

Dungse Jampal Norbu
Compassion in Polarizing Times
Week One: “Happiness is Found Within”
March 4, 2019



Hello everyone, my name is Jampal Namgyel [Dungse Jampal Norbu]. I am a teacher in the Mangala Shri Bhuti sangha based out of Colorado. I am a Tibetan Buddhist practitioner, and it is my pleasure to be speaking with you about *Compassion in Polarizing Times*.

Just to give you a little background on myself: I was born into a dharma family in the Longchen Nyingtik lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. My parents moved to America when I was a couple of weeks old and I grew up here in the U.S. and also abroad in India. I studied for five years at a traditional *shedra* institute in north India near Dharamsala, training in traditional practices, meditation, and philosophy. It's my great pleasure to be here with you.

One of the interesting parts about being a practitioner and teacher in the Western world while having a traditional background is seeing the difference in culture, and how things change over time as society changes and culture evolves. We take on new challenges, but the dharma, despite being thousands of years old, remains quite relevant to our everyday life, no matter what culture we're in or what situations we may encounter. It's an interesting study for me to be a part of that conversation.

For instance, there's a lot of discussion around the polarizing times that we live in today. There are many cases of disputes between countries, politics, people, and ethnic groups; there are so many different disputes. It seems to be woven into the fabric of our society where poles are clearly defined: a polarizing mindset is marketable and thus desirable. This is true for great social issues as well as less relevant YouTube videos debating whether someone says “Laurel” or “Yanny.” It's just a part of our culture these days. With so many examples of polarized thinking—the right and the wrong, the good and the bad—it can be hard to find one's own ground and one's own sense of peace. But this is really the point of meditation practice, a spiritual path, and a dharma practice. It is something that I explore as a practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism, and which I'm fully engaged with as a teacher in this tradition as well.

One of the most significant factors about living in a world with so much news, so many opportunities, so much to take in, so many opinions to have, so many polls to take, and so many stances to have, is we don't always know ourselves. It's quite easy to get swept along by the views of those around us, by our culture, or by our immediate surroundings, and this isn't particularly desirable for most people. We feel like a leaf in the wind, so to speak.

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Meditation is a way to find ground and take on an introspective view of the world. We can stop basing our understanding and opinions off the noise that we hear and instead come to some personal space and understanding of how we conduct and hold ourselves in this world, with all its distractions and influences. Meditation allows us to find that solidarity of being and peace which we all desire as sentient beings. All beings desire happiness. All beings wish to be free from suffering. We go about finding happiness and avoiding suffering in a variety of ways. But for all living beings, fundamentally, we seek happiness.

Whether we live in the U.S., Asia, South America, Africa, or Europe, anywhere in the world, it's hard to escape the emphasis on materialism. It's hard to escape the emphasis that there is happiness out there that we can find, that we can buy, or that we can take, and so we are constantly looking for that. We are constantly in pursuit of that happiness through one way or another, whether it is through our job, dating, finding a partner, having success, reputation, fame, or all of these things. There is an emphasis on happiness being outside of oneself, and as we look harder outside of ourselves to find happiness, the question arises, "Can it be found outside? Can happiness be found in certain objects or in certain situations?" The causes and conditions of life are always changing. Culture changes, worlds change, people change, and it's hard to find consistent peace and happiness in any outer situation.

Whether or not we find happiness in an object is often determined by our relationship with that object. Growing up in both an Asian family and the environment of Colorado, I've had the great pleasure of being exposed to many different kinds of chili peppers. One of my first memories of chili peppers was taking down some Bhutanese chili from the shelf in the pantry and then accidentally rubbing my eyes about ten minutes later. It felt like my eyes were on fire. That was an unpleasant experience, but it didn't deter me from trying more and more chili over time, and now it is something that I cook with constantly. I eat it with almost every meal. I just love chili peppers, hot sauce, salsa, the whole nine yards. Not everyone enjoys chili peppers. Not everyone enjoys that feeling of pain on the tongue and feeling warm and uncomfortable all of a sudden while eating food. This is quite enjoyable for me, but not to other people. For those who enjoy hot sauce, is pleasure, happiness, and satisfaction inherent in the hot sauce itself, or is it a matter of our relationship to it? If it was inherent within any chili pepper, then we would all have the same experience. We would all have an experience of pleasure and joy when eating hot food, but

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that's not the case. Some people hate hot sauce. Some people will rub chili in their eyes and never think of trying it at any point in life.

This kind of example goes to show that happiness, pain, suffering, and all the ways in which we relate to the world, are not inherent within objects themselves or in the outer world. It has a lot to do with ourselves; it has a lot to do with our own mind and our own relationships. The difference between 'Laurel' and 'Yanny' as heard in the well-known YouTube clip revolves around what kind of conditions we live in, what kind of hearing we have, and what kind of music we've listened to over time. Do we have a developed musical ear? Do we have the ability to hear high-pitched tones or low-pitched tones?

It's easy to get caught in an argument where someone will say hot sauce is good, and someone will say hot sauce is bad, and then there will be a contentious debate about it, just as there is a contentious debate about whether a person might hear Laurel or Yanny. I've encountered some of these debates and it's interesting to have someone tell me how wrong I am to hear one of the other sounds, because it's not inherent within the noise itself. It's not inherent within the chili pepper itself, it's about my relationship to it. It's about our relationship to the world around us. When it's about our minds, the search for happiness ceases to be about outer objects, materialism, or an outer pursuit, and becomes more about our internal life.

Happiness is found within. It's a cliché, but it's also true. To continuously search for happiness and well-being outside of ourselves without taking into account our relationship with the world would be a tragedy because we have the ability to look inside. We have so much potential to find happiness within, without giving in to the advertising of the material world where something is always just out of reach and unattainable. It's fully attainable within oneself. It's fully attainable through self-reflection, through meditation, and through developing an understanding of one's internal life.

As a dharma practitioner, I understand that the development of internal awareness and self-reflection is a spiritual practice. Dealing with the spirit and how the mind relates to the world is a spiritual path. This is the path of dharma. This is the path of Tibetan Buddhism, and it's my great pleasure to be a part of this tradition as well.

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The more one develops self-reflection, which is the basis for all spiritual practice, the more our world opens up into something else. The more we cease to become part of an outer debate where things are either right or wrong, good or bad, black or white—polarizing views in their most extreme sense—the more we find a sense of solidarity, a sense of connection, a moving away from vagueness, and a moving away from assumptions to direct experience. It’s a direct experience of our own minds and intelligence of our own heart. In this way, spiritual practice paves the road to happiness and understanding, and it also paves the road to a connection between ourselves and others, between our life and our environment, our world and our universe. This is what a spiritual path can do, and this is what the path of Buddhism was created for. I hope to see you again next episode where we’ll continue this discussion on compassion in polarizing times.