

Conscious TV - Genpo Roshi

Genpo Roshi - Path of the Human Being

Interview by Iain McNay

Iain: Our guest today is Genpo Roshi who is the originator of 'Big Mind.' And we're going to talk obviously about Big Mind but also about Genpo's life, maybe also his early life and we're going to have some real look at what realisation is, what Non-Duality is, what maybe enlightenment is and try and get ourselves clear on that big, big subject. So first of all welcome Genpo.

Genpo: Thank you. That is a big subject. [smiling]

Iain: It is a very big subject but it's probably, for most of us that are in our own way searching, the most important subject there is.

Genpo: Absolutely.

Iain: Because without that as some kind of base of our life we're lost.

Genpo: That's right. That's right. It gives us direction, it gives us meaning and purpose.

Iain: I know for myself, I've had quite a difficult few days and it was interesting because I was in hospital in France for three days and there was a big language barrier and it was quite challenging at times, and then I got out yesterday morning, got a flight last night and then we got back to our apartment in London and the first telephone message was to tell me my car had been towed away and I had to pay five hundred pound to get it out of the car pound, and I must admit that was very challenging, and I reacted. It's something to do with keeping the big picture or a connection quite well the previous few three days, and then I was tired and it snapped [makes snapping sound with hands] and it went. And I know you had a similar, well not a similar... but you had a test as well because you fell over in Amsterdam, you were walking... well you tell the story.

Genpo: It was the day that I arrived in Amsterdam which was a week ago Friday, and we were walking to a nearby restaurant and it was icy and cold and my foot kicked a rise in the pavement. It was cement blocks, and I kicked that and had my gloves and hands in my pocket and I just took a face plant, straight down on my face, and that's why my eye's [pointing to left eye] like this. It's healed quite well in these ten days or so but it was quite bad.

Iain: And what was your first thought, reaction when you... because you must have known when you were going down... what was the process? Was there a process?

Genpo: It was real fast and the first thing was "Get me to a hospital." I knew it was bad. I hit it really hard and it was unforgiving. The pavement slapped me pretty hard.

Iain: Pavements tend to do that, yes. [laughing]

Genpo: Pretty hard slap.

Iain: Yes.

Genpo: So we spent the next three hours in the emergency room getting stitched up.

Iain: Yes. But there was no reaction saying "Oh shit," or something like that? It was just...

Genpo: Maybe after the fact was "I'm a mess."

Iain: Yes.

Genpo: Yes, afterwards. In the immediacy of the moment it was just "I need to get to hospital, I need care."

Iain: So it was a practical thought that came up.

Genpo: Very much so.

Iain: A very intelligent thought.

Genpo: Well it was... yeah. [laughing]

Iain: Good for you.

Genpo: I needed a hospital.

Iain: So, I don't know very much about you, but we chatted a bit before we started recording here and I know that you were a very successful swimmer when you were younger and you were very driven as a person and you wanted to be successful in the world like most of us.

Genpo: Yes, I mean definitely I'm very competitive, very driven, very disciplined. I trained very hard every day, in fact I don't think at that time in history we understood the necessity for rest and recovery and I trained every day for probably ten years, not missing a day and trained many hours, many, many hours, both swimming and water polo. Water polo was my great love, swimming was something that I did, obviously I loved it, but water polo was my great love.

Iain: And you had ambition to be as successful as you could?

Genpo: Absolutely. I was working towards the Olympics at that point for the nineteen sixty-eight Olympics and in nineteen sixty-six I got married, and I was... I went to graduate school at the University of Southern California, working on my Masters degree and I also was working two jobs; I was teaching full-time and I was a lifeguard, and I was doing it all. So I had to give something up and it was my pursuit of the Olympic experience, but you know I went to the Maccabean Games in nineteen sixty-five, we won a gold there. We were I think three times national champions in water polo out of four years of college and I was an All-American, which doesn't mean anything in England I think, but it means there's a team selected, the top five... six... I can't remember now, seven, top seven water polo players in the country and I was named to that, so it was a successful career.

Iain: And was there any interest in spiritual matters or finding out more what motivated you and made you work at this stage?

Genpo: Zero at the time, zero. In fact I went to my twenty-fifth. I think it was, high school reunion and when people found out what I'd been doing because I'd been now a Zen priest ordained since nineteen seventy-three which is now thirty-five, thirty-six years I guess and... they found out what I was doing and they said, "Well you were always very spiritual." I said, "I was?" They said "You were very religious about your discipline in swimming and water polo, it was like your life, you became you know, the driving force." I didn't see that, I never saw myself as spiritual. I come from a long line of Rabbis and Rebbes, but I... that was not my pursuit, it was not my interest until nineteen seventy-one when I was twenty-six years old and I had this experience in the Mojave Desert. I was sitting there alone and you could say I had an enlightened experience, an awakening experience where I became one with the cosmos, one with consciousness and this self dropped off, body and mind dropped off and there was no Dennis Merzel in that moment and my whole life changed. It was like I was a locomotive going a hundred and forty miles per hour and all of a sudden I found myself going the opposite direction, because everything up to that moment was a pursuit of what we normally pursue: success whether it be financial or you know, fame or name, reputation, also stability and that kind of success too, and all of a sudden that became less important to me. And what became more important to me was clarity, wisdom, love, compassion and to share the awakened experience with others, which I began doing immediately right after the experience.

Iain: So what took you to the desert in the first place? What was the catalyst that got you there?

Genpo: That's a good question. I was having some difficulty in a relationship I was in. I found myself feeling once again restricted, confined, controlled and I needed to get away. So I called some friends of mine, we went out to the desert, I took a day off and it was a weekend so I had a three day holiday from teaching school and I went out there. I think I was looking for some space, [laughing] which I found, and I was driven by this feeling that I wasn't free; I was confined, I was restricted.

Iain: So there was a certain intelligence there that you knew you were free? You didn't necessarily have a big picture...

Genpo: I certainly didn't have a big picture, no I didn't.

Iain: Something inside you was guiding you?

Genpo: And it's been a driving force, I would say my whole life this pursuit of liberation, of freedom, yes.

Iain: So you had this experience and you felt... I think you said you felt one with everything is that right?

Genpo: That's correct, that's correct.

Iain: So, was that strange or did it feel strangely familiar or...?

Genpo: Not at all familiar. It was a total reversal of my mind, it was what I would call a shift

of consciousness and instead of kind of seeing the world from my ego self, I was all of a sudden seeing the world being the world. You know, if we look at the human being, just that term, we're all human beings, and we see that we're in this life, in this world and in pursuit of the world, more or less from the human side, where we have anger and fear and jealousy and we have envy and we have hope and we have all these things, right? And that was my whole life. And all of a sudden I got in touch with the beingness, pure beingness which is beyond time and space, has nothing to do with time and space and that was such a shift that it was an awakening because I had never experienced anything like that before.

Iain: And why did that happen at that time do you think?

Genpo: I think just what we were saying earlier, I think I was driven out there because I was feeling confined and limited and restricted and something broke free. Now probably if we get into maybe past lives and so forth, maybe I've had past lives because in that moment where I awakened, in that moment, it was... it was like I'd been there before but I had no recollection, no memory of it and maybe you could say it was like some kind of karmic moment where all the karma from past experiences or past lives all of a sudden came to fruition, but I can't explain it.

Iain: OK, OK. And how long did this feeling last?

Genpo: About a year. [laughing] But it's still what motivates me. What was the driving force right after that experience was really to help people awaken and to continue to clarify and go deeper for myself. There were two aspects: one was to clarify for myself and the other was to serve others, to work with others, and that's still my driving force. I think since nineteen seventy-one I have been looking at how we can make consciousness available to the world in a more immediate and a very sudden and non-threatening way, and that was my koan for twenty-eight years, koan meaning what I worked on.

Iain: Yes, I understand. But just going back to the practicalities because a lot of people watching this, you know, maybe have a similar thing at some point in their life and... it's quite difficult for them to handle in so far as it's chaotic; they have a shift and they see things or perceive reality totally differently, they don't always know how to create that in their life. So you got back home and I think you broke up with your girlfriend of two years or something and then I think you started to go to the Zen Center of Los Angeles, is that the correct sequence?

Genpo: Not exactly. Everything up to that point... everything up to that point is correct. So I went back, I broke off the relationship, I said I needed more freedom, I said I needed to pursue something else, and then I gave... I gave the school board of directors notice that I would be leaving in June, this was February sixth. So I gave them notice that at the end of the semester I was going to take a leave, a one year sabbatical. I never went back to that school district but I made it a year, and I went off travelling and basically for about three months just hitchhiking throughout the United States and Canada, found a cabin deep in the mountains and I spent a year there, ten months, just practising meditation, about four or five hours a day, chopping wood, carrying water, and really going deeply into myself in a solitude way.

Iain: That's a very brave thing to do because that's a big shift, four to five hours a day meditation, that's a lot.

Genpo: You know it didn't seem brave; it seemed like I almost had no choice, I was being driven to do this. I was... it was like I had to, I had to be alone, I needed that time to work on myself. So it didn't feel like a courageous thing; it just felt like a necessity.

Iain: OK, so you were there in the cabin meditating four or five hours a day. So when you say you were meditating you were doing Zen meditation?

Genpo: Yes. Zazen

Iain: Zazen. And what does that involve zazen exactly?

Genpo: Well, for me at that time what it meant is I just sat. I didn't do anything.

Iain: You sat with your eyes closed or...?

Genpo: No, eyes open, eyes open.

Iain: And you look at a wall or floor or...?

Genpo: Either. I had a picnic table outside of this cabin and there were rattlesnakes around my cabin.

Iain: OK.

Genpo: So I would sit on top of the picnic table and actually the rattlesnakes would come and they would sit under the table and they would gather in my wood...

Iain: Picked up the good vibes obviously. [laughing]

Genpo: [laughing] And they'd just hang out, so I sat on the table because if I sat down on the ground it was a little dangerous. I mean it wasn't like there were just rattlesnakes all over the place, but I had a few around.

Iain: OK, and then at some point you decided it was time to leave your cabin?

Genpo: Well what happened was I... I got there in September of nineteen seventy-one and by March I felt this tremendous need really to invite people up to this place and share the beauty of the place and meditation, so I put some notices up in health food stores and places like that and said that there would be Zen meditation, I would teach them how to do this and they're welcome to come out, no charge. And about seventeen, eighteen, twenty people would gather twice a week and we would sit together and I want to say an elderly man, he was probably my age, probably sixty-four, sixty-five at the time, came up there, we were all in our twenties and he said, after we'd spent some time together he said, "You know, I think it would be really advisable for you to meet my Zen master and think that it's time for you to do that," and I said, "It's funny that you should say that because a couple of days ago I had an experience where I realised it was time for me to seek a teacher because I'd been doing this for over a year without a teacher and it was time for me to find a teacher." And here, within three days of that experience, I was face-to-face with my Zen master.

Iain: He found you, in fact.

Genpo: Yes, but that wasn't him. He sent me to his teacher.

Iain: OK.

Genpo: The sixty-four year old man sent me to Maezumi at that time Sensei, later to become Maezumi Roshi in fact.

Iain: And he was connected with the...

Genpo: He was connected...

Iain: ...with the Zen Center.

Genpo: That's right. Yes.

Iain: And then you spent many years at the Zen Center of Los Angeles and...

Genpo: Twelve years

Iain: ...I think you became a teacher of meditation there...

Genpo: That's right. I became a Zen Sensei, a Zen teacher in nineteen eighty. It was interesting, he had me begin teaching almost right away, within a year. So I came there, arrived there in seventy-two, I moved in in August of seventy-two, and by seventy-three, end of seventy-three, he had me start teaching, which was kind of unheard of and... so I've been teaching Zen ever since. And I lived there for twelve years.

Iain: And then I know in the introduction to one of your books you were saying that in nineteen eighty-three there was a bit of a crisis in the Zen Center and somehow the meditation wasn't moving people beyond a certain point, am I correct in my phraseology there?

Genpo: Yes. I would maybe say it another way too; we had gotten stuck with what I now call some shadows of the spiritual, of the Buddhist world, where we weren't well integrating the enlightenment experience with the psychological. And so there were some problems, and that was when we invited Hal and Sidra Stone, who had discovered the Voice Dialogue process, they are the creators of Voice Dialogue. Hal had been a Jungian analyst and his wife a psychotherapist, and they had started exploring different kinds of therapy, and they together came up with what was called Voice Dialogue. So we invited them out in eighty-three and then I spent about nine or ten months studying with them and training several times a week and using Voice Dialogue to begin to integrate the spiritual in a more psychologically sound way.

Iain: Yes, because I can just imagine you sitting there with your thoughts and process all those years and unless there's a way to deal with tangles and difficult situations it kind of congeals, it must do and...

Genpo: Absolutely. In fact you said 'tangles,' I call them 'knots,' I call them 'barriers' and 'knots' and 'kinks' that come up. Imagine a hose, a garden hose that gets a kink in it, you know, so it stops flowing; we were getting some kinks in our hose.

Iain: Just very briefly, how does Voice Dialogue work? Just in a couple of minutes... just a very brief summary.

Genpo: Well basically what it is, the basic premise is that we all have every aspect that is out there in anybody else within us. So if you have an ability to get angry, I do too, but it could be disowned. In other words I could say "I'm not an angry person, I never get angry," and what it is, is that I have disowned my own anger for whatever reason - that it's, you know, it's not acceptable, I was trained, a boy shouldn't, kids shouldn't get angry or whatever. Or maybe fear is disowned, "I never get afraid of anything." What that means is we've suppressed it, so Voice Dialogue is about re-owning these parts of our self that maybe were there at one time or maybe we've suppressed them very early on, and we're not... we're not in touch with them, we're not open to them.

So it's like if we're a whole pie, part of the pie is missing because it's been buried down in the basement. A nice analogy I think is if you have children, and some of the kids you give a really nice name to, like 'sugar,' 'honey,' 'blossom,' 'flower,' you know; and others you give really horrible names to, like 'rage,' 'bigotry,' 'hatred,' 'jealousy,' and you take all the ones you give a negative name to and you put them down in the basement and you lock them down there, and you don't give them access to the home, access to the fridge and the TV and so forth and then they come out, they react, they react in a way that undermines the home because they want attention, they want love, they want recognition, they want to be appreciated and they don't get that.

So the way the Voice Dialogue works, at least this is the way I work with it, you want to bring them out of the basement, you want to introduce them to the family and you want to begin to appreciate that every voice does have a function, even the negative ones have a function. So, we work on looking at what is the positive and the negative function, what is the immature and the mature version of each voice, because obviously there's an immature kind of anger, and there's a more mature kind of anger, a way of expressing anger that actually on the most enlightened level actually can become what we call prana wisdom, which is the 'cutting sword wisdom' which cuts through delusion, which cuts through ignorance. So, that's what we're looking for.

Iain: And of course if a voice is suppressed it's going to come out at inconvenient times isn't it?

Genpo: Exactly.

Iain: You're not really going to be able to have...

Genpo: Inappropriately...

Iain: ...any control over it.

Genpo: ...inconveniently, that's right, so what you want to do is you want to bring them to consciousness, you want to bring them to a state of consciousness where they're well integrated in your life and then they become tools rather than weapons being used against you, they become tools for your life, assets.

Iain: I understand, I understand. Well one of the things that really interested me, you have

these five stages of... I can't... it's not on my notes...

Genpo: I call it the five stages of the human being.

Iain: The human being that's right, yes. Let's run at those five stages and look at them in a bit of detail because I certainly have some questions about where people that I've interviewed may possibly fit into this, and I'm just intrigued to see if there's a map to be followed here somehow. So let's take stage one. I think from what I've read in your book is that stage one is pretty much what happened to you in the desert?

Genpo: Correct. Stage one is an initial opening, a glimpse where we have a glimpse of a higher state of consciousness, of oneness, of beingness. That's stage one, it's a shift in consciousness. That's what happened to me very suddenly, and stage one is always sudden. It can be preceded by years and years of meditation or training but when it happens it's always a sudden realisation, that's stage one.

Iain: And it could be called a 'satori' experience from other, other ways of looking at things?

Genpo: From a Zen standpoint, a satori or kensho experience.

Iain: OK, OK. And so that is... that is where we have a glimpse of a non-dualistic approach because most of us think we're separate and we think everything around us is separate and even though we might read a book, or read lots of books about us all being one, it's quite hard to get through the mind, it comes across as a quantum thing doesn't it?

Genpo: Exactly. In fact it's almost impossible to get through the mind, it's like the little mind trying to grasp the Big Mind and it just can't, it's ungraspable, so it has to be a shift. An analogy I've come to like very much is: think of a railroad track with two rails, and let's say the left rail is the dualistic rail and let's imagine that you've got one of these little carts that you pump, have you ever seen those? Where you're on that rail and you just see that rail and you look way down the line and you can see that these two rails come together at some point, they come together. So maybe that's what you're seeking, you're seeking something where they merge and you want this experience, you don't know what it is, you might call it enlightenment but you're not sure what it is and so you start pumping harder and moving faster and working faster. But as far as you go, that point where they merge is still as far off in the distance, and you never can seem to get there, because it's an illusion that they come together. But the little mind doesn't understand that, that you can't jump from time and space to a... beyond time and space without making that leap to the other rail. I mean, you can't merge; you have to make that leap, the jump. So imagine that all of a sudden you find yourself on the other rail in the non-dual; so the one rail's the dual and the other rail is the non-dual, and I think it corresponds maybe with the left brain, right brain, you know...

Iain: But this is the frustration of so many people who are often genuine seekers, do their meditation, read the books, they go to the workshops, they try and be great people in life and still it doesn't happen.

Genpo: And...

Iain: It doesn't appear to happen.

Genpo: That's right, and that's what Big Mind is, and that's why Big Mind has become so

successful so quickly, because it offers people this opportunity to make that shift, to make that leap because years and years and years of meditation on a cushion... I taught traditional Zen for almost thirty years, you can sit there for twenty, thirty years and not have a true opening, a true enlightenment like that. The Big Mind work makes it accessible and feasible for just about anybody who wishes to do that.

Iain: OK, OK.

Genpo: And it's very simple why it works, you know...

Iain: So tell us then. Why does it work?

Genpo: OK, if I'm identified with my dualistic self, in other words Dennis Merzel, or Genpo, or whatever, if I'm identified with this dualistic self of course I'm going to be very attached to myself and the more I've invested in creating myself and building myself up, and building who I am up, as a persona, as a person, the bigger investment I have. I'm not going to let that go. I'm not going to just drop that because there's a tremendous amount of fear obviously to drop the self, so I'm going to say I'm pursuing enlightenment and at the very same moment I'm going to be clinging with all my might and strength to my self. So if I'm identified with this self, like if you're identified with 'Iain', OK? And I speak to Iain and you talk to me, and I say, "Alright, let me speak to the dualistic mind," and that dualistic mind is the one that knows itself as 'Iain,' OK? So speak to me as the dualistic mind. "Why are you called the dualistic mind? What do you do that's so dualistic?"

Iain: You're asking me the question now? What am I doing... I'm dualistic because I can see things that can be done on the outside and it's separate from me and I can influence things on the outside, like in this interview I can have a degree of control because I ask questions, keep an eye on the time because we have a time limit, I'm doing my best to make it as I can, we can, for people that are going to watch it.

Genpo: And obviously if I were to say "I am you and you are me," from the dualistic mind, that would seem like what?

Iain: If I am you and you are me, that makes a lot of sense because I already feel there is a synergy happening. We're building something together and there is... there's a field. I detect a field happening so for me it's already moved away from me asking the questions and you a guy sitting there answering them, and there's something happening, yes.

Genpo: OK, but it's still happening with you and me. There's still a sense of me and you. The dualistic mind obviously always sees self and other, not self in other, but self and other.

Iain: That's correct.

Genpo: The world and 'me', and I'm coming from 'me'. Now if I were to ask you for your permission to allow me to speak to the non-dualistic mind now, would you allow me to speak to the non-dual mind for a moment?

Iain: OK.

Genpo: So you now are? And you just have to repeat it.

Iain: I am now...

Genpo: The...

Iain: ...the non-dualistic mind.

Genpo: Right, so just experience what it is in this moment to admit that you're now the non-dual mind, just be with it for a moment. What is it to be the non-dual?

Iain: Well the first feeling is relief actually and there's a certain feeling of spaciousness and there's a feeling of connectedness and a relaxation that I'm not so fixed on the clock and [laughing] trying to get into the time we've got left, so I would say simply a relaxation.

Genpo: OK. As the non-dual mind right now, where's the self? Can it find it?

Iain: Yeah... it's moved back [pointing behind top of head] but it's, it's there.

Genpo: OK, look at it and tell me what you see. Is it...

Iain: But aren't I going back into dualism if I...

Genpo: No, no, no.

Iain: OK.

Genpo: Just look at it, observe it.

Iain: It's quite small and it is quite cooperative actually and a little bit meek and the more I look at it the more it's getting hard to find actually.

Genpo: [laughing]

Iain: It's there somewhere, yes.

Genpo: It's there somewhere?

Iain: Yeah.

Genpo: As what?

Iain: [silence] It's there as an identity.

Genpo: A-ha. As a concept, as an identity.

Iain: Yeah.

Genpo: Yeah. So what are you experiencing in this moment? Just give yourself a chance to experience what it is to be the non-dual, the no-self.

Iain: Well I find it enjoyable, I find it... it's actually quite natural.

Genpo: Yes. It's also called 'natural,' state of mind.

Iain: It is, that's right.

Genpo: Or 'original' state of mind.

Iain: Yes.

Genpo: 'Original heart, original mind.' So this is the leap to the other track or the other rail, I should say, OK, this is the leap to the non-dual. In this place, what about time and space?

Iain: They are there but they're less important.

Genpo: OK. When you're completely here, it's beyond time and space.

Iain: Well actually I have had that experience, in my own way I understand that.

Genpo: It's a little hard when you're doing an interview. I've done this before with interviewers and it's a little tough to do it because you're on the spot, you have to keep control and you have to watch the clock and to be aware of the audience, but that's right. So, if we think of these two rails, now we've got a train that's on both rails, on the whole track. I call this the 'apex.' So you've got the dualistic, you've got the non-dualistic, and then over here at the apex which includes the dual and the non-dual, OK, and transcends them both; you have what I call the 'integrated, free-functioning human being,' in other words you've got the human being. So you've got the human side, OK, and that's the dual. The being side, that's the non-dual. So the human side is the 'doer,' it's always doing; the being is just being. In other words we're resting in our beingness, it's total nirvana, it's total peace. But we don't want to get stuck there either, so you're talking about the five stages, the third stage is when we get stuck...

Iain: Don't forget the second stage...

Genpo: Yes, I'm going to come back to it...

Iain: Yes you are...

Genpo: I'll come back to it. The third stage is... actually experiencing the non-dual and then the fifth stage is... and I'll come back and fill it in, is actually the integrated free-functioning. So the second stage is a process where we surrender and we submit to life. So once we have this experience, this opening, this kensho experience or satori experience, we realise it has to be a practice. There's a practice that comes in here if we want to stabilise, if we want to integrate this enlightenment into our life, if we want it to become meaningful, if we want it to be life-changing, life-transformative. We have to do a practice, we have to do something, that's when I began to meditate on a daily basis.

Iain: Yes, so we start with a reference point which is very important...

Genpo: That's right.

Iain: ...because otherwise we don't really know... I was going to say where we're contained which isn't quite right, but there's no holding if you like.

Genpo: We don't know where we're going. That's right, so we need that reference point.

Iain: So stage two is integration of stage one in fact?

Genpo: That's right. It's the integration...

Iain: Into our daily life.

Genpo: That's right, exactly, the assimilation, the embodiment of that. So rather than just being a momentary experience of the awakened state of mind, we begin to integrate that enlightenment into our lives so we're living it. But that takes two things: the feminine is surrender and the masculine is actually submission. We actually submit our self to life, and in my case to a teacher and to a training called Zen practice, and I did that until my teacher died which was about twenty-four years, until nineteen ninety-five. However, there's a point of completion where - not that we've stopped submitting and we've stopped surrendering - but there's a point where we're complete in that process that we actually move to stage three, and we actually... that's again a sudden experience of the impersonal. Stage two is very personal; it's a personal relationship with life, with the world, with the teacher, the teachings...

Iain: It's practical isn't it?

Genpo: ...it's very practical, that's right, and, again dualistic. You're coming from a non-dual and back into the dualistic world and the dualistic realm. Stage three is a bigger, more complete experience of what stage one was, where it's... we call it a complete opening, a complete awakening, it's not final but it's complete.

Iain: Now what does a complete opening, complete awakening mean?

Genpo: You can never go back. In other words, stage one is like the opening of a shutter of a lens; it opens momentarily and then it closes, even if it stays open for a long time, like mine stayed kind of open for over a year. It's still momentary in the sense that it's within time and space. You're coming from the relative and you're experiencing the absolute, the dimension of the absolute, that's stage one. Stage two, you're coming from that experience of the absolute and you're moving back into the relative world, OK, in relation to a teacher, a teaching, a process, a practice. Stage three, you finally become a master, OK? So, what happens at stage three is you eliminate all doubt to who you are and what this life is.

Iain: So the realisation, let's say of oneness is there permanently?

Genpo: That's right.

Iain: But, you still have details to tidy up in a way?

Genpo: Lots.

Iain: And what kind of details?

Genpo: [laughing] Well a lot of shadows, a lot of shadows. Because what happens at stage three is that at stage three there is no duality, so there's no cause and effect, therefore there's no karma. So one of the things that can happen at stage three is ignoring the 'law of causation,' because at stage three everything is perfect as it is and one sees every manifestation as absolutely perfect, so like every snowflake falls at exactly the right spot,

every leaf in Fall falls at exactly the right spot. Then we have to shovel the snow or rake the leaves, but they fall in exactly the right spot. In other words all manifestations are perfect, so there's no sense in here of Big Heart. There is a big heart but there's no sense that anybody has to be liberated, in a sense, from anything because it's all perfect.

Iain: OK. Now I'm going to bring something in here which is... I wouldn't say it's a process for me, but it's certainly a series of questions for me and we've had a lot of interviews on the subject of Non-Duality on Conscious TV, and there's been fascinating interviews, not with everybody, but one of the consistent themes that comes up is once the great awakening happens, there's no self, meaning there's no personality, meaning there's no one to do anything about anything and so...

Genpo: That becomes a shadow. That's absolutely true and that becomes a shadow.

Iain: So explain more about...

Genpo: Yes, I will. OK, so the experience is there is no self, there is no ego, there is no 'me'...

Iain: And that's a genuine... it's a genuine experience.

Genpo: It's an absolutely genuine, authentic experience and we get stuck there. So traditionally in Zen we talk about that as being 'stuck in the absolute' or 'the stink of enlightenment.'

Iain: But who... if there's no self then how do you get stuck there?

Genpo: Because there is a self.

Iain: So you're saying there is a self?

Genpo: There is a self, but the self has expanded beyond itself, and there's no boundary and there's no limit at this point, so the shadow of this experience of no-self is the no self. In other words there still is a self, because there wouldn't be a stage four or a stage five if there wasn't. So what happens is now the self comes in, in a covert way as a disowned voice. The experience is no-self, but then what happens is the ego takes that experience, owns that experience and then walks around, "I have no ego, I have no self."

Iain: That's right.

Genpo: And that becomes the shadow.

Iain: OK.

Genpo: That's why stage four is so important and so difficult, because no one is going to go to stage four. Because stage four is returning to embrace the self, it's returning to the dual and to the personal, in other words, the self comes back, OK? No one in their right mind is going to do that once they reach complete liberation. That becomes an accumulation of karma and then at some point, I call this stage four... I call stage three 'the great enlightenment,' or 'dropped-off body-mind,' or 'the great liberation.' Stage four I call 'falling from grace,' because it's like Humpty-dumpty sitting on a wall and then Humpty-dumpty

[makes slapping sound with hands] does a face plant... does a face plant, right?

Iain: Yes.

Genpo: Right into the pavement and shatters, and at that point all the stuff that has been suppressed, in other words all the human aspects, all the dualistic things come back, so now there's once again a self that gets angry, that gets frightened, that has this and has that. And who's going to want that, if you've been in nirvana?

Iain: No, but you see, and I'm not going to generalise... I'm not going to generalise... oh I have to generalise, I'm not going to be specific here; some of the people say they do get angry, they do have fear, they're not denying it exists but they're just saying there's no one in control of that.

Genpo: Well that's true, that's true. I mean as long as they're not denying that they get angry or they get fear, then they're not in denial.

Iain: They're giving it permission. In effect they're saying "It's what's happening, there's no self here to have control over it," they just let it... "It's just what happens."

Genpo: There is no self there, OK? And there is. So again, let's use the triangle I was trying to create with the dual and the non-dual and the apex. So you have self, and you have no-self. I spent about twenty-four years in this no-self place. Now I would say to embrace both the self and the no-self, and to come from that transcended place where you include and go beyond. In other words there is a self, but it's not such a solid self, it's not a permanent self. It's just what the Buddha said. The self is not solid, it's not permanent, it's not real, right, but there is a self. He never denied that there was a self but it's not as... we're not as fixated on it, we're not as driven by it, we're not as obsessed with our self anymore, it becomes a much greater picture.

Iain: And where does the motivation come from to help that process?

Genpo: Well, for me the apex is Big Heart. I call the book '*Big Mind, Big Heart*'. So Big Mind is over here [holding one hand out as one corner of a triangle] the transcendent, and Big Heart great compassion [holding one hand above, at the apex of the triangle] is the apex. Because Big Mind is basically not an active thing, it's a process of awareness and consciousness, it's beingness. Big Heart is actually then coming back into the body and eventually returning to the marketplace, right? For me returning to the marketplace doesn't mean just going back into the city and working; it means coming back to the market owning all the disowned aspects that we have disowned when we became spiritual. Like when we become spiritual obviously we pursue loving and compassion more than we do hatred and bigotry, we disown all of these things that we consider not spiritual, right? We try to be more compassionate, more loving, more kind, more considerate, more generous, more open, and we disown all the opposites. So returning to the marketplace is re-owning all those aspects but not being controlled by them - being the master. In other words, if I get angry, the anger is usually very much connected to what we would call wisdom, it's coming from wisdom. It's compassion coming out of the wisdom of the non-dual, in the dualistic realm, in the world, in the marketplace.

Iain: So what you're saying is it's used in a positive way in effect?

Genpo: Not only positive, but in a mature way.

Iain: A mature way, OK.

Genpo: Because every aspect has an immature... when we're new at anything, we're going to go through a process of immaturity and growth, and as we reach more maturity and growth, then it becomes a wiser, more appropriate way to use that energy. That's why I also say it's very Tantric, because now we're using the same energies but in a way that brings about transformation and empowerment to others.

Iain: Because one of the things again I've always had difficulties with is people who, you know, who are enlightened/self-realised people, and they can be pretty nasty at times, they can for me, lack compassion, there's all the excuses why I'm doing this for you and you're unaware; I don't buy that anymore, I just... it doesn't feel true to me, and I think what you're saying is...

Genpo: It's disowned.

Iain: ...is in fact it's been disowned and once it's owned again then it becomes balanced if you like.

Genpo: Yes. We could...

Iain: More rounded.

Genpo: ...we could say it becomes what we call a 'upaya,' a skilful means to help others. Because what happens when it's disowned, it leaks out. It always is going to come up covertly because it's disowned. So the whole Big Mind process, and what I'm trying to do with Big Mind, is to work on these shadows, to work on these voices or these aspects of our self, whether they be in the spiritual or in what we might call the marketplace realm, the awakened or the marketplace, there's going to be shadows. For somebody who's just in the world the shadow might be, "There's no such thing as awakening or enlightenment, or no-self or no-mind," that's, you know, that's bull, right? For the spiritual it's "I'm not going to be angry as much as I possibly can, you know, stay away from being angry, aggressive, ruthless, competitive because they're all bad things." So we end up being less successful. Spiritual communities, particularly Zen, which I know the best, we're all very poor.

Iain: [laughing]

Genpo: Because what happens is we disown success on that level, and so it's OK to be poor, but then we're always struggling, right? And somehow it's not OK to be successful.

Iain: Yes, and you know there are some interesting people, because I know Steve Jobs - I don't know Steve Jobs, but from what I've read about him - he's been a Zen meditator since nineteen years old, and I'm not saying he's always a great guy and I know he's a ruthless man at times, but he has obviously a side of him that is really looking and willing to meditate and go within, and I think there are a lot of people in the world that are very successful, which brings me onto the... we're now two or three days after Barack Obama has been formally made President and I think he's actually read your book hasn't he? You showed me a picture earlier of the book.

Genpo: [laughing] There is a picture of Barack Obama holding my book and my wife took it, it's on our website. Yes we went to a fundraiser and I got to meet him a year and a half ago, not quite a year and a half ago, it was the summer, a little over a year ago and he did say he was going to read it, and obviously he's been quite successful.

Iain: And you see this is the wonderful thing about...

Genpo: I didn't mean to imply he's successful because he read the book [smiling whilst holding hand up apologetically].

Iain: This is the wonderful thing I think about... it was the same with President Clinton; he was I gather very open to meeting people like yourself just to see if he could learn something and this is... I think this is becoming more with world leaders now where politicians or business men... I'm not too sure about religious leaders - that's another big subject - but certainly with politicians and business men they are very open to looking outside the box because that's how you become successful. You see things in a way other people don't see them, a much bigger scope.

Genpo: That's right, and more creative, more creatively. I found him to be extremely open and he really spoke from the heart which really moved my wife and me, really moved us. We had a lot of heart feeling from him.

Iain: Right. Well we have about three minutes left. I'm going to give those three minutes to you. Anything you'd like to say about yourself, or Big Mind, or a little story you want to tell?

Genpo: Well I think what I'd like to leave really making sure people get, is that this shift of consciousness can happen to anyone who wishes to have this shift, all we have to do is be open. There is a way to do it that requires some skill, to make that shift, but it is absolutely available and accessible to every one of us because everyone of us already is Big Mind, already is the state of 'beingness' of the human being. There's already that there, we just have to awaken it. And it's not as difficult as we thought for thousands of years. We thought we had to really pursue it and we knew it happened suddenly, but now what we're discovering is it's really accessible and that's what I've been working on for now thirty-eight years: how to make that available to the general public. And what I'd like to do is help more and more people have that awakened state of consciousness so that in the world we come from a place where we really see that we're one world, you know, one mind, one heart, and really come from a more loving and compassionate place.

Iain: And it's almost as if... and to quote a famous Bob Dylan song, "The times they are a changing," because it used to be that to become realised or whatever, you had to go and sit in a cave in the Himalayas and look at the side of the cave for ten years or something, and now it seems with the world speeding up and the world needing big change quickly, that what you're talking about is becoming much more accessible.

Genpo: Absolutely, and I think we're in a really pivotal time right now. I think we've made some great strides in the last few months. I think you know, Barack Obama doesn't just represent America anymore, I think here in Europe we're all watching him very much, right? And I think we've made some real shifts towards a leap in consciousness in the next few years that I feel really is going to happen, really positive about it, that we are going to make that next leap. Ken Wilber, the great philosopher, said we just need ten percent; we're

working at that. In fact Wilber, Bernie Glassman Roshi, and myself, have an organisation called Vast Sky where we're making a conscious effort to reach these kinds of numbers of people.

Iain: Great. I'm going to thank you very much Genpo for coming along and sharing your wisdom and talking about your work. I'm going to remind people of your book here [holding book '*Big Mind, Big Heart*'].

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