested in non-duality. On the other hand, we have the feeling that they lack the basis to go far in this field. What do you think about this?**

**Tenzin Palmo:** Well you know, the problem is that nowadays, people want to build the Golden roof on the house but they're not interested in the floor and the walls which support that Golden roof, and so until we understand duality, in other words until we understand our own conceptual thinking mind, we will not be able to stabilize and sustain any glimpse we might have of non-duality, because our mind has no basis. We have no real practice and so therefore, what is non-duality? It is primordial awareness, the fundamental consciousness of innate divinity within us which is wisdom and compassion by nature. That we all have, and that goes beyond separation of me and others. It's when that sense of duality falls away. That's why it's called non-duality. There is an interconnection with everything, all of nature and living beings on this planet and the universe. People get glimpses. Suddenly they realize that all the ideas they have built around that dualism, their perception is all wrong. But because we don't have the basis—we haven't gone step by step, we can't sustain that realization and so this is why it's very important to understand our ordinary everyday consciousness and understand what it is for, how we think, in order to be able to maintain the genuine realization which goes beyond the dualistic nature of the mind. This is why there should be a progression, like climbing a ladder; you don't start at the top rung. You have to start at the bottom and climb up.

**Question: But how to practice duality and non-duality?**

**Tenzin Palmo:** Forget about non-duality. Understand duality and then from there, the mind will of itself open up into another level of consciousness. But if we don't have mindful awareness every day, we're never going to get primordial awareness, or if we do, we won't be able to sustain it. So we have to start from where we are. Everybody wants the highest, but you can't get the highest until you have the basics in learning how to tame the mind, how to make the mind more calm and clear, to be able to have a mind which is not the monkey mind, a mind which is running all over the place. We have to tame the monkey and through the mind we can train the monkey. Training the monkey transforms the mind and by transforming the mind we will eventually transcend our normal conceptual mind, but it has to go in stages. We can't get to the top of the mountain when we haven't even reached base camp. We have to get all our equipment for climbing.

**Question 2: (Our question is a quote from your book compiled by Dr. Jacques Vigne) where it is said that if one has a purified mind, it is better to be a tiger than a rabbit. Can you elaborate on this?**

**T.P.** In the Buddhist tradition we are trying to overcome our negative and conflictive emotions; our anger, greed, pride, jealousy and our fundamental egotistic ignorance, to uproot these and transform them into their opposites. But in the Tantric tradition it is understood that the root, the source of these negative emotions like greed and anger, their source, is actually a very powerful wisdom energy and so therefore the other side of anger. So you can recognize that source at the moment of anger arising, if one can see nakedly into the source, it transforms of itself into a very powerful wisdom energy, but if we can control that energy, then it's very powerful. It's like trying to drive a Ferrari. If you don't know how to drive you're going to crash, so it's better to go on a bicycle. At least if you fall off the bicycle you won't kill yourself. Most people are not able to control such a powerful car. We start with something very simple such as to recognize our negative emotions and transfer them into something positive. But for great practitioners, that power of having very powerful emotions if we are in control of them, not controlled BY them, then that takes us much higher. We are like a tiger, not a placid little rabbit.

**Question: But Jetsuma, most people take the tiger for a symbol of anger, but you are saying it's better to be a tiger.**

**T.P.** The tiger here is not a symbol of anger, it's a symbol of power. Tigers are very powerful whereas rabbits are sweet but a bit ineffectual. Those who are powerful are in control of their emotions, so they are much more likely to gain great realizations on the spiritual path rather than someone who is very sweet and placid but pretty ineffectual, so this is an encouragement for people who have very strong emotions—negative emotions and feel that this makes them bad people. If we are in control of those emotions it is spiritually beneficial but it doesn't mean that we can be angry and lustful and that's a good thing. That's not what we're saying. What we're saying is the essential nature of those very strong emotions is actually very powerful and could be used for a very great spiritual benefit if a person is in control and controlled by them. This is the basis of tantra. To take things normally as regarded as an obstacle and use them as a means for realization.

**Question 3: One has the feeling that observing one's sensations or the contents of the mind is an endless process. Can a strong Shamatha, a strong meditation practice help to get out of this endless bubbling?**

**T.P.** Yes, of course. Shamatha or calm abiding meditation is intended to calm the mind. In the beginning when we are simply watching the breath, breathing in, breathing out....then after instead of becoming more calm it seems that the mind is wilder than ever and people complain. "I have more thoughts, not fewer. This is not true. We've just become more conscious of these thoughts. We always have lots of thoughts but we normally don't notice it because we're swept along by the thoughts. SO we are learning how to acquire attention on single pointed concentration like the breath. Slowly the mind begins to quiet down and our attention span tends to increase and we can stay with the object longer and longer and the background noise fades.

**Question: One has the feeling that observing the workings or contents of the mind is an endless process. Can a strong meditation practice help to get to Shamatha? Can a calm abiding mind reach that state?**

**T. P.** Sometimes if we start by merely observing the breath, we have, in fact, even more thoughts than before. The mind is wilder. Actually this is not true. We are simply becoming more conscious of these thoughts. We normally don't notice as we are swept along by the thoughts. So we are learning how to acquire single pointed concentration. If we get carried away we bring the thoughts back to the object of concentration like the object of the breath, and our attention span begins to increase and we can stay with the object longer and longer and background noise (like having TV on or reading a book). Ignore TV. Likewise we ignore background "noise" cultivating mindful awareness. When we think we are submerged by our thoughts it's like we are submerged in a river and we're just running along. Now we are stepping out of the river. We're not damming the river, we're not IN the river, we're simply sitting on the banks watching the river and that is an enormous step forward. This is not ultimate reality but it's very important to be able to observe the thoughts without BEING the thoughts and we recognize that we are not the thoughts because we can observe them. So that begins to calm the mind down. The more we can stand back and observe the thinking without judgement, without trying to change anything—just knowing the mind begins to seem as if you're looking at people messing about and they notice people watching them and they suddenly start to put themselves in better order and stop their messing about. So the mind that sees it is being observed naturally begins to observe itself, calm down a bit and come more under control. We need to become the masters of our minds. We are the slaves of our thoughts and our feelings.

**Question: How to know if our monkey mind is less in movement, less active?**

**T.P.** We have to tame the monkey. Not let the monkey be the master. Because the monkey is not very intelligent. In fact the monkey is ignorant and causes lots of problems. You let a monkey into your room and he will destroy the place in no time. So if you have a quiet monkey it won't destroy the room. So this is the point. We need to tame our mind. The Buddha said that a well-trained mind brings happiness. We have a sense of peace and clarity in our thoughts. We can observe our thoughts without being swept along by them anymore. This is already a big step forward, to get space in our mind instead of being caught up in all the noise. Once we look at the mind, we see how really boring the mind is....always thinking the same thoughts, coming up with the same old memories, having the same old opinions. We're not very original and so we stop being so fascinated by our thoughts because they're like soap operas being repeated again and again. This is not who we really are.

**Question: About this topic, one sage said: "We have to be clever and know what the monkey is searching for. It is searching for a banana so should you give him this banana which is happiness? What do you think?"**

**T.P.** I think he just wants more bananas. If you see monkeys in a tree with fruit, what do they do? They pull down one fruit, bite it, then pick another, throw it down, pull another, throw it down and what do we see? Before you know it they've wrecked the tree and what you find is

half eaten fruit on the ground under the tree. So don't put any control in the hands of the monkeys. Monkeys have to learn that they are not the master. It just doesn't work. However much you feed the monkey, he'll never be satisfied and he's just going to wreak destruction everywhere he goes. So don't put him in charge.

**Question 4: Jetsuma, the Buddha says that the karma of anger is eight times worse than that of desire. But it is much more difficult to detach oneself from desire than from anger. Can you elaborate on this?**

**T.P.** Yes. If we have a lot of anger in our hearts, then we are not comfortable. We make enemies. We are always fighting with people and basically we're not happy, so we'd like to get rid of anger. Many times people ask "How do I overcome my anger?" And there are many books on how to overcome anger because everyone would like not to be angry. It causes lots of problems, BUT desire is much more tricky because when we think we get the object of our desire we think we are happy, and therefore the more we can desire and gratify our desire, that is the path to happiness. It is hard for people to recognize that as the Buddha said, the cause of our suffering is our grasping desiring mind. People normally don't want to get rid of their desire, they just want to satisfy their desire and they don't recognize that actually their unrest inside is the cause of their problem. Greed is like salty water. We can drink the whole ocean and we're still going to be thirsty. Sometimes I explain with this example. When I lived in the cave up in the mountains, then outside there was like this kind of patio which was of hard earth, which was fine, but then when it rained or snowed it turned to mud. I needed to put some flagstones down, flat stones so that I could walk on it and it wouldn't be muddy. Now on this hard packed earth there were these clusters of little yellow flowers, very sweet, little cluster here and there, very sweet, but when I got these stones, I decided to pull them up because they would unbalance the stones, so I started to pull them up and they wouldn't come up, however hard I pulled and then I got a pick axe and started digging down to see where the roots of these little flowers were and what I found underneath was this whole huge root system; thick roots like that, all interconnected and all you saw was these very innocent little flowers and I thought, "That is like desire....it looks very innocent on the surface but has very deep thick roots inside our psyche. And so it's difficult to uproot desire.

**Question: So how to approach it in practical ways?**

**T.P.** Well, actually speaking, through mindfulness, being aware of the mind we can say that every sensory sensation which we receive through our eyes, what we hear, what we taste, what we touch---we respond to it immediately---either we like it or we don't. This comes up later in one of your questions also. Very important. It happens very quickly. It's actually not a very strong sensation. Everything we see, either pleasant or not pleasant is a reaction to it. If it's pleasant then greed arises or desire. "I like it, I want it" or if it's unpleasant "I don't like it". Immediately there is anger, desire, greed; they automatically come up and if we don't do anything about it, then we find it influences all our actions. To grasp at what we like and have aversion for what we don't like; people, tastes, food, sounds, everything. In this way we become in control of our own mind. I mean the whole point is that usually we're driven along

by our thoughts and our feelings and our reactions and we are slaves to our impulses instead of being in control of our own mind.

**Question: Jetsuma, some teachers who call themselves Buddhists openly say or imply that they do not believe in the law of Karma. Do you think this is right?**

**T.P.** When Buddhist people in the west think of Buddhism they think of meditation. It's not true in Asia but of course mindfulness is very popular now and there's a lot of talk about compassion and loving kindness and, you know Buddhism is fairly logical and rational, therefore people are attracted towards it but the problem is that they want Buddhism to fit in with their own preconceptions. You know, they don't really want to stretch their mind beyond what feels comfortable within their own comfort zone of what they believe and don't believe. Because in the west most people don't believe in rebirth and karma, therefore they feel it's something alien to them, something the Asians believe in but not something rational westerners have to believe in. Which is fine, except when they start to say, "because I don't believe in it, therefore the Buddha didn't either; And all the millions of references to karma and rebirth in the texts and all the teachings of the Buddha and all the masters up to the present day are based on misconceptions. They are all wrong. I am right, and I don't believe in it, therefore the Buddha didn't believe in it either." That I think is going too far. Just because you don't believe it doesn't mean the Buddha has to believe what you believe. I mean, we are ignorant. We don't know everything. You know the Buddha was fully enlightened and many masters that followed were fully enlightened and they say Karma and rebirth exist because they've seen it. So how can we say it doesn't exist because we don't believe in it? doesn't fit in my preconceptions. So actually the whole idea in Buddhism is this idea of Samsara, meaning a cycle of birth, death rebirth and death that we have to try to break through. It's a wheel going round and round from rebirth to rebirth. If you throw out Karma and rebirth, they it's no longer a wheel and you're born and then you die. It's lineal .Rebirth? There is no such thing in the western view. I live my life and then when I die that's it, finished. In Buddhism as you know, because it is non-theistic, there is no idea of a creator God who is willing what is going to happen to us and in the end is going to judge how we managed it. So Karma says "no", what happens to us is the result of actions we ourselves have committed in the past and how we respond to what is happening to us now from moment to moment, creating our future. So there is a justice there, a balance between doing good things and doing evil things. There is a reason why things happen to us---it's not just arbitrary. But if you throw out karma and rebirth, then there is no reason why things happen to us. Things just happen and how we respond to it is just for this time now. So why don't we just be comfortable, be good, be kind and help ourselves, help others. Why strive to go beyond all of that. There's no incentive. You know it's all going to finish anyway when we die so what's the point? From a Buddhist point of view (Boddhicitta), the whole idea of striving to help others attain enlightenment makes no sense if you've only got one lifetime.

**Question: Do you think that to be a Buddhist it is enough to practice and not necessarily to believe?**

**T.P.** You can fool yourself with this. There's nothing saying you can't, and if you take refuge in the Buddha and the teachings and the community then you're officially a Buddhist, but you've thrown out most of the dharma. But if you're happy with that you may well be happy as long as you try and be a good person. It's enough. But personally I think we should think there IS going to be a future life; then we will try to do the best we can and if there is a future life we will be glad we made the effort and anyway, we've lived a good life. But you know, there's no dogma which says you have to believe in this or that. But without karma and rebirth and the idea of endless cycles, much of the Buddhist teachings make less sense. But you can call yourself a Buddhist even if you don't believe this. There's nothing against it.

**Question: in the book compiled by Dr. J. Vigne (p. 17) you say that if you want to save the world you first have to save yourself. Is it first possible and realistic to want and then to be able to save the world? And what can be done to reconcile this idealism with reality?**

**T.P.** From a Buddhist perspective, we have a long way ahead of us. We have so many long lives to accomplish wisdom and to reach unconditional compassion so we shouldn't be too much in a hurry. Gradually we will transform. It doesn't happen intellectually. To really take it from the head down into the heart so that we really transform takes time. Nonetheless, we should not be depressed because there's still so much goodness in the world and we should focus more on this. Somebody just sent me a thing about Lebanon and how there is a big shortage in medicines that people really need and can't get, and how a certain Website was created where other people will try to find the medication for you free of charge. This kind of crisis brings out the good in people. We shouldn't focus on all that is wrong. How much inherent goodness there is in people, and it comes out in times of trauma and tragedy, slowly we also transform. We need to want it enough. It takes practice and skill to master.

**Question: Is it fair to say that much of the stress that plagues our modern world comes from an excess of desire and the fear that it will not be fulfilled? Wouldn't it be the basic solution to let all this dissolve in the luminous space of meditation that develops the capacity for spontaneous altruistic action?**

**T.P.** (Giggles). Obviously if we all became enlightened that would really help the planet, being filled with beings of compassion. It would be absolutely lovely but it's not likely to happen. The roots of greed and hatred in our psyche as we said before are very deep and they're kept in place by a fundamental egotistical ignorance like a sense of OUR place. Like spiders endlessly spinning their web and placing themselves at the center of it. This is our problem. We know that. "I don't like this/that, I want this, I like that." So to uproot and overcome these deep habits takes an awful lot of wisdom and insight. Even very sincere practitioners have a hard time transforming their mind. It just takes a lot of work because we have very deep negative emotions, which Buddhist point of view we inherited from endless past lives, so they're very deeply ingrained in our psyche and it takes time to transform. It's not going to happen overnight. Really, so this is what meditation is for. For us to recognize what's going on in the mind and then gradually to change, to transform that. Using our daily lives as our practice; people we come into contact with, if they're nice to us, or they're not

nice....how we respond to that. How we use that as part of our practice, part of our training. It's an ongoing process and this is what our life is for; to develop our innate wisdom, to develop innate compassion, to uncover that. I mean it's all there inside us but it's covered over.

**Question: 8- You tell the story of an old yogi who had written as a maxim on a wall in his room (p9): “Neither meditation nor distraction” and you explain this maxim by another from the Shamata meditation: “Place the gaze on the mind, without distraction or grasping ”. How to practically achieve this and avoid at the same time the two opposites: Distraction or grasping?**

**T.P.** What it means is not a “fabricated meditation “, one with effort. No effort but just watching. Just relax into awareness of whatever arises. No judgement, only awareness, that knowing quality of the mind. Replay the scenario like a movie. We do this in letting things pass by. (Like looking out of the window of a train). But not engaging. Not really looking at the scenery.

**Question 9-You advise to face the anger (p18): "to replay what made us angry and to watch it from a distance, like a movie. So, we can try to see if we can replay the scenario of a different way " Is it in meditation that you have to do this? And how to do it practically?**

**T.P.** Think about when we get angry with somebody. Afterwards we say “Why did I do that.” Or “I shouldn't have done that.” We don't feel good about ourselves. So we can just sit down and replay the episode, like watching it on TV with no judgements, no excuses, no saying “what I really meant was...” Just try to see how it was, to remember and be honest about ourselves. See why it happened, see why it wasn't a good script and why it made us feel regretful afterwards. You know, we don't feel good. So then we can try to imagine how we could have played it differently, how we could have responded more skillfully, what should I have said or done? Then we're training the mind with positive habits. We get angry and then say we did bad things because we're habituated with being upset and angry. Now we're training the mind to become more patient and skillful and wise. So by replaying that we learn new habits and next time we will maybe remember, “Ah that was not the way to go. I need to rewrite this script and in this way slowly we train ourselves how to be more skillful in our relationships with others and not come under the power of our anger as we have done in the past. I mean it's all practice. In Buddhism we talk about practice all the time. If you want to learn a skill you have to do it again and again until finally it becomes natural and we become proficient. So it's like that with the mind. Our mind is full of bad habits and we have to train the mind, get our neural pathways rechanneled as neuroscientists say we can do.

**Question: Are you saying we have to do this again and again? So it's a very long process to train the mind?**

**T.P.** Well, we've had many lifetimes of doing it wrong so it's going to take a bit of time to replay. But it doesn't take as long as all that. Neuroscientists, for example, took a sample group of ordinary people—not meditators—and showed them a set of short video clips of

things which made the upset and very angry, and of course they were watching their brains and those parts of the body which showed signs of anger or being upset lit up like anything. Then they took these people and gave them a few weeks of training in meditation and compassion; just a short time every day. They weren't spending all day doing it but maybe half an hour every day doing metta, loving kindness meditation for a couple of weeks. Then they again showed them video clips to make them upset and angry and they were amazed to see that in these very ordinary people, instead of those parts of the brain lighting up showing anger, a whole other part of the brain lit up revealing compassion and kindness. The scenes which had sparked off their anger before now sparked off love and compassion. So we can make new neural pathways. That's the beauty of it. We CAN change. We have to make that determination to do so and then we can surprise ourselves. Things which would have normally made us all upset suddenly just don't.

**Question 10-You say about desires and how to deal with them (p18): "The problem with ordinary desires is that they constantly deceive us. We imagine all the time that if we can satisfy them, we will be happy. . But the world's desires are like salt water. The more we drink, the more we are thirsty. The problem is not so much the desire itself as our attachment to it. "So how do we train ourselves to get rid of our attachment to desires?"**

**T.P.** On one level, part of the spiritual path is about letting go, letting go of our desires and our grasping. Every sensory perception comes with an automatic response: like/dislike, pleasure/pain and we don't notice that we....it's so swift it doesn't register but if it's strong enough then it creates a response. When it's pleasure I want it but if it's pain I don't want it---2 sides, anger and desire. If we are mindful we can see this and decide what we want to do with it. Is it useful or is it not useful. It's very important to recognize what's going on in the mind. Then we are ourselves, and in the control seat instead of being driven along by all our impulses. We can decide for ourselves. Is this useful or is this not useful? And if it's not useful we don't need to go for it. Just because "I want it" doesn't mean I have to have it, and then we're free, because people think that just having more desires bring more fulfillment but it just bring more dissatisfaction. (Like our example of salty water).

Look in the west now. We have so much. Our level of comfort compared with previous centuries is so great. Yet people are more dissatisfied than ever. People are frustrated, more angry and upset, ever grasping. It's never ending. To let go, to appreciate what we already have, to take joy in what is already given to us---that is the way to inner satisfaction. Why I already have so much. What more do I want? Why not give it away? And sharing with others brings so much more delight to the heart than accumulating. Anybody can do this—we all know this. A kind generous heart that is happy to share what they have with others is so much happier. A while back I met with a young woman whose name is synonymous with wealth in America and in the western world. The minute she said her name I went "Wow!" And she said that the advantage of being born in in that kind of a family is that she learned that being wealthy does not bring happiness. She said most of her family are alcoholics or seriously depressive, and the people in her family that are genuinely happy are philanthropists and very engaged in giving away their wealth and being involved in social projects for helping others. So it's true, we know it is but we don't follow that idea of letting go and simplifying. Being

content gives so much more joy than just accumulating more and more and hoping we will be satisfied. It's never going to be true.

**11-You advise the sadhaks (p19): "We can put ourselves to tidy up our interior house by throwing in the trash what is useless. Pick up everything and ask yourself:" Is it useful or no? Why did I carry this all along? "Get rid of it. Have a good big spring cleaning" How to properly discern and distinguish between what to keep and what to throw away?**

**T.P.** Recently I was reading that the Soufis have something called the three gates and to pass through these gates you have to ask three questions. These are "is it true? Is it useful? Is it kind ? So many of our thoughts and desires do not really meet these criteria. They are not really truthful or certainly not useful, nor do they extend to being kind. Moreover, so many of our ideas and opinions are often second hand. If we look at our thoughts, our memories, our opinions, our ideas, a lot of them come from other people, we haven't examined them really for ourselves: is it actually useful, is it true? So, this is how we can discriminate, we can look at these things, we can look at our thoughts, see that they slow down and then take advantage to really examine them. And we can also look at that gap between the thoughts, that space between the thoughts, which is the inner silence of the mind. In this silence, all things come up, we can see so much *clearly* that which is true, which is useful and necessary, which is kind. Yes, that, we maintain! The rest, you know, why clutter our mind with it? All that junk come to us, especially through the Medias. It weighs us down, it's like in a house which is filled with so much stuff that we can't move anymore. There is no space, there is no light, everything is just full of useless furniture which we bought years ago. That's our mind. So, meditation gives us inner space (Jetsunma makes a big encompassing gesture with a smile), inner silence and room to move.

**12-You say (p20): "As soon as we have the idea:" I am vigilant, "we are no longer vigilant. We just have a thought about being vigilant. True vigilance is non-verbal" Is being aware of our vigilance causing us to lose it? And how to keep it in this case?**

**T.P.** I think that I was talking about being vigilant, i.e., being mindful. If we take, say, being mindful of drinking tea. We should do it without judging how we do it, neither commenting about it. Just knowing that we are drinking it. Because, if we start commenting: "Oh, I am mindful that I'm drinking tea, so this is quite easy to be mindful, and blablabla blablabla...". So, you're no more mindful. Mindful means being completely one with the action without commenting on it. Just knowing, just being one with the drinking of tea. As soon as we start commenting on it, being aware that we are aware, it comes back to the conceptual mind again. You're no more in the mindful mind, do you understand? That awareness, that observing consciousness of the mind is different of the ordinary mental stream. It consists in being completely present in the moment, without comment.

**Question: Jetsunma, sometimes, we feel that we're losing our attention, our vigilance with age. Is it normal?**

**T.P.** Not at all! With most people, mind is so wild and difficult to master... The matter is to relax. Often, we are too much straightening. We should have an open spaciousness, but at the same time focus. Either we know or we don't know; I mean, either we're aware or we're not aware. This is very simple and we should allow the mind to rest in that knowing.

**Question: Vigilance, attention, concentration, what's the difference between all this according to Buddhist teachings?**

**T.P.** Well, they are just terms. It's very difficult to know. The classical terms in Sanskrit texts have been translated by different words by different translators. However, concentration means that we give attention to one thing at a time. It's attention, really. In single-pointed concentration, for instance we are aware of the breathing, and not of anything else. And the more we are able to "nest" on our object of attention, the more the concentration comes. This goes until we somehow merge into that, this comes to a kind of *samadhi*. Vigilance is the faculty of the mind which knows if we are present or not, it knows what we are doing at the moment: are we mindful or are we not mindful? So, it's kind of pops up to take a look: "What's happening in the mind? Have we lost our mindfulness or not? If we have, it reminds us to bring back our mindfulness, if we didn't have, it just steps back and rests. So, it's the ability to bring attention to what's happening in the moment, be it inside or outside.

Normally, we're just swept away by our thinking. We don't even know that we're sitting. We are walking along, but our mind is all over the place. We're not conscious of our feet touching the ground. So, we miss so much, because our mind is usually caught up in the past or it's climbing out and anxious about the future. Actually, about what is really happening now...we are not there! So, we miss it!

**Question 13-Jetsunma, you say (p21): "behind the cacophony, the noise of pain, there is the underlying silence. So, it can actually be a great practice."**

**How can one leave the loud, imposing sound of pain and arrive at the underlying silence?**

**T.P.** I think this is really important for people: how to deal with pain. The crux of the matter is resting in the pain instead of resisting it. Usually, when we have pain, we want to avoid it. When we hurt ourselves, we don't like it, we resist that. The Buddha said there are two kinds of pains: the first one is physical, it's unavoidable because we have a body. At some point or other, it's going to hurt. Of course, you can take some pain killers, but essentially, there'll be some pain at some point. But the second kind of pain is mental suffering: I have physical pain, I don't like it, I want to avoid it, and so it increases my suffering. That is avoidable. We don't have to resent our pain. We can accept it and not be so worried about that. At the same time, if we've pain, that is a very strong sensation in the body. So, instead of avoiding it, we can use it as an object of our attention, because it's so powerful. Without judging it, without resisting it, we can observe it. So we know the pain, we're feeling it and accepting it : we're with it, and as a concentration, we perceive all kinds of pain, stabbing pain, drilling pain, all we do is watching it, just knowing it as an object of meditation. Then the mind settles down and it goes beyond that sense of the "noise of the pain". It goes to a subtle level *beyond* the pain. It can be

a very powerful meditation, actually...because it's so compelling! But normally, we tight up, we resist it, we don't want it...but if we accept it, it's different.

**Question: We refuse pain and sometimes we are too much afraid of getting pain.**

**T.P.** Exactly! And this causes *mental* suffering and this is that mental suffering, which is not necessary. We don't have to have a mental suffering on top of a physical suffering. It depends on how is our *attitude* towards physical pain. If attitude towards it is openness, acceptance and using it as our practice, then, there won't be any mental pain. This is why great practitioners, even when they were very sick and ill, were still very cheerful. They're not suffering in their mind. They are only suffering in the body.

**Question: So, is the first step to accept this pain?**

**T.P.** Yes! Pain is just pain. There is this kind of practice: imagining that we're taking in the pain of the world, and giving back health and wellbeing, so that we can use it to develop our empathy and compassion. Again, the mind is not upset, the mind is not suffering.

**Question 14-You say about anger generating bad Karma (p24): "Even if the cause is just, if we are motivated by anger, it will create bad Karma for us."**

**Does anger always create bad Karma? Even to restore goodness, should one not have anger?**

**T.P.** OK, the problem is with what's called righteous anger, righteous indignation. When we are fulfilling our actions, if the underlying feeling is still anger, this won't be good. People who have deep underlying anger will be in this case. They will always find something, some justification for their anger. They will be self-righteously complaining about this or that. There'll be always something, because there is so much wrong in the world. What happens is that it still throws oil onto the fire, it doesn't quieten our anger, it still fuels it. There is always this feeling: "I am right, you are wrong!" And so, immediately, there is conflict. You abide in a sense of indignation, and this arouses anger in the opposition. So, there'll be always to be conflict. You'll never come to another viewpoint, except:"My view point is right!" Therefore, we create conflicts and opposition. It'll never solve the problems, because it's fueled with negativity. We have to act out of compassion and clear seeing. Compassion isn't just being all sweet and passive and sort of weak, as we often imagine. Compassion can be very powerful and it even sometimes manifest as being wrathful. But the root is not anger, the root is clearly seeing the situation and how to deal with it. This is like a mother watching the child: there is a pot of boiling water on the stove, the child is going towards it and the mother says: "No, don't go towards that spot, you'll burn yourself." If the child insists despite the mother saying no and put the arms towards the pot, the mother grasp it and pulls it away and shake this child! But she is not doing it out of anger to this child, she is doing it out of compassion, recognizing that the child is acting out of ignorance and that eventually will hurt itself and even its mother. So, she may appear to be very wrathful and the child will be very afraid, but she doesn't hate the child, she loves the child, that's why she wants to stop the child to commit actions which

will causes suffering to the child and to others. So, when we see people who are doing things which are wrong, we should have compassion for their ignorance, because they will harm themselves through bad karma and we are motivated to stop them. But we want to stop them because of our understanding, seeing the situation more clearly, and out of compassion, not because we want in any way to hurt them or because we hate them.

**Question: Jetsunma, according to your own viewpoint, can we be a tiger and have compassion at the same time, because you actually advice to be a tiger ?**

**T.P.**(Gigging). You know, in Tantra, the bodhisattva of compassion is Avalokiteshwara. He is shown as white, smiling holding a lotus, everything you think as being compassion...very sweet! *Om mani padme hung* is his mantra. But the reverse side of this white, smiling bodhisattva is Mahakala. His name means *The Great Black One* and he is the chief of all the protectors, the Dharmapala-s, who are very wrathful and ready to tear away their enemies, just as tigers. But he is compassionate: not based on anger but on wisdom and compassion. He represents the other side of Avalokiteshwara, the peaceful bodhisattva. So, sometimes even bodhisattvas have to appear to be wrathful to stop people to do things which would bring harm to themselves and to others.

**Question: Do you mean that he showed anger without being angry inside?**

**T.P.** Yes, and the person who would interpret it as anger is just like the child which says: "Oh, Mummy is angry with me!" Mummy is not angry with it, she just tries to protect it from harming itself. Sages have no anger, but this come from clearly seeing the situation and that people are messing up things and that it has to be stopped!

**Question 15-In talking about daily practice you say about the Lamas you met (p26): "They all agree that the real path to success is to stay focused and keep the practice simple and meaningful to you"**

**What does simple and meaningful practice actually mean to us?**

**T.P.** There are so many spiritual paths and practices which are available to us today, more than ever! And at the same time, our lives are so busy, so complicated, and so full of constraints. So, what we need is a spiritual practice which doesn't act as an extra burden and make our life still more complicated. Some spiritual paths are very complicated. So, our minds are already filled with all kinds of ideas and opinions, with what people see in the Medias and television, most of it being junk. Our lives are so cluttered and so busy. So, we have to open out, and as we say before, to have some practices which help us to clear away some of the clutter, make inner space for us inside, not adding more complications. Therefore, it's important to find a practice which is simple and easily integrated in our daily life. Different people are different and what appeals to some people may not appeal to some others. This is like food, which appeal to some people but make others sick and allergic to it. So, we should keep our practice simple while it's also important to cultivate awareness, a sense of presence in our life and at the same time cultivate an open heart, to be more kind,

more generous, and more patient. This is very simple, but the point is that everything which happens in our daily life is not separated from our meditation. Unless we take our practice in our daily life, it's never going to help us really. Mind has to transform, if we are not so angry, we are not so greedy, we are not so jealous, we are not so absorbed in me and me, if we are more interested in others and helping others and being more centered in ourselves, our mind becomes more present, more calm. For some people, it helps to repeat a mantra or a short prayer throughout the day, silently, in their heart. This also can help us to become more centered. People are different, but whatever is our practice, we should integrate it with our daily life. Otherwise, it won't work.

**Question: In your monastery, Jetsunma, do you advise simple practices or intensive ones?**

**T.P.** Well, most of them are studying philosophy, but they do rituals every day and they do half an hour of *shamatha* practice every morning. Then, now, on Sunday, they are going to start a two months retreat where they will keep silent. (Laughing) So, you have these hundred young women keeping silence, not talking for two months. It's quite amazing actually, they do it. They become extremely centered and focused, and I encourage them to be mindful always. Still, they are young women, and some of them are mere children, so... (Laughing). Anyhow, they keep on exercising being more mindful, they are good girls.

**Question 16-You advise making daily life itself a practice (p27): "If we don't use our daily life as a practice, nothing will ever change. It is not enough to go to Dharma centers, or even to do just one daily meditation. It doesn't matter how much intellectual knowledge we absorb and with what intelligence we understand concepts and ideas."**

**How can daily life, which often happens automatically and very quickly, be transformed into a spiritual practice?**

**T.P.** We have developed before that we should not be caught up in past memories and be present to what we are doing: you know, what we are doing is what we are doing! This is what our life is for. Looking where is our mind now; as much as we can remember: what are our thoughts, what is the mind doing. We should do the same with the body: when we are sitting, to know that we are sitting, when walking, to know that we are walking. If we are stressed, bring our attention back to the breath, breathing in, breathing out, and just bringing ourselves back to the moment. Whomever we meet, recognize in our heart that all beings will prefer to be OK rather than suffer. We all prefer that things be nice for us. Really, nobody wants to suffer. We should recognize that all beings are like that, so wishing them well however they are treating me, even if they are rude, or indifferent, or if they are friendly: from our heart, we wish them to be well and happy. Cultivate generosity, sharing, cultivate patience when people or circumstances are difficult. All of this is a part of what is, and in this way our daily life *becomes* our practice. Inside ourselves, slowly, we feel that a change is happening. I always say that the best commendation for our practice is when our families say: "You're nicer nowadays: what are you doing?" Then we know that we are getting somewhere, because there is a change in the ordinary things.

**Question: Jetsunma, you are talking about training our mind : should we do it in our daily life, or in meditation, or both?**

**T.P.** Both! Definitely, it's not "either-or", it's "and"! So, we should have a daily practice and carry this practice in our daily life. When moreover we have an opportunity to have some retreat, a specific guided retreat if we don't know much, and we do it, then, our spiritual progress becomes the focus of our mind. How can I use this life to be of benefit for myself and to others? That's what life is about: making spiritual progress in order to be of benefit to the world. This includes people who are difficult: how to deal with them?

**Question: Sometime we look at some *sadhaks*, we see that they are very good at meditation but not so good at daily life or the opposite, in daily life they are good but in meditation they don't have so much experience or they are not so regular.**

**T.P.** So, it's good to have the balance: to have the inner practice and that this practice radiates into your daily life.

If we are in a church a temple or a mosque and we are looking very nice, but when we are going back to our family or to our job we are not nice, then, what's the use? It's better to be nice in daily life while not looking very religious than the reverse. Still, the very best is to do both. They should support each other.

**Question 17-You have known our master Swami Vijayânanda for a long time. What impression remains of him in you after 11 years of his departure?**

**T.P.** Really, I didn't know Swami Vijayânanda very well. I only met him on very few occasions when I went to Ma's ashram. I really am not the person to talk about him, but my impression of him when I did meet him at that time was that he was a very kind and wise old monk. He was one who had become one with his spiritual *sadhana*. I mean he was genuine; he was a man of great integrity. I also liked him because he had a very great sense of humor. He liked to laugh, and I always think that it was a very good indication.

**Question 18-You often advise your followers: "push yourself gently". What does this mean in practice?**

**T.P.** The problem is that often, when people get interested in the spiritual path and practice, the ego takes over and it is very idealistic or else very impatient : it wants to achieve as soon as possible : "I want to get enlightenment!" How am I to know how soon I'll get enlightenment? So, this is the ego talking. Then, when we push too hard, it is our ego which is pushing. What happens is that we, in particular our *pranic* energy get imbalanced, and we can get very sick, actually. Also, we can get very stressed, very tense, which is counterproductive. If we come to the point of this *pranic* imbalance, the situation is actually very difficult to overcome. It causes a lot of mental stress and it can also cause physical sickness. So, we have to be careful. On the other hand, if we don't make any effort, things are not going to move

and we are not going to get anywhere. So, the Buddha advised a monk who was pushing very hard and so got into a lot of trouble: “Before you became a monk, you were a musician, you played the luth. When the strings were too tight, what happened? Maybe they made a harsh sound and they broke. And if they were too loose, then they didn’t make enough sound. So, when you tune them properly, it makes a beautiful melody. In this way, the Buddha advises us not to push too hard and avoiding pushing not enough. We have to make a balance so that we push forward and our spiritual life makes a beautiful music. At the beginning therefore, it’s good to keep the sessions shorter, do more session but short, so that we are not pushing. If we are doing something and we are enjoying it, then there is no stress, there is no efforts. We are just doing it, it flows. Likewise, when we are practicing, if we keep the sessions quite short, we are enjoying. We tell us ourselves: “Oh! Let’s do it again, it was nice!” Otherwise, the mind gets too hard, we have to push and in general we end up very stressed. Again, it’s good not to push too hard.

**Question: Jetsunma, we reached the last question, the last word is on you, what do you have to tell us as a last message, for France, for Lebanon, for all these people who are hearing you now? It was so nice and so easy to listen to you for such a long time!**

**T.P.** The whole thing we said all along is how to become a good human being, how to cultivate a good heart. Indeed, the world is very much in need of people with good hearts! So, that’s all we need. How can I be a good human being in this world? Forget about, just be nice, if the world would be filled with good people, it would be a different world! Cultivate our kindness, our patience the ability to be more present, and specially, to speak as a nice person to your family, to your friend, to anybody you don’t like, to the world in general. Just try to be good.

**Question: You just talked about Lebanon and about medicines, so we first thank you to have this attention for our country which is poor. Do you have something to say also about this country in this very difficult situation?**

**T.P.** We don’t need to be always in very pleasant situations. Sometimes, it’s not very spiritually helpful. Sometimes, very difficult situations are the best to become strong inside and to develop all the qualities we need, like compassion, and so forth. So, it’s not what happens to us, outer circumstances, but how we *respond* to these circumstances, which is what counts.

**Question: Jetsunma, we are waiting for the next interview, as we waited before from one interview to another. As they say in the Upanishads, waiting is a great purificator. Your teachings are so nourishing!**

**T.P.** From my heart, I wish well not only to you, but to for your country, Lebanon, to the Middle East in general, as also to Afghanistan which is suffering so much at the time being. Human beings are amazing. [*Joining hands*] Nonetheless, our nature is beautiful, despite

everything. So, we must have hope that time and impermanence will bring more peace and more prosperity to your country in the future. May all be well and happy.