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VAJRA REGENT ÖSEL TENDZIN
Intensive Training Seminar (I.T.S.)
“The Life & Teachings of Naropa”

Los Angeles, California

Talk One of Four
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VAJRA REGENT ÖSEL TENDZIN:

[One?) we have a seminar here, I think. It's hard to know in Los Angeles if you have anything definite. In this case we are talking about the life and teachings of Naropa. Has anybody here not heard of Naropa? Would you raise your hand if you have no idea who is Naropa? Everybody knows? That's good. Anybody like to tell me who is Naropa? [laughter] So, since you all know, I would like to remind you anyway who is Naropa. And the reason for doing so is to [read?] from the ground of our time together these next four days, to establish some kind of foundation of what we're going to do here, what we would like to do here. What we would like to accomplish.

When we talk about Naropa we talk about accomplishment. I'm not saying in the next four days we can accomplish what Naropa has accomplished. But I am saying that if we approach this seminar from any kind of side-tracked, any kind of laziness or indulgence of any kind, then we are not understanding who is Naropa and what is, are his teachings. Who he was, what he lived and what he passed down. So, laziness and indulgence don't fit in this particular seminar at all. That includes any kind of entertainment or speculation or nonsense of any kind. So I would like to make that perfectly clear as we've heard from before someplace.

But we'd better settle down from the very beginning. All of you sitting on chairs for the past hour and a half, that's cozy. Naropa didn't have a chair. He did not achieve enlightenment by sitting back in his chair. Absolutely not. Well, anyway, life and

teachings of Naropa. Naropa was the student of Tilopa. Tilopa was the founder or the first in a lineage of the Kagyü up until the present day, which we know His Holiness Karmapa, many of you ever seen him, heard him, who is the inheritor of that particular lineage and of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche also inheritor of that particular lineage of the Kagyü. Kagyü . *Ka* means command and *gyü* means lineage. Or *ka* means sacred word, or mantra, and *gyü* means lineage. So, lineage of the command and lineage of the word, sacred word or lineage of the transmission of the sacred word, the oral transmission. Kagyü .

Started with Tilopa, who was a resplendent who did not take no for an answer. Tilopa actually stoned the palace of the dakinis and achieved complete enlightenment. It is said that Tilopa's lineage starts with the Vajradhara, the dharmakaya Buddha. And he received direct transmission, which he passed on to his student, Naropa. Now, this person Naropa, was from a very early age, brilliant in the sense that he was always questioning and not satisfied with just what people gave him. Some kind of ordinary baby food, some kind of basic [pabulum] or Gerber's or something like that, or TV commercials, or fast food or anything like that, he wasn't satisfied.

This gentleman, Naropa, from very early age was inquisitive. Someone like ourselves if we remember. Very inquisitive. At a very early age he was married, as was the custom in India at that time, and he had children. And he said to his parents who had already, actually had a prophecy that he would be a great teacher, he said to his parents, this life, with all its impermanence is so fleeting, how could I continue with this? I must seek the teachings. So he did, from when he was, very early age, twelve, thirteen years old. By the time he was in his thirties he had accomplished a great deal and the whole world at that point, that world was the Indian world, the world of India and the surrounding countries. You could say at that time that the Western world was [sorting?] out roots from the ground as best they could. But in that world of India in the eighth century was very sophisticated world. I think it's the eighth century, is it? Naropa? Eleventh? Naropa is eleventh, or Milarepa is eleventh? Naropa is earlier. Anyway, we could work it out somehow.

Anyway, he was a, by the time he was in his teens he was well learned in the dharma. And he had traveled around and studied at so many and great monastic institutions under great teachers. He had studied tremendously and he had learned dharma because his inquisitiveness was unbounding, unyielding. He wanted to know everything, anything he could. And he studies so hard, learned so much, that he actually became a chancellor of Nalanda University, a famous Buddhist university. He was called a *maha pandita*, the great pandit, the great scholar, the one who knew dharma inside and out. This great scholar Naropa was still unsettled. No one could defeat him in any debate on dharma. He debated the [tirtikas?], [tirtikas?] means people who believe in god basically. Hindus and whatnot. And he defeated everybody in his debates.

His teaching was pristine, clear, nobody could touch it. Still he had some doubts. He was walking up and down his veranda. You probably have read this story. And before him appeared this ugly old woman. She said she had thirty-seven ugly features. I don't know all of them, but eyes are bulging out and she had warts and all kinds of things. Standing in front of him immediately in front of his face and she says, I hear you are the great pandit Naropa. He said yes. She said to him, well you understand a lot about dharma don't you? He said, yes I do. She said, do you understand the words or the sense? And he said I only understand the words. And she laughed and laughed and laughed. And then he thought he was pleasing her and he said, but I also understand the sense. And then she scowled and frowned and got furious. And then disappeared.

From that the great Naropa understood that he actually was deceiving himself. Completely deceiving himself. That he had to educate himself so much in terms of

dharma, but he had missed the essential point. And he undertook at that point to find the teacher, the guru, one who could transmit the essence. He packed up his things and left his esteemed post at Nalanda, great pandit that he was, left completely in search of a somebody who could clear up this fundamental self-deception.

In our seminar, we're going to talk about two points. First one is devotion, which is in Naropa's experience, based on not believing in ego. Second one is practice. Discipline of giving up one's life, so to speak, one's ego involvement, coming from some kind of a discriminating awareness, some kind of real wisdom. Those are the two aspects of our seminar. Naropa himself, if you read his life, if you practice meditation, have some inkling that Naropa's life is written down, not because biography is good and it's entertaining to read, if you ever read it, it doesn't seem all that entertaining. But because his life is basically the foremost example of a student, a practitioner, what a student can be, should be. A life which did not compromise itself, to not sell any kind of a cheap situation ever. But had such intensity to accomplish realization of the truth. Such intensity that it never stopped, never turned back, and never was defeated by obstacles. Never. That kind of example of Naropa is worthwhile to listen to and to practice in the same way.

When we say the life and teachings of Naropa, which is our topic, we could say that Naropa's life and his teachings are exactly the same thing. Which is somewhat different than the way we actually go about our life. Maybe not, but maybe so. We go about our life and those of us who practice dharma think of it as the special thing or the extraordinary thing, the extra thing, and our life as the ordinary thing or the special thing, as opposed to dharma, as opposed to practice. But when you look at Naropa's life there was absolutely no separation whatsoever. That his life was dharma, his dharma was life, so his life has become teaching to us. Because he was certainly not a coward. He might have been a fool, but he was not a coward.

If we talk about devotion, we have to talk about guru. Devotion only comes into play in Naropa's case because he actually understood before he left Nalanda, he actually understood through his practice and his knowledge that Naropa, which the name he got later on but, by the way, he had tons of names. Every time he won another debate he got another name. He was very renowned in the world. He understood that all those names themselves and their form were absolutely empty. He understood egolessness of a certain level. He understood that he didn't have to believe in all that nonsense of who am I and what I am doing. He understood that, otherwise he never could have seen that old hag with her thirty-seven ugly marks. If he didn't understand from the very beginning, pretty much straight in his heart, that this particular this [slaps chest] is not all that important. In fact, pretty transparent. He had love of wisdom, not love of self. He had love of wisdom.

So he had actually practiced the hinayana discipline and the mahayana discipline quite thoroughly. He had practiced the basic accomplishment of the hinayana. *Pratimoksha* - had accomplished the perfection of discipline and the development of peace. He had understood the non-substantial quality of things and himself. Further than that he had practiced the development of patience and generosity and had sensed and experienced the aspect of the whole phenomena as shunya - empty. He experienced all that before he met his guru. So this gentleman Naropa was no babe in the woods, particularly, when he saw that old hag. He was an accomplished person but still had doubts. So he said to himself, let me seek the genuine guru, the only one who can take me across this particular river.

The point is, ladies and gentlemen, is that we always think, up to a certain point, even if we have some inkling of the non-substantial quality of existence, we always think that "we" understand. And that's fundamentally the seed of ego. We understand. Even subtly. Even when we think we're actually in relaxation and repose and there's nothing definite about anything, we see the, we look at things and we say what's that?

Nothing. Still, there's a very dear little seed of who we are - self, that's sticking right in there. And there's only one way at that point, not that any of you actually have achieved that, or hope you have, or maybe you haven't doesn't really matter, but if it happens, that there's only one way and that is a, some sense of complete devotion to that one who has achieved complete and perfect enlightenment. Which is the guru, which is the Buddha, same thing. Guru, Buddha, same thing.

So, to make things brief. Or to make things extended, as the case may be. The appearance of the guru in one's life is the fundamental stoplight that you actually cannot go any further with self-deception. That's what's happened to Naropa. He realized he couldn't go any further at all with his game of who he was. As pure as it is, as sophisticated as it is, it couldn't go any further because it doesn't mean anything. He knew that already, you see. He understood the notion of shunyata already, that that we call this [bangs loudly on something] this, this doesn't mean anything except for more interpretation. Doesn't mean anything at all. He understood that, that's why he could actually see that old hag and see himself before him in terms of his disgust with the whole thing. He could actually see that and therefore said there's only one possibility, I have to find somebody who knows something. Because it doesn't seem to me, with all my knowledge, that I know anything, or anyone else around here does. In whole of Nalanda University, great scholars of India, he said nobody here knows it, I have to find somebody who does.

So you see, when we talk about finding guru, we're not talking about finding some sort of Godhead. We're not talking about selling books in airports at all, which is a very degrading thing to do. Mr. Naropa, he didn't go to the airport to find Tilopa. He worked all the time. He worked to find this gentleman Tilopa, he just heard of him. When he heard his name, Tilopa, he had goose bumps, he didn't have to think about it. He had goose bumps and he said, I have to find this Tilopa. It's kind of like what happens when you actually understand that you're sick and you have to get better. You have goose bumps to know that everything is so, so fragile, so tenuous, that you must actually find your way. That's what happened to Naropa, he had to find his way. And he did. No matter what it took him, he found his way. Whole point is that he wasn't believing in any kind of god or external figure outside himself. He just knew, absolutely knew, that unless he found his way by himself to Tilopa that knowledge was actually concrete real thing. Enlightenment was real. Unless he found his way there, he could linger in self-deception for a very long time.

There's different kinds of spirituality, different kinds of approach. If you take the notion of homemade spirituality, you get the people who read a lot of books, who hear a few teachers now and then and basically they set up shop. They become impressed with themselves and they sit around their apartment and people come to them and drop a few this and that, snort a few this and that, and they sit around a pontificate about what's real and what's not. Doesn't necessarily mean they have to take drugs or anything, they could just pontificate around their checkbook. And sit around an environment they created and say, well, how are you kiddies, isn't it nice? He never says, well I met such a wonderful person today. They told me everything was nice.

Or you find people that get inspired because they had a shock, you know. They had a shock. Something happened to them, they realized that they were bullshitting themselves and they had a shock and they suddenly had a spiritual achievement at that point. Then they set up shop, they get people around them and they say, kiddies, everything is all right, and they make everybody feel good or zapped or something. And the people are all on the floor and a pathetic kind of animal thing. They make films about themselves. They have testimonials by great people. Economists, ecologists, Linus Pauling might give one, I'm, probably he wouldn't, hopefully. And they say [snaps fingers] well so and so's a great force in the world today. So the homemade spirituality discovered on a toilet one day.

Then there's kind of half-baked spirituality of those who feel secure. Actually they're slightly pathetic people, it's good, you know, basically good people. You know they practice a little dharma, they practice a lot of yoga or a little bit of Sufi thing or something, you know, they practice a little bit and they feel basically good, slightly they start to smile first time in years, and they feel good about themselves and they don't hate anybody any more. And they feel good, it's slightly half baked. Nothing much comes of it, but basically they feel good for a time, it's delightful, for a time. Then they get restless and bored. And after that confused.

Then there's kind of a raw spirituality that those people who come upon the truth by accident. Some kind of a realization of pain comes to them suddenly and they feel shocked and determined to find out something, and that's getting closer. They feel absolutely shocked that the world is not exactly, in fact, not at all like they thought it was. This is very shocking and this kind of raw, like nerves are exposed, kind of raw spirituality. Kind of a feeling of fundamental cynicism, which is very good, extremely good, much better than the others.

Then there's kind of cultured spirituality, which is those people who have practiced the discipline for a long time, whether Buddhist or whatnot. And they feel pretty much at home in their clothes. Which is getting closer to ignorance or dumbness. Because at that point they feel they have accomplished something, which is pretty close to dumbest thing. And they smile, or sort of half-smile, irritating Buddha statue [laughter]. And they sort of feel benevolent to everybody. And say, well, darling, my friend, don't worry about it too much, everything's going to be all right.

When we talk about Naropa, we are talking about a fully accomplished human being. Totally accomplished, totally completed person in terms of spirituality, we are talking about what's called a *siddha*, one who has actually displayed awakened mind in the world, could change confusion into enlightenment on the spot. That's called siddha, somebody who does that. Our notions of spirituality are basically, fundamentally true. We do understand, but our second thoughts about the whole thing are Encyclopedia Britannica. Mr. Naropa himself was Encyclopedia Britannica, until he finally woke up. And he said, this thirty-seven ugly features that I see, that's me! I must find the genuine guru. We're not talking about believing in anything. It was his own intelligence. He understood that what he saw was his actual impression of the world. That's what he saw as the world. Pus and gore and protruding eyes, and everything, fingernails hanging down and hair on face, everything, that's what he saw. He said, look, this is actually what I see, I better find a genuine teacher who doesn't believe in any of this stuff. So he searched for Tilopa and maybe we'll talk about that tomorrow. Any questions?

Exodus. Bye bye. See you again. In a cemetery. Bye bye. They're going to fix dinner, probably. Somebody put a microphone here? Microphone? Microphone? Lady with the blue, in the blue scarf.

QUESTION: You said that a siddha could turn confusion into enlightenment instantly.

VAJRA REGENT: -wisdom, yeah. Enlightenment, yeah.

Q: This...

VR: -could turn, yeah.

Q: Well...

VR: I'm not talking about magic pill or anything like that.

Q: No, but were you speaking for someone else?

VR: Naropa, we're talking about Naropa.

Q: Yeah. Doing it with someone else.

VR: With someone else...

Q: Yeah. You know, someone else's confusion.

VR: No, I'm not talking about anybody someone. I'm talking about confusion. I'm not talking about any someone.

Q: Ok.

VR: Siddha means whenever confusion arises [claps hands] pop. There, over here, excuse me, we come next, over here.

QUESTION: I'd like to know what your definition of enlightenment would be.

VAJRA REGENT: Enlightenment is the absence of confusion.

Q: Oh. And is it possible that we will ever reach enlightenment?

VR: Who do you mean by we?

Q: Myself.

VR: I don't know. Who is yourself? You tell me who yourself is and I might be able to give an answer. Give me a description of yourself.

Q: I don't know.

VR: Ok. Yes, then I think we could reach enlightenment. Just on that basis alone. The I don't know part, that's the only way. If you tell me, five oh two, eyes are blue [laughter] I think well, good luck. But I don't know, is possibility, definitely.

Q: Thank you.

VR: Yeah.

QUESTION: You said that Naropa was a fool but not a coward.

VAJRA REGENT: That's right.

Q: How was he a fool?

VR: Because he followed a path that conventional people would never follow. Did you read the story? You read his story, Naropa? Oh, you should read that story. It's called *The Life and Teaching of Naropa*, it's a book. It's translated by a German, which is ok, best we could do [laughter]. But on the other hand it shows what a fool he was that basically most of us would never suffer that indignity as Naropa did. In fact, why don't you read it? If we're going to go on with this seminar, didn't they tell you to read it? Did

anybody tell you to read it? Life and teachings of Naropa? Nobody did? Eh...[laughter]. Well please do. It's available at your local, spiritual book store, I'm sure. Translated by professor Guenther. It's pretty good, actually. Best we could do. Why don't you read it? Has anybody...oh my goodness. Well, you should have read it so you know what we're talking about at least.

But anyway, he's a fool because he's not conventional. What he does with his teacher was totally unconventional. We're so concerned about propriety even in our hip world, we're so hip about who we are, so with it. But if somebody presents something outside our with-it we wither and become inoperative. [Where's Steve?] Yeah. Ok. That's what we do. We become [laughter] that has no reference to him, it's a little inside joke by the way, a little inside joke about inoperative as a word. We become paralyzed when our conventional logic doesn't work. See? Well any[?] we should read this story, please, read it tomorrow. Get the book, buy it, read it tomorrow before you have to sit, of course. In fact, if you can't buy it before you have to sit, forget about the book and sit. We will do in anyway. Forget about the book.

That's what Naropa did. No [inaudible] here? Well, forget the book. Ok, let's do it. That's what Naropa did, he forgot the book [laughter]. He did! How do you suppose he attained enlightenment? You think he carried all those books, that scholar, that great mahapandita? He went to look for the guru. We'll talk about that tomorrow. There, is there a microphone that goes along with that smile? [laughter] It's coming like a horse at a race track. Here it is, it's arriving. Paid off, two to one. Go ahead.

QUESTION: Could you say something about the application of enlightenment?

VAJRA REGENT: No. Not yet. We don't even [laughs]...

Q: Well, I'm kind of wondering why all this talk about it, you know, why go for it?

VR: What you doing here?

Q: Uh...

VR: What are you doing here?

Q: Uh, just kind of questioning and research of

VR: -good

Q: -why I might be here

VR: -good

Q: -I'm not quite sure

VR: -well, then if you're researching then you got to stick around because if I'm giving you the material you've got to do it at my pace, eh? I mean, you know, you're the researcher and you want to find out, right?

Q: Right.

VR: Right, right.

Q: It doesn't seem like I'm applying anything that I'm going for yet.

VR: Well, maybe you don't have the right machinery.

Q: How would I know I could ever have it?

VR: That's a good question, I think. You do have some feeling that you could though, don't you? Without any kind of bargaining. Without any kind of selling, or fast food approach, or seminar training with an "e" in front, that kind of thing. I mean, perish the thought that we could actually pay for being with it.

Q: What's the difference?

VR: This is it, my friend. This is it. This is the real it, and you got the it of the it. The difference is probably sense of humor. I mean, basically what we come right down to, we have to work the rest of our lives day by day, one minute by one minute and nobody gives anything away. And nobody gives anything to anybody. And nobody's mad at anybody, and nobody expects to be in heaven with a circle round their head, saying I've got it. And clouds coming up. I mean, it's so silly. This is not Naropa's point of view. Naropa had a clear mind, straightforward vision, that he understood he was deceiving himself about all of that bullshit. Know what I mean? Bullshit, bullshit. You have any idea what I'm talking about?

Q: I'm not quite

VR: -bullshit

Q: -sure what you mean by

VR: -not quite what I mean by bullshit

Q: -deceiving himself about all the bullshit in his life, the way he dealt with people.

VR: Who do you think you are? That's the same thing Naropa confronted himself with. When he saw that old hag of thirty-seven ugly features. Who do you think you are? Just a lightning bolt, straight down. Who do you think you are? Just like that. Just like that. Who do you think you are, my friend, asking that question. This way you answer for me or yourself.

Q: I can't imagine like having an answer really.

VR: Really? That's an extremely stupid thing to say. Very stupid. I can imagine you saying that. Well, ladies and gentlemen, this seminar could be fruitful, depends on your point of view. If you decide to bring your talcum powder along it could be interesting as well. It's very interesting talking about Naropa. Naropa is pictured with, in his hand, left hand, skullcup filled with amrita. Amrita means elixer, immortality, liquor. Liquor which is, when we drink it, it is either poison or immortality, one or the other. In his other hand is, in gesture like this, that's called simple gesture. It's kind of like this, that, are the same thing. This is Naropa. He has no pretense.

So, my friends, that means if we're going to do this thing in the next few days, we can't be too squeamish about it. We've got to sit, and these chairs should definitely go away. Even if it takes dragging them all down, where is it, Cloverfield? Yeah. Way you should sit tomorrow, what time? Nine a.m. Hello, nine a.m. You should sit nine a.m. Everybody here. Nobody should not sit. Maybe we could tell you stories, fairy tales, or

something, whatever you like to make you sit. I hope not. Maybe we could promise you its-ville to make you sit. I hope not. That's not what we're here for. We're here to talk about the truth, and if we do so, good. If we don't it's our fault. Because there's nobody pulling the strings up in good old heaven. All right. What time does sitting start? Nine a.m. What's the address? What?

[recording ends]