

In this episode, Elizabeth and her son, Dungse Jampal Norbu, discuss his project the "EveryBodhi Podcast". In his podcast, and this interview, Dungse Jampal offers a fresh and contemporary look at one of Mahayana Buddhism's seminal texts—"The Seven Points on Mind Training", or as it's more commonly known, Lojong. Elizabeth and Dungse la discuss several of Lojong's 59 pithy and playful slogans which were intended to challenge, open and counter our ordinary, habitual mind. It is easy to misinterpret these short slogans and misunderstand their sometimes provocative tone. Dungse Jampal shares his deeply reasoned appreciation of the many precious commentaries available to dharma students today.

EMN: Thank you so much for taking the time to be on Open Question podcast. One of the things I really wanted to talk to you about was your own podcast, which is called EveryBodhi podcast. Instead of everybody, Every Bodhi, which I think is very catchy. And I really want to share your podcast with the people who listen to my podcast. So say something about it.

DJN: Yeah, I guess we both started podcasts around the same time. My podcast, the one that I work on, is called the EveryBodhi podcast. And it's a contemporary look at one of the most important traditional texts in Mahayana Buddhism. It's the teachings on Lojong, which is a very traditional text. It's composed of 59 short slogans on how to turn the mind towards the Dharma or, how to transform obstacles into the path of freedom. How to transform the mind, really. And Lojong means mind training. So we follow the text on Lojong and the podcast goes through each of the verses by utilizing traditional commentaries, candid interviews, and some scripted teachings as well. We interview friends, we interview fellow Dharma practitioners in the sangha and outside of the sangha, and also a few renowned teachers such as yourself and Ani Pema Chodron. And hopefully more to come.

I've been struck by the Lojong text personally because it's full of short one-line teachings. And these teachings are very profound, but they're also quite accessible. It doesn't take a great deal to memorize. Some of them are very easy to memorize. One of my favorites is "don't be so predictable," or at least that's how it's being translated.

EMN: You're wearing a hat that says "don't be so predictable." [laughing]

DJN: Yeah, I'm wearing it—not on my sleeve, but I'm really wearing that one.

EMN: It's a great slogan.

DJN: It's a great slogan. And I think there's a lot of meaning to it because "don't be so predictable" means don't give into your automatic habitual reactions. Don't give into the habits that are kind of boosted up and solidified by your ego. And when I wear this hat, it's a reminder to me to, you know, don't be so predictable. Think first before I just act out of habit or react. To

have, an open question with the world, not just to judge or to jump to conclusions. That kind of thing.

EMN: When you wear this in a store, people see it. Do they ever comment on it?

DJN: Actually yeah. One of the most common reactions to me wearing this hat is someone to get angry at me because they think I'm calling them predictable.

EMN: They take that personally.

EJN: They take it personally. They take offense. And then I have to explain what it means, and I think it's funny because that's the predictable response to seeing the verse.

Open Question [music]

Welcome to Open Question: A Call to Inner Brilliance. I'm Elizabeth Mattis Namgyel, and this is OQ 206: Don't Be So Predictable.

If you were to ask our guest Dungse Jampal Norbu how long he has studied the Buddhadharma, he might respond "since I was born." He is the son and lineage holder of Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche, and has spent his life under his father's spiritual guidance. Dungse Jampal grew up in both Asia and the United States. In 2012, Dungse-la completed a five-year translators' degree program in Northern India, which supplied him with a rigorous and traditional Tibetan *shedra* education focused on the classical Indian philosophical texts of Nalanda, which is the oldest and most important Buddhist university in India. Dungse-la's EveryBodhi podcast focuses on lojong or mind training teachings that examine how we can find solidarity and friendship with our own mind. As Dungse-la's mother, I could say a lot more about him, but he might get embarrassed. I will say that it was a pleasure to interview him because despite being my son, he is also my teacher. And it brings me great solace to witness his love for this profound wisdom tradition.

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EMN: This series of teachings--what I know of it, and what I appreciate about it--is that it demands a certain kind of interest in exposing our own faults and taking joy in that. So there's a certain spirit or attitude that's required when we pick up these cards. I'm saying "cards" because often we have these Lojong cards with a slogan on each card.

DJN: You have a deck here.

EMN: You're holding one right now.

DJN: We started printing these for the podcast and they've really taken off and it's great.

EMN: That's wonderful.

DJN: Some people use this as like a slogan of the day. Here, pick a slogan, any slogan.

EMN: Okay. Let's see which one I get. Wait, they're sticking together. They're so new. Okay, here's one. These are very nice.

DJN: What do you got?

EMN: *Do not ponder others' business.*

DJN: Oh yeah.

[laughter]

EMN: That's a good one.

DJN: Frankly I feel like most of the world could take a lesson from that.

EMN: Most definitely.

DJN: We do tend to project a lot of our own judgments on to other people. It's that sense of, you know, it's the world that's the problem. It's the people out there that are the problem. It's this passing the responsibility for my own mind onto the state of the world. And we may not agree with what's going on in the world, we may not agree with what we see other people doing. But, you know, it is our own state of mind which really has to come first. And how we interact with the world and how we engage with the world. We have to come at it from our own position. We can't just expect everything to cater to us. We can't just expect other people to get their affairs in order. And then that makes it easier for us. There are many levels to this one verse, but I think taking a certain amount of responsibility for one's own mind and not projecting this "the problem's out there."

EMN: Well, how can we take joy in doing this? Because I know a lot of people might ask: how do we look at our own foibles and faults and impediments to our own happiness without getting hard on ourselves?

DJN: Well, let's see, that was verse 26.

EMN: [laughter] You're very well-versed, I can see.

DJN: It's actually on the card. No, it's right here on the card. See? And so that's pretty far down the line. There I think 59 slogans in all.

EMN: I see. The one I just picked was 26th.

DJN: Yeah. And...let's see here. Okay. So here's another great one. This is verse 13. So kind of establishing more of that foundation early on in the text. So you're asking how can we have more joy in the process? And here's an interesting verse: "Meditate upon gratitude towards all." And along with "Don't ponder others' business," we tend to have this sense of there's good stuff in the world, there's bad stuff in the world, and I'm going to try and take the good stuff and I'm trying to get rid of the bad stuff. And so on. However, if we really recognize that the problem is the suffering and the turmoil, the emotional turmoil of our mind, we can't lay the responsibility on outer conditions. We can't just point to the world and say "cater to my mind" or "it is just because of you that my mind is this way."

I mean, certainly it plays a role. We are interconnected with our world, but we can't reasonably expect the world to take responsibility. No matter how it has affected us or brought the conditions, some of the conditions that we reacted to poorly. Again, it's not about laying blame onto oneself. It's just recognizing one's own power in this situation. It's empowering. This is meant to be empowering. So once we see that, we see that our neurosis, our habitual tendencies, our being predictable, has really led us on a wild goose chase. As they say, it's like the secret to happiness or the thing that you desire it's in your house, but you've been wandering around in the jungle looking for it all this time, instead of just going into your own living room and finding it there. So "meditate upon gratitude for all" means that we take all obstacles as a way of practicing with our own mind. We take all challenges as a way of overcoming our own habitual tendencies.

And the more that we overcome those habitual tendencies, the more we overcome that cause of suffering, the more free we are and the happier we are. And so we joyfully embrace these challenges because they are the means by which we can overcome our habitual tendencies. And so we are grateful or meditate upon gratitude towards all, meditate on the gratitude towards all conditions, all outer phenomena that we sometimes project as a problem and see that as the path to awakening. And that's in the third point of mind training, which is

transforming adversity into the path of enlightenment. We don't create enlightenment outside somehow. And then, you know, take it for ourselves. Enlightenment comes from within. It's not as if it's gone and then we fabricate it. It's always present. But to attain enlightenment, to really attain any kind of realization or freedom from suffering, we have to go through suffering. We have to penetrate, we have to see its origin, and we have to see the illusion.

EMN: It almost seems like you learn to value everything.

DJN: The value—I mean, appreciation is all about value. You value the journey that took you to your destination.

EMN: So these slogans really create a very particular context for working with your life. It's very powerful, but it's counter-habitual. And I think that's what makes them kind of funny. You know, sometimes you pick one up and it's almost a startling because it's so not what we're trained to do, or used to do, but it actually supports our intention.

DJN: Absolutely. And it does take context. And thankfully there are many commentaries that one can choose from. The cards themselves don't have any commentary on them, but there are explanations and great guidance by many different teachers. The texts I tend to favor are Kongtrul Rinpoche's *The Intelligent Heart*; Traleg Rinpoche's commentary on Lojong; and of course Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche's commentary *Training the Mind and Developing Loving Kindness*. And there are so many others. But those are the ones I tend to focus on the most. And I like what you said, "counter-habitual." I tend to say "counterintuitive" because a lot of the slogans themselves are very counterintuitive. It seems like you're running towards suffering rather than away from suffering.

EMN: Can you bring one of those up?

DJN: Yeah, so the most counter-habitual verse I think is number seven. I'm reading *The Intelligent Heart* and the translation here is "Practice giving and taking alternately. Mount both upon the breath." So this is the practice of *tonglen*.

EMN: What does that mean?

DJN: Tonglen literally means giving and taking, sending and receiving. It's a practice of exchanging position, exchanging our own happiness with the suffering of others. And immediately it's like a red flag for a lot of people because our natural desire is to be happy and to be free from suffering. And that's the case for all beings. And so the practice seems masochistic. Like why would I take on others' suffering? You know, it has that kind of flavor of martyrdom, I suppose. And it turns a lot of people off. But it comes from an entirely different background than pure martyrdom. Because the cause of suffering is neurotic attachment and craving that revolves around the sense of self, the sense of identity. All suffering that arises—all

anger, all craving, all jealousy, all pride, all stubborn stupidity—it all revolves around this grasping, clinging to the sense of self. And so that manifests as negative emotions. It manifests as neurosis. It manifests in all different ways that we've experienced mental and emotional suffering. The antidote to that, the way that we can overcome the cause of suffering is to expand ourself from this small neurotic ego ball and expand that out towards others to turn the small self into the large self and to include others in our care and concern and to extend beyond our habitual boundaries, so to speak. And we do that through altruism. We do that through compassion. We do that by letting go of the attachment to the sense of self. And so even though taking on someone else's suffering and giving them your happiness and return seems so intense, it's really a practice of letting go of your own cause of suffering, letting go of the neurotic attachment to your own good circumstances, to your own mundane pleasures, so to speak, and freeing your own mind by expanding your care and concern towards others.

So even though it seems like you're taking on suffering, really what you're doing is you're eliminating the cause of suffering inside. And so it's counter-habitual. It's counterintuitive. It seems like you're doing the opposite of what you're doing, or of what you want to do. But isn't the rest of the world counter-intuitive as well? Or I suppose it's counterproductive. The rest of the world is counterproductive because we want happiness. We want freedom from suffering. And then we go out and we buy right into a system that promotes more suffering. We buy into a system that promotes craving, that promotes, competition of the ego, like putting ourselves above others, trying to maintain a perfect static position in life where we dominate others. Or we don't have to engage with what we don't like. Where we're constantly caught in a process of either grasping on to things or pushing things away and rejecting them.

And this constant push and pull of attachment and aggression, I mean, that is suffering. That's aggression and craving right there. And so the more that we focus on the outer world being the solution, and we assume that once we get a good job, then we'll have enough money and, you know, everything will be perfect. But then it comes with its own problems. It comes with its own responsibilities and it really never addressed the cause of suffering to begin with, which is inside. All this outer projection has really caused us to buy right back into the system of suffering that we were trying to escape. So if the pursuit of worldly accomplishments is counterproductive, the practice of overcoming suffering is counter-habitual.

[music]

EMN: It's hard to touch suffering.

DJN: It is.

EMN: It's hard to take in suffering because it's not really—I mean, in a certain way you're taking in other people's suffering, but it's also your own suffering. It's your own mind that you're experiencing.

DJN: Yeah. I think that's really the crux of it is that we think of suffering in an intellectual way, in a hypothetical way we think of suffering as just an idea. But then when we do these practices, we actually touch on suffering. Not that we are literally dragging the suffering out of other people and taking onto ourselves, but we really touch in on this suffering that we understand personally. We touch in, we have an avenue towards our own pain. We have an avenue towards understanding our own suffering from the past or the present. And if we think that just by doing this process, somehow we escape the whole system...we really have to go through it. We have to go through whatever comes up in the practice. And so we do free ourselves, ultimately. Tonglen practice is a benefit for oneself. It's not really possible to take on the karma or the suffering of others, unless you were extremely, extremely realized. And even then, it's not entirely clear if you could do it without some very specific circumstances. But it is a benefit to ourselves and it is a benefit to others as well, because it really promotes that sense of altruism and the aspiration of Bodhicitta and the engagement of Bodhicitta, the awakened intention, the awakened mind, which ultimately serves to benefit others. That is the intention there.

EMN: So in a way, it really makes you think about what it means to be human. Because when you frame it in the way you're framing it, in an ordinary kind of conventional sense, it kind of pops in spiritual kind of way or new-agey way. We all are taught to breathe in everything we want. Breathe in the light and breathe out the kind of heaviness. And that's like putting toxicity into the environment. Is that the kind of human we want to be? So when put in that perspective, this seems like something to really aim for because we want to be good noble human citizens, and we want to be caring for others, and we know it's best to care for others. So in that way, that sounds so selfish to breathe in all the good air and breathe and all the toxicity. I often think, of course, we want to practice tonglen from that point of view.

DJN: I think there is a quality of tonglen specifically as a practice, which really speaks to the ability of human beings, specifically. This sense of altruism and even the sense of giving something of yourself up to serve other beings. That's not unique to people. Animals can also do that. Animals will also sacrifice themselves for others. I mean, particularly if there's a parent-child relationship. Like a mother deer might sacrifice herself to the crocodile in order to let her baby escape. But one quality that we as human beings have that is not common—or not present, I'm not entirely sure—in the animal realm is the power of imagination, the power to really put ourselves into any position and make that exchange. Not just because we have some kind of predisposition towards our family members, or friends, or people we've already extended ourselves towards, where we had expanded our sense of self to include them and so we designate them as part of ourself. But we can really stretch that barrier. We can really stretch our altruism to include all beings, no matter how foreign, no matter how unfamiliar, no matter how antagonistic even we perceive them. Like the mother deer might do that or might

sacrifice herself to the crocodile in order to save her baby. But a mother deer will not sacrifice herself to the hippo to protect the crocodile.

As a human being, we can put ourselves into those positions. We can really stretch our conditions, what we're born with. Just extending ourselves beyond our family, beyond what is already preferential, what one might consider to be an adornment to our ego and an adornment to our sense of self. And that's something that's really human, this capacity to imagine, to expand. It's an enhanced capability that you don't see in the animal realm. You see compassion, you see kindness, you see in all kinds of interesting ways in the animal realm. I mean, even across different species. It's not as if it's always just for your own species. But there isn't that versatility, there isn't that availability that we have in the human realm.

And also in the human realm, we have this way of passing on the Dharma. We have this way of stepping up to a noble legacy in a way you can't transmit between animals, there's a language barrier or there's some other kind of barrier between animals where it's hard to communicate that deep, profound reasoning behind why one would make this exchange. Perhaps with a parent it's more instinctive, but it's maybe not as noble as a bodhisattva who will do it for someone other than their child, who could do it for anyone. It's more natural to do it for people who you are already associated with or who already care about. That means that there isn't a sense of pure equanimity. There's still that sense of preference. There's still that sense of bias. Humans can go beyond bias. We don't generally go beyond bias, but we can, we can really develop that genuine sense of equanimity. Not to be confused with equity. But equanimity in seeing how all beings are equal from their own nature. Even as our circumstances are different, even though we come from different backgrounds. We have different circumstances in life and our lives are conditioned, so they would naturally be different to some degree. But there is something more fundamental which we all share. And that is what we touch on when we are exchanging with tonglen. And that is something that humans have, which gives us an immense advantage on the path to freedom.

EMN: I think you've just made an incredible case for the mind training teachings. Because really, human beings have so much potential to be so treacherous and so selfish. But they also have this incredible potential, as you said, for being generous and open and unbiased and kind. I love what you said about how we have an enhanced capacity for imagination and for innovation. And it's imagination that even allows us to aspire. What I'm seeing in looking at the mind training teachings as you've described in this interview is that it provides the infrastructure to move in that direction, to actually use the human potential for goodness and wakefulness and kindness and harmony and understanding and wisdom. It's a support for that.

DJN: Oh, absolutely.

EMN: That was so clarifying, what you just said. I feel like it kind of brought us to full circle and helped me understand better why these are so important. And I can say this in a somewhat unbiased way as your mother, but I'm really trying to learn myself. And I've found that your podcast is very refreshing. It's digestible, easy to understand, but it's challenging at the same time. And it's asking us to participate, not just listen, but participate in opening up these ideas that are so supportive for our own wellbeing and for the wellbeing of others.

DJN: Yeah. It's definitely a call to action in a way. And that is within our own hands. It's up to us, to each of us, to see the wisdom of this, to see the implications of that, and then to take action or not. And I think that that's mostly contained within the teachings. If I take credit for anything in the podcast, it's really to not compromise on that message and to not compromise on those teachings, I hope. Because this tradition is really alive with that intention. It's alive with that understanding that we won't succeed if the ego dictates the rules, or if the ego is able to make demands along the way. It will, but how much we let it really determines how successful we are. It can even turn tonglen practice into some sort of a self-righteousness and that's not good. So everything has to come from a genuine place, from that genuine aspiration. And we have that capacity as human beings. We're the ideal vessel for the energy where we can either use it to our benefit, or we could use it to our destruction. Being human means that we have a greater potential to rise or to fall.

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