



MINDFUL IN MAY

Dr. Elise Bialylew, founder of Mindful in May (mindfulinmay.org) and The Mind Life Project (www.mindlifeproject.com) and author of The Happiness Plan, interviews Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche is a Tibetan teacher and master of the Karma Kagyu and Nyingma lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. He has authored two best-selling books and oversees the Tergar Meditation Community, an international network of Buddhist meditation centres.

Elise: Mingyur Rinpoche, it is an absolute honour to have you on the program. I have personally read all of your books, and highly recommend them to the listeners. Something about your teaching that is so valuable is that you have this very unique perspective from an incredibly deep practice in Buddhism, but also from a very young age, you came into contact with scientists. I've found that you've expressed the teaching in such an accessible way. For people that have not come upon your work, I wonder if you could just share a little bit about your personal story, and specifically this intersection of Buddhism and science.

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: Yes. I was in Nepal, right in the middle of the Himalayan Mountains. I had a very good family. My father was a great meditator, as well as my grandpa. I had an interest in meditation since childhood. One of the reasons is I had panic when I was young. I had panic when I was seven or eight years old and I was looking for a solution. I asked my mother and she asked my father to teach me meditation. I learned meditation from my father, how to work with my panic. I learned meditation from my father when I was nine years old.

At the same time, there were a lot of Western students around the world coming to learn meditation from my father. One of them was a neuroscientist called Francisco Varela. He also came every year to learn meditation. I was really interested in science and I asked him a lot of questions about how the brain works. Especially, at that time, I was very interested in the solar system, galaxy, and universe. He taught me very interesting things. He also showed me how meditation worked for him. From then, I have had great interest in both meditation and science. Over the years, I developed, more and more deep experience and interest in science and meditation.

Elise: You were very fortunate that it was Francisco Varela, who happened to be (he's not alive anymore) one of the greatest neuroscientists in the world at that time. You had a wonderful education in science as well as from your father. I wonder if you could speak a little bit more about this panic. I think for people that are listening, anxiety and depression - but anxiety in particular - are such a common affliction now. I think a lot of people would be very interested in hearing a little bit more about that. When you started at such a young age, how did it unfold for you? What did you learn? You speak about transforming poison into medicine. Can you speak a little bit more about that?

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: What happened was, at the beginning, I really didn't like my panic. I tried to fight with my panic. In my hometown, we have beautiful mountains. Sometimes I hiked in the mountain, tried to run away

from panic. It didn't work. Panic followed me all the way up to the top of the mountain. I got deep into the valley. We had a nice river in the thick forest, a little bit dark and cosy. Panic followed me there. Next to my home, I had a small cave and I hid inside the cave. It didn't work.

Then I learned meditation from my father when I was nine years old. The first meditation training he taught me was mental recitation, reciting some work in the mind silently, without using lips, then watching the breath. Although I came to learn those meditations, watching my breath, breathing in, breathing out, I felt bored. It felt like I meditated for 30 minutes, but actually it was only five or ten minutes. My panic: sometimes, it was good, sometimes it was getting worse. Then I asked my father, "What should I do? Sometimes, it doesn't work." My father said, "Don't try to fight with panic; you have to welcome panic."

Then I changed my style. I tried to welcome panic: "Hello, panic. Welcome." Then I watched my breath. My main motivation was that if I welcome panic, then panic would not come back. It became a circle. It was fake welcoming, but it still helped. It was much better, just fake welcome. Then there was a lot of meditation training. Eventually, I could use panic as a point for meditation. My father and other teachers taught me about this.

Five years later, when I was 13, I was in India, where there was one of my important teachers, Tai Situ Rinpoche. In that monastery they were going to start a traditional three-year retreat, so that means do the retreat, continuously, for three years. I really want to join but because I was a lazy, lazy boy, and didn't want to meditate, when I began to meditate, I fell asleep. I thought it's good to join in retreat, so I went on retreat. The first month, I was not lazy. The second month, laziness slowly started coming in. Now, what happened? The laziness brought panic. Now, my laziness, panic, they became good friends. Panic became bigger. It was crazy. I couldn't sleep: it was tight around my neck, chest. It almost felt

like I was having a heart attack. Who knows? I felt like I was going to have a heart attack and die.

I could not join the group meditation. When they began group meditation, began to start to pray, I had to leave the room. Then I thought, “Maybe I should leave this retreat.” I feel embarrassed because I told everybody I could do this. If I continued to stay, more than two years, then I had to stay. In the end, I really decided to welcome the panic. I decided to learn how to believe in my panic and use panic as support for my meditation. In the end, panic really became support for my meditation. Symptoms were still there: tight here; sweating; but at a deeper level, I felt happy and excited when the panic came. “Hello.” So many things coming. It was like watching 3-D television, the sensations, the voices, and images, and the breath. But at a deeper level, I was quite happy. Then me and my panic became very good friends. Panic became my best friend, my teacher. We were quite happy.

Then one bad thing happened. Should I share with you or not?

Elise: Yes. Tell me.

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: Not a happy ending. Not a good ending. Because when we became very good friends, the panic said, “Bye-bye.” Gone. Normally, what I say is I miss my panic.

Elise: You lost your best friend.

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: My best friend. Actually, panic’s gone. From then, I learned actually, I can use anything as support for meditation. What I call poison becomes medicine, actually.

Elise: I wonder if you could speak a little bit more about that. I know this is after years of practice, and it’s beyond this conversation but when you say, “it can be support for my practice”, what do you mean? Can we talk about it on a

practical level? The listeners might be sitting in meditation, and even in less than a panic situation. If someone experiences an unpleasant sensation or emotion in any way – boredom, panic – how do you turn that into a support? What are you actually doing with your mind? Can you speak a bit more about that?

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: In general, there are two types of meditation traditions: object-oriented and subject-oriented. In the object-oriented, object is important. When you use the breath as support for meditation, the breath is important: back to the breath. Back to the breath. That type of meditation is good, and a little bit tight and a little bit narrow. My tradition of meditation is the subject-oriented. Subject here meaning the awareness. What we call the essence of meditation is awareness. Awareness is like the sky. The panic or tired, emotion. It could be anything, depression, stress, conflict, guilt, or worry. All these memories, all these things, that we call clouds in the sky. Maybe panic is a thunderstorm, or maybe a hurricane, or maybe a tornado. Depression and all that. No matter how strong the storm is, it will not change the nature of the sky. The sky is always present. Always pure. Always free. Always there. The fundamental quality of our mind is what we call awareness. What is awareness and knowing? It looks like light. It looks like the sky. It is like the ocean. The wave is like panic, but the ocean is the water. This fundamental quality of mind is with us all the time. The problem is we're not recognising that.

The beginning of meditation is how to connect with your awareness. You can use breath; you can use sound; you can use a mental recitation. Whatever you can do, that is okay. Just knowing that, you just know your breath, knowing your breath. It doesn't matter what kind of breath: shallow breath, deep breath, happy breath, tight breath. It doesn't matter. Your mind is knowing; being. Sometimes, what we call knowing; sometimes, what we call being; sometimes, what we call observe, witness, let it be as it is. You don't need to control

anything; you don't have to do anything. You just be with it. Be with your breath.

As we develop some experience with a few of those first steps of meditation, like sound or breath, then we can use sensation in the body as a part of meditation. Just be with the sensation. Again, you don't need to control it; you don't need to do anything. Sensation becomes like a cloud. Behind the sensation, there's awareness. Then you're going to use panic in the end. Watch panic; be with the panic. What I call monkey mind. So many things going on, but it's all in awareness. This panic cannot change awareness. Slowly, slowly, you don't need to change the cloud, but you can be free from the cloud without changing the cloud. You can have the cloud. That's the whole thing about this special practice of meditation.

Elise: When you say that the panic can be a support for the meditation, you can use the breath, you can use sound. If panic or some other strong emotion is there, that can be the object of your meditation that there is an awareness and there is the panic.

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: Together.

Elise: Right. How do you help someone to locate awareness? I'm trying to help listeners here. I understand what you're talking about because I've practised meditation. How do you help someone locate it? What is awareness? Where is it? How do people find it? What is this?

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: This is very difficult. To look at the awareness is very difficult. Do you know why it's difficult?

Elise: No.

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: Should I tell you?

Elise: Yes. Tell me.

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: Because it's too easy. Normally, I make a joke. It's true. Too easy, so it becomes difficult. It's close; we cannot see it. It's there all the time; we cannot believe it. That's the problem. Why is it too easy? Because it's just your own mind. Can you see my hand now?

Elise: Yes.

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: That is awareness, actually. It's just knowing. Awareness meaning just knows, knows that you're seeing, you're hearing, you're thinking, you're feeling, you're doing. Notice what you notice; notice what you're thinking. That's all. As long as you're not unconscious, you have awareness. As long as you have mind, you have awareness.

This fundamental quality of the mind is knowing. That knowing, the moment that you wake up in the morning, it's just there, it's present. The knowing changes colour. Maybe I want to have breakfast, or maybe I use the bathroom, I need to go to the office. I'm happy; I'm not happy. The cloud changes. When the cloud changes, it looks like the sky changed colour. Actually, sky doesn't change, the nature of it doesn't change. Awareness itself is really present, and pure, and always there. The problem is it's so close, so easy, so at the beginning, we cannot really find it. Therefore, we have to have objects in the beginning. In the end, you don't have to have objects. What we call open awareness in meditation is just being, awareness with itself, no need to have any objects.

Elise: You said before, the essence of meditation is awareness. A lot of people come to meditation because there is some kind of desire for something to be different. There is some sense of suffering, or discontent, or something. How does awareness link to greater happiness or less suffering in life? What's the relationship between this finding awareness, and experiencing awareness, and actually having less suffering, which is really what the Buddha, on his path, was really all about.

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: Actual awareness itself is beyond suffering. Suffering is under a cloud. When we look at the deeper level into awareness, it's beyond concept also: beyond subject and object. It's a very pure presence. That awareness is actually with us all the time. It is our fundamental quality, sometimes what we call basic inner goodness. We all have this wonderful nature. Our natural quality is awareness. That's not just awareness, that's love and compassion, there's the wisdom, there are the skills. All these are there within us. Problem is, we do not recognise that. We don't know who we are. We don't know how to connect with our fundamental quality. We are lost in the cloud. When we're lost in the cloud, what we see, what we experience is only cloud. This is why our life normally has a lot of problems. Even when you ask experts, when you ask, "What is mind?" they will say, "Memory, thought, perception, feeling." These all are still the cloud. They're describing the cloud. The fundamental quality of mind is just knowing; what we call clear knowing.

Therefore, when you get more familiar with your fundamental quality, you will be happy. The real happiness. What we call lasting happiness. When you look for a beautiful cloud this happiness is becoming like the stock market. When you're doing the coffee, you're happy for 20 minutes, and then after that, down again. No matter how great and beautiful a cloud that experience will pass, it will change. The lasting happiness is very difficult to get.

Elise: Is it correct if I say that by training in awareness, we're finding a new place that we did not know existed, that we can be in that changes our relationship to everything that comes up in the mind that creates suffering? Anxiety, pain. There's another place within our mind that we can know that helps us to have the different relationship with all the difficult things that come in.

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: What we call discovery. It's not like you need to make new things. It's just there within you, but you just need to discover it.

Normally, I give an example. This is the watch. Do you know what the quality of the watch is? Tells time, right? Of course, that's its purpose. Men call it a watch - it tells time. If you have a watch, maybe the best watch in the world, and you don't know it is a watch, you think it's a bracelet, you don't know your own watch. Can watch can tell you time or not?

Elise: Yes.

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: It cannot tell no, because you don't know it's a watch.

Elise: If you think it's a bracelet, then no.

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: If you think it's a bracelet, if you don't know this is a watch, it cannot tell you the time, although you have watch, you have the best watch. These innate qualities, the awareness, love, compassion, and wisdom are within us. If you do not recognise them, then it looks like there's no function. If there are ten qualities within us, nine are positive, one negative, normally what we see is only one negative one. We exaggerate that negative and we ignore, deny, nine good qualities within ourselves.

When you discover this, in a way, actually, you don't have to do anything. This is the beauty of this path. Just be. Doing work, just being. Just be as it is. Then all the work can be done: purify whatever ignorance; happiness, or whatever and wisdom will manifest.

Elise: I want to read a quote from your book. The most recent book called *In Love with the World*, which I wanted to talk about it a minute. You write, "Throughout the day, we ask, 'Where are my kids? Where are my keys? Where is my phone?' We tend not to ask, 'Where is my mind?' If we can train ourselves to slow down and watch our thoughts, not to get carried away by them, but just to notice, we will be amazed by the universes that we traverse moment after moment." I feel like that quote speaks a lot to what we've been

talking about. Just to clarify again, or to come from a different angle, living in the modern world, how is it helping if we say, “Where is our mind?” What is that doing for us?

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: I think in the modern world now, our mind is totally spaced out. Sometimes we almost forget that we are here. For that, first, we need to bring our mind to the breath first. Just be. Learn how to be with the breath. When you learn how to be with the breath, there are three things. The first is just remember your breath. Second, that there’s a lot of thought coming: “Blah, blah, blah. Yadda, yadda. I Should do this. I forgot something.” Maybe panic, or maybe depression, maybe feeling not good. Let them come. It’s very important. Don’t try to fight with them. For me, my main mistake was trying to fight with my panic. Panic of panic, fear of panic is worse than panic. Let thought come. Let to-do lists come. Normally, I make a joke. Let pizza come. Pizza. When you watch your breath, breathing in, pizza comes. One pizza comes, another pizza goes. If you remember your breath, whatever pizza comes, no problem. Ten pizzas come around you. That’s the second important thing. Let them come; don’t fight. When you fight, when you say, “Don’t think about pizza,” what happens, is you will think about the pizza more. Then what happens? Everything becomes pizza. When I was young, “More panic, more panic, more panic.” Depression. More depression. “I hate this feeling” makes the feeling become bigger. This is very important: what we call aversion. Aversion is one of the main causes of suffering of people. Unpleasantness. All this pain. Aversion is the main cause of pain.

Third is, don’t care about the quality of meditation: clarity, peace, calm, joy. Don’t care. This piece, calm, joy is what we call the experience of meditation, not the essence of meditation. Essence of meditation is awareness. Not the peace, not the calm, not the joy. When you look for peace, normally peace will disappear. “Hello, peace. Where are you?” The peace will say, “I am busy now. You have to make appointment first, then I will see whether I should

come or not.” When you don’t care about peace, then the peace will say, “Excellent. I’m free now. Maybe I can come.”

These three things. This is a very important skill for our life, an important skill in how we work with our minds, emotions, thoughts. Normally, these things trap us and make us unhappy.

Elise: I wanted to pick up on what you said about aversion because the other side is craving, which is one of the causes of the suffering that we experience. I wanted to ask you, living in the modern world, how do we integrate these teachings with modern life? Specifically, I’m talking about attachment or craving. Are we supposed to let go of everything? How do we integrate these concepts? Does no attachment, no grasping mean that we can’t enjoy a coffee in the morning? I love food. A dessert after dinner. Do I have to stop doing that, or is it more just an awareness of how I’m doing that? Do you know what I mean by this question?

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: When you let go, first, you have to give up your home, and money, and car, and go into the cave in the mountain. (Laughter) I’m just kidding. Normally what we call letting go is not “giving up.” There’s a big difference. So what is letting go? Because your mind which is normally tight, solidified or fixed, so small problems become big problems; we make mountains out of molehills, so that is what we call tight. Craving is an extra problem. “Give up”, meaning we try to push away everything. But in the meditative tradition, there’s what we call follow the flow of nature. There’s some kind of balance we have to find and this balance comes when you work more with awareness, more with wisdom, more with love and compassion. Of course, you can have coffee. No problem.

Elise: Phew! I thought you were going to tell me I have to give up the pleasures of my life.

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: We can have everything, no problem, but the problem is, not too tight; for example, some of my students, ask me about the relationships, “When a relationship comes, how can I apply your techniques? Letting go, but not giving up.” So actually, a relationship has to start; you have relationship, of course. Then after a certain level, you have to let go of relationship, so you have to give space to each other, you have to understand each other, you have to be free and open. This is really important. Let go but don’t give up. You don’t need to push away. Just stay there and see how the situation takes place. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t work; what we call impermanent. Life is impermanent. It changes. Whatever is the natural play. Just hold the space and observe then if the readiness comes or whatever, you should follow whatever possible but at the same time, not too tight. Some kind of balance there. That is with business, also. If you’re too tight, you cannot become a good businessperson. If you’re always rejecting you cannot do business. Same thing when you’re playing stock market. Same thing when you’re playing games.

Elise: That’s the middle way.

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: Middle way. Yes. Same thing with the drinking, even coffee. If you’re too tight, hold this and try to drink, you cannot really drink coffee. Our hand has to be relaxed, and grab the cup, then we drink. If you don’t grab the cup, you cannot have coffee. If you’re tight like that, not easy to have coffee. Follow the flow of the nature with the rhythm. That is the meaning of letting go.

But when we meditate, of course, of course we want to learn meditation. We want to improve to become deeper and deeper. At the same time, we don’t care about the ups and downs.

Elise: A common question that comes up in the community here is what meditation to do. “Should I be doing different ones or stay with the same one?”

Another question was about people that do breath meditation and then find that they get quite anxious. Could you talk to both of those things? Could someone just spend their whole life doing breath meditation, and that would be enough? What's your perspective on that?

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: In my tradition, there's a systematic learning of meditation, step by step meditation. First meditation training is, as I mentioned, the breath, sound, mental recitation, or some image, whatever image, form and colour. These are the first meditations. At least, you have to do a few weeks, one month or something, and you get some experience with that. Then you go more second level with the body, with the sensation, awareness of the body. Awareness of sensation in the body. Then you go into the thought and emotion. In-between there, you learn the open awareness meditating, without any focus, just awareness of being with yourself.

I have this course called Joy of Living workshop. So I teach in person. Also, we have an online program. This is what we call experiential units: you have to practise the first step, then you have to go to the second step. You have to have done the homework also. Then you go to the third step. For our practice, we have to do that, because if you only choose breath, then after a certain level you feel bored, then you feel stuck. Breath is not the whole answer of the meditation; it's just the first step. It is a very important step of meditation at the beginning. You cannot spend your whole life, watching the breath.

Elise: Thank you. I mentioned your book, *In Love with the World*. I wanted to ask you some questions. This book was an incredible book about your experience of going on a wandering retreat. For those who don't know what that is, literally, rather than going in seclusion to a cave, you actually decided you had a yearning and a deep need to go, leave your monastery. One night, you left, and then you were gone for about four years, and you went wandering. I wondered if you could share. It's an exquisite book, and I really hope that everyone listening reads it because it combines your personal journey with the

deep teachings. You talk about throwing wood into the fire. This was part of the process for you. Can you share what catalysed this wandering retreat? What were some of the important lessons that it gave you? I know it's a big question. You've written a whole book.

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: Yes. So we have this traditional practice, what we call wandering retreat. You just wander without any particular special preparation of money, or shelter, or plan. You just leave your home and just go on the street like a beggar.

So I had this dream since childhood. In my hometown. Every evening, my mother read a bedtime story. After the dinner, we all stayed around the fire because of the cold in the Himalayan mountains. She would read those great meditators' life stories. One of them is what we Milarepa. Milarepa was the great wandering retreat practitioner in Tibet.

The main purpose of this retreat is actually what you said there, adding wood to the fire. First, we need to learn mediation in the safe place. When you begin to make fire, you have to make it very safe, not too much wind, protected place, and tiny grass in the woods, and then a tiny fire begins to develop. Once the fire becomes bigger, bigger, bigger than you can open. More wind is better. Then you can put the big woods in at the end. Big woods.

I did a three-year retreat when I was 13 years old, a group retreat. That was a very secure environment. Then I panicked, and I made friends with my panic. In my meditation tradition, everything can be support for meditation. Nothing can become an obstacle for meditation. All poison can become medicine. That's our idea. After we finish a certain level of meditation, we just explore the world and look for problems. Challenge things.

Elise: That's a wandering retreat. The idea is you've trained the mind in a secure, more traditional, secluded retreat that's got everything. You get food, and you're looked after, and you just have to focus on your mediation. Then

you increase the challenge by going out into the world and wandering. It did seem like, a little bit, the story of the Buddha. As you described in your book, because of your tradition, the way your life was, you were very comfortable. You had a lot of attendants, and you had meals. Then you just went. Can you speak to how that was and just some of the stories that happened? Where did you sleep, how did you manage, and what did you discover about having so much challenge? How did you manage? What did your mind do to you, and what did you learn?

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: I decided one day to leave my monastery in India, Bodh Gaya, in India. I just left my monastery one night and took the train. I took a few thousand Indian rupees (one hundred, two hundred US dollars). These few thousand rupees were finished within three weeks. Then I had nothing, no money no friends no family, no shelter. I was on the street. The first day, I tried to beg for food. I went to the place called Kushinagar, a remote area of India. It's a holy place of the Buddha. There was one restaurant. When I had money, I bought food from them. Now, all my money was finished, so I thought, "First, I'm going to beg from them." In my entire life, I never begged for food. Normally, I was like a prince. My life was really protected. I'm was special. I'm was the teacher, the abbot. Wherever I went I had a lot of attendants. I was living in my own cocoon.

Elise: This is an extreme. Just so the listeners who haven't read your book understand, it's completely extreme.

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: Extreme. I never stayed alone before, without anybody nearby me even for one night. People were always caring and watching, helping me. In that time, I was totally out in the world by myself. I had never begged for food. I felt embarrassed. First, I went to the restaurant because I knew them. They said they will give me the food in the evening, leftover food. In the evening, I went there and ate the leftover food. Then I had food poisoning: diarrhea, vomiting (no money for medicine) for five or six

days. All my body was decaying, didn't function. I could not see clearly; I could not hear. In the end, my body became paralysed. But then I stayed in awareness. What happened is, all this sensory area dissolved; awareness became more clear, more open. Even thought dissolved. The physical sensation also dissolved. Awareness totally opened. There was no front, no back, no up, no down. Although my eyes were closed, but I knew, I can see there's no front and back. I knew what's going on, but it was not the normal thought. In our normal thought, there's images and a voice. But at that time there was knowing without image and voice in that moment, for six or seven hours.

Then I came back to life again. Slowly. When I came back to life, wow! Now everything became wonderful. Before, on the street, I feel very stressed, a bit dirty, a lot of dogs, mosquitos, unsafe. "Why did I come here? Should I go back to my monastery again?" After that, the street became my home. The unsafe feeling was gone. After that, I spent more than four years, very good. Everywhere, I felt very good. What I call, 'if you love the world, the world loves you back.' That's the title of my book, *In Love with the World*.

Elise: *In Love with the World*. When you were sharing that story, I think about stories you hear about near-death experiences and how people's perspective on life completely change when they've somehow accessed some different place. How do you make sense of what happened before and after this food poisoning? Why did it become good afterwards? What changed?

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: I think one thing is I let go, let go, let go. Because before, I had a kind of ego: I am the writer, abbot, teacher. So many things there. Such a level. I could not "be here." This was dirty etc...so I let go. Let those layers go. The letting go was not just giving up. Actually, I was finding, discovering more and more within myself. The awareness was incredible. I think that really helped me. We are not just hollow; we are complete.

Elise: This just came to my mind, and I don't know if it's appropriate to bring up but a lot is going on in the world at the moment with psychedelic drugs that people take. It's been researched in the field of medicine. People have an event that opens up some kind of awareness. It just reminded me of that when you're talking about this experience. Anyway, moving on....

I wanted to bring up a topic that I know is really an advanced practice and concept around "no self." I want to flag it to the listeners that you can spend a whole lifetime studying this. You shared a story in the book about Nagasena and the Chariot. It links to what you were just talking about, letting go, letting go, ego. Can you share what is meant by no self in the Buddhist concept and why it's relevant for us in our lives?

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: Yes. Normally, there are three senses of self: unhealthy sense of self, healthy sense of self, and then the luminous self or self beyond self. There are three layers. So normally, what we perceive of self is the unhealthy one. That is very tight, rigid, what we call permanent, meaning no flexibility, very tight.

Elise: It's solid.

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: Solid. Yes. Very sensitive. What we call easy to cry, easy to disappear, easy to burn, easy to freeze. You say, "Hi, how are you? I am fine." But inside, you're crying.

Elise: That's like most of the world. We're all pretending everything's fine.

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: Yes. Fine. So that's what we call the outer layer: unhealthy sense of self. Then when we go deeper into the unhealthy sense of self, there's healthy sense of self, which is love, compassion, awareness, wisdom. These are there, for example, unhealthy sense of self tells you, "You're important. Everything else is not important." You grab first. But if

you follow that, you will not feel happy, at a deeper level. No matter how much you achieve, you still feel hollow. If you follow, listen to the healthy sense of self, help others, do charity work, you'll feel really happy on a deeper level. You'll feel who you are. When you really learn something, you feel really happy. When you're aware. This is why meditation helps. People don't know why just watching your breath, makes you happy. When I was young, I felt it's stupid: breathing in, breathing out. Tomorrow, breathing in. Next day, again, breathing in. Just breathing. How come you will be free from panic? Actually, you're connected with a more healthy sense of self: awareness, love, compassion, and wisdom. This healthy sense of self is very important. We need to have a compassionate self, meaningful self, the courage, wisdom. It's not the Buddhist saying, "All selves. You have to get it all." In the healthy self, no need to get it all. That helps our lives, actually, become more peaceful, successful. Benefit for you, benefit for others. Win-win situation.

Then at a deeper level, we have the essence, what we call the luminous self, or the self beyond self. That is actually is the big self. That self is everywhere, but at the same time, nowhere. That is the sky. The sky itself. Sometimes what we call non-self because you cannot grab it. You cannot grab the sky. But it is there. It's not nothing, but does not exist. From the intellectual mind, from this conceptual mind, you cannot really understand it, only through an experiential level. That is really who we are.

Elise: I'm aware of the time. We're going close this conversation, and listeners can get more answers from you by joining your courses. But in that story that you told about Nagasena, and it was something about a chariot. If I said, "Well, what do you mean? I'm Elise, and I'm a mother. I feel pain. It's my pain if someone pinches me. These are my thoughts." Can you just say a little bit more about how could it not be me?

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: So the sense of self - at the surface level, unhealthy. No flexibility. Permanent. Independent, meaning wants to control

everything. But then when we look at the essence of that, a lot of pieces of your sense of self. There is the name, there is the body, there's your story, your experience. Most of them also depends on the way others treat you: from your parents, your child. Because of your job, or are the director or whatever. It's all pieces. Many, many pieces. These pieces are what we call interdependent. Not just one, single. Then it changes by timing. Impermanence. Therefore, when we really look at it, cannot really grab it. At the same time, it has function. It is interconnected with everybody. So other is part of you, also you are part of others. We're all interdependent, not independent. There's a lot of connections there: love and compassion. There is a need to have a lot of awareness, wisdom, to see the pieces. In this healthy sense of self, you see this.

Elise: Thank you. Do we have time for one more question?

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: Yes.

Elise: Great. In the Western world, there's a phrase, "Ignorance is bliss," but in Buddhism, ignorance is the cause of a lot of suffering. Can you share what is meant by ignorance in the context of meditation and Buddhism?

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: Ignorance is not knowing the nature of reality. For example, sometimes, you don't know it looks like you're quite happy, but then that may cause big suffering. If you know, there's a big hole there. There might be some fire or heat down there, thorns down there. Grass covers the surface level. If you walk on that, you will fall into the hole. That's ignorance. You don't know. But then from the surface, if you don't see it, it looks like you're happy. You're walking happily. So maybe ignorance is bliss until you reach the hole, but when you reach the hole, it becomes a big problem. When we learn, to bring awareness, at the beginning, sometimes, it looks like it's getting worse. There's some confusion. Before you understand, there's some confusion, which is a good process. Sometimes that is not so easy, it feels not such a happy process. So that might happen. But in the end, when you really

get it, then you will really feel happy. You feel like who you are. You feel like, “This is fundamentally who I am”

Elise: Thank you very much. Again, I just wanted to thank you so much for your time.

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: You’re most welcome.

Elise: I hope the listeners go and check out all of your books and your online programs. Thank you so much for your contribution and your teaching.

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: Thank you very much. I’m very happy to spend this time. Thank you very much for you too. **