

A Healthy Sense of Self, from a talk by Ani Tenzin Palmo, Saturday, June 9th, 2018

All religions recognize that the ultimate nature of the internal divine, by whatever name you want to give it, is obstructed by our small sense of self. So, all religions, in their more mystical, spiritual level, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, or Judaism, or *any* of the major spiritual paths, in spiritual aspect recognize: the divine is within; it is unnamable, and unthinkable, but we can realize it. It is obscured our dualistic sense of self, the ego. Right.

Actually, all religions agree on this. The bit in between, the dogma bit, might change, but the actual, essential understanding of nature of reality, is surprisingly similar, even though we give different names to the unnamable.

But no religion is more ego-bashing than Buddhism. And so there is tremendous talk about the self cherishing mind, and going beyond our ego grasping consciousness, which is good.

*But, Who wants to go beyond the ego grasping mind? The ego. Who is saying, May I attain enlightenment for the sake of all beings? Me. Right? So, Who is going to walk the path until the very high level of dissolving the ego? It's the ego. Right?*

Just saying, *I am egoless, I am emptiness*, who is saying that? Right? *The ego* is saying that. Ok, I am egoless, I'm an egoless ego.

This is important, because we cannot destroy the ego, through beating it up, ignoring it, sophisticated thought about it's emptiness - that's just thought - thinking emptiness...

The ego dissolves naturally through deep insight into the nature of the mind, which in itself is empty lucidity.

Who is going to walk the path towards that realization is the ego. The Buddha realized this. It's not talked about, but it's understood. So that, in the beginning, we learn shamatha meditation. Shamatha meditation makes the mind quieter, and hones our attention skills. It doesn't get rid of the ego, but it does make the ego healthy and well balanced, so that it can walk the path. If we're neurotic, and have a sick ego, a sick sense of self, we cannot genuinely walk the path, please understand.

So, therefore at the beginning, they start shamatha meditation, and also these meditations on loving kindness, and compassion, and empathetic joy and so forth. The Buddha said, we start with ourselves. We give *ourselves* loving kindness, and compassion.

We are not giving loving kindness and compassion to the nature of the mind, to our buddha nature. That doesn't need it - that's *already* loving kindness and compassion. *That's its nature.* We are giving loving kindness to *our ego*. In other words, we *are making friends* with ourselves, because *we* have to walk the path. The ego is walking the path to its own dissolution. It can only walk the path if there is a strong, healthy, well balanced sense of self.

Now, if, for example, if we break our arm - our arm is very useful, right? We break our arm, we put it in a cast. It hurts us. We're always thinking about it, we're always protecting it. If someone touches it - oww! ooh!, and we can't use it because it's injured, and so we're always thinking about it, and protecting it, and you know, in pain.

But when the arm *is healed*, then, it's very useful. At the same time, we're not thinking about it. How many of you are sitting here thinking about your arm? You know? I mean we're not thinking about it. Our arm is healthy, useful. Somebody hits it - ouch!, and then we've forgotten it. We're not protecting it, endlessly, because it's a healthy, strong arm.

And likewise with the ego. If our ego is *healthy*, and balanced, and strong, then we can use it for walking the path. If it's sick, then we're always thinking about it, right? *Me. Poor me.*

I mean, so many Americans I know have therapists. You all have therapists? (Yes) Yeah? Everybody goes to a therapist. It's like a dentist, you know. Who's your therapist? Because they feel their sense of self is not whole, not healthy, so we're always thinking about it. *Me me me me me... My poor childhood, All the traumas I've been through, Oh, I've suffered this, I've done that... Oh poor me...* Why? Because our sense of self is injured.

And so, in the Buddha's time, they didn't have therapists. You were *your own* therapist. You sent *yourself* loving kindness. Loving kindness is from the base *maitri*, it's from the base, *met*, which means *friend*. So we *make friends* with ourselves. When we have made friends with ourselves, including learning how to make the mind more calm and more peaceful and more centered, then, we have *a very healthy sense of self*, and in that way, we're not thinking about ourselves. We're thinking about others.

As long as our sense of ego is hurting, we are absorbed in our own problems. Once we are balanced and healthy, we don't have to think about ourselves. We have the freedom to be much more interested and concerned with others.

So therefore, even though Buddhism is always talking about no self, no self, no self, and self cherishing mind, at the same time, it is actually, behind the scenes, as trying to develop this...

As Shantideva said - you know, ok pride and arrogance are a *klesha*, they are mental afflictions, but *self confidence* is essential for walking the path. If you don't believe in yourself, you're not going to start, or the minute there's some problem, you'll give up. We have to believe we can do it. And who is believing we can do it? *It's our ego*. Do you understand?

So, stage one is to be at peace with ourselves, make friends with ourselves, accept ourselves. Yes, we have faults. Who *doesn't* have faults. If we didn't have faults, we wouldn't need a path. But we also have beautiful qualities, goodness within us, and we all have buddha nature. So no need to be at war within ourselves. Make friends with ourselves, be at peace with ourselves, then we have a companion, who will walk the path.

When I met the previous Karmapa, the 16th Karmapa, way back in '64, '65, I went to see him, and I was just sitting there and he was sitting, talking to other people, and he turned around and he looked at me and said, 'Your problem is - you don't believe in yourself. If you don't believe in yourself, who will believe in you?'

So, he didn't say, 'That's good!, You *shouldn't* believe in yourself! You know, You're a bad, naughty little ego!' (laughter) He said, if you don't believe in yourself, who will believe in you? You *have to* believe.

We have to *encourage ourselves*. We have to believe in our own potential. Right now, alright, you know, we have problems, we have difficulties we have, you know, psychological issues, we have emotional issues, but, inherently, we are buddha, and, in the mean time, we can walk the path, back to our own original nature. And who is going to walk the path? We are going to walk the path. Right?

So, we have to make friends with ourselves, and encourage ourselves, as we would encourage a good friend. I mean, so many people spend so much of their time putting themselves down, criticizing themselves, magnifying their faults, as if that's a virtuous thing to do, but it's *not* a virtuous thing to do. It's undercutting our confidence.

Sometimes when people tell me what they say to themselves, I say, if you had your best friend, would you talk to them like that? *Oh no!*. I said, no, if you talk like that, you wouldn't have any friends. So why do we talk to

ourselves in a way which we wouldn't talk to someone else. It's not humility.

Someone said that humility is *the absence* of anyone to be proud. So, true humility is the egoless state, so while we are still involved in our ego, what we need is a happy, peaceful sense of our own inner potential. We can do this. We *can* do this, come on. We can do this. Others have done it, we can do it. It's ok. Even there are obstacles, doesn't matter. We can do it.

*We have to encourage ourselves.*

The point is that people think that if we become friends with our ego that we are totally ego-absorbed, but what I was trying to say with the arm, is that if we're *really* friends with ourselves we don't think about ourselves because we're much more interested in other beings. It's because *we're not* friends with ourselves that we're always so self absorbed. It's a sign of sickness.

And so that's why the Buddha said, that first, inside, our internal psychology has to come into balance and be healthy, *then* we can engage in vipassana, which is like peeling off the levels of our false identification.

That's the point. While we have a very negative sense of self, an injured sense of self, it's very dangerous, actually, to try stripping away the layers, because we're hurting inside. First we have to heal. First we have to be healthy, then we can strip easily, and it doesn't harm.

So this is why the Buddha said that first we have to get good shamatha meditation. First we have to get the mind calm, peaceful and healthy, balanced, psychologically balanced, *then* we can start using that well tamed mind to deepen our insight into the nature of our psyche, but first we have to have a healthy sense of being.

I mean if you meet any of the genuine practitioners, you know, they are very healthy beings, psychologically, you can feel it. You know, they're

good...and it's not because they're always beating themselves up. They don't go in for self-flagellation. Many Westerners do... I don't know...

Tibetans don't take any of this too seriously - I mean, they take it seriously at a different level, so that there's a strong sense of well being, and psychological good health that they have, which is needed on the path. Very important. The foundation should be strong.