

No Right, No Wrong

An interview with Pema Chödrön

By Tricycle

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Pema Chödrön is an American nun in the Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, and the director of Gampo Abbey, on Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. She was a student of the late Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche and in 1974 received the novice ordination from His Holiness Gyalwa Karmapa. She took the full nun's ordination in 1981. She is the author of The Wisdom of No Escape and Be Grateful to Everyone: A Guide to Compassionate Living, from Shambhala Publications. Editor Helen Tworikov conducted this interview for Tricycle in Nova Scotia in June 1993. Photographs by Jeri Coppola.

Tricycle: Pema, your life has unfolded into an interesting paradox. Because you are the director of Gampo Abbey, one of the few Buddhist centers in North America to maintain the traditional monastic precepts, and because you have been a celibate nun for twenty years, you are considered eminently trustworthy, a teacher beyond reproach in terms of ethical conduct; at the same time, you have become one of the foremost representatives of the Vajrayana lineage of Trungpa Rinpoche, a teacher who became legendary as much for his unconventional behavior as for his spiritual attainment—specifically his drinking, and having sex with students. Since his death in 1986, there has been increasing concern about the inappropriate use of spiritual authority, particularly with regard to sex and power. Today even some students who were once devoted to Trungpa Rinpoche have had a change of heart. Behavior that they may have formerly considered enlightened they now consider wrong. Has there been a shift in your own outlook?

Pema Chodron: My undying devotion to Trungpa Rinpoche comes from his teaching me in every way he could that you can never make things right or wrong. I consider it my good fortune that somehow I was thrown into a way of understanding Buddhism which in the Zen tradition is called “don’t know mind”: Don’t know. Don’t know right. Don’t know wrong. As far as I’m concerned, if you’re going to make things right and wrong you can never even talk about fulfilling your bodhisattva vows.

How do you understand the bodhisattva vow?

The bodhisattva vow has something to do with going cold turkey, naked, without any clothes on into whatever situation presents itself to you, and seeing how you hate certain people, how people trigger you in every single way, how you want to hold on, how you want to get in bed and put the covers over your head. Seeing all of that just increases your compassion for the human situation. We're all up against not finding ourselves perfect, and still wanting to be open and be there for others. My sense of what it means to be a bodhisattva on the path, a student-warrior-bodhisattva, is that you are constantly caught with "don't know." Can't say yes, can't say no. Can't say right, can't say wrong. Trungpa Rinpoche was a provocative person. In *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism* he says that the job of the spiritual friend is to insult the student, and that's the kind of guy he was. If things got too smooth, he'd create chaos. All I can say is that I needed that. I didn't like being churned up and provoked, but it was what I needed. It showed me how I was stuck in habitual patterns. The closer I got to him, the more my trust in him grew.

What was that trust based on?

It wasn't trust that he would be predictable or follow some kind of reliable code. It was trust that his only motivation was to help people. His whole teaching was about leading people away from holding on to some kind of security. And I wanted my foundations rocked. I wanted to actually be free of habitual patterns which keep the ground under my feet and maintain that false security which denies death. Things are not permanent, they don't last, there is no final security. He was always trying to teach us to relax into the insecurity, into the groundlessness. He taught me about how to live. So I am grateful to him, no matter what.

Stories of Trungpa Rinpoche's sexual encounters with students still upset a lot of people. Have they ever upset you?

No. But he upset me. He upset me a lot. I couldn't con him, and that was uncomfortable. But it was exactly what I needed. Sometimes, in certain situations, I can see how I'm a con artist, and I can see how I'm just trying to make everything pretty and smooth, and all I have to do is think of Rinpoche and I get honest. He has the effect on me of relentlessly—in a dedicated way—keeping me honest. And that's not always comfortable.

How did he respond to your choice of celibacy?

He encouraged me to be very strict with my vows.

He never provoked you or needled you about being attached to your vows?

Quite the opposite. He actually was very strict and used to say, "You know people will be watching you, people will watch how you walk, how you move, and you should really represent this tradition well." In terms of how to be a nun or monk, his teachings were always very straight, very pure. He needled me about other things. I remember one time saying something to him about feeling that I was a nice person. I used the word "nice," and I remember the look that crossed his face—it was as if he had just eaten something that tasted really bad. And he would also do this thing, which many students have talked to me about, where you'd be talking on and on in your most earnest style and he'd just yawn and look out the window.

Would you say that the intention behind his unconventional behavior, including his sexual exploits and his drinking, was to help others?



As the years went on, I felt everything he did was to help others. But I would also say now that maybe my understanding has gone even deeper, and it feels more to the point to say I don't know. I don't know what he was doing. I know he changed my life. I know I love him. But I don't know who he was. And maybe he wasn't doing things to help everyone, but he sure helped me. I learned something from him. But who was that masked man?

In recent years women have become more articulate about sexism. And we know more today about the prevalence of child abuse and about how many people come into dharma really hurting. If you knew ten years ago what you know today, would you have been so optimistic about Trungpa Rinpoche and his sexuality? Would you have wanted some of the women you've been working with to study with him, given their histories of sexual abuse?

I would have said, "You know he loves women, he's very passionate, and has a lot of relationships with women, and that might be part of it if you get involved with him, and you should read all his books, go to all his talks, and actually see if you can get close to him. And you should do that knowing that you might get an invitation to sleep with him, so don't be naive about that, and don't think you have to do it or

don't have to do it. But you have to decide for yourself who you think this guy is.”

Were there women who turned down his sexual invitations and maintained close relationships as students? Was that an option?

Yes. Definitely. The other students were often the ones who made people feel like they were square and uptight if they didn't want to sleep with Rinpoche, but Rinpoche's teaching was to throw out the party line. However, we're always up against human nature. The teacher says something, then everybody does it. There was a time when he smoked cigarettes and everyone started smoking. Then he stopped and they stopped and it was ridiculous. But we're just people with human habitual patterns, and you can count on the fact that the students are going to make everything into a party line, and we did. The one predictable thing about him was that he would continually pull the rug out no matter what. That's how he was.

And your devotion never wavered?

I was very slow to feel real devotion toward Trungpa Rinpoche. For ten or fifteen years I felt that I was lacking in devotion, but then about four years before his death, that changed. I tell this to newer students who are having the same problem. I tell them, just hang in there and be true to what you think you're being taught. Groundlessness is the name of the game, it's not about attachment. See, if devotion sets in right away, it could be from a sense that now you have a new mommy or daddy and there's this cozy feeling to it. But by becoming Buddhists, we don't get a new family. Becoming a Buddhist is about becoming homeless. But finally when devotion did come, it was extremely strong and I was grateful.

Grateful to Trungpa Rinpoche?



You feel such gratitude that somebody pointed out the nature of your mind and gave you instructions that actually encouraged you to be brave and compassionate and to let go of old ways of thinking and old securities. But I would say now that that devotion to Trungpa Rinpoche has gone further since his death. I'm really willing to entertain the idea that maybe he wasn't perfect, maybe everything he did wasn't to benefit people. In other words, my sense of not having to make it all right or all wrong is stronger now. I can actually hold my devotion purely and fully in my heart and still say, Maybe he was a madman.

And it doesn't change my devotion because he taught me something about not saying yes or no but resting in groundlessness. And that's more profound than my saying, Oh, no, he never did anything to hurt anybody, because what do I know, that's just my projection, and making him wrong—that's someone's projection too.

You sometimes refer to yourself as a student/teacher.

Why?

It's kind of a comfort mentality to just say, Oh, I'm not a teacher. I'm more of a student on the path. It's very threatening to actually think of being a teacher. But then, of course, there are people who consider me that and I have to take responsibility. But you get pride in being a teacher and say, "Don't mess with me, don't say I'm not a teacher or my feelings will be hurt." The other thing is wanting to not face it. There's a kind of false humility that can set in. So somehow you're caught in the groundlessness of the confidence in the dharma, which has nothing to do with you but which can come out of your mouth and which will benefit sentient beings. Confidence in that the more you get out of the way, the more you can provide the truth. And at the

same time this humbling experience of being exactly where you are and knowing what some of your limitations are. That tension between confidence and humility is what you get if you are going to relate to reality honestly. You don't get that security of one hundred percent confidence, which turns into pride, and you don't get the converse feeling that you are just nothing. You're big and small at the same time.

There's a lot of talk in Buddhist circles of "safe" places to practice, "safe" teachers, even "safe" environments in which to hold conferences for Buddhist teachers. And the idea of safety seems to imply guarantees and predictability, that things are going to unfold according to plan. This seems so different from your own training. How do you handle students' desire to be in a "safe place" at the abbey?

We just did this program where people were falling apart right and left. Frequently, students would say, Well, this place feels safe to let it all hang out. So the environment was safe, but the teachings were threatening. Everyone was being encouraged to relax and open up to whatever came up, and this meant that memories might be coming up for some people which were causing them to cry; other people were triggered by the fact that people were crying, and they were having to work with their irritation, maybe even rage, at the fact that people were crying. In some sense, it was a very unsafe situation. A situation where no one rocks the boat and the whole thing is smooth creates a very weak understanding and feeds into the avoidance of pain, which is the major cause of suffering, the major cause of samsara.

What role does lovingkindness play in this kind of situation?



Trungpa Rinpoche used to say that the first step in the training of the warrior, which is to say, one who is cultivating their courage, is to place them in a cradle of lovingkindness. And this is really true. In the Buddhist teachings we talk about cultivation of *maitri* or lovingkindness toward oneself. This does seem necessary in order to have the willingness to work with all the messy and delightful parts of yourself. Real safety is your willingness to not run away from yourself. In terms of creating a safe environment, you want to create a space in which people can look at themselves and where that's going to meet approval and it's going to be safe to do that. No one is going to laugh at them for crying or falling apart. Now that's the first stage, because, what you're really talking about is how to live in this world where people do ridicule and laugh at you.

And so we don't just want to create a lot of practitioners who can only exist in a "safe" situation where there is no insult, where there's no roughness. The cradle of lovingkindness is not about getting stroked. It's more about developing a friendship with yourself in a very complete way. The real sense

Do you find that certain practices are more upsetting or disrupting than others?

Certain practices dislodge a lot of emotional material—for instance, *tonglen*. *Tonglen* is a practice where you work with your breath. You breathe in suffering and connect with it fully—yours and other peoples'. It's a willingness to feel what hurts, not to shy away, not to reject it. You're willing to take on suffering and develop compassion for it and even relax with it. And when you breathe out, you give away joy, a sense of inspiration, delight. So what you're usually attached to and want to keep for yourself, you get used to sharing, giving. It's very advanced practice when you start working with other people because it shows you every place that you shut down, hold

back, every single place where you close your heart. If you're a practitioner of the dharma, you want to see that and make friends with it. I think if you really want to become enlightened, somehow you've got to put yourself on the line. If you're already a student and want to wake up fully, then you're going to get the tests and challenges you need, and they're all going to come from working with other people. Safety becomes wanting to avoid all that.

Recently, a group of Western dharma teachers met in India with His Holiness the Dalai Lama to discuss the direction of Buddhism in the West. [Pema Chodron was invited to this conference but was unable to attend.] At the end of the conference, the participants composed—and subsequently circulated—an open letter which set out guidelines for ethical conduct for teachers and which encouraged students to confront teachers in instances of inappropriate behavior and “to publicize any unethical behavior of which there is irrefutable evidence.” Do you agree that this would be beneficial?

The concern here is obviously one of not wanting to see students get hurt. Once you become a teacher, just as if you become a monk or a nun, you can't blindly keep doing what you always did. You have to be more mindful about how your behavior affects others. So that's one side of it. And I'm glad to see this subject discussed. It's important for students to see that dharma teachers have tempers or aggression or passion. Buddhism isn't about seeing a world all cleaned up or thinking that the world can be, all cleaned up. The other side is that it brings up peoples' moralism, their conventional-mindedness. It concerns me that guidelines like these may become like some government edict or law of the land. My whole training in Buddhism has been that there is no way to tie up all the loose ends. And that comes from my teachers and from the teachings. You're never going to erase the groundlessness. You're never going to have a neat, sweet little picture with no messiness, no matter how many rules you make. It's important to have all the different positions expressed, from the left to the right, from the most liberal to the most

uptight.

You don't think it would be helpful to name names, to publicize those instances where Buddhist teachers have been repeatedly taken to task by students?

That really does feel like McCarthyism to me. I wouldn't want to see a list of the bad teachers and I wouldn't want to see a list of the good ones—here are the saints and here are the sinners. For so many of us that's our heritage, to make things one hundred percent right or one hundred percent wrong. It has been a big relief to me to slowly relax into the courage of living in the ambiguity. I know that these guidelines are being created out of good motivation, but they're simultaneously coming from bad motivation, righteous indignation that "they" are doing something wrong. I like the saying "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." You can't make it right, can't make it wrong.

Did this view evolve from your own Buddhist practice?

Very much so. But also, I've never met anybody who was completely right or completely wrong. And a lot of people see me as very trustworthy, and that gives me a lot of insight because I know who I am. Maybe on a scale of one to ten I'm pretty respectable, but still, it confirms that there is no all "right." And what does that mean anyway? My heroes are Gurdjieff and Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche and Machig Labrum, the mad yogi of Bhutan. I like the wild ones. Probably because I've invested so much in being a good child and have always gotten great feedback from it. But my friends and teachers have always been the wild ones and I love them. I'm bored by the good ones. Not exactly bored, but they don't stop my mind. I'm the kind of person who only learns when I get thrown overboard and the sharks are coming after me.

The open letter also says that “no matter what level of spiritual attainment a teacher has, or claims to have reached, no person can stand above the norms of ethical conduct.”

As a woman I don't like that the guys are always misusing their positions and coming on to the women. But I'm tempted to say something like, “When a teacher is very realized it is actually different than when they're not.” But who is going to decide? Nobody can decide except the student who is in relationship with that teacher. That's an unconditional relationship. You vow to stick by each other no matter what. And that teaches something about unconditionally sticking with your own life. When things revolt you and scare you, those things point out those parts of yourself that you are rejecting.

You can't support the idea of ethical norms as suggested in the letter?

My personal teacher did not keep ethical norms and my devotion to him is unshakable. So I'm left with a big koan.

Do you think that Buddhism in our society is too focused on morality?



I don't know. But there are predictions from the time of the Buddha that say that when the rules and regulations become emphasized over liberation or realization it is the sign of the decline of Buddhism. Historically, there is always tension between things getting too tight and then too loose. From my view, it doesn't matter what is happening as long as it is all out in the open and we are not feeding into the fundamental source of suffering which is ignorance. As long as there is alt of dialogue and all the different feelings and views are being presented and are in debate, then it doesn't become sort of McCarthyism where you have to hold a particular point of view—or watch out. It would be very unfortunate to think that we can smooth out all the rough edges. It would kill the spirit of Buddhism if it became uncomfortable or dangerous for people to hold opposing views.

The letter also says that “it is necessary that all teachers at least live by the five lay precepts.”

They must be referring to the five monastic precepts: not to kill, steal, lie, or have sexual relations, which I assume in this case is interpreted not as pure celibacy but being faithful to the relationship you are in, and not to drink alcohol. To be that strict about drinking and sexuality seems a bit rigid as a guideline. I have arguments with friends who feel that keeping these precepts defines being a Buddhist. There are many different views, such as if you don't keep those precepts you cannot call yourself a Buddhist, or that if you eat meat you are not a Buddhist. I don't hold these views myself but I enjoy a good lively debate with people who do. I don't care what the views are as much as I care that people are out there debating them.

You yourself have maintained these precepts?

Absolutely. It's not as if I don't like those precepts.

And for twenty years you have never abandoned your vow of celibacy?

No.

And have those precepts helped to cultivate your own sense of groundlessness?

Yes. Those precepts represent no exit, "the wisdom of no escape." And they represent that there is no way to get away from yourself—ways that you usually use to build up your ego-structure or that distract you from the groundlessness. They give you a clear mirror for seeing how you try to get ground under your feet and how we scramble to not feel that groundlessness. I live by those precepts and I live with people who live by those precepts, and I have seen them benefit people tremendously. But the argument I have sometimes with other monastic friends is whether every Buddhist should be strictly following those precepts.

Is that because there are people who can better express compassion without the precepts, or is it possible that breaking the precepts can itself benefit someone?

We can't make that judgment. But precepts don't work if they're imposed from the outside like a straitjacket. You have to want to set the boundaries that tightly for them to be of benefit. If you force someone to keep the precepts when they do not want to or are not ready to, then it's like they're in prison.

There has been a lot of confusion about what qualities define a true teacher. The letter seems to be suggesting that keeping the precepts defines a teacher as trustworthy for a student new to dharma.

A lot of people think because I keep these precepts, I'm sort of above politics and scandal. So I can see that students want these clean role models. But clean role models were never that useful for me. My models were the people who stepped outside of conventional mind and who could actually stop my mind and completely open it up and free it, even for a moment, from a conventional, habitual way of looking at things. And so people look for different things. But to look for "safety" in a role model, someone that will never hurt you and always confirm you, is very dubious. If you are really preparing for groundlessness, preparing for the reality of human existence, you are living on the razor's edge, and you must become used to the fact that things shift and change. Things are not certain and they do not last and you do not know what is going to happen. My teachers have always pushed me over the cliff, and that is what has awakened my compassion for what human beings are up against. I am afraid that because of where we come from as Westerners, with our Judeo-Christian heritage, that if you get too focused on doctrine, on codifying, or ethics as a major emphasis, it just turns into harsh judgment. And then there is no genuine compassion.



What cultivates genuine compassion?

Genuine compassion comes from the fact that you see your own limitations: you wish to be kind and you find that you aren't kind. Then, instead of beating yourself up you see that that's what all human beings are up against and you begin to have some kind of genuine compassion for the human condition. And you see how challenging it is to be a human being. You try to be peaceful and never raise your voice and you find out that you have a lot of rage. The dharma is about making friends with the groundlessness and discomfort of those feelings. It is not about making rules so that those emotions never arise. Compassion doesn't come from trying to clean up the whole act.

One commonly held view holds that when Euro-Americans first began to practice dharma in the sixties the emphasis was on enlightenment. And, too, the ethics of the counterculture fostered an abandonment of all convention. Some feel that the combination of these two things resulted in a willful misunderstanding of the importance of precept study and that now we need correctives to put things in balance.

To my mind, what we might call Big Mind, or Wisdom Mind, or Enlightenment, or Sacred Outlook, is the main thing. It actually doesn't have anything to do with religion or philosophy. People have human habitual patterns and are caught in a very small view of reality. It's not quite as small as that of a mouse or a flea, but it's really limited. And there is another whole way of perceiving that could be experienced by anybody. In my own sangha what was not emphasized early on and what is being emphasized now—or what people are ready for now—is compassion, the importance of our interconnectedness with each other. That would take care of all these rules. People need to see that if you hurt another person, you hurt yourself, and if you hurt yourself, you're hurting another person. And then to begin to see that we are not in this alone. We are in this together. For me, that's where the true morality comes from. That morality is based on much more profound seeing. That other morality is all about protecting "me." That is not the real intention of the precepts, but they can so easily be misused as a safety zone. To codify things on a grand scale is too moralistic, too based on right and wrong, and too based on fear and on wanting to get ground under your feet.

Is it possible that the kind of strictness and the kind of controls that some teachers are proposing can work well for certain students and not for others?

Well, sure. That's always the best approach, to have a lot of different ways that suit different students. But if we lose sight of what we're really doing, then we have a problem. If we lose sight of the fact that it's all about relaxing into the fundamental groundlessness, the fundamental nonsubstantial nature, then that would be a problem. But let's just say that different students need different things in order to enter into that. If you're already a student and want to wake up fully, you're going to get the tests and challenges you need, and they're all going to come working with other people. And safety becomes wanting to avoid all that. I don't go out looking for trouble, but the big joke is trouble always just comes knocking on your door. If you start to have a direct honest relationship with reality, you know you're asking for trouble because it's not always going to congratulate you, it's not going to confirm you, it's not going to be convenient. And in the process you learn how life itself pulls out the rug.

Can life do it alone, without a teacher?

I am of the school of thinking that you have to have a teacher. The teacher introduces you to the world. Trungpa Rinpoche showed me that life wakes you up. It's tricky because the ego is so slippery. And my ego is still very slippery, but he got that message into me so that subsequently other people and other situations can show me where I am stuck and holding back and what my blind spots are. I'm haunted by the fact that I don't always see them.

As you know, many dharma teachers are using various therapeutic methods in their teaching. Can therapy help us to see the blind spots?

Psychotherapy has a lot to offer Buddhism in terms of its language and because it really deals with people's suffering. And unfortunately, people can misuse Buddhism to try to just get comfortable. The teachings on the nature of emptiness can be misused to numb yourself out and circumvent real issues. But actually Buddhism is about diving into your real issues and fearlessly befriending the difficult and blocked areas and deep-seated habitual patterns that keep us stuck in ignorance and confusion. I feel that Buddhism can work together with psychotherapy. Buddhism can definitely work with people's real issues, it can be an enormously powerful tool and maybe work in balance with psychotherapy. But if it comes to making Buddhism into psychotherapy, then we risk losing a sense of vast mind and timelessness, the sense of magic, of having your whole conventional mind just dropped and seeing things in a fresh way, of making the mind available to insights that just completely cut the root of confusion. And psychotherapy doesn't do that. So the real challenge to my generation of teachers is to not water down Buddhism. We need to ask, How many of the present generation of teachers actually have realized that Big Mind? I think it's something that each teacher needs to be haunted by continually.



Why should dharma teachers be haunted by Big Mind?

Because of suffering. Because we are in a prison of our own conception, a prison with a very tiny view. You know how you go to certain places in the world, places that some traditions call power spots, or you enter certain buildings, or meet with certain people, and you get popped out of your own mindset and realize you've been in prison? Then you see that you don't ever want to be in prison again. In other words, you realize you have to go against the grain. It just comes to you, in certain situations, and you're ruined for life. [Laughs.] You don't want to go back to the narrow perspective of this habitual mind. But you also realize that the narrow perspective gives you a lot of security. You know it's false security, a lie, but starting to wake up is a lot like giving up an addiction. You're going to go through withdrawal symptoms, weaning yourself from this addiction to habitual, small-minded patterns of perception. You could say enlightenment is no more addiction. You're just fully awake, fully on the spot, without having to hide out.

Is it essential for students coming to dharma today to have contact with this kind of Big Mind?

This is the major challenge for teachers today—that we don't get stuck in mundane mind, in problem resolution, in concretizing, trying to put ground under our feet, and that we're willing to die over and over. Otherwise, we will never show that empty mind to our students.

Do you feel that the women who are expressing anger toward male teachers are too caught up in their own issues, too concerned with problem-solving, to experience Big Mind?

I hold as a view that what I see in others is a reflection of me. I only know about myself. When I hear people judging very harshly, I feel

I'm hearing as much about their hang-ups as I am about the issue. I'm hearing about the places in themselves that they can't relate to. No matter how much of an atrocity it is, if it's pushing your buttons so that it is causing great confusion in you, then you have got to look into your bewilderment in order to be able to communicate with the ugliness of that situation. Nothing ever changes in this world through hating the enemy. Nothing ever changes through aggression and hatred. So if it's pushing your buttons, whether it's Hitler or an abusive parent or an immoral war—Hitler was wrong, a parent who abuses a child is wrong—but you have got to keep working with your own negativity, with those feelings that keep coming up inside you. Because we have also had the experience of seeing wrong being done when there is no confusion and no bewilderment and we just say, Stop it! No buttons have been pushed. It's just wrong, unaccompanied by righteous indignation. When I feel righteous indignation, I know that it has something to do with me. In order to be effective in stopping brutality on this planet you have to work with your own aggressions, with what has been triggered in you, so that you can communicate from the heart with the rapist, the abuser, the murderer.

We seem to be in a climate of mistrusting teachers. Even if we study for five years with one teacher, we often do so with no real commitment to the teacher, with no sense of vow. If after six months or six years the person you call your teacher makes you uncomfortable, you leave. How can we have ego-killing practice if the ego is always calling the shots?

You can't. That's why it's important to know the teacher well before you get into this, because at some point the commitment has to be unconditional. It's the same as "till death do us part." Vows can teach you everything; they can teach you to stick with your life. You need a lot of support to go beyond, I want, I don't want, I like, I don't like.

What do you say to women who come to you with feelings of anger and betrayal and complaints about male teachers?

When women come to me with these complaints, I never say, “Oh, there’s no harm being done, this is just your trip.” I ask, “Do you really want things to heal? Or do you just want to make someone wrong? Do you just want to get revenge on someone who hurt you or do you want things to heal?” That’s the question. Revenge never heals anything. And blaming others never heals anything. But what happens when someone speaks to you from the heart? Everyone responds to some kind of kindness, some kind of openness, some kind of curiosity better than they do to hatred. And sure, in this life we are not going to solve all the problems. But if you yourself are working with nonaggression and honesty, that can change the balance of aggression in the world. The bottom line for dharma practitioners is not to get so involved with somebody being the enemy out there. That just adds more aggression. It is not dharma to make the teacher that you feel is doing harm your enemy. You have to find a way to relate to the feelings that that teacher brings up in you and to communicate from the heart with that teacher. If another person is not healed, then you are not healed, and if you aren’t, they aren’t. The habitual human pattern is to try to get rid of our own suffering by blaming it on someone else, or by blaming it on oneself. In either case you make somebody wrong. The dharma’s about stepping into the groundlessness of neither right nor wrong. Or not having the security of either right or wrong—that’s the major challenge, to think bigger than just in terms of problem solving. The dharma is not about curing. It’s about healing. That’s kind of a New Age word. The word that Trungpa Rinpoche used was “workable.” All situations are workable. That’s the nature of reality—it’s workable.