

# Bob Thurman: Buddhist Inner Sciences and the Rainbow Body

[Bob Thurman]: Welcome to my Bob Thurman podcast. I'm so grateful some good friends enabled me to present them to you. If you enjoy them and find them useful, please think of becoming a member of Tibet House US to help preserve Tibetan culture. Tibet House is the Dalai Lama's cultural center in America. All best wishes. Have a great day.

[Locutor]: This is episode 25, titled "Revealing Your Rainbow Body."

[Bob Thurman]: Can I say one thing? Yes, please. "Gyud-zhi" (meaning "The Four Tantras" in Tibetan). Four Tantras... Why is it four tantras? It could be four sutras, you know, because they're texts, right? And Buddhists always have sutras.

Now, there is one Lama, Tarak (likely Tarak-la), you probably never met him. He was an abbot of Namgyal monastery. He passed away in the 80s. He has a reincarnation now in Drepung Loseling. And he wanted to answer the question someone asked: "What is Tantra?". And it's the best answer I ever heard anyone give about what the word tantra means.

Gen-la said it correctly: Tantra means lineage or continuation. That is sort of the root meaning of the word tantra. But what he said was... he said, "Well, in the basic practice of Buddhism, the whole purpose is to destroy the world built out of ignorance—the world of suffering." So what wisdom does it see through being trapped. It escapes from being trapped in the world of ignorance.

But then, when you escape from the world of ignorance and you're no longer trapped and you're free, then there's the question of rebuilding a world with wisdom. A world made of wisdom, like a rainbow world, a wisdom world... rebuilding that world. That's what Tantra means.

So the real meaning of continuum, lineage, or continuation, is continuing the world—now a beautiful world, a world built out of wisdom. Which means... the realization of connection. Love and compassion. Love and compassion is not just a sentiment; it comes out of the wisdom of knowing that you're connected to other persons.

Therefore, the Four Tantras are what the Buddha continues after enlightenment. And this is a very challenging thing for us in the West, where we are taught that the world doesn't work out, that the world "sucks," actually. We're all depressed because we are told that the world sucks. The religious people in the old days said it sucked, but later you'll be okay in heaven if "you're a good boy," you know. Jesus or Buddha or Mahatma or Muhammad or Moses or God will take you to heaven, but this world is just going to suck. That's it. There's no other way out of it.

In India, they also had that idea. And Buddha was a rebel against that idea because he saw that the reality of the world is actually fine. It's perfect. It's freedom, it's connection. It's the interconnection of everyone. It's happiness. "Nirvana" means happiness. He saw that that's the reality of the world and he called it Dharma.

The word Dharma before Buddha meant something like law or religion, something that holds you in a pattern where you can bear to live. But Buddha said Dharma means reality holds you in freedom from suffering. He flipped the meaning into the opposite, meaning that it holds you in freedom. So reality holds you in freedom.

The reason that the medical teaching is so effective is that it's born of Buddha's enlightenment. In the root tantra, different parts of the Buddha's mind, different wisdoms, are talking to himself. He asks himself questions, he teaches about the body, the mind, etc.

So in an empowerment, entering the tantra of empowerment means connecting to a vision of the world of someone who understands it as perfectly okay. Live or die, up or down, it'll be okay. In a coma or awake or sleep, it'll be okay, ultimately.

You can make it not okay by fighting with everything, feeling frightened and thinking it all won't work and how can I get out of here. But if you take refuge in Dharma—meaning reality itself—on the assurance of the teacher who taught that reality is fine if you open yourself to it... and the community of people who've been living like that, like Yutok, people like that... then there's a continuation. You then enter that kind of connection to that continuation. And that's what Tantra means.

It doesn't mean this or that or something secret necessarily. In ancient times, sometimes it was kept a little bit secret because the people who want to keep people trapped in a version of life where they're expected to be miserable—and therefore, if they're going to get out of that misery, they need these authorities, these "bosses" to obey—they don't like someone saying, "It's fine, whatever, without you, boss, it's okay." They don't like that. They don't want people to feel that reality is freedom rather than being bossed around by them.

So they kept it secret from those kinds of people because, otherwise, they would punish someone who was too happy. As you all know, in America, for example, if you're really happy, it's like something illegal, right? We aren't programmed like that. If your roommate comes home, your wife, your husband, your friend, or even your son comes home and says, "Dad, I'm just so happy, no reason at all, but I'm just completely happy"... Is dad happy? No, dad is worried. "What happened? Did you drink? Did you take a drug? Are you freaked out? Are you having a psychotic episode? What's wrong with you?". That's what we think.

So for that, it was sort of a little bit secret. Tantra has this tendency toward the esoteric, the secret, because it just goes against the grain of our backward world where we're taught to expect to be miserable, which feels "safe" when we are. And if we ever feel really happy, we think something's going to go wrong and we get nervous. We're programmed like that.

So this "Yutok Nyingthig," the heart essence or heart teaching of the great Yutok Yonten Gonpo (the rainbow body guy), is really a wonderful privilege. And therefore, I... I requested my guest very earnestly to do this even if I'm not ready quite, and I am not prepared well enough. It was just to connect to this tradition and to connect with what Menla (the Medicine Buddha) represents as an effort in this polluted world to try to bring people back to nature.

And remember they say nature is "red in tooth and claw"—get away from it. That's why they were all getting away from nature, because nature seemed so dangerous and horrible, right? Meanwhile, we have like a jungle in our stomachs. And if that jungle of our microbiome is not functioning lushly, we're going to be in trouble. We depend upon the nature in our gut, right? There are billions of genes and organisms in our gut.

Imagine if anybody claimed today at Mount Sinai Hospital or Beth Israel, or the NIH, "Somebody fully understood everything about how the body and mind works—life, death, and rebirth. It's totally understood. It's a matter of just learning about it and it'll work fine." What would they do? (Laughter). They would give you some chemical to calm you down because you'd be considered demented.

They thrive on the idea that nobody will ever find out, but that they can learn a little more, and therefore give them a big grant to do some research, even though the principle is that they'll never find out what it's all about. And then, to show that what they're doing is really important, they sacrifice animals. Like an ancient priest has an animal sacrifice. They sacrifice a storm of animals to show that it's important because they can take life. That really shows how sad it is.

Frankly, I think I like PETA. They try to stop them from doing all of that. The human being is already understood; you don't have to do that. Just eat some good food, laugh, breathe. Have your shoulder blades like "eagle wings," as they say. Breathe, and then if you get into a coma, know how to do "phowa" (transference of consciousness)—hit the soul ejection seat. Boom! You go up and you're caught by Amitabha.

The Chinese have wonderful paintings of the Pure Land. And the Pure Land that's very famous in Buddhism, the Western Paradise called Sukhavati, the Blissful Land. "Sukha" means bliss. Sukhavati means possessing bliss. Where Amitabha, the Buddha of Boundless Light (or Amitayus, Boundless Life), is dwelling. But he has two big bodhisattvas: one big strong one and one compassionate one, Avalokiteshvara.

And they have these great paintings where Avalokiteshvara has a lotus in his hand. But he's like a catcher in a baseball game. And they show paintings of streams of souls of beings that have died on Earth, and Avalokiteshvara is like a catcher with a mitt, and he's going to catch them on the lotus and put them in the Pure Land. It's really sweet. They have these in the caves in China.

And the Chinese Confucian ministers in ancient times wrote memorials to the emperors saying, "Mr. Emperor, Your Majesty, this Pure Land Buddhist view of the universe under the power of compassion is very dangerous. When those farmers go and see the beautiful palace of Amitabha in a cave painting, and his beautiful golden body with rainbow light rays, and everyone sitting on lotuses in these Pure Lands... when they come back out and go downtown to the market and look at your palace, it'll look like a rat shack. And they're not going to work for you all day and feel dedicated and devoted to you. So you better keep those Buddhists out of here telling everybody that life is alright and there's this blissful world emperor of infinite life."

They really tried to warn those emperors: "Don't let them in here." Because every peasant can have a rainbow body. They're not going to bend over and plant rice all day long in your field, Your Majesty. So we're still in that sort of situation. We're very lucky and marvelous to have our guest here to receive this connection to the tradition growing out of the vision of the wondrousness and beauty of nature and life, against our preconception that it's a mess. Is that okay?

So, that's the work with Tantra. Instead, you could say tantric can mean a technological continuum based on wisdom. The "empowerment" or initiation is very good because, for example... there are the five poisons, not just three. You have ignorance (delusion or confusion), desire (lust, attachment, and greed), anger (hatred), pride, and jealousy.

Jealousy is a mixture of desire and anger, and pride is a form of ignorance—the pride of "ordinariness," thinking I'm so great even in my ordinary self without being enlightened. Now, those are energies in the world. And they're supposed to be "bad," right? In regular Buddhism, when you get started, you think of them as traps and you learn to release yourself from them. You replace ignorance with wisdom, desire with detachment, anger with tolerance and then love, pride with humility, and jealousy with love as well. You try to subdue them so they don't drive you.

But then when you get calm about them and get connected to the idea that reality is all good ("Samantabhadra," they call it, the Universally Good), you then take those energies and turn them into wisdoms. So ignorance becomes mirror wisdom. That's something very beautiful and brilliant. Very simple.

When I see the floor, the floor seems to me to have intrinsic objectivity, like a thing in itself. And my perception of it seems to be an absolutely correct thing. The word "floor," my concept of floor, bounces off the absolute substantiality of the floor. And I'm completely different from the floor and not connected to it. Well, when I walk on it I am, but it's something totally different from me. Subject, object—both with a kind of absolute difference. That's what ignorance is.

Because actually, the floor... even scientists will tell you it looks like a solid floor, but it's actually molecules and atoms. The atom itself is mostly emptiness; there's a nucleus and an electron spinning around. If you threw one of the boards here into an electron accelerator, it would dissolve and completely disappear. Although some people in France will jump up and down and say they found a Higgs boson, and that the Higgs boson is why the thing is solid. They'll try to pretend that. But then the media says, "Well, we don't really know, and we've got to do some more research to give us another 20 billion to make a bigger electron for dark energy and dark matter," which we can't see but is 97% of the universe.

So our ignorance sees it as if it were absolutely just a floor. and I feel about myself like an absolute thing of my mind that's apart from it. That mirrors to me my connection to it, because I'm seeing it, even mistaking it for its true nature. So even our ignorant perception of the self and of the world mirrors our ultimate interconnectedness to it. That's called mirror wisdom.

In a way, the world is in a state of mirror wisdom. People thought nature was just out there and they could abuse it, pollute it, and misuse it. And what's happening now is that the power of technology has magnified human cleverness such that nature is rebelling. The human being is becoming responsible for shaping nature, which is a startling idea that just happened to people en masse. Buddha knew that, but now people are learning that what you put in comes out; you're connected to it,

you are nature, so you can't destroy it without destroying yourselves. That mirrors the reality of interconnection.

The Pope, for example, in his "Laudato Si" encyclical about the environment, goes on and on about interconnection. Whereas Christian theology usually says God is separate, absolute, and apart from everything, creating from nothing. There's usually a big disconnection in that theology, but he's totally broken out of that, which is amazing. So ignorance itself mirrors wisdom; it's called the mirror-like wisdom.

Then desire (or lust) becomes discriminating wisdom (or individuating wisdom). It's a ruby color. Mirror wisdom is white, like a diamond. The ruby color is this energy like desire, and it's seeing the beauty of things in their specificity, discriminating between them. Desire becomes that.

Pride becomes a topaz golden color and it becomes the wisdom of equality. And jealousy—this is a really good one—is green, like the "green-eyed monster." Jealousy becomes all-accomplishing wisdom. Because jealousy is where you feel separate from another person's happiness and you resent it, thinking, "Why isn't it my happiness?". Like when your friend is happy and you worry what they did. Finally, if you're convinced they just naturally feel happy, the last thing we feel is, "What about me? Why don't I feel like that?". That's a kind of jealousy. But when you overcome that, anything is possible. That's when you're really living interconnectedness: other beings' happiness is your happiness, minds can connect and do things together; miracles can happen. That's called the all-accomplishing or wonder-working wisdom.

The final one is hatred or anger. Anger wants to destroy things. But anger is connected to bile in the liver, and also to intelligence. Critical intelligence wants to analyze things, take them apart to find out how they tick. So it's connected with critical analytical intelligence. Anger about the world of entrapment and misery looks to see why it's like that and analyzes everything, and when it does, everything dissolves under critical analysis. If you deeply analyze whatever it is down to the molecules and subatomic energy... the quantum people have reached there finally, and Buddha reached there thousands of years ago. What happens is you ascend with ultimate reality perfection wisdom.

Everything you analyze disappears. But then the disappearance disappears, because that's not a thing apart. So when disappearance disappears, you are there as everything. It is everything—nothing, void ("Sunyata"). Freedom does not impede the existence of interrelated things, but when you've seen it disappear in a way where it's not substantially separate as it seemed to be, you then have a feeling of oneness with all of it, while still seeing differentiation. But now it's a new

way of seeing that difference, where everything is perfect. The wisdom of ultimate reality perfection is the highest and most powerful wisdom. Deep blue energy, the color of the Medicine Buddha (sapphire color), is the color of anger transmuted into ultimate reality perfection. Even all previous seemingly negative things seem totally positive.

This is what the Buddha state is. It's really important, and the Tibetans particularly kept alive what's called non-dualism from the great masters of India. The Dalai Lama often says he is the heir of the 17 great masters of Nalanda University in India, where people came from all over the world to attend classes.

A lot of spiritual projections come from the sense of a separate self: the idea that there's an absolute self in there, apart from everything. Many mystic states and even dualistic forms of Buddhism are still a kind of self-centered thing. It's what I call "cheap oneness": "It's all one, and it all disappeared into the one, and I'm all alone and I'm everything, but actually I'm not even here." It's an escapist idea, almost like an ultimate psychotic experience of disappearing.

But the Tibetans' understanding is fantastic. In that state of "space-like equipoised samadhi," where everything seems to disappear, the last thing to disappear is the state of disappearance. When the state of disappearance disappears, what's left? Everything. But now you're one with the whole thing. Imagine what a weird state that must be.

When Buddha attains blissful freedom, he must perceive all other beings as indivisible from that freedom, or he would be abandoning them, which would break his Bodhisattva vow: "I won't attain Nirvana until all beings are free of suffering." So, believe it or not, Buddha saw everyone in the world, including us in the future, because they see all space and time as completely permeated by this oneness. It's a temporal oneness as well. Shakyamuni Buddha is right here with us, and he sees us as made out of that bliss—just a form in a sea of bliss.

And then comes the complexity: he's also aware that we still don't see ourselves like that. So he's frustrated, like a mother who can't just hug a child into feeling okay, because if you hug a paranoiac, they'll think you're trying to smother them and they'll resist more. The only way is by teaching them, making a joke, or opening the door for them, getting them to open their own mind and heart to their own reality. Because only you can understand your own reality; no one else can understand it for you. They can give you reasons, teachings, and hints... but you have to do it yourself.

That's how wisdom becomes universal compassion. Enlightenment is this complex state: ultimate reality perfection, and yet the ruby wisdom of seeing how others

have managed to take themselves—as a bundle of mental, physical, and verbal bliss—and turn themselves into a "theater of dissatisfaction" and isolation. That compassion makes the Buddha teach.

The Buddhists say that when you have that realization, you can be many beings simultaneously. I love the "Matrix" movie—Neo multiplies himself because he knows the structure of how it works while being an individual in it. Neo becomes the "bad guy" to defeat him from the inside. It was brilliant. I love the Wachowskis; they're bodhisattvas.

Anything "bad" is transmuted by wisdom into goodness. Everything is good. And that wisdom is the same as the compassion for others who still feel that it's bad; it doesn't abandon them saying, "Well, I see you as cool, tough luck if you don't." This is not like some so-called non-dualisms. "I see you as perfectly good and I'm with you until you come into seeing it yourself—completely with you, all the time."

That's what Kalachakra is, the "Wheel of Time." But "wheel" means machine—an evolutionary machine. The Buddha shapes your evolutionary destiny so you can reach your own understanding in the best possible way. Kalachakra symbolizes Buddha's vow to never abandon beings in suffering.

It's a big shock the idea that someone fully understands the world, and that they taught us how to do it and that we can understand it ourselves. And on top of that, we have to. We cannot graduate into our own reality of bliss unless we understand it. Believing is helpful at some stage, but finally, you have to experience and understand. Everyone can. And if we don't have time in this life, we can do it in another once we connect to the stream leading there. "Leading there" really means leading here, because we're already here, actually.

I talked for 20 more minutes. Any questions? Enlightenment is the state of the ultimate tolerance of cognitive dissonance: where everything is bliss, and yet you're specifically aware that others are still suffering, and you're compassionately committed to helping them do it. You can't force them.

Even in Theravada Buddhism, they might say Nirvana is "out there" and the Buddha left. They say he attained "Parinirvana," which they translate as "final nirvana," but "Pari" means "total," not final. If you just "disappear," unfortunately you eventually reappear, because that's only a relational experience. The absolute is just realizing where you've always been.

Knowing this can lessen our anxiety; it's a kind of refuge to know reality is filled with good. Voltaire ridiculed the theistic attempt to reassure people that God would take care of them if they behaved. And of course, there's that nonsense about eternal

damnation. The Buddha would consider the idea of a loving God reserving eternal damnation for anyone to be a very rude idea about God. If he's omnipotent and loving, how can anyone suffer eternally? It's ridiculous. It's a model for bad policing and a nasty justice system.

It's a shock that we could really be alright. It takes away a certain excuse. Then it's only up to us to learn more about ourselves and the world. Before attaining enlightenment, Buddha remembered infinite previous lives of himself and others. Why don't we remember ours? Because they were painful. He developed the ability because he realized he'd always been in Nirvana and it was all a "play of bliss." He revised his memory so he wasn't in agony even when he was in "hell," because even hell was his own stupidity of creating isolation. When he knows that, he fearlessly remembers.

If you remembered infinite previous lives, you'd see we've been going at it an infinite number of times. You've been my mom, I've been yours... we are completely entangled. Nirvana is an expansion to embrace everything. You identify with your child, with your beloved, with your team. That human ability shows how close we are to Buddhahood. If someone cuts themselves in a room, everyone winces. Buddha feels like that for all beings, enfolding them in compassion to lead them toward freedom without abandoning anyone.

Things have their own organic patterns of growth, but you can speed it up with "high-tech" teaching.