

Lama Christie's Talk to Retreatants' Families

I have the great honor of being the retreat leader. Being the retreat leader of this three-year retreat that we are going to take, it feels like I'm being sandwiched by the two retreats. I came out of my last three-year retreat and the first thing we did was to start this university here at Diamond Mountain, and then we led people through six years of courses. Geshe Michael always likes to say that this retreat is their graduation thesis. Their dissertation is the three-year retreat. The students who are here at Diamond Mountain have gone through very intense rigorous study equal to or surpassing what they do in a Tibetan monastery for a *geshe* degree and then going on to even higher teachings than that. They have worked very, very hard and honestly I have been all around the world and I have never seen a more intelligent group of people than the group of people who have somehow found their way here to Diamond Mountain. Often times it felt in my classes that I wasn't teaching them, they were teaching me. So it has been this very beautiful process of growth for the last six years and then, the culmination is this beautiful three-year retreat that we are all going into together.

It's amazing you know, because from the first moment I met the students here I knew they were really smart. I would give them logical debates and they would be right back at me with "but this" and you know they were very very quick, and I know you who know these people probably agree that you are dealing with some pretty smart people. But then over the course of the six years that I have known them I started to learn other things about them. Not only are they really smart but they are really compassionate. They really know how to love others and they are really brave. I think the three-year retreat proves that. To me it proves that because you don't go into a three-year retreat for yourself. Nobody would go into a three-year retreat for themselves. It's too damn hard and we care too little about ourselves to do something like that. It's too big, you know, and if you are at all selfish you want to keep all the things that you love around.

I like to say, you spend a year knowing that you are going to go into this three-year retreat and it is like you are dying. You have to leave your job. You have to get rid of any kind of house that you have. You have to say good bye to every single family member, every single friend. Pretty much, you are giving away all your stuff. You are basically saying goodbye to the entire world and you don't know what it is like. I mean I went through it and with everything that you give up, it's like part of your identity gets ripped away. Like we define ourselves by where we live, what we do, who we hang around. You know, we define ourselves by all of these things and then, one by one these brave people are giving them up. What they are trying to do in the retreat is give up some kind of old identity in order to get a very, very powerful new one because what you start to realize is we are limited. We are limited right now.

So you know, I went into a three-year retreat and of course before I went in I had to tell my mom and I waited for a really long time to tell her and it was terrible. Actually, I learned a lot from my mistakes and so now when people tell me, ok I am planning to do the three-year retreat, the first thing I tell them is ok, go tell your family. Go tell your friends now. Like make a

long period of time where you can actually talk this over because I didn't really do that and it was, I don't know you could probably even say that it was ugly. It was actually kind of scary the way that she reacted so I waited till the very last minute because I was terrified of telling her. I really didn't understand what I was going to do because I had never done a three-year retreat before. All I had was the faith of lamas of the past telling me, "oh this thing is a good thing and it is gonna come out good but I didn't even know anybody who had done a three-year retreat before. We were real pioneers in that so I didn't have a lot of explanation at the time for why I wanted to do this. So I go to my mom and tell her I am going to do this three-year retreat, and of course her response is why are you leaving me. You know? "Why do you have to leave me to do this thing?" Later I thought about it and I'm like, "Ya know if I had come and told her I was going on a trip to Antarctica to do an archeological dig and I can't talk to her for three years, she would be ok, or if I said I have to go to the moon, like if I was a scientist and was going to do something really important for the government she would be like, "ok," but then this three-year retreat thing was just wacky for her. It was out of her realm. She had no idea that people even did things like that. And actually people don't do things like that in this country. It is wacky! It's weird and there was no point of reference and so there was upset involved and pain involved, like, "Why are you leaving me?" and so I spent a long time trying to come up with reasons for her why I wanted to do the three-year retreat and to answer her question.

I grew up with just me and my mom. We were close, like we weren't just mom and child. She was like my best friend and she was like my sister and she was like my mom all rolled up in one and we were very, very, very close and so when she stops and she questions something that I want to do it is a huge deal to me because it is the person I respect their opinion the most in the world and so it was heartache to me when she questioned me but it was a good thing that she questioned me because then I had to question myself. You know, "why am I going on the three-year retreat?" and you know all the three-year retreatants are looking at me and asking, "why am I going on the three-year retreat. Tell me Lama Christie, why am I doing this." (laughter) As it gets closer and closer to the deadline it gets harder and harder to let go of these things. It's the burning question.

Well I traced it back to when I was a little girl. I guess I was six or seven; my mom and dad separated and my dad left at one point and my mom was devastated because it was the love of her life. Actually, she has never been with anyone else after that. It really was the love of her life. And so he left and I was left with my mom and she would be sitting on the bed crying, and because we were just the two of us she really couldn't hide anything from me. I mean she tried. She tried her best to be the mom and not burden me with her emotions and her feelings but we were just two people in the house and obviously I would find her sometimes just crying. I didn't know what to do at all and all I could do was just go and just hug her. I would put my seven year-old arms around her and say, "Please mom, stop crying. Please, I love you. Be happy." I learned very, very early that I couldn't make somebody happy.

I couldn't help her. I couldn't take away her pain. I couldn't take away her suffering. As much as I loved her, I gave her everything. I would do anything for her when I was a kid. It was like she was my life and I would do anything to make her happy. She just had to look at me badly and I would be good. I didn't need discipline. I was never grounded. I was never sent to my

room. All I needed was a stare. That's all it took because I cared so much about what she thought and I would do anything to make her happy and I couldn't. I tried my hardest. I did everything. I got the best grades. I tried to show her what my world looked like. That's why I started taking pictures, because I had this urge to show my mom how much beauty I saw in the world so she wouldn't have to be sad anymore. It didn't work. It didn't work. She was still sad. I could sense it because we were so close. She stopped crying after awhile but ... later it happened with my father.

I watched my father. My father was very close to his dad and then later his dad died. My dad got ten years older in a day. I just watched his face get ten years older in a single day and I couldn't do anything. I couldn't say anything about it. He just withdrew from the whole family. He wouldn't let anyone touch him and I couldn't help. There were the two most important people in my life and I couldn't help them. I couldn't take away their pain. I wanted to find some way of taking away their pain. I wanted to find some way of making them feel better and I think that's what drove my whole spiritual search when I was young and that's what ended me up on this path and that's the reason why I learned how to meditate and that's the reason why I went into retreat. Because there is a certain kind of powerlessness that we have to change the things around us in our outside world and I didn't like it because it meant that the people that I love were in pain. I wanted to find a way to make that change. There had to be a way to help the people that I loved. There had to be.

So I started to study and I started to figure out there are certain kinds of ancient wisdoms. They weren't wisdoms that I was brought up with. They were a different kind of wisdom. They are a wisdom that comes from the other side of the world. I didn't really care that it wasn't my culture. I didn't really care that it wasn't the Catholic Church I was brought up in. I wanted to find it. I was driven to find it. I started reading and they said there is a way to change your world by changing something inside yourself. There is a way to take away another person's pain by changing your own heart. I thought if there is any chance that that is true, I have to try it. Right? Because there is nothing more I want to live for. I want to stop the pain of the people I love. That's it.

When we are little we have all these dreams about changing the world and then when we get older the more people tell us, no you can't do that. No that's impossible you are dreaming too big. You start to feel less and less capable of even thinking about the changes you can make in the world. Until you get to this point where you are just settling. You are just settling for what people call an ordinary life, a life that has a lot of ups and downs. Maybe it doesn't have to be that way. Maybe we don't have to have the downs. Maybe there is a way to change it and we just haven't tried it yet and we just haven't figured it out yet and maybe there is somebody who has. There is a possibility that there are people in our past in the world who actually figured out how to change things.

So we study about how the world really works. I don't know how many of you saw "The Matrix." Most of you saw it but I'm going to tell you about it again because I am this great fan of telling people the whole story of the movie from start to finish. I could spend an hour telling you the story and you wouldn't have to see it any more. I won't spend that much time but "The Ma-

trix” is this beautiful movie about a guy who is living a normal life and then all of a sudden something in his world starts to shift and he starts to look around and question whether his world is exactly what it seems. He is working a normal office job. He is some kind of computer programmer and then all of a sudden he is kidnapped and he is taken to an operating room and someone stick this thing into his stomach and then all of a sudden he is back in his bedroom. He looks down at his stomach and there are no scars there and he thinks it must be a dream.

But then in the next scene somebody comes and kidnaps him again, puts him in a car and pulls the thing out of his stomach. He says wait a minute I didn't think that was real, I thought it was a dream. All of these weird things start to happen in his world that he can't explain. He starts to question and starts to try to figure out what is going on. He finds somebody who knows and the guy says, “Are you really sure you want to know the truth, because the truth is really quite different than what you are used to?” He is like “Yes, yes I want the red pill,” right? The man says if you take this pill you will go back to your bed asleep and you won't even think about this for the rest of your life. If you take this pill you are in trouble! Your mind will explode and you won't be able to go back. It is a no-turning-back process like once you understand this knowledge it is too late for you.

So he is like “OK, I will take it. I will do it. I will take the red pill.” So he takes the red pill and all of a sudden he wakes up in this totally different place and he realizes that everything he has ever experienced up till then has been some kind of virtual reality thing that has gone on from a computer program that his mind has been jacked into. So every single thing that he has ever seen or felt or heard or touched or tasted has all just been this computer thing in the back of his mind and he has actually been lying down in some kind of weird cocoon his entire life ever since he was a baby. Right? Tell me if I get the story wrong because it's been awhile since I saw it. It's been a really long time. It will be a good version, it will be the version that I dreamed about for several years. So he meets these people who tell him how the world really is. That everything in his world is actually fake. Then he starts training.

He starts the process of training how to really live in that kind of world because the way the world really works is different from the way he thought it worked, he thought that everything was normal was actually out there and it wasn't. it's like a bunch of ones and zeros inside some kind of computer, really huge computer somewhere. That's all that it is, it is creating all the pictures that make his world. And so he trained and he went back into that crazy world. He went back in but this time he had this knowledge. That it wasn't real it wasn't real at all and so there are all these bad guys and they are shooting at him because they know he knows. There is this whole game where they are trying to capture him and he is trying to get away and he and his teammates are all in black and they are doing all sorts of summersaults and trying to get away. Am I telling the story wrong? Anyway it is very dramatic! They have all these machine guns it's like an action movie it is very exciting but then...

There is this one very beautiful crucial moment when he is actually about to get shot by one of the bad guys and there is nowhere for him to run anymore because he is in this hallway and there are no more doors and he can't get out. He is trapped. The guy looks at him smug like “I finally got you and I'm gonna kill you now” and he shoots the gun but then somehow... the

guys name is Neo, the hero. Somehow Neo taps into the Matrix. He taps into the whole damn computer program that is building the world thing and he reaches into the reality and he changes it in the moment. He reaches his hand out like this and he stops the bullet. The guy shoots the bullet and he stops time. He completely stops time. The bullet comes to him. He picks it out of the air and he drops it. It's like nothing can harm him ever again because he somehow had the key to that computer program where the whole world was coming from.

So now he can do anything. It's like at the end of the movie you see him flying in the sky. Like the guy can literally fly in the sky because he has no limitations at all what so ever because he has reached in to reality and changed his world Because he knows how to reach into reality and change the world, because he knows what it is made of. So that's sort of like what we are doing.

I was trying to figure out how I m going to tell you about emptiness. That's pretty close. We were actually really amazed that they made a movie about us! It makes my job much easier because you can just get up and tell the story. It's actually a really good movie even if I did ruin the punch line at the end. You should still see it if you haven't. That's what we are trying to do. All the ancient texts that we have been studying for the past six years have been telling us how our world is not what it seems. How everything around us in our reality is not really out there in the way that we think it is. It is coming from somewhere else. It is coming from seeds inside of our own heart. It is like a virtual reality that is being projected out but it is not some über-computer that is projecting it, it is us. We are the ones projecting our reality.

And there are a lot of amazing implications from that. It means that you could do what Neo did and then anything in the world that you don't like you could just reach inside your own heart and change a few things and then the world would change. And we are here in the three-year retreat to see if we can do that. To see how well we can do that... because we have already been trying it. The people going into the three-year retreat already know this is true because they have been doing little experiments in their own lives for the past six or twelve years, or whatever, how long they have been studying, it's not something that you do just with blind faith. I mean you try little things in your life.

So I was going to give you a little meditation because this is my meditation class and if I don't do a meditation my students will be very upset. Are you up for it? I'm not asking you, I know you are up for it (gesturing toward students.) All the people in the chairs are you up for it? I wanted to give you an example of something that we might do in three-year retreat to try and change our reality in a very hands... you know we're sitting down we are on our cushions hours and hours a day. What are we going to do?

Sitting down on our cushions hours and hours a day, what kind of meditations do you do? What are you thinking about? And I wanted to share a little bit with you. What we think about. It's a very beautiful simple meditation. It's also a very profound meditation I think, and it won't take too long and maybe some of you already know it and you can't yawn during the meditation. I know it is late and I'm sorry I teach my class at the midnight hour. So everybody needs to sit up so that their backs are straight, except for Osiris who can sleep because he is already

So if you are in a chair it is best to put your feet flat down on the floor and then just make sure that your back is completely straight. That's basic posture for meditation, and then you can either keep your hands on your lap or on your knees and then close your eyes and, just to calm your mind for a moment, focus your mind at the tip of your nose and watch the air as it flows out and back into your body. Try not to let your mind think of anything else, just focus on one single thing, the very tip of your nose. Let everything else go.

Now picture someone you know who is in some kind of pain right now. It can be a physical pain or a mental pain. Maybe somebody you are close to... and in your mind travel to where they are right now, where you can imagine that they would be, and sit right across from them. Picture the pain that they have as some kind of grey cloud inside of their body, and then get this really strong feeling that you want to help them get rid of this pain. We are going to use our breath to help them, so picture as you inhale the black cloud of smoke starts to gather from the ends of their body in towards the center, until it all congeals into this tiny black ball of pain. Then we are going to pull it out of them, so with your next inhale picture it going from their heart to their throat, and then from their throat out through their nostrils, and then pull this black ball in the air away from them and towards you until it comes to rest just outside your nose but not touching you.

Then look deep inside your heart. Inside you will find a flower. Pick your favorite like a rose and inside the flower is a tiny little diamond. The rose represents your love and compassion, you desire to take this pain away from your loved one, and the diamond represents your wisdom, knowing that the only way to destroy the pain is to be willing to take it on yourself. So again look at the black ball of pain resting just outside your nose and there will be some kind of hesitation in you. Then when I say go we are going to take one big in breath. The black ball of pain is going to travel all the way down to our heart and touch the diamond, and when it touches the diamond there is a flash of brilliant light throughout our whole body and it destroys the black ball of pain completely!

Are you ready?... Go! See the ball of pain completely destroyed. The diamond starts to get brighter and brighter inside your whole body... Your whole body fills up with light... Then you look across at your loved one and you see that the lines of pain on their face are completely gone. They are completely happy... Then send them a ray of light from the diamond in your heart to their heart, and on this ray of light give them the one thing you know they most want. It could be a new job, it could be a puppy, it could be ten years younger. Anything they want... the sky is the limit! And then travel back to this room and slowly open our eyes.

So I have a question and it is just for the guests. Don't cheat — the little peanut galleries on the sides here! Does the meditation work? Question. Are you taking away her pain? Do you think if you called her tomorrow it would be all gone? (answer - laughter) Ya see if we could really go out and send ourselves and actually destroy the pain of somebody else in our imagination, and we woke up and it actually happened for real, then absolutely nobody would have any pain anymore because there are compassionate people in the world who would have just gone through one by one and they would have destroyed all our pain already. But if it doesn't work

then why do it? Right? And this is what I said it is an example of, what we are going to do in the three-year retreat.

I think it is important to talk about how it works and it is kind of crucial to why we are here in the first place. It is not that we go and we can take away somebody else's pain just through that meditation, but the meditation does work. People have been given this meditation who have cancer, and they have actually cured their cancer from it! People have been given this meditation who had a daughter who was estranged from them, who hadn't called them for twelve years and then she did this meditation and the next day her daughter called her. You know? I mean strange things have happened from this meditation!

I did this meditation on my dad. My dad had a bad back. He was trying all these different things. "Should I do acupuncture or should I do surgery?" And in this particular system of thought, the reason I am seeing my dad in pain is because I have some kind of impurity inside of my own heart. So if I reach into my heart with that kind of meditation and I see myself over and over taking his pain away and destroying it something will shift inside my own heart. Some radical thing will shift inside of me and I will open my eyes and I will see a dad whose back is not in pain anymore because that is where the world really comes from. The world really comes, or I should say *my* world really comes from a place inside of my own heart. And so those are the kinds of meditations that we want to do inside the retreat to reach in and change the entire world. You know that is just one person and one person's pain but during the three-year retreat we are going to try to do that kind of thing with everybody. We are going to try to purify everybody. We will see how well we do it, ya know?! We will see how well we do it.

I imagine some of you are a bit skeptical about how this whole world is coming from my heart thing. Raise your hand if you don't believe Lama Christie that the ...no no just kidding... One of the things we have been doing the last six or twelve years depending on how long people were her, is proofs that the world actually is coming from my heart and actually it is not out there. So what is Diamond Mountain? It's a place where we sit around and talk about a billion different reasons why. We can prove to you why the world is not coming from where you think it is coming from. Why the world is like a virtual reality inside your own mind. I don't know since all the students have been doing this for so many years I thought it would be good for them to demonstrate their knowledge of emptiness to you. So how do we prove to the parents and the friends and family that, for instance, this is not a flower from its own side? How do you prove it? How do you prove its not out there the way that we think it is? How do you prove that this flower is actually a seed that ripened inside our own mind and is actually being projected, and we are just experiencing it because we have some kind of seed in the past planted in our mind to see it that way? How do we prove that? (Yawn) I'm not doing it you guys are doing it...yeah but go for it.

(student:) Because there may be somebody who has never seen a flower before and they would have no idea what that object is. (Lama Christie:) So not everybody sees it the same way that you do, Right? Maybe everybody is seeing a slightly different thing. How many people like lilies? Ok like half the people raised their hands. Like the other half don't like lilies right? So that is a proof that this is not coming from itself, because if it had the quality of being a very lovely

beautiful smelling flower, it would look like that to everybody. The reason that people have different perceptions of things is because those perceptions are coming from your mind. The reason that people disagree, “is it a good flower or a bad flower?”, “is it a sweet smelling flower or is it something which gets all over Lama Christies white thing because it has all of that stupid stuff on it?” (laughter) You know what I mean? You could probably go either way... or is it a flower at all?

I mean there are probably some beings in the room who wouldn't even see it as a flower. Like little creatures that we have lots of in the desert, especially the summer. So the fact that we see it as a sweet smelling object to our eyes is coming from our minds. It's like this object is blank and then we are overlaying some kind of trip onto it. We are overlaying some kind of picture that is being projected from our mind and then I say, “oh this is a sweet smelling flower” and I think it is coming from this way. (towards us) I think it is a flower out here. But actually all that sweet smellingness is all coming from my heart. Why? Because not everybody sees it that way.

I was thinking about...what about causes? One of the things about this particular philosophy is that nothing causes anything else in the present moment. You know Geshe Michael was easy on you with the philosophy stuff so I thought I would just go for it. So I smell this flower and I think that somehow there is some kind of sweet smelling nature in this flower that is causing my nose to have a pleasant experience. There is a cause and effect relationship going on between the flower and my nose as I sniff. I mean you can't see it but you can believe me right, as I smell it. If I passed it around to everyone in the room everyone could smell it. Maybe. Maybe everyone could smell it maybe not. See that is another proof, right? Could everyone in the room smell it and would we all smell the same thing? Anyway, so you think there is a cause and effect relationship going on between the lily and my nose because you think that the lily is somehow giving some kind of sweet smell to my nose, and there is an interaction between the two. Why Isn't that true? (student:) You can't call the flower a cause for a pleasant smell until you have had the result. (Lama Christie:) Right. (student:) So then, now you have to find some kind of time where that cause and that result overlap. If you don't then you can't actually say, you can't connect them. They are not connected. Right? They don't touch. Look everyone is saying, “oh yeah I know what she is talking about.” They don't touch the thing.

So here is what Stephane is talking about. So there is a moment where the flower is giving scent and there is another moment where it touches my nose. Or something, there is a moment of flower and there is a moment of the scent. Now can a cause and a result happen at the same time? If a cause and a result happen at the same time there would be no time at all. There would be no progression of events at all. If causes and results all happened at the same time, there could be no progression of events. Causes and results can't happen at the same time. Everybody agreed? Yes, ok. If anyone disagrees we will get to Arya Nagarjuna later! So the cause has to come first and the result has to come second. Right? The cause happens in the first moment and the result happens in the second moment. But if the cause is here in the first moment and the result is here in the second moment, when do they touch. There's the cause and there's the result. The cause has died by the time the result occurs. So they sometimes overlap a tiny bit? It's impossible! It is absolutely impossible for something that is a cause to touch something that is a

result. So all the supposed cause and effect relationships that we have ever seen in our entire lives are false. Let's put it in more relevant terms for us in our lives.

Someone who really pisses you off... Someone who makes you upset or angry, or something they say or something they do... they look at you or they say something to you and it really makes you mad... So they make you mad? Yes? Anatole! I thought you never got mad... we need to talk! My whole vision of Anatole was just shot! (laughter) Can somebody make you mad? So say I am the person. I'll be the guinea pig. Say I am the person who is making you mad. You can imagine any face that you want overlaid on top of me, I don't care. So I am saying something to you that is unpleasant for you. The words travel from my mouth to your ear and somehow it hurts your feelings or something like that, and then something happens in your heart that clenches and you go "owe you hurt me!" Right? You think "you hurt me," that's a mistaken perception. The "you hurt me," that's a mistake. There is no such thing as "you hurt me." Think about all the times you thought that. Think about the billions and billions of times in your own personal life, daily, hourly that you have thought "you hurt me," and it has all been wrong.

Why? The thing that Grant says — the person who said something to you could be in a room full of people and nobody else could think that they were hurting them, and nobody else would find them unpleasant, painful or make them angry, which means that you are seeing them in a very specific light. You are overlaying some kind of perception. It is coming from you. It is coming from your heart. Geshe Michael likes to say, "even mass murderers have moms and you know the mom will always say, oh he is a good boy." Like there is always someone who is going to disagree. There is never a unanimous vote about a certain person in a room like that person is really bad or that person is really good, everybody has different perceptions of that person, which means that that person doesn't have the nature inside of them. Doesn't have any kind of nature inside of them of being that kind of mean person that you think they are, that is making you angry, or being a hurtful person, or being somebody who says mean things to you. You know because someone right next to you could hear the very same sentence that you did and not feel any kind of pain at all and that is a proof that it is coming from your own mind.

Another proof: What about the colors and the shapes that you are seeing on their face as they open their mouth is making you angry? If you sat down and broke it out and analyzed, what about what you are seeing is making you angry? What about the decibels and the tones that they are saying? What is inside the notes of the voice that is making you angry? Is the anger carried on a certain decibel? Is it that they reach certain high notes and all of a sudden that's the anger and it enters into you? What happens? What is exchanged? What is exchanged in that interaction and if you sit down and you analyze it that way and you start breaking down your interaction with somebody who has made you upset, you will start to realize that nothing that they are doing is making you upset. The upset is actually coming from inside you and they are just some kind of trigger.

That's pretty profound because anger is a really bad thing. It gives you health problems, makes you face all ugly. In the Tibetan texts they say that anger makes you ugly. The more you get angry the uglier you get. You know when you were little they had that thing, "Don't make

that face your face might stay that way.” I always think of that when the Tibetans say that. Anyway you start to see the world as ugly and the more you get angry the uglier everything looks around you. And then people start not liking you if you get angry. They start to want to move away from you. You start to be a more lonely person. Nobody wants to be around angry people. They are just unpleasant. One of the more important reasons is that it makes us get old. It makes us age. Anger is what they call a mental affliction. It is something inside of us that when we have it, it automatically ages our body and our minds. It’s like it is killing us. When we say mental afflictions we mean the things that hurt us. That is a definition of a mental affliction, it is something that harms our body and mind, it is something that is killing us slowly. So every single time we have anger it hurts us.

The nice thing about the three-year retreat is, I felt like I didn’t age at all during that time. I have certainly aged since I have been out! You know you are doing so much goodness every day and there are no incidents where you are doing things like getting angry at another person. You are just living this very pure life and you can see for yourself... “I don’t age! I don’t have to get old! The only thing that is making me old is my own mind and my own afflictions inside my mind. If I could learn to stop these afflictions I could learn to stop aging. If I could learn how to stop aging myself then I could learn how to tell other people how to stop aging and then we wouldn’t have to die!” That’s what we are going for! It’s pretty radical the things that we are hoping to do in this retreat but it is things we have seen evidence of in other people and it is things we have also tasted of for ourselves in our own smaller experiences. We know enough to know that they are true, and we know enough to know that they are possible, and then all we have to do is see how good we are at sitting down and actually doing it!

The three-year retreat is not a guarantee; it really depends on how hard we work when we are there. It is not a guarantee that as soon as you enter into a cabin and sit down on the cushion that all of your problems are solved. No, you take the entire world with you because it is all coming from you. That is sort of another proof... it is a more visceral proof in your own mind of, “my god the entire world is coming from me because when I went into retreat and I sat down in my cabin, all of a sudden I realized, I didn’t leave anything behind!” I took every single thing with me in this journey. It is all there. And I realize what an incredibly vast place this mind of ours is. It’s got absolutely everything in it. It’s overwhelming but it also gives you a lot of power. It gives you infinite power to change the things you want to change in your world.

I got out of retreat. I co-founded Diamond Mountain University . I spent 6 years teaching 18 *bok jinpa* courses and co-teaching 18 tantric courses. I founded the Yoga Studies Institute. I made 8 yoga courses for that. I have taught all around the world. I’ve written a few books, and still the very best thing I have ever done for anyone else in my entire life had been the three-year retreat... By far! By far. Opening your heart is an incredible accomplishment in and of itself. Learning how to truly love is what we were meant to do. It is our ultimate evolution as beings. It’s to open our hearts and truly stop all the violence and anger and jealousy and all the negative things inside of our mind and then watch it ripple out into the rest of the world and use our own mind to create a perfect world, to create a *mandala*. So I hope that this three-year retreat will be one of many in this country and that we will be like pioneers. I feel like the first 50 people going on the moon. I really do. I feel like it is a great endeavor for this country and this culture to pro-

duce something like that into our lives as a culture. I hope that it becomes common. That people take three years out of their life when they are young enough to do it and that they go and they really try to change themselves and the world. Should I let them ask questions? Does anyone have questions?

(Q: Father) If you love unconditionally like we do our children. It is difficult for us to love others because they are not our children, then why would we love our children unconditionally. There are moments when we feel such emptiness, or loss.

(LC) His question is, why if we love our children unconditionally, there are moments of such loss? I hesitate to use the word emptiness because here it means a very, very different thing. (Parent) I use the word emptiness because emptiness is used to derive angry, and they do drive you to that point (laughter.)

(LC: Answer) I have come to a certain degree of maturity in the way that I see that kind of heartache in my own life, and I would just pass it on to you in hopes that it would help you. It is a kind of opening of your heart. The feeling that really it is not completely unconditional yet, and he is pushing you towards the walls, toward the limitations of your love and trying to push you beyond that, and that it is the growing pains that hurt a little bit. When we are pushed beyond what we believe our own capacity to love is. The feeling that you get, it doesn't have to be pain. That feeling that you were talking about. It is because you are holding onto something, because you are holding on to him. (Father) I do want to clear it up. He is not the only child I have.

(LC) I think that having children is a remarkable way to open your heart and to learn how to grow, and in some cases like, Geshe Michael's Lama... Ken Rimpoche had two main students; Geshe Michael and a man named art. Art was really really intelligent and , it was just a rumor, but I heard he was kind of angry. He is a really beautiful lama now so I am scared to say it. Rimpoche told art to get married and have a child. He wouldn't ordain him because he saw that as the best path for him to open his heart, and the best way for him to develop as a spiritual practitioner. He felt that would be better for him than sitting in a monastery and reading books or doing retreat or anything. So everybody has a different path in this life. Not everybody's path is to go into some desert somewhere and do three years of solitary retreat, and I do acknowledge that the family path is a very powerful one for opening your heart, especially if you use it well! Yes Stephane? Didn't you talk already?

(Student) Yes but that was about emptiness and this is a question my father asked. He isn't here right now, he is a philosophy professor. He's been doing that for about 45 years. He doesn't believe anything that I believe or understand a lot of what I am telling him. (LC) Ya it is a problem. It's better to get them from scratch, not with all the other baggage of these other philosophical systems.

(Student) He got me pretty good. I was explaining how I was going to change my seeds and therefore project a world where he wasn't getting old and dying anymore, so can you not see that I do love you and I have compassion for you? I am not abandoning you. He said, "ok so you stopping my death. What about me?" He was talking about himself. (LC) His own projection of his own pain and his own death. (Student) And so this is a question from him but it is my ques-

tion as well, cuz I can't very well answer him, "no no no don't worry! You are my projection, I've got it covered!"

(laughter) Somehow I have to be able to address this although I can't really expect that what I say to him will bring the result I wanted.

(LC) I think it is the answer that I was talking about before. First you have to do it yourself and then you can teach other people how to do it. So we are being guinea pigs, right? We are being our own test subject. We are our own scientific experiments but only we are doing it for the sake of every single person that we love, and if it works then we are going to have this incredibly powerful knowledge that we can then give to everybody else and help them as well. But we have to prove to ourselves, that it works first, because otherwise our words are just empty. Ya know? "Hey, I haven't tried this but why don't you?" It's not a very good selling point. It's "hey I tried this and it changed my whole entire life in this, this, this and this way why don't you?" That's something. Yes? Yes there is a story in the Tibetan scriptures. There is a family who is totally poverty stricken and they are dying. There is one slab of beef left and there is a dad a mom and a little baby, and the dad eats the whole thing himself so that he has the strength to go to the nearby town and get food for the rest of the family. So that is kind of the theory. Yes, it is like putting the oxygen mask on yourself first before you put it on the baby. That's the theory here. So you have to do it yourself first or it won't work.

I am glad everyone is completely happy with the three-year retreat.

(Mother) How do you think as a parent we can be the most supportive?

(LC) That is a nice question. Did everybody here that? How can we as parents be most supportive?

It was very difficult for me feeling like the entire world had totally forgotten about me. The first part of my three-year retreat I was extremely lonely. That's how I started talking to all the lizards. At first they were all running away but then I developed a means of communication where they actually wouldn't run anymore, and they would actually come to my hand and I was so happy because they were like my only friends! I didn't realize how much I would miss people. I think what Geshe Michael was saying; Just saying that you are going to be here and every once in a while coming and serving. Knowing that someone that you love is going to come and be on the other side and even if you can't see them they are going to send you something and you will be able to feel that it's them. That's pretty special I think to me. It's not easy, the three-year retreat is not going to be easy by any means. It is very very challenging, very hard, emotionally it is very very hard. It is the hardest thing that you can do emotionally. So giving your love and support and saying that you are going to be there would mean the world to them. So if anyone who is here can make a deal with their child or loved one to come and serve the retreat. Just say you will be on the other side. "I'm gonna be there. I'll be packing your food. I'll put a special heart so you will know it is me." No don't! Don't tell anyone I said that! (laughter) Some non verbal code word so they know you are there. I think that would be really nice. And send us your prayers. You get into a very subtle state of mind in retreat and you can actually start to sense the way that people are feeling about you. You can hear things that you weren't normally able to hear and so if you have very, very strong thought towards us especially toward someone you are close

to they will reach them for sure. They will reach them. It will mean a huge amount to be able to hear that love and that support.

(Parent) You haven't said anything about what happens at the end. How... so they rush out to open arms?

(LC) We took a several month period to readjust to interacting with people before we actually opened the doors and came out to the outside world. So for example we started to meet with individuals and have conversations with them a month or so before we actually came out of the retreat. The very first time I had a conversation with someone it was half an hour and it was the first time I had broken silence, and I went back to the yurt and I slept for 11 hours straight because it was exhausting. It was absolutely exhausting because I was at such a subtle level of meditation and I was so silent for so long, and it was too much for me. That was too much stimulus. You need to re-acclimate. We will do that. Maybe close family members will come one or two times and we will be able to ease their family member back into the world slowly. So hopefully we can do that gracefully. It will also take awhile after the three-year retreat ends for everybody to get back into the world on their feet. I don't recommend that someone just out of three-year retreat goes and gets a nine to five job right that second. I drove from the old Diamond Mountain where we did the first three-year retreat to this Diamond Mountain which is... how far is it? About a half hour drive? No no it's an hour, at least an hour.

Anyway, I was nauseous the whole time. Just the movement of the car and all the stimulus and all the lights. I was in the back seat and they had to pull over at McDonalds and get me a tea. And then I would go into these convenience stores and there would be so much stimulus on the shelves. It took awhile to re-acclimate to the outside world, so we are planning on making the three-year retreat houses available to the people after the retreat for a good period of time, maybe a year or something that people can come and go slowly in and out of there retreat cabins. So that they are not totally shocked when they hit the outside world and they can get back on their feet in the world. If you get to a subtle enough point of meditation then you notice a lot more things than you normally do. For instance someone will come up to you and you can tell by just the way that they are holding their body what pains that they have in their body and mind. All sorts of information starts to come to you just because you are at such a subtle level, and it is so much information that it is a little bit hard to handle. If you meet one person it is ok but if you meet five it is exhausting. You need to learn how to take all of that sensitivity and re-acclimate yourself to the outside world, which is really like an exploration into deep space. Going into three-year retreat, it is the deep space of your mind and it is pretty wild in there and it will take a while to readjust. It is a beautiful journey. It is a very beautiful journey.

(Question)

(LC) Yeah they came and interviewed us because we were the only people on the planet who had not heard of 9 11 for two years I think. No no no, it was really interesting because we came out and the entire country was in a state of fear still and people were doing all sorts of radical things because they were afraid and all sorts of military stuff was coming up. They were also

throwing themselves into all sorts of spirituality much more but I think everything was based on fear, and then somehow because we had totally missed everything and we weren't involved in any of the media we hadn't gone through anything. We were like the only people that weren't afraid and so we could go and help people in a way that I don't think we would have been able to do had we been involved in the whole experience of 9 11. So there were many many instances where we spoke to people and we could see clearly, exactly what was going on with people, and exactly what their fears were. And we could deal with their fears because we had some kind of objectivity because we hadn't been immersed in it. And so I felt it was a great blessing to be able to help people by not having been there.

(Question)

(LC: Answer) That's a good question. That's a hard question Allison was asking, "well what if there is a big death in the family or big crisis in the family?" I can only say what happened in the last three-year retreat. There were originally six and then there were five because one person left and there was... we had decided, Geshe Michael and myself, not to receive any news at all. For the whole three years, three months, and three days we were not going to receive any news from our parents. We were not going to exchange letters. We weren't going to send anything out or get anything in.

There was another girl named Petra who decided she was going to receive letters once a month. So she was writing and everything was fine and all of a sudden she got this letter that her dad was dying. If you know you can't not go, so she broke the retreat and went to see her dying father. When she went back... Well one she felt very unsettled because she and her father had been at odds for many years and she was hoping that when she went there she was going to be able to somehow mend that but he was so sick at the time that really he was just watching TV and falling asleep the whole time and she couldn't really talk to him because he was already at that point past where he was too sick. She never really got resolved and then he died and she came back and she went through a time of total grieving and she had pretty much the worst retreat ever. She said that every single day she looked at the caretaker's house and had to physically stop herself from walking out. Every single day! Being in grief is definitely not a place for someone in retreat. You don't want to be alone when you are grieving. It's not an appropriate time. You don't go into three-year retreat when you just had someone die.

So it was really hard for her. She felt like she never got the retreat and she went right after that and did another three-year retreat because she felt like she didn't have her three-year retreat. She couldn't really concentrate. Her whole understanding of emptiness went out the window. That's what happens when you grieve for families. When you grieve you are supposed to be around other people. And so I think if something like that happens and you chose to go out don't think that you are going to be able to come back in. It pretty much means the end of your retreat. It's good enough for Petra because she had the opportunity to do another one. She had the karma that Lama Zopa was here and had another three-year retreat place. So it's as long as you want. It was kind of handed to her but I met another woman who was traveling with Lama Yeshe.

Lama Yeshe is a very, very old Tibetan Lama. He has since passed. He was one of the first lamas to teach westerners. He taught westerners in his school in Nepal and so he opened the door to Buddhism for all of us. He is one of my lamas even though I never met him. I have a very strong connection to him. I was talking to this nun in Dharmasala who said that “Lama Yeshe put me into retreat and told me to do a three-year retreat and not to come out for any reason at all” but she got news that Lama Yeshe had passed after six, seven months into the retreat. She came out and she said to me, “Ya know, I should have listened to my lama because I came out and was never able to get back in. I have spent the last twelve years trying to get back in and I just haven’t had the seeds for it. I haven’t had the financial means and just nothing has happened. I just missed my opportunity and I am getting too old. I don’t think I am ever going to do a three-year retreat.” She was heartbroken because she had had this dream in her heart to do it and she can’t now. For some reason it blocked her after that. In my mind it is best not to receive that kind of news at all and just commit to the retreat, to go in saying now or never. It’s now or never! But anybody can choose whatever they want. If people want to get news every month they can get news every month.

I had another experience that might be relevant, my grandmother passed while I was in three-year retreat and nobody told me because we weren’t getting any news but I knew because she came to me. She was like twenty five years old or something, she was in a red dress, I don’t know why, I never saw her like that but I knew it was her. It was so sweet and she came with a special message for my father and she called him a special nickname that I didn’t know that only he knew. I won’t tell you because it was kind of personal and when I told my dad what she said he started to cry because he knew it was from her. And I felt at the time, she stayed out a week and I felt at the time that it was the very best place to be able to experience her passing on because if I had come out and gone to the funeral and dealt with all the grieving people I would never have been in a sensitive enough place to actually hear her. And I felt like I was the only one who could hear, and I felt like I could really be of help to her as she passed.

There are special rituals that we do for people who have died and you can only do them when you are in a sensitive enough place to actually feel their spirit when they have passed on. I was in that place and could help her in a way that none of my family members could. And so I felt like being in three-year retreat was the very best place I could be if my loved ones had been dying because I could actually talk to them in the state before they moved on.

Those are my personal experiences that relate to that question and I have to say that everybody has to answer it for themselves and it might not be the same answer for everybody, people do have heart connections to families and if something happens maybe they do have to leave retreat, and I respect that. I wouldn’t tell anybody not to go. It has to be coming from your own heart. If you must go then you have to go. It depends on the relationship. It just depends on your relationship with your family, it’s a hard question though. But I do think you might be of the most help to them when you are in deep retreat.

Well are there any more questions?

My dream is that we don't go into retreat alone. Just like fifty people up there in the cabins. We all go into retreat together so it's like we are all doing it together. The people who are serving here are also going into retreat. The families who have people in retreat are also participating in the retreat. We are doing it together, we are trying to change the world together, make something truly magical happen. I can't wait to see what the world is like when we walk out that door after three years, three months, and three days. These are fifty of the best people I have ever met. The most capable people I have ever met. What can we do together? We will see... I think it will be beautiful! I think it will be really, really beautiful!