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Context to the nugget

Venerable Tenzin Priyadarshi speaks about how he has shaped his path and has made choices along the way. He speaks about how he has handled the various pulls and pressures to move in a certain direction to stay true to his purpose.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Coming to your journey, if you had to pick three or four choices that you have made that have significantly impacted your trajectory, if we just pick these two points you walking away from home when you were 10 towards the unknown and you being at MIT, one would assume it's difficult to think of a curve that would join these two points, but there is a curve. So, are there three or four discrete points in the curve where the choices you made that have significantly shaped your journey thus far?

Tenzin Priyadarshi (TP): Yes, I think, besides that particular episode of running away the second episode would be despite of my aversion agreeing to pursue both secular studies and religious studies simultaneously. It was a burden at times; imagine a 12-year-old kid trying to juggle two curriculums and both in somewhat highly competitive environments. But, I think, when I look back it gave me a particular set of perspectives that I do find very useful to this day. The third thing I would suggest is the opening to other religious traditions was very useful. Growing up in India, of course, it was natural to be exposed to so many different traditions, but the keen interest in exploring all of them and not being simply content with what I was learning on my own was very helpful to understand better human nature and how historically and otherwise various philosophical and religious traditions have approached it. And lastly, the thing around the study in the sciences and technology, which is again that making a conscious decision that I did not want to be become a professor of Buddhist studies or just become a spiritual teacher in the narrowest sense of the word or manage a temple or manage a monastery, all those things have perks associated with it. There is a kind of certitude that you get with being a tenured faculty member or running a monastery and things like that and every step of the way encountering those opportunities but then deciding that no, it's okay to continue with a degree of uncertainty. So, it's managing ambitions, managing ambitions to maintain sort of the clarity of purposefulness of things have been a challenge.

DJ: Wow! And is it fair to say that the current role that you have at MIT is sort of a one of its kind, it's not a The Dalai Lama Centre for Ethics... in a way you have sort of shaped, sculpted the role, it's not a role that existed that you slotted into, is that a fair observation?

TP: No, that is correct, that is correct. I started off at MIT almost 20 years ago initially as a visiting scholar. I was invited by then the president of MIT, Chuck Vest, who was a wonderful scientist and a

wonderful human being. And initially, I started off as doing just some experimental work, because I was still a grad student at that time. And then they said well, why don't you become the Buddhist Chaplain to the institute? And again, it's one of those things that the word Buddhist Chaplain was not a common thing. I don't know what a chaplain means, so I was like, okay, let's try this as well. So, I was a visiting scholar and then I had this role and then... but most of my work was teaching at Sloan and other schools within MIT and working on some joint research stuff. And then, as I have mentioned elsewhere that around 2007 after touring a bunch of universities around North America for lectures and speaking engagements, I realized that there was a sheer lack in the study of ethics meaning it was simply approached as a Philosophy 101 kind of subject and strictly sort of in an academic manner with very little relevance factor. And so, I started having this conversation with my colleagues at MIT at that time and then the financial meltdown happened and suddenly the entire world was questioning the ethics of business schools and schools of management and what's happening and I saw that as the right moment to establish a learning centre that would promote and nurture ethical imagination. And so, part of the, if you ask again about the innovative stuff, it was to figure out ways of promoting ethical imagination that was not prescriptive in nature as it had been historically but highly relevant and highly relevant to disciplines that people were pursuing intellectually, professionally and otherwise.

DJ: Got it. And actually, going back to one of the things you said Venerable, early in the journey you speak about straddling two worlds, right, where you were spending, you went to a regular school with other kids, spending more and more time at a Buddhist temple nearby and so on. One of the things I have discovered in several of my conversations at this podcast and otherwise is sometimes when you have to transition from one orbit to another orbit a lot of times, we take a deep plunge, but very often one has to straddle both these universes and that comes with a burden as you have said. Could you talk a little bit about just that notion, and how it has played out in your life?

TP: Depends what day of the week it is. Oftentimes, I used to joke with my colleagues that I wake up quite early around 4 a.m. or so and in between 4:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. I am immersed in disciplines and literature and tradition that is over 2,500 years old. And by 8:30 a.m., I am discussing framing of artificial intelligence, yeah. So, the jump happens quite often in that way. It is a burden, a burden in the sense that over a period of time, of course, there has been increased sense of proficiency so that allows for this to be done in a seamless manner. That every day and multiple times during the day I find myself going back and forth between traditions in time, worldviews and juggling these things. I think the challenge, one of the biggest struggles of course often becomes is the aspect of relevance, because if you take a cosmic view of the world, we are insignificant, we are less than a dot in the ever-expanding universe. And a Buddhist would know that by virtue of their meditation, by virtue of their experiences and so on. But at the same time a Buddhist also knows the sense of uniqueness of each individual, the uniqueness of time and space that we are in, our role, our responsibilities, our sense of duty and so on. And so, it often becomes an issue of relevance that from one perspective saying that is it really relevant but from another perspective it is yes, it does matter and it matters in these particular ways. And those are the things to think about, people spend too much time bickering about shallow things but if you are constantly waking up with reflection on mortality and reflection on death you recognize that a lot of what we engage in, a lot of what we are invested in as individuals, as a society is irrelevant but we give meaning to it, we give stories to it. Sometimes those meanings are valid meanings, other times they are just fabricated stories of sorts. And I think that's the struggle, the joy that one has to experience.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: As we think about the careers of the future, I guess more and more of us need to co-create the path for ourselves rather than conforming to a stereotype; If I take my personal example, I am trying to marry the path of podcasting and providing Leadership Advisory services. Each of these is a specialist profession with several people operating in the respective domains. But I am doing my bit to combine the two in the context of my journey. It is still only about 5 years and we will see how the script plays out but the key takeaway for me here is that future careers will feel a lot more like off road biking on unchartered paths than racing on an autobahn!

End of nugget transcription

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- 68.01 Tenzin Priyadarshi - Notion of identity lessness
- 68.02 Tenzin Priyadarshi - Limitations of the rational mind
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- 68.05 Tenzin Priyadarshi - Deliberate practice of Spirituality
- 68.06 Tenzin Priyadarshi - Opening the aperture of learning
- 68.07 Tenzin Priyadarshi - Pursuing self-awareness
- 68.08 Tenzin Priyadarshi - Covid-19 - a time-out for humans

About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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