

Unpublished TRANSCRIPT: No reproduction without permission.
Copyright 1988 Vajra Regent Ösel Tendzin

VAJRA REGENT ÖSEL TENDZIN
The Direct Path To Enlightenment
Public Talk [Opening Talk of The Mahamudra Lineage ITS]
April 16, 1988
Los Angeles, California

Transcribed by Jackie Saunders
Checked by Dana Fulmer

VAJRA REGENT ÖSEL TENDZIN: [Whispers:] It's awfully bright.

NINA TYSON: Good evening, Sir. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to The Direct Path to Enlightenment. It may be direct, but it is not easy. It is my great pleasure to introduce our speaker this evening, the Vajra Regent Ösel Tendzin. The Vajra Regent was empowered as Vajra Regent in 1976 by the Venerable, the Vidyadhara Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche. The Vajra Regent, or dharma heir, is very important in vajrayana Buddhism. The Vajra Regent safeguards the teachings [laughter] of enlightenment. [Laughter.]

VR: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to this talk entitled, "The Direct Path to Enlightenment." Basically, what I would like to talk about tonight is the path of enlightenment as taught by my lineage, which is the lineage of the Kagyü of Tibet. Can you hear me?

Audience: Yes . . . No.

VR: [Chuckles.] Maybe we should use a microphone. One of these? I don't know if that'll make any difference. Does that make a difference?

Audience Member: It will.

VR: It will. He promises. All right? Yes. Yes. Yes. [Testing the microphone.] Yes. Yes. Yes. Maybe we shouldn't use the microphone. [Laughs; laughter.] Yes?

Audience: Better.

VR: Ah. [Loud feedback; laughter.] What. That's echo. It's all right? Maybe it's the echo that I hear. [Laughter.] All right, let's try again.

Direct Path to Enlightenment, as taught by the Kagyü lineage, which is my lineage, inherited from Trungpa Rinpoche and continuously taught from teacher to student for one thousand years. And this particular lineage of Kagyü, *ka* means command, and *gyu* means continuity. So Kagyü means the continuous command or the continuous transmission of enlightenment from teacher to student. And this particular teaching is part of the vajrayana teaching, which is said to be the third turning of the wheel of dharma by the Buddha.

The vajrayana, *vajra* meaning “indestructible,” *yana* meaning “vehicle,” is the teaching of enlightenment which approaches enlightenment as the notion that we, right now, have the complete mind of the Buddha from this very moment. The difficulty that we have in relating with our lives is based on ignorance of that particular fact. So enlightenment is our topic, really, and the direct path is simply the recognition of that enlightenment. So it is good to understand what the qualities of enlightenment are, at least from the point of view of our conceptual mind, because we have to start with our conceptual mind since that is what we have been laboring on and with for quite some time.

From the point of view of our conceptual mind, there is habit, or habitual pattern. And habitual pattern is the repetitive quality of mind to grasp on to whatever is pleasing, to push away whatever is not pleasing, and to ignore what we cannot understand. So that basically is the quality of the mind from a habitual point of view. From an enlightened point of view, the mind has none of those qualities. In fact, the arising of such things does not even exist. But in order to grasp that fully, one has to have some sense of openness, some sense of willingness to actually dive into an area of looking at oneself that is unconventional, uncommon, so to speak. In order to do that one has to be sufficiently — bored.

Now, to be sufficiently bored is not easy in this world. In this world of objects and attractions, to be sufficiently bored is perhaps the most precious experience one could have. To be sufficiently bored means that we are no longer attracted, our mind no longer runs after the objects of attraction. Therefore, it becomes settled. When the mind runs after objects of attraction, it moves. And when it moves it creates agitation in space. Now, that in itself is not particularly bad. But when that movement identifies itself as Mr. So-and-so,

Miss So-and-so, then that begins the problem, the trouble we have with life. Our trouble with life is our identity as "miss" and "mister." It starts with a name, and that name has to do with a form, and that form has to do with a memory, and that memory has to do with repetition, and repetition becomes habitual, and then habit becomes passion, aggression, jealousy, hatred, pride and all the rest of them. Doesn't sound very good. However, from the very beginning, this mind is completely pure. And that particular activity which evolves into what we call samsara, or the world of confusion, is simply mistaken identity.

Now that is a very simplistic way of putting it. Obviously, people here, yourselves, have had some experience with your mind, trying to work on it somehow, otherwise you wouldn't be here. And so you know that working on yourself and working on your mind is a difficult thing. Having discipline at all is a difficult thing. And finding out why one should is even more difficult. That is because when the energy arises in space, which we call mind and movement, there's a sudden blank-out. And from that, there's a sudden arising of a consciousness which identifies with a self. And self is a pure fiction, it's a pure identity made out of nothing. However, due to our fascination, we continue to believe that there is such a thing. And in doing so, we grind out our existence, such as we are doing, until it comes to the time of death, and then at that point we are completely shocked that such a thing could happen to us. And as death approaches we become irritable. Even if we have lived a life which is perfectly clean, so to speak. We have accomplished the powerful things which we wanted to accomplish in life, we have seen our children grow and become successful, etc., etc. Even so, when death approaches we become frightened, irritable, and we start to think, "Why is this happening to me?" And as we start to actually die, that is to say, the composite elements of this particular body start to dissolve, our consciousness which has been attached to these elements in a particular form becomes confused. And as the elements themselves start to dissolve, one into the other, the consciousness becomes blank and we lose track of who we are. And from that particular state whatever particular good or bad deeds we did in our life, in other words, the karmic propensities which we have, develop into fantasies. Fantasies which, in this case, have no body, and we become completely terrified and find ourselves involved in incarnating in a body which is the result of our previous mental activity.

This kind of process continues forever, until we get to the point, if possible, if we have the fortunate possibility that the chain in the wheel of samsara can actually stop, or, more precisely, that we can get off it. "We" meaning

consciousness. That consciousness can be liberated from the continuous cycle of birth and death. Sounds pretty big. Sounds pretty fantastic. Sounds pretty absurd in a way. However it is possible. What is necessary is to understand the difference between the ignorant state and the enlightened state.

Ignorance means ignoring what actually is. Enlightened means that things as they are illuminated. In other words, ignorance is illuminated. We could safely say that all of us are ignorant in a particular way. Now that is not meant as an insult, please don't take it that way. The truth of the matter is we all have a sort of fundamental buffer between our conscious mind and its projections, so that we sort of blur things out when they don't quite agree with our state of mind. Now that kind of ignorance is continuous. The problem with that is that it tends to obscure what is actually quite brilliant, what is actually right, precisely on. That's called the enlightened state. The state of enlightenment means illuminating the darkness of ignorance. Putting a light on whatever there is that has been hidden by darkness. That means to say, perception, mental states, body, environment, whatever there is, becomes illuminated all at once. So that there is nothing to hide, there is nothing to lie about, nothing to deceive oneself about, and there is nothing to achieve. All at once there is complete wakefulness, and that's called enlightenment. Enlightenment as opposed to ignorance, which in some way or other keeps us from seeing things clearly, seeing things as they are.

Now the direct path to enlightenment, at least as taught by my guru and my guru's guru, is to actually stop the ongoing production of this habitual life. But how to stop it is even more important. How to stop it means to stop fooling oneself. In order to stop fooling oneself one has to be very much aware of everything that goes on, moment to moment. One cannot be lazy in the least. Wakefulness is the key. But in order to be wakeful one has to be sufficiently motivated.

The Buddha taught that life as we know it is marked by suffering. That is to say, everybody who lives experiences suffering, and that's the basic quality of life. There isn't any other basic quality. It's very matter-of-fact. Very blunt. So Buddhism has often been said to be a nihilistic religion. However, that is simply due to one's fear of facing the truth. Buddhism is not nihilistic, it's realistic. Realistic from the point of view of what is real about life is suffering. What is unreal about life is a fantasy about what feels like pleasure, but actually isn't. Actually painful. Everything we try, we try to, you know, create, has a tinge to it. Some sort of underlying anxiety happens in all of our experience. Whether

it's our experience in the world as a great businessman, great politician, great athlete, whatever great thing we try to do, there's a thread that goes on in all that great stuff that is very annoying, very unsettling, because it has to do with a fundamental feeling of not being quite sure that everything is right. And that's what basically Buddha meant by suffering. That unless your mind is completely resolved, you will always have some doubts about who you are and what you're doing. Unless you completely resolve your mind to its depth, you will always wonder if it's actually right.

Now there are people who feign certainty, who say they are certain about who they are. You just ask them and they'll tell you. They're completely certain, and willing to tell you. However, that kind of certainty is huge ignorance. It's like being in a room filled with smoke and saying, "Yes, I see it, I see it, it's right there." You should be careful of people who proclaim their sanity, they usually have something else going on.

True sanity, or true enlightenment, is very straightforward and very simple, ordinary. But in order for people like ourselves to experience it properly, it is necessary to have a path. It is not necessary from the point of view of one's original mind — I'm sure you've heard that term before, one's "original mind," or whatever you want to call it. Basic intelligence. From the basic, fundamental point of view, there is nothing to be gained, nothing to be done, no enlightenment to be achieved. At the same time, there's no past, no present, and no future. However, we shouldn't be too, shall we say, lighthearted about the thing, especially since we feel irritation with ourselves and struggle of some kind.

If we feel that struggle and irritation, then that is good because there's a kind of irritation which sort of moves us along, so to speak, so that we can open ourselves completely to what actually is. So in some ways the direct path to enlightenment has to do with feeling that uncertainty, irritation, anxiety that comes along with having a human body, comes along with having human relationships, comes along with having this human birth altogether. That particular anxiety or irritation wakes you up all the time. But generally in this life we find that people are always talking about how to get rid of that, how to make that into this wonderful paradise.

I was driving around today in Los Angeles. I first lived in Los Angeles in 1968, and I was thinking, "This was much more a paradise in 1968 than it is now." And when I was first here in 1968 people said, "This was much more a

paradise before." There's always some trouble in paradise, no matter what. Always some trouble. But in our world people are always trying to say, "Well, let's make it beautiful, let's make it so we don't have to experience any irritation at all. Let's make it so that it's constantly milk and honey, smooth." However, the truth of the matter is, unless we feel some of that pinpoint of our existence, we will not wake up, we will just continue that cycle of birth and death constantly. And we, meaning whatever the consciousness is, whatever the consciousness is. At this point you say it's "My name is Joe" or "My name is Frank" or "My name is Sally" or whatever. That's what consciousness is called right now. But it could be Fido. Easily. With no problem. You have your doggie, say, "Nice, come here Fido." Pet. You look at your dog, you know, isn't that sweet? That's also consciousness. The fly you inadvertently slap and kill, that's also consciousness. We really think that could be — guess who flying around there? And even when we think that, we try to glorify it and make a movie out of it or something.

So the direct path to meditation has to do with experiencing things exactly as they are, and that means without any particular notion of having to adjust your state of mind in order to accommodate what you experience. Now that in itself is a very difficult thing to do. That in itself might be called enlightened attitude. The enlightened attitude in its basic nature is non-aggressive. And what we do with our minds is continually aggressive. We are always trying to change our minds and change ourselves into something or other, doing something with our minds so that it becomes something else. Something better, something worse. If we feel like we're too bored the way we are, maybe we should get worse. And that would be better. Or we should get better and that would be worse. In any case, any kind of change would be good. However, every time we try to manipulate our mind, every time we try to change our state of mind from one thing to another by mental means, in other words by manipulation, we are creating an aggressive state of mind in ourselves.

An aggressive state of mind cannot see things as they are. It's too foggy, it's too agitated. The water's all muddy. It is necessary to feel the irritation, but it is also necessary not to make that irritation into some conceptual or philosophical notion about who you are. So that begins the path, to feel the needlepoint of one's existence, pricking. One's brain, so to speak. It's sudden and sharp, and it wakes you up. And that begins the path.

But in order to stay on that dot, it is good to have a teacher and it is good to have a lineage. People who have done it that way, so that you don't create some

sort of self-styled notion of enlightenment. Because if it gets into that, well, you too can have ads in the New York Times. Would you like that? Enlightenment Master Charlie. "For a very small amount of money, you, too, can attain enlightenment." That would be disgusting. To oneself and to others. It is good to follow the path, and the path that has been given in terms of the Buddha, is the path of meditation. And meditation I'm sure all of you know something about, since you live in Los Angeles.

But in general there are two types of meditation. What is called meditation with form, and meditation without. In the sense of meditation with form, it is focusing the mind on an object, whether that object be a mental object such as one imagines, or a physical one. That is called meditation with form. And then there is meditation without form. That is fixing the mind on nothing whatsoever, but merging the mind with space. That particular kind of meditation is what is basically taught by lineage, the Kagyü lineage. And merging the mind with space is called mahamudra, or the great seal, great symbol. That particular meditation, when perfected, sees all phenomena and the mind as completely simultaneous. In other words, the subject and object problem does not exist. And when that happens there is what's called enlightenment. In other words, everything is seen exactly as it is. No second thoughts.

So this particular kind of meditation has been taught for a very long time, passed down from teacher to student, and unbroken in its transmission and without any particular perversion or interruption. In order to practice this meditation, you need only have what you have. This particular body, which you have. This mind, which you have. These thoughts, which you have. Sensations, which you have. And perceptions, which you have. That's it. You don't need any philosophy, you don't need any particular credential, you don't need anything except what you have, right now. How to practice this meditation has been taught from the time of the Buddha until now. It's to sit quietly still, and just be. Perfect instruction.

However, because that is difficult, and it is only difficult because of habit, there are some further instructions. That is, how to hold one's body. Since we are habituated to falling asleep and indulging in fantasy, it is good to sit up straight. Why is that? Quite simply, that when we start to dream and fantasize, we start to bend, start to move this way. [VR leans forward]. First we, maybe sometimes, close our eyes, and then we start to bend. And sometimes we sort of jerk our head back, wake up. But to keep your body relaxed but straight,

that's the best way. And how to keep your thoughts? Don't keep them. Just let them be. As soon as you hold onto a thought, that thought becomes something you are interested in, which begins to interest you further in another thought and another thought. And before you know it, you have forgotten where you are, what your body is doing, what the environment is, and you are simply involved in thoughts. So basically you should let the thought go. Come and go, almost like, you have 24-hour Denny's. Come in, go out. You happen to be the proprietor of this particular body which allows thoughts to come and go. Very simply. So what about one's feeling about the thoughts? You know, like you have sometimes strong feelings when you have thoughts of passion, or aggression, or sometimes you have strong feelings when you have thoughts of ignorance. They're strong ignorant feelings. You should experience those feelings directly, and don't back up from them. That means to say, without any sense of manipulation or trying to make them into something else. And what about the environment? The environment should be just left as it is. Such as this one. Look at it. Amazing. But you can feel what it is. In an environment there's a sense of space. Space meaning around, above, below and through. And an appreciation of that. So that basically is your meditation practice, or at least your set-up.

Then, in order to focus the mind without letting it wander to one thing or another, in other words to be overly involved with either your thoughts, your body, environment or emotions, we generally use the identification with the mind and the outbreath. In other words, the breath going out and dissolving into space as being the reference for the continuity of your awake quality. So in doing those things, one actually begins to be right here. Very settled, very straight, and very open. Open, straight and settled. That's called meditation.

And in doing that, what happens is you become thoroughly bored. Sooner or later, if you do it properly and continually, your trip begins to run out. Your fascination with yourself begins to run out. And when it does, then you start to smell, taste, touch, hear, sense, think, one thing at a time. And, after that, you begin to see the world as not friend or foe, but one total ground of awareness, which is quite sacred and quite good. And from that it is possible to actually generate what is called truly enlightened mind. And that is to say, to make one's life meaningful for others, which is really enlightenment altogether.

That quite succinctly is the path, according to this particular lineage. There are many, many things to say, and many aspects of what I've said we could go into. However, in general, that is the way we practice and that is what we do.

There are a lot of interesting and outrageous things that happen to oneself when you do this, and there are, you know, simple, mundane, ordinary things. But altogether, this particular path is indestructible and free, so one should practice it if one has the chance. So one should practice it if one has the chance.

So that is all I have to say. We can have questions if you like. There is a microphone in the center there and front — anywhere else? Whatever. If you'd like to ask a question, please, there's a microphone in the center. If you're in this part you can come up here, or if not just raise your hand, and I think we can bring you one.

QUESTION: [Inaudible]

VAJRA REGENT: I think they want to record it. Is there a microphone there?

Q: Hi.

VR: Hello.

Q: My question is where does love fit into all this, into dealing with the world and the perception of the world.

VR: Well, I think that love fits in right at the beginning. Love is a feeling of tenderness, or softness — heart, you might say — which comes from that sharp point. When you actually love somebody you feel a sharpness all the time, almost like needles pinching you. And that's because there's an irritation about something being incomplete, and wanting to complete that. So I think right from the beginning we have that. In terms of the teaching, we don't talk about love as a vehicle, particularly, until one's mind is settled. Then we talk about love in terms of compassion.

Q: Thank you.

Question: Can you hear me?

VR: Yes.

Q: Okay. Can nirvana without residue be applied to this kind of meditation?

VR: Nirvana without residue . . .

Q: Without residue...

VR: Well, I think nirvana without residue is this kind of meditation to begin with. If you have to apply nirvana without residue, I think probably missing the point. Nirvana without residue means a totally clear state of mind. Well that's what we have; right now you have it. See? It's easy. No problem.

Q: But Buddha, I mean before he died, or after he died, or in the physical sense he reached the state of nirvana, right, without residue.

VR: Right.

Q: Is that how it works?

VR: Right.

Q: Okay.

VR: Nirvana.

Q: Okay.

VR: Those terms to me are sorta weird. Nirvana is, you know, is been hammered around so much, even though it's a great word, actually, in Sanskrit, nirvana is a great word. I like better to talk about clarity, or cessation from the point of view of complete wakefulness. I think it has more to do with our, you know, ordinary experience. And if we talk about nirvana without residue, it sounds a little complicated.

Q: Thank you.

Question: I first became interested in Buddhism through reading Allan Watts, but I'm sure that his not the only voice. Do you care to comment?

VR: Allan Watts was a great man. He was very open and also very inquisitive to things. And his involvement with Buddhism was due to his inquisitive mind. And he tried to penetrate in his life as much as he could. He had interesting karma, being a spokesperson for many people during his life. Trungpa Rinpoche was quite fond of him. In fact, they had dinner together just before he died. And I also appreciated — what was it, “Psychotherapy East and West,” or something like that. “Psychotherapy East and West?” Very, you know, when I was about twenty-something I was very moved by his, his precision, his, not precision but his inquisitiveness, basically. He was very inquisitive into everything.

Question: Hi.

VR: Hello.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about how imagination is the hindrance. I've always...

VR: Why don't we do it the other way around?

Q: All right. [Laughter.] How imagination is the help?

VR: Yes.

Q: Well, I always thought it was, but I was — when I been reading some books...

VR: Well it depends on what you imagine.

Q: Okay. [Laughter.]

VR: If you imagine yourself as Buddha, then you have to do some really interesting imagining, don't you think?

Q: Yeah. It would be pretty — you wouldn't get bored very easily.

VR: Oh, you would get bored almost immediately. [Laughter.] If you're Buddha, everything's finished. [Laughter.]

Q: Well then, how would it be interesting? [Laughs.]

VR: No, how would it be a help?

Q: Ah.

VR: Ah. Because it would calm your jagged nerves. You see, in some ways we're always imagining. We are imagining this. That's okay, you know. The question is if we have a lot of overlay, conceptual overlay on what we think this is, our imagination, you know. That's why, in many traditions, buddhist traditions, including, and especially the mahayana, there is always an image, such as a statue, or a thangka, or something, where you see image of the Buddha. Why? From a theistic point of view, people think, well, you are worshipping something. Not at all. You are just looking at the image of your mind. So to imagine Buddha, yourself as Buddha, means to exhaust all possibilities of ignorance, therefore to just be, completely. That's not bad, to begin with. In terms of imagination, that's not such a bad idea. When you sit and practice meditation, just getting in that posture is imagination. You imagine that you are enlightened. Otherwise, why would you do it?

Q: So how does Trungpa Rinpoche, what does he mean when he says imagination is a bad thing? He's referring to, it depends on the object of the, of imagination.

VR: If we talk about imagination in the, in the negative sense, it is constantly conjuring up one imagine after another in order to entertain oneself. You can't keep still—

Q: Diversion, right.

VR: — nobody can keep still, so you just work on your, you work with your mind and make another image, make ano— this town is full of it. It's Hollywood, right? It's, it's image-making, right? Just constantly create another image. And then what happens? Just, if you get it going fast enough, it's like the frames of a movie. It looks like one thing. [Laughter.] Right? It just goes ch-ch-ch-ch-ch, very fast. You say, “Aha, look. This is reality.” It's not.

Q: Yeah. Becomes life. [Laughs.]

VR: Yeah. [Laughs.]

Q: Thank you.

VR: You're welcome.

Question: Hi.

VR: Hello.

Q: You said enlightenment is seeing what is? Where does responsibility come in? Is there a need to take action once you see what is?

VR: There might be, if you see what is.

Q: Can you say more about responsibility with enlightenment?

VR: Well, I think that having a clear vision, view of things, means that one's action would follow along with one's vision. The problem that we have for the most part is that our vision is somewhat fragmented, or cloudy. Therefore our action is always suspect. We're not sure that what we're doing is proper or correct. And even when we are sure, it's because we convince ourselves that we're sure. So responsibility can only be looked at in that way. Otherwise we get into the conceptual notion of responsibility, such as responsible to society for this, responsible to my family for this, responsible to my parents for this. That's mostly conceptual.

Q: So once we see what is, the sense of responsibility would be clearer also?

VR: I think it would be sort of, almost, you could say, automatic.

Q: Thank you.

VR: Welcome.

[End Side One; begin SIDE TWO]

Q: Why did you choose this particular lineage?

VR: I didn't. [Laughter.] I have no particular memory of my past lives. I'm not that accomplished a person, you know. When I was in my twenties, I came to this place, Los Angeles, and I was, before that, in New York City, I was one of the disaffected, in the sixties, who looked for something. But I think that looking was since I was a young child. My first memory of it was when I was eight years old, thinking sort of fundamentally, who am I? And ever since then, my life has proceeded in that way. In terms of this lineage, I feel like someone who was hit on the head by a safe. [Laughter.]

Q: Sir. Did you find, was it hard for you to get motivated in executing your practice when you first came into contact with this lineage?

VR: Not at first, but later. At first, it was easy. It was almost like discovering a new friend, or a lover, in some way. It's so easy, you just always want to be there. But very soon after that it becomes tedious. Like, “Well yeah, I know this person already.” So in the middle is much harder.

Q: Do you know, could you talk about how to maybe remotivate—

VR: Motivate yourself? [Laughs; laughter.] Yeah, I could try. Always go back to square one. No matter what you practice and what your accomplishment is, always go back to your first moment of awareness, and that first moment is constantly arising as it is. Always go back right there. You know, some people sit for years and years and years, and they don't have that kind of awareness. Some people sit on and off, but every time they sit, they have it, and they don't, and when they don't they feel upset about the fact that they don't. And some people have it constantly. That's because they're always in that particular first arising of consciousness, or moment of awareness. So just go back to that constantly. As you awareness arises, let it be so. That's it. And there's no need to motivate yourself about that, since it happens anyway. I don't mean to be too, you know –

Q: No.

VR: — direct about this, but it is the case. [Laughs; laughter.] In other words, what I'm saying is don't bother with the motivation, trying to motivate yourself to practice is trying to take medicine. It's much better to know that the medicine itself is exactly right.

Q: It seems sometimes that it has a great deal to do with my environment, you know. I can be extremely motivated when I'm in a dharmic atmosphere, and then I'm really drawn to, to whatever the entertainment is at that particular –

VR: So you know that?

Q: Yeah.

VR: So that's first moment.

Q: Thank you.

VR: So you have to work it out. [Laughter.] That's the great thing about this particular path. Suddenly you find yourself in the boat. There are the oars, but nobody's rowing. [Laughter.] It's not like anything's been left out, it's just that you have to do it. It's not particularly homespun wisdom, it's the truth. You have to do it. Cannot help but do it.

Question: Is it of any value to remember your past lives?

VR: Only if you remember all of them. [Laughter.] As Buddha said to Ananda, "Ananda, the difference between you and me is I remember all of mine and you don't remember any of yours." The whole point, I think, with past lives is that past lives means knowing the past, present, and future all together, in terms of enlightenment. And the Buddha is said to have know all of his past lives. That doesn't mean to say that he said to his disciples, "Oh monks, in 357 B.C. and I was there." That's not the point. What it means is that you know all of your past lives in terms of all life, all kinds of existence, and that you know that your consciousness has been and is all of that, constantly. So if you get a flash about the fact that were Julius Caesar once or another, don't take it too seriously. [Laughter.] I remember when I first was here in L.A. that was really big deal. People would say, "I had a flash; I was Cleopatra," or something like that. Say, "yeah, yeah." [Laughter.] Yeah. The only way that helps is if you remember everything. Little bits and pieces are good; maybe they might inspire you to think, "Well, there's something to this," but really, nothing much. It's much better to know fire as fire and water as water and air as air and earth as earth. That's much better to know that, what that actually is.

Question: Hello.

VR: Hello.

Q: Something that's always bothered me is the Buddhist view of death, that's it's sort of presented in a scary manner, to me. It's not that you just go into the white lights and there'll be people cheering you on, necessarily, you know, you're—so it's always seemed sort of negative. You know, like you, at the point of death maybe you're in a bad mood; it doesn't look so good for the next life. It seems sort of chancy. [Laughter.] Is there anything— how can you—

VR: Precisely. Precisely.

Q: Okay.

VR: It is so chancy. That's the whole point. You got it.

Q: I see. That makes me nervous.

VR: It should. [Laughter.] That's not negative, it's that irritation I'm talking about.

Q: I feel that. But there's nothing positive you might –

VR: Say about death? [Laughter.]

Q: Is there anything you'd like to say to me? [Laughs.]

VR: No.

Q: No? [Laughter.]

VR: Sorry. We could say that everything's fine in heaven, but we're not sure. It's exactly the point, exactly the point. Any uncertainty, that will be your consciousness. That means you will not know where you are going or where you came from or how it's going to end up. Now if you relax with that, maybe that's okay. But it remains to be seen.

Q: [Inaudible.] ... uncertainty, you were saying that to have a sense of certainty is a way of hiding from unawareness. Well, how would you tell the difference

between that uncertainty and possibly being unaware, feeling that you're certain that you're aware?

VR: I think it has to do with some sense of letting go — which has been said a lot, letting go — but it's more a feeling of falling into resistance, which is quite hard to do, it takes tremendous amount of discipline. That kind of certainty is very different that being certain conceptually, so that you can create a fantasy for a length of time. In other words, your visual perception, your mental perception, is exactly what you think. That begins to decay at some point, and at the moment it begins to decay, you should fall into it. That kind of certainty is what I'm talking about.

Q: So it feels quite different.

VR: Very different.

Q: You see, I know when I feel certain, almost always when I feel certain about anything, I don't believe myself.

VR: That's precisely it. That's what I'm talking about. That's what you should get into. You have to be able to sit and meditate to do that; you can't do it by engaging in things, it doesn't happen.

Q: So in effect you're saying when I am certain I will be certain, as opposed to doubt the certainty.

VR: Well, no matter what I'm saying, I'm still coming back to the same point. At a certain point one has to actually drop it, altogether, and float maybe. We don't know if there is a bottom.

Q: The effort, you mean.

VR: Drop the effort completely.

Q: Right, yeah. All right. Thank you.

VR: You're welcome. Takes a good lineage and a lot of discipline to do that. You check it out. At any moment there's a kind of twist.

Are we having tea and cookies and things? No? [Laughs.] One day [inaudible] tea and cookies. [Laughs.]

Well, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank you very much for your patience and your inquisitiveness. I appreciate it. As I said, this particular practice [is] unbroken and been taught from teacher to student to the present day. If you care to take advantage of the instruction and that particular teaching, we have a place called Dharmadhatu, which is here in Los Angeles somewhere. [Laughs.] Where is it? [Inaudible] and West Third Street. Anyway, the name "Dharmadhatu" is hard to mistake in the phone book. Dharmadhatu, d-h-a-t-u. [Laughs.] You can get meditation instruction in this particular lineage there, by people who have been practicing for a long time. Very good to be here. Feels good. I appreciate you. Thank you.