



Anne Klein: You don't really know what you're getting the first time you hear the foundational practices, and most of the rest of the teachings for the rest of your life too. They come in very simply or very mysteriously. You know, my teacher says, “How did you end up here?” Growing up in America, I'd certainly never heard of Buddhism till late teens earliest. And they always say, “You got here through your prayers and aspirations,” which, if we believe in rebirth, that means in some past life we prayed for this. But even if we don't, I think it works as a metaphor that something deep inside us longs for this. We didn't know it. We long to know our true nature. We long for that sky. We long for that kind of intimacy with the most profound and also the most powerful and subtle aspect of our own being. I think once we get a whiff of it because of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, or we meet, or we read, we just want it. It's a love story. In the end, it's the ultimate love story, and that keeps us going.

James Shaheen: Hello, and welcome to *Tricycle Talks*. I'm James Shaheen, and you just heard Anne C. Klein. Anne is a professor of religious studies at Rice University, a lama in the Nyingma tradition, and a founding teacher at Dawn Mountain Center for Tibetan Buddhism in Houston. Her new book, *Lamplight on Your Path: Adzom Drukpa's Guide to Dzogchen's Foundational Practices*, provides the first English translation of a classic Tibetan practice manual. Considered a companion text to Patrul Rinpoche's beloved *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, *Lamplight on Your Path* offers a commentary on Jigme Lingpa's foundational practices, or *ngondro*, that prepare the mind for the state of wholeness and freedom at the heart of the *dzogchen* tradition. In my conversation with Anne, we talk about what the foundational practices are and why they're considered so essential, how chanting helps us to internalize and embody the teachings, the relationship between effort and effortlessness in dzogchen practice, and how the foundational practices can untie the knots that bind us to samsara. So here's my conversation with Anne Klein.

James Shaheen: Okay, so I'm here with Buddhist teacher and professor Anne Klein. Hi, Anne. It's great to be with you today.



Anne Klein: Thank you. Likewise, James.

James Shaheen: So we're here to talk about your new book, *Lamplight on Your Path: Adzom Drukpa's Guide to Dzogchen's Foundational Practices*, which is a translation of a major dzogchen text. So to start, can you tell us about Adzom Drukpa's text and what inspired you to translate it?

Anne Klein: Well, I was introduced to the foundational practices of Jigme Lingpa actually in 1974 when Khyentse Tsultrim Rinpoche came to University of Virginia at Jeffrey Hopkins's invitation and gave a course on *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, which had not been translated yet into English. So it was a revelation, and from that we understood the depth of the foundational practices, and that really was my introduction to them. And we did them under him, and so it's been something bubbling since the start, really, of my engagement with Buddhism and Tibetan practice.

James Shaheen: And *Words of My Perfect Teacher* is by Patrul Rinpoche, and that figures into the history here of Adzom Drukpa.

Anne Klein: Exactly. Patrul Rinpoche was Adzom Drukpa's teacher. And Adzom Drukpa received *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, the teachings on Jigme Lingpa's ngondro, from Patrul Rinpoche, as he mentions in the book. His devotion to Patrul Rinpoche is very clear. He often refers readers to Patrul Rinpoche's *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, saying, "This is already explained there. I don't need to do it."

So I have another teacher that I met in Tibet in 1996, who began teaching ngondro and who is considered an incarnation of Jigme Lingpa. In fact, he was asked to teach Patrul Rinpoche's *Words of My Perfect Teacher* at Samye when he was 13 years old, at Samye Chimpu, which is sort of like asking an adolescent to teach at, you know, Oxford or Harvard or Rice University.



And he said that all the great lamas came to listen to him not because they expected to learn anything but to ridicule him. But they stayed.

So that is to say that my own teacher has a very strong connection, of course, to these practices. I think I said already he is understood to be an incarnation of Jigme Lingpa, and he created a condensed version which began to be practiced among his students. And one day, more than once, he said, "Oh, it would be great if you translated Adzom Drukpa's foundational practices." And I was terrified and really didn't do anything for a while. So that was part of the inspiration. I was asked to do it. I have a love for this tradition, for the foundational practices.

And Adzom Gyalse Rinpoche, who in his previous life was a son of Adzom Drukpa, we were able to ask him to give some discourse on Adzom Drukpa's life and raise the question of why did he write this? *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, as Gyalse Rinpoche said, as the tradition definitely believes, is perfect. It's not missing anything. It doesn't need anything. So why would his student, Adzom Drukpa, write this? And Gyalse Rinpoche said, "Well, he really wanted to include in some way his own experience in the writing." And that was really an eye-opener to me because nowhere does Adzom Drukpa say, "This was my meditative experience." But I began to understand that when I read it closely against *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, there would be some differences, and I believe it's fair to assume that they come from his experience. So that was really very interesting.

Adzom Drukpa was really the great exponent of the Longchen Nyingthig and dzogchen more generally in eastern Tibet in his lifetime. He was born in 1842 in Kham, and he lived there until 1924. So he's living on the cusp of the beginning of what we could call modernity coming into Tibet. So historically, his positioning is very interesting as well.



James Shaheen: So Anne, you've mentioned the foundational practices a few times already, or ngondro, and the text offers guidance on these foundational practices. So can you tell us about what they are and why they are considered foundational?

Anne Klein: Yes. The foundational practices, or ngondro, literally are what you do before, that is to say, what you do before entering dzogchen in a kind of formal way, practices that are only dzogchen practices. I phrase it this way because the foundational practices themselves include essential teachings on sutra, tantra, and dzogchen. Patrul Rinpoche would famously say, "Other people think that the foundational practices are just for beginners. I think they're more profound than any other teaching." So that's kind of the way my own teachers have held them, and that has been a kind of koan for me in practice and as a translator. Where is the tantra? Where is the essential dzogchen? Yes, I see it, and over time, several decades now, I see it more and more, and it is a kind of beacon to find. My experience, and I feel I'm not alone at all in this, is that it is a daily practice, and it is something that you do daily over forty, fifty years that begins to reveal more and more that you didn't know was there. So that's been a very kind of vital, vitalizing factor in my interest in these practices.

There are what are called the shared foundational practices, which are in principle in common with the wider Buddhist teachings of India emphasizing the preciousness of the human life, the impermanence of that very human life, the inevitability of suffering due to one's own actions in that very human life, and the great benefit of practicing to create a future that's different from our beginningless past. So those are familiar teachings, I think, to anyone in the Buddhist traditions, at least of India and Tibet. And these are the four thoughts that really form the crux of the first section of the foundational practices.

The uncommon portion of the foundational practices begin with refuge, with Jigme Lingpa's refuge, which is rightly famous as, I would say, one of the richest, meaning-wise, meditation-wise, one of the most richly packed, one of the most densely beautiful verses in all of what I know of the Tibetan tradition. And in that verse, and maybe this is worth spending a



moment on, he really does lay out the whole future of a practitioner. He names refuge according to sutra, tantra, and dzogchen. And sutra, of course, is the Buddha, dharma, and sangha. So dzogchen practitioners always take refuge in that. In tantra, India and Tibetan practitioners all take refuge in guru, deva, and dakini. The central figure here is Guru Rinpoche. The deva of the field of assembly is White Avalokiteshvara standing in the form known as the natural liberation of pain. And the dakini of this tradition is Yeshe Tsogyal in the form of the luminously red, passionately compassionate great bliss queen, Dechen Gyalmo.

So we learn to take refuge in them. And then the dzogchen line, which really is found in many of the early dzogchen tantras, invites us to take refuge in the tripartite nature of true awareness itself, *rigpa*, the ultimate knower that one seeks to uncover as a dzogchen practitioner. It's already there. It's already there, and it is constituted by actually the three *kayas*, the three Buddha dimensions that are all already present in one's being.

This is very important for dzogchen. Wisdom is not something far away that we practice for countless eons to get to. There are a lot of reasons for presenting it that way to a new student. In dzogchen, however, we understand, much like Zen—there is some compatibility here with Zen and historical continuities also between early Chan and dzogchen—no, it's right here. And how do we understand what is right here? Well, your mind is empty in the sense that it's not something you can lay your hand on. We could say it's open. As Longchenpa describes the situation, there's nothing really there, but everything comes forth from it. So the emptiness of the mind, its lucency, its luminosity, and as always, luminosity in dzogchen parlance, and I think in Buddhism generally, always means some kind of clear knowing. And the empty luminosity combined together allows for the manifestation of all good qualities of buddhahood itself, of the *nirmanakaya*. So in these three, we have already the emptiness, which is the *dharmakaya*; the lucency, which is the *sambhogakaya* or bright form; and the formed form of the *nirmanakaya*.

In other words, long story short, Jigme Lingpa is saying you already have, whether you've ever heard of Buddhism or not, the three kayas are right there in your being. This is how they are at



the time of the ground, and they will, through practice and the path, come to fruition as the famous three dimensions of awakening itself.

James Shaheen: So there are a lot of names here, there are a lot of texts, and maybe the listener is not familiar with all of them, but we're talking about Jigme Lingpa and Patrul Rinpoche's commentary on his teachings, and then after that, Adzom Drukpa's *Lamplight* text, which follows his own teacher but is quite different nonetheless. So we can talk about these practices some more in a bit, but I'd like to back up a little bit and talk about Adzom Drukpa, the author of *Lamplight*. Can you give us some background on him and how he came to write the text? You say it's a practice guide, but in many ways, as you said earlier, it's deeply personal and reflects Adzom Drukpa's own journey, which I found particularly compelling. It differs from Patrul Rinpoche in that way.

Anne Klein: Yes, I also found it very compelling. And he talks about it actually. He talks about it in two ways. He talks about it as how crucial a text it is, how significant it has been for him, and he also talks about it with a kind of charming modesty that great teachers also have.

So these two things, the excellence of his own teachers, Patrul Rinpoche and Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, he describes them as nothing short of *vajradharas*. He says that is demonstrably true. He seems to be a very big-hearted kind of person. That's the impression I get. And one little vignette, if I may, that I think speaks to his kind of personality, and then I'll get back to his connection to the text itself.

He had, it seems, he talks about in his biography, a kind of bad taste in his mouth about Je Tsongkhapa. He had heard some things. He's not clear what. He didn't have a very positive orientation toward him. And then one night, he stays overnight in the library of a student, and there happens to be, I think it was *Lamrim Chenmo*, the *Great Treatise*, but in any case, some book of Tsongkhapa's, and he brings it down, and he reads it. And as he reads it, he tells us he's filled with enormous contrition. How could he have this wrong idea about the great Tsongkhapa?



And he immediately recites 100,000 repetitions of the *migtsema*, a prayer to Tsongkhapa, and becomes thereafter really a devotee. And this is the kind of open-heartedness he seems to bring: "I was wrong. Tsongkhapa is a great being. I will never regard him otherwise."

His feelings for his own teachers are very powerful, and I'll read you a passage about that. At the end of the text, he gives what he calls a nutshell description. And I can't do better than that. He gives twelve points. He talks about six pith instructions in the shared practices and five pith instructions according to the unique inner practices of the ngondro. So in taking refuge in the Three Jewels and the other kinds of refuge, of course, that we just spoke about, you build a foundation for your practice to liberation. And as I already mentioned, I think the foundational practices are a daily practice. My own teachers, great dzogchen masters themselves, practice it daily. It's a foundation in the way that the foundation of a building is a foundation. Every time you walk into that building, you are walking on the foundation. It's not like graduating from kindergarten and leaving them aside. And that's important. That's how they're regarded in the tradition. You always stand on them.

“By giving rise to the superbly kind mind of awakening, *bodhicitta*, you set in place a framework for your oceanic bodhisattvic activities.” So this is a lineage of heart essence, the vast expanse. And the vast expanse is constituted both by the all-suffusion of wisdom, which is everywhere according to Longchenpa. We can come back to that in a moment. By entering the foundational practices, you are entering a lineage of wisdom that is everywhere, including suffusing your own being. And the aspiration also brings you to vastness because, as we often hear in the teachings, beings are as vast as space. Wherever there is space, there are beings. And all of those beings, wherever they are, suffer. Therefore, our aspiration is as vast as space. The wisdom which joins with that aspiration to make possible furtherance on the path then becoming of some benefit in this world, this is also very vast. And at the same time, it is as close to oneself as one's own beating heart, as the blood of the dakini's heart, the metaphor goes. In other words, there's



nothing more intimate than this. So heart essence, vast expanse is a union of what is most intimate for our experience and most vast.

And in the practice of Vajrasattva, the diamond being, the vajra being, Vajrasattva, the indestructible being, who famously vowed and aspired that when he became an awakened being, anyone would be able to free themselves of whatever is obscuring their own mind nature by relying on Vajrasattva. So one is able to free up the clouds that for now, and since beginningless time, have been covering up this radiant nature within us. There's also mandala offering, and ultimately there's guru yoga, which is really the heart of all the practices. Vajrasattva itself is a heart practice. Basically, you see the lama mind, the awakened mind, as much as you can sense what that's like from your teachers, from the lineage. It is a kind of tuning fork, and you try to tune in and really merge with it.

And that's the core practice. So these clearly resonate with, make possible a kind of conviction that, yeah, I could do this. I mean, if I think, "Well, maybe I can't awaken, I'm not good enough," which I think is certainly everybody's, what shall I say? It was certainly my thought: "What? You're telling me I'm a Buddha? That doesn't make any sense." You know, on the one hand, I'm, like many, I think, really drawn to that teaching. It's kind of very healing in one way, but it's also very puzzling, and some part of oneself, in my own experience, I didn't go there. I'm like, "It sounds nice, I'll see what I can do here," but I don't really believe it, you know? But if you study a little bit about emptiness, it's pretty clear that the mind is not something as real as we think when we feel that, oh, you know, I just had to do this. I just had to do this because my thoughts boss me around so much. It's very real. I feel terrible. That feels very real. But as you know, we look for it, and it's not like that. It's effervescent. Yes, there's pain, but if you look at it closely, it doesn't have the kind of substantiality that we fear and that we also feel. So over time, that becomes pretty convincing.

So as you study and practice and think about it more and more, over time it becomes, "What do I think about if I feel, as I do, that I'm not really going to be able to do this? What is it that is



preventing me, and how solid is that really? Well, I'm too dumb, I'm too lazy, I'm too addicted to all the things that I want to do that don't leave me time to do this.”

But there are practices that invite us to just look at this phenomenologically without judgment. This thought that says I've got to look at my phone all day long, it's very powerful by design, as we know. But honestly, I can't find anybody holding a stick over me saying, "You must look." It's something that we've imagined, it turns out. And when we start to realize that we have imagined it, we realize that, hey, I can do this. The thing that seems to stand between me and this exalted awakened state isn't really anything substantial. It's deeply, deeply habituated, and I can't just snap my fingers and make it go away. But it is not something like it has seemed, like a huge granite mountain. Not exactly that. It's just my mind, which it turns out is empty, luminous, and caring. I think I forgot to say that the union of these two is a kind of moving love, is love, which doesn't have form, but which moves out into the world and brings benefit to it and is fundamentally the animation of the bodhisattva.

James Shaheen: When you say the union of these two, are you talking about—

Anne Klein: Sorry, yeah, the union of the first two of the three qualities of rigpa, the emptiness and the lucency, the luminosity. And these two together, because emptiness means, as Nagarjuna famously says, "Once you know emptiness, you realize that anything can happen. Anything can come forth. What's to stop it?" And the lucency brings in the wisdom. It's not just empty, it's knowing. There's a knowingness which itself is empty, which makes any other kind of knowing possible, and which combines, really, to recognize the suffering that goes on throughout space and wants to address it, and that's why it's the formed form, the nirmanakaya.

The emanation of the Buddha, as you know, is called the nirmanakaya. And what is that from this perspective but a union of the emptiness, which means open possibilities. There's nothing that could prevent you from your natural qualities of emptiness, lucency, and tenderness from



manifesting as the three kayas. There's actually nothing to stop it. So it's a matter of getting out of your own way. The foundational practices teach you a lot about how to do that.

James Shaheen: Well, just a comment about those practices. You describe them as a liturgy meant to be chanted and repeated in daily practice. Can you talk about the role of repetition in working with these texts?

Anne Klein: Thank you. I would love to talk about the role of repetition. It is, for me, part of the presiding genius of the whole layout of what a practitioner does. You repeat it. It may not mean a whole lot when you say it for the first time. It's in a different language. Probably you're reciting it, hopefully in your own language, maybe even chanting it. As you know, I've translated into chantable English because from a Western perspective, we know that singing is a very different state than speaking. There's no question about that. People who stutter don't stammer when they sing. It uses a different part of the brain. The way my teacher put it is he said that the blessings, literally grace waves, *byin rlabs* in Tibetan, they come in more easily when you sing.

So there you are, you're singing, you're already in a slightly altered state, and maybe you're singing with your friends, your sangha. And in any case, you're imagining that your whole family and all of your friends, and actually by the way, all living beings throughout space, have come to gather around you, and you are all singing together. So this gets repeated every day. One can do it relatively quickly, especially the condensed version. It's a beautiful melody. There are a number of different beautiful melodies, and it's a pleasant experience. And repetition over time shows you that you can do the same thing and it can feel very, very different, the exact same thing.

And then you start to realize, huh, it's not really about the words, or not only about that, it's me. There's something about me that's different from one day to the next, from one session to the next. That's a big teaching. And then repeating again and again, you see things. I have seen things, you know, this week that I never noticed after fifty years since 1974. It's just that kind of



a—maybe you would say you can look at the sky forever too. It's just blue, but there are different clouds. You feel differently depending on the angle of the sun, what you ate that day, who said something nice to you or didn't. So repetition is key, and sound is key. It's a full body practice. It's body, speech, and mind. It's not just your head. That took me many years to understand, honestly. You know, especially in modernity, we kind of live in our heads a lot. You know, the headphones are up here. We're looking at each other's heads as we talk. You look at the screen, that's mostly a head kind of thing. You forget about the body. But the body, chanting, singing, vocalizing of any kind reminds you you have a body you can feel. You can feel it in your body. And of course, we are instructed to settle the body well before we start. And doing that repeatedly creates a set of habits that counter our other habits, which are less fruitful.

James Shaheen: You know, you quote the scholar Sarah Jacoby, whom we hope to have on the podcast at some point. She says, "What is chantable is memorable, and what is memorable becomes embodied knowledge." So what does it mean for something to be chantable, and how has this guided your translation? Because you were very careful in your translation. With what in mind?

Anne Klein: Yes, that's a wonderful phrase. Thank you, Sarah. She was talking about my chantable English and why chantable English is important. So what does it mean? For me, I was really moved. For many years, I chanted it in Tibetan. I love Tibetan. I more or less understand Tibetan. And I really understood from my own experience, and this is the tradition's own view, that the chanting is really part of it. It's part of the transmission. The melody is part of the transmission. And just chugging along with a long English sentence in prose, which might read well, it's unsatisfying.

The other thing that Rinpoche said when he said that the blessings come in more easily when you chant, when you sing it, it's also important to understand what you're singing. So one of the great qualities of Tibetan practice, in my mind, is that traditionally, that's what you've got. You've got exquisite poetry, Jigme Lingpa is one of the greats, and you understand it. You understand the



words, but you're not in your kind of left brain working on the words. You're letting them flow through you. This couldn't be more important in dzogchen.

Longchenpa explains that cause and effect isn't exactly how things work. It's a bit of another topic. But basically, the qualities that arise in us come to flow through us. It's not like we have a hammer and chisel and are trying to make something out of stone. There's a flowing that occurs. It flows best when we sing. The understanding is also important. So I decided to see if I could translate, matching the number of vowels in the line to the vowels in Tibetan so that you could sing the Tibetan melody, whatever it was. And that's a challenge because Tibetan words are rarely more than two syllables, sometimes three, but English words not so much.

And that became, for me, for some reason, I enjoyed very much the challenge of trying to figure out how am I going to get a one- or at most two-syllable word for samsara, which everybody translates as cyclic existence, a great translation. What is samsara really? You know, it forced me to think about translation in a different way, and I enjoyed doing that, and I came up with “swirl.” So in chantable English, I translate samsara as swirl. And I have a whole list now of vocabulary of how do you translate *lhun grub*, spontaneous occurrence? Way too many syllables to take up and crowd out the whole line. That was really hard, and I don't know how good it is, but I decided to translate it in chantable English as “right there.” It's just right there. And some translators push back on me about that because there is an eliding of words. And sometimes, and I would say very rarely, but sometimes a little bit of something is left out.

So what we do now is we have what I call a long-line in the practice text that we use, a long-line translation, which is really good to use when you're getting commentary on the text. But to sing, once you've read the long-line translation, it's there. You know, the poetry actually holds it all. Yeah. So thank you for asking. That's how I think about it.

One of the first translation conferences organized in Colorado, thanks to Jules Levinson and Tsadra Foundation, sitting around a table with translators who I really admired and know how



absolutely fluent they are in the language, and I said, "You know, the first time I chanted, especially Jigme Lingpa's four thoughts, especially the one that goes through in agonizing detail all of the hells, and I chanted it for the first time in English. I'd been chanting it for probably a decade or two in Tibetan. Oh my God, it was so much more powerful viscerally. You know, the blood of the hells, the pounding, the molten iron. Saying it in Tibetan just didn't do that for me."

You know, there's a little bit more still, even though technically I know what it means. And they all sat around, the two or three sat around the table and nodded and said, "Yes, me too," they said. There's something about your native language. You don't have to translate it back to yourself. However well you know Tibetan, "molten iron" is just going to mean a little bit something different than *ja tso bo* or something like that. So that kind of confirmed to me the importance of really getting the Tibetan flavor of singing while understanding a very profound, sometimes disturbing, challenging meaning. It's important to sing it in English. And I really believe that, and I know that for students who come who aren't going to learn Tibetan, sometimes the people who don't understand Tibetan are the most adamant about the importance of singing in Tibetan. So we do both, actually. We'll sing in Tibetan. We'll sing it in English. And that just seems nice.

James Shaheen: You know, you're very different from the Kagyu teacher Ken McLeod. You have very different approaches, and yet you both have the same struggle, how to render this in English in a way that is meaningful and that sinks in the way it does in Tibetan. You both understand and know Tibetan well, and you're trying to accomplish the same for those of us who do not speak or know or read Tibetan. So it's a really interesting process how you come up with, say, swirl. It works, but, you know, next year you may have a different word for it. I mean, it's an ongoing process, I'm sure.

Anne Klein: It's an ongoing process. That one's lasted. I've kept that for a while.



James Shaheen: It's a nice one.

Anne Klein: Thank you. Thank you. And you're right about Ken, and we talk about this. In fact, at another translation conference, we had a conversation about this, and Ken is like, "Well, you know, the English poetry is iambic pentameter." So some people have done it differently. And at another translation conference, we had a panel on this. They don't try to mimic the vowel syllabic rhythm as I do. They just write new music. And that's another way to do it.

James Shaheen: You know, we have limited time, of course, and there are so many different directions I could take this. But I want to talk a little bit about the practices laid out in *Lamplight*, beginning with Vajrasattva practice, because you mentioned it a few times, and I don't know that our listeners necessarily understand what it is. You imagine that you have become a Buddha. So can you tell us about this practice and how it helps practitioners awaken to their true nature? How does it offer a freer and more expansive way of being in the world?

Anne Klein: Okay. Well, thank you, James. Always such great questions. So becoming a Buddha means, you know, a Buddha's body is not flesh. It might look that way, but a Buddha's body is incandescent light, and that means actually that it is a body of wisdom. And so that means that the identification that we all have with our body, me, mine, we really see ourselves, experience ourselves as fleshy, having bones. And that's a certain kind of erroneous perception. From the perspective of Buddhism generally, certainly Mahayana tradition, we aren't as solid as we seem. And beginning to question that solidity by seeking to imagine that your body is made of light is one great teaching. *What? I'm not made of light. See?*

So the practice invites us to do that. And being light means light dawns in space we dawn in space in our practice. So we begin with a sense of vastness, like a vast sky, and then a little drop of light appears. So we let go. In some sense, somehow we find a way to let go of identifying with our body in that moment. *Well, they told me not to, so I'll see if I cannot.* And I think of the vast sky. Imagination's really important here, and a willingness to play, you know? Oh, there's



just nothing but vast space. And sometimes there's a little ritual. You say a few syllables, and I let that be my passage into a state of just being space, or at least not so much identifying with the body. And then a glimmer of light, technically a syllable, the syllable *hum* arises, but it could just be a small orb of light. And now that is what I'm identifying with, and that becomes the body of Vajrasattva. And what really happens, it seems to me, is that you do get some sense, *Oh, yes, I'm light*. And then something snaps back a little bit, and not quite so much light anymore. And there's a kind of what one of my friends and teachers calls an oscillation between feeling luminous. *Whoa, I didn't know I could feel this way*. And sometimes, especially after repeating it for months and years and decades, *Wow, yeah, that's what it is. That's what I feel like right now. I'm allowed to do that. And who knew that I could get away from this other solid identification, if only for some moments?*

And then as Vajrasattva, of course, you're there. You say the mantra. There's a hundred-syllable mantra, and you feel as you're saying that, that actually there's a Vajrasattva on your crown. You've learned what Vajrasattva looks like. Vajrasattva's not a stranger. Vajrasattva's actually your own human teacher, so somebody you know. And Adzom Drukpa emphasizes this a lot. It's there in Patrul Rinpoche, but I didn't pick up on it until Adzom Drukpa. He says what you're doing when you're saying this mantra, it's actually a prayer to Vajrasattva. You have this prayer in your heart, and what the prayer is basically saying is, "Help me. Help me. See me the way I really am. Take delight in me. Take joy in me. Stay with me. Bring me the *siddhis*. Bring me the powers of the feats of completing the practice." If you look at the translation of the mantra, that's actually what you're saying.

And so to be asking for help is a very important positionality for the seeker. It's a surrender. A kind of like, "I get that I can't do this on my own. Powerful as my nature is, empty, lucent, and loving, really I'm stuck in a lot of ways. Help me out here." And Adzom Drukpa says, "So now what comes is because you ask. You have to ask."



That's so significant. You know how people hate to ask directions because you just don't want to ask. You don't want to be in that kind of subordinate position. So we give that up implicitly, and then we feel that because we ask, what comes pouring through us is, Adzom Drukpa says, like a spring flood. The glaciers of Tibet. I'm feeling cold. That crystal water pouring down the mountainside is coming through you and descending through you into the earth and carrying away every possible thing which you might decide ahead of time what you actually want to get rid of, some feeling that you have of, I don't know, being nervous or always procrastinating or jealous or some nasty thing like that that you don't want anybody to know about. But let Vajrasattva see it. He doesn't care. He loves you no matter what. You've asked him to, and he will. And it just goes down into the earth where it becomes gifts for everyone else.

So one of the things that Adzom Drukpa invites us to feel about this, and what happens is the flood carries away all your faults. You take on the eternally pure radiance of Vajrasattva. And then you ask Vajrasattva to dissolve into you. And I want to read to you what Adzom Drukpa says. “Like a bubble suddenly springs up in a stream, that suddenly you understand that the form and the wisdom of the buddhas are inseparable and internally pure.”

So here you are. To whatever degree you're capable of it, you feel you're Vajrasattva, that's your form, and now you're being told that your form and wisdom are inseparable. With this comes the stable and definitive understanding that knows I am the actual guru, Vajrasattva, lord of all lineages and mandalas, who has extinguished every fault and perfected every good quality.

Now, that's a hard one for most of us. You are encouraged, given permission to feel for this moment, "I really am. I'm not jealous. It's gone. It's dissolved. I'm not fraught with hyperactivity, goals, shredding my energy with what I have, my to-do list. I'm free of that right now. How amazing.”

James Shaheen: You know what I think of when you talk about Vajrasattva practice, at least one particular moment in that practice. It's something that most people probably can relate to from



their own experience of hitting a wall and coming up against the limits of one's own agency. And once acknowledging that, it becomes possible. It's sort of an interesting paradox. But the way you described it is that I'm up against the limits of my own agency. I give up and ask for help, and then everything comes. I mean, it's really quite beautiful. That's just one aspect of that practice that you've described. But anyway, I think it's something that most people would be able to relate to when they're at a point of exhaustion or they're at wit's end, and I give up. And in that giving up, in that surrender, everything opens up.

Anne Klein: Exactly. It's so counterintuitive, and you said it beautifully. You do get to the point of giving up, and I think that's maybe one of the benefits of being told again and again from the very start, "You're a Buddha. You will be a Buddha." I know what happened for me was this big kind of "No" came up, right? And that is a way, a kind of primitive way of realizing, "Well, I can't do that. There's no way I can do that." And that's actually true. You can't do it by yourself.

James Shaheen: Right. You know, I wanted to ask you about guru yoga. I know we're running short on time, but one interesting thing about the personal bent of Adzom Drukpa's accounts is he describes his own skepticism or doubt about teachers just generally. He's reluctant. I hear so many stories of people who have faith in their teacher and then they lose faith in their teacher. Here he comes at it with doubt and skepticism. And as you say, when he reads Tsongkhapa, he then feels great remorse, and then something else opens up. Can you say something about guru yoga and its practice? I know it's a huge topic, but it's one that's often misunderstood.

Anne Klein: Yes. Actually, Vajrasattva practice is also a guru yoga practice because it's your teacher in there finally. Adzom Drukpa feels that his teachers, he says, "Really, I didn't have any talent. I was no good." He said, "My teacher's teachings are as profound and vast as Lake Manasarovar, while my writing, [meaning this text,] is like a single water drop in the desert sand." So this, I think, is maybe mirroring for us as practitioners, or just ordinary people, how we may feel in connection with our teachers and to the project at hand. He says, "Any way you look at it, whether in a spiritual or worldly sense, I am a poorly behaved and lowly beggar." And yet, I



love this one, he says, "my teachers cared for me with great love, as if they were seeing gold in clods of earth." And that's how you imagine your teachers seeing you. And if your teacher's worth their salt, I mean, I certainly have marveled how people often exclaim about how His Holiness the Dalai Lama, anybody he meets, he looks at with total love. And that's just shocking. And you know, our teachers tend to do that too. They see something in us that we cannot see yet, and that's true. And so guru yoga is partly bathing in that.

James Shaheen: You know, one thing I'm thinking about, and I don't want to miss this, is going from effortful to effortless. We describe that or you describe that in Vajrasattva practice, for instance. You're making all this effort and then you hit the limit and then you ask for help and then it becomes effortless, or there's a flow of crystal clear water. We have doubts that we can do this and it does seem like a monumental task, even just ngondro, and it requires tremendous effort. But then you say at some point there's effortlessness. But what is the arc there, or is it a discontinuous break from effort to effortlessness?

Anne Klein: Yeah, that's such a great koan. I think it works two ways. I think maybe the more easily understood way is that, of course, as you do it again and again and again, it becomes easier, and also you discover something. You discover that you can actually step out of the way and it will flow. Maybe it's a little bit like the muscle memory when you've learned to play something really hard on the piano and you had to spend a long time getting it in, and then it just goes. And in fact, if you stop to think about it, it will interfere.

So you discover that actually at the very heart, this famous rigpa that we talk about, pure awareness or ultimate awareness, or if you just call it this kind of ultimate essence of knowing, which is actually the essence of every consciousness we have, even the jealousy, the hatred, it wouldn't exist. Its knowing comes from rigpa in some sense. That's its essence, and that is effortless. There's just an effortless knowing, and somehow we get in touch with that and we realize, "Well, I don't have to push this light through me. Oh, it's here, it's here, it's here."



And Adzom Drukpa actually invites us to sense how it feels in the crown, the throat, the heart, and the navel chakra. You're taking the four initiations the way he does it, which is unique. So you're invited to sense into your body while you're doing this. And sure enough, the light actually, if you stop worrying about it and just stop for a moment and say, part of my mind is just going, “Yak, yak, yak. I'll never get rid of this thing. I just hate so and so, and I'm never going to stop feeling like a nail on a chalkboard when I see this person.” And you can say to yourself, “Okay, I understand part of me feels that way. Let me put it over here.” That's actually internal family therapy systems, but very consonant with Buddhism. “Yes, I do feel that way. It's okay. Just go over here for a minute so I can start to feel what it's like to allow this water, this crystal water to come through,” which actually also has a kind of push to it. It carries it away. And you know what? I can imagine that, and I can see that it actually has an energy of its own. And actually in the end, I'm not doing any of it. Actually in the end, what blessings are literally waves of grace.

This word *byin rlabs*, it means wave. There are waves that come through you. It's hard to explain maybe to the modern scientific mind but easily felt. We feel it when we hear music. It's a wave. It comes through you. There's nothing you have to do. In fact, if you start thinking, “Oh, this is great music. Let me feel every thump of the drum,” no, you have to relax, and then your senses come alive and you can feel it.

So a good part of the teaching of dzogchen, as all of our teachers say in multiple ways, is to relax, to be easy. And the agency that occurs is much larger than yours. As you said, that surrender, it's really a different existential state. It's like my higher power in twelve-step programs. It changes the epistemic situation that you experience. Gregory Bateson pointed that out. And it's just true. And you don't have to be intellectual about it. You just try, “Oh, Vajrasattva, my teacher, the Buddha is on my crown and releasing blessings.” And yes, it's kind of enjoyable to feel that, and it can begin to replace the ordinary sense that we have. And it does take a lot of repetition. They're brilliant to tell us to do it 100,000 times because otherwise, who



would? That repetition, and as Sarah says, it gets something into your body. You can feel it. Something is occurring. It's phenomenologically true.

James Shaheen: Yeah, I guess a crude example would be learning to ride a bike. You know, all that effort children put into it, and then once you're riding the bike, you forget that you even had to learn to do it. It just happens.

Anne Klein: Exactly.

James Shaheen: But of course we don't learn this as quickly as we learn to ride a bike, but it's sort of the same.

Anne Klein: Yeah, it's a great metaphor, the bike, the balance. You just, you have to know what balance feels like. And once you can feel it, it's as easy as pie. And it's a little similar with this. The first retreat I ever did, the Vajrasattva practice was really powerful for me. I mean, often the first thing that comes out is grief, and you don't even know why. And the water is actually the tears from your eyes that are not, though, like ordinary crying. They feel healing. There's just something being released. So maybe I didn't feel myself to be fully Vajrasattva at first or for a long time even. But I felt the power of it in ways I certainly couldn't understand, but I was willing to accept because the teachers I had been taught by were so personally impressive, and I just felt, "Well, they know something, and I'll try it."

James Shaheen: Yeah, I have never heard it put that way, this grief. I mean, we talk about these practices as untying some of the knots that bind us to samsara, as you put it. Is that what we're seeing when one feels grief in that situation? The samsara, or what?

Anne Klein: I think so. Well, the swirl calms down. The swirl is nothing other than your own mind being distracted and excited and bewildered by life. And that's the swirl actually. Samsara is not out there. And so that starts to ring true as you observe your own mind, certainly my own



mind. I mean, that inner swirl is basically why I couldn't believe there would ever be anything else.

But the practices are powerful. There is a possibility. Even a little taste, even a moment's taste shows you it's a rip in the fabric. Oh, this is not the only way to be. It might take me decades, a lifetime to really live this moment to moment, but I can see.

I remember I didn't know anything. This is after my first trip to India. I just learned Vajrasattva at my first retreat ever, alone in Wales, of all places. And nobody told me, but I just started weeping and weeping and weeping, and I noticed that it wasn't an exhausting kind of weeping. I didn't feel sad. I didn't know what I was weeping about, but it felt really good. And, you know, over time, there were other theories about it, but that was not because I was told this was going to happen. It's just because the body holds so much. As you know, the body knows the answer. And there's a lot of literature now. We're finally discovering the body holds memory. It holds our grief. It holds our trauma. Even if we don't have access to it intellectually or emotionally, it's there. And I just decided for myself that I wasn't going crazy, but I was crying a lot, that it was okay. I just decided it was okay. I did feel I was being relieved of something.

James Shaheen: Yeah. I'll end by saying that I don't know why that poignancy or that grief makes sense. I'll have to think about that, but it does seem to make sense to me. I'm wondering, is there anything else you'd like to say before we close?

Anne Klein: Well, I would say that you don't really know what you're getting the first time you hear the foundational practices, and most of the rest of the teachings for the rest of your life too. They come in very simply or very mysteriously. You know, my teacher says, "How did you end up here?" Growing up in America, I'd certainly never heard of Buddhism till late teens earliest. And they always say, "You got here through your prayers and aspirations," which, if we believe in rebirth, that means in some past life we prayed for this. But even if we don't, I think it works as a metaphor that something deep inside us longs for this. We didn't know it. We long to know



our true nature. We long for that sky. We long for that kind of intimacy with the most profound and also the most powerful and subtle aspect of our own being. I think once we get a whiff of it because of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, or we meet, or we read, we just want it. It's a love story. In the end, it's the ultimate love story, and that keeps us going.

James Shaheen: Anne Klein, thanks so much for joining. It's been a great pleasure. For our listeners, be sure to pick up a copy of *Lamplight on Your Path*, available now. Thanks again, Anne. Always great to see you.

Anne Klein: Always great to see you. Thank you so much, James. Thanks to your team. Hi to all of Tricycle.

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