

Sudden Glimpse: the Appearance of Awakened Mind in Everyday Life

Talk II given by the Vajra Regent Ösel Tendzin
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I would like to welcome the survivors of last night's talk and today's sitting, and continue our discussion. In continuing our discussion, there are two principles involved which we should realize are necessary to our continuing along this path. And that is that without real experience of what we've been talking about, personal experience, then we simply become parrots to ourselves and to others. So, the emphasis on experience in buddhist practice is of the first degree, first order. Starting from the Buddha, himself, down to the present day, the emphasis has always been on personal experience. On the other hand, since we represent the descendents of that tradition, that means we have something to speak of, to teach, which involves intellect. So, we should be able to understand intellectually what is going on with our experience. We should be able to actually describe what we experience in common language, ordinary language. Now this is probably so simplistic that it affronts at once the great scholars and the ascetics. But according to our tradition, the two must come together, intellect and intuition. In other words, if you sit, practice meditation, and somebody says to you, "what are you doing there?" And you say, "ahahahahahahah ah feels good, I don't know, I'm confused." Or, on the other hand, you begin to spout endless quotations: "Didn't you know that samsara is confusion and that ego is this and that and...." We must speak true, and that truth that we speak is when heart and mind come together, not become the same thing particularly, but come together.

So, let us just go over our ground again, how we started out our journey together, and that is by talking about awakened mind as occurring in ordinary situations, kitchen sink situations. We're not talking about profound light coming through the window of our minds; or are we talking about being the garbage collector of the universe, therefore, through our penance, waking up. We're talking about kitchen sink situations that happen ordinarily, everyday. And in the ordinary situation, we experience a glimpse of awakened mind all the time. And that glimpse we talked about is a sense of our strategy of who we are being abruptly interrupted, our strategy of how we exist as ourselves being, in a moment, ungraspable.

And we also talked about potential. Now that potential we talked about is two things: could be the potential of continuing our panic at not knowing what the moment is, so that we build ourselves up to be the greater, the best, the most, the real survivor; or, it could be that potential means that that moment which is a gap can be expanded so that we can actually realize, see clearly, the nature of awakened mind.

And we also said that what we generally experience in that sense of gap, that sense of glimpse, that sense of moment, is a panic that is indescribable, which is generally, from hindsight, referred to as horrible, threatening, which we relate to in several ways: ignoring it completely, making a philosophy out of it, or becoming artistic with it, in other words, falling in love with it since we don't know what it is. Those three aspects, those three kinds of neurotic potential called passion, aggression, and ignorance and that proliferates our confusion.

Now again, we should go over the ground thoroughly so that we don't personally, ourselves with each other, create endless rip-off, which we are used to. And that rip-off is making something

out of nothing to the grand degree of paying an awful lot of money and time in the name of enlightenment or awakened mind. Just think about it. How many hypes, how many frauds, how many promises, because somebody somewhere had a moment or two of not knowing, got so freaked out that they created a philosophy and charged us for it. We have been working for the - all day people sitting on the intuitive side of this teaching, feeling personally what we're talking about. And since the time of the Buddha, meditation practice has been the only way to uncover that basic intelligence, basic spark, which we call awakened state of mind. To most of us, that spark, that intelligence is the experience of some kind of irritation, some kind of annoyance, to say the least. But as we discussed, that particular state of mind, that annoyance or irritation is itself the potential. And even more than just potential, it is state of being awake. We could say that what we consider pain is enlightenment from a different point of view than we conventionally think. In order to follow this path of buddhadharma, ones thinking has to be changed entirely. A complete transformation of mind must occur, because there are no promises and because the logic is that tight, but because the proclamation is the most definite and confident that you could ever possibly hear. Make no bones about it friends, what we're talking about is that your ordinary pain is your enlightened mind. And we say that's the truth. And we also say the problem is we experience that pain and annoyance not as enlightened mind but as a calamity, something that we must struggle to change, get rid of, something we must build a fortification against. Well, that is our ground; that is our starting point.

Also that is our question mark. Why sudden glimpse? Why is it a glimpse? Why is it sudden? It's a glimpse because we speed. We cover up everything so quickly that the most we could hope for is a glimpse, sudden because we actually cannot maintain hypocrisy continually. Therefore, it happens suddenly. We are shocked. Sudden glimpse is because we are uneducated as to actually what the moment really is. Nobody bothered to teach us. Mama didn't, Papa didn't, history didn't, friends didn't, lovers didn't, only experience, and we don't trust ourselves. We don't trust our own experience. If we actually did, if we actually looked at our own experience, then the question resolves itself in a moment. But we have no training. We say, "Well, why should I have to be trained?" You tell me. Let's tell each other. Education: it sounds demeaning and humiliating, but basically, that's the situation. And that's why Buddha uttered his word and first teaching in Sarnath, because he realized his enlightenment by itself was not enough, but that it concerned everybody. So, in order to educate ourselves further, we should take a glimpse suddenly tonight at the description of the moment of the awakened state of mind as it has been experienced and confirmed by practitioners since the time of Buddha. And this particular description is not meant to create further story lines but it's actually meant so that whoever amongst us can experience it can click with the sense of totality which has been happening always in a small moment, mundane little moment, from the time of the Buddha to the present day.

So, how do we describe this awakened state of mind? First, we say that this awakened state is unborn, which means that it had no parents. What we actually mean by no parents is that conceptualization, thoughts about this and that, are not necessary to produce awakened state of mind. Also, in the process of giving birth there is a sense of struggle and effort. When we say unborn, the awakened state of mind has no sense of struggle or effort to exist. Therefore, we say it is continuous. If we say it is unborn we mean it has no origin, no starting point. So we have unborn, unoriginated, no dependency on a cause. So, it exists continually as itself. Further description says that this awakened state of mind is not subject to cause and effect. In other words, it is not affected at all by the process of events. What we mean there is that we cannot produce this state of mind, and at the same time, we cannot hinder it from being. It is not affected by time, place, condition, past, and future. It is unobstructed by chaos, and furthermore, it doesn't dwell anywhere, which means that the experience of the awakened state of mind has no allegiance whatsoever to good or bad, pain or pleasure. It has

no allegiance to the past or the future. It has no allegiance to categorizing of any kind. So, awakened state of mind is unborn, unoriginated, unobstructed, and non-dwelling. It is totality, by itself for itself. The main point of discussing this description is that you personally, all of us personally, can connect that sense of gap with this description. But you can't do it by trying to pump it up, trying to regenerate the description over and over again, because that goes against the grain completely, because then it becomes born, originated, dwelling, and obstructing. If we actually, honestly, take a look further and actually be the moment, then, suddenly, we begin to feel more spacious. We begin to feel some sense of room in our life, room to allow our dialogue to continue, room to allow our claustrophobia to continue, room to allow our doubt, insecurity, and resentment to continue, because we see that all of those things, in a moment, are unoriginated, unborn, don't dwell anywhere, and are unobstructed. Therefore, we begin to see that our ordinary experience is completely workable, in the sense that awake is nowhere else but here.

If you have any questions, we could have discussion.

Question: How does the, that experience of unborn and unoriginated have to do with a sense of ongoing birth and death?

Vajra Regent: How does it have to do with ongoing birth and death? What do you mean by birth?

Q: Birth.

VR: Of what? Do you mean your body?

Q: Yeah, and -

VR: You mean Lee Weingrad's birth?

Q: Yeah, or just -

VR: It has a lot to do with your birth, absolutely, 100 percent, because your birth as Lee Weingrad, you find out, is unborn, unoriginated. That's what it has to do with your birth. Now, your death -

Q: And death, also?

VR: Yeah. It's unobstructed and doesn't dwell anywhere, even in a tombstone and six feet under.

Q: And those two are simultaneous?

VR: I think so, absolutely at the same time. You see, but we have to relate to it personally. To begin with, we can't get, you know, the description of the teaching is simply meant as some kind of confirmation of our experience. Otherwise we could think forever about unborn, unoriginated. It's great. The point is to get some sort of sudden glimpse of total environment of what we're

talking about so that ego, what we call ego, in other words, our definite feeling of name and form, starts to become transparent. Robbie.

Q: I have two questions which actually relate more to last night's talk than this night. They came up in discussion group this afternoon.

VR: Um-hum.

Q: The first question is, is sudden glimpse the same thing as that point in meditation where you realize you're thinking and you just say, "thinking."

VR: Um-hum.

Q: Okay. Easy enough. (chuckles) Second question.

VR: Now wait a minute. There's two parts to that. There's sudden glimpse when you realize you're thinking and then you say, "thinking." - technique. We should understand what technique means. Technique of labeling thinking is to confirm sudden glimpse. Got it?

Q: Got it.

VR: Okay.

Q: Second question is you spoke of sudden glimpse as being delightful and horrifying. And I was wondering if that was intrinsic to sudden glimpse or whether that was the take afterwards.

VR: Intrinsic. Intrinsic. It's what we generally call restless mind or pain.

Q: Thank you.

VR: Intrinsically inquisitive. It rubs. In the back, please.

Q: What causes the painful nature of sudden glimpse in the first place?

VR: The painful nature of sudden glimpse in the first place is considering sudden glimpse to be horrible instead of awakened mind. It's simply mistaken identity.

Q: Why do we mistake it? Do we learn to mistake it from our -

VR: We learn to mistake it.

Q: If we didn't mistake it, it would not be painful.

VR: Well, we could say it would not be pleasurable or painful. It would be what it would be. In other words, it is what it is. Change your mind? (chuckle) Blue sweater.

Q: You said that pain is our enlightenment. Could not also joy be our enlightenment? Isn't it simply the reality of the situation?

VR: Well as soon as you have joy, you have pain. It so happens for human beings, pain is more accessible than pleasure.

Q: But there, there, could there not be situations where there would be joy?

VR: Well you see the problem is, when we have a pleasurable situation, we tend to doze off. When we have a painful situation, we tend to become extremely paranoid. In this case, paranoia is the key to waking up, rather than pleasure, definitely. Pleasure, on the other hand, is much more sophisticated and I think it takes a lot of time, a lot of practice, in order to actually experience pleasure.

Q: But it's just as real as pain, is it not?

VR: Just as real or unreal. We're talking about taking a step here. What's real, what's unreal, we have no idea. We're talking about taking some step to recognize some glimpse and according to the way it's been experienced and taught, pain happens to be easier, believe it or not. Jabberwocky.

Q: I have a couple of questions, The first one is last night you mentioned that we all have a hard time figuring out what makes life worthwhile -

VR: Uh-hmm.

Q: - because of all the cultural bias etc., etc.

VR: Uh-hmm.

Q: It seems to me that we have a hard time figuring out what makes life worthwhile because you're saying that pain is enlightened mind. I mean, where's the worth in that? I mean -

VR: No worth at all. That's what gives us some sort of sudden glimpse.

Q: Well, then life isn't worthwhile or, not not-worthwhile. Is that what you're saying?

VR: Well, it gives us some sort of sudden glimpse because you never heard of such a thing before.

Q: Where does the question of worthwhile come in?

VR: Cultural bias.

Q: So that's all worth is, just cultural bias?

VR: Basically.

Q: So this is somewhat meaningless, the path..

VR: What is?

Q: Sudden glimpse.

VR: Meaningless?

Q: Yeah.

VR: Depends on what point of view you're looking at. From the point of view of having accomplished everything there is to accomplish it's absolutely meaningless.

Q: Right. That's interesting. (laughter)

VR: Next.

Q: The next question is that last night you said that there's no answer, sudden, glimpse, then possibilities.

VR: Uh- hmm.

Q: These possibilities have nothing to do with memory, right?

VR: It depends. If you can recognize sudden glimpse as we talked about it tonight it has nothing to do with memory.

Q: Right. Could you say a little more about what these possibilities are?

VR: Which?

Q: The ones that don't have to do with memory if you recognize sudden glimpse.

VR: They're unborn, unoriginated, non-dwelling, and unobstructed.

Q: Right. Anything else?

VR: What?

Q: Anything else? I mean, particular –

VR: Nothing else.

Q: Right. (laughter) I guess that's all I have to ask. Thanks.

VR: Judy? Front.

Q: How do you do that unobstructed –

VR: Which?

Q: - action. Once you see a sudden glimpse, you talked about expanding the moment.

VR: Once you see a sudden glimpse, what happens?

Q: Well you can panic -

VR: You can.

Q: - or you can expand the moment.

VR: Yes. One or the other.

Q: Okay. Expanding the moment is step two?

VR: Step two?

Q: Yeah?

VR: What?

Q: Step one is recognizing that it's there.

VR: No. Step one is panic.

Q: All right, then after step one, then what?

VR: Then we have what's called form, feeling, perception, concept, consciousness, body, name, craving, grasping, birth, death -

Q: You're getting ahead of me.

VR: - intercourse, politics, countries, universe, styles, hairdos, you name it. I'm getting ahead of you?

Q: Yeah.

VR: OK, let's get behind me then.

Q: What I'm trying to talk about –

VR: What I'm trying to say is, step one is too late. Step one is called self-consciousness, in a very primordial form, unrecognizable to most of us who have never practiced, but step one from a meditative point of view is a stepping stone, a key to unborn, unoriginated. In other words, you can step backwards, sort of a, kind of a figure of speech. You don't really step backwards but you begin to see that step one is also unoriginated.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about the connection of the sudden glimpse with the development of self-responsibility and communication?

VR: Well, probably we'll talk about that at Karne Choling. We have a long way to go before that. Responsibility. Self-responsibility is kind of redundant. Responsibility always means to oneself to begin with anyway, and communication is much more sophisticated. You see, I'm very conservative. I've been taught by a very conservative gentleman, so I believe in taking things a step at a time.

Q: Does this glimpse have to occur in the absence of thought processes?

VR: Uh-hmm.

Q: But if awakened state of mind is going to be a continual type of thing, I mean, you should be there when you're doing everything else too.

VR: Uh-hmm. Let's make a distinction between glimpse and continuous meditative awareness, okay?

Q: Yeah.

VR: We're talking about glimpse right now.

Q: Yeah. I realize, I realize -

VR: Okay, good, good. (laughter)

Q: It's just that you could spend a whole month at a dathun and get maybe three glimpses. A whole month sitting on a cushion.

VR: Then you're doing very well. You recognize those two or three?

Q: I remember them vaguely, but, you know, it's memory at this point.

VR: Uh-uh-uh-uh. Wait. You remember them, right? Did you recognize them when they happened?

Q: Well, I'm not sure but -

VR: Wait, wait, wait -- just wait, just wait. Remember that experience? Sudden glimpse? Gap? Do you remember that?

Q: Yeah. Except that, the thing is, as soon as you, yeah, okay, I have, it's just that you suddenly see that it happened and then it's all over, because you start thinking again.

VR: Never mind "it's all over". All I asked you is did you remember them?

Q: Yeah.

VR: Remember that? Do you remember that?

Q: Yeah, it was rare.

VR: Do you remember that?

Q: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

VR: Exactly. That's what we work on.

Q: Yeah, but it's like -

VR: No-o-o. (laughter)

Q: If we, if we -

VR: No boy scouts. No medal of honor, nothing. Just that. It's simple as that. It's so simple, nobody remembers but you, and you don't remember in conceptual terms, do you? Just think about it.

Q: Memory is conceptual, I thought.

VR: Oh, is it? What do you remember about that sudden glimpse?

Q: That it happened.

VR: Yeah. Well, describe it to me. Describe it to me.

Q: Well, I -

VR: Just describe it to me. Right now. Remember it? Remember it. Just remember it. What was it like?

Q: Awake with no thought process.

VR: Good. Great. Work on that. Recognize that in your ordinary experience all the time. Recognize that. It's there. It's nowhere else. You see, what we generally do with potential, it's the same question, we're talking about potential, is at that point we say "Yes. I recognize that but what about all the other things that happened after that? What about my toast burning the next day? What about that person who said to me--? What about? What about? What about? ... " The point of practice is to catch the moment and work on that. You can't do it without discipline. It takes a lot of guts.

Q: Yeah. The catching of the moment, though, has to occur in the absence of thought process, is that right?

VR: Right? Right. We already said that. Working on that means recognizing thought process as unborn, unoriginated, unoriginated-d-d-d-d-d, whatever the rest of it is. Do you get it?

Q: The train of thought is as unoriginated as the gap is.

VR: Exactly. But the only way you can recognize it is through the gap. Otherwise you have no clue whatsoever. No clue. But you do have a clue, don't you? Two, three, you said.

Q: Two or three, two or three.

VR: Yeah. Two or three times. Yeah, I venture to say it could be 2,000, 200 in that month.

Q: You mean, that weren't recognized. I mean, that occurred but -

VR: That occurred, maybe more. Two million. Two billion. How long is a moment?

Q: How long is a moment? No length, I'd say.

VR: Absolutely. Unborn, unoriginated, non-dwelling, unobstructed. How long is our life, our identity?

Q: Our identity?

VR: Who we are. How long does it last? I think the same. The same amount of time. Well, that's our bubble gum. We've got to chew on it.

Q: If I were to look at you and you were to look at me, and we had a (laughter) -

VR: What are they laughing at? We don't know. All right.

Q: - and we had a meeting of the minds just passing each other in the hallway, and I was open when I looked at you, and you were open when you looked at me -

VR: Right -

Q: - that would be a sudden glimpse, would it not?

VR: Well, it would be if we didn't know it.

Q: But eventually we pervert it by remembering it.

VR: Not necessarily. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is our main point, thank you, of tonight's talk and discussion together, is that meeting in the hallway for a moment, we looked at each other and it was without thought. It was unborn, unoriginated, and then later on we remembered it. At that point when we remember it, that is the point when we can recognize again the nature of awakened mind. That is where we have the problem. It is an occasion to do it all over again, and there's no trace. You see, our memory is not particularly ego. That's simply what we are accustomed to believe. While practicing meditation and by study the teaching, there is the possibility of waking up. There is that possibility. Well, we have our chance, eh? This is what's called auspicious occasion, when confusion and sanity mix together in a ground of celebration, in a ground of non-aggression. Sanity is not the good guy; confusion is not the bad guy. We interchange all the time, speaker and listener, listener and speaker, shrine and student, teaching and practitioner.

Q: Once I had some experience. I don't know what it was, but I was afraid. I had no feeling. I thought that if I didn't remember and if I didn't plan for the future, I would be completely nothing and annihilated, and this was panic. I was afraid to expand it. Now you say if I remember that moment, that is still a potential moment to explore that moment, not waiting for it to happen again.

VR: This one.

Q: This one which is the same as that one -

VR: That's right.

Q: - if I think about it.

VR: If you don't.

Q: If I don't. It's there, and I feel almost as if I want it but I'm afraid to look, I'm afraid for it to happen.

VR: Right on. It's a question of discipline. Education.

Q: To live with panic?

VR: Nay, nay, nay –

Q: What?

VR: We're not talking about dragging ourselves through the streets with tar and feathers. We're talking about education. The only reason that moment became so terrifying is because we cannot recognize that moment for what it is. We recognize it as complete threat to our survival, but when we realize that our survival is not ours particularly then we can do a lot more than we think. Then that moment no longer becomes a panic. It becomes celebration of awakened mind. Let's say that that's a promise and a threat at the same time. The only way is discipline through study and practice. This is the only way. Otherwise we're simply trying to put a square peg in a round hole, always, same moment, same time always - that one, this one, any one. When you leave you say, oh sure, easy to say, hard to do. Then we defeat ourselves, always defeat ourselves continually. That's what we like to do. That's what we're accustomed to do, defeat ourselves in the moment so we can continue, so that ignorance continues. Same moment. Train your mind. Train your mind.

Q: Take a good look at what's there?

VR: Right. No more than that. It's too simple.

Q: Without coloring it, right?

VR: Don't worry about the "without" part.

Q: Well -

VR: No, no, never mind "well". Just wait a minute. Take a good look at what's there. Train your mind to do so. Beyond that, the rest is a blah-blah-blah. And if you have the guts, you stick on. If you don't, you wander in the realms of samsara endlessly. It's not particularly Dante's Inferno, it's simply the way it is.

Well, on that happy note, we adjourn our discussion this evening and we also have - (clock tower chimes) for whom the bell tolls - tomorrow another day of sitting, good practice. I intended this program to go on to Karma Choling, for those who would like to go on and actually practice strenuously and not be content with surface. Not that I'm promising that if we go on we will get to the heart of the matter but we have a chance as long as we keep going. As long as we don't give up, we have a chance. As much as the moment is absolutely unpredictable, that's the same chance we have. So sit tomorrow. Take that chance. We'll be together again tomorrow afternoon sometime and continue our discussion. Don't think about what we said unless it comes up. Goodnight.