

## Conscious TV interview with Tina Rasmussen “Living the Enlightenment Drive”

- Renate Hello and welcome to Conscious TV. My name is Renate McNay and my guest today is Tina Rasmussen. Hello Tina.
- Tina Hi Renate.
- Renate Nice to have you here. Tina teaches jhana meditation which is a concentration practice. And she wrote a book with her teaching partner, Stephen Snyder, “Practicing the Jhanas”. And I want to say a lot more about you, that you are also an organisation development consultant and coach. And you wrote several books on humanistic business practice. That sounds very serious!
- Tina [Laughter] Sometimes, yeah.
- Renate So Tina, let’s start with something very interesting, that you started meditating when you were thirteen years old.
- Tina Yes.
- Renate How come?
- Tina Well, it happened just--I guess it was good fortune or something. My family had been attending a Methodist Christian church, near the Chicago area where we lived. And they had a Family Day. And I don’t even know where my parents were at this time but people were going to different events that were happening that day, and I came into the sanctuary of the church and the person there was teaching meditation. And I was thirteen, so I just came and sat down. Something drew me to it. And my story now is that he was somebody who was coming back in the--I guess that would have been in the seventies--had gone to Asia, or India—somewhere--and learned this and wanted to share it. And so I learned it and I started using it, just to relax at night and... It’s kind of stressful being a teenager sometimes so it became something I used really for practical reasons to help me relax and be centred. There was something that just drew me to it that was really comforting and important. And so I just used it for many years as a teenager in that way.
- Renate Right. So, did you watch your breath? Or how did you meditate?
- Tina It was more of a body scan type meditation where one feels the body, and sort of--you work your way up the body. And I just found it very grounding and settling. And there was something about that turning inward to something deeper that felt very nourishing and supportive to me.
- Renate Did you talk about it with your friends?
- Tina I don’t think so. I don’t think I talked about it much. My parents were kind of interesting, in that they were interested in some of the other--the deeper spiritual paths that were coming out at that time, and at that point in my life they took me to many different kinds of churches, to--there’s a Bahai temple in Chicago, and to a Jewish synagogue, and they really wanted me to have a diverse spiritual understanding. So I think it was--I felt comfortable in that context within my family life.
- Renate Yes, but something also really hooked you with meditation because you started then, I don’t know how old you were, doing longer silent retreats.
- Tina Yeah, in my twenties, I got very interested in reading about the different spiritual paths of the world and I just kind of started devouring books of all different traditions and paths. And that was when I really found Buddhist meditation, among others, that one kind of started standing out and I did my first weekend retreat doing meditation. And that became very compelling and I started doing longer retreats of

a week, and ten days, and then up to a month. And started doing those pretty much every year. And my path got deeper and I started getting glimpses of something beyond what I knew myself to be that were so compelling and really some of the deepest experiences of my life up to that point. And I wanted to experience that more.

Renate Yes, so how did--how did that influence your daily life, your experiences? At that age?

Tina At that age, I feel like it really gave me a sense of peace and of the profundity of life also. There was something in these experiences that most people have had, like our students (Stephen and I) will come and maybe have had a few of these experiences, maybe not even meditating--watching a beautiful sunset or the birth of a child or someone dying--where something opens up that's beyond what we know in consensual reality, in the relative. And then that starts informing your life. So for me, it really gave me a sense of there being something more in life, and of the profundity of just the human experience, really.

Renate Yeah, yeah. So after, there was this teacher, you explained your experiences to one of your teachers, it was Guy Armstrong, and he said, he thinks, you experienced the Jhanas.

Tina Mhmm. Well, what happened was I, in my thirties, I really had felt that I had accomplished a lot of what I wanted to do with my life. I had books published and, you know, had successful consulting, and was able to have the time to do long meditation retreats. And I had a teacher who had done a year-long solo retreat. This was actually a teacher, a non-dual teacher. And she really inspired me to consider doing that. And I was single at the time, and self-employed. I didn't come from a wealthy family or anything, had a mortgage. And I really set myself up to do a solo retreat for a year. And stopped working and it was silent. Most of the year was silent. And part of that year was doing the jhanas. So this was before I met Pa Auk Sayadaw. And Guy Armstrong was one of several teachers that I touched into during that year.

Renate So tell me more about this year. How--which form did it take?

Tina Yeah, well I had done long retreats up to that point. So I felt fairly confident in my practice, and that I could do something like this without support. Really this was something I did on my own, in my condo in the San Francisco Bay area. So I didn't go to a monastery or anywhere special.

Renate And which, exactly, practice did you do?

Tina So I really did a combination of all of the practices I had been doing over the years. So, really, the bridge of the practices, the meditation practices, is the Tibetan Dzogchen practice, which consists of Samatha (which is part of where the jhanas lay), Vipassana (which is practiced very commonly in the West), and then Rigpa is the third practice (which is a self-transcending open-eyed practice). And then there are heart practices called the Brahmaviharas, and also Boddhicitta, and those really purify the heart. And then I did movement practices such as yoga, and qigong and a certain kind of meditative walking. And so those are all the practices that I did at different times through that year. And I also went on an organised one month retreat at the beginning, a two-week in the middle, and then a three-month retreat (this was at meditation centres), at the end.

Renate And you had the intention in the beginning: you do it for a whole year.

Tina Right, I had consulting clients for example, that I had to tell them that, "I won't be able to provide services to you for this year because I'm doing a year-long meditation retreat." So it was, you know, a little edgy there, because I was going to

be dependent on having clients when this ended. I mean, assuming I was still functional, which I wasn't actually sure how functional I would be after doing this. But there was just something in me that just felt so compelled to awaken, actually, that it was sort of like--it doesn't matter what happens at the end of the year because I have to do this. And if I become you know, somehow mentally unbalanced or can't take care of myself or whatever – these were some of the fears that came up and of course, other people...

Renate Sure...

Tina ...around me wanted to make sure that I was going to be okay. But it kind of didn't matter. It was sort of like, I need to do this and I need to sort of give myself over to that depth of the practice, because it's the most important thing.

Renate Yeah, so in this school we both are, in the Ridhwan school, it's called the enlightenment drive.

Tina It's very strong in me, yeah.

Renate It took over.

Tina Exactly.

Renate And you were really ready to surrender everything to that and...

Tina Yeah, that's really what it was. The enlightenment drive was so strong and there was like, a window of opportunity in my life and I had had a couple of teachers who really said, "You know, you might not be able to do this at some later point in your life. And you can, you have the conditions." My friends, my family were all very supportive. Even my business clients were supportive. And it, it was an amazing opportunity, and I'm so glad that I did it because it was really one of the most meaningful periods of my life.

Renate Can you explain the enlightenment drive? Because if you hear "drive," you immediately think, well it's the ego which is out there to, trying to get enlightened.

Tina Right. Well, some of it may come from that, you know, the ego's kind of participating. I've heard that...

Renate And hopes it finally gets happiness.

Tina Right, right. *I'm* going to get enlightened, you know! But that's what everybody thinks at the beginning, is that, that the "me" somehow is going to get enlightened. But it helps to have the participation, I think, of the ego-self in that. For me, it really was very--it's always been very strong since I was in my late twenties. This has been a major part of my life. And it feels as a, kind of, it's often talked about as the flame, the flame for awakening, and that flame starts burning up the ego-self. Or at least that's what you hope is happening! And it's something that's very compelling, to know oneself and to know the mystery. The mystery of existence that I think has driven cave yogis for thousands of years to go out--I mean, they had to deal with wild animals and robbers, you know, meditating in forests and caves. I had a nice, comfortable condominium, you know, that I owned. But now I feel differently, because there's been some finding of what was sought. But it's a real, deep spiritual longing to return to what is home. And to know that mystery of existence directly. That--"Where do we come from, what happens to us when we die, and what is beyond the sense of the personality and the body?"--that we are, and that everything is manifesting from. That there's this ground that we really are at our depth. And to know that directly.

Renate And you had, so you had some expectation of what might possibly happen.

Tina Yeah, from the teachings, from different traditions that I'd studied in--from Buddhism and others--of awakening and enlightenment. And I didn't know what would happen, of course. I'd had glimpses of that and felt close; it felt like

something that was arising. But I really didn't know what would happen and neither did the teachers that I was working with at the time. But all I could do is show up.

Renate And how many hours a day did you meditate?

Tina Well, I, during the course of the year, it's kind of funny because I'm an eight hour a night sleeper. I've always needed about that much, and I got down to about four hours of sleep so that allowed for more meditating than I would normally even have time for. So it could have been up to twelve hours a day, something like that. And then with the moving meditations, the yoga, the qigong and the walking meditation which I did every day--I wasn't reading, I wasn't watching TV, I wasn't talking on the phone other than the times when I sort of surfaced to get groceries, and pay bills, and call my parents and do those things. So it could be twelve or fourteen hours a day. And I was also doing dream yoga, so...

Renate What is dream yoga?

Tina It's a certain kind of practice--it's kind of like lucid dreaming where you're actually carrying your practice over into the sleep state. So there were times when I was practicing almost twenty-four hours a day, if you include that.

Renate Right, ok. What's the purpose of that?

Tina Of dream yoga?

Renate Yeah.

Tina It allows us to see--this is from Tibetan Buddhism and then there's a whole modern school of lucid dreaming that's outside of any religious or spiritual practice. It allows us to see that state, to carry over our direct experience of being volitional in that state. So in most dreams we feel like the dream is happening and if we're even conscious of it or lucid we don't feel like there's any sense of volition, it's all just happening in the dream. And in lucid dreaming we actually become active in the dream. And then the dream state starts feeling much more real and then when we wake up we can start to experience the same kind of phenomenon in the waking state--that it's all very kind of dreamlike--which assists with awakening because we aren't taking it to be as solid as the way we would normally experience reality. In Tibetan Buddhism there's different states, the bardo being the death state... there's different bardos, and it's believed that the bardo we're in, that we call daily life or reality, is actually a bardo just like the dream state.

Renate Well, we have a friend who is practicing lucid dreaming and he told us that there were, on a couple of occasions he got lost and didn't know where reality was. And they have some kind of signs, you know... [does thumbs-up]

Tina Looking at your hands.

Renate Looking at your thumb or your hand where they then figure out...

Tina ...which it is

Renate which dream to enter which is all, which is the reality that should be manifested.

Tina Well, the best test to know whether you're dreaming or in our, what we would call normal physical reality, is: try to fly. That'll tell you which one you're in.

Renate Try to fly?

Tina Yeah, because in the dream state you can push off and start flying.

Renate What, like astral travelling?

Tina Well, it's a dream. You're actually flying in the dream. So it'd be like, you know, in the movies how we see, you know, superheroes who can just start flying. In the dream state, for some people, that is possible whereas in physical reality, I still, still haven't seen anyone do that yet.

Renate Well, you can levitate! [Laughter]

Tina I have to work up to that! [Laughter]

Renate I saw people levitating.  
Tina Yeah.  
Renate Anyway, in this retreat you had a profound awakening.  
Tina Mhmm.  
Renate Would you tell us what your experience was?  
Tina Sure. It happened in March. And so in, in February I had been at a month long retreat that was at a meditation centre, and had come back without really resurfacing. So I was in a very deep place, mostly doing the progression I talked to you about, the Samatha, Vipassana, Rigpa in the Dzogchen practice path, and was...  
Renate And those are all different types of meditation?  
Tina Those are types of meditation. And in Dzogchen, you combine those in order to have, in order to cultivate a resting in rigpa which is basically a nondual state that is always present in our consciousness but normally there's a veil that makes us feel as if there's an ego-self, that's doing all these things, that's kind of in charge of everything we experience. And in rigpa that veil drops. And so, I was doing that practice, and, and I don't know why at that point it was different than it had been up to that point. Because I'd been in rigpa, basically that's a taste of awakening. Stephen and I have what we call the "51 % rule." So I don't know if this applied, but where you get to a certain point, whether that's small tastes that accumulate over the course of one's practice or whether something opens and there's a letting go of the ego-self that's very dramatic, and you go from 20% to 60% all in one shot. Or 100% for some people, who have huge awakenings that they get all the way to the 100% maybe. But it went to a point where the ground opened up as what I am, this is what I knew myself as, and just expanded to the point where there wasn't any sense of the ego-self functioning, and this was stable for many months. Almost for a year after that, not that the ego-self didn't come in and be active because that's happening even today. But it opened up to the ground that is really what I am, and what we all are, that we're all functioning from whether we know it or not. And I knew that this is what I was and that the ego-self is really just a fabrication. And that it's flimsy.  
Renate So powerful.  
Tina Right. So this was really the opening I consider--it's where you can't go back from that. I couldn't not know that anymore, even if there was a forgetting temporarily, I know what I am. And that's irreversible.  
Renate Yeah. So how did your body deal with that profound opening? Because...  
Tina My body?  
Renate Yes, because, you know, I know and I heard if, you know, the shutter opens so sudden we have so many--our nervous system is full of traumas, and what have you, and you know, the energy which comes in then or is...  
Tina It's a lot.  
Renate ...is accessed, is a lot. Or the light is, you know...  
Tina Right.  
Renate ...is a lot for the body to hold.  
Tina Right.  
Renate And, did you have any symptoms then or...?  
Tina Yeah, for me that whole year, I had many things. It was, it was manageable but I was reading books about...I think his name's Gopi Krishna, and the kundalini, and the really difficult, difficult experiences that some people have when kundalini opens and its, their system can't tolerate it, and I...

Renate ...can blow your system.

Tina Yeah, I had, I don't know if it was that year or maybe the year before, it might have been actually that year, where I was meditating and, in a meditation hall with eighty or a hundred other people. And at that point I sat on a zafu on the floor, and I could feel it happening where there was a kundalini rising and I knew what was happening, there was nothing I could do. And it went all the way up to my crown on the left side, on the right side there was a block that I knew. But I just basically went face down in the meditation hall. And I, when I came to I didn't know how long I'd been there. I, I sort of looked up and the person...

Renate So you were knocked down?

Tina I was actually knocked unconscious at that time, yeah. And it actually felt wonderful afterwards. It just--so much had opened up from that. This was different than the awakening experience, but it was one of the things--just speaking to the body--that I had a lot of energy phenomenon during that year. And it was extremely blissful. I mean, it was outrageously blissful. And at the same time there was like an edge between at times it being too much. And I would have to do, sort of, energy management things that would regulate it. I'd go out in public at that time, rarely--like right in the middle I went to a Tibetan Dzogchen retreat at a centre not far from where I lived. And there were a few people I knew there, and one of them came up to me, and my eyes were just like lasers, you know. And he said, "What's going on with you? You know, so much light's coming off of you, I can barely even look at you!" So, it took my body some time to adjust to that, that level of energy and, and light. You know, I don't know how else to describe it. And I would have to do things like lie on my bed and just shake, to integrate it. And I later found out that there's actually a qigong move where you stand and you do that, and it's kind of an integrating movement. So I didn't have any negative consequences other than just feeling at times that I had more energy than my system kind of could handle, but it never created problems at that point.

Renate Right. Yeah, So after this year, you came back to, to the world and, and you must have been a completely different person?

Tina I felt very different, I felt as if what I am is different, what I knew myself to be, and also, I actually didn't really want to come back. There was a part of me that--like on the day that I had to start calling clients and reactivating my work and other things, I just literally cried for hours, because I knew that there wouldn't be the same container to hold that experience and I would miss it. I would miss the opportunity to just kind of "abide." For months, I really didn't want to do anything. And one of the Zen teachers I went to, who verified my experience, said, "Oh, it'll come back. You'll start working and doing normal things like normal people. It'll happen on its own." And it kind of did, but there was a way that I just treasured that opportunity so much, because being in the world I wouldn't have the same level of attention on my inner experience that I had been able to have for that year.

Renate You said that you were even contemplating becoming a cave...

Tina A cave yogi.

Renate A cave yogi, yes.

Tina Right.

Renate How did you imagine that? You move into the mountains...

Tina Well, for one thing there's the financial side of that. And at the time I was thirty-nine, I did this for my fortieth birthday year. So I started when I was thirty-nine, I had my fortieth birthday and finished when I was forty. And I wasn't really at a point where I could retire. I had to work, basically. But I thought, well, if I could

save enough money and maybe move somewhere very inexpensive and do some minimal kind of work...I think it was Nisargadatta Maharaj who said, "Just get the most easy job you can get, so it doesn't take much effort or much mental effort." So I kind of thought maybe I would do that, and just kind of abide there. Really that was a longing to create a life situation where I could spend more time just abiding, enjoying the realisation that was present. But there came a point where as much as I wanted to do that, there was like a calling to be in the world, and to not turn away from the world, and to bring to the extent I could the realisation that I had into just my everyday functioning. And that was hard. That was hard to do because as I was in more and more active situations and a relationship, and work and all of those things. That sort of pristine awareness that had been present, I could feel the places where my ego structure would activate and it was actually quite painful. It was sort of like the, a "fall from grace" in a certain way. I mean, I never went back to how it was before, but even seeing from this huge expanded state, seeing the places that my personality material hadn't been digested was excruciating, actually. But there was really something in me that didn't want to turn away from the world, that wanted to get out from behind the monastery walls. And Stephen and I feel that, if you look at this movement in consciousness of so many--tens or hundreds of thousands of people now--who want to have a deep spiritual life but be in the world. They don't want to be monastics.

Renate I think that's what's called for...

Tina Right!

Renate ...in our time, yeah.

Tina It is, it is. So as hard as that was, I felt that this lifetime was about being in the world and dealing with all of the messes that get created when you're in relationships, when you deal with money and sex and jobs and bosses, and, you know, all of the struggles that we all have in daily life. And I wanted to see how much of that personality material could be digested, and that's when I found the Diamond Approach. The meditation paths, and the historical paths, that really went for the transcendent are great at opening someone up to that, but they don't have much spiritual technology on how to live from it as a regular person. They're not very sophisticated, and they just say, "Oh, go and ordain as a monastic." That's the solution, mostly. And so the Diamond Approach, I felt, when looking around, I really felt that was a path that integrated the psychological and the spiritual into one continuum. And that it was the best place to attempt to integrate the awakening into functioning from what I knew.

Renate Well, we have in the West, a completely different mindset, you know. In Buddha's time all meditation was, you know, was done for, or invented for a completely different...

Tina Right!

Renate ...much slower mindset.

Tina Exactly.

Renate You know, where it also was much easier for those people to let go...

Tina Right.

Renate You know, here, if you hear let go, well we need to first own what, before we can let go.

Tina Right.

Renate They don't need to own it, it seems. They could just surrender and let go. So our mind works different.

Tina Our minds are very, much more complicated. And Stephen and I often quote a

study we read about, or heard about, that. Where they studied a number of thoughts per day that a modern person has, and it was something like 35,000. And most of those, 80 or 90% of those are repetitious, not only over that day, but over the day before and the day before, and five years ago and ten years ago. They're not doing anything, they're not helping us. And these are just grooves in the consciousness that we run over and over that are unnecessary, and then...

Renate Yeah, but the problem is, it's not only unnecessary. The problem is that we believe these thoughts.

Tina Right! Exactly! We believe them. And they're mostly coming out of our conditioning that's been laid down in the consciousness from childhood.

Renate And start generation and generations before us.

Tina Right, they're passed on through generations too. And indigenous people who haven't been affected by modern culture have 800 or 900 thoughts a day, and do just fine with that. So you think about the day of the Buddha, that's probably what he was working with, was people who had much less complicated consciousness. And even in Tibetan Buddhism, there's a teacher named Padmasambhava who created Dzogchen, he was really the Dzogchen lineage founder. And he gave teachings that were hidden, and only discovered hundreds, 800, 500 years later, because he saw that the people of his day, their psychologies weren't complex enough to actually use the practice. But there would be a time in the future where this practice would be what was needed for our complicated mindstreams. And that's the practice that I was doing on my yearlong. So you think about how much we've changed, and we need practices that are relevant for a modern person. And so I feel that the diamond Approach for me has, as a companion to the Buddhist practice, really allows for more digesting of the personality material, and then functioning as a unique human from the ground. I mean, that's really my aspiration, is to be able to function more and more from the Absolute as a unique human that's living a human life and enjoying living a human life.

Renate Yeah, yeah. I, some months ago, I did an interview with Reggie Ray, who is in the lineage with Trungpa Rinpoche. And he was talking about how for years and years, they meditated hours and hours and hours, and people were in absolute agony because they did not have any psychological, you know, things would come up and they didn't know what to do, there was no...

Tina Yes.

Renate ...talking about it, or working on it, or looking... And he said, when, he had to leave and stop with that, and do some work on himself and, and go through some therapy, and work on his traumas and, and so forth before he could re-enter the meditation again, yeah.

Tina This is really important, that to do deep and rigorous practices, like what we teach, it is really beneficial and even important to have a, a healthy ego-structure. And I've had a number of teachers who've said that's really ideal is to sort of have a fulfilment of the ego where it's kind of like, "I've done all I can as an ego self." That's how I felt in my mid to late thirties, it's like, "This is it." And so, there was enough of a healthy ego structure, I guess, in this location, to do a year-long solo retreat. For some people, there needs to be things like therapy, and counselling, and to really have that ego structure be solid, in order to subject it to the opening up, as well as the pressures that rigorous meditation practice, or other kinds of practices, put on us.

Renate So, in your teaching, when you do meditation, give meditation retreats, do you have sometimes students where you feel this person cannot really hold going deeper in

the meditation, they need to do first some, some preparation? Some psychological...

Tina Yes, absolutely. One of the things we have is a criteria for, if they're coming to especially one of our longer retreats--like two weeks or we did a month-long once--that they've done several other long silent retreats beforehand. Sometimes like two ten-day retreats. Because people who can do that generally will have enough of a solid container to do a retreat with us. So that kind of becomes a prerequisite that helps anybody who would feel like that would be too much, wouldn't come. They would be sort of screened out. But even in spite of that, there have been a few times when we've felt that somebody should either meditate less, maybe meditate less hours per day, or switch to a practice that is going to round out their psychology. So maybe they're doing the mindfulness of breathing, which is the practice that is used for the jhanas attainment, (mostly, there's other ones too). We might switch them to a heart practice. Say they're having some difficulties, that would benefit from a more suitable practice. Doing Metta, which is loving-kindness, as a way to round out their practice. Or we might tell them to meditate less or to get counselling. Or to do other practices that are helpful and useful.

Renate Right.

Tina As a support, in order to take on the challenge of really deconstructing the ego self. That's what meditation is really doing, is helping us see through the limitations of that, to what we really are.

Renate So you, your main practice is now the jhanas [pronounces yanas]

Tina Jhanas.

Renate Oh, sorry, jhanas. [Laughter]

Tina [Laughter]

Renate Jhanas. This is a very beautiful book, by the way, [shows book, Practicing the Jhanas] where Tina and Stephen really, through their own experience, you know, that's what I love about this book; you really come from your own experience. So the, the jhanas are stages of letting go?

Tina Yeah, that's a nice way of saying it.

Renate Yeah?

Tina Mhmm.

Renate So, well, we'll do a little programme afterwards where we go more into the jhanas and what it actually is. So when you say letting go from one stage into the next, how does that feel? How do you do that actually? Or is there no doer? Is that happening? And where does, where do you end up? There are eight stages, where do you end up? And what's beyond?

Tina Aha, ok, well, there's, there's a couple of questions in there. I like all of them. The practice itself is very simple. It's found in many traditions, but we, in Theravadan Buddhism, it's really outlined in detail. It's mindfulness of breathing. So we know our breath, in this particular way of doing it, you know the breath between the upper lip and the nostril, so sort of in this area.[gestures] And you're just attending to your breath. That's really the whole practice all the way through all eight jhanas. Well, you actually change to another object, when you get to the second part. And I won't get too technical here, but mindfulness of breathing is how one starts with that practice. And what happens is, because you're just coming back to the breath, and the first thing that one notices when they try to do it is: thoughts come up and you go off of the breath. That's what's happening. And some people think, "Well, I can't meditate, I'm not doing it right if that's happening." But actually what this is doing is showing us our conditioned patterns, and our compulsive thinking patterns,

and attachments to the ego self that are always running under the surface constantly. But until we meditate we usually don't even see them. And there's the possibility then, as the mindstream starts coming together--and that's really what concentration is, is a unification of the mindstream that's normally going in all directions--it starts coming together more and more through different levels of concentration. At first, it's momentary, where we're just with the breath, and then we're off. And then it becomes more unified in access concentration. It starts getting easier and we might start feeling some joy and bliss and other things, that sort of reinforce that you want to keep doing it. And then at some point the mindstream is so unified, and with this there's less and less of the running of the story, basically. We're learning how to turn away from the story that keeps the ego-self going and keeps us identified with it. So as we're doing more and more hours a day where that's not present, it's possible for the consciousness to be absorbed into the first jhana. And then there's these other layers. But the, the mindstream becomes at a vibration, (this is how we sort of talk about it), that's high enough that it's at the level of the first jhana and the consciousness is absorbed into it. And the "me," the sense of the "me" goes dormant. So what's significant about this is, it's a non-dual state, the jhana. Any of the jhanas are non-dual, there's no sense of a "me" in it. You know that you're breathing, and you have a sense of if there's the joy or the other [jhana factors], but other than that, that is what you are aware of in the jhana state.

Renate I read in this book that when you experienced it the first time, it was so intense. When you experienced the non, non-dual awareness, it is like being absorbed into the now.

Tina Yeah, so that is the eighth jhana.

Renate It was so intense for you...oh, that's the eighth one...

Tina Mhmm.

Renate ...that you could hold it only a few minutes because it, of the intensity.

Tina Right.

Renate So what you're saying is the now, really being in the now, is so intense that you cannot hold it. Was that your experience?

Tina Well, that particular... all of the jhanas, you're in the present moment. And really any meditation, if one is doing it fully, one is in the present moment. So the, the eighth jhana, there's a whole series...

Renate Process, yeah?

Tina Right, and the first four are considered "form jhanas," so we use the breath as an object but they're relating to the material world. The second four are what's called the "immaterial jhanas." And those are considered actual formless realms. So the Buddha considered them actual realms where consciousness can exist that are beyond physicality, so they're formless. And the eighth jhana is called--I'll give you the name and then you can see how sort of out-there it is--it's called "the base of neither perception nor non-perception." So what does that mean? [Laughter]

Renate Yes, what does that mean?

Tina Well, that's the thing. Your mind can't get around it. The mind can't actually know what that means, because it's non-dual. And so this is the last jhana before the unconditioned.

Renate Yeah but, Tina, this state is present all the time.

Tina Right.

Renate And we are, when we are not thinking, in this state, in this now and we do not realise it.

Tina Right, all of these are always here.

Renate Always.

Tina Right. All of these non-dual, boundless realms are always present because they are manifesting from the unconditioned to us, where it's sitting right here.

Renate Yeah, but what I reckoned from your notes is that when you entered that consciously, it was too intense.

Tina Right, this is the...

Renate So what's the difference?

Tina Yeah...

Renate It being here, in your daily life and, and you know, it, you just, you just rush, rush over it, or sometimes you are without thoughts and you don't feel the intensity of it but when you enter consciously into it, you feel the intensity.

Tina Right, right. Well, one of the things that's unique about the jhanas versus other non-dual states, because people can experience non-duality at any moment, it's always available. So one of the unique things about this practice and about the jhanas is that the concentration level, this unification of mind...

Renate A laser goes in.

Tina ...the laser-like awareness is very different than our normal everyday awareness. And the eighth jhana... and at this point, you know, Stephen and I had been practicing for two months doing meditation. Like one sitting sometimes was three or four hours long, where you sit down, you're in a jhana and you don't get up for three or four hours, doing this numerous times a day. So the eighth jhana is so... What's happening with this practice, and there are other practices that are more about opening--like the Dzogchen--to physical reality with the boundless. This practice, we're really going inward and, and some ways we're orienting to the mystery and leaving the physical. And so much of our awareness--this is why if you see, there's a movie on the Kumba Mela and if I watch it, I can see the people who are doing these practices. Because they can't--when one's abiding, doing the meditations, say, on the eighth jhana--it's very, there's a whole lot of our consciousness that isn't actually in the physical. A lot of our consciousness is actually gone into those realms. Like you may not have any body awareness whatsoever.

Renate But, but then you are not grounded. How, how... you couldn't live in this world.

Tina Exactly, and if you look at them, or the yogis, the traditional sadhus in India--people had to take care of them. And this is part of what the Buddha learned. He learned from people who were practicing the jhanas. This is what he learned from his teachers, and it's dependent on concentration, and also it's a practice that's really orienting our consciousness to the mystery and not to the physical realm. But what it does, is that it allows us to penetrate that in such a deep way, that it's called purification of mind, so it purifies the consciousness and that's what was so strong, was the level of purification and you really feel it, especially in the crown chakra. And our students, we haven't had any students get that far, but it's palpable.

Renate When you say purification, what does that mean? What is purified?

Tina Our consciousness. The mindstream.

Renate The mindstream.

Tina Yeah.

Renate Is, is purified of what?

Tina Is purified of, in Buddhism it's called the hindrances and defilements. But just in lay person's language, it's the personality patterns. So again, when you meditate, and say you're trying to be with the breath and you're going off to thoughts, why is that happening? It's compulsive. Our consciousness is compulsive and can't *not* go there.

And this is where we get caught and lost in it and can either cause harm to ourselves or others, or, or suffering. And that is what's getting purified. And you can feel it. I mean, this is not, "I wonder if it's happening."

Renate But it's coming back. Isn't it forming itself back together again when you...?

Tina Yes. So this is...

Renate ... are out of that state.

Tina Right, so this, this is one of the things about this practice is that it's really about turning towards the mystery. This needs to be supplemented with practices where we're opening to physical reality as a human, embodied, and then bringing that to, as best is possible, using those structures of the personality in order to function as a human. And so really the questions, like some people when they do these practices, they go so far out they can't function that well as a human. Like, look at Ramana Maharshi.

Renate Yeah.

Tina I mean, he's a beautiful example of enlightenment. But he couldn't function as a human, hardly at all. He didn't even care about surviving.

Renate No, I know he was sitting in the mountains and were eaten up by the animals. And he didn't...

Tina He didn't care.

Renate ...care.

Tina Right. So to, to me, as much as I respect the enormous awakening that he had, that is not the fullness of the human experience.

Renate Not, not in our time.

Tina Right.

Renate Not here.

Tina Right, and

Renate Maybe it was.

Tina Oh yeah, absolutely, but I, like, I'll just say for myself...

Renate I think there was some kind of evolution happening in, within consciousness.

Tina Right!

Renate ... which is now trying to embody more into the body and the world.

Tina Right, well even if you look at what happened in Tibet, it was predicted for many, many millennia in Tibet, that Tibet would be invaded and they would have to leave. And so Tibetans always tried to stop that from happening. But look at our modern era where now all around the world we have Tibetan Buddhism. And before it was very hidden. So there's something, there's a movement, this is my belief and hope, is that this is part of coming out from the monastery walls where consciousness needs to penetrate our physical reality and really have it enlighten everything to where it's conscious. I mean, that's already happening, everything already is manifesting from the Absolute, it's just that we don't know that. And this is where the suffering of the world comes in. And so that's, that's the potential, is to, to enlighten physical form. And that's part of the living from it. And that's what the Buddha wanted to do was, he said, "Ok, is there a way that this kind of realisation is possible without the concentration level?" Because with the concentration level, it's hard to function as a normal human. And so for me, this was part of my journey, was coming out of the year, I didn't just do those practices [points to the "Practicing the Jhanas" book]. I did Dzogchen and others. Dzogchen's an open-eye practice and it's really designed for you to realise the ground of being while you are functioning, doing anything, doing your job, taking out the garbage, taking a shower, talking to your, you know, friends or family. And so, that to me, is the next evolution, is how can we, how can

I, how can others function, living a human life as much as possible from that, *from that*. And that way--the ground is manifesting us all the time whether we know it or not--but with the awakening you know that that's happening.

Renate We need the role models, like you. Yeah some, you know, there are all kind of teachers out there who are, have wonderful teachings and, and are great, but they are not really a role model for living in this world.

Tina Well that's...

Renate They, they, they go off the rail into the transcendent. But anyway, what I also read in this book, which I found fascinating, that the jhanas [pronounces yanans] were, jhanas, sorry, were used to gain supernatural powers.

Tina That is, within Buddhism there is a teaching that if one has attained up to the eighth jhana which is extremely rare, I mean we were, Stephen and I were the first, I was the first Western lay woman to attain that, so...

Renate And, did you have supernatural powers? [Laughter]

Tina I'd rather not talk about that. But in, in Buddhism, once one has done that, then there's a whole progression that's actually taught. We had somebody contact us by email who had been at Pa Auk monastery, a woman from the Netherlands, I think, and she said that, that nuns and monks there told her that we might have this information of where do you find that in the teachings. And it's right there in a book called the Visuddhimagga. And there's actually a woman who was in India, her name's Dipa Ma, and there's a book written about her...

Renate I looked her up.

Tina Amazing, she was really one of the most amazing meditators in modern times. She was alive, you know, during our lives. And there were some senior Buddhist teachers, Mahasi Sayadaw and Munindra, she was a student of a man named Munindra who was a lay person and she was a lay person. And they wanted to test out what was in the Visuddhimagga to see if it was real. And so they had her do the practices because she was the best meditator that they knew of, out of, you know, hundreds of thousands of people. And she did it, and they had--scientists came from a university in India, and watched her to see if she could do these things. I wasn't there so I can't speak from first-hand experience but according to the scientists she was able to do things like bi-locate.

Renate What is bi-locate?

Tina Bi-locate. So she could be in two places at once. So they had one scientist at her house and one at a coffee shop down the street...

Renate But they said that about Sai Baba as well.

Tina Right.

Renate He was seen in Switzerland while he was tea... buying watches, while he was teaching wherever in India.

Tina Right, oh yeah, others have been able to do it. But she did it with scientists watching her. And she did things like, they knew a politician was going to give a speech a week in the future. So they had her go there and then she wrote down what he said and then gave it to the scientists, and they waited a week and listened to his speech and she had the whole thing. So I, we can't do that, but that is what's, part of what's possible within Buddhism. In the old days, like the day of the Buddha where they're meditating outside and there's tigers or wild animals that could eat them, lions, they might need some of these things like being able to levitate. It's actually practical; in modern times it's not really that necessary.

Renate Ok, the rainbow body, you know, I did some Mahamudra workshops and there was talk about the rainbow body. How you dematerialise and the only thing which is left

are the nails and the hair.

Tina Fingernails, maybe some teeth. I think I might have to work up to that. But yes, that is one of the--Tibetan Buddhism has some really cool things in it and one of them is the rainbow body. And there have been some teachers in modern times where again, scientists have been involved when they died and their body stays warm for a long time, it doesn't decompose. But then it, it shrinks or somehow disappears and all that's left is the nails and the teeth. And, and it's a very, very advanced state. Maybe what happened, if you believe in the Shroud of Turin and Jesus. Maybe he did that, who knows?

Renate It's all, it's all how much, I think, down to how much you can focus your mind, you know, how sharp the laser becomes. I think anyway, Tina, our time is up.

Tina Is our time up? Oh wow, that went really fast.

Renate And it's not completely up because we are doing another little programme with Stephen and with Tina, so watch out for that, or stay tuned for that. And also Ian did, before us, an interview with Stephen which was very fascinating. Look at that as well. So, see you soon. Goodbye for the moment.

Tina Thanks, Renate.