

A BRIEF EXTRACT FROM THE TEACHING RETREAT “SEEING CLEARLY, ACTING GRACEFULLY” HELD IN TODTMOOS, GERMANY ON 3-5 JUNE 2016

IT WAS TRANSCRIBED BY VERA NEUROTH AND EDITED BY JAMES LOW. THE VIDEO CAN BE WATCHED [HERE](https://vimeo.com/171898621) AT [HTTPS://VIMEO.COM/171898621](https://vimeo.com/171898621).

I'll say a bit about CR Lama first.

When I first knew him, Rinpoche worked in Visva Bharati University in West Bengal, and lived in a little house that was allocated to him by the university, together with his wife and five children. The family had a Nepali servant who helped with the cooking. For about seven years altogether I lived in a little room at the back of the house.

Rinpoche's job in the university was structured around helping Indian scholars reconstruct early Bengali and Hindi texts which he translated back from Tibetan. At the period of the famous Indian Buddhist tantric masters like Tilopa and Saraha, there was a transition in the languages in North India from forms of Prakrit, a late derivative of Sanskrit, into the early forms of Bengali, Hindi, Gujarati and so on. Most of the early manuscripts kept in India were lost or destroyed by insects and by the climate. Many important works, however, had been translated into the Tibetan language and had survived in Tibet. By translating the texts back from Tibetan into early Hindi and Bengali, CR Lama, with his vast knowledge of texts, was able to help the Indian scholars piece together some of the early formation of these languages.

This work suited him because he was the kind of academic who didn't like to teach and indeed his job title was 'Reader in Indo-Tibetan Studies'. Later on he came to Europe many times, yet he did very little formal teaching—he mostly communicated by the power of his ritual practice. I was fortunate that when I met him he was willing to help me learn Tibetan and start to translate various texts. As long as the work was focused on texts, he was very helpful. But if I asked him some questions directly, he would make a joke or look the other way. Why he was like that, I don't know. But he was like that.

We translated many texts together and, occasionally, towards the end of my time in India, Rinpoche started to tell me about his early life in the monastery and his education.

The first two chapters of the book¹ deal with Nyingma history and in particular, with the view of Dzogchen. Then comes a range of topics including bardo, and towards the end of the book there is a chapter outlining details of life in his monastery.

Rinpoche was very much a yogi, he was very present and very sharp in everything he did. He was very clear that if you were not with him, right on the beat, there was nothing to be done. His approach was very traditional. He was like an old-fashioned ballet teacher: *'I tell you once, I show you and if you don't do it, out the door!'* There was a very intense atmosphere, the fruit of which was that we managed to translate many texts some of which are in *Simply Being*² and my other books. C R

¹ [Collected Works of C R Lama](#) [2013, ISBN 978-0956923929]

² [Simply Being](#) [2010, ISBN 978-1907571015]

Lama had a mind which was very bright and focussed, so I have confidence that the translations are very accurate.

One of the chapters at the end is an edited transcription of Rinpoche talking about the education system in his monastery. I think it is a very beautiful account of an education system based entirely on desire. For certain months of the year senior monks would teach. They taught the things they loved and people came to the classes because they wanted to. There was no coercion. You'd go or not go. Everyone who was there was there because they wanted to be there. People could come to hear the same text commented on every year, perhaps for 40 years—because there is no end to the depth and richness of the Buddha Dharma. Each time the explanation will be slightly different and also our capacity to hear and respond will be slightly different.

In the monastery the khenpo (senior scholar) and the senior monks would teach in the service of the text, doing their best to ensure that it was being opened up to those who wanted to learn. They would teach for 12 hours a day, and everyone present, both teacher and learners, had to maintain concentrated focused attention. The teaching went on until the central point was complete. And so these few months each year, could provide the equivalent of two years in a modern university.

Nowadays it might appear that these explanations were too long. In modern culture our education is different and we tend to lack the capacity to focus on challenging concepts and sustain our attention until clarity arises. There are other Buddhist traditions like Zen where there is very little exposition. But in the Tibetan tradition the view, how we look at an issue, is vital. What we do follows how we see the world.

For example, having heard about self-sabotage systems we can start to identify how we ourselves get lost. We need to see the structure of what we are caught up in before we try to change. When we want to get out of a problematic pattern, the quicker we can recognise it, then the easier it is to free ourselves from it. Being very clear and precise in one's understanding of what the Buddhist terms mean gives us an accurate way of diagnosing for ourselves what we are up to.

The path of Dzogchen is almost entirely the recognition of our own falseness, our own artificiality, and then seeing these patterns go free when we no longer invest in them, and identify with them. It's not about building specific qualities or developing a new self, but rather seeing and relaxing and letting the knots untie themselves.

This is helped by seeing how the knots are tied. When I was a teenager I went to a sea school for a while and we had to learn how to tie many different knots. We had to watch very closely what an old sailor was doing very quickly with his hands. Once you have seen how a knot is created, then you can see how to release the rope. Meditation allows us to find the space within which knotted patterns unravel by themselves.

Without the kindness and generosity of CR Lama I would not have learned what I now can teach. His generosity and my eagerness came together and this is how Dharma has proceeded from generation to generation across the years. He presented dharma in an open way and frequently said, "*There are no secrets; nothing is hidden or special.*" Everything is available. But it's only available if we are available.

This means that learning how to learn is very important. Learning involves paying attention to what is presented and then seeing the difference between that pattern and our own current pattern. We need to be very simple and direct and honest about our lostness and this means that we have to free ourselves from guilt and shame because these are the qualities that tend to close us down.