

ele:CONVERSATION
Acharya, Dr. Reggie Ray

AND SPARKS WILL FLY

DR. REGGIE RAY IS ONE OF THE FIRST EXAMPLES OF AN HISTORICAL SYNTHESIS: THE FULL-ON COMING TOGETHER OF the wisdom of the East and the technological know-how of the West. That's not just hype: until 1959, when the Reds rolled through Tibet, Buddhism was something you read about in *National Geographic*. Then, suddenly, in a diaspora equal to the genocide that caused it, 2,500 years of Buddhist wisdom found itself forcibly exported across the snowy Himalayas. Chögyam Trungpa was perhaps foremost among these Tibetan gurus—leaving behind his monk's robes for suits & sake, he put his ancient tradition into terms accessible and relevant to a new America. Among his first students was a young, precocious scholar by the name of Reggie Ray.

30 years later, Dr. Ray is an *Acharya*—an honorific similar to 'Master' or 'Roshi'—and, with Pema Chödrön, one of the best in the West at communicating the everyday profundity of the East. And boy, do we need it. —ed.

WAYLON H. LEWIS, for *elephant*: Can you give me a sense of your life story—where you grew up, what brought you the to U. of Chicago, who you studied with there and how you came here to Boulder [Colorado]? In two sentences.

DR. REGGIE RAY: [laughing] I was born in New York City, in 1942. My family moved to Connecticut, a town called Darien, bought a house, and that's where I grew up.

From a young age, eight or nine years old, I was fascinated with Tibet. I read *National Geographic*, anything I could get my hands on. I started having dreams about Tibet. They were the most compelling thing in my life. I went to college with the intention of saving my money [and] going to go to Tibet. [laughing] After my sophomore year, I dropped out. In those days the only people who dropped out were criminals or the mentally disturbed. But I went to India. I tried to go to Tibet...but you couldn't get into Tibet in 1962 [the Chinese Communist 'Liberation' had taken place only three years earlier]. So I spent time in Laos; went to Nepal. I wanted to spend my life studying Tibetan Buddhism. I went back to college and then graduate school with that intention in mind. William's College in Massachusetts had started a Religion

Department. Because it was new, there were few students and I got to do pretty much whatever I wanted. So I studied Buddhism.

ele: Now you're a long-time Buddhist teacher and student. Do you read anything into those early dreams? Do you think that it some reincarnation thing, or just a predilection?

Dr. Ray: [long pause] Okay...we'll go into this a little bit. When I was two until about four, I would wake up in the night and come downstairs, completely freaked out. Of course my parents had no idea what was going on. You know, it's weird, looking back on it—when I met Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, I told him about these dreams. And I knew he was seeing the places I was talking about, because these dreams involved actual, specific places in Tibet. Sometimes I would be standing in the Brahmaputra Valley looking up at the mountains. I wanted to be on the other side. In most of the dreams I was in Tibet up in mountain locales trying to get back up into certain caves and retreat centers. When I told Trungpa Rinpoche about all this, he asked some questions and said, "You were a Tibetan in your last life." And then he said, "But you need to focus on this life." Because he could see how compelling those dreams were. The strange thing was, these dreams had been the center of my life for 15 years, and when I met him *I never had another single dream*.

I applied to Harvard, Yale and Chicago for graduate school. I was too weird for Yale: I had been to India and was obviously a weird guy. But I got into Harvard and Chicago. Harvard would have been the route of acceptability—I have a Harvard Ph.D and I could write my ticket. But Chicago was a more interesting place, intellectually, because [Mircea] Eliade was there [one of the greatest scholars of religion in the 20th century]. Chicago pushed its students to develop their own point of view. I went to Chicago.

ele: And you studied with Eliade.

Dr. Ray: He was my dissertation advisor. I got to know him pretty well. His approach was that, just as we had a renaissance in this culture through studying the Greek Classics, there would be another renaissance through studying Eastern religions and native, indigenous traditions. His view was that the study of religion is, at its most essential, the study of the self. So he felt that to properly study and understand religion, we had to open our consciousness to a level commensurate with the religions we were studying. And that's what we did at Chicago. It was wild. Of course, I had

to learn Sanskrit and Tibetan and so on.

ele: How did your mother feel about all this? Your father had passed away?

Dr. Ray: He didn't pass away until '75. Both of them were involved in all my adventures—going to India and all.

My mother was wild. When she met my father, the story goes, she was at Wellesley College and my father—who was more conventional—had a date with her. They were walking down to a river, and he happened to ask “What's your religion?” She stepped out on this big piece of ice floating by and it drifted out into the lake and she said, “I'm a Buddhist.” [laughing] In the middle of winter. They had to get a boat [laughing]. She was always supportive and encouraged me in all kinds of wild adventures. As a young boy I would go in my rowboat during hurricanes and row out..! My father was mortified.

ele: So that's lucky that you were supported at that time.

Dr. Ray: Oh, yes. I was never reined in.

ele: Do you consider that, as a parent, it's important to be supportive in that way? I mean, your father obviously just wanted you to be safe.

Dr. Ray: Well, he wanted me to just be like everybody else, because, frankly, he was. With my own two daughters there have been times when they wanted to explore...and even though as a parent, I didn't like it, I had to look at myself in the mirror. “What can I do? That's the way I've lived. I have to let them go for it.” [Laughing]

ele: Throw up your hands! Okay: you're studying with Eliade—by all conventional measures you are doing something amazing. How did you hear about Trungpa Rinpoche and come to move here to Boulder?

Dr. Ray: In 1968, at the University of Chicago, in the Religion library, I found *Born in Tibet*. When I read this book I thought, “Well, he's my teacher.” And it was no big deal, but I *knew* this was my teacher, and I had to find him. Like my dreams—I didn't realize that this was unusual. In 1969, [a Westerner whose Buddhist name was] Kunga Dawa, one of Rinpoche's closest students, had come from England about eight months before Rinpoche. Kunga gave a seminar in Chicago. So I heard about *Karmê Chöling*. They had just bought it. So I went.

ele: Karmê Chöling. This Buddhist retreat in the middle of nowhere in Vermont. It might not have even been *Tail of the Tiger* [Karmê Chöling's first name] yet.

Dr. Ray: Nope, it didn't have a name. And they said, “Rinpoche's in Montreal now, he'll be here in a couple months,” And when he did come, I was there within days of his arrival. [Laughing]

ele: That's amazing.

As you know, I happen to be born in [Trungpa Rinpoche's] Buddhist community. My parents met at a seminar of Trungpa Rinpoche's in '72 in Jackson [Hole]; my mom gave birth during Naropa's first summer here, in '74—and I often think that I never would have been an interesting enough person to study Buddhism or meditation if I hadn't had that fortune. So it always amazes me when people like yourself are so on the case. You were awake to what was happening.

Dr. Ray: Well, I was being driven by forces beyond my

control, you know. I feel that about my whole life: I've never been in control of anything. In fact, I spend most of my time trying to resist my own life.

ele: Well, that's where you and I connect. [Laughter] Do you remember your first meeting with Trungpa Rinpoche?

Dr. Ray: [Pause] He was in Karmê Chöling's sitting room. It had been a dark day—just as I came in through the door, it was as if the clouds parted, the sun came in and filled the room...I sat on the floor, to one side, as Tibetan students do with a teacher. We had a short interview—half an hour. It was strange: it's as if he saw what I was about to think. He was everything that I had been wanting without even knowing I wanted a teacher. We talked about my graduate work. And he said “You have two choices: you can come and interview me, work with me as a research person, in which case we can do some good work together. Or you can come study with me as a student, and we can go much further that way.” And I said, “That's what I want to do.” So that was that.

ele: Brave man.

Dr. Ray: No, driven by the forces of karma.

ele: It's still scary, though.

Dr. Ray: My whole life has been scary. Every single transition has been scary. But at the same time, no choice.

ele: From a conventional point of view—with grad school at Chicago and all the books you've now written—you are an intelligent, scholarly person. So I guess that's why I find it so brave and terrifying, at the same time, that you just leapt forward. You were presented with an intense change of your entire life in one moment—and you just did it. In the West, we don't have a lineage or history of relating to a human being as a teacher. We would talk about something like that as being like a cult because we don't have this 2,500 year lineage of Buddhism. So how did you instinctively know how to relate to Trungpa Rinpoche as a teacher or guru?

Dr. Ray: Often, I think, there's a suspicion of that word. We're trying to work through unresolved Oedipal issues, or we see this person as a savior. But from the first meeting, what was understood between us was that our relationship and my devotion to him was based on what he wanted to show me about reality, the world, life, about the nature of what “is.” I could see that he knew how to point out those things to me; that was why I was there. It wasn't because he was going to solve my problems, but because of my own inspiration to go further in my own understanding of what it means to be alive.

And that, as it turns out, is exactly the way he articulated his role, at least for his more senior students. He didn't want to be a father figure. He wanted to be, almost—it might sound crass—a tour guide, of reality.

Depending on when people met Rinpoche, they seemed to get a different transmission. The period from 1970 to '74 was his first [American] phase, and a certain transmission came through at that time. And I'm part of that generation. And then you have the '74 to '79 period, you have the early '80s, and you have the later '80's. And each group of people has a different idea of who he was and what he was about and what their job is, strangely enough. I was part of the generation where he said, “I expect my students to become realized people.” He even made the statement, “I want my students to

become *siddhas*.” Which is outrageous!

ele: A *siddha* is a realized person.

Dr. Ray: ...Who has accomplished study, practice and understanding. In the early '70s he taught us that what he had learned could be passed on fully and the realization that what he and other people had achieved could be achieved by us, also. And that not only it was possible, but he *expected* that from us. And he didn't just put this into words—he was fearless and outrageous with all of us. He didn't cut anybody any slack. He never cut me any slack at all. Never. That's terrifying. But on the other hand it's a vote of confidence that he was willing to be so naked, raw and communicate so fully with each one of us.

ele: You just founded the Dharma Ocean Foundation. *Dharma Ocean* being a translation of Trungpa's name, *Chokyi Gyatso*. So what you are doing is carrying that lineage of intense practice and realization of '70 to '74 forward?

Dr. Ray: Exactly. I tell them, “You are going to have to practice, practice. You can achieve realization. You just have to do it. This is what it means to carry on this lineage.” It's the same exact thing that he said to us.

ele: And after '78, he introduced the Shambhala teachings, which were more focused on being in the world, being a ‘householder yogi.’ How does someone who has children and a job and a husband or a wife fit into your community? It seems like realization takes in-depth retreat.

Dr. Ray: Yes and no. Fascinating question. I see '74, with Naropa Institute, as a transition in the way he worked with students. In the pre-Naropa period he didn't want us to go into long, significant retreats. He told me personally when I asked him that he wanted me to do at least a month a year for the rest of my life, and to maintain a significant daily practice. But many people asked, “Should we go into retreat?”—because at that time we didn't have children. He said, “No. That's not the most beneficial thing. What you need to do is mix your retreat with ordinary life and you need to live in the world, you need to marry, have children, go through all the ups and downs of life. And when that's combined with meditation that will be the best thing for you.” As far as I know, he told pretty much everybody that, at least in those early years. If you read the lives of the great saints, or *siddhas*, the realized people, what you find is that most of them actually were not full-time retreatants. They lived in the world. Retreat was a part of their life. But there is some power that is unleashed when you bring your meditative state and practice into the chaos of ordinary life. Rinpoche once said, in relation to the monastic tradition that he had grown up in, that he felt actually there was built-in limitation in being in any situation where other people supported you. He said the problem with the monastic thing from an earthy viewpoint is you are relying on rich donors, you have to play political games that effect your ability to be aware. He said that was great thing about the siddhas: they were self-sustaining. Each one of us needs to have our own connection with the earth—to be able to make a living and not rely on other people for our financial support.

So the way of life that I'm trying to teach my students is that transmission that I received about mixing meditation and ordinary life. We are building a retreat center, we're building cabins up in the mountains, and my hope is that all of my

students will be able to spend significant periods of time in retreat as they live their lives. But full-time retreat? For most people, I don't think it's a good idea. Knowing people who have done three-year retreats, I'm not sure it's the most powerful way to go at one's life.

ele: My mother did a three-year retreat in Trungpa Rinpoche's style—six months in and then nine months out, over and over.

Dr. Ray: She mixed it up. That's good.

ele: Trungpa Rinpoche invited you to Boulder, specifically to help start up Naropa.

Dr. Ray: As soon as I met Rinpoche, he was on my case. At one point he made a comment that somebody who writes a Ph.D thesis should offer it to their guru. I thought it meant that I would have to give up my career. I thought about it. And [the next day] I went to him and I said, “I offer you my Ph.D. thesis.” And he just laughed! He brushed it off.

ele: But for you it was serious.

Dr. Ray: Yeah, “I'm offering you my life, here.” A little while later, I went to him again: “Rinpoche, I want to come to Karmê Chöling and study with you. Graduate school is a worthless enterprise.” He said, “Someday I want to start a college.” This is in '71. “I've been talking with some of my students and we'd like to start a college. Your degree could come in handy. You better keep going.” I was supposed to be going to India on a Fulbright-Hays scholarship, to do my thesis. He said, “Go. And why don't you go to Rumtek and meet His Holiness Karmapa?” But joining him was all I thought about.

Before I left there was this hot competition for this job at Indiana, which Tom Coburn, now Naropa's president, also wanted! He was a year behind me, so he wasn't quite ready to interview. I got the job knowing that the minute Rinpoche said, “We're starting a school,” I was there. So it was a little fishy on my part. On the other hand, I didn't know when he was going to do it—there wasn't much choice but to go forward. [Dr. Coburn] jokes about it now: “Who was this Reggie Ray that got my job?!” [Laughing]

ele: We just interviewed Dr. Douglas Brooks, he's a Sanskrit, Hindu scholar. He was good friends with Coburn at Harvard.

Dr. Ray: Small world. So I spent 1972 in India with not much to report. Then I met the Karmapa.

ele: One of the three heads of the Tibetan Buddhist world [with the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama].

Dr. Ray: Finally, early '73, my wife and I got our visa to Sikkim from India. We took a bus to the base of the mountains. Eight miles up the mountain to the monastery. There were no taxis at that time, so we walked. We spent the night, and were served rice filled with stones and rotten vegetables—this was what people ate.

ele: They were Tibetan refugees.

Dr. Ray: Everybody was so poor. It was a new experience for me. Then somebody came into our room and pointed up the hill. So we went out and...[long pause]...we were standing in a courtyard when I heard these Tibetan trumpets. Around the



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corner came this procession. I saw him. In fact, I didn't even know this was His Holiness. There were a couple monks in front, a couple behind but when I saw him...[pause] it was like I'd been hit by a lightning bolt. I couldn't even look at him. I started crying—and my wife looked at me like, “What is your problem?” We followed the procession into the Karmapa’s shrine room and he did the *black crown* ceremony. The whole time, 15 or 20 minutes, I’m weeping uncontrollably, my shirt is drenched and—

ele: This ceremony is powerful: the mark of being a Karmapa.

Dr. Ray: I went up afterward, and I haven't recovered, 33 years later. I went up and he put his hand on my head in the most tender, gentle, knowing way. I had an interview with him. And Sister Palmo was there, who played an important role in Trungpa Rinpoche's life, helping to arrange his scholarship to Oxford. She was [the Karmapa's] translator at that time. She said, “His Holiness has a prediction to make.” [Long pause] And then he said, “You and your wife will be the father and mother of Buddhism in the West.” It was off the chart: I was a graduate student. I had only met Trungpa Rinpoche a couple years before. I hadn't done much practice. It made no sense. She said, “Do you understand?” And I said, “Well, I understand what he *said*.” And so I carried this in my heart all those years. “What is he talking about?”

But as I developed as a Dharma teacher, which has been really the last 15 or 20 years, as I realize that the way I communicate Trungpa Rinpoche's lineage has a distinctive quality, I start to think “Well, maybe.” Because my teaching, from a Tibetan viewpoint, it isn't traditional. Even though

I know the tradition, I use it as a basis for communicating with Westerners and finding ways to talk about their lives. Trungpa's whole message was that the Dharma is not something separate from our lives. It's a way of talking about our life; it's a way of understanding who we are and what reality is. And as I find myself teaching in that way more and more, then His Holiness' comments are interesting.

ele: Trungpa Rinpoche would talk about how the Buddhist lineage would continue through Westerners. It wouldn't always be Tibetans, teaching.

Dr. Ray: He himself had so thoroughly let go of any unconscious attachment to his culture; he had so thoroughly entered into Western culture—the way he related to himself, the way he spoke about emotions, the way he talked about the need to be a lonely individual...Tibetan culture is collective in its orientation. He didn't transplant the Dharma in terms of forms, practices and cultural orientation. What the Dharma is and has to be is a reflection of the karmic situation of the culture into which it comes. It has to reflect it from the basis of the depth of enlightenment and freedom. He did that. The natural thing was then, of course, that the people carrying on his tradition would need to be deeply practiced Westerners who had grown up in, and carried the karma of this culture. The choice of [Trungpa Rinpoche's] Regent was, for many people, an outrageous choice—

ele: The Regent being a Westerner.

Dr. Ray: Thomas Rich. But at the same time, it was an obvious choice to me, in retrospect.

ele: Even, ah, considering how it worked out? Obviously the Regent had some intense karma. [The Regent, Rinpoche's Dharma heir, contracted HIV, passed it on to a student, and died in 1987]

Dr. Ray: All of us Westerners are going to be killed by this process. We're all going to die in the saddle. And he did. And you can debate, you can psychologize, you can moralize—but the fact is he was in a situation of enormous vulnerability and he couldn't quite handle the adulation and the hatred of many Western students toward him simply because he was the Regent. The competitiveness, the jealousy forced him to retract and...I think [our community] killed the Regent. He created a coterie around him just to protect himself. It's a shame that he wasn't able to transcend the situation, but bringing a religion to a new culture, especially for the first generation, it's lethal. The new culture basically doesn't want it. You have to deal with a level of neurosis, aggression and paranoia on the part of the people you are trying to teach that is not quite there in the same way once a religion is more established. So Rinpoche died young. The Regent died young. The Karmapa died young. It's lethal. And I expect to die trying to fulfill this job. I expect it. I'm sure it will happen. I have no doubt.

ele: Well, I think we are learning to take better care of our teachers, so hopefully you are not in a rush. Rinpoche often said, “I'm alive because of my students.” Your community is growing. There is a lot of support even beyond your community—the many people who know you and study with you to some extent, your peers...Things are settled more, hopefully.

Dr. Ray: Yeah.

ele: So, stop talking about it that way.

Dr. Ray: Okay. [Laughing]

ele: All right. Having grown up in Trungpa Rinpoche's community, and the Regent and Karmapa being my two heroes when I was a child...Rinpoche less so, just because he was so inscrutable—but then, connecting with Rinpoche's teachings when I was a teenager, growing up at Karmê Chöling and then working at Shambhala Publications [Boston]...I probably understand the American Buddhist scene from a simple, superficial, beginner's mind [laughing] point-of-view as well as almost anyone. And in terms of communicating to the Western mind—and this is why it's such an honor to finally interview you—you can communicate in a visceral, immediate way to Westerners—to people who may not care *at all* about being Buddhists but who just want to, as you put it earlier, understand how to live life. So, what are you trying to do with that power?

You've written some academic, scholarly books, which are amazing for continuing the lineage but not necessarily for sharing basic Dharma. You are starting this foundation to continue the teachings of Trungpa Rinpoche. What is your game-

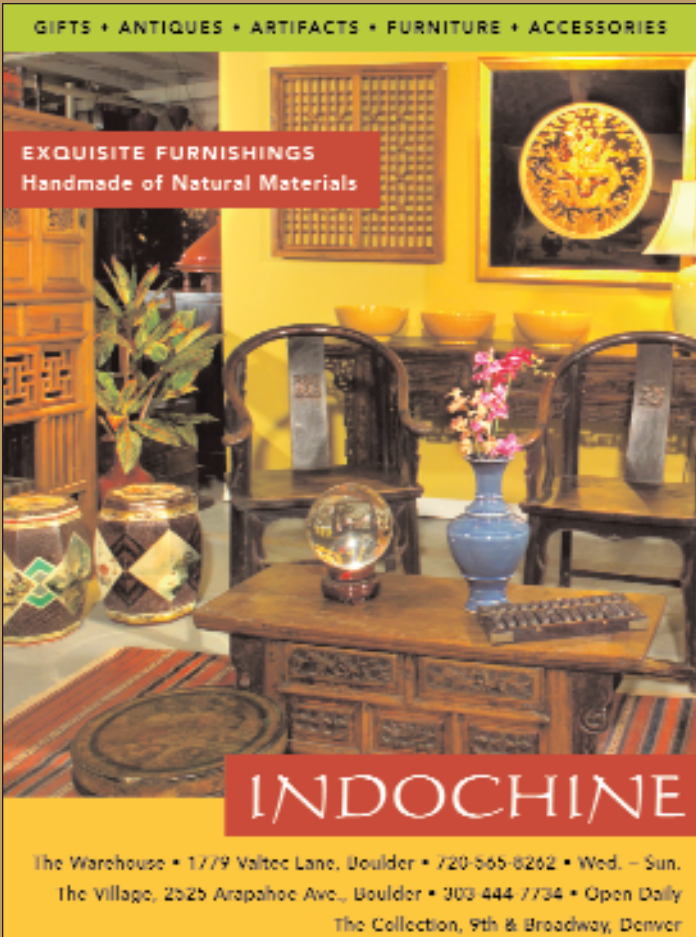


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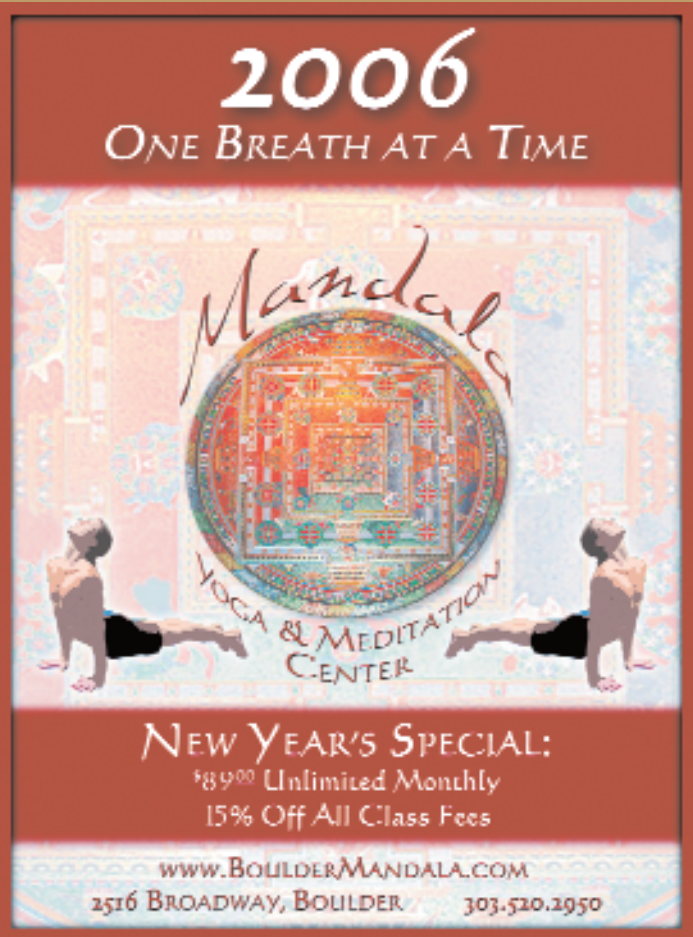
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plan for the next decade or so?

Dr. Ray: [long pause] Well, my intention when we moved to Shambhala Mountain Center eight years ago was to teach, do some writing, do a lot of meditation for the rest of my life.

ele: Sounds good!

Dr. Ray: Yeah. At that time I was 55. I thought, “This is going according to plan. This is how it works. I move into retirement.” However, it appears the lineage had a different idea. [Laughing] I wanted a situation where I

could retreat with my senior students, and give advanced teachings that I couldn’t give in a group situation, with a mix of participants. We [wanted to do] this at Shambhala Mountain and spent a fair amount of time looking around, but it became clear that the direction of the Center is to become more and more active. Then one of my students, Tami Simon (who owns *Sounds True*), suggested, “Why don’t you go down and look at Crestone?” So, last Thanksgiving, my wife and I drove down with Tami and her partner, Julie Kramer. What are these people doing looking at houses, they live somewhere else, they have no money? And we’re driving

up and up, and lo and behold—there’s this house, one of the highest in Crestone.

ele: Was it for sale?

Dr. Ray: Yeah! Strange *causes and conditions* [karma]. You asked about my gameplan? Just one surprise after another. And right above the house, coincidentally, there is a big stretch of land where, later, we were invited to build cabins on—directly facing this 14,000 foot mountain that overlooks the town. Have you been down [to Crestone] at all?

ele: Uh-huh. I did a retreat there, on the Karmapa’s land. I read your book on that retreat, *Indestructible Truth*. Or it might have been the *Secret of the Vajra World*.

Dr. Ray: Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso Rinpoche said that Crestone is one of the two or three places on planet Earth best suited for retreat practice, including Tibet.

ele: Khenpo Rinpoche being one of the last masters of the Tibetan Buddhist practice of retreat. Wow.

Dr. Ray: You feel the stillness when you are down there. Remote; powerful; quiet—there’s not much happening and there’s really a sense of the dralas [the natural world’s awakened energy] all over the place. Every time you turn around.

ele: For those who don’t know, Crestone is a spiritual zoo—Catholic, Hindu...every single religion has a retreat center right beneath these huge mountains.

Dr. Ray: So you see when I say “I’m not in control of my life,” that’s what I’m talking about. My whole life, I’ve been pushed in certain directions and things happen. There’s nothing to do

except just do it, just go ahead.

As you know, one of the main images of the kingdom of Shambhala is that the different major religious traditions from around the world would gather and practice. And that is the situation down there. The Manitou Foundation, under the direction of Hanne Strong, has gathered Christians, Jews, Hindus, Sufis, Zen Buddhists and Tibetan Buddhists—and these are all practitioners. The Christian group, the Carmelites, are devoted meditators in where I did a retreat this spring. I was looking for a cabin this spring—we hadn’t built ours yet—and they said, “Sure, no problem.” So I spent six weeks up there.

ele: You had to get across some crazy river.

Dr. Ray: First of all you have to drive half an hour straight up this road and then there’s a river that the only way to cross is to wade through it. And the water’s coming through at 60 miles per hour! So it’s challenging to get up there—and then you are cut off. Anything happens, you’re out of luck. That’s the ideal retreat situation.

ele: What is *retreat*, in your Buddhist context? What does one do, and what’s it for?

Dr. Ray: [long pause] Well, the view of Buddhism and other contemplative traditions is that each one of us has a capacity for a more profound life than we usually live. And the reason that we don’t live this profound life that is our inheritance is that we live on the surface. Particularly in the modern world, we are more and more disconnected from our experience, from other people, from the natural world, from our emotions.

And the purpose of meditation and especially retreat is to put ourselves in a situation where all of the usual distractions, the usual busy-ness of daily life, are removed. In Crestone, the cabins that we have will be way up on this particular ridge, a long, long way from the nearest road. People will have a bed, a woodstove, a little propane stove, water. That’s it. And by being in retreat and meditating and living in solitude in that simple way by yourself and having no human contact for anywhere from two days up to a few months, what happens is your mind slows down. Over a period of time your mind and state of being and senses and emotions all begin to open up—and you begin to experience life in a much more profound and fulfilling way. And the idea of Buddhist retreat, always, is that you bring that depth of experience, that mind back into your ordinary life. And you never quite go back to the way you were. Every retreat that I’ve ever done, there’s been a shift. The openness of retreat is diminished when you come back to ordinary life, but it doesn’t go away. And eventually, the ideal is that we can maintain contact with this limitless depth of being that we experience in retreat in our *ordinary* life, *in* the world, when we work and have relationships. At that point, life becomes fulfilling. That’s where meditation comes in: we are not in touch fully with who we are. In our culture, we always look outside: a vacation, the new relationship, a new job, buying new things. We find that fulfillment in some external way—and, of course, it never works. Why? We are ourselves the biggest obstacle to that fulfillment. Through the practice of meditation, we are able to discover that *we* are the problem, and that once the problem is

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solved, we can be in any situation in life and experience that depth and fulfillment that everybody is looking elsewhere for. So I encourage my students to do retreat practice. We're not necessarily talking about months and months; even a week or two a year can make a difference in a person's life.



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Retreat is a central fixture on the path of Trungpa Rinpoche, as you know. [Laughing]

ele: Thank you. I've actually only done two in my whole life. They were both hard in certain respects: boring, claustrophobic. But surprisingly, they were also delightful. I'm a busy-minded person, as you talked about in your *Busy-ness is Laziness* article in the last *elephant*. I'm insecure. I'm not relaxed in the sense that I'm always social and always going out and it's hard for me to do nothing. But then I go to retreat and, for some reason, it's just delightful.

Dr. Ray: Trungpa Rinpoche expected us to practice and assimilate the Vajrayana Dharma. But he also made it clear that he expected us to then go out and engage the world on its own terms, as he had. He presented himself not as someone to be worshiped or idolized—or even remembered—but as a teacher to be emulated. There's the comment I referred to where he said, "I want at least some of my senior students to become siddhas." Siddhas, historically, did not remain within the confines of conventional Buddhism or even of their own teacher. Some of them were low-caste people, some were kings, Brahmins, yogis and yoginis. Their job was to present the Dharma beyond rules and regulations—to connect with people in a naked way. I think the Regent is a wonderful model for all of Rinpoche's senior students, particularly those from the early years who have the transmission that you must [attain realization]—and then go out and *wander abroad, practice and gather disciples and teach in your own way, according to your own inspiration*. That's the traditional injunction of the student once they have practiced and achieved some understanding.

ele: I should point out that the namesake of this university was a siddha, right? Naropa himself was a prime example: the abbot of Nalanda, the greatest Buddhist university in history. And he got up and left and went to the forest. I don't think anyone has a problem with [you leaving]. But I think every-

one has a question about the fact that [your organization is now] outside of the *mandala* [community]. "Boy, wouldn't it be great that if you wanted to be a serious practitioner and do retreats within the Shambhala Buddhist world that Trungpa Rinpoche founded, you could go to Reggie?"

Dr. Ray: Uh-hunh.

ele: But now new students who want to study with you can't go through [Shambhala]. It's confusing. The roots of the tree—the lineage—are [tangled up].

Dr. Ray: It's helpful to look at this historically. Anytime a great teacher comes about who, through his charisma and creativity effects many people in many different ways, there's a reaction in the second generation. This dynamic was first pointed to by Max Weber, a great German sociologist. He called it the *transition from charisma to routinization*, making things routine. It's just something that happens—a law of historical development. The first thing that happens is that there is an attempt to narrow down the vastness and chaotic creativity of the founder. There is fear. It happened in Christianity; it happened in Buddhism, Mohammed.

ele: Sure. It happens with small businesses that are then bought by bigger businesses, and they try to systematize it.

Dr. Ray: Sure. The other thing that happens is that the charisma of the original teacher moves outside of the organization. We see this same dynamic even in Tibet after the death of a great teacher. New developments and creativity happens in a different place, among different people. It's also a life-cycle thing. When people are young, second generation and

they didn't know the founder, then they are willing to go along with that restriction of charisma and creativity, that routinization and bureaucratization that occurs. But the students of the founder feel an obligation to carry on that original openness and daring. So usually, even in Tibet, you have

the institutional thing that performs important functions—keeps the texts together and so on—but then you have a lot of people out teaching and they will found particular lineages that actually end up being where the water of life is drunk. So, I don't see a problem. It's a natural process. Yeah, people are confused. But they don't know Buddhist history, they don't know that this is just how it works.

And what I see happening in our community is pretty much following this pattern: there's an attempt to contain and channel the tremendous vastness of Trungpa Rinpoche's teachings. The Shambhala community is haunted by Trungpa Rinpoche. And the problem with memories is, they are not *him*. People are trying to keep his footprint alive, rather than the foot. He's not the forms and he's not the text. It's about the awakened mind itself. And we can only gain access to this mindstream through practice. And it's not going to be the same thing that happened before. That's not how it works. It's about working with sentient beings, listening to them, seeing what their suffering is and what gate will lead them to freedom. That's how you teach. So rather than trying to replicate anything, it's a matter of learning to abide in awakened mind and then allowing the inspiration to flow in a natural way from that—and having the guts to actually express what they see. And right now we see a lot of frightened people who are trying to hang onto the past. I just don't think that's going to work. Rinpoche was never about hanging onto the past. He gave us the tools to hang onto the present. And *that's* what we need to hang onto, which is hanging onto nothing. Now I don't think that's too inflammatory. See, the great thing about setting it in

a historical context is you don't have to name names. You just talk about a dynamic that happens.

ele: Well said. You see it more objectively. And it's true: *The Dot* [*The Shambhala community's newspaper*] won't publish the same sort of things as [*elephant*]. Like this interview. A lot of

my energy comes from this frustration, or devotion: our community has sometimes behaved, since '89, in ways that aren't worthy of Buddhism—let alone democracy, with all its faults. We're not always open.

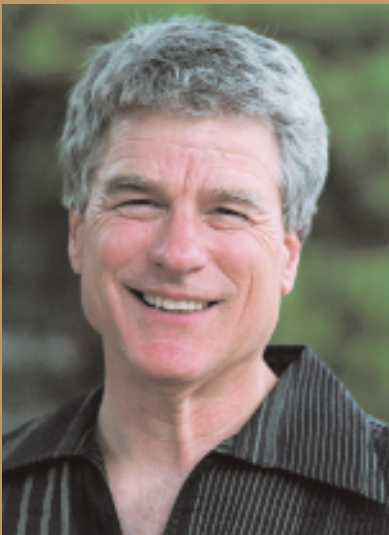
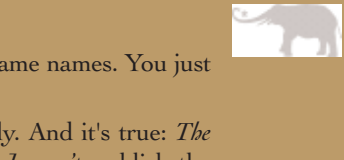
Dr. Ray: Here's the thing. People in the academic world see all this stuff that's going on in our community, and talk about it. It's no big deal; it's just what happens. But in our community, if you mention this, you are disloyal. [*elephant* and other media] have an incredibly historically important function to perform, which is getting people to talk about the actual issues. And they can't seem to do it. Even my own friends, people I've known for years say, "I'm not political." Well, you see, they *are* political. Because when you refuse to talk about things, you are supporting ignorance—and that's a political position.

ele: And you are only hesitating because you have such intense, conflicting emotions.

Dr. Ray: You are scared shitless.

ele: One thing that's striking about you is that you are blazing your own path—and at the same time you have this *feminine principle*—a powerful wife who you refer to constantly in your talks. It feels like, from your last talk [*ele:Autumn '05*], that she's your sounding-board, even your teacher.

Dr. Ray: I met her at the *Vajrayana Abhisheka*, in 1977. I was



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married twice previously, and was miserable. I felt, number one, that I was incapable of having any sane relationship and that, number two, that I was never going to find anybody. And then I ran into Lee and it was—dawn.

ele: I find that from a conventional point of view, an area of life that I am pretty happy with are relationships. I have my fun and I have my occasional meaningful relationships. But as a meditator, I look at my mind when I practice and I see that an *incredible* amount of my mind is caught up in relationships. For many of us I think that's the case—whether we are happy or not, energy that could otherwise be freed up is caught up in relationships. The same could probably be said for our relationship to food or alcohol or consumerism.

From an enlightened or Buddhist point of view, how we can relate to relationships as path instead of obstacle?

Dr. Ray: How would they be an obstacle?

ele: They seem to absorb an immense amount of energy that doesn't particularly benefit the world or myself. It just seems to be this...entertainment.

Dr. Ray: This is where modern Buddhism is going to be different. In traditional Asian cultures, there is an emphasis on renouncing the world; disengaging from daily life. And the same thing goes for relationships, by the way. In Asian cultures, relationships are often not individual friendships so much as they are relationships between families. The role of men and women in marriage is formal, limited by cultural expectations. Now, I'm not saying there aren't people in Asia who don't transcend that, of course, but there's a powerful cultural norm.

Trungpa's view was that in life you are involved in a lot of things...and from a certain point of view they are distractions. The depth of the meditative state and the busy-ness of ordinary life seem to be two different worlds. But the more we practice, we discover that arising in a *natural way out of the meditative state is an inspiration to engage the world*. It becomes your inspiration for your magazine, your inspiration to meet beautiful humans of the opposite sex...these inspirations are rooted in the nature of human life. The only problem is that our way of expressing that inspiration can become overly neurotic. In fact, if we want to achieve enlightenment, we *must* engage our life, we *must* express our inspiration toward other people, toward work. We *must* enjoy the world. We actually have to do that!

Often people have a resistance to meditation because they feel that it's going to disrupt something in their life—work, relationships—that they consider important. And it *is* important; it's part of the sacredness of being human. But what they don't realize is that the process of meditation enables us to let go of the ego's use of our inspirations to feel more secure and safe.


My wife Lee and I have been together for 27 years. The whole process has been letting go of what is inessential. What we get down to is something pretty naked and basic. She's done a huge amount of practice; her mind is open and clear. She provides the space in which I operate. There isn't a moment of my life when I don't feel that space. When I'm open and things are unfolding as they need to, she doesn't say anything. But whenever I start going off—which happens a lot!—she's *right there*. So I rely on her totally, as you can see from the *elephant* article [Autumn '05].

In any relationship, particularly if you are a [meditation] practitioner, because you're more sensitive to what's actually going on, the feminine—and if you are a woman, the masculine—the feminine erupts in your life in different ways. Sometimes it looks like chaos. Usually! The reason we need relationships, desperately, as men is because we need that counterpoint, we need something constantly calling us into question and disrupting our train of thought, our plans. And all women do it, if that doesn't sound too sexist. They get in the way of the dream that I am trying to have. "Stop, I'm daydreaming, I'm trying to fulfill my fantasy." And that just doesn't go.

ele: In my experience, they actually enable you to fulfill—maybe not what you *thought* you would—but they ground you in reality...there's a taming process. I get tamed.

Dr. Ray: That's the story of my life! It helps if that somebody is also a practitioner. You have somebody that you can communicate fully with. It's not essential, but it helps. When you get annihilated, you can actually talk about that.

ele: Right; they have an understanding of their own mind through meditation practice.

Dr. Ray: Also, they have some understanding of the male/female dynamic. Because a lot of people don't, actually. Not really. They don't see it. They don't appreciate it. 



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