

DHARMA DUMPLINGS

A heartfelt, humorous memoir exploring Tibetan Buddhism
through the eyes of a neurodivergent practitioner.

by Chloe Solo

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INTRODUCTION

The events I am about to share occurred at the very beginning of my journey into Vajrayana Buddhism over thirty years ago. However, based on the principle of interdependence, you may find that similar experiences resonate with you, or could unfold for you, should you embark on this path. If you are already a practitioner, the experiences and emotions depicted here may strike a chord; perhaps you have felt the clouds of uncertainty, awkwardness, or confusion gradually transform into clarity as you progress.

Vajrayana Buddhism (aka Tibetan or Esoteric Buddhism) stands apart from both Hinayana (Theravada) and Mahayana traditions, each of which has its own approach to attaining Enlightenment. If we envision Enlightenment as the pinnacle of a mountain, Hinayana might be likened to riding a horse around the mountain's base until eventually reaching the summit. Mahayana can be seen as driving a car up the winding road to the peak. In contrast, Vajrayana is akin to piloting a spacecraft straight to the top. The captain of this spacecraft is your Teacher. Without your Teacher's guidance, you may find it difficult to get off the ground, let alone navigate the journey without risking a crash. Vajrayana emphasizes achieving Enlightenment within this lifetime, rather than over many, possibly hundreds, of lifetimes spent adhering to ethical codes, moral principles, prayers, devotion, compassion, and meditation. In the Vajrayana tradition, the Teacher plays a critical role, using skillful means and wisdom to tailor spiritual practices that align with each student's unique path.

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The purpose of these stories is to illustrate the profound nature of the teacher-student (guru-chela) relationship. From the outset of my own Vajrayana journey, my encounter with my Teacher propelled my spiritual development at lightning speed. Some teachings became clear to me shortly after their presentation, while others took longer to unfold in my consciousness. Some are still unfolding.

As long as you maintain your connection with your Teacher, the learning process never truly ends. There may be pauses, but if your intentions toward developing Bodhicitta (the compassion to help others and attain Ultimate Realization) remain sincere, your Teacher will continue to guide you, regardless of any hiatus that may last months or even years.

You may discover one “heart guru” or main teacher, but there may be other guides along your path. Remember, each of them has your spiritual and mental growth in mind, as Buddhism fundamentally serves as a science of the mind. The type of Teacher you attract will depend on your own karma. It is crucial for you to discern whether to place your trust in the individual entering your life at any given moment. They may hold titles such as Lama, Khenpo, Rinpoche, Jetsunma, Khandroma, or Yogi. Regardless of title, a commitment is necessary. Be aware that not all experiences will be pleasant. Sometimes they are intended to disrupt your complacency. Remaining within your comfort zone will hinder your spiritual development, which is the essence of the Dharma path. Thus, it is vital to commit to your Teacher, trusting them and persevering, whether or not you enjoy the experiences and subsequent lessons along the way.

In my case, my longing for a Teacher was clear. During the 1960s in California, when occultism held a certain allure (predating the New Age movement), I immersed myself in old bookstores,

devouring texts on mysticism. I became captivated by the memoirs of Alexandra David-Néel, particularly her travels to Tibet in the mid-1800s and her deep connection with her guru. I yearned for such a bond and prayed earnestly, “Lama-la, please come find me and take me as your disciple.” Unbeknownst to me, I was initiating a practice known as “Calling the Guru from Afar.” As you will see, they heard me.

In a quest to reach Tibet, I moved to the Far East in 1972 at the age of 20. I obtained a cultural visa in Japan to study martial arts for self-defense during my solo travels, preparing both my mind and body for the rigors of mountain journeys. My introduction to meditation occurred in the dojo, where we always culminated our intense hours-long training with meditation. Training five times a week, this practice disciplined my mind, honed my fighting skills, and reinforced the principle that martial prowess should only be used in self-defense or to protect others, a reflection of the Buddhist tenet of ahimsa (non-harming). I immersed myself in various forms of martial arts in Japan and all across Asia. Eventually, I met my Teacher at the age of 40; not in Tibet, but in Hong Kong.

A note: The experiences shared herein are my own, and the commentaries represent my interpretations of Buddhist teachings. Any errors or misconceptions are solely my responsibility, not my Teacher's.

PROLOGUE

I arrived in Hong Kong as a refugee, and while the specifics of the year or the war that took me there are irrelevant, what matters is the desperation I felt for good reason.

During a public performance, a Buddhist monk in maroon robes beckoned me with a simple invitation: “Come sit with us.” It was an unassuming, practical gesture, one that felt far from mystical at the time. Yet it changed the course of my life.

What began as a seemingly random encounter led me a week later to the doorstep of the Buddhist center the monk had mentioned that evening. It was there that I met my Teacher. Out of respect for his wishes, I will not disclose his identity in this book. For as long as you read these words, “Teacher” will be his name.

What I wish to convey is this: my greatest revelations during my journeys were seldom dramatic. The earth did not quake beneath me, at least not outwardly. As I reflect on those moments, I realize that it was often the smallest of experiences that provided the clearest insights into my path forward—precious lessons that might have eluded me before my Teacher entered my life.

These small moments are like dharma dumplings, and I want to share them with you.

At the heart of all these memories is my Teacher. It has long been my desire to record these experiences so that you, too, might feel the warmth of his loving guidance. You may not undergo the

same transformation he has facilitated in me, but I sincerely hope that you do.

How To Read This Book

Each chapter has 3 parts: A story, a reflection from an ND (neurodivergent/neurodivergence) perspective, and a reflection from a Buddhist perspective. If you are neurodivergent or interested in neurodivergence, these sections might be helpful to you. If you are not, you can skip them and read the Buddhist perspective sections. However, if you only want to read the stories, that's fine, too. Enjoy this book any way you'd like!

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HONG KONG

Chapter 1. A Serendipitous Encounter

Arriving in Hong Kong felt like stepping into a whirlwind of colors and sounds, each sensation jarring and overwhelming. I grasped at the edges of my thoughts, trying to find calm amid the chaos. The city thrummed with energy, a dynamic dance of movement that left me feeling adrift and searching for calm anchorage.

With a tourist visa ticking down to expiration and a handful of rejected job applications, I wandered the streets like a ghost trying to find solidity, struggling to comprehend the cues and rules of this vibrant new world. Often, the noise around me felt too loud, the lights too bright, and the smells too pungent—a sensory storm that left me yearning for a quiet haven.

During those days, I found brief respite in the tiny apartment of a kind acquaintance. Although I slept on the sofa, the lack of a private space and the nuances of their expectations of romance weighed on me like an ever-present pressure. Between the lack of privacy and the unsolicited advances, the grip of desperation grew tighter around my chest. Navigating these unspoken dynamics required emotional energy that seemed just out of reach, amplifying my sense of isolation and confusion.

I sought comfort in routines, visiting the same companies repeatedly, hoping familiarity would eventually lead to acceptance. Yet each day, I returned to my temporary refuge

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with no more than a fresh stack of polite rejections and fraying newspaper clippings of teaching positions that seemed as distant as the stars.

On the penultimate evening of my visa, my acquaintance handed me a ticket to a Tibetan cultural performance. They encouraged me to attend as a pleasant distraction from my worries, yet attending such social gatherings was daunting—rooms full of strangers and unpredictable moments made me want to hide. Still, the prospect of being an invisible member in an audience watching a structured performance appealed to me.

As the bustling crowd gathered outside the theater waiting to enter, a group of maroon-robed monks swept through, their calm presence somehow soothing my restless thoughts. One monk, with a direct yet calm demeanor, approached and asked for my name. As I told him, he closed a business card in my hand, his gesture imbued with a sense of significance, as if he were offering me a key to a hidden door. “You will come to my center,” he said earnestly, before vanishing back into the crowd. His pronouncement felt like an unexpected yet welcome certainty, adding clarity to my otherwise clouded path.

The performance was mesmerizing, each dance and melody a soothing balm. At intermission, I saw the monk again. He caught my eye and beckoned me over to sit with him. He was emphatic about it. It made me feel so odd that instead of going back for the second act, I left the theater. I found myself outside, clutching the card, overwhelmed by the intense emotions stirred within me.

The next day, amidst a haze of sensory overload and internal dialogues, I found myself drawn to the address on the card. Fate seemed to whisper through the cacophony of the city, guiding me

to a choice I could not fully explain. Standing at the gate of the center, the intercom's buzz felt welcoming—a small sound that promised calm.

Inside, the tranquility enveloped me like a warm blanket. The air was fragrant, the silence gentle—a stark contrast to the noise and unpredictability of the outside world. The monk from the theater greeted me with a knowing smile, his familiarity soothing my unsettled spirit. Here, I didn't need to decipher ambiguous gestures or unpredictable scenarios; I could just be.

In this serene space, emotions welled up; grief for past struggles and gratitude for this unforeseen refuge. The burden of constant adaptation lifted, and for the first time, I felt like I had found my place in a world that often seemed intent on pushing me to its edges.

It felt like a weight was lifted from my heart when the monk told me not to worry. Everything would be fine. By what seemed a miraculous twist of fate, the following day I secured a position at a university, obtained a work visa, and found an apartment near the center. The universe had aligned in ways that embraced my needs for structure and predictability, granting me serenity I had not dared to dream of. And so it was, in what felt like an improbably serendipitous twist of fate, that I found not just a safe haven, but the good fortune that had eluded me for so long.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

From an ND (neurodivergent) perspective, the narrator's experience of arriving in Hong Kong embodies the profound feelings of dislocation and anxiety often faced by individuals on the spectrum. The sensation of being a "ghost" in a vibrant yet overwhelming city aptly articulates the internal struggle with

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social unpredictability and sensory overload, familiar to many with Autism or those with other sensory sensitivities. The juxtaposition of a desire for connection against a backdrop of rejection and missed opportunities can amplify feelings of inadequacy and isolation, common challenges for those navigating social landscapes.

The reliance on a new acquaintance for shelter highlights the complexities of interpersonal relationships, particularly in a crowded social environment. The discomfort experienced due to unsolicited advances and lack of privacy reflects how challenging it can be to maintain personal boundaries when one is vulnerable and in need of help. For individuals on the spectrum, such situations can create a heightened sense of anxiety, making it challenging to discern social intentions and navigate personal space.

The narrator's return to businesses that had previously rejected them can symbolize a cyclical struggle, an expression of persistence in the face of challenge but also a reminder of the harsh reality encountered in social and employment settings. Searching through newspapers for job opportunities can be likened to trying to decode a complex social script, requiring skills that might feel out of reach.

The unexpected encounter with the monk introduces a turning point in the narrative, revealing how serendipity can intervene in times of distress. His calm presence represents a contrast to the chaos previously experienced, fostering a sense of safety and connection. For someone on the spectrum, the unorthodox social interaction, a monk asking for their name, could feel bewildering yet offers a glimpse of hope and possibility.

The subsequent invitation to the monk's center symbolizes a moment of transcendence, where the narrator moves from feelings of inadequacy to a sense of belonging. This transformation ignites emotions often felt deeply by those on the spectrum: an awakening to one's place in the world, the sense of being understood, and the realization that support can manifest in unexpected ways. This encounter becomes a catalyst for change, allowing the narrator to finally find a semblance of stability and fulfillment.

Reflection from the Buddhist Perspective

From a Buddhist perspective, the narrator's journey resonates deeply with the principles of mindfulness, compassion, and the interconnectedness of all beings. The initial feelings of unease and dislocation serve as a compelling reminder of the impermanence of life and the suffering that often accompanies attachment to plans and expectations. The poignant imagery of hopes and plans dissipating like smoke eloquently embodies the teachings on non-attachment, a core tenet of Buddhist philosophy.

The interaction with the kind-hearted acquaintance reflects the importance of community and the compassionate support that embodies the essence of the dharma. However, the discomfort that arises from unreciprocated intentions signals the complexities of human relationships that can challenge our understanding of love, kindness, and boundaries.

The second-to-last evening of the visa being marked by the Tibetan performance acts as a pivotal moment of synchronicity—an illustration of how serendipity can redirect one's path. The monk represents a spiritual guide whose intervention is

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welcomed with an open heart, embodying the notion that teachers often appear in our lives at unexpected moments, urging us to recognize the path that unfolds before us.

The act of the monk asking for the narrator's name is laced with deeper significance—a gesture of personal connection, showing that each individual's story matters, reinforcing the view that everyone's journey is heard and honored. The invitation to join the monks during the intermission reflects the Buddhist principle of sangha—the importance of community in nurturing one's spiritual growth.

Upon entering the monk's center, the narrator experiences an awakening that touches upon the essence of presence and belonging. The tranquility of the space, suffused with the rich aroma of incense, becomes symbolic of the inner peace that arises when one aligns with their true path. This newfound sense of belonging elicits tears as a release of pent-up emotion, echoing the transformative power of finding one's place within the larger tapestry of life.

The serendipitous nature of the events that follow—the landing of a well-paying position and a secure living situation—can be seen as the natural unfolding of karma, where intentional steps taken with an open heart yield fruitful outcomes. The narrator's journey thus transforms into one of hope and purpose, demonstrating that compassion and connection—the cornerstones of a Buddhist path—can indeed lead to salvation from the trials and tribulations of life. In this way, the story becomes not just about personal survival but the deep, interwoven narrative of human experience and spiritual awakening.

In the midst of life's trials, we often find ourselves wandering through landscapes of uncertainty. In this story, the specter of

destitution looms large, opening the way to reflection on the nature of expectation, desperation, and ultimately, the serendipitous twists that life can offer when we least expect it.

Each of us may encounter moments when everything seems lost. We may feel overwhelmed by circumstances beyond our control. Yet, buried within this bleakness lies the seed of awakening—a gentle reminder that even in the depths of despair, the universe may conspire in our favor, guided by the intricacies of karma. Our past actions and choices lay the groundwork for the unexpected opportunities that arise, knitting together our experiences in a way that often defies our understanding.

In this story, a chance invitation to the Tibetan cultural performance becomes a metaphor for life's unexpected gifts. The arrival of the monk, embodying both compassion and authority, acts as a catalyst, lighting a path that holds the promise of healing and connection. Sometimes, it is in the most unconventional encounters that we discover our guiding lights, reminding us that our karmic journey often leads us to precisely what we need at the right time.

The serene atmosphere of the temple brings a profound moment of recognition: the realization that true home is not merely a physical space but a state of being. If you find yourself in such a space, you too may find yourself weeping, not solely for past losses, but for the joy and relief of rediscovering a sense of belonging and purpose, a culmination of their journey woven together by the threads of karma.

When we allow ourselves to be open to new experiences, even those that evoke fear or reluctance, we create space for transformation. What unexpected connections are waiting for us on the other side of fear? How might our lives shift if we opened

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ourselves to serendipity, embracing the uncertainty that each new day holds? Each step on our path may lead us closer to moments of clarity, where the tapestry of our experiences begins to reveal a grander design—one that our intentions and actions have woven through the fabric of time.

There is power in surrender, grace in being open to the world. In times of doubt, let us remember that the universe, with its mysterious workings and intricate web of karma, is guiding us home—within ourselves, within our communities, and ultimately, within the boundless realm of connection and love that transcends our individual experiences. Each moment of serendipity is a reminder that we are part of a greater whole, navigating our journeys with purpose and intention, and continuously opening ourselves to the gifts that life holds.



Chapter 2. Take Off – The Journey Begins

In those early days at the dharma center, I found myself woefully unprepared for the intricacies of Buddhist etiquette and cultural nuances. When a celebrated teacher made his entrance, the atmosphere became electrified, crackling with energy as practitioners clutched offerings—red envelopes filled with banknotes and white katak scarves—and formed a line, their faces reflecting a mix of reverence and excitement.

Nervous yet curious, I decided to join the queue, my inexperience hanging over me like a banner. As I shuffled forward, I was unexpectedly nudged from behind and propelled to the front of the line—a bewildering twist for someone still trying to figure out the basics. In that moment, reality hit me like a wave: I had nothing to offer. No gift, no token of appreciation; just myself.

Panic surged as I rummaged through my bag, and pulling out a crumpled letter envelope, I tucked a few worn bills into it that hardly felt worthy of the occasion. Having no white katak to offer (and being unsure of its significance), I grabbed the long red scarf from my neck, feeling awkward as I was practically shoved into the audience room.

Seated before me was the teacher himself, a beacon of charisma with an engaging smile that could have lightened the weight of a thousand stones. “Wow, he’s rather dashing,” I thought momentarily. The absurdity of my infatuation was stark against the gravity of the occasion. With an amused smile, he accepted my hastily offered red scarf, only to touch the crown of my head with it. “It’s supposed to be white,” he playfully pointed out, each syllable

easing the tension of my embarrassment. Instead of placing it around my neck, he kept it, as if it were some curiosity to be studied.

Flustered, I placed my pitifully wrinkled envelope on the coffee table, an offering that felt far from appropriate. I then awkwardly performed three prostrations, my forehead banging the floor, my mind wrestling with the absurdity of it all.

“Are you planning on staying long?” he inquired, arching an eyebrow. “You only do prostrations if you are staying for a while, like for a teaching.”

I gulped audibly, unable to form an intelligible answer.

“Do you have any questions?” he prodded further, his gaze unwavering.

I felt a lump in my throat, as if grappling with my own foolishness. “Not yet,” I managed to croak, the words slipping out awkwardly.

“Good,” he said, his smile returning. “Come back tomorrow morning before the center opens.”

With that, he draped a proper white katak around my neck, a gesture that felt like a warm embrace. He blessed my head with a gentle touch, and just like that, the audience was over.

As I backed out of the room, what had just happened began to set in—a whirlwind of impressions, emotions, and the dawning realization that I had met the man who would guide my journey. His energy lingered in the air, leaving me awash in a mix of bewilderment and elation. There I stood, feeling like a complete novice, yet woven into a moment that would alter the course of my existence. Fate had

played its hand, and I was left to ponder how it might continue to unfold.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

The narrator's experience encapsulates the challenges and complexities of navigating new social environments, particularly those enriched with intricate cultural norms and emotions. The initial feelings of nervousness and curiosity highlight the common struggle many individuals on the spectrum face when entering situations that require intuitive understanding of social cues and etiquette. The electrified atmosphere and the actions of others can feel overwhelming, as sensory stimuli can easily become magnified in unfamiliar contexts.

The unexpected nudge that propels the narrator to the front of the line serves as a metaphor for the frequently disorienting dynamics present in social situations. The subsequent realization of being unprepared—having nothing to offer—can trigger a heightened sense of anxiety, as it introduces a perceived failure to meet social expectations. For many on the spectrum, the anxiety of not conforming to group norms can lead to feelings of inadequacy.

The use of the crumpled letter envelope with a few worn bills reflects an attempt to find a way to cope with the pressure of the moment. This adaptive effort to use what is available, even if it feels insufficient, showcases a common strategy used by individuals with ND to navigate social demands. The awkwardness in performance, as shown in the prostrations, mirrors the intense focus on ritual in these environments, which may not always be intuitive for someone unfamiliar with the practices.

The teacher's warm demeanor and playful approach likely provide a crucial sense of safety for the narrator, promoting a more profound

understanding of acceptance and non-judgment. The interaction culminates in feelings of connection and the dawning realization of embarking on a transformative journey, indicating that while initial experiences can be disorienting, they often lead to meaningful and enriching moments.

Reflection from the Buddhist Perspective

From a Vajrayana Buddhist perspective, the narrator's experience exemplifies the profound teachings on humility, generosity, and the importance of intention in practice. The moment of entering the dharma center, filled with reverence and excitement, signifies the opening of a spiritual journey marked by the essential understanding that all who seek the path are both students and teachers in their own right.

The unexpected nudging to the front of the line serves as a teaching on spontaneity and the impermanence of our plans. It illustrates how the universe often moves us in ways that challenge our expectations, urging us to embrace the present moment, regardless of our readiness or perceived shortcomings. The narrator's panic over having nothing to offer can be viewed as an attachment to material offerings, when in truth, the essence of Buddhist practice lies in the sincerity and intention behind our actions.

The crumpled envelope and worn bills, though seemingly inadequate, symbolize the purity of the heart in offering—highlighting that what matters in the moment is not the gift's appearance but the thoughtfulness behind it. The humorous interaction with the teacher about the red scarf invites reflection on non-attachment to formality and encourages lightness in practice, reinforcing the idea that spiritual growth can blossom even amidst missteps.

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The act of prostration is not just a physical gesture; it embodies the humility necessary for genuine learning and transformation. The teacher's inquiry about the narrator's intentions conveys an important lesson on commitment in the spiritual journey, prompting the notion that one must embark on this path with determination and readiness for deeper exploration.

Ultimately, the narrator's experience culminates in the acceptance of guidance, symbolized by the draping of a proper white katak. This gesture represents the transition from confusion to clarity, underscoring the idea that true teachings arise from the connection between student and teacher—a bond that nurtures growth and deepens understanding. The narrator leaves with a sense of wonder, suggesting that the journey ahead is filled with potential, as each moment bears the power to awaken newfound insights and possibilities along the Buddhist path.

The profound experience of recognizing one's true guru is known as Lama Tönpa, a pivotal moment in the spiritual journey that signifies the deep realization of guru devotion. In the path of Vajrayana Buddhism, the relationship with the Teacher holds paramount importance; they act as both a guide and a living embodiment of the Buddha.

When we recognize our true guru, we open our hearts to a transformative journey marked by deep devotion and commitment. The Teacher becomes a lasting source of inspiration and support. This sacred bond nurtures our spiritual growth, offering guidance that is essential for navigating the complexities of our inner landscape.

In addition to the relationship with the guru, practitioners often establish a connection with a Yidam, a specific deity that embodies qualities we aspire to cultivate. This relationship is typically fostered through practices guided by the Lama, who helps us deepen our

connection with the Yidam. Together, these relationships create a rich web of spiritual support, enhancing our understanding and experience of the teachings.

Recognizing one's true guru marks a significant turning point in a practitioner's life. It signals the beginning of a committed path of spiritual practice, one that is imbued with the blessings and insights of a realized teacher. This commitment invites us to engage deeply with our practice, allowing the wisdom of our teacher to guide us through challenges and illuminate the way forward.

As we reflect on the importance of Lama Tönpa in our own lives, may we cultivate an openness to recognizing the teachers and teachings that appear along our path. Let us embrace the opportunity to develop genuine devotion and commitment, nurturing the connection we share with our gurus, our Yidams, and all beings. In doing so, we honor the sacred journey toward enlightenment, allowing the transformative power of wisdom and compassion to guide us ever onward.

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Chapter 3. Command Prophecy

The night before my anticipated meeting with Teacher, an unusual resolve surged within me, urging me to forgo my customary pilgrimage to the local pub. Karate had been my initial reason for uprooting my life to Asia at the tender age of twenty. For two decades, I had been an aficionado of after-hours revelry, ensconced in laughter and clinking glasses with companions from the dojo. Each evening was a fiesta, a cavalcade of spirits and camaraderie that—like the ticking clock—culminated just before midnight, as we hurriedly crammed a bucketful of libations into the recesses of our cheerful disregard.

Yet something was different this time. An undercurrent of anticipation coursed through me as I envisioned the impending encounter with Teacher. The very thought of that audience—conjured from the silent yearning of countless practitioners—coiled around me, holding a promise of transformation that felt far more substantial than the ephemeral pleasures of the night.

When dawn broke and I made my way to the Center, I felt as if I had stepped into an alternative reality. The usual vibrancy that danced through the halls was conspicuously absent; it was a ghost of its former self, vacated by the collective energy of its practitioners. I was ushered into the reception room, where Teacher awaited. Kneeling before him, I presented the pristine white katak, following the ritual I had rehearsed in my head.

However, before I could utter even a syllable of greeting, his gaze pierced through the veil of my thoughts, as potent as a blade forged in the fires of insight. With an unwavering voice that resonated

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with the authority of prophecy itself, he pronounced, “You will stop drinking. You will stop smoking.”

In an instant, the world around me condensed into a singular moment—a snapshot in time where everything else faded away, leaving just his stentorian pronouncement and the weight it carried. My body felt transfixed, as if a spell had woven itself into my very being. My knees, once independent agents of locomotion, now seemed glued to the floor, immovable in their childlike reverence before this figure of wisdom.

An attendant, observing my paralyzed state, kindly helped me to my feet, guiding me out of the room. On unsteady legs, I stumbled into the shrine room, leaning against the wall as if it could offer some semblance of support against the tidal wave of sensations crashing over me. Slowly, I slid to the floor in a dazed heap, grappling with the enormity of what had just transpired.

Time became elastic—stretched thin and unrecognizable—while my mind spiraled in contemplation. What had just happened? Had I truly absorbed his words? Unbeknownst to me at the time, I was enmeshed in the experience of a “command prophecy,” a phenomenon I would only come to comprehend years later. The sensation was unmistakable: the moment one hears “You will...” and slips into a trance, devoid of recollection thereafter. Such proclamations are not to be trifled with; they carry the weight of inevitability, a collision of fate and intention.

From that fateful day on, the allure of the bottle faded, and the pull of nicotine vanished as if it had never existed. A new chapter unfolded—one with the mundane edges of existence now tinged with an unexpected clarity. Renunciation turned into liberation, and I, the once-partying martial arts enthusiast, found solace in this newfound fate, forever marked by that singular encounter. A command

prophecy, indeed—an anchoring whisper from the universe, steering me toward a destiny that awaited just beyond the horizon.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

It is relatively common for individuals on the autism spectrum to use alcohol in social situations as a way to ease anxiety. Many people on the spectrum experience social anxiety and find social interactions challenging, which can lead them to seek ways to manage their discomfort. Alcohol may be seen as a social lubricant that helps reduce inhibitions and alleviate feelings of stress in social settings.

However, it's important to note that while some individuals may use alcohol for this purpose, it is not a universal experience, and the reasons for drinking can vary widely among people on the spectrum. Additionally, reliance on alcohol can lead to other challenges, such as dependency or negative health effects, which may complicate their social anxiety issues in the long run. It's crucial to address anxiety through healthier coping strategies, such as therapy, social skills training, or mindfulness practices.

From an ND (Autism Spectrum Disorder) perspective, the narrator's experience may reflect a unique processing of sensory input and emotional states. The initial resolve to avoid the pub signals an internal shift, possibly linked to sensory overload and the desire for structure or routine, which many on the spectrum find comforting. The anticipation of meeting the Teacher might elicit both excitement and anxiety, causing a concentration of thoughts that heightens the significance of the event.

Upon encountering the Teacher, the abrupt command—"You will stop drinking. You will stop smoking"—can be seen as a moment of overwhelming clarity, resonating deeply with the narrator's internal

world. This power of direct, unequivocal communication often resonates with individuals on the spectrum, who may respond more effectively to clear and concise messages rather than ambiguous social cues. The subsequent paralysis and trance-like state could signal an intense reaction to this sudden shift in expectation and identity, common among individuals with ND when faced with significant change or overwhelming information.

The transformation that follows—the fading allure of drinking and smoking—can be interpreted as a newfound sense of self-awareness, enhanced focus, and clarity. For many on the spectrum, personal identity may evolve distinctly from societal pressures, and the command could serve as a pivotal moment where the narrator firmly aligns with this emerging identity, leading to a more liberated and intentional lifestyle.

Reflection from the Buddhist Perspective

From a Vajrayana Buddhist perspective, the narrator's experience underscores themes of transformation and the power of direct transmission from a teacher to a student. The choice to forgo the familiar comforts of the pub in favor of seeking wisdom from the Teacher reflects a significant step on the path of renunciation, aligning with the core Buddhist practice of letting go of attachments that lead to suffering.

The moment of the command prophecy—that profound declaration of “You will stop drinking. You will stop smoking”—emphasizes the importance of karmic transformations, highlighting the Teacher’s role as a catalyst for awakening. Such a pronouncement serves as a potent reminder of the impermanence of habits and the potential for profound change. In Vajrayana Buddhism, a teacher's words are

often viewed as vehicles of truth, guiding students toward awakening and liberation from attachments.

The narrator's paralysis and subsequent contemplation can symbolize the deep contemplation often experienced in meditation—a pause allowing for introspection and realization of one's path. The psychological and existential shift that follows demonstrates how a single moment of insight can alter the trajectory of one's life, aligning it with the principles of mindfulness and awareness.

In essence, the resultant liberation—the fading allure of alcohol and nicotine—reflects the Buddhist understanding of non-attachment and the joy that arises from a life dedicated to mindfulness and purpose. The command prophecy serves as a transformative whisper from the universe, embodying the interconnectedness of intention, karma, and the journey toward enlightenment that awaits those who commit to the path.

In the rich tapestry of Vajrayana Buddhism, the concept of command prophecy emerges as a profound expression of the sacred bond between teacher and student. This spiritual instruction, imbued with transformative power, offers not only insights but also a glimpse into the student's potential journey. It serves as a reminder of the profound influence that a realized teacher or guru can have on one's spiritual path.

At the heart of Vajrayana practice lies the guru-disciple relationship, a cornerstone that shapes the practitioner's experience and development. Command prophecies are a significant manifestation of this relationship, where the words of the guru resonate with spiritual authority, carrying an energy that transcends mere instruction.

When a command prophecy is imparted, it often functions as an empowerment, igniting the student's inner drive to engage

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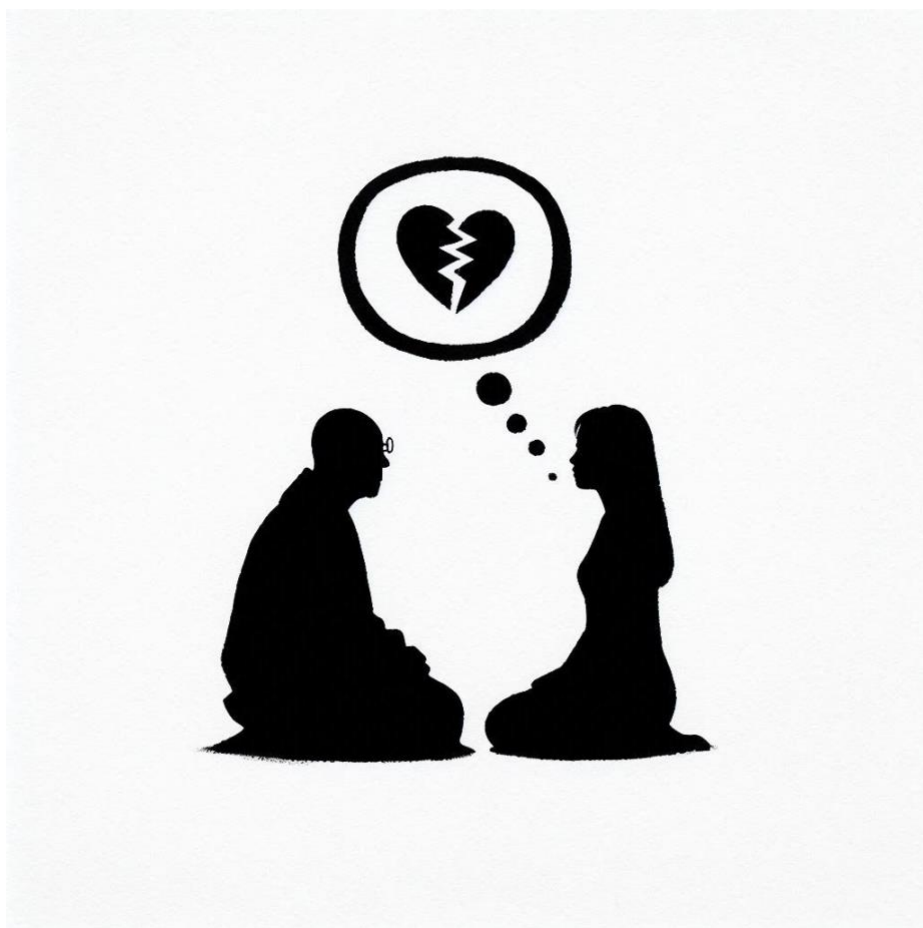
meaningfully with their practice. The teacher's voice becomes a guiding light, illuminating the path ahead and urging the student to step forward with confidence and clarity. Through this confirmation, practitioners can align more closely with their spiritual aspirations, feeling the weight of their journey transform into a purposeful pursuit.

Such prophecies are not random; they arise from a deep intuitive recognition of the student's unique needs and karmic potential. The guru's keen insight into the disciple's inner state enables them to tailor guidance that profoundly resonates on a personal level. This understanding acts as a nurturing force, allowing the student to explore their potential with a sense of support and encouragement.

Command prophecies may also emerge spontaneously during moments of meditation or ritual, illustrating the dynamic nature of the teacher's wisdom. These occurrences remind us that the teachings are not fixed but are living expressions of compassion, responding to the vibrant, ever-changing landscape of our minds and hearts.

In this light, command prophecy exemplifies how the integration of teachings, personal guidance, and spiritual authority enriches the Vajrayana tradition. It beautifully underscores the essential role of the teacher in guiding practitioners on their path toward liberation, reminding us of the interconnectedness of all beings on this journey.

As we reflect on the nature of command prophecy, may we cultivate awareness of the blessings and guidance that come our way. Let us be open to the teachings delivered to us, whether from a guru or from the wisdom arising within our own hearts. May we walk our spiritual path with a sense of purpose and determination, honoring the sacred connection we share with our teachers and with each other as we strive for enlightenment.



Chapter 4. Tell No Lies

At our subsequent meeting, Teacher regarded me with a steady gaze, his eyes brimming with a mixture of curiosity and authority. “Tell me a bit about yourself,” he commanded gently, as if drawing forth a tale from the depths of my being.

I began tentatively, my words hesitant yet earnest. “You were married?” he inquired, a seemingly casual question that struck a chord deep within me.

“Yes,” I replied, a shadow crossing my features. “But he died.” The claim hung in the air. (I had left him, but didn’t want to admit it. He was kind, but I found his constant patter exhausting).

“No, he did not!” he thundered, his voice erupting like a summer storm. “Do not tell stories.”

The intensity of his declaration left me momentarily speechless, a flurry of confusion swirling in my mind. I had yet to grasp the powerful undercurrents of siddhi—the innate gifts that flowed from dedicated practice. An advanced practitioner like Teacher possessed a profound awareness, with unspoken capabilities weaving through his very essence. And yet, should one dare to inquire about his psychic prowess, he would deftly redirect the question like a skilled fencer.

“Can you read minds?” I challenged him, suspicion tightening my voice.

“Can you?” he countered, a playful glimmer sparkling in his eye.

“Not exactly,” I stammered, scrambling to regain my footing in this verbal dueling ground. “I sometimes read the future for my friends using tarot cards. They say I’m always accurate. I never charge them for it, though,” I added, a weak attempt at humor to alleviate the tension.

“Oh, you read tarot, do you?” Teacher said dryly, a hint of amusement curling at the corners of his mouth. “Well, stop it. It’s a crutch. You need to develop your mind.”

“How?” I exclaimed, desperation clawing at my curiosity.

“Meditate. Still your mind. It will come to you.” His words held a timeless quality, an invocation of wisdom that resonated within me.

As our conversation shifted, I began to understand the essence of his teaching. Meditation was not merely a tool for relaxation; it was the doorway to a richer, deeper understanding of the world and oneself. The ceaseless chatter of the mind—the loquacious, ever-babbling thing that it was—could be quieted, permitting a more profound awareness to surface.

And he was right. Once one stills the incessant monologue that rumbles through one’s consciousness, the mind transforms. It quiets itself, shedding the noise, and begins to listen—not just to the external cacophonies of life, but to the whispers of the soul, the vibrations of truth that often go unnoticed.

In that moment, I began to glimpse the path before me. The cards, though they had served as a source of insight, were but echoes of a greater potential, a transient distraction from the depths I had yet to plumb. Teacher’s voice resonated in my mind, an

unwavering guide leading me toward the greater exploration of my own psyche. No more tales laced with untruths or crutches to lean upon; it was time to embrace the stillness, to dive into the silence where profound revelations awaited, shimmering like stars in a boundless sky.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

In this story, the narrator's interaction with Teacher encapsulates the complexity of communication and self-expression that many individuals with ND might experience. The initial command for the protagonist to share about themselves reflects a common challenge: the need to articulate personal experiences in socially demanding environments. The narrator's tentative approach to storytelling highlights the difficulty in connecting and conveying emotions, particularly in the face of authority and expectation.

Individuals on the autism spectrum often face unique challenges regarding communication and personal disclosure. Many people on the spectrum struggle with social communication, leading to difficulties in sharing personal experiences, especially in uncomfortable settings, which can result in hesitancy or avoidance. Also, a strong sense of privacy may cause them to withhold personal information to avoid vulnerability or judgment, not necessarily equating to lying. Individuals often interpret communication literally, which can complicate social interactions and result in misunderstandings based on their own comprehension of events.

Varying degrees of social skills training lead to differences in how individuals share personal information; some may lack guidance, affecting their ability to navigate disclosure. Concerns about being misunderstood may lead individuals to modify their truths, perceived as lying, though the intent may stem from a desire to protect

themselves. Expressing emotions or personal circumstances can be challenging, resulting in oversimplified narratives that may overlook deeper emotional truths. While avoidance of sharing personal experiences is common among individuals on the autism spectrum, it's often due to social discomfort or protective instincts rather than intentional deception. Understanding these dynamics is essential for promoting effective communication and compassion.

When the Teacher challenges the narrator's assertion about their supposedly deceased spouse, it evokes a strong emotional response that resonates deeply – a reflection of the disorientation that can arise when one's truths or understandings are questioned. For someone with ND, this confrontation may amplify feelings of being misunderstood or invalidated, intensifying their struggle to navigate social norms and expectations. The sudden shift from a personal revelation to a moment of confrontation can be particularly jarring, prompting a flurry of confusion that is familiar to those who often find themselves grappling with the subtleties of interpersonal relations.

The narrator's defensive posture during this dialogue—evident through hesitant responses and attempts at humor—illustrates the adaptive strategies often used by individuals with ND when feeling exposed or vulnerable. The mention of tarot card readings serves as a means of connecting with Teacher, and it reflects a common inclination among those on the spectrum to depend on structured methodologies or familiar practices as gateways to social interaction. However, the teacher's insistence that this practice is merely a crutch reveals a deeper challenge: the tension between relying on external validation and cultivating inner understanding.

As the conversation evolves and Teacher directs the narrator toward meditation as a path to stillness and self-awareness, it signifies a turn in the journey. This guidance resonates with a fundamental concept: the journey toward self-discovery and personal insight often

requires a release from external distractions. For the narrator, the call to quiet the mind and explore the depths of their psyche speaks volumes about the importance of introspection and the profound potential that exists within.

The narrator's eventual realization that meditation can lead to a more authentic understanding invites an important shift. This mirrors the journey many individuals with ND face in their quest for connection and understanding—a movement from reliance on external tools to fostering an intrinsic sense of awareness and insight. The metaphor of releasing crutches and embracing silence suggests a liberating path forward, one that aligns with a deeper exploration of the self.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

From a Buddhist perspective, the account of the narrator's conversation with Teacher serves as a poignant exploration of truth, self-awareness, and the path toward spiritual growth. Teacher's initial insistence on honesty—"Do not tell stories"—emphasizes a fundamental Buddhist tenet: the importance of living authentically and engaging with the truth of one's experiences. This call for honesty transcends mere factual accuracy; it urges the practitioner to look beyond superficial narratives and to confront deeper realities of existence.

The narrator's initial shock and confusion in response to Teacher's admonition signal a moment of awakening. This moment illustrates the profound impact of direct teachings, which often challenge our preconceived notions and prompt introspection. Teacher's role as both authority and guide resonates with the notion of the guru-disciple relationship in Buddhism, where the teacher provokes the student to delve deeper into their own understanding and to abandon false narratives.

As the dialogue shifts to the narrator's use of tarot cards, the conversation reflects a critical insight into spiritual practices. Teacher's characterization of the tarot as a crutch emphasizes the need to move beyond external tools and distractions. In Buddhism, reliance on transient sources of wisdom, such as fortune-telling or superstitions, can hinder the development of true insight and understanding. Teacher's guidance to meditate instead invokes the essence of mindfulness practice, underscoring meditation's role as a gateway to authentic awareness.

The narrator's realization that meditation holds the key to quieting the mind is a pivotal moment. This aligns with the core Buddhist teaching that stilling the incessant chatter of the mind allows one to access profound inner truths. By moving beyond superficial insights gained through external practices, the practitioner opens themselves to the transformative potential of their own consciousness. This journey into stillness invites a deeper connection with the essence of being, leading to revelations that may have previously been obscured by noise.

The metaphorical shift from reliance on cards to embracing stillness symbolizes a critical aspect of growth in Buddhist practice: the journey from the external to the internal. It suggests that true insight comes not from seeking answers outside oneself, but rather from diving into the depths of one's mind and spirit. Teacher's voice becomes a guiding presence, leading the narrator toward genuine exploration and the recognition that untruths and distractions no longer serve their quest for understanding.

The narrator's transformative experience encapsulates essential Buddhist themes of truth, self-exploration, and the liberation of the mind. The narrative speaks to the journey of moving from reliance on external validations toward the profound potential that lies within

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when one embraces honesty and stillness. It serves as a reminder that the path to enlightenment is often fraught with challenges, but through committed practice and introspection, profound insights await those who are willing to listen to the whispers of their own soul.

In exploring the concept of "Tell No Lies," we delve into the profound relationship between honesty, spiritual insight, and our interconnectedness with others. Within the framework of advanced meditative practices, practitioners may develop extraordinary abilities—siddhis—that often include telepathy and heightened awareness of the thoughts and intentions of those around them. However, it is essential to understand that these abilities are not the ultimate aim of our practice. Instead, they emerge as natural by-products of deep meditation and realization.

As we engage in practices like mindfulness meditation (lhaktong), we nurture a keen awareness within ourselves, enabling us to perceive not only our own mental states but also those of others. This enhanced awareness brings a nuanced understanding of emotions, facilitating our ability to discern honesty from deception. Yet with this insight also comes a profound responsibility: to approach others with compassion and a genuine desire to understand their motivations, rather than simply seeking to expose dishonesty.

The teachings of Vajrayana beautifully emphasize the interdependence of all beings (tendrel) and the cultivation of compassion (karuna). This understanding encourages us to look beyond mere actions and behaviors to recognize the underlying reasons for them. When we encounter a lie, rather than rushing to judgment, we are invited to ask ourselves what fears or insecurities might have prompted that response. This perspective fosters a deeper empathy, allowing us to engage with the complexities of human experience.

Furthermore, through the practice of shinay, or calm abiding meditation, we cultivate a clear perception of reality. With a quieter mind, we open ourselves to the qualities of shes rab (bodhicitta), which instill within us the discernment and insight necessary to see the truth of our interactions. In advanced states of awareness (nyime rigpa), where the boundaries of self and other dissolve, our perception of thoughts and emotions becomes unfiltered by ego. This state of non-dual awareness allows us to understand the realities of others' minds with kindness and clarity.

Ultimately, while the potential for deep insight into the minds of others is acknowledged in Vajrayana, our true focus remains on cultivating wisdom, compassion, and ethical conduct. The goal of these practices is not to catch others in a lie but to deepen our path toward enlightenment and contribute to the alleviation of suffering for all sentient beings.

May we all strive to foster this compassionate understanding in our interactions, embracing the journey toward truthfulness not just in words, but in the very essence of our being. Let us guide our practice with the intention of love and insight, nurturing a world where honesty flourishes through a shared commitment to compassion and understanding.

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Chapter 5. Newbie

As I stepped into the Hong Kong Center, I expected to be enveloped in warmth and hospitality. After all, I was the only foreigner, and I assumed that would be enough to warrant a welcoming committee. But, as it turned out, I was in for a rude awakening. The practitioners, though kind and compassionate, seemed to operate under a strict code of conduct and hierarchy. Although I was curious and wanted to look in the library and other rooms, I was not allowed to roam freely around the center. I was not permitted to go into the kitchen to get a plate or vase for the fruit and flowers I brought, and was not allowed to place offerings on the altar. I had to ask an attendant to do so. I was told I could only be in the reception area and the shrine room where services were held.

The more I interacted with the lamas, the more objections I encountered from the suspicious followers. It was as if I had stumbled into a sacred space where foreigners didn't belong. On more than one occasion, I was politely yet firmly asked to leave the center. The experience was disheartening, but something within me refused to give up. I became increasingly determined to attend daily puja (services), driven by an insatiable curiosity about this mysterious world.

As I navigated this new environment, several realizations began to dawn on me:

1. No pretenses: This religion didn't seek converts, and therefore, they didn't need to "play nice." They were not interested in making me feel comfortable or welcome; they were focused on their own spiritual pursuits.

2. Ego check: My feeling of not being accepted was nothing more than an ego problem. I was trying to force my way into a culture that wasn't mine, and expecting acceptance without putting in the effort.

3. Lucky indeed: Despite the initial shock and disappointment, I was fortunate to have access to teachings from renowned teachers who visited the center regularly. This midway point between northern India and the West attracted some of the most revered teachers in the tradition.

The cultural barrier was significant—I only spoke a little Mandarin, but knew no Cantonese or Tibetan, and had no knowledge of Buddhist etiquette. I felt like a trespasser or, worse, a burglar trying to break into this religion. But my determination to stay the course only grew stronger.

There was something about this environment that felt familiar, like a forgotten memory lurking in the shadows of my mind. The more I delved into this world, the more it seemed to resonate with an inner part of me, as if I had been here before—or at least, had always been meant to be here.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

In this story, the narrator's experience reflects a journey that many individuals with ND might resonate with—navigating social environments that feel unfamiliar and rigidly structured. The initial expectation of warmth and hospitality, based on their status as a foreigner, highlights a common theme of misalignment between personal expectations and reality. This scenario also underscores the challenges that can arise from social interactions, particularly for those who may struggle to interpret social cues or cultural norms.

The narrator's encounters with strict codes of conduct serve to illustrate the difficulties faced when trying to integrate into a new cultural or spiritual setting. The directive to stay within the shrine room and the necessity of asking for assistance with offerings may evoke feelings of confinement, which could be particularly disheartening for someone who seeks understanding and connection. For individuals with ND, the need for clear guidelines and structure can clash with the unpredictability of social acceptance, leading to feelings of inadequacy or exclusion.

As their journey continues, the narrator's realizations denote a significant moment of introspection. The recognition that their feelings of rejection stem from an ego problem—an expectation of acceptance without the groundwork of respect and effort—reflects a profound understanding often accompanied by personal growth. Many individuals with ND may have a chronic sense of being on the outside looking in, and the protagonist's internalization of this realization demonstrates a valuable lesson in the nature of belonging and personal responsibility.

The cultural barriers faced by the protagonist further emphasize the disorienting nature of new environments. Their struggle with language and unfamiliar etiquette makes it easy to relate to the feelings of being an outsider. Yet, the determination to persist despite these challenges showcases resilience and an intrinsic curiosity about the world—qualities often present in individuals who embrace learning, regardless of the obstacles.

The climax of the narrator's experience hints at a deep sense of recognition—a feeling of familiarity with the environment that transcends their immediate challenges. This notion resonates with a common theme for those on the spectrum, where certain interests or practices can evoke a strong sense of belonging or understanding, even if the social context feels new. It reflects an innate sense of purpose, suggesting that this spiritual journey may hold greater meaning, reinforcing their resolve to explore further.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

From a Buddhist perspective, the narrator's experience in the Hong Kong Center illustrates the profound journey of self-discovery and the transformative power of perseverance in the face of obstacles. Initially expecting warmth and acceptance, the narrator quickly learns that genuine spiritual environments often prioritize their own internal practices over external validation or accommodation for newcomers. This reflects an essential teaching in Buddhism: the community (sangha) exists primarily for mutual support in the cultivation of wisdom and compassion, rather than as a platform for personal acceptance.

The narrator's initial disheartenment serves to highlight the concept of attachment to expectation. The realization that their sense of rejection was tied to their own ego—specifically, the desire to fit into

a culture without truly understanding or respecting it—illuminates the path toward spiritual growth. This understanding aligns with the Buddhist practice of letting go of ego concerns and developing humility, both crucial for genuine engagement with the teachings.

The acknowledgment of their fortune to access esteemed teachers further underlines a pivotal principle in Buddhism: recognizing the value in what one has, even amidst hardship. The protagonist's shift in perspective transforms initial feelings of alienation into gratitude and recognition of the opportunity to learn from revered figures in the tradition. This reinforces the notion that spiritual growth often arises from an attitude of openness and receptivity, even when faced with cultural or personal challenges.

The cultural barriers encountered by the narrator—such as language differences and unfamiliar customs—underscore the significance of diligence in practice. They remind practitioners that spiritual journeys are often fraught with obstacles, both internal and external, but they can lead to profound insights and deeper connections with the teachings. The feeling of being a "trespasser" resonates with a common spiritual lesson: humility is essential on the path, acknowledging one's position as a learner within a larger tradition.

The closing reflection, where the narrator feels a sense of familiarity within the center, echoes the Buddhist idea of connection to the Dharma. This sensation suggests a deeper, perhaps karmic, resonance with the teachings and practices, reinforcing the belief that individuals may be drawn back to certain teachings and environments, as if they are returning home. This sentiment encloses the narrative with a sense of possibility and belonging, suggesting that even in initial discomfort, one can cultivate a profound relationship with their spiritual path.

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Ultimately, the narrator's journey in the Hong Kong Center serves as a poignant reminder that perseverance, humility, and a willingness to engage with the teachings—despite external barriers—are essential elements in the pursuit of spiritual understanding. The story illustrates that true belonging often emerges not from immediate acceptance but from the depth of commitment to practice, learning, and growing within a community dedicated to the path of compassion and wisdom.

We are reminded of the importance of humility and surrender in our spiritual journey. Their strict code of conduct was not a rejection, but rather a reflection of their own dedication to their practice.

Moving into strange situations, places where we don't know the rules or the language, is an ego-bruising experience. We're not fussed over. In fact, we're not needed at all.

Our hurt feelings can hold us back and confine us to the box of what's familiar, cutting us off from our potential. However, if we can simply let the ego go, we may earn a rare reward: the gradual sense of becoming a part of. It is a connection that can advance us profoundly.

May we all learn to approach our spiritual journey with humility and surrender, letting go of our own expectations and ego. May we cultivate patience, persistence, and humility in the face of uncertainty and challenge. And may we find peace and freedom in the simplicity of being present in each moment.



Chapter 6. Full Cup

I ventured to seek the counsel of Teacher, proposing a most curious notion: pursuing a degree in Buddhism at the university. I thought that by focusing on the teachings of a single deity, such as Chenrezig, the Buddha of Compassion, I might accelerate my understanding of the path. But Teacher's response was like a refreshing draught on a parched summer's day. He declared that my studies would be as fleeting as a summer breeze, and that my mind was not attuned to receive the true essence of the practice.

"Studying about Buddhism is akin to studying about basketball from a book," he said, "and then expecting to excel on the court without ever having picked up a ball. You must not confuse intellectual curiosity with true understanding."

He emphasized that self-study would lead me down a path of futility, for I would never possess the authority to impart the teachings to others. Only a lineage holder, one who has received the transmission of the teachings from their own teacher, can pass on this sacred knowledge.

To truly grasp the nature of a deity practice, I must first perform the practice itself. Only then could I receive the empowerment of the deity, allowing me to partake in the oral transmission of the teachings and participate in the puja.

Teacher's words were like a stern wind that rustled the leaves of my mind. "It makes no difference if you are a scholar or not," he said. "You cannot simply request teachings and expect them to be bestowed upon you. The guru will only transmit teachings when the disciple is prepared to receive them. And now, you are like this teacup—full to overflowing."

"What happens when more tea is poured into it?" he asked, his voice like a gentle stream. "It will be wasted, for there is no room

for further infusion. You must be an empty vessel, devoid of preconceptions and ego, if you hope to receive the transmission of teachings."

His words struck me like a thunderclap on a summer's day, awakening me to the true nature of spiritual pursuit. I realized that I had been trying to fill myself with knowledge, rather than emptying myself of my own ego and preconceptions. The realization was both humbling and liberating, for I knew that I had much to learn and many empty cups to fill along the way.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

In this story, the narrator's eagerness to learn and deepen their understanding of Buddhism mirrors a common theme among individuals with ND: an acute intellectual curiosity and drive for knowledge. The desire to pursue a degree focused on a specific figure, such as Chenrezig (the Buddha of compassion) demonstrates a thoughtful approach to learning but illustrates a potential misalignment with how wisdom is truly acquired in Buddhist practice. The contrast between theoretical knowledge and experiential understanding is a familiar challenge faced by many on the spectrum, who may find deep engagement with concepts but struggle with the application in more fluid, experiential contexts.

The teacher's metaphor of studying Buddhism through books being akin to learning basketball from a manual resonates with those who might find it challenging to move from theory to practice. The protagonist's initial belief that one can gain understanding through academic study alone reflects a common inclination among individuals who may prefer concrete information over more abstract, experiential learning. This may speak to the broader tension between the comfort of structured knowledge and the complexities of lived experience that are fundamental to spiritual practice.

When the teacher describes the narrator as a “teacup—full to overflowing,” it symbolizes a crucial moment of self-awareness. The protagonist’s realization of their preconceptions and ego being barriers to genuine learning parallels the struggle some individuals with ND experience in navigating social and emotional landscapes. The idea of needing to become an “empty vessel” to truly absorb teachings encapsulates the concept of letting go—something that might be particularly challenging for someone who often relies on structure and familiarity as a source of comfort.

The moment when the teacher points out that teachings can only be given when the disciple is prepared to receive them reflects a deep understanding of the learning process, emphasizing the importance of readiness, openness, and humility. For the protagonist, this epiphany is a moment of liberation, allowing room for growth and a more compassionate perspective towards their spiritual journey. It serves as a reminder that true learning often requires a willingness to set aside one’s preconceptions—an essential aspect for anyone wishing to deeply engage with complex philosophical or spiritual teachings.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

From a Buddhist perspective, the narrator’s journey illustrates a fundamental teaching on the essence of learning and spiritual growth. The teacher’s wisdom emphasizes that intellectual knowledge of Buddhist concepts, while valuable, is not a substitute for direct experience and practice. By equating studying about Buddhism to learning basketball from a book, the teacher highlights a critical insight: true understanding arises not from mere information but from deep engagement with the practices that embody those teachings.

The teacher's assertion about the futility of self-study without experiential practice underscores a vital principle in Buddhism: the importance of applying teachings through direct experience. This aligns with the idea that teachings are most impactful when accompanied by the sincere practice of meditation, compassion, and mindfulness. The protagonist's initial view of education as predominantly intellectual reflects a common misconception that can lead practitioners away from the heart of the teachings, which demand an intimate experience with the principles.

The metaphor of the "full cup" serves as a powerful illustration of the Buddhist concept of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). In this context, being an "empty vessel" signifies the need to let go of preconceived notions, ego-driven desires, and intellectual arrogance in order to be truly receptive to the wisdom of the dharma. Teacher's reminder that more tea will be wasted if poured into an already full cup speaks to the importance of humility and the necessity to create space for genuine understanding. It affectionately emphasizes that spiritual growth is both a process of dropping burdens and cultivating a receptive mindset.

The narrator's moment of insight—realizing the need to empty oneself for deeper learning—reflects a key turning point in their spiritual journey. This awakening is both humbling and empowering, as it lays the groundwork for a more authentic approach to practice. Embracing emptiness allows for the richness of the teachings to seep into one's being; it is through this humility that the teacher can impart the wisdom of the lineage.

Ultimately, this story encapsulates the journey of moving from theoretical knowledge to experiential wisdom, reinforcing that true spiritual pursuits require not just interest but a profound shift in approach. The narrator's realization signifies the importance of being

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open, adaptable, and willing to let go as one navigates the transformative path toward genuine understanding and connection with the teachings. The teacher's nurturing guidance fosters a deeper recognition of the interplay between knowledge and experience, inviting the protagonist to engage fully with their spiritual path.

As we sit in stillness, we are reminded of the profound concept of *sunyata*, or emptiness, which is often associated with the idea of being like an empty vessel. This term is not just a philosophical framework, but a lived experience that encourages us to let go of fixed concepts and attachments.

When we recognize the emptiness of our thoughts and preconceived notions, we are able to approach teachings with an open heart and mind. We are no longer bound by our own limited understanding, and we are free to explore new ideas and perspectives.

The concept of the "beginner's mind" is closely related to this idea of emptiness. It emphasizes the importance of approaching the practice and teachings with openness and curiosity, regardless of previous experience. This means that we do not come to the practice with a fixed idea of what we want to achieve, but rather with an open heart and mind, ready to learn and grow.

In Vajrayana, this concept is often referred to as being like an "empty vessel," waiting to be filled with the wisdom and compassion of the teachings. This is not a static state, but a dynamic process that requires us to be open and receptive to new experiences and insights.

As we practice *sunyata*, we are encouraged to let go of our own ego and conditioning, and to approach life with a sense of wonder and

curiosity. We are not limited by our own narrow perspectives, but are able to see the world in all its complexity and beauty.

May we cultivate this sense of openness in our own practice, allowing ourselves to be like an empty vessel, ready to be filled with the wisdom and compassion of the teachings. May we approach life with a sense of wonder and curiosity, and may we find peace and freedom in the simplicity of being present in each moment.

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Chapter 7. Dropping the Ball

Our teachers guide us along the path to enlightenment, but it's up to us to make progress. One approach is for the teacher to reveal the true nature of the Mind, and they do this in unique ways for each devotee. "I have to adapt to each person's character," our Teacher once said.

I experienced a poignant attempt at evoking rigpa, or realization of the true nature of Mind, when the Teacher presented me with a stunning silk and wool shawl. The intricate design of royal blue, gold, and cream seemed to dance before my eyes as he held it up.

"Look closely", the Teacher said in a mesmerizing tone. "What do you see?"

The patterns seemed to shimmer and hiss, like a breeze through a field of flowers.

The room grew silent, heavy with anticipation. Lamas hovered in the background, waiting for me to grasp the concept of non-duality—that the self and the universe are one. But I was unable to articulate it. The shawl seemed to radiate a warm light as I gazed at it, lost in its beauty. And then, a ramen vendor's call drifted through the window, snapping me back to reality. I looked around, meeting the expectant gaze of my teachers, and blurted out, "This shawl is a beautiful shade of blue! My favorite color!"

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The room fell silent once more, this time heavy with disappointment. I felt like a fool, like a dog that fixates on its owner's finger rather than gazing at the moon they're pointing to. I asked my teacher, "Did I fail? Are you giving up on me now?" He smiled and replied, "I am not going to give up on you. You may try to give up, but the guru never gives up on the disciple. Through devotion and compassion, there is always a connection—damtsig—and everything is possible."

Reflection from the ND Perspective

In this story, the narrator's experience encapsulates an internal struggle that resonates deeply with the complexities faced by individuals with ND. The teacher's attempt to guide the acolyte's realization of the true nature of the Mind through the beautiful shawl illustrates a profound lesson in non-duality—a concept that can be abstract and elusive, particularly for someone who may find themselves oriented towards literal interpretations and sensory details.

As the narrator initially becomes entranced by the shawl's colors and patterns, their intense focus highlights a characteristic often shared among those with ND: a deep engagement with specific sensory stimuli. In fact, the acolyte has synesthesia, or sensory crossover: a perceptual phenomenon common among those on the autism spectrum in which they experience two senses simultaneously and involuntarily. In this case, seeing the brilliant colors of the shawl might have caused the acolyte to also hear beautiful music, feel strong emotions or taste the colors.

However, when prompted to articulate the understanding of non-duality - the recognition that there is a single, infinite and indivisible reality, they feel a sudden shift in atmosphere, which may symbolize

the social pressures that can often accompany such moments. The expectation from the teacher enhances their anxiety as they grapple with articulating an abstract concept under scrutiny while experiencing a multiplicity of senses.

When the narrator inadvertently conveys their admiration for the shawl's color rather than grasping the deeper philosophical implication, it triggers a wave of disappointment. This reaction conveys the frustration felt not only by the protagonist but also by those who may struggle to meet the expectations of their environment. The metaphor of a dog fixating on a finger instead of the moon aptly summarizes the experience of missing the intended meaning while being overwhelmed by sensory observations. The protagonist's feelings of inadequacy—a sense of having 'failed'—exemplify an acute sensitivity to perceived social judgment, a common experience for individuals on the spectrum.

The teacher's gentle reassurances serve as a crucial element in this narrative, highlighting the important role of patience and understanding in educational settings. Their affirming words remind the narrator that growth is a process, and connection can exist even in moments of struggle. The reference to *damtsig*, or the bond between teacher and disciple, emphasizes that true learning is not defined by instant comprehension but by persistent compassion and support. Ultimately, this moment reflects the importance of recognizing the different ways individuals engage with the world around them and how that can shape their personal journeys of growth and understanding.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

From a Buddhist perspective, the protagonist's experience serves as a metaphor for the path toward enlightenment and self-realization.

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The teacher's presentation of the shawl is likened to a skillful means (upaya) employed to convey the profound concept of non-duality. In this encounter, the shawl symbolizes both the interconnectedness of all things and the multifaceted nature of existence, inviting contemplation beyond surface-level observations.

The protagonist's mesmerization with the colors and patterns reflects a common human tendency to focus on distinctions and dualities—such as Self versus Other. Here, the teacher's invitation to "look closely" serves as a call to transcend dualistic thinking, which is often a stumbling block on the path to understanding rigpa. The moment of being snapped back to reality by the ramen vendor's call becomes a metaphor for the distractions that can pull one away from deeper insight, illustrating the struggle between the profound and the mundane that many experience in their spiritual endeavors.

When the protagonist exclaims their admiration for the "beautiful shade of blue," the subsequent silence filled with disappointment reflects the experience of attachment to expectations, both from oneself and others. This moment serves as a lesson in understanding that growth is not linear and that each individual's journey unfolds in its own time. The teacher's response reinforces a fundamental Buddhist teaching: compassion and non-attachment. Their assurance that the guru never gives up on the disciple embodies the idea that true mentorship is rooted in unwavering support, allowing space for mistakes and misunderstandings as part of the learning process.

The concept of damtsig—the bond between teacher and disciple—highlights the importance of compassion along the path. It suggests that the relationship itself is a shared journey towards enlightenment, emphasizing that connection and devotion to one another pave the way for realization. This experience echoes a central tenet of

Buddhism: enlightenment is not solely an individual pursuit but often flourishes in the nurturing embrace of community and mentorship.

Ultimately, this poignant moment becomes not only a lesson in understanding non-duality but also an illustration of patience, compassion, and the recognition that the path to realization is adorned with both challenges and affirmations. Through this lens, the protagonist's perceived failure transforms into an opportunity for growth, understanding, and deeper connection within the framework of their spiritual practice.

As we sit in stillness, we are reminded of the profound concept of rigpa, a state of pure awareness that lies at the heart of Tibetan Buddhism. Rigpa is not just a concept or an idea, but a direct experience of the true nature of our own mind. It is a recognition of the inherent clarity and openness that exists within us, untainted by thoughts, emotions, and distractions.

Rigpa is often described as "pristine awareness" or "pure awareness," and it is considered essential for spiritual awakening and liberation. It is the fundamental nature of consciousness itself, not a thought or mental process. When we recognize rigpa, we are no longer bound by the limitations of our ordinary mind, which is clouded by ignorance, attachment, and misunderstanding.

Rigpa embodies the principle of non-duality, transcending the distinctions between subject and object, self and other, and existence and non-existence. In this state, we recognize that the natural state of the mind is clear, empty, and interconnected with all phenomena. This realization can lead to profound wisdom and compassion, as we see the world as it truly is.

The practice of rigpa involves quieting the mind and allowing ourselves to access this pure awareness. This may involve

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meditation, contemplation, and utilizing specific teachings. Our teachers may also introduce us directly to rigpa, helping us to experience it in a way that goes beyond intellectual understanding.

Once recognized, rigpa is not just a fleeting experience, but a state that can be integrated into our daily lives. We can maintain a sense of clarity and presence, regardless of external circumstances. This means being fully present in each moment, without attachment or aversion.

May we cultivate this sense of rigpa in our own practice, recognizing the inherent clarity and openness that exists within us. May we see the world as it truly is, free from distortion and illusion. May we experience profound wisdom and compassion, and may we find peace and freedom in the simplicity of being present in each moment.



Chapter 8. Outcast

One day, our center group and the lamas embarked on an outing to a temple in the hills for a special puja. Before we began, we gathered in a pavilion for lunch. As I approached the round tables, the members consistently refused to let me join them, despite the availability of empty seats. I was met with excuses: "You can't sit here," "This seat is saved," and "There's no space."

Feeling rejected and frustrated, I sought out the lamas' table, hoping to lodge a complaint about the members' behavior. But they simply chuckled and said, "You can't sit at this table. Lamas only." The sting of their words was like a knife to my heart.

I rushed out of the pavilion, feeling like I was being forced back into the darkness. The streets blurred as I stumbled down the road, eventually finding solace at a fruit stall where I purchased a banana and juice. Behind the shop, I hid among the trees, clutching my meager lunch and trying to hold back tears. The pain of rejection was overwhelming, and I felt like I had been punched in the gut.

As the tears flowed uncontrollably, I realized that I had thought I had grown accustomed to the followers' constant criticism and ill will. But this time, their rejection had pierced my very soul. I eventually made my way back home, avoiding the main roads to avoid being seen.

For days, I wallowed in misery, too ashamed to face the center or anyone else. But eventually, I emerged from my self-imposed exile, donning a mask of happiness and going through the motions of my daily routine. Then, a new phase began...

Reflection from the ND Perspective

The narrator's reaction is particularly relevant to individuals on the autism/ADHD spectrum.

This is a heightened sensitivity to rejection, where individuals perceive and react intensely to perceived interpersonal rejection or criticism. For the narrator, the consistent refusal to allow them to sit at the tables, combined with past experiences of exclusion, likely exacerbates this sensitivity.

The experience of being deliberately left out from a group can lead to feelings of loneliness and worthlessness. This can be particularly impactful for individuals on the autism/ADHD spectrum, who may already struggle with social interactions.

Often associated with ADHD, emotional dysregulation refers to difficulty managing intense emotions. The narrator's uncontrollable tears and overwhelming feelings of being "punched in the gut" are indicative of this concept.

Common in individuals on the autism spectrum, masking involves concealing one's true feelings or behaviors to conform to social norms. The narrator describes putting on a "mask of happiness," highlighting the effort to appear socially acceptable despite inner turmoil.

While not described explicitly, the narrator's need to retreat and hide suggests a possible sensory overload, where the combination of emotional distress and the physical setting becomes overwhelming.

The act of retreating and seeking solitude serves as a coping mechanism to manage distressing emotions. Such mechanisms can

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be both a source of temporary relief and a way to avoid further confrontation with painful stimuli.

Despite the emotional fallout, the narrator's ability to eventually reintegrate into daily life demonstrates resilience, which is the capacity to recover and adapt despite adversity.

The fear and avoidance of returning to the center after being rejected may indicate social anxiety, which involves a heightened fear of negative evaluation and interaction.

Broader Considerations:

Although it can be particularly difficult for individuals on the autism/ADHD spectrum, experiencing rejection can be challenging for anyone. To help cope with such experiences recognize that it's normal to feel upset, hurt, or frustrated when faced with rejection. Allow yourself to experience these emotions without judgment. Understanding that your feelings are valid is the first step in processing them.

Identify a place or activity where you feel comfortable and safe to retreat to when facing intense emotions. This could be a physical space, like a favorite room, or an activity like drawing or listening to music that provides comfort.

Practice being kind to yourself. Rejection is not a reflection of your worth. Remind yourself of your strengths and qualities, and remember that being different is not only normal but can also be a strength.

Try to see rejection as a learning opportunity rather than a personal failure. Consider what, if anything, you can learn from the experience to help in future interactions.

Connect with someone you trust—a friend, family member, therapist, or support group—who understands your experiences. Talking about your feelings with others who can relate can provide comfort and perspective.

When emotions become overwhelming, grounding techniques such as deep breathing, counting, or focusing on sensory experiences can help you stay present and calm.

Anticipate situations where rejection might occur and plan how you'll handle them. Having a script or a set of responses ready can make you feel more prepared and confident.

Find ways to express yourself that feel authentic, whether that's through art, writing, or a hobby. This can be an outlet for emotions and a way to build self-esteem.

Mindfulness practices, such as meditation or yoga, can help increase emotional awareness and regulation, making it easier to navigate difficult social situations.

Reflect on your social interactions and consider whether those around you are supportive and accepting. It's important to surround yourself with people who appreciate and respect you for who you are.

Work on building social skills at your own pace, seeking resources and support that are tailored to your needs. This can enhance your confidence in social settings over time.

Acknowledge and celebrate your efforts to engage with others and cope with challenging situations. Each step forward, no matter how small, is an achievement.

Remember, rejection is a part of life, but it doesn't define you. By developing coping strategies and building a supportive community, you can navigate these experiences with resilience and strength.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

As we sit in stillness, we are reminded that life is a fluid and dynamic process. Like the river, it constantly flows and changes, never staying the same for a moment. And yet we often try to control and manipulate it, trying to make it conform to our own desires and expectations.

In Vajrayana Buddhism, we are encouraged to foster understanding, acceptance, and compassion. Buddhism teaches the importance of being mindful of one's emotions and thoughts. By observing the feeling of rejection without immediate reaction, one can gain insight into its nature and reduce its power over them.

Recognizing that all feelings, including rejection, are temporary can help individuals detach and not see them as a defining part of their identity.

Buddhism encourages letting go of the need for external validation. Understanding that true happiness comes from within can reduce suffering associated with feeling rejected.

Practicing compassion and loving kindness (metta) towards oneself and others can alleviate the pain of rejection. It involves being kind to oneself and understanding that everyone faces rejection at times.

By applying these teachings, may we cultivate a sense of peace and a more balanced perspective when faced with rejection. May we learn to trust in the flow of life, and may we understand that by the

Chloe Solo

principle of interconnectedness, rejection is part of a larger experience and not solely about us.

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Chapter 9. Spontaneity - The Turning Point

A few days after being shunned at the luncheon, when the evening program had concluded at the center, a small group of devotees gathered in the entrance hallway. As a newcomer and a foreigner, I was still being treated with suspicion by the members, so I hesitated to join the conversation, fearing I wouldn't be welcome. I stood aside, observing the group, not wanting to ask what was going on and risk being rebuffed.

Just then, the Teacher emerged from his chambers, followed by a flurry of attending lamas in maroon robes. They disappeared out the front door, with the center's resident lama bringing up the rear. As he glanced back at me, I froze in surprise. The followers all filed out after him, leaving me alone in the hall.

Days later, the same scene played out again. This time, I was more prepared and quickly joined the group as they turned the corner. To my surprise, they led me to a fancy restaurant. The lama signaled me with a nod, and I took my place at the tail end of the group.

As we entered the restaurant, the host asked, "Party of twelve?" The lama replied, "Thirteen," nodding at me in approval. We were seated at a round table, and before we knew it, huge platters of sumptuous food started arriving.

I was hesitant to serve myself too much, although my funds were low and I had been surviving on congee (rice porridge) for months. But the Teacher encouraged me to eat, instructing the followers next to me to place the choicest dumplings in my bowl from

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the communal dishes. Feeling like I was receiving a reward for finally getting something right, I was in bliss.

In that moment, I felt like I had finally found my place among the group. The Teacher's kindness and generosity had finally broken down my barriers. I felt like I was part of something special, and was finally being accepted.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

The narrator's experience in this story provides a look into the psychological dynamics of social acceptance and belonging, particularly from the perspective of someone who may feel like an outsider.

Initially, the narrator's hesitation to join the conversation reflects a sense of social anxiety and fear of rejection. This is not uncommon for newcomers or individuals who have previously faced exclusion, as they may be hyper-aware of social cues and potential rebuff. Such caution can stem from past negative experiences, creating a barrier to initiating interactions.

Standing aside and observing the group is a strategy often used by those who are uncertain in social situations. By watching others, the narrator can learn acceptable behaviors and norms within the group, which can inform future interactions and reduce the likelihood of negative responses.

The surprise at the lama's acknowledgment suggests a readiness for change despite past reservations. The previous experience of exclusion may have heightened the impact of even a small act of recognition, providing a glimmer of hope and the possibility of acceptance.

In the later encounter, the narrator demonstrates resilience and adaptability. By joining the group more readily, they show a willingness to change their approach in response to previous learning. This indicates a growing confidence in engaging with the group, even in the face of uncertainty.

The experience at the restaurant, particularly the Teacher's act of encouraging the narrator to eat and directing others to share food with them, serves as a powerful form of social validation. Such acts can significantly boost self-esteem and foster a sense of belonging, as they signal acceptance and recognition from authoritative figures within the group.

The Teacher's generosity and encouragement to partake in the meal is a reciprocal gesture that breaks down the barriers of suspicion and isolation. This act symbolizes an inclusion into the social circle, transforming the narrator's experience from one of exclusion to acceptance. In psychological terms, this positive reinforcement can reinforce group cohesion and the narrator's sense of identity within the group.

The feeling of bliss and the perception of being rewarded enhances the narrator's emotional connection to the group. Positive emotions play a crucial role in forming and strengthening social bonds, promoting further engagement and cooperation.

This event marks a significant turning point for the narrator, as they transition from feeling like an outsider to being an accepted member of the group. Such milestones contribute to identity formation, where the individual starts seeing themselves as part of a community, which is fundamental for psychological well-being.

This experience illustrates the transformative power of social acceptance and kindness in overcoming barriers of suspicion and

self-doubt. For individuals who feel like outsiders, acts of inclusion and kindness from group members can have a significant positive impact on their self-esteem and sense of belonging, encouraging further social engagement and integration.

What Changed?

The shift in the narrator's experience from rejection in the first story to acceptance in the second can be influenced by several factors, and it is insightful to consider both external and internal changes that may have contributed to this transition.

In the first story, the narrator, being a newcomer and a foreigner, may have faced initial rejection due to unfamiliar social norms or cultural misunderstandings. The community might have been wary of outsiders, which is not uncommon in close-knit groups that may prioritize established relationships.

The narrator's perception of rejection may have been heightened by previous experiences and sensitivity to social exclusion. Over time, as they became more familiar with the environment and the people, their perception might have shifted, allowing them to interpret interactions more positively.

Over the course of the narratives, the group's perception of the narrator may have evolved. The initial skepticism could have dissipated as they observed the narrator's continued presence and interest in being part of the community, leading to greater acceptance.

In the second story, the Teacher and the lama play significant roles in mediating social acceptance. Their acknowledgment and inclusion of the narrator in the restaurant outing signal to the rest of the group

that the narrator is welcomed. This endorsement can greatly influence group behavior, leading to broader acceptance.

It is possible that members of the group, or the lamas, reflected on the previous incident and realized the impact of their behavior on the narrator. Witnessing the narrator's visible distress could have invoked empathy, prompting a change in how they engaged with the narrator subsequently.

It's plausible that the initial situation at the luncheon and subsequent acceptance were deliberately orchestrated by the lamas as a lesson in humility, patience, or the transient nature of social acceptance. Such experiences are not uncommon in spiritual teachings aimed at fostering inner growth.

The ordeal of the first story might have catalyzed personal growth for the narrator, leading to a more open and confident approach in subsequent interactions. This internal shift could have been perceived by others, facilitating more positive responses.

Ultimately, social dynamics are complex and multifaceted. Both the perception of the narrator and the actions of the group likely played roles in the evolving situation. Whether it was a naturally unfolding process or an intentional lesson facilitated by the lamas, the text emphasizes the potential for transformation through understanding, empathy, and the kindness of authority figures.

Reflection from the Buddhist Perspective

From a Buddhist teacher's perspective, the story "Spontaneity - Turning Point" offers a rich opportunity for reflection on key Buddhist principles such as mindfulness, non-attachment, and compassion, as well as the importance of community and awareness in personal growth.:

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The narrator's hesitation to join the group initially can be seen as an opportunity to practice mindfulness. Rather than being carried away by fear or preconceived notions of rejection, mindfulness encourages staying present and open to the unfolding moment without judgment or expectation. This practice can transform anxiety into awareness and curiosity.

The initial rejection and subsequent acceptance can both be viewed through the lens of non-attachment. In Buddhism, experiences are transient, and emotional reactions to them can lead to suffering if one becomes attached. By cultivating an attitude of non-attachment, the narrator might approach these social interactions with equanimity, accepting both inclusion and exclusion as impermanent.

The Teacher's act of including the narrator illustrates the power of compassionate action. This gesture of kindness reduces the narrator's feelings of exclusion and fosters a sense of belonging. It serves as a reminder of how compassion can break down barriers and create connections, encouraging others to embody this virtue within their own interactions.

The shift from rejection to acceptance underscores the importance of community (sangha) in one's personal and spiritual journey. A supportive community can play a transformative role in an individual's sense of belonging and self-worth. This story highlights the value of building and sustaining inclusive communities where people can find support and guidance.

The narrator's journey from an outsider to feeling accepted exemplifies the Buddhist teaching of anicca, the principle of impermanence. It reminds us that situations, emotions, and social dynamics are always changing. By recognizing this, one can navigate life's ups and downs with greater ease and flexibility.

The story also touches on the practice of letting go of egoic concerns about how one is perceived by others. The narrator's initial reluctance and later joyful acceptance reflect a shift from protecting the ego to opening up to experience. This can be a crucial step in the path towards spiritual liberation.

The narrative's conclusion at the restaurant highlights themes of gratitude and generosity. The narrator's deep sense of being accepted and valued can cultivate gratitude, which in turn fuels a cycle of generosity and kindness towards others.

As we reflect on these Buddhist principles, may we see such experiences as opportunities for inner transformation and spiritual growth. The story illustrates how these teachings can be lived and realized in everyday social interactions, guiding us towards greater harmony and insight.

As we sit in stillness, we are reminded spontaneity is about recognizing the inherent perfection of our own minds and allowing our actions to arise naturally and effortlessly. This recognition allows us to respond to situations with wisdom and compassion, without being burdened by fixed concepts or judgments.

In this tradition, the concept of rigpa or pure awareness refers to the innate openness, clarity, and spontaneity of the mind. When we act from this natural state, our actions arise spontaneously and naturally, without premeditation or obstruction. This is a powerful reminder that our true nature is already perfect, clear, and spontaneous.

The realization of non-duality is closely tied to spontaneity. In this perspective, the distinctions we typically make – between good and bad, right and wrong – are seen as constructs of the conceptual mind. With the realization of non-duality, our actions can arise

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naturally, reflecting a deeper wisdom that is beyond dualistic thinking.

The concept of emptiness (sunyata) is also critical to understanding spontaneity. When we realize that phenomena do not possess inherent existence, everything becomes fluid and interconnected. This realization allows for a spontaneous and flexible approach to life, where our actions can arise freely without being burdened by fixed concepts or judgments.

In Vajrayana teachings, practitioners are encouraged to act spontaneously in ways that effectively benefit others. This means responding to situations with wisdom and compassion, adapting our actions to the needs of the moment without being tied to rigid strategies or fixed responses.

The practice of deity yoga is another way to cultivate spontaneity. By visualizing ourselves as a chosen deity, we embody their qualities and learn to blend our actions and intentions with theirs. This allows for natural expressions of compassion, wisdom, and power.

Ultimately, spontaneity is about letting go of the need to control outcomes or cling to specific results. It requires a relaxed and open attitude, allowing our actions to arise from the natural flow of experience rather than from ego-driven desires or expectations. May we cultivate this sense of spontaneity in our own practice, allowing our actions to arise naturally and effortlessly from the depths of our own true nature.



Chapter 10. The Learning Cycle

I felt like I was being put through a cycle of intense learning and growth. Every significant event seemed to hold a lesson, and I would find myself reflecting on the teachings in my mind. The emotional impact of each incident would be followed by a moment of clarity, in which I would realize the lesson and understand why it had happened.

After that, I would go through a period of adjustment, as my mind adapted to the new level of awareness and clarity. This would be followed by a breather, where things would go smoothly for a while. But then another cycle would begin: crisis, teaching, clarity, adjustment.

This cycle repeated itself with incredible rapidity, leaving me feeling exhausted and drained. I asked my guru, "Who is teaching me these things?" His reply was simple: "It is the Lord Buddha." At the time, I wasn't familiar with the concept of "mind transmission," but it was clear that this was what was happening.

I even asked my teacher for a break from this grueling process, and my request was granted. Two weeks passed before the next cycle began, and I was relieved to have some respite. But eventually, the intensity of the process continued for about a year.

As I progressed through this cycle, I noticed that my mind was becoming smoother and more refined. Although disturbances still occurred, they were less frequent and caused less emotional reaction. Instead of becoming emotionally engaged, I began to

observe occurrences with detachment, saying to myself, "Okay, I've got that one. NEXT!"

Reflection from the ND Perspective

In this story, the narrator describes a cycle of learning and spiritual growth. For many people, especially those on the ND spectrum, life can feel overwhelming. The narrator experiences a series of intense life lessons, but by recognizing a pattern—crisis, teaching, clarity, adjustment—they bring order to a chaotic process. This pattern provides structure, helping them make sense of each event.

People with ADHD often have an extraordinary ability to focus intensely on things that interest them. The narrator's reflection on each part of the cycle shows this deep focus, allowing them to fully engage with their spiritual journey, even though it's exhausting.

Initially, the narrator feels drained by the rapid cycle of learning. This is common for many, as constantly facing new challenges can be emotionally taxing. Over time, they develop a more detached, observational approach. Instead of reacting emotionally, they begin to view each lesson with curiosity, saying, "Okay, I've got that one. NEXT!" This helps them manage emotions and stay balanced.

Recognizing the need for rest is key for everyone, especially those who may get easily overwhelmed. The narrator wisely requests a pause from the intense cycles, allowing time to recharge. This break proves essential to sustain long-term growth.

The narrator experiences learning in a direct, intuitive way, described as "mind transmission." This straightforward understanding might reflect how some neurodivergent people often grasp complex concepts quickly, without traditional studying.

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The story shows a journey of transformation, highlighting how the narrator uses their unique traits to navigate challenges and grow. By embracing the cycle, they learn to handle emotions better, focus on growth, and find peace in the process. Ultimately, it's about personal resilience and learning to thrive in one's way, offering lessons everyone can learn from.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

In Vajrayana Buddhism, the path of spiritual development is often described in stages or phases, each designed to purify, transform, and ultimately lead the practitioner toward enlightenment.

A practitioner first usually undertakes Preliminary Practices known as Ngöndro. These are foundational exercises meant to purify negative karma and accumulate merit. Ngöndro involves practices such as taking refuge, generating bodhicitta (the altruistic intention to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings), mandala offerings, prostrations, and Vajrasattva purification mantras. These lay the groundwork for more advanced practices by preparing the mind and body.

The Purification Phase involves practices specifically aimed at cleansing defilements and negative karma that obscure one's true nature. The Vajrasattva practice is one of the most renowned purification practices. It involves visualization, mantra recitation, and meditation to purify the practitioner's obscurations. Practitioners visualize the deity Vajrasattva above their head, receiving nectar or light that cleanses impurities. This phase is essential for preparing the practitioner to engage in deeper meditation and tantric practices.

During the Generation Phase (Kyerim), practitioners engage in deity yoga, visualizing themselves as enlightened deities. This phase involves elaborate visualization, mantra chanting, and meditative absorption to transform the practitioner's ordinary perception into the divine. By identifying with the deity, one begins to dissolve dualistic notions of self and other, cultivating the qualities of the deity.

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The Completion Phase (Dzogrim) focuses on realizing the ultimate nature of reality, often involving subtle energy practices such as working with channels (nadis), winds (pranas), and drops (bindus) within the body. This phase emphasizes direct experience of emptiness (sunyata) and the clear light nature of the mind. Advanced meditative absorption techniques are employed to transcend ordinary perception and stabilize the realization of non-dual awareness.

The final Integration and Attainment phase involves integrating the insights and transformations realized during practice into everyday life. The goal is to maintain an awareness of one's true nature consistently, regardless of circumstances. Practitioners strive to embody the qualities of compassion, wisdom, and skillful means, engaging with the world from a perspective of non-duality and enlightened activity.

Each phase of the Vajrayana path is interconnected and serves as a stepping stone towards greater clarity, compassion, and the realization of one's true nature. The progression through these phases is not necessarily linear, as practitioners may revisit earlier phases to reinforce their practice and understanding. Ultimately, the Vajrayana path aims to transform ordinary experience into opportunities for enlightenment, with the guidance and support of a qualified guru being crucial throughout the journey.

As we sit in silence, we are reminded of the profound concept of mind transmission, or direct transmission, in Vajrayana Buddhism. This ancient tradition recognizes the power of non-verbal communication, where profound teachings and spiritual insights can be transmitted directly from teacher to student.

In this tradition, the concept of mind transmission is closely tied to ear whispered teachings and telepathic understanding. All of these practices emphasize the importance of a deep, personal connection

between teacher and student, allowing for a direct and intimate conveyance of wisdom.

Direct transmission is not just about the verbal communication of doctrine, but rather a transmission of profound insights and realization that can occur without the use of words. This is a powerful reminder that true understanding can arise from a place beyond conceptual thought.

Mind-to-mind transmission takes this concept a step further, suggesting that a teacher can impart knowledge directly to the mind of a student, without the need for extensive explanation or academic study. This is a testament to the power of the teacher-student relationship, where the connection between two beings can transcend ordinary communication.

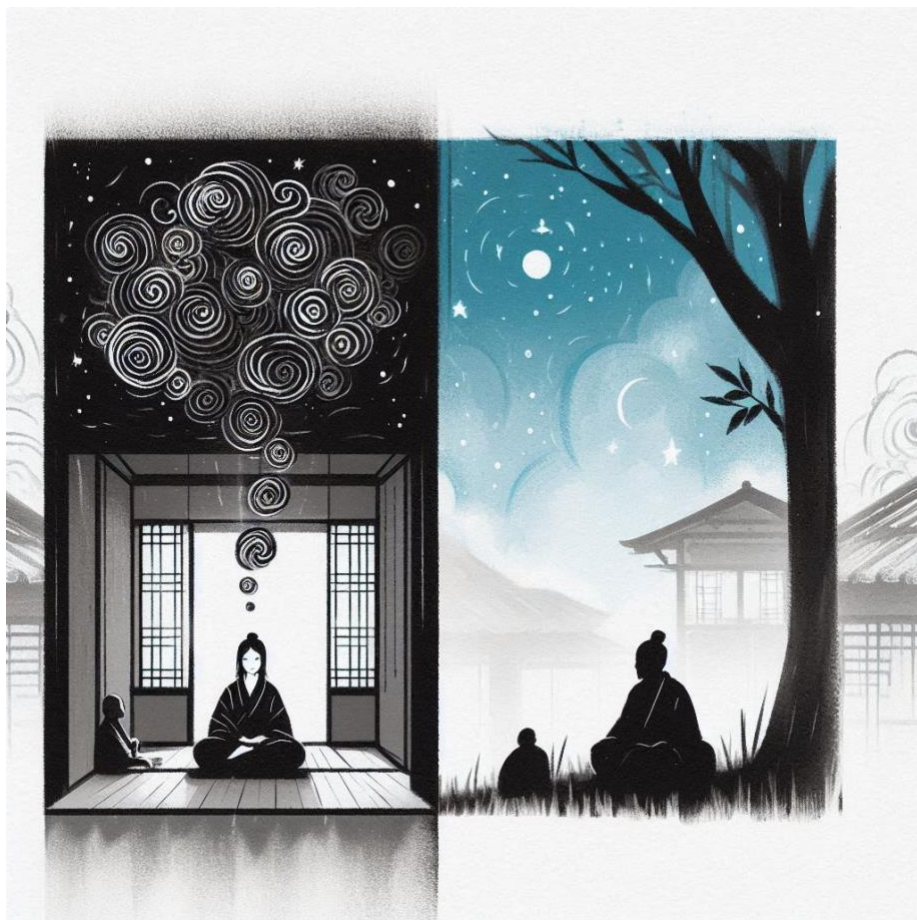
Ear whispered teachings add another layer to this concept, emphasizing the personal and intimate nature of the teacher-student relationship. This practice allows for the sharing of secret teachings or instructions, meant only for that student, which can be transformative and life-changing.

As we reflect on these concepts, we are reminded that true wisdom is not just about intellectual understanding, but about the direct experience of reality. Vajrayana Buddhism teaches us that our minds are characterized by clarity and potential, and that this state allows for a direct understanding of teachings that goes beyond conceptual cognition.

May we cultivate a sense of openness and receptivity in our relationships with our teachers and fellow practitioners, allowing for the transmission of wisdom and insight to occur in a profound and transformative way. May we recognize the intrinsic nature of our own

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minds, and may we use this recognition to deepen our understanding of ourselves and the world around us.



Chapter 11. Small Dark Room - A New Beginning

Finding an apartment near the Center was no easy feat, especially in the bustling Wan Chai district of Hong Kong. My friend, who still held hopes of becoming more than just a friend, introduced me to another acquaintance—a tough yet endearing woman who owned the eighth floor of a modest apartment building. She managed a mahjong parlor in the front and operated a guesthouse in the back.

Unfortunately, due to my sudden arrival, all the rooms in her popular guesthouse were booked solid for months. However, she took pity on me and offered me a small, dark room that had previously served as quarters for the staff. Though it was windowless and only suited for the necessities, the location was ideal for my newfound job and for staying close to the Center. With the rent being quite reasonable, I accepted her offer.

Seizing the opportunity, I committed to deepening my meditation practice in this peculiar space. The room's dark ambiance and quietude felt perfect, like a cave that would conserve its own energy. I embarked on the shinay practice of stilling the mind, as I had been taught. Ideally, this process should have taken ten to fifteen minutes for my mind to settle. However, my thoughts felt scattered, darting in ten different directions. It was a frustrating experience that felt more akin to herding cats.

After a series of unsuccessful daily attempts, I sought help from my teacher. I sat at his feet, hoping for guidance.

“Do not struggle with your thoughts,” he advised gently. “First, you must calm your energy.” His voice was low and steady as he guided me through a visualization. “Imagine a dark purple-blue lotus

in your heart chakra, facing downward. It releases a heavy drop of nectar that falls ever so slowly to your lower gate. As it descends, it passes through the lower gate and into the ground. The earth absorbs it.”

As we sat together in that tranquil silence, time felt suspended. Eventually, I found comfort in practicing this technique. Gradually, the incessant chatter in my mind faded, and stillness emerged. Even in my normal conscious state, thoughts began to arise slowly, each separated by a comfortable distance. My mind became an observer, listening rather than incessantly babbling.

Teacher, observing my progress, explained, “We can train the mind to rest one-pointedly by first using a support such as visualization. Then, over time, we can practice without that support. Eventually, the mind will abide in its essential nature. This is what we call calm-abiding.”

With each meditation session, I grasped the essence of his teachings more clearly, feeling the rough edges of my mind begin to smooth out. The little room had transformed from a mere space of necessity into a sanctuary of spiritual growth, a crucial step in my journey.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

In this story, the narrator undergoes a period of significant personal growth, using the physical and mental challenges they face as opportunities for development. Moving to a new location and settling into a small, dark room in a bustling district like Wan Chai represents a substantial environmental change. For those with autism or ADHD, adjusting to new surroundings can be overwhelming, as it can disrupt routine and sensory comfort. However, the narrator views the room's qualities positively, finding it suitable for meditation and personal growth, showing resilience and adaptability.

The narrator's initial struggle with quieting their mind—described as herding cats—indicates the challenge many people with ADHD face when trying to focus or meditate. Racing thoughts are common, and this metaphor perfectly encapsulates the difficulty in achieving mental stillness. Recognizing the issue, the narrator seeks guidance, a proactive step towards managing their internal landscape.

The teacher provides a visualization technique to calm the mind, demonstrating a tailored approach to mindfulness—beneficial for those who find traditional meditation challenging. Visualization engages creative and sensory processing areas of the brain, which can be particularly effective for individuals with ADHD or autism who may have strong imaginal capabilities.

The practice of visualization involving the dark purple-blue lotus and the nectar drop is a grounding technique. It helps shift the focus from chaotic thought processes to bodily awareness, reducing mental chatter. This aligns with psychological strategies that emphasize grounding and sensory focus as means to achieve calmness, develop stillness, and reduce anxiety or sensory overload.

As the narrator practices Mindfulness and Observant Detachment, they notice a gradual shift in how thoughts arise—slowly and separated by a comfortable distance. This transition towards an observant and non-reactive stance indicates improved emotional self-regulation and cognitive flexibility, as they learn to listen to their thoughts rather than being overwhelmed by them.

Over time, the small, dark room evolves from a mere living space into a sanctuary for meditation and personal growth. The narrator's acceptance and transformation of their environment mirror their growing mastery over their inner experience, highlighting how external conditions, when embraced with intent, can foster psychological and spiritual development.

The story highlights the narrator's journey from struggle to understanding, demonstrating how tailored guidance, visualization, and mindful practice can transform challenges into pathways for growth, particularly for those navigating neurodivergent landscapes. The process of finding calm-abiding reflects a meaningful step in cultivating a centered and resilient mindset.

Reflection From a Buddhist Perspective

As we sit in silence, surrounded by the stillness of the natural world, we are reminded of the profound benefits of solitude and silence in our spiritual practice. Just as ancient meditators retreated to caves to cultivate a deeper understanding of themselves and the world, we too can create a space that fosters contemplation and introspection.

Calm-abiding meditation, also known as Shamata, is a powerful tool for cultivating a stable and tranquil mind. By focusing on a chosen object, such as the breath or a mantra, we can train our minds to rest in a state of clarity and concentration. This foundation allows us to access deeper states of awareness and insight, ultimately revealing the nature of reality and our own true nature.

As we sit in stillness, we are reminded that the mind is constantly moving, wandering, and distracted. Yet, with patience and persistence, we can learn to observe these thoughts and emotions without judgment, gently bringing our focus back to the present moment. This process cultivates compassion and understanding for ourselves, recognizing that distractions are an inevitable part of the journey.

Calm-abiding prepares us for insight meditation, or Vipassana, where we can explore the deeper truths of impermanence, suffering, and non-self. By cultivating mindfulness, observing sensations, and letting go of attachment, we can gain a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

As we reflect on the power of solitude and silence, may we be reminded of the importance of creating space for contemplation and introspection in our daily lives. May we cultivate a sense of calm-

Chloe Solo

abiding and insight into the nature of reality, ultimately leading to greater compassion, wisdom, and peace.



Chapter 12. Teacher Request

In the early days of my journey, I approached my teacher with a request that carried a weight of seriousness and hope. “Would you please be so gracious as to be my teacher and allow me to be your disciple?”

He seemed slightly annoyed by my overly formal language, yet a twinkle in his eye revealed a hint of amusement. “What is it you think I have been doing all this time? Playing games?” he responded, his tone gruff but not unkind.

“I thought I was supposed to ask formally, to make it official,” I replied, a bit sheepishly.

He rolled his eyes, sighing with mock exasperation. “Very well, then. It is official. But don’t get upset if I pass you on to another teacher for certain aspects of your training.”

“I won’t get upset,” I assured him, hoping to maintain my composure.

“You say that now, but often disciples feel rejected when I hand them over to someone else,” he added, his gaze steady. “I will always be the one overseeing everything, all right? The best way for my students to deepen their connection with me is by going deeper into their practice, to meditate, and to learn more about what I am teaching them.”

“Thank you,” I said, feeling a swell of honor at his acknowledgment.

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Then, unexpectedly, he admonished me: “Don’t let anyone make you angry. Do shinay practice to calm down. Then do tonglen, as I taught you. Breathe in the negativity, disperse it, then breathe out compassion to that person.”

Just then, a lama entered the room with some documents for the Teacher to review. Curious if there was anything else he wanted me to do, I asked, “Is there anything else you want me to do?” “Yes,” he replied gruffly. “I want you to get out.”

The lama stifled a laugh, covering it with a cough as I bowed and backed out of the audience room, feeling both bewildered and amused.

Once outside, I encountered a fellow practitioner, who exuded a superior air that quickly turned my curiosity into annoyance. He began interrogating me about my practice—a conversation that is typically frowned upon within the community, as practice should not devolve into a competition.

“Have you even started doing Ngundro yet?” he asked, referencing the foundational practices that required one hundred thousand repetitions of prayers, prostrations, and other rituals. “If you’ve practiced daily for an hour, it can take up to six years to complete. At what point are you in your practice? Have you finished one hundred thousand prostrations? I’ve completed Ngundro two times.”

As he continued boasting and firing questions at me, I felt increasingly cornered and annoyed. The Teacher’s voice echoed in my mind, warning me not to let anger rise. Instead of telling this man he was being obnoxious, I focused inward, silently sending him thoughts of loving-kindness as I walked away.

In that moment, I was left pondering whether this encounter was merely a coincidence or if my teacher had orchestrated it as a test. Perhaps it was a lesson in compassion, resilience, and the importance of maintaining equanimity amidst challenges—exactly the teachings I needed to deepen my understanding on this transformative path.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

In this story, the narrator navigates the complexities of their spiritual journey with a focus on their relationship with their teacher and peers.

The narrator's initial, formal request for a teacher-disciple relationship may reflect a desire for clear boundaries and expectations, which can be particularly important for individuals with autism. Many neurodivergent people find comfort in explicit agreements and formalities, which help reduce uncertainty and anxiety. This theme of seeking structure can resonate with anyone who values clarity and order in relationships.

The teacher's amused but gruff response suggests layers of social interaction that the narrator initially takes very seriously. Interpreting nuanced social cues, such as humor mingled with directness, can be challenging for those with autism and ADHD. This moment highlights a universal theme of learning to read social dynamics and understanding that feedback can be delivered with warmth even if it seems blunt.

The teacher's guidance on managing anger and negativity through mindfulness practices like shinay (calm abiding) and tonglen (compassion meditation) reflects a crucial skillset. For the narrator, who might experience heightened emotional sensitivity due to ADHD, these practices offer tools to regulate emotions constructively. Many people, regardless of neurotype, face challenges in maintaining emotional balance and can benefit from mindfulness techniques to enhance self-regulation.

The encounter with the fellow practitioner introduces themes of ego, competition, and the struggle for spiritual or social superiority. The narrator's irritation mirrors a common human experience—dealing

with people who boast or undermine our own efforts. Here, the narrator applies their teacher's lessons to transform personal annoyance into an opportunity for compassion and inner growth. This reflects a widely relatable theme of rising above petty conflicts to maintain personal integrity.

The narrator wonders if the encounter was coincidental or a test orchestrated by the teacher. This introspection reveals a deeper understanding that life's challenges can serve as lessons in personal development. This reinforces the idea that external experiences often mirror our inner learning objectives, inviting a state of awareness and reflection that benefits anyone on a path of self-improvement.

The narrator's journey through these experiences illustrates how neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals alike can find common ground in the pursuit of clarity, emotional balance, and personal growth. The story portrays complex interactions with humor, humility, and mindfulness, offering a reflection on how we can all learn from life's unpredictable lessons.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

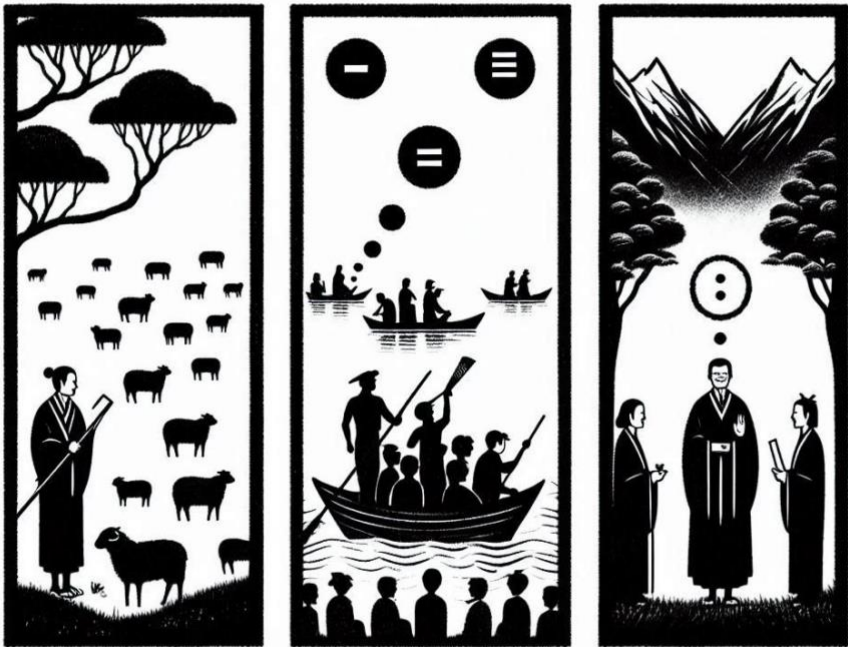
In Vajrayana Buddhism, the bond between student and teacher (or guru) is sacred and transformative, founded on mutual respect, sincerity, and commitment to spiritual growth. The teacher acts as a guide, offering personalized and powerful teachings that cater to the student's unique journey. Requesting someone to become a teacher is a significant spiritual act, demonstrating the student's commitment and acknowledgment of the teacher's wisdom and compassion.

A qualified teacher must possess deep understanding, practice experience, and ethical conduct, serving as both guide and role model. This relationship enables a supportive environment for spiritual growth, allowing students to seek guidance and address

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challenges. Both teacher and student have responsibilities; the student must engage sincerely and respectfully, while the teacher offers compassionate guidance tailored to the student's needs.

Teachers help students grasp both conventional and transcendental realities, aiding in navigating life's illusions while deepening insight into the mind's nature. This relationship can accelerate spiritual awakening and, in advanced stages, involves devotion founded on respect and appreciation of the teacher's insights. This devotion is not blind faith but part of merging one's mind with the enlightened mind of the teacher. Thus, the student-teacher relationship is pivotal, nurturing sincere growth and understanding on the path to enlightenment.



Chapter 13. Bodhisattva

One day, driven by curiosity, I approached the Teacher and asked, “What exactly is a bodhisattva?”

He looked thoughtful for a moment before responding, “A bodhisattva can take on different forms, much like a shepherd, a sailor, or a king. The most noble of these three is the shepherd, for he places the welfare of his sheep before himself. This represents the ‘Others first, me later’ approach to bodhisattvahood.”

I listened intently as he continued. “The second type is akin to a sailor. He desires to cross a vast ocean. So, he builds a boat and gathers a lot of people to travel together. This embodies the ‘All of us together’ approach.”

He paused before elaborating on the last figure. “The third type is like a king. He requires a castle, a queen, servants, an army, and land tilled by his serfs. His priority is to ensure his own safety and prosperity first. Once he is secure, he then turns his attention to caring for his people. This represents the ‘Me first, others second’ approach to being a bodhisattva.”

Intrigued, I couldn’t help but ask, “Teacher, are you a shepherd bodhisattva?”

With a sly smile, he replied, “Of course I am! And if you don’t believe me, you can go ask my lawyer!”

His playful response elicited laughter from me and lightened the atmosphere in the room. The Teacher’s ability to intertwine

profound insights with lightheartedness was a reminder that wisdom doesn't always have to be serious.

I reflected on his words, contemplating the different roles that bodhisattvas could play in the world. The imagery of the shepherd sacrificing for his flock resonated deeply. It inspired me to embrace a mindset of selflessness in my own interactions, to strive to put others before myself.

As I left the conversation, I carried with me not just the definitions of the bodhisattva but a gentle reminder of the balance between caring for oneself and for others. Would I, too, strive to embody the noble spirit of the shepherd in my daily life, or would I sometimes slip into the comforts of the sailor or the king? The exploration of these identities would become a continuous journey in my practice, one that would challenge and reshape my understanding of compassion and selflessness.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

In this story, the narrator engages with their teacher in an exploration of the concept of a bodhisattva, which provides an opportunity for personal reflection and growth.

The narrator's curiosity about what a bodhisattva is highlights a fundamental trait often found in individuals with autism or ADHD: a deep, intense interest in specific topics. This earnest quest for understanding can lead to profound insights and personal transformation. This curiosity is universal, reflecting a desire to comprehend and connect with broader spiritual and philosophical ideas.

The teacher's explanation using metaphors of a shepherd, sailor, and king offers the narrator diverse frameworks for understanding selflessness and leadership. These metaphorical roles provide grounding points for reflection, helping the narrator conceptualize complex virtues in relatable terms. This approach resonates with anyone trying to navigate their role in the world, offering relatable archetypes to embody different aspects of care and responsibility.

The teacher's playful response to the narrator's question about being a shepherd bodhisattva introduces humor into the conversation. This use of lightheartedness amid serious topics demonstrates an important coping mechanism for buffering intense intellectual or emotional exploration, a technique valuable to everyone, regardless of neurotype.

The imagery of the shepherd resonates deeply with the narrator, inspiring them to strive for selflessness in their own life. This reflects a broader human theme of grappling with the balance between personal needs and the needs of others—a central tenet in many

spiritual and ethical frameworks. This aspect of the narrative encourages self-reflection, challenging readers to consider how they prioritize and act upon their values.

The narrator leaves with a renewed commitment to exploring and embodying the principles of the bodhisattva. The acknowledgment that they may sometimes slip into the roles of the sailor or king speaks to the ongoing nature of personal development. This journey of self-improvement and self-awareness is universal, embracing the idea that growth is more about the path taken than the destination reached.

The story cleverly intertwines personal curiosity, metaphorical insight, and playful wisdom to explore significant themes of compassion, selflessness, and personal growth. The narrator's experience serves as a mirror, inviting all readers to reflect on their own approach to these timeless questions, indicating that the pursuit of such ideals is a lifelong endeavor filled with learning and laughter.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

In the midst of turmoil, our teacher's sense of humor shone brightly, reminding us that even in the most challenging situations, we can find wisdom and compassion. This reflection inspires us to embody the qualities of a Bodhisattva, an enlightened being who has vowed to attain Buddhahood and alleviate suffering for the benefit of all beings.

The Bodhisattva path is available to everyone, and striving to embody its qualities can transform our daily lives. By practicing kindness, patience, empathy, and generosity, we can cultivate a sense of compassion and work towards the benefit of others. This path often inspires us to engage in social justice, humanitarian work, and community service, reflecting our commitment to the welfare of all beings.

A Bodhisattva practices the Noble Eightfold Path by cultivating right understanding, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. They act out of great compassion while developing deep wisdom, understanding the interdependence and nature of all phenomena.

Bodhisattvas employ Skillful Means, adapting their teachings and help to meet the unique needs and abilities of different beings. They strive to attain twenty qualities that ripen awakening to enlightenment, including great kindness, compassion, steadfastness in liberating sentient beings, and more.

As we reflect on the Bodhisattva path, we are reminded that wisdom and compassion are not limited to formal vows or titles. We can all strive to embody these qualities in our daily lives, regardless of our circumstances. May we cultivate wisdom, compassion, and kindness

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in all our interactions, and may we work towards the benefit of all beings.



Chapter 14. Language Breakthrough - Beyond Words

In the beginning, I struggled to grasp the concept of chanting, and even more so with the intricate Tibetan words that danced around my mind. The prayer books at the center were a jumble of phonetic Tibetan letters, Tibetan script, and Chinese characters. Frustrated by my inability to understand what I was saying, I decided I needed to find some books that offered English translations. In a bustling city like Hong Kong, however, finding a bookstore dedicated to Buddhist literature in English felt like a daunting challenge, especially back in a time before the Internet and smartphones made such searches a breeze.

The following day, as I stepped out of my apartment, I was suddenly captivated by the sweet melodies of birdsong filling the air. I looked up, curious about their source, and spotted a birdcage perched on a seventh-floor balcony of the building across the street. To my astonishment, there hung a sign that read “Buddhist Bookshop.” It felt like a stroke of serendipity.

I hurried over, crossing the street with a newfound sense of purpose. As I pushed open the open-gated red door, a wave of fragrant incense enveloped me, welcoming me into the small, mystical space. From behind a shrine that seemed to hold stories of ages past, an ancient-looking man emerged, as if he had been patiently waiting for my arrival. Without uttering a word, he guided me to a bookshelf nestled in the corner and pulled out an old hardback book in English—a treasure trove on the Tara practice by Stephen Beyer.

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Clutching the book, I raced back across the street to my room. As I pored over its pages, everything about the practice began to crystallize in my mind. The meanings behind the words unfurled like petals of a blossoming flower, revealing a profound understanding that had previously eluded me. With the newfound clarity, I was finally able to keep up with the chanting in Tibetan, feeling the rhythm and essence of the words resonate within me. Each puja transformed into a vibrant tapestry, rich with meaning and intent, opening up before my very eyes.

Eager to share my discovery, I approached Teacher with enthusiasm. "I found a book that explains the translations!" I exclaimed, my voice brimming with excitement. His eyes sparkled with a knowing insight as he replied, "The words themselves are not important, but rather the meaning behind the words."

His words echoed in my mind long after our conversation ended, illuminating a vital lesson on my spiritual journey. It was a reminder that true understanding transcends language; it lies in the depth of intention and the heart's connection to the practice. From that moment on, I sought to engage with the essence of my practice, embracing both the beauty of the Tibetan language and the profound meanings that breathed life into those sacred sounds.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

In this story, the neurodivergent narrator experiences a meaningful breakthrough, transitioning from frustration with language barriers to a deeper understanding of spiritual practice.

The narrator's initial struggle with the complexities of chanting in Tibetan underscores a common experience for neurodivergent individuals who may have heightened sensitivity to language and sensory input. For those with autism or ADHD, navigating intricate language patterns can be particularly daunting, often necessitating alternative approaches to understanding. This resonates with anyone who has ever felt overwhelmed by a new or complex language, emphasizing the universal quest for clarity.

The fortuitous encounter with the Buddhist bookshop reflects a significant theme in many personal journeys—the unexpected moment of discovery that catalyzes change. This serendipity speaks to broader human experiences of finding guidance in surprising places, emphasizing the openness needed to recognize and embrace these moments of grace.

Upon finding the book that deciphers the Tibetan chants, the narrator experiences a profound sense of clarity and joy. This breakthrough moment illustrates the rewarding feeling of overcoming barriers to understanding, reinforcing the importance of persistence and curiosity. It's a recognition that resonates with everyone who has worked hard for a moment of insight or realized deeper truths in their pursuits.

The teacher's guidance to focus on the meaning behind the words rather than the words themselves highlights an essential aspect of spiritual and personal growth. For the neurodivergent mind, this shift

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from literal comprehension to an understanding of underlying intent can provide a more accessible pathway to learning. It also mirrors a universal theme: genuine understanding transcends surface-level details, inviting us all to connect more deeply with the essence of our experiences.

The narrator's journey from confusion to insight, and subsequently their engagement with the core meaning of their practice, demonstrates a powerful integration of knowledge and experience. This evolution from rote learning to heartfelt practice not only enriches their spiritual journey but also represents a broader pursuit of authenticity, where actions and beliefs align harmoniously.

This story captures the transformation from frustration to enlightenment, illustrating how obstacles in understanding can eventually lead to deeper connections with one's intentions and practices. It's a testament to the enriching power of patience, curiosity, and openness in learning, providing valuable insights that transcend individual differences, speaking to the shared human experience of aspiring towards meaning and wisdom.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

In this story, we see the profound power of intention and the heart's connection to our spiritual practice. The struggle to understand the chanting and intricate Tibetan words is an obstacle to meditation. The words themselves are a barrier.

But something remarkable happens. A bookshop seems to appear out of nowhere, and it contains exactly the needed text in English. In this serendipitous discovery, we are reminded that the universe often provides us with exactly what we need, when we need it most. The English words provide a bridge not just to the Tibetan words but to the meaning behind those words, and the chanting transformed into a vibrant tapestry of meaning and intent. This experience is a powerful reminder that true understanding transcends language; it lies in the depth of intention and the heart's connection to the practice.

Teacher's wise words, "The words themselves are not important, but rather the meaning behind the words," remind us that it is not about the specifics of the practice, but about engaging with the essence of it. True understanding comes not from mere intellectual comprehension, but from the heart's connection to the sacred sounds and words that fill our meditation practice.

May we all strive to engage with the essence of our practice, embracing both the beauty of the language and the profound meanings that breathe life into those sacred sounds. May we remember that true understanding transcends language, and that it is the heart's connection to our practice that ultimately brings us closer to the truth.

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Also, Buddhist teachings emphasize that direct experience is often more meaningful than language, encouraging experiential understanding rather than mere intellectual comprehension. May we reflect on the significance of intentions and contexts in our communication and strive to cultivate compassion, wisdom, and understanding in our interactions with others.



Chapter 15. Puckish Friends

The numerous lamas who traveled with the rinpoches always seemed friendly and eager to help. During one of my early visits as a new member of the Hong Kong center, I ventured into the kitchen behind the shrine room to fill a vase with water for the flowers. To get there, I had to walk through the dining room, where several lamas were gathered around a table, enjoying tea and engaging in light-hearted conversation. They beckoned me over with inviting smiles, and I gladly accepted their invitation to sit down.

However, my blissful moment was abruptly interrupted. Just as I took a sip of the steaming tea, Mrs. Chan, the wealthy proprietor of the building and the center's main patron, strode in. Like a hawk spotting its prey, she zeroed in on me with a piercing gaze. In a flurry of Cantonese exclamations, she swooped down, seized me by the arm with a grip that felt like talons, and yanked me out of the room. While Mrs. Chan shouted at me in a fervor all the way to the front door, I could hear the lamas struggling to suppress their laughter behind me, their wheezing giggles echoing in the background. Though I felt mortified, a small part of me couldn't help but appreciate the humor of the situation.

A few days later, I found myself captivated by the beautiful zen, or shawl, that one of the lamas was wearing. It was made of raw fuchsia silk, shimmering in the light. To my astonishment, he immediately took it off and offered it to me, following the Tibetan custom of generosity and hospitality when someone admires one's possessions. I politely tried to refuse, but he insisted, draping it over my shoulder while saying, "This is the way we wear it."

Enthralled by the vibrant shawl, I admired my reflection in a nearby window, feeling a connection to the compassion symbolized by the piece. However, my moment of joy was short-lived. Some of the elder members of the center entered the shrine room and immediately stormed over to us, arms crossed and faces flushed with indignation. “You’re not a lama! How dare you? Only lamas can wear a zen!” they shouted, their voices filled with outrage.

Though this was not true (anyone who had taken refuge vows in Tibetan Buddhism could wear one) I knew explanations would be futile. The lama beside me looked around, feigning innocence, and did not come to my defense. Feeling the pressure of their fury, I hurriedly removed the zen and tucked it into my bag, leaving my moment of joy behind.

This incident was a vivid illustration of the contrasting attitudes of the practitioners. The wealthy patronesses, especially the older ones, were fiercely protective and possessive of the lamas, while the lamas themselves were approachable, playful, and often infused with a delightful sense of humor. I realized that I had unwittingly stepped into a realm where cultural norms and expectations created a tug-of-war between reverence and camaraderie. This would not be the last time I found myself caught in the middle of the friction between these two sides, navigating the delicate balance of respect, misunderstanding, and the bright spirit that the lamas brought to our practice.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

In this story, the neurodivergent narrator experiences a cultural and social landscape filled with contrasting behaviors and expectations,

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offering a unique opportunity to reflect on their adaptive strategies and growth.

The narrator's interaction with the lamas and the subsequent confrontation with Mrs. Chan and the elder members highlights their entry into a complex social environment. For neurodivergent individuals, such as those with autism or ADHD, deciphering social cues and norms can be particularly challenging. The narrator's experiences reflect a common struggle to navigate different social dynamics, resonate with anyone who has felt caught between contrasting expectations in a community.

Despite feelings of mortification, the narrator is able to appreciate the humor in the situation with the lamas and Mrs. Chan, demonstrating resilience and a capacity to find joy amidst discomfort. This ability to embrace playfulness and humor is often a valuable coping mechanism, helping to mitigate the stress of social faux pas. It's a reminder to all of us to find light-heartedness in life's unpredictable moments.

The narrator's curiosity about the Tibetan culture—displayed in their admiration for the zen—illustrates a desire to connect with and understand different cultural practices. This eagerness to learn and adapt is typical of many neurodivergent individuals who thrive on intense interests. Additionally, it speaks to a universal theme of wanting to engage deeply and respectfully with cultures that are new to us.

The incident involving the zen exposes the challenges of miscommunication and misunderstanding within cultural contexts. The narrator's recognition that an explanation would be futile indicates an awareness of when to step back and adapt to tensions rather than confront them directly. This experience echoes a broader human tendency to navigate misunderstandings by seeking a

balance between asserting one's perspective and respecting the social fabric.

The narrator finds themselves caught between the reverence expected by the elder patrons and the camaraderie and playfulness of the lamas. This tug-of-war is a relatable experience for anyone trying to balance respect for tradition with the joy of forming personal connections. It reflects the universal challenge of integrating into communities that have diverse, and sometimes conflicting, expectations.

The story captures the narrator's journey through a web of cultural norms and social expectations, illustrating how humor, curiosity, and adaptability can be keys to navigating complex interpersonal landscapes. This narrative serves as a reminder of the importance of patience and open-mindedness in overcoming misunderstandings and embracing diverse perspectives, fostering growth and understanding along the way.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

In this story, we see the complex and often contradictory nature of human relationships. The lamas, who are normally warm and welcoming, seem to adopt a different demeanor when Mrs. Chan and the elder members of the center are around. It was as if they are caught between two worlds, torn between their desire to be friendly and approachable on one hand, and their need to maintain respect and tradition on the other.

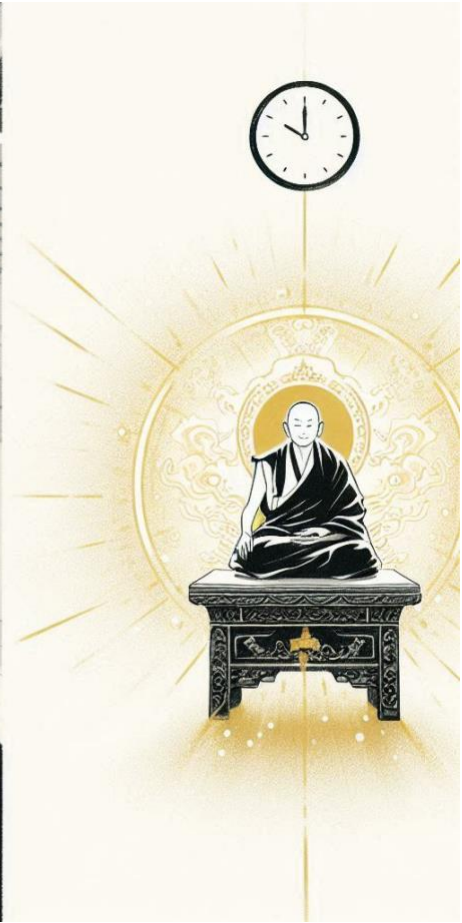
As I reflect on this story, I am struck by the importance of understanding and respecting the cultural norms and expectations that shape our interactions with others. The story also highlights the

importance of compassion and understanding in navigating these contradictions.

Furthermore, I am reminded that Buddhist teachers often employ unconventional methods to guide students toward deeper realizations and insights. These methods may seem unorthodox or even humorous, but they are aimed at breaking through fixed conceptual thinking and helping students grasp deeper truths. The concept of skillful means (upaya) highlights the teacher's ability to adapt teachings to suit the individual needs of students.

In this context, the lamas' playful behavior and unexpected reactions may be seen as unconventional methods designed to challenge a student's attachments to specific beliefs or practices. By using these methods, they aimed to provoke a deeper understanding within me, rather than simply following traditional protocols.

As I continue on my own spiritual journey, I am reminded of the importance of approaching teachers with an open mind and a willingness to learn from their unconventional methods. May we all strive to cultivate compassion, understanding, and patience in our interactions with others, recognizing that even seemingly absurd or unexpected actions may be designed to guide us toward deeper insights and greater understanding.



Chapter 16. Miracle - The Teacher's Arrival

In the early days of my visits to the Hong Kong center, I always made it a point to arrive well ahead of events. My goal was to secure a prime seat in the front row, right in front of the Teacher's throne, which loomed over us at more than a meter high. Nestled on my meditation cushion just two rows back, I avoided the strain of craning my neck to catch a glimpse of him.

On this particular night, the Teacher was to give an empowerment that would usually extend over two hours—an eternity to remain seated in the lotus position. As usual, my feet would fall asleep, so I opted for a half-kneeling position. I figured this would allow me to rise gracefully for three prostrations in unison with the congregation as he ascended to his throne.

While I sat familiarizing myself with the text, I glanced around the room, satisfied with my front-row seat. Conversations hummed softly as practitioners greeted one another. Then suddenly, a collective gasp swept through the crowd. I jolted my attention away from my prayer book and looked up. The Teacher had materialized on his throne in a shimmer of presence. There was no music to announce his entrance, and the door to his quarters remained firmly closed. The lamas, who had been standing by the door, silently filed in and took their seats on the floor beside the throne, as if nothing unusual had occurred. The practitioners quickly rose and performed three prostrations to the Teacher, who appeared immersed in deep meditation. Following this, we all settled down and entered into our own moments of meditation.

After some time passed, and without any elaboration on the seemingly miraculous occurrence, the Teacher commenced the ceremony. The proceedings unfolded with the same gravity and reverence as always, yet my mind was fixated on the baffling moment I had just witnessed.

Once the ceremony concluded, I approached one of the lamas, questions bubbling in my mind. "Did the Teacher really just appear on the throne?" I asked, eager for some clarity. The lama looked at me earnestly and told me that the Teacher had broken his hip a few weeks prior; then he simply walked away, leaving me staring in confusion.

Feeling mystified and perhaps a bit foolish, I scanned the room for others' reactions. Surprisingly, no one seemed to be discussing what had just transpired. It was as if acknowledging the event would be somehow inappropriate in this sacred space. Determined to find out more, I discreetly pulled one of the attendants aside. "Is it true that the Teacher broke his hip?" I inquired. He met my gaze solemnly and nodded, then walked off without another word.

Being new to the Vajrayana tradition, I had yet to grasp the concept of siddhi or supernatural abilities that advanced practitioners can develop. The Teacher's appearance on the throne was undeniably remarkable. It raised questions: Was this a manifestation of bilocation, with his other body perhaps resting in a hospital bed? Or was it a technique to manage pain, allowing him to sit in lotus position after surgery? I had no answers, and the more I pondered, the more intriguing the mysteries of the practice became.

I wasn't the only one to witness this unexpected arrival, nor would it be the last time such a spectacle occurred. Each event only deepened my fascination with the teachings and the enigmatic lives of those who had devoted themselves to a path of transcendence

and extraordinary potentials. Each experience was reminding me that in the realm of spiritual pursuit, the line between the ordinary and the extraordinary often a new and expanded place of possibility sometimes even leaving us in awe of the unseen threads that weave through our understanding of reality.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

In this story, the narrator encounters an extraordinary event during a spiritual ceremony, which challenges their understanding of reality and deepens their engagement with the teachings they are exploring.

The narrator demonstrates a willingness to engage deeply with spiritual practices and teachings, arriving early to secure a close seat. This openness reflects a readiness to immerse themselves fully in their spiritual journey. For neurodivergent individuals, such as those with autism or ADHD, this earnest dedication can manifest as intense focus or special interest, driving them to seek deeper understanding. This is a universally relatable trait as many people strive to get closer to sources of inspiration or wisdom.

Witnessing the Teacher's sudden appearance on the throne provokes a mixture of awe and confusion in the narrator. This reaction is a natural human response to seemingly inexplicable events, often triggering curiosity and wonder. The narrator's attempt to understand this experience reflects a broader quest for meaning that transcends individual differences, seeking to bridge the gap between the mystical and the rational.

The narrator's surprise at the lack of discussion among other practitioners highlights their navigation through new cultural and spiritual norms. This situation illustrates the challenge of adjusting to

tacit conventions within a community, a common experience for anyone entering unfamiliar social or cultural environments. It underscores the importance of observation and inquiry in learning to navigate such spaces.

Driven by curiosity, the narrator approaches both lamas and attendants to gather information about the Teacher's remarkable appearance. Their determination to seek answers exemplifies an intellectual curiosity that drives further engagement with spiritual teachings. This mirrors a universal desire for understanding, especially when faced with phenomena that defy conventional explanation.

The narrator's intrigue with siddhi and the potential for supernatural abilities in advanced practitioners opens them up to broader concepts of reality. This exploration reflects a willingness to entertain possibilities beyond conventional limits, encouraging growth in perception and understanding. Such flexibility in thinking is valuable in both neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals, fostering creativity and openness to transformative experiences.

The story captures the narrator's journey from confusion to fascination, highlighting their adaptive responses to awe-inspiring experiences and new teachings. The narrative offers insights into the ways curiosity, reflection, and open-mindedness can enrich one's spiritual path, bridging the extraordinary with the everyday. This journey resonates with anyone seeking to expand their understanding of the world, emphasizing the wonders that lie beyond the veil of familiar experience.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

In this story, we are reminded of the mysterious and awe-inspiring nature of spiritual practice. The Teacher's sudden appearance on his

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throne, without any fanfare or explanation, is a profound and humbling experience, a blurring of the lines between the ordinary and the extraordinary.

The Teacher's ability to transcend his physical limitations, even in the midst of physical pain, is a powerful reminder of the potential for human beings to access realms beyond the ordinary. His presence on the throne is a manifestation of Siddhi, a supernatural ability that advanced practitioners can develop.

This experience leaves us with many questions and reflections. What does it mean to cultivate extraordinary abilities in spiritual practice? How do we reconcile the seemingly miraculous with our everyday understanding of reality? These questions are not meant to be answered intellectually, but rather to be explored and integrated through meditation and contemplation.

In this story, we are also reminded of the importance of cultivating an open and non-judgmental mind. The Vajrayana tradition is known for its emphasis on skillful means and expedient methods, which may seem unorthodox or even mysterious to those outside of the tradition. This experience guides us to approach such teachings with humility and curiosity, recognizing that the ordinary and extraordinary are intertwined in ways that are beyond our rational comprehension.

Ultimately, this story can deepen our appreciation for the mystery and wonder of spiritual practice. It reminds us that even in the most unexpected moments, we can access realms that transcend our ordinary understanding of reality. May we continue to cultivate an open heart and mind, and may we be guided by the wisdom and compassion of our teachers as we navigate the complexities of the spiritual path.



Chapter 17. Foolish Compassion: The Duck Incident

In Hong Kong, as in many other parts of Asia, the custom of "Life Release" holds a special place in Buddhist practice. This compassionate act involves the liberation of living beings—particularly fish and birds—from captivity, a ritual designed to accumulate merit and generate positive karma. Members of our center would come together to donate funds, rent fishing boats, and buy large quantities of fish, releasing them back into the vast waters with the Teacher onboard blessing the occasion, all while we recited mantras. Similarly, we would purchase birds from bustling markets and drive them up into the mountains, where we would chant prayers before letting them soar into the open skies.

One particularly memorable incident occurred when a new member, a British girl named Julia, decided to embark on her own personal life release. Eager to act out her newfound compassion, she persuaded me to join her for a visit to the outdoor market. There, she set her sights on a hefty duck, outbidding a housewife who had intended to take it home for dinner. Once the deal was struck, Julia triumphantly carried her quacking prize onto the tram, with the poor creature still trussed up by its legs and squawking loudly in protest. We had no idea how to soothe an enraged duck, which left Julia with little choice but to find a nearby park to release it.

After a short jaunt, we arrived at a peaceful area of the botanical garden, perfect for the duck's grand escape. It was around 5 pm when we gently tossed the duck onto the grassy ground, and

for a fleeting moment, we felt the glow of righteousness—after all, we had saved this creature from a dinner plate.

However, our moment of triumph quickly turned into a conflict. Just as we began to walk away, confident in our compassionate act, we heard a cacophony of loud squawking. Turning back in alarm, we were astonished to see a handful of people pursuing our duck, clearly intent on reclaiming their would-be meal. Panic set in. Without a second thought, Julia darted after the frantic mob, determined to rescue the duck.

In a stroke of desperate luck, Julia managed to snatch the duck just before it fell into the hands of those hungry patrons. But the chaos continued to escalate. The angry individuals, irate at being thwarted, demanded proof of ownership for the duck. With no rational explanation at hand, we did what any sensible person would do: we ran.

Our escape was filled with a combination of adrenaline and laughter as we galloped back to the tram. It's not every day you bolt through the streets of Hong Kong with an escaped duck and a band of irate would-be dinner guests on your tail. I managed to distract our landlady with some quick thinking and a flash of charm, allowing us to sneak the duck back into the boarding house. There, we deployed a cloak-and-dagger routine, hiding the creature away in Julia's room while still trying to suppress our giggles.

The following day, Julia, fearing further repercussions for our ill-fated release, decided it was best for the duck to embark on another adventure. She took a ferry out to one of the nearby islands, where she resolved to set the duck free once and for all amidst the wild. I didn't inquire about the specifics of that release—after everything our little escapade had entailed, I preferred to let the saga of the duck fade into memory.

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In retrospect, the incident underlined the complexities of compassion. Our intentions had been noble; we wished to free a creature destined for culinary demise. Yet, our naïveté had led to unforeseen chaos and a comical chase that could easily have resulted in calamity. While the act of life release is grounded in altruism, the reality of executing such acts is often more complicated than our idealistic views allow. Through laughter and a tinge of folly, we learned that even the most genuine intentions can manifest in absurd and unpredictable ways. The duck may have evaded one dinner plate, but it certainly served as an amusing reminder of the unpredictable nature of compassion in action.

As we shared our story with Teacher, he listened intently, his eyes twinkling with amusement. When we finished, he smiled and said, "Ah, the complexities of compassion. It is a delicate dance, indeed."

He began to explain that compassion is not just about feeling good emotions or doing good deeds, but about understanding the intricacies of the situation and acting with wisdom and awareness.

"In your case," he said, "your intention was noble, but your actions were misguided. You didn't consider the consequences of your actions or the potential harm you might cause to others."

Teacher paused, collecting his thoughts before continuing. "Compassion is not just about releasing a duck from captivity, but about understanding the interconnectedness of all living beings. It's about recognizing that our actions have ripple effects and can impact others in ways we may not even be aware of."

He looked at us with a serious expression. "In your case, your actions may have caused harm to the people who were trying to buy

the duck for dinner. They were just trying to fulfill their basic needs, and your actions disrupted their plans. You may have intended to be compassionate, but you ended up causing harm instead."

Teacher's words struck a chord within us. We realized that we had been so focused on our own intentions and desires that we had neglected to consider the potential consequences of our actions. We had been so caught up in our own ego and sense of righteousness that we had forgotten about the well-being of others.

In that moment, we began to see the complexity of compassion in a new light. We realized that true compassion requires not only empathy and understanding, but also wisdom and discernment. It requires considering the potential consequences of our actions and acting with kindness and awareness.

In the end, our story became a valuable lesson in the complexities of compassion. We learned that even with the best of intentions, our actions can still have unintended consequences. But we also learned that by being aware of these complexities and acting with wisdom and kindness, we can cultivate a deeper sense of compassion and understanding in our lives.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

The narrator and their friend Julia embark on a well-intentioned but chaotic mission of compassion by liberating a duck from a market stall. Their escapade is driven by a mix of altruism and naïveté, leading to a series of humorous yet thought-provoking events that shed light on the complex nature of compassionate actions.

At its heart, the story captures a universal experience: how good intentions can sometimes collide with reality in unexpected ways. Many of us have found ourselves in situations where we've aimed to

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do good, only to discover that our actions have ripple effects we hadn't anticipated. The narrator and Julia's adventure with the duck highlights this perfectly, reminding us that the path to doing good is often more winding than it seems.

The narrator's intense focus on freeing the duck, while overlooking broader implications, offers a glimpse into how neurodivergent traits like hyperfocus can shape experiences. Their sensitivity to the duck's plight is a testament to a strong sense of justice and compassion, traits common in neurodivergent individuals, who keenly feel the impulse to act against perceived injustices.

When the situation turns chaotic, with a band of would-be diners chasing them through the streets, the narrator and Julia turn to humor as a coping mechanism. This use of laughter and playfulness helps them navigate the stress of the moment, demonstrating resilience—a skill that many can relate to, whether neurodivergent or not.

Engaging in the Buddhist ritual of "life release" without fully grasping its nuances illustrates the challenges of navigating unfamiliar social norms. This isn't just a neurodivergent experience; it's something anyone can relate to when stepping into new cultural or social environments, highlighting the learning that unfolds from such experiences.

The story takes a reflective turn with the Teacher's guidance on the complexities of compassion. His teachings emphasize that true compassion requires a balance of intention, awareness, and understanding of interconnectedness. It's a call for empathy to be paired with wisdom—recognizing that our actions, however well-meaning, can have unintended consequences.

Ultimately, the duck incident becomes more than a comedic misadventure; it's a lesson in growth, humility, and the intricate dance of compassion in action. It invites us all to reflect on how we can better align our intentions with thoughtful and aware actions, embracing the unpredictable nature of life's journey.

In the end, this story captures the delightful chaos of trying to do good in the world, offering valuable insights wrapped in humor and wisdom. It reminds us that while our paths may be fraught with surprises, each experience is an opportunity to learn and grow, weaving a richer understanding of compassion into the tapestry of our lives.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

As we reflect on this story, we are reminded of the delicate dance of compassion. It is a dance that requires balance, awareness, and intention. We must be aware of our own motivations and intentions, as well as the potential consequences of our actions. We must also consider the interconnectedness of all beings and the ripple effects of our actions.

Compassion is not just a feeling or an emotion, but a practice that requires skill and wisdom. It is a practice that requires us to be present in the moment, to listen deeply, and to respond with kindness and understanding. It is a practice that requires us to be mindful of our own biases and assumptions, and to approach each situation with an open and non-judgmental mind.

This story shows how our good intentions and motivations can lead us down a path of chaos and confusion. Righteousness and ego can always get in the way of our compassion. When we neglect to

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consider the well-being of others, our actions can cause harm instead of healing.

Yet we clearly see the beauty of compassion in action. One student's willingness to take risks and challenge herself leads to a deeper understanding of the complexities of compassion. With quick thinking and resourcefulness, her fellow student helps them escape the chaos and find a new solution. Their laughter and tears throughout bring them closer together and deepen their connection.

As we reflect on this story, we are reminded that compassion is not just about saving a duck or helping others. It is about cultivating a sense of awareness, kindness, and understanding in our own hearts. It is about recognizing the interconnectedness of all beings and responding with empathy and compassion.

May we continue to cultivate this sense of compassion in our lives. May we continue to walk the delicate dance of compassion with awareness, intention, and kindness. May we remember that compassion is not just a feeling or an emotion, but a practice that requires skill and wisdom.



TIBET

Chapter 18. Foolish Compassion: Soggy Offerings

When the Teacher invited me to accompany his entourage on a trip to a distant monastery in northern Tibet, I was filled with excitement—and the urge to contribute. I gathered a substantial trove of donations, comprising clothes and medicine, to offer to the monastery for distribution to local villagers. I packed everything meticulously into suitcases and boxes, applauding myself for what I perceived to be a generous endeavor. However, I underestimated the practicalities of traveling, such as the weight limits for baggage, which soon became a source of frustration.

Once we reached mainland China, the airline staff informed me that I had exceeded the weight limit, and no plea for consideration—especially one invoking charitable intent—would sway their decision.

Our journey spanned almost a week, taking us through various modes of transport: we flew north toward Mongolia, then traveled by truck, followed by jeep over the rugged Changtang Plateau. When we reached the last village accessible by road, we transitioned to horseback, employing domesticated yaks, or dzo, to carry our loads. As my belongings were too bulky to secure properly, the clothes were transferred into woven plastic duffle bags.

However, this mountain adventure took a turn when we were stopped by Public Security Bureau officers on horseback. They demanded to know the contents of our bags. I nervously attempted to pass off the clothes as my own, but when they discovered the 40 pairs of children's sneakers I had brought, they were on the verge of confiscating everything. In the end, a small bribe—a carton of cigarettes and some “coffee money”—secured our passage.

As we ascended a narrow mountain road, we were unexpectedly confronted by a herd of massive wild yaks, huffing and snorting their way toward us. In the chaos, one of my dzo bolted back down the road, scattering my belongings in every direction. The sight of the local Tibetans bursting into laughter at my disarray added to the absurdity of the moment as I frantically collected my clothes from the ground.

Once we resumed our journey, the weather took a turn for the worse, and rain began to pour down on us. Despite my efforts to tightly secure the bags and cover them with oilskin cloth, the streams had swollen from the spring rain. We decided to take a risk and cross a rapidly rising stream, with our guides managing the ropes on either bank. As I followed behind, the current grew dangerously swift, starting to drag both me and my overwhelmed dzo downstream. Thankfully, the nimble guides managed to lasso us and pull us to safety.

By the time we reached the meadow at the foot of the monastery, everything was soaked. My clothes, the bags, and the precious donations had doubled in weight, which further slowed our progress. When we finally neared the village, we were greeted by an overwhelming welcome. The locals rode down the pass, clad in stunning traditional attire, singing and yodeling in a joyous reception. Yet, amidst this captivating scene, a new concern crept into my thoughts: *What will they think of the plain Western clothes I brought?*

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After settling into our quarters, we were treated to a lavish feast, leaving me perplexed. If these people were indeed poor, they were rich in the natural bounty of their land. Yet, when the time came to present my gifts, the initial admiration for the medical supplies was swiftly overshadowed by the sight of the sopping wet clothes emerging from my tattered bags. The headman scrutinized me with a disapproving look, holding a dripping jacket with two fingers. In his blunt, brutally honest manner, he quipped, “Next time, better to just bring money.” His remark resonated throughout the gathered crowd, with laughter erupting all around. In that moment, the Teacher shot me an “I told you so” look that was both entertaining and chastising.

Later that evening, as I made my way to the attic where I would sleep, I realized my new quarters were less than comfortable; I spent the night atop hay with mice scurrying across my forehead—an experience that was more amusing than restful.

The following day, I had the chance to present three modern tents, which were much better received. Each lama set one up to host guests, and I was invited to partake in a meal of roasted meat still on the bone. As we ate in silence—a Tibetan custom—I was given a knife to carve the meat. The atmosphere was rich with tradition, yet as the meal continued, one dignitary noted, “This tent is too small. Next time, bring a bigger one.”

Even the medical supplies I had brought encountered scrutiny. When we ran low on medicine, village women chimed in, “Next time, bring more!”

I felt disheartened that my well-intentioned offerings were met with criticism rather than gratitude. Yet, as I reflected on the experience, it dawned on me that my expectations were my own—the locals were simply expressing their needs, based on their

situation and customs. My journey had undoubtedly been fraught with challenges, from logistical issues to the physical burdens of my gifts. However, the laughter, hospitality, and honesty of the Tibetan people illuminated my understanding of true generosity—not solely in tangible items but in the willingness to connect, to share, and to listen.

In the end, I learned a valuable lesson: while my intentions may have been noble, the execution of compassion should be coupled with consideration, practicality, and an awareness of what truly serves those we wish to help. It's a reminder that generosity is not just about giving, but about recognizing the true needs and culture of those on the receiving end, and that sometimes the most foolish acts of compassion can lead to the deepest insights.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

In this story, the narrator's experience during a journey to a remote Tibetan monastery highlights the challenges of translating good intentions into effective actions.

The narrator's excitement to contribute and their meticulous preparation reflect a genuine desire to help, a characteristic commonly found in those with heightened empathy. This enthusiasm is widespread, resonating with anyone who has felt compelled to make a positive difference but perhaps underestimated the practical logistics involved.

The narrator's careful packing and collection of supplies indicate a strong attention to detail, which can be a trait seen in neurodivergent individuals who may take particular care in organizing and planning. This effort, while well-meaning, underscores a common oversight in assuming that plans made in isolation will translate seamlessly into different contexts.

When faced with unexpected travel challenges, such as baggage limits and environmental conditions, the narrator encounters difficulty adapting their plans. This highlights a broader human experience of struggling to remain flexible when initial plans fall apart—an experience often magnified for those who find it challenging to shift gears quickly.

The attempt to pass off the bulk donations as personal items reveals a gap in cultural sensitivity and understanding, emphasizing the importance of researching and respecting local norms. Many people encounter similar challenges when engaging in cross-cultural interactions, highlighting the need for cultural awareness in acts of service.

Despite the trials—the soggy donations, unplanned sleep arrangements, and critiques—the narrator finds humor and learns from the experience. This use of humor reflects resilience, a universally valuable trait that allows people to navigate failures with grace, transforming challenges into opportunities for learning and growth.

The narrator's final reflection underscores the importance of aligning generosity with the actual needs of the recipients. This realization resonates with a broader understanding that compassion involves listening and adapting, rather than imposing assumptions. It highlights the vital distinction between well-intentioned actions and those that are truly beneficial.

While initially disheartened by the critiques, the narrator learns to view them as expressions of genuine need, offering valuable insights into effective service. This theme is relatable, as many have found that feedback, while initially tough to hear, can guide us toward more meaningful and impactful actions in the future.

In essence, the story and its challenges illustrate the complexities of compassionate action, urging both neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals to couple good intentions with cultural awareness and practicality. It reminds us that true generosity is about deeply understanding the unique contexts and needs of those we wish to help, and how even foolish attempts at compassion can yield profound lessons.

Reflection from the Buddhist Perspective

As we reflect on this story, we are reminded of the importance of considering the practicalities and cultural nuances of our actions. The intention to bring donations to the Tibetan monastery is noble, but the execution is flawed. The weight limits, language barriers, and

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cultural differences lead to a series of challenges and misunderstandings.

The story highlights the importance of awareness, consideration, and practicality in our actions. We must be mindful of the needs and customs of those we wish to help, and not assume that our intentions are universally understood. The locals' reactions to the offered gifts—from the initial admiration to the eventual criticism—serve as a reminder that generosity is not just about giving, but about understanding the true needs and culture of those on the receiving end.

The story also teaches us about the value of humility and openness. Arriving with initial expectations that are out of touch with the reality of the situation, the giver is forced to adapt and learn from their mistakes. This humility and willingness to listen lead to a deeper understanding of the true nature of generosity and compassion.

In our own lives, we may face similar challenges when trying to help others. We may underestimate the complexity of a situation or overestimate our own abilities. We may also assume that our own perspectives and values are universal, when in fact they are not.

As we reflect on this story, we are reminded that true generosity is not just about giving things, but about giving ourselves—our time, our attention, and our understanding. It is about being willing to listen, to adapt, and to learn from others. It is about recognizing the interconnectedness of all beings and responding with compassion and wisdom.

May we cultivate a sense of awareness, consideration, and humility in our own actions. May we recognize the true needs and culture of those around us, and respond with kindness, compassion, and

Chloe Solo

wisdom. May we learn to give ourselves fully, without expectation or attachment, and may we find joy in serving others.

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INDIA

Chapter 19. The “Catch” Incident

When the Teacher returned to his home monastery in northern India, I made it a point to visit him regularly, often staying for several months at a time. The monastery itself was a labyrinth, filled with shrine rooms, libraries brimming with ancient texts, corridors adorned with murals of deities, tranquil meditation rooms, and living quarters that felt both sacred and inviting.

One particular morning, I found myself quietly seated at the Teacher's feet. He was perched above me on a raised golden platform. The atmosphere felt intimate, and I reveled in the privilege of having a prolonged private audience with him—though I must admit, part of my mind was wandering, lost in a semi-dream state that often enveloped me in his presence.

Suddenly, without warning, something whizzed through the air and landed atop my head. Peeking beneath the white silk shawl draped over me, I realized to my astonishment that the Teacher had thrown a *katak*, a ceremonial blessing scarf, in my direction. Surprised, I blinked as he leaned forward, his expectant gaze urging me to respond in some way. Flustered, I hurriedly got to my feet, bowed deeply a few times in respect, and made my way out of the room, walking backwards as tradition dictated. As the attendant opened the door for me, I caught a glimpse of the Teacher bursting into laughter, a warm sound that lingered in the air.

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During my next visit, I found myself in a group setting, and the Teacher gave no indication—no secret nod or mischievous wink—that anything unusual had transpired during our last encounter. Weeks passed, and I again found myself in private audience with him, my curiosity piqued about the significance of the katak incident. “I do not know what you are talking about,” he replied, his expression serene. For a moment, I wondered if I had imagined the whole thing; the experience of visiting Teacher often put me in a half-dream state, making reality feel malleable.

As our session drew to a close, I knelt with my head bowed for his traditional parting blessing. That went well, I thought, relief washing over me as I began to back out of the room. Just then, a whizzing sound filled the air. Startled, I glanced around, puzzled, but saw nothing on the floor. My gaze traveled down the length of the audience room to where the Teacher sat, absorbed in counting prayers on his mala. Confused, I looked to his attendant for guidance. He pointed to the top of my head. I raised my hand, feeling something soft, and upon pulling it free, discovered a flower had become lodged in my hair. Embarrassed, I hid it in my pocket and quickly exited, the low chuckles of the attendants echoing behind me.

When I mentioned the flower episode during my next visit, the Teacher raised his eyebrows, a slight smile playing at the corners of his lips but no further comment followed.

Months later, I returned to the monastery bearing offerings, including a bundle of exquisite brocade samples I had carefully brought from Japan. In the audience hall, absorbed in unrolling a length of fabric, I suddenly felt something sail through the air. Reflexively, I reached up and caught a beautiful silk fan! I stood frozen, staring in amazement at the delicate fan now in my hands. As I lifted my gaze, I was met by the Teacher’s penetrating stare. His unspoken thoughts echoed in my mind: You had better sit down.

Obediently, I crumpled to the floor, surrendering to the depth of experience unfolding around me.

A wave of awareness washed over me, and within that moment of stillness, I heard a voice within: The glass that has been encasing your mind shatters. It is like breathing through a mirror.

We sat together in that shared space for what felt like an eternity, minds entwined in a silent exchange of understanding.

Eventually, I roused myself, thinking I had been left alone. The room had dimmed, illuminated only by the soft glow of candles flickering on the altar. As I rose to leave, I peered through the shadows to navigate my way to the door. Suddenly, a pale, shimmering figure appeared to hover above the Teacher's throne. My mind heard the Teacher's voice once more: This is for your eyes only.

I bowed deeply, awash in a mix of reverence and wonder, then tiptoed out of the audience room, the weight of the experience enveloping me like a warm embrace. Each visit with him was a profound reminder of the mysteries that lay within the teachings, each encounter becoming a thread woven into the tapestry of my journey on this path.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

In this story, the narrator's experiences with the Teacher at a monastery reveal both their unique perceptions and a broader exploration of spiritual understanding and personal growth.

The narrator describes a semi-dream state when in the Teacher's presence, which might reflect a sensory sensitivity or tendency to

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experience altered states of consciousness, common among neurodivergent individuals. This heightened sensory perception can sometimes make reality feel fluid and experiences more intense or vivid, allowing for a deeply emotional and spiritual connection.

The narrator's need to understand the significance of the katak and other objects that the Teacher playfully throws signifies a quest for meaning. This can mirror the literal interpretation often seen in neurodivergent individuals, who may seek clear explanations for actions to make sense of social interactions and experiences.

The narrator's introspective nature, illustrated by their internal dialogue and interpretation of events, suggests a deep level of self-reflection, a trait common among neurodivergent people. This reflection propels personal growth and a better understanding of their spiritual journey.

The Teacher's playful acts, like throwing items in a seemingly random yet meaningful manner, highlight the importance of maintaining a sense of wonder and play in spiritual practice. This encourages a broader audience to embrace mystery and humor as integral parts of learning, rather than solely focusing on structured teachings.

The story demonstrates how profound insights can arise from non-verbal communication and intuition. The Teacher's silent gestures and the narrator's subsequent realizations emphasize how understanding sometimes transcends words. This speaks to a more universal experience of recognizing that wisdom is not always conveyed through explicit language but can be felt or sensed.

The narrator's final revelation, with imagery of a mind's glass shattering, represents breakthroughs in personal growth. This metaphor of shedding mental constraints is relatable to anyone on a

journey of self-discovery or spiritual development, urging them to embrace transformative experiences that might initially seem perplexing or surreal.

The story illustrates how each encounter with the Teacher acts as a thread weaving into the broader tapestry of the narrator's life journey. This ties into a universal theme of integrating experiences—both ordinary and extraordinary—into a cohesive narrative that shapes personal identity and spiritual understanding.

In essence, this narrative celebrates the journey of spiritual exploration, highlighting both neurodivergent and universal aspects of perceiving and interpreting profound experiences. It encourages embracing the mystical and playful elements of life that challenge our understanding, ultimately leading to deeper insights and personal growth.

Reflection from the Buddhist Perspective

As we reflect on this experience, we are reminded of the profound wisdom and humility that we will encounter in our spiritual journey. The Teacher's ability to manifest objects seemingly out of thin air is a powerful reminder of the interconnectedness of all things and the illusion of separateness.

Encountering the Teacher's extraordinary abilities, we are struck by the realization that true spiritual practice is not about acquiring powers or achieving a specific goal, but about cultivating inner wisdom, compassion, and understanding. The presence of siddhi is a byproduct of deep spiritual practice, rather than the aim itself.

The story also highlights the importance of detachment and humility in spiritual practice. The Teacher's ability to manifest objects is not used for personal gain or self-aggrandizement, but rather as a

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pedagogical tool to inspire and guide their students. This reminds us of the importance of aligning ourselves with higher truths and transcending our ego.

As we reflect on our spiritual journey, we are reminded that true power lies not in the attainment of extraordinary abilities, but in the cultivation of inner wisdom, compassion, and understanding. Our true potential lies within us, waiting to be awakened and manifested in the world around us.

This story serves as a reminder of the importance of cultivating detachment from our own desires and attachments, and instead focusing on developing wisdom, compassion, and understanding. May we continue to strive for this detachment, and may we remember that true power lies not in external manifestations, but in the depths of our own hearts. May we carry this wisdom with us on our spiritual journey, and may we continue to cultivate inner wisdom, compassion, and understanding in all that we do.



Chapter 20. Beyond the Frame – Cupboard Exhibition

My nun friend and I had eagerly prepared a collection of enlarged photographs to present to the Teacher. These images depicted him during his numerous overseas trips, as well as tender moments captured at his own monastery in northern India. The Teacher seemed genuinely pleased with our offerings and set us the task of framing these photos and creating a photo exhibit. He even provided us with additional images from his own archives to include in the show.

Each day, my friend and I dedicated ourselves to this project in an office specifically designated for the task. Our work involved meticulously mounting the photographs in mats to separate the art from the glass of the frames. Teacher had a particular vision for the colors and quality of the matting materials, but unfortunately, they were not available in the local village. Therefore, we set out on an adventure to the capital to procure the proper materials.

After searching through various shops, we finally found the right supplies at an art store. Ecstatic, we decided to buy some local delicacies as offerings for the Teacher upon our return. However, our day took a comical turn when we discovered that the bags were too large to fit inside the tuk-tuk (a small three-wheeled taxi), and the driver had to tie them to the roof.

As we drove through the bustling streets, an unsettling noise caught our attention—the rope securing our art supplies came loose. In an instant, the heavy items flew off the roof, scattering chaotically

onto the road. The colorful sheets of paper soon began to unfurl from their rolls, propelled by the wind, and attached themselves to the windshields of the cars trailing behind us.

Panic ignited a flurry of motion. The driver quickly pulled over, cursing under his breath as we hastened to reclaim the fallen glue pots, paper cutters, rulers, and brushes from the asphalt. Unfortunately, it was clear that recovering the sheets of paper was a lost cause. The drivers behind us erupted in frustration. Some were ripping the paper from their windshields with furious gestures, while others tore them to shreds, crumpled them in their fists, or stomped angrily on the remains.

Caught in the absurdity of the situation, we leaped back into the tuk-tuk, and the driver sped away, laughter bubbling up in all of us. The craziness of it all felt surreal, the chaotic scene a whirlwind of artistic aspiration colliding with the realities of everyday life.

Back at the monastery the next day, my friend and I opted not to mention the incident to anyone. We immersed ourselves in the work of matting the photos with the remaining paper, surrounding ourselves with the sound of our mantras chanted loudly throughout the day. Occasionally, we approached the Teacher to present our progress. He offered praise, giving suggestions that guided us forward.

Finally, after long hours and careful craftsmanship, we completed the project. We wrapped the "ready-to-hang" photographs carefully and stored them in cupboards, instructing the attendants on where and how the images should be displayed for the exhibit. With a sense of fulfillment, we left the monastery, confident that when we returned in two months, our hard work would be on display for all to admire.

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When the day of our return arrived, excitement bubbled in our chests as we anticipated standing in front of our finished exhibit. However, as we stepped into the gallery, our faces fell. The photographs remained tucked away in the office cupboards, just as we had left them. Instead of our carefully crafted exhibit highlighting the Teacher, we were met with the vibrant images of other photographers' works—exquisite photos of monks performing traditional dances, all elegantly framed.

Despondent, my friend and I sought out Teacher for answers, our hearts heavy with confusion and disappointment. When we asked what had happened to “our” exhibit, he simply replied, “There’s no need to put pictures of me in an exhibit,” and waved us off dismissively, leaving us feeling dejected.

Crestfallen, we withdrew to a quiet corner of the monastery, retreating to process what had just transpired. The air felt thick with unspoken aspirations and buried dreams. I contemplated the intentions behind our project, the hours we spent dedicated to framing the Teacher's likeness—an effort born out of love and admiration.

In the solitude of our contemplation, we began to realize that the Teacher's dismissal wasn't so much a rejection of our efforts as it was a gentle nudge to shift our understanding of appreciation and recognition. The photographs, treasured as they might have been, were just that—images. The experiences, teachings, and presence of the Teacher extended far beyond what could be captured in a frame.

As we sat in silence, the laughter and joy of our earlier adventures echoed in our hearts, reminding us that perhaps the moments we created together—the shared humor in adversity, the joy of working with intention—were the true representation of our

journey with the Teacher. What lay beyond the photographs was the true essence of connection; an understanding that art, like life, often leads us to unexpected detours, ultimately teaching us invaluable lessons along the way.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

This story presents a tapestry of experiences blending dedication, humor, and lessons learned through mishaps and realizations.

The narrator's dedication to framing the photographs with the specific materials preferred by the Teacher highlights a meticulous attention to detail. This attentiveness can be a trait seen in neurodivergent individuals who take pride in precision and meeting expectations, striving to create something meaningful and appreciated.

The inability to fit art supplies in the tuk-tuk and the subsequent loss of materials on the road illustrate a situation where plans go astray. For neurodivergent individuals who may find unexpected changes challenging, this scenario demonstrates resilience, as the narrator and friend adapt and continue their work despite setbacks.

The deep emotional connection to the project reflects a common neurodivergent trait of intense investment in special interests or tasks. This intensity can drive creativity and thoroughness but can also lead to heightened feelings of disappointment when outcomes don't align with expectations.

Broader Observations:

The chaos of art supplies flying through the streets could easily become overwhelming, yet the narrator and their friend find humor in the absurdity of the situation. This resilient approach underscores a

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universal lesson about the power of laughter and light-heartedness in overcoming life's unexpected hurdles.

The disappointment of discovering their exhibit tucked away unfolds into a lesson about the nature of recognition. The Teacher's nonchalant dismissal of the need for an exhibit serves as a reminder that value and worth extend beyond tangible displays, encouraging a shift from seeking external validation to finding meaning in shared experiences and intentions.

The conclusion reveals a deeper understanding that the true essence of their connection lies not in the images themselves but in the experiences and moments shared. This idea resonates broadly, reminding us all that life's worth often emerges from the intangible, teaching us about the beauty of unexpected detours and the significance of presence and intention.

The realization that art and life both involve paths that might divert from initial plans offers a relatable theme. It celebrates the process and the learning that occurs along the journey, encouraging an embrace of creative endeavors as explorations that lead to growth rather than focusing solely on the end product.

This story highlights the interplay between dedication and adaptability, underscoring the importance of finding joy in the journey and appreciating the deeper connections that lie beyond initial expectations. It speaks to both neurodivergent and broader audiences about valuing processes over outcomes, using humor to navigate challenges, and recognizing the true essence of our shared experiences.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

As we reflect on this story, we are reminded that true appreciation and recognition often go beyond the physical manifestations of our efforts. The students' dedication to creating a photo exhibit for the Teacher, their enthusiasm and creativity, are admirable qualities. Yet, in the end, it is not the physical exhibit that is truly valued, but the intangible connections and experiences that they share with the Teacher.

The story highlights the importance of shifting our understanding of appreciation and recognition. We often get caught up in our own desires to be recognized or acknowledged, and forget that true value lies in the relationships and experiences we have with others. The Teacher's dismissal of the photo exhibit is not a rejection of the work, but rather a gentle reminder to look beyond the physical manifestations of our love and admiration.

The story also teaches us about the impermanence of things and the importance of letting go. The students' attachment to their photo exhibit is understandable, but ultimately, it is not meant to be. They are invited to let go of their attachment to their creation and accept that it was not meant to be displayed. This is a valuable lesson in accepting what is and letting go of what is not meant to be.

The story also reminds us that the true essence of connection is not about what we can capture or create, but about the experiences and moments we share with others. The laughter and joy these students share with the Teacher during their adventures together are more precious than any physical exhibit.

This story reminds us to cultivate a sense of detachment and acceptance in our own lives. We are reminded that true appreciation

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and recognition come from within, and that it is not about what we can create or achieve, but about the relationships and experiences we have with others. May we continue to cultivate this sense of detachment and acceptance, and may we learn to appreciate the intangible connections and experiences that bring me joy.



Chapter 21. Flower Power

My friend and I were brimming with excitement as we embarked on our quarterly visit to India, determined to create a stunning flower garden around our monastery. We had collected an assortment of flower seeds from Asia, America, and Europe, envisioning a vibrant sanctuary in bloom by the time the next Mahamudra program rolled around. Hundreds of practitioners from around the world would gather there, and we believed that our “Calm-Abiding Garden” would serve as a beautiful offering—a tranquil space for meditation amidst a breathtaking tapestry of colors and fragrances.

With a shared enthusiasm, we sketched an intricate layout in the shape of a mandala, meticulously labeling each section with different varieties of flowers, color-coded to reflect their blossoming beauty. Our dreams were grand, infused with the hope that this garden would both inspire and uplift everyone who visited.

However, the reality of cultivating the garden proved to be a much more arduous endeavor. After procuring some basic gardening tools, we dove into the hard labor of preparing the ground, a task that entailed relentless weeding and removing stones. The sun beat down on us mercilessly as we toiled from dawn until early afternoon, each day more taxing than the last. After a week of watching us struggle from his window, Teacher showed his compassion and assigned a few young monks to lend us a hand.

Despite the additional help, we soon discovered that May, in India, was one of the hottest months of the year—the dry, cracked earth was hardly conducive to planting seeds. Naively, we thought

early spring would be the perfect time to sow our flowers, as that was what we did back home. But here, under the intense heat, it became clear that our timing was far from ideal. We could almost hear the lamas chuckling at our persistence from their balconies, amused by our ignorance.

After two grueling weeks of labor, we finally managed to plant the seeds and began the task of watering in the cool of the evenings. With each encounter with Teacher, he expressed genuine interest in our project, eagerly asking us detailed questions about our planting and watering schedule. His eyes twinkled with curiosity, asking if we had seen any signs of growth. Unfortunately, to our growing distress and frustration, there was no sign of anything sprouting. Teacher was an avid gardener in his own right, having cultivated a wondrous rooftop garden filled with vibrant blooms. We could sense that he noticed every mistake we were making but chose to stay quiet, only saying, "You dedicate this work to the Buddha."

As our visit came to an end, we left the monastery with heavy hearts, knowing very little had grown during our time there. We left instructions with the monks to regularly water and weed the garden. Their faces were serious as they nodded in agreement. Rumors began to circulate throughout the region about our gardening efforts, though not for the reasons we had hoped. How foolish we must have seemed to others.

Gathered around Teacher for our farewells and blessings, I felt compelled to express my hopes. "Please pray for our flowers to grow," I blurted out, my voice tinged with desperation. Teacher smiled warmly, a glimmer in his eye. "I can do that," he replied, a promise that felt like a gentle assurance.

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Returning a few months later, we approached the garden with anticipation, only to have our hopes dashed. Our hearts sank as we discovered that everything we had planted had been torn out, leaving the ground barren and empty. Slumped shoulders reflected our disappointment, and I could have sworn I heard playful snickering behind us.

When we returned in the following spring, however, our spirits lifted in disbelief. The garden that we had envisioned, the one that we thought would bear our name, was alive with vibrant blooms in every direction. Colors danced joyfully alongside fragrant petals, each flower standing in stark contrast to the empty ground we had once tended. We were relieved, elated, and thoroughly astonished.

Yet, the true nature of our efforts came to light in that moment of joy. The flowers we had hoped to nurture and grow had blossomed beautifully, but not under our care. It dawned upon us that Teacher had orchestrated the project not for our personal accolades but to serve a greater purpose. He had put us in charge to teach us invaluable lessons about karma—reminding us that true happiness should not arise from our own self-congratulatory deeds but from contributing to a higher purpose.

In his own quiet way, Teacher had imparted a lesson in humility as well. We had come to India with a longing to create something beautiful, yet in the end, we had learned that sometimes the richest rewards arise not from our efforts but from the blessings of a compassionate teacher and the thriving heart of community. The Calm-Abiding Garden was a testament to the power of collective intention and the beauty of surrendering to the flow of life. We stood amidst the blooms, grateful for the transformative journey that led us there, understanding at last the true essence of our offering.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

The narrative of "Flower Power" offers a view into the experiences and perceptions of an autistic narrator. Through their journey to create a garden, we see the narrator's aspirations, their dedication to detail, and their emotional responses to unmet expectations—all framed within the broader context of a communal and environmental setting.

The detailed planning of the garden in the shape of a mandala highlights a characteristic autistic affinity for structure, pattern, and exactness. This meticulous approach reflects a comfort in organization and the desire for predictable outcomes in a world that can often feel chaotic.

The decision to plant in early spring, based on the practices at home, underscores a tendency to apply known routines to new contexts, sometimes without accounting for local variables. This can be linked to a literal interpretation of previous experiences and expectations, common among those on the autism spectrum, who may not instinctively adjust to the nuances of different environments.

The emotional journey from hopeful anticipation to intense disappointment reveals the depth of emotional investment that the narrator places in their pursuits. Autistic individuals often engage passionately with their interests, leading to significant emotional highs and lows depending on the outcomes.

Despite the setbacks, the narrator's perseverance is evident in their continued efforts and willingness to pursue their vision. This resilience, coupled with the willingness to engage help and accept the circumstances, demonstrates adaptability—a trait that may take longer to manifest but can result in profound personal growth.

Broader Observations

For a neurotypical audience, it is crucial to understand that autistic individuals may not always articulate or perceive emotional cues in the same way. The Teacher's quiet observation and indirect encouragement, such as his interest in their planting schedule, reflect a supportive approach that respects the narrator's autonomy and offers guidance without direct correction.

Projects like the garden exhibit how diverse cognitive styles bring unique perspectives and methodologies. The narrator's initial misstep with timing is balanced by their innovative design and ambitious goals, illustrating the importance of embracing diverse approaches even if they initially appear unconventional or impractical.

The narrative highlights the rich emotional depth that autistic individuals experience. Expressions of hope, disappointment, and eventual joy are intense and authentic. For a neurotypical audience, recognizing and validating these emotional experiences can foster understanding and acceptance.

The transformation of the garden, although not in the original manner intended, reflects the broader life lesson that growth and success may take unexpected forms. For both neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals, this story underscores the beauty of adaptability, reminding us that fruitful outcomes often require patience and an openness to unforeseen changes.

"Flower Power" serves as a testament to the value of diverse cognitive experiences, encouraging neurotypical audiences to appreciate and support neurodivergent perspectives in collaborative and creative endeavors. By doing so, we cultivate environments

where varied talents and insights can flourish, much like the vibrant garden eventually did.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

The story of the "Flower Power" garden reminds us of the importance of humility, surrender, and the cultivation of a greater good. The initial enthusiasm and determination to create a beautiful garden, driven by personal desires and expectations, ultimately led to frustration and disappointment. However, it was through the gentle guidance of the Teacher and the blessings of the community that the students were able to transcend their own limitations and realize the true purpose of their efforts.

As we reflect on this story, we can see that our own ego and attachment to our desires can often lead us astray. We may become so focused on our own goals and achievements that we forget the greater context in which we are operating. The story of the Calm-Abiding Garden reminds us that true happiness and fulfillment come not from our own individual accomplishments, but from contributing to a higher purpose.

In this sense, the garden becomes a metaphor for the cultivation of our own minds and hearts. Just as we need to tend to the soil and water and nurture the flowers, so too do we need to cultivate our own inner qualities, such as patience, compassion, and wisdom. The garden's transformation from barren ground to vibrant blooms serves as a reminder of the transformative power of these qualities.

As we continue on our own spiritual journeys, may we remember the importance of humility, surrender, and the cultivation of a greater good. May we approach our endeavors with an open heart and mind, willing to learn from our mistakes and adapt to the changing circumstances of life. And may we come to understand that true happiness and fulfillment arise not from our own individual

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achievements, but from contributing to a higher purpose that brings benefit to all beings.



Chapter 22. The Sword – Beneath the Surface

In Tibetan culture, the act of giving gifts is more than a mere formality; it embodies a deep and revered custom that speaks to the spirit of generosity and connection. One never visits a home empty-handed; rather, it is customary to bring along a basket filled with an assortment of gifts, like fresh fruit, ghee butter for butter tea, or an array of biscuits and sweets. Yet, almost immediately upon entering, hosts will begin to reciprocate—filling your basket with homemade treats and delightful surprises to take home, thus initiating a gracious cycle of giving and receiving.

For those with close connections and the means to take part, gifts can extend beyond simple delights. I once heard about the difficult situation faced by the sisters of a certain high lama who were desperately in need of a washing machine. Winter's ice-cold grasp rendered hand-washing a painful ordeal for their raw hands, and it was clear they required some relief. Inspired to help, I made a shopping trip to a larger town, where, after much deliberation, I purchased a fancy new washing machine that they could pick out themselves. Their gratitude lit up their faces, a reminder that even small acts of kindness can create ripples of joy.

Presenting gifts to teachers carries an even deeper significance. Offering fine goods from one's home country is especially cherished, and I often brought an assortment of exquisite brocades from Japan to adorn the altars. On occasion, the lamas would request lengths of fabric to offer to Teacher directly; this became a common practice for me, gifting the lamas so they could bestow these treasures to him.

However, I encountered some unintended missteps in my enthusiasm. On one particular visit, I brought along a suitcase brimming with Japanese cultural items for a lama of very high station. In the West, it is customary for the receiver to open gifts in front of the giver, to admire the contents and express gratitude. Unfamiliar with the nuances of Tibetan etiquette, I placed all the gifts out for display. The attendant lamas watched with disapproving glares, particularly when I laid wooden geta sandals on the table—a significant faux pas, as anything touching the ground is considered unclean, even if it is brand-new. Fortunately, the venerable lama laughed heartily, donning the sandals along with a gold silk kimono. His response comforted me, easing my anxiety about having trampled upon traditional customs.

On one of my subsequent visits, Teacher expressed a special request: he asked for a samurai sword. His interest in martial arts was well-known, and he had trained in various disciplines. Back in Tokyo, I eagerly scoured martial arts supplies stores and antique shops, determined to find the perfect sword for him. After much searching, I finally discovered a stunning blade—its quality was undeniable, with an ornate hilt adorned with a regal purple tassel, though the scabbard was rather plain.

With excitement swirling in my chest, I presented the sword to Teacher, my heart brimming with pride. But as I unveiled my find, his expression was one of mild disappointment. He inspected the sword closely, finally drawing it from its sheath. In that moment, the blade gleamed brilliantly in the light, revealing its intricate hammering pattern and fine craftsmanship. He held it across his forearm, scrutinizing its quality with an approving nod.

“The outside is very plain, but we can add more decorations,” he remarked thoughtfully. “The important part is not the appearance, but the hidden inner quality.”

I saw in his eyes that he agreed with my choice. I was making progress.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

The narrative "The Sword – Beneath the Surface" delves into the perceptions and behaviors of an autistic narrator, highlighting their interactions with cultural norms and personal learning experiences. The narrator's literal approach to cultural customs, such as displaying gifts directly, illuminates a common autistic trait of interpreting situations in a straightforward manner. Their initial actions suggest a focus on practicing what they perceive as generosity and openness, reflecting their understanding of gift-giving based on their own cultural contexts. The ensuing discomfort from attendants emphasizes the challenges autistic individuals may face when navigating nuanced social customs.

The careful selection of gifts, including the samurai sword, demonstrates the narrator's dedication to detail and thoughtfulness. Autistic individuals often invest significant time and effort in understanding and meeting the specific interests of others, emphasizing the value they place on meaningful connections and thoughtful gestures.

The narrator's interaction with both the high lama's laughter and the Teacher's lesson regarding the sword reveals an openness to feedback. This adaptive learning shows an ability to process and integrate new information, even when initially outside one's familiar framework. For many autistic individuals, similar experiences can lead to personal growth and enhanced understanding of social nuances over time.

The narrator's deep reflection following the Teacher's comments about the sword suggests a capacity for profound emotional insight. Autistic individuals may experience such revelations more intensely, deriving significant meaning from specific interactions or comments that resonate with their personal values and experiences.

Broader Observations

For a neurotypical audience, it is essential to appreciate the narrator's direct manner and intentions. Autistic individuals might not always conform to implicit social conventions, but their actions are often driven by genuine intentions and logical reasoning. In recognizing this, neurotypical individuals can foster more inclusive environments where diverse approaches are accepted and valued.

The narrative underscores the importance of acknowledging the detailed and earnest efforts many autistic individuals invest in tasks and relationships. Highlighting and appreciating these endeavors enhances mutual understanding and can bridge communication gaps between neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals.

The narrator's experience with the sword reflects an ongoing journey of learning and adaptation. Neurotypical individuals can support autistic peers by providing constructive feedback in an empathetic manner, allowing them space and time to process new cultural or social information without pressure or judgment.

The Teacher's lesson—that the essence of an offering lies in its inner quality, not its appearance—is relevant across all interactions. For a broader audience, this teaching invites reflection on the inherent value within actions and relationships, paralleling the understanding that neurodivergent behaviors or expressions may differ yet hold profound authenticity and sincerity.

This story serves as a reminder of the depth and richness that autistic perceptions bring to the tapestry of human interaction. By approaching these experiences with openness and understanding, neurotypical audiences can engage in more meaningful exchanges, ultimately enriching both individual and community connections.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

In reflecting on the story of the sword, we are reminded of the profound benefits of giving that Buddhism teaches us. It's not just about giving something away—it's about cultivating a sense of generosity and kindness that touches not just the recipient, but also ourselves.

When we give with an open heart, we receive a direct benefit. We feel lighter, more at peace, and more connected to others. Just as the swordsmith sleeps peacefully knowing he's created something to bring joy and protection, we can find solace in knowing that our actions are making a positive impact.

The recipient, too, receives a tangible benefit. They may find relief from suffering, support for their well-being, or opportunities for growth and development. For the warrior, the sword is a powerful tool for defending himself and others—but it's also a symbol of the protection and support we can offer to those around us.

But the greatest benefit of all is the ripple effect that our giving can have on all beings. When we engage in acts of kindness, we create a positive atmosphere that promotes harmony and sets an example for others to follow. We foster a sense of interconnectedness and compassion that can spread far and wide.

In this story, the act of giving is not just about the sword. It's about creating a culture of kindness and generosity that touches everyone involved. As we reflect on this teaching, let us remember the power of giving to transform ourselves, our relationships, and the world around us.



Chapter 23. The Broken Bracelet – A Tale of Attachment

My fascination with the maroon color of the monks' robes had turned into an obsession. I found myself on a quest, combing through every shop and market stall in search of clothing and accessories that matched that deep, rich hue. This pursuit wasn't just for me; I wanted to find suitable gifts for the lamas as well—caps, gloves, and knit scarves to provide warmth during the biting cold of the Himalayan winters. Each item I acquired felt like a cherished piece of the culture I admired so deeply.

One afternoon in Dharamsala, while wandering through the narrow streets, something caught my eye—a delicate silver bracelet displayed in the window of a petite shop. Set with blood-red garnets, it seemed to possess an alluring glow that perfectly complemented my all-maroon ensemble. Without negotiating for a better price—something I'd grown accustomed to—I decided to buy it. The shopkeeper secured it around my wrist with a gentle clasp, and I felt an immediate sense of satisfaction.

Just a few steps away from the shop, as I admired my new treasure, a group of young Tibetan women passed by. One of them broke away from the group and approached me. Her curiosity was evident as she asked to see the bracelet. I held it up to the light, eager to showcase the shimmering stones. But then, her gaze shifted, and an unmistakable expectation hung in the air; without saying a word, she seemed to silently demand that I give it to her.

I hesitated, my initial excitement fading. I felt a sense of reluctance swelling in my chest—I had just bought the bracelet, and a part of me enjoyed its presence on my wrist. With an awkward smile, I pretended not to understand her implied request and wished her a good day before turning away.

Yet fate had other plans. Almost immediately after I walked away, disaster struck—the clasp of the bracelet broke, and it slipped off my wrist, crashing to the ground and fracturing into pieces. I crouched down, embarrassment flooding through me, as I quickly scooped up the remnants, shoving them into my purse. I fervently hoped the young woman hadn't witnessed the mishap. The bracelet was brand new, and I'd have to return to the shop another day for repairs.

The next morning, the atmosphere in the monastery hall was electric, filled with a buzzing anticipation as a large crowd of devotees took their places for a special empowerment ceremony. As I settled into my spot, my eyes caught sight of that same young woman from the previous day. She was standing at the side of the stage, talking with some lamas, her head shaven and dressed in maroon robes that mirrored those of the monastic community.

Intrigued and somewhat anxious, I leaned over to the man beside me and asked, "Who is that young woman?"

He replied simply, "She is a Jetsun."

The weight of those words sank in, and my heart raced. Jetsun—a title denoting a female practitioner of exceptional qualities and spiritual stature, someone revered within the community. It dawned on me that the young woman I'd encountered was not just anyone; she was likely a figure of high respect and spiritual significance.

Panic took hold of me as I felt the sweat bead on my forehead. Overcome with a sense of urgency, I excused myself, darting out of the hall and down to the riverbank. Once there, I pulled out the broken remnants of the bracelet from my purse. The water glimmered in the sunlight, and without further thought, I tossed the broken pieces into the flowing current, watching them disappear from view. It felt like a symbolic act of letting go—an acknowledgment of my own attachment and an attempt to align myself with the teachings of generosity and non-attachment.

What had seemed like a simple accessory had transformed into a profound lesson. The experience echoed like a clarion call—an immediate and vivid reminder of the values I cherished within the community. I understood that sometimes, the universe teaches us through unexpected encounters and divine retribution; a gentle nudge towards humility and greater self-awareness. As I stood by the river, watching the bracelet sink into the water, I felt an overwhelming sense of release, a cleansing of my spirit akin to the flowing river itself.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

The narrative "The Broken Bracelet - A Tale of Attachment and Awakening" provides an insightful perspective into the autistic narrator's experiences and perceptions. Through the lens of a material attachment and its subsequent loss, the story explores themes of cultural fascination, attachment, and spiritual growth.

The narrator's fascination with the maroon color of the monks' robes reflects a common autistic trait of developing intense interests or hyper-fixations. This interest manifests in a search for clothing and accessories that match, showcasing a desire to connect deeply with a cultural aesthetic. Such focus can provide comfort and a sense of identity for autistic individuals, offering a structured way to engage with the world.

The encounter with the young Tibetan woman presents a moment of social complexity. The narrator's choice to pretend not to understand her non-verbal request for the bracelet reveals a potentially pragmatic approach to an uncomfortable social situation. This reaction aligns with how some autistic individuals navigate unspoken social cues, relying on direct communication styles when faced with ambiguity.

The loss of the bracelet triggers an emotional journey, marked by embarrassment, panic, and eventual release. Autistic individuals may experience strong emotional reactions to unexpected changes, requiring time and space to process and adapt. The narrator's spontaneous decision to discard the broken bracelet into the river symbolizes a personal resolution and acceptance of impermanence.

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The narrative culminates in profound reflection and spiritual awakening. The narrator draws connections between the incident and broader teachings of non-attachment. This introspection highlights an ability to find deeper meaning in experiences, a strength that autistic individuals often possess, allowing them to internalize and learn from life's lessons in unique ways.

Broader Observations

For neurotypical audiences, understanding the importance of focused interests for autistic individuals is crucial. Such interests offer a gateway to personal expression and connection, providing stability and joy. By valuing these interests, society can foster environments that encourage exploration and creativity.

The narrator's handling of social cues underscores the diversity in communication methods. Neurotypical individuals should be mindful that not everyone interprets or responds to social nuances in conventional ways. Encouraging direct and clear communication benefits all parties by reducing misunderstandings and fostering inclusivity.

The narrative illustrates the intensity of emotional processing in autistic experiences. Neurotypical individuals can support autistic peers by allowing them space to navigate their emotional responses independently, recognizing that seemingly simple events can hold significant personal weight and learning potential.

The narrator's eventual release of attachment serves as a metaphor for personal growth and adaptability. The broader audience can learn from the narrative's reflection on impermanence, gaining insight into how autistic individuals may derive profound lessons from everyday occurrences, enriching their spiritual and emotional journeys.

"The Broken Bracelet - A Tale of Attachment and Awakening" offers a compelling exploration of autistic perceptions. By recognizing and valuing these perspectives, neurotypical audiences can better appreciate the unique insights and potential for growth that arise from neurodiverse experiences, ultimately fostering a more empathetic and understanding society.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

In the realm of Buddhism, the story of the bracelet and its untimely break offers a profound lesson about the impermanence of all things. This experience serves as a powerful reminder that our attachments, even to cherished possessions, are fleeting. When we let go of something as personal as a bracelet, we are embodying the Buddhist principles of generosity and selflessness, fostering deeper connections within our community.

Karma, an essential concept in Buddhist thought, reminds us that our actions carry consequences. However, it's important to recognize that the effects of karma aren't always immediate or straightforward. What truly matters is the intention behind our actions. In this tale, the breaking of the bracelet can be viewed not as punishment but as a natural occurrence within the physical world, nudging us to reflect on our own motivations.

As we journey through life, the attachment to material possessions can often lead to suffering. When the bracelet broke, it served as a vivid reminder of this impermanence, encouraging us to examine our relationships with our belongings. This moment can provoke introspection, leading us to reconsider what truly matters and cultivate a healthier sense of detachment.

Ultimately, the tale of the bracelet's break invites us to embrace the art of letting go and the virtues of generosity. By acknowledging the transient nature of life and prioritizing selflessness, we open ourselves to greater peace and liberation on our spiritual path. It's a gentle yet powerful nudge to release our grip on attachments, allowing us to grow and connect more meaningfully with ourselves and others.



Chapter 24. Meditation and Mind Music

During meditation sessions termed "Calling the Guru from Afar," I endeavored to forge a deeper connection with my Teacher, a vital practice for me as my travels frequently whisked me away from the monastery. These sessions were initially perceived as a one-sided endeavor on my part; I thought I was simply trying to reach out to him. However, I would later come to understand that it was a profound exchange, a two-way communication that opened channels between us, transcending physical distances.

After spending several months away in Japan, I found myself sitting in the audience of Teacher at his monastery in northern India. It felt surreal to be back in his presence, where the energy buzz resonated within me. Out of the blue, he made a comment that took me by surprise: "You should listen to more soothing music," he advised, his tone imbued with concern.

"Why do you like to play that rough music so loudly?" he continued, raising an eyebrow. "It sounds like pots and pans being thrown down the stairs. It sounds so angry and violent."

I felt my heart skip a beat. How could he possibly know? I had never shared my taste for hard rock music. Music had always been a private sanctuary for me, an energetic release that I submerged myself in during moments of solitude. Yet here he was, perceptively critiquing my habits, revealing a connection I had yet to fully comprehend.

This wasn't an isolated incident. On another occasion, he playfully probed my affinity for a different genre altogether—Arabic

music. It took me back, years earlier, to a time when my family hosted a student from Jordan named Mohammed. He introduced me to the captivating artistry of Abdel Halim Hafez, the Egyptian singer whose records would fill our home with beautiful melodies. I could still recall those afternoons spent listening to Hafez's smooth voice alongside Mohammed, learning to sing along in Arabic. Over the years, I had lost those precious records, but a recent trip to Egypt had reignited my love for that music. I eagerly collected every form of Hafez's work—cassettes, CDs, videos—bringing them back home to Japan and playing them at every opportunity.

When I next visited the monastery, Teacher couldn't resist a teasing jab. "Why do you listen to Arabic music?" he asked, seemingly bemused. "You are Buddhist, aren't you? Are you not aware that you're listening to Islamic music? In what former lifetime were you a Muslim?"

Each song, each rhythm held a certain elation for me. Listening to this music would evoke a kind of ecstatic high, sending a cold fire shooting up my spine and bursting out from the top of my head. For me, it was a shared experience—a reaction that I naively assumed everyone felt in the presence of their favorite songs. This sensation would often lead me into a trance-like state, a delicious buzzing coursing through my body, as if I were acting as a transceiver, channeling energy from the universe itself. Years down the line, I would learn that this phenomenon was called synesthesia, a blending of sensory experiences that colored my understanding of music's power.

Yet, during a subsequent visit, Teacher offered a surprising piece of advice, seemingly unrelated to our previous discussions. "You know that buzzing feeling you get when you listen to music?" he said contemplatively. "That is not enlightenment."

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His words hit me like a gentle but firm hand. He was pointing out that instead of becoming attached to the sheer wonder of these sensations—obsessing over replicating them—I should redirect my focus toward deepening my meditation practice. While these experiences might signal a fleeting glimpse of awakening, clinging to them could impede my progression toward ultimate realization.

With his insight, Teacher articulated a broader message about the nature of attachment and desire. He served as my guide, reminding me not to veer off course in pursuit of ephemeral highs. Instead, he encouraged me to cultivate a more profound understanding of my spiritual path, one based on continuous growth rather than momentary bliss.

“I’m keeping my eye on you,” he added with a twinkle in his eye. “I check the progress of your practice and will guide you back should you find yourself distracted amidst a whirlpool of sensations.”

In these moments of reflection, I felt the immense responsibility and privilege of having such a teacher. His observations were more than mere personal critiques; they were gentle, guiding lessons meant to reintegrate my focus on what truly mattered in my practice. A beautiful interplay of learning, connection, and the sacred artistry of music began to unfold in my path, illuminating the way toward a deeper understanding of self and spirit.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

The narrative "Meditation and Music: A Journey of Connection" provides a rich, insightful portrayal of the autistic narrator's unique perceptions and behaviors, particularly as they intersect with sensory experiences, personal preferences, and spiritual growth. Through the exploration of music and the lessons imparted by their Teacher, we

gain a deeper understanding of the narrator's worldview and their journey toward self-awareness and enlightenment.

The narrator's experience of music as a "cold fire shooting up the spine" illustrates the phenomenon of synesthesia, where sensory inputs blend and cross over in unique ways. Autistic individuals often have heightened sensory perceptions, leading to rich, multi-layered experiences. This synesthetic response to music exemplifies how intensely autistic people can experience seemingly ordinary stimuli, finding in them profound personal meaning and emotional resonance.

The narrator's deep engagement with music—whether hard rock or Arabic melodies—demonstrates a focused affinity typical of autistic individuals. Music acts as both a sanctuary and a channel for emotional expression, where the narrator finds solace and ecstatic joy. This highlights the autistic tendency to form strong attachments to specific interests that offer both comfort and excitement, effectively serving as a tool for regulation and expression of complex emotions.

The Teacher's comments on the narrator's musical preferences may initially appear playful, yet they communicate deeper insights about attachment and spiritual progress. The narrator's ability to take these remarks seriously, reflecting on them as symbolic lessons beyond their literal meaning, showcases an openness to learning and personal growth—a journey that requires moving beyond the comfort of familiar interests toward broader awareness.

Throughout the narrative, the narrator remains open to their Teacher's guidance, even when it challenges their existing perceptions and attachments. This willingness to reflect on personal experiences from multiple angles and to integrate feedback into their spiritual journey indicates a high degree of adaptability and self-

awareness, traits that may require conscious development but can lead to meaningful transformation.

Broader Observations

Neurotypical audiences should recognize and appreciate the profound sensory experiences and perspectives that autistic individuals bring to the table. These experiences often provide deep insight and creativity, enriching both personal understanding and broader cultural expressions. By appreciating these differences, society becomes more inclusive and open to diverse forms of expression and perception.

The story underscores the importance of respecting and valuing autistic individuals' interests, which may differ from mainstream preferences. These interests are not merely hobbies but essential components of identity and emotional well-being, offering pathways for deeper connection, exploration, and personal insight.

The Teacher's approach—combining playful banter with profound spiritual insights—serves as a model for offering guidance to autistic individuals. Gentle, empathetic feedback that respects personal autonomy while encouraging growth is more likely to be accepted and integrated. Neurotypical individuals can adopt such approaches, fostering trust and growth in their relationships with autistic peers.

The narrative invites reflection on the nature of attachment, urging both autistic and neurotypical individuals to consider how clinging to familiar pleasures might impede personal growth. It highlights the need for balance, encouraging a broader awareness and adaptability in the pursuit of personal and spiritual goals.

"Meditation and Music: A Journey of Connection" emphasizes the rich inner lives of autistic individuals and the importance of

supportive, empathetic relationships in guiding personal development. By valuing these insights, neurotypical audiences can better appreciate and engage with the diverse contributions of neurodivergent individuals, enhancing collective understanding and empathy.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

This story beautifully encapsulates the profound connection forged between a guru and a disciple, a relationship deeply rooted in the spirit of Vajrayana Buddhism—a path which emphasizes the transformative power of the mind and the guidance of a teacher. In Vajrayana, the guru is not merely an instructor but rather a living embodiment of wisdom who plays a crucial role in the disciple's spiritual development.

The narrative vividly illustrates how the relationship transcends physical distances, carving an intangible yet deeply felt bond. Through the practice of "Calling the Guru from Afar," the disciple begins to recognize this connection as a two-way communication. This realization underscores a key principle of Vajrayana: the intricate relationship between the mind and energy, and how even from afar, the guru's guidance can shape and influence the disciple's path.

The story poignantly reveals moments of personal insight catalyzed by the Teacher's remarks about music, serving as metaphors for broader spiritual teachings. The Teacher's uncanny knowledge of the disciple's music preferences highlights the deep attunement and understanding the guru possesses regarding the disciple's inner world. This insight is not just an anomaly but a testament to the guru's role in seeing beyond the surface, helping unveil hidden attachments that may hinder spiritual progress.

The Teacher's comments about Arabic music and the intense sensory experiences associated with it bring forth a crucial teaching: the delicate balance between enjoyment and attachment. In Vajrayana practice, while sensory experiences and energies are tools for transformation, they also pose a risk if not navigated

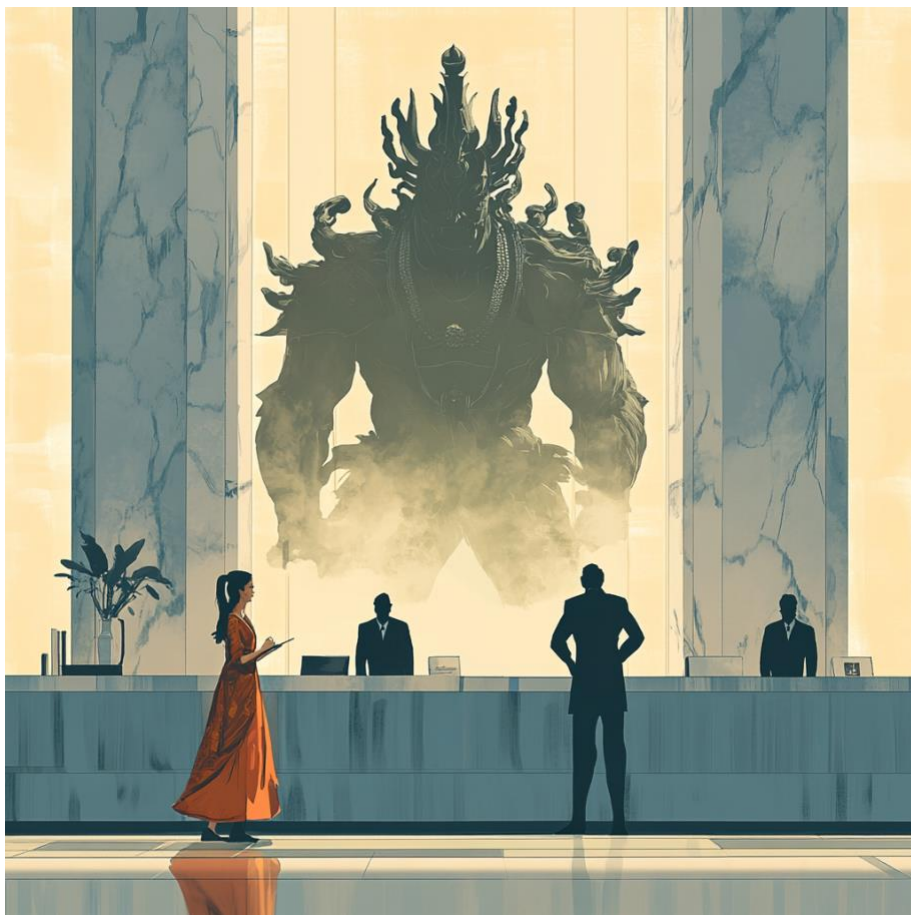
carefully. The Teacher gently redirects the disciple's attention from the intoxicating allure of these sensory highs to the importance of grounding one's practice in deeper meditative inquiry. This guidance is emblematic of the Vajrayana approach, where the allure of samsaric pleasures is acknowledged, yet transcended through the wisdom of heightened awareness.

The notion of keeping a "third eye" on the disciple underscores the compassionate vigilance of the guru, always attuned to the disciple's spiritual trajectory. This connection serves as both a safety net and a compass, ensuring that the disciple's path remains aligned with the quest for ultimate realization rather than sidetracked by impermanent indulgences.

Through the teacher's gentle, yet firm guidance, the disciple learns to appreciate the ephemeral beauty of sensory experiences while maintaining focus on the greater goal of spiritual enlightenment. In doing so, their journey reflects the essence of Vajrayana—transforming every moment, sensation, and connection into a potential doorway to deeper understanding and liberation.

The story thus invites reflection on the delicate dance between attachment and release, between joy and wisdom, and on the enduring bond that illuminates the journey of teacher and student in the quest for spiritual awakening.

Dharma Dumplings



Chapter 25. Hotel Trap – Peril and Protection

The Teacher usually sent one of his trusted drivers to greet me at the Delhi airport. This ensured my safe passage through the chaotic streets, across the expansive plains, and up the treacherous mountain roads that led to the monastery. My journeys typically involved two heavy bags, loaded with offerings for the Teacher and gifts for the community. The customs officers, familiar with the purpose of my frequent visits, would breezily wave me through the “nothing to declare” line, as if they were part of the same sacred routine.

Yet, on this particular visit, something felt off. When I stepped into the bustling arrival hall, I scanned the crowd for the familiar face of my driver, always there, sign in hand, ready to whisk me away. But today, there was no sign. My heart began to race with unease as I searched the faces around me. The minutes ticked by, and with each passing second, my anxiety grew.

By 1 am, still no sign of him. Frustrated and exhausted, I spotted a young man with an inviting demeanor, already dragging my baggage cart toward a nearby taxi. “Madam, come with me. I’ll get you there quickly. No problem,” he insisted. Too weary to argue and desperate for a place to rest, I relented and instructed him to drive me to my usual hotel in town. I would arrange for another driver to take me north in the morning.

The traffic was mercifully light, and we navigated the city with minimal interruptions. But as we approached my hotel, the driver unexpectedly turned off the main road onto a narrow street. “Blocked up ahead,” he gestured, claiming he needed to take a detour. My

Dharma Dumplings

unease began to bubble beneath the surface. Each question I posed about our direction was met with vague gestures and an odd reluctance to speak. Confused, I felt the air around us thickening as the buildings transformed into sparse outlines shadowed by the night.

As we slowed down through a small village, I instinctively reached for the door handle, only to find it locked. The veneer of calm I normally carried began to fray, replaced by frustration and a growing pit of dread in my stomach. My instincts screamed at me to be cautious.

It was nearly 3 am when we finally pulled up outside an ancient, deserted-looking hotel, dimly lit by a solitary street lamp. I followed the driver up the creaking steps and entered a dismal reception hall that looked frozen in time, with peeling faux leather sofas and a damp odor hanging in the air. A youngish man with a mustache stood behind the desk. He barely greeted me, only asking me to sign the guest book, and tried to keep my passport when I wouldn't let it go.

"See here, my good man," I said with an air of authority, "you haven't properly welcomed me, you haven't brought my bags, and you haven't offered me any refreshments. What rooms do you have available on the ground floor? You must have several vacancies. There can't be many guests in this place."

As I spoke, I noticed figures emerge from the shadows, men standing quietly in corners, watching me. Their silence was deafening, and the atmosphere shifted palpably—they seemed to be waiting for a signal from the receptionist. Panic coiled within me, but I pushed it aside, instead feeling an urgent need to reach out to the Teacher.

"I have to call my husband. Give me that phone!" I demanded, snatching it from the counter despite the receptionist's protests that it was out of order. My fingers trembled as I dialed Teacher, but the line was busy. I panicked for a split second before feigning a conversation, my voice taking on a commanding tone.

"Laila? This is your mistress. Tell my driver to come and get me at once. I'm at the..." I grabbed a matchbook and rattled off the name and address of the hotel. I ended the call abruptly, turned to the receptionist, and demanded, "Show me to a room. I want to rest a short while until my servants arrive. Bring my bags. Bring me some tea. What kind of place is this? Terrible service."

To my annoyance, the receptionist informed me that the charge for a room would be \$100, even if I stayed only an hour. "What does that matter to me?" I retorted, waving my hand dismissively. "Do you expect me to wait in your dusty lounge? I want a room on this floor so I can leave quickly. Bring my bags immediately!" My haughtiness masked the growing fear knotting in my stomach.

Just then, shadowy figures of monks began to materialize in the dim light, slowly filling the room behind the men. For a split second, I could have sworn one of them was the Teacher. A chill swept through the hall, resonating with an unfathomable energy. The chandelier flickered, and a cold breath of air sent shivers down my spine. My heart raced, half in fear and half in recognition that I was being watched over.

"Hurry up," I barked at the bellboy as he led the way, pushing my cart of luggage toward a hallway lined with doors. He showed me to the first room, setting my bags inside. I tipped him and closed the door behind me, listening intently as silence enveloped the space.

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After a moment, I felt compelled to try calling the Teacher again, and this time, my call connected. There were no pleasantries exchanged; he immediately warned, "Do not leave the room. We will come get you."

Just then, someone jiggled the door handle. My heart jumped as I sprang from the bed and swung the door open to find the bellboy standing there with a tea tray. I took it from him, gave him a few coins, and shut the door quickly, attempting but failing to lock it.

Sensing the gravity of my situation, I piled my heavy suitcases against the door before collapsing onto the bed, drifting into a restless sleep filled with unsettling dreams.

It was barely dawn when I was jolted awake by loud banging on the door. The Teacher's attendants rushed in, grabbing my bags and ushering me out of the room. My heart raced as they led me to a waiting sedan, and we sped away from that eerie hotel.

Arriving at a luxurious hotel, I was led into a spacious living room where the Teacher sat on a sofa, watching my arrival with a slow shake of his head. I dropped to my knees, touched my forehead to the floor at his feet, an instinctual gesture of respect and gratitude for the protection he had provided.

In that moment, I realized the deep connection I had with him was not merely that of a student to a teacher, but rather a bond forged through trials, guidance, and an unwavering watchfulness in the face of danger.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

The narrative "Hotel Trap - A Night of Peril and Protection" takes us through an experience that highlights the autistic narrator's unique

perceptions, behaviors, and relational dynamics with the Teacher. Through this tale, we gain insight into their sensory sensitivities, social navigation, and deep emotional connections, offering broader reflections for a neurotypical audience.

The narrator's sensitivity to the unfamiliar—heightened by the absence of their trusted driver—demonstrates an acute awareness of changes in routine. Autistic individuals often find comfort in predictable patterns and can experience heightened anxiety when faced with unexpected disruptions. The sensory details of the environment, such as the dim lighting and musty smells of the hotel, further amplify their unease, showcasing the hyper-intensity with which autistic people often perceive their surroundings.

Faced with a potentially threatening situation, the narrator employs direct and assertive communication, relying on literal and straightforward demands to gain control. This approach illustrates the pragmatic use of verbal skills to navigate complex social interactions, a strategy that can be crucial for autistic individuals when managing stress or perceived threats. Their ability to improvise a phone conversation to project an authoritative presence further underscores adaptability and quick thinking in high-pressure situations.

The narrator's deep, emotive connection to the Teacher illustrates the intensity of attachments that autistic individuals can form with trusted figures. The narrative reveals an embedded trust and reliance on the Teacher's guidance, which empowers the narrator to face and endure their anxieties. This bond is rooted in past experiences and spiritual connection, highlighting the profound relationships that can develop through shared understanding and mutual respect.

The vision of monks and the sensed presence of the Teacher during the tense moments at the hotel speak to the narrator's spiritual and sensory synthesis, reflecting a uniquely autistic means of integrating

spirituality with lived experience. This blending of sensory detail with spiritual symbolism illuminates the depth of the narrator's internal world, where physical and metaphysical realms intersect.

About Fear:

Neurodivergent people can experience and express fear differently from neurotypical individuals. For example, autistic individuals often experience heightened anxiety and may be prone to more intense fear responses in certain situations. This anxiety can be triggered by sensory overload, unexpected changes, or social situations that are difficult to navigate.

Also, the triggers for fear in autistic individuals may differ from those for neurotypical people. For example, they might feel more fearful in situations involving loud noises, crowded spaces, or disruptions to their routines, whereas neurotypical individuals might not.

How fear is expressed or communicated can vary. Some autistic people may have difficulty articulating their feelings in ways that are easily recognized by others, leading to misconceptions about their emotional states.

Situations that often induce fear in neurotypical individuals, such as public speaking or social interactions, might not invoke the same response in some autistic people due to a different focus of attention or interpretation of social cues.

Autistic individuals may not always perceive danger in the same way neurotypical people do due to differences in contextual and environmental processing. *This can sometimes result in not recognizing situations that others might instinctively find threatening.*

Broader Considerations

It's important for neurotypical individuals to respect and understand these differences in fear perception and expression, rather than assuming a lack of emotional experience.

Recognizing what induces fear or anxiety in autistic individuals can help in creating supportive environments that mitigate these challenges and respect personal boundaries.

Encourage open discussions about feelings and fears in ways that are accessible and comfortable for autistic people, allowing them to express themselves more freely.

Avoid stereotypes or blanket assumptions about emotions in autism. Each individual is unique, and their experience of fear and other emotions is shaped by a variety of factors, including personal history, sensory sensitivity, and social understanding.

While fear responses in autistic individuals can be distinct and sometimes misunderstood, they are nonetheless very real and valid. It is crucial to approach these experiences with empathy and a willingness to learn and adapt to each person's unique needs and expressions.

Neurotypical audiences should appreciate the heightened sensory perceptions that are characteristic of the autistic experience. Recognizing and accommodating these sensitivities can lead to more supportive environments and interactions, acknowledging that seemingly small changes can have significant impacts for autistic individuals.

Dharma Dumplings

The narrative demonstrates the effectiveness of direct communication as a tool for navigating uncertainty. For neurotypical individuals, acknowledging and respecting this communication style can enhance understanding and collaboration, respecting the clarity and straightforwardness that can be essential for autistic peers.

The importance of trusted relationships, as exemplified by the bond with the Teacher, emphasizes the need for reliability and consistency in fostering meaningful connections with autistic individuals. Neurotypical audiences can learn from this to build trust through reliability, clear communication, and respect for individual needs and boundaries.

The blending of sensory and spiritual experiences provides insight into the multi-faceted ways autistic individuals interpret the world. Neurotypical audiences might draw inspiration from this holistic perspective, recognizing that diverse sensory and spiritual insights contribute to a richer, more nuanced understanding of human experience.

"Hotel Trap - A Night of Peril and Protection" presents an engaging exploration of the autistic narrator's world, encouraging neurotypical audiences to acknowledge and appreciate the unique insights and resilience that arise from neurodiverse perspectives. By doing so, society can foster greater empathy, understanding, and inclusivity for individuals across the cognitive spectrum.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

In Tibetan Buddhism, recognized teachers and lamas have the authority to perform rituals and practices that involve *dharmapala* or dharma protectors. These protectors are considered to be embodiments of enlightened qualities and are invoked for the

purpose of removing obstacles on the path to enlightenment, providing protection, and guiding practitioners on their spiritual path.

If a Teacher feels that a follower is in danger, they may perform specific rituals or prayers to invoke a dharma protector, seeking their aid and protection for the individual. However, the effectiveness of such actions is understood to depend on various factors, including the faith and devotion of the practitioner and the karma involved.

It's important to note that while these rituals can be meaningful and powerful within the context of Tibetan Buddhist practice, they also coexist with the understanding that personal responsibility, wisdom, and practical actions should be taken in situations of danger or distress.

Dharma Dumplings



Chapter 26. Wild Driver – A Guardian's Presence

Ani (my nun friend) and I were well-acquainted with the regular taxi drivers who frequented the monastery, men from a nearby village who had become part of the fabric of our lives, transporting monks and visitors alike to and from various monastic universities and guesthouses dotting the landscape. However, on this particular day, urgency nipped at our heels; we needed supplies for our work, but none of the familiar faces were around. Out of necessity, we hailed an unfamiliar driver who seemed eager for a fare.

As soon as we were settled in the back seat, the driver hit the accelerator, launching us down the winding mountain road at breakneck speed. His radio blasted Hindi pop music, the sound mingling with the roar of the wind and the acceleration of the car. Alarm bells rang in our heads as we quickly realized that the road we were traversing was precariously sandwiched between a steep mountain to our right and a sheer cliff that dropped dramatically to a swirling river below.

“Slow down!” we shouted in unison, but our cries were drowned out by the music blasting through the car, and the driver seemed either oblivious or uninterested in our pleas. Panic started to creep in, tightening our chests. We dared not tap him on the shoulder, fearing that even the slightest movement might distract him at such high speeds, so we turned to chanting a protection mantra, hoping our collective energy would wrap around us like an unseen shield.

Dharma Dumplings

Our voices rose with urgency, mingling with the blaring music and the screeching tires beneath us. The cacophony was punctuated by our nervous laughter, tinged with fear, as each twist and turn threatened to send us tumbling into the abyss below.

Just as we thought it couldn't get worse, we rounded a blind corner and were met with a sight that made our stomachs drop—a stretch of broken road, completely covered by debris from a recent landslide. In a moment of panic, the driver swerved onto a path that seemed to materialize out of nowhere before hitting the brakes, the car skidding into a tangle of broken shrubbery.

When the car finally came to a halt, we scrambled out of the vehicle with a mix of relief and anger. We turned to confront the driver, but our words caught in our throats when we took a good look at him. His wild, bloodshot eyes roamed erratically, and though he didn't smell of alcohol, it was clear something was seriously amiss. The reddish-brown stain on his teeth exposed his habit of chewing paan or betel nut, a stimulant that kept him alert on long journeys.

We stepped away from the car, shaking off our anxiety, and sank onto a ledge of nearby rocks, laughter bubbling up as we processed the near-disaster. It was in this moment of levity that an unexpected visitor appeared—a striking albino grasshopper. It hopped onto a branch, its pristine white body standing out starkly against the background. It seemed to size us up for a moment before making an improbable leap onto my hand, its size almost matching that of my palm.

Ani and I exchanged wide-eyed glances. “Teacher?” we gasped in unison, our faces lighting up with wonder. It felt as though this extraordinary creature had been sent—or had embodied the essence of protection right when we needed it most. The

grasshopper soon made itself comfortable on the mala rosary I held, performing a little dance that felt like confirmation of its purpose.

When the driver was finally able to coax the car back into motion, Ani and I settled in the back, feeling a wave of calm wash over us. To our delight, the grasshopper climbed onto the top of the driver's headrest, where it remained throughout the journey. Surprisingly, the driver, seemingly unaware of his unlikely passenger, began to relax. The erratic pace slowed to a manageable speed, and he turned off the radio, succumbing to an unspoken tranquility that blanketed the car.

With the white grasshopper watching over us, the remainder of our drive was serene. We held hands in the back seat, our spirits lifted as we chanted together, surrounded by a sense of safety that had once felt so fragile. As we approached the outskirts of Delhi, glimmers of light from the city ahead promised solace and safety.

Suddenly, the grasshopper jumped from the driver's headrest and out of the window, landing gracefully on a nearby tree trunk. We shared a knowing look, realizing we didn't need any more protection for the journey ahead.

And just like that, our guardian bid farewell. Though we did not know it, he would not be gone for long. This magical creature would reappear on future trips, manifesting in the same spectacular guise—reminding us that not only did we walk with protection, but we also walked with the uncertain yet thrilling magic of the universe, persistently keeping watch over us, even in the most unexpected ways.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

Dharma Dumplings

The narrative "A Guardian's Presence" offers a portrayal of an autistic narrator's experiences of navigating a precarious situation, highlighted by heightened sensory perceptions, intuitive connections, and spiritual symbolism. These elements provide deeper insights into the narrator's world and offer broader reflections for a neurotypical audience.

The intense sensory experiences described during the car ride—blaring music, roaring wind, and the precarious road—underscore the narrator's heightened sensitivity to their environment. This sensory awareness is common among autistic individuals and can amplify both anxiety and caution in situations that feel overwhelming or dangerous.

Faced with the alarming behavior of the driver and the dangerous road, the narrator and their companion turn to chanting a protective mantra. This response highlights a reliance on familiar rituals and intuitive coping mechanisms to regain a sense of control and security in moments of crisis—strategies that many autistic individuals use to navigate anxiety-inducing situations.

The appearance of the albino grasshopper represents a powerful moment of symbolic connection, interpreted as a spiritual sign of protection. Autistic individuals often have unique relationships with nature and the symbolism they perceive in the world around them. This connection can foster a sense of wonder, comfort, and reassurance, reinforcing their understanding of interconnectedness.

Despite the harrowing experience, the narrator processes the event with humor and camaraderie, highlighting the capacity for emotional resilience and connection with others. Finding levity in adversity reflects an ability to process complex emotions, a trait that can be consciously developed and deeply rewarding.

Broader Observations

Neurotypical audiences should recognize that heightened sensory sensitivities are a reality for many autistic individuals. This awareness can promote empathy and understanding, supporting efforts to minimize overwhelming sensory inputs in shared environments and valuing individual coping strategies.

The reliance on mantras reflects the importance of familiar rituals and personal strategies for managing stress. Recognizing and respecting these methods can help neurotypical individuals appreciate the adaptive techniques autistic individuals use to self-regulate.

The narrative encourages neurotypical audiences to appreciate the richness of symbolic and intuitive connections that autistic individuals can experience. These interpretations add depth to personal understanding and offer diverse perspectives on the interconnected nature of existence.

By acknowledging and participating in shared emotional experiences such as humor and collective rituals, neurotypical individuals can help cultivate supportive, inclusive communities that celebrate diversity in emotional expression and resilience.

"A Guardian's Presence" invites a broader audience to reflect on the unique insights and strengths of autistic perspectives. By embracing these perspectives, society can foster environments that honor neurodiversity, enhancing collective empathy, understanding, and connectivity.

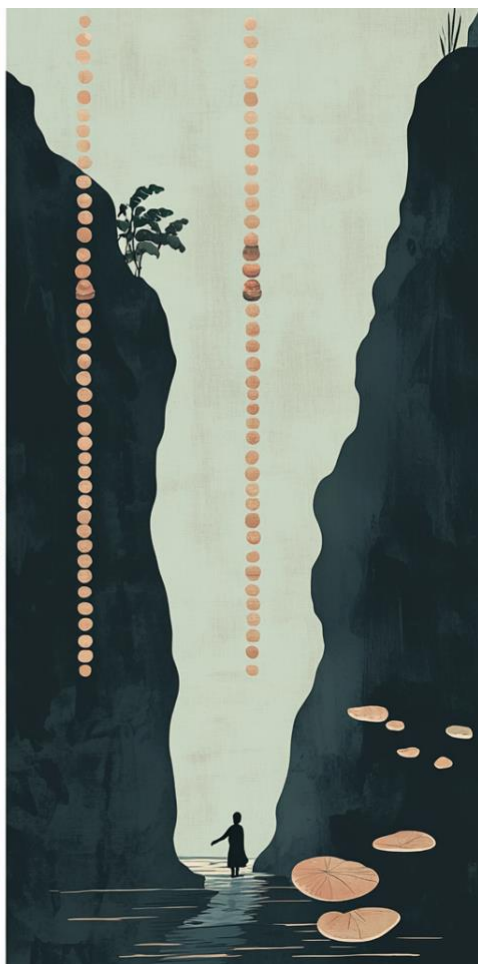
Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

In Vajrayana Buddhism, a teacher manifesting in an animal or insect form to act as a protector for a disciple can be understood through various interconnected concepts and principles. The idea of protectors (Herukas in Tibetan; Dharmapalas in Sanskrit) and skillful means (upāya) are crucial in this context. The teacher's manifestation can symbolize the protective qualities that embody both wisdom and compassion, necessary to guide the disciple safely.

The concept of skillful means (upāya) highlights the adaptive strategies that an enlightened teacher employs to meet the needs of their students. If a disciple requires protection or guidance, the teacher may appear in a form that is accessible, relatable, or culturally resonant to the student. This manifestation serves to provide assistance in a way that is specifically suited to the disciple's circumstances.

Compassion (karuna) is a fundamental aspect of the spiritual path. When a teacher takes on the form of an animal or insect, it can reflect deep compassion for the disciple's situation. Such a manifestation can be understood as a gesture of deep caring and commitment to protecting and guiding the student.

The concept that all beings possess Buddha Nature highlights the idea that wisdom and enlightenment are not limited to human forms. As a teacher embodies the essence of enlightenment, they may manifest in an animal or insect form to reinforce the understanding that all beings are interconnected and that spiritual protection and guidance can arise from any source.



Chapter 27. Special Powers - Lessons in the Light

There were moments in my journey with the Teacher that left me questioning the very fabric of reality. His extraordinary feats often felt surreal: materializing on his ornate throne, or hovering in deep meditation above the tranquil pond in his private garden. During these instances, I couldn't shake the feeling that I had stumbled upon a sacred secret, a rare glimpse into a mystical realm. Whenever he effortlessly turned his gaze towards me, smiling gently and declaring, "This is for your eyes only," I sensed that these wonders were not mere spectacles, but gifts intended to nurture my faith and commitment to the path I was striving to walk.

However, on one occasion, despite the reverence and awe I held for him, my curiosity got the better of me. I gathered the courage to ask him a direct question about the attainment of siddhi, or special powers. "What kind of special powers?" he responded, a hint of impishness sparkling in his eyes.

"For example," I pressed, "what practices might someone undertake to develop the ability to walk through walls or to levitate?"

He chuckled at my inquiry, his laughter like a warm sunburst, but his expression quickly shifted to one of serious contemplation. "If I were interested in attaining special powers—and I'm not—but if I were, I might spend many years in retreat, engaged in numerous practices. And then, after all that time, I would check my progress."

“How would you go about doing that?” I inquired, my curiosity fully ignited.

With a deadpan expression, he responded, “I would run straight into a wall to see whether I could go through it. Or I would sit in lotus position and jump to see if I’d levitate or crash back down to earth.” The image of him playfully crashing into a wall made me stifle a laugh, yet his message began to sink in, heavy with significance. “So much effort, energy, time, and pain. For what? Why would you want to put yourself through that? It might make you want to give up practicing altogether. I will tell you an easier way,” he continued, leaning in as if to share a treasured secret.

Eager to hear this revelation, I held my breath in anticipation.

“If you want to go to the other side of a wall, just open the door. If you want to fly, buy a plane ticket,” he said with a hearty chuckle. “Then you won’t waste your time and get discouraged when you try and try, and fail. Instead of chasing after spectacular feats, go back to square one. If you can establish a basic practice firmly, then you will see genuine progress.”

His words echoed in my mind like chimes in the wind. “For example, if you chant mantra a million times, it is never a waste of energy. Each time you utter those words, as you count them off on your mala, your practice deepens, and the results become richer—just as your mala becomes polished over time.”

Feeling chastened yet enlightened, I lowered my gaze to the yellow amber mala nestled in my hands. Its smooth beads held the whispers of my countless prayers, each one a step towards understanding.

When I looked up again, the Teacher had vanished from sight. Yet his presence lingered, vibrant and alive, as if he had

become one with the very breeze that rustled through the room. I could hear his laughter carried on the wind, a reminder that the path I traversed was not about seeking extraordinary powers, but about nurturing my spirit through dedication, practice, and the simple joy of each breath.

In that moment, I understood that true mastery lay not in miraculous displays but in the profound subtleties of everyday life—a lesson not just for my practice, but for every aspect of my being.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

The narrative "Special Powers - Lessons in the Light" provides an introspective view into the autistic narrator's experiences of spiritual pursuit and learning. Through contemplative moments with their Teacher, the narrator explores themes of mysticism, curiosity, and the essential nature of consistent practice, offering lessons for a broader audience.

The narrator's curiosity about siddhis, or special powers, exemplifies the intense focus and inquisitiveness common among autistic individuals. This curiosity often drives a deep desire to understand complex ideas and phenomena, motivating them to seek knowledge beyond surface explanations.

The Teacher's playful responses to questions about developing special powers highlight the potential for literal interpretation to kindle both humor and deeper understanding. Autistic individuals may engage with these literal perspectives, integrating them as part of their learning and cognitive processing—a balance of seeing the humor while also uncovering symbolic meaning.

The focus on practices like chanting mantras and counting prayers on a mala reflects the narrator's commitment to structure and routine, which are often valuable for autistic people seeking stability and progress. Their dedication showcases the comfort and growth that can stem from anchoring oneself in consistent practices.

The narrator's eventual realization that true mastery lies in the simplicity of everyday practice illustrates a capacity for profound introspection. It demonstrates an understanding of growth as a cumulative process, rather than the pursuit of extraordinary feats—an insight that can resonate deeply with the autistic emphasis on process over result.

Broader Observations

The narrative underscores the importance of dedication to practice and the potential for transformation through simple, consistent actions. Neurotypical individuals can learn from this approach, appreciating how routine and repetition contribute to both personal and spiritual growth.

The interplay between literal and symbolic understanding in the Teacher's lessons offers insights into cognitive diversity. Neurotypical audiences are encouraged to appreciate the layered interpretations that autistic individuals bring to conversations, enriching shared understanding and dialogue.

The story highlights the value of focusing on the journey rather than the destination. By shifting attention away from spectacular achievements to cultivating presence in each step, everyone can nurture fulfillment and growth. This approach promotes patience and perseverance, valuable traits for personal development across cognitive styles.

Recognizing the cumulative power of consistent practices—whether spiritual, creative, or personal—encourages both autistic and neurotypical individuals to appreciate the depth of incremental progress. This understanding fosters resilience and reinforces the idea that meaningful change often occurs through sustained effort.

"Special Powers - Lessons in the Light" invites both autistic and neurotypical audiences to explore and appreciate the richness of simple, daily practices. By valuing the insights and dedication shown in such narratives, society can embrace diverse pathways to learning and growth, fostering environments that celebrate cognitive and spiritual diversity alike.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

In Vajrayana Buddhism, gurus may display siddhi, or supernatural accomplishments, to demonstrate the attainment of enlightenment and transcendence of the ordinary world. This can serve as a tangible illustration of the effectiveness and validity of the teachings and establish trust and confidence in their students.

Siddhi can be used as a tool to guide students on their own spiritual path, helping them understand profound spiritual concepts. For example, a guru's ability to disappear or materialize objects can symbolize the dissolution of ego or transcendence of dualistic thinking.

However, it is essential to approach these displays with caution and critical thinking. Some critics argue that students may become overly attached to the guru's supernatural abilities, losing sight of the true purpose of the teachings. Public displays of siddhi can lead to confusion among those who are not familiar with the context and significance of these practices.

Ultimately, it's essential to approach these displays with an open mind, critical thinking, and a deep understanding of the teachings and context in which they are presented.

Dharma Dumplings



Chapter 28. Bitten - A Serendipitous Bite

While on a leisurely stroll in the woods beyond the monastery compound, I stumbled across a family of dogs napping peacefully in the dappled shade of a stone wall. It was a heartwarming scene: two large dogs, robust and watchful, keeping vigilant guard over a handful of rambunctious half-grown puppies at their feet. Dogs were a common sight around monasteries and temples, often regarded as sacred beings. There was a belief among locals that these canine companions were actually the spirits of monks, reincarnated due to a lack of diligence in their spiritual practice during their human lives. They were treated with compassion, regularly fed by the kind-hearted, and surrounded by prayers for their rebirth into the human realm—an opportunity for them to continue their quest for enlightenment.

Though I had never kept dogs as pets and had little familiarity with their behavior, I couldn't help but admire the family from a distance. However, one large German Shepherd caught my attention as she looked up and bounded over to me, tail wagging with uncontainable joy. I had no food to offer her, but I picked up a stick and threw it for her to chase. Much to my amusement, the other dogs eagerly joined in the impromptu game, their playful energy infectious.

In the midst of our lighthearted frolicking, one of the larger dogs bit my arm as he jostled for the stick. The bite didn't seem malicious—in fact, it was quick and playful—but it drew blood. Almost immediately, the mother dog intervened, pulling her pups away with a concerned expression. As I walked back to the monastery for my appointment with Teacher, I couldn't shake the feeling that she cast

a look of apology over her shoulder, as if she understood that the playful moment had turned undesirable.

When I entered the audience room, Teacher's sharp eyes caught sight of my injury. "You've been bitten!" he exclaimed, concern flooding his voice.

"It's nothing," I reassured him, trying to downplay the incident. "I was just playing with some dogs, and it's only a flesh wound."

"You need rabies shots," he stated firmly, his expression leaving no room for argument. Despite my protests that I felt fine, he insisted that I visit a clinic immediately. "I want you to be around for many years to come, so go get vaccinated," he urged. "Your body will need this protection in the future."

Reluctantly, I obeyed, recognizing the wisdom behind his insistence. The reality of rabies being widespread in India meant that the vaccine was readily available and affordable. At the nearest village pharmacy, the pharmacist administered the vaccine without hesitation, and over the next weeks, I followed the prescribed schedule of vaccinations without giving it much thought.

Months passed, and I found myself in a picturesque Eastern European country, where the air was crisp and the landscapes were draped in autumn hues. One day, as I strolled along a sandy beach, a dog that bore an uncanny resemblance to the one that had bitten me approached. With a familiarity that tugged at my heart, she followed me as I walked, her eyes bright with recognition.

Over the next few days, I began returning to the beach to feed her, and soon other dogs began to gather, drawn in by the promise of companionship and food. Each dawn and dusk, I found myself surrounded by a growing number of furry friends, their tails wagging in unison as they eagerly awaited their meals.

As the fall weather started to give way to winter, I felt a deep sense of responsibility rising within me. I couldn't bear the thought of these dogs suffering in the harsh cold, so I made the decision to move into a house where I could offer them shelter. With that choice, I transformed my life—it became a refuge for lost souls. My dog refuge blossomed, and I soon found myself welcoming in as many dogs as I could before the first snow blanketed the ground.

What had begun as a seemingly innocuous dog bite had spiraled into a profound blessing. The nudge from Teacher to receive my rabies vaccinations turned out to be fortuitous, allowing me to fully embrace my new path without the fear of illness looming over me. As I looked back, it was clear that the unexpected encounter with those dogs had awakened something deep within me, igniting a passion and purpose I had never known.

In the warmth of my refuge, surrounded by wagging tails and grateful eyes, I felt the significance of that bite deep in my heart. It was a gentle reminder that sometimes, the most unexpected moments lead us to our true destiny, and that even perceived misfortunes carry within them the seeds of great potential.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

The narrative "Bitten - A Serendipitous Bite" offers an account of the autistic narrator's experience with unforeseen circumstances that lead to profound personal transformation. Through unexpected interactions with animals and spiritual guidance from their Teacher, the narrator explores themes of intuition, responsibility, and newfound purpose, providing insights for a broader audience.

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The narrator's fascination with the family of dogs may reflect a common autistic affinity for animals, which can offer non-judgmental companionship and a form of communication that feels straightforward compared to human interactions. The natural curiosity and willingness to engage with the dogs, despite limited prior experience, illustrate an openness to connection and new experiences.

The encounter with Teacher and his insistence on pursuing rabies vaccinations highlights how autistic individuals might initially downplay health concerns or social cues. Here, the narrator respects the Teacher's guidance, showcasing an ability to value and trust knowledgeable input from individuals they respect and rely on.

The later establishment of a dog refuge demonstrates the narrator's ability to transform an unexpected event into a meaningful routine. The commitment to feeding and sheltering dogs reflects the autistic emphasis on routine and the satisfaction found in purposeful, structured activities that align with personal values and interests.

The narrative also reveals the narrator's intuitive empathy, as evidenced by the connection with the dog who recognized them from the past encounter. This innate understanding enabled the narrator to identify a call to action, leading to the establishment of a haven for the dogs—reflecting a strong sense of responsibility and care.

Broader Observations

Neurotypical audiences can learn from the deep connections autistic individuals often form with animals and nature, appreciating the nonverbal communication and comfort these relationships can provide. This perspective enriches our understanding of diverse ways to experience companionship and express empathy.

The narrative underscores the importance of trusting guidance from respected figures. Recognizing the role that mentors, teachers, or trusted advisors play in the lives of autistic individuals is crucial, as their advice can help navigate situations that might seem overwhelming or confusing.

The establishment of routines that serve a larger purpose, such as the creation of a dog refuge, illustrates how structured activities can drive meaningful change and personal fulfillment. Neurotypical individuals might also adopt this approach, using routine and structure to align their actions with personal values and goals.

The story highlights the potential for unexpected events to lead to transformative experiences. Embracing serendipity and recognizing growth opportunities in adversity can enrich individual journeys, showing that even perceived setbacks may hold the seeds for future fulfillment.

"Bitten - A Serendipitous Bite" demonstrates how an autistic narrator navigates unexpected challenges and transforms them into a meaningful pursuit. By valuing these insights, neurotypical audiences can better appreciate the unique strengths and perspectives that neurodivergent individuals bring to our shared world, fostering empathy and inclusivity.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

The story of Serendipitous Bite highlights the concept of karma in Buddhism, where past actions influence one's current and future existences. The story of a dog who was reborn as a human after being treated with kindness by a monk illustrates the idea that even animals can be reborn in the human realm based on their past deeds.

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The story encourages compassion towards animals, recognizing that they may be suffering the consequences of their past actions. It also motivates us to treat them with empathy, kindness, respect, and care, embodying the principles of compassion and loving-kindness central to Buddhism.

Rescuing dogs and other animals from abandonment, neglect, and abuse aligns with the principle of avoiding harm (ahimsa) and protecting vulnerable beings. This practice is seen as commendable within the Buddhist framework, promoting compassionate action towards all beings and alleviating suffering.

The interconnection between all life encourages helping all sentient beings in need, including animals. The aspiration to achieve enlightenment (Bodhicitta) for the benefit of all beings inspires acts of kindness, such as rescuing dogs.



Chapter 29. Wild Animals - Shadows in the Monastery Woods

The beauty of the natural world surrounding the monastery never ceased to astonish me. Nestled in the heart of a lotus-shaped valley in the Himalayas, it stood as a sanctuary against the vibrant backdrop of blooming flowers, rustling trees, and the chirping of exotic birds. The landscape was a testament to biodiversity, with a rich tapestry of life woven among the hills and valleys—each element, from the smallest insect to the tallest tree, contributing to the intricate ecosystem we inhabited.

Springtime was particularly lively, but it also brought warnings. We were advised to remain cautious due to the inquisitive brown bears emerging from hibernation in nearby caves. Rumors circulated about a particularly irritable one that had taken a fancy to the forest outside the monastery gates, and we were reminded to steer clear of its preferred haunts.

On lazy afternoons, goats could be spotted nonchalantly standing in the branches of trees, blissfully chewing on the succulent leaves as they enjoyed their own version of a leisurely siesta. At sunset, we watched them jump down from the trees and clatter up the rocky path past the monastery towards their home, Ani observed dryly, “Rush hour”.

The shrine room was not just a haven for practitioners; it also served as a resting place for fat mongooses, which sprawled across the sun-kissed altar beams, unfazed by the melodious chants of dedicated monks and practitioners filling the air with devotion.

Even the smallest creatures seemed to claim their share of this sanctuary. As Ani and I made our way through the woods, still glistening from an afternoon rain, we encountered an army of leeches. They eagerly attached themselves to our legs, and it wasn't long before we returned to our guesthouse, horrified to find our limbs covered with the slimy creatures. We removed them with a mix of amusement and disgust, finally deciding to give them a proper send-off. Flushing them down the toilet while chanting mantras for their future rebirth, we hoped for them to find a better existence next time around.

However, the universe had a sense of humor. Just half an hour later, when I headed to relieve myself, I was greeted by an unwelcome sight: the leeches had returned, crawling around the rim of the toilet as though they had never left. In a fit of laughter and disbelief, Ani and I whipped up a plan. Armed with spoons borrowed from our tea tray, we carefully scooped them up one by one and catapulted them out the window, sending them back to the forest, satisfied that we had treated them with compassion.

After our leech escapade, we decided to take a sunset stroll, choosing to remain on the well-trodden path rather than risk another encounter in the woods. We ambled into the hills behind the stupas, seeking the last golden rays of sunlight dipping behind the snowy peaks. Hand in hand, we chanted mantras, enveloped in the enchanting atmosphere created by the fragrant incense wafting from the monastery. The scene was utterly mesmerizing, and for a moment, all the troubles of the world faded away.

As dusk blanketed the landscape, we began to retrace our steps. With only one flashlight between us, we navigated the rocky terrain, careful to watch our footing in the pitch-black night. Our laughter echoed softly, but soon we were halted by a rustling noise

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from the bushes nearby. We whipped around, peering into the shadows but seeing nothing. “Just the wind,” I reassured Ani, but an uneasy feeling lingered.

As we pressed on, a low groan pierced the stillness, followed by a menacing snarl. In an instant, our playful spirits shifted to wariness, and we quickened our pace, the unsettling sounds urging us onward. By the time we reached the entrance driveway, we were almost speed-walking, and to our relief, we collided directly with Teacher, who was just emerging from his sister's house.

“What are you doing out so late?” he asked, with stern concern etched on his face.

We recounted our evening's escapade, including the unsettling noises we had heard. “What did it sound like? Soft or loud?” he pressed.

“It wasn't loud, so it must have been at some distance from us. We figured we weren't in danger,” I explained.

Teacher's brow furrowed, and his voice took on a more serious tone. “There has been a panther roaming around here recently. When a panther's growl is loud, it means he is far away. When he growls softly, it means he is close by, stalking you. You were in great danger. Get inside and stop taking walks at night!”

His warning sent chills down my spine. I realized how easily our adventure could have turned into a terrifying encounter. Grateful for the guidance of my wise Teacher, I nodded, and we hurried inside, our hearts a little lighter but our spirits tempered with a newfound respect for the wild environment that cradled our monastery.

That night, as I lay in bed, I marveled at the unexpected lessons hidden within the wilderness. The beauty of life encircled us, shimmering with possibilities—yet it was tempered with the untamed rawness that demanded respect. The encounter with the leeches, the playful goats, and now the lurking panther all felt interconnected, reminding me of the balance between serenity and danger that defined the sacred space we called home.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

The narrative "Wild Animals - Shadows in the Monastery Woods" offers a glimpse into the vibrant, untamed natural world surrounding the monastery and provides insight into the autistic narrator's perceptions and emotions. Through interactions with the wildlife and the prudent guidance of the Teacher, the narrator reflects on themes of connection, respect, and the balance between awe and caution.

The detailed observations of the natural world—the sounds of birds, the vibrant colors of blossoms, and the clatter of the goats' hooves—suggest the narrator's heightened sensory awareness. This acute perception is often present in autistic individuals, who may experience their environment with an intensity that brings both joy and vigilance.

The playful engagement with nature, from watching goats to dealing with leeches, showcases the narrator's comfort in exploring and interacting with the world around them. Autistic individuals might find solace and connection in natural settings, offering a sense of clarity and order within the complexity of the social world.

The humorous and methodical handling of leeches exemplifies adaptability and a preference for routine and creative problem-

solving when faced with unexpected situations. The narrator's reliance on these strategies mirrors the way many autistic individuals navigate daily challenges with resilience and humor.

The careful exploration of the environment, tempered with curiosity and guided by the Teacher's wisdom, demonstrates a cautious approach to learning. This reflects a common preference among autistic people for structured exploration, balancing curiosity with a need for safety and predictability.

Broader Observations

Neurotypical audiences can learn from the narrator's sensory-rich descriptions to appreciate the intricacies of nature and the heightened perceptions that many autistic individuals experience. Recognizing and valuing these details can enhance empathy and understanding of the autistic way of engaging with the world.

The narrative highlights a deep connection with the natural world, illustrating a source of comfort and exploration beyond human interactions. Neurotypical readers might draw inspiration to nurture their own relationship with nature, recognizing its value as a grounding and restorative force.

The adaptive use of humor and creativity in dealing with situations like the leech encounter offers insights into resilience strategies. Neurotypical individuals can adopt similar approaches in their lives, appreciating the balance of levity and practicality when facing unexpected challenges.

The Teacher's role in providing guidance about the panther emphasizes the importance of trusted advisors in navigating complex situations. Recognizing the value of mentorship and wisdom is vital

across all cognitive styles, fostering growth and safety through shared knowledge.

"Wild Animals - Shadows in the Monastery Woods" invites reflection on the interconnectedness of life and the balance of exploration with caution. By appreciating these experiences and insights, neurotypical audiences can better understand and celebrate the richness of autistic perspectives, fostering a more empathetic and inclusive society.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

The story of Shadows in the Monastery Woods highlights the importance of mindfulness, compassion, and skillful means in navigating potentially dangerous situations. In Vajrayana Buddhism, teachings on awareness, mindfulness, and the nature of existence can guide individuals in being vigilant and respectful of their environment while also protecting themselves.

Mindfulness is a fundamental teaching in Buddhism, emphasizing the importance of being aware of one's surroundings and staying present. This includes being conscious of potential dangers and taking steps to avoid them. Compassion towards all beings encourages a respectful attitude towards wildlife, recognizing that they are part of the interconnected web of life.

Skillful means involve applying practical wisdom to navigate difficult situations. This might include taking precautions, understanding animal behavior, and finding ways to peacefully coexist with nature. Vajrayana practices, such as visualization and mantra recitation, can instill a sense of peace, confidence, and protection.

The recognition of impermanence in life can also influence one's approach to potential dangers. This understanding can encourage practitioners to accept that risks are a natural part of life and respond with equanimity rather than fear. Ultimately, the story highlights the importance of cultivating a sense of awareness, compassion, and wisdom in navigating life's challenges.

It suggests that even in potentially dangerous situations, there is always an opportunity for growth and learning through mindful and compassionate response.



AMERICA

Chapter 30. One Mind

During a Mahamudra training retreat, I found myself in a spacious hall filled with about 300 practitioners, predominantly Americans. The atmosphere buzzed with shared anticipation as we settled onto the floor for a collective meditation session guided by our Teacher.

He began by explaining how, typically, it takes ten to fifteen minutes for the mind to quiet down and align with the present moment. Just as he started to guide us into stillness, I felt an extraordinary connection wash over the room. It was as if our collective consciousness—our disparate thoughts and distractions—had fused into a single entity, a solid stone. This stone, heavy with intention and focus, was thrown deep into the expansive ocean of meditation, where it began to sink peacefully into a calm abyss.

Before long, we were cradled in a profound state of meditation, embraced by tranquility. We floated together in a deep, serene space, floating in the gentle waves of collective awareness, as the visualization practice unfolded around us. The experience was deeply immersive; time seemed to stretch, and the outside world faded into obscurity.

Just then, an unexpected voice pierced the stillness, ringing out like a mischievous bell: “Would whoever is thinking about pizza, please stop?”

In an instant, a wave of laughter erupted through the hall, breaking the serene bubble of our meditation. It was a jarring but welcome interruption, bringing joy and levity to the otherwise solemn atmosphere. I saw heads turn and faces light up, each practitioner attempting to suppress their chuckles as if it were an exercise in restraint.

Amid the laughter, our Teacher's countenance remained calm, unwavering. In his soothing, deliberate manner—like a gentle yet firm hand guiding a wild horse—he spoke: “Settle down. Quiet. Shhh.” His voice was an anchor, drawing us back toward that tranquil state we had been cultivating.

Despite our best efforts, I could sense the ripple effect of that playful mention of pizza. It lingered in our minds, tantalizing us with thoughts of warm, cheesy slices and savory toppings. Our shared laughter was infectious, yet it brought a reminder that distractions can shift our focus away from the practice.

With expert precision, the Teacher took hold of our collective consciousness once more. He guided our one mind, this time reconstituted and lightened by laughter, and tossed it back out into the ocean of meditation. We re-entered that sacred stillness—deeper this time, with a newfound openness that held within it a sense of community and connection.

What had begun as a profound training in mindfulness transformed into an experience of shared humanity. The brief interjection about pizza became a reminder that while personal thoughts can disrupt our focus, they can also foster a shared moment of levity that enriches our practice.

As we sank back into our meditative depths, the resonance of laughter remained, threading through the silence like sunlight filtering

through water. It was a beautiful reminder that even on the path to stillness, spontaneity and joy could weave themselves into the fabric of our shared experience, connecting us in ways that transcended individual thoughts.

In that sacred space, we were not just silent practitioners seeking enlightenment; we were a vibrant tapestry of life, humor, and deep connection, each of us contributing to the collective exploration of the mind and spirit. The session continued, rich with newfound energy and harmony, as we let the waves of meditation carry us deeper into the ocean of our shared consciousness.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

The narrative "One Mind" presents a portrayal of the autistic narrator's experience during a communal meditation session, highlighting themes of unity, spontaneity, and the interplay of individual and collective consciousness. Through this shared experience, the narrator delves into the dynamics of focus, distraction, and interconnectedness, offering insights for a broader neurotypical audience.

The narrator's acute awareness of the collective consciousness signifies a heightened sensitivity to the energies and dynamics within communal settings. Autistic individuals often possess a deep perceptiveness, allowing them to tap into subtle shifts in the atmosphere and connect with the emotional undercurrents present in group interactions.

The playful interruption about pizza and the subsequent laughter illustrates the narrator's engagement with shared moments of humor and levity. Autistic individuals may appreciate the authenticity and

simplicity of such interactions, which can bridge gaps between structured activities and spontaneous connections.

The narrator's receptiveness to the Teacher's guidance underscores a respect for structured support and direction in navigating focus and mindfulness. For many autistic individuals, having a clear anchor or focal point can facilitate engagement and enhance the depth of their meditative or reflective practices.

The ability to re-center after a humorous distraction reflects the narrator's capacity to integrate unexpected elements into their practice. This balancing act reveals adaptability, showcasing the potential to allow disruptions to enrich rather than derail their focus—a valuable skill in both meditative and daily activities.

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Broader Observations

Neurotypical audiences can learn from the narrator's sensitivity to collective energy, recognizing the diverse ways autistic individuals perceive and engage with group dynamics. This understanding can encourage more inclusive settings that honor individual sensory and emotional experiences.

The narrative highlights the value of spontaneity and humor in fostering shared experience and community. Neurotypical individuals can embrace these moments as opportunities to connect authentically, acknowledging the strength in shared laughter and humanity within structured practices.

The role of the Teacher in facilitating a return to focus serves as a reminder of the importance of guided support in learning contexts. Offering clear, compassionate direction can benefit all individuals, particularly those who thrive within structured frameworks and guidance.

The story underscores the potential for balance between structured practices and spontaneous moments of joy. Neurotypical individuals might also explore ways to incorporate flexibility within routine activities, enhancing shared experiences and fostering community connection.

"One Mind" invites reflection on the fluidity of focus and connection within communal settings. By valuing these insights and embracing diverse experiences, neurotypical audiences can deepen their appreciation for the unique perspectives and contributions of autistic individuals, fostering environments of empathy, inclusivity, and shared growth.

Reflection from the Buddhist Perspective

The concept of *sprinlu*, or shared mental state, highlights the interconnectedness of human consciousness and the possibility of collective experience. In Vajrayana, this phenomenon is considered an important aspect of spiritual development, as it allows individuals to transcend individual identities and boundaries.

The practice of *Tonglen*, or giving and taking, is a key contributor to the development of *sprinlu*, as it cultivates empathy and understanding by imagining the suffering and happiness of others. By understanding and cultivating *sprinlu*, practitioners can develop a deeper sense of empathy, compassion, and collective awareness.

The phenomenon of *sprinlu* is not unique to meditation, as it can be observed in various group settings. Theories suggest that people meditating together can resonate with each other's energy and brainwaves, creating a collective coherence that leads to similar experiences and thoughts. Additionally, the release of similar neurotransmitters, such as oxytocin and dopamine, can influence their thoughts and emotions.

The shared intention and focus of group meditation can also create a sense of unity and collective awareness. Group dynamics play a significant role in this phenomenon, as people may unconsciously mimic each other's thoughts, emotions, or behaviors, creating a sense of collective consciousness.

The story of One Mind highlights the potential for collective experience and awareness through meditation and shared intention. By understanding and cultivating *sprin-lu*, practitioners can develop a deeper sense of connection and compassion with others.

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Chapter 31. Buddha Hoodie

In the sun-soaked landscapes of Arizona, a vibrant group of spiritualists thrived under the guidance of their charismatic leader, a gifted psychic named Irma. Every Sunday, she held readings, attracting a diverse audience seeking clarity and connection. When my Teacher, a revered figure in the Buddhist community, visited Phoenix, Irma and her followers were captivated. With no local dharma centers at the time, they found themselves yearning for someone to guide them on their spiritual journey. Recognizing their interest, the Teacher entrusted me with the responsibility of introducing them to Buddhist practices.

“But I am not ordained,” I protested, unsure and feeling the weight of the task ahead.

“You do not need a doctorate to teach kindergarten,” he replied with a gentle smile. “Besides, you have received the proper empowerments and training, so you are qualified to give transmission of these practices.”

Encouraged by his faith in me, I prepared for my first visit to the group on my return to the States. During this visit, I introduced them to the Chenrezig sadhana, the practice of the Buddha of Compassion. Their enthusiasm was palpable, and I felt a deep sense of connection with this lively group. They embraced the teachings with open hearts, hungry for understanding and practice.

At the end of my visit, their affection and gratitude overflowed. They presented me with a picture of the Teacher and his most prominent disciple, which I had given them earlier as a token of our

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shared journey. The joy on their faces was contagious, and I felt honored to have played a small part in their spiritual exploration.

My next trip was marked by unexpected excitement. When I arrived, they excitedly revealed their latest project: they had created a hoodie featuring a silkscreen image of the Teacher and his disciple, exclaiming with delight over the idea of marketing these “Buddha Hoodies.” Their enthusiasm to sell the merchandise and donate the proceeds to the monastery was heartwarming.

After returning to India, I presented the hoodie and other gifts to my Teacher. His immediate reaction, however, was a mix of amusement and horror.

“What is this?” he asked, staring incredulously at the garment.

“They plan to call them Buddha Hoodies and sell the merchandise to raise funds for the center,” I explained, trying to gauge his response.

“Buddha Hoodies?” he echoed, eyebrows raised. “Do they think they will attain Buddhahood by wearing it? They should not wear this on their bodies. It would not be proper.”

I chuckled at his earnestness, but he continued with gravity, “What about when they put these sweatshirts in the washing machine? Our faces will go around and mix with their underwear and what-not. That would be very disrespectful—and dizzying. Tell them I forbid it.”

The gravity of his words hung in the air as I tried to suppress my laughter at the imagery he conjured. It was clear that the charming idea of “Buddha Hoodies” was not only impractical but also went against the decorum he held sacred.

With that, the plans for the hoodie merchandise were promptly nixed. I returned to the spiritualists with a message from the Teacher, delicately explaining his concerns and emphasizing the importance of respect in their practice.

The group received the news with mixed feelings. While they understood the reverence behind the Teacher's words, I could sense their disappointment. Instead, we brainstormed other creative ways to support the monastery, focusing on initiatives that honored the spirit of the Teacher and the teachings they cherished.

In time, we learned that true connection to the teachings transcended objects and clothing—finding it in the heart, in mindfulness, and in the compassionate actions that we undertook together. The experience solidified a bond between us that was deeper than any apparel could convey.

Reflecting on the incident later, I realized how valuable it was for all of us—both the Teacher and the group of spiritualists—to navigate this path of understanding and respect together. Each interaction, whether filled with laughter or serious discourse, became an opportunity for growth and deeper realization of our shared journey in the realm of spirituality.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

The narrative "Buddha Hoodie" provides a story of cultural intersection, humor, and respect in the context of spiritual practice. It explores the interactions between a diverse group eager to embrace Buddhist teachings and the guidance of a revered Teacher, presented through the lens of the autistic narrator. Here, we delve

into the narrator's perceptions, the lessons learned, and offer insights for a broader neurotypical audience.

The narrator's initial hesitation about leading a spiritual group reflects a recognition of the challenges associated with unfamiliar social roles. Autistic individuals can be keenly aware of their own knowledge limits, but with encouragement, they often demonstrate adaptability, stepping into new situations and learning through experience.

The narrator finds common ground with the group through shared spiritual practices, highlighting their ability to connect with others around mutual interests. This reflects a broader trait among many autistic people, who often build strong and meaningful relationships through focused interests and shared purposes, rather than through traditional social channels.

The straightforward way the narrator conveys the Teacher's concerns about the merchandise underscores a preference for honest and direct communication, a common autistic disposition. By addressing the issue transparently, the narrator helps maintain respect and understanding, emphasizing the importance of integrity in communication.

The narrative captures moments of humor, such as the Teacher's concern about washing the hoodies, demonstrating the narrator's appreciation for light-heartedness even amid serious discourse. Autistic individuals often enjoy humor, particularly when it arises in unexpected contexts or clever wordplay.

Broader Observations

The narrative underscores the importance of being open to learning and respecting cultural nuances within spiritual practices. Neurotypical individuals can appreciate the value of approaching

unfamiliar situations with curiosity and a willingness to adapt, fostering inclusivity and mutual respect.

The direct approach taken by the narrator and the Teacher highlights the effectiveness of clear communication. Neurotypical individuals might benefit from embracing similar honesty in discussions, reducing misunderstandings and promoting clarity in group settings.

The story reveals that connection to spiritual teachings extends beyond physical objects or attire to the deeper practices of mindfulness and compassion. For a wider audience, this lesson encourages exploring personal growth and community building through diverse and introspective means.

While humor brings joy and lightness to interactions, the teacher's view also calls for balancing humor with reverence, particularly in sacred or respectful contexts. Neurotypical audiences can value this balance, allowing for both joy and respect to coexist in religious or culturally significant engagements.

"Buddha Hoodie" offers reflections on learning, respect, and connection within a spiritual context. By appreciating these lessons, neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals alike can deepen their understanding of cultural sensitivity, shared human experiences, and collaborative growth in spiritual and everyday interactions.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

The story of the Buddha Hoodie highlights the importance of approaching sacred images with respect and consideration. Wearing images of Buddhist teachers or deities on casual clothing, such as sweatshirts, can be seen as disrespectful or trivializing their significance. In Vajrayana Buddhism, these images are regarded as

sacred and embody teachings, lineage, and the nature of enlightenment itself.

The intention behind wearing an image is crucial. If one wears the image of a teacher casually, it may not reflect appropriate reverence or mindfulness. The motivation behind actions is paramount.

Wearing a teacher's image should ideally come from a place of devotion and respect, rather than as a fashion statement.

The story of the Buddha Hoodies also raises concerns about ego and attachment. If individuals wear such images to express identity, style, or status, it may detract from the teachings of humility and reduction of ego, which are central to Buddhist practice.

This story serves as a reminder to approach sacred images with respect and consideration. It is essential to understand the spiritual significance imbued in these representations and approach them with reverence and mindfulness. By doing so, we can avoid diluting the meaning and impact of these teachings and maintain their profound significance in our lives.



JAPAN

Chapter 32. Tri–Sun

When I embarked on the exciting journey of starting my own company, I felt a deep desire to pay homage to my Teacher, the wellspring of my inspiration and guidance. It was only fitting that I name my venture “Tri–Sun,” a name that symbolized both light and life, carrying with it the rich lore of his birth: three suns appearing in the sky when he came into the world. The imagery was captivating, and I envisioned a logo that encapsulated this profound moment in a way that honored his legacy.

Eager to collaborate, I approached my Teacher with my vision, brimming with enthusiasm. “I’d love for you to design the logo,” I said, revealing the name I had chosen. I imagined how pleased he would be that I wanted to celebrate him in this way.

“Tri–Sun?” he echoed, his expression a mix of incredulity and bemusement. “Too much heat! Something like Emerald Planet would be better.”

I couldn’t help but feel a pang of disappointment. “But I wanted a name to honor you. Didn’t three suns appear in the sky when you were born?”

“So they say,” he replied, waving a hand as if brushing aside the legend. “But I was pretty busy at the time.”

“Wouldn’t having such a name convey virtue and purity?” I pressed, hopeful to sway him.

“It might,” he conceded, “but doing any kind of business is dirty, no matter what kind it is or what name it has. It is just the nature of business, so people in business need to do extra practice for purification.”

His pragmatism was a sobering reminder of the complexities of blending spiritual ideals with the realities of enterprise. Nevertheless, sensing my earnestness, he sighed softly and relented. “All right then, let’s do your logo.”

Heavy paper and calligraphy brushes were retrieved, and as he settled into the task, I watched in awe. With deft strokes, he painted a majestic mountain range, three black peaks rising against the background. Over each peak, he free-handed three perfectly symmetrical red circles representing the suns. There was an elegance and harmony to his work that made it seem not just an image but an auspicious blessing.

“Now go do your business,” he advised, his tone shifting to a more serious note. “Remember, everything is temporary, so make money and save money while you can. Your generation does not know how to plan ahead. Stop giving everything away. There will always be those in need. You cannot help everyone, so start saving for yourself, for the future. And remember to do more Benzasetto (Vajrasattva purification practice). Now go away!”

As I stood there, taking in his words and the culmination of his quick brushwork, I felt a mixture of emotions: gratitude, inspiration, and a hint of apprehension about navigating the complexities of business while staying true to my spiritual roots.

The logo he created was not just a design; it was a guiding emblem of the balance I needed to maintain between my spiritual practice and the material world. The three suns, radiant and vibrant against the peaks, served as a reminder to illuminate my path with wisdom and compassion, even within the messy fray of commerce.

With a newfound sense of purpose, I left his presence, clutching the logo tightly. The name “Tri-Sun” was not just about my company; it was a representation of the light I hoped to share with the world, grounded in the teachings of my Teacher.

Reflecting on his insight about business, I understood that while I sought to do good, I also needed to be mindful of sustainability—of my own wellbeing and the longevity of my efforts. The wisdom imparted to me that day became a foundational principle in how I approached both my business and my spiritual life.

As I ventured forth, I could still see the three radiant suns shining brightly in my mind’s eye, a reminder that amidst the challenges and the hustle, there was always a way to bring light to others—and to myself.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

The narrative “Tri-Sun” provides a reflective glimpse into the journey of an autistic entrepreneur seeking to honor spiritual guidance while stepping into the business world. Through interactions with their Teacher and the symbolism of the logo, the narrator explores themes of inspiration, pragmatism, and balance between spiritual and material pursuits, offering insights for a neurotypical audience.

The narrator's choice of the name “Tri-Sun” and their enthusiasm for the logo design reflect a strong connection to symbolism and meaningful imagery. Autistic individuals often place significant value

on symbols as tools for expressing complex ideas and emotions, finding profound meaning in visual and conceptual representations.

The narrator's initial idealism about honoring their Teacher through their business venture is tempered by the Teacher's pragmatic advice. This illustrates the challenges autistic individuals might face in balancing personal ideals with practical realities, a common theme for those who seek to integrate personal values into their professional lives.

The mixed emotions of gratitude, inspiration, and apprehension highlight the narrator's capacity for deep emotional resonance with the advice and guidance they receive. Autistic individuals often internalize feedback and teachings in profound ways, using these insights as foundations for growth and decision-making.

The narrator's desire to maintain spiritual integrity while navigating the business world shows a dedication to aligning actions with personal values. This reflects a broader trait among autistic individuals, who frequently strive for authenticity and consistency across different areas of their lives.

Broader Observations

Neurotypical audiences can learn from the narrator's appreciation of symbols and their importance in conveying complex concepts. Recognizing the value of symbolic thinking enriches understanding of how autistic individuals interpret and interact with the world around them.

The interplay between the narrator's idealism and the Teacher's pragmatism highlights the importance of balancing values with practical considerations. For a neurotypical audience, this balance can inform approaches to personal and professional endeavors,

fostering environments where idealism is honored alongside realistic planning.

The narrative underscores the emotional depth with which autistic individuals can process guidance and experiences. By valuing this depth, neurotypical individuals can foster more empathetic communication, understanding that autistic individuals often reflect deeply on advice and integrate it into their worldview.

The narrator's commitment to aligning their business practices with spiritual teachings offers lessons in authenticity and integrity. Neurotypical readers might adopt similar principles, recognizing the importance of maintaining ethical standards and personal values in all aspects of life.

"Tri-Sun" invites reflection on the integration of spiritual and material worlds, highlighting the insights and strengths autistic individuals bring to such endeavors. By valuing these perspectives, neurotypical audiences can deepen their understanding of the diverse ways in which individuals navigate challenges and harness their unique gifts for personal and communal growth.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

The story of Tri-Sun's encounter with the teacher and the unexpected events that unfolded highlights the concept of spiritual protection in Vajrayana Buddhism. The teacher's awareness of Tri-Sun's needs and subsequent actions demonstrate the interconnectedness of teacher and student, as well as the teacher's intuition and compassion.

The practice of guru yoga, which involves deep devotion to the teacher, allows students to cultivate a deeper connection with their teacher and align their mind and heart with theirs. This connection

can lead to a sense of protection and guidance, as seen in Tri-Sun's experience.

The story also illustrates the importance of maintaining a pure relationship between teacher and student, as emphasized by the concept of samaya. When this bond is upheld, it is believed that the teacher can respond more effectively to the student's needs, as seen in Tri-Sun's situation.

The story of Tri-Sun serves as a reminder that spiritual protection is not just about physical safety, but also about spiritual guidance and support. It highlights the importance of cultivating a strong relationship with one's teacher and engaging in practices that foster a deeper connection with them. By doing so, students can experience the benefits of spiritual protection and guidance in times of need.



Chapter 33. Protection - An Unexpected Encounter

When I returned to Japan from Hong Kong, eager to establish a dharma center, a generous student offered me the use of his summer house nestled within a serene bamboo grove in the countryside. While it was relatively isolated, the tranquil setting proved to be ideal for spiritual gatherings. We held puja services on weekends, and gradually, a warm community of practitioners began to form around us. Idyllic afternoons were spent overlooking a garden lush with wildflowers, practicing together and sharing potluck meals, while during the weekdays, I enjoyed the stillness of solitude.

I was filled with excitement when Teacher visited Japan after a tour in Taiwan. His arrival turned the center into a hive of activity with followers who were eager to attend special events and seek his audience. The energy was electric, drawing people from afar, all wishing to share meals and show him the sights of our country.

However, among the flurry of visitors, a group of newcomers became a source of concern for me. Although they greeted Teacher with superficial respect, there was an unsettling aura surrounding them. I observed his responses to their queries; they were curt and serious. After their departure, he turned to me and said, "Do not ever receive these people again."

I was bewildered and pressed for an explanation, but he remained vague. "Since you are alone, I do not want you to have male guests way out in this isolated place," he stated, his wisdom emanating a sense of urgency.

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As if he sensed the impending danger, that night Teacher performed a mala divination regarding the group. The following day, he advised me once more not to see those men, and he placed a plan in motion. Teacher arranged for a relative from Ladakh to come and stay with me for added security. The arrival of his relative, whom he simply called Uncle, was highly anticipated; Uncle was known to be a highly advanced practitioner, and he would be dedicated to helping run our new center.

Uncle came from a family distinguished for their spiritual prowess. His twelve siblings were renowned seers and healers, capable of miraculous deeds when possessed by powerful entities. His brothers, during full moons, would manifest the wrath of the protector Mahakala, while his sisters channeled the Bodhisattva Tara, performing acts that seemed to defy the laws of nature. Uncle, being the youngest, had not yet experienced possession but was diligent in performing puja to appease Mahakala.

As the days rolled by, the atmosphere around the center transformed as Uncle engaged in daily chants and rituals. The energy felt stronger, bolstered by the fierce protection he conjured. Our gatherings flourished under his care, and some evenings, we spotted shadowy figures moving past the smoked glass front door—guardians of this sacred place, a neighbor explained, citing the area's history as an ancient battleground.

One Monday afternoon, however, I was caught off guard when I received a call from the women of the unsettling group. They insisted that we need to meet urgently for tea. Despite my apprehensions, curiosity piqued; I needed to run errands in their neighborhood anyway, so I reluctantly agreed.

The women met me at the train station, leading me towards what appeared to be an office rather than a cafe. Once inside, they told me to sit as they went to get tea. But as soon as they left, the men from that ominous group entered the room, trapping me in an unwelcome confrontation.

As they surrounded me with their chairs, their ringleader loomed menacingly, demanding information about our secret power practices. Instead of fear, I felt a wave of amusement—I had been training in martial arts since I was fifteen. This wasn't intimidation; it was comical.

When one woman asked if I wanted to see their shrine room in the back, my instincts flared. It was glaringly evident that their intentions were far from innocent; they likely planned to force me down a path I wished to avoid.

In an instant, I sprang to my feet, shoving the ringleader away with a force that took him by surprise. He toppled over the table, crashing into the chairs behind him, which sent a flurry of tea dishes clattering into the air as I seized the moment. "Thanks, but must dash!" I called over my shoulder, bolting out the door and racing down the subway stairs.

The following day, my dharma friends and I convened to report the incident to the police. We spoke about the menacing behavior we had experienced, including stalking and harassing phone calls. It became clear that we were not isolated in our troubles; the unwelcomed attention had reached several members of our community.

Just two days later, as we awaited the police to conduct a raid on their office, the unthinkable happened: the Tokyo subway sarin gas attacks unfolded. It turned out that the very group I had

encountered was part of a now-infamous terrorist cult, linking them to a nefarious agenda with roots in manipulation and violence.

Reflecting on the ordeal, I felt an overwhelming sense of relief mixed with gratitude. Teacher's wisdom had safeguarded not just me, but our entire community. I understood the importance of vigilance and discernment in our interactions, especially in spiritual pursuits where the earnest seeking of truth could attract the unscrupulous. The episode served as a potent reminder of the importance of protection, both in physical and spiritual realms, affirming the strength of our practice and the bond of our sharing community, forged under the watchful care of wise teachers and dedicated practitioners.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

The narrative "An Unexpected Encounter" delves into the experiences of the autistic narrator, highlighting themes of intuition, vigilance, and community protection within a spiritual context. Through interactions with the Teacher, the narrator learns to trust spiritual guidance and navigate unexpected dangers, offering broader insights for a neurotypical audience.

The narrator's sensitivity to the unsettling aura of the newcomer group underscores an intuition that many autistic individuals possess when assessing social situations. This heightened awareness can drive both caution and discernment, empowering them to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics effectively.

The narrator's reliance on Rinpoche's wisdom reflects the trust placed in spiritual mentors and advisors. Autistic individuals often value structured guidance and the security of trusted relationships,

which provide both reassurance and a framework for decision-making in uncertain scenarios.

When confronted by the menacing group, the narrator's training in martial arts becomes a practical tool for self-preservation. This reflects an awareness of personal strength and the ability to act decisively, characteristics that align with common autistic traits of adapting skills to suit varied contexts.

The story highlights the strength derived from a supportive community. The narrator's interactions with dharma friends and police demonstrate the importance of collective vigilance and shared efforts, reinforcing the idea that community bonds enhance individual resilience and safety.

Broader Observations

The narrative underscores the significance of intuitive awareness, a trait often present in autistic individuals. Neurotypical audiences can learn to appreciate and respect these intuitive insights, understanding their value in enhancing personal and communal well-being.

The story highlights the importance of trusting in mentors and guides, echoing a broader principle of seeking wisdom and clarity from experienced figures. Neurotypical individuals can apply this trust to personal and professional settings, promoting growth through reliable, informed guidance.

The narrator's quick adaptation and action in confronting danger illustrate resilience. Neurotypical audiences might draw inspiration from this, recognizing the power of adaptability and preparation in navigating unpredictable situations and maintaining safety.

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The collective response to the threat reinforces the importance of community support and vigilance. Neurotypical individuals can take away the lesson that strong community bonds and open communication can enhance safety and resilience against external challenges.

"An Unexpected Encounter" serves as a potent reminder of the power of intuition, guidance, and community support in protecting and strengthening individuals and groups. By appreciating these insights, neurotypical audiences can better understand and celebrate the unique perspectives and contributions of autistic individuals, fostering environments grounded in empathy, understanding, and mutual protection.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

The concept of spiritual protection in Vajrayana Buddhism is rooted in the interconnectedness of teacher and student, intuition, and the spiritual bond between them. A qualified teacher possesses a deeper level of insight and compassion, allowing them to sense their students' needs, including in times of danger or distress. This connection is cultivated through practices like guru yoga, where students focus on the teacher and align their mind and heart with theirs.

Vajrayana practitioners engage in prayers and rituals that can invoke the protective blessings of the teacher or divine protectors. When students pray for assistance or invoke their teacher's protection, it is believed that the teacher becomes attuned to these prayers and intentions. The teacher's awareness is triggered by these practices, allowing them to respond effectively to the student's needs.

The concept of samaya, or the bond of commitment and dedication between teacher and student, emphasizes the importance of maintaining a pure relationship. When samaya is upheld, it's believed that the teacher can respond more effectively to the student's needs. Practitioners may experience signs or synchronicities that they interpret as messages from their teachers in moments of need.

In Vajrayana, the relationship between student and teacher is considered profoundly important, especially in the context of spiritual protection and guidance. A realized guru or spiritual teacher can offer protection to their students, even from a distance. This concept is rooted in the deep spiritual and karmic connection between the guru and disciple. A guru can extend their blessings and spiritual power to

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students, providing them protection and guidance. The faith and devotion from the disciple towards the guru enhance this connection. This may manifest as a sense of inner peace or clarity during challenging situations.

Moreover, through the transmission of practices, the guru empowers the disciple with specific practices, mantras, or deity visualizations meant to offer protection. For example, there are certain dharmapalas (dharma protectors) believed to assist practitioners. These deities are considered manifestations of enlightenment that help protect the dharma and its followers. Students are taught to visualize their guru or yidam (meditational deity) during meditation. This visualization can act as a source of comfort and protection, reinforcing the idea of being spiritually safeguarded. By diligently engaging in these practices, disciples can invoke the protective energies associated with the teachings.

Furthermore, Vajrayana traditions teach that the guru-student relationship creates a strong, energetic link. This connection allows the guru to feel or be aware of the student's circumstances, and thus they can exert influence or offer protection from afar. In addition, the guru's enlightened qualities can positively impact the student's karma. This bond can offer protection by aligning the student with the guru's compassion and wisdom. The psychological impact of having a trusted and enlightened guide fosters a sense of courage and determination, empowering students to navigate dangerous situations with a calm and focused mind.

While these concepts might seem mystical, they embody the profound emotional and spiritual support offered by the guru-disciple relationship and reflect the importance of faith, practice, and dedication in the spiritual path.



Chapter 34. Foolish Compassion - Turtle Love

In Asia, snakes and turtles are often revered for their perceived fortifying properties, particularly among men. It was during one of my strolls with Uncle—recently arrived in Tokyo and still adjusting to the bustling urban life—that we stumbled upon a restaurant specializing in exotic amphibian dishes. The atmosphere shifted subtly as we passed, and I noticed the cages piled in the side alley, brimming with various species, all awaiting their grim fate in the kitchen.

I continued my walk into a nearby shop, but Uncle, intrigued and perhaps oblivious to the dire circumstances of these creatures, stopped to peer into the cages.

Later, with a mix of admiration and disbelief, he recounted his experience to me. He noticed a regal-looking turtle, its eyes wide and pleading, seemingly begging for mercy. Moved by an unexpected wave of compassion, Uncle stepped into the small restaurant and inquired about the turtle. “How much?” he asked, feeling a strong pull to save this creature.

The owner, not missing a beat, brought the turtle in, weighed it, and announced, “Fifty dollars.” To his surprise, that was all the money Uncle had in his pocket, yet the urgency of his compassion overshadowed his caution. He handed over the cash without a second thought, consumed by an impulse to save the turtle.

With the money exchanged, the restaurant owner asked, “How do you want it prepared? Soup? Sashimi? Fried? Or I can cut him up, and you can take him home to cook yourself?”

As those words sank in, Uncle stole a glance over his shoulder at the customers savoring their meals. The reality hit him like a ton of bricks—this was not merely a dinner option; he had inadvertently rescued a creature destined to be someone’s meal. Instinctively, he grabbed the turtle and declared, “No thanks, I’ll do it myself!” With that, he dashed out the door, the turtle cradled securely in his arms.

He managed to carry the turtle all the way back to his house on the train, creating a scene that must have been both hilarious and heartwarming. Uncle always possessed a gift for connecting with beings of all kinds, and it seemed that even the turtle could feel the gratitude emanating from him. Once home, he filled his bathtub with water and set the turtle in it, offering the creature some vegetables he sourced from the kitchen.

The following dawn, Uncle took the turtle to a nearby river, a place where the water flowed clear and untainted. He carefully released his newfound friend back into the wild, watching as it paddled away, free from the threat of being served up on a plate.

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The next time he walked past the restaurant, the owner called out jovially, "How was that turtle?"

"Wonderful, thank you!" Uncle replied, a sense of triumph swelling within him.

"Do you want another one?" the owner quipped, likely not expecting a serious answer.

At that point, the gravity of Uncle's compassionate action dawned on him, and he ran—his heart racing not just from the physical exertion, but from the realization of the slippery slope of such purchases. Recognizing the futility and the potential cycle of suffering this could create, he vowed to avoid that street altogether in the future, seeking to turn his compassion into more sustainable actions.

Later, I recounted the story to Teacher, eager for his insights on Uncle's impulsive, yet heartfelt, act of compassion. Teacher listened carefully, the wisdom in his gaze sharpening.

"You see," Teacher began, "compassion is a powerful force, one that can lead us to act in ways that seem noble but may also embody foolishness. Your Uncle's heart was in the right place, wishing to free the turtle from harm. Yet, in his act of saving one, he inadvertently supported the very system that imprisoned so many others. True compassion includes not just the wish to alleviate suffering, but also the wisdom to understand the larger implications of our actions."

He leaned back, contemplating for a moment before continuing. "In our practice, we must blend love with discernment. The compassion that only acts impulsively can sometimes lead to

unintended consequences. If we really want to cultivate compassion, we must think of not just the individual creature in front of us, but the broader web of life that connects us all. Encourage your Uncle to seek out ways to protect and preserve life that don't perpetuate cycles of harm."

Teacher's words resonated deeply, illuminating paths I had yet to see. Uncle's experience became a teaching moment, weaving into our ongoing discussions of compassion and responsibility within our spiritual practice. True kindness would involve a deeper understanding—something beyond the immediate feel-good moment of rescuing a creature.

I left Teacher's presence with new insights to share with Uncle, encouraging him not just to act from compassion, but to engage with wisdom—an integral dance in the journey toward authentic love and care for all living beings.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

The narrative "Foolish Compassion - Turtle Love" explores the complexities of compassion through the actions of Uncle. Through this story, themes of impulsive kindness, unintended consequences, and the need for thoughtful compassion are explored, providing insights for a broader audience.

The narrator's appreciation for Uncle's empathetic gesture towards the turtle highlights a sensitivity to suffering and an innate desire to alleviate it. Many autistic individuals demonstrate an acute sense of empathy towards animals and the natural world, finding deep connections that transcend typical human interactions.

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The narrator learns from the Teacher's lesson about the complexities of compassion, reflecting an ability to process nuanced perspectives. Autistic individuals often engage deeply with topics of interest, seeking comprehensive understanding and integrating new insights into their worldviews.

The narrator's reflection on the story and the message from Rinpoche shows a willingness to engage in introspection. Autistic individuals can possess a strong capacity for reflective thinking, allowing them to derive valuable life lessons and expand their understanding of broader social and ethical dynamics.

The intention to share newfound insights with Uncle about the interplay of compassion and wisdom illustrates the narrator's commitment to fostering learning and growth in themselves and others. This reflects an inclination towards honest, meaningful communication and an emphasis on personal and communal development.

Broader Observations

The story invites neurotypical individuals to appreciate the empathy and spontaneous acts of kindness that arise naturally among autistic individuals. Recognizing the value of these actions fosters mutual respect and understanding in interactions with diverse cognitive styles.

The narrative emphasizes the importance of blending empathy with discernment. Neurotypical audiences might incorporate this balanced approach, ensuring that actions are both compassionate and informed by an understanding of larger systemic impacts.

The Teacher's advice on considering the broader web of life highlights the need for holistic thinking in decision-making processes.

Neurotypical readers can learn to apply this perspective in their lives, promoting sustainability and responsibility in their practices of kindness.

The narrator's eagerness to discuss and share learned insights encourages open dialogue. Embracing such communication fosters environments where diverse perspectives and experiences are valued, enhancing empathy and collaborative growth.

"Foolish Compassion - Turtle Love" presents a nuanced exploration of the interplay between empathy and wisdom in our actions. By valuing these insights, both neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals can deepen their understanding of compassion, cultivating a more empathetic and interconnected world

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

Uncle's impulsive act of compassion towards the turtle, while well-intentioned, highlights the importance of blending love with discernment. His heart was in the right place, but his actions inadvertently supported the system that imprisoned many others. This story serves as a reminder that true compassion includes not just the wish to alleviate suffering but also the wisdom to understand the larger implications of our actions.

Teacher's wise words emphasize the need to think beyond the individual creature in front of us and consider the broader web of life that connects us all. If we truly want to cultivate compassion, we must strive to protect and preserve life without perpetuating cycles of harm. This requires a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of all beings and the world around us.

Uncle's experience can be seen as a teaching moment, illustrating the importance of considering the consequences of our actions. His story encourages us to reflect on our own motivations and the impact they may have on others. By integrating wisdom into our practice, we can cultivate a more authentic and sustainable form of compassion.

This Dharma Reflection invites us to consider the following questions: How can we balance our desire to help others with a deeper understanding of the world and its complexities? How can we cultivate compassion that is both heartfelt and wise? By embracing these questions, we can develop a more nuanced approach to compassion that benefits not just individuals but also the world around us.



Chapter 35. Foolish Compassion - A Lesson in Resilience

Although I found most humans marginally tolerable, my heart swelled with compassion for animals. I was drawn in their beauty and purity. In my village on the outskirts of Tokyo, I daily encountered the suffering of exotic creatures sold illegally in a nearby pet shop.

Passing by the shop on a cold winter day, I was struck by the sight of a Kenyan fox with large, noise-sensitive ears, huddling in a barred wooden box, its body shivering against the chill and visibly stressed from the noisy street traffic. Meerkats, chained and anxious, darted about in worry, while chinchillas were stacked inside cramped cages like living ornaments. My heart sank at the sight of normally vocal mynah birds that now had bedraggled feathers, silent and sodden, alongside frightened ferrets curled in the corners of their crates. Tassel-eared squirrels scurried anxiously inside their small enclosures, and a white wallaby was confined to a cage so small that its tail was raw from struggling to turn around.

Among them was a majestic, yet deeply troubled, 80-year-old Amazon parrot, its breast featherless—an outward manifestation of the stress it endured from constant exposure and the chaos surrounding it. I felt an urgent need to help, but when I approached the shopkeeper to inquire about purchasing the parrot, I was met with resistance; he flatly stated that the parrot was not for sale.

Frustrated yet resolute, I attempted to educate the shop owners about the appalling conditions the animals were forced to endure, but they brushed me off, seemingly indifferent to the

suffering displayed before them. The question lingered in my mind: what could I do besides stand by helplessly? Inspired by a sense of duty, I devised a plan to rescue them, one by one, purchasing the animals in hopes of caring for them through the unforgiving winter months, then releasing them into the wild come spring.

I started with the ferret, whose soulful eyes seemed to plead for freedom, followed by the lively tassel-eared squirrel. Next came the mynah birds, which I housed in spacious cages perched high on shelves, far from the chaos of life on the floor. With each animal I saved, my home transformed into a veritable sanctuary, more of a bustling zoo than a single dwelling. I steadily collected new companions, each of them bringing joy and mischief to my days, despite the chaos that ensued. The squirrels chewed on my wooden table legs, ferrets nested in my underwear drawer, meerkats stationed themselves atop my bookshelves while strategizing raids on the pantry, and the four mynahs chattered endlessly, each vying to assert its dominance.

Through the cold weeks, we survived, united in our quirky household, until at last, the warmth of spring arrived. One by one, I began to release them into their natural habitats. The squirrels found refuge in the tree-lined river nearby, weaving among the branches with newfound freedom. I took the mynahs to an aviary where they could soar in spacious enclosures. The ferrets found a home at a local elementary school where children learned how to care for them as part of their school project, and the meerkats were relocated to Ueno Zoo, which boasted a more naturalistic habitat for their kind.

But as I passed by that pet shop a few months later, a heavy weight of disappointment fell over me. The shopkeepers had merely replaced the old animals with a new stock, no changes made to improve their conditions. It felt as if my efforts had been in vain.

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I returned to Teacher, longing for understanding and a sense of closure after my tumultuous experience. Sitting with him, I recounted my story—the animals I saved, the joy they brought me, and the disheartening sight of the pet shop's unchanged facade.

Teacher listened intently, then offered me a perspective that changed everything. “It is not possible to save everyone,” he said, his voice gentle yet firm. “What you did for those animals did indeed benefit them. Their time with you was filled with good karma, and the kindness you extended helped them transcend their immediate suffering. But you must remember, compassion also involves recognizing the limitations of our abilities.”

Taking a breath, he continued, “Dedicate your good actions outward. Pray that these animals, whom you cared for, find rebirth in a higher realm, where they can live in peace, free from suffering. Understand that not all can be saved, but every act of kindness creates ripples—each effort, no matter how small, contributes to a greater wave of compassion.”

His words stirred something deep within me, illuminating the path forward. Though I could not save every creature from suffering, my efforts had created a sanctuary, if only temporary, that transformed the lives of those animals, if only for a fleeting season. The experience became a lesson in resilience—not just rooted in the act of saving, but in embracing the broader picture of compassion.

Inspired by Teacher's wisdom, I made a silent vow. I would dedicate my future actions to fostering awareness of animal welfare, working towards systemic change rather than individual salvation. Perhaps one day, with education and persistence, the suffering of countless animals would be alleviated, and they, too, would find their rightful place on this earth, living free and wild, just as they were meant to.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

The narrative "Foolish Compassion - A Lesson in Resilience" offers an exploration of the narrator's journey through compassionate actions and the realization of their limitations. Through meaningful interactions with animals and wise guidance from the Teacher, the narrator navigates complex emotions and societal challenges, providing insights for a broader audience.

The narrator's deep empathy towards the suffering animals is a testament to the sensitivity and compassion often found in autistic individuals. This strong connection to the well-being of animals highlights an intuitive understanding and respect for living beings, which transcends traditional human-centric perspectives.

In seeking to improve the lives of the animals, the narrator takes direct, actionable steps, reflecting a practical approach to expressing compassion. Autistic individuals often channel their empathy into tangible actions, focusing on measurable outcomes that align with their sense of justice and fairness.

After witnessing the pet shop's unchanged practices, the narrator reflects on the outcomes of their efforts. This introspection showcases a capacity for self-reflection and the desire to understand the broader impact of one's actions—traits that are often found in autistic individuals who seek to make sense of complex societal systems.

The narrator's interaction with the Teacher underscores the importance placed on mentorship and learning from those with greater experience. Autistic individuals often value structured

guidance and wisdom, integrating these teachings into their evolving worldviews and strategies for future actions.

The relationship between neurodivergence and hoarding behavior (in this case, hoarding animals) is complex and not completely understood, but certain neurodivergent conditions might increase the likelihood of hoarding. Individuals with ADHD may face organizational challenges and impulsivity, leading to clutter. Those with Autism Spectrum Disorder might develop strong attachments to objects or require consistency, potentially resulting in hoarding-like behavior. OCD, which can co-occur with neurodivergent conditions, includes a hoarding disorder subtype characterized by difficulty discarding possessions. However, not all neurodivergent individuals will experience hoarding, and it can occur without any neurodivergent diagnosis. Factors such as mental health, environment, and personal traits influence hoarding experiences. Effective management typically involves understanding the individual's situation and may benefit from professional guidance.

Broader Observations

The narrative invites neurotypical audiences to appreciate the deep empathy that autistic individuals can hold towards animals and nature. Understanding and valuing these perspectives can enrich collective efforts towards animal welfare and environmental preservation.

The story highlights the balance between taking compassionate action and understanding the limitations of individual efforts. Neurotypical individuals can learn to integrate this balance in their own compassionate pursuits, fostering pragmatic approaches to effecting positive change.

The narrator's journey of reflection and growth offers insights into the importance of learning from experiences. Encouraging introspection and embracing the insights gained from mentors can lead to more informed and impactful actions in both personal and communal contexts.

Teacher's advice to focus on creating systemic change over individual salvation resonates with broader advocacy efforts. Neurotypical audiences might take inspiration from this perspective, recognizing the power of education and awareness in driving long-term positive change.

"Foolish Compassion - A Lesson in Resilience" reflects the nuanced journey of balancing empathy with practical awareness. By valuing these insights, neurotypical readers can deepen their understanding of the unique ways in which autistic individuals express compassion and engage in meaningful efforts towards a kinder, more just world.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

When rescuing animals becomes overwhelming, Buddhism encourages a balanced and mindful approach. While the intention to rescue animals is commendable, it's essential to ensure that actions are ultimately beneficial for the animals and sustainable for the rescuer. Finding a balance between compassion and practical considerations of care and well-being is key.

Buddhism emphasizes the importance of intention and mindfulness. Reflecting on motivations behind rescuing animals can help individuals recognize when their actions may be causing more harm than good. Practicing mindfulness can also help recognize when self-care is necessary to avoid burnout.

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Compassion should extend not just to the act of rescuing animals but also to their well-being. If overcrowding leads to stress, illness, or suffering among the animals, reevaluation is necessary. Responding with compassion may mean recognizing one's limitations and understanding how best to support the animals in a way that ensures their health and happiness.

Engaging with local animal shelters, rescue organizations, or fostering networks can provide more structured support for rescuing animals. Educating others about responsible pet ownership, spaying/neutering, and adopting rather than buying pets can lead to a long-term reduction in the number of animals in need.

The principle of ahimsa emphasizes non-violence and harm reduction. If the current situation is resulting in harm to the animals, reconsidering the approach and making changes that respect all beings' well-being is essential. Recognizing the impermanence of situations and conditions can ground an individual in reality and inspire a more sustainable and thoughtful approach to animal rescue.



Chapter 36. Passport Mantra

It was an ordinary day filled with excitement as Teacher prepared to give a special program in Taiwan the following week. Several members of our center were buzzing with enthusiasm, eagerly planning their group trip. The thought of witnessing Teacher's instruction in another country, just a two-hour flight away from Japan, invigorated us all. Naturally, we invited Uncle to join, envisioning how much he would appreciate the experience.

However, he declined our invitation with a matter-of-fact tone. "I don't have a passport."

Puzzled, we pressed further. "But how did you get through immigration at Narita airport without one?"

Uncle shrugged, a hint of amusement in his eyes. "I showed them my Tibetan refugee card," he explained, "which was issued to me in Delhi. It only allows me to go to one place with a single-entry visa; I can't travel to any other countries."

Realization dawned upon me — Uncle's circumstances were far more challenging than I had imagined. Determined to help him secure a proper passport, I spoke with Leslie, a fellow practitioner known for her resourcefulness and unwavering spirit. Together, we set out on a quest to the Indian embassy, harboring the firm belief that we could succeed in procuring him a passport despite the daunting obstacles: Uncle was not an Indian citizen and lacked any formal identification.

The day of our mission arrived, filled with the sacred energy of hope and mantra. Upon reaching the embassy, we found ourselves in a long line of people, each person absorbed in their own thoughts and intentions. As the minutes stretched into what felt like an eternity, we filled out Uncle's application form while whispering mantras under our breaths—a rhythmic, meditative chant that became our refuge amidst the bureaucracy.

The atmosphere grew heavy with anticipation as we inched closer to the window. The officers inside, clearly fatigued from a long day, hurried through each interaction, while we remained focused on our shared intention to help Uncle. When we finally approached the counter, it was nearly closing time. The officer glanced at us, his expression a mixture of impatience and mild irritation, eager to wrap things up and head home.

Recognizing the need to strike a balance between providing the necessary information and not appearing overly anxious, we responded to his questions deliberately and concisely. The man took Uncle's application, scanned it for the requisite details, and asked whether he had the required photographs. Leslie and I exchanged anxious glances, silently urging Uncle to remain calm as he offered them without hesitation.

Then came the moment of truth: the officer requested us to wait while he processed the application. Time seemed to stand still as we held our collective breath, bringing forth all the energy of our mantra—a continuous wave of determination and love, sending our prayers into the universe.

A few minutes later, the officer returned to the window, a new passport gripped tightly in his hand. He slid it through the small opening with a lackadaisical demeanor. As we caught sight of Uncle's photo inside the passport, a wave of relief washed over us.

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“Thank you,” we murmured in unison, a sense of disbelief still lingering as we emerged from the office. Once we turned the corner, out of sight from the embassy, the relief erupted into uncontrollable laughter and joyous embraces.

“We did it! We actually did it!” I exclaimed, nearly jumping with excitement.

Leslie beamed, her eyes sparkling with the thrill of our small victory. “I knew we could! It just took faith and a little bit of mantra.”

As we walked, our laughter mingled with the cool air, the atmosphere buzzing with our collective achievement. Uncle held the passport tightly against his chest, his eyes gleaming with gratitude and disbelief.

“Now you can go to Taiwan!” I proclaimed, giving him a playful nudge.

He shook his head, a smile spreading across his face. “I never thought I’d have this. Thank you both; it was your belief that made it happen.”

In that moment, I recognized that our journey had been more than just acquiring a passport. It was a testament to the power of unwavering determination, the community’s shared spirit, and the profound influence of mantra—an expression of love and hope that bridges gaps and overcomes obstacles.

We went our separate ways that day, but the joy of our adventure—the laughter, the mantras, the triumph—remained etched in our hearts. Uncle would go on to witness Teacher’s program in Taiwan, and while he cherished the passport he now possessed, it

was the journey we took together that became a cherished memory—a lesson in faith, resilience, and the importance of sharing our visions with the world.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

The narrative "Passport Mantra" presents an account of community effort, perseverance, and the transformative power of shared intentions, as experienced by the autistic narrator. Through the journey of helping Uncle obtain a passport, the narrator explores themes of determination, the significance of collective action, and the influence of spiritual practice, offering insights for a broader audience.

The narrator's commitment to helping Uncle reflects an innate appreciation for community and collaboration. Autistic individuals often value the supportive relationships they form within close-knit groups, deriving strength from collective efforts and shared goals.

The careful preparation and focused approach to navigating bureaucracy at the embassy demonstrate the narrator's capacity for determination and problem-solving. Autistic individuals frequently exhibit a strong focus when pursuing their objectives, leveraging their attention to detail and persistence to overcome challenges.

The use of mantras as a source of calm and focus amidst a stressful situation highlights the narrator's connection to spiritual practices as a grounding force. Autistic people often find comfort in routines or rituals, which offer stability and a means to channel energy positively.

The narrator's exuberant reaction to the successful outcome reveals a deep appreciation for shared victories. Autistic individuals can

derive great joy and fulfillment from collective achievements, strengthening their connections within their community.

Broader Observations

The narrative underscores the power of community support and collaboration in achieving goals. Neurotypical audiences can learn from this example, recognizing the value of working together towards common objectives and fostering inclusive environments that support diverse contributions.

The detailed approach to navigating a bureaucratic process illustrates the importance of methodical problem-solving. Neurotypical individuals can adopt similar strategies, appreciating the benefits of patience, planning, and determination in overcoming obstacles.

The role of mantras demonstrates the potential of spiritual practices to provide focus and resilience. Neurotypical audiences might explore incorporating mindfulness or spiritual routines into their lives as a way to enhance well-being and navigate challenging situations.

The joy experienced in collective success emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and celebrating achievements with others. Neurotypical individuals can take inspiration from this, fostering a culture of appreciation and recognition within their communities.

"Passport Mantra" highlights the transformative power of community, determination, and spiritual practice, as seen through the lens of the autistic narrator. By valuing these insights, neurotypical readers can deepen their understanding of the unique strengths that autistic individuals bring to collaborative efforts, promoting empathy, inclusivity, and shared achievement.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

The practice of chanting mantras is rooted in the spiritual traditions of Buddhism and Hinduism, where sound emits the frequency of powerful force that shapes reality. Mantras are specific sounds or phrases that, when chanted with intention, can create a vibrational alignment with what one wishes to manifest.

When setting a clear intention or desire (sankalpa), practitioners believe they are channeling energy toward specific goals or desires. The combination of intention and sound can create a resonance that brings desired outcomes into reality.

Repetitive chanting (japa) helps to deepen concentration and create a meditative state, establishing a stronger connection to the desired intention or quality associated with the mantra. Regular chanting can cultivate qualities conducive to manifestation, such as patience, clarity, and inner strength.

Many mantras are associated with purification, helping to clear negative emotions, limiting beliefs, or karmic obstructions. Chanting can facilitate the removal of internal barriers that may impede the manifestation process.

By calming the mind and reducing distractions, chanting enables better focus and clarity, which are important for effectively manifesting intentions. In Vajrayana and other Buddhist traditions, certain mantras are associated with specific deities or bodhisattvas, which can help in the manifestation of desires aligned with the greater good.

Ultimately, chanting mantras is a way to connect with divine energies and co-create one's reality with a greater spiritual source. By

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focusing on positive qualities such as compassion, wisdom, or abundance, practitioners can manifest not only external goals but also inner transformation.



Chapter 37. Dancing Buddha Statue

As I walked with my father through the charming streets of Kamakura, Japan, I couldn't help but feel a sense of wonder and curiosity. We had already visited the magnificent Daibutsu (Buddha) statue, and now we were making our way to the Hase Kannon temple. The little road lined with shops led us to the temple's entrance, where we were greeted by the soft glow of sunlight and the gentle hum of activity.

As we walked, my eyes wandered to the various shops and stalls, taking in the vibrant colors and enticing aromas. Suddenly, my gaze fell upon an antique shop that caught my attention. In the window, a beautiful bronze statue of Kannon-sama seemed to be...dancing. My heart skipped a beat as I felt a surge of excitement and amazement. I turned to my father, who had walked a few steps ahead, and grabbed his elbow, pulling him back to the shop window.

"Dad, look!" I exclaimed, my eyes shining with excitement. "The statue is moving!" My father followed my gaze, and for a moment, he seemed puzzled.

"What do you mean?" he asked, his brow furrowed in confusion. "It's just a statue," he said, as if trying to reassure me.

But I was insistent. I urged him to come inside with me to take a closer look. As we entered the shop, my father's confusion only grew. "I don't see anything moving," he said, his eyes scanning the room.

I too was perplexed. Perhaps it was just an illusion? But I knew what I had seen – the statue was moving, its bronze limbs seeming to sway in a gentle rhythm.

When I asked the shopkeeper about the mechanism behind the statue's movement, he looked puzzled. "I don't understand what you mean," he said. "There is no mechanism in this statue. It is over 200 years old."

I was stunned. How could this be? But then he explained that religions of colonists were banned from 1612 until 1871, and during that time, Christians would disguise their religious figures as Buddhist deities. This statue, he revealed, was actually the Mother Mary in the guise of Kannon-sama.

My father's face lit up with understanding and approval. "Ah," he said, "I see. Well, in that case, it's perfect for us." And with that, he purchased the statue for me.

I didn't say anything more about what I had seen – the dancing statue – but I couldn't help but feel a sense of wonder and awe every time I looked at it. For me, that moment was more than just a beautiful bronze statue; it was a reminder that sometimes, the things we see are not always what they seem. And even when they are not what we expect, they can still hold a deep beauty and significance.

As I looked at the statue now, sitting in my home, I couldn't help but smile at the memory of that day in Kamakura. It was a day that had taught me to look beyond the surface level, to see beyond what was apparent on the surface. And it was a day that would stay with me forever—a reminder of the magic that lies just beneath our everyday lives.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

The narrative "Dancing Buddha Statue" presents a story of curiosity and perception. Through an encounter with a seemingly animated statue, the narrator explores themes of wonder, hidden meanings, and the transformative power of looking beyond the surface, offering insights for a broader audience.

The narrator's keen observation of the "moving" statue reflects a heightened sensory perception, which is common among autistic individuals. This sensitivity allows them to notice details and nuances that others might overlook, leading to unique interpretations and experiences of their surroundings.

The narrator's insistence on examining the statue further, despite initial skepticism from their father, illustrates a persistent curiosity. Autistic individuals often demonstrate a desire to explore and understand phenomena deeply, driven by intrinsic interest and the pursuit of knowledge.

The revelation that the statue represents the Virgin Mary disguised as Kannon-sama highlights the narrator's openness to alternative interpretations and meanings. Many autistic individuals are adept at considering multiple perspectives, which can enrich their understanding of complex symbols and hidden narratives.

The narrator's reflection on the experience underscores the value placed on meaningful moments and insights. Autistic individuals often derive significant personal meaning from their experiences, which shapes their worldview and connection to deeper truths.

Broader Observations

The narrative invites neurotypical audiences to appreciate the diverse ways autistic individuals perceive and interpret their environment. Recognizing these perspectives can lead to a greater understanding and appreciation of the richness and complexity of autistic experiences.

The narrator's curiosity serves as a reminder of the value of exploration and inquiry. Neurotypical individuals might draw inspiration from this approach, fostering a spirit of curiosity in their own lives and seeking deeper understanding in seemingly ordinary situations.

The story highlights the potential to uncover hidden meanings beneath surface appearances. By valuing the insights gleaned from looking beyond the obvious, neurotypical audiences can develop a more nuanced view of their world and appreciate the layers of meaning present in everyday life.

The narrator's reflective insights demonstrate the importance of introspection for personal growth. Neurotypical individuals can embrace similar reflective practices, recognizing the transformative potential of thoughtfully engaging with personal experiences.

"Dancing Buddha Statue" offers reflections on perception, interpretation, and meaningful exploration through the lens of the autistic narrator. By valuing these insights, neurotypical readers can deepen their understanding of the unique strengths and perspectives autistic individuals bring to navigating and enriching everyday life.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

The phenomenon of a Buddhist rupa or statue dancing can be understood through the interconnected concepts of perception, reality, and the mind's role in spiritual experiences. This experience can be seen as a blend of meditative altered perceptions, symbolic meanings, the fluid nature of reality, and the innate creativity of the mind.

During meditation, practitioners often report altered perceptions of reality, including vivid visualizations and experiences that seem beyond ordinary sensory input. The intense focus during meditation can affect the perception of physical objects, making them appear animated or alive. This reflects the mind's capacity to influence how we perceive the world.

Statues in Buddhism often carry profound symbolic meanings, and a dancing statue may symbolize an internal state of joy, enlightenment, or spiritual awakening. The movement of the statue could represent the dynamic nature of life or the dance of emptiness and form.

The concept of emptiness (sunyata) teaches that all phenomena are interdependent and lack inherent existence. A dancing statue may serve as an expression of the fluid nature of reality and perception, emphasizing that meaning arises from one's mind and conceptualizations.

The dance of the statue could symbolize the illusory nature of phenomena (maya), reminding us that our perceptions are often shaped by mental constructs and that the ultimate nature of reality transcends appearances. Ultimately, this experience invites

practitioners to explore the deeper dimensions of their spirituality and the nature of existence itself.

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Chapter 38. Foolish Compassion – Naivete

As I sat in the office of my small post-production company in Tokyo, I couldn't help but feel a sense of purpose and fulfillment. I had started this business with the altruistic goal of sponsoring Tibetan refugees living in India to come and work in Japan, so they could earn money for their families. The plan was simple: they would start with basic tasks like escorting actors to studios, delivering scripts, and collecting demo tapes, and eventually learn the recording business and become sound engineers.

I had tried to recruit Uncle, a kind-hearted man who had helped me with the new Dharma center, but he was not interested. Instead, he got a job in a shoe factory where he could spend his days packing shoes and chanting mantra. I was disappointed, but I didn't give up. I hired a secretary to take care of the business while I went to India to look for someone to sponsor.

In India, I met a young man who worked in the monastery's office and was enthusiastic about working in Japan. But when he arrived, he seemed more interested in sightseeing than working. He stayed for three months, enjoying himself, and then returned to the monastery. I tried again with another young man, a friend of Uncle's who was a taxi driver from a nearby village. He was determined to work and send money back to his wife and child, but he ended up getting a job at a fish-packing factory instead.

This pattern repeated itself: I would invite someone to come and work with me, but they would either get another job or return to India after three months of fun. I would buy them clothes, take them out to restaurants, and show them the sights, but no one seemed

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interested in working with me. It got so that people would ask me to take someone back to Japan just so they could have a vacation.

One day, Uncle sat me down and told me bluntly: "Stop inviting them. They don't want to work. They just want to come here for a vacation, and they're laughing at you behind your back. They're taking advantage of you. Stop letting them use you."

I knew that I shouldn't expect anything in return when helping others, but it was hard not to feel like I was being used. I decided to stop inviting people and gave up on my quest.

I asked Teacher about my experience and he chuckled wisely. "Your picture should be next to the word 'naïve' in the dictionary," he said. "You can't force your help on anyone if it's obvious they don't want it. Stop trying to help people if they don't want it."

He explained that true happiness doesn't come from external circumstances or expectations, but from having a clear mind. "You're looking for happiness in all the wrong places," he said. "You're confusing happiness with fun. You took your guests to Disneyland and I'm sure that was fun, but that's not happiness."

Teacher taught me that true happiness comes from within and is cultivated through compassion and understanding. He encouraged me to develop Bodhicitta, a mind of compassion that seeks to help others without attachment or expectation.

I realized that my attempts to help others had been misguided and that I needed to rethink my approach. I decided to focus on developing my own mind and cultivating compassion for others, rather than trying to force my help on those who didn't want it. It was a difficult lesson to learn, but one that ultimately brought me closer to true happiness and understanding.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

The narrative "Foolish Compassion – Naivete" offers a lesson in understanding the dynamics of altruism and the importance of aligning one's intentions with realistic outcomes. Through the narrator's journey from well-intentioned efforts to hard-earned insights, we explore themes of naivety, expectation, and the cultivation of genuine compassion.

The narrator's initial venture to help Tibetan refugees is driven by a deep sense of idealism and generosity, common traits among autistic individuals who often strive to create meaningful impact and positive change. This sincere desire to support others highlights a compassionate approach to life and work.

Despite repeated disappointments, the narrator continues to attempt to help, demonstrating resilience and perseverance. Autistic individuals frequently exhibit a strong commitment to their goals, even when faced with obstacles, driven by a sense of purpose and dedication.

Through the advice of Uncle and Rinpoche, the narrator experiences a profound realization about their approach. This capacity for introspection and willingness to learn from experiences is reflective of the often deep reflective nature of autistic individuals, who seek to adapt and grow from their insights.

The narrator's transition from attempting to offer material help to cultivating inner compassion highlights a shift in understanding the essence of true altruism. This demonstrates an ability to integrate teachings into personal growth, reframing their approach to align with broader spiritual principles.

Broader Observations

The narrative illustrates the importance of balancing idealistic goals with practical considerations and understanding the needs and wants of those one seeks to help. Neurotypical audiences can learn the value of merging ideals with realistic strategies that consider the perspectives of all involved.

The story emphasizes the importance of recognizing when help is neither desired nor effective. Neurotypical individuals can appreciate the lesson of respecting boundaries, emphasizing that support should be grounded in mutual understanding and genuine need.

Teacher's advice highlights the significance of cultivating happiness from within rather than relying on external circumstances. Neurotypical audiences might integrate this perspective, prioritizing mindfulness and self-awareness as foundational components of personal well-being.

The narrator's journey of realizations encourages a practice of reflection and personal growth. Embracing such introspection can lead to more informed decisions and compassionate actions that are both impactful and sustainable.

"Foolish Compassion – Naivete" provides insights into the complexities of helping others, teaching valuable lessons about understanding, boundaries, and the refinement of compassion. By appreciating these lessons, both neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals can strive for more mindful and effective altruism, fostering a world of deeper empathy and understanding.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

When faced with situations where we feel taken advantage of, Buddhist principles can guide us in navigating these complex emotions. Mindfulness allows us to observe our thoughts and feelings without reacting impulsively, enabling us to respond thoughtfully and recognize when we're being taken advantage of.

Practicing compassion towards others can help us see their actions as a reflection of their own suffering or ignorance. This fosters empathy in us, rather than resentment. Embracing an attitude of non-attachment helps us let go of clinging to outcomes or the opinions of others, and understand that our self-worth doesn't depend on external validation.

Maintaining a balanced mind amid difficult situations promotes resilience, and cultivating equanimity helps us accept unpleasant experiences without being overwhelmed by anger or frustration. Engaging in ethical actions and communicating clearly and honestly (Right Action and Right Speech) is essential, as is setting boundaries and learning to assert oneself.

Recognizing the interconnectedness of all beings can help us understand the broader context of behavior, leading to more constructive responses. The principle of avoiding harm (ahimsa) emphasizes doing so without causing harm to others, and seeking a balanced approach can help maintain peace while protecting ourselves.

By letting go of grudges and resentment, we can free ourselves from emotional burdens and find personal peace and healing through forgiveness. By applying these principles, we can navigate complex

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interpersonal relationships more skillfully, maintaining our integrity while fostering compassion and understanding.



Chapter 39. Wannabe -The Maroon Dress

I had always been fascinated by the vibrant color of the Vajrayana monastic robes, a deep maroon that seemed to radiate a sense of spirituality and devotion. I had scoured the shops in Hong Kong for maroon-colored clothes, and would often wear them with my mala (prayer beads) around my neck like a necklace. The color became a badge of honor, a symbol of my identification with the Buddhist teachings.

When I moved to Japan, I started my own center and wore a long sleeveless maroon wraparound dress that a friend had made for me. It echoed the traditional Tibetan chuba and monastic robes. I felt it gave me a sense of authority and made me look like a teacher, even though I was not an ordained nun. I wore it during weekend services, which I presided over, and felt a sense of pride and connection to the Buddhist tradition.

But one day, my world was turned upside down when I met a Scottish lama who brought along a nun with tattoos and a monk who bickered constantly. Despite their unconventional appearance, their voices were rich and beautiful when they chanted during puja services. I felt validated and like I finally fit in, surrounded by fellow Westerners who shared my passion for Buddhism.

When we went on a sightseeing trip to see the famous Daibutsu statue in Kamakura, I wore my maroon chuba as a sign of reverence. But little did I know, our group was about to attract attention from busloads of tourists. As we posed in front of the statue, many people took pictures of us, striking up conversations with the Scottish nun and asking questions about our robes. When

one tourist asked about me, the nun replied bluntly, "She is nothing." And with that, she walked away.

I felt hurt and confused, like an abandoned dog who had done nothing to deserve such treatment. The nun's words cut deep, making me question my own identity and purpose as a Buddhist teacher. I remained silent for the rest of the trip, lost in contemplation of sunyata: the concept that everything is empty and lacks inherent existence.

In that moment, I realized that my attachment to my maroon robes had been misguided. I had been trying to fit into a role that wasn't mine to play, seeking validation from others rather than finding my own sense of purpose and belonging. The experience was a painful lesson in humility, forcing me to confront the emptiness of external labels and appearances.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

The narrative "Wannabe - The Maroon Dress" offers an exploration of identity, validation, and humility through the lens of the narrator's experiences with Buddhist practice and attire. Confronted by unexpected interactions and insights, the narrator embarks on a journey of self-discovery, providing lessons of authenticity, belonging, and the impermanence of external validation.

The narrator's deep connection to the maroon robes as a symbol of spiritual identity reflects a common autistic tendency to attach significance and meaning to tangible objects. This strong association illustrates how autistic individuals often find comfort and meaning in physical symbols that represent broader concepts and values.

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The narrator's initial pride in wearing the maroon dress in imitation of monastic robes represents a natural desire for belonging and validation within a chosen community or role. Autistic individuals might similarly seek acceptance and validation from others, while navigating the complexities of fitting into social and cultural norms.

Following the nun's dismissive comment, the narrator engages in deep reflection, questioning their motives and sense of identity. This introspection highlights the capacity for self-awareness and contemplative thought common among autistic individuals, allowing them to process experiences with depth and insight.

The narrator's contemplation of *sunyata*—recognizing the emptiness of external labels—demonstrates a philosophical engagement with Buddhist teachings. Autistic individuals often pursue interests with great focus and depth, enabling them to explore complex and abstract ideas with clarity and thoughtfulness.

Broader Observations

The narrative invites neurotypical audiences to appreciate how objects and symbols may hold significant personal meaning for autistic individuals. Understanding these connections can foster greater empathy and acknowledgment of diverse ways that people express and validate their identities.

The story emphasizes the importance of seeking validation from within rather than from external sources. Neurotypical individuals can reflect on the value of authenticity and self-acceptance, recognizing that external appearances and labels do not define one's true worth or identity.

The narrator's journey of introspection offers insights into the process of learning and growth through self-reflection. By embracing similar

practices, neurotypical audiences can cultivate greater self-awareness and resilience, enhancing their understanding of themselves and others.

The misguided dismissal faced by the narrator highlights the need for inclusivity within spiritual and social communities. Neurotypical readers can learn to foster environments where individuals are valued for their unique contributions and encouraged to explore their identities freely.

"Wannabe - The Maroon Wraparound Dress" provides reflections on identity, validation, and the journey toward inner acceptance through the lens of the autistic narrator. By appreciating these insights, neurotypical individuals can deepen their understanding of the ways in which autistic people engage with and interpret the world, promoting environments that celebrate authenticity, diversity, and the shared quest for self-discovery.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

When faced with feelings of humiliation and hurt, Buddhist teachings offer a path to navigate difficult emotions with greater equanimity and resilience. One key insight is the impermanence of feelings and experiences, which can provide comfort and help individuals cultivate resilience. Recognizing that feelings of humiliation and hurt are transient can help reduce their intensity and promote healing.

Another important aspect of Buddhist practice is understanding attachment to the Self (ego) and how it can lead to suffering. Being hurt by others' words or actions can indicate a strong attachment to one's self-image or reputation. By reflecting on this attachment, individuals can reduce the pain they feel from negative interactions.

Practicing compassion toward oneself and others is also transformative. Instead of internalizing hurt, one can cultivate loving-kindness (metta) toward oneself while also understanding the suffering of those who may have caused harm. This can diminish feelings of resentment and foster healing.

Mindfulness practice encourages individuals to observe their thoughts and feelings without judgment, creating a space between experiencing hurt and reacting impulsively. By recognizing emotions as they arise, individuals can respond with more clarity and balance.

Buddhist teachings emphasize the importance of forgiveness, Right Speech, and ethical conduct, which can help individuals reframe their experiences without falling into despair. Understanding karma can also provide context for interpersonal conflicts, promoting a broader perspective on human suffering.

Chloe Solo



NEPAL

Chapter 40. The Statue of Tara – Deity Embodiment

As I wandered through the shops in Kathmandu, searching for the perfect statue of Tara, I found myself drawn to one particular shop tucked away at the end of the road. The shop was empty except for a few statues that seemed to glow in the late afternoon sunlight. And then, I saw her. A 12-inch statue of Tara perched on a shelf, her face radiating a sense of calm and wisdom. I was captivated by her features, but the price tag was higher than I had anticipated, and I knew it would be wrong to try to negotiate a lower price for the sacred statue.

As I stood there, dithering about whether to make the purchase, a shopkeeper emerged from the back room. Her face was identical to the statue's, and I was struck dumb with awe. She greeted me calmly, but I couldn't muster a word. She simply stood there, waiting for me to make my decision.

I eventually mustered up the courage to point to the statue and place the money on a tray. The shopkeeper wrapped it carefully, placing the face in cotton before handing it over to me. Not a single word had been spoken between us.

As I walked back down the road, clutching the precious statue tightly to my chest, I felt like I had acted like a rude tourist by not speaking to her. The next day, I returned to the shop to apologize

and thank her for her kindness. But when I asked for her, the man behind the counter informed me that they had no woman of that description working there. Only he and his brothers ran the store.

I was left with more questions than answers. Who was this woman who resembled the statue of Tara? Was she a reincarnation of the goddess herself? Or was it just a remarkable coincidence? The experience left me with a sense of wonder and awe, reminding me of the mysteries that lie beyond our understanding.

As I looked at the statue, now safely ensconced in my hotel room, I felt a deep connection to it. It was as if Tara herself was watching over me, guiding me on my journey. And even though I would never know the truth about the woman who sold it to me, I knew that our encounter would stay with me forever.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

The narrative "The Statue of Tara – Deity Embodiment" presents an exploration of spiritual encounters and the mysteries of perception, as experienced by the autistic narrator. Through an intriguing interaction in a Kathmandu shop, the story delves into themes of intuition, wonder, and the ineffable nature of certain experiences, while offering insights for a broader audience.

The narrator's attraction to the statue of Tara reflects a deep sensitivity to spiritual symbols and art, a common trait among autistic individuals who often find meaning and connection in visual and symbolic representations. This intuitive draw can facilitate a personal connection to broader spiritual teachings and practices.

The narrator's recognition of the shopkeeper's resemblance to the statue highlights their acute attention to detail and keen perception. Autistic individuals frequently notice subtleties and nuances that might elude others, contributing to rich and layered experiences of their surroundings.

The narrator's decision to return to the shop to express gratitude and apologize demonstrates a reflective and thoughtful approach to social interactions. Autistic individuals often reflect deeply on their actions and seek to engage in sincere and meaningful exchanges with others, even when faced with uncertainty or ambiguity.

The narrator's contemplation of the encounter with the shopkeeper reveals an openness to the mystical aspects of life. Autistic individuals can approach the unknown with curiosity and a sense of wonder, allowing them to engage with experiences that transcend conventional understanding.

Broader Observations

The narrative invites neurotypical readers to appreciate the depth of sensitivity many autistic individuals have toward symbolism and art. Understanding this connection can enhance empathy and recognition of the diverse ways individuals engage with and interpret spiritual and cultural symbols.

The story underscores the significance of keen observational skills, which allow for profound and meaningful encounters. Neurotypical audiences might learn from this by cultivating greater attention to detail and awareness of their environment, enriching their personal and shared experiences.

The narrator's introspective approach to interactions highlights the value of thoughtful engagement and communication. Neurotypical individuals can embrace these practices, promoting sincerity and depth in their interactions and acknowledgment of diverse communication styles.

The narrative's engagement with the ineffable aspects of the encounter encourages an appreciation for the mysteries of life. Neurotypical audiences might take inspiration from this openness, allowing for curiosity and wonder to inform their understanding of events that defy straightforward explanation.

"The Statue of Tara – Deity Embodiment" reflects on the interplay of perception, spirituality, and mystery through the lens of the autistic narrator. By valuing these insights, neurotypical readers can deepen their understanding of the unique ways in which autistic individuals navigate and interpret their experiences, fostering environments of empathy, inclusivity, and shared appreciation for the mystical aspects of life.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

The experience of seeing Tara manifest as a human woman can be a powerful reminder of the interconnectedness of all phenomena and the transformative power of meditation. This encounter can highlight the qualities of compassion and wisdom, reinforcing the idea that the divine can be present in everyday life. As we recognize that all phenomena, including deities, are empty of inherent existence, we can see Tara as a manifestation of the fluid and interdependent nature of reality.

The human form is significant in this context, as it offers the opportunity for spiritual practice and realization. The manifestation of a deity like Tara in human form can symbolize the potential for enlightenment within all beings, suggesting that divinity can be found in ordinary forms and experiences. This experience can also encourage us to recognize the manifestations of compassion and wisdom within ourselves and others.

In Vajrayana practices, practitioners often engage in deity yoga, where they visualize themselves as the deity or perceive the deity in various forms. This practice can blur the lines between the practitioner and the deity, facilitating a deep connection that can result in perceiving the deity as manifesting in a relatable form, such as a human woman.

By recognizing the mythological context of Tara's manifestation as a human woman, we can understand that this experience is not just a personal encounter, but a reminder of the ongoing presence of the sacred in the mundane.



Chapter 41. The Unsuitable Gifts

As I prepared for my trip to a Tibetan refugee camp in northern Nepal, I was faced with the dilemma of what to bring as gifts for the families of the lamas I had been asked to check on. With limited funds, I knew I had to think creatively. That's when I remembered the fashionably dressed colleagues I worked with in the entertainment industry in Tokyo.

I had a few more studio gigs lined up before my trip, and I came up with the idea of collecting clothes from my colleagues to donate to the camp. It was a cold and harsh environment, and warm winter clothes would be a welcome gift. I approached my friends with the idea, and they were enthusiastic about donating their unwanted, yet clean and pressed, clothing.

The response was overwhelming, and I ended up packing dozens of boxes of clothes to send ahead to the camp. Not once did I take the time to examine each item carefully, assuming that it was all useful and practical for the refugees.

But when I arrived at the camp two weeks later, I was shocked by what I saw. It was as if I had stumbled into a fashion show from the 1980s. Everywhere I looked, people were wearing designer clothes that seemed to have come straight from a vintage store. Thigh-high boots, oversized coats with broad shoulders, voluminous skirts, and fedora hats adorned the refugees. I couldn't help but laugh at the absurdity of it all.

It became clear that my well-intentioned gift had not been quite what the refugees needed. The clothes were too flashy, too

trendy, and too impractical for their daily lives in the harsh Himalayan environment. I realized that my lack of attention to detail had resulted in an unsuitable gift, one that might have even caused more confusion than comfort.

The experience was a humbling reminder of the importance of understanding the needs of others before offering assistance. It was a lesson that would stay with me as I continued to travel to remote regions, seeking to make a positive impact on the lives of those around me.

Reflection from the ND Perspective

The narrative "The Unsuitable Gifts" provides an account of the challenges of offering assistance without fully understanding the needs of those being helped. The autistic narrator's experience highlights the importance of empathy, cultural awareness, and thoughtful giving, offering important lessons on altruism and impactful support.

The narrator's initiative in collecting and sending clothing to the refugee camp reflects a strong desire to help and create a positive impact, a common trait among autistic individuals who often show genuine compassion and commitment to supporting others.

In their enthusiasm, the narrator assumes that all donated clothes will be suitable without checking for practicality, illustrating how assumptions can sometimes lead to unintended outcomes. Autistic individuals, while detail-oriented, may sometimes focus more on the logistics of execution rather than the broader context unless guided or experienced.

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Upon realizing the mismatch between the gifts and the needs of the refugees, the narrator displays a capacity for reflection and learning. Autistic individuals often possess strong introspective abilities, which can lead to meaningful personal growth and adaptation based on their experiences.

The narrator's ability to find humor in their well-meaning blunder shows resilience and an ability to view situations with a balanced perspective. This quality can be a powerful tool in navigating social challenges and fostering positive relationships.

Broader Observations

The story underscores the importance of understanding the specific needs and cultural contexts of those being helped. Neurotypical audiences can learn from this to prioritize empathy and active listening when engaging in charitable activities, ensuring that their efforts are both appropriate and effective.

The experience highlights the potential pitfalls of making assumptions about what is best for others. By avoiding assumptions and seeking direct input from those they intend to support, neurotypical individuals can enhance the relevance and impact of their assistance.

The narrator's reflection on the experience serves as an example of learning from past actions to improve future efforts. Neurotypical readers can embrace this practice of reflection, encouraging personal and collective growth in various philanthropic endeavors.

The humorous approach to the situation encourages a positive outlook even in the face of mistakes. By valuing humor, neurotypical audiences can foster resilience and adaptability, viewing challenges as opportunities for growth and improvement.

"The Unsuitable Gifts" provides a lighthearted yet meaningful exploration of the complexities of giving, as experienced by the autistic narrator. By valuing these insights, neurotypical readers can deepen their understanding of effective altruism, promoting more empathetic, informed, and impactful ways of supporting diverse communities around the world.

Reflection from a Buddhist Perspective

When we discover that a gift we've given is unsuitable, it can be a challenging and humbling experience. However, rather than getting discouraged or ashamed, we can choose to approach the situation with mindfulness, compassion, and understanding. By acknowledging the impermanence of all things, including gifts and relationships, we can accept that the situation is not a reflection of our worth or intentions.

The Buddha teaches us to focus on the motivations behind our actions, rather than just the outcomes. If our intention was sincere and rooted in compassion or generosity, that intention holds significance, even if the gift didn't turn out as planned. By cultivating non-attachment and letting go of expectations about how gifts should be received, we can respond to the situation with greater ease and humility.

In this moment, we can practice compassion toward ourselves and the recipient, acknowledging that mistakes are an opportunity for growth and learning. We can reflect on why the gift was inappropriate and use that insight to improve our actions in the future. By embracing forgiveness and self-compassion, we can grow from our mistakes and develop greater wisdom and understanding.

As we navigate this experience, we can remember that skillful means is not about achieving perfection, but about acting wisely and compassionately in the present moment. By embracing this mindset, we can transform our mistakes into opportunities for growth and connection with others.

Epilogue: Reflections on the Path

As the final page of "Dharma Dumplings" turns, we find ourselves at a quiet crossroad—a moment to pause and reflect on the stories shared and the lessons imparted. This collection began as a humble attempt to encapsulate glimpses of a journey rich with wisdom, humor, and profound encounters. It ends as an open invitation to continue exploring the limitless landscape of the heart and mind.

The tales within this volume, though sparked by personal experiences, are like the dumplings they celebrate—each one a unique blend of ingredients, folded with care, and shared in the spirit of nourishment. They are meant to satiate the hunger we all have for understanding, compassion, and connection. In their telling, they have hopefully provided a taste of the timeless teachings that guide us all, whether we walk a well-trodden path or forge our own way through the thickets of life.

The anonymity preserved throughout these stories serves as a gentle reminder that the essence of the teachings transcends individual identities. Instead, it touches on the universal truths and shared experiences that bind us all as seekers of truth and meaning. These stories are yours now, to hold and to ponder, to share with others, and to revisit as companions on your own journey.

As you carry these stories forward, may they serve as touchstones, reminding you of the wisdom that lies in everyday moments, the insights gleaned from quiet reflections, and the guidance of those who walk alongside us, both seen and unseen. May you find inspiration in the simplicity of a well-told tale, and may it light your path as brightly as a lantern swaying gently in the wind.

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The journey continues, not just within these pages but in the rhythm of each breath, the silence between thoughts, and the vibrant tapestry of your own unfolding story. With gratitude for the shared time and space, we close this collection, knowing that every ending is just another beginning.

May your path be illuminated by joy and laughter, and may the wisdom of the dharma dumplings fill your heart with peace.

With these words, we conclude this collection, honored to have shared in this journey with you. Wherever your path may lead, may it be marked with kindness, insight, and the gentle nourishment of shared wisdom.



Sanskrit and Tibetan Buddhist Terms Glossary

Ahimsa

Non-violence or non-harming; a principle of causing no harm to living beings.

Anita

Non-self; the absence of a permanent, unchanging self or soul.

Anicca

Impermanence; the idea that all conditioned things are transient and in constant flux.

Bardo

The intermediate state between death and rebirth.

Bodhisattva

A being who seeks enlightenment not only for themselves but also to help liberate all sentient beings.

Chöd

A tantric practice developed by Machig Labdrön involving visualization, chanting, and ritual offerings to cut through ego and fear, often performed to confront and transform negative forces.

Damtsig (Damtsik)

The bond between a guru (teacher) and chela (disciple) that emphasizes spiritual connection, trust, and commitment. It signifies the sacred relationship where the disciple receives guidance, blessings, and transmission of teachings from the guru, which is essential for progressing on the spiritual path. This connection is often nurtured through guru yoga practices, where the disciple visualizes and meditates on the guru as a divine figure.

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Dharma

The teachings of the Buddha; the natural law or truth that underpins reality.

Dzogchen

The Great Perfection; a tradition emphasizing the innate nature of mind and direct realization.

Gompa

A Tibetan Buddhist monastery or temple.

Kangyur

The collection of the Buddha's words, the authoritative scriptures in Tibetan Buddhism.

Khatak or Katak

White silk blessing scarf.

Klesha

Mental states, afflictions including as greed, hatred, delusion, pride, doubt, wrong views and attachment that cause suffering and present obstacles to one's practice and achieving enlightenment.

Kyerim

A Tibetan practice involving visualizations and offerings to accumulate merit and purify obstacles.

Lama

A spiritual teacher in Tibetan Buddhism.

Lhakhang

A temple or sacred space.

Lojong

Mind training practices aimed at developing compassion and wisdom.

Mantra

A sacred sound or phrase chanted during meditation or rituals.

Mandala

A geometric diagram representing the universe used as an aid in meditation.

Metta

Loving-kindness; a meditative practice and attitude of unconditional love and compassion.

Mudra

A symbolic hand gesture used in meditation and rituals.

Ngakpa / Ngakmo

Lay practitioners (male / female) who practice Vajrayana Buddhism and often perform rituals and ceremonies.

Ngondro (Ngöndro)

Preliminary practices involving prostrations, refuge, bodhichitta, Vajrasattva purification, and guru yoga to prepare the mind for advanced tantra.

Nirvana

The ultimate goal of Buddhism; the cessation of suffering and the end of the cycle of rebirth.

Prajna

Wisdom; the understanding of the true nature of reality.

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Phowa

A practice aimed at transferring consciousness at the moment of death to a pure land or enlightened state.

Puja

Ritual offerings and prayers performed in monasteries or temples.

Rinpoché

A respectful title meaning "precious one," often used for high lamas.

Samsara

The cycle of birth, death, and rebirth driven by karma and afflictions.

Sangha

The Buddhist community of monks, nuns, and lay practitioners.

Shiné (Shamatha)

A foundational meditation practice focused on developing mental stability, concentration, and tranquility by calming the mind through focused meditation on an object such as the breath, a visual object, or a mantra.

Sunyata (Śūnyatā)

Emptiness; the idea that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence and independent self-nature.

Tathāgata

A term used by the Buddha to refer to himself; meaning "Thus Gone" or "One Who Has Arrived at the Truth."

Tsalung

A Tibetan yogic practice involving the channels (tsa), winds (lung), and drops (thigle) to facilitate spiritual realization.

Tengyur

The collection of Buddhist scriptures and commentaries translated into Tibetan.

Torma

A ritual cake or offering used in Tibetan Buddhist ceremonies.

Tsog

A group ritual involving offerings, prayers, and recitations to accumulate merit and invoke blessings.

Tsa Lung

Practices involving the channels (tsa), winds or energies (lung), and drops (thigle) to purify and activate subtle energies in the body.

Vajra

A ritual object symbolizing indestructibility and the method aspect of enlightenment.

Vajrayana

The tantric or thunderbolt vehicle of Buddhism emphasizing esoteric practices, mantra, and visualization.

Yab-Yum

A symbolic representation of union, often depicted as a male deity with a female consort in tantric art.

Yidam

A meditational deity representing enlightened qualities, used in Vajrayana practices.

Yujidharma

A term referring to the union of method and wisdom in tantric practice.

Dharma Dumplings



Thank you for reading Dharma Dumplings.

I'd appreciate hearing from you.

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In the Dharma,

Chloe Solo

