

Q&A with Dungse Jampal Norbu Second Weekend NSS

Mark Hall

I sometimes feel overwhelmed by the suffering in the world and I am realizing that an understanding of emptiness is essential to all-embracing compassion. Can you say something about that?

Hi Mark,

The unity of compassion and emptiness is an essential element in Buddhist practice. Without compassion, meditating on emptiness can be misunderstood as nihilism. Without an understanding of emptiness, compassion can fall into dualism which is difficult to sustain. When we are touched by the suffering of the world, we may feel overwhelmed by compassion and sadness. However, with study and practice the view of emptiness will take us past the overwhelming quality of samsara so our compassion can extend unimpeded. The unity of shunyata (emptiness view) and compassion is both uplifting, limitless and self-sustaining since it does not rely on grasping, bias, or validation. This is bodhichitta.

Aurora

Can you please speak to the idea of how enlightenment for one leads to enlightenment for all? Thank you for the teaching today!

Thank you Aurora,

Kongtrul rinpoche once asked me “which brings greater benefit; a single enlightened being, or a thousand partially awakened beings?” A thousand bodhisattvas may bring benefit to millions of people, but it was the Buddha Shakyamuni who elucidated the dharma for all of us and benefited billions of beings over the course of history. The presence of a genuine Buddha has a much greater potential to guide others to enlightenment.

Wilder

When I think of practicing so that I can help others it feels like it really is quite centered around me still. While at the same time if I think of practicing for my own happiness it's also obviously very centered around me. Can you speak about how to want to benefit others without any trace of self-importance or feeling like "I" will do this for others?

Thank you Wilder,

In the beginning, compassion may seem like an excuse for self-importance, like virtue signaling. However, this will pass over time. The purpose of altruistic practice and four immeasurables is to simultaneously benefit others and let go of self-importance. Since self-grasping is the cause of suffering we will naturally feel more free and happy as we practice over time. Joy and freedom are the byproducts of practice, whether that is our intention or not. Keep practicing, and the self-importance linked to compassionate activity will gradually give way to genuine freedom.

Marsal Nazary

Can you speak more about how to work with the discomfort of not knowing what to do in the face of another's suffering. Thank you Dunse-la and MSB!

Thank you Marsal,

It is difficult to bear witness to suffering and feel unsure of what to do. Certainly, we can act when seeing a clear opportunity. If there is no clear opportunity, then we can clear our intention while waiting for the right conditions. Waiting is uncomfortable but can also be a great teacher. Resting in discomfort without becoming discouraged takes humility and courage. Courage is a facet of genuine compassion, and humility is a sign of wisdom. From my experience learning how to rest in discomfort is an incredible skill which can be turned to benefit others when the time is right.

Vanessa Waxman

What do you mean by not taking yourself so seriously when you are practicing the 4 Immeasurables. Can you describe that in more detail please?

Hi Vanessa,

The practice of four immeasurables is aimed at letting go of self-grasping. So it makes sense that we should not make our practice of kindness and the like an ornament to our ego. Even as we strive to be better in our practice, understanding the egolessness of self keeps us humble, and hopefully adds a healthy sense of humor to how we see ourselves relatively.