

Meditation Dilemma: Portrait of a Free Choice (Nepal, 1990)

1.

I first met Anitya Pal the monk on a summer afternoon at a small Buddhist temple on the outskirts of the town of Banepa, Nepal. Banepa is not a famous place--among travellers it is known mainly as a transit point and service centre for buses making their way along the Arniko highway to Tibet, which emerges from the Himalayas only a few hours away. Among Nepalis the town is recognized for its large number of schools, which serve the greater district of Kavre. Groups of smartly uniformed students are a common sight, making their way between the town and neighbouring villages. Banepa is also a destination for pilgrims, with the temple to the goddess Chandeshwori (Parvati) located on the banks of the Punya Mata river, just outside of town. Surrounded by the rolling hills and rice paddies of central Nepal, the feeling of Banepa remains deeply rural, deeply traditional--with the exception, of course, of its main drag and bus station, which is a typical modern chaos of shouting, honking, and revving engines.

Having passed through Banepa many times before, I had decided, this day, to get off the bus and do a bit of exploring. I'd been wandering the side streets for some time, lost in thoughts, when I came across a dilapidated little temple complex, innocuously situated on the other side of a brick wall I had somehow found myself following. Rounding a corner, suddenly there was an archway and a signboard in *Devanāgarī* script: *Banepa Theravāda Buddhist Vihāra*. This one was not in the guidebooks.

The gate was open. I walked in. The temple was at the far end of the compound as I entered; I could see that its doors were fastened shut with a large iron padlock. Two smaller buildings stood adjacent on either side. All three were low one-story structures, painted in a pale grey-green. The courtyard in which I now stood was overrun with randomly rooted weeds and shrubs. Thick walls shielded the entire enclosure, muffling the sounds from the streets outside; inside, flying insects darted and buzzed about. There didn't seem to be anyone around.

I sat down on a mossy concrete bench facing the temple, taking care to avoid some ants scuttling in and out of the cracks. A hot day. No wind. My eyelids wanted to close on their own.

After a few minutes I was startled by a voice, directly in front of me.

"Yes?"

I opened my eyes. There was a monk. He stood within arm's length before me, his saffron robe radiating in the bright afternoon sunlight. His eyes were wide and alive, staring; a big toothy smile stood out starkly against the blackness of his face. A thin layer of perspiration glistened off the crown of his head. His face was slightly drawn, his build lean and wiry. He was not tall. He appeared to be quite a young man, possibly just a little bit older than me. I stood up quickly.

"I'm sorry, I didn't think there was anyone here."

"Yes. No one here now, me only. No sorry. You would like to see temple?"

"Um... okay."

We walked over to the temple, introducing ourselves as we went. He said that he was the sole occupant of this hermitage and had been living here for three years. I told him that I was not, in fact, simply a tourist but worked as a volunteer in the neighbouring town of Dhulikhel. I would, however, still like to see the temple, as I was very interested in Buddhism.

"Yes. Buddhism true teaching. Hinduism no good."

The bluntness of the monk's sudden pronouncement surprised me, to say nothing of its uninvited nature--but I concurred politely with a smile. One thing was certain though. This man was not a Nepali. No Nepali would be so forthright in dismissing the state religion. His accent was strange too. "Where are you from?" I asked.

"Assam. India."

"I'm from Canada," I said, as he unlocked the door into the temple. I followed him in, removing the chappals from my feet before entering. We came directly into the main shrine room. This was a largely featureless affair save for a mid-sized statue of the Buddha, which sat on a shelf halfway up the wall facing the doorway. Anitya Pal knelt and touched his head to the floor before the image of his teacher; I followed suit. The stone felt cool on my forehead.

The monk stood up. "This is temple."

"Yes. Very nice." I stepped forward to examine the Buddha. He was simply carved out of solid stone, sitting in classic meditation posture with his right hand touching the earth, the *bhumi-sparsa*. I turned back to the monk.

"We sit here," he said, pulling a hand-woven fibre mat from a darkened corner of the room. "No hot here." It was in fact rather pleasantly cool. We sat facing each other.

"You are having questions?" he asked. He seemed eager that I should ask him something. And so we talked. His voice was animated; his English broken and rapid. I learned that his time in Nepal was nearly up and that he was looking forward to an imminent return to his native Assam. The monk clearly took great pleasure in conversation--he liked to practice his English whenever he had a chance, he said. But as we spoke I sensed an undertone of loneliness.

I told him of my interest in Buddhism. "I studied Philosophy and Eastern Religions in university back home. But now that I'm living here it seems like everything I learned from my textbooks is irrelevant or just plain wrong. It's completely different from what I read. I never realized how important astrology is, for example. Everybody here has to check everything against the stars -- business decisions, travel, government, everything ... And nobody seems to meditate. I thought meditation would be a bigger part of people's lives."

"Meditation very important."

“Yes, everyone says so. But nobody seems to actually meditate. Even some of the monks I’ve met don’t seem to meditate very much. I visited the Burmese monastery down in Bodh Gaya. The monks I saw there just passed their time hanging around and smoking beedies.”

“Yes, lazy monks. No good. You are practicing meditation?”

“No, actually--not really,” I said sheepishly. “I don’t really know how.”

“You learn meditation. Meditation very important.”

“I’d like to, but I’ve never had proper instruction. Only from books. I think I need a teacher. Reading books about meditation is pretty useless.”

“What books you are reading?”

“Right now, I’m reading one called *Hidden Mind of Freedom*, by Tarthang Tulku.” I reached into my shoulder bag and pulled it out. “Do you know it?”

The monk took the book, looked at the cover for a moment and then handed it back. “You take class, learn meditation.”

“I’ve talked with some of the Buddhist teachers in Kathmandu; they give meditation classes. I might take one of those.”

“Which teacher?”

“There’s a Tibetan Lama over at Boudhanath I like. I sometimes go to his talks on Saturday mornings. ”

"This not Buddhism," he interjected.

"It's Mahāyāna Buddhism. Tibetan. Different from the Theravāda tradition." I replied.

"Mahāyāna, Hinduism--same thing."

I took a moment to digest this. "Why do you say that?"

"Only Theravāda Lord Buddha's teaching. Other mixed, Hinduism, no good. You learn Theravāda."

I was taken aback by the monk's assertiveness on this particular point. He certainly had strong views. "But I've read books that say Mahāyāna Buddhism also teaches no self, *anatman*, just like Theravāda. And also emptiness, *śūnyatā*. That's not Hinduism. Hinduism teaches *atman* and *brahman*, a permanent Self, identical with God. That's a complete contradiction. Mahāyāna and Hinduism can't be the same--they teach *opposite* things."

"Mahāyānas--many gods, just like Hindus. You learn Theravāda--pure Buddha-dhamma."

"Gods? Oh, you must mean *bodhisattvas*. Like Mañjuśrī, or Tara? Yes, there are many of those in Mahāyāna. But they are not really gods, are they? I mean, aren't they more like Buddhas?"

"Only one Buddha! Buddha human being, no god! You learn Theravāda--pure Buddha-dhamma."

He was still smiling, but I could see that I had touched a raw nerve. I decided to shift the topic away from the Tibetans. "Do you know about Zen? Also Mahāyāna, but no gods in Zen."

"Jen also Hinduism," he replied. As was common in this part of the world it appeared that the monk was having difficulty enunciating 'Z'--a letter that does not find an easy correspondence in Sanskrit-based languages.

"Zzzzen," I said. "Japan Buddha-dharma."

"Yes. Jen. I know Jen. Jen--many gods. Jen not Buddha-dharma."

"I don't think Zen has many gods. Zen, no gods. Only meditation."

"Oh yes, Jen, many gods. I see many Jens in India, yes."

This confused me. "Really? I didn't know that. But Zen is mainly in Japan though. You know Japan? Japan another country, not India"

Anitya Pal paused; he seemed puzzled. "Yes. Japan country. I know Japan. Jen--India religion, not Japan. Jen-dharma, Buddha-dharma not same," he said.

I was surprised. It seemed the venerable monk was unfamiliar with the Japanese Buddhist traditions. Still, as a monk, he must surely have heard of Zen... We seemed to have reached a standstill. And then, suddenly, I understood. He hadn't been mispronouncing his 'Z', but rather mishearing my 'Z' as 'J'. And I had been mishearing his diphthong!

"Not *Jain*," I said, "*Zen*. Zzzzen!"

"Yes, Jain," he repeated, calmly.

"No Jain. ZEN. With the letter 'Z', not the letter 'J'!"

"Jain," he said simply. He seemed secure in his knowledge, happy to repeat himself until I understood.

"No, look," I said. "We're not understanding each other. I said the word 'Zen' with a 'Z', not 'Jain' with a 'J'. Jainism not Zen. Zen is Buddhism from Japan, Jainism is a completely different tradition, from India. They're different religions."

Anitya Pal looked sceptical. I continued slowly. "Zzzzen is Buddha-dharma, made in Japan. Zzzzen is only meditation. No gods. Jainism is a different Indian religion beginning around the same time as Buddha, 500 years BC. Yes, maybe Jainism has many gods, or just one maybe, I think... Actually I don't know much about it."

It appeared I had sorted the whole thing out. I smiled.

"Yes. Jain, many gods. Not Buddha-dharma."

"Yes, Jain many gods," I said, flushing. Anitya Pal was not getting my point. He was smiling broadly. His head was cocked slightly and his face wore an expression of serene confidence. He clearly regarded my latest admission as a kind of victory. And, in fact, what I had just said was mistaken; I knew it as the words had left my mouth. The gods are *not* a big part of Jainism. I had studied this in my first year classes. As in early Buddhism, liberation is entirely based on one's own effort, one's own karma. In fact, both Jainism and Buddhism would better be said to be non-theistic religions. But...

Anitya Pal was watching me think. I suddenly found myself irritated. What the hell was going on? This was silly. Was it really worth the effort to debate about the beliefs of Jainism? No. Best just to be clear about Zen. I needed a new tactic.

"Jainism not Zzen. Zzzzen different. Do you have a pencil?"

"Pencil, yes. Come."

We rose and emerged from the temple onto the porch; the full heat and glare of the day becoming real once again. Angling across the courtyard, we came to one of the smaller buildings. It contained a single room. This appeared to be Anitya Pal's residence. It was a spartan affair, as befitting a monk. The longer wall of the little rectangle was occupied with a low wooden bed-frame. There was a neatly folded blanket at the end of the bed, but no mattress or pillow. Across from the bed: a writing desk, set close to the floor, with a few books and an English-Nepali dictionary. On the floor beside the desk there was a single-burner kerosene stove and some cooking utensils. The space was cramped, but tidy.

Anitya Pal opened the drawer of the desk and handed me a pencil as I pulled my journal from my shoulder bag and found an empty page. I wrote the two words, *Jainism* and *Zen*. He watched my hand carefully as I wrote.

"This is Jainism, Jain-dharma from India," I said, underlining the first four letters *Jain*. "And *this* is Zen," I said, double underlining the word. "Buddha-dharma from Japan."

"Buddha-dharma from India, not Japan," he corrected me.

"Yes, of course. The Zen tradition also traces itself back to India, to Buddha. In fact the

word Zen is just Japanese for the Sanskrit word for meditation, *dhyāna*. Look..." I wrote the words *dhyāna*, *Chan* and *Zen*.

"Do you know *dhyāna*?"

"Oh yes, *dhyāna*, Sanskrit. Same as *jhāna*, Pali word. Meditation"

"Yes. Right. Now, look... *Dhyāna* becomes 'Chan' in Chinese, and then 'Zen' in Japanese. Zen is a Japanese Buddhist tradition that teaches meditation, not devotion to gods."

Anitya pal was quiet as he examined at the words I had written. We were finally making some progress. After a moment he spoke.

"This-- Zzen..." he said slowly, clearly trying to enunciate the 'Z', "...this, Mahāyāna. Yes?"

"Yes."

"Mahāyāna, Hinduism. So.... Zen, Hinduism." Q.E.D! He smiled triumphantly.

I wanted to laugh. Back to Mahāyāna Hinduism! It was clearly pointless to continue on this track. But I wasn't sure how to get off, at least politely. Fortunately Anitya Pal did the work for me.

"You like Christian-dharma?" he asked suddenly.

"I don't believe in God," I said. Relief--this was an easy topic.

"Christian-dharma, Buddha-dharma same thing."

I stared at the monk incredulously. "You believe this?"

Anitya Pal spoke more rapidly now, "Yes. Christian-dharma, Buddha-dharma same thing. Jesus Christ teaching only loving neighbour, do not kill, and living peacefully. Lord Buddha also teaching loving-kindness meditation for everyone, do not kill, and living peacefully. So Buddha-dharma, Christian-dharma same thing." The monk looked gleeful. His eyes had widened; they regarded me like those of a puppy who has just dropped a stick at one's feet.

"But how...?" I began.

"Only loving-kindness teaching."

"Yes, but.... Okay, I can see what you mean; yes, ethically, I guess Jesus and Buddha may perhaps have taught the same thing in some ways, pretty much.... Still you have to admit that Christians believe in God. And an eternal soul too. So maybe same thing for behaviour, but not same thing for big picture of universe."

"No. Same big picture."

"Same big picture?"

"Yes."

"But how? Buddha-dharma has no God."

"Yes -- no God."

"But Christianity has God."

"Yes."

"Then how same big picture?"

Anitya Pal appeared to think for a moment.

"Is contradiction, yes?"

I nodded. The monk was smiling. His eyes sparkled.

"Contradiction okay here," he said.

This I didn't understand. But I certainly didn't want to venture to ask under what conditions Anitya Pal thought a contradiction could be "okay." I had had enough.

"So even though Christian-dharma teaches belief in God, Buddhism and Christianity are the same because they both teach loving kindness." The monk waggled his head, assenting in the Indian manner. I went on, "But Mahāyāna also teaches loving kindness. So Christianity and Mahāyāna are the same too. So that must mean that Mahāyāna and Buddhism are the same as well. What's the difference?"

"Mahāyāna no good. Mahāyāna Hinduism."

It was time to leave. I looked at my watch. "I must catch my bus."

Anitya Pal's smile faded momentarily, then resurfaced. "You come other time. We talk, practicing English."

"You speak English well," I told him.

"Please write address in Canada."

I obliged.

"There," I said. "If you write to me I will reply--only don't write too soon. I should be in Nepal for some time yet."

I got up to leave. "Thank you for showing me the temple."

Anitya Pal grinned as we walked across the courtyard. "Remember," he said, "Only Theravāda true Buddha- dharma."

I smiled. "Yes. Good-bye. Thank you."

I walked through the gate and turned toward the centre of town. Making my way toward the bus depot, I began to laugh.

2.

In the end I followed Anitya Pal's advice, but more in spite of it than because of it. I decided that my first formal classes in meditation would be from within the Theravāda tradition. It had been an either-or proposition at the time--there were two courses I wanted to attend, one coming out of the Mahāyāna tradition, the other Theravāda. They happened to fall on the same dates. The former was going to be taught by Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche, a reincarnate Tibetan lama whose monastery in Boudhanath I had been irregularly visiting for some months. Chokyi Nyima was a popular teacher, well-loved and respected among Tibetan exiles and ex-pats alike. I found him to be both smart and funny. I enjoyed talking with him, and had recently finished reading one of his books; I very much wanted to attend his course. On the other hand, everything I had heard about the Theravāda course struck me as perfect for where I was at. For one thing it was free; I could make a donation at the end of the course if I wished, but there was no obligation. Although the fee for Chokyi Nyima's course was nominal, my supply of traveller's cheques was looking thinner by the week. But a more important consideration was the schedule--by all accounts the Theravāda course was brutal: over ten hours of solid sitting meditation every day for ten days running. Complete silence was to be maintained throughout. Even eye contact with other meditators was to be avoided. Chokyi Nyima's course involved discussion periods, breaks, and plenty of contact with other students. This wasn't what I was after. I wanted strong medicine, isolation, space to work alone. The last thing I needed was more dialogue about the Dharma. I'd had enough of pussyfooting around Buddhism through conversations and books. It was time to dive in and I wanted to start at the deep end.

Still I was uncertain. I had heard so many disparaging remarks about the so-called Hīnayāna or "small vehicle" of Buddhism that I didn't quite know what to think. Westerners in Kathmandu's Dharma scene tended to label Theravāda as Hīnayāna and drop the topic, enough said. "Hīnayāna" is a pejorative and polemical term whose origins remain obscure, wrapped up as they are with the origins of the Mahāyāna, or "great vehicle" of Buddhism. Mahāyāna Buddhism appears to have begun as a reform movement that gradually emerged in the early centuries of the common era. New scriptures attributed to the Buddha were composed at this time; these juxtapose their own superior understanding of the Buddha's teachings with those of an older, inferior way--the so-called Hīnayāna.

The Mahāyāna holds forth a new religious ideal. This is the figure of the bodhisattva, a heroic figure who strives to become a fully enlightened Buddha for the benefit of all sentient beings. Bodhisattvas choose to forgo their own final entry into nirvana until all other beings have been brought to this state. They work tirelessly for this goal of universal liberation. The ideal of the Hīnayāna, by contrast, is that of the Arhat or "Worthy one," someone who has completely purified his mind and attained nirvana, never to be reborn. The Arhat doesn't wait around for anyone else, much less everyone else.

Although the Mahāyāna aspiration struck me as technically impossible--there would after all, always be new suffering beings around for the bodhisattva to rescue--I found myself attracted to its universalism and noble sentiment, paradoxical as they were. On the other hand again many of the Tibetan practices felt alien to me, steeped in the imagery and symbolism of a culture that was not my own.

I decided to present my dilemma to Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche himself. I showed up at his monastery without an appointment.

The monastery of Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling is a five minute walk inside the main gates of the Tibetan refugee settlement of Boudhanath, located on the perimeter of Kathmandu. The settlement is a maze of scattered dwellings, shops and monasteries, which has evolved into a cluttered collection of haphazardly connected clusters loosely arranged in concentric circles radiating out from the central fact and object of the place: the giant stupa of Boudhanath. The massive white dome of this reliquary is surmounted by a bright golden box with the painted eyes of the Buddha gazing out serenely in all directions. Myriad lines of prayer flags stream and flutter down from its spire to the ground below, where a seemingly unending stream of pilgrims circumambulate its circumference, turning prayer wheels and chanting *Aum Mani Padme Hum* as they go. The faith is palpable, with sound and incense mingling in the air like milk and water. The entire cultural thrum and vibe of the place is distinctly Tibetan; as one enters through the main gates at the base of the stupa there is a shift. One has left Nepalese society. The Tibetans in Nepal are visitors who have been allowed to stay; they have made Boudhanath their own.

When I arrived at the monastery a friendly monk asked me to wait in the hallway outside the main meditation hall. I was soon led in.

Rinpoche was speaking animatedly on a cordless telephone as I entered. I bowed three times before him, awkwardly following the custom. The practice of prostrating before the guru always felt forced to me. I found it too devotional for my temperament, and this showed in my bows, which were decidedly on the clumsy side. Chokyi Nyima didn't appear to notice. He raised his eyebrows in acknowledgement and nodded for me to sit down. I did so, cross-legged, on a cushion in front of him. His eyes were twinkling and alert--almost mischievous, it always seemed to me. He was an attractive looking man, probably in his early forties--although he appeared younger. He was, perhaps, a little on the plump side, but healthily so; he exuded an air of open energy and general well-being. It was no wonder he was so popular with westerners--he came off like a cross between the Buddha and a teddy bear. He was seated on a raised Dharma throne, plainly dressed in monk's attire. The wine coloured outer robe and yellow inner robe seemed to harmonize naturally with the predominant colour tone of the high-roofed chamber in

which we sat. Magnificently detailed frescoes of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, wrathful and peaceful deities covered the walls. Thousands upon thousands of seated Buddha figures smiled beneficently down from their celestial spheres. Light streamed through long open windows and thick red curtains; the earthy scent of Tibetan incense hung in the air.

"Yes, yes... I see," he was saying. "Then sell it! Of course! Don't worry." I waited. Scanning the heavens.

After some time, Rinpoche hung up.

"Mr. Canada!" he exclaimed.

"Hello, Rinpoche."

"What can I do for you today?"

"Well, I wanted some more information about that meditation course you're teaching in October."

"Yes?"

"What kind of meditation does it involve?"

"Did you read my book?"

"Yes, thank you. I enjoyed it very much."

"Well, that is the course! Very similar."

"Oh, I see.... Rinpoche, there's another problem I wanted to ask you about. There's a different course I want to take as well--but it's being taught at the same time as yours. I can't do both."

He laughed. "What course?"

"It's something called 'Vipassana', taught by a man named Goenka. He is not a monk, he's an Indian layman who learned how to meditate from monks in Burma. Many Nepali friends say that he is a great teacher. He is coming to Kathmandu in October to teach a course."

"Oh yes! This is a very nice course. This is Hīnayāna. I teach Mahāyāna."

"So you think I should stick to Mahāyāna?"

"You will like my course very much. Other course is also very good."

"So how can I decide which one to take then?"

"Easy--make a choice!" He laughed again.

"My problem is that everything I read about Mahāyāna philosophy I find to be more appealing than Hīnayāna. Emptiness teachings, great compassion... all of that. But I don't think Theravāda is necessarily Hīnayāna. I mean, if a person is enlightened, isn't it irrelevant what tradition they are part of? Enlightenment must be the same for everyone, mustn't it? The scriptures always say that enlightenment has 'one taste,' don't they?"

"Yes."

"And in fact, I find that some western practitioners of Mahāyāna are actually just reinforcing their egos by dismissing Theravāda as necessarily narrow and self-centred."

"Then those individuals have misunderstood Mahāyāna. One cannot practice Mahāyāna without Hīnayāna."

"But even the idea that Hīnayāna is a "necessary preliminary" for Mahāyāna is a bit condescending, isn't it?"

"Is it... necessarily?"

"I'm not sure I understand."

"Hīnayāna really means small motivation, not Theravāda. There are many Theravāda Mahayanists. And there are many followers of Mahāyāna who are Hīnayāna. It is the motivation that matters, not this tradition or that tradition."

"So the label is just a label? But doesn't the label we choose matter? I've never heard of a Theravadin who calls himself Mahāyāna. Or, for that matter, *anyone* who calls himself Hīnayāna," I said, smiling.

Chokyi Nyima laughed. "Yes, no one calls himself Hīnayāna. Good."

"So why use the label then? Doesn't it just cause hurt feelings?"

"Label is useful for making distinctions, but not important. Motivation is important."

"I understand that Mahāyāna is supposed to be all about being concerned with the suffering of others, not just oneself. I understand that. But if you really want to help others don't you have to take care of yourself first?"

"Yes, is that what you think?"

"I think so. But I have to think about it some more actually. It's not clear to me. On the one hand you could think that concentrating on yourself is selfish or small-minded, but if you recognise that others' suffering is no different than your own, you could still be a Mahayanist. You can't

really help others if your own mind is confused; you just create more confusion. You have to begin by cleaning up your own backyard--or so it seems to me.”

“Good!”

I hesitated.

“Rinpoche, there’s one more thing I wanted to ask you about. I find that many of the practices associated with Mahāyāna Buddhism feel very foreign to me. Visualizations, chanting and such, they don't suit me. I like the simple kinds of meditation like watching the breath or just sitting -- like in Zen.”

“Then *Dzog chen* meditation would be good for you, it is similar to Zen. That is part of the course I teach.”

“But is there any chanting, or visualization practice?”

“Yes, some.”

“The other course doesn't involve any of that. It seems to be just sitting. Lots of sitting. You observe the breath, and whatever else happens in your mind and body. They mainly focus on sensations throughout the body.”

“Yes, this is *śamatha*, calm abiding meditation”

“Well, they consider it insight meditation, *vipaśyanā*. From what I understand, the point is to see things as they truly are. Impermanent, basically.”

“Yes this is *śamatha*. In my course we practice insight on emptiness.”

“I know. I read about that in your book. I like the emptiness teachings--Nagarjuna and all of that. But I’ve never really quite got it how one can focus on emptiness in meditation. It seems too abstract. In this other course, they mainly focus on impermanence. Seeing everything as arising and passing away.”

“Yes. And what is the point of this?”

“I think it is supposed to teach non-attachment and equanimity.”

“Good. This is a good practice. Very helpful.”

“But some of the other Dharma students tell me that this particular course is not very good.”

“Not good?”

“Well, some of them say that it can turn a person into a kind of observer-robot. Just impassively watching one’s sensations and feelings, but never reacting to them... They say that this way of meditating has no heart, no compassion for others. It can make you into a cold and indifferent person, like a machine. Just registering information, but never reacting.”

“No, no. That is only if you do not understand. This meditation is very important. It is necessary to practice it before practicing other kinds of meditation.”

“So you think it is a good course?”

"Oh yes, very important. Very helpful. My course is also very good. Both are good. No problem."

Apparently the conversation had run its course.

"OK, this is great. Thank you, Rinpoche. Thank you very much. I will think about all of this.”

“Not too much!”

I laughed. “No, not too much.”

"Good!"

I stood up and bowed three times. I felt inexplicably happy.

As I departed Rinpoche smiled and reached for his telephone, which was ringing again.

No problem.

-Martin T. Adam