

Good morning and welcome to the fourth talk on the Tricycle Online Retreat: “Romantic Fantasy Every Day Disappointment.” Our first talk really talked about what happens with romantic fantasies, and how they do not deliver on their promise; and that when disappointment dawns, the dharma steps in to really guide us on how we can work with relationships in a more realistic way—how our meditation practice supports us for a more realistic understanding of relationship. Of course you might have come out of that talk thinking that there’s no romance left at all, and that Buddhism is against romantic relationships. Quite the contrary, but it’s a journey.

In talk two we talked about loneliness and how it is that very often we fall in love and feel an urgency about love, because we’re so terrified of loneliness. We really want to have a relationship, so that we’ll never have to feel alone. No one can take away our experience of loneliness. We actually continue to feel lonely, even if we’re in a relationship. That’s part of our human life. Making a relationship with loneliness we begin to discover the dignity, beauty and simplicity of aloneness. That’s really the core of our life as practitioners.

Then in the third talk, I talked about how when we discover ourselves alone, we look around and see that there are others and they feel alone as well. We could develop a relationship with another person based on a sense of mutual aloneness. We looked at the possibility of love being a resonance that we may have the same kind of loneliness or aloneness as another person. This becomes the ground of developing a genuine intimate relationship with another person.

So far this is good. It suggests a path for how we could develop a love relationship with another person. We’ve been practicing loving kindness practice as a reminder for what it looks like to love without so many strings attached; letting go of our usual attached approach to relationship.

But today we’re going to talk about passion. We’re going to talk about desire. This is an extremely important aspect of romantic relationship. I’m very delighted to be able to talk about this today. I’m very proud to be a member of a Tantrayana Tibetan Buddhist lineage, where desire and passion are very much part of the path.

You may be familiar with many lineages where desire and passion are viewed as big problems. It’s said that this is something that we need to overcome and see as an obstacle to a dharmic life. In fact, in many traditions of loving kindness practice, it’s said that we should never do loving kindness practice for somebody we’re sexually attracted to. That is not true in my lineage. In a Tantrayana lineage, we understand that passion is very much part of our life; and that we need to understand how to make the proper relationship with passion in order to really have a genuinely dharmic life.

So I’d like to talk about how we can bring passion into our relationships and develop a genuinely passionate real romantic relationship with a real human being. I’d like to go

back to the discovery of the Buddha under the Tree of Enlightenment because I think that very often the way that the Buddhist teachings are presented, there's a misunderstanding about what the Buddha realized under the Tree of Enlightenment. He recognized that our habitual relationship with passion was a big problem. Our pursuit of desire—our constant wanting—became a very big obstacle in our lives and really caused lots of issues in our life. If we really look at the Buddha's realization under the Tree of Enlightenment, we realize that he realized teachings of what are known as the three Yanas: the Hinayana or the foundational path, the Mahayana or the broad path and the Vajryana which is the diamond path.

I'd like to talk about the Buddha's realization about passion through the three Yanas. From the point of view, the foundational teachings of the Buddha, he realized that there is a kind of flame at the heart of our existence—a flame of knowledge. That flame burns way too hot for most of us. It burns in the form of constant desire and wantingness—wanting to be made happy by objects of desire outside of our experience. But the Buddha realized that that flame is constantly out of control, and that the very beginning of our path we need to get that flame under control.

So, if we could understand the image of the flame through the image of the Aladdin Lamp. I don't know if you know what Aladdin Lamps are. My husband and I own a Yurt up in the mountains where we do retreats. It has no electricity. It's a beautiful place for very simple, very quiet, unfancy retreats. We light our Yurt with an Aladdin Lamp. It's a kerosene lamp with a base and has a glass lantern on top. They are tricky because you have to get them just right. If you have way too much wick, the flame will burn out of control. So you have to trim the wick just right, turn the flame down and put the glass lantern on top in order to get the kind of flame that illumines the yurt. I'd like to use the Aladdin Lamp for the three Yana journey of the Buddha under the Tree of Enlightenment.

The first Hinayana is the slogan for it is do no harm. The Buddha taught first do no harm. Our flame of wisdom is so out of control, it's become the flame of desire and we just want what we want and go after it. This is the example with the Aladdin Lamp of having the wick turned way too high and the flame is burning way too hot. It's burning out of control. If we don't do something with it, you could actually catch the Yurt on fire. You could burn down the Yurt. We have that experience when we are caught up in conventional understandings of romantic love. We have everything out of control and burning. Our meditation practice is to begin to turn down the wick. Turn it down so that the flame gets very, very low and burns in a very steady way around the cylindrical wick.

It's very important that we turn the wick down. But unfortunately for many people, they think this means extinguishing the flame; that there should be no flame at all. People live in loveless, lonely, unhappy lives and feel that the spiritual path has no possibility for relationship. The Tibetan tradition says, “No, no, no. Keep the flame burning but turn it

down and stabilize it; develop it.” When we turn that down, then we begin to recognize that the flame has to be under control.

Then the Mahayana teachings: benefit others. Benefit others. That is in order for the flame to really be a positive thing; we need to be able to radiate light on others. We need to share warmth and a kind of heat with them, without burning them down. This is like when we put the glass chimney on top of the wick. When we do that, suddenly the mantel in the chimney begins to glow. At first we have to keep the flame really, really low until the mantle gets a steady glow.

Our Mahayana practice is to begin to turn up the flame ever so little so that the mantel begins to glow and the chimney begins to radiate light throughout the Yurt. This is a beautiful moment where we begin to see that this flame is precious. The worst thing we could possibly do is put the flame out. The best thing we can do is to begin to use the flame in a way that can begin to illumine and shine light in our world; so we can begin to notice others and extend to them the generosity of our care and warmth for them. The world becomes illumined. This is the Mahayana teaching of the Buddha.

The third step is the Tantrayana and the slogan for the Tantrayana is enjoy your life. Hinayana: do no harm. Mahayana: benefit others. And Tantrayana: enjoy your life. This is the importance of passion in the Tantrayana. Once we begin to turn up the flame, we can begin to illumine our world and begin to extend light to others. We can then begin to enjoy beauty and the kind of richness of our human life. This is when the flame begins to show that life is beautiful and can be enjoyed not just for ourselves, but enjoyed for others as well.

Rinpoche wrote, “Strangely enough, this love, desire or passion hasn’t been completely captivated by the ego. It is the one emotion that has escaped that is completely outside the realm of ego, unlike anger, pride, envy and the other clashes or emotions which have been successfully captivated. Passion is a very powerful thing. It is the powerful makeup of the basic origin. So we haven’t been able to captivate or spoil it 100-percent.”

In other words, it’s very important for us as human beings to recognize that passion is part of the special gift of humanity. The passion of human beings is what makes life rich, enjoyable and something we can share with others or use to build culture, community, celebration, ritual, practice together and practice with others. This is also very much a part of being able to develop a genuinely romantic relationship with a real human being, with a real person.

In the tradition of Tantrayana there are two kinds of passion. One is passion that’s connected with one’s teacher and lineage. We call this devotion. It’s devotion that sees that the fire of wisdom is fed by the fuel of blessings from the lineage; from the lineage of enlightened teachers who have gone before, traced all the way back to the Buddha. It’s

one of the reasons devotion is so important in the Tantrayana tradition. It's about keeping the flame of wisdom alive in our experience.

The other kind of passion is the passion for the phenomenal world. It's what Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche called radiation without a radiator; where we begin to exude a fundamental zest for life and an appreciation for life.

It's really interesting when you meet Tibetan teachers, whether they are Monastic or lay, they have a kind of love of life, which is very unique to the Tibetan Tantrayana lineage. It's a kind of zest for living, which understands that every single moment of life is enjoyable. Whether it's painful or pleasurable, there's enjoyment. Whether it's happy times or sad times, it's enjoyable.

This kind of flame of enjoyment of life is very important for the dharma practitioner to cultivate. When we cultivate this quality—the gift of humanity and passion—we begin to see that there is a role for passion in our relationships with others. When we are attracted to someone, we have to overcome our romantic fantasy version of them, and begin to see them for who they actually are. Passion is part of it. Passion not captivated by ego. Passion not trying to get our needs met. But passion of enjoyment of who they are; just in who they are in their very being and enjoying our time with that person—recognizing that a mutual passion is a mutual zest for living.

Another quote by Rinpoche: “Free passion is radiation without a radiator; a fluid pervasive warmth that flows effortlessly. It is not destructive because it is a balanced state of being and highly intelligent. Self consciousness inhibits this intelligent balanced state of being. By opening and dropping our self-conscious grasping, we see not only the surface of an object, but we see the whole way through. We appreciate not in terms of sensational qualities alone, but we see in terms of whole qualities—which are pure gold. We are not overwhelmed by the exterior, but seeing the exterior simultaneously puts us through to the interior; so we reach the heart of the situation. If this is a meeting of two people, the relationship is very inspiring because we do not see the other person purely in terms of physical attraction or habitual patterns or what they can give us. We see the inside as well as the outside.”

This is an opportunity to develop real romance. That is romance that's based first on giving up the notion of just having our personal needs met, but willingness to feel alone in relationship. Secondly beginning to feel that mutual aloneness is a beautiful basis for a relationship, for caring for another person. Caring for them for who they are and wishing their happiness—extending to them our wish that they be happy just for who they are. Thirdly, beginning to recognize through the Tantrayana the quality of being able to enjoy our life and not just our life alone, but to enjoy our life with others.

Our ongoing journey is to begin to celebrate a life together. I wanted to go back to my earlier story of falling in love with a man at a month long meditation retreat 35 years

ago—more than 35 years ago. This is a man who I went through, as I mentioned earlier, feeling I was in love with him but feeling very alone and feeling lonely. With Rinpoche's encouragement, I stayed in that relationship and felt a quality of first desolation and then a feeling of alone with others; and eventually I began to feel a quality of mutual aloneness that turned into tremendous mutual passion. So, I married that man.

I'm so grateful to have been able to find someone to share a life with in the dharma. I married that man and we have been married now for 33 years, going on 34 years, and had two beautiful children. We of course went through our ups and downs, and times of feeling that we have drifted apart and back together. But this quality of mutual passion, enjoyment and constantly feeling the simplicity and intriguing qualities—of alone together and the richness of a dharmic marriage—is incredibly precious and lovely. I appreciate so much my teacher who showed me the way of developing real romance with a real human being.

Good luck on the journey. I hope you are able to follow this through. When disappointment dawns, welcome it as the dharma gateway to real romance. Thank you so much for joining me for this Tricycle Online Retreat.