

INTERVIEW WITH GESHE MICHAEL ROACH & CHRISTIE MCNALLY

[The following interview was conducted by T. Monkyi for publication in a Buddhist magazine a few days after Geshe Michael's Easter 2003 three year retreat teachings.]

T. MONKYI: I thought it would be useful to have this interview with you, Geshe la, and you Christie hla, just because there might be some confusion in terms of the form that you're taking as you come out of retreat, the aspect, since it's not really usual in our tradition, the Gelukpa tradition, and there might be questions in people's minds about it, and we thought it might be useful to air people's concerns a little and see what you have to say about questions that people might have. In particular during your last series of teachings, a number of letters were circulated to students including a poem written by you describing your spiritual life and in particular your realization of emptiness. In addition you mentioned that you had been staying in retreat with a lady, and that you had changed your appearance to reflect a change in status concerning your practice and personal life.

As you can imagine, some of these things have brought up a number of questions amongst your direct students, and will undoubtedly raise a stir in the dharma world, east and west. So I guess the first question is, why did you decide to come out with this publicly?

GESHE MICHAEL: OK good, that's a good question. I had thought not to talk about my personal meditational experiences until just before I died, and then I thought I would have to say something. The main one had occurred when I was 23 or 24 years old, and I had intended, and it's traditional not to speak directly about that particular experience until ... at all, during your life. It's traditional for a person not to mention it at all, and I hadn't ever spoken about it directly to anyone except my closest lamas. Well, the main thing was I thought it might help people if they knew that someone claimed that they had really been able to do that, and that that kind of experience really was true, and really did exist, and I also thought it might help some people believe more in my current outer change in my appearance and in my outer life and in my practices. And so I felt it was a good time. And so that was the answer to that thing.

And I think on the outer level, my external appearance, throughout my life, my relationship to divine beings has evolved and then it reached a point where I thought the possibility of misperception was more of a problem than just telling people openly that this is how I perceive the world and this is what has happened to me. So I thought it was a good time to be very frank and open and honest with people about how I perceive the world. And I had a close friend at one of the FPMT centers, a director, who came to me before the retreat and said, "There's rumors about you and one of your students, and it's going to hurt your mission. You should think about what's more important – your image as a senior monk and teacher or your personal feeling about your practice, and you might want to reevaluate that balance. What do you think is more beneficial?"

And I didn't hesitate at all. We were sitting alone in a room and I said, "I honestly believe that it's more important for me to do what a divine being might indicate for me is important for me to do than all of the impressions that people might have." What I'm trying to say bluntly is that if a lot of people thought I was being a bad person or a bad monk or even a corrupt person, that was less important than doing what I felt a divine being wanted me to do, even if everyone thought it

was crazy. And I've never had a doubt about that. I think that it's more important for me to get enlightened and to follow what I perceive to be direct divine instructions than to be thought of as a bad person. But frankly, it's very difficult. Frankly, I value the perceived integrity of the sangha very highly. It's very important to me. And so it's been very difficult to think that people might lose faith in me. So it's not a light thing for me to do and it's not something easy for me to do, but the balance of what's more important is very clear to me.

Q: So you say that you've been receiving guidance from divine beings directly. How do your teachers...? Does that contradict your teachers' advice, or have you received instructions from your teacher directly, like your human manifesting teacher, to take on this aspect as well and to reveal your realizations and things like that, or is there a little bit of a hierarchy going on?

GMR. I think in our minds it's natural to perceive it as a hierarchy, as you say, but they're all the same person. What I forgot to mention when I spoke about Vajra Yogini appearing to Naropa hla, as his spiritual partner throughout the course of his life, the reason he left the monastery to become a yogi was an encounter with an old woman who turns out to be... You know everyone would think it was Vajra Yogini but later in his life he asked Tilopa who was the old woman and Tilopa said, "That was me." And I honestly perceive my monastic Tibetan teachers to be the same as Vajra Yogini, to be Vajra Yogini, who I perceive has been guiding me my whole life, so they're the same person.

Q: Do they endorse this? What do they say?

GMR: The question came up when there was the controversy about the protector, and a lot of people in the world perceived themselves as being put into the position of ... which by the way I don't practice and I never have. I've never even been given that practice. But I think a lot of people perceived themselves in the position of either obeying His Holiness or obeying their root lama. A lot of people were put into this difficult position. And I think you have to be very firm about not seeing them as separate beings, and what they are forcing you to do is to make a decision. When His Holiness seems to contradict your root lama, that puts you in a position of having to decide based on your knowledge and the teachings you've received throughout your whole life of what's the right thing to do.

And in many scriptures there's that quandary. Who do you follow? Which teacher's advice? When you get contradictory advice from two of your heart lamas, what do you do? And it happens a lot to people. And I think then you have to truly work on what is of greater benefit, and what will get you enlightened faster. The key is never to lose the perception of the dissenting lama as being the other lama. But then it puts you into the position of having to make very difficult spiritual choices based on your own understanding. And I think that's why they put you in that position.

Q: So when you get guidance from divine beings, does that come in the form of dreams, voices? Do you meet someone suddenly? How does that come to you?

GMR: In many ACI courses, I've tried to describe the final goal. And in the lower half of tantric practice, called *kya rim*, you try to imagine that people around you might be divine beings. That's what *kya* means in *kya rim*, to create a divine being around you and try to perceive them that way. But as your practice bears more fruit, if your practice is sincere and if you follow your vows strictly, then those karmic seeds ripen in your mind, and the same beings that other people would perceive as normal people, you perceive as divine beings. I like to call them angels. Maybe it's not so good in a dharma publication, but personally I like to call them angels. But you know what I'm talking about. And your perception of that being changes and they become a divine being for you, and they teach you.

And there's a story of Asanga who spent twelve years in a cave trying to meet Maitreya, and everybody knows this story but I'll repeat it because it's relevant here. He doesn't see Maitreya. He's upset. He leaves the cave. He goes back into the village to go back into the world, and on the side of the road he sees a dog that has been run over by a cart. And the dog's body is almost cut in half and the guts have spilled out and so Asanga stops and wonders what he can do to save the dog. And then he sees maggots growing in the dog's guts, and so he decides to pluck the maggots out. And then he understands that if he picks the maggots up with his fingers he'll crush them. The dog's body is rotting so he decides he'll pick them off with his tongue. So he closes his eyes and his face goes down and hits the ground. And he looks up and there's Maitreya. And then there's this funny conversation, right? "I've been meditating for twelve years. I've been calling you for twelve years. You didn't show yourself once. Now I'm licking maggots off a dog and suddenly you show yourself."

And Maitreya says, "Well you just went over the peak, you know, that's it. That's what it took for you to see me, you know." And the story is that Asanga is so happy that he puts Maitreya on his shoulders and runs around town with Maitreya on his shoulders. And everyone thought he was running around with a half-rotten dog on his shoulders. Everyone else saw it like that.

So the goal of all of our practice is that one day the karmic seeds you've planted in your mind by keeping your vows perfectly or as best as you can, and by studying and meditating and doing retreats, is that one day, not because you want to meet them or not because you're doing the part of *kya rim* where you are pretending that they are divine beings, but you just are sitting in a room with a divine being and they are teaching you. So that's the way it happens. They are not divine and they are not normal. They are what each person will see according to how well they have kept their practice.

Q: So for example you receive instructions from Christie, seeing her as a divine being?

GMR: [laughs] Who is there?

Q: No, I'm just asking your experience; I'll ask Christie her experience.

GMR: I personally throughout my life have had the fortune to perceive – I don't think perceive is a good word maybe, but – in my personal experience of many of the people that other people might see as normal people around me is that they are divine beings, and I do receive constant instructions from them. And that's the goal of our practice.

Q: So, yes.

GMR: I hate to say yes. It's not really proper to say yes, but you can draw your own conclusions.

Q: In a manner of speaking then, maybe.

GMR: You can draw the conclusion.

Q: So then Christie, I'm wondering how this experience is for you.

CHRISTIE: Like, am I going around seeing divine beings all the time, do you mean?

Q: I guess in some respects. When did this begin, on whatever levels it began, and how was that for you? Where were you at with it and maybe how has it evolved or changed or not or what?

C: I think I had incredible karma from my past life, which ripened first when I was in Kopan for the first time.

Q: And when was that?

C: In like '95.

Q: And how old were you?

C: 22, I think, because my birthday's in November. It was an intellectual perception of emptiness that allowed me to pursue the teachings. Which I think everybody comes to, but it was really strong for me. So part of it ripened then, but it really ripened when I met Geshe la. But not right away. It was about maybe – I'm not sure exactly, but maybe about nine months to a year after I'd been taking his courses, and I take taking a root lama as very serious. You have to believe that they're completely infallible and be willing to risk your life for them, offer your life to them, everything. And so you know, I'm hemming and hawing for like a year trying to figure out if this is... I mean I feel called to do it, and I feel a need for a lama, but I didn't want to rush into it. But as soon as I made the commitment, and asked if he would be my root lama, things started happening very very quickly. I mean very interesting ripenings of karma.

Q: Can you give any examples?

C: Like seeing my lama do miraculous things, like going into very interesting meditative states while I was still like wandering around, just spontaneously. Like sitting in a room and all of a sudden seeing every single person as a holy divine being, just for short periods, but it was the blessing of seeds ripening from my past from my lama. But the strongest seeds that ripened were that I saw him as my angel that came to me to guide me to enlightenment, you know, and that

was the one thing that hasn't changed for me. A lot of the other things that ripened immediately, they wore off. To tell you the truth, things like everybody around you being holy – yeah, they wear off real quick and then you're left with the hard work. You're left to go into and get to that meditative state by yourself. You get like thirty minutes to get a taste of it, and then you have to do the rest yourself. But that one thing, it's so obvious to me, you know.

Q: So it wasn't love at first sight. You went looking for a lama and studied with Geshe la for nine months and came to the conclusion that he was your teacher, and then sparks started to fly in terms of your spiritual life.

C: Yeah. People would associate it with this love at first sight stuff – it doesn't relate to me, because that's not what it's about for me. It's about – he's teaching me to see emptiness, he's getting me closer to getting enlightened. And it's not something that can be taught verbally – not the deeper, more experiential wisdom.

Q: So now everybody wishes to have a close relationship with their lama. Maybe not everyone wishes to live with their lama for three years in a yurt. But I am curious and I'm sure that other people are as well, how did the intimacy that you have, how did that develop? When did it become OK with you being a fully ordained monk, and you being a fresh young female student? How did those boundaries shift? How did that happen? Because you're the monk, and you're the one who's supposed to hold the line... I guess that would be an appropriate question for you.

GMR: I think the goal of becoming a monk in our tradition is to meet Vajra Yogini directly and have instruction from her, if you're into the Vajra Yogini tradition. So the goal of taking vows and the goal of keeping them is precisely so that one day you could reach Vajra Yogini. *Drup thab; sadhana* – the word means to reach her and have her teach you. So you know the exact day that it happened, or the exact place, I remember, but I think it's something I'd rather not talk about, but I know one thing that – how to say – I would say that if practicing your whole life and becoming ordained bears fruit and you meet Vajra Yogini, I think you would recognize that she has come to you in many forms throughout your life, and then you would recognize that fact. And then I think you would assume that it had been going on for many lifetimes. And I don't have direct perception of other lives at this moment – I have had direct perception of other lives – but as far as my past lives, I mean I only have some insights into that she has been helping me for many lifetimes...

Q: This same continuation of consciousness, person?

GMR: Yeah. But it's only one emanation of thousands probably. So I think it's a little hard to grasp, but if it's quite within the realm of possibility that Lord Buddha could be emanating every single person you ever met in your life simultaneously, which is quite plausible, then it's not unusual to say that many of the people in your life – and many times in class I have mentioned your first high school boyfriend or girlfriend, and I'm quite frank that it's not only possible, but it's quite probable that your parents or your sister, if you're a male, or your brother, or especially your first high school girlfriend or boyfriend that you are on this path and if you have been

following it strongly – I’d say almost anyone who has become a Tibetan Buddhist in the United States would have this same karma that they are not normal people; they are Vajra Yogini. And then one day it just becomes less of an intellectual realization, and more of your actual experience of your whole life, of your everyday life, that it becomes a stable part of your whole life, a direct being taught by that being. And then realizing that throughout your whole life they’ve been coming to you in different forms and teaching you. And I would say that any westerner – westerner meaning even Singaporeans or whatever – who has become a Buddhist in this lifetime, I would say certainly has the same karma. So they have to look back into their life and see that she or he has been directing them for their whole life.

Q: So there was a specific day where you went, “Oh my God..”

GMR: I don’t think it happens like that suddenly, once you’re at that level. I think you’re just phasing in and out of it. Like it happens once, and then it doesn’t happen for a year. And then, you know it sputters at first. You have experiences of people as special.

Q: Cause I heard one story through the grapevine about a mala switching wrists.

GMR: (laughs)

C: Oh, yeah...

Q: Something like that... I don’t know the whole story, I just know there was something...

C: That happened, yeah.

Q: What happened? Was it early on or was it like...

C: We were doing this meditation, and he had a mala around his neck and at the end of the meditation it was around my neck and I didn’t even know how it got there, and he hadn’t moved. You know it was just something like that. Those are the kind of miracles that I’m talking about that happen all the time. It’s not something that you really talk about because people don’t believe it. It has to happen to them, and sometimes even when it does happen to them, they go and forget it. The seeds in their mind just burn out and they’ll forget that they saw this miracle, or they’ll try to turn it into something ordinary. So miracles aren’t something that I personally like to base evidence on because it’s not good enough for people.

Q: So it was a mutual coming together? It wasn’t like you became magnetically attracted to your lama and were inseparable and then your lama said, “This is cool; let’s stay together.” And it wasn’t like Geshe la said, “I’m ready for a consort and she’s really attracted to me and this is working out really well, and we’re really close and we have this connection...” I mean that would be the ordinary way of trying to understand how this came about. Do you know what I mean?

C: How it came about, in my perception – you can even say my projection if you like – (laughs) is that I started to have these experiences and things were coming to me – I’m just talking about like while I’m walking on the street or something – things were coming to me from my past life, and they weren’t logical. They were from past... I feel kind of shy to talk about this, is it OK?

GMR: If it’s good for you.

C: I’m not sure.

GMR: I think it’s good.

C: It just feels kind of strange to talk about these things openly, but so when things come to you from your past life, it’s not logical; it’s really like deep inside you, and the logical mind will even cut them off. It’s like this process of me stopping my logical mind from cutting it off and starting to open up to these things that somehow part of me knew from my past, but because I didn’t remember having gone through anything before from my present life, I was trying to stop it. So I was just going through this process of letting it out. And I think when I finally got to the point where I could stop the logical mind and just let out this other knowledge, that’s when it happened. It was like I was ready to go ... to pick up from where I had left off before. Like I had reopened up that space. And I think my lama sensed that, and it was this communication on a different level that was going on about everything that was happening to me internally.

Q: Is that your experience?

GMR: I’m going to say something a little different. Sometimes people ask me, “How did you pull off the Geshe thing?” Like how did you do that? Total, it took me eighteen years. And I always say, “I was just enjoying the classes, and I had no intention of being a Geshe.” It never even crossed my mind until the final year, and then I got a letter, and it said, “You’re up”, and I was surprised because I was just enjoying the courses. I just wanted to know the courses. And I never had that goal in mind; it just came at the end. And I think ... I’ve practiced my whole adult life, from the day I left college, to try to become enlightened. And now looking back, I see this is how it’s supposed to go. You train; you meet lamas who train you. If it’s your way, you get ordained. If it’s not, you don’t. And I want to say that it’s not necessary to be ordained to see emptiness directly, and I wasn’t ordained at that time. But what I just want to say is that this is Lord Buddha’s teaching, the natural progression of Lord Buddha’s teaching.

Lord Buddha himself emanated in three great emanations: first as the hinayana monk, secondly as the mahayana monk, and then thirdly as the tantric yogi. And I think Lord Buddha was enlightened according to mahayana millions of years ago, and went through these three stages of his life to demonstrate how it should be done. And Naropa did the same thing. He went through exactly the same stages. And without intending to, and without thinking it would ever happen, I’m just there now. At the third stage. And I didn’t think it was ... you see I was just living each day and just doing my practice and then it just happened. So it wasn’t a decision or anything like that. It’s the natural progression of all Buddhist practice, if you practice hard and well and sincerely.

Q: So another question I have, I mean I'm assuming that most people when they understand that you were three years in retreat living in a yurt with a lady doing advanced practice, everybody thinks sex. Consort, sex, that's where the western mind, probably any ordinary person's mind, goes. So how does that fit in with being a monk?

GMR: I think it's an obvious question, and since it's so obvious, the answer won't be understood by a lot of people. But during our tantric rituals, we take a drop of alcohol from the cup. But it's not alcohol at that point. And it's completely wrong for an ordained person to have any form of sexual activity. It's completely forbidden. It's the first of all monks' vows. And a monk can never engage in sexual activity at all. And I never have. I mean, I've masturbated, and things that are wrong, and I've gone to my lama and confessed them, and I think any ordained person who is honest will say it's a struggle, and then over years of practice you become self-celibate. And if you're honest, I heard that many great lamas have said that the only disciples they believe are the ones who come and confess things to them. Like, "I looked at a woman." I never broke any of those vows in a major way. I never had any kind of sexual contact with a woman since I was 21 or 22. And then in very extraordinary rare cases, it's important, it's useful, to do special kind of physical yoga with a divine being. And in the vinaya texts, I think even in the *Tsotik*, which is the basic huge vinaya text for the monasteries, you don't break your vows if you engage in high yoga with a divine being. It isn't anything normal at all.

That's the first part of the answer. The second part of the answer is in the actual practice of higher physical forms of tantric yoga, these are extremely difficult, physically, extremely – they are unpleasant, quite unpleasant for the physical body, and quite ... [Christie: exhausting] difficult for the physical body. They are like doing yoga for four hours a day or five hours a day, and it's not fun. And it's not a joke, and it's a life-or-death attempt to become a being who can serve all living creatures before you die, and I don't perceive it in any other way. And it's no fun. And people who truly want to learn those practices, unless they are extremely disciplined and dedicated, they would quit within a week.

Q: So because it must create confusion for people, I mean, it will create confusion for people... I mean, you're a monk; you're wearing robes, on the one hand, you're a monk. You're in the Gelukpa tradition, which has its own... I mean there's the Sakya and the Kagyu and sometimes they wear robes, and they're with women, and then people say, "Oh no they're not really monks. They're doing something else..." Now this is just going to create another level of confusion that requires clarification just upon first sight of you and how you represent the teachings. So how, I mean why stay a monk?

GMR: When I took my monk's vows, I swore: "*Jisi tsoi bardu*" means until the day I die, I'll keep my vows. So on the one hand, I can't give up those vows. I swore to keep them for my whole life. Secondly those vows are the power. Having kept those vows for my whole life. Pretty well, I mean no one's perfect, right? But I've never broken them in a serious way. Having kept them carefully my whole life is why, is the only reason this practice has come to me. I didn't ask for this practice. I prayed constantly for Vajra Yogini to come to me. One of the first things she taught me was to pray for her to come and stay with me. And I did that for years, every night before I went to bed. And so it's the power of having kept my vows that in my perception has brought her to me, and to break them then is crazy. It's the foundation of all

accomplishments. It's the goal of all mahayana monks who have tantric initiation to have Vajra Yogini come to you and teach you directly. That's the goal of becoming an ordained person.

Q: This was one question I had, because my understanding of Lama Tsongkapa's biography for example, there might be a secret biography – I accept that that could be the case – but the conventional everyone knows biography, at least my understanding of it, Lama Tsongkapa could have become enlightened in one lifetime, if you take the view that he wasn't already enlightened, and that he chose not to, he chose to wait until the intermediate state, I think it was, during the death time, because it was so important to him that the vinaya be not confused, and given strength and empowered, and I just find it a little bit interesting because you've had such a strong emphasis on vinaya, and I think you've really brought the importance of vows and morality again much more into the forefront, and I think it had lost a lot of its strength coming to the west, and so I was just curious because it seems like you're at a level where you could wait for the benefit of sentient beings and the dharma and the vinaya, so how did you make that judgment call? How do you make that call that – I mean because many people probably perceive you as being advanced enough that you probably don't have to do this if you don't really want to; you could wait. You have enough realization to benefit countless sentient beings already. Why do this that has the possibility of disempowering a lot of the foundation that you've already set?

GMR: To put it very briefly and bluntly, you follow your lama's instructions. And knowing the downside, and knowing that you have to judge, even when your lama tells you to do something – you know my opinion on that, in the end you have to decide what's right. And a lama may be testing you. So that throws the whole game open, you know. You can't in my opinion, and in Je Tsongkapa's teachings, especially on the art of interpretation, *drang-nge*, basically that whole book, which is probably his most significant work, really, is putting the burden on the disciple to decide what does the lama really want you to do. And balancing all my knowledge of what my lamas want me to do, and knowing that there will be great confusion and loss of faith in many cases, in the final analysis, I believe that Vajra Yogini my heart lama wants me to do this, and so I do it, and it's hard.

Q: Is it possible, because your manifesting-in-human-form root lama is Khen Rinpoche in New Jersey...

GMR: One of them...

Q: He's quite traditional, as I understand it, quite conservative, you might say?

GMR: I'd say so.

Q: Is it possible, because you haven't seen him yet, obviously, is it possible that when you see him, that he might recommend you to not be a monk anymore if you're going to do this? I mean, how would you take that?

GMR: Actually we've been in contact constantly for many years on this subject, and, but if one emanation of Vajra Yogini told me that I should disrobe, I wouldn't take it as literal, and I would never disrobe. And I think that if I were crazy and I disrobed, I think that I would lose my vision of Vajra Yogini. You see? It's the foundation of that experience, and not in any way a problem with that experience. The goal of becoming ordained is to have this experience.

Q: So let's say that I'm a monk or a nun, and I'm doing my practice as well as I can. How do I know that I'm ready for this level of practice? How do I know that I'm not deluding myself, hearing a voice or having a dream, for example, because some people get instructions in their dreams, and sometimes it's said that that's just Mara – it's not the emanation of a Buddha, but you can get that in your dream. How does someone really determine, because enlightenment in one lifetime, for many of us has seemed kind of a fantasy, and the role model that you're making the aspect of now is, OK we can actually do this all in one lifetime. So if I'm a monk or a nun, I'm getting pretty excited about that idea. And maybe I'm not totally finished with my attachment and my desire, and so now I'm thinking, "Cool, at the end, I get to have a boyfriend or a girlfriend! This is getting better all the time!" How do I know that I'm ready; how do I know that I'm qualified? How do we keep it from just becoming a huge mess?

GMR: It's a good question. It's an important question. Did you want to say something about that? Did something come to you?

C: (laughs) I just thought that you would talk about it.

GMR: OK but it felt like you wanted – that something came to you.

C: Oh, you know I'm always thinking. OK, ummm.

GMR: I have a very clear idea in mind. There's an expression in Tibetan called, "becoming enlightened as the demons look on," and it's about Lord Buddha under the tree in Bodh Gaya, and the demons are trying to tempt him or mislead him. The word in Tibetan is, "as they watch, you get enlightened; as they are standing there trying to delude you, you get enlightened," and I think something very very important to say, the person that you might think would be a tantric angel coming to teach you the highest practices just before you reach enlightenment is Mara, at the same moment. That same person, you know, is complete corruption and a demon at the same moment. So what I mean to say is that if your motivation is not pure, then that same person who could have been Vajra Yogini five minutes later will be a demon who will corrupt you and will ruin your chances for enlightenment for many lifetimes. You see? People are empty. Every person who comes to you is empty, and we perceive most of them as normal human beings. But if your motivation were not pure, that person *would* be Mara, and would ruin your chances for enlightenment for many lifetimes by making you break your vows. And if your motivation were pure and if you maintained your motivation, the same person would be Vajra Yogini and leading you to enlightenment. So what I mean is that it can switch quickly either way, the same person. And it's extremely important to look at your motivation.

Q: And when you say motivation being pure?

GMR: Bodhichitta.

Q: Just that.

GMR: And I'm very adamant about bodhichitta. It's not some kind of worldly kindness. It's not that at all. It's an irreversible decision to do whatever you have to do quickly to become a being who can serve all other creatures in the universe simultaneously. That's all. That's it. And when you achieve bodhichitta, the first moments of bodhichitta, you perceive every single creature in the universe directly. And then after that you don't spend a single second of your life that you are not directly working for that goal or close to it.

Q: Do you get signs that you are ready for that level of practice? I mean I can think I have bodhichitta – I can think that I have a realization of precious human rebirth, and then I go and do another retreat and there's another whole level I wasn't even aware of. Or I think I have a realization of guru devotion, and there's another whole level, I didn't know that I didn't know that level. I thought I had it, but then there's this whole other vision or window to pass through. So just saying that if you have a pure motivation, the beautiful woman walking in your room can be the deity, could be a little bit of a loophole. Because how does somebody really know they have the proper bodhichitta? It's the self-deception thing that I'm kind of ...

GMR: I know what you're saying.

C: I think you don't see it as that kind of relationship at all. I don't know, for me, it's you start getting signs in your inner body, your winds start moving differently. And that was the sign for me that you need to learn how to get the winds into the central channel. And that's the goal of these practices, not anything else. And if your mind is thinking about anything else, maybe you don't have the proper motivation. But personally I can't help but just think of just that. Because it's nothing else for me. And he's right, it's very... you know...

GMR: It's unpleasant.

C: I wouldn't say unpleasant. I mean, I don't want to discourage people. It is very difficult and sometimes the winds go into strange places and it gets uncomfortable, and you know like there's no instruction manual here; it's all experiential, you know. And sometimes you get so much heat in your body that it's very uncomfortable, or like you know these weird things happen, or like digestive problems or weird stuff. I think that's one good thing to tell people is to wait until your inner body is telling you that you have to start practicing these higher teachings, because I don't think that they would work if your inner body wasn't ready anyway.

Q: I mean, don't you have to have single-pointed concentration and a certain level of generation stage realization and all that kind of stuff, or is this also a case of try to practice all of the path simultaneously and eventually it will all come together?

GMR: I've heard different people say, I mean one of my close students who was trying to explain me to someone one day was saying, "Well, you know you have to be at level number 14.3, and ..." "Some texts say you have to be an arya. Some texts say you have to be a bodhisattva. Some texts say you have to be a bodhisattva arya to really grasp these practices and to do them properly. And I think it's important to say very strongly that if you're not sure if

you've seen emptiness or if you're not sure if you've developed bodhichitta, then you definitely have not. The day it happens, the day you reach bodhichitta directly, you perceive every single living being in the universe in a single moment. So if that hasn't happened to you, you don't have bodhichitta. And a person who has perceived emptiness directly has no doubt about what happened. It's impossible to not know that you did it. You perceive the Dharmakaya of the Buddha directly. You meet a Buddha directly. And there can't be any ... and you see your own enlightenment directly. And you see how many lifetimes it will take directly. And so that's what happens to every person who perceives emptiness directly. So if it hasn't happened to a person, then they definitely haven't seen emptiness. I think it's important to say that because many people ask me about that. As far as when you are ready to do special practices, I don't think you can quantify it in terms of you need to pass a geshe exam or some text say you need to concentrate on the whole Chakra Samvara mandala – 64 deities for three hours straight. I don't believe that at all. That's not the point at all. *Kye rim*, in my experience, is a gradual and very undoubtable experience of deities around you. And I hate to say it as seeing other people as deities. That is saying self-existent. They are not normal people and they are not deities. They are empty. But as you achieve *kye rim*, more and more people around you become deities. And you know it. It's just a direct experience.

Q: When you say become deities, in terms of your perception, does that mean you perceive Christie hla as a red-light-flaming lady?

GMR: (laughs)

Q: Or is it just that experientially there's just this awareness of her being a divine being? I'm just kind-of curious to know what that means, and that's a big question that people have.

GMR: There are three levels. It's *ponya*. *Ponya* in Tibetan means "the messenger", right? *Christos*, the Christ, and they come to you in three forms: *shing kye*, *ngak kye* and *hlen kye*. They call it "born of the 24 sacred sites", "born of mantra", and "born of the paradises", and I think they can range anywhere from a human form who is teaching you directly to a being of light who is teaching you directly. That's the traditional range and that's true.

C: And maybe even the same person ranges, depending on your level of *kelwa* (virtue to see things purely) at that particular moment.

GMR: Your vows, how well you've kept your vows.

Q: So when you say it's unpleasant, I'm just kind of curious for myself, I've just noticed personally as my practice develops, I'm actually getting a little bit grossed out by sex...

GMR & C: Yeah, that happens.

Q: ...and I'm just kind of wondering, I mean I understand what you're talking about higher level practices, it's probably not even appropriate to call it sex, you should probably call it something

else, but I was curious to know, you know, does it shift back, or does it just get so disgusting that you have to transform it at some level or you can't continue?

C: That's interesting. I know what you mean, because when you get to a subtler meditative state you don't want gross things. Like food starts to gross you out, and sex starts to gross you out, and just those mundane base things, because you're already up here on a slightly higher plane. Yeah, that's interesting. I think it's the same as anyone who does yoga asana practice very regularly. The movements in the yoga asana practice become a meditation. And it becomes something of that higher plane. Even though you're moving your physical body, your concentration is not on the physical level. It's in your inner body. It's watching your winds and channels and if you're not quite there, you're right, it could be like, you know...

Q: ... a source of repulsion.

C: So it's very interesting that you brought that up. It's like that is what keeps your motivation and your practice very strong, because it's true that that happens when you're in a deeper state of meditation, and you couldn't possibly practice like that unless you were focussing properly, like with proper motivation and with serious concentration on what you were trying to do. Because I had the same experience.

GMR: I think for both of us. I mean I haven't had sex since I was 21 – I haven't had sex for 30 years, and I, it's like eating. I have to eat. I eat what I have to eat, but I don't enjoy food or eating. It's dirty to me, and the poop that comes out is dirty as well. And for me that's what eating is about – gross things coming in and poop coming out, and for me sex is like that. I wouldn't have any attraction for it. I have sexual urges that I've had for my whole life, that everyone has, or I wouldn't be in this realm – I wouldn't have been born in this realm. But the gross physical act for me, I don't think it's disgusting or dirty or something like that, but it's not interesting for me at all. You know, I don't have any, it's not something uplifting or it's not an inspiring thing to do.

I believe the sexual energy is exp...

C: yeah, powerful. [tape cuts off]

Q: ...awkward? I mean, just living together in a yurt and then experimenting with these practices and trying to figure out how it works, I mean, were you just, I mean when you went to India did you get instructions? Were you reading a book and then like trying to figure it out? How did it, I mean maybe this is too personal, but I'm just asking everything I want you guys to decide what you want to answer...

GMR: On a worldly level, we did receive instructions from the highest lamas I'm aware of. That's what I consider a lower level. On a higher level, Vajra Yogini comes to you and trains you. You don't experiment or read books.

Q: So it's quite clear what to do, when to do, how to do...

GMR: Vajra Yogini teaches you.

C: You know he's Vajra Yogini don't you?

Q: I have my suspicions.

GMR: It's not ... you are a supplicant. If it's a monk who is doing the practice, you are a supplicant. You are begging to be taught, and at her pleasure and if you have kept your vows and practices pure, then she comes and teaches you. Although we've had formal, the book instructions from high lamas, properly, and very sweetly and very beautifully, and we worked for a long time on that. It's not the main thing, but we did do that also.

C: You do have to reach a certain level of meditation I think.

GMR: To have her come to you, I think you'd necessarily.

Q: Well that's what it sounded like. It's sort of like the whole karmic thing. You can't will yourself to be at a level of practice that you're not at yet. For me it would be awkward, because I would be pretending and wanting to be at a level that I'm not at yet. It sounds like for both of you, anyway, it's just kind of been, "of course". It's just been the next thing you do or how you do it, and there's no...

C: I don't know. A lot of it ... past lives, past lives, past lives.

Q: Clearly.

GMR: I think we could say honestly that we both have very strong seeds from past lives. Not all the training took ... I think this is the final step of thousands...

C: I don't know if it's the final step for me. I'm not really a very advanced practitioner. I don't want people to get the feeling that ... I don't consider myself very advanced. I consider that I worked very hard on certain practices in my past life, which is why I'm here and I'm practicing this particular path.

Q: So how does it feel to know that Geshe la is referring to you as Vajra Yogini?

GMR: That's a great question!

Q: I mean, how did you deal with that?

C: You know, I spent many years testing him on that. Many years. Because well, that is a very interesting teaching on emptiness, to tell you the truth. It was one of my very first, very profound teachings on emptiness. Because you really can't logically deny someone else seeing you that way, even though you don't see yourself that way. You can debate them, and I have, all you want, but really it's your perception against their perception.

Q: What ground do you have to stand on?

C: ... and you really come to this understanding of how self-grasping you are. How, “No, no, no, but I’m right because I’m me!” Why am I more right than he is? Like why do I think that I have... it’s just that self-existent “me” coming up and having to reconcile that with some other perception. But I’ve also tried on another angle of the tests to be like, “OK, I’m Vajra Yogini; I tell you to do this!” and see if he does it, just because you’ve got to know, like where does he stand? I’m Vajra Yogini, OK, well, and you know, and he says, “Well, that’s figurative, (laughs) I don’t believe you.” And he just does whatever he wants anyway. So it’s really not for me...

Q: So he’s a selective student.

C: Well for me, it’s just uh...

GMR: I do do what Vajra Yogini tells me to do. Frankly. I mean it’s hard.

C: Well, anyway, in my perception, he’s teaching me how I should be towards who I perceive is Vajra Yogini. Like firsthand he’s teaching me, and he’s teaching all of us how to respond to your deity, your personal deity, by example. And I just try to follow that the best that I can. That’s the place I’ve come to after six years of something of little trial and errors here and there.

Q: So is this a lifelong commitment? I mean are you like married in a sense?

GMR: If you worked your whole life to have Vajra Yogini come to you, you would be foolish to lose her.

Q: So, yes.

GMR: I hope so, but it’s up to her. It’s the disciple’s desire, of course. And historically there have been cases where she would say, “You haven’t been behaving,” and would leave you for a while. I think from the disciple’s side, you’re just begging them to stay, but you don’t lose faith if they tell you that it would be better to do something else. But personally I beg Vajra Yogini to stay with me. (laughs)

Q: And, how are your parents going to take this?

C: They pretty much already know. What my mom didn’t like was that I was going away for three years, nothing to do with that... I mean, she said, “You’re not going to email me?” I had this great email relationship going with her, and she was so disappointed and it was very very hard for her because she’s not spiritually inclined so much. My dad is more spiritually inclined, and so it was much easier for him. But really it had nothing to do with any of this. It was more, “My God, you’re going on three-year retreat away!”

Q: So the age difference, all the conventional things that they might think of in terms of who they would want you to be partnered with.

C: Well, I never really talked to them much about it. I think that when I got back from, when I went to Kopan, I had done it on an airline trip around the world, and when I got back, I had this nice discussion with my mom. I said, "Mom, you know I'm never going to do the marriage and children thing. I just want you to know that it's not going to be a normal path for me," because I just knew that and I wanted to prepare her, because I knew she was thinking something different. And she took it quite well, really. I had a lot of time to talk to her about that. So they probably didn't have the kind of concerns that a parent might have if their daughter was now the spiritual partner of her teacher. (laughs)

Q: I mean, just because the precedent in the west has been, a lot of people have suffered because of that. So I mean is that one of the things that you guys have to deal with in July? I mean are you going to sit down and have a kind of conversation, or are you not going to really talk about it and just hope that it's all right?

C: We already talked to them about it, and like I said, it wasn't the issue. The issue was going away.

GMR: I think their issue is that they love their daughter, and they want to see her.

C: They really miss me, and they just want me to be happy. They're like the best parents in the world and they wouldn't ever stand in my way for anything that I had a dream about. Like my true heart's desire, they want me to have it. I've always been very free, in that sense, very supported. But the distance, I could hardly bear their sadness, especially I would feel these things at Christmas time, the first Christmas, it was just like this wave of sadness that I wasn't there, even couldn't call.

GMR: I think one thing to say is I think it's a level you reach after millions of years of practice, and to be within one hundred years of the person who is Vajra Yogini is sort of a miracle. You see what I mean? So I think it's important for people to realize that you might hit the proper level at the age of sixteen, or you might be seventy, and it's not a question of how many years you've lived in this present life, I think. I've met people who have studied in the monastery their whole lives, and who I think would surely seem not to be ready for anything near this practice, and I've met people who have studied for six months but who are obviously ready for that practice, and I think that it's a function of thousands of lifetimes of training and not so much of your apparent age in this life.

Q: Is there any chance that you could have kids? I mean, do you have to use birth control and stuff like that.

C: No, no, it's not like that.

Q: I didn't think so, but I just thought I'd check.

GMR: And by the way, that physical part of it is maybe about one percent of our practice. It's not...

C: We're sitting down on our butts on our cushions for a long time, let me tell you, and we're doing our yoga asanas, and he's making me do this ballet thing, I don't know. I'm so bad at it. I'm not even doing anything.

GMR: I just see ballet as very good for the alignment of the channels. I see it as a... It happened during retreat that we realized it, and we had been training before that. We had had some very famous dance teachers in New York who were training us. Even after classes sometimes we would get in a cab at ten o'clock at night and go train for hours. And at some point Vajra Yogini had come to me and said, "You should do this." And it was very funny because I have never been physically oriented in my whole life. I'm an intellectually oriented person, and I have no physical ability or anything. I was a flop at every kind of high school physical thing, sports and stuff. I was no good at it at all. I hated it. So I got this message that I should start dancing, and I took it very seriously, and I went and found the best teacher in New York, and we did that for years. And then when we got here, we jacked it up to ballet, which is much more difficult, and it's very beneficial for the channels, the alignment. It's incredibly demanding and incredibly good for the alignment of your channels and your chakras, and so we worked very hard on that. And that's no fun either. Lots of injuries and hard days, and the heat is incredible. We had two very fine teachers coming and training us during the break times. People tend to focus on physical union, but 99% is, I mean the ballet is very typical. Your body has to be extremely well trained to even consider these things.

Q: And meditation doesn't do it by itself?

C: Actually you get a lot of *lung* when you just sit and meditate and you need to do something physical to let some of that energy out. I would go crazy if I didn't. We did two exercises a day. We did like an hour and a half to two hours of yoga in the late morning, and then in the afternoon we did a half hour of ballet.

Would you like to hear our general schedule? Would that help? Because you mentioned that meditation practice was good. We got up at, normally at around 3 or 3:30 in the morning. We switched our practices around a lot, so this was like the later stage. When we did one month *lerungs*, or deep tantric retreats, the first year and a half, we did one-month and two-month *lerungs*, and we didn't do any reading or writing at all. It was strictly the four sessions, with an hour-long meditation and maybe another hour of mantras after that, and then yoga. And then we did a really nice thing we would do after we eat in the afternoon, we would do recitation chanting. We memorized the *Yoga Sutra*. And he requested one of his students find a tambura, which is like the easiest instrument in the world to use – you just pluck four strings, and we would do that and just chant this holy Sanskrit language. So it was like, you get up at 3:30 in the morning, sometimes we would do these kriyas that our yoga instructor had taught us, which was really good for our early am meditation, you know we would do *neti*, *sutra neti*, you know you pour water into your nose, and I think we did that for about a year, just to experiment on what is the best way to get your body ready for your meditation, because the early am meditation we found was the best, the most concentrated, the most intense kind of. Then we would go through the *dakkye*, or tantric prayer, the first *dakkye*, and then we would do our hour-long meditation, about 5 to 6 or something like that. And then from 6 to 7 we would work on memorizing, just by ourselves, and then we would take a little nap. And then we would get up and do our second

session. The first session was more *dzok rim* practices. The second session for me was always an emptiness meditation, because it worked better during the day, and I think he did the same thing. And then after that we would do our yoga asanas, and then after that we would have lunch, which was about one o'clock. A very light meal – we didn't eat much during the morning. We ate maybe like cheerios. They were really good because they settle in your stomach really well, and I had a lot of problems sometimes with my digestion. Like doing all these heavy *dzok rim* practices, the digestion just didn't want any food in there. But I would get *lung*, or inner wind problems, if I didn't eat. So I had this terrible balance. So then after that, when you're too full of food to do anything, we would do our tamboura recitations. And later the Diamond Mountain Director Winston sent us a little kid's keyboard, so we had even more fun.

GMR: We did a lot of ragas. I used to play Indian music, so we did the chant by different raga scales.

C: It was really beautiful. Really really. And chanting is really good for your heart chakra – if you feel *lung*, just chant.

Then after that, later after about the first year and a half, he started writing his books, like *Katrin*, and I started working on a translation that he had given me. And we did that for maybe an hour and a half, and then after that we did our ballet practice, like managed to get in half an hour maybe. And it was good for the body to move, and it was also good to get outside – sky, because you're all pent up in your yurt all day doing heavy practices. And then after that we would do our third session. And then we would eat dinner, which was usually the heaviest meal – dal, rice.

GMR: We figured it was better to digest, to waste the time while you sleep.

C: Yeah, because you can't do practice.

Q: Probably helps you sleep a little too.

C: Yeah, it does. You see that was the problem. I couldn't switch my diet because I just had such problems falling asleep.

And then after that we would do our fourth session, and usually we didn't do much of a meditation after that, maybe just a very light thanksgiving rejoicing meditation, for like sometimes just fifteen minutes and just mantras. And then later on we did less mantras because they were longer retreats, like three months.

GMR: You can do 100,000 in three months by only doing a half an hour a day.

C: Yeah, or like 200,000, or whatever you want to do. But it's not as much as say a one-month, you really have to sit on your cushion a lot. But I think for a three-year retreat, I don't think you could keep up that intensity that much. And then after that we would just go to bed.

GMR: I think one important thing to say is that we did our vow book very carefully, six times. So we broke between each activity to do our vow book, and we kept it very nicely.

C: Everything was, "Wake up, do your book, meditate, do your book, go to bed."

GMR: I think we had a good time with our vows, and we learned them very deeply.

Q: How did you come up with the formula, because it wasn't the traditional great retreat. Like Paula and Roger, when they did their great retreats in Vermont, they were doing four sessions a day, seven days a week, from day one through three years, three months, three days, and they had a certain number of mantras they also had to complete, and then I think they had five or six months of fire puja retreats to finish it, because there was a certain percentage of fire puja offerings they had to make to correspond with the mantras, so I was kind of curious how you came up with the formula that you guys ended up using? Was that inspired, is it from a text, how did you come up with the way you structured it – one month on and then one month off, and then the two months...?

C: I think it's more of a practical thing, especially for those of us who tried to push too hard.

GMR: All of the retreatants, as you know they had about hundreds of hours of training before, from traditional texts. Like we had been training actually the first training began in about 1995, the first going through the first texts with some of the retreatants for the retreat began in 1995, and then it accelerated until the last two years we were meeting once or twice a week wherever we were around the world, and they went through a major and a very secret Gelukpa text on the practice of Vajra Yogini, including the practice of *dzog rim*. And we found some important texts in Mongolia and in Russia that we used also. But one text was about how to do the great retreat. But personally in my lineage, all my lamas at the monastery, no one had done a three-year retreat. And to be very frank, it's not a strong tradition in our lineage. We approached many lamas for advice, and we got a lot of good advice, but it's a tradition that has died out in our lineage, and so a lot of what we did was trial-and-error on how to schedule the three-year retreat. One of the retreatants translated the manual for the great retreat, but it wasn't very detailed. So what we did here was mostly based on trial-and-error as we went, and also that one of the rules of the retreat was that we wouldn't speak to each other. So in our own yurt, we kept silence.

Q: Between each other the whole three years?

C: Oh yes, not even notes during lerungs.

GMR: And we didn't have any notes from the outside, and we didn't take any notes from other retreatants, and we didn't speak with other retreatants for three years. And we were good, and we kept that pretty well. I mean there was a lot of sign language.

C: During the breaks it kind of deteriorates into like half-speech, like "Oh, hmm, hmm."

Q: During the lerungs you didn't communicate, but then in the break time, didn't you meet? Were you giving instruction to each retreatant?

GMR: One of the rules of the retreat was that I wouldn't be a lama. One of the rules of the retreat was that I wanted to be a retreatant and not a lama. And I didn't accept any requests for teaching.

C: And that was very hard for some people.

GMR: And it put an edge on ... I gave them a list of lamas on the outside, like Lama Zopa, Khen Rinpoche, and Geshe Gyaltzen, and other great lamas, and we had an informal deal that they

could email them if they needed help. But one of the ground rules was that I wasn't a lama for those three years.

Q: Because I thought you were kind of like the retreat leader, and instructing people what they should do.

GMR: Not at all. I wanted to be a retreatant.

C: He decided on the one month, two month, three month thing, before we went in, but how people structured their retreats was based on the study that they had done already. I mean four sessions I think everybody started out.

GMR: They got all that training.

C: We got all those basic ...

GMR: I think each person ended up doing their own emphasis, but I wasn't the lama during the three years. We even dropped our names. We all took on symbols that were drawn, because we wanted to drop our own identity. And that's when I started wearing ornaments of Vajra Yogini and wearing my hair that way. I think it's powerful. You know in our lineage it's only done during initiation, that the lama would dress as Vajra Yogini. I think if you're serious about getting there before you die, it wouldn't be a bad idea to dress like that all day long.

Q: So how did you choose the bracelet, for example? I mean the hair, that makes some sense; the ring, I have a question about that later, but why the bracelet?

GMR: Oh, just Vajra Yogini gave it to me.

Q: And then the rings. I mean did you guys actually have like a ceremony?

GMR: We're not married in that way. It's not ... I'm Vajra Yogini's disciple, and I wear her ring.

C: No, no, *I'm* Vajra Yogi's disciple and I wear her ring. (laughs)

GMR: And I guess it's only coincidence, right, that the wedding finger is the finger that is sacred to Vajra Yogini. So is it possible that every person in the world who wears a wedding ring on their third finger is somehow, that that custom has spread in our world due to Vajra Yogi's direct influence? I don't know.

Q: That's a nice thought. So you guys didn't do any special trading of rings?

GMR: Oh we made a beautiful ceremony of it. And the rings were made by a friend of mine who's a very master jeweler from, he's Yemenese, a Yemenite Jew, who's a master handcraftsman. And we put a diamond in them to remember emptiness, and they're Irish design. So it was to remember.

Q: So then another question I have, my understanding of how this path progresses is you get more and more advanced. You know there's the kadampa inner jewels, and the last three as I understand it, the changes in status, you get expelled from the ranks of humans, you find yourself among the ranks of dogs, and then you attain divine ranks. And all the life stories of the mahasiddhas that I know, at some point in their career they went through incredible trials and tribulations in terms of basically being rejected by the society that they lived in, and their peers, especially in the spiritual community. And the final stages of practice, at least from my understanding, there is some level when your behaviour becomes less and less conventional. I don't remember exactly and I'm not totally clear on why except unless it's just to bring up more and more subtle levels of self-grasping you might still have, and you just have to keep dealing with that. But is that the direction you'll probably go? I mean, should we just fasten our seatbelts and hang on and try to do the best we can with the ride?

GMR: Do you have anything?

C: Well, I have no idea what you're going to do next. (laughs)

Q: Because the relationship that people have with you now, obviously many of us have already taken you as a teacher, and then as you go into the advanced practices, there will be another whole level of Vajra disciple, guru-disciple relationship, which is even more powerful and more dangerous for the disciple's mind if they can't manage to transform the appearance. So just for those of us who are in the process of, you know pretty clear where we want to go, OK, I'm riding this one out, but it might be nice to have some idea. Is it possible that it might get more and more unconventional, as far as your aspect?

GMR: Well the first thing is that I'm just following what Vajra Yogini tells me to do, so I don't know what comes next. I don't personally know what comes next. I guess secondly, you know reading the life story of Naropa hla, and the changes he went through from monk to yogi to staying with Vajra Yogini openly, and then teaching, passing on that lineage on to Tibet. In Naropa's case they say he was already enlightened, and he just wanted to show us the stages we have to go through ourselves. And so I think that's one aspect. And then I think it's happened throughout history, if your practice is successful, if you are sincere, and I may not be brilliant and I may not be the best practitioner, but I really tried hard. My whole adult life, I have really followed all the practices with my whole heart and all my life, every moment. And you will change. It should change you. You will evolve, and then you would look more different every year to other people. And I think that's just the nature of evolution. If one person is changing quickly then I think it's very natural that they would look strange to other people. And more each year, if their practice is intense, if they are trying really hard, and so I think that's just a natural thing.

We were listening to Ani di Franco. Someone sent us her recent cd. And the first time we played it, I was like, "Oh." I told her, "Oh man, no, no, no. This is bad." And then I heard an old tape by Joni Mitchell, Miles of Aisles or something, and it was a live tape, and on the tape she said it in front of a concert and everyone was trying to get her to do her 1968 songs, you know, and she says, "Painting is so great because Picasso just paints something just once. They don't have to repaint it every two weeks. I'm evolving, I'm changing, I'm moving on. I don't play my 1968 songs all the time. I'm a different person." And Ani di Franco, later I got to like that

album, but you kind of expect what they used to play before. But they're evolving, if they're a real artist. They're evolving, they're changing, they're going higher, in their own way. And then some of the fans get discouraged or they don't like it. I remember every time a Beatle album came out everybody hated it for three months. Everybody hated it, everybody said, "They're done for", because they were evolving, they were moving. I think it's just a natural thing. And the job of a lama is to evolve ahead of the student so they can pull them up.

Q: Lama Zopa Rinpoche's letter – we've been discussing it, trying to figure out exactly what he's saying in his very circuitous way.

GMR: It's very empty!

Q: Many of us understood it to say, "Look if you're at that level of practice really, put your cards on the table. Let's see some tricks. Show that you have power, realization, control over the elements. Give your students a little cookie so that they don't lose their faith." Can we expect some miracles, flying in the air, walking on water or anything coming?

GMR: (to Christie) Do you have any idea?

C: I think he's reluctant to do miracles openly because for one, it doesn't really generate true faith in people. People need the logical understanding of emptiness to generate true faith. And if you get this sudden inspiration from a really inspiring teaching or a miracle that you've seen, it's all emotional. And those emotions change so quickly. And even the mind starts to rationalize whatever you saw. Like, "I couldn't possibly have actually seen that. It's probably just this." And also of course, secondly, it's the disciple who makes the miracle happen. You create the miracle, the lama can't give you a miracle if you don't have the seeds to see it. I could beg and plead and hold my breath and put a knife to my ... do anything. You can't make it happen unless you create the karma for it to happen. And there are students, many students who I've talked to, who've already seen them. Some of my guides leading me into the teachings were telling me, "Oh yes, the other day he did this." Those are the two points I would probably make on this. He will claim he can't do them, but I have a different experience, and many other people have had different experiences. Of course, he won't openly say anything that he can do.

Q: Any comments?

GMR: Oh, yeah. When you achieve the path of seeing, when you see emptiness directly, I think a minor realization is that you could control the elements. And it happened that my lama asked me to turn a brick into gold, just after that. And it was a funny statement, because I knew that if I trained further I could do it. You know what I mean? But I couldn't do it then. He just said that right after the experience. He pointed to a brick and said that, and so I understand that it can be done, and I see how it could be done, but I'm not at that level, and I can't do those kinds of things. But I understood Lama Zopa Rinpoche's comment in two ways. One was, "You should now push on and try to learn to do those things," and I appreciate that.

And then secondly, you know when I read the stories of Jesus or Marpa in particular, I think their showing miracles was a reason for many people to believe in them. I think it can be very

valuable. I thought Lama Zopa Rinpoche was, when I reflected on what he had said, and when I read the stories of Jesus, a lot of what's written is about the miracles he did. And I think over the centuries that it did help some people to perceive him as special. In our tradition, in Buddhism, in the scriptural tradition, miracles are considered to be ... you are advised not to do miracles if you can do them, because that kind of faith doesn't last. The faith that comes from years of training and study lasts, and it's strong, and the faith that comes from seeing a miracle is not stable and people rationalize it. A miracle is that Lama Zopa lives in our world, and we don't think that way. So I have that. And of course the last thing would be, I said many times in classes I think that you have to be very close to being able to perform a miracle yourself to see a miracle happen. And even Jesus' closest disciples, some said he walked on water and when they lost faith and they tried to do it themselves they fell in. They started to walk on water and then they fell in the water. And so a lot of the perception of a miracle... everything. If things are empty, you can only see a miracle if your own mind is producing that miracle. But I took it as a beautiful advice to me from one of my lamas, and I'll try. But I don't think it would be appropriate for me to tell if I have done miracles. But I think it's a wise advice in that letter, and I think it would be very useful on special occasions to do miracles. I think it could help people.

GMR: It was a beautiful letter though. The way his mind works is so unusual. You would expect a person to address A, B, or C, and he goes to Z, and he tells you this long story about this yogini, and you can sit with it for days, and it's a blessing. His mind is so beyond us, it's totally beyond us. I think I'll be absorbing that letter for years.

C: But basically he's sending a message not to worry. Because I was afraid that, I don't know, that he was somehow uneasy, and then I just got this response that there was nothing to worry about, at least from my side.

Q: And then the letters, I mean did you want the letters kind of as a character reference?

GMR: I know what you mean. I thought it was important to be very straightforward with all my lamas in writing, so that there was a record that everyone could see that I had totally informed everyone of importance about my life. And I think rumors begin to spread, and my perception was to just totally reveal everything that had happened to me and just let the chips fall where they would. And I was ready to be rejected or expelled, and I didn't have... Some of the lamas, you don't know, but they are extremely conservative and extremely demanding, and so I was pretty much ready for some very difficult reaction, hard reaction, and I was ready to be just expelled and rejected, but I thought it was important that it come from me, to be very honest and straightforward about my practice, and I just trusted that the truth would come through. And if you had seen emptiness, and if you wished something to happen, you could swear on that emptiness or on the truth of what had happened to you. And then you wouldn't have to worry after that; things only happen perfectly after that, so I sort of did an act of truth in the letter. And I was pretty surprised by the reaction by the lamas.

Q: In what regard?

GMR: Well I didn't expect them to be so understanding. I didn't expect them to be so supportive, and it was quite amazing to me. It was very amazing to me, and I think it gave me

more faith in all of my lamas, because somehow they were relating to the fact that a disciple was claiming that their work had been successful. And I was very happy obviously, and surprised and honored.

Q: So I have two more questions. I'm sorry that I'm keeping you up, but I'm taking full advantage of this opportunity.

GMR: No, we can go home and rest, but I'm sorry that you had to stay up so late. I know you need to get up early.

Q: Secrecy, you know the whole tantric path, the secret path, the secret teachings. Even it's said that if you don't keep the secrecy incredibly strictly it creates obstacles to your being able to attain realizations, and so how does this fit into all of that?

GMR: I'll be very open and frank. I didn't tell anyone but extremely close lamas for 28 years about what had happened to me as far as emptiness and bodhichitta, and I think one of the realizations when you see emptiness directly is that you cannot tell anyone, that you shouldn't tell anyone. I worked in the diamond business for fifteen years only because I had seen emptiness and I wanted to remember what I had seen. So sixteen-hour days for fifteen years. I made a lot of money for the monasteries, and I did a lot of good with the money, but it was only to remember that twenty minutes. Fifteen years in a corporation just to remember what had happened to me, and that's the only reason that I did it. But I think it's pretty obvious the two reasons to speak about it. One is I really want people to know it's possible to do it and to really know that you can meet Vajra Yogini in the flesh and that she can teach you and you will succeed in your practice. So if 90% of the people think I'm crazy or immoral, it's worth it to me for the 10% who get a sense that it's true, and then they push for it themselves. To me that's very exciting. And then secondarily is that there were a lot of rumors starting about my relationship with ladies. It hurt me a lot, and it hurt other people a lot. And so I thought it better to just be clear. We live in a different world from Naropa, and Marpa hla. There wasn't internet. And very heavy energies begin around a lama, I mean things happen around a teacher, where strange obstacles start to happen. I had people trace my phone. I had people break into my room. (C: And my room, actually.) I had people steal my confession books. I had people threaten me with many terrible things, and so I thought it's better just to cut off all rumors and those who can believe believe and those who think I'm crazy, then without any pain for them, they can go to a lama who they believe in at a different level. And so if you can believe in it, and if it's your heart's desire, and if it feels like the right path for you, then you know where I am. And if you don't believe it then you don't have to investigate me, you can just leave and go to a lama who you feel comfortable with who is not claiming to be working at that level. We had people follow us in cabs. We had people trying to figure out where we were going when we were doing the dance things. (C: Which coffee shop we were doing translation at two o'clock in the morning.). And I don't blame them. I mean I don't blame them. I mean people want to know what's going on. So the secrecy thing in the modern world is either you – it's impossible to keep a secret like this in the modern world, so it's better to try to explain it to people, and if they believe, it's a holy thing, and if they don't believe, they can leave and follow a path which is more at their comfort level.

Q: So that leads into my last question. Which is, what is your heart advice for your current students, older and newer, students yet to come, in terms of just how should they walk into this story and process it and try to understand it and come to the conclusion that's most beneficial?

GMR: I think it's to say at least there's a chance that what I'm saying about my life is true. I think there's some odds, I don't know what it is, 5%, 10%, 50% – there's some odds that everything I'm saying is totally true. And then I think that my disciples, or my students, I don't even like to call them mine, you know, but people could be enheartened that someone claims that all of the sadhanas and all these empowerments and all of these mantras and all of these years of study and all of this keeping your vows and all of this becoming ordained can have its final effect in your lifetime. And I would say that, to think of it in that way. What would you say?

C: It seems to me that this is all part of one big master plan of the lamas, and with everything that the lama has taught, he has tried to make it extremely real for his students. These real experiences that people can relate to that are not limited to people with Tibetan Buddhist thangka bakchaks, you know, and a lot of the tantra I believe that's being taught nowadays is possibly not exactly annutara tantra. It's not maybe the highest tantra, and perhaps the lama is pushing people who are ready up to the highest level of tantra. I mean this is really kind of calling people on whether or not they actually believe in tantra. Because this is the real thing, and so in some respects we're just like icons or something. It's not even about what we're actually doing, it's just this representation of what could be and do you really believe in this path enough to follow it, and how many people really take to heart the visualizations that they're doing? (laughs)

Q: Any final thing you want to say?

GMR: It's something that I said in the teachings, but I think there's a reason for the powerful energy between men and women, and I think it's a craving to get the winds into the central channel, and to turn this mortal body into an immortal body and mind, and there's a subconscious craving of all of us, everyone, to reach a body of light and to be able to work on countless planets for countless beings. Everyone has that craving in them, and that's expressed as a craving to get the winds into the central channel. And on a gross level, that's expressed as the attraction between men and women, and so to realize that the attraction between a man and woman is a very sacred thing, and at the deepest level, it's a craving to become an angel who has a body of light and who can reach countless beings and help them.

Q: We'll end on that one, that's good.