

Tricycle Talks

“Being Human and a Buddha Too”

Episode #91 with Anne C. Klein

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James Shaheen: Hello, and welcome to *Tricycle Talks*. I'm James Shaheen, editor-in-chief of *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*. When Anne Klein first read that everyone, including her, was already a buddha, she was so shocked that she put down the book she was reading. Now, as a Dzogchen teacher, she continues to grapple with the relationship between our buddhahood and our humanity. In her new book, *Being Human and a Buddha Too: Longchenpa's Sevenfold Mind Training for a Sunlit Sky*, she takes up the question of what it actually means for each of us to be a buddha, as well as what happens to our humanity when we seek awakening. In today's episode of *Tricycle Talks*, I sit down with Anne to discuss how she has come to understand buddhahood, the difference between wholeness and perfection, and why she believes that we are all backlit by completeness.

James Shaheen: So I'm here with writer and teacher Anne Klein. Hi, Anne. It's great to be with you. Hi, James.

Anne C. Klein: Hi James. It's great to be with you too.

James Shaheen: So Anne, we're here to talk about your new book, *Being Human and a Buddha Too: Longchenpa's Sevenfold Mind Training for a Sunlit Sky*. So to start, can you tell us a bit about the book and what inspired you to write it?

Anne C. Klein: Well, several things inspired me to write it. One was that in 2007, Adzom Paylo Rinpoche taught it, and it was my first acquaintance with this. It apparently is not taught that often. At least it hasn't been in the West in my knowledge. So I really enjoyed it. It's short, it's clear, it gives you things to do that are rewarding. And I had an opportunity to discuss it with



him. And I got to hear firsthand from the perspective of his being really a great Dzogchen master is what a tremendous foundation this is for one's practice.

And then I reached back to kind of a koan that I've been just kind of chewing over since almost high school when I first heard this idea that you somehow were a buddha, which sounded insane and yet a very compelling statement. So a little bit in the book is occasional reflections on kind of my own process with looking at that statement and making sense out of it. And of course, it's absolutely pivotal to Dzogchen, and, in fact, Adzom Rinpoche emphasizes it a lot. Even to a new student, he just sits them down and says, "Do you think you could be a buddha in this lifetime?" And it's kind of a wake-up call, like, do I think that? And if I don't, why not? And if I do, really? So these are things that were on my mind that I really wanted to bring forth in some way, and it felt like this was the way to do it.

Also, the theme of wholeness is something I've been reflecting on a good bit. I wrote a short story called “A Vow of Wholeness,” which, for me, really was a vow to really try to explore the wholeness that the traditions tell us is there. What does that mean to an ordinary human being? Because I'm clearly a human being, but there's a buddha too that's actually not separate in some way that I wanted to explore. I would say it's been a continuing exploration. So for me, this book was a way to pull these things together and also to launch the House of Adzom series. It's the first book that has a significant portion from Adzom Rinpoche, who is by all accounts really one of the great Dzogchen masters of this time in Tibet. So it just kind of came together.

James Shaheen: So we'll get to Adzom Rinpoche and Jigme Lingpa and Longchenpa further on, but you write that Dzogchen understands all paths to move toward a natural state of wholeness like "rivers seeking their ocean or pained and promising humans like ourselves contending with something at once utterly foreign and also inseparably intimate with our human being." Can you say more about this state of wholeness?



Anne C. Klein: So a state of wholeness is one of the great central symbols of Dzogchen, for example, the vast ocean. There are waves that are catastrophic, there are little ripples, there are changes in color, there is water crashing on the shore, but it's all unquestionably ocean. The ocean is whole. I think that's one of the reasons humans love to look at the ocean and the sky because somehow the sense of the usual sorts of "me," "that" sort of dissolves just naturally, or I would say it softens. There's still some kind of subject object sensibility there, maybe, but it softens. And there's something about that that I think as a species we fall in love with. We love that vastness. And it's a very intimate connection at that time, and it's radically different experientially from looking at a computer or looking at cars or most of the things that we look at most of the time. So I feel like it's actually a very deep yearning to have this. Some people might use other words. They might use the word beauty, for example, or heartfelt. And all of these sensibilities seem to be nourished in an experience of wholeness.

James Shaheen: In fact, you say that we are backlit by wholeness, and this is already accessible to each of us yet the book also describes a very highly structured path of practice. This may seem paradoxical: If we are already whole, then why do we need such structured and specific practice? And how do you understand the relationship between wholeness and the path of practice?

Anne C. Klein: It's the central paradox of the path, not only in Dzogchen, but I think it's particularly vivid in Dzogchen. You're a Buddha. We're told this from the beginning. You also don't understand that. How can that be? How could that which is utterly perfect, the ground of everything, the real realm, the dharmadhatu? That is whole, and everything arises in it. Everything arises in your experience also. Your experience is in some sense the expanse in which everything arises. This is not an esoteric thing. You're happy, you're sad, but it's all part of the domain of your experience. Or if you look at something, anything, this computer, my thermos, can you separate your knowing consciousness, the knower, from the thing you're looking at?



James Shaheen: I don't think so.

Anne C. Klein: You're shaking your head. Most of my students who never heard anything about Buddhism, I'll bring this up very early sometimes, and they're all like, "No, I don't think so." And that's an extremely important recognition, because that's where wholeness lies. And perhaps one of the reasons we love to look at the sky, the ocean, mountains, is that we get a sense of unfettered, unelaborated as they say, I like to say free of frills. The moment can be a portal to the wholeness that's there. So this is some of the ways that I think of it.

So really, to come into wholeness is greatly advancing that process. Looking at the mind, in very particular ways, the mind can do anything, it is of infinite variety. And that's kind of important to see. This kind of wholeness is the ultimate creative space. Everything arises in it, never leaves it. So practices like we have in the seven mind trainings, for example, will call on us to actually think about certain things like impermanence. It helps open our radar to flux and change and lightens up a little bit our projection on things and desire for things, especially “me,” “mine,” to be permanent, feel that they are permanent. And then it takes us through various kinds of permutations using vivid imagery, using the imagination, allowing things to rise in fullness of color and drama and emotion and then dissolve. It's seeing that kind of process over and over and over again in daily practice that really opens up to the wholeness, the ground that is actually always there and never shaken, and nothing ever happens to it. But a lot of stuff happens in some sense, and we can't ignore that. Maybe that's the important thing to say: life is not just looking at the sky. The sky has clouds; the ocean has waves. Wholeness without arisings in it wouldn't be wholeness; it would be some kind of exclusive zone. So it's partly to really reckon with that experientially.

James Shaheen: One of the ways I looked at it was you have this wonderful description of yourself as a young woman, and you serendipitously stumbled into that state of wholeness or connection with it, and the way I look at it is yes, I think most people have an experience like



that. And then we wonder, how does one cultivate a state of mind in which that is more likely to happen, in which that connection can be strengthened so we can come back to it more easily. That's one of the ways I looked at it. Even as children sometimes we dip into that state. We don't know what it is. But I understood the practice as recognizing that and connecting with that. Yet you say that wholeness and connection are central to our existence, but we rarely live as if they are. Can you say more about what you call our unwieldy sense of separateness? How does separateness cause our suffering, and why is it so easy to get stuck there—in other words, not find our way back or not even recognize that we're already whole?

Anne C. Klein: Very simple question, of course. So this separateness operates on many levels, just the sense of hey, look over there, the birds are over there, right away, there's there. And once there's a there, there's a here. So the dualism, the sense of separateness, the sense of two-ness gets more and more reinforced. There's a you and a me; already the stage is set; there's separateness. Of course, sometimes there's connection also. One of the reasons I think that connection of many kinds is such a blessing is because it does soften our terrible sense of aloneness. So we don't want to be alone, we don't really want to be separate. In a way that makes us feel a stranger in the world in one sense or another, which happens a lot. It's the cause of the greatest divisions in our society as these separations grow more powerful, and there's tremendous suffering just because somebody looks a little different or thinks a little different, and suddenly, they're your enemy, and you have to spend your whole life fighting.

But even more than that, in a way, what I'm thinking of is a separateness from one's own experience. Just on a very simple level, most of us most of the time don't really know how we feel and what we feel. We're in our heads a lot. Being in the head keeps us active and lively. But without being also in the body, you really don't know what you feel. You don't feel things in your head. You know things in your head, and one of the things that I discovered, to my great surprise, but now I think it's very common, is how frequently one confuses thinking with feeling. And that comes up a lot. Some people honestly don't know the difference. So you'll say, "How does that



feel to you?" And they'll say, "Well, it's a nice day." They'll describe some kind of describable thing, but it doesn't tell you or them anything about how one feels. So part of practice, it seems to me, is to really get in touch with what one is feeling. So mindfulness practice does that, practices where you feel you're encountering a special being, which is very common in Mahayana, especially Tibetan style practices, traditional practices of cultivating equanimity, for example. "Oh, I'm equanimous," most people will say. Well, watch yourself through the day. Or even the classic example of bringing to mind someone you really like. Notice what that feels like. Not get caught up in why you like them and so on, the story, but how does it feel? Is your body more or less relaxed? Is your breathing more or less deep? Or whatever it might be. Then think of somebody you really don't like. How does that feel? One reason Dzogchen values certain of these practices is that they do bring us into closer contact with our own experience. And that's essential because the experience, ultimately of our nature, is the most intimate experience there is. And we usually need practice to discover what we're experiencing,

James Shaheen: We're talking in part about relationships, how we relate to ourselves and to others, and at the same time, you say, while there's this completeness, this wholeness, it's not the same as sameness. It doesn't erase the difference. So how does Dzogchen honor and celebrate the vast diversity and variety of human experience while also acknowledging completeness, wholeness, because you always hear people say something that has now become cliché, "we are all one" and so forth. And yet, there's this infinite variety, not only to the many selves that we are but the many other things, the many other phenomena. You mentioned the clouds in the sky, the waves in the ocean. They're there, and that's where the tension often arises.

Anne C. Klein: Yeah, and we think that difference then is the last word, and it blinds us to the wholeness, and yet a great line from a Dzogchen text, "Because there are many, there is one." Wholeness is not a dead expanse with nothing in it. Wholeness is the open space in which everything occurs, which is boundless, which is unlimited, and in which anything can occur



without in any way leaving that state of state, place, unnameable, unthingable wholeness. And this is actually very central to Longchenpa's approach, that nothing ever leaves this state. It's like, well, again, the waves in the ocean. They never leave the ocean. The clouds never leave the sky. They arise there, they dissolve into it, they don't disrupt it. And in some ways, the more clouds and lightning and thunder and rainbows and birds that you can see in the sky, the more you can appreciate its openness and its boundlessness. So it is often said that for a pretty developed practitioner, not so immediately, the more activated your mind can be, in a certain sense, the more you can see, "Yeah, but that wholeness is not getting disrupted." So it's very important to recognize that variety is like the blossoming of wholeness and creativity. One of the great Dzogchen tantras is called Kunjed Gyalpo, which is translated as the all-creating majesty, that which actually is the source of everything. And its greatness is there, its majesticness is there. The *chen* of Dzogchen, *dzog* meaning perfect or complete, *chen* literally just meaning great, means it's great because there's nothing outside of it. Nothing. Not your worst enemy, not your worst fears. It's all a wave in the ocean.

James Shaheen: Right, in fact, you refer to Dzogchen's radical inclusivity. So in that wholeness, there's this inclusivity. So you say that in Dzogchen, there is no barrier between ordinary and awakened conditions, and humans and buddhas are simply different ways of arising from the general ground of being. Can you say more about this? What does it actually mean for there to be no barrier between ordinary and awakened?

Anne C. Klein: At different levels, it means different things. So at the very ground of everything, there is not yet any division into human/buddha. In other words, there's something there that's not really anything but nonetheless from which everything comes forth. Longchenpa says this in exquisite poetry over and over and over again. And that's really kind of as deep as we can get into our nature or our existence. And then an ocean can divide, and at some point, something happens that's part of the ocean's process, the Earth has moved in a certain way or a



dam has built up or something has happened, and the streams go in different directions, and one goes through the mountains, and one goes through valleys and they're like completely different. But there's still ocean actually. But one forgets. We forget. We are so entranced by the objects of our senses that we think they're separate from our senses and not part of the sensory awareness arena that is associated with our senses. They're arising right there. They're not outside our ocean of experience ever.

James Shaheen: Again, we come back to the no separation between the knower and the known. It's something I've talked to Ken McLeod about. And likewise, the sense of separation, negative sense of separation, in which we feel lonely and cast out and at odds with the world is not to be confused with variety or extraordinary diversity of experience. You write that only a wisp separates buddhas and humans, and it is this sensed separation from our birthright of wholeness that causes pain. So what does it mean for us to be just barely separated from buddhas? And why does this cause us so much pain?

Anne C. Klein: Oh, where to start. So this wisp is not even a wisp, really. It's not really anything. But for us, there's a collapsing of attention and a collapsing even of a sense of existence into the moment of this wave, this conversation, this piece of food, this is what there is. And somehow we forget about everything else that actually makes this possible. You know, even if we think of it in terms of dependent arising, which is famous throughout Buddhism, as we know, the food we eat connects us back to the beginning of time. We don't think about that. We lose that openness. But you don't have to lose it. I mean, it's not easy not to lose it. But one can meet practitioners and just being around them, it's quite clear that you're never losing it. It's all the play of clouds in the sky. It's all the waves in the ocean. It's all unfurling within one's own intimate expanse, and intimate and vast are commingling. And that's also very important: very intimate and it's also infinitely vast, and we tend to get stuck in one or the other.



James Shaheen: You note that when you first read that everyone, including you, was already a Buddha, you were so shocked that you put down the book you were reading. What was so shocking to you then, and how have you come to understand that statement now?

Anne C. Klein: Well, really? I'm a Buddha? I mean, I can barely get through the day.

James Shaheen: Yeah, I have a hard time with that too.

Anne C. Klein: On the one hand, it seemed ridiculous. But I put the book down, I didn't throw it away, because I guess on some inchoate level that maybe over the decades is getting a little less inchoate, it rang true. If I look back, there was something compelling about it. In one of my classes at Rice I did, it was a small class, and I did something that I'd never done before. We had been doing exercises together of various kinds. And I asked them to sit in pairs and say, one person to the other, "You're perfect." And right away, one student said, "I can't possibly say that to anyone, and I don't want them to say it to me, because I know that's not true." And she had her religious faith had taught her that and she was just not going. I said, Okay, you don't have to believe it's true. What you're really just doing is giving this person an opportunity to feel whatever it is they feel. So then afterwards, I asked them, "Well, what happened?" And the two things that I remember, one, this is a Rice class, so undergraduates, and one student said, "How can I be perfect? I didn't turn my last paper in on time." And how to explain that that's not the dimension making mistakes is not a violation of the kind of completeness or perfection. It's being talked about here. And I think that's hard to communicate. And then somebody else said, "What did you feel?" He said, "I found it very healing to be given this kind of positive reflection," which from the perspective of really all the Buddhist traditions is also true. I think it's very challenging to consider how close whatever you want to call it, but wholeness, pure awareness awakening might be. And I think it's hard for at least two reasons. One is that it's very, very poignant to feel this is so close, and yet I can't get it. It's just hard to believe.



James Shaheen: Yeah, you know, one of the things that I found helpful is that often I see Dzogchen translated as the Great Perfection, and to say completeness is easier for me. If someone says, "Are you perfect?," I feel the same discomfort. If someone says, "Are you complete?," I think, "Well, how could I not be?" Complete is much easier for me to understand. So a central question you raise is what actually happens to our humanity when we seek awakening. In particular, do we lose or amplify our humanness in the process? How do you understand our humanness and how it changes in the process of recognizing our buddhahood?

Anne C. Klein: I would say it becomes fuller and even more human. I'm remembering Barbara Walters. A long, long time ago, she interviewed the Dalai Lama, and she said something like, "I think he's the most human person I've ever met." When I think of my teachers, for example, they're totally human. Why? Because they're not defended against you. You know, they will look at you with complete acceptance in a certain way, which doesn't mean that everything you're doing is right in some other sense. You know, you come into their presence, and they're all there for you. They will laugh with you, they will cry with you, they will hear you, they will be sensitive. They're just interacting in a completely intimate way. You're not a stranger. And that's optimally human. I think the Sufis talk about being a real human being, and I think this is the kind of thing that is meant.

James Shaheen: I'm trying to remember, I think maybe it was in *The Brothers Karamazov*, where the saint is expected to remain preserved when he dies. But in fact, he stinks to high heaven, and in that we're supposed to say he was intensely human, in other words, which was a really wonderful thing to read. But you ask, “Are we humans practicing to be buddhas? Are we buddhas masquerading as humans?”



Anne C. Klein: Yeah, it's actually the latter. And to come to see that in one's own experience from any angle a little bit is just very helpful. It's OK. It's terrible. But there is some okayness right there in everything. That's hard. It's hard to remain in touch with that short of full awakening. Anyway, I feel thinking about it this way and that way that it is just really true. And therefore it's worth sitting and sitting and sitting through whatever you have to sit through, living through whatever you have to live through, with that in mind, that actually anything could finally open that wisp and dissolve it.

James Shaheen: One way this plays out is the relationship between what Dzogchen calls the ordinary mind and the wisdom mind. So first, what is the ordinary mind?

Anne C. Klein: The mind that laughs and cries and sees things as over there. It's pretty much everything of our ordinary mind. Reactive, habitually programmed.

James Shaheen: Maybe the clouds and the waves that don't know they're part of the ocean.

Anne C. Klein: Yeah, probably. That's good.

James Shaheen: So in Dzogchen teachings, it's said that if we can't relax, then we will always be in ordinary thought. This may seem paradoxical given the rigor of some of the practices associated with the mind trainings. So what role does relaxation play in awakening and helping us to access the wisdom mind? Because relaxing is no mean feat.

Anne C. Klein: Indeed, relaxing plays a huge role. And we see that in what I'm calling the pith practices of Jigme Lingpa all these different words for relaxing, being at ease, being settled, not being pulled or tethered in any direction. It's extremely important. And anticipating sometimes when we do really, really, really vigorous exercise, you go skiing for the whole day, and then



you're in a hot tub, there's a way in which, finally, we're just finished, we just can't do anymore. And there's relaxation. So maybe that addresses the seeming paradox.

Thought is actually effort in the way that Dzogchen is talking about it. After going through a series of practices and getting used to various aspects of ease and relaxation and wholeness and so on and you're ready to maybe sit in that state of wholeness, there will be thoughts. That's kind of an efforting. If we watch ourselves very carefully, which is partly what those five pith practices are about, we notice, which usually we don't, compared to being in total ease for the ordinary mind, there's something a little bit effortful when thought arises. If your body is very quiet, you might feel it somewhere in your body. Your shoulder just tenses a little or your mouth just does something. We wouldn't consider effort normally, but it's something that has a quality of constriction, a quality of construction, which ease does not have, which wholeness does not have. So the ocean isn't tense about all the waves, you know, which way are they going to go and who's going to reach shore first. There's really nothing but the waves and the fluid and the movement, and it doesn't contradict things happening, but there can be much arising even in that state of openness, but we don't clutch onto it.

James Shaheen: It's interesting just about relaxation. My discovery when I was much younger, there were a lot of people to be taken care of who were ill, and that would mean many sleepless nights. And there would come a point when there was no option but to relax because of the exhaustion. And sometimes I look at the practice as a way to relax without having to be up ten days in a row. And so it's very interesting. I love the way you talk about relaxation. But we've mentioned a few names that our listeners may need a little bit of help with. You structure the book around Longchenpa's sevenfold mind training and Jigme Lingpa's commentaries on the trainings. So first, could you give us a brief introduction to these two teachers? Who were they, and how did you first come to their writings and teachings?



Anne C. Klein: So Longchen, whose name means vast expanse, Longchenpa lived in the 1300s, and he is to this day regarded as the unparalleled architect and conveyor of the richness of the Dzogchen traditions. He compiled Dzogchen materials going back to at least the way Tibetans unveil the story to the eighth century. Certainly scholars would say it's from the 10th or 11th century. You already have traditions known as heart essence, Dzogchen traditions. Longchenpa then writes a big text called the *Nyingthig Yabshi*, the *Fourfold Heart Essence*. And he brings together all of these earlier teachings, and he writes his own commentaries on them, and then he writes the *Seven Treasures*, among his most famous writings. Interestingly enough, he talks about the seven trainings—if you only read a few texts, he says in some place, make sure this is one of them, because this has everything in it.

So Longchenpa, his poetry, his philosophy, there's kind of nothing like it. That's how Tibetans regard the tradition. And I think that hasn't paled in Dzogchen's coming to the West. So Longchenpa is the great one, and there are many myths about his origins. He has a story that takes him back to the earliest beginnings of Buddhism in Tibet. Longchenpa, at the end of his life, he spent some of his life in Bhutan, he came to Samye Chimpu, a very important place where Guru Rinpoche gathered his first twenty-five disciples. Yeshe Tsogyal visited there. Everybody who was anybody visited there, practiced there.

Jigme Lingpa also practiced there. And in one of his retreats, he has a vision of Longchenpa. He sees the wisdom body of Longchenpa. And he receives the full empowerment, permission to teach and really the full mind of Longchenpa. And after that, he begins to teach. From the perspective of the lineage and tradition there, even though they're separated by a few centuries, Jigme Lingpa absorbs all that Longchenpa represents and is, and he comes forth with his own revelation called the *Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse*, the *Longchen Nyingthig*, the *Heart Essence of Longchenpa*, who is the whole of Dzogchen up to that time. And when I first visited Samye Chimpu on a pilgrimage, and I happened to meet someone who said, "You know, a great lama has just come here, and you could go see him," and that's when we met Adzom Rinpoche, who was then identified by his cousin who read a litany of his previous incarnations,



one of which was Jigme Lingpa. but that was a very heart-stirring moment. He became my teacher from that time, that formed a tremendous connection, which fortunately continues.

James Shaheen: We can go into them in more depth, but briefly, what are the seven mind trainings? And what do they aim to cultivate in a practitioner because the seven mind trainings of Longchenpa are really later what Jigme Lingpa and Adzom Rinpoche are sort of building on, is that right?

Anne C. Klein: Yes, that's right. And it goes back even further than that. The seven categories come from an ancient tantra, which actually lists these. At the last minute, Wisdom asked me to ask Rinpoche if he would write something praising the book, and he sent a poem about the book and the seven trainings, and I would like to read two verses.

"When you mind-train to discern mind and its nature,
all untoward thoughts hanging on to self
are finally free in their own ground. *I have no doubt.*
Naturally seeing reality is astounding. *I'm amazed.*

Practicing just this way, dissolve your ideas
into their ground, the frill-free Sheer Form (dharmakaya).
Let the uncontrived, incalculable way things are,
wholly free of contrivance, be a rich, serene stillness."

So I would say that that describes what they do. These seven trainings begin with training in impermanence. Mind training is a very important genre from India, and this mind training is therefore part of that genre. And yet, it has some unusual features, especially in the way that Jigme Lingpa unfolds it. All Longchenpa says really is to learn to recognize that whatever you



see, there's outer, inner, and secret impermanence. There's changes in weather, changes in leaves. The flux of your thoughts as a kind of subtle impermanence. And Jigme Lingpa creates these vignettes, especially in the first three, and to my knowledge, and I've asked around other people who have read more widely in lojong mind training than I have, this is unusual. He creates a vignette where you imagine that you find yourself somewhere, you have no idea where you are, you have no idea how you got there, you're alone, the wind is blowing. It's kind of horrific. It's existential aloneness writ large. And these people come by and they say, "Hey, we're going to go look for a jewel, you want to come with us?" And he says, "Yeah, OK." And they go, and of course, it's a harrowing journey. The waves of this ocean, which represent samsara, are frightful. And finally, they're just in a little rickety boat. The oars break. He's terrified. "Oh, my God, I'm going to die. I'm never going to see my family again," this horrific fear. The boat breaks. He's really on the edge of death.

Just at that moment, Guru Rinpoche, who, of course, is the constellation—when I talk about this in general, I say to just imagine an orb of light. And Guru Rinpoche says, "You've really been a fool. You thought that life was about getting some kind of jewel, something you would call the jewel. You've risked your life for nothing. And you've never thought of impermanence. And here you are, you're on the cusp of death, and you are just desperate and desperate." And then somehow something cracks and light comes forth from Guru Rinpoche. You melt into light, your mind becomes one with Rinpoche, you have realized your completeness, your wholeness just like that, and you're free. You're free from samsara.

So this kind of vignette is, to my knowledge, not part of mind training. One of the things that if we look at it closely, as I describe, it really takes you through all nine vehicles from the beginning of the path to the end. The ancient ones famously divided the entire corpus of the teaching into nine vehicles, but we can reduce that to sutra, tantra, and Dzogchen. The worry in thinking about impermanence is sutra. The encounter with a deity and melting into a deity is tantra, very simple creation and completion phases, dissolving into space. Then Jigme Lingpa



says, “Now let all of this go, you've been through all that, and give up all thoughts of the past, present, and future. Relax, be open, and just be aware of movement and stillness.”

And that potentially, over time, really opens to Dzogchen’s understanding. There's movement and there's stillness. Maybe they aren't contradictions. Maybe they don't disrupt a wholeness of which they are, of course, a part. And yet, there is movement and stillness, and wholeness remains. It's all there. Jigme Lingpa says that to move through all nine vehicles in one sitting is a great practice, which I think is another way of saying buddhahood is not so far away. And I think in Zen they also have statements like that.

James Shaheen: You've just told a story, and you have talked in the book about imagination, and many of the trainings rely on imaginative practices, and as you write, “Is it possible to attain something we have not imagined?” So can you say something about the role of imagination in these practices? How do the mind trainings ask us to imagine possibilities beyond our habitual range of experience?

Anne C. Klein: Well, they do ask us to do that, and the very fact that you can somehow imagine it maybe shows the infinite scope of the mind. Imagining isn't the same as being. There's a movement. I call it a movement from seeing to being. Imagination can expand the horizon that we live in. Imagination is a natural human expression of creativity. Little children imagine. We imagine all the time. We imagine in ways we don't know that we're imagining. We imagine that we're real. We imagine that we're permanent. But that is not what is meant here. It's important to distinguish between daydreaming and what we could think of as a trained imagination. I'm training myself to think about impermanence. I'm training myself to feel that, hey, this isn't flesh, this isn't light. Now that may be easy, or it may take time, or it may be both. It may be easy, and it may get even more powerful over time. We have a mind. We have imagination. And meditation is a full-being process. It's not just in the head, although it may stay there for a long time. But it's really not. It's a full-body process. A lot of imagination has to do with reimagining,



reexperiencing one's body to imagine it as light. I mean, there are many practices where buddhas melt into you and you melt into buddhas and then into space and over and over again, and I think this is a way of helping one to imagine and feel into this no-boundariness between being ordinary and being human. They flow into each other. That is, over and again, there are infinite practices that one way or another ask us to imagine that, and I think that that has the potential even neurologically to shift how we experience things over time.

James Shaheen: In addition to the focus on imagination, some of the later mind trainings focus on the body. Can you say something more about bodily practices of the later mind trainings? How do they facilitate deeper meditative experiences like bliss, clarity, and nonconceptuality?

Anne C. Klein: Thank you for asking that. This is so important. This is the seventh mind training, so it's a kind of culmination. And really, it is a tantric practice. It is the basis of what are called the channeling wind practices, which are really part of the very esoteric corpus of Tibetan practice. How do they help us? They help us go deeper into the body. The ordinary mind lives more or less on the surface of the body. This practice invites us to go right into the center, to the heart center, to the central channel, which is the most sacred secret sanctum of the body. It is said to be suffused with wisdom, only wisdom actually permeates the entire body. That means our body is a resource for accessing wisdom, because the wisdom there is most accessible through the heart. And the heart is the center of the vertical rise of the central channel, which in ordinary life, I mean, nobody ever told me to pay attention to my central channel. But we do think about the spine and sitting straight, which in a way is very much related. I would just say it's a way to get more deeply into the body, which will yield a more subtle type of experience. I can feel my hand moving, but to go deep inside whatever movement might be, there is stillness or maybe there's space there. And we find places to rest in the body. In Zen, Zen calls it the dantian. Tibetans call it the *mdo*, where the three main channels meet deep in the navel. So this is part of tantric physiology, and it's really the deepest place to settle in the body. So when we're learning

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to relax, we settle into the deep belly, and that also primes us to be more quiet than usual. And that quiet allows more clarity, which allows us finally to rest in a state of bliss, as you mentioned, and clarity. Bliss is naturally part of our physiology, and it's understood to just naturally emerge when the conditions are right. And posture is one way for the conditions to be right, and that's why posture is very important. All of the traditions emphasize sitting straight, at the very least, because that allows a flow of energies through the body, and ultimately the mind is always moving through energy. So the way the energy moves in the body very much affects the mind. When the energy is more subtle, the mind is more subtle. So we go into the body and find subtlety there and wisdom.

James Shaheen: You mentioned nonconceptuality, and in that embodiment, that very deep embodiment, it seems to be where knower and known disappear.

Anne C. Klein: Exactly. Exactly, it's so important. The more esoteric you get in the Buddhist tradition, the more important the body becomes. These practices that are intimated here in the seventh training are really a portal and maybe more than a portal to the kinds of practices that certain Tibetan practitioners will develop enormous expertise over the years, and really, they just move differently.

James Shaheen: I was really interested in the question of agency and surrender as opposed to submission. It is interesting that we've talked a few times about serendipitously dropping into a state. It can happen to anyone. And then of course, there's the surrender to these trainings in order to deepen and cultivate our inclination toward that state. Can you say something about surrender and how that differs from submission?

Anne C. Klein: Maybe the surrender is what allows the tremendous flow, which makes agency really creative, expressive of our fullness, whereas submission is a state of constriction. You're

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submitting to someone else. Surrender is like letting go of everything that obscures authentic agency, and that serendipitous falling into a state is really important, and very poignant is that I do believe people fall into it all the time. For example, in psychotherapy, one might fall into it. But the therapist, a Western-trained therapist, won't know to point that out, and it's usually so fleeting and makes so little sense in the context in which you are occupying your life at that time. You don't get paid more for having such an experience. It doesn't go on your CV. In a sense, it has no meaning in public life until someone who really has it emerges and you realize this is the most meaningful thing. What's so important is for somebody to point it out. Or even maybe if you read about it in a book, when you notice it, you know, "Oh, hey, let me hang here for a minute." Hang there for a minute literally is very significant. Usually, we just bounce off and say, "Oh, that was weird," but just stay there a little bit, because that will imprint it for you, and then it will be something of a resource. It's a really important point.

James Shaheen: Sometimes we find ourselves without even realizing it so willfully trying to make something happen and we're so utterly defeated that surrender comes as a very sweet experience. I lost, and I can relax. I get to relax now. OK, well, Anne, it's been a pleasure. For our listeners, please be sure to pick up a copy of *Being Human and a Buddha Too*, available now. Thanks so much, Anne.

Anne C. Klein: Thank you.

James Shaheen: You've been listening to *Tricycle Talks* with Anne Klein. We'd love to hear your thoughts about the podcast, so write us at feedback@tricycle.org to let us know what you think. If you enjoyed this episode, please consider leaving a review on Apple Podcasts. To keep up with the show, you can follow *Tricycle Talks* wherever you listen to podcasts. *Tricycle Talks* is produced by As It Should Be Productions and Sarah Fleming. I'm James Shaheen, editor-in-chief of *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*. Thanks for listening!