Open Question Podcast Episode 205: Science Magic Grace with Jakob Leschly

Elizabeth:

There's this notion of the teachings being pristine, but it's really the subjective mind that brings them to life and animates them. You know, what are they calling us to do? And how do we approach things? I find that really important. And I sometimes think we're just expecting this all to happen for us automatically. And often people are not really clear about what it is we're called to do in order to bring these to life. I think a lot of people feel disappointed in the Dharma because of that. And there's so much to talk about—well, what is our task as practitioners? And I feel you speak to that so well. In the book *The Logic of Faith* in particular, I was asking myself continuously: what is the mind poised for insight? I like that word "poise" because it's not like the mind has some ontological truth, but it has a relationship to the phenomena that it continues to encounter.

Jakob:

You know, what's so interesting about our situation…in the 2,500-year history of Buddhism, this has happened before--that it's transitioning into another culture. So there's a tension between the attitudes and the culture of this particular situation that we have in the modern world. And one of the things that we've sometimes grown accustomed to is that you subscribe to something and then it's given to you. But the Dharma is obviously different because we have to be proactive. We actually have to do something. We can't just take a pill. You know, I remember Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, he once said "Okay, Jakob, open your mouth." And then he said, "You think that I can just pop the Dharma in there, like a little pill, don't you?" and I stood there with a wide gaping mouth. [laughter]

Welcome to Open Question: A Call to Inner Brilliance. I'm Elizabeth Mattis Namgyel, and this is OQ 205: Science Magic Grace.

Jakob Leschly became a student of Buddhism upon meeting his teacher, the renowned Tibetan master Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. His other teachers include the accomplished Tulku Pema Wangyal Rinpoche and Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche.

In the early 80s Jakob did a three-year retreat in France, after which he worked on English translations of many significant texts, including Shabkar and Wondrous Dance of Illusion. He has served as an oral interpreter for several lamas. In the 1990s Jakob lived in northern India, translating material for Siddhartha's Intent, Dzongzar Khyentse Rinpoche's organization, which is dedicated to supporting Buddhadharma worldwide.

Jakob has a fresh, clear and friendly way of presenting challenging aspects of the teachings. His enthusiasm for dharma is contagious and inspiring. I always enjoy

talking with Jakob…as you will hear, we pretty much laughed our way through the entire interview.

JL: I guess it's a bit weaning off our habitual tendency to, like you were saying, expect that the world is going to do it for us, you know? We nevertheless have to do the journey ourselves.

EMN: Well said.

JL: And that can be disappointing if you were hoping it was going to be done for you.

EMN: Yeah. That's what it is. I think also these days, you know, people really want the world to be comfortable for them. Like they're holding the world responsible for their own wellbeing in certain ways. And I think this is very challenging.

JL: I think it's like transitioning from a possible bad lifestyle into good lifestyle, you know? Becoming healthy, eating well, exercising--and it doesn't necessarily appeal to our laziness or our comfort zone. It's rather a question of getting out of our comfort zone, I guess.

EMN: Yeah. Kongtrul Rinpoche once said “this really isn't about being peaceful or comfortable. It's about being awake.”

JL: Sometimes we talk about merit as actually…in the sense of we might have the fortune that things become uncomfortable, sufficiently uncomfortable for us, that we think something needs to be done. And we might realize that it doesn't necessarily come from the outside. It's going to have to be a change that comes from how we relate to reality, not the reality itself that's supposed to position itself and meet our expectations. We might just have the circumstances that lead to that insight that something needs to be done. I remember Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, he would describe the circumstances of the Buddha with him encountering the various sufferings of the world as really being a display of Manjushri. Being a display of this, you could say, innate potential for awakening. And this was all sort of a magical display that led him towards truth, led him towards Dharma.

EMN: You know, we don't have the agency to change the world, but we have the agency to work with the way we utilize things. Like you say merit could arise in very different ways. It could be very challenging, but how do we step up to it and how do we use it as an opportunity for ourselves? And I think when I look at the life story of the Buddha, I think, well, there's a certain fierceness in that way with him, that he was always exploring, you know?

JL: Yeah. Sometimes when you look at the Buddha and you think he was insanely courageous, his project was really getting to the bottom of what ails the world everywhere at all times. Based on that encounter he had with the various forms of suffering, he actually said he was determined to remedy something as vast as that. I mean, that's a pretty big aspiration.

EMN: It's a big aspiration. And it's such an amazing example. And I think sometimes we look at the Buddha, we look at our teachers, and we tend to deify them rather than seeing that actually this is the spirit that we need to bring to our lives. You know, it's such an example. And it also means that no matter how hard things get they're workable, you can utilize it for something. Even if it's hard, you know, it might not turn out the way you want it to, but things are always opportunities if you take them as such.

JL: That's so true.

EMN: And this is a kind of optimism, right?

JL: Well it actually comes down to what you speak about in *The Logic of Faith*, which is that everything leans. Nothing is stuck in being a problem. I mean, sometimes we'd just like to whine and people say, "yeah, it really is terrible." And then you have a Buddhist friend that says, "well you know, maybe you could turn it around." [laughter] Or we might go "I don't want to turn around. I just want to be loved and pampered and told that you feel sorry for me." But I mean, that's implicit really in the nature of dependent arising. And like Nagarjuna says, for those who understand emptiness, everything is possible.

EMN: Right. Not shutting down around ideas you have about how things are or should be. And in this world of possibility or an expanded experience that comes from the subject, the way we look at things, the mind of inquiry. This is what I want to talk to you about first, this tradition of inquiry. And I was so inspired when I heard you teach, about two months ago…you talked on that tale of two sciences. And you also wrote an article that I just read, a very short article. And in it, you spoke about the shared approach, a verification through observation in the tradition of both modern science and in Buddhism--the fact that we use inquiry in certain ways in both modern science and in Buddhism. That's what they share in their approach.

But they're also very different. And if you don't mind, I'd like to read just a short couple sentences that you wrote in that article. And maybe you can comment on that as a kind of way to set a foundation for our discussion on inquiry.

JL: Sure.

EMN: “Suffice it to say that the objectivist thrust of modern science results in information and data, while the subjectivist thrust of Buddhist science, Dharma, results in wisdom. This is not really about better or worse, good or bad. The author of this article [which would be you] would rather fly in an airplane constructed by modern scientists and engineers than by Tibetan meditators.” Yep. I would too. “But yet for the important issues of life, he chooses to consult the latter.”

JL: Yeah. I should right away apologize to any Tibetan engineers who might be listening.

EMN: Yeah that would be the ultimate. [laughter]

JL: But, you know, I'm profoundly awed by the enlightened science of Tibet. But you know, we have both modern science and Buddhist science. And from the very start really in all the Buddhist traditions, we acknowledge this famous sutra where the Buddha--I think it's the Buddha talking to what was called the Kalama people. He said, you should never accept what I teach out of respect for my person, but on the basis of your own critical inquiry. And he gives the example of purchasing gold, where you want to verify the authenticity of the gold that you're going to purchase. And the same applies to the teaching. And that of course also is basic to modern science. And that's why in the modern world science elicits such incredible respect.

I remember there was one Facebook group that somebody introduced me to that was called *f…I love science*. And what everybody on that group loved was that you could rely on science because it actually substantiated its claims with what we could verify. But the thing is, we look at the mind and we can actually verify what is happening in our mind. I know that I have anger. I know I have desire. I know I'm jealous or whatever it might be. It's not as if it's a mystery, but it's just intangible. But just because it's intangible doesn't mean that it's not something that is verifiable, observable, and particularly workable. And so that's where modern science of course works tremendously successfully in manipulating the phenomenal world and what is material, everything that can be observed and quantified measured and so on. That's the scope of modern science.

And when I say the thrust of Buddhism is subjectivist, it's not that it excludes the objective, but it allocates primacy to the observer. We do have within neuroscience, we have various camps. Francisco Varela, he talks about these three camps. One that is entirely what they call limitivist, which is just materialist. There’s no connection between consciousness and the observed phenomenon—if there even is a consciousness. So

that's entirely material. Then there are those like quantum physics, that allocate the role of the subjective in our perceptions. And then you have those that would say everything is consciousness. So you have different camps. There's not a unanimous agreement in neuroscience, for example, around the nature of consciousness. But the overall scope of 90% of science is really that everything is material. And that's something that people would trust, that can be verified.

But in Buddhism, we operate with an equally critical approach. It's just that it situates what we experience as originating from our consciousness. So that's really essential to understand that the science of Buddhism doesn't conflict necessarily with the objectivist science.

EMN: In certain traditions we talk about that you can't separate the mind from the world it experiences. In other words, subject and object are interdependent and arise interdependently like in the Madhyamika.

JL: Yeah. And also, this is reflected in our everyday experience. I mean, we can see how our world really changes on the basis of our attitude to it. It's verifiable. But even on an analytical level, we can break everything down. Like you also touch on in *The Logic of Faith*--that everything leans and our perceptions are entirely our own. It's our own interpretation of what is, in fact, just a web of causes and conditions.

EMN: Yeah. It almost seems like a leap of faith to assume that something is just as you see it.

JL: That's right.

EMN: In a material way or--so much of the conflict that we experience in life is because we think we're right. But how can we be right if everybody is having kind of a different experience of things? And this is not to also negate the material world, but just to show the incredible relativity of how things are.

JL: Makes so much sense. And that's also why you could say the beauty of this understanding of relativity is also that you can see the non-aggression that's implicit when we actually respect the views of others and understand that others are seeing things in a particular way.

EMN: Yeah. It works against fundamentalism. I always think of fundamentalism as the inability to embrace complexity, you know?

JL: That's right, I agree.

EMN: That aspect of the mind that just wants to shut down and be right. And then on the other hand, when you're right, you're always kind of in a fragile state because something can prove you wrong. So it's like belief on one hand, and doubt on the other hand arises around this kind of misunderstanding. So what would you say then? How do we utilize the mind to understand things in a more accurate manner?

JL: In the Buddhist tradition what's so delightful is that the Buddha didn't give us the answer. But the Buddha just said, look. He actually did not present a dogma or a mantra or something that we could hold on to. He said our suffering comes from this insecurity that wants to hold onto a rigid position. Just the tendency of wanting to have something that we can hold on to. And the Buddha identified that this is exactly what drives suffering. And that's where his great teaching on no-self, dependent, arising, spells out that we're not denying the presence of our reality. But we are identifying how we misinterpret and misalign ourselves with reality through this insecure, confused attempt to solidify ourselves and the phenomenal world. And he didn't say, okay, get with the program people. He rather just said, have a look. And he encouraged us to--like you're promoting, which is inquiry. But that is so much the beauty. We have that famous example of, you know, it's dusk and we think we come across a snake on the path. And then somebody nudges us, saying, Hey, it's not a snake. It's just a striped rope. And the solution of the situation, which initially appears to be terrifying, is not that we negotiate with the snake or the good Lord takes away the snake. It really just lies in us seeing what is. The whole misery is resolved through looking, inquiry.

EMN: We're working on accurate discernment. We call that *prajna* in Sanskrit. Is there a way to look at things in an accurate way?

JL: You know Chogyam Trungpa, in *The Myth of Freedom* there's a place where he says awakening could quite simply be defined as us stepping out of self-deception. That in a way is my definition of prajna. It’s that quality that can see through deception.

EMN: What is deception here?

JL: Deception is simply just that nobody's done anything wrong, except we just got lost. We’re just hallucinating. The way forward is just to look clearly. But the delusion has taken place and we've become habituated to it. So we have a challenge ahead of us. But then again, it's workable because innately, this is just hallucination. It doesn't possess any reality. But of course, while we're in it, while we're in the dream, it seems very real.

EMN: Let's talk a little bit about real. [laughter]

JL: Can we have something real, please? [laughter]

EMN: This is such an interesting inquiry on the path. What does that mean? We often say things aren't real. We cling to things as real. What does that even mean? It's a part of the inquiry, right? What do we usually think is real?

JL: If we look at the five skandhas, then the second skandha, feeling, is where we begin to have that very binary relationship of like and dislike. And that's where the kleshas originate from, right? There's something there, out there, and I like it. And I don't like it. And as these rigidify, I guess you could say, the perceptions become increasingly solid. And also the subjective that constitutes that experience also begins to become correspondingly solid.

EMN: If you didn't cling to its solidity, then it would have kind of an impermanent or multi-dimensional quality to it…

JL: Yeah, I think that's what we're supposed to do on the path, right? [laughter] We're supposed to see through the hoax.

EMN: We're supposed to see through the hoax. So this notion of something being real from its own side, or being solid--like when you sit in meditation, you know, when things arise, it's very uncomfortable because emotions and thoughts seem very vivid and real, and then we get overwhelmed. So sometimes when people even start to meditate, they get more neurotic and overwhelmed by the rich energy of their experience. You know, it's so uncomfortable.

JL: Don't you think the neurosis was always there? It's just like all of a sudden, you're just becoming painfully aware of this. Because normally we manage to distract ourselves. Right?

EMN: There's so much there.

JL: We're so used to just being entangled in distraction. And meditation is a place where all of a sudden, you're sort of just nakedly there with what is. And the patterns of what's happening inside, they're obviously going to continue. And there we are without distraction. And the usual drama seems to be very vividly manifest, and we weren't that conscious of it before. I don't know if we become more neurotic, but I guess we become painfully aware.

EMN: It's very comfortable.

JL: It's very humbling.

[music]

EMN: Speaking of the Buddha and this mind of an open question, I want to ask you if you would tell us about your experience of some great living masters you've met. You've had the opportunity to spend time with His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, who is a very great accomplished master in our tradition. And I wanted to see if you can talk about what it was like being around someone like that. I think it could be very helpful in terms of what we're talking about.

JL: I'm only too happy to do that, but, you know, words falls short, right?

EMN: Yeah.

JL: When I met Rinpoche, I didn't know who he was. I was in Kalimpong and it was just around Tibetan new year, the night before Tibetan new year, 1975. I was in the temple and then some monks said, do you want to meet Rinpoche? And I had no idea who this was and they took me upstairs. And there was this big, beautiful, possibly the most beautiful living being I'd ever seen, you know? And then through an interpreter, we had a conversation. But then the next day, there were all these offerings being made by Khampa women with huge trays of offerings and so on. And I actually, I didn't know what to do. So I hadn't brought anything. And incidentally, there was Vivian Kurtz, who I didn't know at the time. But she handed me three sticks of incense. And behind these Khampa women who offering these gigantic trays of butter cookies, and what have you, I stood there with three puny sticks of incense.

And Rinpoche just laughed. And we both got the joke in this sort of rather diminutive offering. And that was actually such a moment of understanding, really. The sense of camaraderie and that we met and it had nothing to do with being Tibetan or foreign or anything. And just the comedy of this. With Rinpoche there was always this complete lack of cultural barriers of any kind. Rinpoche was, you could say, the ultimate humanist. Rinpoche was there as a human and sympathetic to everybody. And there was never any selection or preference. With Rinpoche there was never ever preference for Tibetans or foreigners. And there was just this great sense of humanity and warmth. He made everybody feel good. It was very sacred. That was a very, very luminous and extraordinary atmosphere around Rinpoche. But it was always underscored by this warmth and kindness and sympathy. So even the shortcomings--you know, around someone Rinpoche, it was pretty obvious that we're all pretty human and have various shortcomings. But there was a lightness around it. Rinpoche used to joke with me about my heart breaks, or my bad Tibetan, or my practice, or whatever, but it was always tinged with this warmth and sympathy.

EMN: Did he tease you?

JL: Oh, a lot.

EMN: It sounds like that. Sweet.

JL: Yeah, he was very, very kind. And of course when he would give guidance, you'd really pay attention to what he was saying. Actually, in *Brilliant Moon*, there's Matthieu Ricard who says something about--well, it's more in general about the spiritual friend, but of course he's referring to Khyentse Rinpoche. And he says, a truth like impermanence might be so obvious, but when it's spoken and when we're reminded by somebody who carries such weight and authenticity, it takes on a whole different validity. It really deeply impressed.

EMN: Yeah. All the non-biased compassion you just described, but also perhaps his humility and interest and curiosity…did you see that quality in him?

JL: Well very much. The warmth that comes from freedom, you know what I mean? You could say that's universal and that's also why we recognize it in somebody like Rinpoche. Because it's something that we all have, something we all know. But there, it has really fully blossomed and become manifest. And so there is this joy, there's this kindness. But it all comes from, you can say, cutting through the deception, cutting through the unnecessary baggage that we tend to drag with us, right? There was a very definite sense of freedom and a definite sense of something can be done. Something needs to be done and it can be done.

EMN: It's so helpful to meet…there are very few people like him, but these are qualities here and there that we can encounter in the world and say, this is where the spiritual path leads. And it's so helpful, that kind of just example. And you mentioned before that he had such an extraordinary physical presence. Can you just describe that a little bit?

[laughter]

JL: Rinpoche would probably have been selected for basketball. He was sort of the size of Shaquille O'Neal or something like that. He was, what was he? He was probably over seven feet tall. And in his young days he was tall and lanky. And then as he got older, he had some big bones. And he was always exquisitely beautiful. And, you know, part of the physicality of Rinpoche was that in his later years, he would generally just wear a petticoat. And he had an extraordinary torso, very broad chest, and very golden skin. And so much of the encounter with Rinpoche was just that it was this magnificent, beautiful human being. And he had this very intelligent and warm face that was just very inviting. And so that sort of generated an extraordinary sense of his physical presence. But it was of course also aligned with his incredible presence, you know, spiritual presence.

And also one thing that comes to mind a lot when we're talking about Rinpoche is also what he's really instigated in terms of his heritage. Because he really passed this on to his close students. And we actually have a culture or an environment of close students that Rinpoche really shaped. And I'm particularly thinking of persons like Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche, Chokling Rinpoche, Jigme Khyentse Rinpoche, Tulku Pema Wangyal, and so many other teachers. And like Tulku Thundop says, what was unique about Rinpoche was that everybody would feel he knew you very, very well and you were unique to him. But I mean that lack of territoriality and that lack of…there was just a natural humility in the group of students around him. And I see this reflected in the style of his close students, like Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche and Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche and so forth. And yourself, you met Rinpoche also. You should tell us a little bit about that.

EMN: One thing that I always remembered is his scent. He smelled like milk to me. This whole thing I have about inquiry comes from meeting him. I thought when I met him I would find--the idea was this old wise man that would give me…you know, like someone with a long beard and glasses…that kind of stereotype. And what I found was somebody who was completely open, almost childlike, and totally engaged and in awe of the world. So when I think of Rinpoche, I think of the term *E Ma Ho*. Like he was living in the E Ma Ho, like how amazing it is, or wow. So he had that mind of inquiry. He had that mind that engaged the phenomenal world in that way. And there was so much joy and so much kind of tenderness that way. And I thought in the beginning, “oh, this must be where the spiritual path leads.” And this has continued to inform me on my path. And it wasn't his teachings, for me. It was just his presence that got me all the time.

JL: There was a lot of freshness around Rinpoche.

EMN: Yes, so fresh!

JL: Yeah. A lot of joy, a lot of light, a lot of humor.

EMN: Actually, it's really funny. Because I went to see him one day when Kongtrul Rinpoche was in Tibet. And I found some mushrooms in the market, some dried mushrooms. And I thought it was really rare, and there was just a small handful. And I put them in a bag and I thought, I don’t know, I offered it like it was some great thing. And he looked at me, and he was like, what is this? He didn't look very enthusiastic, you know? It was such an interesting…he just looked at me like I was from another planet. But he often laughed when he saw me. I think I was humorous to him. He definitely laughed. And also you know, Jakob, when he touched your head, his hand was so big when he gave you the *chawang*, you know, his hand was so enormous on

your head. I remember that. And how warm and all encompassing his touch of his hand on your head. These kinds of things.

JL: You know, he had very long nails. So sometimes he would just take the nails and just dig them into your skull.

EMN: I never had that one. [laughter]

JL: Sometimes he would sort of gently slap me on the cheek. And you know it's true, his hands had this quality of being really warm and yet never sticky or humid or anything. Just really warm and then he would give you a little slap or whatever.

EMN: I think he was quite fond of you.

JL: I think he was fond of everybody. I think so. He really was very, very loving.

EMN: It's such great fortune to have met him.

JL: But in this wonderful, not-sticky way. Just joyously engaging with persons. And so much out of a trust in the sanity. And of course, we'd come to him as students and practitioners of the path and it was as if he was, you know, really trusting that we would be able to do that. Joyously encouraging that. Yeah. What we're doing here is we're gushing about our teacher, but our teacher never was there wanting to be adored or objectified as somebody special. He wanted us to realize something with that. I mean that was the whole purpose of his existence, right? I was just thinking of this reflects a bit these two lineages of Dharma that we have. One is the Dharma of transmission, which is all the, you could say, heritage of the body of knowledge that we have accumulated in Buddhism, you know. The Buddha's words and the commentary and so on. But then we also have the lineage of realization. And I mean, what really makes the Buddhist teachings so valuable is when there is not just all the books, but there are persons who've have fully realized and manifested enlightenment. That's so extraordinary. This is really important.

EMN: Very important. I appreciate that. Because this notion of lineage is so important to all of this. I was talking to Judy Lief, one of Trungpa Rinpoche’s main students--she's so wonderful--about lineage. I think it is for her that all the older students have this history with Rinpoche and they have all these stories to tell. And sometimes the newer students feel that they've missed something. I don't know, I never met Trungpa Rinpoche but I feel so deeply connected to the wisdom.

JL: Yeah, me too.

EMN: Yeah, do you? And I think it's through the people who have met the teacher. That's why I wanted to ask you about this. We can carry through that information. And like you said, that's merit. That's one thing we can do is just keep that story, tell that story and help people feel that connection. It seems very important. It can be inspiring for others.

JL: I have the same thing with Trungpa Rinpoche also. And I would always think how fortunate these people who have met Trungpa Rinpoche are. And actually initially I was in Denmark, and I thought either I'm going to go west to Boulder and study with Chogyam Trungpa, or I'm going to go east and study with Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. I ended up going to the east and studying with Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. And I thought, oh, I didn't study with Trungpa Rinpoche, I studied with somebody else. But then just a few years ago it dawned on me: I am a student of Chogyam Trungpa. I mean, my whole way of thinking about the Dharma, so much of it has been shaped by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. And so actually I consider myself a student of Trungpa Rinpoche and I think I'm legit in doing that. And also people who never met Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, I don't think they should ever think that they're not students of him. I mean, you look at some of the beautiful books with Matthieu Ricard's photos and people look at that and they receive blessing. There's something beyond words that touches them and they receive blessings of Rinpoche. And hey, who's to say they're not students of his? That could inform their path, that can inspire their path and, you know, direct them.

EMN: Yeah, I agree. It seems to be the case. Many, many people have said that to me. Just by looking at a photograph of a teacher or reading a passage or meeting a student of that teacher, you know, someone who's met that teacher. I think a lot about lineage and how are we going to keep going in this in contemporary culture? How is this going to continue? And you know, what is our responsibility, what is our task in this? And how can we be a benefit to each other in keeping this.

[music]

EMN: I've been thinking about this term “magic.” You said something that kind of connected to this earlier, too, about living in this kind of bigger, expanded world where you're not so shut down. It's like this world of possibility that you enter into through the Dharma. An example of that would be you look at a picture and somehow it opens you up in some way, and you're connected to your own nature. I talked to one Lama recently and he said to me he feels like the world is losing its magic. And I found that very curious and interesting. So I started to think about what is magic actually, because I think people are shutting down a little bit around technology or getting caught up in very strong, extreme views. Which is the opposite of opening up into the world of possibility. You know, magic--maybe it means to stay open in the midst of even a

crisis. Can we bear to stay open and not shut down in fear? Or when overcome by beauty, can we tolerate this kind of enjoyment without grasping? Or while struggling with something we don't understand? Can we remain that big, you know? Because that seems to be the place where possibilities arise. I just wanted to ask you, because in our tradition, the Vajrayana tradition in particular, we talk about sacred world. But it's not trying to find a pleasing place, or living around difficult things.

JL: This is such a key theme really in the entire path. Because that is implicit in the wider perspective that prajna opens up too, the vipassana, and the scope of this seeing more of our reality, right? Because we were unfortunately limited. We have a half-life where we're not really seeing reality and what we're doing on the path is of course removing the veils. You know, in one way we could discuss this from the sort of the ordinary perspective, like the Lama who says the world is losing its magic. And there was one of the early fathers of social sciences, Max Ernst, who sort of deplored the lack of what he called enchantment. The sort of disenchantment of the modern world and re-enchantment and all of that. And so there's all sorts of romantic ways to go about that.

But I actually think the key really to genuinely touch on--the genuine abiding magic of our reality--is actually something that you touch very skillfully. I'm sorry to just be completely buttering you up here or whatever or flattering you. [laughter] But I was very impressed with *The Logic of Faith* because it actually achieved what very often is lost in the discussion around emptiness and dependent arising is how it's actually the entranceway into what you call grace. Which is what I would say the wider perspective that appreciates reality without grasping, without retreating into reaction when there's a crisis, or without grasping onto beauty. But actually relating fully to reality without fixating. And that's where this quality of grace emerges. And that is very much what's prevalent in the whole celebration of reality that we see as a natural expression of Buddhist culture. Of course within individuals, in terms of their qualities of enlightenment, and also in Buddhist culture as such, all the artwork that enlightenment has produced. You know, enlightened societies have produced beautiful pieces of sacred art.

And there's so much that quality of joy and goodness and artistic expression that comes from that. And that is from this place of grace that is no longer held by confusion. And that's where we begin to see the world, not in terms of its suffering, but in terms of its abiding, innate, natural, enlightened qualities. Jamgon Mipham Rinpoche, he actually talks about an interesting aspect of *pramana*--valid knowledge about our reality. He says of course conventionally, then, everything abides as we would ordinarily perceive it. But he says there's a reality which is the reality of when there's no longer any confusion, which is seeing sacred reality or seeing purely. In Tibetan, [inaudible]…the pramana that sees reality purely, or that sees pure perception. And that's where the whole Vajrayana vision originates in the sense of that innately and

as the ground nature. Everything has this luminous quality that's not held by our ordinary limiting, you could say reduction of reality. So you could say magic is actually the natural condition of things. And it's about us finding our way to that. It doesn't need to be conjured up or created, but it is actually the nature of reality.

EMN: Beautiful. I wonder, too, if many of the great scientists also had this sense of awe about the universe. I even just remember being young and watching Carl Sagan. I remember he was always in awe of things. There was a sense of just appreciation and humility around looking at the natural world. But we're talking in a very big way with the Dharma of also being in awe of things that are really difficult, not shutting down around the harder things. To me that makes this a very unconditional kind of wellbeing.

JL: Yeah. I think it's something that is very much key within the entire path. Right from the moment that we just sit down on the cushion and we're a little bit, how do you say, wary of the grip that the ordinary conceptual mind has on us. And we begin to sort of not be that caught by it. Already there something is beginning to happen. And of course, like you were saying, we can also see this in its fully manifested form as the result of the path. When you see someone like Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, or Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche's students, the great teachers that we have with us to this day.

EMN: I love what you just said: when you sit down to practice there's this opening, or there can be. And people have that all the time. And I find that very encouraging and important to say, because I think people are suffering so much right now in the world. This has been a tough time for a lot of people. It's very important that this is seen as not something impractical. I think the sense of awe or magic is part of the human condition. And it's not divorced from this world that we're really challenged by and struggling with too.

JL: Suffering has always been there. And modern society is so much focused on shielding us from discomfort that also suffering very often is institutionalized and hidden away. And so much of the way that we represent our societies, this ongoing self-congratulation about our achievements, and that's just not working. Things are breaking down. But I think in many societies, there's always this proximity of persons dying of illness, of decrepitude, of frustration and the humble recognition that there's a limit to what we can do and achieve and so on. Whereas in our society, we've been a bit on steroids believing that we could achieve bliss through material accomplishments and that's obviously not working. So there is a lot of discouragement and a disillusioned spirit and so on, but it's nothing new, really. I remember once I was talking a little bit about—it must've been something Buddhist obviously--and somebody says that it's all very good with this enlightenment business, but how about the dark side?

[laughter]

JL: I never really thought about that, but I realized actually in Buddhism, that's what we start with.

EMN: Exactly.

JL: And then you can say that's terrible marketing, but the Buddha actually starts off talking about suffering. Chogyam Trungpa highlights that the Buddha could have just started off about love and light, but he doesn't. He's being honest. He's not being a salesperson. He's saying there's a pebble in the shoe and there is suffering. And that's the dark side. And that's our point of departure--that we can actually work with that. This we also talked about earlier, how everything is workable. So the beauty, the gospel of the Buddhist teaching is in that things lean and they're dependently arisen. We can work with our own experiences in terms of what's happening. And also we can work with the conditions and we shouldn't retreat into being overwhelmed. That's a nice moralistic attitude, but it's really also something that is rendered workable if we practice meditation, if there is a practice of actually sitting down and beginning to be less overwhelmed by our psychological content and discovering a bit of wiggle room within the space between the thoughts and the space between the mental events that happen. It gives us a lot of breathing space.

EMN: Special thanks to Jakob. You can see that the kindness and openness of Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche has rubbed off on him.

[music]