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## Context to the nugget

Venerable Tenzin Priyadarshi speaks about how we can sometimes get trapped in all kinds of labels around us. He speaks about how he has been guided by his curiosity and his quest for spirituality without getting pigeonholed into some box.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Venerable, I wanted to spend a bulk of time talking about the book you have recently published *Running Toward Mystery* in a way which chronicles your journey and your choices so far, but the at the outset what caught my attention when I read the book was in the flap on the back the book you are described as an innovative thinker, philosopher, educator and a polymath monk. I was just curious about how you relate to each of these identities. Maybe just to set context, give us a sense of what you do, how you spend time and a little bit of the why behind what you do?

Tenzin Priyadarshi (TP): You know at the very outset I should say that the part of the joy of being a monk is becoming comfortable with identity-lessness. And so much of my life and the effort ongoing is to not assume additional identities but to lose whatever that there is. However, in the world that we live in of course these labels are useful but most times they become trappings of different kinds. So, I think by virtue of my dabbling in spiritual life and academia and the world of invention and discoveries, these titles or labels get afforded to me, but I would say, innovative thinker mostly in the sense that I question things, I maintain a healthy sense of curiosity, I am a fan of tradition but not bound by it, and I like to think but I don't like to think mindlessly, it's not a pastime leisurely exercise, it's a purposeful thinking and by purposeful thinking it's again something that is influenced by the Buddhist worldview, which is thinking towards the sense of collective well-being and a collective sense of joy and how to nurture a mindset of freedom. So, I think, that's my sort of world. I think the notion of... I am going to get long-winded in these kinds of answers so you will have to edit all this stuff.

DJ: No worry.

TP: You know, the notion of polymath I think simply what it signifies is that my interests are not contained in a singular discipline. And there is a clear reason for that from early on because of my interest in multiple subjects and not being somebody who was dictated by market economy or professional ambitions. I was able to deeply dive into many disciplines. When I was growing up, I had a sense of aversion to formal education, because I thought it was not a very useful way of learning. But when I first came to U.S. and I realized that I could dive into so many things that my undergrad year I declared multiple majors and multiple minors, because I was a monk, I had nothing else to do.

So, I just wanted to study and it just, sort of, made me go deeper into things. So, that's what I guess these titles might be useful in terms of labels, yeah.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This insight from Venerable is profound at many levels. If I look at my journey, for a long time, I kept attaching labels. I am an Engineer, I am an MBA, I am a Strategy Consultant, I am a Head-hunter and so on. Post my leaving EgonZehnder, I have tried to be a little more fluid with how I think about my identity. I don't want to come across as I have figured this out. It is a journey I have been on and it has been quite fulfilling. Sometimes, people ask me binary questions – Are you a podcaster? Are you a Coach? Are you a Sounding Board? Are you a Consultant? And so on and so forth. I often find that I don't have a clean answer to any of these questions. While I am still working on moving in this direction, I have learnt a little bit to get more comfortable with this fuzziness.

If this topic is of interest, do look up the Curated Playlist on Identity at [www.playtopotential.com](http://www.playtopotential.com).

To quote one particular nugget, James Clear (JC), Author of Atomic Habits was on the podcast earlier and he speaks about the criticality of keeping the identity small for us to transition from one context to another.

JC: *“So, a part of that is the separating of the identity or the defining it in a better way but the other aspect of this and this is the part that you referenced with Paul Graham’s quote “keep your identity small” is that the tighter you cling to any individual identity the harder it becomes to grow beyond it. So, you see this in pretty much any area of life. The tighter you cling to the idea that like a teacher who has been teaching for 20 years and have their lesson plans figured out and it’s like this is the way it is, the tighter you cling to that the harder it becomes to grow beyond that, learn new different learning methods, new learning modalities, change your course structure etc. The surgeon who is like this is the way we do the operation even though there might be a new technology that allows them to do it in no less invasive manner, the tighter you claim to that previous identity the harder it becomes to grow beyond it. And this is one of the real challenges for building habits which is that early on building a new identity is a really valuable thing because it can get you to stick to the habit. So, for example, let’s say that you are not fit right now but you want to start getting in shape, building the identity of I am runner is a really valuable way to get you to stick to that when you are running. But then what happens you know 20 years from now if you injure your knee or your hip and it’s not possible for you to run anymore and now you feel like yeah, you have lost this sense of self and so you need to transition to a new identity. So the process here is not like a line, it’s much more like a circle, you are continually evolving, continually updating and expanding and revising you beliefs and you really need to be committed to doing that and if you can keep your identity small it makes that process easier because it’s like retouching a painting. If your identity is so large that it consumes everything about you then all of a sudden getting rid of that aspect feels like you are tearing yourself in two. So, for all of those reasons keeping your identity small could be a valuable way to continue to grow or evolve and expand.”*

DJ: Like James says, when we are in transition, not being too attached to the labels from the past can open up a new world of possibilities.

## End of nugget transcription

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Nugget from James Clear that is referenced: [Keeping the identity small](#).

## RELATED PLAYLISTS YOU MIGHT LIKE

**Identity:** Identity refers to the reputation, characteristics etc. of a person that makes the individual or the people around him/her think about them in a certain way. To put simply, how do we think of ourselves and what to the others think of us. Identity is a key element that we need to wrestle with during pivotal transitions. Herminia Ibarra shares her insights on how we should treat Identity as a Work in Progress that gets influenced by the journey we go through and the choices we make. Ram Guha speaks about the multiple identities of Gandhiji. Atul Kasbekar speaks about how he saw his identity evolve from being a photographer to a producer. All this and more in this playlist. You can access the playlist [here](#).

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## Tenzin Priyadarshi - Nuggets

- 68.00 Tenzin Priyadarshi - The Full Conversation
- 68.01 Tenzin Priyadarshi - Notion of identity lessness
- 68.02 Tenzin Priyadarshi - Limitations of the rational mind
- 68.03 Tenzin Priyadarshi - Shaping one's journey
- 68.04 Tenzin Priyadarshi - Mindfulness is not a hack
- 68.05 Tenzin Priyadarshi - Deliberate practice of Spirituality
- 68.06 Tenzin Priyadarshi - Opening the aperture of learning
- 68.07 Tenzin Priyadarshi - Pursuing self-awareness
- 68.08 Tenzin Priyadarshi - Covid-19 - a time-out for humans

## About Deepak Jayaraman

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

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