

**Living the Dharma:
How to Practice Buddhism and Make It Count
Taught by Anyen Rinpoche and Allison Choying Zangmo**

Talk One: Discovering the Meaning of Life

[chanting]

ANYEN RINPOCHE: I'm a little bit nervous. Not at all. [Laughter] Good evening, and I'm so grateful, having this talk here at Shambhala Publications. I'm so excited to discuss this topic with all of you here, and also the people who are going to listen and watch the video.

The first night, I would like to say that one of the most important things as a Buddhist practitioner is to focus on motivation. The quality of the motivation is so important. All of you are here. I'm sure a lot of you have been studying *buddhadharma*, but it's so important—whether we are listening, contemplating, or meditating: the first thing we should focus on is the motivation. Examine the motivation: why we came here tonight and why we are listening to these teachings or why we are contemplating certain subjects of buddhadharma or why we are sitting on the cushion and trying to do the meditation. If our motivation is lacking, then we should always try to fix it and try to generate positive motivation—which we call, as Buddhists, *bodhichitta*. Some of you may know this; some of you may not have heard this word, but the most important thing is not just to grasp on the word. The meaning of excellent motivation is not just to focus on our own selves, but to focus on others, whether we are listening or contemplating or meditating. That motivation, which I just mentioned, is so important.

For six talks, from tonight, we're going to get together, and you're going to be the attendants of this talk, and I and Allison are going to present the teachings. I would say this talk has some unique qualities. I'm not bragging up here, and I'm not trying to be charming up here. I'm saying these talks have some unique quality because I'm representing this talk based on Tibetan Buddhist tradition and way of thinking, and sharing that, and also, at the same time, I'm sharing the teachings based on understanding Western mind and Western culture and Western society. So that's what I feel is a little bit unique, but especially, Allison is here to share her understanding of the buddhadharma as a Western woman who grew up here. She experienced the culture that Western people have, but she started practicing buddhadharma, and she really adapted to this buddhadharma tradition from the land of Tibet. So I feel this program is going to be really unique because she has a lot of things to share, and she

has a lot in common with you. That's the reason I feel it's going to be really unique. Therefore, examine your motivation and rejoice we all are here, and now I'm going to get into the talk.

First, we need to find the meaning of life. Then we can find the right direction, whether it's spiritual or ordinary life. Finding the meaning of life is such an essential thing, such an important thing to do, but as a modern world, beings—or human beings—in the modern world, we have no idea, or we don't know how to find the meaning of life, so I'm going to turn this to Allison and see what she's going to say.

ALLISON: I guess, for me, the meaning of life is finding that thing which alleviates suffering, and that's where I found the buddhadharma.

I was just growing up with ordinary aspirations—going to college, wanting to go to graduate school, wanting to have a career, wanting to have a normal marriage and things like that—and got interrupted when I was about twenty-four and went to Nepal and I met Rinpoche. It was really wonderful for me, but at that time, I was kind of lost. I didn't really have a direction that I was going—what Rinpoche said, like when we don't know what makes life meaningful, we don't really know where to go.

What wound up happening to me was when I got really interested in the buddhadharma, I realized if we don't have a way to alleviate our own suffering, then we have no way to connect with other people, and when we don't connect with other people, we're just terribly, terribly unhappy. I felt that in my upbringing, even in my family or in my culture or the school I went to or . . . Probably the most prominent quality of my life was feeling disconnected, or feeling different, or feeling like other people were doing OK but I couldn't figure out how they were doing it. How were they just fitting in to this society that we lived in?

When I met Rinpoche, it was like I met the first person who could ever understand me. That was a pretty wonderful thing, and then Rinpoche started talking about how important it is to connect with others, how important it is to realize that probably almost everybody out there feels exactly the same way, and that we have so much in common, but we spend our lives feeling disconnected or feeling like we can't find each other, or we can't find the common ground that we have with others, and maybe sometimes also feeling attached to being different or being unique, even though that can be so painful. What I found meaningful in life was the four-line verse in Buddhism that we often use: all sentient beings wish to be happy, they wish to be free from suffering, they wish to experience joy, and they wish to experience equanimity—the four immeasurable qualities.

Rinpoche, that's what comes to mind when I think about finding the meaning in life.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: Good. What I feel, being in the West, is we really do not have appreciation for being a human being, and we do not see how precious this life is. That's the first thing we need to find. Otherwise, we don't know how to really use this life for a good purpose. And a lot of us are almost lost because we do not have any appreciation for our lives, with what we have, with what we do. So the first thing which can help us to find this life—

ALLISON: Meaning, in this life.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: Meaning, in this life—is to feel we have this precious life. Not many people have this feeling. Finding that preciousness of human life is so important for us as ordinary beings who want to be happy, live happily, live joyfully, live peacefully. If we can feel of this preciousness of human life, and we're not going to waste the time we have . . . Of course if we can find this preciousness as a human being, we use this to develop spiritual practice.

As a Tibetan Buddhist, the first thing we discuss, the foundation of Buddhist teachings, is realize how precious this life is, and also, at the same time, to understand how precious others' lives are. That's so important. If we really realize this life is so precious, we're not going to waste and damage or contaminate this life. Also, we do not want to hurt others. Others' lives are also precious. Finding preciousness in this life, individually, can help us connect. Others also have that precious life. Finding that this life is just so precious is just so important. Then that will help us to respect our own life and also can help us to develop respect for others. It's something so important in Buddhist tradition: realizing life is so precious.

In general, life is so precious. I'm talking about general life, including any beings who have a body or any kind of beings who have consciousness, but especially human beings. This life is so precious because we can do more things... we're capable of doing things and helping others, serving others, more than any other beings on this planet. Therefore, it doesn't matter whether you believe in Buddhism or any other religion—it doesn't matter—if we really can develop to see or to realize, to recognize, we all have this precious human life, we can really do something that can help others and that can bring some happiness and peace and joy for others and for ourselves. This is really condensed teaching, but we all need to realize how precious this life is. Every morning and every evening and whenever you can, be happy what life you have, and recognize how lucky you are, how fortunate you are, to have this life.

Especially, being born in the West . . . Not many Western people are realizing life in the West is really, really . . . In Tibetan, we call it . . . [*inaudible*].

ALLISON: Abundant.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: Abundant. But our way of thinking is pretty weak because we do not realize how precious this life is.

ALLISON: I was thinking about . . . How is it that we experience the preciousness of human life? One way that I feel like Rinpoche has taught me to do that is the idea of sharing happiness with others. Our normal way of living in the world is . . . Especially in the West—I’ve realized since traveling to Asia and being with Tibetans a lot—everything that we think and feel tends to be right on our face or right in our body language. If we’re upset or we’re angry or we’re irritated or agitated, we tend to express that energy or to share that with people all the time.

So Rinpoche says, “Well, what about sharing joy and happiness with others?” If you really feel that your life is precious and you really feel “I’m doing my very best to develop my spiritual life and to use the life that I have for good,” it would seem that there will be many moments during the day that when we feel that gratitude, we could express that to others. In an indirect way, we could help them also see the value of their life. Rather than being the person who comes in and casts a dark cloud on the room, we could be the person that lightens up the room or shares happiness with others.

Another way that I think we recognize the preciousness of human life is through rejoicing. Oftentimes, when we see things around us, we could have a negative reaction. If we hear that someone got something that we wanted, we might think, “Why did that person get it and I didn’t?” Or if we hear . . . I remember being in Japan, and Bill Gates had donated a huge amount of money to a medical project in Africa. I remember there was this other American guy who was jaded, and he didn’t feel happy that Bill Gates had donated this huge amount of money. He was talking about how corrupt the American system was, that there was a person who could have so much money that they were able to donate it.

Really, the Buddhist teachings say that when people do good actions and we rejoice in their good actions, that what we gain is equal to what others gain. Simply by having that positive motivation and that rejoicing or that connection with others with whatever they do, we’re sharing our happiness, and we’re sharing their merit; we’re bringing good feelings and positive energy to the world. I think when we are reflecting on the value of life or the preciousness of human life, we have to do a lot to

uplift ourselves because our normal way of thinking is to focus on the negative. We don't want to listen to the news; we don't want to know what's going on in the world because it seems like there are too many negative situations and too much difficulty, and we want to shield ourselves from it. But we can also change our perspective, and we can look for the positive things that are happening maybe in our own community or in our own house or our own workplace or our own family and shift our focus and shift the way that we're looking at things and that can help all of us to recognize that life is valuable and precious and that there's an opportunity to develop spiritually all the time.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: Yeah, that's a very general Western way of thinking and a point of view. The thing is, this nature of human being—we do not want to share things that we have or things bringing us some joy or happiness or peace. We want to keep it for ourselves. But we want to show other things which make us unhappy and bring us suffering. But from Buddhist point of view, skillful Buddhist practitioners, we really need to learn a skill to bring any situation to support the practice, the path we're on, whether they are things that make us so miserable—most of us are miserable every day, day and night . . . But if we learn the skill, that pattern will slowly change.

In general—this is not just Western society—when human beings are happy or have thanks for what they have, we always forget suffering. We are completely occupied with attachment towards happiness or joy—the temporary joy we have. So we need to learn to be, for example, like skillful skiers, who can turn towards each side. We can fall down on this side, and it can hurt, and fall down on this side, it can hurt. That means if we are really into happiness and peace and joy and grasp on it and really, really cling to it, that grasping, that attachment, that clinging will bind us and become the cause of pain, cause of unhappiness, cause of suffering.

We also need that skill to learn how to not attach to it. At the same time, when we are feeling sad or experiencing sadness, pain, death, or sickness or aging or changes—whatever suffering we're experiencing—we also should not really attach to that and identify with that, and learn another skill to see, to connect with others, who are also experiencing almost the exact suffering, pain, that you are experiencing. It's something so important to learn as a spiritual practitioner; especially in the modern world, we need to learn that skill to be balanced. Then maybe, even if you do not have that goal to become a serious Buddhist, at one point you can be balanced, and you can find some peace and joy in this ordinary life because we have skills not to attach to this world, the temporary happiness. Also, we do not try to push away or try to identify with the suffering or making that suffering so unique.

We can have a skill to connect with others if we practice the Bodhisattva path, things like that. You can use all situations as a positive condition for your practice and for your support of your path and practice. That's the skill we need to learn, whether we want to be Buddhist or not. But most of the time, either we are so attached to this ordinary life, and nothing is enough and nothing makes us happy, or so attached to . . . Even though we know the suffering, the pain, we're experiencing is going to cause more suffering, we still attach to it, and we feel our suffering is something so unique, not like anyone else is experiencing. If we just let ourselves be that way, we cannot really use the path, the practice, to bring rejoicing or learning the path, the practice, to transform the situations—suffering or happiness—to the path of the buddhadharma.

ALLISON: I think one of the really wonderful things about studying with a teacher is that they give you a lot of tools. When I listen to Rinpoche teach—I've heard him give so many thousands of talks now—I can recall all of these different instructions that he's given. It came to me, when Rinpoche was talking about achieving balance and especially when we work to achieve balance, it does really help us to value the life that we have. It helps us to value all of the different situations in our life. Especially if we start to have an appreciation for what Rinpoche is talking about, that both really painful or really happy situations, becoming attached or chasing after, either one of them can bring us a lot of suffering, we can really start to value every situation as an opportunity to develop our spiritual practice.

Among the topics that Rinpoche already mentioned tonight, I think that focusing on the excellent motivation really helps us to do that. It's a kind of mind training that you can come back to all the time. If we think to ourselves, "I'm not just doing this for myself, I'm doing it for others," or if we come across a really difficult situation or a painful situation, "I'm going to train in patience right now, and that will help me and this other person that I'm with, who maybe I'm disagreeing with. I'm going to try to bring harmony to that connection" . . . If we can keep coming back to that motivation, like a touchstone, it really can help us to find that value in life or that value in the moment, or in that situation, because that situation then becomes a way to purify these patterns and these habits that we all have, which takes a lot of effort—it's very hard to change.

Rinpoche also mentioned . . . Well, I mentioned rejoicing, and Rinpoche talked about it again: feeling happy about the good things that others have and trying to change those patterns that we have within us that really cause us to not value life, that cause us to bring negativity into our connections and into our environments. And also, repeated application: none of us are going to change without a lot of

effort, and none of us is going to really spend a lot of time even thinking about using all of the moments that we have in life for spiritual development without a lot of effort and a lot of repeated application.

A big focus of living and dying with confidence is that idea that we have to work on training the mind every single day, and these changes don't come easy to us, even though we naturally have a good heart. Especially the Buddhist teachings . . . We believe that all beings have inherent and natural compassion and loving-kindness for others, but at the same time, it's so obscured and covered up; it's very hard for us to connect with. Often, when we look at others, we have trouble seeing their good qualities, so it does take an extraordinary amount of effort for us to find that we do have that in common with everyone and we do have that connection with everyone. To start to feel that and to start to feel, "I'm going to be the one who's going to bring positive energy," or "I'm going to express joy as part of this relationship," or "I'm going to bring levity to this relationship," or "I'm going to do whatever I can to turn around whatever habit I've cultivated in a certain connection or with a certain person" . . .

What do you think, Rinpoche?

ANYEN RINPOCHE: OK, I guess so.

ALLISON: You guess so.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: Even though, intellectually, you all understand what the Buddha said, what Buddhist teachers are saying or teaching—intellectually, we do understand—emotionally, none of us are accepting it, accepting the things, the situation. It's so important. We do not accept the life we have. We do not accept the situations which we are facing. We do not accept who we are. Either we think we're really so important, or we hate ourselves. This accept . . .

ALLISON: Acceptance.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: Acceptance is so important for the Buddhist foundation or for a human being or for a spiritual practitioner—really, really important. If we can develop this quality, we really can live spiritually, and also, maybe we can die spiritually and confidently. It's so important. Isn't that the key? What do you guys think? We do not accept the situation, right? We don't. We do not want to accept the life that we have. If we could, we can be happier, but somehow we really do want to fight with the situation.

There's something going on between Western culture and Western philosophy and Western mind, and Eastern mind or Tibetan Buddhists. Tibetan Buddhists always encourage everyone to accept the situation. I do think that's a really important topic we need to think for tonight, until maybe next talk. If we could really accept what we're facing, experience the situation we're experiencing, whether it's some happiness situation or unhappiness situation . . . If we have that strength, to accept it, we can be much more skillful. How? Because if we accept something peaceful, joy, happiness, which we're experiencing, if we accept it and we enjoy it—we know how to enjoy it—we're not going to ruin that happiness based on attachment or grasping or clinging, and we will have the skill to experience that happiness.

Also, if we're experiencing a death or someone who died or someone who's really sick or experiencing a change in life, relationship or financial changes, if we accept the situation, we can be more skillful to use that situation to develop our skills. For example, if someone dies in our lives, if we are so attached to it, we do not feel we're capable of finding a solution or way to release that grief, and we're stuck. But if we try to accept the situation we are facing, then we may have a space to breathe and have another way to maybe improve or see differently, see the world differently. Maybe you can connect with the rest of the world, others also experiencing death and dying. Or some kind of life financial changes . . . If we accept that financial change, we will find another way to get out of that suffering and find a new way. We really need to learn how to accept the situation, the life, and from there, we can really develop the skills to improve our individual spiritual practice and learn also how to serve and help others.

This is the same as what Allison was saying. If we learn those kinds of skills, that energy influences others. But if we always show that depressed personality and feel so depressed, then that influences others, and that brings others to suffering, unhappiness.

But this is a really tough topic—really difficult topic. Just think, Tibetan Buddhist masters really got through that huge spiritual change, and also completely flipped upside down, since China invaded Tibet . . . But they got through that obstacle—that situation—because they accepted the situation, and they did not identify with that situation and feel like there's no hope or no way to get out of that situation. They used that situation as a positive or good condition to develop their realization, spiritual practice, compassion, loving-kindness, and bodhichitta. Still, there are so many realized Tibetan Lamas who came to the West, who are still in Tibet. So it's something so important. It's just a topic we need to do some discussions and to think why (big question mark), as a human being, normally we cannot accept

the situation, especially why, as a Western person, we cannot accept the situation or the life that we have.

But there's another thing we need to discuss too. What I am trying to say here is . . . "Oh yeah, you should accept who you are, do not need to change"—no, I'm not saying that. There's a huge discussion, a lot of modern spiritual teachers, are teaching, "Oh, we should accept who we are and do not need to do anything." No, we really need to do a lot of things. But the thing is, we need to learn how to accept the reality of the situation.

ALLISON: When Rinpoche teaches, I'm not always in the habit of not completely agreeing with him, but since we're teaching together, I'll say something about Western culture.

I do think that emotional acceptance is key to spiritual development, but I also think that sometimes the Tibetan way is too passive. When I met Rinpoche, he was twenty-nine, and Rinpoche said, "I'm too old to learn English." That's a kind of acceptance of your situation, in a sense, that makes you not feel like I'm going to do something different or . . . I think that enthusiasm that Westerners have, that they feel capable and they feel empowered to do things, is a really strong part of Western culture. The thing that I find fault with, myself, is that I'm not good at distinguishing when I should try to change something and when I shouldn't. I accept, oftentimes, what situations are happening in my life, but I'm constantly looking for solutions, not realizing that even if I solve one problem, another problem is just going to happen because that's just how life. That's a way that, when we do feel capable and empowered, we can spend a lot of energy, and it can be self-defeating.

I think there's a middle ground, where when we accept what's happening, that it helps us to connect with others and to connect with society or to connect with a certain situation so that it can be workable. At the same time, we can also look for ways, like Rinpoche's been talking about, of how we're going to use that situation for the better. I think I'm a person who always wants to solve problems, and sometimes that's not the best quality. Some problems maybe aren't worth putting our energy into, and we can become lost in trying to solve a problem that maybe is better just to be left alone or to accept.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: Is that all you have?

ALLISON: Well, I can say something else, Rinpoche.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: Well, so it seems Allison is agreeing, at the same time, disagreeing.

ALLISON: As I always do.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: That's what she does. But we're still together. It seems OK. *[Laughter]* It seems there is like an acceptance between us. *[Laughter]* But the question I have is, why, really? There's something, really. We always want to fight. That's what this culture is, with the situation. It's a good thing, but also sometimes it brings a lot of problems and suffering. So why? This is the question for all of you. It's so hard for us to accept what we have or what we are facing or what we're experiencing. Why is it so hard to accept?

ALLISON: I have the answer, Rinpoche. I know the answer.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: No, no, not you. I want to ask . . . ?

ALLISON: Yeah, no . . . "Because it's not fair." Tibetans don't have the fair thing. Tibetans don't care about what's fair and not fair, but Americans really care about what's fair, and we think if it's not fair, then we should try to fix it.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: OK. That's fine, but I would love to hear something from someone I don't know. *[Laughter]* Mhm. I'm going to ask that lady who's holding a pen. Yes. What's your name?

STUDENT 1: My name's Sue.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: OK. She did answer from Western point of view, but what's your point of view?

STUDENT 1: What's my point of view? From my point of view, the only way we really can do something and be effective, to try and make something better, is to start from a place of acceptance, and that we only really serve when we're not pushing against, but creating something positive.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: OK.

STUDENT 1: Does that make sense?

ANYEN RINPOCHE: OK. I would love to hear what Carolyn is going to say.

STUDENT 2: Well, I think this is not in contradiction to what Sue just said, but I think one of the big things that happens—and it is particularly in the West—is a lot of speed.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: What?

STUDENT 2: A lot of speed, like . . .

ANYEN RINPOCHE: Speed.

STUDENT 2: Yeah, being really, really fast. That quality of wanting to fix things, which I can relate to a lot, Allison said, I think it also can come from a lot of speed. You think you see what needs to be done and what needs to happen, but you skip over . . . It's so easy to skip over the really deep acceptance that you don't necessarily have to change it or fix it, but the antidote is inside the situation as it is, and if you can't slow down, you can't see clearly enough (if that makes any sense).

ANYEN RINPOCHE: OK. It's from speeding. Speed—the life that we have. OK.

STUDENT 3: I look at this from a medical background.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: What's that?

STUDENT 3: I look at this from a medical background; that's what I do. We used to have the disease polio, and Jonas Salk had to accept that, yes, there was this disease that was paralyzing a generation of children . . .

ANYEN RINPOCHE: OK.

STUDENT 3: But he did not accept it so much that he did nothing. He started the research and was motivated by accepting a bad situation in order to make a vaccine so that pretty much you do not see this condition anymore in the West.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: OK. Good.

STUDENT 3: He used it as a motivation to do something positive.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: Uh-huh. Good. I like that.

But there is a weakness we human beings have. I'm not saying tonight here we just should try to accept everything, like a dog. It doesn't matter how the owner treats that dog. The dog accepts the owner, whatever way the owner treats the dog. I'm not saying to develop a skill like that. I'm trying to say something about this tonight: gain some skill and learn a skill to face the situation—exactly what you're saying.

For example, there's a huge change happening in the life. Try to fix it, fix it, fix it. Good. But there is a point; also accept and bring some maybe harmonious and hatred and resentment between the connection. It's not always a fight. Exactly what you are saying: develop a new medicine to treat a new disease. Accept the situation, what is happening, but look, something else can help to take care of that situation. That's how we should use buddhadharma. Accept death and dying, or problems which are happening in our lives, not always clinging on it and being attached to it, but finding another way, maybe changing or looking at different directions to fix it, to change it. It's almost like a medical point of view.

This habitual pattern which we developed is not just what, in Buddhist point of view, we've developed in this lifetime. It's so hard to remove. We just want to fight and just completely focus on that and make that situation or turn that situation—it is the world, only world, we have. We do not see any other things except that situation. Then we cannot find any way to change that situation, make that situation a little bit healthier. That's the acceptance that I'm trying to discuss here tonight.

I'm not saying, "Oh, just become a careless person." "OK, fine, that's happening." Yeah? "World is falling apart—who cares. That's the samsara in the situation." No, I'm not saying that. I'm saying do not just focus only on that situation and to try to find another way to make that situation a little bit better or healthier.

ALLISON: Rinpoche, it seems like this is where the beginning of the talk intersects with the end of the talk. Basically, if we become really self-involved in trying to fight with a situation or not accept a certain situation, then we're distracted from our main purpose in life, which was to find a way to connect with others. Also, the way that we get out of this cycle of constantly obsessing about a certain situation or a certain habitual way that we do things—the best way to get out of that is to find connection with others, which again we do by reflecting on how others have a situation or life situations similar to ours. Whether we're facing something difficult or whether we're facing something happy, others are also facing the same thing, and maybe not in the same way. One way we say that in the dharma is to say "in accordance with their circumstances." Our circumstances all look different, but essentially, we're all facing the same things. Even when we're fighting with a certain problem—if we're ill and we're getting treatment and we're trying to get better and we're really fighting with that—it seems like the fighting and acceptance have to go together, in a certain way, right?

ANYEN RINPOCHE: Mhm.

ALLISON: We have to accept what's happening at the same time that we're motivated to try and solve it.

What I heard Carolyn saying that I really loved was when we speed up, we can just focus on the fighting and just focus on that rapid activity and skip over the rest of it. But when we do connect with others and we get out of our own head and get out of just focusing on ourselves, I think that's what allows us to really slow down and then to work with all these other aspects of the dharma that we're talking about, like cultivating that excellent motivation. "Oh yeah, all these other people are sick, just like I am, and what can I do to help them? How can I be an example? How can I share what I'm learning with them? How can I bring something positive to others?"

It seems to me, Rinpoche, this way we switch that when we bring acceptance and the motivation or the fighting together.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: Sure. For example, I have been in the West for more than eleven years. On one hand, I completely accept it, Western culture, Western mind and who you are. But the other hand, I'm still fighting with Western Buddhist practitioners, in a skillful way. The way I'm fighting is not just physically [*laughter*] fighting, but the way I fight or gain that courage to fight is finding the good quality of Western people, what potential Western people have. At the same time, I'm reflecting who I am. The

thing that bothers me the most from Western people: is that my problem or their problem? Mostly, as a human being, we feel it's their problem, but a lot of time that's also coming from me, because of my identity. I feel they have to accept who I am, no matter what. So if we all can really develop a skill like that—accept who I am as a spiritual teacher (a lot of students of mine are here)—at the same time, also you can see what good potential or parts you have. And you do not need to think, “Oh, if I have to be his student or her student, I have to accept completely the way this person is saying.” The skill we need to build is accepting, but at the same time, find another way to really transform that potential, what others have or what the situation is.

Any situation, whether it's positive or negative, there's another way to look at it and then to accept it and change it. If we accept the situation . . . For example, Kayla is here tonight; her father-in-law died a couple days ago. This is for you. You need to accept the death of your father . . .

ALLISON: In law?

ANYEN RINPOCHE: In law. At the same time, we need to bring the situation to the path to understand life, what we're going to face. Then, in accepting the situation, you can use the situation to become a more compassionate person and maybe connect with the rest of the world and whoever lost their father-in-law last week or two weeks ago. That's something we need to learn—skill. It's always skill. Buddhadharma is based on skill. But if we really attach to something strongly, then we do not see any other options that can help to release or change the situation. OK?

And what else we have? You can ask a question, or, Allison, you can say something.

What's your name? What's your name?

STUDENT 4: I get in trouble when I think I know something.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: OK.

STUDENT 4: I know how to help people and what I do is not helpful, so I need some help here.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: Mhm.

ALLISON: Did you get the question?

ANYEN RINPOCHE: Yeah, kind of. You can answer first.

ALLISON: Well, I get in exactly that same trouble, so I'm not sure I have a good answer for you, except that I think part of being self-centered, which I am and probably everyone here is, is that I get confused and I think that everybody thinks just the same way that I do. Sometimes I'm not a good listener because I think I already understand or I must know what that person thinks or I must know exactly what they're experiencing. I think, for me, it's a kind of arrogance. And so many, many of Rinpoche's students want to talk to me about all kinds of things, and I have to really try to put that personality aside; I have to try to actually be patient. I know Rinpoche, when he teaches on the *paramitas*, he talks about being willing to listen to people and give people time as a kind of patience and generosity that we're very stingy with in our culture; we don't want to spend time listening to someone; we just want to get to the gist of it. I guess making that space to hear what somebody else has to say is something that I've worked hard at, takes effort for me.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: Thank you.

I have a question for you: in what kind of situation do you want to help but it turns into not that helpful?

STUDENT 4: I have a friend who's an alcoholic, and he tells me he wants to quit. He quits for a couple of days, and then we have some things to do, and when I get over there, he's already drunk again. I don't know the cause; I don't know why he does this, but it's periodically. So what do I do?

ANYEN RINPOCHE: Well, maybe your friend is here, maybe not, but I'm not taking your side, but what I think is that there are some things you can do and some things you can't, no matter what; even though your friend wants to change, that pattern is just so strong, and there's almost no hope to change when that pattern comes—it's like a wave. Therefore, I do not think you should think your action or your speech is not helpful. Your heart is completely pure, and you want to help, but also you need to think about the pattern he developed. That's what you need to think, and some people cannot let go of that pattern because that pattern is so solid and so strong.

One thing maybe you can do is find another way to communicate. That may help. Other than that, you should not think, "Oh yeah, I'm trying to do this, but the way I'm doing things is not good

enough and maybe I'm doing something wrong." No. If you want help a friend who's alcoholic, or has that kind of strong pattern . . . Your motivation is really, really nice, and maybe there are some skills that you can develop, but I'm not 100 percent sure you can really find a special skill and a tool to completely change that person, because some people do not want to hear the things that they feel bad about . . . themselves, and it hurts, and do not want to accept . . . Then someone who points out those kinds of faults—they get resentful towards that person, even though they know that person is trying to help. But for some reason, this def . . .

ALLISON: Defensiveness?

ANYEN RINPOCHE: Defensiveness—we want to defend. That's a base of this culture . . . [*inaudible*]. So I do not think you should think, "OK, I'm doing something wrong." Also I do not think you should think, "Oh yeah, he cannot change, and we don't have hope." But maybe try to find another way to work with it, but I wouldn't think there's a lot of ways to . . . I know people like that in Tibet, who drink. They go to a lama, and they say, "From today on, I am not going to drink." Maybe that evening, or a couple days later, they just drink and drink and drink. That pattern is hard to remove. OK?

STUDENT 4: OK.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: I hope that helps. [*Laughs*]

Does anyone else have something? No? There's a hand back there. What's your name?

STUDENT 5: My name is Peter. Good evening, Rinpoche. Maybe you can help me with this. I have a twenty-eight-year-old daughter. She had a boyfriend who was very nice to her—always brought her things, told her that he loved her—but she didn't feel that she could do the same towards him. That made her feel very bad about herself, like she wasn't a good enough person. Finally, she told her friends about this over and over, and they said, "Oh, you should . . . It's not the right thing; you should break up." So she broke up with him finally, and now she just is wallowing in pain, feels so terrible and so stupid and like she didn't appreciate this person who was being so kind to her, so she must be a terrible person. She called me today, and I . . . Other than saying, "Thoughts and emotions arise; they're insubstantial; these things will pass; allow yourself to feel what you're feeling"—all this dharmic stuff . . . doesn't do a thing.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: Right. I think, on the one hand, it's something so easy to take care of: again, accepting the situation. They already broke up. Accept it and find a way to make that connection healthier, and do not have that self-hatred feeling towards herself. Also, regret about the situation and having that feeling of guilt—try to let go of those. That's so important.

As a human being, we always get lost based on past and future. We're not here. If we can be here, that can be really helpful. Past is the past. So learn a way to let it go. And if she (or whoever those people are) can focus on present, to do something now, this automatically can fix the past and make the future healthier.

This is just the modern world, and especially in the West—we have this unique thing about self-hatred: "I'm not good enough," or the feeling of guilt. That's the most unhealthy thing, and it does not help the situation at all. That feeling really hurts the situation much worse.

So if you can help her to think, to accept the past . . . One thing Shantideva said, "If we can fix the past, what's the point to worry about it? If we cannot fix the past, again, what's the point to really clinging onto it?" When we say it intellectually, it's easy. "Yeah, that makes sense." But when we bring it to the emotional level or experiential level, that's so hard to do. Again, this is kind of a mind training: if we bring that quality over and over and over again, try to focus on the present, make her life healthier and way of thinking healthier and the emotions healthier, then that can be a healing and that can release the things that she's really identifying with.

I hope that helps.

STUDENT 5: The only . . . if I may . . .

ALLISON: We need to wrap up.

STUDENT 5: That's what I came with, an offering of dharma, but she's so caught up in her wild mind and her emotions and the struggle that she can't hold her mind in one spot. Always it's just pulled off. And then I think she just wants . . . needs a shoulder to cry on, and I'm on the telephone; I can't help her with that. So I feel sort of helpless. I don't know how to help.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: Yeah, I think that emotional pattern is so powerful and so strong. The thing is, you have this willingness to help, and her friends have this willingness to help, but the most important thing

is she has to have that willingness to help herself—that’s the most important thing. Until then, no matter who is there to support her emotionally, that emotional pattern is not going to go away.

STUDENT 5: Thank you, Rinpoche. That’s helpful.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: You’re welcome. OK. Maybe that’s going to be the last question. Uh-huh? What’s your name?

STUDENT 6: My name is Trish. In thinking about acceptance, I was . . . I’ve had this circular pattern where I think, if I’m not accepting of a certain person or situation or whatever it is, then I become discontent. I’ve thought about it; it’s like, “Well, why am I discontent? Do I feel like I know better than reality? Do I think I’m smarter?” Which also perpetuates the pattern, but I find that the more I can be accepting of things outside of myself, the more peace I have; and the less acceptance I have, the more pain I have. Just a statement.

ALLISON: OK. Yeah, I agree with that.

ANYEN RINPOCHE: [*Tibetan*]

ALLISON: [*Tibetan*]

ANYEN RINPOCHE: OK. Sounds good. [*Laughter*]

STUDENT 6: Thank you.

[*chanting*]